

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

**LEFT RESPONSE TO
FAR-RIGHT THREAT**

UNITY IN ACTION

WHERE WE AGREE

HONEST DEBATE

WHERE WE DISAGREE

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Unity: an open letter to the left



Comrades: In the aftermath of the disaster of Donald Trump's Presidential election victory we printed an appeal to the left (*Solidarity* 725).

The additional political problems the international left faces after Trump's victory, with the boost it has given to the racist-authoritarian right across the world, should require us all to reflect and at least ask the question: can we do better? Are our habitual patterns of political behaviour fit for purpose?

Because, for sure, our movements will be under greater pressure in the years to come. In the US democracy, labour and migrant rights will be assaulted, the oil companies will drill, many public services will be scrapped. The right and far right are on the offensive, globally.

Four ideas

Three ideas briefly spelt out in our appeal were:

- The left must explore additional ways to unite in practical activity;
- Where we disagree socialists should attempt to spell out clearly and honestly our differences, so that political lines are clear. We should debate differences;
- The creation of single-faction, pseudo parties on the left, in which debate is stifled, is debilitating and counter-productive.

And a fourth we would like to raise now, which is connected with the rejection of the defensive, sealed-in sect politics of much of the Marxist left: the need for the socialists to orientate outwards, to the existing labour movement, with the intention of helping to transform it into a movement capable of fighting for the interests of the working class.

The purpose of this letter is to discuss these points in a little more detail and to encourage other socialists to engage with these ideas.

It is true, of course, that the Marxists, in Britain and internationally, are isolated and weak. An aspect of that isolation is the tendency to look for "quick fixes", looking around for the next movement to piggy-back on, then making programmatic concessions to

fit in and recruit.

The lurch of Socialist Appeal, now the RCP, to what – at least visually, from the iconography – appears to be Third Period Stalinism is a recent, risible, example.

Some political adaptations seem baked-in. On Saturday 30 November, at the Gaza protest in London, the 50-strong SWP youth contingent chanted: "One solution, intifada-revolution!" Even a cursory glance at the reality in Gaza shows that there is no intifada (uprising), only isolated, now small-scale, military actions of the clerical-fascist militias of Hamas. And even if an intifada could be said to exist (as it did for a few years after December 1987), it was not our revolution (positive in ways, but nothing like a workers' revolution).

Of course the Israeli government is viciously right-wing and the large-scale massacres and destruction in Gaza is appalling and should end. But that does not imply Hamas is preferable. It isn't.

Redress

Even partial redress of the oppression of the Palestinians requires the growth of movements among both Palestinians and Israeli Jews backing a democratic, equal-rights, settlement. Longer-term, the key in the region is the larger working classes there, in Egypt, Iran, Israel. Those people will make the socialist future.

Not every uprising is a democratic, progressive movement, let alone a workers' revolution. Not every action against established capitalist or imperialist powers is positive. Our enemy's enemy is very often not our friend. We all agreed that in the case of Daesh, but it's not just Daesh.

So, when the SWP celebrated the 7 October 2023 pogrom against Israelis with the headline, "Rejoice!" they seemed to us to have lost touch with reality (and human, socialist decency, too).

Nevertheless, the SWP did chime in with a section of radicalised, militant young people on the march. Unfortunately, militancy is not enough to build a better world. The Chinese Maoists were militant, the Khmer Rouge were militant; so is Daesh, and so, even, were the German Nazis in their own disgusting way.

All those forces "stood up to" American imperialism. And all of them stood for something worse, measured against what we actually want: workers' liberty and human emancipation.

An aspect of the retreat of the far left is its negativism: stop this, end that, smash the other. The lack of confidence to raise positive demands and slogans, to advocate a socialist programme which is detailed, nuanced and rele-

vant, is part of the left's decay and confusion.

Some of the aspects of the left's isolation were visible during the far-right riots in England, in late July-early August. The left could mobilise in parts of London, but had little to offer in the North East. The Stand Up To Racism campaign, licensed by the unions to do what the unions themselves should be doing, was feeble.

Defend

In the years to come the labour movement will probably have to defend itself, and minorities, from far-right violence but we are unprepared to do so. We must repopularise the idea that labour movement self-defence is not an offence, and that workers' unity must be built on socialist ideas.

Nevertheless, despite all the weaknesses, the craziness, the confusion, this is the actual political world we inhabit, even if we might wish for a much better, more adequate Marxist left.

The Trump victory should give us all a reason to reflect and perhaps rethink and reorientate. It should give us a sense of urgency to do so, too. In the next period we will need to raise the socialist flag and fight to assert ourselves. We assess that it is our responsibility to try to do this work effectively, and we know that a more united left will be better able to do that than a divided left.

And in the past we have had some successes: we were part of the Socialist Alliance for some time and the project enabled joint-work and better intra-left discussions and clarifications than we

had had for many years. It was a project we had been advocating for some years prior to its creation, so we also know that sometimes persistence in advocating left unity is necessary, and that, on some occasions the message is listened to even when it appears that no-one is listening.

This appeal can be – and is – directed at individuals, but also at socialist groups. The impact of cooperation between left organisations could be significant, perhaps even in some areas decisive; the difference between winning and losing episodes in the class struggle.

So, we are asking you to discuss with us and work out plans in areas where we can agree, in the unions and other arenas of activity. We already have unity in action with other socialist groups in some unions; we have enough common ground that united action for solidarity with workers in China, for example, should be possible.

Debate

We can debate our differences, where we disagree. We know there are disagreements on Israel-Palestine, on Ukraine, and on the Labour Party. Well, we can debate those differences in a comradely manner.

We offer you space in our paper to do so. And if we are able to find agreements to work together, we think that might encourage others on the left to follow our lead.

For solidarity, cooperation on the left and free debate on our differences!

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Solidarity 729

Solidarity 729 will be out on 8 January. We're skipping some weeks, because labour-movement and left activity is lower as we approach Christmas and New Year, and to give our paper staff time for other tasks. □

Peace! Two states! Equal rights!

By Ira Berkovic

In Gaza, hopes of a ceasefire agreement remain remote after the 26 Nov ceasefire deal in Lebanon. Bezalel Smotrich, the far-right finance minister in Israel's cabinet, spoke in a speech on Monday 25 November of the need for Israel to fully "conquer" the Gaza Strip.

Israel continues to bombard northern Gaza, which has been placed under a choking blockade which is deepening already severe humanitarian crises, and pushing the population to the brink of

starvation. Aid provision and distribution is further hampered by the looting of trucks by armed gangs, which Israeli forces often fail to intervene against.

Another danger opened up by the Lebanon ceasefire and by Trump's election in the USA is that of new Israeli bombing expeditions against Iran. We do not "defend Iran" – the Tehran regime oppresses many nationalities, and frequently promises "death to Israel" – but such expeditions would kill many people and possibly spiral into

full-scale war. We advocate a real independent Palestinian state alongside a secure Israel, equal rights, and workers' unity.

Inside Israel, Standing Together held an anti-war protest in Tel Aviv on 29 November, demanding a ceasefire and hostage-release agreement. Prior to the demonstration, Standing Together wrote: "We must not get used to the abandonment of the hostages. We must not get used to the mass killing and starvation of Palestinians in Gaza.

We must not get used to the constant airstrikes, and the daily barrage of rockets and missiles. We must not get used to the neglect of the communities in the north and south.

"We must not get used to it – and that's why we are organising a mass protest on Thursday evening in Tel Aviv to demand an end to the war, a ceasefire that will end the death and destruction, bring back the hostages, and allow us all to begin the process of recovery and rebuilding." □

Creating new light for all

By Sabreen Msarwi

Sabreen Msarwi is a Palestinian citizen of Israel and a high-school teacher. In June 2024, she was suspended from her job and threatened with dismissal after she attended a march on Nakba Day, the day on which Palestinians commemorate the expulsions and disposessions they suffered as part of the war around the foundation of the state of Israel. After an international campaign, the disciplinary charges against Sabreen were dropped. Sabreen is also a member of the leadership of Standing Together. The text below is excerpted from an article by Sabreen, which first appeared in Hebrew on Standing Together's Rosa Media platform on 15 June 2024. This version is based on a translation by Bernice Keshet of UK Friends of Standing Together, which first appeared online at Rosamedia.

"I belong to the Israeli people, and also to the Palestinian people. But precisely because I'm Palestinian, they're trying to kick me out of work at the school I love so much. Palestinians in Israel have no freedom of expression, we are persecuted because of what we say and



because of our identity. It's like that because of the media, the ministers who incite [hatred], those who have been persecuting us since 7 October until today. There is a war in the south and a war in the north, but Ben-Gvir is concerned with how terrible the Palestinians are, how they must not be allowed to breathe, and how they must be further forsaken. Put more and more [pressure] on our shoulders and see if we still survive.

"The Palestinian flag, which I was persecuted for being photographed next to, represents my identity, it tells my story. I am a Palestinian citizen of the State of Israel. The erasure of Israelis or Israeli identity is not part of my own identity. I belong to the Palestinian people, like anyone who was born here and lives in an Arab village or town, and this cannot be erased. Maybe not everyone will agree on the narrative, but Palestinians have always lived here. When Taybeh was occupied by Israel, we Palestinians became citizens of the State of Israel. I feel a part of the Is-

raeli people, and this does not erase my primary Palestinian identity.

"I have no place under the Israeli flag. Still, I'm not angry and I don't speak out against the Israeli flag. But the school administration and the municipality came out against the Palestinian flag, which is part of my identity. The flag reminds me of my responsibility to my people and my family, to the injustice done to us – my responsibility to work so that we will not experience another Nakba, more house demolitions or racism. I am doing this together with my partners in the State of Israel, partners in the path of peace. I don't keep score of what happened in 1948, even though I know that an injustice was done to my people.

"I know that 520 villages have been destroyed and uprooted, but still, I say let's build a new reality that sees me as an equal, no less than anyone else. From an ugly, difficult, dark place, let's create hope and send out light." □



A hundred people protested at the Chinese Embassy in London on 30 November in support of the Hong Kong 45, democrats and trade-union activists recently sentenced to jail for "subversion" because they sought to organise "primary" elections in 2020. See workersagainsttheccp.org for ongoing solidarity activity.

Correction

Two slips in *Solidarity* 727. The nominated US Secretary of Labor is Lori, not Lisa, Chavez-DeRemer; the Tory MP with whom Diane Abbott cooperated on the Assisted Dying Bill was Edward Leigh, not Heath. □



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“Third World War” hysteria and Ukraine



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

Fear of World War Three is not irrational: Putin’s repeated threats to use nuclear weapons have so far proved empty, but no-one can simply discount the words of the man who controls the world’s largest nuclear arsenal.

It remains irresponsible to try to create an “abandon Ukraine” panic by predicting that “Britain may find itself formally at war with a nuclear-armed power before 2025 breaks.”

As did Andrew Murray in his Eyes Left *Morning Star* column of 27 November. Murray, as well as being a long-standing member of the Communist Party of Britain, is also a leading light in the Stop the War Coalition. The record of both organisations over Ukraine has been to blame the West (rather than Putin) for the invasion and to oppose Ukraine’s right to obtain arms. Both organisations (and their mouthpiece, the *Morning Star*) now make little secret of their hope that Trump will force Ukraine to capitulate on terms favourable to Putin.

Murray and his co-thinkers have been frustrated by their failure to undermine support for Ukraine within the British

labour and trade union movement and are now hoping to mobilise legitimate concerns about world war three and the claim that arming Ukraine is making it all but inevitable, in a desperate bid to win an argument that so far they’ve been losing. The left in Britain has a long and generally honourable history of supporting the peace movement and opposing militarism: Murray’s column is a cynical attempt to use that tradition to whip up panic and hysteria in the cause of undermining support for Ukraine.

Given the fact that Murray, the *Morning Star*, and Stop the War all spent December 2021 and January 2022 denying that Putin had plans to invade (and claiming that suggesting he might would be in itself a form of provocative war-mongering) I thought I’d turn to someone with a rather more impressive record of foresight: the Yale historian Timothy Snyder, who not only predicted Putin’s 2014 annexation of Ukraine but also that he might try to engineer a coup in Kyiv and if that failed, “armed intervention”.

Snyder is a left-liberal, but his understanding of what motivates Putin and what is at stake in the Ukraine war have so far proven much sounder than that of the so-called “Marxist” Murray. In a recent article, Snyder [argues](#) that Ukrainian resistance is making the third

world war less, not more, likely.

Snyder outlines the three most likely scenarios for a third world war: (1) escalation from a conventional war in Europe; (2) escalation from a conventional war in the Pacific; and (3) the spread of nuclear weapons. Snyder argues that in all three cases, “Ukrainian resistance is making us safer.”

Briefly, Snyder’s case is:

1. Europe: the traditional scenario for a third world war has been a great-power conflict in Europe. Ukraine has resisted Russia’s invasion, keeping the largest war since 1945 contained on its own territory. Should Ukraine lose, Putin will be emboldened and the war will very likely expand.

2. The Pacific. The main twenty-first century scenario for a third world war is a Chinese invasion of Taiwan, provoking an American response. So long as China sees successful Ukrainian resistance, they are unlikely to undertake a risky offensive in the Pacific.

3. Nuclear proliferation. If the Ukrainians had submitted to Russia’s nuclear blackmail, the lesson would have been that every country that does not have nuclear weapons must build them in order to resist threats like Russia’s.

Snyder’s conclusion is: “Nobody in their right mind wants a third world war. So let’s not bring it about by abandoning the people who are holding it

back.” Murray’s is that “the escalations in recent weeks have been designed to thwart any move president-elect Trump may make to end the war, risking the ‘special relationship’ beloved of Labour politician for the sake of bleeding Russia some more and saving Nato’s face.”

Based on their respective records so far, I know whose judgement I’m more inclined to trust. □

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Renewed wave of protests in Georgia



Eric Lee

Georgia’s increasingly authoritarian and pro-Russian government has made a major miscalculation.

Protests against the fraudulent elections on 26 October were showing signs of dying down. When the Georgian Parliament met – with all the opposition parties boycotting it – only small numbers of demonstrators were there to protest.

But then the country’s prime minister dropped a bombshell on 28 November: Georgia, he said, would abort the efforts to start accession negotiations with the EU until 2028.

If one thing unites nearly all Georgians, it is the belief in a European future. It’s written into the Georgian constitution. And even the ruling party incorporated the EU flag in its election propaganda.

The government announce-

ment ignited a massive wave of protests. Unlike in previous rounds, this time the protests took place all over the country. Students continue to play a leading role. But also large numbers of government workers – including over 250 employees of the ministry of foreign affairs – have spoken out against the government. Several Georgian ambassadors, including the one in Washington, have resigned. Leading businesses, among them the country’s top banks, have joined in condemning the government. Street protests have continued well into the night for several days running. Tens of thousands of Georgians have taken to the streets.

Meanwhile, the ruling party has announced that it will be replacing the country’s elected president, who has been a strong supporter of the pro-democracy protests. She has responded saying that she does not accept the authority of the parliament and will re-

main in post until a legitimately-elected government returns to power. The stage is now set for dramatic confrontations later this month.

The government is pouring oil on the fires of protest. By Monday, it was reported that some 224 demonstrators had been arrested. The Health Minister admitted that dozens of protestors have been injured. Local clinics began offering free treatment to pro-democracy activists who have been injured by the police.

As the president posted on X, the “majority of the arrested protestors have injuries to their heads and faces, broken face bones, eye sockets, open wounds. [They] have been subjected to systematic beatings between arrest and transport to already overcrowded detention facilities.”

Journalists covering the protests have been singled out for police violence. According to the European Federation of Journalists, they “have been deliberately targeted by secu-

rity forces, with many reporting that they were beaten and required hospitalization.”

Governments across Europe, as well as the United States, have been forceful in their condemnation of state violence against the pro-democracy protests.

Meanwhile, the UK has been largely silent about all of this, having issued a feeble call on the Georgian government – which ran a fraudulent election – to investigate itself. After four days of mass street protests in the Georgian capital and across the country, as world leaders stepped up their criticism of state violence in the country, the UK has been silent.

As there is no large Georgian community in Britain, pressure is unlikely to come from that quarter. It is up to the left and trade unions to show solidarity with the Georgian people as they take to the streets, challenging an increasingly violent and undemocratic government.

There can be little doubt who will prevail in this struggle – in part because the Georgians have been here before. In November 2003, former Soviet foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze was clinging on to power in his homeland, where he had previously served as the Communist Party boss. Following fraudulent elections, Georgians turned out in vast numbers demanding change. And they won.

Their peaceful protests are now known as the “Rose Revolution” and every Georgian today must be wondering if they can do it again. They can – but they cannot do it alone. The ruling party in Georgia has Putin on their side. The pro-democracy protestors need the full-throated support of all democratic governments if they are to win again.

The Labour government must speak out – and soon. □

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

Misogyny and the rise of the far right



Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

Though material conditions of capitalism underpin sexism, life is not purely a reflection of political and economic systems. Our experiences encompass the realms of belief, emotion, imagination and representation too. Base ideas, really powerful ideology, takes strength from being presented as a fact of nature rather than culture. The family is presented as a biological unit rather than a social arrangement. Gender and race are presented as eternal and biological. Not just race or gender themselves as constructs, but the social inequality and divisions with them, are also seen as natural.

Read the *Guardian*, and the explanation for resurgent misogyny is basically Andrew Tate and Jordan Peterson – or maybe, if you're a bit better versed in the manosphere, earlier iterations like 4Chan, gamergate, etc.

The internet has served as a great recruiter for misogyny. The algorithms encourage the outrageous and also create an environment for swarms and harassment with far lesser consequence for the perpetrator. The immediate consequences for threatening to

rape someone or for a hundred people all using the same insult at the same time to a victim are far reduced.

It is not as if we have had this wave of misogyny, but life for LGBT+ and black people is A-OK. There has been a generalised rise of the profile and power of the far right.

It has been fuelled by the fallout from the 2008 financial crisis, the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, hikes in the cost of living, rising inequality, and the austerity years: the near-destruction of the post-war welfare state and growing inequality which labour movements have been unable to stop or reverse. People's lives are more bleak and at the same time there is a cultural drive for more reproduction to be done in the home due to the crisis in care caused by austerity.

We have seen the failure of mainstream liberalism. In the UK, US and South Korea we have seen the end of the march of progress of living standards. In Russia, Poland, Hungary we have seen removal of state subsidies and rapid privatisation, corruption and elites transfer to capitalist oligarch model. Nobody is living the capitalist dream they were promised.

The single biggest motive for Trump voters in 2024 was the inflation and cost of living.

You get liberals in the press and on social media talking about the "vibe-

cession" – the mistaken belief by the public that the economy is in recession, when GDP is growing and inflation is modest at 2.4%. But the GDP figure is not how most people experience the economy. Household debt is high and after 2008 a bigger worry. Biden also cut benefits established during the pandemic which provide a basic welfare state.

Prices are 20% higher than before the pandemic and prices for things poor people spend more of the income on, essentials such as food, are up 28%. To say "the economy is doing great, actually; you feel differently because you're an idiot" isn't helpful. A social programme is needed to undercut the growth of the far right fuelling the rise in public misogyny. □



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Sheffield organises against far right

By Alice Hazel

Anti-fascist protestors in Rotherham on 30 Nov far outnumbered the handful of far-right activists who gathered with some union jacks, and incoherent placards on the steps of the city police station.

After moving their advertised position due to the counter demo, bizarrely shouting that they weren't racists, and dancing to tunes by the Pogues, Bob Marley and Tom Robinson, they skulked away.

The show of strength against the fascists in Rotherham was important after their attack on a hotel housing asylum seekers nearby at Manvers in August, but in reality outnumbering this pathetic crew didn't go very far in undercutting far right mobilising in the area.

The counter protest was initially called by Stand Up To Racism but supported and built for by a significant new local coalition, the Sheffield TUC



anti-fascist committee.

That committee has been part of initiating a Sheffield Stewarding Collective which has worked to train up stewards to provide self-defence. Their visible stewarding of the protest was a great improvement on recent chaotic and unsafe organisation at local anti-fascist protest (not) co-ordinated by SUTR. The organisation is new and not tested at this protest, but the work is important and needs to be built in the unions.

The initiative for the STUC committee came from comrades in local branches of Aslef. It includes representatives

from trade unions, workplaces and community and campaigning organisations.

Far-right street mobilisations have mostly subsided for now, but in the Woodhouse council by-election in Sheffield on 28 Nov Reform came in second to the Liberal Democrats by only ten votes and far ahead of Labour, which previously held the seat. The committee needs to build its base in communities and workplaces, challenging racism and the lack of resources for working class communities with socialist ideas and action. □

Care workers demand big pay rise in 2025

By a carer

Around seventy care workers attended a careworkers' conference organised by Unison Scottish Region in Glasgow in November.

Given the problems of organising in social care – many workers have no contact with staff outside of their own accommodation unit – this was a good turnout. It was a much better turnout than at the previous such conference (just eleven) and had representation from a wide range of social care organisations.

Particularly encouraging was the attendance of around twenty BAME careworkers, with one of the plenary sessions given over to the particular problems faced by migrant workers. (Most migrant workers in social care are BAME. And most BAME workers in social care are migrant workers.)

Many care sector employers exploit the vulnerability of migrant workers, who have leave to remain in the UK for five years – provided that they work in social care. A job loss can therefore lead to a loss of the right to remain.

Demands

They are therefore more vulnerable to demands from employers to work extra hours, and more likely to be scapegoated when things go wrong.

Conference sessions included workshops on building alliances with service-users and their relatives, mapping often atomised workforces, and a hands-on session on creating slogans, chants and banners.

At the core of the conference was a drive for a substantial pay increase in 2025, and the recruitment and organising of more workplace representatives and activists, in order to make a combined industrial and political campaign more effective.

There was also a stocktaking of the skills of the conference attendees, the main issues in their workplaces, and any potential political contacts. Training courses in the New Year will be organised for existing and potential union reps.

The conference could be the basis for helping to build a serious pay campaign next year – provided that it is properly followed up.

And also provided that all three unions in social care – Unison, Unite and the GMB – give up their territorialist approach to social care and instead work together in a single co-ordinated pay campaign. □

The Earth and limits to consumption



Environment

By Vicki Morris

We live under an economic system, capitalism, whose expansion depended and whose continuation still depends on burning fossil fuels, alongside other depredations on our Earth system's "planetary boundaries" which should not be exceeded if humanity is to thrive.

But the rich and powerful will not dump their system, the source of their obscene wealth. Since they will not, we other humans, the workers and those who this system does not serve but instead exploits or neglects, as it exploits and neglects our planet, must dump their system, overturn it and replace it with democratic planning to meet human need – within planetary boundaries.

Yet we need growth of many things: renewables and nuclear energy pro-

duction; public transport infrastructure; efficient, sustainable agriculture; energy-efficient homes and workplaces, schools, hospitals; etc. We need de-growth of the activities that are driving global warming, species extinctions, etc.

Equalisation of global incomes would lift many out of poverty, and cut carbon emissions too. About half of global carbon emissions can be attributed to the world's best-off 10%. And 16% to the top 1%. But the "10%" includes many better-off workers in richer countries, as well as the plutocrats: it correlates roughly with the global percentage who have cars, and with the percentage who take even one flight each year.

Productive gains from capitalism have created the conditions that allow 8.2 billion people to live now – and, if not well, at least with many fewer outright famines than in previous eras. World population will probably be 10bn or so by the mid 2080s, and decline thereafter. The problem is not "too many people".

Global GDP is a bit over US\$100,000 billion. Divide that by world population,

and you get income per head around the average of Algeria or Ecuador: not high, but enough for almost 100% of households to have electricity, a fridge, and a phone, as well as basic food and clothing.

Meeting human needs – and for communication, education, health care, etc., as well as just food and shelter – is within our grasp now. It has been made possible because technology is now developed to a very high level, sufficient to solve the problems of consumption and to mend the environmental damage done in the process of getting to where we are now. True human flourishing is attainable if we move beyond capitalism.

Still, we cannot afford for everyone in the world to drive a petrol car, or everyone to take several flights a year. It may be that some reductions in things that better-off workers in developed countries take for granted will be necessary, but that will be by co-operative decision, people deciding on restraint for the common good, as we have come to avoid dumping waste on the streets or, largely, to avoid smoking tobacco.

Post-capitalism, nationalism will fade and international cooperation will be stronger. Large numbers of people will continue to move, notably to areas of the world less affected by climate change. Perhaps in a post-capitalist world we will have a system of internationally determined carbon quotas for these units.

There will be shorter working hours; more autonomy and control over how we work; less wasteful competition; fewer wars; more equality between sexes and genders; better education; less anxiety; happier childhoods; friendlier societies. All those factors will wither the consume-consume-consume drive inculcated in us by capitalism, and ease the difficulties of the economic restraint needed to respect the environment..

Ending capitalism, pooling wealth, and the possibilities that flow from that, is a virtue and also a necessity for us and the planet we depend on. □

Germany gives us a warning

By Dale Street

Following November's [collapse](#) of the coalition government, a general election will be held in Germany on 23 February 2025.

Since 2021 Germany has been governed by a coalition between the SPD (roughly akin the Labour Party), the FDP (a very free-market version of the Lib-Dems) and the Greens (despite its origins, now a mainstream political party).

84% of respondents in recent opinion polls expressed dissatisfaction with the government's record. The main grievances of voters were immigration (48%) and the economy (20%). Overall support for the three coalition parties stands at 30%, compared with 52% at the time of the 2021 election.

SPD leader Olaf Scholz is the most unpopular Chancellor since German reunification in

1990. Polls put support for the SPD at just 14%.

Although the FDP has tried to distance itself from the government's record and triggered the coalition's collapse by opposing increases in public borrowing, support for the FDP stands at 4%. The FDP is therefore unlikely to have any parliamentary seats after the election. (Parties have to pass a 5% threshold.)

In the 2021 election, the Greens won 15% of the vote, nearly double their 2017 score. Although its loss of support is not as dramatic as that of the SPD and FDP, it is now at 11.5% in opinion polls.

Support for Die Linke, which traces its origins back to the pre-unification ruling party in East Germany, has declined from 9% in 2017 to 4.9% in 2021, and now to 3.5%. It too will likely fail to reach the 5% threshold. (It has 39 seats in

the current parliament because of a rule that a party with sufficiently concentrated support to win three individual constituencies, as Die Linke did in 2021, gets seats on the basis of its percentage vote even if below 5%.)

Support

Support for right-wing parties and the nominally "left-populist" (but, in reality, nationalist-populist) BSW has increased dramatically.

Support for the CDU and the CSU, its Bavarian sister-party, stands at 33%, compared with 24% in 2021. Led by Friedrich Merz since 2022, the CDU has shifted to the right.

In his book *Mehr Kapitalismus wagen* (Dare More Capitalism), Merz advocates cuts to welfare benefits, corporation tax, and the size of the public sector workforce. As a member of the German Parliament he has voted against liberalis-

ing abortion law, and against marital rape being treated the same as any other rape.

Dismissive of a transition to sustainable forms of energy and of green politics in general, Merz has promised to roll back the coalition government's energy policies. He has also repeatedly pandered to anti-immigrant and anti-refugee prejudices.

The AfD (Alternative for Germany) is akin to Farage's Reform Party, but far worse. Opinion polls show support for the AfD at 18%, as against 10% in 2021. In recent federal-state elections it topped the poll in Thuringia and came a close second in Saxony and Brandenburg.

The BSW (Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance) was officially founded in January of this year, but dates back to the breakaway from Die Linke which Wagenknecht led in

September 2023. Wagenknecht simultaneously plays the role of BSW cult leader and BSW political oracle.

The BSW is anti-immigration, anti-asylum-seeker, Putin-apologetic, Covid-19 conspiracy-theorist, anti-EU, and anti-trans-rights. Support for the BSW is 6.5% nationally, but heavily skewed towards the former East Germany. In the Thuringian state election, for example, it got 16%.

Although the coalition government is only roughly comparable to Britain's Labour government, especially given the (former) presence in it of the FDP, its experience serves as a warning of how the right and far right can channel discontent with a vaguely left-of-centre government when it flounders and no left-wing force is strong enough to lead protest. □

Anti-war protest still simmers in Russia

By Michael Baker

A Russian state crackdown on dissent continues. So does anger against the Ukraine war among sections of the population. OVD-Info reports that since the beginning of 2024, 1184 arrests have taken place at public events, and there are currently 1103 criminal cases open against anti-war dissidents.

The Telegram channel "Appeal to Conscience" reports that Moscow authorities are in the middle of an extensive roundup of anyone who has been issued a military enlistment notice but has not yet been sent to the front.

"Evaders" (often those in the middle of a legal appeal against their summons, or those with valid diagnoses for medical exemption) are being tracked down through data from local government and CCTV facial recognition software, as well as information from places of study and doctors' clinics.

One individual reported police showing up at his door 20 minutes after he was seen passing a public CCTV cam-

era with his face uncovered. There have also been reports of violence – including the use of tasers – at the collection point. As the war nears the end of its third year, the fight against enlistment rages on, and the ranks of conscientious objectors grow.

Valeriya Zotova is a 19-year-old woman from Yaroslavl, a small city north-east of Moscow. She was sentenced in June 2023 to six years in a penal colony on charges of "preparing to commit a terrorist act" – namely, fire-bombing a military recruitment centre. The evidence for Valeriya's sentencing is a series of messages between her and two individuals. One was a man who claimed to be from Ukraine, and repeatedly suggested that she attempt arson on a recruitment centre. She refused each time, even going as far as to show her mother the messages at one point.

Encouraged

After a while, another woman started sending her similar messages, and encouraged her to meet up with them. While the three of them were in a car, police appeared and handcuffed Valeriya, but not the others.

The "accomplices" admitted openly in court that they were FSB agents, and called the entire operation an "investigative experiment". Although Valeriya Zotova never agreed to commit the crime, and the provocation was entirely fabricated, the court found her guilty.

This month, Valeriya has been displaying signs of an infection in prison:

raised lymph nodes, a swollen neck and a high temperature. She has been told by the prison authorities that she is in no need of medical assistance, which means that she will now only get it after a successful appeal by her lawyer, currently in progress. Support for Valeriya, legal and otherwise, is being coordinated by [Solidarity Zone](#).

Torture

In November, a [report](#) by the UN's special rapporteur on Russia concluded that torture was rampant and unchecked in the country, carried out by

police, prison guards or prison inmates for a variety of reasons and at different levels of severity. The report also discusses psychological torture carried out in Russian prisons, including extended periods of isolation and the return of Soviet-era "punitive psychiatry".

In the report's own words, "of particular concern [...] is the documented torture of peaceful anti-war activists and of Ukrainians forcibly transferred within Russian-occupied Ukrainian territories or deported to the Russian Federation". □



Activist Agenda

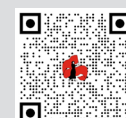
Meetings

Fri 6 Dec: A Marxist history of Christmas. 7pm, Marchmont Centre, London WC1V 1AB

Thu 12 Dec: After the US presidential election. 7pm, Friends' Meeting House, Manchester M2 5NS

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.



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Template motions

Texts: to adapt for union branches and Labour Parties: bit.ly/mo-pe

Socialist-feminist book clubs

workersliberty.org/sf-book-clubs

Campaigns

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

Ireland heads for new FF-FG coalition

By Micheál MacEoin

Ireland's general election looks set to produce a return in some form for the Fine Gael/Fianna Fáil coalition, though with those main two parties again needing to enlist smaller other groups to get a majority (88 seats). Formation of a new government may take some weeks.

With all 43 first counts in, first preference vote is Fianna Fáil 21.9%, Fine Gael 20.8%, and Sinn Féin 19.0%. The Social Democrats and Labour achieved just under 5% each. People Before Profit-Solidarity won just under 3%, slightly up on 2020.

At 19%, Sinn Féin has done better than the opinion polls and the recent European and local elections, though it is 5.5% down on its 2020 high, when was the most popular party on first preferences.

Sinn Féin came behind FF and FG as a party, but its leader Mary Lou Macdonald is the most popular choice for Taoiseach in some exit polls, and the party registered particular gains amongst voters aged 25-34.

Housing and homelessness emerged as the top issue in the exit poll, cited by 28% of people, followed by the cost of living, 19%, and health, 17%.

Despite the anti-immigration riots in November 2023 and the high profile given to the issue by the media, only 6% of voters cited immigration as their top concern. The far-right, in several organisations, scored a total of around 1.5%, and the more "respectable" anti-immigration party Independent Ireland took 3.5%.

Turnout, at 59.7%, was the lowest since 1923, just after the Civil War.

This probably reflects sullen

resentment against the governing coalition plus hesitancy about a divided opposition landscape led by a party, Sinn Féin, still distrust by sections of the electorate because of its historic and relatively recent associations with the Provisional IRA.

Transfers

Ireland operates a single transferable vote system with multi-member constituencies, so the overall picture will be decided only after transfers are taken into account.

But an increasing fragmentation of the electorate is already clear. Within this fragmented picture, there is a loose divide between the two long-dominant parties on the one hand, and an amorphously defined opposition on the other – Sinn Féin, the Social Democrats, and People Before Profit-Solidarity on the other. Labour,

who perhaps once filled that space of opposition, occupy an ambiguous position, outside government but widely reviled as enablers of austerity for their role in supporting Enda Kenny's 2011 Fine Gael administration.

Muddying the picture, with 13.2%, is a motley group of independents, some members of the main parties by any other name and others anti-establishment mavericks or figures with strong local support. Those opposed to the government, but from the further right, now are voting for the socially conservative republicans of Aontú or the anti-migrant Independent Ireland.

At 42.7%, the combined total for the once dominant historic rivals Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael is the lowest-ever, suffering its fourth consecutive decline in a general election. Their combined total was 69% in 2011.

A return to a two-party coalition after this election will hasten a trend since 2016 or so for FF and FG to converge as two awkward halves of one centre-right Party of Order. Within this bloc, Fianna Fáil has again edged ahead of Fine Gael, with Micheál Martin considerably more favoured in the exit poll as a prospective Taoiseach than Fine Gael's leader Simon Harris.

Their coalition partner, the Greens, saw their vote down 4.1 points to 3%. As with Labour, which lost 30 seats in 2016 after entering government with Fine Gael, the Greens look set to be largely wiped out, with only their leader retaining a seat.

This is a cautionary tale for any junior party (possibly the Social Democrats or, again, Labour) tempted to prop up the two main parties in the post-election horsetrading. □

The ups and downs of ca

By Leon Trotsky

Everyone on the left wants to see mass radicalisation, and is constantly on the look-out for signs of it. Today, in Britain, some see the beginnings of a big new left party in the few, disparate, and not-so-left "Gaza independents" who won in the 2024 election. Others are puzzled that the 2022-3 strike wave has produced only patchy revitalisation, and no great shift left, in the unions. Some wonder why recent years' spates of big street demonstrations – the student climate protests of 2019, Black Lives Matter in 2020, etc. – have generated not much ongoing, week-to-week, in-person organisation. A few say radicalisation has already come, with a lot of young people saying they like "communism" (even if what they mean by that varies). And others ask why the 2008-9 crisis came to boost right-wing nationalist politics more than the left. Trotsky tackled similar issues in a 1929-30 polemic, still instructive today, against the French Communist Party and the "Comintern" (the Stalin-led organisation of the official Communist Parties), which at that time saw "mass radicalisation" in almost any sort of disturbance or rebellion.

For the Comintern, the radicalisation of the masses has become, at present, an empty catechism, not the characterisation of a process.

But radicalisation... is a characterisation of the temper of the masses. Is this characterisation correct or incorrect for the given period? That is a question of fact. In order to correctly gauge the temper of the masses, the right criteria must be used. What is radicalisation? How does it express itself? What are its characteristics? With what tempo will it develop? The deplorable leadership of the French Communist Party does not even pose these questions.

At most, an official article or a speech will refer to an increase in the number of strikes. But even then only the straight figures are given, without a serious analysis or even a simple comparison with the figures of the preceding years.

Such an attitude to the question flows [from their description of the] radicalisation of the masses... as a continuous process: today, the masses are more revolutionary than they were yesterday, and tomorrow will be more revolutionary than today. Such a mechanical idea does not correspond to the real process of development of the proletariat or of capitalist society as a whole. But it does correspond almost perfectly to the mentality of the... frightened opportunists.

The social democratic parties, especially before the war, had imagined the

future as a continual increase in the social democratic vote, which would grow systematically until the very moment of taking of power. For a vulgar or pseudo-revolutionary, this perspective still essentially retains its force, only instead of a continual increase in the number of votes, he talks of the continual radicalisation of the masses....

The reformists see only the ups of the capitalist road. The formal "revolutionaries" see only its downs. But a Marxist sees the road as a whole, all of its conjunctural ups and downs...

The political mood of the proletariat does not change automatically in one and the same direction. The upturns in the class struggle are followed by downturns, the floodtides by ebbs, depending upon complicated combinations of material and ideological conditions, national and international. An upsurge of the masses, if not utilised at the right moment or misused, reverses itself and ebbs into a period of decline, from which the masses recover, faster or slower, under the influence of new objective stimuli...

The activity of the masses, properly understood, expresses itself in different ways, depending upon different conditions. The masses may, at certain periods, be completely absorbed in economic struggles and show very little interest in political questions. Or, suffering a series of defeats in economic struggles, the masses may abruptly turn their attention to politics. Then – depending upon the concrete circumstances and the past experience of the masses – their political activity may go in the direction of either purely parliamentary or extra-parliamentary struggle.

We give only a very few variants, but they characterise the contradictions of the revolutionary development of the working class. Those who know how to read the facts and understand their meaning will readily admit that these variants are not some kind of theoretical construction but an expression of the living international experience of the last decade.

In any case, it is clear that in a discussion about the radicalisation of the masses a concrete definition is demanded. The Marxist Opposition should, of course, make the same demand of itself. A simple denial of the radicalisation is of as little use as its complete affirmation. We should have an estimate of what the situation is and what it is becoming...

The statistics of the strike struggles are indisputable proof of certain shifts in the working class. At the same time, they give a very important estimate of the number and character of these shifts. They outline the general dynamics of the process and make it possible,

to a certain degree, to anticipate the future or, more exactly, possible future variants...

The statistics show that the growth of the strike movement is still very modest, and do not in the least give a picture of a tempestuous upsurge that would allow us to conclude this is a revolutionary or at least a pre-revolutionary period. In particular, there is no marked difference between 1928 and 1929. The bulk of the strikes continued to be in light industry.

From this fact Chambelland [a French union leader of the time] comes to a general conclusion against radicalisation. It would be a different matter, he says, if strikes were spreading to the large enterprises in heavy industry and the machine shops. In other words, he imagines that a radicalisation falls ready-made from the sky. As a matter of fact, these figures testify not only that a new cycle of proletarian struggle has begun, but also that this cycle is only in its first stage.

Decline

After defeat and decline, a revival, in the absence of any great events, could occur only in the industrial periphery, that is, in the light industries, in the secondary branches, in the smaller plants of heavy industry. The spread of the strike movement into the metal industry, machine shops, and transportation would mean its transition to a higher stage of development and would indicate not only the beginning of a movement but a decisive turn in the mood of the working class. It has not come yet. But it would be absurd to shut our eyes to the first stage of the movement because the second stage has not yet begun, or the third, or the fourth.

In discussing the radicalisation of the masses, it should never be forgotten that the proletariat achieves "unanimity" only in periods of revolutionary apex. In conditions of "everyday" life in capitalist society, the proletariat is far from homogeneous. Moreover, the heterogeneity of its layers manifests itself most precisely at the turning points in the road. The most exploited, the least skilled, or the most politically backward layers of the proletariat are frequently the first to enter the arena of struggle and, in the case of defeat, are often the first to leave it. It is exactly in the new period that the workers who did not suffer defeats in the preceding period are most likely to be attracted to the movement, if only because they have not yet taken part in the struggle. In one way or another, these phenomena are bound to appear also in France.

The same fact is shown by the vacillations of the organised French workers, which is pointed to by the official Communist press. Yes, the inhibitions



Maurice Chambelland

of the organised workers are too well developed. Considering themselves an insignificant part of the proletariat [France's union density was only 7% even in 1935], the organised workers often play a conservative role. This is of course not an argument against organisation but an argument against its weaknesses, and an argument against those [Stalinist] trade union leaders... who do not understand the nature of trade union organisation and are unable to estimate its importance to the working class. At any rate, the vanguard role of the unorganised at the present time testifies that the question is not yet one of a revolutionary but of a united economic struggle, and moreover in its elementary stage.

The same thing is demonstrated by the important role of the foreign-born workers in the strike movement, who, by the way, will in future play a part in France analogous to that of the Negroes in the United States. But that is the music of the future. At present, the part played by the foreign-born workers, who often do not know the language, is further proof of the fact that it is not a question of political but of economic struggle, which has received an impetus from the change in the economic conjuncture.

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Capitalism and of struggle

Even in relation to the purely economic front, one cannot speak of the offensive character of the struggle, as Monmousseau [Stalinist union leader] and company do. They base this definition on the fact that a considerable percentage of the strikes are conducted for higher wages. These thoughtful leaders forget that such demands are forced upon the workers on the one hand by the rise in the cost of living and on the other by the intensified physical exploitation, a result of new industrial methods (rationalisation). A worker is compelled to demand an increase in his nominal wages in order to defend his standard of living. These strikes can have an "offensive" character only from the standpoint of capitalist bookkeeping.

From the standpoint of trade-union policies, they have a purely defensive character. It is precisely this side of the question that every serious trade unionist should have clearly understood and emphasised in every way possible. But Monmousseau and company believe that they have a right to be indifferent trade unionists because they are, if you please, "revolutionary leaders." Shouting until they are hoarse about the offensive political and revolutionary character of purely defensive strikes, they do not, of course, change the nature of these strikes and do not increase their significance by a single inch. On the contrary, they do their best to arm the bosses and the government against the workers.

It does not improve matters when our "leaders" point out that the strikes become "political" on account of – the active role of the police. An astonishing argument! The beating up of strikers by the police is called – a revolutionary advance of the workers. French history reveals quite a few massacres of workers in purely economic strikes. In the United States, a bloody settlement with strikers is the rule. Does this mean that the workers in the United States are leading the most revolutionary struggle? The shooting of strikers has in itself a political significance. But only a loudmouth could identify it with the revolutionary political advance of the working masses – thus unconsciously playing into the hands of the bosses and their police...

At the [union] congress, [union leader] Chambelland expressed the superficial thought – based exclusively on his own reformist inclinations – that capitalist stabilisation will last for about another thirty or forty years, that is, even the new generation of the proletariat now coming forward will not be able to make a revolution. Chambelland had no serious arguments to substantiate his fantastic time period...

[On the other hand] at the Third Con-

gress of the Comintern (1921), the ultra-lefts of that time (Bukharin, Zinoviev, Radek, Thaelmann, Thalheimer, Pepper, Bela Kun, and others) claimed that capitalism would never again know an industrial revival because it had entered the final... period, which would develop on the basis of a permanent crisis until the revolution itself. A big ideological struggle took place at the congress around this question.

A considerable part of my report [then] was devoted to proving that in the epoch of imperialism the laws determining industrial cycles remain in effect and that conjunctural fluctuations will be characteristic of capitalism as long as it exists; the pulse stops only with death...

Chambelland says: "The radicalisation of the masses is in a certain sense the barometer which makes it possible to evaluate the condition of capitalism in a given country. If capitalism is in a state of decline the masses are necessarily radicalised". From this Chambelland concludes that because in France strikes embrace only the peripheral workers, because the metal and chemical industries are only slightly affected, capitalism is not as yet in decline. Before him there is still a forty-year development.

How does Vassart answer this? Chambelland, according to him, "does not see the radicalisation because he does not see the new methods of exploitation". Vassart repeats the idea that if one recognises the intensified exploitation and understands that it will develop further "that in itself compels you to rely affirmatively to the question of the radicalisation of the masses".

Reading these polemics, one gets the impression of two blindfolded men trying to catch each other. It is not true that a crisis always and under all circumstances radicalises the masses. Example: Italy, Spain, the Balkans, etc. It is not true that the radicalism of the working class necessarily corresponds to the period of capitalism's decline. Example: Chartism in Britain, etc.

You cannot deny a beginning of radicalisation because strikes have not yet embraced the main sections of the workers; what can and must be made is a concrete evaluation of the extent, depth, and intensity of this radicalisation. Chambelland, evidently, agrees to believe in a radicalisation only after the whole working class is engaged in an offensive. But leaders who wish to begin only when everything is ready are not needed by the working class. One must be able to see the first, even though weak, symptoms of revival, while only in the economic sphere, adapt one's tactics to it, and attentively follow the development of the process...



A Comintern poster from 1929, Proletarians of all countries unite!

How can the radicalisation of the masses be denied, Vassart asks irritably, if exploitation grows from day to day? This is childish metaphysics, quite in the spirit of Bukharin. Radicalisation must be proved not by deductions but by facts. Vassart's conclusion can be turned into the opposite without difficulty. The question can be put this way: How could the capitalists increase exploitation from day to day if there were confronted by the radicalisation of the masses? It is precisely the absence of a fighting spirit that permits an intensification of exploitation. True, such arguments without qualification are also one-sided, but they are a lot closer to life than Vassart's constructions.

The trouble is that increasing exploitation does not always raise the fighting spirit of the proletariat. Thus, in a conjunctural decline accompanied by growing unemployment, particularly after defeats, increased exploitation does not breed a radicalisation

of the masses but, quite the contrary, demoralisation, atomisation, and disintegration. We saw that, for example, in the British coal mines right after the 1926 strike. We saw it on a still larger scale in Russia, when the 1907 industrial crisis coincided with the wrecking of the 1905 revolution...

[In France] the last weekly economic supplement to reach me, *Le Temps* (December 9, 1929), for example; carries a report of a general meeting of the stockholders of the metal industry of northern and eastern France. We do not know M. Cuvelette's attitude to the philosophy of the "third period" and we admit that we are not very much interested. But nevertheless he can very well add up profits and collect dividends. Cuvelette sums up the total of the past year as follows: "The condition of the domestic market has been exceptionally favourable." This estimate, I hope, has nothing in common with platonic

continued on page 10 →



→ from page 9

optimism, because it is strengthened by forty-franc dividends instead of the twenty-five-franc dividends of the year before. Has or has not this fact an importance for the economic struggles in the metal industry?

It would seem that it has. But, unfortunately, behind the back of Cuvelette we see the figures of [the Stalinist leaders], and we hear their voices: "Don't believe the words of this capitalist optimist..." Isn't it clear that if a worker makes the mistake of believing Monmousseau and not Cuvelette, he must come to the conclusion that he has no basis for a successful economic struggle, to say nothing of an offensive?

It must be said plainly that for the French working class – which has renewed its composition at least twice, during the years of the war and after the war, drawing into its ranks tremendous numbers of youth, women, and foreign-born and still far from having assimilated these new elements – for this French working class the further development of an industrial upturn would create an incomparable school, would allow it to gather its strength, would prove to the most backward sections their meaning and role in the capitalist structure, and would thereby raise the general class consciousness as a whole to new heights.

Two or three years, even one year, of a broad, successful economic struggle would rejuvenate the proletariat. After a properly utilised economic upturn, a conjunctural crisis might give a serious impetus to a genuine political radicalisation of the masses.

It is remarkable that in speaking of radicalisation the official [Communist Party] leaders pointedly ignore the

question of their own party. Yet the facts are that beginning with 1925 the membership of the party has been falling from year: 1925, 83,000 members; 1926, 65,000; 1927, 56,000; 1928, 52,000; 1929, 35,000...

It may be said that quality is more important than quantity, and that there now remain in the party only the fully reliable communists. Let us assume that it is so. But this is not the real question. The process of the radicalisation of the masses can in no way mean the isolation of the cadres, but, on the contrary, the influx into the party of reliable and partially reliable members and the conversion of the latter into "reliables"...

At this point the honourable Panglosses of official communism will interrupt, pointing to the "disproportion" between the size of the party and its influence. This is now the general Comintern formula, invented by the shrewd for the simple.

However, the canonised formula not only fails to explain anything but in some respects even makes matters worse. The experience of the workers' movement testifies that the more a revolutionary party assumes a "parliamentary" character – all other conditions being equal – the more the extent of its influence exceeds its size. Opportunism is a lot easier in Marxism, for it bases itself on the masses in general.

For Marxists, it is no secret that parliamentary and municipal elections distort and even falsify the underlying moods of the masses. Nevertheless, the dynamics of political development find a reflection in parliamentary elections; this is one of the reasons why Marxists take an active part in electoral struggles. But what do the election results show? In the 1924 legislative elections the Communist Party polled 875,000 votes, a little less than 10 per cent of the total electorate. In the 1928 elections, the party polled a little more than a million votes (1,064,000), which represented 11.3 per cent of the votes cast. Thus the specific weight of the party in the electorate increased by 1.3 per cent. If this process were to continue at the same rate, then Chamberland's perspective of thirty to forty years of "social peace" would appear too – revolutionary.

The Socialist Party, already "non-existent" in 1924 (according to Zinoviev and Lozovsky), polled almost 1,700,000 votes in 1928, more than 18 per cent of the total, or more than one and a half times the Communist vote.

The circulation of *l'Humanité* [the Communist Party's paper], to our knowledge, has not grown... As far as the trade-union organisations are concerned, they paralleled the party's decline – judging by the official figures – one year later. In 1926, the CGTU [the more left-wing of the two confederations in France at the time] numbered 475,000 members; in 1927, 452,000; in 1928, 375,000. The loss of 100,000 members by the trade unions at a time when the strike struggles in the country were increasing is incontestable proof

that the CGTU does not reflect the basic process at work in the economic struggles of the masses. As an enlarged reflection of the party, it merely experiences the discipline of the latter, after some delay.

[In fact] the impetus to the strike wave was the upturn in the economic conjuncture, with a simultaneous rise in the cost of living. In its first stages, the strengthening of economic struggle is not ordinarily accompanied by a revolutionary upswing. It is not evident now either. On the contrary, the economic struggles for a certain time may even weaken the political interests of the working class, at least some of its sections.

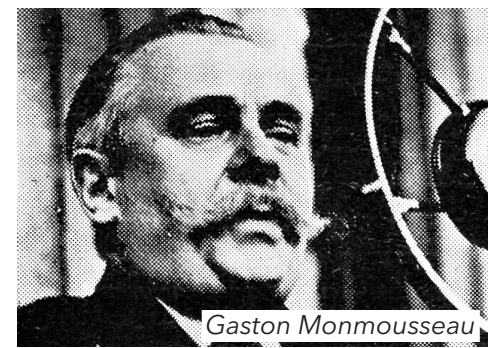
If we further take into consideration the fact that French industry has been on the upturn for two years now, that there is no talk of unemployment in the basic branches of industry, and that in some branches there is even a shortage of workers, then it is not difficult to conclude that under these exceptionally favourable conditions for trade-union struggle the present strike wave is extremely modest...

Dorelle [another CP union leader] demanded that the revolutionary Communist trade unionists show the workers in every strike the relation of isolated examples of exploitation to the contemporary regime as a whole, and consequently the connection between the immediate demands of the workers and the proletarian revolution. This is ABC for Marxists. But this in itself does not determine the character of a strike. A political strike is not a strike in which Communists carry on political agitation, but a strike in which the workers of all occupations and plants conduct a struggle for definite political aims. Revolutionary agitation on the basis of strikes is a task under all circumstances; but the participation of workers in political, that is, revolutionary strikes is one of the most advanced forms of struggle and occurs only under exceptional circumstances, which neither the party nor the trade unions can manufacture artificially according to their own desires.

The identification of economic strikes with political strikes creates confusion that prevents the trade union leaders from correctly approaching the economic strikes, from organising them and working out a practical program of workers' demands...

The political activity of the masses, before it assumes a more decisive form, for a shorter or longer period may express itself in more frequent attendance at meetings, in broader distribution of Communist literature, in additional electoral votes, in increased membership of the party. Can the leadership adopt in advance a worked-out orientation based on a stormy tempo of development, come what may? No. It must be prepared for one or another tempo. Only in this way can the party, not altering its revolutionary direction, march in step with the class.

The art of revolutionary leadership



Gaston Monmousseau

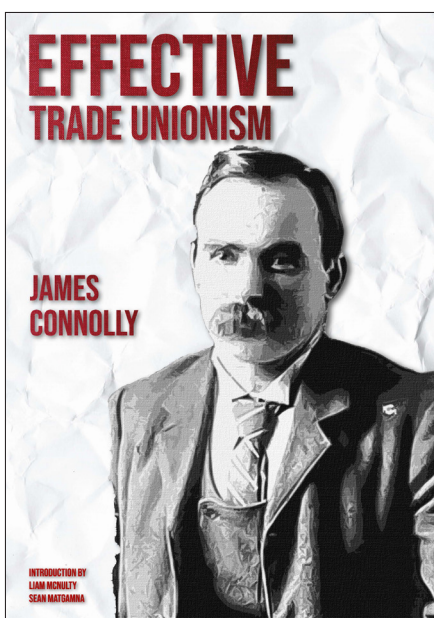
is primarily the art of correct political orientation. Under all conditions, communism prepares the political vanguard and through it the working class as a whole for the revolutionary seizure of power. But it does it differently in different fields of the labour movement and in different periods.

One of the most important elements in orientation is the determination of the temper of the masses, their activity and readiness for struggle. The mood of the masses, however, is not predetermined. It changes under the influence of certain laws of mass psychology that are set into motion by objective and social conditions. The political state of the class is subject, within certain limits, to a quantitative determination – press circulation, attendance at meetings, elections, demonstrations, strikes, etc. In order to understand the dynamics of the process it is necessary to determine in what direction and why the mood of the working class is changing.

Combining subjective and objective data, it is possible to establish a tentative perspective of the movement, that is, a scientifically based prediction, without which a serious revolutionary struggle is in general inconceivable. But a prediction in politics does not have the character of a perfect blueprint; it is a working hypothesis. While leading the struggle in one direction or another, it is necessary to attentively follow the changes in the objective and subjective elements of the movement, in order to opportunely introduce corresponding corrections in tactics. Even though the actual development of the struggle never fully corresponds to the prognosis, that does not absolve us from making political predictions. One must not, however, get intoxicated with finished schemata, but continually refer to the course of the historic process and adjust to its indications...

In the past we have had a good illustration of the relation between conjunctural and fundamental factors.

From 1896 to 1913 there was, with few exceptions, a powerful industrial expansion. In 1913 this changed to a depression, which, for all informed people, clearly began the long drawn-out crisis. The threat of a turn in the conjuncture, after the period of unprecedented boom, created an extremely nervous mood in the ruling classes and served as a direct impetus to the war. Of course, the imperialist war grew out of basic contradictions of capitalism. This generalisation is known even to Molotov. But on the road to war there were a series of stages when the contradictions either sharpened or sof-



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

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tened. The same applies to the class struggle of the workers.

In the prewar period, the basic and the conjunctural processes developed much more evenly than in the present period of abrupt changes and sharp downturns, when comparatively minor shifts in the economy breed tremendous leaps in politics. But from this it does not follow that it is possible to close one's eyes to the actual development and to repeat three incantations: "contradictions are sharpening", "the working masses are turning to the left", "war is imminent" – every day, every day.

If our strategic line is determined in the final analysis by the inevitability of the growth of contradictions and revolutionary radicalisation of the masses, then our tactics, which serve this strategy, proceed from the realistic evaluation of each period, each stage, each moment, which may be characterised by a temporary softening of contradictions, a rightward turn of the masses, a change in the relation of forces in favour of the bourgeoisie, etc. If the masses were to turn leftward uninterruptedly, any fool could lead them. Fortunately or unfortunately, matters are more complicated, particularly under the present inconstant, fluctuating "capricious" conditions...

Molotov [a Russian Stalinist leader] wants to unite the isolated strikes; a praiseworthy task. In the meantime, however, this is still the task, not an accomplished fact. To unite isolated strikes – Molotov teaches – is possible by means of mass political strikes. Yes, under the necessary conditions, the working class may be united in revolutionary mass strikes.

According to Molotov, then, the mass strike is "that new, that basic and most characteristic problem which stands in the center of the tactical tasks of the Communist parties at the given moment. And this means" – continues our strategist – "that we have approached [this time only 'approached!'] new and higher forms of class struggle". And... Molotov adds: "We could not have advanced the slogan of a mass political strike if we had not found ourselves in a period of ascent."

His logic is truly unexampled! At first both feet entered the most tremendous revolutionary events. Later it appeared that facing the theoretical head stood only the task of the general strike – rather, not the general strike itself, but only the slogan. And from this, by inverse method, the conclusion is drawn that we "have approached the highest forms of class struggle". Because, don't you see, if we had not approached them, how could Molotov advance the slogan of the general strike? The whole construction is based on the word of honour of the newly made strategist. And the powerful representatives of the parties respectfully listened to the self-confident blockhead and on roll

call replied: "Right you are!"

At any rate, we learn that all countries, from Britain to China – with France, Germany, and Poland at the head – are now ready for the slogan of the general strike. We are finally convinced that not a trace is left of the unhappy law of uneven development. We might manage to be reconciled to this, if they would only tell us for what political aims the slogan of the general strike is advanced in every country.

It should at least be mentioned that the workers are not at all inclined toward general strikes just for the sake of general strikes. Anarcho-syndicalism broke its head on the failure to understand this. A general strike may sometimes have the character of a protest demonstration. Such a strike may occur when some clear, sometimes unexpected, event stirs the imagination of the masses and produces the necessity for unanimous resistance. But a protest strike demonstration is not yet, in the real sense of the word, a revolutionary political strike: it is only one of the preparatory rehearsals for it.

As far as the revolutionary political strike is concerned, in the real sense of the word, it constitutes, so to speak, the final act in the struggle of the proletariat for power. Paralysing the normal functions of the capitalist state, the general strike poses the question: Who is the master in the house? This question is decided only by armed force. That is why a revolutionary strike which does not lead to an armed uprising ends finally with the defeat of the proletariat.

If Molotov's words regarding revolutionary political strikes and "highest forms of struggle" have any sense at all, it is that simultaneously, or almost simultaneously, throughout the world, the revolutionary situation has reached maturity and faces the Communist parties of the West, East, North and South with the general strike as the immediate prologue to armed uprising.

It is sufficient to review Molotov's strategy of the "third period" to reveal its absurdity. □

Notes

L'Humanité: paper of the French CP. *Marcel Cachin*: leader of the French CP, and a servile Stalinist.

Gaston Monmousseau: a CP trade union leader.

Albert Vassart: another CP union leader.

Maurice Chambelland: leader of the syndicalist (pure trade-unionist) minority in the CGTU. The French trade union movement at the time was divided into two main federations, the reformist CGT and the revolutionary CGTU, led by the CP.

Pangloss: the caricature optimist philosopher from Voltaire's satire *Candide*, who insists through disaster after disaster that "all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds".

Resurgent sexism and the 1968 precedent



Letter

Katy Dollar (*Solidarity* 728) writes that labour-power is reproduced in households, not in factories. Women do most of the unpaid housework which reproduces labour-power, and are more likely to end up in "jobs that resemble domestic labour".

In writing on this since the 1970s, some have called housework "necessary labour"; others, work outside social labour, or labour in a different mode of production from capitalism. Dollar, however, describes it as surplus labour for capital. "The unpaid labour of women in the family is... appropriated... by capital".

Not so. Housework produces labour-power, which is owned by workers. Households do not hand our children over to capitalists as chattel-slaves at age 18.

Unpaid housework means that capitalists can pay lower total wages, across society, than they would if all child-upbringing were done by paid workers? Sure. But we cannot measure by comparing actuality to an imaginary alternative society.

Lenin called "housework" "the most arduous work". Socialists have advocated egalitarian socialisation of housework. Nothing valid is added by calling housework "surplus labour".

Dollar stated the baseline economic analysis as background for discussing today's sexist resurgence. Maybe changes in that baseline are more important here than the barebones baseline itself, however we state it.

Women were 29% of university entrants in 1968, but are now the big majority of university students, including in medicine and law. Gender inequity continues even in those fields – no space here to unpick that – but we are no longer in a world of women being universally "seen" as "housewives".

For decades a "capitalist socialisation" of housework (piped water, central heating, washing machines, supermarkets, more semi-processed foods, fridge-freezers...) was offset by private-housework-increasing trends (e.g. clothes changed and washed more often). Women's average housework hours (UK) in the 1950s were estimated at 57 despite much of childcare then being "putting them out in the

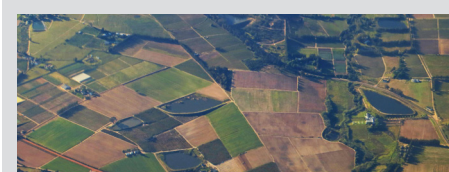
pram", having children play in the street or in neighbours' houses, or training them for housework. 1970s figures suggested housework hadn't decreased much then.

Since then the "capitalist socialisation" has had some impact. The housework average is 165 minutes a day (19 hours a week) for women, more than the 116 (14) for men, but less than in the 1970s. Childcare distinct from housework is 31 minutes average for women (remember, at any given time, only few adults have small children), 18 for men. 72% of 16+ women "go out" to work, 6% below the 78% rate for 16+ men, where in 1971 the gap was 40%: 52%-92%. Production of labour-power via social labour (schools, early-years, healthcare, etc.) has expanded since the 1970s, even despite post-2008-9 cuts. Thus capitalism has created a stronger basis for a future egalitarian socialisation of housework. It is blocked now by increasing atomisation into small and walled-off households and by the sexist heritages of millennia.

The shifts suggest that the resurgence of sexism and misogyny among young men may have parallels with the George Wallace backlash against civil rights in the USA in 1968.

Young men lacking educational credentials, seeing their [gross motor skills](#) less in demand for labour-power than the [social skills](#) and fine motor skills attributed to (and for now better acquired) by girls, "rebel" in a reactionary way – as "poor whites" in the South and many white workers in the North "rebelled" with Wallace. □

Martin Thomas, London



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Why SWP looks two ways on Zionism



Eye on the Left

By Matt Cooper

It is that time of year when members of the Socialist Workers Party are allowed to have a voice. For those unfamiliar with the internal workings of the SWP, for nine months of the year there is little outlet for debate. Then, in the three months in the run-up to their conference, three discussion bulletins are published to which any member of the SWP can contribute. Often the bulletins are dominated by the leadership and loyalist members.

This year's bulletins have been dominated by plans for "winning hegemony on the radical left." The aim was decided at the last SWP conference in January 2024, and it agreed to take a "turn outwards" to achieve it. Two main strands: Palestinian solidarity work and Stand Up To Racism (SUTR).

It is unclear how the SWP will win hegemony in Palestinian solidarity work where there is a crowded field. The Palestine Solidarity Campaign is well established without any strong relationship with the SWP. The Stop the War Coalition nationally is dominated by Counterfire (who split from the SWP in 2010) and the Communist Party of Britain (Morning Star). The student Gaza protest camps have tended to be cautious of the SWP. In fact the Socialist Worker Student Society at Bristol University collectively quit the SWP to move towards the (worse) politics that dominates the camps.

Stand out

Also, there is little to make the SWP stand out in this field. Their argument that they are distinctive through their demand for a one-state solution to be delivered through mass uprisings across the whole Middle East is underwhelming.



And, as the bulletins make clear, the SWP is hampered in this milieu by SUTR. They agree "that SUTR is right not to make anti-Zionism a ticket of entry into the movement." So, when wearing its SUTR hat, the SWP agrees that Zionists can be anti-racists. However, in Palestinian solidarity work, "as the SWP we insist on the inevitably racist nature of Zionism." There, Zionists are necessarily racist and, the bulletins suggest, genocidal. However hard the SWP attempts to square this circle, it fails.

Pursues

The reason why the SWP pursues absolute anti-Zionism in one area of its work, while rejecting it in another, is obvious. SUTR is entirely reliant on the support of the trade union bureaucracy, which finds it convenient to outsource anti-racist work to SUTR. Refusing to co-operate with Jewish organisations in the UK (few would be unwilling to jump through the anti-Zionist hoop) would

endanger that relationship.

Under that pressure, the SWP comes as close as it ever has to recognising that there is antisemitism on the left. A Central Committee motion draws a firm line against those who see Tommy Robinson as a puppet of Zionism and even has room to (belatedly) criticise the increasingly openly antisemitic academic David Miller for "wrong-headed and sometimes antisemitic claims about the influence of the 'Jewish lobby'." As recently as February 2024, *Socialist Worker* welcomed an employment tribunal stating that Bristol University had made procedural errors in sacking Miller as "a victory for anti-Zionists". One has to wonder whether they would be as keen to promote a tribunal victory for someone engaged in another form of racism.

These small steps towards a recognition of antisemitism on the left are to be welcomed. A left hegemonised by the SWP, less so. □



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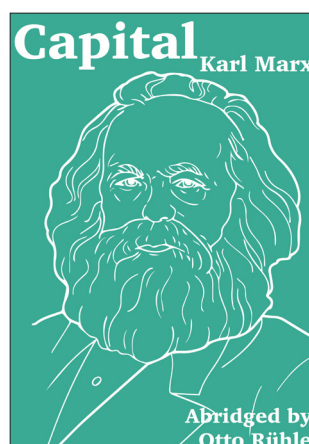
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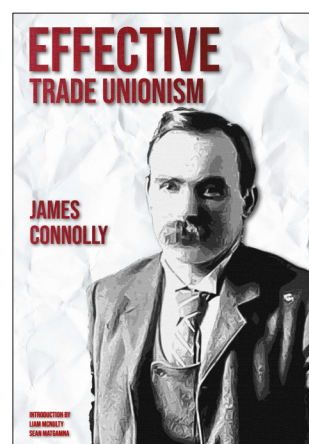
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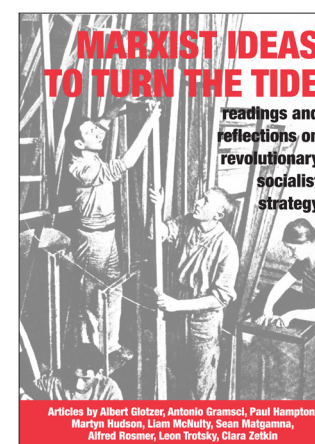
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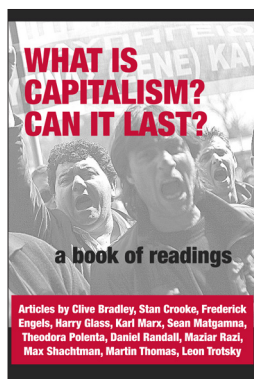
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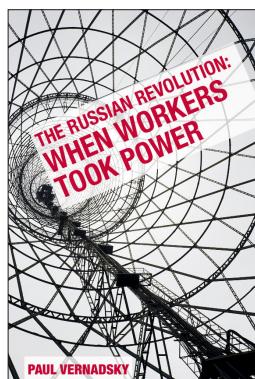
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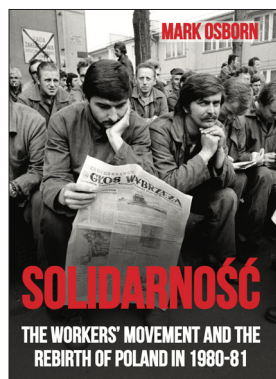
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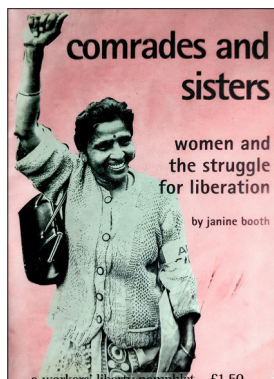
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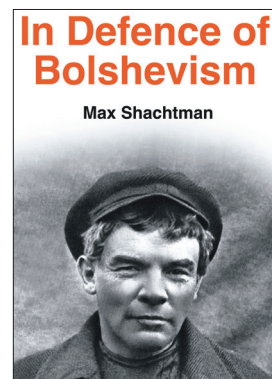
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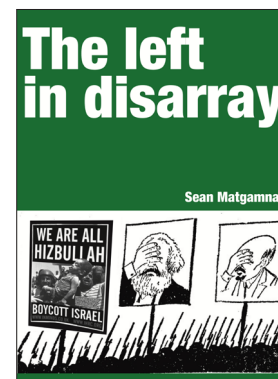
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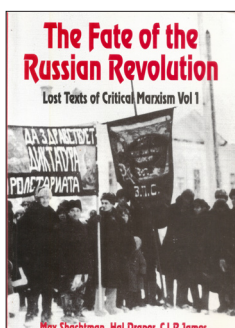
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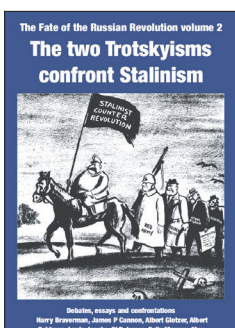
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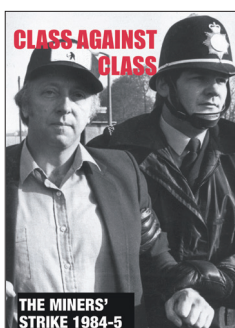
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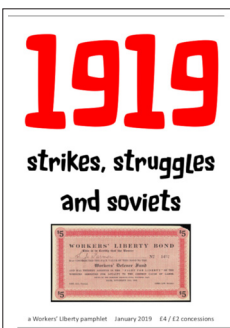
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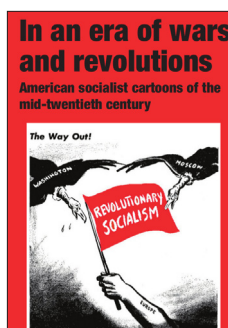
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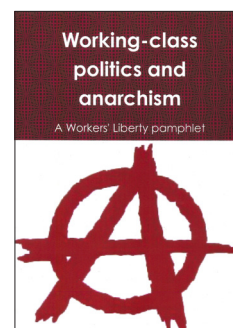
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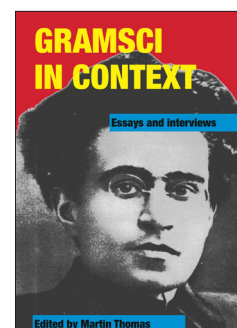
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Trump 2: chaos and corruption on steroids

By Tom Harrison

Donald Trump has really only had two main objectives in life – make a lot of money and stay out of jail. Despite his wealthy origins, he wasn't particularly good at the first one. With the second he has displayed a veritable masterclass in avoiding criminal culpability. Now he's returned to the White House who can blame him for believing he can literally get away with anything, murder included?

Several commentators have used the old H L Mencken quote about the "plain folks" eventually electing as President "a downright fool and complete narcissistic moron." Trump certainly fits the bill as far as narcissism goes. Ignoramus and philistine certainly. But he's no fool, having convincingly taken the American electorate for a ride, pulling off the biggest con imaginable. Legal woes disposed of, he can concentrate on using his regained office to make millions for himself and his family. A golden age of corruption beckons.

The Presidency is now effectively Trump's plaything, the ultimate rich man's executive toy. The cavalier nature he's going about choosing members of his cabinet is an obvious example of this. Fantasists, fascists, philanderers, quacks and fruit loops aplenty, they've been mostly chosen for their unquestioning loyalty to Trump. Being involved in sexual assault scandals (at least four of Trump's "picks") is no barrier to cabinet membership, but then again look at who's doing the choosing!

Probably the crankiest appointments are in the field of Health. Dr Oz, no wizard he, but a promoter of weight-loss scams and hydroxychloroquine as a "cure" for Covid, has been put forward to run Medicare. Even worse is R F Kennedy for US Health Secretary. His opposition to the fluoridation of water might stop US comedians making jokes about Brits having bad teeth, but the Kennedy pick is no laughing matter.

From his anti-vaxxer views (calling the Covid-19 vaccine the deadliest ever made) to extolling the virtues of raw milk consumption, his appointment has horrified the public health and medical experts.

Cataloguing all of Trump's collection of incompetents will take up too many column inches here.

Buddy

Trump's new buddy Elon Musk, who bought his way into the administration, is in the forefront of a drive to "roll back" the state as head of the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE). Simultaneously other Trumpists will be rolling forward the state against immigrants, unions, campaigning non-profit groups, etc.

The idea that Trumpism somehow represents the interests of the American working class against "the elite" was never credible in the first place. Now we have the richest man in the world apparently co-driving the Trump project.

Musk is very good at firing people, as his takeover of Twitter demonstrated.

He got rid of over half the staff and turned it into an X-rated cesspit for fascists and racists. Since the takeover of that platform, its value has fallen by 80%, with people leaving in droves.

Now Musk plans a sacking spree of government employees, claiming he will get rid of one and a half million jobs and cutting \$2 trillion from the federal budget. He has even published the names of a few government workers he wants to sack, putting them and others in fear for their lives considering the millions of online followers Musk has.

To say that Musk has considerable conflicts of interest acting as an adjunct of the Trump administration is putting it mildly. One of those interests is to further pursue his war against trade unions. He hates them as much as he does trans people. During one of their cosy chats together Trump praised Musk for threatening to sack striking workers. This is in fact illegal under current US law, so the opportunity now presents itself to get rid of such laws.

The main target here is the National Labour Relations Board, set up in the 1930s by F D Roosevelt, which gave workers some rights and protections to organise. Many of those were repealed by the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947, but the Biden NLRB was unusually active in promoting the rights that remain.

Musk has taken the lead in attacking the NLRB in the courts, joined by Jeff Bezos and union busting firms like Starbucks and Trader Joe's. They've sought to have the NLRB declared "unconsti-



tutional" and they can probably rely on the pro Trump judges on the Supreme Court for support. But straight away, from 20 January, the Trumpists can gut the NLRB by replacing its staff with corporate cronies.

American workers have generally done much worse than European on things like public health care, maternity rights, holiday entitlements, etc. In large part this is due to the lack of a political party based, even tenuously, on the working class.

The Republican Party is the plaything of plutocrats. The Democrats are also in thrall to corporate interests, as was evidenced by the paucity of pro-worker policies in the Harris campaign, lest those upset millionaire donors.

In the chaos and confusion of Trump's second term, the American left must seize the time to launch a fightback and build a movement that truly serves workers' interests. □

How to counter the "crazy ones"



By Martin Thomas

In *Solidarity* 227 I argued that the rise of the far right cannot be attributed to them having found catchy popular policies which voters like, and the answer cannot be for the left to rummage for our own catchy counterparts.

Far-right politicians have won with extravagantly self-contradictory pitches (Mussolini, in the 1920s) or with their own

voters seeing them as a bit crazy (Trump, Milei). They prevail not because people know what is to be done; rather, because they don't know and yet think the "leader" embodies energy to push through the murk.

In 2019 most voters liked most of Labour's policies, yet Labour crashed electorally (not as badly as the Starmerites say, but crashed). Voters thought Jeremy Corbyn was untrustworthy, in considerable part because of his floundering on Brexit and antisemitism. They couldn't see Labour having the necessary force

and determination to execute the policies.

The Workers' Party in Brazil got great approval for its mild-but-real reforms from 2003 to 2013. From 2013 to 2019 it was overwhelmed by the right, eventually by Bolsonaro, because it had lost its activist base and energy and was visibly unable to tackle the economic crisis part-nullifying those reforms.

When far-left candidates win support, it will, for now, of course not be because voters think we're about to make a revolution by parliamentary vote. It will be because voters

see us speaking up – boldly, radically – for the working class, both in election time and outside it, and want that speaking-out amplified by a good vote and a presence in the elected bodies.

Electoral work done properly, on that basis, has its solid effect in building the far-left organisation and its activity and influence outside elections. When the left organisation is not strong enough for a sizeable week-in-week-out public presence, work in elections making a left voice audible within a Labour campaign, despite many limitations, may

achieve some of the same results (it did in 1979).

Trying to re-establish the left in politics by dumping socialist agitation, and instead trying to vote-grab as "independent", "local", "community", or single-issue ("Gaza") champions is a snare. It was a snare when pioneered by the Socialist Party in 2009, dropping its previous socialistic electoral profile in favour of "No to EU". It is a snare now. All it can teach our listeners is something about us: that we lack confidence and energy about our own ideas. □

“ 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

Behind the fall of Aleppo

By Simon Nelson

Since the Syrian civil war began, around 2012, approximately 6.9 million people have been internally displaced, and an additional 6.8 million are refugees, mainly in Turkey and Jordan – and Lebanon, until the Israeli assault drove some back to Syria.

Aleppo, the country's second city, was seized at the end of November by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the leading force in the so-called National Salvation Government which controls the province of Idlib.

The civil war has long been complicated. On the one side, forces loyal to Assad and his backers: Hezbollah from Lebanon, Iran, Iraqi Shia militias, and Russia. On the other: a loose and fragmented alliance under the banner of the Syrian National Army (previously the Free Syrian Army) backed by Turkey and sometimes Qatar and other Arab states; other Salafist or hardline Sunni Islamist groups including Daesh (ISIS).

Around 2014-5 Daesh held a vast

swathe of territory across Syria and Iraq, but since about 2019 Assad's government almost entirely regained control, with only Idlib holding out, plus Kurdish areas thanks to the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), the Kurdish-led force that has had US backing and was crucial for re-taking territory from Daesh.

HTS comes from mergers and splits in 2017 among several groups, including Jabhat al-Nusra, al-Qaeda's former affiliate in Syria. HTS severed formal ties with AQ, but its leader, Muhammed al-Julani, was formerly in AQ in Iraq under the leadership of Abu Musab Al Zarqawi.

Idlib

He has undertaken a form of "modernisation" of his movement and has faced protests from both hardliners and the population of Idlib. HTS remains a sectarian Sunni Islamist organisation. It seeks to set up an Islamic government across Syria. Christians are already attempting to leave Aleppo.

An informal but unstable truce could

exist between HTS and the Kurds for a time, but there is significant tension between them and their changing regional alliances. Turkish President Erdogan wants to drive the Kurds from the northeast and would be able to assist HTS in doing so. Russia has brokered an uneasy but stable split in Syria, leaving Assad the majority of the country since 2016, the Kurdish forces in the northeast and other rebels like HTS in the northwest. The US, under Biden, wants to maintain a relationship with what it can see as reliable Kurdish forces. Trump may choose to ally with Turkey.

HTS's new ability to take Aleppo is, probably, a knock-on from conflict between Israel, Lebanon, and Iran. The Assad regime has been reliant on support from Iran and from Hezbollah and their allied militias. Both have suffered from Israeli attacks on their capabilities.

Russia, since invading Ukraine, had withdrawn most of its ground forces from Syria. It has now resumed bombing HTS targets in Idlib on behalf of Assad. □

Ealing workers out to 27 Jan

By Will Sefton

Ealing Parking enforcement workers in Unite are back on strike till 27 January in their long-running dispute with Greener Ealing Ltd (GEL) for union recognition and GEL's refusal to universally honour sick pay, overtime and other arrangements when the service

was "insourced" by Ealing Council in April 2024. Ealing Council wholly owns GEL.

The workers went back to work for two weeks, during which GEL continued to behave in a cavalier and dismissive way, still insisting it will not recognise Unite and wants the workers to join the GMB, with whom it already has a recognition

agreement. Workers have subsequently gone off sick while GEL continues to try to discipline workers over often petty and unsubstantiated issues. With both GEL and Ealing council stubborn, political pressure from Unite on Labour councillors and the local MPs must be stepped up. Despite hearing their lively pickets for

over 12 weeks, Ealing councillors still refuse to engage with the workers. Some may well be embarrassed that a Labour council refuses to intervene to support workers having their chosen union recognised. They should break ranks and denounce GEL and the collaboration of Ealing council leader Peter Mason. □

Farmers' struggles in the USA



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

Jessica Lange (who appears as Jewell Ivy in the film) thought of *Country* as an update of *Grapes of Wrath* (see *Solidarity* 727).

Jewell and her husband Gilbert "Gil" Ivy (Sam Shepard) have worked their family farm for years but a combination of mounting debts, rising costs, low prices and a poor harvest brings the farm to its knees and they are threatened with foreclosure. Gil has to go out and find work but Jewell stays behind on the farm and fights to keep it alive.

Ronald Reagan thought the film was



"a blatant propaganda message against our agri programme". The farming crisis of the 1980s devastated the US Midwest. The town of Waterloo, Iowa lost 14% of its population. Between 1981-83 farmers' debts in the USA came to a staggering \$125 billion and government aid was piecemeal and slow in

coming. In 1935 there were 6.8m farms in the USA; by 1990, 2.1m.

Two other films from the same year also depict the struggles of farmers in the USA: *The River* and *Places in the Heart*. The latter is set in the 1930s and stars Sissy Spacek. □

• Watch *Country* at bit.ly/c-ry



Councils: rebuild our services!

By Katy Dollar

The finance policy statement published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government on 28 Nov said the government would “fix the foundations of local government, so that local authorities can return to delivering the core services the public relies on and shaping their places”.

Local government finance is overly complicated and needs reform, but without an massive injection of money into local government any reform is akin to rearranging deck-chairs on the Titanic.

The Tories’ cuts hit particularly hard on urban areas. The rural services delivery grant was poorly designed, but the Labour government’s assumption that there is enough money but going to the wrong places is simply wrong. Even the councils that did relatively better out of the Tory years lost money in big post-2010 cuts. Even once the big cuts subsided, costs have increased more quickly than the funding.

Cuts to universal and preventive services have led to increased costs in temporary housing statutory care for adults and children. Labour councils for years have passed on Tory cuts saying they had no other choice until there was a change of government, Labour now needs to commit to funding and rebuilding public services.

Lambeth Unison has launched Rebuild Our Services, a public campaign for restoration of funding and expansion of social provision. We want to work with unions across the public sector to demand Labour redistributes wealth, reverses austerity and privatisation. □

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Vote Wrack in the FBU!

By an FBU member

Voting in the FBU’s general secretary election begins in December and, with the nominations in, the two candidates are incumbent Matt Wrack and the Vice-President Steve Wright, a figure broadly on the left but under the radar of most members prior to the election.

Wright states he has internationalist and Labour orientations, although there is only passing mention of either in his main campaigning materials. In a highly polarised and divided internal context, seemingly the whole union right is lined up behind him. His pitch and slogan, “time for change”, in practice represent a vehicle for a political and industrial project defined as “bread and butter”, anti-politics. His stated core principles – safety, unity, representation, accountability and a political member-driven union – do not add up to much.

Figures such as Paul Embery, an influential ex-FBU official known for pro-Brexit, anti-migrant views, are throwing their weight behind Wright, and in an industry with recent damning reports of horrendous sexism and a large number of accusations and counter-accusations, the union’s culture, transparency and democratic norms are at the forefront.

FBU members in Workers’ Liberty are campaigning for Matt Wrack, who has a track record of internationalism and campaigning against anti-union laws, against misogyny and against racism. The “firefighters’ manifesto” is a good initiative, raising a comprehensive set of demands on the Labour government.

The importance of Wrack’s and

the left’s equalities work has been thrown into light by the recent barring of former union Executive member Grant Mayos, a Britain First supporter and until very recently a key figure on the union right.

While Wright himself says the right things, given the bullying and anti-democratic track record of some in his campaign his election would represent a significant slide to the right in terms of the union’s democratic culture and lead to political drift.

I am, however, not uncritical of Wrack and the left leadership, and there are plenty of issues to resolve. A core problem is that the left is not well organised and there is no rank-and-file movement.

An informal left grouping dissolved when Wright split from Wrack. There are a number of personal agendas at play as well as an ongoing smear campaign, but a majority of the EC nominated Wright and he won branch nominations 415 to 178, demonstrating the unevenness of the left through the union.

Chance

While there is a strong chance that many of Wright’s nominations are little more than a rep with a pen, and it is unlikely those numbers will be accurately reflected in votes, it shows the FBU left is in need of rank-and-file renewal.

There are also questions on pay, with deals of 7, 5 and 4% for July 2022, 2023, and 2024 respectively widely accepted by members but nonetheless below inflation two of the three years. There has been no national strike action since 2015, although the union was prepared for it in 2023 before a late settlement.



Wrack is the clear left candidate, and the right would be hugely emboldened by his loss. Whoever wins, building an organised left is a necessity.

Partly thanks to the significance of the right’s challenge and their undemocratic tactics, some links are being developed by Wrack-supporting reps concerned by the behaviour of the right and the bullying and weaponisation of union structures that characterises recent years. Beyond the election, what matters is developing these links into a meaningful political structure. □

PCS FM strikes to continue into 2025

By a PCS member

The Left Unity faction has prevented the PCS civil service union taking national action over pay. At the local level, things are different, in particular with Facility Management (FM) strikes.

On high turnouts with emphatic Yes votes, members in ISS, OCS and G4S, working on civil service contracts, voted for strike action over pay, more annual leave and contractual sick pay (most FM workers don’t get company sick pay, they have to rely on Statutory Sick Pay, SSP). The strikes started in late October and are scheduled to continue into early New Year.

Before the first full strike day, ISS made an offer that the lay bargainers

agreed was enough to suspend action and allow talks to continue.

In contrast G4S and OCS are playing hard ball and refusing to talk to the PCS. And that of course brings us to the Labour government. Has it made any difference to this dispute that Labour are in charge? Well, no. Despite being asked to intervene, it has done nothing.

Given this silence, G4S tried to intimidate staff in returning to work but strikers’ morale and resolve remains very high. If you go to the strike demonstrations in the Whitehall area, you will see how lively they are.

We are now in the “who will blink first” phase of the dispute. And it won’t be the strikers. □

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 solidarity@workersliberty.org

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

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



Trump's USA: "there's going to be a lot of conflict"

By Howie Hawkins

Howie Hawkins, a long-standing socialist, a member of Solidarity USA, and Green candidate for President in 2020, talked with Sara Lee, Ben Tausz, and Martin Thomas on a visit to London.

The vote for Trump went up a couple of million; but the Democratic vote, from Biden to Harris, went down seven. I think those seven millions are working-class people who don't like Trump but feel the Democrats are doing nothing for them, so they just stayed home.

Trump scapegoats. He punches down at immigrants, people of colour, uppity women, gay people, trans people. Working-class people felt hurt, and without a positive program from the Democrats everything is moving to the right. The Republicans were a conservative party from the 1930s through, really, to Trump. Now they are a neo-fascist party.

Trump is lazy and incompetent, and in 2016 he didn't expect to win, so he didn't get much done. Now the right wing is organised. So, we're in much deeper trouble. Trump can break the law and the Supreme Court says it's all right. We're back before the American Revolution when King George was the law, and we had no recourse. Trump can do what he wants and say it was an "official act". People are trying to figure out how to resist. I heard of 140,000 people on a call organised by the Working Families Party, which is a faction of the Democratic Party.

There will be single-issue

movements around issues like immigrants, the right to abortion, and so on. I don't know whether the public-sector unions will resist the huge job cuts planned among federal employees, or the organised private sector are going to want to stick their necks on that.

But the left needs to build a membership party, go into the labour movement, turn the unions from business unions into social-movement unions, and start independent political action. That's the historic task of the workers' movement that America is a century behind on.

The problem now with political culture is that it's top down. It's funded by foundations and the funders tend to be oriented to the Democratic Party on the side.

Syracuse

It varies from locality to locality, of course. The USA is a huge country. In Syracuse, where I live, we have the DSA (Democratic Socialists of America). What do they do? Tenants' campaigning, but it's mainly activists providing advice, legal letters to landlords, and so on, to individual tenants in trouble, rather than getting tenants themselves organised. The DSA is based at Syracuse University and in the suburbs and trying to organise people in the inner city, where I live, and really there's no connection. Most people have never heard of DSA. There's a Syracuse Peace Council, pacifist, based in the university neighbourhood, kind of countercultural, almost all white in a city where the majority are Black. And then there's the Party for Socialism and Lib-

eration, but it is totally on campus, and it's a neo-Stalinist sect with money from Neville Roy Singham, a billionaire. They come to demonstrations in the community and then all stand by themselves with their signs; they don't interact with us.

Our Central Labour Council is conservative. SEIU has a lot of people organised in hospitals and university services. But members appointed by leaders to union committees feel they never get to speak as to what they're supposed to do, and they get disgusted and they quit the committees.

In Chicago, Detroit, New York, San Francisco and the Bay Area, Los Angeles, Seattle, Portland, there's more activity. But there you have left groups very competitive for getting credit for anything that happens; and most of the movements end up going with the Democratic Party.

In the Teamsters the Reform caucus, which was Teamsters for a Democratic Union, compromised too much in getting behind Sean O'Brien. O'Brien was a Hoffa guy who fell out with Hoffa over negotiations in 2018. He's not a guy who believes in the rank and file strategy. So, he went to the Republican convention and basically gave permission to union members and working-class people to vote for the Republicans. Formally he stayed neutral because, he says, there was a poll internally showing that 60% of Teamsters supported Trump.

Sean O'Brien's speech at the Republican convention praising people like Josh Hawley as pro-worker disgusted me. O'Brien may think his tactic is



working, because Trump's nominee for Secretary of Labor is a Republican who supports the Protect Our Right to Organise Act, a modest labour reform act. More important is going to be who they replace the current National Labour Relations Board with. And both Jeff Bezos and Musk have sued the National Labour Relations Board for being unconstitutional.

If they win, it might be a blessing in disguise because then we would also get rid of the 1947 Taft-Hartley amendments which prevent unions in the US from doing solidarity strikes and sympathy strikes. But it depends on the response.

With mass deportations, the question is, if he does call out the military to bring people in and put them in concentration camps, are they going to obey those orders? Local law enforcement could split, too, with some of them saying they've got to work with these immigrant communities and enable them to come with local public safety issues. There's going to be a lot of conflict.

Popular opinion is much more diverse and anti-Trump than appears from Trump's electoral base. A lot of these states that voted for Trump also voted in referendums for abortion rights and for things like raising the minimum wage. □

• More on Trump: p.13

Far-right threat rises in France

By Martin Thomas

Almost certainly, Michel Barnier's right-wing government in France will fall on 4 December.

Facing fiscal crisis, it tried to get its cuts budget through by "49.3", a constitutional device enabling the government to proceed without parliamentary assent as long as it is not toppled by a vote of no confidence. But now Marine Le Pen's Rassemblement National (RN) says it will back a no-confidence motion brought by the NFP left alliance (Socialist Party, Communist Party, France Insoumise, greens).

A one-day public-sector general strike by seven union confederations is set for Thursday 5 December; a day of action on jobs including strikes by the CGT confederation for 12 Dec; demonstrations for migrant rights by the CGT, FSU, Solidaires and others for 14 Dec.

Such mobilisations, and a political rallying of the left, are urgent, because the far-right RN is moving closer to power, and in a new Trump era.

[Arguments pour la lutte sociale](#) "demands now that the NFP should be a grass-roots movement" – with local united-action committees – "as it began to be when it first appeared, but everywhere, and stronger".

After the governing party, supporters of president Emmanuel Macron, did very badly in Euro-elections on 9 June, Macron tried to regain the initiative by calling a snap parliamentary poll on 30 June/ 7 July. That produced a National Assembly where neither the NFP left alliance (spurred into formation by that poll), nor the RN, nor the "centre" alliance of Macronists and the "old right" (Les Républicains) had a ma-

jority. In September Macron got the RN to back Barnier, but that has now broken down.

After Barnier falls, his government can continue as a "caretaker", but as such can only roll over the old budget. Macron is constitutionally barred from calling new parliamentary elections before June 2025. He can use emergency powers to impose a budget ("Article 16"), but doing so when he is so unpopular (22% approval rating) would set a precedent for future autocracy.

A new presidential contest is not due until 2027. Macron could resign. Marine Le Pen is way ahead in the polls to succeed him. If she is banned from standing (possible from a current court case), RN leader Jordan Bardella would get the same support. Edouard Philippe, Macron's first prime minister, is at present the only runner-up within reach.

The RN still pursues "self-de-demonisation", as it has for years. It has dissociated from the AfD in Germany, and pointedly not applauded Trump. But it remains a party organised round a cadre with a solidly fascist past.

Unlike other far-right parties, it has won support in big cities and among young women as well as young men. But 70% of French voters still see it as "far right", and 52% report themselves "worried" by the prospect of it winning power.

It remains vehemently hostile to migrants. Though it says it is not against unions as such, it denounces the "political" character of the actual unions in France. The strength of France's unions depends a lot on legal protections they won in the 1946 constitution, so a RN regime is a big threat. □



Solidarity

For a workers' government

RESPITE IN LEBANON? RUIN IN GAZA

By Ira Berkovic

After nearly 4,000 Lebanese had died and over 16,000 had been injured, as well as 45 Israeli civilians and at least 73 Israeli soldiers, a ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah, the Shi'a Islamist paramilitary party based in Lebanon, was agreed on Tuesday 26 November, taking effect the following day.

The terms of the agreement preclude either party from carrying out any "offensive" military action against the other. Many commentators see the truce as extremely fragile, especially given the lack of any clear enforcement mechanism. The agreement mandates the creation of a "committee", to which either party can report alleged breaches of the ceasefire, but does not specify the committee's powers.

According to the agreement, only the official Lebanese military and security forces will be allowed to operate in south

Lebanon. The agreement also refers back to UN Security Council Resolution 1701, which ended the 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah, but which was only ever partially implemented. According to that resolution, only Lebanese and UN forces should operate in the area south of the Litani River, about 18 miles north of the Lebanon-Israel border.

Halting Israel's bombardments of targets inside Lebanon, and Hezbollah's rocket barrages against northern Israel, even for a short time, is real progress, but only a first step. As well as the military aspects of the ceasefire, huge questions remain around the rebuilding of civilian life inside Lebanon. With the Lebanese economy and state in chaos, international aid is required to ensure humanitarian crises of the sort now gripping Gaza do not spiral in Lebanon too.

The left-wing Standing Together movement said: "Finally,

our government has done what it has needed to do for a long time and signed an agreement for a truce with Hezbollah. The agreement will bring calm to northern Israel after almost 14 months of constant rocket fire, it will stop the constant bombardment in Lebanon, and it'll allow people in South Lebanon and northern Israel to return to their homes.

"Now we must continue to pursue real security and safety for everyone in the region and sign a deal that will stop the war for good and bring back the hostages. However, Ben Gvir, Smotrich, and messianic extremists in the cabinet with dangerous fantasies of resetting Gaza still oppose a deal, putting everyone in the region in danger of a permanent state of war.

"It is both crucial and possible to end all of this diplomatically. All that's needed is political will." □