

# Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



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

# STOP TRUMP AND MUSK!



## Mobilise labour movement to fight the far right

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# Reshape the left to beat the far right!



"People's March" protests against Donald Trump are coming on 18 January in Washington DC and in 300 other cities across the USA.

The main movers are those who organised the half-million-strong Women's March against Trump in 2017. Women's Marches are planned in several cities in Britain on the same day.

Trump becomes president two days later, on 20 January. Senate hearings to confirm or reject his nominees for top posts, including wild-card Pete Hegseth for Defence and vaccine-sceptic Robert F Kennedy Jr for health, start in the week before.

The Washington march looks like being many tens of thousands. That will be a good start for a fightback, even if it's not the half-million of 2017. Resistance to Trump is slower-burning than first time round.

Yet in 2017 Trump was a maverick, openly rejected by many leading Republicans, with only an ad hoc mass base, and compelled to choose old-establishment people for many of his top posts.

This time round he poses a bigger danger.

He is still surrounded by some chaos. Trump's talk about going to war with

Denmark in order to seize Greenland, or bombing Mexico to stop the drug trade, or invading Panama, is surely designed to put his opponents off-balance and widen his options.

On 8 January, Steve Bannon denounced Trump's new right-hand man, Elon Musk, as a "truly evil guy" and said he would "have Elon Musk run out of here by Inauguration Day" (20 January). Bannon's blast was in an Italian newspaper. He was Trump's "Chief Strategist" (for eight months) in 2017, but he has no post in the new Trump regime.

Bannon probably has anti-Musk allies inside the new regime. Some US billionaires are worried about Trump's bombast about high tariffs, bitcoin, and depriving them of cheap "undocumented migrant" labour or skilled-labour migrants.

Most are willing to be reassured that in practice he will be more tempered on such things. The "Maga movement" and the ranks of hard-core Trump loyalists are thicker this time.

## Oligarchs

The USA's top capitalist oligarchs, including former Democrats, offer Trump favours or money or praise: Tim Cook, Jeff Bezos, Jamie Dimon. In deference to Trump, Mark Zuckerberg of Meta is trashing the fact-checking he had introduced, in part, because of outcry against the use of Facebook in stoking the massacre and driving-out of the Rohingya people in Myanmar in 2017. Simultaneously, Trump is set to pardon most or all of what he calls "the J6 warriors", the people who stormed the Capitol on 6 January 2021.

The dangers are bigger than in 2017.

The flurry of online meetings and attempts to get local anti-Trump community groups which came after 5 November has faded. The DSA (Democratic Socialists of America) is backing the 18 January protests, but, sadly, not energetically. The Working Families Party attempted some broad online and on-streets organising straight after 5 November, though it had previously been only an electoral flag of convenience. It is not promoting 18 January.

The reunification of most of the USA's union movement, as the SEIU rejoins the AFL-CIO (equivalent to the TUC in Britain), is welcome. But even the unions which were feistiest after 5 November – SEIU, UAW, UE, CWA – are not promoting 18 January. Instead (for now) they limit themselves to general-

ities like the UAW's slogan "Building a United Working Class against Billionaire Rule".

Trump is already gutting the National Labor Relations Board (which under Biden was markedly pro-union). Moves by Musk and others are likely to get the basic US union-rights law (Wagner Act, 1935) ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court. Some Democrat states talk of "state Wagner laws" in response.

Trump's vice-president, J D Vance, and Trumpist think-tanks, have proposed replacing unions by joint worker-boss forums. Some of the think-tanks want to have all public-sector unions declared unconstitutional.

Apart from putting "the J6 warriors" on the streets again, Trump's most likely first move after 20 January will be for mass deportations.

Democrat states and cities have passed laws to obstruct the deportations, and have also pledged to defend respect for transgender students in schools. Those moves are the major form of anti-Trump organising so far, and they can put sand in Trump's gears.

However, Trump will respond by legal action (assured that the Supreme Court will favour him) and by denying federal funding to states and cities. The Democrats will probably not be very resolute. Certainly not without a fire lit under them by working-class organising in workplaces and localities.

The Laken Riley Act is a bad omen. This law, mandating Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) cops to detain undocumented immigrants who are charged with offences as small as shoplifting, had been held up in Congress for a long time by Democrat resistance. Now it is speeding through. In the last Senate vote, 10 January, only eight Democrats joined with Bernie Sanders in voting against. Others went absent.

Trump's advance has implications worldwide.

Marine Le Pen and her RN in France have been at pains to dress up as not-so-extreme as Trump. But when the RN's unmistakably fascist historic leader Jean-Marie Le Pen, Marine Le Pen's father, died on 7 January, the RN lauded his record, without mention of when they discreetly cut him adrift in 2015. Kickl in Austria and the AfD in Germany cherish support from Musk and Trump.

Musk has denounced Nigel Farage because Farage keeps a distance from Tommy Robinson. Farage has mini-

mised the rift in order to keep alive his Reform party's hopes of getting £100 million from Musk.

Musk declares himself set on removing Keir Starmer as prime minister long before the next scheduled general election (but how?).

## Reform

In the last couple of opinion polls, Reform is at 24% or 25%, ahead of the Tories, and not far behind Labour.

Reform is still incoherent, weaker than its forerunner Ukip was at its peak. It has the winds of world politics filling its sails now, but it can be beaten with action from the labour movement.

We need to unite the left as often and as extensively as we can. At present much of the activity of left groups is about cultivating their own little projects and gambits, without dialogue and debate with others, let alone exploration of common actions.

We need to transform the labour movement. Many unions remobilised themselves on pay in 2022-3, but mostly by sporadic one-day or few-days strikes and without coordination. The Labour-affiliated unions have pressed the Labour government with some success on trade-union and worker-rights legislation, but left huge social issues like the NHS and social care in the too-hard basket.

Much of the Labour left has dispersed, into inactivity or unpromising "local independent" initiatives, and the remaining left is often demoralised and passive.

We need to raise the sights of the labour movement to take on the big social issues like the NHS and care, which are as important for workers' lives as pay. We need to rebuild organisation at the grass-roots level, which improved in some sectors in 2022-3, but only some, and limitedly.

We need to get national and local unions not to "contract out" anti-racism to external campaigns, but to challenge Reform policies themselves and defend migrants and minority communities. We need to let workers see that there is an energetic left opposition to Starmer-Reeves within the labour movement.

Otherwise the social discontent sure to increase in the next years will feed the far right here, as it has in the USA, Austria, Germany, France, the Netherlands, and other countries. □

## UK Friends of Standing Together

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

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

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

• [@omdimbeyachaduk](https://twitter.com/omdimbeyachaduk)

# Back the anti-war protests inside Israel!

By Ira Berkovic

As I write on 12 January, talks aimed at securing a ceasefire and hostage-release agreement continue in Qatar. Benjamin Netanyahu's recent decision to dispatch David Barnea, the head of Israeli intelligence agency Mossad, back to Doha is seen by some as a hopeful sign.

Some media reports suggest talks are deadlocked because Netanyahu will only agree to the first phase of the proposed agreement, involving a six-week-long ceasefire and hostage-prisoner exchange, and not the rest of the proposal which includes a roadmap for Israeli withdrawal from Gaza.

However, the Israeli military has recently begun dismantling some of the facilities it established in the Netzarim Corridor, a militarised zone established by Israel's invasion that divides the north and south of Gaza. Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* reports that the military has approved plans for large-scale troop withdrawals, indicating Israel may be prepared to endorse a ceasefire agreement that involves a withdrawal of their military presence. But confidence would be foolish.

Anti-government demonstrations have continued in Israel, especially in Tel Aviv. Whilst the anti-government movement poses its demand in terms of a hostage-release agreement, placards and banners with slogans such as "Stop the War" have been increasingly visible on protests, in the "mainstream" of the demonstrations as well as in blocs organised by Standing Together and other anti-occupation groups.

On Friday 10 January, Standing Together and other groups held a protest outside Sde Teiman, a detention centre run by the Israeli military on a site near the Gaza border. Standing Together [write](#): "We demonstrated outside of Sde Teiman, the notorious detention center and torture camp in southern Israel where Palestinians from Gaza are held, with a clear demand: Release Dr. Hussam Abu Safiya!"

"Dr. Abu Safiya, the director of the Kamal Adwan Hospital, was arrested and detained during the Israeli army's raid on the hospital in late December. He was previously arrested in October and released shortly after, during an attack that killed his 15-year-old son in a drone strike. According to the Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, his detention without charge has been extended to February 13th and he will be denied access to a lawyer until January 22nd.



"Palestinians in Sde Teiman and other detention facilities in Israel are at risk of torture and incredibly harsh conditions, and Dr. Abu Safiya's status remains unknown. Two Palestinians who were recently released from Sde Teiman said that he was in poor condition when he arrived and that he appeared physically and mentally exhausted.

"We must stand against the relentless attacks on hospitals and civilian infrastructure, mass incarceration, starvation, and torture of Palestinians! This brutal reality is not only destroying the lives of Palestinians, it is stripping Israeli society of its humanity and dragging us all deeper into the never-ending cycle of bloodshed."

## Protest

On 9 January, members of the Standing Together chapter at Haifa University, a campus where around 50% of students are Palestinian, were involved in an overnight sleep-in protest in the student union offices to demand democracy in the union's elections. The elections were postponed from September following a court injunction, after union bureaucrats attempted to [obstruct](#) the candidacies of Palestinian students in Standing Together, left-wing party Hadash, and secular-nationalist party Balad.

The protest aimed to ensure scrutiny over the ballot boxes and prevent tampering by union bureaucrats and managers. Standing Together supporters stood as part of a joint slate with other groups, saying: "We are up against the corrupt and racist student union, fighting for democracy and equal representation. All students deserve freedom of expression, safety, and equality on campus!"

A Palestinian student activist said: "We are aiming for a student [union] which is representative of all. The current body has 40 representatives, none of whom are Arabs, at a university that has approximately 50% Arab students. It's crucial to have democracy in the University of Haifa, and it's finally time to do so. We can actually make a change here [...] this university could be a model for what Jewish-Palestinian

partnership could look like." Although aid supplies to Gaza remain at catastrophically low levels, trucks filled with provisions collected by Standing Together as part of their "Aid to Gaza" campaign are amongst those which have managed to pass the blockade. Standing Together [says](#): "Despite the immense difficulties getting aid into Gaza, so far we have managed to transport 150 trucks full of food and aid into the Gaza Strip! This is a massive success, and each week we receive new updates of additional trucks that have managed to enter Gaza.

"The only solution to end the starvation and suffering in Gaza is a ceasefire. But while we fight day in day out for a ceasefire, we must also do what we can to help the people who are most vulnerable. This aid campaign is a testament to the power of grassroots organising and Jewish-Palestinian solidarity. Together, we are capable of fundamentally changing our reality."

In Lebanon, army commander Joseph Aoun was elected president on 9 January by the country's parliamentarians, ending a period of over two years in which Lebanon had no head of state

and only a sketchy caretaker government. Aoun's election is widely seen as an indication of the diminished power of Hezbollah, the Shi'a Islamist paramilitary party backed by Iran. Hezbollah-affiliated MPs eventually voted for Aoun, after their preferred candidate Suleiman Frangieh withdrew. Aoun has promised to "confirm the state's right to monopolise the carrying of weapons", suggesting he may pursue efforts to disarm Hezbollah. His election also semi-stabilises the ceasefire that ended Israel's recent war on Lebanon.

A period of stability and reintegration into international political and economic networks may bring material benefits to the Lebanese people, via limited economic recovery and increased aid. But the system via which Aoun was elected is part of Lebanon's institutionalised sectarianism. In 2019, protests around basic economic issues soon expanded into a social movement against corruption and sectarianism. It is to be hoped that the beleaguered forces of that movement's left wing can use any period of stability and economic recovery to regroup for future mobilisations. □



## Activist Agenda

### Meetings

**Sun 19 Jan:** Changing agriculture. Workers' Liberty environment reading group, 8pm, Zoomlink [bit.ly/envi-rg](https://bit.ly/envi-rg)

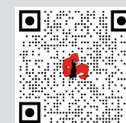
**Mon 20 Jan:** Trump's second term. Leeds Workers' Liberty. 7pm, Leeds University Union, Lifton Place Woodhouse LS2 9JZ

**Thu 23 Jan:** The rise of the far right. N London Workers' Liberty. 7.30pm, Menard Hall, 14 Galway St EC1V 3SW

**Sun 2 Feb:** The Middle East – democracy, equal rights and the working class. London AWL dayschool, 12:30 – 17:30, Hatcham House, 67 Queen's Rd SE14 5HD

### 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](https://workersliberty.org/work-unions), Insta [@workerslibertystudents](https://www.instagram.com/workerslibertystudents), and email [awl@workersliberty.org](mailto:awl@workersliberty.org) for more.



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

### Template motions

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

### Socialist-feminist book clubs

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

**2 Feb:** Manchester. The Transgender Issue. 3pm, The Gallery Café, 81 Princess Street M2 3JL

**3 Feb:** Sheffield. Strong Female Character. 6pm, University Arms, 197 Brook Hill Broomhall S3 7HG

**9 Feb:** London. Women Without Kids. 2pm, Effra Social, 89 Effra Road SW2 1DF

### 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](https://workersliberty.org/agenda). For environmental campaigning email [awl@workersliberty.org](mailto:awl@workersliberty.org). □

# Musk? Farage? Really it's all about Jeremy



**Antidoto**

By Jim Denham

In an interview with the *PoliticsJOE* website this month, Nigel Farage claimed he had much in common with... Jeremy Corbyn!

Farage described what he claimed was their common ground: "Anti-establishment, obviously. A sense that the giant corporates now dominate the world that we live in, that politics is very much in the pockets of the big corporates ...

"My thinking and Corbyn's does cross over. I mean Corbyn was a Eurosceptic right from the start. He thought that what Brussels would do is be good for big banks and big businesses and bad for everyone else. Well, he was pretty much right."

The interview received little attention in the mainstream media, but was seized upon by the *Morning Star*. Andrew Murray, a former Corbyn adviser and now the paper's political reporter, quoted Farage at length (MS 8 Jan:

"Farage attempts to woo the left with Corbyn comparison") and while describing him as a "right-wing populist", also quoted an unnamed "close associate" of Corbyn saying that Farage was "not wrong" in his comments.

The MS report did include a comment from Corbyn presented as evidence that Corbyn did not welcome Farage's claim of common ground: "My opposition to the establishment is an opposition to an economic system that promotes inequality and wars around the world – and an underlying belief that a more equal and peaceful society is possible."

Murray's assessment was that although "Reform has been strongly identified with Thatcherite economic views together with anti-immigrant positioning ... Mr Farage's new turn reflects an understanding that Keir Starmer's failures have opened up space to its left for anti-big business rhetoric."

In fact, Farage's willingness to use leftist phraseology when it suits him is nothing new: last year he told the *New Statesman* "in some ways my economic narrative against the global corporatists is quite left-wing" and Reform has called for the renationalisation of

Thames Water and the protection of domestic steel production (whilst retaining Thatcherite policies on low tax and cuts in public services).

We might have expected some editorial response to this, warning against being taken in by Farage's opportunist fake-leftism and calling for a united front against the far-right in the form of Farage and his US backers Trump and Musk. But no.

What we got the next day (9 Jan) was an editorial claiming that "Nothing did more damage to the Corbyn movement than the diversion of the left into defence of the status quo, supposedly to stop right-wing populism ('Trump – Brexit – Sound the Alarm!') Large sections of Corbyn's support fell behind liberal leadership, dividing Labour from majority working-class sentiment and diluting the insurgent politics that fuelled the 'Corbyn surge' of 2015-17."

The MS's uncritical love affair with Corbyn and determination to continue defending its pro-Brexit stance (long after most Brexit supporters have realised it was a disaster) have become obsessions that colour the paper's coverage of a wide range of issues, not least any retrospective assessment of

the Corbyn "movement".

As for the megalomaniac Musk's plan to oust the UK government, his call for Starmer to be jailed, and his life-threatening, misogynistic denunciation of Jess Phillips – well, it's no worse than what the "Starmer clique" did to poor Jeremy: "The playbook should be familiar to the Starmer clique, who ran with it when Jeremy Corbyn ran Labour: an initial scattergun series of attacks... gave way to a concerted campaign to portray Labour as anti-semitic... the Labour right... may be startled by the willingness of the whole British right to amplify the unhinged smears of the world's richest man. They should not be: decorum, honesty and all sense of proportion were similarly abandoned when they egged on the media war against Corbyn, and the institutional encouragement of the most vicious lies about the Labour left have simply shown the right how much it can get away with."

The conclusion seems to be that Starmer and co deserve everything they get from Musk or that they – and not the likes of Farage and the Tory leadership – are the main enemy. □

## In unity is strength (maybe)



**Eric Lee**

Twenty years ago, some the largest unions in the United States broke away from the AFL-CIO claiming that it was not doing enough to organise workers. Everyone understood that the labour movement was rapidly shrinking, down a tiny percentage of the workforce in the private sector. The breakaway unions set up an alternative national centre known as "Change to Win". It was not a success.

I was an eyewitness to some of these events, having been invited by the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), the largest American union, to the founding conference of Change to Win in St. Louis. That conference was full of hope, with inspiring speeches and promises to revitalise the

labour movement. But Change to Win never really became an alternative centre to the AFL-CIO and was unable to deliver on its promise.

The men who founded it -- and they were pretty much all men -- included Andrew Stern of SEIU, Bruce Raynor from Unite Here, and James Hoffa Jr, from the Teamsters. Today none of them head up their unions anymore. And in the case of the AFL-CIO and the SEIU, women leaders have replaced them.

On 8 January, the top leaders of the AFL-CIO (Liz Shuler) and the SEIU (April Verrett) announced that the split was over. SEIU had rejoined the AFL-CIO. Of the unions that broke away in 2005, only the Teamsters, now headed by Sean O'Brien, remain outside the tent.

Shuler and Verrett took pains to assert that, as *Forbes* magazine put it, "the combination

was not a consequence of Republican Donald Trump winning the November election and returning to the White House." No one mentioned that both the AFL-CIO and SEIU had endorsed Kamala Harris in last year's election. And that the Teamsters had refused to endorse any candidate, instead taking up the opportunity to address the Republican National Convention.

Of course it's about Trump -- like everything else in the US these days -- even if union leaders don't want to say it. To understand the role unions play in American politics, this statistic tells us a lot: in last years elections, 18% of the voters came from union households, with 54% backing Harris and 44% voting for Trump. Considering Trump's strength among white, working class males, those are extraordinary numbers. They show how much workers who

join unions are pushed in a more progressive direction, while those outside the labour movement are much more likely to fall for Trumpian populism.

A strong and united labour movement, now with some fifteen million members, is the last, best hope for a working class expecting an onslaught of attacks. That means not only defending workers in their workplaces, but more generally flexing union power in society. As Liz Shuler put it, "We are the, probably, only institution in the country that has an infrastructure in every city, in every state, in every workplace, that is a mobilizing machine."

That "machine" will now be used first of all to defend workers from Trump and his allies. As the *Huffington Post* put it, "The incoming Trump administration will probably seek to reverse the labour-friendly

reforms under President Joe Biden, while a Republican-controlled Congress won't make it any easier for workers to form unions." Some Republican leaders have talked openly about getting rid of the National Labour Relations Board, which was set up in the 1930s to ensure some very basic workers' rights.

There are no guarantees that the reunified American labour movement will do any better than the divided one. In the 1930s, the CIO split from the AFL, triggering the most successful organising campaigns in the history of the American labour movement. Change to Win was unable to repeat that success.

Today, threatened by the most dangerous right-wing and anti-worker government in American history, unions are making the right decision by getting back together. In unity, maybe, there is strength. □

# Why cosmetic surgery is booming



**Women's Fightback**

By Jill Mountford

Capitalism creates and profits handsomely from women's self-doubt. It helps keep women in their place, keeps us busy worrying about how we look. It pressures women to strive for impossible ideals and increases our self-loathing when we inevitably fail to achieve them.

The beauty and personal care industry has a global revenue of around \$636 billion and is growing. Within that, cosmetic procedures and surgery have grown exponentially since the end of the pandemic.

According to the British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons (BAAPS) national audit in 2022, there was a 102% rise on the previous year in cosmetic procedures. It was the highest rise since records began in 2004.

This is repeated globally, with enor-



mous growth in China, Brazil and South Korea, and women taking more than 93% of all procedures.

The data of the International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ISAPS) show cosmetic procedures vaulted from 25 million in 2019 to 35 million in 2023.

According to *the Economist*, the true figure is much higher because ISAPS surveys only certified plastic surgeons. In China there are six-times more unlicensed plastic surgery clinics than licensed ones, and that is in a country where the number of procedures is doubling in just four years from 2021 to 2025, and is forecast to double again over the next five years.

In Brazil there is chain of high-street

plastic surgery clinics aimed at low-paid workers – or more specifically low-paid women workers – where plastic surgery can be bought on the never-never and comes in cheaper than buying the latest iPhone.

In Iran there are only 400 accredited plastic surgeons, yet there are more than 2,000 doctors offering cosmetic procedures, making this highly profitable industry a highly dangerous one too.

The significant increase in women spending money they barely have on cosmetic procedures which fail to make them happy, and in turn become addictive, is said to be due to a number of factors: the Zoom boom, social media and its influencers, unreality TV, and

lower costs for such procedures as private equity groups and venture capitalists sniff out a chance to make billions in a "recession-proof industry".

But there is nothing cosmetic or surface or trivial about Brazilian butt-lifts, trout pouts and reshaped labia "to restore a youthful look". Rather, this is a deeply inhuman experience in which you make a stranger of yourself to yourself.

I saw graffiti that said "In a system that profits from women's self-doubt, liking yourself is an act of rebellion". Make that collective, and we will have beauty on the streets. □

• More: [bit.ly/cosm-r](https://bit.ly/cosm-r)



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shop-wl](https://bit.ly/shop-wl)

# Can strikes shift the president?

By Will Roberts

South Korea has seen a week of continued uncertainty, as impeached president Yoon Suk Yeol continues to evade arrest.

On 13 January, it was revealed that the president was claiming his scheduled pay rise even as he has refused to leave his house since a speech on 11 December. The pay rise of 3% is higher than the simultaneous 1.7% rise in the minimum wage – an irony that protestors have noted, during a period where the president is conducting no business whatsoever.

Last week's failed attempt to arrest Yoon is likely to be attempted again once the warrant has made it through a

number of stages of red tape. There are two separate cases in motion: one in constitutional court which could have him officially removed from office, another an investigation into the charge of "insurrection". The first, failed arrest attempt was meant to take him to court for questioning in the latter case.

Perhaps more interesting than the man himself is the continuing series of near-daily protests in Seoul and elsewhere. These are not solely people who want Yoon out – as reported in *Solidarity* 729, the Korean right have been mobilising in defence of the president, painting the impeachment as the liberal establishment "stealing" the

presidency. An [article](#) by Workers' Solidarity, sister organisation to the British Socialist Workers Party, accuses acting president Choi Sang Mok of deliberately avoiding open conflict with Yoon, or encouraging officials to make an arrest, because doing so would exacerbate street protests and unrest.

They call for a general strike, citing the importance of the July-August 1987 general strike in ending the military rule of Chun Doo Hwan.

"If the KCTU [Korea's more militant trade union confederation] declares a general strike now and the strike actually takes place, the protests to oust Yoon Suk Yeol can take a significant step forward." In-

formation has been hard to locate, but this suggests that the general strike declared by the KCTU on the day of Yoon's attempted insurrection was not, in fact, carried out to any great effect. The KCTU has 1.13 million members, barely smaller than the 1.15 million in the "company union" federation, the FKTU, and much smaller than Korea's population of 51 million.

Yoon cited the strength of the labour movement as one of the main reasons for his coup attempt at the start of December. Whatever the outcome of his (undeniably engrossing) court drama and attempted arrests, solidarity with Korean workers in organising against increasing gov-

ernment repression will have to be central to the response of the international left. □

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# Analysing the fall of Assad



## Eye on the Left

By Matt Cooper

This week, and in coming weeks, I will look at how the British left has responded to the fall of Assad. The SWP has perhaps a more grounded position than other well-known groups.

A [statement](#) from the SWP's International Socialist Tendency rightly welcomes Assad's fall and recognises the dangers of the new HTS government as Islamist, repressive and socially conservative. The weak social base of HTS creates a breathing space for workers and secular democrats to organise. But HTS's weak base could lead to collapse into further conflict (or, it could be added, an authoritarian dictatorship where HTS's superiority in arms "compensates" for weak support).

Although overlapping with the IST statement, Alex Callinicos's *Socialist Worker* column, "What is behind the fall of Assad?" ([17/12/24](#)) develops the argument in a different direction. He starts well, rejecting Tariq Ali's claim that Assad's fall is a victory for US imperialism and a blow to anti-imperialism. At the same time he rejects the [view](#) of Joseph Daher that this has little to do with US imperialism (Daher is a Swiss-based Syrian academic once around an SWP-aligned Syrian group, but now with the Fourth International whose British affiliate is Anticapitalist Resistance).

Daher's point is a reasonable one. Since 2012, Assad's regime was under-

pinned by military support from Russia, Iran and Hezbollah, the withdrawal of which led to his fall. In turn, the strength of HTS is based on support from Turkey and Qatar and the vacuum left by Assad burning Syrian civil society.

Callinicos partially accepts Daher's view. But he refuses to let go of the idea that the US and Israel are axiomatically the big bad. He notes the Israeli attacks on Hezbollah and Iran undermined Assad's position, implying those served some US grand plan.

From when Assad and Russia defeated Syria's opposition, bloodily and apparently decisively, around 2015, until the anti-regime demonstrations of 2023, SW's coverage focused almost entirely on opposition to US (and UK) bombing and operations in Syria. The context of these was never properly explained (in particular, the Kurdish (YPG) ground war against Islamic State). Instead, the Kurdish forces in Syria were [told](#) that "Proper liberation for Kurdish people can only be won by challenging imperialism in the region".

SW pointed to a preconceived view of the USA as the "main enemy", rather than opposition to every foreign and foreign-sponsored military force in Syria.

Of course, Hezbollah's capabilities were massively reduced by Israel's attack on it in Lebanon and Syria. Iran's ability to intervene has been reduced by Israeli airstrikes. Russia is tied up in Ukraine.

That all those factors combined to enable HTS to bring down Assad was not the intended consequences of the actions of Israel (or the US). Anyway, there is a strong argument that Iran and



Russia started to disengage from Syria prior to the wars in Ukraine and Lebanon with the repeated refusal of Assad to engage seriously with the Astana process (a peace process involving Russia, Syria and Turkey) since 2017.

### Skewed

An optic even more skewed by wanting to render it all in anti-US and anti-Israel terms came in an article by SW's Middle-East commentator, Anne Alexander ([SW 17/12/24](#)). After some reasonable analysis, she stated: "there can be no real peace or security for Syrians while Palestine is occupied. The fall of Assad means a Syria where Palestinians can organise more freely – no longer do they face the regime's brutality. This may create a new dynamic." For dis-

cussion of space for working-class and democratic politics to emerge in Syria, Alexander substituted the pious "anti-imperialist" hope that some undefined force within Syria will move to end the "occupation of Palestine" (a term which in SWP-talk is systematically ambiguous, meaning alternately Israeli repression in the West Bank and Gaza, or the very existence of Israel).

The result of all of this, for the SWP, is a contradictory mess. A reasoned understanding of the regional powers impacting on Syria is mixed with a programmatic demand that Syrians and Kurds swivel focus to fight, not HTS, but the USA and Israel, although those two have been far from "the main enemy" which is "at home" for Syrian workers. □

# No, socialism is not austerity



## Letter

Responding to Paul Vernadsky ([Solidarity 729](#)), it stands to reason that a socialist revolution can only happen if there are enough working-class people willing to carry it through. It would be strange therefore to make an argument that put working-class people off making a socialist revolution, but I didn't think I had in my article "The Earth and limits to consumption" ([Solidarity 728](#)).

I gave a very rough indication of what standard of living would be possible for all now

if current incomes were redistributed. I know that GDP is a poor measure. I know that private jets in the USA can't be straightforwardly "redistributed" into clean water supply in Africa. But working-class people need to know such rough indications to orient ourselves. Marx wrote that socialism requires generalised abundance of the basics of life. How close are we to that? If we don't have the indications, the political right can frighten working-class people, saying the left offers them only a Stalinist vision of the future, with everyone (except the bureaucrats) living grey, austere lives in identical, cheap uniforms. It's certainly not my vision.

I also suggested that under socialism there would be growth of many good things (sustainable agriculture, decent homes, etc), but reduction/degrowth of bad things, principally burning fossil fuels.

I imagined what life would be like beyond the end of capitalism: "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". It sounds pretty good to me! I'd buy into that even if in the future I had to give up the odd overseas trip (I don't have a car). I did not

propose immiserating well-off workers – raising the level of the poorest requires taking control of wealth from the rich who have it now and reshaping society and the economy so that everyone can have a good life; not as much "stuff" as the best-off workers now, in the short term, probably, but a good life, yes.

Neither did the article blame better-off workers for global warming; I set the context for this in the growth and expansion of capitalism and large-scale burning of fossil fuels. Set against this, the cars and flights of better-off workers are a small part of the problem, but they are not nothing.

There are environmental

limits to what a good life for all might be like and some of the things that better-off workers take for granted would probably not be prudent in future. Crucially, that would be for the working-class, future rulers of society, to discuss and determine democratically, armed with the facts. With better public transport we can reduce car usage. A better organised society might mean fewer journeys altogether.

I don't regard this as a melancholic project, on the contrary, it's a liberating prospect: a better life for all, with fewer harmful emissions for the planet. □

Vicki Morris, Nottingham

# Is “tax the rich” demagogic?



**Socialism vs  
Capitalism**

By Martin Thomas

The [Socialist Standard](#) of December 2024 criticises our call to “tax the rich” to mend the National Health Service and other public services.

We cited detailed proposals from [Tax Justice UK](#) (experts on such matters) for a wealth tax, increased capital gains tax, and other measures which would bring in between £52 billion and £60 billion a year. We said such taxes would not redress social inequality, but they would restore the NHS and other public services to a moderate working order.

*Socialist Standard* responds: “Taxing the rich to increase wages and benefits and provide better public services is fantasy politics. It’s not going to happen and, if it was tried, would precipitate a massive economic crisis”. They accuse us of manipulative politics: “proposing something to attract worker support but which [we] know won’t work, in the expectation that, when it doesn’t, the disillusioned workers who fell for it will turn to us for leadership in an assault on the capitalist state”.

*Socialist Standard* is wrong, but there is a grain of truth in its arguments.

*Socialist Standard* comes at such questions from a different angle from most of the left. Its publisher, [SPGB](#) (Socialist Party of Great Britain, quite different from the Socialist Party which publishes [The Socialist](#)), was one section of a 1904 split from what was then the British Marxist group, the Social Democratic Federation, in protest against the SDF’s advocacy of what it called “stepping stones”, partial measures, as well as full socialism.

The other section was the “De Leonite” Socialist Labour Party, whose leaders mostly joined the then-revolutionary Communist Party when it was founded after the 1917 Russian revolution. The SPGB rejected the Russian revolution as only “state capitalist” from the start, and argues that the only road is via winning elections by first gaining

workers’ support for full socialism with no half-measures.

They have a way to go on that – the SPGB stood two candidates in the 2024 general election, totalling 193 votes – but at times the SPGB has been quite well-known on the left. It is willing to debate with other left groups, as sadly many others are not.

But pro-worker partial measures can be won, even under capitalism. They have been won. Despite the long waiting lists, the NHS is still a great improvement on what we had before 1948. Wages are much higher, work hours shorter, schools better, than in 1904. Winning improvements is the chief way that workers organise ourselves, increase our confidence, and gain time and facilities to study and discuss beyond the scanty minimum possible when workers cannot buy books or newspapers or travel to meetings, are illiterate, are exhausted after long work hours, and have our lives dominated by a battle to feed our households each week.

Higher taxes on the well-off paid for the NHS after World War Two. Thatcher cut the top rate of income tax from 83% to 40%, increased VAT (which hits poorer people harder) from 8% to 17.5%, and sent the NHS into funding difficulties which (with some periods from relief along the way) has continued since then and sharpened since 2010.

## Cut

It is possible for Tories to cut taxes and deprive public services of revenue! It is also possible for us to resist and sometimes to push back our enemies. We do not make our demand as a trick to manipulate workers into revolution. We mean exactly what we say.

Marxists made such demands before the SPGB hived off in 1904. The Communist Manifesto called for a progressive income tax. The German Social Democrats’ Erfurt Programme of 1891 called for “graduated income and property tax” and “inheritance tax”. When in 1921-3 taxes on business became notional in Germany because of high inflation (by the time those taxes, as distinct from workers’ PAYE, were collected, inflation had reduced their real amount to almost nothing), the then-revolutionary German Communist Party [demanded](#) “taxation of real values”, the state to take a proportion of firms’ “real property”.

However, demands like “tax the rich” were relatively rare in those revolutionary times. The nearest equivalent in the German CP’s founding “Spartacus Programme” was “Confiscation of all wealth above a [certain] level”.

In May 1917 Vladimir Ulyanov (Lenin) [dismissed](#) a call by a Menshevik minister in Russia’s bourgeois Provisional



Government for 100% taxation of profits. “Our party is much more moderate”, he wrote sarcastically, demanding “control [by the workers’ and soldiers’ councils] over the banks and... a more just progressive tax on incomes and properties”.

“It is to the advantage of the capitalists and the bureaucrats to make ‘extravagant promises’, even of notionally forgoing profits for a while, because that was “diverting people’s attention away from the main thing, namely, the transfer of real control to the workers”.

In June-July 1919, Mussolini’s then-infant fascist movement in Italy took up, so Angelo Tasca wrote in his history, “the refrain of all demagogues, whose demagoguery covers up and serves a fundamental opportunism: ‘make the rich pay.’” Italy’s economy was in such collapse that only reorganisation under comprehensive workers’ control could redress it. Not a seizure of this or that stash of cash.

As I remember, Trotsky made a similar argument in a comment on French politics in the years after 1929, but I can’t trace the reference.

To raise “tax the rich” as the first demand in a revolutionary crisis is to distract and confuse. It is not entirely wrong – individual plutocrats will still have large individual stashes even after all big industry and banks have been taken into workers’ control and public ownership, and we will be demanding, for example, that their palaces and mansions be seized to accommodate the homeless and ill-housed – but it should not be the first demand.

We are not in a revolutionary crisis. In today’s conditions, the danger of distraction is the converse. A message that nothing can be done about the NHS short of a comprehensive working-class takeover of large-scale productive wealth would be an alibi for passivity. A demagogic alibi, even.

Even today it is important to point out that feasible tax rises will bring only partial relief (£60 billion is little more than 2% of GDP). A working class sufficiently mobilised to win that partial relief will have to be ready to use our improved organisation and confidence to go on for control and ownership of major productive wealth. Otherwise we will see our raised aspirations thwarted, our political drive stalled, our gains annulled as soon as the capitalist class can regain its balance.

Our article, to avoid being reasonably charged with demagoguery, had to point that out and explain that “tax the rich” is not a cure-all. But it did. We were not demagogic or opportunist. □

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- The Occupation of the Cammell Laird Shipyard, Birkenhead 1984
- When workers beat the fascists
- Automation and the working class □

[workersliberty.org/publications/](http://workersliberty.org/publications/)

## Venezuela disaffiliation

Many union branches are still affiliated to the Venezuela Solidarity Campaign, which has become an apologist for the anti-working-class regime of Nicolas Maduro. The Camden branch committee of the public services union Unison voted in January to disaffiliate and seek instead to support the working-class left in Venezuela. See: [bit.ly/mo-pe](http://bit.ly/mo-pe) □

# Palestine: lesson



## Book review

By Martin Thomas

Soon after the Hamas atrocity of 7 October 2023, while Israel was bombing Gaza in retaliation but before it invaded, Aaron Bastani of [Novara Media](#) named two books as “must-reads to understand the situation in historic context”. Those were Ilan Pappé’s *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* and Rashid Khalidi’s *The Hundred Years’ War on Palestine*.

Pappé’s book is an account of 1947-9, by an Israeli historian who moved to Exeter University in 2007. Khalidi’s covers from 1917 to 2024. He is an American academic. Some of his book is personal or family reminiscences: Khalidi was in Beirut, at the American University there, in 1982-3; he was a PLO adviser in the Madrid talks in the early 1990s; his uncle was mayor of Jerusalem in the 1930s, etc. Some of it is straightforward history.

Both books are somewhat skewed, in my view, but Khalidi’s is valuable. He argues for peace by way of “absolute equality of human, personal, civil, political, and national rights” in a scheme for “the two societies”, Israeli and Palestinian. He is no socialist, so social and economic rights are outside his vision, but he wants consistent democracy. In *Solidarity*, we have expressed that idea as “two states, equal rights”.

Khalidi rages at the suffering inflicted on the Palestinians over the last century. But he insists that the Israeli Jews have created a “thriving national entity”. However it came about (few nations have solidified without wars and atrocities), it exists. A search for revenge will not bring progress. Palestinians, he argues, “need weaning from a pernicious delusion... that Jewish Israelis are not a ‘real’ people and that they do not have national rights”.

He quotes Eqbal Ahmad’s argument that military tactics (let alone militarism primarily targeting Israeli civilians) are no substitute for politics in this case. He describes the First Intifada (from 1987 in the West Bank and Gaza, and deliberately using stone-throwing to keep exchanges a step below outright war) as a great advance, and the Second Intifada (from 2000, soon centring round suicide bombs) as “a major setback for the Palestinian national movement”.

Pappé is different. He writes that “the solution” is for “Israel... to transform itself... into a civic and democratic state”, and that means organising the “return” (resettlement) in its territory of six mil-

lion or more descendants of 1948 refugees. Who will do that? He dismisses “the contemporary Israeli left” as “racist”.

Really he doesn’t think the Israeli Jews will voluntarily remake themselves as a minority under a majority sure to be more or less hostile. As a parallel he cites the medieval Crusaders’ Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem. History reports that in the final defeat of that Kingdom, the fall of Acre in 1291, “the conquerors only thought of destroying the city, the only object of the conquered was to escape”. What the Crusaders had inflicted on others, they now suffered themselves.

Pappé authorises himself for blanket anti-Israelism by a claim to be redressing the balance. “The dispossession of the Palestinians in 1948 by Israel” has been “erased almost totally from the global public memory”. Even Khalidi has a bit of the same tilt: it can all “be understood as both a colonial and a national conflict. But our concern here is its colonial nature, as this aspect has been... underappreciated”.

Pappé depicts a world consensus accepting old official Israeli apologetics. The 1948 refugees fled only because Arab leaders told them to.

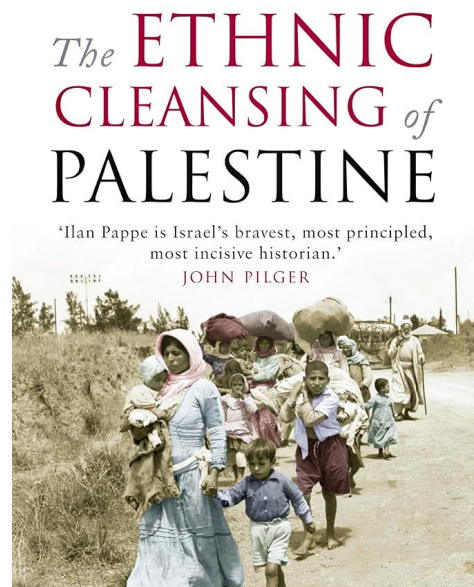
### Voice

But even in the 1950s, though the Palestinians as yet essentially had no voice, many people denounced how they had been pushed into fleeing and often driven out. These days, even Israel-apologists like Efraim Karsh in his *Palestine Betrayed* have abandoned the old story.

Our political tendency wrote about Israel-Palestine in 1967 ([Workers’ Republic 19](#)). Like other Marxists then, we did not imagine that Israel should or could be erased. We were for “class unity of Israeli [Jewish] and Arab workers” and a socialist federation of the Middle East in which the Israeli Jews and the Kurds would have the right to self-rule. But, again like other Marxists, we had no doubt that “from the part of [Palestine] that was to become Israel, [Arabs] were driven out by terror”.

As Khalidi points out, world opinion has shifted against Israel’s rulers repeatedly since then: after 1967 (occupation of West Bank and Gaza), after 1982 (Israeli war in Lebanon), after 1987 (first intifada), and after the repeated Israeli wars in Gaza. Over a very broad range of leftish opinion, demonisation of Israel has become more common than complacency about it.

Back in the 1980s, Pappé was one of Israel’s “new historians”, with Benny Morris, Avi Shlaim, and others. Now



Pappé says that “the new historians never contributed significantly to the struggle against the Nakba denial”.

Morris, once jailed for refusing to serve in the West Bank, and still very anti-Netanyahu, has shifted to the right politically since about 2000, with weary “pessimism” – two states won’t happen, because revanchist political Islam is too strong – which has led him to shocking bleak “realpolitik” comments. The shift has not made him revise history to favour official Israeli apologetics. In his *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited* (2004), his main shift from his 1988 book on the subject was “that pre-1948 [Zionist] ‘Transfer’ thinking had a greater effect on... 1948 than I had allowed for”. Khalidi is nearer to *Solidarity*’s views politically, but Morris’s *Righteous Victims* (1999) is a better source for finding historical fact.

Comparing Pappé’s list of Israeli atrocities with Morris’s books on 1948, I find nothing real omitted in Morris, but often sloppy generalisations in Pappé. Adam Raz, author of a recent book denouncing the looting of Palestinians’ property within Israel after 1948, [writes](#) of Pappé: “So many errors and manipulations” to claim that “the expulsion was... a master plan from the beginning of Zionism”. Raz chooses Pappé’s claim of rapes “throughout” Israel’s conquest and clearing of Arab villages in 1948 as an example of where his story is full of extrapolations.

The expulsions were not just “what happens in war”; equally, the expulsions and the large-scale fearful flight were not just a read-out of an old “master-plan” to be pursued even with little or no war. Israel kept a 20% Arab minority.

Pappé highlights John Bagot Glubb, the seconded British commander of the Jordanian forces in the 1948 war, talking then about a “phony war”. Glubb did not mean the war as a whole

was “phony”. He used the phrase after the First Truce, 11 June to 8 July 1948. Jordan had won all it could reasonably hope to win, namely the West Bank, allotted by the UN to a Palestinian Arab state which Jordan and Egypt snuffed out, and East Jerusalem, theoretically due to be part of an international zone. Now Jordan should be cautious.

In 1948 everyone on the left regarded the Arab states as corrupt, mostly semi-colonies of Britain, and the Muslim Brotherhood volunteers who came to fight Israel as far-right reactionaries. The Palestinians themselves were unable to produce more than local militias allied with the volunteer Arab Liberation Army, assembled in Syria, which entered Palestine in January 1948. Almost no-one on the left wished for victory of the Arab states.

### Attempts

Yet for Pappé the Arab forces represented only attempts to “save the Palestinians”, slight because “Egypt and Iraq were embroiled in the final stages of their own wars of liberation”. Egypt and Iraq in 1948 did keep troops at home in 1948, but to prop up their monarchies, not to pursue “wars of liberation”.

Pappé praises Fawzi al-Qawuqji, the leader of ALA, as “charismatic”. But what were his politics? In World War Two al-Qawuqji had thrown in his lot with the Nazis, going to Berlin with the originally-British-appointed nominal leader of the Palestinian Muslims, the Mufti of Jerusalem. He became a colonel in the German army. As the United Nations moved towards approving a Jewish state, he responded: “We will murder, wreck and ruin everything standing in our way, be it English, American or Jewish”.

On 12-13 May 1948, Jordan’s Arab Legion (still then officially part of the British Army) and local Arab militias destroyed four Jewish settlements, the Etzion Bloc, killing about 130 people, some massacred after surrendering. After the massacre, the Legion managed the safe evacuation of the remaining settlers who surrendered.

Because Arab forces conquered few Jewish settlements, there were far fewer incidents like that in the 1947-9 warfare than of Israeli atrocities. But Pappé airbrushes the massacre. He writes only: “The Legion rescued the Gush Etzion settlers from the hands of angry Palestinian paramilitary groups”.

Raz sums up: “Pappé is disgusted with the Israelis”. Pappé denounces, fairly, Israeli government failure to acknowledge old Arab buildings and villages. But then he insists all old-Arab sites are “beautiful”; wherever Jews

# ns from history

have built since 1948, is not. The story becomes one of a predetermined drive to replace beauty by ugliness.

What really happened? After pogroms in the Russian empire in the late 19th and early 20th century, and the Dreyfus affair in France, some became convinced that persecution of Jews in Europe was not fading away, as it had appeared set to do. Adapting a common social recipe of the time (Argentina, Brazil, New Zealand, USA, Australia...) they thought an answer lay in creating a new Jewish society by settlements somewhere.

Palestine was sparsely populated at the time (about 500,000 where there are 15 million now). It not been a political unit for centuries. It was a vaguely defined region within the Ottoman Empire.

The Jewish settlers shared the complacency common among Europeans at the time about European settlement. There were then many more Jews in Europe than there would be by 1945. If only a fraction went to Palestine, they would be a majority. The Arabs would be surely better off than under Ottoman rule.

## Nationalism

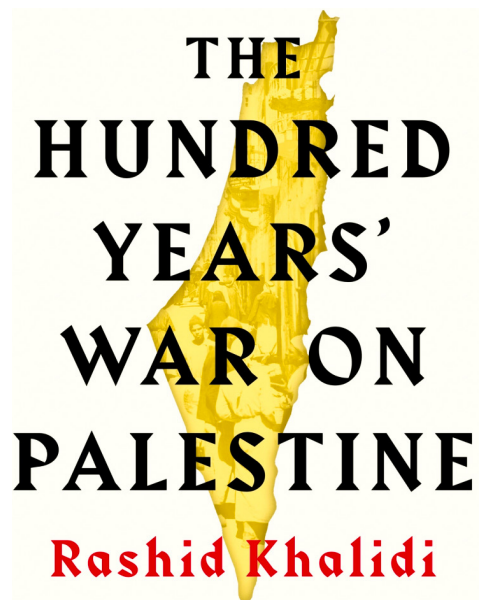
However, Arab nationalism began to stir soon after Zionist efforts began. Aiming to win Arab and Jewish support in World War One, Britain made promises to both. Those included British protection for Jewish settlement in Palestine, which Britain seized in 1918. By 1921 there were the first Arab riots against Jews. That the Arabs were resentful about incomers is no more surprising than that the Zionists were inclined to "look down on" the Arabs.

In Europe, Marxists disputed with the Zionists, arguing that Jews should instead join the class struggle in the countries where they lived. In the late 1920s it looked as if the Zionist experiment would fade away as one of history's dead ends. More Jews were leaving Palestine than were arriving.

Hitler's coming to power changed everything. (As Khalidi notes: not Pappé, though his own parents came to Palestine from Germany in the 1930s).

More Jews fleeing to Palestine, as other countries closed their borders to them. More Arab revolt. Britain moving against Jewish migration and land purchases so as to stabilise its Empire's hold on other Arab lands.

After 1945, Holocaust survivors in Europe wanted to go to Palestine. The British blocked them. The Palestinian leadership had bet on Germany in World War Two, and was dispersed and discredited. The Jews in Palestine,



now a third of the population there and a majority in the big cities, warred against the British occupying forces. Britain joined with the USA to recommend a binational state in Palestine. That had no Arab and few Jewish takers. Britain then gave up and referred the issue to the UN.

Seeing two nations now in the territory, the UN voted for partition, and made no provision for organising it. Palestinian militias and the ALA went to war against the Jews. When the British quit in May 1948, the Jewish community declared a state. Now the Arab states invaded. Despite their much larger populations and larger armies, they were ill-prepared and ill-coordinated, and lost.

The Jewish forces fought as embittered nationalists, intent on defensible borders whatever the cost to others. It was a war with no umpire.

"Transfer" of populations was not a special Jewish idea. In the 1920s the big powers had overseen "transfer" of 1.6 million in a deal after the Greece-Turkey war. The British government had proposed a small "transfer" in a failed 1937 plan for Palestine.

Morris uses the word "atrocities" often in his books on 1948, and with good reason. Pappé is not wrong in being angry. He is wrong in building a sort of conspiracy theory out of his disgust at his own people becoming mean-minded and brutal as communities do in poisoned national wars.

For him it was the work of "the Jews who, since the late 19th century, wished to uproot" the Palestinians. "The aim of the Zionist project has always been to construct and then defend a 'white' (Western) fortress in a 'black' (Arab) world... Their primary goal is to keep the population of the state 'white', that is, non-Arab".

Such is the thinking behind the slogans on Gaza demonstrations about

"75 years of Nakba", interpreting the discriminations against Arabs in Israel since 1948 as an irresolute form of the eternal conspiracy. In fact the Arab population of Israel is 20% today as it was in 1950. There has been nothing like the decline in the Protestant percentage in the 26 Counties of Ireland from 10% in 1891 to 3% in 1991.

In Pappé's world-view, some people are racist, but then the Jews... something else again. They are set on scanning for places where "black" people live and replacing them with "white" people.

Probably a majority of today's Israeli Jews have heritage from Arab countries, Ethiopia, Iran, or such, and are no more "white" than Arabs. In any case, where did the Jews, a dispersed and persecuted minority, get a predetermined power to "uproot" remote areas at will? And why would they make the effort?

Just more of the malign intentions and powers that conspiracy theories have attributed to Jews for centuries now?

## Answers

The usual answers are either that the USA wanted to dominate the Middle East for the sake of oil, and found Israel its best local agent to do that (but then why was Israel the only ally which the USA pointedly did not want in its coalition for Iraq in 2003?); or, conversely, that Israel, by dint of "the Zionist lobby", has been able to suborn the USA for its own local-imperialistic interests.

Pappé gives neither answer. In the detail of his account Khalidi refutes all such simplistic stories.

Khalidi shows, for example, that the State Department, the Pentagon, and the CIA were wary of the Palestinian Jews in the 1940s; that the USA briefly reversed its support for the UN partition plan in March 1948; that the USA pressed hard for return of the Palestinian refugees for a short while after 1949; that the modern full-scale US-Israel alliance dates only from 1967, when the USA became convinced that Israel was both the most stable ally it could hope for in the region and the strongest; and that even since then the US has often gone out of lockstep with Israel.

In the title of his book, though, he contradicts the detail. The chapters are headed First, Second... up to Sixth Declaration of War, saying that Britain, then the USA and USSR, then a more autonomous Israel in 1967, etc. repeatedly "declared war" on "Palestine".

The kernel of truth, I guess, is that the Jewish settlement in Palestine survived

only because each time an old source of strength peeled away, it found a new one. But is Khalidi arguing that Zionists had programmed it all in advance? That the Jewish settlers had some unique power to gain allies? That it has been a single "war", a single read-out over a hundred years of evil Jewish plans against a stable entity called "Palestine"? That the entity has been passive all through?

In detail, certainly not. But the oddity of the title and the chapter headings may connect to an oddity in Khalidi's indications of possible agency for progress.

He deplores at length Palestinian ineptitude at winning over opinion in the USA (by which he seems to mean ruling-class opinion). In some generalisations he seems to say that the USA could never support Palestinian rights, but in detail he describes himself working with the PLO on that political effort, and registers frustration as if he thinks with better backup he could have had successes.

So the lever for change is to shift opinion in the USA? Khalidi, though only in passing, backs BDS ("Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions").

Even if BDS were good for winning support in the USA or Europe – and I think it is not – it is certainly bad for connections and help for groups within Israel which support Palestinian rights. Khalidi is unfussed about that.

He does not explicitly denounce the Israeli left as Pappé does, and he is aware that since 1982 there has been a section of Israeli society – of fluctuating strength, and weaker in recent years – looking for democratic redress. But he sees no important lever for change in those groups within Israel, not even in those like Standing Together with roots in Israel's 20% Palestinian minority, which these days is the segment of Palestinians with the greatest social power and freedom to act.

He does not look instead to Hamas – "uncompromising and antisemitic... extremely conservative social positions". He is aware that autonomy under the Oslo Accords has left the Palestinians in the West Bank politically and economically weaker than direct Israeli rule did: the Israeli army does not have to try to control the streets in the 160-odd separate patches of land under Palestinian Authority oversight, and can do what it likes around them in Area C. But his answer seems to be external agency – BDS, not so much as a way of pressurising the Israeli government, but first as a lever to budge the US ruling class.

His book is still worth reading. Pappé's, not so much. □

# The first Irish

By Sean Matgamna

Solidarity 729 surveyed the renderings of James Connolly as a political model in Irish nationalism since the 1950s. What was left-wing politics in Ireland before Connolly?

Identifiable left-wing politics first emerged in Ireland at the end of the 18th century.

It was the result of three revolutions.

The American revolution, which broke out in 1776. The French revolution, which started in 1789. And the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688 in which the English Parliament kicked out the would-be absolutist Catholic King James and put William of Orange and James's Protestant daughter, Mary, jointly on the throne, under the control of Parliament.

In England and Scotland 1688 was a peaceful, liberating consolidation of the bourgeois revolution of the 1640s. For Ireland's Catholics it had been a terrible war between Protestant and Catholic European coalitions, ending in vast confiscations of land held by Catholics, the migration of much of the Irish Catholic upper classes to France and Spain, and the sinking of the Irish Catholic people into a system of helotry akin to South Africa's apartheid in the 20th century, with their status defined and determined by religion. To them the "Glorious Revolution" meant enslavement, not liberation.

If it increased the liberty of Irish Protestants, it was a liberty erected on the bent backs of the subjugated "natives". Yet it was remembered by them as a liberating revolution. And so it was seen through Europe and most of English North America. It exerted on the American colonists, and on the European liberals, living under autocracies, the influence of example and precept.

When the thirteen American colonies came into conflict with England, they raised the cry that had been heard in the 1640s in England as Parliament and the King squared up to each other – "no taxation without representation". They demanded the rights of "free-born Englishmen", and made war on the English government and set up their own revolutionary assembly to realise and exert those rights.

In turn, the American revolution exerted a great influence on bourgeois France and helped shape their demands against the King and the aristocracy.

The American revolution had a dual influence in Ireland. Britain's defeat and

weakening created a need for the authorities in Ireland to organise defence against French raids and a possible French invasion. This gave the heirs of 1688 in Ireland their chance, and the "spirit of 1688", flowing back across the Atlantic ocean, inspired them to act.

The Protestants – who, under the system of restrictions on the Catholics, alone had the right to bear arms – organised "volunteers", locally-based armed militias to defend the country. Soon they confronted the English government.

According to the then dominant ideas about economics, colonies existed to serve the "mother country". Their trading rights were strictly limited and controlled to ensure that they did not compete with it.

From early in the 18th century the ruling Irish "Protestant nation" had resented the constrictions placed on them. The Volunteers turned into a political movement demanding free trade with Britain and its colonies, and an end to subordination of the Protestant Parliament in Dublin to the Parliament at Westminster. Some of them demanded equality for Catholics.

In 1783, the weakened British Parliament capitulated to their demands. For the next 17 years, the Irish Parliament was linked to the British Parliament only by obedience to a common king, George III.

While this was going on, the Catholics supported the Volunteers and their demands, and in some places they may even have been allowed to "volunteer".

But the "revolution" was an affair of the "Protestant nation". It ended in the effective independence of that "nation's" Parliament, from which Catholics were rigidly excluded.

This was a "left", but one confined to an elite caste. The Protestant oligarchy which ruled in Dublin jealously guarded its privileges; the volunteering movement declined.

The "revolution of 1783" would inspire future Catholic nationalists – for example, Arthur Griffith, founder of the first Sinn Féin – to argue for a return to 1783, but with manhood suffrage which would produce, this time, a Catholic majority. In fact, however, 1783 only prepared the Protestant-Catholic explosion that was soon to come.

The revolution in France, unfolding from mid 1789, had a tremendous impact all over Europe, and in Ireland too. "The Rights of Man and the Citizen", proud republicanism, open contempt for kings and their toadies – these ideas spread quickly through the towns



The United Irishmen

of Ireland and in parts of the countryside, where peasant secret societies – primitive, illegal peasant "trade unions", some Protestant, some Catholics – were an organised force.

"The Rights of Man in Ireland", was how the leading Republican, Wolfe Tone, summed up his political objectives. He and his comrades were people of the left, of the then-international "extreme left" even.

This was the real beginning of a plebeian left, and the beginning of secular politics in Ireland. Before, politics had been the politics of religious sects and struggles for advantage, with the Catholics going down to utter defeat at the end of the 17th century.

## Nation

Now it was to be the politics of nation and, though this was not said, of class.

The words of the man who became the leader and martyr of the new politics, Theobald Wolfe Tone, an Anglican from the Midlands in origin, have been made hackneyed by quotation. "To unite the whole people of Ireland, to abolish the memory of all past dissensions and to substitute the common name of Irishman in place of the denominations of Protestant, Catholic, and Dissenter..."

What a tremendous new departure such an objective was is lost if you forget what it was that Tone was trying to replace with this new approach.

Belfast and the Protestant towns of the North were the most responsive to the new word from France. But it gripped Catholics too, though the Catholic Church was very hostile to the French Revolution.

Those who would liberate Ireland from English rule were people of the

left. The French Revolution was their revolution. Large marches took place in Belfast on the anniversaries of Bastille Day, 14 July.

The revolutionary cause meant in Ireland what it meant in France – "liberty, brotherhood, equality". An end to oligarchic rule, from Dublin or from London; an end to the helot condition of the Catholics; their elevation to equality as citizens; an end to the rule of Kings and their ministers, and an end to the Kings themselves if they did not make way.

The oligarchy in Dublin was immovable. The radicalisation of the revolution in France, the overthrow and then the beheading of the King and Queen and the aristocracy, the first war of the European monarchies on France, all this had a tremendous impact on Ireland, and in the first place on those who had been for the French Revolution from the beginning – the plebeians of the towns, most of them Protestants. So did the Reign of Terror in Paris and elsewhere – when the head of the Austrian army had announced on crossing the French border that he would massacre the entire "contaminated" Jacobin population of Paris – and the victory of the French armies, with the matchless élan and audacity of people fighting for their freedom.

A "Catholic Association" was organised, with Wolfe Tone as its secretary, to campaign for an end to the penal laws. The Society of United Irishmen – in which Catholics and Protestants were fully equal – was launched in 1791, at first as an open, legal organisation concerned with reform.

But the unfolding events in France which aroused the common people also aroused the ruling classes. In Brit-

# sh left

ain it led to a savage political reaction that would not lift for 30 years, until the 1820s. Disillusioned early supporters of the French Revolution, such as the poet Wordsworth, who wrote the famous lines, "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive/ But to be young was very heaven!", turned into bitter reactionaries. Look what the attempt at reform had led to in France!

In Ireland repression drove reformers into illegality. The United Irishmen was reorganised as an oath-bound secret society, Wolfe Tone had to flee, and, after a stay in America, eventually went to France to seek French armies to help liberate Ireland from the rule of the Dublin oligarchy and the domination of England – to set up an Irish Republic.

Yet Tone's words about "the common name of Irishman" recorded not a fact, but only an aspiration. The people of Ireland were far from united.

The impact of the French Revolution had been mainly in the towns, and mainly on Presbyterians, the majority among Protestants. Presbyterian Ireland had direct links and affinities with the American Revolution. The "Ulster Scots" too had been subjected to religious discrimination by the Anglican Irish establishment, and many had been driven to the USA in the course of the 18th century. Such early US leaders as Presidents Monroe and Jackson were of Scots-Irish descent.

The Ulster Scots had been well prepared by the American Revolution for the impact which the French Revolution would have on them. The Anglican peasants were not so receptive.

Their secret societies battled with Catholic secret societies in areas where they competed for land. The Orange Order is a direct descendant of those secret societies; it was formed after a battle with Catholics in Armagh in 1795.

Where the townspeople could talk of Catholic-Protestant equality, competition with desperate Catholics used to a lower standard of life, who might offer to pay the landlords a higher rent to get hold of land as renewal of leases fell due, dominated the Anglican peasants.

Of course, to imagine, as Catholic middle-class nationalist historians used to, that the Catholic secret societies were free of the sectarian spirit, would be mistaken. Catholic peasants in Wexford committed some of the worst sectarian atrocities during the insurrection there in 1798. Yet the United Irishmen did establish contact and collaboration with the Catholic peasant secret society, the "Defenders".

The political organisation, the United

Irishmen, was mainly made up of middle-class and professional people (though one of its leaders, who lost his life in 1798, Edward Fitzgerald, was a son of the Duke of Leinster, the "premier aristocrat" in Ireland).

Riddled with spies and informers, the revolutionary movement was kept under surveillance by the Dublin and London governments. The records of the time show the rulers to be deadly afraid of one thing: that the Republicans of the cities would succeed in crossing the ethnic-sectarian barrier and link up with the downtrodden Catholic peasantry. If these two distinct elements combined, then, as the Dublin oligarchy and the English government understood, they had the potential of an immense explosion in Ireland.

Some of the French revolutionary leaders thought so too (though French politics had taken a turn to the right with the overthrow of the Jacobins in 1794). They remembered the blow which regular French troops had helped the rebel American colonists deliver to the "motherland" two decades earlier.

An invading force of French soldiers set out for Ireland in 1796, but bad weather made it impossible for them to land. They returned to France. Wolfe Tone had been on board.

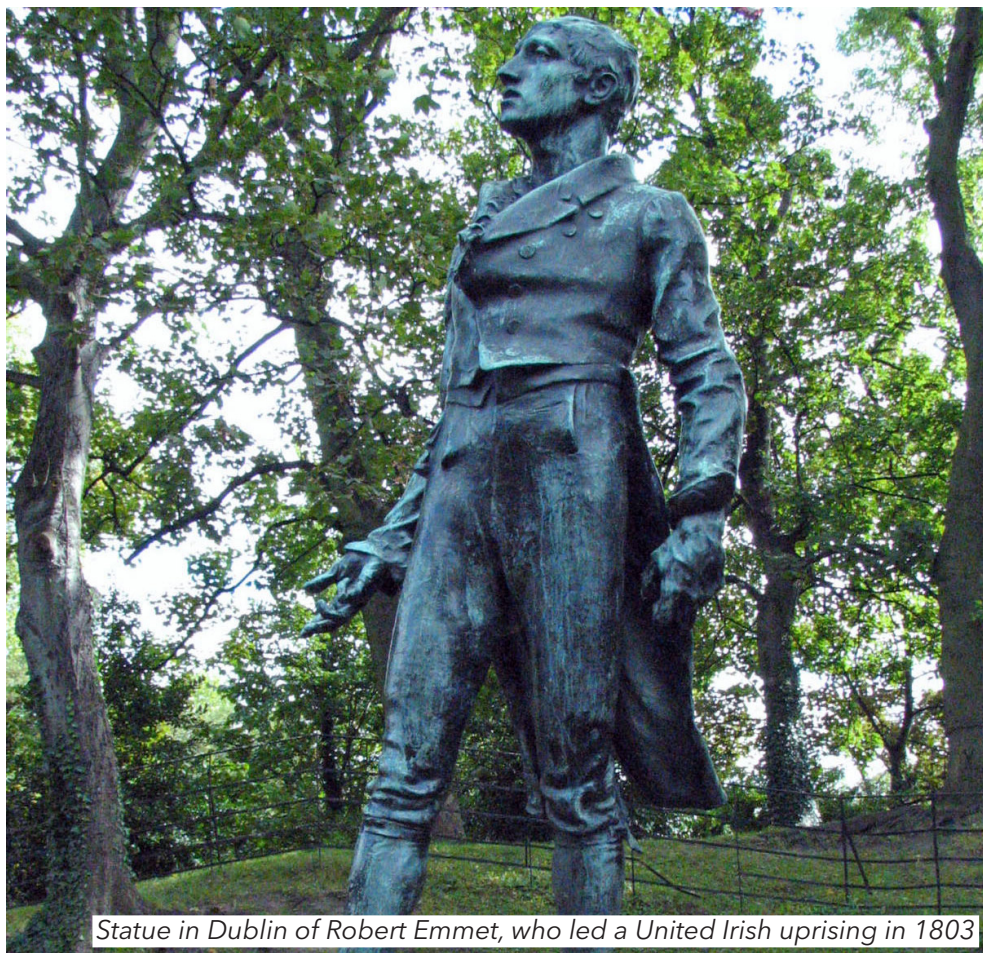
Its narrow escape spurned the government on to a reign of terror in Ireland, whose object was to cow and disarm the people. Soldiers went round the country systematically torturing information out of the peasants and seizing all weapons.

## Disarming

To a considerable extent they succeeded in disarming the people. They severely repressed the United Irishmen, the conscious Republican movement that might have given leadership and coherence to an all-Ireland rising.

When the Rising came in 1798, it was not one movement, but a series of more or less disconnected regional risings. The Presbyterian United Irishmen rose in the North; peasants rose in Wexford in the south-east, one of the most Anglicised parts of Ireland, where the peasants spoke not Gaelic but English; and a small French invasion landed in the West, creating the "Republic of Connaught", from which a movement spread to the Midlands.

Everywhere there was defeat and slaughter. In the North the Presbyterians, led by a Lisburn draper, Henry Monroe, were crushed in a battle at Ballynahinch. The government hanged the captured Monroe in front of his own



Statue in Dublin of Robert Emmet, who led a United Irish uprising in 1803

draper's shop.

In the West, the peasants rallied to the French Republican army under General Humbert. They inflicted a notable defeat on an English army, but, denied the reinforcements they needed from France, were ultimately defeated. The French soldiers were treated as prisoners of war; the Irish "croppies" as defeated rebels to be butchered on the battlefield after they had surrendered, or later hanged.

Wolfe Tone was captured – recognised and denounced by an old school friend in British Army uniform – and cut his own throat to avoid hanging.

In Wexford, revolutionary Ireland came face to face with its own condition and its own contradictions, and tragic evidence of how far it was from being a nation united and integrated in a common identity.

Elements of the shattered United Irishmen were involved, notably Baginbun Harvey, but it was a peasant jacquerie. Led by a priest, Father John Murphy, the Catholic peasants rose and won a series of victories. Armed with locally-made pikes – long two-headed spears, a point for stabbing and a hooked blade for cutting, mounted on an eight foot long ash handle – they fought and beat trained soldiers armed with gun, bayonets, and cannon. The Catholic peasants had something of the élan of the French revolutionary armies.

Finally they were surrounded at Vinegar Hill, defeated, and slaughtered. As the 19th century song puts it: "And poor Wexford, stripped naked, hung high on the cross/ With her heart pierced by traitors and slaves/ Glorio! glorio! to our brave sons who died? For the cause of long downtrodden man".

The risings would inspire nationalists all the way into the 20th century. Song about them would be sung for 200

years and more, such as Boolavogue, a song about Father Murphy.

Another word would be remembered and enunciated by Protestants, including the descendants of the United Irishman – "Skullabogue". Catholic sectarians rounded up local Protestants, locked them in a barn at Skullabogue, and set fire to it, burning them alive.

If the peoples of Ireland could ever have melded together into one distinct people, one nation, it would have been in "98", in a radical social and political revolution modelled on France – where the political reaction under Napoleon Bonaparte nevertheless preserved most of the social conquests of the revolution – and in alliance with France.

In victory, such a thing as "Skullabogue" would have assumed the character of a mere incident. In defeat it came to symbolise how far Ireland was from being one people, and how wide the gulf was between Protestants and Catholics.

The United Irishman William Drennan wrote:

"Hapless Nation, rent and torn,  
Thou wert early taught to mourn;  
Warfare of six hundred years!  
Epochs marked with blood and tears!  
Hunted thro' thy native grounds,  
Or flung reward to human hounds,  
Each one pulled and tore his share,  
Heedless of thy deep despair.  
Hapless Nation! hapless Land!  
Heap of uncementing sand!  
Crumbled by a foreign weight:  
And by worse, domestic hate."

The Irish majority would in the first half of the 19th century claim their own. In doing it as they did, organised by priests under the leadership of Daniel O'Connell, they would step back a long way from the politics of the United Irishmen. □

# If you care, then overthrow capitalism



## How I became a socialist

By Matt Sanderson

I grew up on the Isle of Man, a crown dependency not part of the UK, to a Manx republican father and French migrant mother who separated when I was young.

I had a healthy dose of anti-monarchy sentiment from both sides, and my questions about how the world functions being encouraged. I developed an inquiring and anti-hierarchical view of the world.

My dad is a Manx republican and anti-violence advocate. His job as a chef was always precarious, and yet he ran to be elected. My mother, working in health care, through 30 years of promotions has become a manager two down from the Minister of health and taught

me to value remembering your roots.

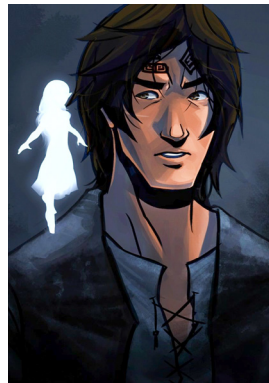
My stepdad, who had been a lead union negotiator during historic bus strikes, taught me how to debate and discuss.

At school I chose subjects I thought would help me understand people and the world: biology and psychology. I had wanted to pick politics, but it wasn't available.

I organised for our sixth form debate club to host the politician proposing abortion legalisation in the Isle of Man and a speaker from the antiabortion Christian campaign group, and it was attended by nearly every student.

But there are no socialist organisations active on the Isle of Man, so I didn't come across them until I left the island to go to university.

Those that I first came across never had the arguments I needed to hear



about their strategy or vision for how to achieve socialism. So many of the university groups were solely focused on getting you to attend a meeting, sign their mailing list, and accept their line without critical thought.

I continued to figure out my socialist views alone, bringing a political element into a biological science degree. After the experience of lockdowns, I slowly came to the conclusion that you can never develop and win alone. Socialism requires genuine collective organising.

I first met Workers' Liberty on the day I was homeless between moving student housing. I met two comrades on an empty university concourse who finally gave a strategic-focused answer to my question of "how do we achieve socialism?". They were open about their revolutionary organising of students, in workplaces, unions and the Labour

party, and they didn't just reply "join us and find out".

That brought me into Sheffield Solidarity Group, where we focused on learning socialism through practice, combining student activism with Just Eat courier strikes, lecturer picket lines and the creation and distribution of workplace bulletins that were unafraid to talk about issues. It was the training ground I needed to go into the NHS and rapidly become involved in my union branch and workplace politics.

My favourite story is that of [Kaladin](#) in the Stormlight Archive. He starts as a depressed but resistant slave, who organises the oppressed around him to resist their indenture and overthrow their oppressors together.

The message: protect those who cannot protect themselves when you have the strength to do so. I think at my core I believe that the overthrow of capitalism is one of the most caring acts anyone could aim to achieve. □



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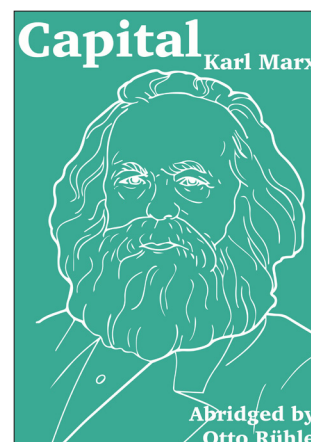
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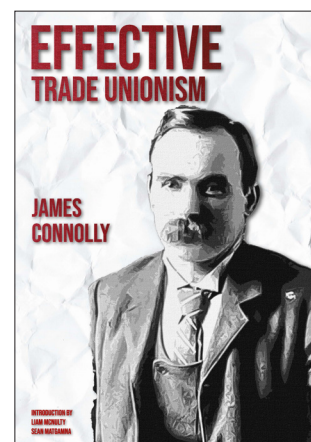
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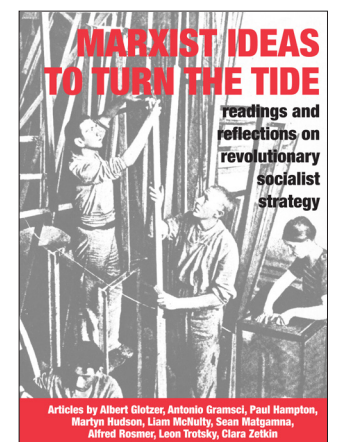
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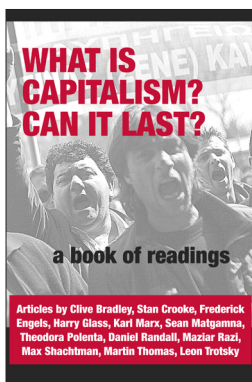
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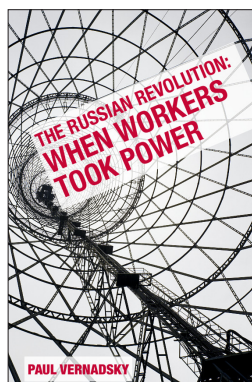
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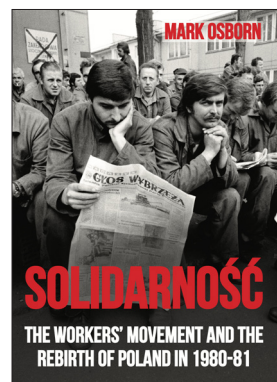
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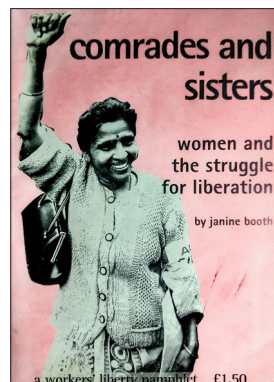
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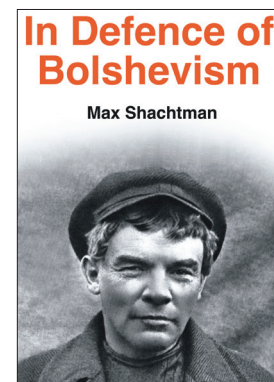
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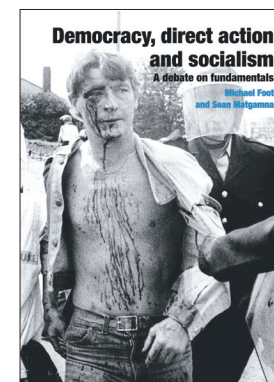
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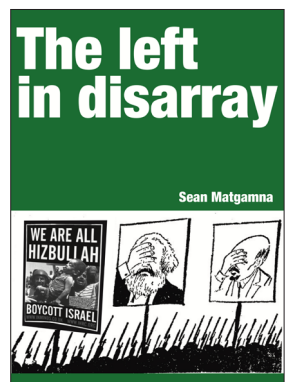
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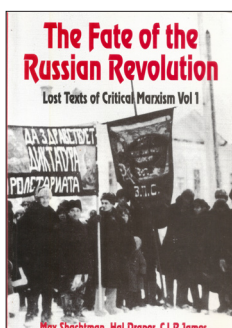
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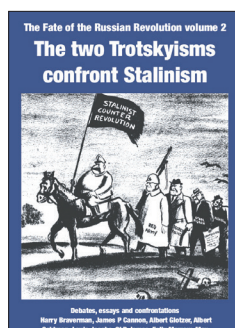
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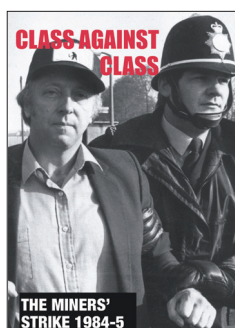
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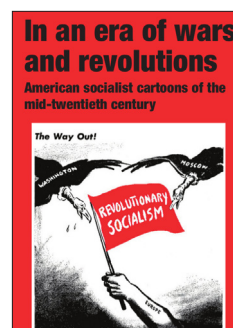
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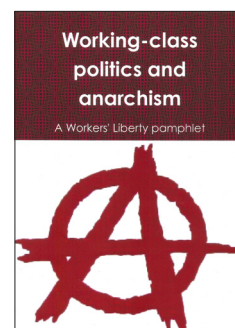
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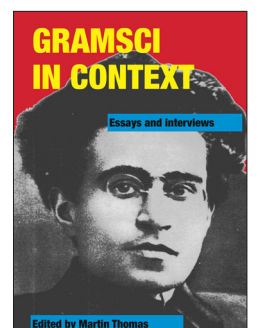
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# Solidarity meeting defies boycott calls

By Owen Flood

Bristol Friends of Standing Together held a successful public meeting on 9 January with two Standing Together activists, Itamar Avneri and Amal Ghawi, speaking.

Standing Together is the largest grassroots Jewish-Arab movement in Israel, calling for a ceasefire, a hostage-deal, an end to the occupation, and peace in the region.

But Bristol Palestine Alliance (BPA) had called for a boycott of the meeting on social media saying "'Stand Together' [sic] is on the BDS boycott list!! They are a Zionist organisation. Do not engage with them, do not attend this meeting." This was followed by the hashtags #freepalestine, #no2statesolution, #boycottisraelproducts.

BPA's graphic was circulated on other social media accounts and in WhatsApp groups where the meeting had been promoted. Comments were

blocked on the original BPA Instagram post.

This is the latest episode after PACBI (Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel), a campaign linked to BDS (Boycott, Divest, and Sanctions) spread disinformation about Standing Together and called for a boycott of the organisation, alleging that Standing Together "seeks to distract from and whitewash Israel's ongoing genocide", that it ignores the violence and injustices that took place during the creation of Israel, that it holds Palestinians and Jewish Israelis for equally responsible for conflict in the region, and that it tries to normalise Israeli oppression of Palestinians.

Standing Together's social media, website, and other publications show different, and Standing Together's Palestinian leadership has [responded](#): "Efforts to silence us serve Israel's leaders".

The public meeting was due to be



held in the Unite union building in Bristol, after a Unite branch had unanimously passed policy in support of Standing Together. Nevertheless, some employees at Unite, sympathetic to the call for a boycott of Standing Together, complained to the Unite South West region. They argued that Standing Together is on the BDS boycott list and that because Unite nationally has policy in support of BDS it should not host the public meeting.

Despite protests, Unite SW pulled support for the meeting and refused to host it. Nevertheless, in official communications to branch officers about why Unite could not support Standing Together, the reason given was, rather,

that because Standing Together opposes arms sales to Israel and Unite has members in military industries.

In fact, the activity of Standing Together is immensely important for the Palestinian cause. In 2024 Standing Together organised the largest demonstrations for a ceasefire in Israel, intervened on anti-government demonstrations with calls for a ceasefire and hostage-deal, supported Palestinians and Israelis victimised for speaking out against the war, organised a Humanitarian Guard, impeded the far-right in Israel blocking aid to Gaza, and most recently organised an aid drive that filled 400 trucks of aid to go to Gaza and the West Bank.

The BDS boycott of Standing Together and the support by some pro-Palestinians serves as yet another example of how counter-productive BDS is to winning relief and rights for Palestinians. □

## The "old evils" are still around



### Film review

By Will Roberts

*Nickel Boys*, a new film adaptation of Colson Whitehead's 2019 novel *The Nickel Boys*, is sure to shoot director RaMell Ross to fame, and with good reason. It is a truly rare feat: a film that takes brilliant source material, takes great risks in its filmmaking, and sticks the landing. It is truly a must-see.

The "Boys" of the title are attendees of the Nickel Academy, a juvenile detention centre run by the state of Florida, euphemistically termed a "reform school". It is a lightly fictionalised version of the Dozier School, which was shut only in 2011 after widespread [reports](#) of abuse and mistreatment.

Whitehead's book came out in 2019, just after a further 27 bodies were located by an un-

derground scan of the school grounds during the clean-up for the first 100 or so bodies that had been discovered in unmarked graves in 2016. Montages of real "reform school" attendees (inmates) play between scenes in the film.

The story follows those who attended the school in the early 1960s: Elwood is a teenager from Tallahassee, whose only record at home is a collection of Martin Luther King Jr.'s speeches. Diligent at school, he gets arrested after hitching a ride from the wrong car to enrol at a local college, and taken to a very different kind of "school".

The Academy, both in the story and real life, claimed to operate on an ethos of self-improvement. Behave well, work and study hard, strive to follow orders and do as you're told, and you will be out in no time. The film, and the real school's survivors, tell a different story.

Nickel Academy is strictly



segregated, and Black inmates are given more gruelling labour and worse treatment than white inmates, along with punishments that are downright barbaric. Virtually everything shown in the film has been documented to have happened at the Dozier school.

The boldest decision Ross makes as director is in the camerawork: the entire film is shot from a first-person perspective. The approach would be clunky and obvious if done by a worse filmmaker, and it

takes a moment to acclimatise as a viewer, but in Ross's hands it feels subtle and well-considered.

Between scenes at the Nickel Academy are slices of the grown-up Elwood's life: an old man clicking through articles about the discovery of new graves; a younger man running into a former fellow inmate in a bar and having a guarded, uncomfortable conversation.

It feels impossible that one life can span both stories. The old-world horror of Nickel feels distant from the scenes of modern New York. It feels just as distant again, in fact, from the 1960s Tallahassee of the film's opening. The story of the American civil rights movement is one of extraordinary political, social and cultural success, but its successes still happened alongside some of the worst depravity of the Jim Crow era.

Ross's film wants us to feel deeply uncomfortable at the

fact that these "old evils" may not be so old after all. Whitehead claims that before Trump was elected, he had wanted to write something less bleak, a change of scenery from his previous book, *The Underground Railroad*, documenting nineteenth-century American slavery.

If you haven't read Whitehead's (excellent) novel, do not read it first. The film delivers the story in a manner that deserves to be talked about, but I will refrain from spoilers. □

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## “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](http://workersliberty.org/join-awl)

# Thanks for all the chats?



## Diary of a school teacher

By Colin Foster

This week's column is not a weekly diary, but rather a longer-term comment on last week's, which was about the discussion that train cancellations had created in Tube drivers' mess-rooms when there were more people there, for longer.

When I moved on from my last teaching job, my workmates in the maths department gave me the customary farewell card. One teacher thanked me for my "enthusiasm for students, maths, and politics", and wrote: "Thanks for all the chats".

The writer and some other workmates came to Ideas for Freedom and other events, and one still writes for *Solidarity*. But the chats were much more scrappy and difficult to get than when I first worked as a teacher, in the early 1970s.

Then, almost all the teachers would be in the staffroom at lunchtime. Then, we did not have the managerial box-ticking on marking and lesson-planning which keeps teachers today scattered and out of staffrooms.

I remember one school where all the young teachers, plus one leftish older teacher, would cluster at one end of the staffroom, the old ones at the other. All the younger teachers were broadly left-wing, most would buy the paper I offered them, and we talked about politics. I remember talking about the Chile coup in September 1973; we all decided to go to the protest demonstration the next Saturday.

As a teacher in Australia, I found a lot more chat than in England recently. Mostly about how to teach topics, sometimes about substantive maths, sometimes about school mis-organisation, sometimes about politics. Why? School unions are stronger. Less box-ticking; longer breaks; less fatalism about management mis-organisation; "subject offices" where every teacher has their own desk.

I remember a comrade, a former steelworker, telling a Workers' Liberty meeting that the once-strong union organisation in his works had been killed, essentially, by the management changing break times so that only a few were on a break at any one time. Weakening of unions over the years has been both effect and cause of bosses reducing space for chat between workmates.

There is another dimension. In some workplaces it is still not workable for bosses to stop workers chatting. Yet, so I hear, often even there workers don't chat much (about the job, about politics, about anything) in breaks, but instead are on computers or phones doing online shopping, playing online games, or the like.

If that is an inevitable result of technology, then we socialists are in trouble. If it is more a result of successive union defeats, and neoliberal consumerism seeping into our very bones, then it will turn round as the class struggle turns out. Or, rather, we can turn it round with an effort. □

• "Colin Foster" is a pen-name

# Politics can help win this strike

By Dylan Seah

Parking enforcement workers employed by Greener Ealing, a wholly owned trading company of Ealing Council, are still striking.

Ealing Labour branch has passed a motion calling on Greener Ealing and Ealing Council to recognise Unite and meet the workers' demands. More political pressure on the Council can help to win the dispute.

The strike, beginning on 27 August 2024, is the longest these workers have

ever been on. A key demand is recognition of their chosen union, Unite.

Four workers have now been dismissed following a series of disciplinary investigations launched during the strike. The timing of these investigations and dismissals is suspect, especially since the alleged breaches were not identified as such at the time they took place and only became grounds for investigation several months later, when the workers were well into strike action.

The strikers briefly resumed work for

two weeks in November to allow for a rebalot and for notice to be served of renewed strike action. In those few weeks, the strikers were given the worst shifts. They returned to a chaotic work environment where some workers are continually being asked by the employer to change roles and responsibilities.

Despite the workers unfailingly picketing the council every day since August, not a single councillor has spoken to the workers, except once to tell them to keep the noise down. Ealing Council is a Labour council under a Labour government, and it is egregious that they have stood by while union recognition is taken away in an organisation they own. □

## The Day of the Jackal mark 2



### Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

The first series of *The Day of the Jackal* (in ten one-hour parts) featuring Eddie Redmayne as the Jackal and Lashana Lynch as his would-be nemesis, Bianca Pullman of MI6, concluded in December.

Unlike the Fred Zinneman film (1973), a tightly constructed 142 minutes, the "updated" TV version goes on and on. An already shaky plot just gets more ludicrous as the Jackal runs around Europe evading MI6 while pursuing his victims, the main target being a tech billionaire, UDC (think

Bill Gates on speed).

Although a billionaire, UDC has a plan to release all the world's banking information into the public domain through a strategy he calls "The River", thus destroying at a stroke the power of the ultra-rich and freeing the world for economic change. The mind boggles at this farrago of utter nonsense, but the stinking rich are a bit miffed and the Jackal is hired to kill UDC.

In the background, as the series comes to its temporary finale, a murky conspiracy involving the Foreign Secretary and the MI6 Deputy Chief is revealed. Sky TV promises a second series soon and, although I am quite amenable to a good adventure yarn, I'm not sure I can sit through another ten hours of this. □

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## Higher Education: pay and the financial crisis

By Vicki Morris

Higher Education unions are gearing up to vote on industrial action against the imposition of a below-inflation 2.5% pay rise in August 2024. The ballots take place during a funding crisis for the sector.

UCU's higher education committee (HEC) has decided to conduct an aggregated strike ballot starting in February, demanding 5.5%, although the exact dates are not yet announced. It is not yet clear whether there will be a recommendation to vote yes to action.

The UCU ballot follows a consultation with a 27% turnout, giving 68% to reject the pay offer and 32% to accept.

Unison's ballot, which is disaggregated, runs from Tuesday 21 January to Tuesday 4 March with a recommendation from the left-dominated Service Group Executive to vote yes to strikes, following a consultative ballot that showed an overwhelming rejection of the pay offer.

The other unions with a small number of members in the sector – GMB, Unite, EIS – are now considering their next steps.

### Ballots

All the unions had been gearing up to begin work with the employers' negotiator, the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA), on important pay-related topics – reform of the pay spine, pay inequalities, contracts, and workload – but UCEA have punitively pulled these discussions in response to the strike ballots.

It will be difficult to get sufficient turnouts in the ballots, but fighting now on pay makes sense. It will put more pressure on UCEA as talks on the 2025-26 pay round begin in spring 2025. We can link the problem of low HE pay to the financial problems of the sector: we cannot get decent pay while our institutions are struggling to survive.

The strike ballots must go alongside a political campaign aimed at the Government: we need a fully funded HE sector for the benefit of its staff and all the students who use it as well as for the wider society. □

• More information: [bit.ly/ucu-25](https://bit.ly/ucu-25) and [bit.ly/unison-25](https://bit.ly/unison-25)

# PCS: face up to austerity prospects

By a PCS member

The Consumer Prices Index rose by [2.6%](#) in the 12 months to November 2024 and by 3.5% when owner occupiers' housing costs are included. Yet the Government wants to restrict public sector pay awards to a mere 2.8% rise.

Civil service members of the PCS union are faced with another fall in the purchasing power of our wages, after a decade or more of pay depression. Academic research revealed last year, "... UK Civil Service wages have dramatically eroded in real terms due to persistent below-inflation pay rises. Depending on the inflation indicator used, at best, real wages in 2023 were at where they were two decades ago..."

Alongside pay cuts, PCS members are facing job losses. The *Financial Times* [reported](#) on 11 December, "more than 10,000 jobs are to be set to be cut under ministers' plans to find

savings of 5 per cent to their departments in the spending review..."

However, the 10,000 job loss figure increasingly looks likely to be an understatement, with Reeves focussing on greater "savings" and Starmer insisting they will be "ruthless" in cutting public expenditure to meet their austerity-portending "fiscal rules". Both of them have been using the language of the Tories to suggest that civil servants are in some way to blame for the state of public finances and the parlous condition of the UK.

This anti-civil service scapegoating reveals a base instinct to attack ordinary working people that will be increasingly on display if, as seems likely, the current economic travails worsen. Falling pay, job loss, and a further hollowing out of our collapsing public services are on the Government's agenda, unless the leaders of the trade unions lead a fight back. In that regard, PCS is

in crisis. UK Government civil servants (i.e. excluding those working directly to the devolved National Governments) got the worst public sector pay awards in 2023 and [2024](#).

The PCS Left Unity (LU) was [complicit](#) in both these debacles and has worked, by abusing their control of the General Secretary and National President posts, to wreck the ability of the Coalition for Change majority on the National Executive Committee (NEC) to defend members' interests.

With branch Annual General meetings being arranged, serious PCS activists must agitate for:

- A vigorous defence of pay, jobs, and other terms and conditions
- Policy and constitutional decisions by this May's annual delegate conference to halt LU's anti-democratic antics
- An NEC able to implement the decisions of Conference. □

## Make "ruthless" the word for the fightback

By Rhodri Evans

Islington Labour council [plans](#) to cut £14 million (about 4% of its "core spending power") in 2025-6. That is a "leftish" council as things go these days, meaning that it doesn't close libraries and it agrees plans with the unions. So it's likely other councils will also plan cuts.

The October Budget allocated a bit more money to councils, but that has been swallowed by increased employers' National Insurance payments due and by uncontrollable overruns on statutory duties. (Islington: £5.4 million overrun in 2024-5 on temporary accommodation for the homeless).

The Budget allocated £22.6 billion more to the NHS. But NHS Trusts are still making cuts.

Much of the cash has been mopped up by overdue pay rises, National Insurance, making good the Tories' failure to fund their own plans, and "fix-it" gimmicks.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies [reported](#) on 8 January that "growth in mainstream school funding... won't be sufficient to cover the expected increase in school costs". Special Education Needs provision is already falling far short, and will fall further.

The 26 March Spending Review promises no relief. The *Financial Times* (14 Jan) quoted a Whitehall official: "Unless it's for tanks or windmills,

there's basically no money".

The interest rate the government pays on its borrowing has gone up, and economic growth has flatlined. World conditions are poor, and may get worse; and it takes more than talk from Starmer or Reeves about "growth" to nudge capitalism into a boom.

Keir Starmer says he "never pretended... that after 14 years of failure you can turn around our economy and public services before Christmas". You might be able to start restoring public services rather than cutting them further, though. Starmer said he would be "ruthless" about the "fiscal rules". They were softened in October but are still very arbitrary.

We need ruthlessness in the fightback!

Too many unions think they've done enough by pushing Labour on union and workers' rights, and have put the NHS and public services in the "too-hard" basket.

Many Labour councillors are bitter. An oddball recent [survey](#) found they identified Imogen Walker, best known as the partner of Keir Starmer's chief of staff, as the most right-wing of Labour's 400-odd MPs.

But too many, in fact almost all, then shrug and do their best to soften cuts.

Too many Labour members are also shrugging, or missing meetings. Too many ex-Labour people are diverted into dead-end and mostly online-only

schemes for "local" and "independent" politics to replace working-class struggle. Organise in the unions and the Labour Parties for "ruthless" taxes on the rich! □

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# “Local” and “independent” is no socialist answer

By Martin Thomas

Twenty Labour councillors in Broxtowe, near Nottingham, quit on 2 January to sit instead as “independents”.

Another flurry of fed-up Labour councillors quitting, as in early 2024? This exit is being touted as more, as a signal for the much-promised “new party” finally to take off.

[Transform](#) announced itself as a new party in July 2023, with the Liverpool Community Independents (councillors who quit Labour in 2022: three of the eight survived the next council elections).

Transform has faded. It ran three candidates in the July 2024 general election. One “Liverpool Community Independent” got 7.8%, but the other two got 0.8% and 0.7%.

## Favoured

The current favoured vehicle is [Collective](#). Leading figures there are Karie Murphy, who was the Director of Jeremy Corbyn’s Leader’s Office from 2016 to 2020, and Andrew Feinstein. James Schneider, a former big wheel in Momentum and then in the Leader’s Office, who is or recently was Communications Director for the pro-China Progressive International, is also said to be around. He ran Corbyn’s July 2024 election campaign in Islington North.

Collective was launched in March 2024. It wishes to “bring together” a range of groups, including the Socialist Party and its TUSC electoral vehicle. Also, for example, The Muslim Vote, which does not particularly claim to be left-wing. The SWP

now seems more interested.

The “new party” people want to get Jeremy Corbyn as their figurehead. Corbyn seems reluctant. In Parliament he has grouped with the four Muslim “independent” MPs elected primarily on a “Gaza” ticket. The four are a mixed bag, none particularly left-wing, and [one](#), Shockat Adam, linked to Friends of Al-Aqsa, a Muslim Brotherhood offshoot.

Corbyn won Islington North as an independent in the general election, and surely on his record as a left Labour MP. His written prospectus was, however, markedly less left-wing than he offered as Labour. He stood as a local champion “for all of us”, a step further away from working-class politics than the old Blair and 2017-election Labour slogan, “for the many, not the few”.

The main “Collective” people seem to prefer “local” and “independent”, or possibly “community”, as a political ticket, rather than “working-class” or “socialist”. The glorification of the “local” and “independent” obviously makes party organisation harder. The one “non-local” element is “for Gaza”.

Islington North had long been a left-wing and active local Labour Party. It had dwindled since the heyday of Corbynism; but we expected that Corbyn’s general election campaign would pull back some of the recently-gone, and, after Labour expelled others for backing Corbyn, they would be able to form a small “alternative party” locally.

In fact few were expelled.

Some 70 others quit Labour just before polling day. Corbyn has a constituency office which has been able to run “independent” candidates in two council by-elections, but with little success, and, apparently, many of their election workers from outside Islington. Corbyn has run two “People’s Forum” public meetings since July, but there is no alternative “party organisation”.

## Formidable

The cause is not at all a formidable Labour revival. Islington North Labour Party has still not been reconstituted (some say that it is because the regional office thinks the left would still prevail there; others, that it is just incompetence). The official Labour campaign in the general election in Islington North was only a token, and in the council by-elections, mediocre.

The “Corbyn surge” in the Labour Party was always limited by the fact that so many of its people were leftists who had been active in the 1980s, had dropped out, and were now “returning”, but with worse politics and less tenacity than when young. Plenty of young people were Corbyn-minded; but Young Labour and Labour Students were weaker at the end of the Corbyn era than with Ed Miliband, thanks to the poor work of Stalinoid-tending Corbyn youth leaders.

Mostly, the “returners” have now quit a second time and dispersed.

Ex-Labour “independent” councillors may be well enough



known to win re-election. In Pendle (Lancashire), for example, where the whole council Labour group quit in early 2024, three of them up for re-election won in May 2024, and the “independent” ex-Labour group continues to run the council, in coalition with the Lib Dems. Such successes are possible, but they are not a revival of working-class politics.

At the very best Collective looks like producing something less lively, more solely-electoralist, and politically poorer than Arthur Scargill’s Socialist Labour Party of 1996, let alone the old Communist Party after 1968, when it opposed Russia’s invasions of Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan but still had 30,000 members.

Weaker, probably, even than Respect in 2004-7. And the stances of many Collective people on Hamas, on Putin in Ukraine, on Xi’s China, etc. are not that much better than George Galloway’s on Saddam Hussein. (At that time Galloway did not publicly push the anti-“woke”, anti-immigrant, anti-green, pro-police line he has today; our denunciation of him was unpopular then).

Things are bad in the Labour Party, to be sure. But the “new party” moves so far promise a dead end, not something better. □

# Climate change behind LA fires

By Adrian Noble

As I write on 13 January, the ongoing Los Angeles wildfires have killed 24 people and destroyed over 12,000 buildings in one of the largest-scale disasters in US history. 15,000 firefighters are at work and 200,000 residents have been displaced. The fires are expected to cost north of \$150 billion.

Along with incredibly strong and dry “Santa Ana” winds up to 100pmh from the south-western USA’s desert interior, the fires have been facilitated by climate change. The region has experienced the driest 22 year period in 1,200 years.

A decades-long mega-drought was replaced three years ago by “whiplash”, with a very wet 2022-23 causing high vegetation growth which turned to kindling as the droughts returned. LA has received just 0.4cm of rain since October, and these extreme fire conditions are occurring well outside the traditional fire season of May to October.

Firefighters have reported dry hydrants and poor water pressure as the urban water system fails to cope with demand four times higher than normal, with 20% of hydrants being used to fight the largest (Palisades) wildfire running dry last Wednesday. In many places this is a problem even with much smaller urban fires, as population growth and a lack of infrastructure investment strain systems.

The annual fire department budget was cut by \$17 million last year, as well as cuts to support roles and \$7 million in



overtime. The chasm between overwhelmed public fire services and millionaire residents hiring private firms to protect their property is stark.

While the scale of these fires is unprecedented in an urban environment, the underlying factors of the glacial pace of action on climate change and a scandalous lack of preparedness are long-standing facts.

It is imperative that climate change and mitigating its effects rocket up the political agenda. The labour movement has barely even been willing to oppose Starmer’s support for new North Sea oil drilling approved by the last government, let alone put serious pressure on the government and industry to decarbonise the economy and properly fund adaptive measures.

Meanwhile there is silence from the oil companies most directly responsible for climate change who, far from being forced to pay for the destruction, claim state tax breaks of up to \$146 million in California alone. The necessity of mass movements led by trade unions demanding governments appropriate their vast resources to restore communities and minimise the severity of future disasters is clear. □



# Solidarity

**For a workers' government**



Pic: @omdimbeyachad

## GAZA: STOP NOW! Ceasefire, peace, equal rights

**By Ira Berkovic**

According to research published in the medical journal *The Lancet*, the death toll from Israel's war on Gaza could be 41% higher than reported.

The current official death toll, compiled by the Hamas-run Health Ministry, is just over 46,000. UN figures suggest a majority of the dead are women and children. Accurate reporting is difficult because of the devastation the war has caused to the infrastructure of civilian life. There are likely large numbers of dead unaccounted for beneath the rubble of razed buildings. The destruction of much of Gaza's healthcare and sanitation infrastructure, and the lack of adequate aid provision, means that deaths from preventable diseases will likely continue to rise even after military action has ceased.

Whether the real figure is

at the lower or upper end of current estimates, the war has been obscenely destructive, inflicting brutal collective punishment on an already substantially immiserated population. Two Palestinian children, Rida Bisharat and Hamza Bisharat, were also killed in a recent Israeli air strike on Tamun, near Nablus in the occupied West Bank. Alon-Lee Green, national co-director of Standing Together, said: "Someone at a military base simply pressed a button, and ended two young lives. How can we accept the killing of children? How can we accept these kids' deaths? [...] 15,000 children are already dead in Gaza. More are dying in the West Bank. Do we think it's okay, because they're just statistics? No. They have names, they have families, they had futures. We can't continue this. We must stop killing children. Stop this madness, stop the war, end the

destruction in Gaza and the occupation in the West Bank. Everyone has the right to live, including Palestinians and Palestinian children."

In a recent speech in the Knesset (Israeli Parliament), MK Gilad Kariv, a member of the centre-left bloc The Democrats, denounced what he called a "spiritual, religious, national, and moral mutation" that has led some Israeli political leaders to argue that "among 2.3 million Palestinians [in Gaza] there is not a single innocent person". Kariv asked, "You don't care about the lives of children, women, and the elderly, just because they belong to the other people?" He argued that their positions parallel "the worst of those who hate Israel and the Jews." Kariv attacked the "messianic fantasies of pursuing Jewish resettlement in the middle of a Palestinian population of 2.3 million people." □