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Against tariff wars, workers' unity



Chinese capitalists have been doing good business, exporting red "MAGA" baseball caps to the USA. The caps cost \$47 from the Official Trump Store (an ordinary cap is \$10 or less), so they can undercut that price and still cash in.

Not with the new tariffs. But the *Economist* magazine reports one of those Chinese capitalists shrugging. He'll remove the "Made in China" tags, ship the caps to Mexico, and export them to the USA as "Made in Mexico". Chinese capitalists in other sectors, so the magazine reports, are evading tariffs via Ma-

laysia and Korea.

China looks more likely to face down Trump on tariffs than vice versa. The USA needs many imports from China as inputs to its industries, and cannot readily substitute. China can substitute more easily for many of the imports it gets from the USA, such as animal feed, and its government can more readily ride or evade economic disruptions.

Shift

Trump's tariff war is a huge shift in world market regulation. In a world where long supply chains crossing many countries have become routine, it will have consequences we can't yet calculate. So far it looks like few countries will respond by raising tariffs to match. The EU, for example, has first rushed to nail down free-trade deals

with South America's Mercosur, India, and Australia. But the tariff war cannot but disrupt.

And, not only with China, it can scarcely work as Trump wants. His gang wants the tariffs to cut the USA's chronic trade deficit, bring revenues so they can cut income tax, and force capitalists to build factories in the USA.

A much quicker effect will be raised prices. Building factories and arranging the infrastructure (suppliers, transport links, local skilled labour pools) takes many years in high-tech industries today. Capitalists will hesitate unless they can be sure about tariffs many years ahead. They can't be.

Even if Trump can degrade US democracy enough that a non-MAGA victory in 2028 becomes unachievable – and that is not certain – he is 79 next

month. His gang is openly divided on tariffs.

Trump says he is negotiating with many countries for trade deals before his delay on the non-China ultra-tariffs expires on 8 July, but he has reported no wins yet. Another 90-day delay is possible. Turmoil is certain.

A working-class response:

- Reduce borders everywhere we can. Free movement of people. Oppose tariffs other than "nursery tariffs" for poorer countries to develop new industries.

- Reverse Brexit.

- For social levelling-up, against Trump's drive to get all countries to level down environmental and safety standards to those which he is reducing in the USA.

- Workers' unity across all borders! □

"Biologically nonsensical", say doctors

By a BMA activist

The British Medical Association (BMA) conference of resident doctors (what used to be called junior doctors) on 26 April decided:

This meeting condemns the Supreme Court ruling defining the term "woman" with respect to the Equality Act as being based on "biological sex", which they refer to as a person who "was at birth of the female sex", as reductive, trans

and intersex-exclusionary and biologically nonsensical.

We recognize as doctors that sex and gender are complex and multifaceted aspects of the human condition and attempting to impose a rigid binary has no basis in science or medicine while being actively harmful to transgender and gender-diverse people...

A BMA activist told Solidarity:

"Most doctors recognise

that biological sex is bimodal rather than binary, and that many people find themselves outside the two common categories at birth, during development, or via gender affirmation medications and surgeries. A definition of biological sex as being assigned in a binary at birth risks creating a urinary leash or worse, exclusion from medical care, for intersex and trans people. By increasing hostility, it also

increases risks for gender-diverse cis people, such as butch lesbians, and for women with medical conditions that give them 'less feminine' features, such as PCOS [polycystic ovary syndrome].

"Clearly services based on biological sex do need provision. But nobody is objecting to gynaecology care being provided just to women and trans/enby people with gynaecological organs. This

judgement is part of a long series of attempts to advance bigotry via the judicial system. Although transphobes have organised incredibly successfully in medicine and around the law, at resident doctors' conference there were only speakers in favour of the motion, and all speakers were women. I am glad to see resident doctors are prepared to stand up for science, our patients and our colleagues." □



The benefits of Brexit?

By Tony Southwell

At the start of campaigning for the 1 May elections, Notts Stand Up To Racism held a meeting to discuss its upcoming campaign against voting Reform. One of the speakers was Communist Party of Britain (CPB) bigwig Andrew Murray who told us that "Brexit hadn't delivered yet".

Reform

He didn't elucidate on what that would look like when it did arrive, but I think it is safe to say that it wouldn't have included Reform taking over-

all control and going from one to 40 Nottinghamshire County councillors on 1 May. During the Brexit vote we said that in the current climate a vote for Brexit would only aid the right and that the CPB's "Lexit", also promoted by the SWP and SP, was a fantasy. Case proved. Not to inflate their influence, but if the Lexiters had campaigned to stay in, Reform might still be a single issue party called Ukip, busying itself with getting out of the EU, rather than as now, in its latest incarnation, a national force dragging politics in Britain even further to the right. □



Activist Agenda



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

Meetings

7 May: How do we solve a problem like Nigel? Birmingham AWL. 6:30pm, The Wellington, 37 Bennetts Hill B2 5SN

12 May: Defend and extend trans rights! Newcastle AWL. 6:30pm, Northumbria University Students' Union (upstairs)

18 May: AWL environment reading group on aviation. 8pm, Zoomlink bit.ly/envi-rg

Template motions

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

At work or on campus

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

erslibertystudents, and email awl@workersliberty.org for more.

Socialist-feminist book clubs

workersliberty.org/sf-book-clubs

11 May: London. Marxism and the Oppression of Women. 2pm, Effra Social, Effra Social, 89 Effra Road SW2 1DF

12 May: Sheffield. To Exist is to Resist. 6pm, University Arms, 197 Brook Hill S3 7HG

Campaigns

For: UK Friends of Standing Together, Labour Left Internationalists, Workers Against the CCP, Free Our Unions, Solidarity With Iranian Workers, Neurodivergent Labour, Ukraine Solidarity Campaign, Labour Campaign for Free Movement – contact details, activities, template motions, etc. – see workersliberty.org/agenda. For environmental campaigning email eco@workersliberty.org. □

Defy the EHRC non-guidance!

By Will Roberts

On 25 April, the Equality and Human Rights Commission published an “interim update on the practical implications of the UK Supreme Court judgement”. This is *not*, as it has widely been reported, “guidance” on the ruling. That will come later: a full document will be provided to the government by the end of June, but only after a public consultation and dependent on approval by ministers.

The “interim update”, however, gives us a good idea of what the EHRC plans. It focuses heavily on workplaces providing single-sex toilets (toilets were not discussed in the Supreme Court judgement, nor in the relevant section

of the Equality Act). The EHRC explicitly recommends that trans people are excluded from toilets that match their current gender. In certain cases, they also state that a trans person could be denied access to toilets matching their sex assigned at birth, instead insisting that they must use “third spaces” – mixed-gender toilets.

Obstacles

There are immediate practical obstacles to implementing this. Law firm Lewis Silkin [points out](#) that “whilst the guidance acknowledges that trans people should not be put in a position where there are no facilities for them to use, it provides no guidance at all on how employers are expected to en-

sure that given the limitation of some current facilities”. Many workplaces have little space or money to build new toilets. How they are supposed to implement this recommendation without illegally discriminating against trans people is not clear.

Challenge

Another legal challenge could come from existing Equality Act protections against forcibly “outing” queer people. If a trans woman (for example) has been in a workplace for several years without disclosing to any colleagues that she is trans, being forced to use the men’s toilets would, in practice and likely in a court of law, be seen as her employer forcing her to out herself to her colleagues. A legal challenge on the grounds of the Human Rights Act’s right to privacy could, if necessary, could go all the way to the European Court of Human Rights, which has a history of siding with trans people in similar cases.

The EHRC has wildly exaggerated the meaning of the Supreme Court decision, which directly referred only to whether trans women with GRCs should be counted in women’s quotas on official committees in Scotland, and which the judges claimed (wrongly) would “not cause disadvantage to trans people with or without a GRC”.

The EHRC overreach should come as no surprise.

Kishwer Falkner, current head of the EHRC, was put in her position by then Women and Equalities Minister Liz Truss in 2021 amid a “culture war” backlash against trans people led by the Tories. Truss openly [boasted](#) of Falkner “driving [her] agenda forward”. Falkner’s leadership has seen large numbers of queer staff at the EHRC [quit](#) citing a hostile environment, direct [links](#) being made with transphobic organisations like the LGB Alliance, and reports of a transphobic leadership heavily influencing the organisation’s policy with no democratic oversight, deriding staff who complain as “woke”.

If the EHRC guidance matches the “interim update”, it will be unenforceable and deliberately vindictive against the trans community. It will also lead to an increase in harassment in public life of anyone deemed to look “unusual”.

We must call, first and foremost through the unions, for employers not to comply with the guidance, and to take on the ensuing legal battle. This must be paired with a broader campaign to change legislation to enshrine self-identification in law, as well as recognising non-binary genders and intersex people, vastly expanding trans healthcare, and removing the ban on puberty blockers for trans kids. □



Unions move to defend trans members

By Simon Nelson

Too many unions have been cautious so far since the Supreme Court decision of 16 April on transgender rights, but there are signs that the tempo is changing. Socialists should be at the forefront of the fight. *Solidarity* supporters and others are taking a prominent role in pushing for unions and the Labour Party to support trans liberation.

Unison, the largest public sector union, immediately deleted details of training on trans rights, presumably because it was scared of legal action. An open letter to the General Secretary, Christina McAnea, about the deletion has already gained 500 [signatures](#) from Unison members.

A Zoom meeting on 28 April, called by some Unison and NEU branches in which the SWP has leading activists, produced an unwieldy WhatsApp group of several hundred. It has now been bro-

ken down into union and regional groups, some of which have provoked productive discussions about how to take the fight forward in unions. At the time of publication, 7 May, making today a day of action in workplaces promoted by the SWP is the only generalised concrete proposal.

An emergency motion from the LGBT+ committees and UCU passed by the Scottish TUC called for them to campaign, “for the introduction of comprehensive legislation for full protection from discrimination, harassment, and victimisation for trans, non-binary, gender fluid, and intersex people”.

Expanded

The TUC Trans and Non-Binary network has a meeting (scheduled before the Supreme Court decision) on 10 May in Cardiff. We want to see the network expanded to include more input from branches and other trade union activists. If

it can develop local meetings that can help coordinate regular activity, it would be a boost for the ongoing campaign.

Activists in the RMT are putting forward two emergency motions for their AGM, 22-27 June. [One](#) will commit the union to publicly support trans rights, support full legal equality, demand that employers provide appropriate facilities, and support any member who defies the unworkable EHRC “interim” text. Another condemns the regressive policy of the British Transport Police, announced following the Supreme Court decision, to conduct searches of trans women with male officers.

At the University of Nottingham, the Unison and UCU branches are drafting a joint statement to give to the university, asking them to continue respecting trans employees’ rights. Other UCU branches are doing the same in different universities. This is an opportunity for all unions

active on campuses to cooperate on such demands. At the University of Sheffield Student Union, a motion will be put to the AGM.

In Nottingham East, the local Labour MP, Nadia Whittome, is a strong supporter of trans rights and that local party is due to discuss a pro trans rights motion at its next meeting. We know that [motions](#) are also being put to Islington South and Sheffield Heeley. Labour for Trans Rights has also drafted a [motion](#).

Pride in Labour has written an [open letter](#) to Keir Starmer calling for Labour to make the limited reforms promised to the GRA, rejecting the draft school guidance, and reversing the ban on puberty blockers.

Motions to the Labour Party women’s and national conference will need to be decided once the reporting date of the National Policy Forum is known. Activists in Pride in Labour, Labour for Trans Rights,

and LGBT Labour should work together to produce a text that local parties with sympathetic delegates can pass.

Starmer, Phillipson, and Streeter have made their (mis)interpretation of the Supreme Court ruling all too clear. Other Labour MPs, many of whom have remained almost entirely silent on the puberty blockers ban, have now started to raise their [voices](#). Others have [doubled down](#).

Now is the time to go on the offensive and demand that Labour representatives stand up for trans rights.

A Tory-backed amendment to the Data (Use and Access) Bill has caused alarm among trans rights activists. It could force public bodies, including the DVLA, NHS, Passport Office, and others, to store and process data based on sex assigned at birth. It has little chance of passing without government endorsement. A model letter to MPs has been [circulated](#). □

The dogs that didn't bark



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

There is a famous Sherlock Holmes story in which the crucial clue is a dog not barking in the night-time. Similarly, silence on the part of the *Morning Star* can tell the reader at least as much as what it does publish.

For instance, a lot has been going on inside Unite the Union recently without a single mention in the paper. According to a statement issued by a majority of the Unite Executive Council (EC) on 10 March: "Unite's internal democracy is being extinguished." A further statement from the "EC majority", issued in mid-March, voiced "serious concerns about the governance and accountability within our union, as well as about the basic financial stability of our organisation." On 4 April the same members of the EC announced that they had initiated legal proceedings in the High Court.

One would have expected the MS, as a paper that has long had close links

with Unite, to give this some coverage. But not a single word has appeared. This is all the stranger given that the signatories to the statements are all supporters of the United Left grouping which supports the MS. They blame general secretary Sharon Graham and her supporters for the alleged attack on the union's democracy.

But this puts the MS in a difficult position: if the paper comes out in support of its own people within the union it will inevitably antagonise Sharon Graham and possibly jeopardise the extensive funding it receives from Unite. Safer then to say absolutely nothing.

Elections

Another silence reigned in the run-up to last week's local elections and the Runcorn byelection. Since the demise of Corbynism, the paper has been all over the place on whether or not to vote Labour and has given sympathetic coverage to supposedly "left of Labour" candidates from the Greens and Galloway's Workers Party and "pro-Gaza" independents. The Greens and the Workers Party were standing on 1 May as were some "pro Gaza" people – notably Michael Lavalette, Yousuf Mo-

tola and Almas Razakazi, all of whom were elected in Preston.

But in the weeks preceding the elections, the MS carried no advice about who to vote for. It carried no discussion of whether, and under what circumstances, to vote Labour.

Galloway's friend Andrew Murray had an article on 30 April (i.e. the day before the elections) that mentioned the Trades Union and Socialist Coalition, the Communist Party, the Workers Party and Jamie Driscoll's Majority, but stopped short of advocating a vote for any of them.

The same day's editorial quoted – approvingly – a Reform supporter denouncing support for Ukraine and concluded "If such men and women are not to be abandoned to the Farage gang and right-wing populism then the left must find the means to appeal to them directly outwith the incubus of decaying Starmerism." What the hell that means remains of mystery.

Finally (for now): the Supreme Court ruling in the case of *For Women Scotland v The Scottish Ministers*. The editorial of 28 April addressed the Scottish TUC, which opened that day. The ed-

itorial noted that "The Congress will doubtless see emergency resolutions concerning the recent Supreme Court judgement on sex and gender, an issue on which there are strong and principled opinions in the movement. This newspaper has taken its own stand but recognises the validity of the debate and the importance of mutual respect".

Debate

But the MS has not "taken its own stand" or, indeed, "recognised the validity of the debate". It has carried the Communist Party of Britain / Young Communist League statement *welcoming* the Supreme Court's ruling together with some photos and reports of protest marches *against* the ruling. There has been no "debate" and the paper has not "taken its own stand" unless you assume the CPB/YCL statement is, indeed, the paper's de facto stand (so much for its claim to be run by the People's Press Printing Society and not the CPB).

In fact, the lack of any debate whatsoever on the ruling could be taken as yet another dog that didn't bark in the night-time. □

Solidarity? No, you're just a proxy



Eye on the Left

By Matt Cooper

In *Socialist Worker* of 30 April, Alex Callinicos returned to the issue of Ukraine. The central claim of SW is that the war's predominant character is an inter-imperialist conflict between Russia and the US, with Ukraine serving as a proxy for the US or Nato. This underpins SW's opposition to arming Ukraine.

Ukraine's government since 2014 is also described as a "Western" proxy. Tomáš Tengely-Evans characterises Ukrainian politics after 2014 thus: "the West and Russia poured in support for their proxies as they sought to pull Ukraine into their rival camps" (SW #2946). In reality, after Yanukovich was elected on a pro-EU platform in 2010, his government became increasingly corrupt and pro-Russian, and blocked moves towards EU membership. After the Euromaidan uprising in 2013-4,

constitutional moves to remove him led to his fleeing to Russia, followed by the constitutional appointment of an interim president by the Rada (Ukraine's parliament). Russia's response was its invasion of Crimea and eastern Ukraine. Later that year, Petro Poroshenko was overwhelmingly elected in a vote recognised as fair. He expressed the desire of the Ukrainian people to move towards EU membership. Those were not left-wing governments, but not "proxies", either.

Tengely-Evans further claims that the US "poured military aid into Ukraine" under Obama. Between 2014 and 2017, the US provided around \$700 million in non-lethal aid, such as medical kits and blankets. The US was concerned not to threaten Russia. While SW repeatedly suggests that Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022 because it felt threatened, the reverse is true. Most informed commentators reckon Russia believed Nato was divided and weak, so would offer little help to Ukrainian resistance.

In SW #2952, Callinicos compares Russia's invasion of Ukraine with the Korean War. He suggests Trump's move to end US aid reflects a "necessary conclusion". The end of the Korean War in 1953 and the partition of Korea show "a model for a peace deal" in Ukraine. This analogy is seriously flawed.

Colony

Korea was a Japanese colony until 1945, when the USSR and the US hastily divided it into zones of occupation. Both sides installed client regimes – Kim Il-sung in the North, and Syngman Rhee in the South, through a deeply flawed election. The 1950-3 war was fought largely by Chinese and US troops. The 1953 ceasefire left the peninsula divided and heavily militarised.

Ukraine, by contrast, was an independent state with no foreign military presence before Russia's 2014 invasion. Since 2022, it has been defending its territory against imperial aggression. Ukraine is not a semi-colony or client state, but an independent state being in-

vaded by an imperialist neighbour. Its government is not a proxy for US power.

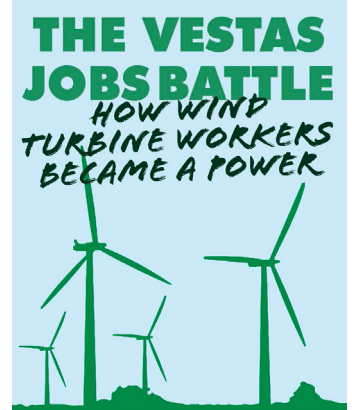
Callinicos acknowledges that Korea's 1953 peace was underpinned by US troops. But the US has ruled out any presence in Ukraine. SW also opposes it. Callinicos admits any US-imposed peace now would be "bitter and uncertain" and concedes Putin "can come back for more if the opportunity offers" (SW #2946). Tough luck, Ukraine, apparently.

SW's characterisation of Ukraine's government as a US proxy sits badly with Trump's drive to turn Ukraine into a tributary state. SW #2947 editorialised that the US and Russia are both predators and the war is still a proxy conflict – but this incoherent analysis has not been developed.

The deeper problem is that SW recognises Ukrainian self-determination only in the most abstract way. They acknowledge Ukraine cannot resist Russia without Western arms but offer no meaningful alternative other than waiting for a mass movement in Russia.

Their response to annexation and occupation is resignation.

By casting Russia's occupation as a proxy war between US-Nato and Russia, SW denies the agency of Ukrainians. It leads them to accept peace terms that validate conquest. That is not a principled anti-imperialist position – it is evasion, wrapped in confusion, inside a politics that has given up on solidarity. □



The 2nd edition contains new material, plus photos from the campaign and occupation. £4 (inc. post) □ bit.ly/shop-wl

Schools and the “guidance” documents



Women's Fightback

By **Natalia Cassidy**

In December 2023, draft non-statutory guidance was released for schools and colleges in England on “Gender Questioning Children”. The official consultation ended a while back, but the draft is still only a draft. The government says [only](#) that it will respond “in 2025”.

Given the backwash spun from the 16 April Supreme Court ruling, some pessimism is in order.

The draft guidance was markedly different from most widely-used previous guidance documents in its emphasis on exclusion of trans people from single-sex spaces and on “outing” transgender children to parents. In a

2022 study by Gallup, 43% of trans and non-binary people surveyed had experienced familial abuse, so there are serious safeguarding concerns here, even with the caveats laid out in the guidance.

As far as I know, not many schools have actively pursued implementation of the draft guidance, and, given its non-statutory status, they need not do so even if the government endorses the draft.

However after the recent Supreme Court decision and the subsequent EHRC “interim update”, some institutions are trying to “get ahead” of the guidance, as it were. Some trans members of the NEU, the biggest union in schools, have been told they can no longer use the toilets they have been using for years at their schools and without incident.

There is a worrying trend, not exclu-

sive to education, where workplaces are going beyond the relatively minimal scope of the Supreme Court ruling, which, directly, says only that trans women with a Gender Recognition Certificate cannot be counted into women’s quotas on official committees in Scotland. Loud voices are pushing beyond that to a generalised hostility towards trans people in public spaces.

This is a battle that the labour movement is going to have to fight. The official policy passed by many unions is generally positive, though there are varying levels of support amongst trade unionists. Some leading members of the NEU helped to set up Women’s Place UK (WPUK), which was set up in opposition to self-identification and has folded after putting out a statement that effectively stated that it had won its cause and was a bit embarrassed that the far right had the same position.

Given the impact of the guidance on the public policing of gender (for both transgender and cisgender people), and the fact that the public spaces of concern are mostly workplaces, it is going to be crucial to fight for a collective opposition to these policies within the unions. □



Women's Fightback.
28 pages,
£3.00 □
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Unions are central to eco-policy



Environment

By **Vicki Morris**

Often, to workers, it doesn't much matter what job we do so long as we earn a living.

Workers grow and process food; they work in factories to produce clothes, toys, washing machines, cars; they work in the creative industries, on arthouse films, blockbusters, video games, pornography; they do sex work; they work in the public services, teaching, nursing, healing, and caring; they drive cars, trains, and aeroplanes; they generate energy using renewables or nuclear but, still, predominantly, drilling for oil and gas and digging coal; they smuggle coca, they make cigarettes, they build and drop bombs.

Our role as socialists is to raise our and other workers' eyes above this beaten-down level, where all that matters is to get a wage, and not what we do, and to organise workers to create a society that supersedes this; to understand ourselves not as individuals but as part of a class with an interest in the future.

Today the jobs of many UK workers depend on industries linked to causing climate change including energy, manufacturing, and transport.

We want a “worker-led just

transition” that doesn't just mean closing polluting industries and putting the workers in them out of a job. Workers, through our trade unions and our political participation, need to shape the transition, to be in control of it.

Until we have confidence that they are in charge, while there is no credible, reliable alternative, for them and for their children and their communities, many workers will resist the idea of transition and be prey to climate change scepticism, of the sort that Reform peddles. The “just transition” agenda is only achievable through developing workers' confidence and power, so that we can push to the centre of transition plans.

Socialists must aim to build rank and file power to the point where we can propose the changes that must be made, confident that we can impose workers' needs in the process and workers now in high-emissions jobs can be assured alternative jobs. In the early 1970s the New South Wales Builders Labourers Federation (BLF) ran boycotts to support environmental causes as well as women's, gay, and Aboriginal Australians' rights. They could only do that because they had first built themselves as a strong and democratic union, able to impose itself on the employers on workplace issues.

We need to align the inter-

ests of the workers in particular industries with the interests of workers – and all humanity.

How can we do it? In most unions there is a network – official or informal – of workers who want to raise environmental issues. Socialists should join such networks.

Socialists in the unions can link discussions about the need for worker-led just transition to questions about the ownership of electrical supply and generating companies, of the grid, etc., of economic planning and democratic control of the economy. Such discussions allow us to critique capitalism from an environmental perspective.

Networks

Environmental networks in the unions should develop transition plans for their industries/workplaces. Sometimes they can do this in conjunction with the employers, but they should always keep in mind that we must change the whole of society, seize industry and the economy and democratically reshape them to serve the needs of all people, not, as at the moment, a minority of capitalists.

In many unions, climate-change work is considered distinct from “normal” trade union work. Socialists should mainstream environmental work into union activity. One way is to submit green bargaining claims, as the PCS civil service union has done.

There, climate-related demands are made on employers, and to campaign around those demands as we would for any other industrial demands. Unions can campaign for adaptation measures, e.g., adapting to work in higher temperatures.

Within unions and environmental campaigns socialists

can make the case for revolutionary, democratic change as the only way to head off environmental catastrophe and to repair the damage and suffering we are already seeing. Simultaneously we can fight for reforms to mitigate the effects of climate change and build workers' strength for the larger battles to come. □

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Different roads to autocracy



Debate

By Martin Thomas

"The governing caste", wrote Marx in 1855, "in England is by no means the same as the ruling class".

The relations between governing caste and ruling class, and between the state and other classes, vary widely between capitalist countries. But, centrally, some offer flexibility, space for pushback, channels from pressure.

In the USA now, Trump's gang seeks to make governance more like an absolute monarchy. Trump proclaims it himself: "We are the federal law". On 3 May he posted on social media a [graphic](#) of himself as Pope, following his previous [one](#) of himself as king. The Pope one he has passed off as a joke. It's not funny. His process is not a military takeover like Pinochet's in Chile; but it is another way towards autocracy, rather than a path safely within democratic bounds.

In Chile, martial law wiped out the old political mechanisms almost at one blow. The army jailed 40,000 in the National Stadium and killed some thousands in the first months. Then, over the years, resistance re-emerged and repression slackened. Chile still has the constitution instituted by Pinochet in 1980, but Pinochet was voted out in a referendum in 1988 and replaced by more-or-less parliamentary government in 1989.

Erdogan in Turkey shows a different trajectory to authoritarian rule. He came to office in a more or less ordinary parliamentary election, in 2002-3. As late as 2012-3 Turkish Marxists with whom we discussed described his AKP as "a bourgeois party proper", like an Islamic counterpart of Christian Democracy. In some ways the AKP liberalised Turkey from remnants of the military regime of the early 1980s.

In 2016 Erdogan suppressed a military-takeover move by sections of the army. He has followed that with an AKP power-grab in sector after sector. The World Press Freedom Index now ranks Turkey as 159th of the 180 countries it covers, only just above Venezuela and Cambodia, and vastly worse than Hungary, for example. Opposition politicians are jailed. Unions function but unionists are often arrested. The same Marxists now see the AKP as fascist.

In India, Narendra Modi came to office in 2014 through an ordinary election, though at the head of a party with a long-established mass paramilitary adjunct. Since then he has accumulated power, gradually, from above. The press freedom index shows India declining from 60 in 2014 to 33 in 2025 (only a bit better than Turkey). By 2024

India's lower house of Parliament was sitting for only 55 days a year and half its laws were discussed for less than two hours each. Opposition politicians get jailed. Protesters and public critics are more and more harassed.

Unlike with a military takeover followed by slow easing-off, here we have a slow grinding-down. India still has trade unions, though probably the largest confederation (BMS) is tied to the ruling party. State governments retain autonomy.

In Poland, Józef Piłsudski led an uprising by a section of the military in 1926. It was (foolishly) supported by the Socialist Party, the Communist Party, and unions. The government resigned, and an unchanged parliament elected a new government with Piłsudski as the power behind the scenes.

A real parliamentary election in 1928 gave Piłsudski's supporters a majority. Bit by bit Piłsudski extended his autocracy, harassing but never outright outlawing opposition such as the Polish Socialist Party.

Hitler in Germany came to power constitutionally, and followed with a power-grab from above, but much faster.

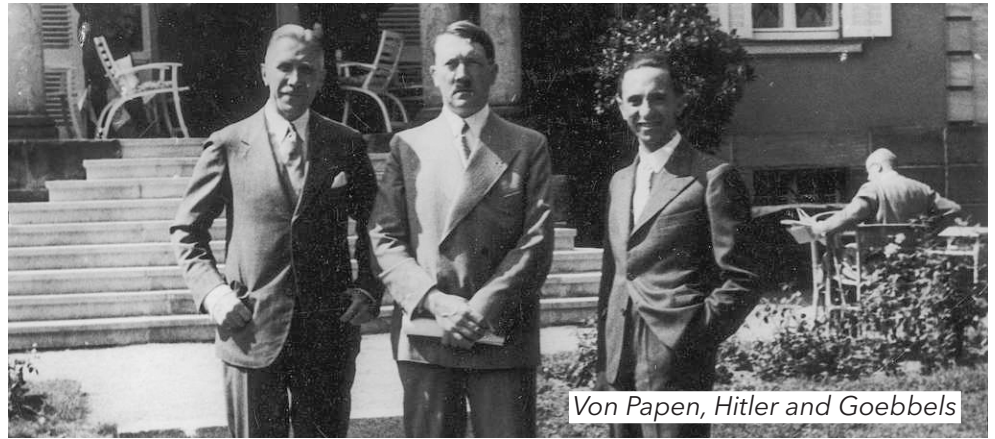
From 1930 to 1933, Germany's parliament could produce no coalitions with majorities to govern. Chancellor (prime minister) Heinrich Brüning (of the Centre Party, forerunner of the Christian Democrats) was appointed by the president, Paul Hindenburg, and ruled by decree, with parliament's power limited to evicting him by no-confidence vote if it dared.

Restoration

To replace that uneasy makeshift, Brüning privately favoured restoration of the pre-1918 monarchy. The Social Democrats privately agreed to back that as long as a relatively liberal member of the royal family was chosen. Hindenburg insisted on full restoration. Impasse.

Brüning's successor in December 1932 and January 1933, Kurt von Schleicher, wanted a military dictatorship. Conservative politicians and the military themselves feared that would evoke a general strike. Instead they had Hindenburg appoint Hitler chancellor as the more constitutional option. They thought they could tame Hitler within a coalition government (30 January 1933).

Some "power grab" had already been done "for" Hitler by Franz von Papen, another Centre Party figure, Chancellor from June to December 1932. He sacked the Social Democrat government of Prussia (the biggest component of Germany) and put Rudolf Diels, a conservative, in charge of the Prussian police, heavily Social-Democrat influenced. The Social Democrats



Von Papen, Hitler and Goebbels

mooted a general strike to resist, but thought it too risky.

Hitler never purged the old aristocratic military elite. It went along with him until defeat loomed in World War Two, when large sections of it tried and failed to oust him, notably in July 1944.

On 27 February he seized a chance when a loner set fire to the parliament building. He curtailed civil liberties and, though Diels would not cooperate fully, arrested thousands of leftists. Hitler did not have complete control yet: the Stalinist Georgi Dimitrov, falsely accused of the fire, was acquitted by a court.

Patient

In elections on 5 March 1933 the Communist Party still got five million votes (and the Social Democrats seven million: the right were still a minority in the cities). The Stalinists claimed "an enormous political victory" and promised good times soon: Hitler could not last long. The Social Democrats, meanwhile, counselled patient opposition and waiting for better times.

Leon Trotsky remonstrated: "Yes, five million Communists still succeeded in reaching the ballot box, one by one. But in the factories and on the streets, there are none. They are disconcerted, dispersed, demoralised".

The Nazis, with the monarchist-conservatives whom they would soon discard, now had a majority in parliament, which on 23 March voted an Enabling Act for the central government to rule by decree and reconstruct state governments. The Centre Party voted for the Act because it foolishly believed Nazi promises that it would then be spared repression. The Communist Party members of parliament had been arrested or were hiding. The Social Democrats voted against, dignified but passive.

In April the Nazi Göring replaced the conservative Diels as head of the Prussian police.

The trade unions dissociated from the Social Democrats, and rallied for a government-organised May Day. On 2 May they were suppressed, and submitted quietly. They would be replaced by a government-run Labour Front in October 1934.

The Social Democrats were banned

on 22 June. Universities were quickly subordinated: the Nazis were strong among students. Public book burnings started on 10 May.

What the Nazis called "Gleichschaltung", the takeover of all public agencies (except the top military) by Nazi control, took a couple of years, and included the slaughter by Hitler in June 1934 of the leaders of the slightly-dissident paramilitary wing of the Nazi party. Repression intensified year on year, up to and into World War Two.

Mussolini in Italy deployed more violence, and for example got many local authorities replaced by appointees (of the conservative-liberal Rome government), before taking office; but he also came to power "constitutionally". The famous "March on Rome" was a bedraggled affair which set off only after the king had made Mussolini prime minister, in October 1922. The governing Liberals had given up and hoped that bringing Mussolini into government would subdue civil strife.

In the second half of 1924, Mussolini's power looked precarious. The Marxist Antonio Gramsci thought it "very likely" that he would lose his majority in parliament and fall to "a government of generals, senators, and former prime ministers". But none of the opposition mobilised. Mussolini recouped, and completed his power-grab by late 1926. His repression intensified after 1926, though it was never as fierce as Hitler's. In July 1943 he was voted out by the Fascist Grand Council, which included figures who had volunteered to the Liberals in October 1922 their services as army chief (Badoglio) or leader of a Nationalist militia (Federzoni) to quash the March on Rome, and then gone in with Mussolini. They now decided to seek a deal with the Allies and "go democratic".

Mussolini was jailed, but the Germans rescued him and made him nominal ruler of a puppet state in northern Italy until April 1945.

That is another story, and another example of how autocratic rule can be imposed not by a sudden military takeover, but by a process which starts with a "constitutional" transition, and can then go on at very varying speeds. □



Trump speeds power-grab

By Rhodri Evans

"You could get him back", said journalist Terry Moran to Donald Trump, about Kilmar Abergo Garcia. "There's a phone on this desk".

"I could," Trump said.

Trump's administration flew Abrego Garcia to jail in El Salvador, without him ever being charged or convicted in the USA or in El Salvador, and while he was protected by a US court order. Trump's lawyers said it was an "administrative error".

A unanimous decision of the Supreme Court, despite its pro-Trump majority, told the administration to "facilitate" Abrego Garcia's return home. Trump's lawyers flam. Too late! They can only readmit Abrego Garcia if El Salvador's dictator Nayib Bukele sends him back. And Bukele won't.

Now Trump says he can get Abrego Garcia back, by asking Bukele, whom he is paying millions to jail people deported from the USA. Only, he won't.

And nothing happens. The Supreme Court lacks the means to act against Trump. The police unit all federal courts rely on, the US Marshals Service, is controlled by the Department of Justice. The DOJ, which has powers in public prosecutions, has traditionally had some autonomy from the president. No longer.

Besides, Trump has in his pocket a July 2024 Supreme Court ruling giving him immunity from prosecution for all "official acts". And, by all reports, the cautious non-Trumpist Chief Justice of the Supreme Court wants to avoid a

confrontation with Trump, in which, he thinks, the Court would come off worse.

Abregon Garcia's single case condenses the essentials of Trump's drive to remake US government with a power-grab from above.

He has a mass of institutionalised consultation, counterbalances, and litigation to cut through, but he has moved fast in his first hundred days. He threatens to install tyranny-above-the-law in place of scope for the labour movement and civil-society groups for self-defence and redress.

Trump has largely sidelined Congress. He wants it to pass some budgetary measures, but everything else, including history's biggest-ever sudden changes to the world market regime (outside world wars) and a vast repeal of environmental regulations, he does by "executive order", often on the plea of "emergency".

Swerved

He has more often swerved the courts than flatly defied them (as over Abrego Garcia), but he has not let them stop him. He got a judge arrested on 25 April for obstructing federal agents trying to seize an immigrant in her court (on an unrelated issue).

In an executive order against "sanctuary cities" (those which instruct local police not to cooperate with federal deportation cops), he describes their policy as "a lawless insurrection". The word "insurrection" signals his desire to invoke the Insurrection Act, allowing the use of the military for domestic policy. Before his election, he promised



"one very violent day" to quell crime. A recent "factsheet" from his White House proclaims a wish to "unleash high-impact police forces".

He is hastening preparations, legal and physical, for mass deportations, and may hope along the way for some incident which he can call "lawless insurrection" and deploy that "violent day".

As *The Economist* magazine comments, after arresting and jailing or deporting rebellious students, "arresting judges – and perhaps eventually mayors or university administrators" is on the cards. Trump has purged the top ranks of the armed forces, the FBI, and the CIA, putting in loyalists.

He is bending states, notably on transgender kids in school sport, by withholding federal funds. He is dissolving whole government departments and federal agencies, and has gone after universities, law firms, museums, and scientific research projects.

He is cutting funding for NPR and PBS, the USA's vestigial BBC-type

media; has started proceedings against Disney, ABC News, and AP; and has threatened CBS. He has made, according to Politico, a "sweeping offensive on America's non-profit sector... funding cuts, the elimination of tax benefits, bureaucratic paralysis... a small DOGE team to target them".

He has removed union representation rights for federal employees, and sacked or displaced about 200,000 of them. That includes tens of thousands at the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). The IRS will be less able to chase rich tax-evaders. But the real reason why Trump has had four IRS chiefs within 100 days is that he wants to circumvent legal obstacles to using IRS data to aid the deportation drive.

The National Labor Relations Board, the USA's worker-rights watchdog, is semi-paralysed. Trump acolytes have proposed ruling public-sector unions unconstitutional and replacing other unions by joint worker-union forums: whether or when Trump will go for that, we don't know. □

May Day in the USA

By Colin Foster

May Day in the USA counted over 1,000 protests against Trump in over 800 towns and cities. 5,000 marched in Philadelphia, where Bernie Sanders spoke, berating Democrats for defending the economic status quo, and nearly 10,000 in New York.

"May Day Strong", initiated by the Chicago Teachers' Union, and the NGO-ish 50501, promoted the protests. Unions backed them, though usually with small contingents. There was action in some places on 2 and 3 May, too, and another day of action is set for 14 June.

The leading Democrats who talked big about "resistance" at first have gone quiet. Many

now try to do deals with Trump for their states or cities and hope that if they show themselves conservative enough then the tide will turn for them in mid-term elections in November 2026 or the next presidential election in November 2028.

The socialist group Solidarity calls for more urgency against "the Trump-MAGA regime's open drive toward a police state" which of course could shift the political framework long before 2028. This is, they say, a "five-alarm [maximum mobilisation] civil and human rights emergency in the United States".

The Tempest network, initiated by former members of the International Socialist Organization (ISO, the USA's biggest far-left group before

its collapse in 2019), adds: "Trump is not going to listen to ethics and reason and change course, and street demonstrations alone are not enough to force change. Only mass strikes capable of shutting down business as usual would have the power to do this".

Strike

In the US trade-union movement, too, there is talk of mass strikes. But the shape so far is the United Auto Workers' call for a one-day general strike on 1 May 2028 (yes, 2028), to be prepared by synchronising contracts to end around then. In the meantime the UAW, while criticising Trump, is also supporting him on tariffs.

Socialist Alternative USA argues for more urgency: "This year's May Day should serve

as a springboard for a nationally coordinated one-day strike against Trump, Musk, and the billionaire class". (Back in the 1970s and 1980s, the Militant tendency in Britain, to which the origins of Socialist Alternative can be traced, had "one-day general strike" as its cure-all response to Tory and capitalist attacks).

The US far left has moved forward from its [shrug](#) last November: "whatever the result on 5 Nov, it's business as before". Of course, whatever its efforts, it is still weak, especially since the ISO's demise.

There was some talk straight after 5 November, more from the NGO-ish left than the far left, of local anti-Trump defence committees. But that seems to have faded, for now anyway.

Possibly internal contradictions at the top of the ruling class will trip up Trump and open up divisions and tensions in the MAGA cadre.

Federal Reserve Bank chief Jay Powell, a Trump appointee in his first term, is nevertheless visibly minded to resist on interest-rate policy, where Trump will need help if he is push through his erratic and botched tariff war. After saying he wanted Powell "terminated" "soon", Trump has backed off, saying he has no plan to remove him.

A MAGA stumble or split could give the left and the labour movement new hope and courage. But it would be foolish to rely on time being on our side. The battle is uphill. And urgent. □

Israel goes for “conquer” and “hold”

By Ira Berkovic

Israel's security cabinet has approved a plan for a sustained military occupation of Gaza. Government officials have told the press that the plan involves a renewed offensive aimed at “conquering” and “holding” territories.

On 24 April, around 10,000 people demonstrated against the war in Tel Aviv, at a protest called by the binational (Palestinian-Jewish) left-wing social movement Standing Together. Whilst general anti-government demonstrations, which have increasingly foregrounded demands for a ceasefire and hostage-release agreement, have been larger, this was the largest explicitly anti-war, anti-occupation demonstration since the war began. Protesters held up photos of Palestinian children killed in Gaza, in defiance of police threats to repress attempts to do so.

Standing Together wrote: “Thousands of us, Palestinians and Jews, stood side by side on Thursday at our protest in Tel Aviv. In the face of the police's attempted censorship, we held up images of the victims of this horrific war with a simple message: We refuse to stand by as atrocities are committed in Gaza and as our government abandons the hostages. We know none of this has anything to do with safety and everything to do with the extremism of our leaders. We refuse this war of annihilation!”

At the University of Haifa, a campus where nearly 50% of students are Palestinian, university management has banned the local Standing Together chapter, after it held a protest also featuring images of dead children. The chapter has launched a campaign to overturn the ban.



On 29 April, a far-right mob stormed a Reform synagogue in Ra'anana, north of Tel Aviv, that was hosting a screening of the Joint Memorial Day Ceremony, an annual gathering of Jews and Palestinians who have lost family members.

Standing Together said: “Dozens of far-right extremists arrived in an organised group; they threw stones, shattered windows, climbed on cars, spat, cursed, beat people – and even pushed a woman in a wheelchair to the ground.

Deliberate

“This was not merely an attack on an event, but a deliberate assault on an idea: that Jews and Palestinians can mourn together, live together, and build a shared future. The ceremony is about dignity, about refusing to let grief fuel hatred, about acknowledging one another's pain and daring to imagine a life without bloodshed. No

one should face violence for lighting a candle in memory of the dead, and no one should be attacked for believing in peace.

“This attack was meant to silence us, to frighten us, to stop us – but what it revealed instead is the urgency and growing strength of what we are building together.”

More than 70% of Gaza is already either under direct Israeli military control, or subject to evacuation orders issued by the Israeli military.

Throughout its war, Israeli leaders have vacillated on whether they intend to maintain an ongoing military presence in Gaza once the nominal war aims, “destroying” Hamas and freeing hostages, have been achieved. The new plan shows conclusively that an ongoing occupation is intended, which will undoubtedly lead to renewed calls from the settler movement for Jewish resettlement of Gaza.

The new plan also includes the “possibility” of measures to resume distribution of humanitarian aid, through private companies under direct Israeli control and supervision. UN aid agencies have denounced the scheme as unworkable.

To facilitate the new troop movements in Gaza, thousands of reservists will need to be called up. This gives the wave of refusal currently taking place within Israel, with thousands of reservists signing statements saying they will refuse to fight in Gaza, an increased significance. Whilst its political impact is considerable, thus far the refusal movement has had little operational impact, as the IDF's operations in Gaza did not require significant numbers of personnel. If the wave of refusal continues, it could play a role in obstructing implementation of the new plan.

In Britain, Foreign Secretary David Lammy held a visit with Mohammad Mustafa, the Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority, the semi-state body with limited control over some areas of the occupied West Bank. A UK gov-

ernment statement announced a £101 million aid package, and Lammy reported that he is in talks with the French government towards possible joint recognition of the State of Palestine, a diplomatic entity covering the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem.

Although such recognition would be symbolic, it would be an important symbol. Benjamin Netanyahu's government's political project is to block Palestinian self-determination, in any form, in any territory; any diplomatic pressure that can be brought to bear against this is worthwhile.

The UK government can do much more, including withdrawing the export licenses via which UK-based firms sell arms to Israel. Trade unions, especially those affiliated to Labour, must use their weight to press these demands, as well as increasing direct solidarity with movements such as Standing Together fighting for peace and equality on the ground. □

UK Friends of Standing Together

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

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

UKFoST promotes the benefits of joint struggle by Jews and Palestinians to this end. □ • ukfost.co.uk

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

Hear Uri Weltmann and Amin Amara at these meetings...

May 14th 7:00PM

London

May 15th 6:00PM

Cambridge

May 16th 3:00PM

Oxford

May 18th 2:00PM

Nottingham

May 18th 7:00PM

Sheffield

May 20th 7:00PM

Bristol

Register to attend your nearest event at bit.ly/fost-tour



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Reform wins are a warning

By Cathy Nugent

Reform's wins in the 1 May county council elections (677 councillors, ten councils), mayoral elections (two mayors), and the Runcorn by-election are a warning to us all – that far right populism, influenced by both the European far right and Trumpian ideology, is a serious threat.

Farage told Radio Four's Today programme that in the 10 councils now controlled by Reform they will set up mini "Departments of Government Efficiency" – "Doges" – slashing spending on anything associated with climate change and EDI (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion). This has to be an impulse for the unions to radically improve their organisation in local government.

The council elections were also a story about Tory losses – of 674 councillors and 20 councils, out of the total of 23 which were up for grabs, to either Reform, the Lib-Dems or No Overall Control. Time will tell if Runcorn was mainly a protest vote, but there is no room for complacency.

The elections indicated that protest votes shifting from Labour will mostly go to Lib Dems or Greens (or abstention). The Greens increased their numbers of councillors, but "ex-Labour-left" groups had little presence on 1 May, and where they had (Broxtowe Alliance in Nottinghamshire) did not do well.

Reform has a growing branch structure, and will build up support through many elections in the run up to 2029. We cannot rely on all their councillors being exposed as racists or antisemites (although many will be).

Since the general election, when Reform won four MPs, the party has been steadily rising in the polls; it is now neck and neck with, or even marginally ahead of, Labour. In those 89 constituencies where Reform came second to Labour in 2024, Labour MPs will be worried.

Who are Reform?

Reform has its roots in the UK Independence Party (Ukip), a single-issue hardline "Eurosceptic" party. A faction dominated by Nigel Farage took control in 1997, but the public-school-educated commodities trader and self-styled boozing man-of-the-people did not become the official leader until 2006.

After dropping its abstention from European elections, Ukip won three seats in 1999. Farage took a seat in South East England, which he held right up to 2020. Ukip benefitted from the wages, expenses and research money which followed.

Over the next 20 years Ukip polled well in European elections, less well in general elections, but did build up support. It broadened its right-wing appeal

by putting anti-immigration policies front and centre. Ukip became a general party of protest as well as a beacon for the UK's significant, but more volatile and less reliable, anti-EU sentiment.

In the early 2000s when Ukip had to compete somewhat with the BNP for electoral support, some in the party wanted an electoral pact. Farage has always consistently opposed joining up with the fascist right or Tommy Robinson. The aim of this so-called "insurgent" has been to become an "insider", to displace the Tories, and keep just on the right side of "respectable".

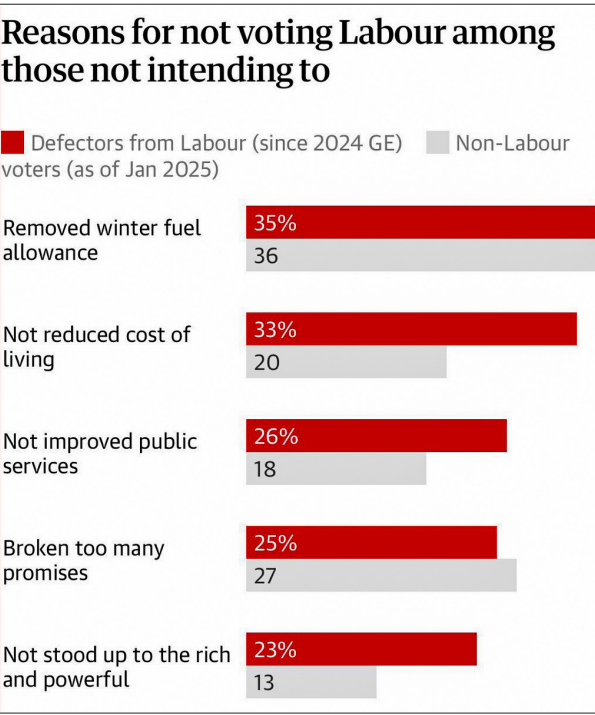
On the other hand, Ukip's divisive and racist anti-immigration politics have become mainstream. Our hardest fight in the future will be to confront the myths about migration – democratic labour movement-based local committees will be the best way to organise this work.

The financial crash of 2008 and the austerity which followed shook up the UK political system, with support for both leaving the EU and Ukip growing significantly. In the 2010 election Ukip won 3.1% of the vote, around a million votes, but no MPs. By late 2012 polls gave it 10% support. In the 2013 local elections they achieved around 23% in the wards where they stood, winning 147 seats. In the 2014 European elections they won 4.4 million votes (27.5%) and 24 MEPs. In the May 2015 general election Ukip gained 3.9 million votes (12.6%).

Ukip's success and the Tory Party's own divisions on Europe led Cameron to pledge a referendum on EU membership in 2013. Cameron wanted to "save" the Tory Party and secure his own position, caring little about how toxic such a plebiscite was likely to be.

Meanwhile Ukip had become the largest party in the far right Europe of Freedom and Democracy group in the European Parliament. The group included Lega Nord, the Danish People's Party, the Finns Party, and the Slovak National Party. In recent years Farage has openly supported Marine Le Pen, Giorgia Meloni, Viktor Orban and the AfD; he has made frequent trips to the US to court Donald Trump.

During the EU referendum Farage and his multi-millionaire sidekicks Arron Banks and Richard Tice were left out in the cold by the official Leave campaign. Their unofficial "radical" Brexit campaign, Leave.EU, was vile. Remember their poster with the sub-heading, "We must break free of the EU and take back control of our borders", using a photograph of seemingly "invading" Syrian migrants crossing the Croatia-Slovenia border in 2015? Farage claimed that most of the people were young poor males who would risk



the "security of everybody". That 17.4 million people voted for Brexit (51.9%) is explained to some degree by years of Ukip's little-Englander, nationalistic, scaremongering.

After the referendum Farage stood down as Ukip leader, resigning in 2018, as the party descended into in-fighting. In the prolonged delay to implementing Brexit Richard Tice set up the cross-party Leave Means Leave. Then a supporter, Catherine Blaiklock, registered the Brexit Party name at Companies House. When Blaiklock was exposed as a racist, Farage opportunistically used this as an opportunity to usurp her. In the 2019 European elections, with a manifesto of watered down populist policies, the party won 5.2 million votes (31.6%), gaining 29 MEPs. But it did very badly in the general election later in the year.

The Brexit Party was relaunched in January 2021, now renamed Reform UK, in order to take advantage of anti-lockdown sentiments. In March 2024 Lee Anderson defected from the Tories to Reform.

Far right

Reform is not fascist, but is a part of the global wave of the non-fascist far right. Reform's leaders strongly object to being called "far right", not wanting to be associated with the "nationalism" of the National Front or BNP. Indeed many people who support Reform do not see themselves as far right.

A useful 2024 [poll](#) by Hope Not Hate splits Reform supporters into five groups. A group of middle aged working-class men (22.5% of Reform's base) are "hardline" on immigration and would support Tommy Robinson. A smaller group (19.1%) are more in favour of multiculturalism and more likely to be women; they are profoundly disillusioned with the political system. The biggest group (26.1%) are older and

pessimistic about the future; 60% are Christians. 12% of Reform's supporters are young men who are not strongly anti-immigration but are influenced by conspiracy theories and online misogyny. 19% are traditional Tories.

With such a base Reform's policy platform has to be a mix of patriotism, small-state policies, anti-wokery and nods to conspiracy theories, e.g. a "patriotic curriculum", cuts in corporation tax and the effective privatisation of the NHS, the banning of "transgender ideology" in schools, and scrapping the Climate Change Levy.

Starmer's response to Reform's success was to say, Labour should "go further and faster" to make "change" happen. But the changes Labour have introduced were a problem!

Some Labour MP as well as canvassers in Runcorn have blamed the cuts in pensioners' winter fuel allowance and potential cuts to disability benefits for Labour's losses. Voters talked about Labour betrayal.

We have to be careful here. In the far right's narrative "betrayal" links to the idea that the government is against "British values", or "looking after your own". The desired policies are stopping illegal immigration, the war in Ukraine and foreign aid. "Betrayal" is also an expression of nationalist identity politics.

The labour movement can and must make an appeal to Reform's more economically left-leaning potential supporters. In the immediate period it needs to fight hard against Labour's benefit cuts.

Workers' Liberty supporters will seek ways to galvanise the "soft left", the for-now subterranean opposition inside Labour which is fearful of where Labour is going.

Even small successes in these areas will help undermine the pessimism and lack of trust in politics underlying support for the themes of the far right. It will also help recharge activism in the labour movement.

Above all the socialist left needs clear socialist policies. Jobs with genuine living wages and decent homes for all are affordable when we tax the rich and the capitalist corporations. □



For socialists to understand and confront left antisemitism from primitive or Stalinist roots to the "anti-imperialism of fools". 265 pages, £9.99 □ bit.ly/shop-wl

How we can learn from history



Book review

By Martin Thomas

"No, I don't need to know any more about Stalinism", said one demonstrator on London's May Day, when I offered him a copy of our new booklet, *The Fall of European Stalinism*. "I read about all that long ago".

Another was not against reading about Stalinism. But, he said: "I'm not buying a booklet on Stalinism from you. Our differences on that are too big".

The second non-buyer is not a Stalinist, but an avowed Trotskyist. But he is right that there are differences. We cooperated with his group, Workers' Power, to produce Labour for a Socialist Europe leaflets on a wide range of topics for the 2019 general election; but we had to abandon one explaining that our socialism had nothing in common with Stalinism because we just couldn't get enough agreement.

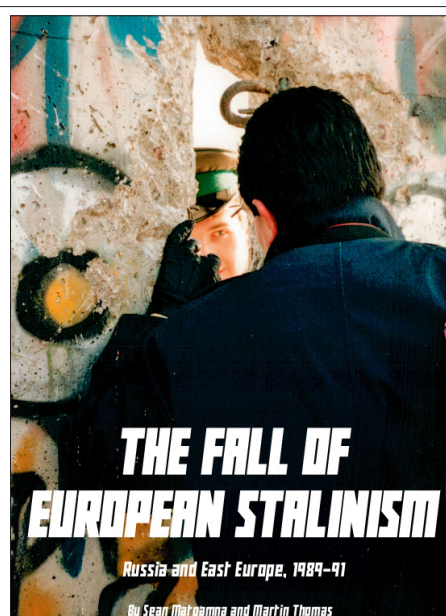
There are many answers to the non-buyers' objections.

The fall of European Stalinism in 1989-91 was a turning point in world history. If we are Marxists, dedicated to a long-haul battle for working-class emancipation, and not just agitators for the moment, liable to fade if we don't see quick results, then we need a view of history and where we stand in it.

1989-91 is in the past? So, by definition, is every experience we can learn from. We need to know about 1989-91 as we need to know about the Russian Revolution of 1917, or the Stalinist counter-revolution that followed, or for that matter the French Revolution of 1789-94.

And this was a turning-point which refuted previous expectations. Our booklet reprises our analyses from the time which saw the 1989-91 overturns as "bourgeois revolutions" – revolutions within bourgeois limits, ending with bourgeoisies in power – but bourgeois revolutions against Stalinism, not feudalism (as in France in 1789-94).

In other words, the overturns



In 1991 the USSR collapsed. It was a turning-point in world history. The book surveys socialist responses at the time. £6

workersliberty.org/publications

showed the Stalinist systems to be not "post-capitalism", ahead of capitalism, but "behind" capitalism.

Pretty much all of us, however anti-Stalinist, had seen it differently. It might be hard to overthrow the Stalinist states, but the great popular uprisings against them which we hoped for would surely go straight on to workers' rule.

Max Shachtman, Leon Trotsky's close comrade who went on after Trotsky's death to draw the conclusion that Stalin had created a new form of exploitative class society, "consider[ed] it untenable and, in the long run, disastrous to counterpose to Stalinism the defence of capitalism in any of its synonymous forms". Why? "So long as the choice before the world is only between these two, it is Stalinism – totalitarian collectivism – that will gain, at one or another rate of speed".

"The unarrested decline and helplessness of the capitalist world", he wrote in 1961, ruled out its alternative "generating or promoting" a crisis within Stalinism.

The booklet spells out a different

view, which we came to over the course of long and difficult discussions: that the Stalinist states represented not a new path, even a short one, but a giant blind alley, a cul-de-sac, within the world era of capitalism.

Consternation at the apparently "post-capitalist" systems being ousted in favour of world-market capitalism has had lasting repercussions on the left.

In the *London Review of Books* of 3 April, for example, Perry Anderson, one of Britain's most influential British Marxist academics for over 60 years now, expresses perplexity about what alternatives there may be to neoliberalism. Nothing socialistic, he writes, because of the "disappearance of any significant political movement calling robustly either for the abolition or the radical transformation of capitalism. By the turn of the century, socialism in both of its historical variants, revolutionary and reformist, had been swept clear of the stage in the Atlantic zone. The revolutionary variant: to all appearances, with the collapse of communism in the USSR and the disintegration of the Soviet Union itself".

Anderson was never a Stalinist, and for a while in the 1970s he was a sort of semi-Trotskyist, but he is explicit about 1989-91 (regrettably) wiping out revolutionary socialism as an option in his eyes.

The view spreads wider. The slogan of the "alternative globalisation" movement of the early 2000s was "another world is possible", pointedly not specifying what. In the heyday of Corbynism in the Labour Party, neither the 2017 nor the 2019 manifesto mentioned "socialism" (or any alternative description of a whole new society) as an objective. The word "socialist" was used once, in the 2019 manifesto, not to state an aim but to describe what (so it said) existed already in the NHS.

When Clive Lewis, one of the best of the Corbynite MPs, talked with *Solidarity* in the early euphoria after Corbyn's victory as Labour leader in 2015, he equivocated when asked whether he was against capitalism and for socialism. Well, he said, capitalism has many

forms, and he was certainly against the current neoliberal variant.

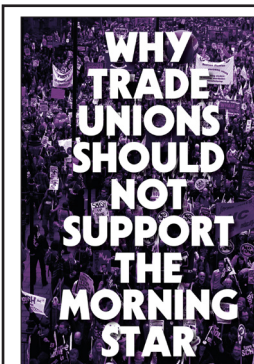
And again: the biggest more-or-less activist movement coming out of the Sanders surges of 2016 and 2020 in the USA, the Democratic Socialists of America, does dare to call itself socialist – but has sustained that only by drifting towards Stalinist-inspired models, as in Venezuela, as proof that such is possible.

A central item in the booklet, *What was in the coffin at the funeral of socialism?*, takes all these issues up by asking what the mass uprisings in Eastern Europe were against. They were against national oppression, stifling authoritarian rule, and ruling-class privilege. In other words, they were for national and individual freedom, democracy, and prosperity for all in society.

They were for demands which embody the rudiments of socialism. Because no organised egalitarian-commonwealth movement had been able to develop and educate in the previous decades, workers in Eastern Europe and the USSR saw their "realistic" chance of at least some modest approximation of those demands in copying the model of Western Europe.

What that proves for the future is not that radical alternatives to capitalism are no longer possible. It is that to give them life requires building political movements which self-educate and educate, over years and decades, to give a picture of that alternative, and of how previous history shows it can be a path for future history.

No convincing argument for the alternative is possible without a well-understood account of such turning-points as 1989-91. □



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Workers' Liberty debates the year ahead

By Simon Nelson

Workers' Liberty held our annual conference on 26-27 April. We discussed the rise of the far right internationally and the need for left unity, industrial organising, the state of ecology work in the unions, the Middle East, our own internal education, and feminist and LGBT+ work.

We continued our debate about ongoing Marxist activity in the Labour Party. The conference agreed that we should encourage our friends to work in the Labour Party while we also investigating the possibility of serious discussions in the new We Demand Change initiative on working-class socialist candidates who may stand against Labour. We re-

ject the localist focus of many of the supposed left-wing breakaways from Labour. A "left-of-Labour" campaign, if it is to have any value, must foreground socialism and link to continuing organisation in the working class and labour movement.

The conference heard solidarity greetings from the [NPA Révolutionnaires](http://NPA.Révolutionnaires) in France, the

German RSO, and the Work-er-communist Party of Kurdistan.

Of course, we would like our next conference to be bigger. In a discussion on intervention and recruitment, we looked at how to make ourselves more accessible and argue for our politics with a larger audience. The conference helped us recruit one new member and an

active sympathiser. The collection at the conference raised £3,100 for our fund drive.

Our "summer school", Ideas for Freedom, will this year be not in the summer but in November. We are organising several local day schools in the next couple of months, and will run a summer camp on 22-25 August. □

Nasuwt: democracy is an issue

From Educators' Fightback

The appointment by the teachers' union Nasuwt of former Fire Brigades Union General Secretary Matt Wrack as their new General Secretary to replace Patrick Roach has caused some controversy, and is now subject to legal action taken by the union's national officer for Wales, Neil Butler.

The Nasuwt executive will [now](#) allow a four-week extension of the nomination process to 26 May, including allowing Butler to be nominated. Voting will be 19 June to 23 July if he or another gets enough nominations. Wrack is Acting General Secretary meanwhile.

The first upset came when Nasuwt member Luke Akhurst had attempted to stand for the position. Akhurst, a history teacher and branch secretary in Leicestershire, had found that impossible as Nasuwt rules apparently prevent members for canvassing branches to gain the 25 branch nominations required to stand against the Executive's nominee. (This Luke Akhurst is not to be confused with the slightly-differently-spelled right-wing Labour factionalist Luke Akehurst).

This second upset comes from Butler having been barred from standing as he – just like Wrack – is not a member of the Nasuwt (though he was previously a teacher and Nasuwt member prior to working for the union).

As the Guardian reported it: "Wrack, a former leader of the Fire Brigades Union, was selected by the executive as its 'preferred candidate' earlier this year, meaning he would automatically get the job unless a challenger received enough branch nominations to

trigger an open election among members. But branches attempting to nominate another candidate, Neil Butler, the Nasuwt's national officer for Wales, were told that rules barred him from receiving nominations because he was not a member of the union".

There are so many issues intertwined in the Nasuwt discussion that we have to be careful with the vastly over-simplified reporting of it.

Wrack is certainly one of the better trade union senior full-timers, with a record previously as a trade unionist and in the Labour party. He was elected to the FBU position on a pledge to take only a firefighter's wage (though there are no reports that say either way whether he will take a teacher's wage or the over £125k that Patrick Roach was on). He has played a positive role in many ways, including in recent pressure to prevent Labour further watering down its Workers' Rights Bill.

The hope I have seen expressed that Wrack as general secretary is also a positive thing for the prospect of Nasuwt-NEU unity is probably wrong.

But that does not mean we would accept the description that those in Nasuwt opposed to the appointment are making "attacks" on Wrack – a vast over-simplification that is being made in both "pro" and "anti" Wrack reporting.

Officialdom

As socialists, we are for trades unions (and the wider movement) being democratic and member-controlled, not run by officialdom – elected or otherwise. The Nasuwt is not very democratic, and the way it appoints its General Secretary is just one part of that. It is quite right for people within the Nasuwt to raise their concerns about not being allowed to canvass for the required 25 branch nominations, or being ruled out from standing, and so on.

This is an appointment by the Nasuwt executive with a pretence of being an election.

Others in Nasuwt have perfectly reasonably raised the concern that their union is no longer to be led by someone from education. (Wrack was elected – not appointed – as FBU General Secretary after 22 years in the fire service and FBU. FBU members – Wrack included – would never have accepted an ex-teacher union official being appointed as their GS instead!)

We should not dismiss those concerns, nor delegitimise them because Wrack is "on the left". Labour movement democracy matters.

It is similar with Jewish members of the Nasuwt, who have been reported as raising concerns. If some are concerned by his appointment because of what they have heard about him (he is on record as referring to "so-called anti-semitism" being used to under-

mine Jeremy Corbyn, for example), we should not dismiss their concerns either, or delegitimise them, just because Wrack is on the left or because others have seized on it for their own reasons.

There are Jewish teachers who have suffered horrendous harassment up to and including death threats. There are some in the Nasuwt who previously left the NEU because they perceived the NEU to be bracketing them in with blame of the Israeli government's actions. They were a minority of the NEU's Jewish membership, as far as I know, and it is a pity that they chose to leave – but we should understand, not dismiss, their concerns.

Some have described that the repeated use in the NEU of the – highly ambiguous – term "Zionist" as a label for the war crimes committed by the Netanyahu gang meant that they, as Zionists, were feeling held responsible, or made uncomfortable, in their own union – however much they were opposed to Netanyahu, the war and occupation, and so on. Those ex-NEU people will be particularly sensitive to what they have been told about Wrack, I'd have thought.

But those concerns have been bracketed together with others to be labelled "witch-hunting" and just part of a "smear campaign". Skawkbox refers to "one Jewish Nasuwt member, out of the purported thousand Jewish members". ("Purported"). The same report twists this as being really about "Wrack's support for the many anti-Zionist Jews who supported Corbyn and his call for action against Israel's slaughter of Palestinians". As if Jewish teachers have faced no actual hostility or antisemitism that they should expect their union to support them against. No, that is just made up to deflect attention from Israel. Really?

So it would be wrong to go along with that and label those those people in the Nasuwt concerned about Wrack's appointment as "attacking" him, as much popular press has done (approvingly) and the dreadful Skawkbox has done (negatively). It is more complex than that.

There are plenty outside the union

movement who absolutely are "attacking" Wrack – from tabloid press to senior politicians (including Luke Akehurst – the right-wing factionalist spelling, not the history teacher) – and attacking him for all the things most of us would approve of about him. They are hypocritically referencing the undemocratic nature of his appointment, the issues raised by Jewish Nasuwt members, and the fact that Wrack is not from education. But to accept the oversimplifications those people make, just placing ourselves on the other side, would be wrong.

Election

It is a good thing that there will now be, as we understand it, an actual election – for the first time in over thirty years in the Nasuwt!

If Wrack is elected by union members in that, fine. But it is still a pale shadow of democracy if no other candidates will be allowed to canvass for nominations. And it could get nasty along the way.

Wrack's statement about the election – "I suspect we can expect the witch-hunting campaign to continue" – is not a sensible way to approach this, showing little understanding or sympathy for the issues raised in the membership, and smacking of a sense of entitlement that he as a "professional trades union leader" should not be challenged by union members like this.

However this turns out, Nasuwt members have a long way to go to create a democratic, member-controlled union.

And NEU members might note that, although the full election process is much more democratic, NEU rules do allow for General Secretary candidates who have never been NEU members or education workers – so long as they have been a member or official of another TUC-affiliated union. Matt Wrack would be eligible to stand for NEU General Secretary, but at least he would have to go through the same election process as other candidates, rather than being placed on the podium by the Executive. □

• Abridged from bit.ly/nasuwtw

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Kneecap and the right to offend

By Matt Dunn

If you can't laugh about killing Tories, what can you laugh about? It's a fair question.

I saw Kneecap in Brighton last year, about 200 meters from the Grand Hotel, scene of the IRA bomb attack that nearly claimed Thatcher's life in 1984: 'Some lovely hotels here in Brighton. You can have a banging time'. So far, so good. Offensive? Maybe. But do I give a fuck about offending Tories? Not really.

Kneecap's Provo cos-playing is daft. If they were older, they wouldn't find the Troubles so glamorous. All the "up the Ra" stuff is silly for sure. And shocking maybe. But should young bands really not be allowed to shock or offend?

Sid Vicious and Siouxi Sioux flaunted swastikas. Shocking. Offensive. Especially when the generation they were trying to shock and offend – their parents – had fought a war against the

Pic: Duncan Cumming



Nazis. But wasn't that the point? Should we have cancelled punk? What would we have had if we did do that? MoR, prog and the new romantics. Fuck that!

Kneecap put on an amazing show. The whole place is jumping. I'm enjoying it. Even if some of the sideshow sectarianism is uncomfortable.

There is a weird dynamic to the sectarian divide in Northern Ireland, where Loyalists support Israel and Republicans support Palestine (check the flags at an Old Firm game). Just as the small world of Northern Ireland can be viewed through the sectarian lens of two camps – one the "good" camp, the other the "bad" – so can the world. So, on the "bad" side sit the USA, the EU, perhaps the UK, and, for sure, Israel. On the "good" side sit Cuba, maybe Nicaragua, perhaps even China or Russia, definitely Palestine.

Kneecap call out Israel (so far, so good) and "Israeli apartheid" (I've got some concerns here). They support BDS (of course). And everyone cheers to "Fuck Israel". This is daft, perhaps, but then "Fuck the USA" was a phrase found more widely in punk days than

just as the title of a song by the Exploited.

But few bands (Yard Act are among the contemporary exceptions) call out China or Russia. Or support the Uyghurs, or the Ukrainians or the Kurds or the Tamils. For sure the Israeli state is committing vile crimes against the Palestinians, but Israel sometimes seems to be the only state to be noticed by bands. Or by the left. Why?

Rebellion

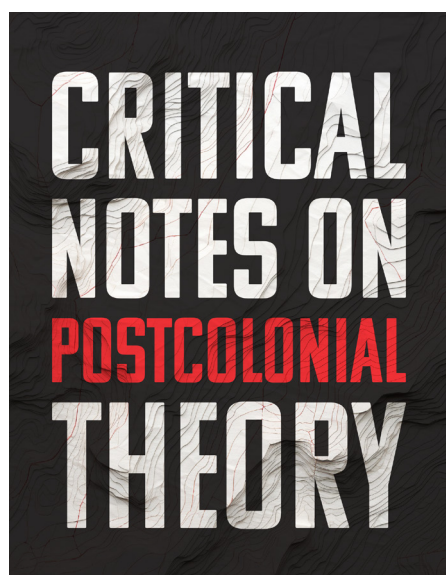
But then Kneecap cheer on Hamas. And chant "Oo ah Hezbollah". What really gets me going is not this bunch of kids trying to provoke and monetise shock and rebellion, but the adult audience, most of whom would no doubt consider themselves left-wing, chanting along. It's left to me and my partner (and maybe a couple of others) jabbing fingers in their faces and shouting: "You stupid cunt! You know who Hamas or Hezbollah are? They're fucking fascists, not freedom fighters. People like me, and maybe you, would be swinging from lamp-posts if those fuckers were in charge here!" (Yeah, I know how to make friends).

That's where dividing the world into good and bad gets you. Where losing class as your anchor gets you. You can end up supporting all sorts of shit.

The outrage from Tory, and Labour, MPs, making out that Kneecap were actually trying to incite murder of Tory MPs (of course they weren't: they were trying to provoke) is utterly hypocritical. As many have pointed out, it was dismissed as "banter" when soldiers were photographed bayoneting dummies wearing Jeremy Corbyn masks. It's OK apparently to "incite murder" against left-wingers, just not Tories.

But the band's support for Hezbollah, and even more so for Hamas, is truly shocking. Awful, pathetic stuff. That grown adults can join in and cheer along to that should be a warning. The left needs better politics than this.

Kneecap, and other idiots should not be banned or cancelled. But they should be confronted. Gig audiences should know better. And if they don't know better, get your finger out. Get shouting. And get educating the fuckers! □



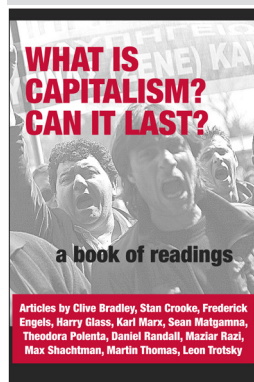
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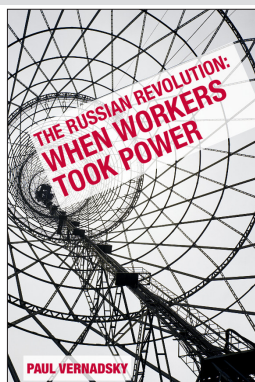


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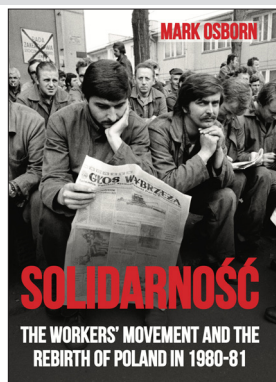
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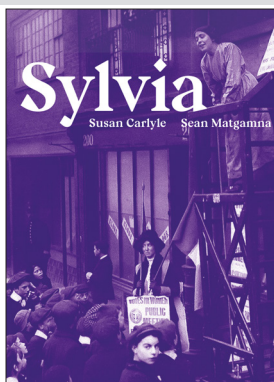
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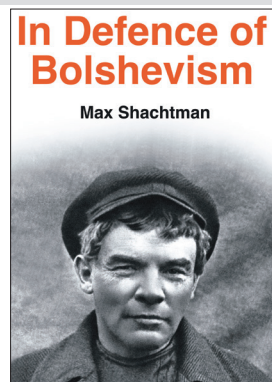
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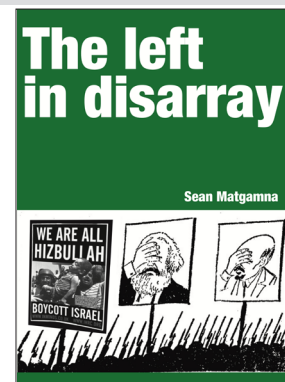
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Link pay battles across public sector

By Katy Dollar

Local government and fire service workers have been offered 3.2% increase in pay by their employers.

Fire Brigades Union leaders are recommending acceptance in a consultation of the membership. Unite have rejected the offer. Unison and GMB consulting members. Workers' Liberty members in Unions are arguing to reject the offer. After years of real-terms pay cuts, 3.2% going nowhere near restoring pay. Between January and

March 2025 (latest figures) CPI inflation has been at 4.5% a year, RPI at 5.6%, and with the Trump tariff storm, worse is on the cards.

Public sector pay offers in the UK are determined through a combination of government decisions, Pay Review Bodies (PRBs), and negotiations between employers and trade unions. Pay awards for approximately 45% of public sector workers, including the NHS, teachers, and police, are based on PRB recommendations. Those have not been made public yet, but leaks suggest recommendations for more than the health and education departments have budgeted for this financial year.

In their own submissions to the pay review bodies, the government departments said would limit increases in their pay bills by England by 2.8%.

In health, Unison, BMA, and RCN have said 2.8% is too low. BMA is moving to ballot ahead of a formal offer. It is demanding pay rises of up to 35% by 2027 to make up for lost pay. Resident doctors won up to 22% in their last round of strikes.

School unions NEU and Nasuwt have both voted at their conference to ballot for strike action on any offer that isn't fully funded by the government. Without a government commitment to fund pay rises, increases in pay will mean cuts in jobs and services. The government will not be pushed to release more funding unless there is considerable fightback from the unions.

The trade unions should be looking to challenge the government's continuation of underfunded public services



with coordinated action across the public sector.

Moreover, in some areas of the public sector pay has been so pushed back that the legal minimum wage and local living wage agreements are knocking out the lowest grades.

Low

Union membership remains low by historic standards, and membership rates amongst younger workers, lower earners and those with lower levels of education are all below the average.

The strike wave of 2022-3 was a boost to unions, producing an increase in the trade union pay premium (difference in wages between union and non union members), new activists, and a public display of potential for strike action. In

2023 members of trade unions in the United Kingdom earned on average 4.2 percent more than the average worker. But for times where data are available, the trade union wage premium was at its highest in 1995 when members of trade unions could expect to earn 25.9 percent more than people who were not in a union. New reps and members will drift away if unions don't again assert themselves.

The Labour government has still not repealed the 2016 Tory law requiring minimum ballot turnouts. (It says it will do that when it introduces electronic rather than postal balloting, maybe in 2026). That will hinder national action. But disaggregated ballots across the public sector can ramp up pressure on the government. □

Lambeth ballots over cuts

By Katy Dollar

Ballot papers are arriving in the week starting 5 May for Unison members in Lambeth council Libraries and Archives.

They are balloting over:

- Upgrading 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 for any staff

Lambeth Council is proposing £90 million of cuts over coming years. The Budget was passed before the government confirmed they would not be releasing more money for the 2025-6 local government pay deal. □

The debates due at PCS conference

By Charlie George

The annual delegate conference of PCS, the union for civil servants and outsourced civil-service workers, is in Brighton on 20-22 May.

The last conference in 2024 was an important step forward towards PCS being a left-led democratic, fighting union; with significant gains made including delegates voting for an escalation of the campaign on pay and jobs and to continue our support of Ukraine along with other measures. The PCS Independent Left, with whom Workers' Liberty supporters organise, in coalition with the Broad Left Network, HMRC Rank and File, and others, won a narrow National Executive (NEC) majority in last year's elections.

These advances, however, have not proven decisive. The

largest group, the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), remains run by the old continuity leadership of the Left Unity (LU) faction, who also control (and are indistinguishable from) the union bureaucracy. General Secretary Fran Heathcote has refused to follow the instructions given to her by the Coalition for Change-led NEC to build a fighting campaign. Together with union president Martin Cavanagh and LU supporters, Heathcote has manipulated NEC standing orders to consistently rule motions out-of-order in a flagrant abuse of PCS rules.

This conference and the NEC elections (voting closes 9 May) will be pivotal in wresting control from this anti-member clique and pushing for greater democracy in the union – transforming it into a real

member-led body capable of winning on jobs and pay.

Members will demand answers as to why we are likely facing yet another real-terms pay cut, and will be angry to hear that the Coalition for Change supporters on the NEC have been admonished for not giving Labour "a chance" and told that any threat of cuts was just "speculation." This conference gives members a chance to support a real fighting campaign for pay restoration.

We will also need to rally to support our trans members in response to the Supreme Court ruling sequels and the bland and weak reply from the General Secretary, which offered neither opposition to the decision nor solidarity to trans people under attack. We will be supporting Emergency

Motions calling for a defence of trans rights and a coordinated response.

The union's support for Ukraine is also again up for debate, with a motion pushing the Stop the War Coalition line that the working class should abandon Ukraine's right to self-determination against Russian imperialism and back a "peace" with annexations. PCS has built close relations with its sister union, the State Employees Union of Ukraine, and earlier this year sent a joint delegation to Kyiv with the European Federation of Public Service Unions. In the current climate, Ukrainian trade unionists need our solidarity more than ever.

There will be fringe meetings by the PCS Independent Left and Coalition for Change, and both AWL and IL bulletins

will be available every day. □



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“What we stand for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Back on track but always room for more

As predicted our annual conference was a good weekend for fundraising activity. An additional £3,100 was added to the fund, bringing our total to £11,550.

• Donate: workersliberty.org/fund



Do the trial, or lose the money



Diary of a health worker

By Alice Hazel

The new thing at work is virtual monitoring – fitting patients up to tech that they can use to submit their clinical observations – pulse, blood pressure, oxygen saturation etc – which we check on a dashboard.

Rush

Apparently, this enables patients to develop awareness, confidence and self-care, but more importantly, so the very enthusiastic rep at the training said, frees up hospital beds and clinical time. There are pros and cons to it. In a few instances it might be useful. But the way it is being introduced points to the priorities behind the project. It came in

in a rush "because we had to complete the contract by a certain date or lose the money".

"The money" couldn't be spent on anything but remote monitoring equipment. The remote monitoring equipment only comes from private companies. We have been instructed to find a certain number of patients to put on remote monitoring for "the trial" of equipment that the NHS Trust is already contracted to use. I'm sure "the trial" will be a great success.

More

We used it for the first time today and all agreed we would rather spend the money on more healthcare workers to visit patients, have a conversation, a smile and give out some, yes, care. As for time-saving, we spent the day responding to alarms, which triggered to tell us the patients weren't very well. Yes, we know that, thanks, that's why

they are under our care.

I phoned Frank for the second time to tell him his alarm had triggered again. "I'm fine", he said. "Well, no worse, anyway. I'll ring you if I need you." Patients who are too vulnerable to know when to get in contact don't get the monitors because they can't manage the tech.

Obsessed

We know from people who buy their own monitoring equipment that some patients get obsessed with checking and it badly heightens their anxiety, not great for their health. One of my colleagues told me: "We know it won't work because we tried it 15 years ago and abandoned it, but I feel like I'm being negative if I say that".

So that's a no to self-care, confidence, time-saving and recovery, and a big fat yes to money pouring into the private sector. But let's wait to see how the trial goes... □

Leni Riefenstahl: Hitler's filmmaker



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

One of my favourite stories about Leni Riefenstahl is that when the documentarist Paul Rotha spotted a framed picture of her on the wall of the British Film Institute Café he tore it off its hangings, threw it to the floor, and smashed it. Not quite the final nail in the coffin of this Nazi-sympathising filmmaker, but that may well be delivered by a new documentary, *Riefenstahl*, directed by Andres Veiel, due to be released on 9 May.

Born in 1902, Riefenstahl made her name in the 1930s by directing a number of films featuring mountains and mountain climbers, such as *The Blue Light* (1932).

One of her collaborators was the Hungarian writer Béla Balázs, one-time close friend of György Lukács. When the film was re-released in 1938 his name was removed from the credits (he was Jewish).

She was drawn to the Nazis and became friendly with Hitler. Much to the disquiet of propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels, Hitler chose her to direct *Triumph of the Will*, the film of the 1934 Nuremberg Nazi rally. It was a monumental film, a paean to Nazi power mythology. In effect, Nuremberg and its huge stadium became a gigantic film set.

Three years later she released her film of the Olympic games held in Berlin. *Olympia* wasn't quite the stage-managed propaganda piece Hitler wanted. Riefenstahl certainly highlighted Hitler's opening speech and the parade of

the contestants (many of them obligingly giving the Nazi salute) but she didn't – or couldn't – ignore the victories of the Black American sprinter Jesse Owens, which somewhat dented the aura of Aryan racial superiority.

Horror

During the Second World War, Riefenstahl took a backseat. There is a photo of her recoiling in horror at the sight of German soldiers shooting prisoners in Poland, and later her brother was killed on the Eastern Front. However, while filming towards the end of the war, she used Roma prisoners from a nearby detention camp as extras. When filming was over they were dispatched to Auschwitz where most of them died. She denied having any knowledge of that.

After the war she was os-

tracised, although some film personnel appeared quite willing to forgive and forget, and she always maintained she was just a film-maker, never a Nazi sympathiser. She remained active. In the mid-50s she produced a collection of photos of the Nuba people of Sudan, but was accused of producing images which suited her idea of what the Nuba should look like, not their reality.

She admitted in one of her last interviews that meeting Hitler was one of the worst things that happened to her. The new documentary promises revelations from her archive, to which the production team had unrivalled access, including new evidence about her relationship with Hitler. Leni Riefenstahl died in 2003. □

• To watch *Triumph of the Will* online: bit.ly/t-o-w



Yes, the HCSWs can win

By Robert Hudd

The Health Care Support Workers' strike in Nottingham is continuing, with more days of strike action planned for 13, 14, 18, 19, 20 May.

Management show no sign of giving the six years of back pay demanded for the skilled Band 3 work that workers have been doing since well before Covid on Band 2, which has made them the lowest paid in the two big hospitals.

The new left leaders in the Unison union branch reflect the members, overwhelmingly women. As the Assistant Branch Secretary, Megan Wilson-Ibbotson, told *Solidarity* at the Notts TUC May Day rally: "The lowest paid workers are determined and are conscious of their worth – we are recruiting new members and need everyone on the two picket lines to persuade nurses and agency workers not to cover on strike days"

Adam Turner, the branch welfare officer, said for the first time health workers who normally stick to their professional associations are seeing the value of strikes, looking at their own regrading claims, seeing the union as visible and worth joining.

Voting for the national executive of the UK's largest union Unison is going on at the same time. Some candidates on the right want to be photographed with the strikers, but it's the left slate, the Time for Real Change candidates, that need to be backed. Vicki Morris, Secretary of Nottingham University Unison, who gave her solidarity to the strikers at the May Day rally whilst telling us about the threat of 500 job cuts in her own branch, is on that slate.

One of the most common questions asked was: "do the strikes make any difference?" The answer is "Yes". What started as just one union branch taking action has spread to many, and the more that win, the easier for others to win, until hopefully all Trusts will give full back pay and all HCSWs will get the Grade 3.

In places like Warrington and Halton, Wirral, Mid-Cheshire, Leicester, Northampton, HCSWs have voted to take industrial action, forced the employer to reconsider, and won five or six years back pay. □

MHCLG first wave is strong

By a PCS member

The initial wave of strikes called in Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner's Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) concluded on 2 May. PCS members based in Newcastle had two weeks of industrial action. Members based in Exeter, Truro, Birmingham, Warrington and Sheffield struck 29 April to 2 May.

Well-attended and lively pickets at offices threatened with closure generated support for the campaign among local labour organisations, Trades Councils, and community activists.

Branch reps have reported on the galvanising effect the pickets have had on members whose offices are threatened with closure, with members feeling buoyed by the support they have gained from their local communities. Successful ballot results have also been returned in offices not currently threatened with closure, so all MHCLG offices now have secured mandates for industrial action.

Despite the strikes, the department is yet to respond meaningfully to the demands that have been set out by PCS members as part of the "our work, our way" campaign, including the immedi-



ate pausing of planned office closures. Branch reps have made clear that they have no plans to let up in campaigning and will continue to take action with membership support if the department do not bring meaningful proposals to the table.

The branch is discussing the next steps of the campaign with members both in offices not threatened with closure and those threatened with closure: what escalatory routes are available, and what action do members want to take next in their campaign to resist office closures and arbitrary attendance

policies and gain a say in how their work is organised? □

Support the bin workers!

By Sacha Fox

The Birmingham bin workers strike is heating up even further and approaching the second month of all-out strike action. Negotiations between the Unite union and the council are still not going great.

The Waste Recycling and Collection Officer role is being abolished, which Unite says will cost 150-170 workers up to £8,000, with other workers losing £3-4,000. The council says WRCOs should be unaffected, as they will be able to retrain as LGV drivers, but truck drivers have now also been slated for moving down a pay grade.

Throughout, the council – its finances managed by appointed commissioners since late 2023 – has been obstinate and domineering. The Labour-controlled council and the Labour government have conducted a "media war", fuelling rumour and disinformation. Masked thugs attacking workers who weren't striking? *Birmingham Dispatch* couldn't substantiate that claim. Most bin workers live outside Birmingham and aren't affected by the disruption? Unlikely, but what about the commissioners? Bin workers won't lose any money? See above. Not abolishing this role opens up further equal pay disputes? Easier and better to solve by increasing the pay of majority-women workplaces!

Binnies *accuse* the council of deliberately dumping more waste on poorer areas of the city in order to manufacture a health crisis and help them to use police powers to disrupt the pickets and the "slow walking" tactics strikers were deploying to limit the impact of scabs. The aim is to set the public against bin workers, despite the fact that strong solidarity with the bin workers from the community and council could resolve the dispute, and create a source of pressure to kick out the commissioners and force the government to restore lost funding to councils.

The situation with the driver downgrade is leading to concern amongst other local government workers across several unions that similar downgrades could happen to them, and it's worth noting the model could also be used in other councils if it isn't resisted here. Unison workers in the refuse team are already entering dispute as a result. As one bin worker succinctly put it, workers are "like a line of dominoes", with the success or failure of this struggle determining their futures too.

We Demand Change is organising a mass picket on Friday 9 May from 6am onwards at the Lifford Lane (B30 3JJ) depot. Once the cautiousness of Unite reps is overcome, solidarity protests and other community mobilisations will likely stem from a successful mass picket. More: linktr.ee/brumbinstrike □

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Ukraine signs minerals deal with the US

By Dan Katz

On Wednesday 30 April the US and Ukraine signed a deal which will allow the US access to Ukraine's untapped mineral, oil and gas reserves.

The US-Ukraine agreement will establish a joint investment fund for Ukraine's reconstruction which will be in part capitalised by revenues from natural resource extraction.

The deal is a substantial improvement for Ukraine on previous iterations of an agreement which was being aggressively pursued by US President Donald Trump. Initially Trump had insisted that Ukraine exchange its reserves of rare earths and metals as repayment for US aid given to Ukraine since the Russian full-scale invasion of February 2022.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy resisted, pointing out that the money Trump claimed was due to be repaid to the US was gifted to Ukraine by the US Congress. Trump also vastly overestimated the worth of US aid to Ukraine, putting the figure variously at \$350bn, or even \$500bn. Those numbers seem to have been invented. The German Kiel Institute, which has closely monitored Western aid, put the figure of US military and other aid at around \$130bn, somewhat behind European contributions to Ukraine.

The signed minerals text also now plainly states that the agreement is not intended to prevent Ukraine's accession to EU membership.

However, initially, the minerals deal seems much more important diplomatically and politically than economically.

The immediate consequence of signing the agreement was that the US authorised \$50mn in arms supplies to Ukraine. The US also shipped some decommissioned F16 planes to Ukraine which will be cannibalised for parts.

The wording also marks a shift in US rhetoric. The text opposes the full-scale Russian invasion, affirms a "long-term strategic [US-Ukraine] alignment" and commits the US to "support for Ukraine's security, prosperity, reconstruction and integration into global economic frameworks."

The agreement fails to commit the US to support Ukraine actively against attacks by Russia, which is what the Ukrainians and European powers wanted.

Practically, there are a lot of barriers before potential mineral reserves can be extracted. Even

supposing a stable Ukraine-Russia peace were agreed tomorrow, the global average time taken to construct a mine is 18 years. It requires between \$500mn and \$1bn in investment to construct a mine and extraction facilities.

It is unlikely American private capital would commit large amounts to such an investment as the war continues to rage. Investment led by capitalist powers and institutions will require peace and stability in Ukraine, and that might well be a long way off.

Just hours after the deal was signed off Russian missiles slammed into residential blocks in Odesa.

It is not clear exactly what reserves Ukraine has, as most of the geological mapping dates back 40-60 years, from Soviet times, using outdated methods. Some of the important deposits of titanium and zirconium appear to be in Russian-occupied Donbas. Two of Ukraine's four lithium reserves are in occupied territory.

Mining requires a substantial energy and transport infrastructure. In 2022-3 Ukraine lost half of its power-generation capacity to Russian occupation and destruction; and 50% of major substations were hit by Russian drones and missiles.

Ukraine now has about one third of its pre-war electricity capacity.

This US-Ukraine deal appears to be a model for an element of Trump's foreign policy. The US wants a security-for-minerals agreement with the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to get control of the DRC's cobalt, copper, lithium and tin.

DRC President Felix Tshisekedi has offered minerals in exchange for the US's help against the Rwandan-backed M23 group, which has control of large parts of the eastern DRC. The US is pressing Rwanda to sign a peace agreement, and, on 24 April, the DRC and Rwanda began a formal process for peace in Washington DC.

If a Ukraine-Russia peace deal is concluded on the terms now in the air, and reconstruction begins take place under the direction of the US, EU and World Bank, it will be at the expense of the Ukrainian working class. Another reason for the UK's labour movement to make practical solidarity with the unions of Ukraine right now.

How to start? Twin your union branch with a similar organisation in Ukraine. If your union has policy for Ukraine, its head office and international department should be able to help to link you up. □

Scrap the benefit cuts!



By Cathy Nugent

Pressure on Labour to back down on the disability benefit cuts is growing after its defeat by Reform in the 1 May Runcorn by-election. Prominent elected Labour representatives have blamed the cuts, in part, for the defeat.

A recent academic study highlights Labour's problem. The study, for Health Equity North, shows the constituencies with the biggest potential loss of income from cuts to PIP are overwhelmingly those with a Labour MP. Labour constituencies take 92 of the top 100 biggest loser places, with the North East and North West hardest hit.

But growing discontent inside Labour will not be strong enough on its own to stop the cuts. Decisive action could come from the unions.

On 17 April Unison's National Executive agreed to run an active campaign of opposition. If that campaign is run vigorously, and involves the union's public sector members, for example by setting up local campaigns, it could help push the government into retreat.

Unite's Retired Members section is set to soon launch a campaign against these cuts, along the lines of the campaign they ran against the Winter Fuel Allowance last year. Leaflets and materials should be shared with all Unite branches; public leafleting, stalls and protests should be organised in local areas.

A key date is the TUC Disabled Workers' Conference on 3-4 June where there will likely be emergency motions on the cuts.

Local union activity is also important. Notts Trades Council are planning a public event on the cuts, Sheffield Labour Against the Benefit Cuts a demonstration.

Meanwhile the government's public consulta-

tion events are in full swing. A protest outside the event in Manchester will take place on 7 May and outside the event in Cardiff on 3 June.

DPAC and the Coalition Against Benefit Cuts (a national co-ordinating group) have organised a lobby of MPs on 21 May: dpac.uk.net

DPAC is also organising local demonstrations in Cardiff on 24 May, Stratford on 31 May and Leeds (in Rachel Reeves's constituency) on 31 May.

The SWP-driven We Demand Change coalition and the People's Assembly are also organising on the ground (the PA plans a national demonstration on 7 June). However, this organising is mostly geared towards general shows of anger about austerity.

But everything now should be geared to *stopping* the benefit cuts. Democratically constituted local campaigns, and actions involving trade union branches and Labour members and disability groups, will make the resistance more effective. □

Students join uni cuts fight

By Sam Myerson

At Sheffield University, as University and College Union (UCU) members strike against compulsory redundancies (30 April and 6-16 May), the student Anti-Cuts Coalition has visited pickets, given speeches, and distributed leaflets. The aim is to bring more students into active support for the dispute.

On 10 May a national UCU demonstration is planned in London. Workers' Liberty is mobilising, but it's disappointing that it involves neither other campus unions nor the National Union of Students.

A sector wide, cross-union campaign is needed to fightback against the thousands of job losses and millions in cuts. Students have to be part of that fight.

Newcastle University UCU branch is calling for signatures on an [open letter](#) demanding a new settlement for higher education.

The *Financial Times* (6 May) declares that "the English higher education market is broken": a pointed reminder that bourgeois society has no answers, but stands by the decision to base education on fees and financialisation. □



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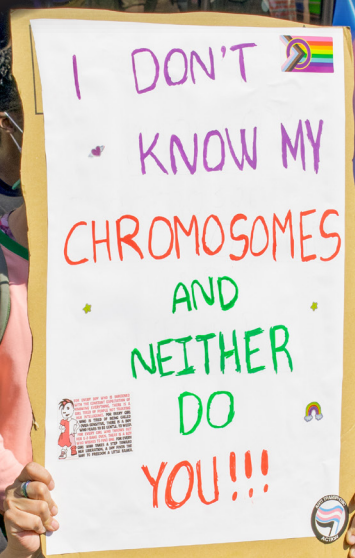
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**TRUMP
SPEEDS
POWER
GRAB**

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**TRANS
RIGHTS:
DEFY THE
“GUIDANCE”**



London
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