

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

Rally labour movement against Starmer



STOP THE CUTS

*"Crips Against Cuts"
protest in Bristol,
Saturday 22 March*

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Tax top wealth, stop the cuts!



Two in five of the households who receive disability benefits currently struggle to buy enough food, heat their home or pay their bills. The *Pathways to Work* Green Paper published on 18 March will exacerbate this problem.

It promises cuts, mostly through stopping access to PIP for between 800,000 and 1.2mn people. We can and must defeat these cuts completely.

There's a budget gap? The immediate answer is to tax the rich. A 2% tax on assets over £10mn – a barely-noticeable dent in the wallets of the rich – would make the government almost five times more than the proposed benefit cuts.

The language of the Green Paper is nauseating: Liz Kendall says in the foreword that young people leaving school have been "consigned to a life on health and disability benefits." The framing of the paper is to get people back to work, off benefits and no longer "financially dependent on the state".

PIP is not an out-of-work benefit, but a compensation for extra costs associated with disability. A lot of disabled people apply for PIP because Universal Credit is so low.

70% of those who receive PIP are in the poorest half of the population. The *Financial Times* [calculates](#) that the proposed changes would leave tens of thousands losing over 60% of their income. Make no mistake: these cuts are a decision to further impoverish poor people.

The government say they are increasing UC payments. But [only](#) by an extra £3/week per household, on average!

Even on their own terms, the cuts will fail. The Disability Policy Centre [suggests](#) that the outlined policies may "save" just 2% of the £5bn Rachel Reeves is hoping for.

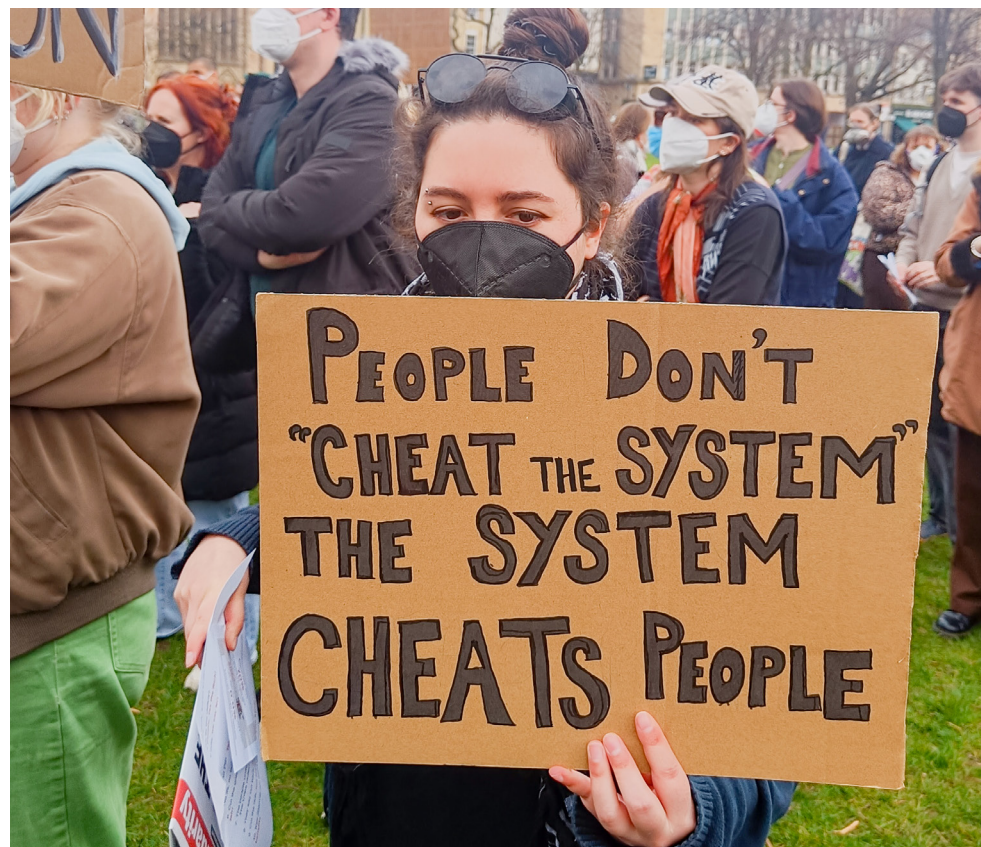
Yet, on official figures, 32% of all UK households include at least one disabled person. The average UK household has not recovered financially from the pandemic. Rising prices (notably, mortgages and rent) have outstripped wages. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation calculates that even on official forecasts of growth, by 2030 average disposable income will be lower still.

The Labour government's cuts will make people poorer, and poor people poorer still. Rising inequality is predicted to continue. For the poorest 20% of the country, the coming five years of government cuts will hit even harder.

Most of the changes will take a while: the parliamentary debate on the eventual White Paper is not scheduled until November. The PIP access curbs are scheduled for November 2026. A vote could happen in May on some elements of the plan.

Alarm

We have time to raise the alarm and fight these cuts. Immediate protests called by Disabled People Against Cuts (DPAC) and Crips Against Cuts (CAC) around 22-23 March drew hundreds at short notice. Not-very-left local Labour Parties have voted unanimously against the cuts. Strong local campaign committees, based on labour-movement



and disabled groups, which meet and do activity in-person and regularly – and even better, a national campaign coordination, intervening at union conferences, actively drawing in big unions – could build a crescendo of protest.

Existing campaigns against other cuts can help. In Lambeth, a campaign run by the local Unison branch is fighting proposed cuts of £99 mn over coming years to libraries, child care, social services, etc. Nottingham Save Our Services is fighting to keep funding for community centres and libraries.

Former New Labour minister David Blunkett has called for the government to loosen the "fiscal rules", and others, for scrapping them. That may look like an easy way out: help the poor without troubling the rich! But just removing fiscal rules would force the government to offer higher interest rates on its IOUs (bonds), and end up costing more than it saved.

Taxes on top wealth – in fact, small taxes on top wealth – could easily pay for keeping and even improving benefits. But just nibbling at the edges of the £600 billion or so which flow to profits each year, or the billions more which flow to ultra-high "wages", will not mend poverty, inequality, exploitation, or ensure basic services for all.

Solidarity fights for a broader range of more fundamental policies, including public ownership of high finance and utilities and democratic control of big investment and economic decisions.

It is our duty to take the fight into the labour movement, and make life hell for the Labour leaders. □

A movement not a moment

Excerpt from a [speech](#) a Crips Against Cuts (CAC) demonstration in Bristol on the 22 March.

We know that PIP is already not enough, that it generally fails to meet the unfair additional costs that it is supposed to cover, and that many who need it are already refused. Nonetheless, PIP is a lifeline to people in an already marginalised, disadvantaged group.

But these cuts are not a problem happening in isolation.

NHS funding is still falling far behind what is needed. Huge sections of the NHS have been privatised, and

are being left in private hands by the Labour government. The NHS must be brought back into fully public ownership and adequately funded. We stand with health workers fighting for this.

Local councils are facing cuts in funding from the central government. Councils have been implementing, rather than resisting these cuts – including devastating cuts to social care [...]

There is plenty of wealth available to adequately fund this all, and more. We must tax the rich and super-rich.

Attacking migrants, trans people and disabled people

Cuts and austerity-lite. Cutting foreign aid. These things will not stop the rise of the Reform party, or Tommy Robinson, or the Tories. They only suggest, wrongly, that their "concerns" are real problems, feeding the growth of their hatred.

Starmer is attempting to undercut the growth of Reform by offering a toned-down version of their politics. This is wrong and will not work. And it comes as the far right is on the rise all over the world [...]

Crips and allies can and will continue to come out in force to defend our right to live well, to contribute to society in the ways each of us

uniquely can. But we must all band together to come out in force, over and over again, to fight for the right for all people to thrive.

When we come together as a collective, the ruling class is forced to listen. The ruling class is forced to worry. It is in their interest to divide us – to keep us squabbling with each other, so we don't have the knowledge, time or energy to demand better. We can refuse to be divided. We can demand change.

This is a movement, not a moment. We encourage as many of you as possible to join, to contribute, and to have your voice heard! □

• Insta [@crips_against_cuts](#)



Corrections

To clarify on [Statutory Sick Pay](#): the new changes will bring increased SSP only to those who currently receive none because below the limit of £125 a week (from April), and to them it will bring only 80%, i.e. a maximum of £100 a week. □

Dumbing down America for dictatorship

By Tom Harrison

"I love the poorly educated", Trump remarked in 2016 when he won the Republican nomination in Nevada. Nine years on they'll be a lot more of them now he's effectively abolished the Federal Department of Education. Around half its staff have been sacked so far, and transferring functions to other government departments will get rid of the rest.

A major reason the Education Department has been a target for MAGA is its work enforcing and upholding civil rights. The Trump regime is white supremacist, obsessed with eliminating Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) programmes,

Nowhere has the attack on DEI been more obvious than in the purging of information on the Defence Department website. Anyone or anything with the name Gay has disappeared, including Enola Gay, the plane that dropped the A bomb. Also removed were items on Jackie Robinson and the Tuskegee airmen, Afro-Americans who fought in WW2. Native Americans didn't escape either. Ira Hayes, one of the iconic flag raisers at Iwo Jima, got cancelled, as did the Navajo Windtalkers, who were vital in protecting military communications.

The idea that America will see a return to the days of racial segregation doesn't seem that far fetched now Trump has removed the ban on segregated facilities from Federal contracts. It might have even revived nostalgic memories of apartheid South Africa, the place where his chief financial backer Elon Musk was brought up as a racist. Some brologarchs like Peter Thiel don't think it was a good idea to give women the vote, either.



Things previously thought unimaginable or impossible can't be ruled out in Trump's America. His race to establish an authoritarian regime has gone into sprint mode. In his years out of office he fought the law and he won. He's now attacking the rule of law head-on.

Racism was a key factor in Trump's return to the White House and he is using it to assume authoritarian powers. When a teacher in Idaho is told to [take down](#) her "Everyone is welcome here" poster (deemed pro-DEI) you can tell there's an atmosphere of toxic xenophobia.

The past few weeks have been anything but welcoming for visitors to the US. Ordinary tourists have been held in chains and violently interrogated. A French scientist has been refused entry because he had criticisms of Trump on his phone. So were members of the punk band UK Subs. Disrespect for the ruler now bars your entry into the land of the free!

More shocking was the deportation of around 300 mainly Venezuelan men from the US to a notorious mega-prison

in El Salvador. The administration invoked the 1798 Alien Enemies Act, claiming that those deported were all members of the Tren de Aragua drug cartel. Subsequently, it appears that the vast majority of those deported had no criminal record in the US and this was just a random roundup of Venezuelans to make the White House look tough on immigration and test the waters as to what it could get away with legally.

Federal Judge James Boasberg issued a 14 day restraining order on the grounds that America is not at war with Venezuela and those deported were denied due process. The deportations went ahead anyway. Trump's border Tsar Tom Homan said "I don't care what the judges think", and Trump was quick to denounce Boasberg as a "radical left lunatic". (Boasberg was originally appointed to the bench by G W Bush!)

Since his inauguration Trump has been ruling by decree via a deluge of executive orders. He's sent no bills to Congress, and effectively bypassed it. Nobody in his party there looks likely to challenge him. Musk has taken many

powers from Congress through his command of DOGE.

Checks on presidential overreach are thus left to the judiciary. Musk has been at the forefront of attacks on judges who've reversed some of the cuts he's made to the Federal workforce and questioned DOGE actions as unconstitutional. He has donated funds to Republican Congressmen who've called for judges to be impeached and offered \$100 each to Wisconsin voters if they sign a petition against "activist judges".

What happens now if his administration simply ignores all judicial rulings made against it? Little faith can be placed in the Supreme Court to do much given they've granted him more or less complete immunity from criminal prosecution.

Attacks on the legal system are not limited to delegitimising judges. Law firms are now in the crosshairs. The administration currently faces over 130 lawsuits, and law firms are being subject to threats such as restricting their access to federal contracts and taking away security passes for government buildings, which could effectively put them out of business.

One major firm, Paul Weiss, has already caved in. Trump managed to extort \$40 million from them in free legal work for charitable causes Trump allegedly champions.

All this is just the start before Kash Patel sets the FBI onto Trump adversaries as he goes through the "enemies list".

Attacks on free speech and protest have been carefully calculated to begin with measures against foreigners and universities. Mahmoud Khalil, arrested for his part in pro-Palestinian protests, is a green card holder. If he gets deported then anyone with a green card and views the government doesn't like will be fair game. To paraphrase Martin Niemöller – first they came for the foreigners...

How long will it take to turn the USA into a full-fledged dictatorship? Mussolini did it in four years; Hitler, in a matter of months. Erdoğan is not there yet after 22 years. The use of the Insurrection Act to quell anti-government protests looks like only a matter of time, but the best bet is that it will come before the mid terms in November next year when Congress, or the House at least, may see the Democrats in the majority.

The courts can't be relied upon to stop the onward march of authoritarian rule. Neither can the pathetic efforts of the Democrat leadership. Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez have been holding rallies against the rule of the oligarchs, with 34,000 at one of them, in Denver. That could provide the impetus to build a movement capable of fighting back against the criminal Trump regime. □

The Maga takeover in microcosm

By Martin Thomas

On 17 March, Elon Musk's DOGE took over the Institute for Peace, an agency set up by Congress under Reagan's presidency in 1984 to provide research and training for diplomacy. It was a microcosm of how Trump and Musk are moving to establish rule by presidential diktat.

The Trumpists sacked the governing board of the Institute on 14 March. Institute president George Moose tried for safeguards by discharging the Institute's security contractor and locking down the Institute building early on 17

March.

The security contractor, threatened by DOGE with losing government business, sent a manager who still had a master key, and got in. The Institute security chief called the cops.

But then the police brought DOGE officials into the building. The DOGEists had (the cops said) shown them authorisations. The DOGEists bundled Moose and Institute chief of staff Anna Dean out of the building without even their car keys.

On Wednesday 19th a judge refused to block the takeover. Litigation continues.

So far the Trump team

has skirted round direct defiance of judges. Often the Trump gang has made some formal compliance with a judge's ruling, but too late to mend damage already done.

To enforce their rulings, federal judges rely on the US Marshals Service, and the Marshals are controlled by the Department of Justice, headed by Trump loyalist Pam Bondi.

Some time, probably soon, this will come to a crunch. The Trump gang will be forced back, or – either by formal Supreme Court decision, or by accumulation of accomplished facts – establish its autocracy.

They are building up re-

sources and legal faits accomplis before moving to their mass deportations. Those will be soon, too.

Once the Trump gang beds in autocracy, the prospects for the US trade-union movement, for all dissident "civil society" groups, and for the world, are bleak for a sizeable time.

Wait for people to "see through" Trump and censure him at the 2026 mid-term elections? The drive for autocracy is too fast for that.

US campaigners have called protests on 5 April. The [Stop Trump Coalition](#) is campaigning in Britain. Resistance is urgent! □

Defending Duterte... and Chinese “democracy”



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

The former Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte is a ruthless, unrepentant mass murderer. In 2016, a few months into his presidency, he readily acknowledged that his policy of summary executions of suspected drug dealers would involve the deaths of innocents and children – this was “collateral damage” he told reporters. As many as 30,000 civilians are estimated to have been killed under his rule – mainly men in poor urban areas who were gunned down in the streets.

Earlier this month Duterte was arrested on an International Criminal Court (ICC) warrant accusing him of crimes against humanity. Until recently a deal between him and the current president Ferdinand Marcos Jr appeared to have ensured his immunity from prosecution, but the deal fell through and now thousands of Filipino families are looking forward to at least the possibility of some justice.

So it may come as a surprise to find the *Morning Star* criticising the arrest and quoting the arguments of his legal team with evident approval (Duterte has suddenly developed a concern for due legal process): “He was denied access to legal counsel while on

Philippine territory, including from his own daughter Sara Duterte, the country’s vice-president, and the right to challenge his extradition in a sovereign Philippine court. So much for the rule of law, the Duterte camp argues” wrote one Kenny Coyle in a lengthy MS article (18 Mar) headed “Duterte’s arrest: justice for the Filipino people won’t be found in the Hague”.

This degree of sympathy for a murderous authoritarian can, however, be explained. The giveaway is this (again from Coyle’s article): “While Duterte quite astutely recognised the benefits of closer China-Philippines relations and the need to avoid being enlisted in the US-led cold war against China, [his successor] Marcos has swivelled on this 180 degrees.”

Once again, the MS’s take on an international issue is determined by its uncritical support for the Chinese ruling class and Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Mr Coyle is a Hong Kong resident and author of many MS pieces denouncing pro-democracy campaigner and applauding the CCP takeover of the province. □

Explaining Chinese “democracy”

In another recent MS piece, one Jenny Clegg (a leading light of “Friends of Socialist China”) attempts to convince



us that the Chinese National People’s Congress (NPC) is far from being a “rubber stamp parliament”. Ms Clegg writes that this phrase is used to “numb [people’s] minds to any thought other than that China must be a dictatorship”). But the NPC

embodies “other forms of democracy – the idea of democratic centralism, deliberative democracy [that have] been around for over 100 years.”

“True,” Ms Clegg admits, “the NPC only meets for two weeks a year and never seems to reject any piece of legislation put before it. “However,” she explains, “the reason why laws are passed unanimously is that they undergo a prior long and arduous process of deliberation, consultation and revision to ensure disagreements and differences are addressed and eventually consensus is reached.”

And it gets still better: “The party and higher state levels oversee elections, approving candidates both to ensure inclusivity across diversified social groups and to vouch for candidate competence.”

To anyone who thinks this doesn’t sound very democratic at all, Ms Clegg has a reply: “However, the system relies not simply on elections – it also involves consultations, decision-making and oversight.”

The term “Orwellian” is much overused, but it’s the best I can come up

with in response to such self-evident nonsense.

Does Ms Clegg seriously think this sort of guff will prove attractive to workers in the UK who are used to multi-party free elections? Socialist democracy is supposed to be an advance on what we have already, not something far, far worse.

And does the *Morning Star* think it’s going to win over any British worker by publishing this insult to the intelligence? □

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Israel has had enough of Netanyahu



Eric Lee

Public opinion polls in Israel consistently show that Benjamin Netanyahu’s far-right government cannot win the next election.

The parties of the centre and left are consistently polling higher than those of the right. And it’s not only the centrist parties led by Yair Lapid and Benny Gantz that are doing well. Even the new Democrats, led by the charismatic Yair Golan, have emerged as a significant force. That party was formed by the remnants of the Labour Party and Meretz, social democratic parties which stood on the cusp of disappearance from the political scene just a couple of years ago. According to recent polls, the Democrats seem to have the support of one in five

opposition voters – perhaps more. This is significant.

Netanyahu knows this. If elections were to be held tomorrow, he’d be thrown out of office. His criminal trial on a wide range of corruption charges would resume, and he’d likely wind up spending time in jail, like his predecessor, the former prime minister Ehud Olmert.

Far-right

That’s why it was so important for him to woo back the far Right party led by Itamar Ben-Gvir, which had left the government once Netanyahu committed to a ceasefire in Gaza.

Ben-Gvir’s return to government means that the cease-fire is over – and also that the Israeli hostages held by Hamas have now been abandoned to their fate by their own government. But none of that matters to Netanyahu, who seems to be laser-focused on staying in power at all costs.

We don’t only see the hostility toward Netanyahu expressed in public opinion polls. Mass demonstrations in Jerusalem and elsewhere have been an everyday occurrence. They are increasingly met by police violence.

This, too, is significant. For decades, Jewish protestors would show up to demonstrations, waving the national flag and singing the national anthem at the end. The police would stand idly by. No more – the police are now being used by the government to quash dissent.

Shocking

Shocking video clips show leading figures of the opposition, including the Democrats’ Yair Golan, being pushed and threatened by police. These have triggered condemnation by a broad range of leaders, including Lapid and Gantz.

Things have gotten so out of control that even the Histadrut, the country’s venerable

labour federation, which normally stays aloof from party politics, has been forced to act. The Histadrut’s leader, Arnon Bar-David, has warned that the labour federation won’t allow the government to ignore High Court rulings, such as the one suspending the cabinet’s decision to fire the head of the Shin Bet (Security Service) Ronen Bar.

While Bar-David has not committed to a general strike, journalists believe that’s what’s behind his statement. “The State of Israel is a country of law, and the government is not above the law,” Bar-David said.

The latest polls show that the vast majority of Israelis support the Supreme Court and the Shin Bet but show far less confidence in their government.

The stage is now set for a confrontation between civil society and the government. As Netanyahu’s base of support shrinks, he turns to increasingly undemocratic and

violent tactics to silence his opponents. Those tactics are not working. The opposition is growing stronger.

For many years, Israeli leaders would boast that the country was the only democracy in the Middle East. Arab regimes were all autocratic and corrupt. Today, there is less to boast about.

Tactics

Israelis are increasingly turning to tactics like ongoing, mass street protests that are reminiscent of the “Arab Spring” at its height. Maybe an “Israeli Spring” could bring down the most right-wing, corrupt and unpopular government the country has ever known.

With fresh elections nowhere in sight, this may be the country’s only hope. □

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

Women's TUC backs decriminalisation



Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

Women's TUC on 5-7 March passed a motion securing strong backing for the campaign to fully decriminalise abortion. This victory reaffirms that reproductive rights are trade-union rights and that access to abortion must be protected from political interference, stigma, and restrictive laws.

Moving the proposal, Vicky Blake, a University and College Union (UCU) activist and an Executive Committee member of the Abortion Rights campaign, linked the fight for abortion rights to the urgent task of confronting the far right.

"The global backlash demands a global response – but the same far-right playbook is in use in the UK: an-

ti-choice groups are growing louder, richer, and more organised. We see their influence in attempts to weaken and delay buffer zones around clinics. Their rhetoric seeps into politics, providing cover to reactionary MPs keen to roll back our rights.

"The same disturbing pattern is evident across Europe, with abortion rights under attack in Poland and Hungary, and access reduced through oppressive laws and deliberate restrictions on services.

"Far-right forces target women, pregnant people, trans people, migrants, and workers – seeking to control who has the freedom to exist safely, to move freely, to organise collectively, and to make decisions about their own bodies."

The motion calls for trade unions to take an active role in campaigning for decriminalisation, challenging misinformation, and ensuring that reproductive healthcare remains a protected right.

This includes:

- Recognising abortion as a public health necessity, supported by major medical bodies.

- Pushing for full decriminalisation to remove abortion from criminal law in the UK.

- Educating trade union members about the intersection between far-right politics and attacks on bodily autonomy.

- Strengthening alliances with pro-choice and anti-fascist organisations.

Most British unions are affiliated to Abortion Rights but the labour movement has not mobilised for such events as the counter protests to the annual "March for Life". Workers' Liberty members are supporting a push at the Abortion Rights AGM to produce motions for the Labour Party and trade unions and get better mobilisation this year.

Blake highlighted the dangers of inaction: "In our own movement, we have to be honest about the danger of

complacency. Where trade unions organise, we create hope, solidarity, and power. In 1979, when the Corrie Bill threatened abortion rights, trade unions mobilised 80,000 people onto the streets. We made a decisive difference. We need to do it again."

Workers' Liberty is joining protests around "40 Days for Life" anti-choice activity throughout Lent. □



Women's Fightback. 28 pages, £3.00 □ bit.ly/shop-wl

Free Mahrang Baloch! Free Balochistan!

By Sacha Ismail

On 22 March Pakistani police arrested Mahrang Baloch, the 31 year old leader of the Baloch Yakjehti Committee (Baloch Solidarity Committee), shortly after she led a protest against "disappearances" of Baloch youth by the Pakistani state. (To avoid confusion: it is common for Baloch people to have or adopt the surname Baloch.)

Three people were killed during the arrest of Baloch and fellow activists. The arrested are now being charged with terrorism, sedition and murder.

Moreover, the extreme repression in Pakistani-controlled Balochistan means that even a high profile person like Mahrang Baloch (nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize) is in imminent danger.

We must vocally demand freedom for Baloch and other arrested and disappeared people in Balochistan, and demand its people's right to live free from violence and have self-determination.

In response to the arrest, major protests have broken out across Balochistan. In the capital Quetta hundreds of peaceful protesters have

been arrested, tear gas used extensively, and live rounds fired by the security services, while injured protesters are prevented from reaching hospital. Meanwhile there are reports of plainclothes security personnel setting fire to city buildings.

Pakistan has occupied most of Balochistan, which was an independent state before the British takeover and briefly again in 1947, since March 1948. Repression there has been general and violent ever since, but has deepened considerably since about 2009. (Part of Balochistan is occu-

pied and also violently repressed by Iran.)

The Baloch Yakjehti Committee was founded in 2018 with a focus on opposing Pakistani human rights abuses in Balochistan. In the last few years it has led huge waves of protest against the huge number of disappearances and murders carried out there by the Pakistani state. Women have played a leading role. Baloch political culture, relatively progressive and secular, is sharply in conflict with the right-wing religious nationalism dominant in Pakistan.

Both the US and China play

central parts in Pakistan's oppression and plundering of Balochistan, the poorest part of Pakistan despite very extensive resources. The UK also provides extensive support to Pakistan's military, which has continued to really run the country under governments of various stripes.

Yet the UK labour movement pays very little attention to the situation in Balochistan. The Baloch struggle is every bit as worthy of support as those of Palestine and Ukraine. □

- Interview with London-based Baloch activist Aomar Karim: bit.ly/aomar-k

Draft constitution will not subdue fears in Syria

By Simon Nelson

Days after signing the agreement with Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), the HTS-led Syrian Transitional Government published the constitution for the next five years.

The new constitution enshrines Islamic jurisprudence as the primary source of law, a change from being "a primary source" under Assad; says the President must be a Muslim; and concentrates power in the hands of the executive, until a new permanent constitution is approved.

Sharaa is the supreme military leader, in charge of appointing ministers, can issue decrees, propose law and veto legislation. There are few references to rights for women and rights for minor-

ities; freedom of speech and religious beliefs are conditional on compliance with "public order". Syria will remain the Syrian Arab Republic, with Arabic as the only officially recognised language. The transitional parliament, the People's Council, will have one-third of its members appointed by Sharaa. While there is a formal separation of powers between the legislature and the judiciary, Sharaa will nominate all the judges.

The new National Security Council, a body which Sharaa again chooses, can declare a state of emergency. A process to look at the crimes of the Assad regime has been established. However, there is still no process by which abuses committed by HTS and the transitional government will be investigated. Following the recent massacres

in Latakia, fear among Alawites remains high. Thousands have now crossed the border into Lebanon, while others are seeking security at the Russian-controlled Hmeimim air base.

Socialist Worker has carried a short [interview](#) with their co-thinkers in the International Socialist Tendency, the [Revolutionary Left Current](#). As has been reported by the Australian left paper *Red Flag*, the fall of Assad opened up some space for the small, heterogeneous, and isolated Syrian left to organise.

The RLC was one of the signatories to a statement in January against sectarianism, violence and foreign intervention in Syria and calling for the setting up of independent trade unions and political parties. They have played some role in organising protests by

government workers against the transitional government's plans to sack them and other reforms. However, the interview has nothing to say about the question of the Kurds. It points to women's role in recent protests and the 2011 uprisings. □



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Beyond EVs to eco-aware transport



Environment

By Neil Roberts

As I wrote last week, electric vehicles (EVs) are less environmentally damaging than fossil-fuel transport. But there is more to it. The ecological footprint of building and maintaining road networks is [colossal](#).

Probably EVs degrade the roads at a greater rate than ICEs and the end of their exemption from Road Tax this year is [rational](#). Some estimate that public road-maintenance [subsidy](#) to drivers, in the UK, amounts to £2,500 per taxpayer annually.

EV charging is requiring a massive expansion of grid capacity, much of it to allow drivers to charge at home.

As of 2018-19, the RAC estimated the average British personal car was driving [4%](#) of the time, being degraded by the weather and taking up an enormous amount of (generally public)

space and paved infrastructure. Cars are not unique in this regard. A component yet to be explored of [socialising housework](#) is the resources that could be saved by ovens, washing machines, power tools etc. being held collectively.

Also, the way we tolerate [thousands](#) of road deaths a year even in countries like the UK with relatively safe roads as an inevitable social overhead is insane. EVs do nothing to challenge the assumption that a one-time demonstration of competence to drive qualifies a large proportion of the population to operate large dangerous machinery, with re-training generally only in the event of an accident or other transgression.

Workers' Liberty cannot be a ready-made "government in waiting", with a series of ready-made blueprints for a better economic system. But we can and must make the basic case in the labour movement for a fight for democratic and in particular workers' control over production decisions, big and small.

Even in the UK, with relatively com-

pact cities, planning since the mid 20th century has been dominated by the growth of suburbia and by priority for road access. 11,000 out of the 37,000km of railways in Britain were dismantled between 1950 and 1973, and the network has not recovered. Many journeys in Britain are now impractical by any other means than by driving.

Transport is affected by virtually all other social policy. Work commutes, for example, are a function of access to housing. In London, the best-connected central boroughs now see falling school roles as families are driven further out. The policies of successive governments have left many London kids with lengthy criss-crossing commutes.

Workers' Liberty members are involved in [Fare Free London](#), a campaign for free public transport. Covid-19 exposed the absurdity of funding transport through ticketing. The overwhelming social need to maintain isolation during the pandemic starved Transport for London of cash, which

passengers and staff are still being squeezed for. We are also advocates of rail unions campaigning aggressively for the expansion and electrification of the network.

A logical supplement would be a socialised minicab service, where vehicles were procured and maintained according to a rational plan, driven by professionals and allocated according to a priority of need.

We will still need some road vehicles and internal combustion engines for the foreseeable future. There is currently no viable technology other than use of fossil fuels to power rescue helicopters for instance. Hydrogen powered tracked vehicles, promoted for military use but essential for construction and mining, are in the very early stages of [development](#).

However, as new generations of technology and their accompanying behaviours and expectations develop, we advocate they are informed by our ecological constraints and by social need rather than profit. □

Street protests defy Turkey's clampdown

By Pete Boggs

Protests in Turkey are continuing after the detainment of Istanbul mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu, widely perceived as president Erdoğan's main rival. Detained on 19 March for a number of charges including support of a terrorist organisation and corruption, he was formally arrested on 23 March.

He was taken into custody alongside 105 other people on the same day, following months of growing repression against the opposition. As of Monday 24 March, 1,133 people have been detained during the protests so far. Some have been plucked off the street at demonstrations, and police have made dawn raids at the homes of journalists and members of leftist organisations: detainees [include](#) BirGün writer (and Left Party activist) Barış İnce, Sendika.org reporter Zişan Gür, and NOW TV reporter Ali Onur Tosun.

The protests are spreading out beyond Istanbul to multiple cities, particularly Ankara and Izmir, involving tens of thousands of people. Workers have been playing a central role: local government workers in Istanbul's Şişli neighbourhood stopped work and [protested](#) outside their work-

place, as did their colleagues in [Izmir](#). There have been large confrontations with the police on university campuses, and on Monday thousands of [students](#) across the country walked out of their classes in protest.

The state has responded violently, deploying tear gas and plastic bullets against the crowds. The Turkish police attacks against large protests like these have historically had a high casualty toll: 15-year old Berkin Elvan was hit in the head by a tear gas canister during the 2013 Gezi park protests, later dying of his injuries.

Leadership

So far, the political leadership of these protests has been taken up by the CHP (Republican People's Party), the secular nationalist opposition to Erdoğan. It is often described as a left-wing or social democratic party, but the truth is more complicated: it was constituted as a political party in 1923 when the Republic of Turkey was established, and was the only legal party in the country from 1925 to 1945. Since the transition to multi-party democracy in the years following the Second World War, it has been on the left of the political spectrum in vague

terms, but still thoroughly a party of aggressive Turkish nationalism and of the bosses.

At the centre of the AKP's attacks on the CHP has been the accusation of support for terrorism. In the 2023 general elections the CHP candidate narrowly lost, after gaining the backing of numerous opposition parties including the People's Equality and Democracy Party (DEM), the successor to the now-banned HDP. This policy of support for the CHP was semi-continued into the 2024 local elections by the DEM Party, dubbed the "Urban Consensus" policy. This cooperation is the basis of the government's accusations: in February Erdoğan [accused](#) the CHP of "seeking a compromise with Qandil [the mountain headquarters of the PKK on the Iraq-Iran border]".

These months of repression follow the fall of the Assad government in Turkey, an event very much perceived as a Turkish victory by those close to the Erdoğan government. The AKP has presented itself as the man behind the curtain and now the main international ally of the HTS government, with the corrupt Turkish construction industry salivating at the prospect of further



Pic: @mlsaturday

expansion into Syria.

In Syria, the Turkish-backed SNA (Syrian National Army – an especially vicious formation which essentially functions as a Turkish proxy) stepped up its attacks against the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), supported by Turkish bombing campaigns.

Peace

Despite these attacks, Kurdish forces have been part of moves towards peace. On 27 February, the long-jailed PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan called for the PKK to lay down its arms as part of discussions with the AKP-MHP government; on 10 March, the SDF signed a deal with Syrian president Ahmed al-Sharaa to integrate into the Syrian state.

Socialists demand that the Turkish and Syrian states depart from their historic treat-

ment of the Kurds, recognise the Kurds' national right to determine their own future, and put an end to the ongoing violence against them by the Turkish state and its proxies. □

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Fear and loathing in the Trump regime



Book review

By Cathy Nugent

Katherine Stewart, in her book *Money, Lies and Gods: Inside the Movement to Destroy American Democracy*, argues that although the influence on the Republican Party of a network of billionaires (now commonly referred to as “the oligarchy”) is key to understanding Trump’s regime, this picture is incomplete.

The same billionaires are also the funders of a renewed Christian nationalism. The ideology of that movement is a convenient fit for the billionaires’ preferred authoritarian order. Christian nationalism is not a freaky side-show but is at the heart of the US’s plutocracy.

Republican support has long come from white evangelical Protestants. It now also comes from a majority of Catholics (55%). However, with the overall decline of church-going and the rise of more extreme evangelicalism, and denominations like the Pentecostals, the link between more “out there” religion and authoritarian far right politics has grown.

itics has grown.

Stewart shows how an enormously well-funded Christian nationalist network of think tanks, churches and theological institutions was key to winning a second term for Trump. The network has found it expedient to hitch their wagon to the not-very-spiritual Donald Trump.

Christian nationalism believes catastrophic change now afflicts the political order. There are no good political establishment values. and moreover that political establishment wants to crush religious freedom (that is freedom for my religion).

Therefore the government has to force through a more godly rule, embodied in a particular vision of the nation which, the Christian nationalists say, will return America to the spirit of the Founding Fathers, who apparently never intended to separate church and state. Stewart summarises this mythical thinking as “reactionary nihilism”; it draws on US political traditions of paranoia and conspiracism.

Christian nationalism’s sprawling network is both non- and multi-denominational, organised around various nodes which have distinctive political-religious missions.

Groups like Moms for Liberty who chase after immoral elements for the school curriculum such as “critical race theory” – a topic which in fact is on no school curriculum – to get them banned.

Although the movement relies on volunteers, the congregations of many thousands of conservative churches, it is not, Stewart argues, a grassroots movement. The role of lay religious organisers and preachers is only to spread the message and convince the followers to accept identity-based authoritarian rule and, of course, to raise up politicians of the virtuous elite to power.

Spectrum

The big political-religious lobby groups include the Federalist Society, The Heritage Foundation (the group behind Project 2025) and the Claremont Institute, at the furthest right of the spectrum. The Claremont Institute has been heavily responsible for the idea that “wokeness” is at the centre of an “administrative state” which must be smashed.

None of this appeared overnight. A massive concentration of wealth has been building up over five decades.

Key individuals, their charitable funds and the lobby groups are rooted in the Christian right of the late 1970s and Reagan-era politics. But everything is worse now and because this movement is adjacent or even synonymous with other streams of far right politics its institutions often have the support of the others on US right, such as libertarians.

Stewart helps us understand many other connections. For example, she shows us a connection between US Christian nationalism and the Russian far right through the World Congress of Families (WCF), an organisation that had at its inception the participation of the new Russian ruling class which followed the collapse of Stalinism.

Both Russians and Americans in the WCF and allied organisations saw the usefulness of framing “fear and loathing of gay people and hostility to women’s equality as part of a nationalist, ‘pro-family’ vision that could be used to secure authoritarian forms of governance and protect the privilege and property of an elite”.

Stewart’s important research should arm the left in its fight against the far right in the US and around the world. □

Like People’s Assembly, but not quite



Eye on the Left

By Matt Cooper

Saturday 29 March sees a day-long “[Summit of Resistance](#)” in London, purposed to “construct... a network of activists across campaigns and unions to turn the tide on despair” and “deliver solidarity.” This network is of existing campaigns, expressly those “to free Palestine, end the drive to a war economy, stop the far right and prevent the further deterioration of our planet.”

The Summit wants “to bring together all those who believe that an alternative to austerity, wars, climate denial and racism is possible.” The statement is silent on what that alternative is: the idea of a system not based on profit is entirely absent, as is the word “class”.

The Summit’s sponsors include the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Stop the War (StW), CND Trade Union advisory group (but not CND itself), Just Stop Oil, Stand up to Racism (SutR), and Jeremy

Corbyn’s Peace and Justice Project. The agenda suggests an anti-Ukraine stance, but that is not in the statement.

One union is backing the conference, the small and left-wing Bakers’ Union, and the NEU’s general secretary Daniel Kebede is due to speak. Other union speakers are mainly union executive members who are also in the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), and the driving force behind the Summit is the SWP.

Counterfire is supporting it, but has not promoted it strongly. It appears to be a narrower and “campist” version of the Counterfire initiatives of the 2010s, the Coalition of Resistance and the People’s Assembly, lacking their trade union base or their inclusion of the Labour left.

Since their 2010 split from the SWP, Counterfire has worked closely with the *Morning Star* and CPB, particularly in the leadership of StW. Although both StW and the (now withered) People’s Assembly are backing this event, the CPB pointedly is not. It is supporting another event in London the same day, the more

Labour-left-oriented [Arise: Socialism or Barbarism](#) day-school. Some have suggested that the SWP-Counterfire rapprochement might be courtship for reunification, but we will see.

The SWP’s Post-Conference Bulletin from December 2024 conference explained that the Summit serves the SWP’s aim to be “hegemonic” on the UK radical left. The SWP sees that as to be won with the “shield” of SutR and the “sword” of “combative working-class response”.

Pursuit

As the Marxist Antonio Gramsci used the term, a fight for “hegemony” calls for a consistent pursuit of active united fronts of working-class organisations. The SWP’s version looks more like ceremonial alliances including “faith” and other non-class bodies. Gramsci: winning over people to revolutionary ideas with democratic debate. Summit: it promises “debate and discussion”, but there is no structure for such debate, no visible and accountable organisation, no call for position papers, no suggestion of

ongoing structure. Even the People’s Assemblies of the early 2010s had some attempt at those structures.

The Post-Conference Bulletin also suggests the SWP are looking to the Summit for a move towards “a broad, pluralist umbrella formation of left independent candidates running [in elections] under the same banner”. It seems probable that the SWP is not clear itself about what this is, and also probable they have nothing set up for 1 May 2025.

The SWP was involved (with

the AWL among others) in a left electoral bloc in 2000-3 – the Socialist Alliance, which was socialist, not “independent” – but abandoned that in 2004 for a lash-up with George Galloway (Respect, in which the now-Counterfire people played the leading part). It looks like they want a Galloway-free retread of Respect.

It is unlikely that anything such will emerge from this conference: Jeremy Corbyn is speaking, and he has largely opposed such a bloc. But it will be a subtext. □

Scrap 50% rule now

By Gerry Bates

An open letter signed by ten union leaders, including Unison’s president and vice-president and the FBU’s new general secretary, calls for “all unions” to discuss action to win repeal now of the 50% turnout threshold for strike ballots.

“Soon after the general election, Labour confirmed its promise to ditch the 2016 act that imposes thresholds within 100 days of taking office. Now we learn that according to the TUC, ‘The government will delay the repeal of the Tory measure that requires a 50 percent turnout for a strike ballot to be valid until after it has introduced electronic balloting.’”

Solidarity recommends all trade unionists to sign the letter: bit.ly/50-pc-t □

The cruelty of shrivelled souls

By Mara

The government has published a Green Paper on benefits which if implemented would cause severe harm to disabled people and their families. The proposals are a range of benefit cuts, with the solution to poverty presented as getting people into work. This follows months of briefings to the press which have whipped up a poisonous atmosphere of resentment, portraying disabled people as workshy, not really all that disabled, and taking up resources.

The Green Paper proposes making Personal Independence Payments, PIP, harder to qualify for. Currently to qualify for monthly PIP payments people need to get a minimum of 8 points in the category of Daily Living or of Mobility. The new rules would mean for Daily Living you must also get four points in one single category, which would exclude many disabled people who get eight points across several categories, including needing assistance to cook, dress and go to the toilet.

Getting PIP can mean you can claim other things such as reduced cost travel and Carer's Allowance, so people losing PIP may also lose other benefits.

PIP is not means-tested, which is particularly important for people living with partners and family as it means the disabled person is not totally reliant on a partner's income, and protects people in low income families as otherwise money could be deducted due to other benefits or wages.

The other major change is to what is called the health element of Universal Credit. Currently people have a Work Capability Assessment (WCA) and can be assessed as having limited capability for work and receive extra money (the health element, or on ESA the support element). The government intend to reduce the amount of the health element for new claimants and, from 2028, abolish the WCA. Then, people will only be able to get the health element if they qualify for PIP.

These changes make PIP necessary for accessing more benefits at the same time as making PIP harder to qualify for, meaning large numbers of disabled people will not be eligible for any disability benefits at all.

The proposals also remove the health element from young people under 22 unless they have "lifelong conditions".

The government is presenting these brutal cuts using rhetoric about the

"unsustainable" rise in disability claims and about people being written off. The rise in claims has a number of causes including raising the pension age, the effects of the pandemic, and effects of increasing poverty which have combined to damage people's health. There isn't an "acceptable" quantity of disabled people that the government can decide by changing benefit rules.

The line about people being "written off" is trying to portray people as being prevented from working by their benefits, rather than the disability itself, inaccessibility and the intransigence of employers. People on "Limited Capability for Work" (LCWRA) can work. There is a limitation on hours and earnings but they are not banned from working. PIP is not means tested so people on PIP can work full time. The government respond to criticism by talking about how people say they want to work if the support was available, but then the "support" they offer is just job centre work coaches, when people obviously mean support to work in a wider sense, accommodations at work and so on.

The government's whole position relies on there being large numbers of disabled people who don't really need that much help and actually could work

if they tried hard enough. The problem is this isn't actually true, and no amount of sanctions and job coaches can make it true. If there is any rational core to the government's plans, beyond their shrivelled souls and burning need to kick the undeserving poor, it may be an attempt to impose work discipline harder, to keep people in line with the threat of destitution.

There are demonstrations planned nationally, and online meetings for organising, [with DPAC](#) providing good information on events coming up. Disability is a class issue. Ill-health is connected to poverty and bad working conditions. Cuts to benefits harm all working-class people, and everybody needs to resist these attacks. The press speculation and the government announcements have already caused fear and distress. As well as attending protests comrades can check in on people and make sure they are not isolated and alone. Violent attacks on disabled people go up when there is hostile media coverage about benefits. Already protesters against the cuts in Exeter faced aggression and intimidation. The cuts are broadly unpopular and we can fight this, but disabled people should not be left to fight alone. □

Against cuts and against trashing Ukraine



By Martin Thomas

The slogan "welfare, not warfare" is being misappropriated to mean "abandon Ukraine".

But UK military aid to Ukraine is not responsible for social cuts. That aid has amounted to £7.8 billion so far, 0.3% of public spending, or 4.7% of military spending. It is due to be increased in 2025-6, but still only 0.4% of public spending. Even the Starmer government's proposed increase in general military spending, which we oppose, amounts to 0.6% of public spending by April 2027.

The cuts are down to the Labour government's refusal to tax the rich, except in the inept form of increasing National Insurance employers' contributions (which meant that £6 billion of the "tax rise" is in fact a transfer to the Treasury from areas like local government, the NHS, and education).

And the UK is not at war

against Russia. The war in Ukraine is about Russia's attempt to conquer as much as it can of the country. "Abandon Ukraine" is not an anti-war slogan. It means "let Putin conquer as much of Ukraine as he can digest, and thus encourage him to more war".

Welfare, not warfare, might have been a good slogan, for example, in 1951, when the then Labour government introduced charges on NHS dentures and spectacles directly in order to increase military spending for troops sent to the Korean war. (Prescription charges followed in 1952). Today is not comparable.

Oppose

While backing aid for Ukraine, we oppose increased military spending, despite arguments by [Eric Lee](#) and [Malcolm Hunter](#).

In the Spanish Civil War, Trotsky backed the Republic against the fascists. And an American comrade wrote: "If a Bolshevik-Leninist on the... front were asked by a Socialist comrade why his representative in the Cortes voted against the proposal by Negrin to de-

vote a million pesetas to the purchase of rifles for the front, what would this Bolshevik-Leninist reply? It doesn't seem to us that he would have an effective answer ..."

Trotsky replied: "To vote the military budget of the Negrin government signifies to vote him political confidence ... To do it would be a crime. How we explain our vote to the anarchist workers? Very simply: We have not the slightest confidence in the capacity of this government to conduct the war and assure victory. We accuse this government of protecting the rich and starving the poor. This government must be smashed.

"So long as we are not strong enough to replace it, we are fighting under its command. But on every occasion we express openly our non-confidence in it: it is the only possibility to mobilise the masses politically against this government and to prepare its overthrow. Any other politics would be a betrayal of the revolution".

The Republican government did fight the fascists: but it also suppressed the socialist revo-

lution which erupted in the Republican areas.

When Karl Liebknecht opposed military budgets in Germany in the run-up to World War One, he and other socialists recognised that Tsarist Russia was a danger, and France, too, for that matter, was keen to avenge its defeat in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870. They supported a democratically-controlled people's militia. But they opposed putting more military resources in the hands of their ruling class. "Not a man, not a penny, for this system" was their slogan. They took pride in the fact that in that Franco-Prussian war – when then-disunited Germany was attacked by Napoleon III's France, fresh from military exploits in Italy and Mexico and Indochina – the pioneer socialists August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht (Karl's father) had refused to vote for military credits (and were jailed for it).

Karl Liebknecht wrote: "Patriotism out of fear is a fateful danger for all prospects of the hoped-for blessing of future benefits. Once fear has proved its value as a factor which helps preserve the state, then

it becomes a question of preserving and increasing this opportunity for the future as well. But how? Through a strong and, if possible, ever stronger and stronger state power!"

We oppose increased military spending because we oppose putting a stronger military apparatus, controlled from above, in the hands of our ruling class.

Malcolm Hunter qualifies his support for increased military spending with a series of demands to democratise the military machine. However, an option to vote for "increased military spending, if only the military is reorganised according to our wishes" is not on the table.

The argument about increased military spending now is an argument about increased resources for the existing armed forces, the same ones that aided the USA in Iraq and Afghanistan, "held the ring" for Partition in Ireland between 1969 and 2007, and were deployed against strikes several times in 1945-9 by a Labour government certainly no worse than the current one. □

Lambeth ballots for anti-cuts strike

By Katy Dollar

Following a decision of Unison members in Lambeth council libraries, and approval by the Unison branch committee, the union has launched a trade dispute and will be balloting for strikes.

The demands are:

- Upgrade lowest graded posts (Sc2 and Sc3)
 - No compulsory redundancies
 - Safe and adequate staffing levels across all libraries and the Archives
 - No reduction in working conditions.
- The Unison branch hold an all members' meeting on 27 March to discuss

other local ballots or branch-wide action against £50 mn cuts planned this year by the Labour council.

A dozen people turned out at the weekend 22-23 March in Brixton for leafleting and stalls against the cuts. Stalls will run every weekend,

An anti-cuts conference in Brixton

will be Saturday 12 April in a revised meeting-place, St Matthew's Tenants' Hall. The Unison branch says: "We have been forced to postpone the conference and find a new venue. The council has not before blocked use of council facilities for union campaigns working with community groups". □

STOP THE CUTS
83%
STUDENTS
SUPPORT
STAFF STRIKES

Sheffield students vote to back UCU strikes

University of Sheffield students voted 2,217 to 44, in a referendum held 17-20 March by the Student Union, to support university staff taking industrial action. They also voted 2,230 to 277 for No Confidence in the University Executive Board.

Planned cuts could result in 400 jobs lost, and the Student Union block grant has been cut by £400,000.

The student Anti-Cuts Coalition had been escalating its campaign in the run-up to the referendum, with protests at the University open day on 8 March. The Sheffield UCU ballot for industrial action ends on 31 March.

Robyn Ortifelli, Sheffield UCU President, said: "The decisions made in recent years by the vice chancellor and university executive board have led to programme closures, cuts in staffing, and a decline in crucial support services for students". The Anti-Cuts Coalition will meet on 1 April (5pm, Hicks Lecture Theatre 04). □



The 24-25 March strike at Sheffield Hallam University is a response to the pay freeze made in September – management decided to pause a miserly nationally negotiated pay rise. This is amidst a context of crushing workloads and a now permanent state of generalised precarity. Where is the national union? Where is the general secretary Jo Grady? The sector is in a major crisis and we desperately need a nationally coordinated response. Instead, local branches are left to fight alone.

Camila Bassi (Sheffield Hallam UCU, p.c)



Three schools reprieved in IoW

By David Pendleton

On 20 March the cabinet of the Isle of Wight council voted to proceed with the closure of two primary schools, Cowes and Arreton St Georges. However, it also voted not to proceed with the closure of three other primaries, Oakfield, Brading and Wroxall.

Godshill had already been reprieved. From the six schools originally proposed for closure, only two are now due to close.

The school based unions have been central to fighting this. Both Unison and the NEU have indicative or consultative ballots running, though it will be much harder to win those now the three schools have been saved.

The unions had organised a rally of 300 people. However, probably the threat of legal action by the Diocese of Portsmouth was central. That arose because the process for choosing the schools was rushed and terribly flawed.

The school based unions still believe that the process for the remaining two schools should be stopped. We will be campaigning hard to defend our members' jobs and the services they provide. □

Drop charges against the Drax 15!

By Sam Myerson

On Thursday 20 March, fifteen of those arrested for planning to take part in the climate camp at Drax organised by Reclaim the Power had their initial day in court to face charges and to enter pleas. Others who had been arrested have had the charges against them dropped. The fifteen are

being charged for the dangerous crime of carrying some zip-ties (could be used for "locking on") and leaflets.

According to [Novara](#), the police operation to arrest 24 activists took over 1,000 police officers from almost every force in the country, and cost over £3 million. That was at the same time as the far-right racist riots last summer. Police had

said that they prevented the Drax protest camp because they did not have capacity to police it and the riots. That wasn't true: they had capacity to deploy 1,000 cops to make those arrests.

Powers which the police used had been brought in by the updated Public Order Act 2023, which was directed against tactics by JSO and In-

sulate Britain of locking on and disrupting traffic. Pre-emptive arrests were also made against JSO activists who had been planning disruption to the M25, and several got long sentences.

These powers against even planning for peaceful protest are unprecedented.

We call for the charges against the Drax fifteen to be

dropped. The government has just extended [subsidies](#) for the plant to run from 2027 to 2031. The subsidies are supposed to be for developing BECCS (Bioenergy with Carbon Capture and Storage), and the company has posted record profits, but Drax has said they will slow their investment in carbon-capture, still unproven at large scale. □

When “agitation” contr

By Sean Matgamna

Wrapping up a series of articles on the great political upheaval in Northern Ireland in 1968-9. This instalment is about Britain putting troops onto the streets on 14 August 1969.

On 12 August 1969 serious fighting broke out in Derry at the Orange Apprentice Boys’ march around the well-preserved walls of the old city. It was the start of civil war, and it spread to Belfast after two days. The British army took over Derry, and then the Belfast areas where the Catholic minority was being attacked by Orangeists.

The People’s Democracy (PD) leaders in Derry, Eamonn McCann and Bernadette Devlin, [called for](#) British soldiers (*Irish Press*, 13.8.69: see *Solidarity* 734).

McCann and Devlin had adopted the policy of the left of the Labour Party in Parliament. They criticised Labour prime minister Harold Wilson for not having taken control already.

PD leader Michael Farrell [did the same](#) in Belfast [*]. (14 August).

The British army would remain as the scaffolding of the artificial Six County state for 38 years. Britain could offer no solution.

But Farrell identified the “basic cause of the trouble” as the “undisciplined and biased RUC”. That was not the “basic cause” of anything. The unjust partition and the creation of an artificial Catholic minority in the Six Counties was.

And the description in Farrell’s statement of the Orange supremacists as a “fascist band” was a Farrellism, plausible nonsense. They were communalists, not fascists. Such throwing-around of falsely-attributed names would always characterise PD.

For Farrell, the Orangeists had no right to be in Ireland. He would later compare them to the French pieds noirs in Algeria and in effect advocate

an Algerian “solution” – driving the Orangeists out of Ireland. Farrell was a Catholic communalist.

In Britain, IS (forerunner of today’s SWP, and then linked with PD) was seriously disoriented.

Initially the Northern Ireland Catholics were friendly to the soldiers. British troops could only help the RUC, had said IS when it demagogically blazoned “troops out” on the front page of *Socialist Worker* a short time before.

But now the British government, with the army as its agent, disarmed the RUC, and the B-Specials were stood down and soon abolished. IS was left politically naked.

The first response of *Socialist Worker* (14 August) was written by the Christleite Gery Lawless. On the troops, it said that: “British imperialism can no more aid the struggle of the Irish people than petrol can quench fire”. That was true, and it was fundamental.

But by the next issue of SW (21 August), the IS leaders had taken over, and they took the PD line.

The IS leaders were always demagogic on Ireland, always had no sayable or defensible analysis, though some of them had a line shaped in the discussions in *Socialist Review* (forerunner of IS) in 1957-8, and that showed through. In 1969 they always followed PD. In August 1969, in the wake of PD, they came out for the use of British troops. Long term considerations? Basics? All that was for other, less sophisticated, people!

The IS leaders defended themselves from the Trotskyist Tendency at the September 1969 IS conference with tremendous and shameless demagoguery. Why were we against British troops? Because we *wanted a bloodbath*, that was why.

Was the problem that they had switched their line on British soldiers in the Six Counties from headlining Troops Out to following PD is saying that the British soldiers were essential to the Catholics? No! The problem was that we, the Trotskyist Tendency, allegedly wanted to repartition Northern Ireland.

The problem, they said, was not that they supported the existing Partition, but that we supported (in a Manchester branch resolution) the idea that the two Catholic majority counties and Derry City should secede from the Six Counties to the 26.

That, we mistakenly believed, would make the Six Counties unable to continue, and would begin a process of creating a united Ireland.

The “nationalist” floor of Irish politics was left to the Catholic nationalists and the Paisleyites. We tried to remedy that.

But the level of demagoguery was such

that it was impossible to discuss and explore anything. Much later, Jim Higgins told me that they thought the Trotskyist Tendency would lead a walk-out from the conference. Maybe, but that it only another way to say that they were very badly rattled by the collapse of their previous line on Ireland. The bloodbath nonsense was a way of appealing to the members of IS against us and giving themselves an excuse for the change of line. They got a big majority. The line was changed back to “troops out” six or seven months later when I moved a resolution at the National Committee to that effect.

Cliff used demagoguery in speech, but he put forward others to commit it to paper. Here, he left it to one of IS’s young English gentlemen, Stephen Marks, whom he would later expel.

Marks translated Cliff’s wisdom on British troops in Ireland into would-be Bolshevik precedent.

Propaganda and “demands in the present situation”, explained Marks, were quite separate things, and need not be in agreement with each other. The issues he raised with that argument were of great importance way beyond the immediate issue.

Plekhanov

On the relation between “agitation” and “propaganda”, the classic Marxist statement had been G V Plekhanov’s in *The Tasks of the Russian Social-Democrats in the Famine* (1891). “Agitation is also propaganda, but propaganda that takes place in particular circumstances, that is in circumstances in which even those who would not normally pay any attention are forced to listen to the propagandist’s words. Propaganda is agitation that is conducted in the normal everyday course of the life of a particular country.

“If I had to clarify further the relationship between agitation and propaganda I should add that the propagandist conveys many ideas to a single person or to a few people, whereas the agitator conveys only one or a few ideas, but he conveys them to a whole mass of people, sometimes to almost the entire population of a particular locality”.

Marks wrote: “Those who would raise the demand for withdrawal now must explain how they would implement that demand if they were behind the barricades in Derry or Belfast. Would they fire on the troops now, and encourage others to do the same? If so, they would merely add their bullets to those of the Paisleyites and provoke an immediate clash in a situation which would lead to a massacre. But if they would not take this responsibility on themselves they would presumably be reduced to get-

ting the troops out by persuasion – a difficult task!”

It had been all right nevertheless for Bernadette Devlin to see Paisley as a representative of the Orange workers, and ask him for a united front against the liberal Unionists? Ian Paisley said publicly that Devlin had done that, and he was not contradicted.

“To combine a demand for withdrawal with a demand for the arming of Catholic workers is to solve the problem only at the level of the mounting of slogans. In real life, the two demands are in contradiction if both raised at the present time, for the arming of the Catholics is dependent on the precarious breathing space the presence of the troops provides. But if the demand for withdrawal in the present situation does not flow from a false evaluation of the relation of forces, it can only mean one of two things:

- either the conscious advocacy of a massacre now, presumably as a means of raising the level of struggle (a demand we would invite the supporters to raise behind the barricades);

- or else it could be justified with the excuse that raising the slogan will not lead to the departure of the troops and therefore we need not reckon with the consequences. On this we need only say those who do not take their own slogans seriously cannot expect others to do so”.

IS had thus worked out a formula, as we commented, “whereby in slogans and headlines the troops shouldn’t be mentioned, but in the text we should ‘warn’ about their future role. In subsequent arguments the headlines and slogans were labelled ‘agitation’, the small type was the ‘propaganda’. We were told that one must ‘understand the difference between propaganda and agitation’...

“Underlying these arguments... was an absolute lack of clarity on the basic question. Why do we make demands? What are they for? Who are they addressed to? Throughout the discussions on the troops, the political effects (as opposed to the alleged physical effects) on the people of Belfast and Derry of either having or not having the ‘Withdraw Troops’ demand was never considered. The role of demands, of agitation and propaganda, in raising and developing consciousness and self-confidence among the workers, never came into it. The only people we were talking to, according to the conceptions of Marks and the EC, were the British authorities.

“Unless we have a clear conception that the reason for putting demands, for making agitation and propaganda, is directly to try to raise the level of consciousness, to show the necessary di-



addicted “propaganda”

rection of the struggle, to sharpen that struggle so that the masses, or at least those of the vanguard that we reach, learn the best political lessons from it, we are hamstrung from the start, we are tied down to a reformist conception – to a stance of petitioning the powers that be, looking to their actions and decisions for alleviation, rather than to the direct action of the working class. If that were the case, we would never make a demand that wasn't likely to be realised immediately.

“Moreover, if we do not see the various forms of ‘communication’ (demands, slogans, agitation, propaganda, headlines and small print) as necessarily bound together by a single aim and programme, with the single purpose of raising consciousness (whether this be ‘purely’ literary or whether it be linked with immediate action) then what is there to link them, to prevent them flying apart into contradictions and inconsistencies?”

“For [Marxist] revolutionaries, there can be no contradiction between the content of agitation, propaganda and theory. The difference is one of form, of style and technique, and of scale. The content and meaning does not differ according to whether action might or might not follow, or whether that action might be on mass scale or on a tiny scale. This is the essential meaning of the well known definition of Plekhanov: ‘A propagandist presents many ideas to one or a few persons; an agitator presents only one or a few ideas, but he presents them to a mass of people.’

“Marks, having no conception of the purpose of demands, departed quite explicitly from this formula: ‘Of course, this very situation’ (of contradictions, with the troops’ presence being approved) ‘increases the need to expose on every occasion *in propaganda and discussion* [our emphasis] the role the British troops are playing; and the side on which they must ultimately come down. But those who conclude that raising the demand for withdrawal *in the present situation* [emphasis Marks] must therefore follow, do not understand the difference between propaganda and agitation.”

“We say one thing in ‘discussion and propaganda’ and another ‘in the present situation’.

“Marks might have been paraphrasing Martynov, in that passage which Lenin (in *What is to be Done?*) sarcastically described as rendering Plekhanov more profound. ‘By agitation, in the strict sense of the word, we would understand calling the masses to certain concrete actions...’ In reply, Lenin demonstrated that all types of political writing were more or less directly connected with ‘action’. One couldn't make



that a criterion for separating out one type of work.

“To single out a third sphere, or third function, of practical activity [as well as propaganda and agitation] and to include in this third function ‘calling the masses to certain concrete actions’ is sheer nonsense, because the ‘call’, as a single act, either naturally and inevitably supplements the theoretical tract, propagandist pamphlet, and agitational speech or represents a purely executive function”.

Lenin gave an example of a “concrete action”, the signing of petitions: “The call for this action comes directly from the theoreticians, the propagandists and the agitators, and, indirectly, from those workers who carry the petition lists to the factories and to private houses to get signatures”.

“The point about the Plekhanov formulation is, of course that the ‘single idea’ put over in agitation is not just any old idea but a correct idea; not in antagonism to the larger complex of ideas that is propaganda, but flowing out of it and, again, leading back to it. Taking this definition together with IS’s practice, the only thing it can mean is that you tell most of your audience that the troops are indispensable to the Catholic workers, that the troops ‘for the moment’ and ‘in the present situation’ are doing a good job; while you tell an initiated few, who probably don’t really need to be told anyway, that things aren’t so simple.

“The justification for having a different line for agitation and propaganda was that given by Marks and Martynov: that agitation must lead to action, but propaganda is about the general, overall picture, about the future. Only propaganda is seen as educational. Martynov, the Russian ‘Economist’, counterposed agitation leading to action to Plekhanov’s propaganda and agitation, because he wanted to fight for reformism and to ‘free’ his reformist

tactics from a too rigorous connection with revolutionary Marxist propaganda and the agitation spun from it. Marks and IS use the very same distinction, for the reason that they want to free themselves to react impressionistically with regard to the long-term interests of the class. They want to free themselves from theory, programme and basic principles”.

People’s Democracy

There were still two revelations about 1969 to come. When the Cameron Commission reported on 12 September 1969 on the fighting that broke out in Derry in January 1969, it revealed in passing that PD had no members, only a general assembly of students who could make and change policy at will, including more than once in the same meeting, so those with the political commitment to stay late decided what the seeming mass meeting did. Michael Farrell was not a student, but an ex-student college teacher.

Initially, PD had had large meetings, but they had become much smaller. Big meetings had initially rejected both PD candidacies in the Northern Ireland elections in March and the “Long March” from Belfast to Derry. (The “Long March” was an event in Maoist history). The vote was taken again when most people had left. The leaders “led” by such manipulation. PD was not much more than a make-believe organisation.

As has been said, essentially, PD was only a few leaders, ex-students like Farrell and Toman and, I think, the anarchist McGuffin, and the student Bernadette Devlin, and their relationship with the media and identification with the students at Queen’s University. McCann, though critical of Farrell, was in the media referred to as “PD”.

The PD leaders, Devlin, Farrell, McCann and others, called a press conference after Cameron reported at which

they said they would shortly publish a rebuttal of Cameron. As far as I know, they never did. They couldn’t, because it was all true. A reply of sorts was given soon when PD became a (very small) membership organisation.

“Struggle in the North” and Irish autarky

Another political mystery was cleared up in December 1969, when the then IS publisher Pluto Press put out as its first publication Michael Farrell’s *The Struggle in the North*. (PD later reprinted it). It was revealed that Farrell advocated for Ireland a left variant of De Valera’s 1932-58 attempt at economic autarky. John Palmer had half-flirted with the idea in an article by Chris Gray and himself in *International Socialism* journal 36 (originally written to be a pamphlet), and it was impossible for the Trotskyist Tendency to see where that was coming from. It came from Farrell, who was very eclectic and incoherent and here, I think, taking Stalinist Cuba as his model.

Inside IS, “PD” was Cliff’s and Palmer’s relationship with Farrell. Farrell’s pamphlet functioned, and was used by the IS leaders responsible for the IS Irish debacle, as a reply to a pamphlet which Rachel Lever and I had written for the Trotskyist Tendency, *IS and Ireland*. Eventually, IS broke with Farrell and PD in 1972 or 73. PD had become a political satellite of the Provisional IRA. Then, at some point, as Socialist Democracy, it joined the Mandel Fourth International, which believed in “permanent revolution” for Ireland, i.e. that the Provo war could be the start of the socialist revolution in Ireland; and Farrell retired from politics.

The difference of the Trotskyist Tendency (Workers’ Fight) with the Cliffites was not that we knew it all (we didn’t: we were groping), but that we thought that Marxists should work at getting or seeking the truth, and then state it as bluntly as necessary. The Cliffites, including the critical Cliffites, did not understand Marxism like that. The important “Marxism”, for them, was something you added or invoked afterwards to back up what you had decided empirically.

For instance, on Ireland, I believed in 1969, and had already written, that talk of “British-occupied Ireland” implied conquering the Protestant workers, and naturally I was against that. I took a federal united Ireland as the only possible united Ireland as a result of the discussion in IS. I took things like that seriously. I tried to learn, with good or bad results.

Cliff was guided by the idea (and

continued on page 12 →



→ from page 11

apparently said to the IS Executive Committee frequently) that “tactics contradict principles”. I would later hear him tell the NC that when in 1971 he was successfully advocating that IS should reverse its line on Europe and the European Union (then European Economic Community).

I don’t think that I properly understood in January 1969 that Cliff and Palmer stood for two Irish socialist revolutions, one in the Six and another in the 26 counties. That was not because I couldn’t see the meaning and implications of what they said, but because what they said was just too stupid (and they were not ordinarily stupid people).

An independent Six Counties was then and is now impossible: it would lead to civil war and the break-up of the sub-state. The idea of a stable independent Six County state that would in the fullness of time join in an independent Ireland was simply ludicrous, politically ridiculous.

The revolt in 1969 was not a revolt of “the people” (in general) of Northern Ireland. It was a Catholic revolt against being second-class citizens and an artificial minority in the Six Counties. Protestant involvement was an individual here and there.

In the early period in 1969, the Trotskyist Tendency called the IS leaders “Catholic economists”, people who related to the Northern Ireland revolt as if it would lead to socialism just by becoming more militant. Any such hope was nonsense, but it was what they seemed to believe. □

[*] In his book *The Orange State*, Michael Farrell seriously misrepresents what happened in Belfast. PD and NICRA issued no joint call to the Catholics. PD could deploy at most ten

people in Belfast.

Appendix 1

Tony Cliff had not taken part in the 1957-8 discussion in *Socialist Review*, and he did not take part in the 1969-70 written discussion. For preference he wrote background articles and filled in conclusions separately. I think Cliff did supply the two articles by Owen Sheehy Skeffington in *Socialist Review* of September and October 1957. Sheehy Skeffington was not a Marxist, didn’t claim to be, but a decent utopian socialist, an Irish Senator, and a friend of Cliff’s (by Cliff’s own account). He was the only member of the Dail to take up the question of violence in Irish schools when some Dublin citizens did. See *Why did they stand for it?*, [online](#). □

Appendix 2: IS and Marxist theory

Excerpt from a document given limited internal circulation in 1971 in *Workers’ Fight* (forerunner of *Workers’ Liberty*)

I agree that IS has contempt for theory. Why? Because the IS theory is the possession of a handful of mandarins, who function as both a group mandarin and as a segment of normal academic Britain. What theory there is, is their theory: they are quite snobbish about it.

This is inseparable from a manipulationist conception of the organisation. The members don’t need to know the theories – the leaders can be relied upon – and demagoguery and word-spinning phrase-mongers like Cliff and Palmer can bridge the gap. It is in this sense that IS has contempt for theory – contempt for the Marxist conception of theory and its necessary relationship to the organisation as a leaven and tool of the whole group. “Contempt” is not the best expression for it, though, is it? The

priestly caste most certainly have contempt – for the uninitiated – but their theory is their special treasure, their badge of rank, their test for membership of the inner elite. There actually is such open caste snobbery in IS.

The real sense of IS’s “contempt for theory” is in their use of theory, the function of theory, the relationship of theory to practice: there is no connection between the two for IS. Do you know that in last week’s debate at the National Committee Cliff said and repeated that principles and tactics contradict each other in real life!

This is organically connected with their mandarinism. It is an esoteric knowledge – for if principles contradict tactics and practice, if theory is not a practical and necessary tool, if theory is not the source of precepts to guide practice, to aid in the practical exploration of reality – why then, where is the incentive to spread theoretical knowledge? What is to prevent the polarisation of the organisation into the mandarins and the subjects of the demagogic manipulation of the mandarins and their lieutenants? What is to prevent the esoteric knowledge of the mandarins from being just one intellectual “in-group”’s defining characteristic, to be played with and juggled with: after all it is very rarely tested, since it doesn’t relate to reality?

The central IS leadership are subjectively revolutionaries – but entirely bourgeois in their method of thinking and conception of politics. These people are very like the Lovestoneites (the Right Opposition group in the USA) referred to by Cannon and Trotsky. I’ve recently come across some of their material – and [Duncan] Hallas [of IS] could have written the anti-Trotskyist sections!

Do you know what I think our real



problem is regarding this – say on the Common Market? [as the EU was called at the time: in 1971 IS switched from “in or out, the fight goes on”, to campaigning against British entry] It will help them grow, to gain strength, to avoid losses, and therefore to be imposing enough to continue to be the “natural” choice for raw leftists just coming on the scene – or at least a sizeable section of them. Opportunists who are capable and have resources and who are fortunate enough not to have to face principled opponents with a sizeable base and sizeable resources can always do that – in times of normalcy. The tragedy is that what is being built is not a revolutionary organisation that can stand up under pressure when needed. That’s why the sort of moral panic and collapse on Ireland in 1969 is so revealing and so significant for the understanding of IS. □

What resonated was socialist feminism



How I became a socialist

By Dylan Seah

One of my housemates at university was a member of *Workers’ Liberty*. He reassured me that you didn’t have to be a Stalinist to be a socialist, and that was a relief. But the thing that really resonated was socialist feminism.

I didn’t know about social reproduction theory at the time. All I knew was that women – including myself – seemed to do a lot of emotional labour in their relationships. I began to learn that this had something to do with the way society had organised itself under capitalism – men went to work

and women refreshed their labour power by cleaning their clothes, cooking their meals and comforting them at the end of the day. It made sense to me that oppressive ideas of gender would arise out of this – ideas that some people were meant for a certain kind of role and other people were meant for another, and that their different aptitudes had something to do with their genitalia since the roles seemed divided that way in most cases.

I read some of *The Left in Disarray* in the summer after university. I was convinced by it and, when I went to graduate school in New York, I dedicated most of my time to finding a way to get stuck into socialist activism. The only real opening was the Democratic Socialists of America. Bernie

Sanders was running a second time, the DSA was fired up about it, and the Lower Manhattan branch meetings were pretty big.

Interventions

I made interventions about having a socialist presence on the climate demonstration, and was approached by Nancy Holmstrom, editor of *New Politics*, and Richard Smith, who had written extensively about China’s bureaucratic collectivist state. We printed ecosocialist leaflets at my NYU dorm and gave them out at the climate demonstration. I also audited Charlie Post’s course at the City University of New York, part of which was on how capitalism produces and reproduces ideas of race. I gained a firmer theoretical

footing and a more sophisticated orientation to struggles around race and gender. I read *The New York Intellectuals* by Alan Wald, a history of the anti-Stalinist left in New York – I loved it.

Covid happened and I returned home to Singapore earlier than expected. COVID was rampant in migrant worker dormitories where masses of workers were packed into cramped barracks with stale air. There were a number of suicides. The left was only just beginning to coalesce out of the youth climate movement and because of the opening up of a bit more democratic space at a liberal arts college set up by Yale. I intervened where I could, trying to persuade other activists to orient towards the working class

as an agent of change, but everything was online, and politically I was alone.

I helped organise a campaign around food couriers. A number of young activists and I went out on the streets to talk to couriers, and this effort was one of the first of its kind in Singapore. But I was beleaguered by largely online fights going on at the time about things like consensus decision-making and deferring to marginalised groups. In my tunnel vision I prioritised those fights over educating individual activists in a deep way about socialism.

No longer wanting to rely on my own political assessment of things, I relocated back to the UK in the middle of Covid. It was important for a socialist to have a group, and for me that group was *Workers’ Liberty*. □

Unison: vote TFRC and build the grassroots!

By AWL Unison members

Public service union Unison boasts of being the UK's biggest union with 1.3m members, but so far size has been no indication of performance. Seemingly less radical unions such as the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) have now outflanked it. That must change.

Unison was formed in 1993 when the National Association of Local Government Officers, the National Union of Public Employees, and the Confederation of Health Service Employees merged. From 2001-2020 the union suffered former Nalگو then Unison deputy general secretary Dave Prentis as its General Secretary (GS).

Prentis presided over an ineffectual giant that delivered little for its members, offering no resistance to the austerity that followed the 2008 financial crisis, and a public pensions sellout in 2012. Moreover, Prentis orchestrated a witch-hunt of left-wing activists, and pocketed a huge personal salary. He now sits in the House of Lords. Not surprisingly, he lost vote share at each of his five-yearly re-elections.

The 2020 GS election saw four candidates, three of them ostensibly on the left, with Paul Holmes, Branch Secretary at Kirklees council, competing for left votes against Hugo Pierre of the Socialist Party (SP), and then assistant general secretary Roger McKenzie, who is now a member of the Communist Party of Britain. With the left vote split, Prentis's anointed right-wing successor Christina McAnea was elected with 47.7% of the vote in a first past the post election. Paul Holmes achieved 33.8%. The turnout in the election was a shameful 10.5%.

The good showing for Holmes gave parts of the left hope, and they began to organise with vigour for the next National Executive (NEC) elections. The current main left grouping in the union Time For Real Change (TFRC), who had run Paul's campaign, emerged from this.

Between them, TFRC and the smaller SP won 40 of 68 seats in the biennial NEC elections in 2021, enough to control the union's ruling body for the first time. They just held onto this majority again in 2023.

TFRC fell out bitterly with the SP (who lost all but one seat), particularly around the SP's role in making allegations against Paul Holmes which led to him being sacked, though they were not solely responsible. Despite the legacy of bitterness the two groups are not going up against each other in the current NEC elections, so there is less danger of the left vote splitting. Hopefully

this will persist into the GS election. The SP state they will not stand a candidate there.

Andrea Egan won a democratic vote to become TFRC's GS candidate in 2025, vowing to take no more than her current social worker wage. NEC candidates for 2025 were selected at regional caucuses.

Following Service Group Executive (SGE) elections in 2022 and 2024 TFRC has majorities on the Local Government and Higher Education (HE) SGEs but is still a minority on the Health SGE.

While pushing for good policies, left leaderships are hampered by the bureaucracy. It has proved painfully hard to get the Service Groups or the union as a whole to organise the much needed public campaigns to defend local government, the NHS, or Higher Education, or to win national ballots.

A laser focus on this from the left can help break through, and we also need to build and then channel pressure from below up into the union. This has partially succeeded in HE where by demonstrating to the bureaucracy the amount of rank and file frustration, we finally have a commitment to organise a public lobby against HE funding cuts in May.

Campaigns

TFRC members on the NEC must continue to push for public campaigns against local government cuts, and for more funding for the NHS.

As part of its current NEC campaign, TFRC has listed its main achievements including, crucially, doubling strike pay and making it payable from day one. This seems to have been decisive in a number of local but also nationally co-ordinated disputes, including Healthcare Assistant victories. Despite recent disappointments in local government and health pay ballots, since TFRC won the NEC there have been more strike days than ever, more back pay won, and years of membership growth; NEC and other TFRC supporters have been on picket lines – this has dominated TFRC social media outside election periods.

There are signs that TFRC leadership is starting to turn the union into what it can and needs to be: a trade union that organises its enormous membership in a fight for their own interests at work, and for their wider communities.

Unison's strong ties to the Labour Party, mediated through its Labour Link apparatus, could stand it in good stead to exert pressure over the Government to rebuild public services. Instead it operates as a cheerleader for Starmer and for the right in the union.



TimeForRealChange
for a members' union

After the left won the NEC in 2021, the right of the union, working with the Labour right, manufactured expulsions of Labour Party members so that the left couldn't win control of the Labour Link committee.

Ruth Cashman, elected to the London Labour Link seat; Egan, then the union's national president; and others were expelled. Other expulsions have followed since.

Nevertheless, Unison left activists should be active in Labour Link. This is hampered by sections of the left, though not TFRC as a whole, taking a sectarian attitude to this area of work, falling back on denunciations of Labour's ample failings. The Labour Party is a vital arena for struggle and the left has to say this clearly and organise seriously there.

At the 2024 Labour Party conference, Unison was one of the union delegations to pressure the leadership to pull a vicious anti-migrant motion, and also supported a motion calling for an end to the two-child benefit cap – this shows what can be achieved with a positive attitude to the possibilities and some organisation.

Two elected Unison members sit on the Labour Party's national executive. They should operate there in line with Unison's policies, not kowtow to the Labour Party leadership as they currently do.

TFRC can only be really effective if it builds the grassroots. The low turnouts in recent health and local government pay ballots show how ineffective many of our branches have become over decades of right-wing leadership. The union could get over the 50% threshold in more branches with patient building. If the law changes in our favour, making winning ballots easier, we will still need to rebuild our branches.

TFRC needs to be honest about political disagreements between its supporters on key questions and be clearer and bolder in acknowledging this is a strength, not a weakness. This means more organising, locally, nationally, and in service groups. It means understanding how decisions are made by TFRC, and developing a process for when members should be bound and when not.

TFRC will not succeed if it organises only as an electoral vehicle and at conferences. It will not win the GS election if it does not build the grassroots, as it is

up against the Unison bureaucracy who will stop at nothing to prevent Andrea Egan winning. TFRC can succeed and will earn support by organising and leading struggles for the rebuilt public services we need, and getting involved with wider political struggles.

Workers' Liberty supporters are active in TFRC at all levels and around the country. We have three supporters elected onto SGEs as part of the TFRC slate; two currently serving on the NEC, and three candidates standing in the upcoming elections. Our supporters are active in young members' activities, and in Self Organised Groups, as well, obviously, as in our branches.

We participate in TFRC in the spirit of wanting it to succeed, making suggestions for improving TFRC's ways of operating so that they are as inclusive and open as possible, while at the same time recognising the danger of witch-hunting and interference from the right. We have developed ideas of how to ensure our representatives are accountable to those who elect them.

We suggest that TFRC develops a mechanism for debating and agreeing a basic platform of principles, at the same time as encouraging debate on wider issues. We are for unity in action where we agree, and maximum democratic debate where we disagree.

We have developed some ideas for widening and deepening TFRC's reach in the union, particularly by building in the regions, in Self Organised Groups, and among young members; and developing communications and feedback from the committees we are involved in. To discuss the ideas in this article please email unison@workersliberty.org.

NEC elections run from 21 April to 21 May 2025. The General Secretary election will be in autumn 2025. Unison members should join [TFRC](https://www.timeforrealchange.org), help elect a left NEC, and help elect [Andrea Egan](https://www.timeforrealchange.org) as the next General Secretary. This will create the best conditions for turning our union around. □

More online

Mahmoud Khalil

A criticism bit.ly/mo-kh and a response bit.ly/mo-kr

“What we stand for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

• workersliberty.org/join-awl

Can we get to £7,500 by next week?

Thanks to Dave, Tristan, Mick, John, Tom and a donation collected at a Crips Against Cuts demonstration our total now stands at £6,745.

If we can pick up the pace in the next week and get to £7,500, we will still need to raise £600 per week to hit our £20,000 target.

A big chunk of this week's money came from a supporter who donated recent back pay to us. If you are in a similar position, consider passing that on to us to help us reach our goal and expand our capacity and work. □

• Donate: workersliberty.org/fund

Matt Wrack goes for Nasuwt job

By Samuel Akhtar

Matt Wrack, who was General Secretary of the Fire Brigades Union from 2005 until January this year, is now standing to be GS of teaching union Nasuwt – which is possible under that union's rules.

Wrack's defeat in the FBU was a setback for the union and the wider labour movement and left. He has been an important left-wing labour movement leader. However, this is a bad move.

Whatever his intention, it seems very likely to reinforce the trend towards trade unions as professional or corporate organisations with leaders taking roles as part of pursuing a career, rather than democratic collectives of workers, rooted in the workplace and with leaders coming up from it through the union's collective life. (In far less bureaucratised unions, leaders coming "from outside" might not always have this dynamic. In today's mainstream UK unions, and certainly Nasuwt, they do).

Nasuwt is one of a few unions that go as far as allowing people with no connection to them to stand for General Secretary; If he is elected, he will be the first Nasuwt GS not to have come from teaching.

Nasuwt GS elections are usually uncontested. The arguments from Luke Akhurst, an Nasuwt activist from Leicestershire seeking to stand against Wrack, are conservative – but it's not ridiculous for him to highlight having a "teacher

on the ballot".

TSSA General Secretary Maryam Eslamdoust was elected from outside in 2023, with no connection to the union or the transport sector. Pilots' union General Secretary Amy Leversidge was until her unopposed election a leader in senior civil service union FDA.

Many more unions allow unelected members of their staff, some of whom have never worked in an industry their union organises, to stand for senior leadership positions, including General Secretary. Christine McAnea, the General Secretary of the UK's largest union, Unison, was an unelected staffer in various unions for 39 years before being becoming GS in 2021. Sharon Graham had been a Unite staffer for over 20 years before becoming its GS the same year.

In PCS, Assistant General Secretary John Moloney was elected in 2019 and re-elected in 2023; in both contests he faced unelected senior staff members, both of whom despite their defeat by the members for AGS were later appointed to even more senior national roles. There is a bit of a trend, with a number of unions changing rules in this direction. We should oppose and seek to reverse it.

Ironically, the FBU is very much at the other end of the spectrum from Nasuwt and TSSA, with a strict separation between elected officials, all of whom have worked as firefighters or in other fire and rescue jobs, and union staff; and a much greater reliance on elected officials as against senior staff than in most unions. In 2017 Matt Wrack was

interviewed in the *Clarion* magazine and said this:

"I hear people who are described as officials of unions. To me an official of a union is someone who's been elected by workers to represent them, not someone who's got a job as a researcher or policy or whatever. In my union, all our officials, the people we call officials, are elected; we employ members of staff, and I have a great deal of respect for them, but we wouldn't call them officials of the union. *That's one of our strengths – everyone has come through the industry, everyone has been a firefighter, or worked in the fire service.*" (Emphasis added) What happened to that idea?

There has been some commentary on what the election of a left-winger like Wrack as General Secretary would mean for a generally pretty moderate and non-militant union like Nasuwt. Could it make merger with the National Education Union, the school workers' union virtually all left-wing teacher activists are in, more likely? I can see likely benefits or risks from Wrack becoming GS, and hopefully there will be benefits; but I see nothing to outweigh the general principle of union leaders coming up from the workplace.

Meanwhile the Nasuwt General Secretary is paid £134,386 (I don't know if Wrack would be getting his fire service or FBU pension on top of that). The average salary among teachers is about £45,000. What about the principle of union leaders only taking a [worker's wage](http://workersliberty.org) that Matt Wrack at least used to adhere to? □

A Swedish classic: Wild Strawberries



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

Ingmar Bergman (1918-2007) isn't everybody's cup of tea: too mystical, too religious for some. Nevertheless, his films deserve to be seen, for example *The Seventh Seal* (1957) and his TV family epic *Fanny and Alexander* (1982). I want to highlight *Wild Strawber-*

ries (1957), where ageing Professor Isak Borg (Victor Sjöström) heads off in his car to Lund University to receive a lifetime-service award.

The journey triggers memories of youthful summers spent in a country cottage where the family ventured out foraging for wild strawberries. Driving through the countryside he passes through the place where he first worked as a country doctor, memories prompted by a petrol stop where the garage owner (Max von

Sydow) was one of his former patients. He reflects on his earlier happiness and later gives a lift to three teenagers who also evoke bygone days.

It is a gentle film as befits the subject – an old man looking back on his past and reflecting on what might have been. However, the film has a complex, dark side which makes me wonder if Bergman was an influence on the Nordic Noir genre of later years. Pub quiz time: in a flashback why is there a



Norwegian flag (not Swedish) flying by the side of the country cottage? □

• Watch online: bit.ly/wild-s

FM workers out again 7-13 April

By a PCS member

After three weeks of talks, facility management workers in OCS, ISS and G4S, all working on civil service contracts are back on strike, scheduled for 7 to 13 April. On top of that, there will be reballots of those areas where

mandates run out in April, though there are still leave areas where the mandates run for a few more months. Additional strikes might take place in those areas.

All the companies claim they want a deal, but they won't offer any unless the government stumps up more cash to them. It only shows the parasitical

nature of the companies if they have to leech off taxpayers' money in order to award staff semi-decent pay.

It also shows that the companies only bid the bare minimum to win contracts: a practice that Labour shows no sign of stopping.

During the notice period until 3 April,

the companies can still make the offers they claim they want to, and the strikes can be settled.

Of course behind all of this is the broken model of outsourcing – again one that at the moment Labour does not seem to want to fix either. □

GSTT cleaners can win

By Stuart Jordan

Specialist cleaners in the Guy's and St Thomas' Hospitals' Rapid Response team are striking 17-28 March in an escalating battle over pay and improved welfare facilities.

The cleaners use dangerous chemicals and specialist techniques for deep cleaning and disinfecting rooms and ward areas after incidents of highly

infectious and dangerous diseases, like Clostridium Difficile (C. Diff). The team is on the frontline of infection control within the hospital and the hospital cannot function without them. It is on this basis that they will force management to concede.

The workers are currently paid at the lowest pay grade, band 2, which is barely more than the minimum wage. The

Rapid Response Team make the reasonable case that the specialist nature of their dangerous work should qualify them for band 3.

Some workers take their breaks in the cleaning cupboards and they have no washing facilities for after their shifts. As well as the pay uplift, the workers are demanding decent showers, changing areas, rest areas and toilets for

staff to use before, during and after their shifts.

The GSTT Unite branch has been organising these workers and patiently arguing in negotiation with management for over a year.

The GSTT Unite branch has led a number of successful strikes in recent months and is demonstrating the power we can have as health workers when we make use of our

trade union rights to organise at work. In August 2024 security officers won an up-banding campaign. In autumn 2024, GSTT Unite organised theatre nurses against management attempts to extend their shifts, arguing that it was not safe. On both occasions sustained strikes forced management to concede to the workers' demands. □

Teachers' pay: vote for strikes!

By David Pendleton

The National Education Union (NEU) opened its indicative ballot for teachers over pay and funding on 1 March. It closes on 11 April.

The government's submission to the School Teachers' Review Body (STRB) suggests a 2.8% pay increase for schools to pay out of their existing budgets by making "efficiencies".

The ballot asks members whether

they accept the government's offer and whether they are "willing to take strike action to secure fully funded, significantly higher pay". 2.8% is below the current rate of inflation (CPIH 3.9% in January), and that after our loss in real earnings since 2010. An unfunded deal, on top of the National Insurance rise, means further job cuts in schools.

For these reasons every eligible member should vote and encourage others to vote no to question one and

yes to question two.

However, to win the indicative ballot and a formal ballot, we must have clear demands and a clear strategy.

After years of our real wages being eroded we need a guaranteed, above-inflation pay rise every year. And for the lowest earners in schools, more than. Our demands should be something like 2 percent above inflation or £3,000, whichever is greater.

There has been talk of arguing for a multi-year deal. The problem there is that a £3,000 (or whatever lump sum) will be eroded by inflation. We need future-proofing.

The strategy for the dispute must include demonstrations and campaigning, but also a rapid and escalating

programme for industrial action. There is a danger that the National Executive are hoping that an indicative ballot and the threat of action will be sufficient to move the government. That is far from certain. □

RMT activists launch new network

By an RMT member

Activists in the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT) have launched a new network, RMT Rank & File.

The initiative aims to promote militant strategies for industrial disputes, defend and extend the union's democracy, and promote struggles for equality.

Up until now, the only openly organised current within the union,

apart from groups of supporters of individual socialist groups, is the RMT Broad Left, comprised of supporters of the CPB/*Morning Star* and their allies.

Over the last several years, many activists feel the union has become more bureaucratised, with national officers exerting a conservative influence, including over the strategies the union has pursued in industrial disputes. These experiences have led

many to conclude that an organised network, aiming to act as a counterweight to these conservative tendencies, is necessary.

The new network's first bulletin, available at bit.ly/rmt-rnf, argues for the union to demand no-strings pay increases in Network Rail and the Train Operating Companies, and reject productivity agreements that trade off terms and conditions in exchange for a pay rise. □

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 [020 7394 8923](tel:02073948923)

 solidarity@workersliberty.org

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

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



Restore ceasefire! Peace!

By Ira Berkovic

At the time of writing, over 600 people had been killed in Gaza by the renewed Israeli bombing which, with Trump's backing, has broken the January 2025 ceasefire. Three Hamas rockets have been fired into Israel in response, causing no casualties. Hezbollah has also launched rockets at Israel, after which Israel renewed bombardment of sites in southern Lebanon. A large proportion of those killed in Gaza are children. In Khan Younis, seven children from the Abu Daka family were killed in air strikes.

Israel's aid blockade continues, with UN officials describing conditions in Gaza as "apocalyptic". The death toll, based on figures compiled by a Hamas-run ministry but not seriously contested by any party other than the Israeli government, has now passed 50,000. Although this figure does not differentiate between civilians and combatants, Israel's own figures for the number of Hamas fighters killed affirm that the overwhelming majority of the dead are civilians. The number equates to just over 2% of the entire population of Gaza. A paper in the medical journal *The Lancet* in January suggested the death toll may be undercounted by up to 41%, meaning the real figure could now be over 80,000.

Israeli leaders have signalled they may look to reoccupy Gaza, with defence minister Israel Katz saying the IDF will now pursue "permanent

maintenance of the territory". The Israeli army has re-entered areas from which they previously withdrew under the terms of the ceasefire.

Israel wants Hamas to release half the remaining hostages in exchange for an extended ceasefire, but has not committed to any further releases of Palestinian prisoners, or to move beyond the first phase of the January ceasefire deal, which would involve Israeli withdrawal from Gaza.

In the occupied West Bank, a new UN report argues that "the line between state violence and settler violence has blurred to a vanishing point." 2023-2024 saw a monthly average of 118 incidents of settler violence, a record high, up from the previous year's total of 108, also a record. 612 Palestinians were killed in the period, with 1,779 Palestinian buildings demolished.

On 24 March, Hamdan Ballal, one of the Palestinian co-directors of the Oscar-winning documentary *No Other Land*, was violently attacked by settlers, and then snatched by soldiers from the ambulance he called. At the time of writing his whereabouts remained unknown.

Protests

Inside Israel, several people have been arrested in growing protests against the government, which have opposed the renewal of the war and called for the implementation of the existing ceasefire agreement.

Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu has sacked Ronen Bar, the head of the Shin Bet security service, nominally over the failure to anticipate the 7 October attack. The sacking is widely perceived to be a political move against a prominent representative of a security establishment that has been critical of Netanyahu's strategy in Gaza.

The Israeli government also voted for a motion of no confidence in Attorney General Gali Baharav-Miara, a move seen as an attack on the independence of a judiciary that has sometimes constrained government power. Netanyahu's measures are similar to those undertaken by Orbán, Putin, and other authoritarians as they shifted their countries towards dictatorship.

For many Israelis, opposition to Netanyahu is a matter of defending Israel's democracy against authoritarian sabotage. But Israeli democracy was always partial; the territory between the River Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea is, in functional terms, an ethnocracy. Jews have democratic rights. Millions of Palestinians living under Israeli



Placard from an anti-war protest in Tel-Aviv, 22 March 2025, showing the children of the Abu Daka family from Khan Younis, Gaza. The Hebrew reads: "Killed in IDF bombing, 20.03.25 – Did we not see? Did we not know?"

occupation and blockade do not. Palestinian citizens of Israel have formal legal equality, but face significant racism and discrimination.

To truly be a movement for the defence and extension of democracy, the anti-Netanyahu movement must become a movement against the occupation of Palestinian territories and for equal rights between Jews and Palestinians. The efforts of Standing Together, the left-wing binational (Jewish-Palestinian) social movement in Israel, and others to intervene in anti-government protests to argue that democracy cannot coexist with occupation are vital. Oded Rotem, an activist with Standing Together, was hospitalised with a broken leg after a driver rammed him and other protesters at a recent demonstration.

Standing Together writes: "Across the country, people are standing up. Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel together, refusing to fight Netanyahu's war. Refusing to let them decide our fate. Refusing to be silent.

"We must stand for the hostages. We must stand for the people of Gaza. We must stand for life.

"We say no to being part of a machine built for death and destruction.

"We refuse to kill and be killed. We refuse to be complicit. We refuse in every way we can.

"Now is the time to stand up, to speak out, and to demand a deal that will bring them home alive.

"Raise your voice. Refuse their war. Refuse their destruction. Choose life. Choose peace."

Speaking at a protest on Friday, Palestinian activist Naser Odat said: "You will not silence the two million Palestinians within the state of Israel, two million citizens. We are Palestinians by national identity, you cannot separate this. It's time for the people of this country to unite, Palestinians and Jews, and put out a joint call to refuse a bloody war that will shed more and more blood, and cause more and more death, not only for the Palestinians, but for Israelis too."

London

Israelis living in London held a protest opposite Downing Street on Sunday 23 March. UK Friends of Standing Together supporters attended the protest to raise awareness of Standing Together's work and promote its vision for co-resistance against war, racism, and occupation, for peace and equality.

UK Friends of Standing Together is also encouraging supporters to write to their MPs to push for the UK government to increase diplomatic pressure on Israel, including by withdrawing arms sale licenses. Text of the model letter: ukfost.co.uk □

Standing Together leaders to tour England in May

Friends of Standing Together (UK) will host Standing Together leaders Amin Amara and Uri Weltmann for a tour in May 2025. Times/dates are subject to change; additional dates may also be added. UK Friends of Standing Together will publish exact details, including how to register to attend each meeting, nearer the time: ukfost.co.uk. Wed 14 May: London (evening); Thu 15th: Cambridge (evening); Sun 18th: Nottingham (afternoon) and Sheffield (evening); Tue 20th: Bristol (evening). □



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COUP IN THE USA

On Monday 24 March the Trump gang flatly refused a judge's order to supply data about the flights taking 250 Venezuelans to jail in El Salvador on 15 March despite a court ruling blocking the deportation. It's a new stage in Trump's drive for dictatorial powers – "we are the federal law", as he puts it. So is the case of Yunseo Chung, a Columbia University student, who the same day went to court against the Trump gang's efforts to arrest and deport her without charge or trial (like Mahmoud Khalil, but Chung, in hiding, has so far evaded arrest). And both cases, for Trump, are preparations for his mass deportations, coming soon. More: page 3. □