

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

FOR THE

RICH: £600BN

**FOR NHS,
COUNCILS,**

UNIS: ZERO

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£600bn, the NHS, and the big picture



So the cut-off of Winter Fuel Allowance from most pensioners may not save the government money at all. Some say the “savings” will be overwhelmed by the extra costs as more of the 1.3 million people who are entitled to Pension Credit, but don’t get it it, claim the credit and the consequent benefits.

We don’t know. For sure, though, unless the government’s talk of a real drive to increase Pension Credit take-up was all bullshit, then there were never going to be nett “savings”. And any “savings” there might be were always going to be rounding errors in relation to a total government budget of over £1 trillion a year.

The Labour government is probably puzzled. They have allowed public sector pay rises, meagre, but enough to win approval in several union ballots. They have moved fairly fast on union and employment law reform. The Blair Labour government of 1997, which did none of that (its relatively “good” stuff, like the minimum wage and such, came later), scored over 50% in opinion polls through to mid-1999. But Keir Starmer’s credit has sagged fast.

Voters are not impatient. Rather, they are generally too patient, too willing to be reassured that “Rome was not built in a day”.

Only, now, the government’s first

steps are to half-demolish some of the flimsy shacks already there (the Winter Fuel Allowance) and to insist that the benefits building half-demolished by the two-child cap will stay half-demolished. The shining future city depends on promises of “growth” arriving down a faint footpath scratched out with just 0.06% of UK wealth (the “National Wealth Fund”).

Probably the Labour leaders’ aim was to make a show of some cuts, so as further to reassure “business” that they are not tax-and-spend types, and get the “bad news” done quickly. Probably in the 30 October Budget Rachel Reeves will loosen the “fiscal rules” a bit and apply a few taxes on the wealthy. But no wonder few believe a chariot of “change” can arrive down the scarcely visible Starmer-Reeves footpath.

In all this scratching-around, the big picture is obscured. The new government has said the NHS is broken, but nothing about fixing it except that there’s no money.

UK profits are about £600 billion a year; wealth, £12,000 billion. Those figures are some index of how much labour and technology is going to senseless fripperies, ostentation by the wealthy, and exercises in capitalists trying to out-gamble each other (high finance).

Meanwhile, millions rely on food banks, the NHS waiting list is 7.62 million cases, hospitals are crumbling, and other public services are hobbling. Shortages, cuts, penury, alongside wild wealth.

The Labour leaders have closed their eyes to those facts, and to the answer: social ownership of the banks and industry, workers’ control, re-basing economic life on solidarity, equality, and cooperation for the common good. Or at least, as a modest start, tax the millionaires!

Solidarity agitates in the unions and the Labour Party for those answers. We offer no illusions about the short term.

The general opinion polls show much less shift than the drastic drop in Starmer’s personal ratings. Labour is down a few per cent from its general election percentage, Reform is up a few per cent. Other parties’ scores are little changed (including the Greens, though you might expect a shift to the left to reflect at least partially in some increase for them).

Some Labour MPs have protested by voting against the government or abstaining on the benefit cap and the Fuel Allowance, and the unions defeated the Labour leaders on three issues at Labour’s Liverpool conference on 22-25 September.

Rosie Duffield MP has quit Labour. She used to associate with Open Labour, a soft-left grouping in the party. But in recent years her criticisms of Labour have almost all been claims that Labour is too liberal on trans rights, and Open Labour and Duffield have parted ways (whether on her initiative or theirs, we don’t know). Duffield’s resignation letter gives no promise that she will now do anything left-wing of substance.

The Unison union conference this year was more left-wing than previously, and in the PCS civil service union a left slate won the Executive elections. But in both unions entrenched officials still hold control. There is much work to be done to transform the labour movement.

This article is written in inner London. We can see the citadels of wealth here directly from many working-class areas, or at least on our journeys from and to work. The big picture is before our eyes.

Still, even here, people will factor out those citadels as inevitable background, and focus on supposed or small differences with other sections of the working class (such as immigrants). It’s like people being roasted by a fire, and not thinking of putting the fire out, but instead worrying or pretending about their neighbour having better clothing to mitigate the burns.

Our job is to refocus vision. □



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Starmer, Odger, Bevan, and freebies

By Martin Thomas

Early capitalists often valued frugality in the interest of maximising reinvestment of profits and the most rapid accumulation of capital. But, wrote Marx, “when a certain stage of development has been reached, a conventional degree of prodigality, which is also an exhibition of wealth, and consequently a source of credit, becomes a business

necessity... Luxury enters into capital’s expenses of representation”.

Maybe the motive for Starmer, Reeves, and Rayner accepting so many freebies from friendly plutocrats was that Starmer and the others thought posh clothes and appearances in private boxes were a “business necessity” in their drive to accredit themselves as “pro-business”. Maybe it was more that the

“business necessity” seemed obvious to the friendly plutocrats and the Labour politicians wanted to seem in tune.

Either way, the freebies scandal is a symbol of Starmer’s avowed “pro-business” orientation.

Bevan

Aneurin Bevan, a hero of the Labour left, was fond of hospitality from wealthy friends, which then he could take with-

out publicity. In a Britain where food was still rationed, he had a personal taste for a little luxury.

George Odger, one-time President of the First international and a pioneer of worker candidacies for Parliament, appears in a campaign photo from the 1870s wearing a top hat. The hatmakers’ union had made it for him because they thought that some workers, a bit conservative-minded but

also radical-minded, would think that their champion face to face with the top bourgeois should at least be well turned out.

I guess there is a similar reason why John McDonnell usually chooses a smart suit (which a skilled worker’s wage these days will readily cover).

The business about the freebies for Starmer and his circle is different. And much worse than Bevan. □

Gaza, Lebanon, Israel: ceasefire! Peace with justice!

By Vincent Présumey

Continued from back page

It was in fact Iran, with Russia's blessing, that pushed Hamas into the provocation and pogrom of 7 October 2023, whilst never having the intention of turning the so-called "Al-Aqsa Flood" into an all-out war. Hezbollah and the Houthis have never tried to seriously help Hamas, let alone the people of Gaza, who they don't care about.

The Jewish-Israeli, Palestinian and Druze inhabitants of northern Israel are the victims of Hezbollah's missiles and threats, which have never weakened the Israeli state itself. Just as the end of Hamas's threats could come from a ceasefire, the release of political prisoners and recognition of the Palestinians' right to a state, so the beginning of the end of Hezbollah, whose domination is rejected by many in Lebanese society, could quickly result from such a policy. The lives of those displaced and threatened in northern Israel are no more than a pretext.

For the past three weeks, Israel has been using the methods of state terrorism to strike a blow at Hezbollah. Whilst Hezbollah is a totally reactionary organisation, the fact that these blows are being dealt by Israel, and using these methods, rules out any "progressive" scope or outcome for this operation.

For Netanyahu, stuck in Gaza on the brink of an actual genocide – which has not yet taken place, and which must be prevented – the aim is to create a diversion, to regain a broader base in Israeli society, and to raise the spectre of an all-out regional war before the US elections, in the hope of lobbying for

his candidate, who is also Putin's candidate: Donald Trump.

Above all, and this is the point least touched on, and which is precisely what is concealed by these operations, they also serve to cover up the pogroms and intensified colonisation against the Palestinians of the West Bank. These are moving towards de facto ethnic cleansing, which Netanyahu and his followers want to make irreversible. The end of this colonisation is a precondition for the realisation of Palestinian national rights and therefore for any peace.

The bitterness with which the hundreds of thousands of Arab victims of Hezbollah can acknowledge the elimination of Nasrallah and company is therefore caused by the fact that the moral right to judge and punish them belonged to them, and to no one else, and certainly not to the Israeli military.

Twofold

But it is twofold, because this military does not only kill, does not even mainly kill, Hezbollah cadres. Just as Israel is, in reality, targeting the population of Gaza whilst claiming to be confronting Hamas fighters (who reserve for their own exclusive use the protection of underground tunnels, which are off-limits to Gazan civilians), so in Lebanon hundreds of civilian victims and, already, a million refugees, are the main de facto targets.

These targets include many Syrian refugees who fled from Bashar al-Assad and Hezbollah, and thousands of Syrian refugees who cannot, and do not want to, return to Syria.

One might also wonder whether the Israeli military has not received discreet help from Assad, whose regime has been silent about the attacks and operations carried out in recent weeks. Assad is not troubled by large-scale massacres: in the event of ethnic cleansing in the West Bank and real genocide in Gaza, he, the "anti-Zionist" and "anti-imperialist", is concerned only to ensure his own survival.

The demands of the world's leaders for "restraint" are theoretically aimed at Israel, but do not inhibit it, and are therefore in reality aimed more at Iran. Technically and militarily, it is difficult for Iran to retaliate. Moreover, the Iranian regime is going through an internal crisis. The Iranian population is hostile to it, and there is now a risk that, instead of putting down popular resistance, the regime will seize upon a war to put an end to it. Although repressed, the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement is alive and well in the consciousness of many. Iran is also in the process of ac-

quiring nuclear weapons, but probably does not yet have them.

For all these reasons, direct Iranian intervention would require Russian help. Russia is busy with its invasion and occupation in Ukraine. The leaders in Tehran and Tel Aviv know that transitioning to a full-scale regional war would therefore be very difficult.

Forced, theoretically and by their own bellicose rhetoric, to take "terrible" revenge, Iranian dignitaries and those of Hezbollah risk backing themselves into a corner where, for the time being at least, a ground war of position in southern Lebanon is their only option. They could perhaps try to advance to the north of Israel or even to the Golan Heights, although Israeli tanks are massing on the border.

To conclude these remarks, written in the heat of the moment, it is important to understand that the broad picture given in this article is part of a general framework – that of the international class struggle in the era of imperialist multipolarity. The pogrom of 7 October 2023 was a provocation aimed at triggering Israel's war to destroy Gaza, thus playing into Putin's hands and fanning the flames of all the most reactionary tendencies on a global level: "left"

campism, "right" Trumpism, etc.

Israel is already at war with the Palestinians. The spectre of a wider, regional war between an allegedly "anti-Zionist" and anti-imperialist "axis of resistance", backed by Iran, and Israel, backed by the United States, plays a key role here. The great beneficiaries of this world order through disorder and war have been Putin and Trump.

But they have not yet decisively won. The world situation, whilst worsening, has not completely shifted in a reactionary direction, which would have happened, and could still happen, in the event of a crushing defeat for Ukraine. Putin has not decisively won, and Trump might not win in November, so Netanyahu rightly feels threatened. In response to the threats he faces, he has opened a second front, going right up to the brink, and invoking the spectre of regional war. □

• This article is reprinted from [Arguments Pour la Lutte Sociale](#), with thanks. The translation has been lightly edited, and the headline here is ours.

• See also online: [Ceasefire, not regional war](#), [bit.ly/cf-war](#), by Ira Berkovic.

UK Friends of Standing Together

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

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

UKFoST promotes the benefits of joint struggle by Jews and Palestinians to this end. • [ukfost.co.uk](#)

• [@omdimbeyachaduk](#)



Activist Agenda

Meetings

Thu 3 Oct: What is capitalism? North London AWL. 7pm, Menard Hall, Galway St, EC1V 3SW

Fri 4 Oct: Women's Fightback #32 launch. 7pm, Feminist Library, 161 Sumner Rd, London SE15 6JL

Thu 10 Oct: Why the Working Class? North London AWL. 7pm, Menard Hall, EC1V 3SW

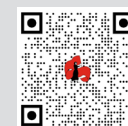
Wed 16 Oct: How to defeat the far right. London AWL. Marchmont Community Centre, 62 Marchmont Street, WC1N 1AB

At work or on campus

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

Template motions

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



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

Socialist-feminist book clubs

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

Sun 6 Oct: London. The Second Sex (Volume I). 2pm, Effra Social, 89 Effra Rd, SW2 1DF

Sun 6 Oct: Manchester. Women and the Subversion of the Community. 3pm, Gallery Café, 81 Princess St, M2 3JL

Mon 7 Oct: Sheffield. Does Anyone Have the Right to Sex? 6pm, University Arms, 197 Brook Hill, S3 7HG

Campaigns

For: UK Friends of Standing Together, Labour Left Internationalists, Workers Against the CCP, Free Our Unions, Solidarity With Iranian Workers, Neurodivergent Labour, 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](#). □

Singham's man at the Morning Star



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

When Roger McKenzie, the (then) assistant general secretary of Unison, failed in his bid to become general secretary in 2020, he fairly promptly got a job at Liberation (formerly the Movement for Colonial Freedom), resigned from the Labour Party and joined the Communist Party of Britain.

Pretty soon Roger was writing regularly in the CPB-controlled *Morning Star*. When the paper's international editor, Steve Sweeney, left in mid-2022 so that he could more openly support the invasion of Ukraine and peddle Putin's propaganda at RT (formerly Russia Today), Roger replaced him.

Roger has not promoted the kind of blatant conspiracy theories that his predecessor specialised in (e.g. false claims about the White Helmets in Syria and American "biolabs" in Ukraine), but he hasn't changed much about the paper's international coverage, which remains resolutely "campist". In certain respects it has actually become worse: for instance Ortega's brutal and reactionary regime in Nicaragua, which had become too embarrassing even for Sweeney, is once again regularly glorified in the pages of the MS.

Roger's third-worldism and enthusiasm for "multipolarity" (i.e. multiple imperialisms) has led him to enthuse over military coups in Africa's Sahel region, welcome the failure of leaders of the "Global South" to condemn of Russia's invasion of Ukraine at the UN, and to call for the recreation of the "Non-Aligned Movement", originally set up in the 1950s by various Third-World heads of state (and Tito's Yugoslavia) but by the 1970s increasingly dominated by Cuba.

Roger's increasingly bizarre geo-political outlook reached something of an apogee with an article (19 Sept: "From the IMF to Brics") arguing for "a level of military co-operation between the alliance of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa – the core group and the newer Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, the United Arab Emirates and, if they finally decide they are in Brics, Saudi Arabia."

Roger is not entirely uncritical of the Brics leaders: while he has no criticisms of Putin, Modi or Xi Jinping, he does condemn Brazilian president Lula da Silva for remarks that "interfered with the sovereignty of Venezuela by arguing that there should be a fresh presidential election [which] led some critics to suggest that he had succumbed to US threats to remove him from power."

All of this fits in very nicely with the world view promoted in the pages of



2018 BRICS summit

the MS by Vijay Prashad, founder of the Tricontinental Institute for Social Research and chief correspondent at the media outlets *Globetrotter* and *Peoples Dispatch*, all of which are funded by Neville Roy Singham, a US billionaire tech magnate now based in Shanghai who controls a network of "campaigning" groups, "news" organisations and supposed "charities" dedicated to spreading Chinese government (i.e. Chinese Communist Party) propaganda and denying reports of Chinese human rights abuses. All Singham's vast network of organisations (the best known of which, the pro-Iranian regime supposed "peace" group Code Pink, is run by his wife, Jodie Evans) portray the US as the root cause of virtually all exploitation and oppression in the world, China as uniquely benevolent and Russia as blameless for its invasion of Ukraine.

Since Roger took over as international editor *Globetrotter* and *Peoples Dispatch* articles have been frequently republished in the MS, and he refers to

Prashad as "my comrade." Roger himself has been writing for *Globetrotter* since 2022 and has jointly authored with Prashad at least one article (published by *Globetrotter*, *Peoples Dispatch* and the *Morning Star* in April 2022), "Now Is the Time for Nonalignment and Peace."

Just as we don't know the details of the relationship between Singham and the Chinese government, so we don't know the exact relationship between his various media outlets and the MS. What is certain, however, is that the paper is now a de facto, if unpaid, part of Singham's network.

Singham and his people invariably respond to criticism with charges of "McCarthyism" and "red baiting" – charges that are simply bizarre when the criticism frequently comes from the genuine left and is aimed at a billionaire capitalist who defends some of the most authoritarian and reactionary regimes in the world. □

"Mobilised literature" in Tbilisi



Eric Lee

I am currently in the Georgian capital, participating in the Tbilisi International Festival of Literature. The subject of the festival is protest – a very timely topic in Georgia with national elections just weeks away.

There are writers, novelists and poets from all over the world here, and one panel discussion involved three writers from Georgia, Ukraine and Armenia. All three countries have had democratic revolutions with mass street protests in the last couple of decades. All have issues with the expanding Russian empire. And in all three countries, according to the writers who spoke, there is an extraordinary degree of unity among writers and artists.

As the Georgian writer put it, there is not a single person,

not one, who he knows who does not support the struggle for democracy in this country. It was clear that similar sentiments were felt by the Ukrainian and Armenian speakers.

Of course I am on their side. Obviously one cannot support authoritarian movements or regimes. Obviously democracy is preferable to the alternative. And obviously when confronted with an aggressive foreign invader, one has to choose sides.

Speakers

But as I listened to the speakers, acutely aware of the fact that they all came from former Soviet republics, I grew increasingly uncomfortable. And I was reminded of a Hebrew expression that I learned in Israel: sifrut m'guyeset. Roughly translated, that means "mobilised literature". I tried to look up the precise meaning of this phrase but found just a short Wikipedia entry in Hebrew – and in no other lan-

guage. Strange, because it's not something unique to Israel – and here I was meeting it again in the South Caucasus.

To me, it means literature in the service of a cause, or a state. And this would have been common in the young state of Israel where writers and other artists did feel a responsibility to contribute in their own way to the new society being built there.

Controlled

But it can also mean the controlled art and literature of a totalitarian state, like the Soviet Union.

And in that case, "mobilised literature" means not only that artists and writers serve the interests of broader society and the state, but that dissident views are not tolerated.

Worse than that, it means that artists and writers whose work focusses perhaps on their personal lives would be seen as useless because their writing does not contribute to the

greater struggle.

This year's festival was organised by PEN Georgia, PEN being the international organisation that supports and defends writers. PEN campaigns for writers who have been unjustly arrested and jailed for the "crime" of writing that does not suit the current regime in their countries.

Fortunately, this is not happening in the three countries whose authors sat on the panel. But as one of them pointed out, depending on the results of the upcoming Georgian elections, that might change. He suggested that we prepare for the possibility of writers being punished for writing what they really think. In my view, he was not wrong.

But just as we must defend artistic freedom against a repressive state, we must also defend the right of people to speak their minds, even when that doesn't perfectly suit our agendas.

As Trotsky put it in the Man-

ifesto for an Independent Revolutionary Art, which was signed by André Breton and Diego Rivera, revolutionary socialists must speak out against "those who would regiment intellectual activity in the direction of ends foreign to itself... To those who urge us... to consent that art should submit to a discipline which we hold to be radically incompatible with its nature, we give a flat refusal and we repeat our deliberate intention of standing by the formula complete freedom for art."

"Mobilised literature" and "complete freedom for art" cannot co-exist; one or the other must be chosen. In free societies, regardless of challenges and threats, one thing we should all agree on – perhaps the only thing – is freedom itself. □

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

Scale down jails, end migrant detention



Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

The Labour government has made a surprise announcement that it wishes to reduce the number of women prisoners. The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) will set up a new women's justice board, led by a minister and tasked with "reducing the number of women going to prison, with the ultimate ambition of having fewer women's prisons".

Speaking at Labour Party conference in Liverpool, Justice Secretary Shabana Mahmood said that "prison isn't working" for women, describing prisons as "desperate places" that are "hurting mothers and breaking homes".

Pressure has been mounting to reform women's prisons, with reports of high levels of self harm (eight times higher than in men's prisons), failing

care for pregnant women, and the death of two babies in prison in recent years. New guidance from the Sentencing Council for England and Wales came into force on 1 April mandating courts to consider how jail time affects a woman who is either pregnant or has recently had a baby.

Two-thirds of the women in prison in England and Wales have been sentenced for non-violent offences, The MoJ also said those serving custodial sentences were significantly more likely to re-offend compared to those who haven't been sent to prison.

Prisoners (of any gender) convicted of non-violent offences should be released. Many people in prison need support, not incarceration. This is particularly true of women prisoners. More than half report being victims of domestic abuse. Well-funded services should be provided to support people with mental health issues, drug and alcohol addiction, debt, domestic violence and homelessness. We need a humane justice system which focuses



Graffiti outside Yarl's Wood detention centre

Pic: [Eye.D.J.]

on reducing crime, rehabilitating offenders and keeping everyone safe.

Labour should follow the logic of closing "desperate places" that are "hurting mothers and breaking homes" by committing to close immigration detention centres, releasing detainees to decent housing in the community.

About 2,000 women seeking asylum are locked up in detention every year in the UK. Most of these women are held in Yarl's Wood detention centre, near Bedford. The majority of asylum-seeking women who are detained have reported surviving rape and other forms of gender-based violence. □

Labour: uphill, but with footholds

By Colin Foster

Keir Starmer has beaten down and demoralised many Labour activists, and pushed others into dispersing. The Labour women's conference and general conference on 21-25 September in Liverpool confirmed that.

They also showed that resistance can revive.

After they planned a victory celebration to follow the general election, Labour leaders were defeated in the three big political disputes which got to conference floor.

A motion backing the worst of government policy against asylum seekers was withdrawn to avoid probable defeat. Unite and CWU won on a motion to reinstate the Winter Fuel Allowance for pensioners and for a wealth tax. Unite and the GMB put through a call to ban all zero-hours contracts, not only those singled out as "exploitative".

Cabinet speakers from

the platform felt obliged to pledge again and again "no return to austerity", and Keir Starmer, to stress "service to working people" and to omit his usual signalling about being "pro-business".

Shift

None of that will shift government policy soon. And the force behind all of it was the unions rather than the Constituency Labour Party (CLP) delegates. Maybe a majority of CLP delegates voted against the Winter Fuel Allowance motion (there was no exact count).

Moreover, the unions left big issues in the "too hard" basket – NHS, council funding, environment, where the motions that reached conference floor were bland. Social care motions were bland too, and did not even get prioritised for conference floor.

Our victory on Border Security came thanks to frantic campaigning by the Labour Campaign for Free Movement

and Labour Left Internationalists. Without that, the motion might well have gone through "on the nod". But Unison, Unite, CWU, FBU and other unions decided to oppose it.

20,000 people attended the conference, the biggest ever. Maybe 2,000 were delegates. The others were visitors, staff, press, and lobbyists, both corporate and leftist ones from NGOs.

Agenda

Only 116 motions reached the conference agenda, and 78 were remitted in advance to the National Policy Forum or the National Executive. (How many of those 78 under the reintroduced "contemporary motions" rule, we don't know. Only Rushcliffe CLP made noise about its motion being remitted: it was on asylum and migrant rights, but remitted as supposedly on "more than one topic"). Many of the 600-odd CLPs and 20 affiliated "socialist societies" didn't send motions.

The figures from the priorities ballot in which CLPs choose six topics to reach the floor suggest that many CLPs sent delegates but no motion. Some 42% of CLP delegates voted the straight "right-wing slate" on priorities, and it won (as in 2022 and 2023), but housing (a left-favoured priority) could have won with only 11,000 of the other votes scattered over multiple topics concentrated on it.

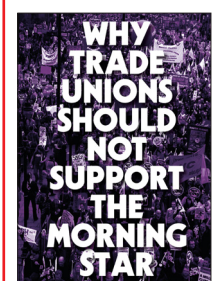
Left fringe meetings were sometimes bigger than in 2022 and 2023, partly because of the absence of The World Transformed (a festival organised alongside Labour conference from 2016 to 2023). Labour Left Internationalists (LLI) was the biggest and most consistent presence at the conference entrances, defying bad weather to distribute the LLI bulletin; help with Labour Campaign for Free Movement, Pride in Labour, and Ukraine Solidarity Campaign leafleting;

and join protests organised by LCFM and Labour for Trans Rights. LLI also organised its own fringe meeting, with former TUC president Maria Exall and Unite Unilever convenor Jane Stewart speaking.

Workers' Liberty people sold *Solidarity* – the only left paper on sale at the conference entrances, and selling well considering the weather – and ran a literature stall.

The path for the left in the Labour Party is still uphill. But with footholds along the way. □

• Much more online at bit.ly/up-hill



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bit.ly/shop-wl

Labour's environmental vacuum



Environment

By Colin Foster

The environment debate at the [TUC congress](#) (8-11 September) was not clear. The debate at Labour Party conference (22-25 September), where the labour movement comes nearer to insistent demands on the new government, was weak.

TUC passed both a fairly strong composite from PCS and Unison, and a rival

composite from Unite and GMB seeking a longer life for fossil-fuel operations.

PCS is not affiliated to the Labour Party. Unison is, but put no environmental motion to the Labour Party. Nor did any other union.

There were Constituency Labour Party motions, and there were a lot of fringe meetings related to the environment. But Labour for a Green New Deal, the least weak of the left-environmental networks in Labour, has never been good at working with the rest of the left, and has faded recently. Labour's official "environmental" affiliated socialist society, SERA, founded by leftists in 1973, has long been right-dominated, and most of its many fringe events at conference were corporate-sponsored.

One tranche of environmental motions (topic "Clean Energy Mission") was prioritised for debate. But those motions really only applauded (some of) what the government says it will do: the National Wealth Fund, GB Energy, aspiration for "clean power" (unde-

fined) by 2030, upgrading five million homes. They were weaker than government policy.

Some other environmental motions were parcelled off under other "topics" which didn't get enough priority to be debated, but they were scarcely stronger.

Nothing about public ownership of the energy industry. The PCS-Unison composite passed by the TUC called, rightly, for "public ownership of key sectors such as energy, water, transport, mail, broadband, education, health, and social care". But that was in a broad-brush way suggesting this as an aspiration rather than a practical plan, and no-one put anything to Labour conference translating the aspiration into an insistent demand.

Nothing about expanding grid and storage capacity, as is vital to increase renewables contribution to electricity generation. Nothing about replacing gas heating of buildings wholesale by heat pumps. Nothing about expanding and electrifying rail and shifting to



electric vehicles on the roads. Nothing about what the government will say if a 12 November [court case](#) results in the Rosebank and Jackdaw North Sea developments having to reapply for planning permission.

And nothing about workers' plans – such as the North Sea "Our Power" [report](#) – to shape a transition from fossil-fuels with retraining and new green jobs.

We will press unions to push environmental policy within Labour, and seek to make lively environment campaigning a big part of efforts to rebuild the Labour left. □

Correction

The Marking and Assessment Boycott at Goldsmiths Uni (article on uni cuts, *Solidarity* 718) was not just threatened. It was carried out. A further indefinite strike was threatened. The story has been amended [online](#).

□

How should schools be checked?



Debate

We need external inspectors

By Patrick Yarker

A recent article about Labour's decision to abolish "telegram" Ofsted judgements seemed to advocate replacing Ofsted by a system of locally-managed school "peer-review".

As an inspectorate, Ofsted has shown itself unreformable and should be abolished. But a system based solely on peer-review, whereby schools "inspect" each other, will not appear independent enough to command public confidence, even if all schools are returned to local authority oversight.

In forming judgements about the quality of education a school offers, all kinds of balances have to be struck, including the degree to which inspection is "responsive" to the needs of the school, and the degree to which it is "coercive", in the sense of requiring certain standards be met. (How such standards are ar-

rived at is a separate question.)

Parents and carers, students, school governors, and arguably those in the wider community served by the school, should retain a right to contribute meaningfully to the process of inspection. The inspection judgement arrived at should be framed as provisional, not summative: part of a continuing process of dialogue and review.

Schools working together to foster improvement is very much to be welcomed, always provided practitioners are given adequate time and space to think and talk together about what matters to them. But some democratically accountable mechanism of external scrutiny is also necessary. A public education system must be open to public scrutiny, including by those who, as inspectors, are charged with representing the public good, however that may be determined. □

Ways for accountability

By David Axon

I think Patrick Yarker is right that "peer review" alone

would be insufficient as a replacement for an abolished Ofsted. There is more to be said, though – firstly on why the peer review idea is important, and secondly on the idea of school "accountability" more broadly.

One of the most useful things the local authority (LA) system of schools did, before it was substantially dismantled, was provide opportunities for teachers and other staff from schools to come together in a range of "networks", "projects", "working groups" and so on.

That LA system started to shift (pretty much from 2004) into the so-called "school-led system". That system never had anywhere near the level of capacity that was taken out of LAs, but even that has gone now, with teaching schools replaced by MAT-run 'teaching school hubs' with a much smaller remit. There is simply no system now whereby school staff have any opportunity to collaborate in any real way with people beyond their own school. Teachers are much more isolated now than when I was a new teacher in the 1990s.

Ofsted inspections don't include any sort of feedback to

staff, only to governors and SLT. There is no opportunity for inspectors to talk with staff about their findings and suggestions, and no opportunity for staff, parents or students to ask inspectors for any clarifications. There are even schools that have resorted to "subject access requests" to try to get inspectors' notes – none with any success that I know of.

I think Patrick would probably agree that it is a myth that Ofsted provides any sort of "accountability" to local communities, parents/carers and so on. The only accountability is to DfE "Regional Directors" who decide what Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) to move a school into if it is judged inadequate.

And at the same time we have lost meaningful staff governors and parent governors from two-fifths of primary schools and four-fifths of secondaries. Parents find schools in many MATs hugely remote, resorting to trying to contact MAT offices or complaining to the DfE or Ofsted – there has been a huge increase in the number of these complaints.

The Socialist Education Association manifesto for education calls for peer review, but

also "a new NGO with powers to enter schools, including those in the private sector, to monitor and ensure children's safety and wellbeing, plus compliance with legislation including the Equalities Act". This new NGO would include the role of parent advocate, particularly for disadvantaged parents, refugees, and non-English speakers. It should also be the last port of call when complaints from parents and learners are not resolved.

The National Education Union (NEU) "let teachers teach" slogan sums up opposition to the wastefulness, workload, pressure and distortion of priorities that Ofsted brings, but could also be seen as saying "leave us alone to do what we want, with no checks by anyone".

There should probably be more accountability of some schools and MATs. But the question is whether the current arrangements actually provide that; and accountability to whom? □

• Abridged from a debate on the Educators' Fightback blog. For much more see bit.ly/sch-i

Direct funding, not tuition fees!

By Sam Myerson

The [Guardian](#) reports that Peter Mandelson is pushing the government to raise university tuition fees by 2.5% now, and then in line with inflation, to shore up the finances of universities. He also talked of more support for students from disadvantaged backgrounds to get them into higher education.

Universities UK (the cabal of university bosses) has proposed options which include increasing tuition fees to £13,000, the figure they put on the base cost of providing an undergraduate degree programme. UUK says 93% of all funding for teaching comes from tuition fees. Until 2011 it was mainly direct government grants.

The Higher Education minister, expenses abuser extraordinaire Jacqui Smith, has repeatedly said that there is no new money for universities and that some will have to be allowed to fail. Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson, having previously stated that the government would not raise tuition fees, is now [hinting](#) at an increase from £9,250 to £10,500 over the next five years, the biggest since the Tory/ Lib-Dem tripling of fees to £9,000 from 2012-3. To cushion the blow Labour might reintroduce maintenance grants for the poorest students, removed by the Tories in 2015-6.

But those poorest students will be saddled with over £30,000 debt even before interest has accumulated, which it now does while students are studying, and at a higher-than-ever level.

Keir Starmer was elected as leader of the Labour Party on a pledge which

said: "Labour must...end the national scandal of spiralling student debt and abolish tuition fees".

We are under no illusion that there is a student movement ready-made to fight a fee increase. It will take diligent work to bring student groups, student unions, and the wider movement together.

The National Union of Students has a day of action planned, but its main thing is to invite students to "write to their MP". Meanwhile over 60 universities have active cuts programmes.

As of now the student left is disorganised and fragment, and in many places does not exist in any coherent sense. Where students are organised, we can work for demonstrations, direct action, and occupations. Elsewhere we can hold planning meetings, run stalls, and reach out to as many students as possible.

In 2010-11, a very right-wing National Union of Students was swamped by revolt on the campuses against the fee increase. The terrain can change rapidly.

There is more than enough wealth in society to pay for Higher Education and public services, and without relying on funds from arms manufacturers, green-washers, or fossil-fuel firms.

Reliance on fees and universities competing to recruit more students is an irresponsible way to run education. Education at all levels is necessary for a democratic society. It allows us to discuss and think creatively and critically about the world, and gives people the means to learn, discuss and teach. The costs should be borne by those who have the means to pay. □

Just Stop Oil activists protesting the jailings by throwing soup at another Van Gogh (picture credit [Jamie Lowe](#))



Free Phoebe and Anna!

By Will Roberts

On 27 September, Just Stop Oil activists Phoebe Plummer and Anna Holland were sentenced to two years and 20 months respectively, for throwing soup on Van Gogh's *Sunflowers*.

The action was taken in October 2022. Plummer had been on remand for 58 days by the time of the sentencing. Three other JSO protestors responded almost immediately by daubing another Van Gogh painting orange (again, with no actual damage to the artwork). They have since been released on bail.

When passing down the verdict, judge Christopher Hehir noted that the crime fell under the category of "extreme harm to society" (how exactly failing to damage a painting causes society harm, he didn't say).

He also argued that "There is nothing peaceful or nonviolent about throwing soup. Throwing soup in someone's face is violent." The judge's reasons for equating an inanimate object with a person's face were unclear.

Stunt-based protest to "raise awareness" of the climate crisis is a model Workers' Liberty has argued against – in part so that talented activists are not locked away for vital years. We call instead for a concerted working-class intervention in the climate movement, to argue for reorganising industries under workers' control with social foresight.

But the lengthy prison sentences on JSO's activists are attacks against all space for protest, and we should be absolutely clear that these sentences are an outrage. Free Phoebe Plummer and Anna Holland! □

Solidarity with Haifa students

By Sam Myerson

On Monday 9 September Palestinian students at the University of Haifa, standing on lists for Standing Together, Balad, or Hadash, or independently, were blocked by the Student Union from the union's annual elections.

The deadline for candidacies was brought forward without notice, so the Palestinian students' nominations were "too late", and a list of incumbent students was announced. Students gathered outside the Union offices shouting "Shame!" 130 lecturers have signed a letter for free and fair elections, and the District Court in Haifa has ordered a delay which should allow for a wider list.

About 40% of undergradu-



Students wait outside the registration office, University of Haifa, September 9, 2024. (Hadash at University of Haifa)

ate students at Haifa University, and a majority of those registered at the Student Union, are Palestinian. This is not just about excluding anti-war students, but also Palestinian students, not currently represented in the Student Union leadership.

Since the beginning of the current war, harassment and discrimination against Palestinian students by the Union and university administrations has increased. As against those who advocate breaking

connections with universities in Israel, we support solidarity with students, and academics within Israeli universities who are fighting for a fair and equal settlement.

UK Friends of Standing Together has produced a statement and model motion: bit.ly/haifa-u. Bring those to your Student Union or union branch, seek support, and make links with students and workers on the ground in Israel. □

Legal challenges to rats, mould, damp, high rents

By Sam Myerson

Unite Students, the largest provider of purpose-built student housing, with 68,000 rooms across the country, is being taken to court by a group of students.

A tribunal is reviewing cases from 346 students who lived in ten Unite blocks in Liverpool in 2022-23, including Atlantic Point, where students complain of rats and mice.

During Covid lockdowns Unite and Student Roost agreed to offer rent refunds to thousands of students after first trying to make them pay accommodation fees though they had left the student halls or stayed away.

[Flat Justice](#) also has cases coming in London, Coventry and Birmingham. The stories will be familiar to many who know "purpose-built student housing": rats, poor waste management, unresponsive administration, mould, damp, broken utilities.

There have also been shortages of student accommodation. In Liverpool and Manchester last year students arrived in September only to find out they would be living in different cities with long commutes.

The boss of Unite Students stood down last year, blaming the shortage of housing for higher rents. He had been paid [£866,000 a year](#). □

Kyaw Nyein and t

By Hein Htet Kyaw

As regular readers will see, the author's ideas on the "Third Camp" are not the same as ours: see *Workers' Liberty* 3/7 (bit.ly/3-camp). But its account of anti-Stalinist socialism in a country such as Burma (Myanmar) tells us about a chapter of history now almost entirely unknown.

Kyaw Nyein is one of the most controversial prominent revolutionary political figures in Burma. He was almost everything a politician could become in Burma, ranging from a student leader, a revolutionary who was hunted down by the colonial ruling classes, a minister, a party theoretician, and a diplomat, to a political prisoner.

Kyaw Nyein started engaging in student politics during the 1930s. At Rangoon University (later known as University of Yangon) he met other student activists such as Than Tun (who would become leader of the Communist Party of Burma during the Cultural Revolution), Thein Pe Myint (who would become the co-founder of the Communist Party of Burma), and Aung San (who would become the co-founder of the Communist Party of Burma and later known as the father of the nation).

In 1939, Kyaw Nyein founded the People's Revolutionary Party (PRP) together with Thakin Mya, Aung San, Ba Swe and Thakin Chit. Kyaw Nyein, as one of the founders of People's Revolutionary Party, led several oppositions to British colonialism.

The Communist Party of Burma (CPB) was founded by Burmese revolutionaries like Thein Pe Myint, Aung San, and some Bengali co-founders such as H N Goshal.

Both PRP and CPB considered themselves as Marxists, but PRP was broadly influenced by social democracy and CPB was more into "Marxism-Leninism".

In 1942, a tremendous split occurred among the Burmese revolutionaries between Aung San's faction, which was pro-Japan (pro-fascist anti-colonialism) and Thakin Soe's faction which was anti-Japan (pro-British colonialism but anti-fascist). Kyaw Nyein followed

Aung San's faction and served as a Cabinet Secretary in the Civil Executive Administration, but at the same time contributed to the founding of the anti-Japanese resistance organization "Anti-Fascist Organisation" behind the scenes as a member of the AFO Supreme Council.

[Kyaw Nyein would repeat this combination of both having official government positions, and organising radical opposition].

The People's Revolutionary Party was transformed into the Burma Socialist Party after the war against Japanese invasion of Burma, and the Anti-Fascist Organisation was renamed Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League.

AFPFL was an alliance that included three main organisations, two ideologically driven, one militarily driven and some independents. Burma Socialist Party represented social democratic ideology within AFPFL and the Communist Party of Burma represented "Marxism-Leninism" (Stalinism), while the Burma National Army led by Aung San was solely military.

The struggles between socialists and communists were indeed tremendous at that time. Even at the household level, the deep division between Socialists and Communists was felt throughout the nation. At that time, the majority of tiny villages were classified as socialist or communist communities. The same divisions were also seen in metropolitan areas.

Independence

Kyaw Nyein became the first Minister of Home Affairs upon independence, Kyaw Nyein also held the roles of Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs starting in September 1948. That was interpreted by Communist Party of Burma and its sympathisers as their failure to influence the politics of AFPFL and a success of the Burma Socialist Party. The Stalinists complained about "Socialist Repression" and used Stalin's conspiracy theory about "social fascism".

[Eventually the Communist Party of Burma] officially started a civil war against the AFPFL government that lasted almost half a century.

Kyaw Nyein was also the founder of the "Asian Socialist Conference" which was a Pan-Asian multinational socialist organization.

The membership of the Asian Socialist Conference included Burma Socialist Party, Socialist Party of Egypt, Praja Socialist Party, Socialist Party of Indonesia, Mapai from Israel, Leftist Social-



Rangoon (Yangon) following the Japanese invasion in 1942

ist Party of Japan, Rightist Socialist Party of Japan, Progressive Socialist Party of Lebanon, Pan-Malayan Labour Party, and Pakistan Socialist Party...

Independent Trotskyist publications like *Labor Action*, edited by Hal Draper and carrying articles by Leon Trotsky, published articles and opinions of Kyaw Nyein. Kyaw Nyein gained notoriety for his "Third Campism" worldview, which shares a lot of similarities with the views of Hal Draper, Max Shachtman and Sean Matgamna.

Labor Action of 13 September 1954 had a report about a discussion between Kyaw Nyein and Dr. Lohia of the Praja Socialist Party of India about "Third Campism". Kyaw Nyein referred to western imperialism as "imperialism" and USSR imperialism as "neo-imperialism." Both of those forms were hazardous in his opinion.

Kyaw Nyein:

"The Soviet type of imperialism is perhaps even more degrading and more dangerous [than 'Western' imperialism] because it is more ruthless, more systematic...

"To us socialists, the one is a devil and the other a deep sea. We should not only reject them, we should combat them, we should try to escape from them".

Later, Kyaw Nyein maintained that classical Marxist analysis only provided light on the dialectical evolution of capitalism and its highest state, imperialism, and that it was necessary to analyse the dialectical development of Soviet neo-imperialism as a new phenomenon.

Kyaw Nyein also shared the following thought during the same meeting.

"It is for Asian Socialist Parties to head a Third Camp, and try their level best to save the world from the Third Great War while they still can. It is for

the Asian Socialist Parties to offer an alternative to Capitalist Democracy and Totalitarian Communism namely in the form of Democratic Socialism. World Public Opinion will be with us."

According to the report in *Labor Action*, the discussion between Kyaw Nyein and Ram Manohar Lohia also revealed some difference or maybe "misunderstanding" between them. Kyaw Nyein believed Stalinist imperialism to be more dangerous than capitalist imperialism since it misled the victims with the rhetoric of global communist revolution. Ram Manohar Lohia said both imperialisms were equally exploitative.

Due to the shallow culture of Burmese leftists who failed to see beyond the "Marxist-Leninist" campist left and were ignorant of the global broader Marxist movements that are an antithesis to authoritarian fascism-like Stalinism, such an intellectually impressive democratic socialist as Kyaw Nyein, who managed to unite a lot of socialist revolutionaries from the Middle East, North Africa, and Asia, was pushed away and labelled an anti-communist nationalist. Kyaw Nyein, far from anti-communist nationalist, was an internationalist democratic socialist, post-colonial intellectual, and decolonial organiser who ended up with similar conclusions to Trotskyist revolutionaries such as Hal Draper, Max Shachtman and Sean Matgamna, a tradition that contributes to the new analysis of intersectional oppressions compared to orthodox Trotskyists. That Kyaw Nyein, a revolutionary from a third world country, who started off under the influence of Fabian socialism, reached to a similar conclusion as such thinkers, is something that should have attracted significant attention.

Since Kyaw Nyein had a high reputation in anti-Stalinist socialist circle, U



the “Third Camp”



Nu used the red-brown alliance type of populist politics against Kyaw Nyein.

Around 1958, U Nu and Kyaw Nyein had a split within AFPFL. U Nu proposed for the formation of a faction known as “Clean AFPFL” by left-wingers with conservative ideals (red-brown alliance) and the independent members within AFPFL. The Burma Socialist Party faction of the AFPFL was called “Stable AFPFL.”

U Nu’s faction, the “Clean AFPFL”, was also called the Union Party (Burma). The Union Party was supported by the Burma Workers and Peasants Party (a split from Burma Socialist Party), the conservative left-wing (Pongyi Kyaung) faction of the Burma Socialist Party, the National United Front (an alliance between far-left and far-right parties), and sympathisers of the Communist Party of Burma. Some local leaders from the Communist Party of Burma endorsed U Nu’s faction of AFPFL via the National United Front (NUF).

Kyaw Nyein supported multi-party parliamentary democratic socialism, but U Nu’s political principles were a syncretism of capitalism, evolutionary Marxism, and Buddhism. U Nu began to use religion and moral principles to influence those who adhered to traditionalist and social conservative beliefs with fringe help from communists (Stalinists).

U Nu pledged to establish the Union of Burma as a “Buddhist state,” effectively eliminating secularism from the nation. Many left-wing NUF members who held conventional and conservative views joined U Nu’s “Clean AFPFL”.

As a result, the Stable AFPFL was defeated by Nu’s party, and Kyaw Nyein lost his position in the legislature. Only conservative NUF members were permitted to become cabinet ministers.

On 2 March 1962, Ne Win carried out

a coup d’état with military support. As the Union Revolutionary Council leader and prime minister, Ne Win gained notoriety. The Revolutionary Council, led by General Ne Win, disbanded all political parties and other legislative democratic institutions after the coup d’état in March 1962.

Imprisoned

In 1963, Kyaw Nyein and other well-known politicians from the Burma Socialist Party and AFPFL were imprisoned by Ne Win’s military dictatorship. Kyaw Nyein suffered cruel treatment while he was detained. The military junta placed Kyaw Nyein in an animal cage, unlike other detainees. When the lights were off, they denounced Kyaw Nyein from the shadows. Kyaw Nyein tried to commit suicide after such humiliations.

In 1968, Kyaw Nyein was set free during the height of hostilities between China and Burma and a growing civil war between the Burmese military and the Burma Communist Party, which was supported by China.

Kyaw Nyein was invited by General Ne Win to advise the Revolutionary Council on drafting a national constitution. He accepted the offer and became part of a group of twenty-one politicians who proposed the return to democracy with a mixed economy. Thirteen politicians voted for a one-party Soviet-style system. Ne Win turned down Kyaw Nyein’s faction’s proposal to restore democracy with a mixed economy. In 1974, Ne Win established a Soviet-style one-party system based on a new constitution.

Despite all his impressive devotion for democracy, socialism, anti-imperialism, and internationalism, Kyaw Nyein had a drawback. He was a universalist class reductionist. Although identity politics is reactionary at some point,

self-determinism for minority ethnic groups is crucial in Burma’s politics.

During the advisory committee meeting for Ne Win, even though Kyaw Nyein took the bold position of demanding the restoration of democracy with a mixed economy in face of the dictator who once sent him to prison, he took a chauvinistic position regarding the self-determinism for minority ethnic groups. Kyaw Nyein voted for a unitary nation over a federal union; not to allow Mon ethnic group or Arakan ethnic group to have their own states; and to push back the separatist movements.

Kyaw Nyein indeed was far from a perfect revolutionary. He was less dogmatic than many, but yet at the same time, showed integrity on political values such as democracy, socialism, anti-imperialism, and internationalism.

Despite facing multiple personal attacks from the BSPP dictatorship and the Communist Party of Burma, along with deceptive labels like “opportunist” and “anti-communist nationalist,” he was in fact a leading figure in the broader internationalist left opposition against Stalinist regimes. He was a pioneer of decolonial politics since 1940s that united the internationalist socialists from post-colonial nations all across the Middle East, North Africa, and Asia.

Kyaw Nyein warned us about the imperialism of Soviet Union and China from the 1940s. Nowadays, China, with its pro-military junta politics, acting as an imperialist force, has undermined Burma’s Spring 2021 revolution. Russia, which shares the historical image of Soviet Union, has become an imperialist camp that is actively endorsing and supporting the genocidal Myanmar military junta.

Kyaw Nyein was the Bernie Sanders of Burma.

During the Iraq war, the Syria war, and the recent Ukraine war, the global left has witnessed the dangers of conservative left-wing populist movements and their red-brown alliance fascist politics. The Workers Party of Britain led by George Galloway and Germany’s Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance show how left conservatism with the campist left politics is counter-revolutionary and can resemble classical fascism especially when it comes to genocide denialism and antisemitism.

Kyaw Nyein suffered the red-brown alliance of U Nu’s Union Party, NUF, and the communists (Stalinists) in Burma, giving us another case study to learn from.

The power of propaganda is yet an-

other lesson that Kyaw Nyein could offer to progressives of the twenty-first century who support socialism and intersectionality. In fact, it was a successful propaganda campaign of Communist Party of Burma and Ne Win’s Burma Socialist Programme Party to portray a brilliant revolutionary such as Kyaw Nyein as an anti-communist patriot. Several young left-wing generations who know too little to see beyond the propaganda indeed bought the narrative.

It would be extremely hard to escape the sway of the Communist Party of Burma, the Burmese Way to Socialism, and their campist narratives unless one had a burning desire to discover the truth and a critical mind with the abilities to undertake appropriate research.

Understanding how democratic socialism, and Trotskyism functioned as Marxist movements that opposed Marxism-Leninism (Stalinism), is necessary to comprehend Kyaw Nyein’s perspective, which was anti-Stalinist rather than anti-communist in the historic meaning of “communism”. One would need to have a thorough theoretical understanding of the national question, the development of imperialism, and capitalism to appreciate the significance of “Third Campism” and its opposition to the campist left. □

• Much abridged. More: bit.ly/kyawn

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The dangers now in Sri Lanka

By Kavita Khrishnan

Taken with thanks from bit.ly/d-yake

As in India, the first test of democratic character in Sri Lanka is the question of Tamil nationality and Sinhala-chauvinist and communal politics.

The six-decade-long violence and genocide against the people of Tamil nationality by the Sri Lankan army reached its peak 15 years ago. The genocide of Tamils in Sri Lanka is one of the most horrific genocides in history, and even today the Tamil people there have neither got justice, nor security and

equality. On the contrary, many parties in Sri Lankan politics compete in Sinhala-chauvinist stakes.

In such a situation, the first condition for democratic change is the political will to mount a campaign against Sinhala-chauvinism.

Like Modi, Mahinda Rajapaksa had gained popularity by calling himself a God-like national leader. He presided over economic disaster that trapped the country in a web of foreign debt and austerity measures, resulting in crippling inflation and impoverishment – but for a long time, Sinhala chauvinist sentiment protected his popularity from being affected.

But two years ago, Sri Lankans finally burst out in anger against nepotism, economic chaos and dictatorship, and an uprising forced the Rajapaksa brothers to flee.

Sri Lankans no doubt voted with the hope of change. Anura Dissanayake succeeded in channelling this hope in his favour by promising miraculous solutions and presenting himself as a common man, an outsider challenging the ruling elites. His election campaign, an article published in *Frontline* yesterday observes, was similar to Trump's and Modi's in this respect.

Dissanayake's party JVP was directly involved in the genocide of Tamils: JVP's militias massacred Tamils. Even today JVP and its NPP coalition are second to none in Sinhala-chauvinistic politics, especially against Tamils and Muslims. The *Frontline* piece said, "The JVP claims that it is communist but excludes Tamils and Muslims from almost all realms of activity. Compared to Dissanayake and his JVP, former President Mahinda Rajapaksa and his brother,

Gotabaya Rajapaksa, appear to be a 'lite' version of Sinhala chauvinism."

The Tamil party ITAK supported Dissanayake's rival, SJB's Sajith Premadasa and he got a large share of the vote in Tamil areas. SJB is by no means free from Sinhala-chauvinist taint. But Tamils noted that Premadasa, whose father was killed by LTTE, sought Tamil support in a language of unity and respect. Whereas Dissanayake maintains that he has no regrets about supporting the genocidal war against the Tamils.

Leftist leaders and parties in India are celebrating Dissanayake's victory, saying Sri Lanka's people have chosen a Marxist, left-leaning leader. They congratulate Dissanayake, calling him a comrade. (It is not that these comrades have any excuse for ignorance about the character and history of JVP: they would only have to ask Tamil Nadu left leaders. I remember that in CPI (ML) our (late) Comrade Ganeshan educated us about the politics of JVP.)

So the question arises that what do the words "Marxist", "communist" or "left-leaning" actually mean?

Not being chauvinistic and bigoted is an entry level requirement for being a decent human being and politician, not a higher standard to which Marxists or Leninists must be held. If JVP fails that minimum standard is more chauvinist and communal than some of the worst chauvinists in Sri Lanka, it's a laugh that the Left is arguing about whether or not he's a Marxist. I'm not arguing about whether or not Dissanayake is a good Marxist, based on his position on "right to self determination" in Leninist terms. I'm saying he and his party are right wing and communal-chauvinist – and therefore they aren't democratic.

How can we call a leader who practices the politics of hatred towards Tamil and Muslim minorities and whose party's history is stained with the blood of Tamils a "Marxist", "communist", "left-leaning"? Is being democratic and opposing bigotry not the first condition of being a Marxist? How can anyone on the left say something like "The JVP was against Tamils, they are Sinhala nationalists but they'll be leftist on the question of IMF". Or worse, some on the left even say "The JVP was quite right to be against Tamil chauvinism and separatism."

What a shame it is that none on the Indian Left seem to have been able to say:

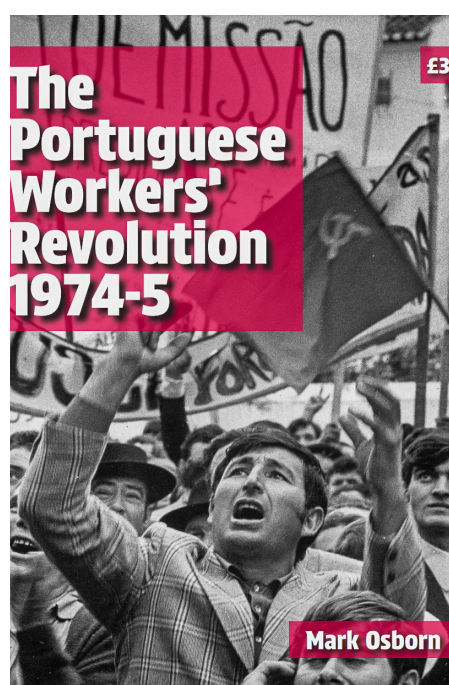
Yes, the people of Sri Lanka want change.

Yes, getting rid of the burden of economic crisis and austerity is a big challenge for the new government.

But democracy – defeating Sinhala chauvinism is an even bigger question, on which no one can expect anything from the new president.

No one on the Left should allow Dissanayake and the JVP cover up their crimes with a red flag. Their "Marxism" is a sham, their politics is chauvinistic and communal. They are not "left-leaning", but "fascist-leaning".

The only hope is that enough people in Sri Lanka will take responsibility to stop the new regime from "change" in the direction of more chauvinism and authoritarianism. We hope they will lose no time in demanding action from the new government to arrest and prosecute the Buddhist monks and politicians who incite hatred and violence against Tamils and other minorities. □



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Ukraine: a changing "analysis"



Eye on the Left

By Matt Cooper

In many issues of *Socialist Worker* you can find a column headed "Analysis" by SWP leading writer Alex Callinicos, the purpose of which is to tell SWP members what they should be thinking. Ukraine features heavily in these columns, dominating more than a fifth of them in the last year.

The essentials of the conflict are unchanged, and Callinicos's conclusions too, but the "analysis" has changed. Callinicos's starting point im-

mediately after Russia's 2022 invasion was "the Western imperialist powers are instrumentalising the Ukrainian national struggle against Russian imperialism for their own interests", although these "interests" were never well defined.

Callinicos declared that Lenin's views about the issue of Serbia's claims to national independence within World War One were applicable and that the Ukraine war was 99% an inter-imperialist conflict between Russia and NATO. (SW, #2798)

As the war has ground on, it has not become a general inter-imperialist conflagration. By November 2023 there were new reasons to oppose the



arming of Ukraine, "And let no one tell you that it's a 'moral imperative' to supply Ukraine with whatever weapons its government says it needs. Nuclear war is a mortal threat to everyone on the planet." (SW

#2863)

Into 2024, Callinicos is now struggling with the apparent waning of backing from the USA and other NATO powers for Ukraine. His first take is that US/NATO has underestimated Russia and it is now a "dangerous rival", although he is still unclear that what that Russia rivalry means. (SW #2892)

Now Callinicos has changed tack again. In SW of 18 September Callinicos downgrades the nuclear threat and pins the lack of enthusiasm from the US and its allies on the potential for Russia to aid the US's enemies in the Middle East. The Houthis are named, but logically this would include Iran, which has supplied both

Hezbollah and Hamas. Russian aid could be a "threat to exacerbate the crisis of US imperialism where it is most severe".

To be clear, Callinicos does not say "good" at the end of this. But SW remains sympathetic to the Houthis and to Iran's funding of Hezbollah and Hamas, whom they lionise as "the resistance".

Whether, or how, *Socialist Worker* join up these dots in their "anti-imperialist" thinking remains to be seen. But they have drifted far from basic solidarity with the people of Ukraine, who are under the cosh not of NATO powers, but Putin's Russia. □

TUC Congress: left-wing votes plus deference

By Alex Jones

Several Workers' Liberty members attended the 8-11 September TUC Congress – the national conference representing the big majority of UK trade unions, with 5.5 million members – as delegates.

As predicted before the Congress, it passed a swathe of left-wing motions.

That included several explicitly critical of the Labour government's policies. Congress voted for a motion to radically change economic policy, including by implementing taxes on the rich to rebuild public services and expand public investment; and ones specifically calling for universal free school meals and an end to the two-child benefit limit and reversal of the cut to pensioners' winter fuel payment. Most of that text came from unions generally regarded as left-wing (general union Unite, rail and transport union RMT, civil service union PCS) – but the two-child benefit demand came from "moderate" and Labour leadership-supportive retail union USDAW.

Congress voted for blurry but left-wing motions on fighting the far right, anti-racism and migrants' rights. It voted for a major expansion of public ownership. It voted not only for a speedy and thorough carrying out of Labour's New Deal for Working People proposals, but repeal of all anti-strike and anti-union laws; and for a high-pro-

file campaign for "pay restoration", reversing real-terms pay cuts since 2008.

All that is good – but. The tenor of the whole thing was symbolised by the TUC hierarchy moving the vote on the two-child limit and winter fuel payment back a day so it would not take place till after Keir Starmer had delivered his speech at the Congress.

When Starmer spoke – offering very little and reaffirming the government is likely to implement further public-sector cuts – he received strikingly strong applause and a standing ovation from about half the delegates. Virtually all the motions discussed above were passed without opposition – which is part of the problem, because it is actually an indicator of how many of those voting for left-wing policies do not take them seriously.

And as predicted, the major open disagreements that did take place at the Congress were on climate change – though the TUC machine did manage to mitigate their sharpness.

The results were very mixed, but indicate the progress made in labour movement debate on these issues:

The composite motion from the two unions encompassing large numbers of workers in high-emission industry (Unite and GMB), downplaying the need to move away from fossil fuels and opposing Labour's policy of no new North Sea oil and gas licenses,

was passed: but only by 2.7 to 2.4 million votes. If conservative teachers' union NASUWT, who appeared to have a rather vague idea what they were voting for, had gone the other way, it would have been defeated. Given the long-established culture of deferring to unions about their own sectors, even when the issues in question have a radically wider impact, the close vote was noteworthy.

A relatively strong composite motion from public-service unions PCS and Unison was passed overwhelmingly. This did call for a "rapid and just transition away from fossil fuels to prevent catastrophic climate breakdown", as well as engagement with community groups in the formulation of transition plans and "a year of green trade union

activity" in cooperation with community and climate justice groups.

GMB's amendments seeking to gut the PCS text contributing to the composite disappeared due to the nonsensical and undemocratic TUC practice of not allowing separate votes on amendments (so did an amendment from post-16 education union UCU arguing for reduced military spending). Nonetheless, presumably fearing how being defeated would look, Unite voted for the motion, while GMB and technical and managerial union Prospect abstained.

An important motion on climate change, heat and workers' health from the Bakers' Union and the FBU was also passed. □

• Abridged. More: bit.ly/tuc-co

Our videos

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

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How will work be better under socialism?



Socialism vs Capitalism

By Martin Thomas

A comrade off work on mental-health grounds asked me: will work really be less oppressive under socialism?

Marx declared that even in communist society, "labour cannot become play, as [the utopian socialist Charles] Fourier would like". There will still be difficult, stressful, tiring work. As the first socialist demand, Marx emphasised shorter working hours, the "Magna Carta of the working class".

Marx never promised universal ease. The Italian Marxist Antonio Labriola declared: "I leave it to... the people of the future... to arrange their own lives, which will not be easy, I hope, in order that they may not become imbeciles in paradisaic beatitude".

But shorter working hours can also change work. "The

forces of production [wrote Marx]... increase... Freedom [in relation to the burdens of labour means] socialised humanity, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common control... and achieving this with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most favourable to, and worthy of, their human nature... The shortening of the working-day is its basic prerequisite".

"Free time – which is both idle time and time for higher activity – has naturally transformed its possessors into different subjects, and they then enter into the direct production process as those different subjects".

We can make work different by shortening the working day; by using technology to reduce physically-punishing, unsafe, dirty, wet, hot, noisy work; by electing managers and having them on workers' wages and under workers'

control; by flattening competitiveness between workers (for promotions, for better-paid jobs, etc.) inculcated by capitalism, and replacing it by mutual aid and conscious co-operation; and, with increased free time to learn and develop our talents and skills, by making each worker's time more of a mix, rather than a treadmill of the same thing every day.

Work is still work. We will still want play and rest time. But a drive to learn (including difficult things), to work (even when it is difficult) in order to sustain collective life, to cooperate, and to value doing the work well and reliably, is probably hard-wired into humanity by evolution. Despite class societies being geared to getting maximum surplus labour, they also poison their own wells and stunt productivity by making the majority experience work as a curse, to be suffered reluctantly, rather than a creative (if sometimes difficult) contribution to the collective.

None of this is airy or "uto-

pian". Substantial parts of it have been won by better-organised workers in more developed capitalist countries. Sometimes we can "civilise" employers to value cooperation above the advantages (for them) of setting workers against each other.

We can achieve it generally, however, only with a workers' government, not by relying on incremental progress within capitalism. There are counter-trends within capitalism.

China has a "996" (9am-9pm six days a week) standard, especially in high-tech companies. In Britain, after many decades of slowing-shortening work hours, they are slowly increasing, while also becoming more on average [more "anti-social"](#).

A friend of mine from teenage years who became a university mathematician told me when he was retiring he could scarcely imagine anything better – being paid for "self-development" which expanded his personal and society's knowl-

edge in friendly cooperation with others, and with mostly flexible hours. Even jobs like that have been warped by imposition of market or market-simulating mechanisms, with academics chained to a "publish or perish" treadmill.

"Competitive-unproductive" jobs (high finance, lobbyists, PR specialists, telemarketers, corporate lawyers...) have increased. Even in capitalism, most workers can see their work as a contribution to collective life (if warped by the way it is organised), and take some pride in doing it well. But those jobs serve only the rivalry of capitalists with each other, or even the rival impulses of managers to "show off".

The motive for work effort in such jobs becomes almost entirely competitive – about getting ahead in the race for promotion. These are both "bullshit jobs" and stressful.

Workers' control, in the workplace and in society, can bring huge change. □

Grenfell: an indictment of capitalism

By Jack Horner

The Grenfell Tower Inquiry has at last produced its final report into the fire that killed 72 people and devastated a whole community. The public inquiry spent seven years forensically examining the events, now exhaustively laid out in seven volumes over 1,700 pages. For all the limitations of a state-sponsored investigation, the report is a damning indictment of advanced neo-liberal capitalism.

The first volume of the report concentrates on the failures of central government, particularly relating to building safety and how thousands of homes were clad with materials as flammable as petrol. Ministers, senior civil servants and public bodies are severely censured. The guiding ideology was deregulation, the drive by successive governments over forty years to remove and weaken safety regulation, giving business a free hand. The FBU fought deregulation throughout, warned about cladding and insisted the fire was caused by deregulation from the beginning. The union's interventions are vindicated by the inquiry, even if they are not explicitly acknowledged.

The second volume is a savage indictment of the venal manufacturers who made and sold flammable cladding, insulation and related products. They

systematically fixed testing and certification to get around regulation, bringing their dangerous merchandise to market and flogging them for a profit. They were aided and abetted by the private bodies such as BRE, BBA and NHBC that tested, certified or advised firms and governments. The crooks and killers must be brought to justice.

The third volume examines the role of the tenant management organisation (TMO), which superintended Grenfell Tower under another form of deregulation, the contracting out of social housing. The TMO and Kensington and Chelsea council failed the residents of the block, ignoring or threatening those who sought remedies to improve their homes.

Refurbishment

The fourth volume scrutinises the refurbishment of Grenfell Tower in the immediate years before the fire. In the words of one fire consultant, they made "an existing crap situation worse". Not only the flammable cladding, but the windows, flat doors, lifts, smoke ventilation system and pretty much every fire safety feature was worse after the refurbishment, while clowns and chancers made money out of the misfortune. They deserve to go to prison for their crimes.

The fifth volume studies the role of the London Fire Brigade (LFB). The

inquiry's 2019 report was scathing about firefighters and control staff on the night for not evacuating residents. The inquiry now at least recognises that there was no plan or training then (and still none today) to evacuate a building containing 300 people with 30 firefighters, no alarm, no communications, no firefighting lift, down a 1-metre-wide single stairwell in the middle of the night with dozens of disabled and sick residents. LFB inspected the building numerous times before the fire, imposing enforcement and deficiency notices, but was mostly ignored by the TMO and the council.

Volume six is a poignant review of events on the night, including how the 72 died and others were rescued. Most died from the inhalation of asphyxiant gases. This is scant consolation for loved ones or the firefighters who tried to rescue them from a nightmare situation.

The inquiry dragged into the light a mountain of evidence that capitalists and their states cannot keep working class people safe in our homes. The cladding crisis continues to plague housing to this day. The report exposes the mercenary practices of the construction industry, which also heavily funds the Tories and no doubt other politicians. Despite its polite language and constricted remit, the inquiry does at least point to systemic failure and fur-



nishes the raw materials for a damning critique of current housing arrangements.

Of course, the inquiry's recommendations do not advocate systemic transformation. Many proposals are rational reforms of the existing state, with a few more constraints on private industry and landlords. Such measures if implemented will improve safety at the margins, while leaving much of the system intact.

Socialists must rouse the labour movement to fight for safe homes for all and a revolution in housing. This starts with campaigns to remove cladding, force landlords to improve living conditions, and make ministers invest, tighten safety regulation and build more decent homes fit for workers to live in. □

"Austro-fascism" was not fascism



By Cathy Nugent

In *Solidarity* 718 Martin Thomas says that there is no doubt that the regime established by Dollfuss in 1932 was "Austro-fascist". The designation is a matter of debate among contemporary historians and was explicitly argued against by Trotsky in 1934 (in [Bonapartism and Fascism](#)). Trotsky's analysis is interesting.

Trotsky is always concerned to be precise at any given point in time, to analyse what is happening in terms of his overall perspectives, but also to not leap ahead over the stages of the development of his perspectives. He describes the possibility of a "transitional" (Bonapartist) regime, something not yet fascist, and the Dollfuss Austrian government is an example. In the

same article he says the Polish Pilsudski regime has elements of Bonapartism but overall can be described as fascist.

Austrian Bonapartism was another form of dictatorship, "an instrument of order", and an attempt to stave off a more ferocious fascist order. Trotsky's perspective was that this was an unstable stage on the road to fascism, yet the outcome was not inevitable, i.e. it could be fought off by the Austrian workers. At the same time he was very sharp against those (the Stalinists) who could not imagine open capitalist repression in any circumstances other than fascism.

The Austrian short-lived violent authoritarian regime had Catholic-political forces dominant, at the centre; it incorporated the Heimwehr paramilitaries and suppressed all opposition, the Social Democrats and Communists but also the Austrian Nazis (who wanted unification between Austria and Germany).

The regime followed a period of political polarisation and instability – 23 governments with 12 heads of state between 1918 and 1932. The ultimate Nazi takeover in 1938, came after two-plus years of intense German political intervention. But the Nazi takeover was under the full direction of the German Nazis (i.e. it was no longer even "Austro-fascist").

What's interesting about the historical example and Trotsky's analysis is that it may help us think about (not provide a blueprint or exact replica, just think about) our own period of unstable, at-least authoritarian regime, where parliamentary democracy is intact. That is to say what transitional forms of far right regime look like. I did not say, nor meant to say, Trump was like Dollfuss. Only that there are many forms of extreme authoritarian government other than fascism and even in the era of "classic" fascism, there were many forms.

I find the way Trotsky's anal-

ysis emphasises structural elements of fascism over description of ideology and culture useful. The way that Traverso, the historian Martin claims I draw on, attempts to combine both approaches, I find unconvincing. But I have never said that I "draw on" Traverso anywhere, certainly not as a positive source for what I have written. I think Martin has taken this idea from a brief conversation we had some months ago, a misunderstanding of some kind, and chosen to put it into circulation in order to point score: "Hey look all these professional historians who have changed their minds about Trump, including the one Cathy draws on".

But, of course, I already knew some historians had changed their mind about Trump being fascist, proto-fascist or whatever; it's not something I'm overly bothered about. □

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Cammell Laird 37: The fight for justice continues

By Liz Williams and Lol Duffy

I doubt that many people have visited or even heard of Birkenhead unless they're a fan of Half Man Half Biscuit, but it has a proud history built around the Cammell Laird shipyard which in 1950 employed over 17,000 men. Over the years, with deliberate lack of investment, the numbers dwindled and there were no other large employers in Birkenhead, so we knew with the announcement of 1,000 redundancies the only place that we were destined for was the dole.

When Elvis Costello sings about "Shipbuilding" he isn't romanticising the building of ships but about the stark reality of how important this industry is to an island nation. The song is about the irony of shipyard workers hoping to benefit from the Falkland war. Thatcher was set on destroying this industry because countries such as Taiwan, Italy and Japan could build ships cheaper and, like the treatment of the miners, she wanted to destroy trade unionism, no matter the cost to ordinary people. We knew that the redundancies and closure would rip the soul from Birkenhead at a time when people were scrabbling to survive by collecting anything useful from the rubbish tip.

It's been 40 years since I, along with 36 of the lads, was arrested and imprisoned for standing up for our jobs and our community.

We were fighting against nearly 1,000 redundancies at the yard and many of us weren't even on the list.

It wasn't just about our jobs. It was about the future of Birkenhead and the wider Merseyside area. We could feel the rage and the despair at the indifference of a vicious Tory government. We knew what was at stake. Our occupation of the rig and frigate lasted four months. It was tough on us and our families, but we believed in what we were doing and those around us gave

their support.

On October 1, 1984, the first 11 of us were arrested and sent to Walton High Security Prison. I was in the first 11. The remaining 26 were arrested two days later, on October 3. We were all sentenced to 30 days for contempt of court, a decision made by courts we refused to cooperate with.

The prison sentence was brutal as Walton Prison was an old Victorian building and was dubbed as Britain's worst prison infested with rats and cockroaches. It was in a terrible state with human excrement on the walls and our toilet was a bucket in the corner. We were held two to a cell and locked up for 23 hours each day, treated like hardened criminals rather than workers fighting for our jobs.

There were some bright spots like when I was approached by one of the other prisoners who said that they had been discussing it and said that it was totally out of order that we had been locked up for trying to save Lairds from closure. As a sign of solidarity he said that a group of them would be willing to organise a riot! I thanked him for his offer but pointed out that we would only be there for three weeks and we didn't want to increase their prison terms. With limited options of solidarity in prison it was a generous offer and showed that many of those in prison had a better idea of solidarity than those outside. We were also applauded on our first walk to the "I Wing", also known as the Unemployment Wing, our home for the next three weeks. It's ironic that we were put on the unemployment wing as that was the only direction that we were headed on our release.

Two days later we heard a commotion with laughter and applause as Whitto (Chris Whitley) arrived with the rest of the 37. The main cause of the commotion was Whitto striding through the prison in an oversized prison uniform

SHOP **CONFED** STEWARDS BULLETIN.

ISSUE NUMBER 8.
MAY 84.

WHY SHOULDN'T I TAKE REDUNDANCY ?

IT'S MY JOB !

Over 150 years Cammell Laird built up a workforce of 12,000 for generations of workers.

Since the 1960's they have made over 8,000 people redundant - these jobs will not be replaced.

Lairds plan a further 1,650 redundancies and any future work will be on the basis of casual hire and fire, as in the 1930's.

I'LL BE BETTER OFF FINANCIALLY.

Some people may be tempted by the initial enticement of redundancy payments in order to pay off debts or take that well earned holiday.

However the DHSS state that before a person qualifies for social security the DHSS must be convinced redundancy payments have been used for acceptable purposes - holidays and mortgage payments are not classed as acceptable.

PROSPECTS OF EMPLOYMENT ELSEWHERE.

Employed in 1976 = 23 million.
Employed in 1983 = 17 million.



singing Jailhouse Rock. Humour and solidarity was what got us through. This was about trying to rip our dignity from us and trying to humiliate us but they didn't succeed. We stood together and held our heads high that we had fought a campaign that we were proud of.

When we were released, we found ourselves not only without jobs but also stripped of our redundancy pay, pension rights and blacklisted from other jobs. We continued to picket the yard into the early months of 1985 but the fight was lost although it did force the Thatcher government to place work in the yard when their previous plans were for closure.

In the years since Eddie Marnell has been the driving force behind the Justice For Cammell Lairds 37 campaign. Sadly, 13 of the lads have died without seeing their names cleared.

In 2014, the European Parliament

ruled that the British Government had no basis for our convictions and should apologise and compensate us. That was 10 years ago but we're still waiting for action. Why does it take so long to get any justice? The fight was never just about us. It's about standing up against injustice and ensuring that workers' rights are protected. As I look back on those events of 1984, I'm proud of what we stood for. We were just men fighting for our rights and our community. We deserve to have our names cleared and our story told.

The Labour government should now wipe the slate clean and apologise for the treatment of the 37 and their families as well as restoring their pensions and redundancy rights. They should also release all the paperwork/records related to the Thatcher government and the jailing of the 37. □

Far-right surge in Austria

By Will Roberts

On Sunday 29 September, Austria became the latest European country to see an electoral surge for far-right parties. The Freedom Party of Austria, or FPÖ, received the highest vote of any party, though at just over 29% (58

seats out of 183 in the parliament) not enough to form a government outright.

The traditional conservative ÖVP (Austrian People's Party) came second with 26%. The ÖVP has formed coalitions with the FPÖ in the past, but says it will refuse any coalition

with FPÖ leader Herbert Kickl as Chancellor. All other major parties have ruled out a coalition of any form.

The FPÖ has a history of loose connections to Nazism. Its founding leader in 1956 was a former SS member (though it was more "moderate" before

1986 than it is now). Two days before the current election, videos were released of members of the party singing old SS songs.

Kickl's slogan is "Fortress Austria - closed borders". He is very fond of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban;

since 2019, Orban's party Fidesz and the FPÖ have been in an alliance in the European parliament. The FPÖ has also been the leading party in Austria promoting ties with Russia, wanting to force an unjust end to the war in Ukraine on Russia's terms. □

“What we stand for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

• workersliberty.org/join-awl

Back to pen and paper



Diary of a Tube driver

By Jay Dawkey

As I go to the platform, I check one of the apps on my phone that shows where my train is. It reckons it is 35 minutes away. On the board, it looks like it is five minutes away. Errors are not uncommon, and I assume the five minutes is closer to the truth. That would only be a minute behind, after all.

The train turns up, and I think nothing of it. Four hours later, I am back for my next train, but the app now shows no data. Oh well, it happens. My train is on time, and I think no more of it.

On 2 September, back at work, I saw that the app now says that TfL has switched off all publicly accessible data following a cyber attack. That'll be that,

then, for tracking our trains. Sadly for us, but not the passengers, the trains are still running fine.

In the mess room, the most important questions are: how will the syndicate do our duties if they get locked out of the system? And will we get paid on time? We all just assume TfL's initial statement that no customer data has been accessed will not be true. And lo and behold... it wasn't. Faith in the company is not strong. Perhaps they should hire the 17-year-old who has been arrested to tell them where they went wrong.

And now we are faced with the saga of every single employee having to get their password manually reset to access the systems. Drivers are low down the list of priorities. A fair number in my depot don't use their email. As always, the rumours start. T says, "We won't get paid". Others: it must be "the Russians".

We did get paid, and so far, we only have one 17-year-old in Leicester to go

on as potentially complicit. D asks if "a ransom needs to be paid". There is no confirmation from the company that anything is being held hostage. Most of the switching off is apparently to protect the systems rather than the hack having taken them down.

"Some people are just fascinated by trains and transport; good chance the person who did this doesn't have another motive"? I am guessing here. It isn't as exciting as Russia hacking in and stopping people applying for Oyster cards.

Of course, resetting 30,000 passwords is quite a big job – a job that most of us will not go out of our way to do, even if TfL would like us to access one of the 24-hour centres they set up. So, for now, we'll keep driving trains and doing anything else we have to the old-fashioned way, with pen and paper. □

NHS needs better pay

By Alice Hazel

Members of the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) in England have voted against the 5.5% NHS pay award, by 64% on a reportedly high turnout. Despite calls from members for this result to trigger an immediate strike ballot, the RCN leadership appear to be using it weakly as a negotiation tool, rather than as a spur to necessary action.

Pulling together active members of NHS Workers Say No and of local RCN

organisations will need to happen quickly to push for a ballot for action.

Unison (by 77% on a 31% turnout), Unite (two-thirds) and GMB all accepted the award. The long running, if sporadic, RCN strikes, have produced lasting increased militancy in comparison to the other unions. There is a need for this to be channelled and organised. In the other unions we need to start organising for next year, and continuing to build cross-union rank and file organisation so that we can level up on any action.

The Darzi report, commissioned by Wes Streeting, made it clear that lack of funding under the Tories, has been the main cause of the "serious trouble" within the NHS. (Darzi explicitly states that the model of the NHS as a tax funded free universal healthcare system is not broken.) It may be that some additional funds for the NHS are ceremoniously announced in the Budget, but nowhere near enough to fix the decline of services.

A massive injection of funding is needed, including the restoration of pay levels to 2009 levels to limit the exodus of staff.

Organisation at workplace level now will serve us well in the future as pressure on the government increases. □

Forty years since Threads



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

There is one sure way to know if a TV programme has made an impact: people talk about it on the bus or at work. *Threads*, broadcast in September 1984, was one such example.

Directed by Mick Jackson and written by Barry Hines, it shows in a stark and horrifying way the effects of nuclear war, centering on the city of Sheffield. The Cold War was again peaking: Ronald Reagan was US President, Margaret Thatcher had just won the 1983 General Election, and the Soviet Union's war in Afghanistan

had been dragging on for almost four years.

In the film, conflict is triggered by the USSR invasion of Iran. The effects on the city and its population are utterly devastating. Overworked civil servants, operating from a bunker, try vainly to maintain energy and food supplies but society as we know it has simply collapsed. The city is a pile of rubble and a starving population struggles to find anything to eat, some even venturing out onto the nearby moors to find a dead sheep.

A "nuclear winter" sets in and crops fail. The remaining population lives at a medieval level. In the final scene a young woman gives birth but this not a new dawn – the baby is still-born. □

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Labour council pushes through victimisation

By Cathy Nugent

At the start of September, Justine Canady, full-time Branch Secretary for Unison at Lewisham council in south-east London, was made redundant as part of a restructure at the council where her post was the only one affected!

Under pressure of a campaign against blatant trade union victimisation the council had retreated from

previous plans to sack Justine. Then after the General Election the council u-turned and decided to move ahead with the deletion of her post.

At the same time Jay Kidd-Morton, also joint branch secretary since March 2024, has been facing dismissal alongside three members of her team (overwhelmingly Black and Asian) in the legal services department, despite no allegation of wrongdoing.

The Branch Secretary had previously

been a male member in post since the 1970s.

The change of branch leadership led to increased turnout in national consultations, a net increase in membership for the first time, recruitment of new reps and activists, and a new branch focus on equalities work and organising low-paid migrant workers. Jay was previously Black Members' Officer and had lodged a whistleblowing complaint about discriminatory practices.

In response Unison launched a strike ballot in August. Unfortunately, although members voted for strikes, the ballot failed to reach the legal threshold of 50% voting.

Justine is now pursuing legal action against the council. The fight continues to stop Lewisham council's attacks on union organising in the run up to what look likely to be another year of severe cuts in the borough. □

Parking workers stay determined

By Will Sefton

Ealing parking enforcement officers remain determined to win union recognition for Unite from their "insourced" employer, Greener Ealing.

Workers have been on strike for six weeks and are determined to keep going until Greener Ealing, which is entirely owned by Ealing Council, recognises Unite. The workers have been represented by Unite for over 10 years and were recognised by previous private contractors. There was no indication that this would change when they were transferred in-house.

Ealing Council claims that the strike has limited impact, but the strikers told *Solidarity* this is not the case. Agency

workers are being used to fill some gaps, but they also know that the number of enforcement notices is decreasing, a clear sign of the strike's impact.

Workers have protested at the surgery of the new MP for Ealing Southall, the Council's former deputy leader. She now wants to wash her hands of the matter, despite previously having a good relationship with Unite while she was the Cabinet member responsible for the workers. Those who lobbied her surgery were told she is independent from the council. "She has to be able to represent her constituents when they have an issue with the council". These workers have a problem and want a local MP to intervene!

A further protest has been held at the

Ealing Council Cabinet, and the Ealing Trades Union Council has written to every councillor, calling on them to recognise Unite for this group of workers.

The strikers are noisy and disruptive outside the Council offices. Those working there has been moved to the back of the building, but they can still hear the chanting, drumming, and air-horns from the daily pickets. Local businesses, residents, and the College have all complained about the noise, which can be quickly quieted if the council does the right thing.

Greener Ealing is directing agency staff towards joining the union they already recognise, GMB. They believe that as they have made a collective agreement with GMB that covers all

workers in Greener Ealing, including street cleansing and refuse, they do not need to recognise Unite.

Two Ealing Labour councillors became MPs in the last election, leaving local activists with the opportunity to pressure the candidates in the by-elections to stand with these workers. Peter Mason, the council leader, is newly elected to Labour's NEC on the right-wing slate. To win this dispute, Unite must put more political pressure on the council to stand with these workers. □

Offers accepted, but what now?



Off The Rails

Pay settlements have now been accepted by RMT union members on Network Rail and the Train Operating Companies (TOCs), both by large majorities.

Off The Rails believe those settlements fall short of what we could have won, with a renewed push to mobilise sustained action. However, we understand why so many workmates, many of whom feel fatigued by the strikes throughout 2022-3, wanted to take what was the on the table.

The RMT message to members announcing the acceptance of the deal says: "This ends a period of national dispute, which started in March 2020 with what amounts to an industry-wide

settlement."

This isn't entirely accurate; there has not been a single, continuous dispute stretching back nearly five years. But, in the absence of any alternative strategy being offered by the union leadership, it's hardly surprising that most members want to settle this year's pay round without taking further action.

We have to be honest with ourselves and each other. These are not good deals. They are below inflation (i.e., pay cuts), and do nothing to address the years of lost pay we've suffered throughout all the prior years of below inflation rises, or no increases at all.

Throughout 2022-3, Off The Rails and others argued consistently that the RMT leadership's "marathon, not a sprint" strategy of sporadic 24-hour strikes would not win. It would have the effect of grinding down members' morale and confidence, whilst not ac-

tually budging the bosses. We argued that more sustained action, financed by strike pay wherever possible, could force real concessions, thereby shortening the dispute.

It is now up to the reps and activists who want to see us win substantial improvements to our pay and conditions to rebuild confidence in the idea that striking can win, and enthuse and empower members to renew our fight in 2025.

RMT's message says that negotiations over next year's pay on Network Rail will begin at a Business Council meeting on 22 October. The union must make clear that we will not settle for anything less than an above-inflation increase for all members, with a flat-rate minimum for the lowest paid. If Network Rail bosses don't deliver that, we must build for action. □

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Asylum: defeat the “Meloni model”

By Ben Tausz

Much anger has rightly erupted about Keir Starmer’s visit to Italy’s far-right leader Georgia Meloni, where he praised and sought to learn from her anti-immigration policies. What are those policies?

In November 2023, Italy signed a €670 million deal with Albania. The scheme is still not running but in theory Italy will divert 36,000 asylum seekers annually to Albania for detention and processing.

Starmer and his Home Secretary Yvette Cooper say they are considering copying this example. They emphasise that it differs from the Tories’ Rwanda plan in that under Meloni’s deal, asylum seekers will be processed under Italian jurisdiction, with admission to Italy if successful.

Nevertheless, offshoring places detainees further from support. Out-of-country detention centres are further from the reach of independent monitoring, legal assistance and solidarity campaigns.

See the results of [Australia’s](#) years of offshoring immigration detention and processing to Nauru and Papua New Guinea. Migrants were imprisoned for years in squalid conditions. There was rampant physical, verbal and sexual abuse and rape, including systematic child abuse. Some detainees were driven to self-harm and suicide.

Irregular arrivals have dropped significantly in Italy this year. Starmer said he wanted to understand this “remarkable progress”, commenting “It looks as though that’s down to the upstream work that’s been done in some of the countries where people are coming from”. This is a euphemistic description of Italy’s border-externalisation policy: paying authoritarian governments, militias and gangsters to stop migrants before they reach Italy or its waters.

Italy’s deal with Libya was signed in 2017, before Meloni’s premiership, by the allegedly centre-left Partito Democratico government. People attempting to pass through Libya face torture, enslavement, sexual violence and murder at the hands of the Italian government’s partners.

Meloni signed a similar agreement with Tunisia, with EU support. There, security forces receive European [funding](#) to imprison migrants in squalid,

packed camps. Many report beatings, rapes and murders by police. Meloni has also placed curbs on humanitarian rescue ships.

Irregular crossings may be down due to these murderous deals – though will this drop even last? – but with safe alternatives barred, they have not stopped. And more than 1,400 are missing or dead in the Mediterranean since January.

Intensifying

Meanwhile, Labour’s leadership remains focused on intensifying policing against irregular Channel crossings, and ramping up deportations, while refusing safe routes and asylum rights. Interviewed by [inews](#), Cooper admitted that the clampdown has driven more people into fewer, more overloaded boats, increasing the danger of crushing or drowning, while hiking prices. Dozens have died already this year.

Cooper blames this on smugglers’ greed, but the border regime creates the smugglers’ market. This was a predictable consequence of her actions: harsher enforcement has consistently pushed people into more dangerous routes.

The Labour Right had hoped to get Labour Party conference to endorse this approach. Their “Border Security Command” [motion](#) encouraged the government to escalate its crackdown by deploying new counter-terror powers against migration and speeding deportations, including by agreeing more “safe” countries as deportation destinations.

But the [Labour Campaign for Free Movement](#) rallied opposition. And with major trade unions swinging to oppose the motion, the Labour Right [pulled](#) the motion at the last minute rather than risk losing.

This was a symbolic win. Starmer’s government will continue implementing their policy regardless. But their forced retreat at conference shows their political weakness. A concerted, mass fight for safe passage, asylum rights, equality and free movement, crucially including through our unions, could force concessions from the government. □

• The Labour Campaign for Free Movement has an online organising call, 7pm on 10 October: bit.ly/LCFMOct24



Thousands of jobs go in steel

By Matt Dunn

Thousands of jobs will go at Tata Steel UK’s Port Talbot plant as its owners shut its last ageing blast furnace on 30 September 2024. Thousands more look set to go at British Steel’s Scunthorpe works. The UK will be left with no ability to produce “virgin” steel – needed for industries like construction and vehicle manufacture. A huge economic impact will be meted out to the communities of Scunthorpe and Port Talbot. And we will pay billions.

Despite a high-profile campaign by Unite, with at best mixed support from Community and the GMB, workers at Tata voted with their back pockets. The voluntary redundancy scheme was over-subscribed.

Money

New money was promised by the Labour Government for Port Talbot and the final deal does include talk of future investment in expansion. And it commits Tata to retaining 5,000 jobs in the UK steel sector. The government is promising a steel strategy to be produced in 2025. This is an improvement on the money-for-nothing deal struck by the previous government, but still lacks

the clarity needed to give workers confidence.

Tata is a huge, rich corporation, headquartered in Mumbai. The UK Government has subsidised it through “pollution permits” to the tune of £1.4 billion over the last four years, and is now handing over another £500 million. According to the *Mirror* (Sunday 15 September 2024) Tata bosses, “could be in line for a windfall worth tens of millions of pounds”. If they don’t use their free permits, they can sell them. For a lot of money.

At the same time as they are shutting old, polluting blast furnaces in the UK, Tata is investing in new, greener steel in the Netherlands, and in new dirty steel produced in brand new blast furnaces in India. They are able to do this thanks in no small part to the largesse of the UK taxpayer.

Instead of bankrolling private conglomerates and their wealthy owners, we should demand the public ownership of polluting industries and the planning and financing required for a just transition to new, cleaner, socially useful industry. The voices of workers and affected communities – in industries like steel, oil and gas and automotive – must be at the fore of a worker-led transition. □



Solidarity

For a workers' government

Ceasefire! Peace with justice!

Israel and Hezbollah, maybe Iran too, have moved near all-out war. The suffering in Gaza increases, as does repression in the West Bank. We say: ceasefire, peace, two states: a real independent Palestinian state alongside a secure Israel. This article describes the background and prospects.

By Vincent Pr sumey

Hezbollah has confirmed that its leader, Hassan Nasrallah, was killed on 27 September by the Israeli bombardment of the Beirut district where he was staying.

He is not the only one: the bombardment officially left at least six dead and 90 wounded, adding to the hundreds of civilians killed in Lebanon in recent days. A million people have fled southern Lebanon, some crossing into Syria. You have to be truly terrified to take refuge in Syria.

There is no question of mourning Nasrallah. His death was celebrated in Idlib [in Syria], where there is not the slightest pro-Israeli sympathy. The tens of thousands of Syrian, Lebanese and Palestinian victims of Hezbollah's thugs, killers and torturers have every right to acknowledge this elimination with

satisfaction, but they do so with a double bitterness. It should have belonged to them, not to Netanyahu and not to the Israeli state.

Netanyahu has reached an impasse in Gaza. 45,000, probably more, dead, hundreds of thousands of people trapped in and amongst the rubble by starvation, trauma and disease. But it is impossible for Israel to achieve its stated aim of "destroying Hamas": it is only possible to massacre the people of Gaza.

And it is precisely because there is a real risk of genocide, as a barbaric outcome of this situation, that the obsessive proclamation of "genocide" prior to October 2023, as a description for all Israel's mistreatment of the Palestinians, obscures the real situation of massacre and destruction that would lead to effective genocide, which must now be prohibited by imposing a ceasefire and the release of hostages held by Hamas and Palestinian political prisoners held in Israel.

A ceasefire and hostage/prisoner-release agreement must be imposed by a global internationalist campaign, involving dock workers' unions, to stop arms deliveries, mainly from



the USA, to Israel. This has not been the focus of the current "pro-Palestine" movement in western universities, which has continually cried "genocide" but has no effective strategy for preventing it in practice.

It is the internal contradictions of US imperialism and the pressure of public opinion which, in the event of Trump's potential defeat by Kamala Harris in the US presidential elections, are likely to make Netanyahu's impasse in Gaza the beginning of the end for him.

This is why Israel's security and military apparatus has embarked in Lebanon on what is not an operation "in defence of Israel", but a diversion designed to reunite the Jewish-Israeli population, which is increasingly divided over Gaza, the hostages and Netanyahu, behind the state, and to stoke global fears of a regional war with Iran.

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