



For social ownership of the banks and industry

ISRAEL OUT OF GAZA AND THE WEST BANK



Protesters in Israel hold photos of children killed in Gaza – despite police ban

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FOR TWO STATES AND EQUAL RIGHTS

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Trump's road to economic chaos and autocracy

6699 Editorial

Donald Trump announced a trade sort-of-deal with China on 12 May, and with the UK on 8 May.

Even if Trump continues to announce more "deals" up to the end of his 90-day delay on 8 July, these are thin quarter-deals. They leave dozens of issues open. They leave tariffs still much higher than they have been for decades. And they are unstable. They leave tariffs unpredictable. World trade will still be disrupted.

Quite likely Trump won't "succeed" broadly in forcing other countries to level down their environmental and safety standards down to the USA. At least in the short term, quite likely other countries will seek to build networks of their own bespoke trade deals, rather than raising retaliatory tariffs.

But the unmistakable push is towards a patchy world market of bilateral trade

deals. In the US-UK deal, the UK casually dropped the rules of multilaterality which had been written into the reconstructed capitalist world market back in 1947 and which had made their way, over decades, into a relatively free-flowing global economy. Dropped after 78 years, and without a murmur.

About half of world goods trade these days is neither raw materials nor finished products, but "intermediate goods", parts and processed materials exported as inputs into final production. Many US corporations' supply chains depend on China, with no immediate alternative, which is why China was and is the stronger-placed in its tariffs tussle with the USA.

The short-term outcome of the tariffs war will not be tariffs replacing income tax for US government revenue, industry rebuilding large-scale in the USA, or any other of Trump's claim. It will be inflation and shortages in the USA. The longer-term result: disruption and chaos.

Workers

Building a moderately high-tech factory these days can take something like ten years, when you factor in the time to get planning permission and tax breaks and to arrange the utilities and communications you need. And that's assuming that you're sure of a good supply of workers with the right skills near to the factory. The USA is short of welders and similar workers – it predicts a shortage of about 360,000 welders by 2027 – and it won't fill that gap quickly. Capitalists want a good guess at trade conditions in ten years' time before they build.

Grand claims then jettisoned are not new with Trump (as with: Mexico will



pay for The Wall). Maybe Trump is dialling down his tariffs outcry, at least for now, to "shorten the front" and ease his way on other things. Maybe that is why he has also backed down on a couple of other things. Rümeyza Öztürk, the international student arrested on the street in Massachusetts and shipped to jail in Louisiana, has been freed following a court order. After Trump sacked the chief of the Library of Congress (the biggest library and records office in the world), staff there have refused to co-operative with the MAGA appointees sent in to take over, and Trump has not forced the issue yet.

But if he is clearing the deck, it is for his promised mass deportations, which are likely to be accompanied by a big uptick in repression and in Trump's institution-by-institution power grab on the way to personal autocracy.

Trump has ordered the recruitment of an extra 20,000 Immigration Enforcement (ICE) cops, on top of the current

6,000. His sidekick Stephen Miller says the government could suspend habeas corpus (the right to have a hearing, not to be held or deported arbitrarily). "The Constitution is clear", he claims: it "could be suspended in time of invasion. That's an option we're actively looking at".

Trump's Homeland Security boss Tom Homan warned Wisconsin governor Tony Evers: "I'm just saying: watch what happens". The Department of Justice is "suing sanctuary cities. We're going to arrest people who cross that line of harbouring and concealing. So if they cross that line, just see what happens."

The leading Democrats remain abject, resorting to catchpenny criticism of Trump's climbdown on wild ultra-tariffs against China as "capitulating to Xi Jinping".

The next mass protests are planned for 14 June, the day when Trump plans a huge military parade to celebrate his personal birthday. □



Corrections

The current wave of Nottingham Health Care Support Workers' strikes is 13, 14, 19, 20, 21 May, not 18 May as in *Solidarity* 742.

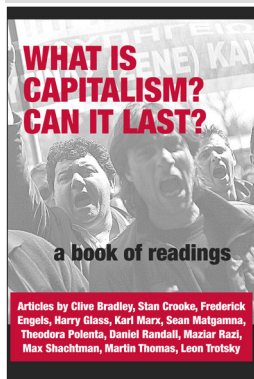
Solidarity 744

Solidarity 744 will be out on 28 May, not 21 May, because some of our staff are at an international left conference on 16-18 May. □

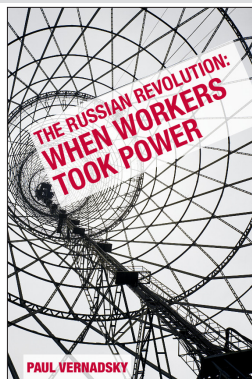


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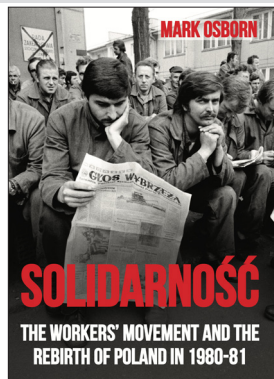
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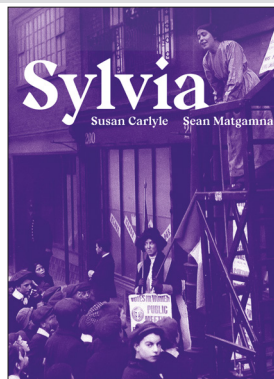
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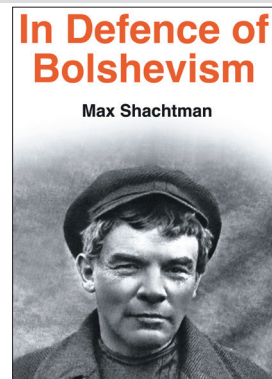
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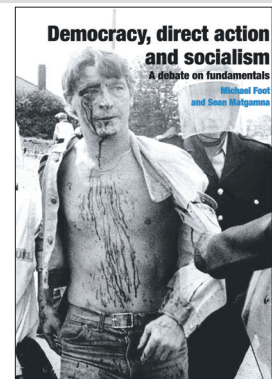
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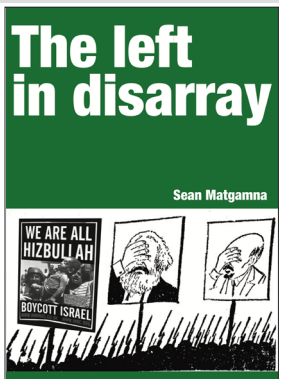
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Peace! Two states and equal rights!

By Ira Berkovic

As *Solidarity* goes to press, activists in UK Friends of Standing Together are preparing for a speaker tour featuring Amin Amara and Uri Weltmann, two leaders of the Standing Together anti-war movement in Israel, who are due to speak in six cities in England between 14-20 May.

Their cause is urgent. A report commissioned by the United Nations has concluded that the entire 2.1 million population of Gaza is at risk of famine.

Israel has imposed a total blockade of aid, including food provisions and other essential supplies, entering Gaza for nearly three months. Malnutrition, particularly amongst children, is rising sharply. The blockade has also exacerbated existing humanitarian crises resulting from the widespread destruction of Gaza's healthcare, sanitation, and housing infrastructure caused by the war.

244,000 people, over 10% of Gaza's population, are already experiencing "catastrophic" levels of food insecurity. Nearly 71,000 children under the age of five are expected to experience acute malnourishment over the next year unless aid provision dramatically increases.

Mike Huckabee, the US ambassador to Israel, has said aid provision will resume via distribution centres run and protected by private security contrac-

tors. The UN has previously said such a scheme would be unworkable. Huckabee did not give any specific date.

Negotiations

Since his announcement, media outlets have reported direct negotiations between the US government and Hamas, the Islamist paramilitary party that ruled Gaza prior to the war. Hamas has released Edan Alexander, the last US-Israeli dual national being held hostage. Negotiations have reportedly also covered the issue of aid provision.

In Israel, peace organisations met on 8-9 May in Jerusalem for the second annual "It's Time" conference, which was attended by around 5,000 people. Some Israeli leftists, such as Orly Noy in +972 Magazine, have criticised the conference for not more explicitly foregrounding opposition to the destruction of Gaza. Whilst some Israeli peace organisations are quietist and overly moderate, with a discourse that reflects the long-dead diplomatic "peace process" of the 1990s, that is not true of all the organisations involved in "It's Time", and especially not of Standing Together, the binational (Palestinian-Jewish) left-wing social movement whose speakers were prominently featured.

Standing Together continues to build its "Refuse War" campaign, encouraging Israeli citizens to refuse to fight in Gaza. A former IDF colonel who spoke at a Standing Together protest on 24



April said: "No-one is off the hook. If you are sent to do wrong, you're still responsible, even if it's an order. A pilot sent to bomb a 10-story building because a logistics officer from Hamas lives with his family on the seventh floor should say, 'No, I won't do it. I won't take part in war crimes. The responsibility is on me, because I'm not just following orders.'"

"An intelligence officer asked to approve a target that will hurt dozens of

civilians because an AI programme says the suspect once stood near someone maybe tied to Hamas, she should say no. A soldier ordered to shoot at medical workers and then bury them should say, 'No, I won't shoot. This is on me, because I am not a tool for wrongdoing.' A soldier in the West Bank entering a village where settlers are attacking Palestinians whose commanders tell her to arrest the Palestinians, not the settlers, should say no." □

"Change is needed, and possible"

An extract from a speech given by Rula Daoud, national co-director of Standing Together, at the "It's Time" conference in Jerusalem on 8-9 May.

At one of our stalls in Jaffa, showing photos of Palestinian children killed in Gaza, a passer-by approached me. He was Jewish. He stood quietly, looking at the photos, and said, "Better their children than ours."

I replied, "Better a world where no children die in wars at all, neither Jewish nor Palestinian." He answered, "I agree, but it won't happen", and walked away.

I've thought a lot about that exchange. This brutal war in Gaza has claimed 50,000 Palestinian lives, 18,000 of them children. Hun-

dreds of Israelis have died too, in Hamas's 7 October attack, or as hostages killed in captivity, or by air strikes. The war has displaced hundreds of thousands, forcing them into tents and starvation.

Amid this pain, two peoples yearn for a different life. To live in security, without fearing tomorrow. To live comfortably, with livelihoods, with housing, with true freedom without oppression or discrimination. Simply to live well.

But though most people here want change, many are swayed by those in power. As if we're doomed to endless war, occupation, and racism. But this is our mission. We here, and those watching across the country, tens of thousands strong,

Jews and Palestinians, will convince them: change is needed, and possible. We'll mobilise, inspire political imagination, recruit, and do it together, Jews and Arabs. I'm thrilled to open our conference on this stage today, excited to discuss our opposition, and our vision for a different future.

I know it's tough, with endless terrible news from Gaza and the West Bank. But I refuse despair, and I know you do too. And that, my friends, gives me hope. I am a Palestinian citizen of Israel, standing here with Alon-Lee [Green, the co-director of Standing Together], a Jewish citizen, and you, thousands of Jews and Arabs, we are together in the struggle to save this land, and make it a safe place for all of us. □



Activist Agenda

Meetings

Sun 18 May: Workers' Liberty eco reading group: Aviation. 8pm. Zoom-link bit.ly/envi-rg

Wed 21 May: The Reform surge. Lewisham AWL. 7pm, New Cross Learning, 283-285 New Cross Rd SE14 6AS

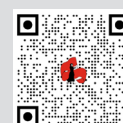
Wed 28 May: Trans fightback. London AWL. 7pm, Marchmont Community Centre WC1N 1AB

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-ersliberty



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

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

Socialist-feminist book clubs
workersliberty.org/sf-book-clubs

29 May: Leicester. Minnie Lansbury; email womensfightback@workersliberty.org for venue.

1 June: Manchester. Trans/Rad/Fem. 81 Princess St M2 3JL

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. □

The mask slips on Putin and Ukraine



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

The *Morning Star* celebrated VE Day with a 12 page “commemorative supplement” that contained an account of World War Two by prominent Communist Party member and author of *Freedom from Tyranny: the war against fascism and historical revisionism*, Phil Katz.

Comrade Katz describes the events leading up to the war. “Chamberlain’s betrayal at Munich”, he writes, “wasn’t just a diplomatic failure; it was proof that the old elite would rather bargain with fascists than arm the Spanish Republic.” An interesting observation to find in a paper that vehemently opposes arming Ukraine.

Katz goes on to mention that the Communist Party had “some early debates over the war’s character” before becoming “a relentless anti-fascist force” bringing “battlefield discipline to the Home Guard and shop floors.”

This is what really happened: between August 1939 and June 1941 Stalin and

Hitler were in alliance (the Hitler-Stalin pact), and the British Communist Party (CP) made pro-Hitler propaganda, embellishing the German regime, and its “desire for peace”, which British imperialism was obstructing.

It was only after Germany invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941 that the CP became “patriotic” – and a strikebreaking agency for the bourgeoisie, now the allies of Stalin’s Russia. CP leader Harry Pollitt made an infamous speech in which he insisted that it was “the class-conscious worker” who would cross the picket line!

If Katz’s account of the war is selective to the point of dishonesty, an article (“Winning the Peace”) by former union bureaucrat and uber-Stalinist Doug Nicholls is simply nauseating: he uses the anniversary to denounce immigration (“engineered to weaken the labour force from which people leave and those where they emigrate to”), condemn the EU (for “nation-breaking politics”) and promote patriotism (“To be patriotic and proud of our country is to be proud of the progressive achievements of us as a people”).

Poisonous

Not content with such reactionary nonsense, Nicholls slips in a poisonous dose of Putin’s propaganda: “That Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky has intimated that the largest commemorations of the victory over the Nazis, which will be held in Moscow on May 9, may not be secure is a blood-chilling reminder of the traditions that he comes from.”

Yes, Nicholls believes Putin’s “Victory Day” charade in Moscow represents some sort of continuation of the Red Army’s campaign against German fas-



cism on the Eastern Front – with Zelenskyy and the Ukrainian resistance in the role of the Nazis!

The claim that a nation whose president is a Jew with relatives who died in the Holocaust and where far right parties have less electoral support than many other countries in Europe is “neo Nazi” may seem absurd, but it’s central to Putin’s propaganda around the Ukraine war.

And it’s now cropping up openly in the *Morning Star*. A piece by the paper’s former Moscow correspondent Kate Clark (“When allies became enemies: the Soviet sacrifice betrayed”, 9 May) claims that “Ukraine – part of the USSR for 70 years – has been taken over by a ruling clique which admires and applauds those Ukrainian nationalists who openly collaborated with the Nazis during their occupation of Ukraine from 1941 to 1944.”

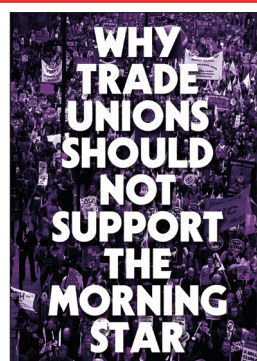
The paper’s editorial of 10-11 May, applauding leaders of the so-called global South “flocking” to Putin’s charade in Moscow, accused the Ukrainian

government of “open celebration of Nazi collaborators.”

It is true that the Ukrainian parliament marked the 114th birthday of the collaborator Stepan Bandera, but Zelenskyy is on record discouraging such celebration and has commemorated the victims of Bandera’s movement. Paradoxically, the Kremlin’s attempt to paint the current Ukrainian government as heir to Bandera’s crimes has enhanced his symbolic status within Ukraine.

But the MS ignores all that – as it ignores the far-right nature of Putin and the “Ruscist” ideology he espouses, influenced by fascist thinkers Alexander Dugin and Timofey Sergeytsev.

The paper’s coverage of VE Day and Putin’s Victory Day proves that all the pious claims to disapprove of the invasion were so much nonsense: at heart the paper – and its political masters, the British CP – want Putin to win and Ukraine subjugated. The mask has slipped. □



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Turkish union’s whole leadership arrested

By Pete Boggs

Schools in Turkey are in a bad way under the AKP government. Forced transfers of teachers are happening at so-called “project schools”, part of an education scheme to create specialised high schools with focuses like science or training new imams. Many of the teachers who have been transferred out were political critics and trade unionists, and the education workers’ union [Eğitim Sen](#) argues that the main criteria for getting an appointment now is political loyalty.

The leadership of Eğitim Sen has faced intense state repression since the beginning of recent protests and

their decision to carry out political strikes in solidarity with students protesting against a wave of arrests. The union’s entire Executive Board was placed under house arrest and fitted with ankle monitors, and have only recently been [released](#).

Protests against state repression have continued since the arrest in March of Ekrem İmamoğlu, mayor of Istanbul and disbarred CHP presidential candidate for 2028, and the Turkish government has continued to crack down violently on the opposition.

Towards the end of April, 52 more people were arrested as part of a “corruption investigation” into the CHP-controlled

Istanbul municipality, particularly targeting officials in the Istanbul Water and Sewer Administration (İSKİ). The leader of the CHP, Özgür Özel, claims that this is due to their criticism of President Erdoğan’s controversial “Canal Istanbul” project, a proposed \$75 billion canal paralleling the Bosphorus.

Harassment

May Day this year in Istanbul was large but also subject to heavy police harassment, which is no departure from tradition. The government used their usual tactics of shutting down most public transport in Istanbul and deploying over 52,000 police officers: by the

end of the day, 407 people had been detained. According to state figures, across the country there were 212 separate May Day rallies across the country with 286,584 people taking part.

Students have played a large role in the protests, organising boycotts and walkouts. This boycott movement has spread to high schools, where students have led walk-outs and sit-ins in support of teachers who have been transferred out of their schools as punishment for supposed political disloyalty. These actions have been carried out in coordination with teachers, particularly those organised by Eğitim Sen.

Another trade union under

attack in Turkey is SES (Health and Social Services Workers Union). Some of their leaders have dragged through extended trials and prosecution since 2021 for supposed links to terrorist groups: this is a [commonly used](#) charge against any political oppositionists. They recently held a meeting with sister unions from Europe, which included representatives from Unison and Unite.

Even though the Eğitim Sen leaders are now out of house arrest, they and their members are still facing repression and still fighting back. Sign this petition in defence of them! [bit.ly/tk-te](#) □

Unions can push back for trans rights

By Simon Nelson

The Women and Equalities Committee of MPs [wrote](#) on 8 May to the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), raising concerns that its guidance following the Supreme Court ruling of 16 April will discriminate against trans people.

EHRC chair Kishwer Falkner stated that only “biological women” could access single-sex spaces like changing rooms and toilets, and that trans men might be barred from using male facilities. The committee’s letter calls

for assurances that the forthcoming EHRC code of practice will support the rights of all individuals, including trans people. It also urges an extension of the public consultation period from two weeks to at least six. The EHRC responded that it is reviewing its consultation approach in light of the feedback.

The EHRC “guidance” is not guidance in any official sense, only an “interim update”. Even if the EHRC finally produces regressive guidance and gets it approved by the government, it is only “guidance”, not law. If the EHRC wants

to enforce it against organisations and employers, it has to do an “investigation”, issue a “compliance notice”, then start proceedings if it claims non-compliance.

There is wide scope for unions to stop and reverse any rush by employers and organisations to start penalising trans workers or service-users on the pretext of the EHRC “update”. We can hold the line and go forward to secure and codify respect, equality, and healthcare provision for trans people. □



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Open borders! Migrant and local workers' unity

By Will Roberts

On Monday 13 May, Labour Home Secretary Yvette Cooper released a White Paper (a statement of government policy prior to drafting legislation) titled Restoring Control over the Immigration System. It proposes a number of changes to immigration law, all of which aim to restrict immigration, and all of which socialists should fight to oppose.

The paper focuses on legal immigration, with a further set of proposals on illegal immigration and borders due later in the summer. The current proposals include (see the [FreeMovement website](#) for the full list):

- Raising requirements for education or training for visa applications, as well as demanding higher qualifications in the English language;
- Work visas below those education requirements being limited to industries with established shortages, or strictly time-limited;
- Employers being punished for offering work visas without hiring enough British workers;
- A clampdown on foreign students, including making requirements during their studies more rigorous and reducing the period students can stay in the UK after completing their studies.

The paper also encourages reinterpreting the application of a section of the Human Rights Act regarding the right to a family, which Labour claims (following the lead of right-wing propaganda) has been misused to grant too many asylum claims.

Starmer's introduction to the White Paper claims Labour are



putting into practice policy that the Tories failed to implement: “the previous government repeatedly promised inward migration would be brought under control. Instead, Britain became a one-nation experiment in open borders [...] The damage this has done to our country is incalculable. Public services and housing access have been placed under too much pressure. Our economy has been distorted by perverse incentives to import workers rather than invest in our own skills.”

Blaming migrants for cuts to public services and lack of affordable housing is a classic piece of Westminster trickery. A high influx of migrants does not have a noticeable impact

on wages, and population growth does not correlate to unemployment.

Public services are decayed because of 15 years of austerity, which Labour have continued instead of reversing as they promised in the run-up to the election. It is also a lie that Tories were somehow “lax” on migration: they ended free movement with Europe and introduced yet more restrictions and punitive measures on immigrants, up to and including the notorious deportation-to-Rwanda scheme which even Starmer had to oppose and scandal.

Starmer also encourages racist ideas about migrant workers: “if people want to come to Britain to start a new

life, they must contribute, learn our language and integrate.”

The imaginary “lazy migrant” Starmer attacks here is a racist fantasy used to encourage nationalist politics. Visa applicants being made to pass a higher grade of English Language test will achieve nothing but restricting the number of applicants. Despite Tory cuts to funding for teaching English as a Second Language, official statistics show 98.2% of people in England speak English well, and another 1.5% imperfectly.

Narratives about migrants failing to integrate may as well have come straight from Reform UK's election platform.

The fight against these policies has to come both within

and outside the Labour Party. At the September 2024 Labour conference, the platform had to withdraw an anti-migrant motion for fear of defeat after campaigning by groups including the Labour Campaign for Free Movement and Labour Left Internationalists which produced announcements by affiliated unions that they would vote against.

Our counter-demands to these policies must be:

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

Another version of Collective?



Eye on the Left

By Matt Cooper

An online report from *Socialist Worker* on a meeting in Huddersfield on 10 May (called by a local alliance, People's Alliance for Change and Equality, within which Socialist Alternative is active), reported that Jeremy Corbyn as shifting closer to endorsing a new political formation. While still cautious, he said:

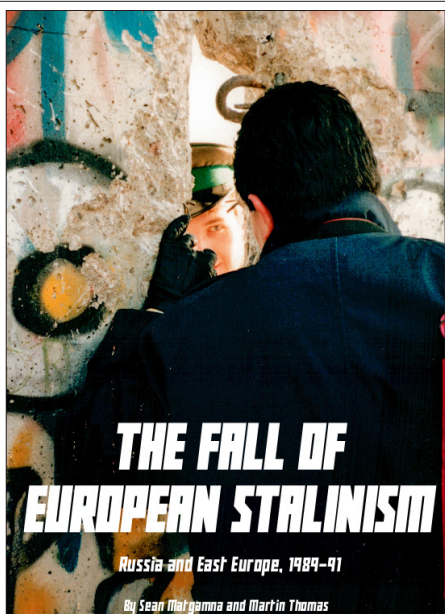
"Now I hear the call for a new political party. I fully understand that... that party needs to give our central message of peace, justice, equality, and diversity... Anyone we support must be accountable to their community, behave democratically, and pledge to redress grotesque inequality."

He added that efforts are underway to bring people together ahead of the next local elections in May 2026.

Independent

Yet Corbyn reiterated his view that those candidates should be "independents". Which begs the question, independent of what? The Labour government is too "independent" of the working class and the labour movement. One of the MPs in Corbyn's small "Independent Alliance" parliamentary group, elected in Birmingham Perry Barr, was a Lib Dem councillor until recently. He called for troops to break the Birmingham bin workers' strike.

The 10 May speech may be a small shift, because so far Jeremy Corbyn has been pointedly reluctant to support a coordination of candidates. There is not even a clear formula for whom he might personally endorse.



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In the 2024 general election, a would-be party named Collective, in which Karie Murphy, formerly "Executive Director" of Corbyn's "Leader's Office", was a main mover, tried to do it for him. Collective took the "five demands" of Corbyn's Peace and Justice Project as its main criterion for endorsing candidates. These were: a pay rise for the many, a Green New Deal with public ownership, housing for all, taxing the rich to save the NHS, and welcoming refugees. While worthy, the demands were not distinctively socialist and had no reference to the working class or labour movement as agents of change. Corbyn's own campaign in Islington North had a different headline, "For All of Us: An Independent Voice", and *different* planks.

Collective endorsed candidates including a mix of Gaza and other independents, TUSC, and RCP. Corbyn remained at arm's length. Candidates did not promote Collective in their electioneering. Collective as such did no visible campaigning in the general election, and now appears defunct.

Rather than viewing candidates as a way of building a democratic political movement which is also active outside elections, works to increase confidence in the working class and trade unions, and makes candidates accountable to the movement, Corbyn leans on vague notions of "community" support as a way of building candidates. In Islington North, this translates into the nebulous "People's Forum", which is due on 29 May to hold its fourth meeting since the July 2024 election. The meetings have been worthy public forums on handed-down topics (housing, mental health, gig economy, housing again) rather than democratic decision-making events. Others have experimented with citizens' assemblies, sometimes linked to Assemble, a project of Roger Hallam (Extinction Rebellion/Just Stop Oil).

We Demand Change

Also on 10 May, the SWP's National Council discussed two documents from their central committee (we can assume they were passed). The first focused on "We Demand Change" (WDC), the SWP-aligned activist network aimed at giving them political leadership across fragmented campaigns. It positions WDC as a means of building opposition to Starmer, but so far it has only been initiated in four cities outside of London (Birmingham, Manchester, Sheffield, and Leeds). In Manchester, it has struggled to expand beyond core members from SWP and Counterfire (wearing a variety of hats: SutR, the Campaign Against Climate Change, People's Assembly, and StW), though it has attracted some disability rights activists and a broader layer of activists appear open to it.

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GUEST SPEAKER: JEREMY CORBYN MP



Corbyn speaking at another rally backed by various Independent groups, and attempts at "left-of-labour" electoral projects like Transform and Collective

The SWP seems unsure about WDC's purpose beyond mobilisations. Its recent priority was a mass picket in support of the Birmingham bin workers – something that should have been pushed for through the local labour movement long ago. Reviving labour-movement structures might be more strategically useful than creating new vehicles.

Umbrella

The second SWP document addresses electoral strategy. It clarifies that WDC is no longer seen as a potential electoral front. Instead, the SWP supports a Corbyn-style "umbrella" for independents with "community" backing, albeit with more connection to existing campaigns. Like Corbyn, they avoid proposing a new party and instead advocate a network of candidates with "high-profile" (read: Corbyn's) support. This, they believe, can lead to "a big and insurgent campaign... nearly everywhere".

The SWP also wants to impose a "filter" to avoid backing politically problematic candidates like the 2024 "independent" MPs. Their six demands – including "welfare not warfare", which is poor because it functions as code for "abandon Ukraine" – are arguably even weaker than the PJP's and Collective's (which at least included "tax the rich"). The idea of creating a broad but ideologically coherent umbrella in the next few months is fanciful.

The SWP seems to believe recent mobilisations – against anti-refugee rac-

ism, for Gaza, and for trans rights – can be transformed into a united political movement under their leadership, with Corbyn's blessing adding legitimacy. But it is far from sure that they can do better than Collective. They risk building only a loose candidate network, without an ongoing base outside elections, and one that bypasses the hard work of convincing people of socialist ideas and rebuilding a fighting labour movement. □

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Feminism, capitalism, and alienation



Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

In *Socialist Feminism: A New Approach*, Frieda Afary looks to “conceptualise an enriched emancipatory socialism with transformed gender relations at its heart”. She does this by examining four socialist feminist theories of gender oppression: (1) theories of social reproduction, (2) theories of alienation, (3) intersectionality, and (4) queer identities.

The book contains useful literature reviews of socialist feminist theories, in particular queer theories and social reproduction, which she also subjects to friendly critique.

She correctly identifies that in its quest to produce a Marxist theory, socialist feminism has become over-reliant on social reproduction theory, which can tell us much about the relationship between paid and unpaid labour and women's role in the home, but is not an all-encompassing theory of sexism under capitalism.

Her own explanation for the missing piece of socialist feminism is the relation of alienation to sexism: “Capitalism affects and alienates the mind and body and human relations in insidious ways that are not simply caused by private property and the market. Its alienated mode of labour affects all human relations and most deeply intimate and sexual relations.”

In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* of 1844, Marx discusses the various ways in which workers are “alienated” under capitalism. Opportunities for workers' creativity are shut down. Routine and repetition increase as work is specialised, to extract more and more profit from more and more intensified work.

Marx explains how this can “mutilate the labourer into a fragment of a man”. Our project is to return human freedom to those whose labour makes the world run.

Yes, what Marx described as the working class's “loss of self” must clearly have some effect on our gendered relations. The coercion inherent to broader society is certainly replicated within our family structures. But the nature of capitalism's effect on the worker is contradictory, and those contradictions aren't just waiting within us to be resolved after the revolution. Many aspects of gendered relationships have improved through collective working-class struggle under capitalism.

It is important not to lean too far towards Marx's idea of capitalism dehumanising us; it gives us chances to be humanised too, and Marx identifies those tendencies alongside the dehu-



manising ones.

“Modern Industry, indeed, compels society, under penalty of death, to replace the detail-worker of to-day, grappled by life-long repetition of one and the same trivial operation, and thus reduced to the mere fragment of a person, by the fully developed individual, fit for a variety of labours, ready to face any change of production, and to whom the different social functions they perform, are but so many modes of giving free scope to their own natural and acquired powers...” (and Marx cites testimony from a migrant worker in the capitalist USA on actually achieving that through varied work).

Realised

Capitalism brought with it the humanist conceptions of reason, universality and solidarity, but it also prevented them from being fully realised. We can realise movements not possible before capitalism. Men under capital are neither machines nor animals, but people.

I'm unconvinced too by Afary's declaration that the end of alienation will bring the end of the unconscious mind. I suspect that human minds will change considerably (as they already have). But the fact will remain that there are things of which we are aware, and other things of which we are not aware, and we will not change so fundamentally that all implicit mental processes will disappear.

Even where capitalism does brutalise us, it is not right to situate sexism as flowing from alienation. What about the systemic oppression of women that occurred in pre-capitalist societies before capitalist alienation began? In part the working-class family under capitalism derives structures from the ruling class (from the bourgeois family). Both as a conscious ruling-class project of control, and through workers' understandable desire to emulate lives which look

better and more comfortable. Families do not just produce workers, they have an ideological function for capitalism: the reproduction of the relations of production through the socialisation of children within the family hierarchy.

As women have entered the workforce in greater numbers and experienced greater alienation there, we haven't noticed sudden spikes in women committing rape or domestic violence. In part, Afary gets around this by situating alienation as primary within capitalism. Everything else stems from alienated labour, because alienated labour is essential to the system. To identify alienation as the one decisive element of capitalist exploitation, and ignore its interactions with ever-shifting elements of the capitalist system and changing social forces, seems undialectical.

Afary argues that we are facing a new model of state capitalism, with the state and military having more and more control over the direction of companies even when there is no direct full ownership. She at one point (borrowing from bourgeois economist Joshua Kurlantzick) defines state capitalism as state ownership or significant influence over more than one-third of the 500 largest companies (by revenue) in a country. It is a very broad definition. She jumps from this to predicting a move to an authoritarian state capitalism, and its potential gender implications. She posits a capitalist future with the state in charge of all aspects of life, including the family: children brought up in care facilities and adults working in workcamps. This seems fantastical.

There is a blur between “free” wage labour and wage labour in work camps or super-exploited migrant labour in capitalist economies. But workcamps and political labour are not the economic norm. They are exceptions to the wage system. Were the economy not to depend on wage labour, and transition instead to being based on some form of prison labour, I don't see how you could describe it as capitalist. There are real threats of rising authoritarianism to gender relations, but fringe exceptions do not affect the majority of the workforce. The authoritarians are politically motivated to strengthen gender relations and the family.

Afary has a commendable humanist and internationalist perspective on the liberation of women. She references Black liberation struggles in US led by women and uprisings in Sudan, Algeria, Hong Kong, Iraq, Lebanon, Chile, and Iran, as well as mass protests and labour strikes in France, Haiti, and elsewhere which had women at the forefront.

She is not afraid to call out those leftists who are so adamant that imperialism is a western phenomenon that they fail to fight for liberation else-

where: “Although the Occupy Movement was inspired by the Arab Spring, many of those on the Left who called themselves anti-imperialist supported the Assad regime in Syria because it claimed to be against U.S. imperialism, and its regional imperialist backers Israel and Saudi Arabia. Some leftists also openly supported Russian imperialist intervention in the Middle East and Ukraine, as well as Iranian regional imperialist intervention in Syria and in Iraq. This unprincipled and inhumane attitude, this failure of those who claim to be against capitalism to see the connection between capitalism and the rise of imperialist powers other than those in the West...”

It would be good to see more books trying to move socialist feminism beyond current approaches. Dual-systems feminism, a perspective within Marxist feminism, argued that women's oppression stemmed from the intersection of two distinct systems: capitalism and patriarchy. The swing back to social reproduction theory has somewhat overcorrected. The role of women in reproducing workers is part, but not all, of the material basis for sexism, and taking that as the explain-all can be economic.

Though I am unconvinced by the way Afary situates sexism in alienation, considering oppressive practices in the context of the dehumanising nature of capitalism as a political/economic system is necessary too. More discussion is necessary on pre-capitalist gender oppression, which continues not just through human practices being slow to change, but also by their embedding into the material lives of workers. □

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Finland, the labour mover

By Eric Blanc

Contrary to the myth that socialists have always ignored gender oppression, full women's suffrage was first won by socialist feminists – and working-class revolt.

There are a lot of different ways to discredit working-class politics. One of the most popular today is to claim that socialists ignore women's oppression. Elaborate versions of this argument fill the news-media, Twitter, and academia. By focusing only on economic issues and class, we are told, the socialist movement has always marginalised women and their specific demands for equality.

Like all good liberal myths, these arguments rely on bad history. Working-class feminism has a long and rich legacy. For over a century working women fought for their own liberation through the socialist movement.

Few cases better illustrate this point (or have been more buried by history) than that of turn-of-the-century Finland. In 1906, through a mass general strike and working-class insurgency against the Russian Empire, it became the first nation in the world to grant full universal suffrage – i.e. the right to vote and run for office. Socialists were at the forefront.

Of all the lands of the tsarist empire, Finland had throughout the nineteenth century been allowed the most self-government and political freedom. Annexing Finland from Sweden in 1809, the Tsar granted its new dominion extensive autonomy, though the Russian regime maintained ultimate authority. Finland preserved its own constitution and most state functions were governed by Finns through their

autonomous Senate. In 1863, a new Finnish parliament was established, though only a small percentage of the population was allowed to participate in its election.

A crucial turning point in Finnish history came in 1899. In February, the Tsar began to eliminate Finland's special autonomous status, attempting to bring it under the same forms of administration as the rest of the empire. Soon a major Finnish national protest movement emerged against this "Russification".

1899 also marked the emergence of the Finnish labour movement as an independent political force. After a string of labour strikes, the Finnish Workers Party was founded in July 1899. Whereas socialist parties across the Russian empire were banned and forced underground, the relative political freedom prevailing in Finland allowed the Workers Party to exist as a legal organization.

Autonomy

Though virtually all labour leaders in Finland supported the re-establishment of Finnish autonomy, the question of whether to collaborate, and on what basis, with the Finnish liberal "constitutionalists" against Russification became a major debate. While the constitutionalists essentially fought for a return to the pre-1899 status quo, the labour movement tied the national struggle to popular demands, such as improved conditions for urban and rural workers, the prohibition of alcohol, and the expansion of the vote.

One of the central points of contention between workers and constitutionalists was the issue of suffrage, from which all working people – both men and women – were excluded at that time. Constitutionalists refused to support universal suffrage. The conservative Association of Finnish Women led by women's rights activist Alexandra Gripenberg, for example, argued that lower-class women were ignorant and prone to vice, therefore they had to be guided by their morally superior upper-class sisters.

In contrast, the Workers Party from its inception demanded suffrage for all: the right to vote and to run for office irrespective of wealth, gender, or nationality. In 1900, it helped found the socialist-led League of Working Women to involve working-class women in the labour movement, to develop their leadership capacity, and to help raise their demands.

Socialist leader Hilja Pärssinen, the working-women movement's main theoretician, advocated a strict class-against-class perspective along the lines set out by the German Marxists August Bebel and Clara Zetkin. Pärssinen's 1903 pamphlet on women and

the vote made the case for irreconcilable class conflict: bourgeois women wanted only equality with upper-class men, while women workers wanted the vote to pass laws to improve their material conditions.

That same year, the Workers Party adopted a Marxist program, renamed itself the Social Democratic Party (SDP), and announced that if its suffrage demands were not met, it would resort to a general strike to win them.

The Bloody Sunday massacre of unarmed protestors in St Petersburg on January 9, 1905 sparked revolt across the entire empire. This upheaval, more often than not under socialist leadership or influence, demanded better working conditions, political freedom, and a democratic republic – and it came close to toppling the increasingly discredited tsarist regime.

The revolution arrived relatively late in Finland. Inspired by the general strike in central Russia, Finnish railway workers walked off the job on October 29, 1905, setting into motion the "Great Strike." By October 30, all of Finland was on strike, and effective power passed into the hands of strike committees and armed guards. The event radically transformed the consciousness of urban and rural working people. And perhaps nowhere was this transformation more pronounced than among women workers.

Palvelijatarlehti (The Maids' Paper) noted:

"The strike week was a wake-up week for the rights of women. ... As soon as the strike began, women started to hold special meetings in which they debated their economic position, and these meetings were flooded by people. It was as if it took the breakout of the general strike to make women realise that it would depend on themselves whether the status of women improved or not".

Miina Sillanpää, the influential socialist leader of the maids' association, noted that the week of the general strike accomplished among the maids "more than what could have been promoted in ten years of peaceful conditions." Bourgeois society was particularly scandalised by the participation of their servants in the action, which shattered paternalistic notions of maids as members of the host family and represented the direct intrusion of the labour movement into their homes. In daily mass meetings in a Helsinki elementary school courtyard, thousands of servants came together to formulate their demands.

The call for full suffrage was legitimised by this mass female participation in all arenas of the strike, including in its top leadership; the Tampere Strike Committee, initially composed only of



Alexandra Gripenburg

men, was quickly reorganised to include ten women and twelve men.

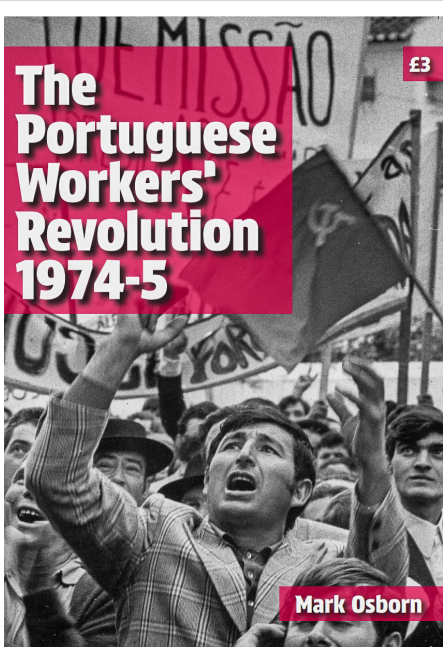
"We live in a wonderful period of time," wrote Alma Malander in the SDP newspaper *Kansan Lehti* (The People's Paper) in December 1905:

"People who were humble and satisfied to bear the burden of slavery have suddenly thrown off their yoke. Groups who until now have been eating pine bark, now demand bread. The oppressed demand justice! ... Women, who have always been subordinate, suddenly get the idea that they really are equal with the other sex".

Faced with the imminent overthrow of the regime by a paralysing labour strike, peasant rebellions, and army mutinies, the Tsar was forced on October 30 to promise civil liberties and a parliament for the whole empire. On November 4, the Tsar's "November Manifesto" repealed the Russification of Finland, re-establishing the pre-1899 status quo – without guaranteeing that the new Finnish Parliament would be elected by the whole population.

Though constitutionalists and socialists had closely collaborated during the first days of the November Great Strike, this tenuous alliance quickly broke down into open conflict. After the Tsar's "November Manifesto," the constitutionalists pushed for an end to the strike, as their main demand – the restoration of pre-1899 "constitutional legality" – had been achieved. In contrast, the workers' movement continued to demand universal suffrage and a unicameral parliament.

Having felt their power to shut down society, Finnish workers were determined to continue mobilizing. Immediately following the strike, the SDP began organizing mass demonstrations and building for a new general strike to ensure their political demands. The next half-year witnessed an unprecedented number of strikes, the rapid spread of



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ment and women's rights

socialist influence among tenant farmers and workers in the countryside, the creation of a workers' Red Guard, and closer Finnish socialist collaboration with Russian Marxists. It was during this upsurge that the campaign for women's suffrage reached its highest peak.

Following the Great Strike, there was considerable and justifiable concern that women would be excluded in the upcoming elections. During the April 1905 suffrage reform bill discussions in the Finnish parliament, only the Peasants Estate had supported women's suffrage, while other estates and the various constitutionalist parties all favoured giving the vote only to men. The chair of the Parliamentary Reform Committee chosen in November 1905 to draft the new suffrage rules was liberal leader Robert Hermanson, an outspoken opponent of women's suffrage. Women, he felt, were by nature emotional creatures prone to extremism and ill-suited for politics.

Initiative

In this context, League of Working Women leaders argued that working-class women had to take the initiative to ensure that their demands were met:

"We [working women] have to shout to the world that we are demanding the right to vote and to stand for election, and that we are not going to settle for anything less. Now is not the time for compromises, because if we are excluded now, we can be sure that it will remain that way for a long time".

By the end of 1905, the League, with the support of the whole Finnish Social Democracy, had organized 231 suffrage meetings across the nation with 41,333 participants. It called for a new general strike in the case that women were excluded from the vote, and it established a special women's committee to start preparations.

It was announced that any male party members who opposed women's suf-

frage would be denounced as collaborators of the bourgeoisie. Some female workers threatened to go on a cooking strike at home to force sceptical husbands to support their struggle. And there were even public statements made that if women were left out of the vote, women workers would, if necessary, strike on their own, even against the opposition of the other party members.

The influx of women into political life challenged traditional gender roles. Miina Sillanpää called on men to stay at home and watch the children to enable their wives' participation in political meetings.

Perhaps the most powerful actions of the suffrage campaign were its mass demonstrations. On December 17, 1905, the League organised protests for women's suffrage in sixty-three towns across the nation, bringing together over 22,000 demonstrators. A "National Women's Declaration" written by the League's leadership was sent out to be adopted by each rally.

"The fate [of Finland] concerns us just as much as men. Is it any wonder that tens of thousands of us rise up to call for our rights, to demand for ourselves equality with men. A powerful cry is echoing across our country at this moment, from the large cities to the villages, showing that the majority of citizens support the heartfelt wishes of women. The demand of women for the vote and to run in elections will be silenced only when it is granted. The right to vote is a means for us to shut off the flow of alcohol, to raise the proletariat from material and psychological distress, to prepare the way for light and freedom".

The rallies continued into 1906 and the Finnish Social Democratic Party did not waver on demanding suffrage for all. But a new general strike did not ultimately prove necessary to win this demand, as the Parliamentary Reform Committee eventually announced that all women would be allowed to vote and run for office, despite considerable controversy within the Committee over the latter point in particular.

How can we explain this decision by a Finnish political elite that until then had consistently opposed universal suffrage? Put simply, they were forced into it. The pressure of the workers' upsurge during and following the Great Strike of 1905, and the real threat of a new general strike, proved greater than elite opposition to universal suffrage.

That the suffrage decision had been imposed from below was openly admitted at the time. The influential banker and politician Emil Schybergson told the Parliamentary Reform Committee that the revolution had forced them to rush through a decision that might oth-



The Women's Guard from Vihti in 1918. Composed entirely of local maids

erwise have waited another fifty years. Indeed, it took many more decades for other countries to grant full suffrage, including France (1944), Italy (1946), and Switzerland (1971).

The Tsar's acceptance of the Finnish suffrage proposal on July 20, 1906 was similarly a victory imposed by revolutionary struggle. Such an act would have been inconceivable without ongoing mass rebellion across Russia, which flared up again that summer in a new wave of peasant revolts and army mutinies. Through this concession, the embattled tsarist regime hoped to quell unrest in Finland in order to concentrate its forces on putting down the revolution in the rest of the empire.

Campaign

The suffrage campaign lasted all the way through 1907. In January, the League sent out a memorandum to its local branches, calling on them to ensure that the SDP electoral slates include a sufficient number of women candidates. By this time, over 18,000 women had joined the party, close to a quarter of the total membership.

The 1907 elections were swept by the Finnish Social Democracy. It won 37 percent of the vote – the highest of any party – and of the nineteen women in the new Parliament, nine were socialists. The latter were a remarkable group, all leaders of the League and most from humble backgrounds. Anni Huotari, Maria Laine, Maria Raunio, and Sandra Reinholdsson were seamstresses; Jenny Kilpianen was a weaver; Mimmi Kanervo was a maid, as had been Miina Sillanpää; Ida Ahlstedt was a baker and boarding-house operator; and Hilja Pärssinen was a school teacher.

Prominent feminists were, at best, ambivalent about the suffrage victory. The Finnish Women's Association's top leaders still stressed that Finnish working-class women were too backward and unprepared for full suffrage. Alexandra Gripenberg declared to a 1907 women's congress in Vienna

that the entry of uneducated, plebeian women into Parliament was a "horrible" embarrassment. Most of the socialist MPs, Gripenberg lamented, were "formerly servants, factory hands, or seamstresses... It was a mistake that so few really able and suitable women for the work in the Diet [Parliament] were elected... If we had women lawyers, merchants, physicians, scientists, and so on, women's words would have weighed more."

Hilja Pärssinen, in contrast, travelled abroad to present the Finnish struggle as an unqualified victory and a vindication of a strict class-versus-class political perspective. She argued in the British newspaper *Justice* that "women who have to fight together with their men comrades for the abolition of the present capitalist system and the private ownership of the means of production cannot work together with women who support this very system." In an interview with the *Christian Science Monitor*, she declared:

"I should very much like through your paper to send a message to the American people, and to ask them why they have not yet granted the suffrage to women, and to urge upon them, out of a considerable practical experience of its value, the importance of making this great, and ultimately necessary, political change".

Pärssinen's perspective was shared by the workers' movement in Russia and beyond. For August Bebel, the German SPD leader and author of the influential work *Women and Socialism*, the events in Finland represented "the triumph of international socialism." Similarly, Alexandra Kollontai at the 1908 First All-Russian Women's Congress pointed to Finland to show that "in those countries where unlimited political rights for women have been achieved, this has been done only with the help of the social-democrats." □

• Taken with thanks from bit.ly/eb-fi



Hilja Pärssinen



The case for o

Adapted from the Workers' Liberty pamphlet Remain and Rebel

Immigration and asylum rights were the headline issue of the Brexit campaign in 2015-6. Almost a decade later, many of those who voted for Brexit regret that, and polls show a majority for rejoining the European Union. But Mr Brexit, Nigel Farage, is back, on a roll with his scapegoating of immigrants and asylum-seekers as if they are the cause of decayed public services, eroded wages, and high rents, and intimidating the Labour government into "Reform-lite" policies.

Reform is still beating the old Brexit-type drum about "taking back control of the UK's borders" and limiting migrants.

Nigel Farage's famous "Breaking Point" adverts in 2016 portrayed a tide of mostly Syrian refugees as the threat which would somehow "break" Britain.

That built on decades of anti-migrant agitation, in which xenophobic politics were advanced by endless scaremongering about migrants supposedly undermining workers, committing violent crime and leeching off the public purse.

All too often, back to the 1960s at least, the centre and centre-left tried to head off the right-wing agitation with more "moderate" anti-migrant rhetoric and policies of their own. But the effect was the opposite: to vindicate the worst agitation and let it advance ever further.

The mainstream, conservative-and-liberal led Remain campaign in 2016 continued that failed approach. Rather than offer an uncompromising defence of free movement, its leading figures tried to triangulate by highlighting the anti-migrant policies that remained possible within EU rules, or even proposing to push within the EU for yet harsher rules.

Jeremy Corbyn supported free movement within the EU then, and continued to support free movement across the Channel for some months after the 2016 referendum. Then he gave in to pressure from the Labour right – and, indeed, many on the Labour left – and dropped that support. The 2017 Labour manifesto was very poor on migrant rights, arguably worse than Ed Miliband's 2015 manifesto.

In 2019 the Labour Campaign for Free Movement won a vote for free movement at Labour conference. That was one of the Labour policies kept out of the 2019 manifesto, although generally that manifesto included more conference policies than any for a long while, and it was not as bad on migra-

tion as 2017's.

In early 2020 Keir Starmer, in order to get elected Labour leader, felt obliged to make one of his "ten pledges": "Defend migrants' rights. Full voting rights for EU nationals. Defend free movement as we leave the EU. An immigration system based on compassion and dignity. End indefinite detention and call for the closure of centres such as Yarl's Wood".

Now the same Starmer is chasing after Reform, trying to cajole Reform voters by promising them that Labour can be as anti-immigration as Reform or the Tories. He can see that the UK needs to repair links with the EU – even more so in the Trump era – but insists that even mild schemes facilitating "youth mobility" across borders would cross a manufactured "red line" by edging too close to free movement.

Such moves will push more people to vote for the actual Reform party rather than Reform-lite, and more of the many Labour voters who would never back Reform into abstention or voting for Greens or Lib-Dems.

This is a lesson that – it seems – is never learned.

Back in 2016, many supporting Leave within the labour and trade union movements – from the Stalinists of the Morning Star, to Blue Labour arch-conservatives, to leading trade union bureaucrats in Unite, RMT and more – adopted elements of their right-wing bedfellows' politics on migration. Parroting the racist tabloid fiction that migration threatens the wages of workers who are already here, they demand we acquiesce to the so-called "legitimate concerns" of the "white working class" and embrace curbs.

As socialists, anti-racists, and internationalists, we stand against all these forces and uncompromisingly in favour of the maximum possible freedom for people to move across borders. It should be a basic obligation for the left to fight to increase free movement we have and fight to extend it – not making the UK open again to Europe but opening both to the rest of the world.

Border controls exist to separate us and to enforce different restrictions on the right to live in different places to people based on their origin. They are presented to us by our ruling classes as protecting us from outsiders. But as socialists we believe that each "national" group of workers has more in common with other workers than with its "own" ruling class, the capitalists.

Our vision for society is about human freedom and solidarity. The socialism

for which we fight is one that liberates people to live how – including where and with whom – they choose. There is no place in our socialism for barbed wire, detention centres and 2am raids. No place for uniformed heavies checking papers and denying you the right to access healthcare or education or even just to walk down the street in peace.

Some leftist supporters of immigration controls like to imagine that these things – barbed wire, violent deportations and a hostile environment – are not a necessary part of restricting migration, and that these things can be replaced by a "kinder, gentler" enforcement of borders.

It is certainly true that reforms falling short of the full removal of migration controls can reduce these things to some degree. But it is simply not possible to effectively enforce any restriction on migration without them. The idea that migration in the modern world can be successfully controlled with nothing more than an official at an airport, port or road checkpoint, politely turning away those whose papers are not in order – that's a fantasy.

Contradiction

And more fundamentally, the very idea of progressive migration controls is a contradiction. Some proponents try to frame them as "democratic" control of the "supply of labour", by and for workers. But migrant workers are not inanimate raw material, a commodity picked up, moved around the world, dumped here or there – they are human beings. So these calls amount to nothing more than a request for the state to ramp up the machinery of border controls to discriminate against some workers for the supposed benefit of others.

Some migrants are fleeing poverty, war or environmental destruction. Many would prefer to stay where they grew up, and near family and friends. We support aid and solidarity which helps them do that. But that will not happen overnight, and it would be a criminal failure of solidarity to turn away the people trying to flee right now.

This is not a new theme. Demands to discriminate between workers by nationality echo the male trade unionists who historically protested against women entering the workplace, or the white workers who defended "colour bars" blocking black workers entering their professions.

In those cases, those on the right side of history saw an alternative to clinging onto the old hierarchies and prejudices. They rejected the idea of begging capitalists or the capital-

ist state to inflict violence, discrimination or deprivation on other workers to "protect" us from them. Those who best served the movement and its future strove instead to organise workers on equal terms, across divides like race and gender, to win a better future for all of us. The solution is no different today.

In fact, it is not even true that immigration undermines wages, conditions, job security or public services for the workers already here.

Consider the claim that immigration stretches NHS waiting times. We surveyed the figures in 2022. Plenty of the NHS divisions with shorter A&E waiting times had high proportions of migrants (e.g. North-West London, Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes) and some of the worst-performing ones had very few (e.g. Shropshire, Staffordshire, Lancashire and South Cumbria). Overall there was no correlation. Meanwhile, foreign-born workers keep the NHS going.

Or take the claim that an increase in the supply of labour drives down the price, which has an intuitive appeal. But this assumes that there are a fixed number of jobs workers are competing to take – the "lump of labour" fallacy, debunked over a century ago. If this were true, then population growth from births in general would also depress wages, and population decline would raise them. But the populations of cities like Sunderland and Hull, both of which saw majorities for Leave, shrank substantially (6% and 7% respectively over 1981-2013), while both suffered high unemployment and low wages. Conversely, Swindon and Cambridge are some of the UK's fastest-growing cities and have substantially above-average wage growth and employment rates.

Extra workers don't just seek jobs; they need to eat, drink and live. So they increase demand for housing, food, and other goods and services, which in turn creates jobs (plus the government could, if it chose, spend their taxes on better public services and more jobs). And at least some of the profits derived by the rich from their labour further spur consumer demand and new investments.

A study just before the 2016 referendum found no relationship between immigration from the EU and wage cuts, unemployment, or deterioration in public services – even when they narrowed their focus to the poorer-paid sectors which are often claimed to be more affected. Other studies have found wage impairments for some of the lowest-paid, but only small ones. The scapegoating of migrants for the

pen borders

social ills facing working-class people was always a lie. Its function is to divide the working class and shield the real culprits – the rich and powerful, and the capitalist system that serves them.

Some left-wing opponents of free movement claim that it is a policy that serves capitalists against workers. Bernie Sanders memorably called open borders “a Koch brothers proposal”, referring to the billionaire crusaders for hard-right free-market politics. But for all the rhetoric about protecting local workers, it is anti-migrant policies that really undermine us, by making migrants less than equals, making them into a sub-class of particularly vulnerable, easily exploitable workers lacking legal rights.

We are sold policies such as “no recourse to public funds” and tying visas to employment conditions or to particular employers, by conservative invective about the need to stop migrants “stealing” benefits and “leeching” off the welfare state. But if a migrant worker knows that losing their job will mean being left without the safety net of unemployment benefits, their child going hungry without school meals, or even deportation, then they will be less willing to stand up to an exploitative boss, and more willing to accept low paid work with poor conditions.

This goes double for the hounding of undocumented migrants. In 2008, cleaners on London Underground unionised and went on strike for a living wage, sick pay, holiday pay and dignity at work. It was probably the largest industrial dispute of undocumented migrants in UK history and then Mayor Boris Johnson was forced to concede the pay rise.

The reprisal was swift and merciless. Long serving workers’ papers were suddenly questioned and their bosses coordinated with the Home Office to have them seized and deported. Others were scared into staying away from work and away from the union. Every attempt to organise tube cleaners since has been disrupted by the same tactics.

In 2009 a similar fate befell cleaners

at the School of Oriental and African Studies who were campaigning for a living wage. They arrived at an “emergency” meeting with their bosses only to find themselves locked in and confronted by immigration officers in riot gear. Nine were deported.

In 2010 David Cameron won the election for the Tories with a promise to reduce all immigration to “tens of thousands a year”. In 2012 the Tory government officially declared it was introducing policies of a “hostile environment” to push out undocumented migrants. The slogan “hostile environment” was dropped after the Windrush scandal of 2018, about mistreatment of migrants from the Caribbean who had been living and working in Britain for decades, but the actual policies changed little.

Reduce

Those policies did not reduce total immigration – it has increased steeply – or even undocumented migration. But then, that was never their purpose. For the capitalist class and the right-wing politicians who serve them, the purpose of all these policies is discipline – to keep a set of workers precarious, non-unionised and exploitable. Even documented migrants are now often on work visas, dependent on the goodwill of their employers, at risk of deportation if they annoy employers by standing up for their rights.

An amnesty for undocumented workers, citizenship for all residents, and equal access to decent employment rights and social security for all, would put the whole working class on a secure footing to fight back against exploitation.

Another argument commonly found on the anti-free-movement left is that the right is an elitist concern: that working-class people don’t have the opportunities to make use of free-movement rights, and the concerns boil down to privileged people fretting about how easily they’ll get to swan about the continent.

But five minutes in a multi-ethnic, multi-national, working-class neighbourhood like London’s Wood Green, where a myriad of languages from Bulgarian to Portuguese to Somali fill the high street and adverts for cheap international phonecards fill corner shop windows with slogans about freedom from borders, will quickly dispel the myth that only the comfortable and privileged are bothered about the freedom to live and work in other countries.

Conversely, the very richest are always able to breeze around the world



quite freely with or without free movement policies. Visa fees amount to the kind of money these people might lose behind their sofas. Over 20 countries – including several in the EU – offer fast-track citizenship or residency in exchange for large investments in local property or business.

If the most disadvantaged workers face bigger obstacles in the way of living, working, or studying abroad, then we want to reduce those obstacles. In any case, we won’t help them by denying these opportunities to those workers who are a little better off – or to those poorer workers who do manage to access them despite the inequality.

Free movement within Europe, which we had before Brexit, was better than what we have now, or what is threatened now, but even at its best it has never been a right enjoyed by everyone. It has been a partial right, extended only to citizens of the EU and Schengen area (i.e. also non-EU Iceland, Norway, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein). Those coming from outside the walls of Fortress Europe have long had a frostier reception – somewhat less hostile in countries such as Germany and Sweden than in the UK, but, all too often, one characterised by barbed wire and brutality.

Non-European migrants are barred, or if allowed in, face onerous visa conditions including fees, denial of social security and public services, surveillance, legal discrimination, and precarity that could see them detained and deported on any number of grounds. EU member states collaborate to enforce a vicious regime at Europe’s borders against those fleeing war, persecution, disaster, environmental destruction and poverty.

Many thousands of refugees have drowned in the Mediterranean since

2014. While charities and NGOs attempt to run rescue missions, the response from European governments has been to turn them away from ports, bar them from operating in Italy’s waters, criminalise them and impound their boats. Mainstream press commentators have openly argued that refugees should be left to drown in order to deter others from making the trip. Those migrants pushed by this crisis into attempting the land route instead, report being beaten and abused for entertainment by police before being turned back from the Hungarian border – a border now fortified with electrified fencing and heat sensors.

Rather than end this cruelty by opening their arms and accommodating those in need – which would be easy with a mere fraction of the wealth of our continent’s capitalists – European governments collaborate via the EU to pay authoritarian states like Turkey to fortify borders and capture and detain migrants before they even reach the edge of Europe.

With far-right parties in government from Hungary to Italy, all these aspects of Fortress Europe are only becoming more vicious.

All this is certainly a good argument against romanticising the EU. But staying out of the EU, or curtailing the rights of EU citizens, will not in any way improve the situation for non-EU migrants.

Many migrants currently living in the UK on EU passports came originally from non-European countries but got their papers via another European country (for instance, Latin Americans to whom Spain and Portugal have lowered the barriers to citizenship due to colonial history). High barriers to movement between the EU and Britain will not help them. □

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International conference on 16-18 May

By Michael Baker

On 16-18 May, delegates from many revolutionary left groups around the world will gather in Paris for the third “meeting of internationalist forces” initiated by Italian “left-communist” group Lotta Comunista. This year will be the first of those meetings attended by Workers’ Liberty.

Before each meeting, attending groups are invited to contribute to a bulletin (see our contributions for the last bulletin on our website). This is a summary of the attendees and contributions at the March 2024 meeting.

The meetings are not an attempt to establish a new international. For starters, many of the groups attending are in their own international networks, and multiple such networks have contributed as a whole to the bulletins.

Instead, they are billed as encouraging a level of constructive interaction and debate, and cooperation on key issues where there is mutual agreement. If the left is to regroup, its various parts must be willing to talk to each other first; in that spirit, we see this initiative as a productive step forwards.

The groups attending fall broadly into three categories: left communist groups, Trotskyist groups and internationalists, and a smattering of anarchist and other groups.

Left Communists

The paper *Lotta Comunista* has a subtitle “Organ of the Leninist groups of the Communist Left”: it has little continuity with the “Left-Wing Communism” criticised by Lenin in a 1920 pamphlet.

Its original core, round Arrigo Cervetto (1927-1995), started activity in the “partisan” movement against fascism in northern Italy in 1943-5. They evolved towards anarchism. Then they took part in a regroupment, from 1957, which included “Bordigist” currents. *Lotta Comunista* as such was launched as that regroupment broke up, in 1965.

It is different from other left groups not only in programmatic stances but in its activity. It puts much effort into selling its paper, including door-to-door. But the paper is monthly rather than weekly (although the group is now quite sizeable), and relentlessly “heavy”, with long analytical articles often full of economic statistics and very little in the way of “agitation” or reports from struggles. LC also publishes a lot of books. It has long held that the world is in a lengthy counter-revolutionary phase.

Unlike many “left-communist” groups, it is not against activity in established trade unions, but seems to do

little of that, instead promoting neighbourhood “Workers’ Clubs”.

In its early years, the Cervetto group talked of a “Third Front” against US and USSR imperialism, but then dropped it as giving too much credence to the idea of (capitalist) Europe forming that “Third Front”. They spoke and speak instead of “unitary imperialism”.

Despite its origins in a “national” struggle, LC has for decades now argued that we are past the era of history in which “national liberation struggles” are truly liberatory, or carry any importance for the revolutionary left. “Blatantly obvious to the oppressed and the oppressors without a clear class reference,” they argue, “means falling into priestly moralism or becoming an instrument of the game of the bourgeois fractions and their large economic groups.” It does not call for victory for Ukraine.

Other groups in the conferences, such as Novyj Prometej (Russia) or ControCorrente (Italy), are likewise inclined to see no gain in national struggle. This produces a consistent position that may seem out of place for many used to debates on the British left when discussing the oppression of the Palestinians. Contributions are short on answers for what Palestinian and Israeli workers should fight for in the immediate future, but strong on opposition to Islamist forces like Hamas.

Trotskyists

The selection of Trotskyist organisations is much more varied. The most active of them is the French NPA-Révolutionnaires, which is now helping to organise the meetings, and with strands of which Workers’ Liberty has long had links.

Of groups that have sections in Britain, most prominent are the CWI (Socialist Party) and the LFI (Workers’ Power). Other Trotskyist groups include the PCL (Italy), the post-Morenoist ISL/LIS, Argentina-based group Socialismo o Barbarie, the Partido Obrero, the Turkish SEP, and the RCIT.

This spectrum is far too varied to summarise in one go. The only true shared principles are a belief in revolutionary politics, some form of agreement that Stalinism as constituted in the USSR was a force to be opposed, and that between now and the socialist future there are “transitional demands” of some form, for which communists must agitate. There is an inconsistently applied and shakily explained belief in “the right to self determination” and “national liberation struggles” ex-

pressed in many of the statements.

Workers’ Power is the only group to make a practical suggestion for activity at the conference: given the vast differences in programme and agreement, groups that have greater areas of similarity should engage with one another in talks on further cooperation. This, presumably, led to the [discussions](#) between the LFI, the ISL/LIS and the International Trotskyist Opposition that occurred late last year.

Workers’ Power’s statement also has an odd side-step: they declare first that “without a proper analysis of Russia and China, no analysis of the world situation is possible”. They then proceed to give no analysis of Russia and China. We wish the comrades luck in their efforts to work out what’s going on over there.

Most of the Trotskyist groups claim that the Ukraine war is an “inter-imperialist” conflict, and that the primary obligation for socialists around the world is to prevent their own government from intervening. Those who disagree, and believe that Ukrainian self-determination is a cause worth defending, are the ISL (whose Ukrainian section will have played a positive role), the NPA-R (who declare Russia an imperialist nation “even if it exports more raw materials than capital”), and the RCIT (who call to “support Ukraine’s struggle of national liberation” without “supporting the great powers”).

Several of the groups lack the critical analysis of political Islamism that the left communists (and we at Workers’ Liberty) have developed. Socialismo o Barbarie, a group with whom we have engaged in discussion [elsewhere](#), reject any organisation that criticises both the Israeli government and Hamas as “equating the two sides”. The ISL calls for “dismantling the Zionist state”, and the Partido Obrero and Turkish SEP outright defend the 7 October 2023 attack on civilians in Israel.

It may be no surprise to learn that the Trotskyist left is disparate, has lost its bearings on key questions of imperialism and has lost the ability to argue even amongst itself. You could even write [a book](#) about it. Nevertheless, Workers’ Liberty comrades will seek discussion on differences and see if there are areas of agreement where we can work together.



Anarchists and others

The final grouping is by far the least coherent. Groups such as the Alternativa Libertaria/Federation of Communist Anarchists have the left-communist “all bourgeois politics are identical” bent with an anarchist flavouring (their slogan of choice for Israel Palestine is “Two peoples, no state”). The Italian Anarchist Federation talks of calling for a general strike against militarism, and denouncing all those who “had not yet broken the umbilical cord with pro-government unionism”, calling instead for something akin to “red unions”.

The Kharkiv Anarchist Assembly contributed primarily by complaining that the other contributing organisations wrote contributions that were too long and jargon (I have some sympathy). Kamunist Kranti has written a fascinating article on factory organising in India since the 1980s, including discussion of the anti-union laws in India and the harm they do to building militant industrial action, particularly amongst garment workers.

2025’s meeting will be discussing two bulletins: one on international themes, similar to the previous years, and a new bulletin focusing on industrial questions, and how the groups in question address the trade union movement and workers’ struggles in their own countries. □

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Against Starmer’s demagoguery:
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Against war over Kashmir

By Will Roberts

On Saturday 10 May, India and Pakistan agreed a ceasefire which at the time of writing appears largely to have held, avoiding a full-scale ground war along the Line of Control in Kashmir.

On 22 April, 26 tourists were killed in Pahalgam, in India-controlled Kashmir. The Islamist group Kashmir Resistance claimed responsibility. Asserting that Pakistan had backed this group, India retaliated first with big words, then harsh diplomatic steps including a ban on trade, and ultimately with a series of missile attacks on what they deemed "terrorist targets" on 7 May. Three days of cautious back-and-forth followed, including both sides firing missiles across the border, and sporadic gunfire along the Line of Control.

Trump claimed the ceasefire as a big win for himself, blustering that he could

solve a "1,000 year" conflict (in fact, 78 years, since partition in 1947).

Reliable information about the fighting is hard to come by. It is certain that a great deal of infrastructure has been damaged on both sides. There have been a handful of civilian deaths and at least some damage to military technology. (The Pakistani air force even at one point claimed to have destroyed the entirety of the Indian air force in one operation).

Both India and Pakistan are run by nationalist governments with a history of oppressing minority populations. They are also both nuclear powers. A relapse into war over Kashmir could be catastrophic.

Some of the left in both India and Pakistan have come out against war, supported the self-determination of Kashmir, and opposed national-chauvinist rhetoric. Revolutionary Socialist Movement, the Pakistani section of

the LFI (Workers' Power in Britain) released a [statement](#) before the ceasefire, condemning both governments and calling for working class action to oppose the war. Indian socialist Kavita Krishnan posted on Facebook calling for the Indian government to publish the terms of the ceasefire, support an international investigation into the Pahalgam attacks instead of taking their own kneejerk military reaction, and to stop ramping up confrontation with the Pakistani government.

However, the CPI(M), closely associated with Stalinist political figure Vijay Prashad, released a statement on May 7 supporting "Operation Sindoor", the Indian government's missile strikes into Pakistan earlier the same day. They declared that "pressure should be continued on Pakistan to hand over those responsible for the massacre of innocent people in Pahalgam... The Indian government should ensure that the

unity of the people and integrity of the country are protected." This is a shameful capitulation to Hindu-nationalist military adventurism, and has no place on the left.

In Britain, the Labour Party has a track record of courting Modi's BJP in India, including meeting with Hindu nationalist groups. Starmer declared soon after becoming Labour leader in 2020 that the oppression of Kashmiris was "a matter for the Indian parliament".

Escalating war would serve nobody's interests. Kashmir is a complex multi-ethnic region split between two different ruling powers; despite large obstacles to its achievement, the principle of self-determination for the people living in Kashmir is paramount, along with rights for minorities in the region, perhaps most notably the Baloch people in Pakistani Balochistan. □

Big vehicle-workers' strike in China

By Dylan Seah

Thousands of workers at factories of the giant BYD electric-vehicle company in Wuxi and Chengdu struck in late March and early April this year. Those factories, previously owned by Jabil Inc, have had strikes every year since BYD acquired them in 2023.

The strike this year began on 28 March at the Wuxi fac-

tory, with workers demanding the right to be paid their final wages if they resigned, and the restoration of performance-based compensation and birthday benefits. The strike spread to the Chengdu factory where workers protested against a reduction in their working hours (and therefore their pay), cuts to allowances and bonuses, workplace changes, forced department

transfers, low pay and job precarity. The Chengdu workers won some concessions and some workers were allowed to work overtime during the Qingming holiday.

Despite the regime, strikes are common in China. In 2010, workers in a Honda factory in Nanhai won a 35% pay rise after going against the government-controlled "trade union" and taking strike action.

Technology manufacturing strikes in China are increasingly common. In 2018 Maoist students joined worker protests at the Jasic Technology factory in Shenzhen and formed the Jasic Workers' Solidarity Group. That eventually resulted in the detention of 50 activists.

The Foxconn workers' battles with police at the world's largest iPhone factory in Zheng-

zhou were an important part of the larger protest movement against the CCP's Covid ultra-lockdown policy which produced the first spectacular example of the CCP backing down to resistance from below.

Solidarity with workers in China against the bosses and the CCP! □

GMB takes Amazon to court

By Ollie Moore

The GMB union is pursuing a legal case against Amazon for alleged union busting during a ballot for union recognition at the BHX4 warehouse in Coventry last year.

The ballot was lost by 28 votes, after Amazon launched a massive campaign against the union. The GMB alleges that some of its tactics, including a poster campaign with QR codes that auto-generated an email cancelling union membership, misled workers and may have breached laws on campaigning by employers during recognition ballots.

Amazon's lawyers had applied to the Employment Tribunal due to hear the case to request a separate hearing over the QR code issue; GMB argues the whole case should be heard together. The Tribunal judge ruled against Amazon's request, which the

union has described as "a big win".

GMB is right to use every channel available to it to challenge Amazon. But the Tribunal is not due to begin hearing the case until December 2025. The battle for union recognition and workers' rights at BHX4, and in other Amazon warehouses, will not ultimately be won through the courts, but in the workplace. □



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The cavalry at Lifford Lane

By Sacha Fox

The 8 May mass picket for Birmingham bin workers was incredibly successful, with many trade union delegations and individuals attending from around the country. Informal discussions among bin workers and supporters ranged from big politics to strategies in the dispute and critiques of past strikes.

The feeling among workers was that the cavalry had arrived and injected new life into the picket line, but they'll still have to be on those pickets each day

across multiple depots, in a long war of attrition with the employer.

Step-up

Plans are afoot within Unite For A Workers' Economy (a Unite campaigning team) and We Demand Change on how to step up the community campaigning for this strike in communities around Birmingham. Ideas floated so far are public demos, a series of local meetings with strikers, forming some link with religious and community groups which have organised bin collections, and more.

Currently, posters are

being put up around the city, postcards are being sent to council leader John Cotton, and union branches are sending money to the strike fund.

Absent on 8 May were local Unite officials who allegedly have been briefing the press against the dispute and suggesting that a deal could have been taken but was refused to boost Sharon Graham's image. But if all goes to plan, the solidarity campaign will be too big to derail: linktr.ee/brumbinstrike □

“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.

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- Taxing the rich to fund good public services, homes, education and jobs for all
- Workers' control of major industries and finance for a rapid transition to a green society
- A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression
- Full equality for women, and social provision to free women from domestic labour. Reproductive freedoms and free abortion on demand.
- Full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people
- Black and white workers' unity against racism
- Open borders
- Global solidarity against global capital – workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers
- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation
- Equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small
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Our grand total has not risen that much this week. We are still lurking below £12k with our grand total now standing at £11,725.

But I want to thank a particular reader, Clare, who donated £10 because they enjoyed the article on [Kneecap](#) in *Solidarity* 742.

There are well over 20 articles in this paper, so if you enjoy at least one of them, why not consider donating to our fundraising efforts?

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Why is this the court's problem?



Diary of a Tube driver

By Jay Dawkey

Some conversations happen in a crowded messroom, whether people are taking part or not: pensions, length of time driving, pay, housing, disruption, and complaining about management.

Some conversations happen one-on-one and people judge who might be around to discuss them. One afternoon, after several loud-mouthed and vocal drivers had left the messroom, an old-timer looked across to me and said, "So what does this Supreme Court decision [16 April, about trans people] mean?"

We know each other, and he knows my politics. He also knows that I would have supported the demonstrations that happened the weekend of the decision. So I explain roughly what the decision means and, more importantly, its consequences.

"But why is this the court's problem? What about everything else we have to



worry about, whose business is this? In India [where he is from] you have the hijra ["third-gender" people], they don't have the best life, the best jobs, and they live with each other, but the state doesn't interfere. It's not our business. People are left alone."

"I don't care what you want to wear or which toilet you go to, and why is it toilets people are worried about? Is this all a way to distract us, from the real issues. And who is getting them to do that?"

I address the conspiratorial aspect of what he's saying. This is not the first

time people have alluded to this. The culture wars are used to divide people, and often it's about an erosion of trust in official politics and institutions, but they are not something cooked up that you can just tell people not to worry about. They are real issues. "But people are living on the street, and the state is saying this is the toilet you can go to. This isn't real. Who is this all for?"

As often happens, one of you has to go, so it's another conversation to pick up the next time the mess room is quiet. □

Who torched the Reichstag?



Letter

In *Solidarity* 742, Martin Thomas makes a passing comment on the "loner" who torched the Reichstag on 27 Feb 1933. This refers to the

Dutchman Marinus van der Lubbe, a former member of the Dutch Communist Party and stonemason. There is a considerable body of evidence that Lubbe was not involved: that he turned up some 20-30 minutes after the conflagration started and the finger of guilt

points to a conspiracy of Nazis headed by Hermann Goering. After such a long period of time it is difficult to be precise (although some new evidence has emerged in recent years) but I am currently working on a lengthy article which I hope will demonstrate Lub-

be's innocence, show that Goering and his collaborators are probably the guilty party, and also highlight the despicable role played by Dimitrov in all this. □

John Cunningham,
Lancashire

Disney's Bambi and the original



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

Can there be anyone out there who has not seen the famous Walt Disney 1942 animated film *Bambi*? I suspect fewer people know that the original story was written in 1923 by the Austrian writer Felix Salten. With the title *Bambi, a Life in the Woods* (*Bambi,*

eine Lebensgeschichte aus dem Walde), it became a best seller, and is very different to Disney's offering.

The pursuit and killing of deer by human hunters in the novel was seen by many commentators as a kind of parable of the persecution of Jews. and in 1936 the Nazis banned the book. Salten, a supporter of the Zionist movement and an acquaintance of both Theodor Herzl and Martin Buber, fled to Switzerland in 1938 and died in Zurich in 1945. Salten sold the film rights in the USA for a pittance and, eventually, Dis-

ney acquired them.

The production team denuded the story of much of its social impact. In Disney's hands it became primarily a children's story, hence the introduction of two new characters, Thumper the rabbit and Flower the skunk, giving the film a much softer and more easy-going aura. Whether or not Disney was antisemitic has long been a matter of debate. □

• Watch online: bit.ly/bbi42

Setback in PCS election

By a PCS member

The 2025 National Executive (NEC) elections in the civil service union PCS have resulted in setback for the Coalition for Change, with its NEC presence reduced from nineteen to seven members and victory to the ironically named "Left" "Unity" (LU).

The setback follows the CfC's sweeping 2024 gains, on the back of the disastrous mismanagement of PCS's pay campaigns by the then long ruling LU. But from the outset, the LU General Secretary and President, supported by the LU NEC minority, [obstructed](#) and wrecked the effective working of the NEC at a time of rising challenges from our employers and with the intent to blame the NEC majority.

However, CfC still retains a higher NEC starting point, compared to 2023, for transforming PCS, provided lessons are drawn, including the need to step up local resistance against employers' attacks.

Voter turnout was an all-time low of 6.4%, a symptom of organisational and democratic ill health that should focus all factions, including the LU NEC members who argued in 2024 that the then CfC majority lacked a democratic mandate on a turnout of 8.6%.

Bev Laidlaw, a member of the Independent Left (IL) component of CfC, secured the highest vote of CfC candidates standing for senior posts and was elected Deputy President. She secured the highest vote of all candidates for Ordinary NEC posts. She should have been the presidential candidate spearhead for the CfC campaign.

IL will now focus on the PCS conference, 20-22 May in Brighton, where delegates can set policies to address the critical challenges facing members and for which the incoming NEC will be accountable. □

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Stop cuts in NHS!

By Matt Sanderson

The political choice of austerity as a method of control over the NHS in the past decade and a half has resulted in a situation where a Labour government has no new vision other than further cuts and so-called "efficiency savings".

An idea is emerging of what NHS Trust will have to do to meet the top-down targets for "savings". The [picture](#) looks grim. The government has made an increase of £22bn over a two year period above Tory plans, but the NHS still has a financial shortfall of £7bn this year. Some trusts have drawn up plans to shed jobs and to cut back diabetes and palliative care.

All that comes after the government saying in March that it would phase out NHS England and integrate control back into the Department for Health and Social Care, and make 50% cuts to "bureaucracy" within the Integrated

Care Boards (ICBs) which commission regional health services. Unions, while they had not favoured the NHS England spin-off or the ICB structures, warned about the rushed nature of these plans.

The attitude of the government and the interim head of NHS England seems to be that "the NHS has maxed out its budget". There is a maximum amount of money that is justifiable to spend on health, and above that it doesn't matter that waiting lists are so long people die on them, that it has become normalised to wait for care on hospital corridors or car parks, or that every NHS worker is tired beyond hope and underpaid.

The mindset is out of step with frequent public polls showing support for taxes on the rich to pay for healthcare. The unions recognise this and make some statements. But they should be organising mass demonstrations against cuts, balloting over pay, and

getting ready to coordinate strikes across unions.

The Labour government set out aims for the NHS to include moving to a model where health care is more about keeping people healthy than fixing us up after we get sick. But if services cannot meet current demands for the already-sick, how can they prevent future health issues?

We need a model of health care which accounts for the causes of ill health, recognising how poor housing conditions, overwork stress, and the cost of good food contribute to ill health. Healthcare is a collective act and relies on all functions of the state working effectively to lower the burden of serious disease and prevent illness at source. To finance that, we have to tax top wealth. A small wealth tax, and levelling up tax rates on capital gains to income-tax on wages, could [raise](#) £50 billion a year. □

Vindictiveness at University of East Anglia

By Pat Yarker

Lively and well-attended picketing of the University of East Anglia (UEA) campus in Norwich has continued into a second week. UCU members are striking to try to prevent a number of colleagues being made

redundant. Management has called the strike action "premature", even as they have summoned colleagues before Redundancy Panels.

In recent years UEA staff and students have endured many rounds of voluntary redundancies, the scaling-back of courses, with-

holding of salary increases and other cutbacks. After similar measures this year, the remaining sum management want to save by redundancies amounts to a mere 0.25% of the university's operating budget. This is half what was spent in 2023-24 on "key management per-

sonnel".

Union proposals for alternative ways to make up the apparent shortfall have all been rejected. In the face of what looks increasingly like vindictiveness, UCU members strike again 13-16 May. Messages of support to: ucu.office@uea.ac.uk □

Universities continue cuts

By Sam Myerson

Several disputes in higher education have been settled in early May. Striking workers at the university of Dundee have got a deal with management to abandon compulsory redundancies and have the university seeking funding from the Scottish government.

At Cardiff strikes were called off after management withdrew the threat of compulsory redundancies. At the University of Sheffield the UCU branch has voted, with a significant minority against, for a deal which gets compulsory redundancies withdrawn this year, but insists staff reschedule teaching lost during the strike days.

The deal at Dundee is the best so far, but it still means significant job losses. At the University of Sussex, a voluntary redundancy scheme has recently closed with hundreds of staff signed up.

Each job lost will not be replaced, and it reduces the quality of the service. Universities are often using this moment to strip out humanities and the arts.

And the basis is continuous cuts through voluntary schemes. What is going to change in the next year to avoid more cuts? An increase in international students, more direct funding from central government, and higher tuition fees for home students, are all unlikely.

Vice Chancellors, while having luxury trips and enormous salaries, have called for an increase in fees. But we want education free from fees, with good wages, secure employment and a welcoming environment for international students.

The 10 May UCU demo for higher education had at most 300 people on it, and no visible presence from Unison, Unite, or the National Union of Students. What should have been rallying point was just a PR stunt for the general secretary.

Where campus unions and anti cuts campaigns win some concessions, that should inform a continuous campaign, not a slowing down or a pause in organising. □

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solidarity@workersliberty.org



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



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



Iran: against war, against nuclear weapons

By Dan Katz

Iran and the US meet for a fourth round of negotiations on Sunday 11 May.

The talks are being held in Oman's capital, Muscat, and the US has threatened to walk away from the nuclear talks unless a deal is reached.

The US wants Iran to dismantle its nuclear enrichment programme, including the facilities at Nantaz, Fordow and Isfahan. Steve Witkoff, America's lead negotiator, has said that the alternative to an agreement is "another route", which is a threat to bomb Iran's nuclear sites.

Iran is a big loser from the aftermath of the 7 October 2023 Hamas pogrom against Israel. Hamas has been smashed by Israel and Lebanese Hezbollah, an Iranian proxy, has been decimated too.

In December 2024 the Iranian ally, the homicidal Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad, fell. And the Iran-backed Houthi group which controls most of Yemen has recently agreed a ceasefire with the US.

The Iranian state is now talking to the US, forced to do so by its weakness and the sanctions regime on Iran which has throttled its economy and immiserated the working class.

The US and Israel want to prevent Iran getting nuclear weapons. That is perfectly reasonable. The Islamist-fascist government in Iran is a poisonous menace, malevolently interfering across the Middle East. The Iranian regime not only fiercely oppresses its own people but is a particular threat to Israel, which it is committed to destroying.

It is rational for Israel to oppose Iran getting nuclear weapons, which Iran is clearly intending to do.

However, Workers' Liberty opposes a military attack on Iran, the consequences of which are unpredictable and possibly devastating. Iran is weakened but could still spread the conflict across the region, in particular to Iraq. Iran could well launch terror attacks in the West, too.

Iran would use a conflict with the US to rally nationalist support at home, and strengthen its position inside the country.

Following nearly a decade of periodic but very substantial rebellions inside Iran, most importantly the Woman Life Freedom movement in 2022-23, the regime is isolated, perhaps with positive backing from as little as 15% of the population. Very many Iranians now detest the clerical state and there is still widespread public defiance

of the obligation placed on women to wear the hijab.

Inside Iran the conditions of the working class are dire. Official inflation has run at 40% for over five years. The Iranian rial has lost about half its value against the dollar in the last year.

The minimum wage rate is set at the equivalent of \$125, about a quarter of the real amount needed to live.

Power cuts are now a regular feature of working-class life, shutting down major factories and impacting disproportionately on workers. Over the past two months, in the capital, Tehran, working-class areas in the south and west of the city have been hit by 75% of the power cuts, often lasting four hours per day, while the prosperous north of the city has had very few outages.

Nevertheless, workers continue to organise and fight. On May 1 the Coordinating Council of teachers' unions organised protests which were heavily repressed.

Last week bakers in Tehran and Arak protested about flour shortages and power cuts. Water and electricity workers in the southern region of Khuzestan protested against unpaid wages.

Since the mid-90s the Iranian economy has been deregulated, with a majority of workers now on short-term, usually three-month, contracts. Contract oil workers have their own clandestine organisation and committees and last week they protested in front of the Oil Ministry, chanting, "Our tables are empty."

Our people are the workers. Solidarity with the Iranian working class! □

Step up fight on benefit cuts!

By Cathy Nugent

On 7 May, MPs discussed potential cuts to Personal Independence Payments at a Westminster Hall debate (a forum where government ministers are questioned). A number of MPs reported the situation of constituents who have approached them in fear of these cuts.

The MPs who spoke against cuts went beyond the 42 Labour MPs who last week signed a letter to Starmer pledging opposition and calling for a pause and change in direction. Danny Kruger, the Shadow Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, also spoke, to say that the Tories will be joining MPs opposing the changes on the grounds that this was a cut without any plan for reforming the benefits system!

Control

Labour has lost control of its narrative – increasingly it looks like the "nasty party". Even if it manages to push through these cuts it could do itself irreparable and irreversible political damage.

Time is short to get the government to either pause or change direction. We need to step up the pressure now.

We need to hammer home why benefit claims are rising. A recent report from the New Economics Foundation shows that the pandemic and the

cost-of-living crisis has hugely impacted on our health, especially our mental health. In addition, a rise in claims, over-and-above the rise in disability, is likely due to more people claiming the help they are entitled to who previously let it go because of the hassle.

Reality

The government is not listening to the voices of people who best understand this reality. A Workers' Liberty supporter who attended a demonstration outside the Manchester public consultation on the proposed changes reports:

"[The event] had only 20 tickets made available.... the scope of the consultation was limited to specific parts of the proposal (i.e. there was no opportunity for people in the consultation to say 'I disagree with the proposal as a whole')."

"Over the course of maybe 20-40 minutes, people managed to sneak in... Eventually security gave up and everyone got in. Once inside, we were blocked from getting to the consultation room, police were present, but staff were wary of the optics of trying to remove a group of disabled people from the building with the TV crews there. Eventually 15 of us got let in to the consultation halfway through. The format of the consultation was small groups. Our group was lead by the senior civil servant who originally spent an hour keeping us out, who was then very frank about how he also thought the proposal wasn't exactly a good move."

Disabled People Against Cuts (DPAC) is organising a lobby of MPs on 21 May. Anyone who can get to it should. On Saturday 31 May DPAC-led lobbies or demonstrations will be held against Stephen Timms (in Newham) and Rachel Reeves (10-1.30am, Bramley Centre, Leeds). Sheffield Labour Against the Benefit Cuts has a demonstration on Saturday 17 May, from 2pm at City Hall.

Unison's officials have yet to act on the union's National Executive decision to have an active campaign of [opposition](#). Branches and Exec members should demand they get on with it. Similarly Unite's Retired Members section needs to start its promised campaign against the cuts. □

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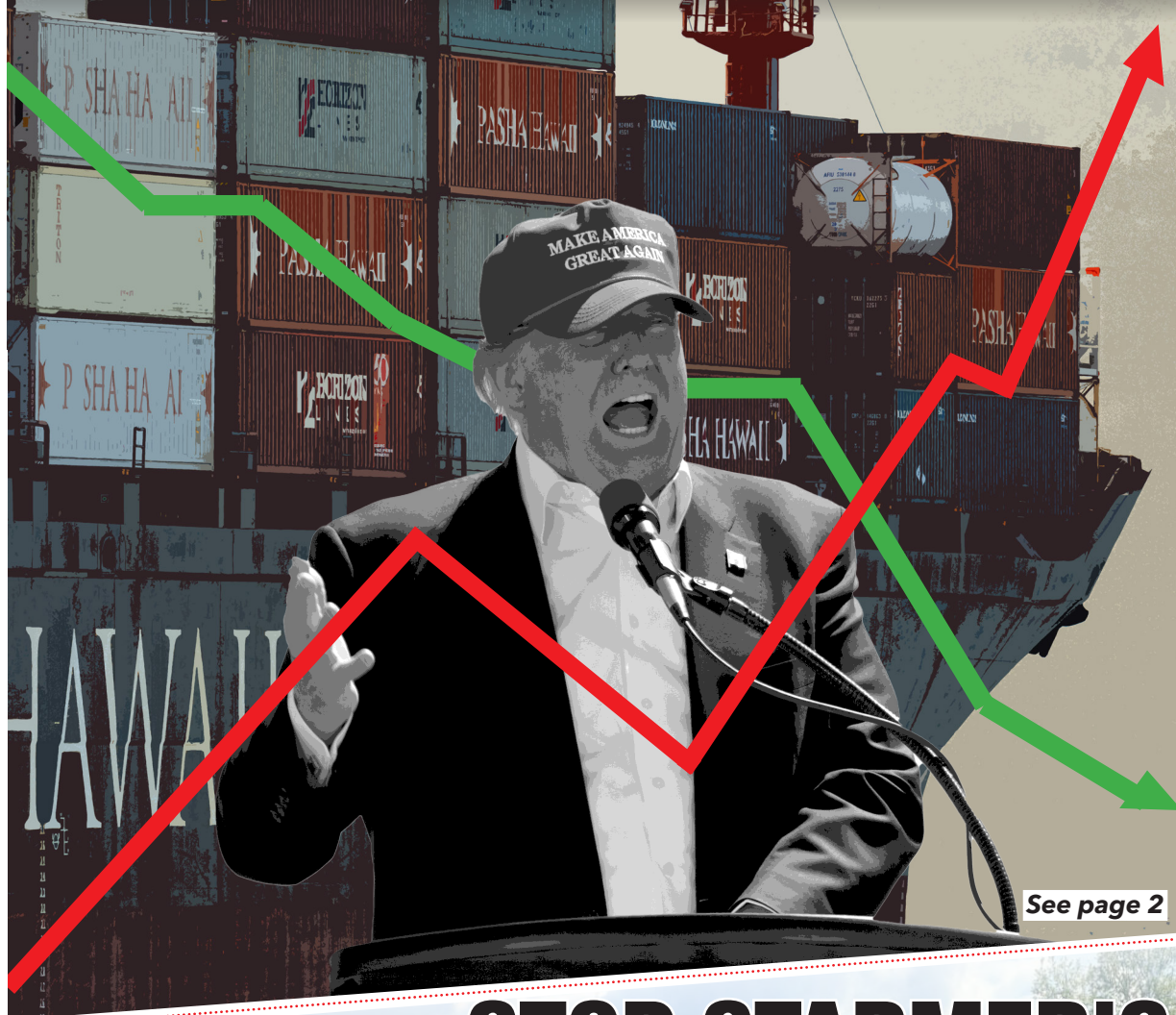
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TARIFFS WILL CAUSE CHAOS



See page 2

STOP STARMER'S ASSAULT ON MIGRANTS



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