

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

STAND WITH UKRAINE



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Trump prepares disaster for Ukraine



Ukrainian military blogger Yuriy Butusov describes the situation on the eastern Ukrainian frontlines with these words: "The situation in Chasiv Yar is dire, with most of the city under enemy control, and Toretsk is almost completely captured. The enemy has also deeply penetrated Pokrovsk. Kurakhove has been captured but fighting continues on its outskirts. The enemy continues to advance on Siversk."

200,000 Ukrainian troops are defending a 1,200km frontline against 580,000 Russian fighters.

Ukraine is a victim of Russian imperialism but also of inadequate support from the Western powers. Much of the weaponry which the US and European states promised to deliver in 2024 has not arrived.

Ukraine continues to lose ground, albeit at a slower rate, in Donbas.

Currently around one-fifth of Ukrainian territory is occupied by Russia. In the areas Russia controls it rules through terror. Trade unions, independent political organisations and publications are repressed.

Seven million Ukrainians have fled the country to live as refugees, mainly in Europe. Four million are internally displaced and 12mn (according to UNHCR) are in need of humanitarian aid, including two million children.

4,000 educational institutions, 1,500 medical facilities, 210,000 houses, 26,000km of roads and 260,000 cars have been destroyed or damaged by Russian military action (Kyiv School of Economics).

Ukraine has lost 43,000 troops, according to President Volodymyr Zelenskyy (December 2024).

Ukraine has recorded 140,000 alleged war crimes committed by Russian forces including the use of chemical weapons, forced deportations, killing

of POWs and civilians, mass torture and rape. Russia has systematically attacked Ukraine's energy infrastructure in the hope it will sap the population's will to continue fighting.

Russian battlefield gains have also come at a staggering cost to their own troops. The US military believes Putin's armies have suffered 100,000 casualties (killed, wounded, missing, captured) since December. Nevertheless, the Russian state thinks its bigger population and economy will allow it to grind Ukraine down. Vladimir Putin continues to believe that Ukraine has no right to exist.

Biden

Former US President Joe Biden's policy of helping Ukraine to avoid defeat, but not supplying enough weaponry to force Russia out of Ukraine, is over. Now Donald Trump is negotiating a deal with Russian President Vladimir Putin without Ukraine and against Ukraine's national rights.

Trump spoke to Putin for 90 minutes on 12 February in a call which was greeted with delight in Moscow. Trump had broken the three-year long Western boycott of direct contact with Putin. The new US administration proclaimed that Ukraine would not be allowed to join NATO and that it would have to give up territory overrun by Putin's forces.

A US-Russia conference on Ukraine is expected to open on Tuesday 18 February without Ukraine's participation. Zelenskyy says he will refuse to sign a deal negotiated behind his back and imposed on him.

However, he may eventually calculate he has little choice. Ukraine is a poor and comparatively weak country and it has had to sign shabby deals before. In 2014-5 France and Germany pushed Ukraine to sign the Minsk 1 and 2 agreements. Minsk 2 represented a substantial infringement of Ukraine's national rights, allowing Russia to directly intervene in Ukraine's political



The NEU Ukraine Network ran a solidarity conference in London on 15 March for NEU activists and other trade unionists. 110 attended across the day, discussing local and union-by-union plans. More: neuukrainenetwork@gmail.com

structures.

That was shortly after Russia had seized Crimea and its proxy forces had got hold of part of Donetsk. France and Germany aimed to restore normal political and economic links with Russia. Trump aims to do similarly, hoping for an economic benefit from making peace with Russia, and at the expense of Ukrainian rights.

Trump is also attempting to asset-strip Ukraine. Leveraging Ukraine's vulnerability he has demanded access to \$500bn of Ukraine's mineral wealth. A deal has been written but Zelenskyy is currently refusing to sign as the sale of Ukraine's "rare earths" comes with no US guarantees of support for Ukraine against further Russian attacks.

Reasonably, Zelenskyy wants the West to help prevent a future invasion of Ukraine.

Trump and his representatives have also picked up a theme of Putin's cynical propaganda: that Ukraine's Zelenskyy government lacks democratic credibility because Ukraine has postponed elections while the war lasts.

Ukraine's constitution prevents elections during martial law. Nevertheless, it seems that Zelenskyy is manoeuvring. The fact is that elections would be a major opportunity for Putin, giving the Russia state an opportunity to intervene malevolently as it has done recently in Moldova and Georgia.

The insurgent far-right in power in the US has open contempt for the

mainstream bourgeois governments of the European Union. US Vice President JD Vance intervened in the Munich Security conference, taunting European leaders.

Vance has previously said openly, "I don't really care what happens to Ukraine one way or the other" (2022, on a podcast with former Trump-advisor Steve Bannon).

Disrupt

The US political leadership is now actively seeking to disrupt politics in Europe by intervening in European politics in support of far-right politicians and parties such as the anti-immigrant AfD in Germany in the run-up to German parliamentary elections on 23 February. The US-European alliance that has been sustained over 70 years, post-WW2, is crumbling, and with great rapidity.

Europe's leaders rightly want Ukraine involved in peace talks. They also want a seat at the table themselves, believing that a peace treaty that actually delivers a victory for Putin in Ukraine represents an immediate threat, in the first instance to Moldova and the Baltic states. And they are not wrong on that.

The internationalist left, weak through we are, will continue to defend Ukraine's right to self-determination, now under threat from the contemptible far-right US government as well as Russian imperialism. □

Stop the anti-migrant drive! Campaign for free movement

By Colin Foster

The Labour government has responded to the opinion-poll rise of Reform by boasting of workplace raids and increased deportations (and using Reform colours and fonts for the social media posts).

Home Secretary Yvette Cooper [boasted](#) of "the highest rate of returns [deportations] for six years. Enforced returns are up 24%... illegal

working raids and arrests are up 38%". She promises "counter terror-style powers against the criminal smuggler gangs who organise small boat crossings". The government declares that it is "strengthening" rules which bar from getting citizenship anyone who has arrived by small boat or otherwise "illegally". (Asylum seekers have almost no safe and legal ways to arrive).

Over recent years raids and deportation flights have some-

times been blocked by street action. Solidarity works to get more such action, and also political change.

At Labour conference 2024, the platform had to withdraw its "Border Security" motion. It knew that, thanks to campaigning by the Labour Campaign for Free Movement and Labour Left Internationalists, unions would defeat that motion in a vote.

That was a victory, but nowhere near enough to stop

Cooper's shameful, worker-dividing, anti-migrant drive.

Solidarity campaigns in the unions for them to support:

- Safe and legal routes for asylum seekers
- The right to remain and work, and access to benefits, public funds, health care, and education
- Restored free movement with Europe
- Open borders

Britain's migrant influx is small. Colombia is now home

to 2.8 million people who have fled Venezuela in recent years. Thanks to generous policies by the not-especially-left-wing Colombian government, the [result](#) is an improvement in economic conditions there, not a worsening.

Reform's anti-migrant hate agitation only serves the bosses.

• Workers' unity, local and migrant! □

• More: labourfreemovement.org

The West Bank is burning

By Ira Berkovic

Donald Trump says the US is committed to “buying and owning” Gaza. In reality there is no mechanism for enacting the plan, which would either require the active complicity of the Egyptian and Jordanian states, or sufficient military power, presumably from the US and Israel, to forcibly displace Gazans and subdue Egyptian and Jordanian opposition. But the Trump plan does encourage those elements in Is-

raeli politics, which are not limited to the far right, who also fantasise about ethnic cleansing.

It also serves to encourage Israel’s ongoing project of occupation and displacement, in the Palestinian West Bank. The binational (Palestinian-Jewish) left-wing social movement Standing Together writes: “Since the ceasefire deal, the West Bank has been burning. As settlers riot, the army has expanded its operation, invading towns and cities, driving people from their homes, tear-

ing up roads, and bombing buildings.

“The West Bank looks like Jabalia [an area in Gaza largely razed by Israeli bombing]. A few days ago, the army killed a pregnant woman and a 21-year-old woman. Three children and an elderly man have also been killed. This is not what a ceasefire looks like. It’s a consolation prize for far-right ministers in the coalition who oppose the ceasefire agreement. It’s opening a new front in an endless war, which will create a new cycle of revenge and hatred.

“The next cycle of violence is being created now, amongst the thousands of people fleeing their homes, losing loved ones, and witnessing more death and destruction. Another child is waking up scared as soldiers enter their home in the middle of the night. Another mother is losing her son. The next cycle of violence is being created right now in the halls of parliament, where our prime minister sits and doles out consolation prizes. He is working with the far right to implement its vision of endless war. They don’t care how we, the people here, feel, as long as they continue to advance their project of settlement and endless occupation of millions of Palestinians [...]

“Only one thing can stop this: Israeli-Palestinian peace. This is in the interest of all who live in this land. They tell us that endless death and destruction will bring security, but after decades of bloodshed, we’re right back where we started, and not closer to security. They lied.

“We want life, and our decision-makers only care about spilling more blood. It’s time we take back our power as the majority. We refuse to kill and be killed. We refuse to let our dream of a better future be ignored. We have to stop the cycles of revenge and stop this government. Because only peace will bring real security.” □

The opposite of Netanyahu and Hamas

By Uri Weltmann

Uri Weltmann, Standing Together’s national field organiser, was speaking at a demonstration in Kfar Saba, Israel. Extracts:

“This Monday, talks on the next stage of the ceasefire were supposed to begin in Qatar. Instead, we got a horror show from Netanyahu and Trump in Washington... But the problem with [Trump’s] plan is not how unrealistic it is. The

problem with the plan is how evil it is...

“I want to tell all Hamas leaders, I’m not going anywhere. This land is my homeland. My family is here, my roots are here, mine and my people’s. And I want to tell Netanyahu and Trump and the Kahanists, the Palestinian people are also not going anywhere.

“On this land live millions of Jews, and they will remain here. On this land live millions of Palestinians,

and they will remain here too. There is no solution other than agreements between the peoples. There is no solution besides one that guarantees both people living on the land share the land. We tried wars and occupation, they brought both peoples disaster, pain, and misery. We need to do the one thing that can bring safety, independence, and justice to both peoples: Israeli-Palestinian peace.

“To talk about peace,

to talk about a Palestinian state alongside Israel, might sound distant. But it’s the direction we must go in. The opposite of Ben Gvir and Netanyahu is an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement... The opposite of Hamas is an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement. Instead of choosing endless war, we must choose peace. Instead of drowning in despair, we must choose hope.” □

• More: bit.ly/p-2s-er

The “domestic labour debate” of 1960s and 70s



By Jill Mountford

Early in the second wave of Women’s Liberation Movement (1960s-70s), socialist and Marxist feminists set about trying to understand and explain the role of domestic labour in women’s oppression under capitalism.

Domestic labour is the unpaid work that takes place in the private sphere of the nuclear family serving several vital roles in the maintenance of capitalist society (reproducing human beings; educating and caring for the young, sick and old; and cooking, cleaning, laundry, etc).

The domestic labour debate (DLD) was international, involving writers from Canada, the US, Britain, Italy, and France. Back then, a lot more women, even without children, were

“housewives”. Betty Friedan’s liberal-feminist 1963 book *The Feminine Mystique* had re-established critique of housewifery as central (beyond the few Trotskyists who knew about it from *The Revolution Betrayed*).

Margaret Benston published her 1969 [article](#) *The Political Economy of Women’s Liberation* in the Stalinoid *Monthly Review*, and sparked a debate about the Marxist “economic base”. Later, [Italian-autonomist](#) “Wages for Housework” (WFH) writers like Silvia Federici and Mariarosa Dalla Costa, and others like Selma James, came in on it. It continued to the early 1980s.

Coming from strands of Marxism, and seeing the working class central to smashing capitalism and creating a socialist society, some WFH authors invoked Marxist economic categories to justify their slogan.

Many WFH writers argued that housework is “productive labour” in the Marxist sense.

But Marx argued that capital is about getting surplus-value, so in capitalism “only labour which is directly transformed into capital is productive”. A teacher in a state school is “unproductive” (*Capital* vol.1 ch.16) whereas one in a fee-paying private school is “productive”.

“Productive labour, in its [meaning for capitalist production](#), is wage-labour which is exchanged against the variable part of capital, (that part of capital that is spent on wages), reproduces not only this part of capital (or the value of its own labour power), but in addition produces surplus value for the capitalist... only that wage-labour is productive which produces capital.”

For WFH writers, for example in a footnote to Dalla Costa’s *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* (English edition, 1972) “what we meant precisely is that housework as work is productive in the Marxian sense, that

is, in producing surplus value”.

However, domestic labour produces labour-power (owned by workers), not capital. Domestic labour is productive in the everyday use of the word productive (useful), but not in a Marxist economics sense. In a Marxist sense productive labour is socialised labour conducted in direct relation to capital which produces surplus value. Those are not features of domestic labour. On the contrary, that it is not socialised is a chief curse of domestic labour under capitalism.

Domestic labour is also not unproductive socialised labour in Marxist economics terms. Unproductive labour is characteristically labour exchanged directly against (private or state) revenue. Working as a cook in a posh person’s house in exchange for pay is “unproductive labour”, socialised by the labour-market for such work. The same cook in a capitalist-owned restaurant is

“productive”. But as [Sue Himmelweit](#) pointed out in 1977: “The categories of productive and unproductive labour relate to wage-labour alone; in the analysis of domestic labour they are irrelevant”. Domestic labour in capitalism is unsocialised labour.

In an attempt to shoehorn housework into an economic category of profit-producing socialised labour somehow denied that “status” by prejudice, WFH end up distorting Marxist economic categories.

In the “Domestic Labour debate”, non-“autonomist” Marxists, ourselves among them, argued for the socialisation of domestic labour, freeing up all involved to fully take part in society. □



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Praising Trump on USAid and Ukraine



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

A lengthy piece in the *Morning Star* by leading CPBer, Nick Wright ("Trump's USAid crackdown and the new global order" 13 Feb) has welcomed Trump's "more-or-less abolition" of USAid, and the MS has also praised Trump on Ukraine.

Just before last year's US presidential election, Andrew Murray used his Eyes Left column in the MS to opine that Brits shouldn't concern themselves with the outcome. In particular, we should stop worrying about Trump. Murray assured us that Trump's threats and possible "civil conflict" were "nothing to fear". After all: "There is no progress without conflict, and in the USA most likely no socialism without an awful lot of it". And the prize will be worth it: "A weakened US is a gain for the rest of the world."

As for "a fascist US presidency" – not to worry, it will "surely give cause for protest here before long." But the "most aggressive powers on record have been impeccably liberal British and US imperialisms, with not a day of fascist rule between them... There is the main enemy, not the orange demagogue".

Given that Murray isn't just a *Morning Star* columnist, but also a leading member of the Communist Party of Britain,

his views can be taken as representative of at least a significant section of that organisation.

No wonder, then, that while the MS is clearly upset by some of Trump's policies (e.g. Gaza) on other matters they're more relaxed – and even pleased.

Wright's case on USAid is verbose and mired in the politics of the cold war, and as ever, Wright seems to think Putin's Russia, together with "the global South" is pretty much equivalent to the old USSR. Wright's case depends upon characterising USAid as a "partial successor to and enhancement of the Marshall Plan" which he describes as "not simply a humanitarian aid programme but... intimately involved in a wider project to develop trade – especially transatlantic trade – and enhance European economic integration in support of Federalist impulses. It was also aimed at countering Soviet influence and domestic communist activity..."

Wright even supports Musk's claim that USAid is "a criminal organisation", writing: "In this he is, albeit tangentially, approaching the question with some truth... because of its auxiliary role in projecting imperial soft power alongside the more obviously coercive instruments of US foreign policy."

No mention of the supplies of life-saving medicines that have been blocked and children left without food in places like Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. No mention of the closure of a girls' education project in Nepal, raising the risk of a rise in child



marriage and trafficking. No mention, either of, the closure of malaria-control projects in Uganda. The Guardian quoted a former senior USAid official describing the Trump/Musk crackdown as an "extinction-level event" for the international humanitarian sector.

If the closure of USAid brought joy to the hearts of at least some at the MS and CPB, the betrayal of Ukraine was the stuff of neo-Stalinist wet dreams. As Trump and his heavy-drinking white-supremacist sidekick Pete Hegseth told Putin that he could keep much – if not all – of the Ukrainian land he'd seized, Andrew Murray berated Starmer for (uncharacteristically) "turning his back on US president Trump's negotiations." The Putin apologist Murray also had the nerve to describe British union leaders who signed a letter denouncing the betrayal of Ukraine as supporters

of "veteran Tory enemy of the peace movement Julian Lewis" ("Labour vows to pour in cash to prolong Ukraine conflict", MS 14 Feb).

The same issue's editorial (headed "Time for negotiations – Labour must not block Ukraine peace plan") made it crystal clear that the paper backs the Trump-Hegseth betrayal: "It is an indictment of three years of Western policy that it should eventually take a Fox News host and extreme white nationalist to spell out the truths about the war in Ukraine... Indeed, the peace plan as outlined echoes the calls made by some on the left ever since the outset of the war." At least now all pretence that the *Morning Star*, the CPB and their co-thinkers at the Stop the War coalition are anything other than Putin-appeasers has been dropped. □

Munich 2025: Return of the "Guilty Men"



Eric Lee

As Karl Marx famously wrote in 1852, "Hegel remarks somewhere that all great world-historic facts and personages appear, so to speak, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce."

There can be little doubt that the Munich peace conference in 1938 ended in tragedy – perhaps the greatest of all tragedies. On 30 September that year, the leaders of the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Italy reached agreement in Munich to guarantee, as the British prime minister said, "peace in our time". Instead of peace, the world was at war within a year.

Neville Chamberlain was convinced that by giving part

of Czechoslovakia – the Sudetenland – to Hitler, the German dictator would be satisfied, and would make no further territorial demands in Europe. Chamberlain and the French leader, Édouard Daladier, felt no need to involve the government of Czechoslovakia in their decision. Preventing another world war was so important that the Czechs and Slovaks could afford to pay a small price for it.

Czechoslovakia

In the end, of course, everyone paid that price – not only Czechoslovakia, which quickly came under German rule, but eventually all of Europe as well. The story is so well known as to hardly need re-telling. And yet we witnessed in the last week the new American government, led by Elon Musk and Donald Trump, re-enacting key moments of the 1938 Mu-

nich disaster in, of all places, Munich. And this time, Hegel and Marx notwithstanding, the result is anything but a farce.

The American defence secretary, former Fox News presenter Pete Hegseth, and Trump's Vice President J D Vance, went to the Hotel Bayerischer Hof in Munich to tell assembled world leaders that in order to assure peace in our time, the Ukrainians would need to give large chunks of their territory to the Russians.

In order to hurry that process along, President Trump would be meeting in Saudi Arabia with Russia's Putin to work out the details. The Ukrainians would be about as welcome in Riyadh later this year as the Czechoslovakians were in Munich in 1938. And the result of any deal that would be struck by Trump and Putin would be the same as that of 1938: not "peace in our time" but the

dismemberment of a sovereign, democratic nation – and a guarantee of further conflict.

Decades before he became the leader of the Labour Party, Michael Foot co-authored a remarkable book, published in 1940 under the title *Guilty Men*. It was a devastating polemic attacking those politicians whose short-sighted policies enabled Hitler to launch his blitzkrieg and to swiftly conquer most of Europe.

Foot

Guilty Men was so scandalous that distributors including W H Smith refused to handle it. But it became a best-seller anyway, and was reprinted many times. Just as Foot knew full well who the "guilty men" were who enabled Nazi Germany to unleash another world war, today we know who are the leaders in the West who are

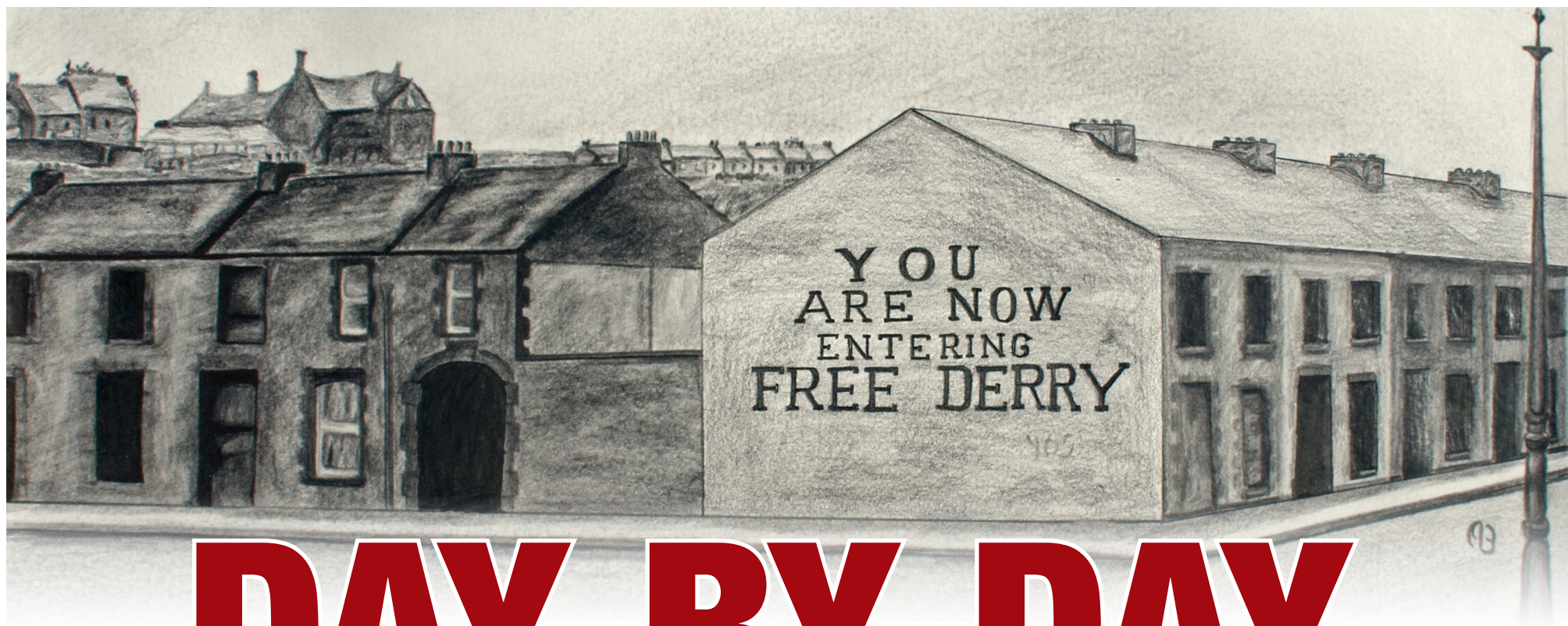
guilty of appeasing Putin. It's not only Trump, Musk, and Vance. It's all those politicians in Europe who are happy to betray Ukraine in exchange for an illusory peace with Russia. Among them are the neo-Nazis of the "Alternative für Deutschland" which is expected to do very well in the upcoming German elections, Nigel Farage's "Reform UK" which is also expected to do very well in upcoming local elections in Britain, and Marine Le Pen's "Rassemblement National".

They are the "Guilty Men" – and women – of our time, and they are all working flat out to ensure that aggression is rewarded, making another European war inevitable. They must be stopped. □

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

Workers' Liberty

February 2025 • Vol.3 no.76 • Published with Solidarity 734 • £1 if sold separately



DAY-BY-DAY, HOW THE STATE BROKE DOWN IN NORTHERN IRELAND, 1969

Politically, Northern Ireland in 1968-9 was sterile territory. Nothing had been done by political parties or groups to explore a possible democratic modus vivendi between Catholic Nationalists – with their ultimate aim of a united Ireland – and Protestant-Unionists, who were determined to remain united with Britain, or at any rate, determined not to become a powerless Protestant minority in a Catholic-majority all-Ireland state. They confronted each other as irreconcilable enemies.

In Catholic “Derry of the burning zeal” (as Thomas Kinsella called it) there was, by the summer of 1969, a heroic spirit of determined revolt. It was by no means only the youth. The Catholics of all ages were unwilling to go on as for the previous decades. Without the taint of hyperbole, one might even speak of “The Commune of Derry” that rose repeatedly – three times in 1969 – behind improvised barricades. But only of Catholic Derry. And they could make neither a nationalist or a socialist revolution. At the best, they could win only reforms within the 6 Counties

They were encouraged in their revolt by the sympathy and outrage on their behalf in the media and in the British Labour government, which openly demanded reform. In August, they were spurred on by fear of more sectarian onslaughts by the RUC, the B-Specials, and the Paisleyites.

Essentially, they were trying to break the framework of the 6 Counties entity and the limitations it imposed on their struggle. In January and April 1969, Catholic barricades had gone up against the Six Counties state. An editorial (by John Palmer) in *Socialist Worker* (on 21 August 1969, when Catholic Derry and parts of Belfast were barricaded off) accurately depicted what they were groping towards.

“In Derry in particular the Bogside has a real chance of holding out. The Derry people, who are overwhelmingly anti-Unionist, were never consulted about the Border. They were forcibly co-opted into the Northern State.... One day the people of Derry will take their city from the Chichester-Clarks and the slum landlords.”

The Catholics of Derry, who would not take down the barricades of August until October, were, evidently, groping towards breaking away from the “Protestant State”.

The 6/26 County partition of Ireland was a curse on the Protestants within it as well as to the Catholics.

Many elements entered into the social and political discrimination of which the Catholics were the victims, very importantly a general scarcity of jobs and of material resources; ages of Catholic/ Protestant animosity; and the inbred belief among the Protestants that the Catholic Irish were an inferior people. The Protestants themselves were the people who mattered – “we the people!”

The things that kept the Protestant

belief alive, that united Protestant-Unionists to defend and sustain it, were not only political differences and the competition for scarce resources, but also fear. The Protestant-Unionists were a minority on the island. It had taken an armed near-revolt, and the credible threat of a real revolt, on the eve of the First World War, to keep them from being delivered by Britain to their age-old enemies as a minority in a Home Rule Ireland.

The way the 26 Counties had developed into the “Rome Rule” which Protestants had said Home Rule would inevitably be, suggested to them that their fears and their efforts to avoid being a Protestant-British minority in a Catholic-ruled “Irish Ireland” had after all, not been needless fears.

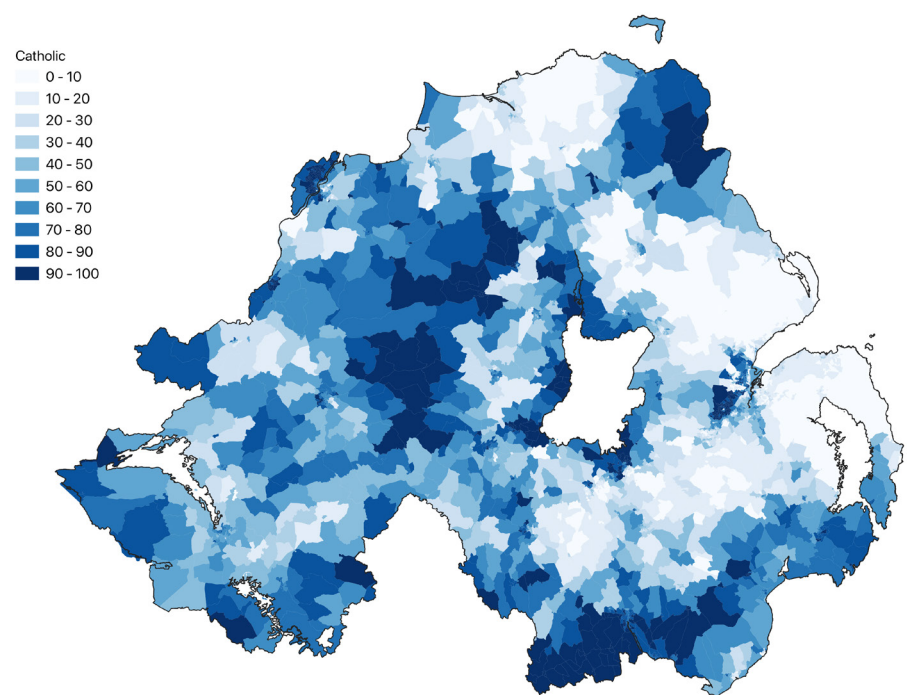
In 1969, they feared “betrayal” by London, and were on the look-out for it. They saw the pressure for reform from London as the thin end of the wedge whose thick end would be an attempt to force them into a united Ireland. They saw the Catholic mobilisations for civil rights as Republicanism writ small, but small only for the moment.

A writer in the Dublin paper, *The Irish Press*, reporting on the events of mid-August 1969 in Derry, described how fear-ridden Orange reaction helped push Partition to the political forefront within a few months of the launching of the Civil Rights movement, despite the efforts made to exclude it from the movement

“It has proved impossible to exclude violence and the Partition issue from the civil rights campaign not because, as Major Chichester Clark alleges, Republicans and hooligans subverted the movement, but because the Paisleyite element, seeing the threat to Unionist dominance in the civil rights movement’s legitimate demands, did everything in their power to pervert the campaign into a naked confrontation of violence and hate. Unfortunately they succeeded”.

And they were not entirely wrong in their fears, though their own backlash speeded up and intensified what they feared. The basic “civil right” the Catholics lacked was national self-determination. And the Catholics were in the majority in large swathes of the state’s border territory; for a large part of them, it was not a case of being a minority inescapably interlaced with a majority population. The Six Counties Catholics outside of Belfast were by and large an artificially created minority, a section of the majority population in the island artificially severed by the border drawn for the “Protestant state”.

The logic of the demand for civil rights formulated by the civil rights movement – and not too many links along the chain of social-political development, either – was a demand for the abolition of the Six Counties state. There were people at the heart of the civil rights movement – the Republicans – whose ultimate goal was Irish unity, and who saw the civil rights movements and its mobilisations as a



Northern Ireland: Catholic percentages of population. This is 2021, but 1969 also had Catholic majorities in much of the land area

first stage in the overthrow of the Six Counties state. (Desmond Greaves of the Communist Party’s Irish front in Britain, for example, the political guru of those who led the IRA up to the Provisional IRA split in December 1969, saw it that way. See the memoir of Greaves by one of them, Anthony Coughlan).

The candid Catholic-nationalist answer to those Protestant fears was: why shouldn’t we? What right have you to expect anything else?

It was a tragic communal-national-religious antagonism, build in to the Six Counties, and given a special intensity and intractability by the artificiality of the state. That Northern Ireland should begin to break apart “vertically” on 12 August 1969 in Derry was in the very nature of the Six Counties. It was by August 1969 what we would now call a “failed state”.

What follows is a stark outline of the breakdown of the old order in Northern Ireland and the beginning of low-level Protestant-Unionist vs Catholic nationalist civil war.

August 1969

Before the general breakdown of “law and order” between 12 and 15 August 1969, parts of Northern Ireland are already on fire. Serious clashes between police and Catholic youth have erupted in Derry on 12 July.

Not only Catholic Northern Ireland is inflamed. Protestant Belfast, especially the Shankill Road district, the heart of Protestant working-class Belfast, is disaffected too. The Protestant Shankill Road and the Catholic Falls Road run parallel to each other, separated only by a network of small streets.

Weekend of 2-3 August 1969

Shankill Road Protestants riot, fight police, and loot “Protestant” shops. The clashes start when police try to disperse a crowd which has gathered around the (“Catholic”) Unity Walk flats, near the beginning of the Shankill Road.

Petrol bombs are thrown at the RUC. A seven-hour battle is fought on the Shankill Road. Water cannon and

riot trucks are used. There are baton charges. The police, helmeted, with riot shields and long truncheons, baton-charge the Protestant crowd.

There is extensive looting of “Protestant” shops, from grocers to furniture sellers. Kids hand out loot through the broken windows. Some shops are set on fire. It was very like what the working class of the Dublin slums had done during the insurrection there in 1916.

Both Ian Paisley and his chief lieutenant, Major Ronald Bunting, are jeered at and booed when they appeal to the Protestant crowd to go home.

The mile-long Shankill Road is a battle zone, strewn with bricks and bottles. Cars are used as a barricade, and set on fire; the RUC use armoured cars to break the barricade. A petrol bomb sets an RUC man on fire.

Over 20 RUC are injured, two seriously. There is talk of a curfew, but that would require either troops or extra police from Britain to enforce it, so it is not attempted.

The RUC reserve force, the B-Specials, the all-Protestant militia, is mobilised on the Shankill to prevent further



People’s Democracy opposed British troops after first calling for them to be sent in
Pic: cain.ulster.ac.uk

looting. Troops have been brought in to back up the cops if necessary, but they are held in reserve. They play no role yet. It is up to the Northern Ireland Government and the RUC chiefs to decide if they will be deployed or not.

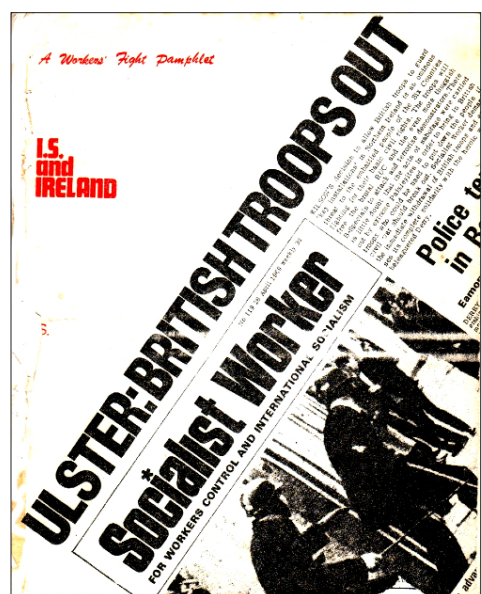
Why does the Stormont government not ask for troops, which in the past have been used for riot control? Because the British Prime Minister Harold Wilson has said publicly that if it comes to the point that the Belfast Government at Stormont needs troops to maintain law and order, then the whole constitutional relationship between Britain and Northern Ireland will have to be re-examined. It does and it will. The political cost is likely to prove too high to Unionism for the Belfast regime to call for troops while it still thinks it has other options. They will be a last resort.

Monday 4 August

Labour Home Secretary James Callaghan sees "law and order" as the Belfast government's responsibility.

Rival Catholic and Protestant mobs clash. Both sides petrol-bomb the RUC. The RUC says it blames "Trotsky-anarchists" for the trouble.

In response to the clashes between the Protestants and the police, Bernadette Devlin (who has been elected in April as Westminster MP for Mid-Ulster, and in London has functioned as a sort of "IS MP", IS being the forerunner of the SWP), speaking at a PD meeting in Enniskillen, appeals to the Protestant workers who have been fighting the police to back the civil rights movement. Devlin notes the statement by the Protestant Shankill Defence Association that the "police are no longer the friends of Ulster Loyalists and never can expect our help again". She appeals to them: now that the Government has shown its readiness to use police – "the armed wing of the Unionist party"



Our critique of and counterproposals to Socialist Worker's support for British troop deployment in Northern Ireland in 1969: read online at bit.ly/is-ire. The SW headline shown on the cover was from April 1969, and we had criticised it as simplistic and nationalistic. Then SW u-turned in August 1969. "IS" was the name then of SWP.

– against Protestants as well as Catholics, Protestant workers should unite with their Catholic brothers and sisters against the Unionist government.

But Devlin simply doesn't know where she is. The Shankill Defence Association is led by the ultra-Paisleyite, and obvious lunatic, John McKeague. The naivety here is mind-boggling. With so small a purchase on reality, the socialism and appeals to working-class unity Devlin represents are flimsy, fanciful, even idiosyncratic, things.

Perhaps Devlin knows that, for she also appeals to British Home Secretary James Callaghan to put the RUC under the control of British police officers. She says she wants the recall of the Westminster Parliament to discuss the situation in Northern Ireland. Through the crisis that is now about to break, this most prominent of Northern Ireland, even of UK, revolutionary socialists will combine other such "practical" proposals with inconsequential talk of working class unity and socialism.

Tuesday 5 August

Paisleyites storm the Council Chamber in Lisburn, County Antrim – Protestant-Unionist territory. The newspapers print pictures of riot-gear-clad police and streets showing blackened patches from petrol bombs and littered with glass, bottles and broken paving stones.

Wednesday 6 August

"Intimidation" of Catholics living among Protestants and vice versa is already rampant in Belfast. The "Catholic" Ardoyne Tenants' Association says that it knows of 60 Catholic families forced out.

"Everyone" knows and fears what is likely to come out of the Orange parade in Derry on 12 August. But nobody has the will to do anything to avert it.

The *Belfast Newsletter* reports that in a poll it has had taken 90% want a ban on all parades. Parades will indeed be banned – on 13 August, when the Orange march in Derry has already set fire to the 6 Counties.

Sunday 10 August

Prayers for peace are offered up in chapels and prayer-houses all over Northern Ireland. Though nobody expects the scale and intensity of what will happen, everyone expects a catastrophic eruption of communalism from the Apprentice Boys march in Derry on the 12th, when 15,000 Protestants in full Orange regalia are expected to parade there.

In anticipation of 12 August, a meeting is held in Celtic Park, Derry, where John Hume MP, Eamonn McCann and seven others speak to a crowd of about a thousand people.

The revolutionary socialist McCann is self-conscious about advocating "peace". He tells the meeting that the reason to oppose violence is that it will be the wrong sort of violence directed at the wrong targets, at Catholics by Protestants and at Protestants by Catholics. But this is no more than a pri-

vate argument inside Eamonn McCann. It is beside the point.

He is self-conscious also about the political company he has been keeping. He pledges that if they get past Tuesday's Apprentice Boys' August Parade in something resembling peace he, McCann, will "never again be associated with a united Catholic platform" embodying cross-class Catholic unity at a meeting like this. In its own way, this is a sort of prayer – McCann's contribution to the ocean of prayers that is that day being poured out all over Northern Ireland: the supplicant promises God to do good in future if only God will grant something fervently wished for now: Catholic-Protestant peace on the 12th! (God won't listen, and Eamonn won't keep his promise.)

Neil Gillespie, an old quavery-voiced, much-respected Republican veteran of the Irish War of Independence, is an honoured speaker. He says: "If we are forced to fight, then let us in God's name fight as peace-loving men". Gillespie will be wheeled out by the future SDLPers at the DCDA meeting of October 10 to help persuade the meeting to agree to dismantle the last barricade, let the RUC and the British army in and liquidate "Free Derry". Two months after that he will be the titular Secretary in Derry of the breakaway Provisional Republican movement...

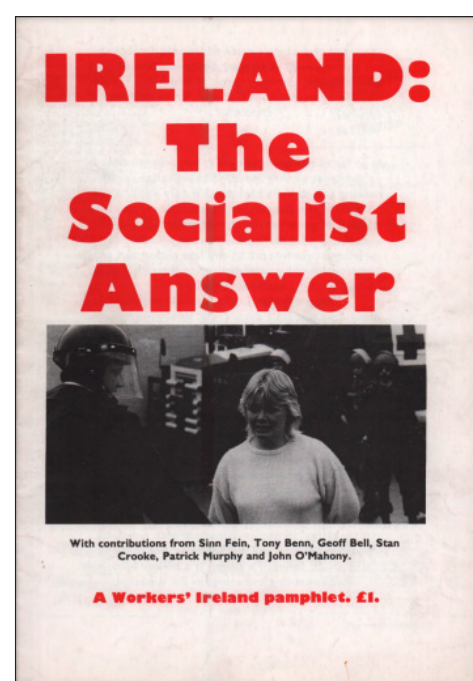
Eddie McAteer, leader of the Nationalist Party, recently defeated in the February Northern Ireland General Election for a Derry seat by fellow platform speaker, John Hume, expects a catastrophe on the 12th. "Tuesday may", he thinks, "raise the curtain on the last terrible act of the age-long Irish drama". He appeals directly to the Dublin Government: "Help us" if Derry erupts. If and when it does, he hopes that "our watching brethren in the South would no longer stand aside".

The Bogsiders express the wish for peace; but they prepare for war to defend themselves. A couple of weeks earlier, a Derry Citizens Defence Association (DCDA) has been set up on the initiative of the long-time Republican ex-internee Sean Keenan. They have made plans and piled up weapons, stones and the makings for petrol bombs – to defend themselves against the Northern Ireland State's armour-clad police, wielding truncheons, tear gas and guns, and deploying armoured cars.

Monday 11 August

Most of the social, moral, and religious authorities in Northern Ireland reiterate their desire for peace. Expecting war, they act as if talk alone can avert it. Dr Abernethy, Governor of the Apprentice Boys, who plan to march the next day in Derry, says that he wants peace. John Hume, the independent Catholic MP for Foyle, wants peace. He says that the Apprentice Boys have a right to march, but it would be unwise for them to exercise that right.

But Northern Ireland is now in the grip of a mechanism more powerful



1989 pamphlet making the case for socialist workers' unity with a democratic programme of a federal united Ireland: read online at bit.ly/ire-sa

than pious hopes.

Appeals are again made by Stormont opposition MPs and Westminster Labour MPs for the Northern Ireland government to ban the march. But the government knows that a ban will be defied. An attempt to enforce a ban would lead the Government into bitter conflict with its own Unionist supporters. London, which has overall responsibility for Northern Ireland, accepts the decision of the Unionist government.

Northern Ireland moves like a sleepwalker towards the general breakdown of 12-15 August.

All the responsible authorities fatalistically hope for the best. Nothing is done to avert the catastrophe. Reading the newspapers of the time, knowing what will follow, is like watching in slow motion an imminent crash, the vehicles hurtling towards each other murderously, as if no-one is inside them taking control.

Tuesday 12 August

The Apprentice Boys march begins, if not quietly, peacefully; and it remains more or less peaceful for a while. Trouble starts at 3pm. Catholic youths gathered behind police barricades in William Street, at the entrance to the Bogside, which pens them in, jeer, swear and make rude gestures at the marchers and the stationary lines of riot-clad police separating them from the marchers. They begin to throw stones and bottles at them. From the walls, Protestants shout back abuse at the Catholics: "Fenian bastards", and worse. Stones and bottles are thrown back.

After this has been going on for some time, 200 police and a very large crowd of Loyalist youth, led by an armoured car and police jeeps, chase the youths back to their own territory and then attempt, following them in, to invade the Bogside. The police are still accompanied by Protestant youths; and they make no attempt to discourage them

or distinguish themselves from them. They are all beaten back; but again they attack; and again...

The battle that will rage for two days and ignite Northern Ireland has begun.

The Derry Citizens Defence Association has prepared well. Barricades are quickly thrown up around the Bogside, and then reinforced and strengthened. In the rear of the front line barricade, petrol bombs on a large scale are prepared for use. A continuous stream of petrol bombs and stones is brought to the barricade fighters. Pavements are dug up and broken into throw-size pieces. Showers of stones and bottles of petrol – with flaming petrol-soaked rags plugging the neck of the bottles to dam off the petrol and soap suds inside, until the glass shatters and the flame and the released petrol unite in an explosive conflagration, the petrol spreading on the soapy water – rain down on the armoured and shield-carrying police and their helpers, like flights of arrows on a medieval army.

It is no longer just a section of the Bogside youth. The youth, and the police and Paisleyites, have detonated the whole population of the Bogside. People of all ages and persuasions turn out, determined this time to prevent the police and their civilian helpers ranging through the Bogside, truncheoning and beating indiscriminately.

One newspaper quotes a young Catholic fighter, shop worker Maureen Roche. "They've had this coming for a long time. We've had to put up with their bullying for years". Another youth agrees: "They've believed that they can beat us up whenever they want to, but that day is gone".

The Bogside dig trenches in the street to stop police water-cannon wagons. They burn mattresses and furniture from their own homes. Police begin to use CS gas. Soon the Bogside will be swamped in CS gas.

A valuable eyewitness report by Joe Carroll in the Dublin *Irish Press* (the nationalist paper of the governing Fianna Fail Party) of 18 August, describes how the fighting started, "despite the efforts of civil rights leaders like Hume and McAteer". After the first stones landed on the Apprentice Boys, "riot police with helmets and shields and clutching batons massed in several lines, confronting the Bogside youths across steel barriers.

"From 4.15 to 5.05 the police were showered from close range with every type of missile, which they tried to ward off with their shields, but they made no attempt to throw back.

"Most of those who witnessed the scene must have felt rather sickened by the sight of cursing youngsters firing literally lethal weapons at exposed policemen who, it must be emphasised, at this stage made no attempt to enter the Bogside proper...

"This was a crucial episode because along with myself it was witnessed by thousands of Protestants, both marchers and spectators, with what mounting fury can be imagined. The stoning was



The map uses the name for Derry historically preferred by Unionists, "Londonderry"

also carried out in defiance of commands and appeals by civil rights stewards and the leaders mentioned earlier [Hume and McAteer].

"The sequel was inevitable – a police charge and the scattering of the youths – but the escalation of the violence which also ensued was certainly avoidable, and could fairly be said to have precipitated the rest of the week's tragic events.

"Having driven the Bogside youths back up William St, leading to the Bogside proper, the police made a deliberate decision to make a lightning charge down Rossville Street past the eight-storey flats which command the entry into the Lecky Road, which could be described as a spur of the Bogside.

"Worst of all, the police made no effort to deter or even discourage a pack of Protestant extremists who followed on their heels, stoning Catholic flats and such people as came within range.

"The police immediately retreated then to the fringe of the Bogside, but in those few minutes the pivotal event of the rest of the week's pattern of violence had taken place. The police had 'invaded' the Bogside and had tacitly permitted Protestant thugs to form part of the invasion". Police had raided the Falls Road in April and beaten one of the residents, Samuel Devenny, to death.

"The news was a clarion call to the whole of the Bogside, and the handful of youths who had defied their stewards' appeals were now joined by practically every man, woman, and child in

the Bogside, in building and maintaining defensive barricades and ensuring an enormous supply of petrol bombs..."

But Derry City is neither a geographical not a political island. Soon, the fighting begins to spread outside Derry. Catholics are spurred by the impulse to help Derry into taking to their own streets. In the next 36 hours the sparks from Derry will ignite Catholic demonstrations all over Northern Ireland. At Strabane, 14 miles from Derry, the RUC station is besieged. In Dungannon on the night of the 12th, clashes leave 30 injured.

Counting 5 October 1968 and its immediate aftermath in Derry, this is the fifth war between Bogside and the RUC in 10 months, and it is the worst.

This round of RUC-Catholic fighting in Derry is in scale and in the involvement of Protestant-Unionist civilians in partnership with the RUC, the start of a general Catholic-Protestant communal war. Like spreading fire, it had begun to catch outside Derry. The need to stop it developing further might persuade a half-way responsible government, even if it had not dared, or desired, to ban the march on 12 August, to pull the RUC back from the confrontation. The Government can at will stop the fighting in Derry simply by calling off the RUC and leaving the Bogside in possession of the Bogside. It will not choose to do that. The Government, like the police, is determined to subdue the Bogside and overrun it.

As the catastrophe which Nationalist Party leader Eddie McAteer had

predicted two days earlier, seems inexorably to be engulfing the peoples of Northern Ireland, late on August 12, Bernadette Devlin MP and Eamonn McCann issue a joint statement appealing for outside help, as had Eddie McAteer two days earlier. Where McAteer had in advance appealed to the Government of the 26 Counties to send troops to intervene, McCann and Devlin – certainly with more realism – direct their appeal to London.

"The riot which has taken place in Derry today, and resulting violence in other areas of Northern Ireland, show that Northern Ireland is ungovernable under the present constitution. Westminster must now act.

"The barricades in the Bogside in Derry must not be taken down until the Westminster government states its clear commitment to the suspension of the constitution of Northern Ireland and calls immediately a constitutional conference representative of Westminster, the Unionist government, the Government of the Republic of Ireland, and all tendencies within the civil rights movement.

"The situation in Derry at the moment is such that the people of Bogside are fighting off the combined forces of the police and the Paisleyites, who are operating as a single unit. The police have already entered Bogside with the support of the Paisleyites in defiance of orders from senior officers. Therefore the RUC is out of control and can no longer be considered as the force of law and order. The country is now in a state of

chaos.

"It is the responsibility of Harold Wilson and his government, who should have acted almost a year ago and who have repeatedly been warned by ourselves and others of the possible consequences of their deliberate and total inaction. It may well be of personal concern to Harold Wilson that, given his own position in the Labour Party, he cannot take the political risk of intervening in Northern Ireland. We consider the lives of Irish people more important than the career of Harold Wilson". (*Irish Press*, 13.08.69).

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Wednesday 13 August

While London waits upon a call to intervene from the RUC and the Stormont Government, the 26 County government decides to "intervene", not as McAteer and others want it to, by sending troops, but in a way that can not but stoke up the fire on both sides of the communal divide. Taoiseach Jack Lynch appears on TV to make an emotional declaration on what is happening in the Six Counties. He warns that his government could not continue to "stand idly by".

"It is clear now that the present situation cannot be allowed to continue... It is evident... that the Stormont government is no longer in control of the situation. Indeed the present situation is the inevitable outcome of the policies pursued by successive Stormont governments... The Irish government can no longer stand idly by and see innocent people injured or worse... It is obvious that the RUC is no longer acceptable as an impartial police force. Neither would the employment of British troops be

acceptable, nor would they be likely to restore peaceful conditions – certainly not in the long term".

The Dublin Government is, he says, appealing to the UN to act. He has "requested" the British government to seek UN help, or else agree to a joint "Anglo-Eire" peace-keeping military force in Northern Ireland.

All that Lynch says is true and some of it prescient. And? What is Lynch going to do about it? What can he do? If the Irish army moves into Derry, then Protestants, and – unless there is some pre-agreed Dublin-London plan to divide up the 6 Counties – the British army will resist. And yet, if there was ever a case to be made for the 26 County army moving into Derry and the other Catholic-Nationalist majority areas bordering on the republic, Lynch has made it, But Lynch confines himself to an empty threat and a little bit of pseudo-nationalist pseudo-militant political theatre. It is fake-Republican "gesture politics".

He does not "mean business" even about calling in the UN. As Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association Chairman Frank Gogarty comments: the only possibility of UN involvement is if the Irish army does cross the border, creating an "international incident".

But Lynch's speech encourages Catholic all over Northern Ireland to act, naturally, and must give some of them the expectation that they will soon be rescued from their captivity in the Protestant state. It gives Protestants the same idea. Uncoupled as it is from commensurate action, it is, to say the least, irresponsible.

Jack Lynch's own Fianna Fail paper, the *Irish Press*, comments: "Virtual civil war hit Derry in the wake of the Taoiseach's speech when 500 cheering men, women and children, hurling petrol bombs and stones, waving the tricolour and shouting 'Up The Republic', charged RUC and B-Specials.... But their place was taken by a strong group of Paisleyites, who hurled petrol bombs and stones at the jubilant Bogside".

If Lynch's speech raising the spectre of imminent invasion before the eyes of the Northern Ireland Protestants, a statement by Cathal Goulding, Stalinist chief of staff of a very shadowy IRA tells them that the invasion is already under way. Goulding announces that a number of fully-armed IRA units are already active in Northern Ireland. They aren't: it is all bluff and bluster by IRA leaders who have been wrong-footed by events. Local Republicans like Sean Keenan, John White and Finbar O'Doherty are indeed involved, centrally, in the defence of the Bogside and others soon will be in Belfast.

It is all extra kindling on the fire. It helps strengthen the interpretation that Northern Ireland is in the grip of a coordinated nationalist rising.

Sinn Fein seconds Lynch in calling for UN intervention. Sinn Fein President Tomas MacGiolla sends a telegram to UN Secretary General U Thant calling for UN troops to be sent to the Six Counties.



People's Democracy poster on N Ireland Prime Minister Major James Chichester Clark

In the South there is growing outrage. Large demonstrations are mounted outside the British Embassy in Dublin. In Donegal, the "Southern" county a couple of miles from Derry City, Letterkenny Urban Council passes a resolution calling for the Irish Army to invade Northern Ireland. The Council calls on Lynch "to move troops into Northern Ireland to bring back peace and look after our persecuted brethren, those who are being persecuted by a sectarian armed force known as the B-Specials."

Southerners cross into the border town of Newry and join local Catholics against the RUC. There are calls for volunteers for the north from Republicans, and even from the Irish equivalent of the Stalinist Young Communist League, the Connolly Youth Movement (which in general believes that the socialist revolution will be made peacefully, through existing parliaments).

The story begins to spread in Dublin that the Irish cabinet is divided, that Lynch's angry speech is a compromise – that at least three Dublin ministers want the Irish army to move into Derry city and the other Catholic majority areas, urban and rural, along the border. The three include the future Taoiseach Charles Haughey, himself one whose parents had fled south in the early 20s. Early the following year Dublin Ministers will be dismissed from Government and prosecuted for running guns to the North (they will be acquitted).

Officers of the Irish Army in civilian clothes are sent to liaise with the Defence Committees and the fighters in Derry, Belfast, and other areas, and to help coordinate them..

For a short while, the 26 Counties state, whose 1937 constitution lays claim to the Six Counties territory, as part of the Independent Irish state, seems on the verge of getting drawn into civil war and – probably – war with Britain.

From mid-August, even after Lynch

has issued a joint statement with Britain guaranteeing the territorial integrity of the 6 County entity so long as a majority there want that, arms training will, on the quiet, be provided at the army camp over the border in Donegal for selected men from Derry.

Instead of retreating from the siege of the Bogside, Northern Ireland Prime Minister Clark now escalates the conflict. While the fighting is still raging in Derry, he tells the Stormont MPs – and the whole Unionist population – that they face a general Catholic insurrection to force the Protestants into a Catholic-majority Irish state. He implies that the insurrection is controlled by a conspiracy. Bitterly he denounces “Eire’s clumsy intrusion” into Northern Ireland’s internal affairs – Lynch’s speech. On radio and TV, the Belfast government sends out a call to the 8,500-strong armed Protestant militia, the B-Specials to mobilise. (There are 3,000 RUC.) It is taken as a public declaration of full-scale war on Derry and the other areas where Catholics have been stirring.

And in effect it is a call for more than the B-Specials to rally to the defence of Protestant Ulster. It is a call to all Protestants, to the sort of people who are already going to Derry to “do their bit” against the rebellious taigs. In fact though, the B-Specials will play only a very limited role. In calling them out, inadvertently, Clark is digging old-style Unionism deeper into the pit.

Eight opposition members – John Hume and others – boycott the Stormont debate on the situation in Northern Ireland, where Clark raises the alarm against the Catholic insurrection.

Protestants are streaming into Derry in cars and motor cycles, armed with pick-axe handles, helmets, and some guns, to help the cops put down the Fenian uprising. There is now some gunfire.

The British Government still stands “idly by”. So far it is the Left of the civil rights movement – Devlin and McCann – and not only the left, that is calling on the British Government to take control

of Northern Ireland.

The left is in the forefront of the fight in Derry. The London *Times* quotes Bernadette Devlin telling a crowd: “I want you to fill your pockets with stones and carry a petrol bomb in each hand. Then we will rush the barricades”. She urges them to fight “the black bastards”, the RUC. “Black” Protestants, the “Black North”, are Catholic-religious terms. Devlin is the Catholic-nationalist “unity” MP for Mid-Ulster, a constituency where if Catholics are united, as in the April 1969 election they were, they can win the seat.

To criticisms that an MP should not do such things, she sends a message: “Tell them that I did not go to Westminster to join their bloody club”.

Wednesday August 13, outside Derry

More and more Catholics across Northern Ireland are starting to act to take the pressure off Derry. At least eight police stations are attacked: in Belfast, Dungannon, Armagh, Coalisland, Dungiven, Dungannon, Enniskillen, and Newry.

What will be a big movement of refugees out of and inside Northern Ireland has started. A steady stream of women and children flee over the border to Donegal. It is the beginning of what will be the biggest forced population movement in Western Europe since the turmoil at the end of World War Two, in 1945.

In Coalisland, 500 defy the ban on marches and meet in the street. A crowd forces its way into the police station; windows are broken and petrol bombs put through them.

In Armagh, 400 youths march in protest at what is happening in Derry. Paddy O’Hanlon, Nationalist MP for South Armagh, says that they want “to take some of the pressure off Derry”.

Barricades are put up in Dungannon. In Lurgan, Catholic and Protestant crowds face each other. Catholics put up barricades. Bottles and stones are thrown by both sides and a few petrol bombs from the Catholic side. Earlier, a crowd had gone to the RUC station to protest at police actions in Derry.

In Enniskillen, stones and bottles are thrown at the RUC, who have interfered with a meeting (by now, when on 13 August all marches have been banned, illegal) on the events in Derry.

B-Specials are put to man border posts and to guard the Waterside and Fountain Street Protestant areas in Derry.

In Belfast, 200 people attack Hastings St RUC barracks. One group sets up a barrier across the Falls Road at the Divis St junction, and sets it alight with petrol bombs. Police armoured cars smash two barricades.

A big crowd marches down Falls Road, in Belfast, and sets up barricades at the top and at the bottom of the road.

100 RUC are on the adjoining Shankill Road, guarding the streets connecting the Shankill and the Falls.

Northern Ireland prime minister Chichester Clark, having stoked the fire with his talk of a general Catholic insurrection, now tries to bank it down by reiterating on TV his commitment to a civil rights reform programme. That would have been important six months ago, but now events have gone way beyond that.

“Hooligan irresponsibles in our midst, whether they are Protestant or Roman Catholic, are a menace to our prospects as a community”.

He hopes the riots will not be attributed to intransigence on the Government’s part.

“I take my stand upon these essentials – that houses should be allocated by need, that public jobs and appointments should be filled on merit alone. That there should be equal protection for the law-abiding, and equal retribution for the law-breakers. No other course is either possible or moral”.

Yet, he threatens the Catholics with the British army, telling them that he will not shrink from summoning “other than police aid”.

The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association warns Chichester Clark that unless police are withdrawn from the Bogside immediately, civil rights meetings will be held in “about 12 places” in the next 24 hours, in defiance of a ban. It is in effect a call for such demonstrations. They are already welling up. But for Clark now the only basis on which peace can be restored is the victory of the RUC and its auxiliaries in the Bogside and its victory over the “republican insurrection”.

He denies that there will be “retaliation” in the Bogside. “We want peace, not vengeance... If the rioters withdraw peacefully to their homes and observe the law, no attempt will be made to exploit the situation. I give this assurance in the name of the Government and in the earnest hope that it may contribute to peace”.

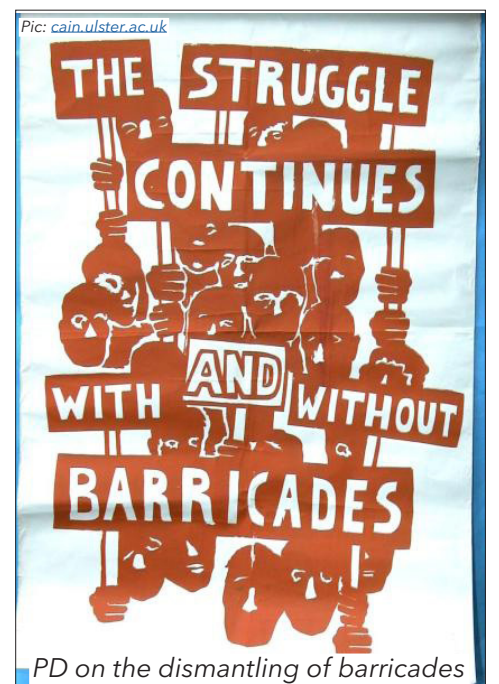
On this he is lying. Fighters, among them Bernadette Devlin, will be jailed after the crisis has passed.

Thursday 14 August

The British Establishment is by now in the grip of undisguised revulsion against the incompetence and irresponsibility of the Stormont Government. The Tory party, of which the Northern Ireland Unionist party at Westminster is an organic part, will pointedly back everything the Labour Government will do in Northern Ireland over the next few months. A prominent Tory leader, Lord Hailsham, will go to the 6 Counties in the wake of the British Army to make that plain to the Unionists.

A *Times* editorial, noting that all marches have been banned in Northern Ireland, says angrily that it should have been done a month earlier.

“The folly of allowing the Apprentice Boys to trail their coats through Derry is now apparent... The reasonably-formulated political demands, the non-violent demonstrations... are all engulfed



in something much more primitive and volcanic, tribal fears and hatreds: this madness, as Chichester Clark called it [on TV] last night”.

Frank Gogarty, chair of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association, puts out a CRA statement: “The B-Specials are leading the Paisleyites. They are in tenders [armoured cars] shooting indiscriminately. They are firing into people’s homes. They are shooting all over the place...” He calls for demonstrations throughout Northern Ireland. He attempts to define what is happening:

“It must be among the greatest ironies of Irish history that parts of Northern Ireland are now in open insurrection, demanding that the British government directly intervene...” (Michael Farrell, in his book *The Orange State*, is mistaken in saying that NICRA and PD put out a joint statement).

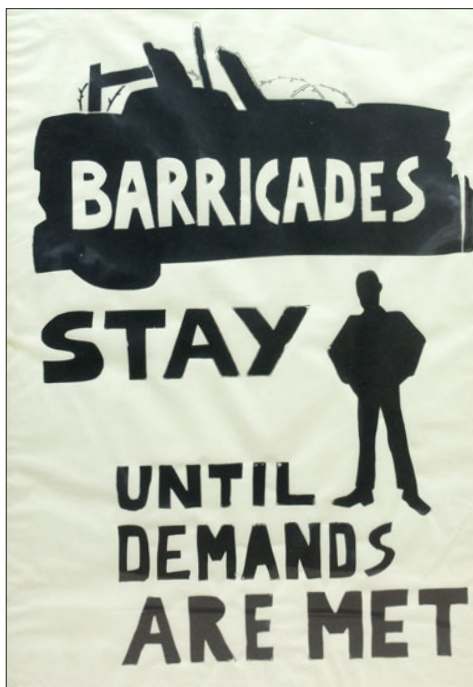
The London NICRA calls on every “able-bodied Irishman to make himself available to go to the North of Ireland for active service”. Similar calls have gone out in the South, and volunteers are being organised to go to “the North”.

Now Clark is finally forced to face the fact that he can’t cope, that Northern Ireland has become ungovernable to the Unionists. The high command of the RUC and the Belfast government call on the British state for help and support.

On Thursday 14 August at about 5.15pm, four hundred British soldiers take to the streets of Derry. Their immediate orders are to prevent Bogside breaking out into the nearby centre of the city.

At first about 200 armed B-Specials join the cordon around the Bogside. They are withdrawn later that night and sent to patrol Derry’s Protestant areas.

A formal announcement will not be made for a few days yet, but in fact control of “security” in Northern Ireland is now beginning to pass from the hands of the Belfast Government to the British Government, with the Army as its instrument. The RUC, including the B-Specials, is about to be put under the control of the British army. The commander of that army, General Freed-



PD poster, 1969

land, will decide whether B-Specials will be deployed in Catholic territory.

His first act is to call off the war with the Bogside.

Contrary to Chichester Clark's threat on TV, the troops do not attempt to enter the Bogside or to remove the barricades. The army respects the wishes of the Bogside. No attempt will be made to remove the barricades by force, then or later.

There is jubilation and the sense that they have won, in the Bogside. With some justification, they feel they have beaten the RUC and the Orange state. To the irony of Irish Catholics calling for London rule over them is now added the paradox of them greeting British troops as liberators and saviours. Much will be made – for instance, in the discussions in IS (as SWP was then called) over IS-SWP's support for the troops – of Bogside people chatting in friendly fashion with soldiers, and bringing them cups of tea.

The British Army leaders are more clear-headed.

A London *Times* report summarises the view of the future expressed by the General Officer Commanding British Forces in Northern Ireland, the man who now holds Northern "security" in his hands: he knows "that the honeymoon for Britain may soon be over and that they may be under attack from two sides" (19 August, 1969).

Eamonn McCann is at this point more or less clear-headed too. So is the chair of the DCDA, Sean Keenan: "Stand firm. Barricades remain. Conduct yourselves in the disciplined fashion that you have shown since the start of the crisis" (*Irish Times*, Aug 20). So is Bernadette Devlin.

Speaking on behalf of the DCDA, McCann announces the terms agreed on for the ceasefire:

1) All B-Specials to be withdrawn; 2) The RUC be restricted to normal police duties; 3) The DCDA will help to keep the peace.

He reiterates what the DCDA is demanding:

1) Disband the B-Specials; 2) Abolish the Stormont Belfast Government; 3) Release all political prisoners; no further political prosecutions.

The barricades are not going to be attacked by the army. They will stay up until the Bogside feel safe taking them down.

McCann tells journalists he "was never happy to see British troops on Irish soil, and it was not clear what their function was to be. If they had come to operate with the RUC against the Bogside, it was clear no one would enter the Bogside with the approval of the people or without a fight." (*Irish Times*, 15 Aug)

He had earlier responded to stories that six French students in the area had come to instruct the Bogside on barricade fighting: "For the information of the police, the people of the Bogside do not need any training from anybody on how to fight the police." (*Irish Times*, 13 August)

Not self-consistently or with politi-

cal coherence (she had called for the British Army to be sent in), but nonetheless to the point, Bernadette Devlin says: "The British Army is no good." She adds: "The RUC should be controlled by British police officers". To Protestants she says: "This is us against the RUC. The Protestants should join us in working for a socialist workers' republic". This is holy water at a funeral – irrelevance.

Devlin says: "we are ready to negotiate with the British Army". But only, she insists, "if the police keep out and the B-Specials are disbanded". She tells the people of Bogside: "Defend the barricades to the last. Do not let them come in... This fight is between the RUC and us." Unfortunately, it is not.

Paddy Doherty, the "SDLPish" Vice-Chair of the Derry Citizens' Defence Association, says much the same thing. He tells the Army commanders that "we will remain at war with the RUC until [our] demands are met." (*Irish Times*, 18 Aug).

Devlin reports to the Bogside on the phone conversation she has just had with prime minister Chichester Clark. When she asked him whether the army is to replace or assist the RUC, he replied: "to assist them". Devlin asks the crowd: "Do you still want to sing, 'We Shall Overcome'?"

She tries to persuade them not to disperse, and not to rely on the army. They are divided. Some boo, and some shout, "Back to the barricades". Most of them disagree with Devlin and follow the "moderates".

She demands of Harold Wilson: "Call an immediate constitutional conference, and settle the Irish question once and for all... The constitution should be suspended immediately." The Six Counties had been gerrymandered at birth, in 1920-2, to give Protestants a majority. A Six Counties constitutional conference will solve nothing at all, as the one called in 1974 will demonstrate.

But the Battle of the Bogside has brought out the best in Bernadette Devlin. The role of intransigent militant which she played from 12-14 August is one prescribed and described in the culture of song and story that saturates her Catholic-Nationalist background. She has inhabited that role very well. Yet her expressed trust in senior British policemen – calls for "British standards" in Northern Ireland had been central to the early civil rights movement – and her call for a "constitutional conference" shows that Devlin has not thereby ceased to be muddled, eclectic and prone to glib pseudo-solutions.

The exhausted, jubilant Bogside disperses to their homes. Paddy Doherty (a mainstream Catholic) Vice Chair of the Derry Citizens' Defence Association, is carried on their shoulders, and leads them in the singing of "We Shall Overcome".

Later, soldiers and residents chat across the barricades.

The British commander, Colonel Todd, meets members of the Derry

Citizens' Defence Association, and they agree a three-point peace plan. All B-Specials will be withdrawn from the area, and the RUC will be restricted to normal peace duties. In return, the DCDA agrees to help maintain the peace.

Thursday 14 August, Belfast

That it will be necessary for the British Army to play the central "security" role all over the 6 County state has not yet been decided. That will be determined by what happens in Belfast in the next two days and nights.

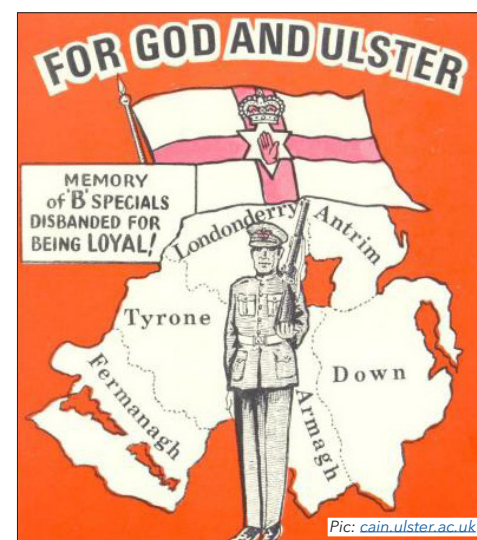
Four hours after a sort of peace is restored in Derry, fierce fighting erupts in Belfast, where the army has not yet been deployed.

On the morning of August 14, the *Belfast Newsletter* appears with a main front page headline, "'Eire's Clumsy Intrusion' Lashed by the PM". There is a big picture of Bernadette Devlin in jeans and jumper, flagstone raised above her head to be dashed to the ground and broken into pieces small enough to be thrown, the very image of the incorrigible taig rebel. Below the picture is another headline "Eire Mob Crosses Border Into Newry". They have taken over most of the town.

Catholics in the Falls had already taken limited action in solidarity with Derry. Now Protestants go on the offensive. That evening the Shankill erupts against the people of the Catholic areas, in a spectacular mass assault. A large crowd descends on the Falls Road. They surge in the wake of the RUC, and the effect is of a joint movement, as in Derry.

"People from the Shankill Road, wearing white arm bands, moved north to the Crumlin Road or Ardoyne and South on the Falls.

"At Hooker Street, scene of some of the worst rioting in Belfast two weeks



ago, the Loyalist crowd, ordered by the men wearing arm bands, hurled more than 100 petrol bombs at houses in Hooker St and broke down a barricade which the Catholic people of the street had erected.

"A force of riot police with shields stood by as the crowd set fire to houses, a public house, the Black Rose Inn, which has twice been fired in the last fortnight, and [another tavern] across the road.

"The police, who had arrived in two tenders and about five Land Rovers, stood across the Crumlin Road while the Loyalists ran in front of them, smashed their way through a barricade and set houses in Hooker Street alight. Then the police, backed by three armoured cars, went into Hooker Street with batons drawn.

"A hundred yards from the burning public house a crowd surged across to the Catholic side. They hurled stones and petrol bombs. Police tried to break the attack – then an armoured car was called in.

"As it drove up, there were four bursts of automatic fire – a senior policeman said he thought it was a sub-machine gun.

"On the Falls Road as Loyalists moved South a group of Catholics gathered and marched to Hooker Street police station, which they attacked with petrol bombs and stones.

"Police moved into the road with about seven armoured cars and scattered the crowds to right and left. The road was sealed off."

Barricades are thrown up, and defended as in Derry, with stones and petrol bombs. Now the whole panoply of RUC power of repression is thrown at the Catholics, including one heavy machine gun able to penetrate through brick: a boy of nine, Patrick Rooney, is shot dead through the walls of his bedroom...

IRA men are few and few of them have guns, but the few who do, use them. There is one light machine-gun, operated by a middle-aged man who had dropped out of the IRA many years earlier.

Pubs are burned in the Crumlin Road. Some factories are fired, reportedly by Catholics. Four Catholics are shot dead by police fire: one Protestant is killed by a shot in Divis Street. Two people, one

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a Protestant and one a Catholic die, shot by civilians. And the fighting is still spreading.

In Newry there are attempts to put up barricades, and fighting with the police.

In Portadown, Catholic and Protestant crowds gather and confront each other.

In Dungiven, the Orange Hall is burned, and the courthouse, and the premises of the Ulster Bank. In Armagh, a Catholic is shot dead.

600 soldiers of the 26 Counties army (three companies) have been moved close to the border, and there they halt.

The *Times* (15 August) reports that the "government here has been watching anxiously reports from the Republic of Ireland as rumours of large-scale IRA activity and Irish army manoeuvre swept the province".

Dublin's Minister for External Affairs, Dr. Hillery, goes to London to talk to Callaghan.

The left in Belfast is less prominent than in Derry. Michael Farrell will later tell the historian of the People's Democracy, Paul Arthur, that PD had only ten people mobilised in Belfast at that time. On 14 August PD – Farrell and others – follow where Eamonn McCann and Bernadette Devlin have led two days earlier, and call for British intervention. The IS in Britain (forerunner of today's SWP), with which Farrell is linked, has implicitly been calling for 26 Counties intervention.

The People's Democracy statement is headlined in the *Belfast Newsletter*: "Suspend Stormont Junta".

It reads: "The welcoming response for the British troops in Derry has shown that the basic cause of the trouble there was the undisciplined and biased RUC.

"Not content with provoking war in the Bogside, the Ulster government, hell-bent on self-destruction, has now put 8,000 members of their murder gang – the B-Specials – on the streets. This vicious, undisciplined fascist band has already killed one man and wounded several others within hours of their mobilisation.

"It is intolerable that the people of the North should again be subjected to a reign of sectarian terror. Any government which would entrust law and order to this savage gang is unfit to rule.



"The British government must suspend the Stormont junta immediately if more lives are not to be lost in Northern Ireland".

Though it coincides with the great eruption of Protestant-Catholic conflict in Belfast on 14 August, this statement is far more politically calculating than the call for help by Devlin and McCann on 12 August. The author is responding to the response of Derry Catholics to the coming of the troops, whose coming was the end of the RUC war on the Bogside people. It may have been worked out jointly with the leaders of IS-SWP: the telephones have not ceased to work. In any case this statement signals the new "line" of IS-SWP too.

Friday-Saturday 15-16 August

On the evening of 15 August the British army does what has been done in Derry – it goes on the streets of Belfast to relieve the RUC and separate the fighters.

The Army enters the Falls Road, but not the other areas of Belfast where Protestant and Catholics clashes occur. In Belfast as in Derry the army makes no attempt to force its way into the barricaded Catholic areas or to remove their barricades.

Catholic houses are burnt that night by Protestants at Bombay Street (Falls Road area) and Brookfield Street (Crumlin Road). After whole Catholic streets have been burned down in Belfast on the 16th the army enters the Crumlin Road area.

According to the Scarman tribunal, 1,820 families flee their homes in July-August 1969. Over 80% per cent of the families are Catholic. Ten people are killed; 900 injured. 16 factories and 170 houses are burned down; a further 417 houses damaged by fire.

Over the longer period from August 1969 to February 1973, according to another estimate, between 8,000 and 15,000 families will move as a result of sectarian intimidation.

James Callaghan makes a statement to, so to speak, accompany the troops: There will be no constitutional change in Northern Ireland without the "consent of the people of the province".

There are hopeful signs too. On Wednesday 15 August at a 4,000-strong mass meeting, Belfast shipyard workers declare for peace, and stage a token stoppage at 4pm to show their "concern". They pledge to keep sectarian conflict out of the shipyards. Minister of Commerce Roy Bradford addressed the meeting. Alex [Sandy] Scott, chair of the shipyard stewards, rejects the story that there has been fighting in the shipyard. 2,000 workers, Catholic and Protestant, at the Michelin tyre works, Belfast, also proclaim that they want peace.

Lord Fenner Brockway, chair of the Campaign for Democracy in Ulster, calls for the suspension of the constitution – for direct rule of Northern Ireland from London. The call is not new from the Labour left.

Monday 18 August

Armed groups have besieged the RUC station at Catholic Crossmaglen. There is a lorry-load of men, with guns, including sub machine guns. Hand grenades are thrown through the window of the RUC station. They are driven off after an hour. The terrible future is already stirring in the womb.

But the British Army is now in control of security in Northern Ireland. In a few days it will call in the guns of the B-Specials for safekeeping in special depots. It will have a short honeymoon period. The barricades will not finally come down in Belfast until mid-September – by agreement – and in Derry, again by agreement, in the second week of October.

The aftermath

The crisis that erupted in Derry on 12 August, the breakdown of the Northern Ireland state system, would be followed after October – after the decision to abolish the B-Specials and a major gun battle by RUC and British soldiers against Protestant gunmen on the Shankill – by a lull. Then it would erupt again, in old and familiar forms.

In fact it would not be resolved for decades. Soon it became clear that the whole Northern Ireland system had been sapped and undermined. From August 1969 the British Army acted as an emergency scaffolding to stop disintegration. The Belfast parliament would be abolished by Britain in March 1972.

What opened in mid-1969 was a major revolutionary crisis. Analysing the experience of revolutions, including Russia's, Lenin had defined three conditions necessary for a revolution to take place. The old order is no longer able to go on in the old way; the ruled, or enough of them, are no longer prepared to go on in the old way; and an alternative to the old order is available.

The Northern Ireland Catholics were no longer willing to go on in the old way, and the old order could not go on in the old way because of the Catholic revolt and Britain's commitment to reform. The great gap in the scenario was in relation to Lenin's third condition: what could replace the old order?

The working class was radically divided and in both its sections, Protestant and Catholic, politically and intellectually hegemonised by "its own" bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie and their national-communist ideas.

The workers in the South were powerfully militant "on the job", but in no political condition to reshape society. The working class had no independent political organisation to make proposals as to how the divided people of Ireland, or of Northern Ireland, could democratically rearrange their affairs. There was no possibility of a working-class political force to fill the gap.

In neither of the national or communal groups was there a revolutionary socialist force able to plausibly propose a democratic settlement of the "constitutional conflict" (whether Ireland should be independent or affiliated with Brit-

ain) and working-class unity on the issues that had led to breakdown and the beginning of communal-national civil war in Northern Ireland.

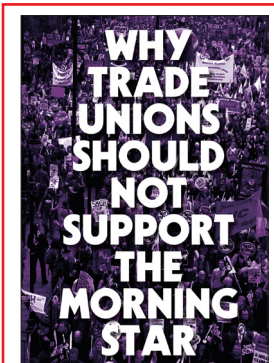
The left in Ireland, such as it was, used political categories – pro-imperialism, anti-imperialism, sectarianism, anti-sectarianism, British occupation, and so on – to obscure the fundamental issue, the nature of the Catholic-nationalist/Protestant-Unionist divide.

The left was solidly on the Catholic side, the side of the Six Counties' oppressed of the previous 50 years and previous centuries. It was right and necessary to be on that side. But the left shared middle-class Catholic-nationalist ideas, changed only by re-expressing them in the left's own political language, for instance, the "Trotskyist" notion that Ireland was experiencing, or could be made to experience, a "permanent revolution" in which the Catholic nationalist movement would grow over into united-working-class power and socialism.

From 1970 Northern Ireland would settle into a long low-level communal conflict, half-smothered by the British state, and entwined with a Catholic-nationalist Provisional IRA war against that British state. It was a hopeless and unwinnable war. The Provisional IRA had no policy for the big Protestant-British minority but to subjugate it. Since they could not themselves do that, and civil war could not but result in continued partition, perhaps with a smaller "Protestant state", the Provisional IRA were reduced to trying to force Britain to "persuade" the Protestant community into a united Ireland.

Things have settled down – or seem to have – after the long travail, into the present system of intricately structured bureaucratically organised sectarian power-sharing – a system that, though it is "better" than war, cannot but work to perpetuate the communalism it enshrines in its workings, and therefore cannot but work to perpetuate the division in the Irish working class.

What happens on the level of big events such as those in Northern Ireland happens because, everything being as it is, it has to. In retrospect what happens assumes the character of inevitability. In fact, things that in retrospect were part of an inexorable movement of given facts may have been in flux before they settled into the congealed jumble of facts that make the event which in retrospect we see as inevitable. Other things may have been possible. □



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Behind the conflict in DR Congo

By Cathy Nugent

On 27 January the M23, a militia based in the east of Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and backed by the Rwandan army, seized control of Goma, the capital of North Kivu province. The M23 has been active in the area since it revived in 2021, but their operations escalated last June. A July 2024 ceasefire soon collapsed, and renewed peace talks planned for December were put off. Calls for a new ceasefire from African leaders have been ignored and the M23 is now advancing into South Kivu province.

The fighting is directly linked to the M23's struggle for control of and profit from mineral resources. The escalation of their operations may be linked to the withdrawal of UN troops from South Kivu last June.

Reports say 3,000 people have been killed, and hundreds of thousands displaced during recent events, alongside many acts of sexual violence, a horrifically prevalent "weapon of war" in this conflict-ridden area. More than 160 women prisoners were raped and then burned alive during a jailbreak in Goma.

In annexing North Kivu, the M23, and de facto Rwanda, are taking over an area slightly bigger than Croatia with a population of over eight million. The M23's modus operandi in areas it controls is to set up a monopoly on local mining. Gold and coltan ore, from which tantalum, a metal used in electronics, is extracted, are the important minerals in both North and South Kivu provinces. The M23 is able to by-pass the regulations intended to stop trade in minerals associated with conflict in the DRC. They smuggle them into Rwanda where it is mixed in with Rwan-

dan production and sold on. It's a lucrative trade which does not benefit the artisanal miners.

The Rwandan government claims they are defending the Tutsi population in the area from other armed groups. Given the Rwandan genocide in 1994, when 500-800,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutu people were systematically killed by Hutu militias, the west is reluctant to challenge this claim.

The Rwandans say they want to stop the activity of the Democratic Liberation Front of Rwanda (FDLR in French) an anti-Rwandan, ethnic Hutu group that has sought refuge in the DRC and has allies in the Congolese army. At the same time they build alliances with the west by providing troops against an Islamist insurgency (linked to Daesh) in Mozambique.

Congo River Alliance

The DRC government is not an innocent actor in this situation – the mineral trade has also corrupted DRC politics. The M23 is linked to the Congo River Alliance, a coalition of rebel parties and militias which wants to overthrow the DRC government. Its leader, Corneille Nangaa, is a former ally of DRC's president Félix Tshisekedi. Other factors in the immediate background are Tshisekedi's plan to remove the president's two-term limit so he can stay in power, and a renewed campaign against the M23 by DRC armed forces. They are now allied with local militias known as Wazaleno ("patriots"), a southern African regional force and the Burundian army.

With Uganda backing Rwanda and South Africa, Burundi and Malawi backing DRC, this conflict could develop into another full-scale regional war.

Many M23 cadre have been "at war" since the 1990s, having their origins in a Tutsi-dominated rebel group, the National Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP). In 2009 the CNDP signed a peace treaty and were integrated into the DRC army. However, when the process did not work out they formed a new militia, the M23, in 2012. At that time they took over Goma but were defeated in 2013. The group restarted in 2021-2. Through this entire period the M23 have been responsible for unlawful killings, rapes, recruitment of child soldiers, looting of villages and other war crimes.

Rwandan President Paul Kagame is at least as authoritarian as Tshisekedi. Last year he was elected for the fourth time allegedly with over 99% of the vote on a 98.2% turnout. Under Rwandan law he could go on until 2034.

These conflicts have their origins in the Rwandan civil war and its aftermath. Kagame, once a Tutsi refugee, is a former leader of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) a Tutsi armed group which



invaded Rwanda from Uganda in 1990 sparking the civil war which ended with the genocide. The RPF eventually overthrew the Hutu-dominated government.

40,000 militia men and around one million Hutu refugees fled to Zaire (now DRC). The Hutu militias regrouped in UN-run refugee camps. Then the Rwandan RPF-led government and its Ugandan ally started military incursions across the border, on the grounds of preventing further genocide. Two wars (from 1996-7 and 1998-2003), as well as lower level conflicts such as the ones involving the M23 followed. Between 1996 and 2003 a number of militias were involved in fighting against the government; they were backed by Rwanda, Uganda and other African countries. In this, the biggest conflict since the Second World War, which is still ongoing, around six million people died, primarily due to disease and malnutrition.

Transitional

The 2003 peace deal set up a transitional government of all the belligerents, a new constitution and "development" money for DRC. However a low level armed conflict in the eastern part of the country, thoroughly enmeshed with a politics of patronage and enriched by the mineral trade continued. Being an officer in the state army became a way to extort money from the local population. A "military bourgeoisie" has kept the conflict going.

The Rwandan economy is regarded as a success story of development aid, even though aid which has been directed towards military conflict. The DRC's economy has benefitted from a

surge in prices of minerals. Yet in both countries economic inequalities are immense. In DRC 64% of the country lacks basic necessities – access to health services, education and clean water. After 2003 the country's mining interests were privatised to enrich an elite. Every rich country, all the international mining enterprises, and organisations like the World Bank approved the privatisations because they wanted to free up the mineral wealth.

International solidarity campaigns have arguably overly simplified the issues by focusing on stopping the trade in "conflict minerals". This requires effective regulation – including over child labour and environmental damage – in volatile conditions and remote terrain. Moreover a dramatic decline in the actually-existing mineral trade could hurt the miners who have no choice but to play by the rules of all the armed forces. It is the underlying social-material inequalities and the endless violent struggle for territorial and political control which is the problem.

On the other hand, any political campaign which highlights the current role of the Rwandan government, and the political corruption of the DRC government is important. Labour should take a lead on such a campaign. We highlight and should demonstrate against the appalling prospect of a renewed war. Western labour movements should argue for open borders for refugees from the region and for more aid. Aid which goes directly to agencies that can get it to the people who need it. We support fights for decent standards of living and against human rights abuses. □

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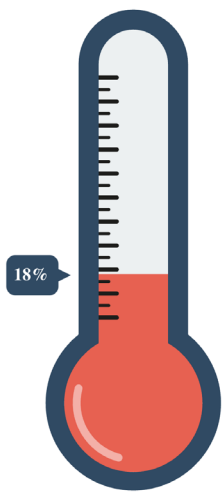
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Solace workers win a pause

By Katy Dollar

The UVW union has announced that planned strike action by Tower Hamlets domestic abuse support workers at Solace Women's Aid has been suspended. Both strikes and the redundancy process have been paused to allow for further talks between union and the employer.

All-out strike action had been announced after a ballot returned a 100% vote in favour of strike action following a 92% turnout. The strike was building local support,

and hundreds of people gathered for a rally outside Tower Hamlets Town Hall in against the cuts to domestic violence service and in support of the workers. Apsana Begum MP, Solace workers, and Sisters Uncut had spoken at the protest.

The crowd heard from Independent Domestic Violence Advisors, union members, local councillors, the campaign group Sisters Uncut, and Apsana Begum, who is currently suspended from the Labour whip for voting against the Govern-

ment on the two-child benefit cap.

The service, which receives funding from the council, provides free emotional support to high-risk survivors of domestic violence, which includes advocating, referring and providing them with information. Between April and December 2024, Solace workers managed 1,139 referrals and supported 227 victim-survivors.

The UVW members have done well to push a pause in redundancy plans through their ballot and campaign-

ing work. Negotiations can take place whilst strikes are happening, and indeed strikes add to leverage. New dates should be set unless the cuts are reversed. The cuts are happening as a result of continued austerity policies under the Labour government. The labour movement must fight to refund services. Keir Starmer pledged to halve violence against women and girls in a decade but services dealing with violence against women and girls continue to lose funding. □



80 years after the liberation of Auschwitz

By John Cunningham



Kino Eye

Passenger (Pasażerka, 1963) by Polish director Andrzej Munk, despite its rather fragmentary nature, should be better known. Tragically, the director died before the film's completion and his collaborator Witold Lesiewicz finished the job in his stead.

Most of the film is a flashback, but

the story begins in the postwar period on an ocean liner heading for South America. One of the passengers, Liza (Alexandra Slaska), a former SS guard at the camp, spots Marta (Anna Cieplewska), a survivor of Auschwitz.

Memories

Liza desperately tries to avoid Marta and her thoughts are in turmoil as she confronts her memories of the camp and her conflicting, strange relationship with Marta.

She confides in her husband but she tells him different stories. She tried to

save Marta and even helped her to meet up with her fiancée. But she also wanted Marta to be her slave. Liza is no angel, she was a brute, but for reasons which are never clear Marta was treated differently. Is it possible, in a hell-hole like Auschwitz, to make sense of these emotions? The audience is left with many questions unanswered. Why did Liza, who in another life could surely have been a decent person – or at least a different person – behave the way she did? □

• To view online: bit.ly/p-ger

Strike call was too casual



Letter

It is difficult to know what to think of Claireen Ryan's [conclusion](#) to a summary of the threat posed by Trump: "A general strike against the attempted presidential coup should be the [still numerically strong] labour movement's response."

Ryan does not spell out how a weakly-organised US labour movement gets from where it is to... a general strike. Lack of detail about the "balance of forces" is not our usual method in proposing, or indeed opposing, the call for

a general strike. For example we criticised the SWP's demand on the TUC to call a general strike to fight austerity attacks on workers after the financial crash. We had an analysis; we said this was not a realistic demand to make of the TUC, and was about the SWP trying to appear militant.

My best guess is that Ryan is saying only a general strike is an adequate response to the existential threat posed by Trump to the US workers' movement.

No doubt very strong class action is needed to beat back Trump's plans, but even an "existential crisis general strike" should be concretely assessed. Ryan's proposal is casually put out there with a wish that "in such crises

things can turn around quickly". That isn't good enough. I also wondered why only speculate about a general strike for the US? Why not argue for it everywhere there is a serious far right threat?

The prospects for any kind of popular revolt in the US are not great. Trump won by two million votes – not a landslide, but a significant margin. The Democratic Party's defeat will have a demoralising effect.

On the other hand there has been some union action and a wave of local demonstrations, building up since just before Trump's inauguration. As reported in *Solidarity* the Federal Unionists Network – a cross country network – has called a Save Our Services Day

of Action on 19 February. Judging from online reports, the demonstrations are made up of good people organising relatively small protests, some on single issues such as defending migrants and trans people. (Some Democratic Party bigwigs have got themselves on TV posing as militants but I doubt this is their movement.)

Good luck to them all but we should recognise this is just a beginning with hard tasks ahead. Our job, at this distance, is to encourage a distinctly socialist intervention with and for the US left which can help develop these protests. □

Cathy Nugent, London

Join Workers' Liberty!

Want to be part of an organised long-haul collective effort to spread the socialist ideas you read in *Solidarity*, and to link together activities in diverse campaigns and conflicts around that consistent socialist thread? Then take some copies of *Solidarity* to sell each week, and contact us to discuss joining Workers' Liberty, the group that produces and sustains this paper. Check it out and contact us via workersliberty.org/join-awl □

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Letters

General strike

I just read Claireen Ryan's excellent [piece](#) encouraging a General Strike in the US. I have been thinking exactly that: with a supine Congress, a wavering Supreme Court, teetering media, compliant corporations, it rests on the American people to act to protect democracy a general strike against the Trump/Oligarchy crew. Do you have affiliates or members in the USA that I could support?

Harold Nassau, Cambridge, Massachusetts

US coup d'état

Hi Folks: I read your [page](#) on the US coup d'état with interest and, largely, enthusiastic assent. I suggest two modifications:

The first one is that many potential readers in the US at least won't know what a "gobshite" is. We say a "shit-head".

And second, Trump was not convicted of raping E Jean Carroll. (George Stephanopolis dissed DJT in this language and his network paid dearly for the mistake). I believe that the conviction was for "sexual abuse" or some such namby-pamby legal bullshit.

You might also make more explicit the fact that the man was convicted of several counts of felonious fraud in the Stormy Daniels episode.

We are in deep doo-doo in the US and I hope that this won't cause or worsen existing world conflagrations. I would advise you to use your bully pulpit to warn the world. There is the potential for real trouble here.

Power to the People!

Charles Potter

BSW is good

Your [piece](#) seems to say Die Linke and the Revolutionary Socialist and Revolutionary International organisations are the good guys, and BSW are bad.

But economically they are every bit as left wing as these parties and they have a more sane position on green issues – to make the economy green but not at the expense of workers, to do so in a gradual manner, in a just transition.

And they oppose mass migration. Unlike the racist FDP, AfD, CDU and Greens, who are all equally extreme, not on grounds of skin colour or culture, but on grounds of supply and demand. Importing workers who will do it for a fraction of cost suppresses wages and exploits those coming here.



Activist Agenda

Meetings

Sat 22 Feb: The Middle East: democracy, equal rights, and the working class. Sheffield AWL dayschool. Noon, Red Deer, 18 Pitt St S1 4DD.

Sat-Sun 26-27 Apr: AWL conference. London. More: awl@workersliberty.org

At work or on campus

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

Template motions

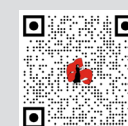
Texts: to adapt for union branches and Labour Parties: bit.ly/mo-pe

We should not have a bloody free market of people coming here like a mere resource.

Instead we should have a free market or a cooperative of resources where companies and or jobs are spread around the world evenly, where the companies, nationalised industries and or cooperative or syndicalist or distributive entities move into each country evenly and pay people all around the world the same rate, by increasing global wages and increasing national wages, as it will not be possible to undercut the local workers if everyone is getting a fair deal.

Move the infrastructure not the people.

Jacky Doyle



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

Socialist-feminist book clubs

workersliberty.org/sf-book-clubs

2 Mar: Manchester: Caliban and the Witch. Gallery Café, 81 Princess Street M2 3JL

3 Mar: Sheffield: Feminist Theory. University Arms, 197 Brook Hill S3 7HG

9 Mar: London: Socialist Feminism, a new approach. 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. For environmental campaigning email awl@workersliberty.org. □



Sheffield students ramp up anti-cuts effort

By Sam Myerson

The student anti-cuts campaign at the University of Sheffield intervened into the launch of a looser campaign by the university Student Union through a student General Meeting on 17 February. The anti-cuts campaign called for scrapping tuition fees, and for No Cuts, No Job Losses, at the university.

The anti-cuts campaign has leafleted and talked with students at the university's "refreshers" event in January, and followed up with a meeting on 11 February where students and staff came together to discuss how to take the campaign forward and what those interventions should look like. Plans include lecture shout-outs and leafleting around university accommodation.

As yet, there are no concrete plans available from the uni about how it plans to meet its declared budget shortfall, but everything is on the table. There is a proposal that the English Lan-

**WE DESERVE BETTER
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NOT HIGH TUITION FEES**
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4. **BETTER AND CHEAPER HOUSING**
5. **LOAN REPAYMENT BASED ON SALARY**

SHEFFIELD STUDENTS UNION

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guage Teaching Centre will lose around a third of its staff.

The Student Union, too, faces cuts in the funding it gets from the university, and that has the potential to affect student societies and officer roles, further hollowing out student voice on campus.

Other universities have already announced their cuts. University and College Union (UCU) workers at Dundee University plan to strike for three weeks from Monday 24 February against a "best case scenario" of 200 redundancies. UCU at Newcastle

University, University of East Anglia, Brunel University, and Sheffield Hallam University, have also voted for strikes. Unison activists in the university sector are looking for openings to ballot where UCU is already up for action.

Student campaigns can make a difference to unions' confidence to strike, and to oppose cuts outright rather than just seeking to avoid compulsory redundancies. □

Trump nixes worker-rights watchdog

By Rhodri Evans

"He who saves his Country does not violate any Law", says Donald Trump on his social media feed, claiming to quote dictator Napoleon Bonaparte.

One of his whirl of measures breaking or swerving the law is to paralyse the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), which rules on "unfair labour practices" by bosses.

Trump has sacked so many NLRB people, without legal warrant, that the NLRB now has no quorum and can [do nothing](#).

Elon Musk and others have a law case going to the Supreme Court this year to abolish the NLRB and nullify the USA's 1935 union-rights Wagner Act as "unconstitutional". Trump has acted to stop the NLRB doing anything in the meantime.

Vance

Vice-president J D Vance has put proposals to Congress to replace unions by joint worker-boss forums, and other Trumpists want all public-sector unions ruled unconstitutional. Whether Trump

FEBRUARY 19

**STOP MUSK
SAVE OUR SERVICES**

Federal Buildings
Tesla Dealerships
Lunchtime Speak-Outs

join the movement: bit.ly/SOSaction

SOS **FUN**
FEDERAL UNIONISTS NETWORK

will go ahead there we don't know.

Trump and Musk continue their bonfire of federal-government agencies and jobs. Federal workers have a day of protest 19 February. So far other unions confine themselves to verbal protests and complaints, instead of seeking joint action.

But every Trump success increases his authority and weakens the labour movement for a fightback. Resistance is urgent, as in Britain we must resist the rise of Re-

form urgently and with bold alternatives, rather than retreating now in the hope people "will eventually see through them".

Trump's [kaleidoscope](#) of calamity includes plans to stop New York City bringing in a congestion charge and a ban on bike lanes there.

He is suing Chicago and other "sanctuary" jurisdictions to clear the way for his planned mass deportations. □

Stop Rosebank! Replace fossil-fuels now



Environment

By Sam Myerson

The Court of Session in Edinburgh ruled on 30 January that the original decisions to grant permission for the new oilfield at Rosebank, and a smaller gas field at Jackdaw, both of Shetland, were unlawful.

That was because they had not considered the implications for carbon dioxide that would be emitted by burning

any of the oil or gas produced.

The Tory government had given permission. The new Labour government said it would give no new licenses, but would allow go-ahead on projects previously licensed (of which there were many in the last period of Tory rule, many more than are likely to be found commercially viable). The legal challenge was brought by Greenpeace and Uplift.

Reeves

In effect, the court has ruled that the permission was in breach of the legal commitments of successive govern-

ments to tackling climate change. But the question now is: will the Labour government restore the permission?

The government has hinted that the new fields have Treasury support, in line with Rachel Reeves's mantra of "growth" by any means. The [Guardian reports](#) opposition from many Labour MPs and from Energy Secretary Ed Miliband.

In Parliament Green MP Carla Denyer [put it](#) to Energy Minister Michael Shanks that "13 new oil and gas fields that received licences from the previous Government but are still awaiting their final consents" for development could be blocked by the Rosebank ruling. Shanks

did not deny it, and said "consents – the point at which extraction takes place – must take into account climate tests, and not least the compatibility test laid down by the Supreme Court".

The crux of the "consents" is "scope 3" emissions, those that are produced when the products are burned after extraction.

Unions

Some unions, notably Unite, have opposed even Labour's policy of no new licenses. But the most advanced [workers' plan](#) for a just worker led transition away from fossil fuels has been devel-

oped by the RMT Offshore Workers [sector](#) in a joint effort with the NGO Platform.

We welcome the court decision and support the resistance within the top ranks of the Labour Party to restoring the consent for Rosebank. We want an end to further fossil-fuel exploration and extraction, and a rundown of fossil-fuel energy in favour of renewables and nuclear.

But it is only with workers at the centre and in control of transition that it can be carried out in the interests of all rather than subordinated to profit. □



Solidarity

For a workers' government

PEACE, TWO STATES, EQUAL RIGHTS!



By Ira Berkovic

The Gaza ceasefire is dangerously fragile. The hostage-prisoner exchange on 15 February went ahead, but the ceasefire remains in danger from day to day.

Hamas had said it would not release those hostages, citing Israel's alleged failure to allow sufficient amounts of necessary aid into Gaza. The Israeli government, backed by Trump, said that then it would resume intense fighting in Gaza. Confusing and contradictory statements from both Israeli government officials and the Trump administration also seemed to imply that they were now insisting that all remaining hostages, not only the three due to be released at this stage of the agreement, must be freed. However, a report in

the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* on Thursday 13 February suggests that Egyptian and Qatari mediators had rescued the deal for now.

A resumption of Israeli military action in Gaza, whether aerial bombardment or incursions by ground troops, or both, would be devastating for the civilian population, and would likely also imperil surviving hostages. Many Gazans, displaced multiple times throughout the war, now live in tents or other temporary structures. Basic infrastructure, including sanitation, is non-functioning in many places. Much healthcare infrastructure has been destroyed. Renewed bombing would lead to massacres.

Hamas's role is also reactionary. Unlike some other currents on the left, Workers' Liberty does not see Hamas as a pro-

gressive force. We support the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and equality; this does not obligate support for particular parties within Palestinian political life. Kidnapping civilian hostages, including babies and frail, elderly people, is indefensible. The condition of many of the hostages released recently makes clear they have been subject to abuse whilst in captivity. All hostages deserve freedom; the best mechanism for achieving that is for the ceasefire agreement to proceed as planned, and to be made permanent.

Meanwhile, Donald Trump has continued to promote his plan for displacing the entire population of Gaza, and the Israeli government has stepped up violence in the West Bank. More: page 3. □