

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

TAX TOP WEALTH!

See inside

PCS leaders fold on pay

Union pay policy trashed days after the conference decision

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Labour's leaders in trouble

Time to increase efforts inside the labour movement, not opt out

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Tax the rich to fund social provision



Editorial

"We have overtaxed labour and undertaxed wealth", declared Manchester mayor Andy Burnham at a 31 May conference of the very-soft-left Labour group Compass.

[Tax Justice UK](#) says that a wealth tax, lifting tax rates on capital gains tax to match those on wages, and a few other measures would raise £60 billion a year.

That is only a 6% rise in public resources. Serious measures for social provision and equality will need more, starting with public ownership and democratic control of high finance.

But the 6% is enough that it could patch up a lot. Enough to be demanded as an immediate riposte to the continuing cuts due to be outlined by chancellor Rachel Reeves in her 11 June Spending Review.

GB Energy, which was touted as the centrepiece of Starmer-Labour's policies for prosperity and ecology, is

stalled. Schools face cutbacks and closures all across the country. NHS managers say they are being forced into "previously unthinkable" cuts.

Big unions have opposed the government's plans to cut disabled benefits, and demanded the restoration of the Winter Fuel Allowance for old people. But the GMB, one of the biggest, has not yet spoken out against the disabled benefit cuts, and Unison and Unite have done no public campaign against them, not even on the (in truth modest) of Unite's campaign on the Winter Fuel Allowance.

Solidarity has pushed for the formation of open in-person campaign committees against the benefit cuts, uniting unions, local Labour Parties, and disabled groups. It is still not too late to get these going.

Everywhere we can, we will be agitating systematically for a united front of the rank-and-file labour movement against the new austerity, and for redress at the expense of the billionaires and the rich. □



"Black flag" means an order you must disobey



Interview

By Avner Wishnitzer

Avner Wishnitzer of the Black Flag Action Group in Israel talked to Owen Flood from Solidarity

Black Flag is an action group of academics in Israel that was established early last week to resist the mass killing, starvation and displacement of the population in Gaza.

In Israel, the term "black flag" (degel shachor) symbolizes an illegal or blatantly immoral order that soldiers must refuse to obey. It originates from the aftermath of the 1956 Kfar Qassim massacre, when Israeli Border Police shot and killed 49 Palestinian citizens of Israel for violating a sudden curfew. In its landmark ruling, the Is-

raeli Supreme Court stated that some orders are so clearly illegal that a "black flag of illegality flies over them," and thus no soldier can justify obeying them. We use this phrase, that any Israeli would recognize, to say that a black flag flies over what Israel is doing in Gaza.

There are other groups who resist the war and have been organizing protests. For instance, I am an activist with the Israeli-Palestinian movement Combatants for Peace that has been co-resisting the war for many months now. Standing Together, Women Wage Peace and other groups are also mobilising against the war. Black Flag joins this resistance. So far, more than 1300 academics have signed our open letter and in the last few days protests were held in different campuses across the country. Students too join the protests and are organizing to mobilise.

Before Black Flag was es-

tablished, there were sporadic actions in different campuses. For example, lecturers and students at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem held Teach-Ins about Gaza and in Tel Aviv University and Haifa University protests were held. This activity, however, was not coordinated and was sometimes limited by the universities' authorities. Black Flag boosts this activity and seeks to raise a voice against the atrocities taking place in Gaza, not only in campuses but across Israeli society.

Exaggeration

The estimate of 100,000 [reservists refusing to serve] is a gross exaggeration. Thousands are avoiding service in many different ways; many of them are at the very least uncomfortable about Israeli policies. But only few openly refuse (and risk imprisonment). As a group, Black Flag addresses its protest mostly toward the

government and the general public. To be sure, there are voices on campuses and outside them that call upon soldiers to refuse but that is not what Black Flag does.

We are very much focused on Israeli society and since the group has only just been established, we have not dealt with the BDS [issue] yet. However, that is by now an old discussion. My personal position is that a blanket boycott of everything Israeli, even groups that actively oppose Israeli criminal policies in the West Bank and Gaza (such as Combatants for Peace, or Standing Together), is counterproductive. It weakens opposition rather than strengthening it.

Trade unions have so far remained uninvolved in the protests against the war, and I do not think that is likely to change soon, considering that mainstream Israeli society is still largely blind to the consequences of our doings in Gaza.

Israeli mainstream media simply does not show what the rest of the world sees, creating a bubble that "shields" Israelis from the horror. Add to this the impact of Hamas's atrocities on October 7th, and years of dehumanization and brutalisation, and you can understand where most Israelis, including trade unions, stand. I do feel, however, that things are changing. More letters are coming out, more protests organised, more critical voices raised in the press.

We hope to boost these critical voices and encourage a more open, more sincere discussion of Israeli policies, and a more effective resistance to them. We will do that through protests in campuses and beyond, op-eds, webinars and many other means. Our main message is that in the face of the catastrophe that is our own making, we simply cannot keep quiet. We must fly a black flag. □

Anti-war movement in Israel stands firm

By Ira Berkovic

On Monday 26 May, mobs of far-right activists marched through occupied East Jerusalem as part of annual “Flag Day” celebrations of the occupation of the city by Israeli forces in the 1967 war.

The march, which is licensed by the state, has become increasingly violent, with settlers attacking Palestinians and their homes and business, whilst chanting exterminationist slogans such as “Death to Arabs” and “Your village will burn”. A banner at this year’s protest read, “Without a Nakba, there is no victory”, referring to the dispossession and displacement of around 750,000 Palestinians in the wars around the foundation of the state of Israel. Many

Academics in Israel oppose the war

Over 1,000 Israeli and Palestinian higher education workers, including Standing Together co-founder Prof. Dani Filc, have co-signed a statement, organised by the Black Flag Action Group, opposing Israel’s war and calling on the higher education sector to mobilise to stop it.

The statement says: “For the sake of the lives of innocents and the safety of all the people of this land, Palestinians and Jews; for the sake of the return of the hostages; if we do not call to halt the war immediately, history will not forgive us. We will not forgive ourselves. It is our duty to act to stop the slaughter; it is our duty to save lives. It is our duty to save what can still be saved of this land’s future. The institutions of higher education in Israel must raise their voices, address their students and the public at large, look at reality directly and call things what they are: unspeakable actions being done in our name, with our own hands, that will ultimately result in destroying higher education in Israel and the entire society from within.”

UK Friends of Standing Together has published a solidarity statement supporting their call. Add your name at bit.ly/israeliacademics. □

Palestinians see the bombardment and mass displacements currently taking place in Gaza as a “second Nakba”.

The only organised resistance to the marchers came from the binational (Palestinian-Jewish) left-wing social movement Standing Together, whose Humanitarian Guard mobilised 100 activists to stand with Palestinians and confront settler violence. The Humanitarian Guard has also recently mobilised at the Kerem Shalom crossing and the Port of Ashdod to protect Gaza-bound aid shipments from settler attack.

Legal action by Standing Together has recently overturned a ban on its University of Haifa chapter. Almost 50% of the students on the Haifa campus are Palestinian. University authorities banned Standing Together after it held a vigil displaying pictures of children killed in Gaza. A court has ruled the ban must be revoked, and the chapter be allowed to continue its activity. A wider legal action brought by Standing Together has also won a High Court ruling that an attempted police ban on the displaying of pictures of Palestinian children on anti-war protests is unlawful.

Whilst there is no doubt that the political atmosphere inside Israel is increasingly repressive and authoritarian, these victories show that the Israeli polity can still be a contested terrain. It is not yet as monolithic or closed-down as the states Netanyahu’s government most admires, Putin’s Russia and Orbán’s Hungary, nor as the Nazi regime to which it is often compared by leftists internationally. The point is not to laud the few remaining scraps of democratic liberalism, but to increase solidarity with currents within Israel seeking to transform the political reality and resist war and inequality.

Standing Together’s message is having an impact on wider political discourse. The hosts of a prominent right-wing news podcast recently commented: “This is a radical left-wing organisation that invested heavily in campaigns to shift mindsets: they were saying ‘yes to peace’ when no-one else would speak up, and now political and ex-military figures echo their radical views. It’s just amazing; we’re looking at a campaign that’s succeeding. They put messages on billboards on the Ayalon highway, they bought ads in newspapers... their messages sounded odd and absurd, but now Standing Together is dragging the whole anti-government camp behind them.” □



The banner as part of Standing Together’s “Refuse War” campaign reads, “18,000 children have died since the start of the war in Gaza”



Activist Agenda

Meetings

Sat-Mon 7-9 Jun: Workers’ Liberty at Lutte Ouvrière fete, Presles, France (stall 174)

Sun 15 Jun: Workers’ Liberty eco reading group on aviation. 8pm, Zoom bit.ly/envi-rg

Wed 18 June: The Fall of European Stalinism. Lewisham AWL. 7pm, New Cross Learning, 283-285 New Cross Rd, London SE14 6AS

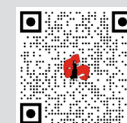
Socialist-feminist book clubs

workersliberty.org/sf-book-clubs

8 Jun: London. A short history of transmisogyny. 2pm, Effra Social, 89 Effra Rd SW2 1DF

At work or on campus

We organise: among health and local government, school and education workers, on the railway and London



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

Underground, in the civil service, on uni campuses, and more. See workersliberty.org/work-unions, Insta [@workerslibertystudents](https://www.instagram.com/workerslibertystudents), and email awl@workersliberty.org for more.

Template motions

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

Campaigns

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

Denouncing Starmer for saying the same



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

There can be little doubt that Keir Starmer knew exactly what he was doing when he used anti-migrant rhetoric, including the semi-Powellite phrase “we risk becoming an island of strangers”, in his speech launching the government’s immigration white paper on 12 May.

Quite correctly, the next day’s *Morning Star* pointed out: “Words are in the everyday kit of lawyers, and we must understand that when Starmer chooses words, he does so with the intent to convey the full range of meaning they bear. His headlong dive into the poisonous narrative of the far right must be taken to mean what it says.”

Andrew Murray in his Eyes Left column went further, more or less comparing Starmer’s speech with Social Democratic deputies voting with Hitler

in the Reichstag in 1933.

Such moral outrage was entirely justified, and probably shared by most left-wing, and even liberal, people.

The problem for the *Morning Star* and its political masters, the Communist Party of Britain, is that on one crucial point they agree with what Starmer had to say in that speech.

Starmer (speech, 12 May): “we do have to ask why parts of our economy seem almost addicted to importing cheap labour rather than investing in the skills of people who are here and want a good job in their community. Sectors like engineering where visas have rocketed while apprenticeships have plummeted. Is that fair to Britain?”

Morning Star (editorial, 13 May): “A migration-enlarged labour force increases precisely those profits – the unpaid wages that employers retain – that would be diminished if they were compelled to train locals and pay them enough to attract a sufficient supply of labour.”

Andrew Murray (leading CPBer, in his Eyes Left column, MS, 14 May):

“Of course, employers want a mass of cheap labour in order to cheapen the value of labour-power as a commodity, and hence pay lower wages. In other news, the Pope appears to be a Catholic.”

For the record, the Migration Advisory Committee reviewed all studies on the impact of immigration on wages in the UK conducted between 2003 and 2018 and concluded that “immigration had little impact on average wages ... some studies had found a small negative impact ... while others found positive average effects.” □

Chinese peace wisdom?

China has set up what it claims is an international dispute resolution organisation. Its headquarters are in Hong Kong, where China has disqualified pro-democracy candidates from running in elections and removed elected lawmakers for publicly opposing China’s control. Thousands of people have been arrested for participating in peaceful protests and an

estimated 1,500 remain in jail. Beijing and the Hong Kong government have curbed media freedoms, with pro-democracy publications such as *Apple Daily* closing after journalists were harassed and jailed.

The *Morning Star* of 31 May welcomed the new organisation:

“The choice to situate it in Hong Kong is a smart move ... Foreign Minister Wang Yi’s gentle boast that Hong Kong’s rule of law was highly developed, with the advantages of both common law and mainland Chinese law systems is an oblique way of saying that China is well positioned to champion the peaceful resolution of inter-state differences ... We can forgive China’s foreign minister for his justifiable conceit in suggesting that ‘Chinese wisdom’ was worth deploying in the resolution of differences.”

Satire has died many times since Tom Lehrer declared it obsolete when Henry Kissinger won the Nobel peace prize in 1973. It died yet again in Hong Kong last week... and in the pages of the *Morning Star*. □

The jewel in the “local independent” crown?



Eye on the Left

By Colin Foster

There is a spate of talk about “independent” electoral challenges to Labour. The jewel in that crown should be Islington North. There, Jeremy Corbyn, who was the local Labour MP for 41 years, and leader of the Labour Party 2015-9, won the seat in the July 2024 general election as an “Independent – For All of Us”.

On 29 May I went to the fourth of the People’s Forum public meetings set up by Corbyn’s office as his grass-roots organisation in the constituency. I live in Islington South, not North, and missed the earlier meetings through clashes.

What I’d already heard meant that my hopes of finding a continuation of the old Islington North Constituency Labour Party, long one of the liveliest in the country, were low. And I didn’t find it. I chatted with two of the “old” Islington North people, one of them as far as I know still in Labour, and saw one other across the room, but that was about it.

There were maybe 50 there,

mostly old-ish. I sold nine copies of *Solidarity* at the end. The SWP were not there, though they are relatively strong in Islington North, active in a local campaign there against school closures, and now interested in electioneering.

Despite the meeting’s virtues, it was set up for political debate and challenge “from the floor” less than even poor Labour Party meetings. It was more left-minded, I suppose, than an average Labour Party meeting these days, but less political, and less connected to socialism or working-class political representation.

The platform ran it largely as a meeting to gather volunteers for the local campaigning of Acorn on housing issues. Acorn describes itself as a “community trade union”. It originated in the USA in the 1970s, got itself some public funding there and grew to 350-600 paid staff, but has since faded in the USA while growing elsewhere. It has four local groups in London.

Local Acorn organiser Fredi Gentz asked the meeting to divide into small groups, spend ten minutes on deciding demands to push on various named housing issues, and then, after a debrief, to decide on suitable campaign actions.

The meeting seemed to be highly structured by (younger) Corbyn and Acorn staffers.

Fredi said at one point: “We’ve come into this room as a group of strangers. But now we’ve started to get organised”. I think there were more people there who’d been to previous forums than he allowed for, but some had come one-off through publicity on the local estate about housing issues. There was no report-back on a previous Forum also about housing.

Lobbies

Realistically, I think the main outcome will have been some sign-ups for actions which Acorn would have done anyway, such as demonstrations and lobbies aimed at councillors and council officials to use their legal powers more to help private tenants, and a lobby of the chief executive of a housing association.

Islington Homes for All also got time on the meeting platform, and I talked afterwards with an activist from the London Renters’ Union.

Good activity, but more a matter of paid and volunteer activists winning individual cases against housing abuse than building a political movement.



The lead speech at the meeting, from Corbyn staffer Maya Evans, complained of the government that they have “money to fund Israel”. (British government policy is poor, but it does not donate funds to Israel). The other complaint most made against Labour councillors and politicians was that they “are just in it for their own gain” (an explanation which is far too crude to be true or serve as a basis for an alternative).

None of Islington’s four “Corbynite” ex-Labour Independent councillors reported. Jackson Caines, prospective Independent candidate for Junction ward, assured us that the councillors are “together with the Greens, providing scrutiny of Islington council” and called for volunteers to be candidates in May 2026 for “the politics of the community”.

Jeremy Corbyn arrived later, and gave an MP’s report at

the end, covering many local issues and criticising the government on disabled benefit cuts and immigration.

Questions to Corbyn provided the only space to introduce wider political debate, but the meeting had then overrun, leaving time for only a couple of questions about local issues.

The next meeting is 19 July, billed as a “summer festival” of culture. I’d recommend going. But I have difficulty seeing these meetings as building a lever to transform the labour movement, or to build a new movement altogether, “community” based, to replace the labour movement. □

• In Dudley, former Labour councillor Pete Lowe, interviewed in *Solidarity* 741, has now set up a new [Black Country Party](#). (There was another party of the [same name](#) around 2019).

Islamists flex their muscles in Bangladesh



Women's Fightback

By Jill Mountford

Nadira Yeasmin, assistant professor at Narsingdi Government College, has been ousted from her job for speaking up against attacks on women's inheritance and property rights in Bangladesh.

Hefazat-e-Islam (Protectors of Islam), a coalition of Islamic groups, formed in 2010 in opposition to plans to give women equal inheritance rights with men, issued a 48-hour ultimatum for her removal from post and transfer to a college 270 km away on the border with India.

Yeasmin is an outspoken women's rights activist who has written for a local magazine *Hisya* (Rights), arguing for equal rights with men. Hefazat-e-Islam viewed the articles as contradictory to Islamic laws and for that she was punished.

Ominously, the Directorate of Sec-

ondary and Higher Education has now appointed her as an Officer on Special Duty (OSD), which means she has been removed from direct teaching. Her new post is at the Satkhira Government Mahlia College in Dhulna district, an area of hard core support for the Islamists.

Yeasmin has not committed a crime. She simply entered the public debate about democratic rights in Bangladesh. The Bangladesh constitution guarantees equal rights for women in all aspects of life. In reality, violence against women remains rife, justice for women is second class and economic equality at best an aspiration.

Yeasmin said her "freedom of expression has been violated". "As a woman, I protest this incident. However, no force can suppress my voice when it comes to speaking up for human rights".

Since the overthrow of the Awami League (right-wing, corrupt, but semi-secular) government by mass protests in August 2024, Bangladesh has had a secular caretaker government under "Chief Adviser" Muhammad Yunus, an 84-year-old economist

of international fame. The previous main (right-wing) opposition party, the BNP, and Islamist forces have so far cautiously gone along with the new government.

But recent mass mobilisations of Islamists want to silence the voice of all women in Bangladesh. They have aggressively opposed proposed reforms from a women's rights commission's proposed reforms and called for the commission disbandment.

Hefazat-e-Islam and their supporters say the demands are "mocking Islamic law... and contradicting the Quran". The women's commission has called for the criminalisation of marital rape, parliamentary representation, equal rights in inheritance, and protection for sex workers.

Women's rights activists have been protesting and arguing the women's commission's demands are in line with fundamental principles of democracy and secularism enshrined in the constitution. They insist they will not back down.

There should be no uncertainty from trade unionists, socialists, and feminists

in the UK about solidarity and support for the women's rights movement in Bangladesh. □

Solidarity 746

Solidarity 746 will be out on 18 June, not 11 June, in order to free a week for the circulation of the forthcoming #34 of our sister publication Women's Fightback. □



WOMEN'S FIGHTBACK

ISSUE 34 WINTER/SPRING 2025 33 A SOCIALIST FEMINIST MAGAZINE BY WORKERS' LIBERTY

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How unions can defend trans people

By Simon Nelson

The Labour Research Department has produced a useful, if somewhat flawed, [survey](#) of what unions have done since the Supreme Court judgement. It is helpful on what trade union activists can do to oppose the "interim update" from the Equality and Human Rights Commission and employers keen to "jump the gun" and move against trans workers or service users.

According to [YouGov](#), sup-

port for trans rights, after decades of increase, has declined since 2018. Although 49% still say people should be able to change their gender, at least socially, now 33% say no (up from 23% in 2022). Women remain more supportive of trans rights than men (55% vs 42% saying people should be able to change gender socially), but that is down on 63% in 2022.

The article highlights the contradictory situation in the British labour movement. In

February, the Unison women's conference committed itself to supporting trans rights. After the judgment, acting out of fear of apparent legal consequences, Unison removed references to trans rights training from its website. PCS issued statements that questioned the application of the Supreme Court decision and then sought to impose a very restrictive interpretation of it at its own union conference, sparking widespread protest (see *Solidarity* 744).

"Over-correction"

A consultation period for the EHRC's revised code of practice has been extended to six weeks. Official HR professional guidance has varied, leaning towards caution against "over-correction" that could increase risks of discrimination. So far, most employers have continued to hold off on recommending any changes to their existing policies.

However, there are exceptions. Ironmonger Row Baths in Islington, run by [GLL](#), which operates many outsourced leisure services in London boroughs, has adopted the "interim update" of the EHRC. "We want to clarify that this rul-

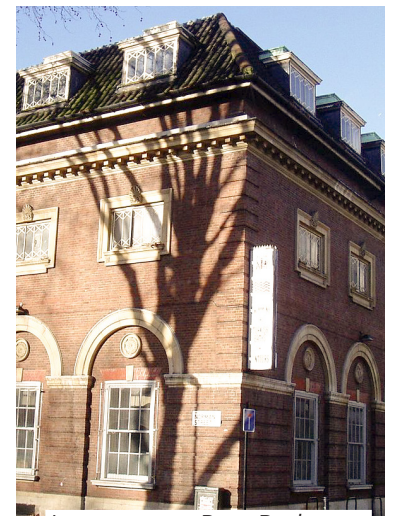
ing is now in effect and being implemented within our centre. This means that access to certain single-sex spaces, such as toilets and changing rooms, is now based on biological sex as required by law".

Local Labour and Green councillors have opposed the GLL policy, but the outsourced contract limits their ability to rescind it.

Gender-critical groups like Sex Matters have sought to influence the implementation of the Supreme Court ruling, advising employers to adopt exclusionary practices, suppress support for trans people, and tolerate transphobic harassment. This approach risks violating the Equality Act's protections against discrimination based on gender reassignment.

LRD cites TransActual's 2021 study which found that 63% faced transphobia in job-seeking, and 73% of trans men and women experienced it from colleagues. A 2018 Stonewall report found that one in eight had been physically attacked at work, and a 2021 TotalJobs survey showed that most trans people are not "out" at work.

The Equality Act still protects trans workers, and any



Ironmonger Row Baths say they "must" comply with the discriminatory EHRC interim update

policy singling them out could be ruled unlawful because discriminatory. The Supreme Court obviously did not think it through, but its judgement claims it should have no adverse implications for trans rights. Instructing trans people to use different facilities violates their privacy and dignity. Enforcement is impractical and risks harassment.

The EHRC's "interim update" is not binding, and unions should insist that employers consult inclusively before making changes. □

Inflation in 2025?

In *Solidarity* 744 we pointed out that price rises have run hot in the first months of 2025. The CPIH price index rose at a rate equivalent to 7.9% per year, and other indices faster. January-April rates are often higher than other months', because of special factors in April. In 2024, Jan-Apr CPIH inflation was the equivalent of 6.9% per year, but the CPIH rise was 3.9% over the whole year Jan 24 to Jan 25. Similar figures for 2023 were 11.7% vs 4.2%; for 2022, 16.3% vs

8.9%; and for 2021, 4.1% vs 3.8%. It is unlikely, short of an economic crisis lurching into "stagflation", that prices will rise 8% over the whole year Jan 2025 to Jan 2026. But then from October 2022 to September 2024, "last-12-months" inflation was on a broadly declining trend. That trend has reversed, for now at least. No trade-unionist negotiating wages should take it for granted that inflation going forward will be lower than 4%. □



Khan challenges Starmer on cannabis

By Simon Nelson

A commission established by Mayor of London Sadiq Khan in 2021 has published its [report](#), concluding that the possession of small amounts of cannabis should be decriminalised. The government should rethink classification and explore other more extensive options of decriminalisation, and a non-medical legal market.

Khan has endorsed the report. The authors are right that the penalties for possession of cannabis and the use of stop-and-search under the suspicion of possession of cannabis disproportionately target young black men.

In 2001, Lambeth's pilot approach to cannabis possession, resulting in a caution rather than arrest, was a success. For a brief period, the Blair govern-

ment appeared to soften its stance on cannabis, reclassifying it to Class C. But with tabloid scare stories about increasingly strong "skunk", it was reclassified as Class B. Now the Starmer government say that drug policy on cannabis is essentially "settled".

Such philistine attitudes mean that proper investigation into how even more formal, if limited legal tolerance of cannabis, may affect rates of cannabis-induced psychosis remains unlikely.

As the report notes, purchase of cannabis in London and the UK is very easy, although dropping. Many respondents to the survey believe that police de facto tolerate it, and that consumption in the home may well be legal.

Few sentences of five years are handed out for possession of small amounts of cannabis. But that does

not make the current government drug policy less ridiculous. While proper legalisation and regulation of the drug market is the only way that harm reduction can be truly prioritised, steps towards decriminalisation would surely help.

The report's authors are persuaded by the time and money saved for the police, but that should not stop us from recognising the ongoing futility of the war on drugs. Some so-called "County Lines" operations make more money in one day than the entire budget of the Metropolitan Police has for tackling the issue.

In a recent [survey](#) by the Centre for Social Justice, a majority of police officers said the current ambiguity of widespread tolerance or acceptance of cannabis use, resources and, since

2018, the legal medical cannabis market means they feel consumption cannot be adequately policed.

The control of the medical cannabis market by private providers, with only a handful of NHS-prescribed patients among 30,000 legal medical UK users, also means that the legal sector and the black market are feeding off each other. Legal providers regularly [warn](#) people against what they claim to be adulterated products, in favour of their services.

As the report notes, legalisation as practised in many countries across the world will not of itself destroy the role of the black market and organised crime in cannabis cultivation and distribution. It would at least stop individual consumers from being put in legal jeopardy for smoking a joint. □

Everyone is male or female



Simon Nelson's article "Fight in the labour movement for trans rights" correctly criticises the rushed EHRC guidance on the Supreme Court's ruling on the definition of how sex is defined in the Equality Act. Simon may also be correct to criticise the Labour Party NEC's decision to cancel the Women's Conference.

But he is wrong to describe the Supreme Court's use of the term "biological sex" as "scientifically illiterate" (and yes, I know the resident doctors' wing of the BMA has also used that description, but many BMA members and other doctors strongly disagree). Simon claims the term means the "deletion" of intersex people.

Misunderstanding

This is a widely used argument, but it is based upon a fundamental misunderstanding of what intersex means, thinking it means people who are inbetween male and female and/or belong to a third sex.

But intersex people don't have sexual characteristics that exist independently of the two sexes, they simply have traits that are under-



developed and/or a mix of both. It is effectively a birth "disorder" (the term should not be taken as derogatory – some people prefer to use the word "difference").

Sexual "dimorphism" (i.e. the mainstream opinion that biological sex is binary) is not the proposition that every instance of male and female is known or knowable, but that from every reputable scientific definition of sex (the gamete definition, the Y-chromosome definition and the cluster account definition) human beings can only be either male or female.

This elementary scientific fact does not detract from every individual's right to identify in whatever gender – or variation of gender – they choose. *Solidarity* is right to campaign for the rights of trans people, but should not do so by denying the reality of biological sex. □

Jackie McDonough,
West Midlands

EHRC contradicts "free from harassment"

The Supreme Court ruling of 16 April was about the status of trans women with Gender Recognition Certificates (a tiny minority of trans women). No "women's spaces" (toilets, changing rooms, sport provision, social or political groups) admit trans women only with GRCs. So the Supreme Court ruling changes nothing directly.

However, EHRC chief Kishwer Falkner and others want to use the ruling to mandate birth-sex-only women's toilets, changing rooms, sports provision, etc.

Ayub Jawad seems to approve, insisting that we must reject a "de facto self-ID model based on gender identity". Yet Ayub also wants "the rights of trans people to live their lives free from harassment and discrimination".

Either-or! If trans women must avoid female toilets, changing rooms, sports provision, etc., i.e. "out" themselves every day, or avoid sports, toilets, changing rooms, etc. altogether, then they are not "free from harassment". Even a good while back, a large survey in the USA showed that 61% of trans people there never used public toilets – because of harassment.

Any supposed benefits from legally "copper-fastening" toilets (etc.) as birth-sex-only fade against the costs of enforcing such a rule: either an impossible apparatus of medical checks, or everyone having to carry sex certificates, or (in practice), more "vigilante" har-

assment of anyone who looks "odd". "Elite" (big prizes, big sponsorship deals, etc.) sports raise some extra problems. On that I'd refer Ayub to [Jo Harper](#). But, as Harper says, "in grassroots sports" – school, recreational, etc. – "we should just have self-identification".

To push girls and young women out of "ordinary" women's sport and into a notional bespoke "open" category is to harass them.

The Women's Institute has had a trans-inclusive policy since the 1970s. With the new anti-trans fad, some members have been objecting. So? They have joined similar but smaller groups which do not welcome trans women, such as Inner Wheel. They did not need the Supreme Court for that.

Obvious

The Court judgement assumes that "biological sex" is "obvious". Jackie McDonough agrees. It looks like Ayub does too. But [it's not](#). In a previous letter, McDonough quoted Leonard Sax, an ideologue intent on talking down "intersex". Sax [says](#) 0.018% of people are "really" "intersex". That is not zero. It is 13,000 people in Britain.

When trans people want medical transitions, obviously they are not denying biological sex traits from birth. Only, they want to change them to conform to their felt identity. And fully-medically-transitioned trans women? What are they "biologically"? They have Y chromosomes? So do some cis women. They lack ovaries?

So do some cis women. Repeated and varied attempts to introduce 100%-reliable "sex checks" for the Olympics started in the 1960s after a row about the USSR athlete Tamara Press (certainly classified as a girl when little, possibly intersex). They ended with the authorities unable to find anything workable.

It is complicated. So the BMA resident doctors' conference called the ruling scientifically illiterate.

Some doctors dissent, notably Louise Irvine (close to the *Morning Star*). But it is Irvine who is being swept along by a fashionable new fad, not the others. Long before Magnus Hirschfeld even, doctors recognised what they then called "hermaphrodites" and "pseudo-hermaphrodites".

"Intersex" and trans people exist. They live, love, hate, hurt, rejoice, worry as we all do. Predatory men exist, but they operate by other means than wearing skirts to get into toilets. Trans people are not conspirators or even (as Kathleen Stock would have it in [her book](#)) elaborate play-actors. Occasional cross-dressing has long been commonplace; but people expressing their deeply-felt core identity is different. That identity is no more fictional or "immaterial" than pain or fear or joy are, and may indeed (we don't know) be biologically "hard-wired" in the brain.

Trans people are people. □

Rhodri Evans, London

Stormy days for Labour leadership

By Colin Foster

Politically, Labour's leaders are drifting on stormy seas. No port is in sight. They are shipping water on all sides.

Their "economic strategy" is not working, their "green policy" is becalmed, voters are peeling away towards the Greens, the Lib-Dems, Reform, and abstention, and the Trump tariff wars promise them harder, not easier, times ahead.

New tranches of Labour members are responding by quitting and, mostly, lapsing into inactivity.

For those with energy and vigour, though, now is the time to start going to meetings again, or to join or rejoin Labour.

The unions and the local Labour Parties, which have been relatively resigned and placid, have rebelled over disabled benefit cuts. Much more feebly than we would wish, but they have rebelled.

The outcome in the 11 June Spend-

ing Review and after looks likely to be a feeble semi-swerve by the Labour leaders: disabled benefit cuts softened, promises to partially restore the Winter Fuel Allowance and maybe scrap the two-child benefit cap sometime, little splashes of investment here and there.

It will be miserable. It will also show that even mild protest can make a difference.

The Labour leaders must see it that way. They are batten down their hatches.

At the last Labour National Executive meeting, on 20 May, they said they would no longer give the NEC information on party membership figures. No doubt they are falling. But if you are running a fever, best break the thermometer?

They have also suppressed the scheduled Labour Women's Conference and all the sectoral conferences written into the rule book as promises some years back.

They are running the "National Policy Forum" process even more bureaucrat-

ically than in the past. To be sure, the fact that local Labour Parties could see each others' submissions to the process on Labour's website never meant that anyone at the top read those submissions, but it is even more closed down now.

Rule changes

The September 2025 Labour conference is likely to see efforts to minimise the number of local Labour Party motions to it, and to push through new anti-democratic rule changes at the last minute. (There were many murmurs in 2024 about such rule changes coming, but in the end the leaders backed off, apparently because of union dissent).

The Labour leaders are clamping down because they feel under pressure. At present they face little organised left within the Labour Party.

Old-style Labour right-wingers, or even old Blairites, have often been the most vocal against disabled benefit cuts. Younger Labour members of many stripes have been shocked by

Keir Starmer's alignment with the EHRC on trans rights (though some long-left-wing older members, it must be said, go the other way). Many across the board were shocked by Starmer's "island of strangers" speech.

On all those issues, there are openings, at least, to swing the main unions alongside the constituency activists.

On 31 May the very-soft-left, very-posh Labour subgroup Compass organised a conference in London, with loud applause greeting speeches criticising the government on such issues and on housing policy (though not, as far as I can see from reports, on trans rights).

Compass will not rally the ranks for a fightback. And a combination of clamp-down from the top and weariness below could stifle what possibilities there are now.

But Labour's leaders are already scared. There is a space opening up to make them more scared. Organise! □



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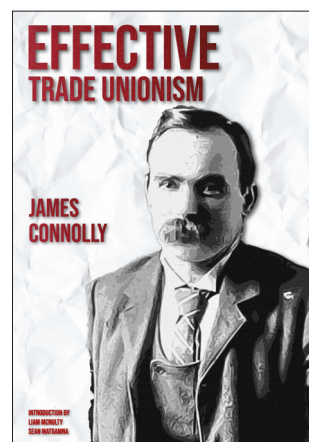
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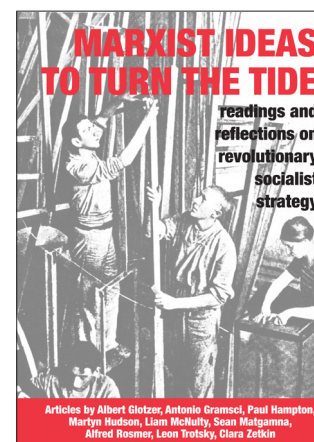
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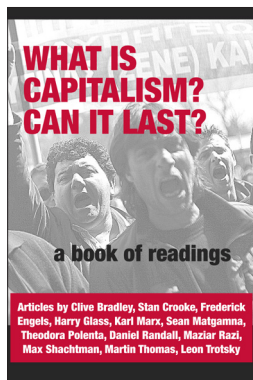
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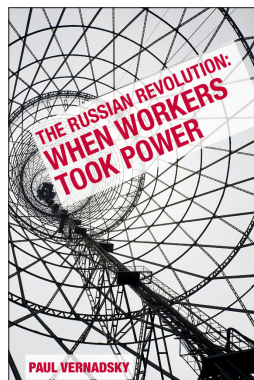
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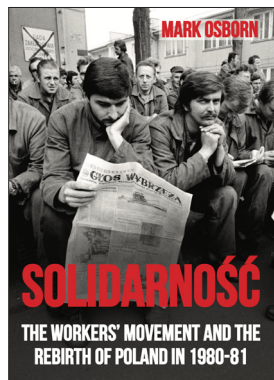
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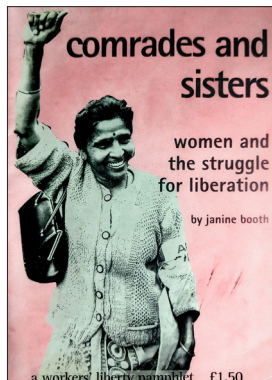
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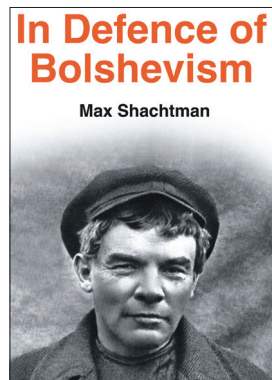
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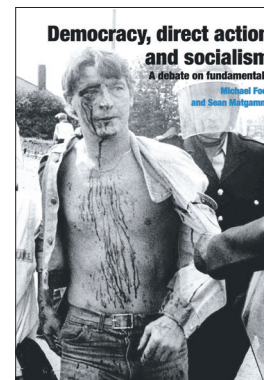
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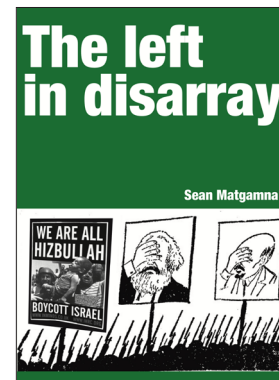
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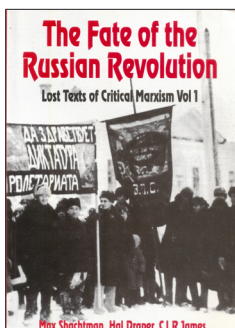
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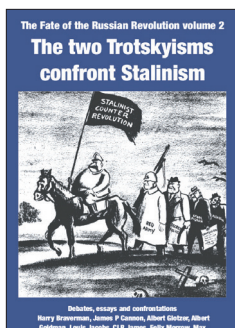
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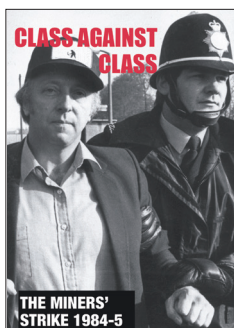
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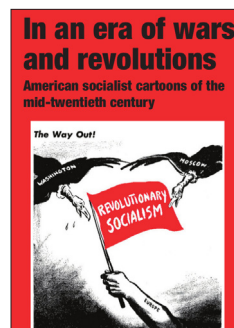
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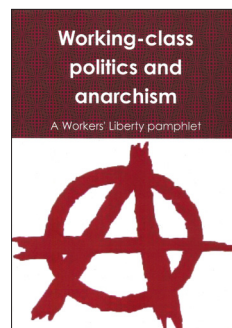
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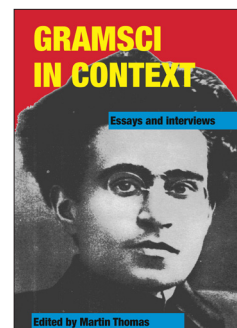
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“Not all Bengalis”: Ba

By Rebellion Chakma

Bangladesh, like many other countries, like China with the Uyghurs and Tibetans, has oppressed regions and minorities. Rebellion Chakma from the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) spoke to Sacha Ismail.

I am Rebellion Chakma from Chittagong Hill Tracts. I am an indigenous rights activist and a supporter of PCJSS which stands for Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (United People's Party of the Chittagong Hill Tracts). PCJSS works for the Jumma indigenous peoples of Chittagong Hill Tracts. PCJSS has been fighting for a long time to establish the right to self-determination for the Jumma indigenous peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Following a 25-year armed resistance, the party succeeded in pressuring the Bangladeshi government to sign the Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord on 2 December 1997 [setting up an autonomous Regional Council for the area]. Regrettably, the implementation of the CHT Accord's fundamental terms remains incomplete, raising concerns about the state's commitment to its obligations. The party continues to pursue the full implementation of the CHT Accord through constitutional and non-violent means.

The ideology of Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS) is humanity and its principles are democracy, secularism, nationalism and social justice. The ultimate objective of the PCJSS is to establish a classless society free from discrimination.

What is the CHT?

The CHT stands for the Chittagong Hill Tracts, which is the south eastern part of Bangladesh. Comprising 10% of Bangladesh's territory, this 13,344 square kilometer region is the homeland of 14 culturally diverse ethnic groups, each maintaining their own distinct language and heritage.

The core issue in the Chittagong Hill Tracts remains land disputes. In the 1980s, under the administration of ex-President Major General Ziaur Rahman, the Bangladeshi government sponsored the settlement of Bengali populations from plain land districts into this region. Since that period, these state-sponsored settlers, often with military support, have been implicated in violence against the Jumma indigenous peoples, including communal attacks, persecution and mass atrocities. The primary objectives behind the demographic engineering in the Chittagong Hill Tracts were to alter the region's population composition and advance an extreme Bengali nationalist agenda along with Islamic ex-

pansionism. This was operationalised through state-sponsored settlement programs that facilitated the unlawful encroachment of Bengali populations and the dispossession of Jumma peoples' lands.

Furthermore, in persistent violation of the CHT Accord, military and various government-backed entities have systematically displaced Jumma communities from their ancestral lands under the guise of tourism development projects, perpetuating land grabbing over decades.

Additionally, since the signing of the CHT Accord, an armed group known as the United People's Democratic Front (UPDF) – led by Prasit Bikash Khisa – has consistently opposed the accord. Credible reports indicate their involvement in enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, abductions and other forms of violence against the activists and the supporters of PCJSS and CHT Accord, effectively furthering a counter-insurgency agenda that aligns with state security forces' objectives.

In a recent incident, UPDF militants abducted five indigenous Jumma students of University of Chittagong. The students were kidnapped while returning to campus after celebrating the Bizu festival. Countrywide protests erupted denouncing the UPDF's kidnapping tactics, creating sufficient pressure to secure the students' release eight days later.

On May 24, 1999, the United People's Democratic Front (UPDF) carried out a bomb attack on Jyotirindra Bodhipriya Larma (Santu Larma), president of the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS), while he was traveling from Khagrachhari to Rangamati. The attack took place at Bijitola. Fortunately, he survived the assassination attempt.

On January 27, 2010, and later on December 27, 2010, Jyotirindra Bodhipriya Lama (Santu), the President of the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS) and the Chairman of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council, survived two consecutive terrorist attacks by the United People's Democratic Front (UPDF). Both times, he narrowly escaped death.

On May 20, 2012, the United People's Democratic Front (UPDF) launched a grenade attack on students who had gathered to attend the founding anniversary of the Parbatya Chattagram Pahari Chhatra Parishad (PCP) a student organisation supporting the CHT Accord. In the attack, Mongsaching Marma, an activist of the PCP was martyred, while many others were injured.

In 2013, during the anniversary event of the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS), the United People's Democratic Front (UPDF) abducted

62 leaders, activists and supporters who had gathered to attend the program. The abductees were subjected to physical torture, and later, they were released only after a hefty ransom was paid. This incident is widely regarded as one of the largest mass abductions in South Asia's history.

What is Chakma? What is Jumma?

Chakma is the largest indigenous community in Bangladesh. They also have populations residing in Myanmar and India. The Chakma community in Bangladesh numbers roughly half a million people.

Jumma means highlanders. The term “Jumma” collectively refers to the fourteen distinct ethnic communities of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, each with their own languages and cultural traditions. These include the Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Tanchangya, Mro, Khumi, Pangkua, Lushai, Bawm, Khyang, Chak, Assamese, Santal and Gurkha peoples. These groups are culturally distinct from Bangladesh's majority population and traditionally inhabit the high lands, this distinct identity gave rise to both the concept of “Jumma” and “Jumma Nationalism”. These communities share similar traditional governance systems. The late visionary leader Manabendra Narayan Larma pioneered Jumma nationalism. It was he who inspired ongoing struggle for the right to self-determination.

The movement for the right to self-determination based on Jumma nationalism holds profound significance for the peoples of Chittagong Hill Tracts. Its fundamental rationale lies in fostering national unity. While the Jumma communities are culturally and linguistically diverse across ethnic lines, Jumma nationalism serves as the unifying framework that binds these distinct groups together. Moreover, all these indigenous communities of the Chittagong Hill Tracts share the common experience of systemic oppression and marginalisation by the state apparatus. During the framing of Bangladesh's constitution in 1972, the late leader Manabendra Narayan Larma courageously advocated for the rights of the Chittagong Hill Tracts peoples. When most of the assembly members declared that all citizens would be identified as Bengalis, Larma protested unequivocally: “I am a Chakma. Not a single ancestor in fourteen generations of my lineage has ever identified as Bengali.” He [M.N. Larma] also presented a four-point demand for autonomous status to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. However, Bangabandhu rejected the proposal and even threatened to resettle one million Bengalis in the Chittagong Hill Tracts if necessary. Subsequent attempts were

made through constitutional channels to reiterate these demands. Following Bangabandhu's 1975 assassination and the imposition of martial law, closed avenues for dialogue. PCJSS's militant wing, the “Shanti Bahini”, initiated guerrilla warfare against state forces in 1976 – a turning point in the CHT conflict. The culmination of 26 negotiation sessions across three political regimes, progressing through four-point, five-point and finally a revised five-point demand frameworks, resulted in the December 1997 CHT Accord between the Bangladesh state and PCJSS. Yet even after 27 long years, no government has implemented the accord's fundamental provisions. Since 2001, a de facto military regime called “Operation Uttoran” remains in force, with over 550 temporary army camps established at two-kilometre intervals – a density that effectively transforms the Chittagong Hill Tracts into a military cantonment. Under the guise of “development”, Jumma people continue to be displaced from their reserved forests, ancestral jum lands through systematic land grabs.

During the communal violence against Jumma peoples in Dighinala, Khagrachhari and Rangamati on September 18-20, 2024 – conducted with direct army support – four indigenous individuals were killed by Bengali settlers and military forces. The victims include:

- Dhananjay Chakma (52), murdered by Bengali settlers in Dighinala on September 18.
- Junan Chakma (20) and Rubel Tripura (30), shot dead by army personnel in Khagrachhari's Swanirbhar area on September 19.
- Anik Kumar Chakma (18), murdered by settlers in Rangamati on September 20.

On January 15, 2025, in Bangladesh's capital Dhaka, indigenous student protesters holding a peaceful demonstration were attacked without provocation by the radical Islamist group named “Students for Sovereignty”. Among the 20+ injured were PCJSS activist Ananta Dhamai, University of Dhaka student and anti-discrimination movement coordinator Rupaiya Shreshtha Tanchangya and journalist Don Jetra.

In a more recent incident, Chingma Khyang, a Khyang woman, was raped and murdered in Tindu Union, Thanchi Upazila, Bandarban.

The pattern of rights violations in the CHT extends beyond isolated cases to include: (1) unlawful land grabbing, (2) coercive displacements, (3) enforced disappearances, and (4) inhuman treatment – all facilitated by state security forces and government-backed settler groups.

Bangladesh's highlands

Most Bengalis in Bangladesh, driven by ultranationalist and Islamic expansionist ideologies, systematically label the Jumma people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts as “terrorists” and “separatists”. They falsely believe implementing the CHT accord would lead to the region’s secession – a baseless fear used to justify increasing military camps. This prejudice manifests in the racist mistreatment of Jumma students and professionals in urban centers, where they face discrimination in education and employment. Nevertheless, there are also honest and progressive Bengalis who stand for the rights of the Jumma indigenous peoples and vocalise their demands. Among them, the “Parbatya Chattagram Chukti Bastabayan Andolan” is one of the prominent ones. Since its establishment, this platform has been working not only for the Jumma indigenous peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts but also for the indigenous communities in the plains. The platform has been campaigning at various times for the implementation of Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord. We actively engage with these allies- progressive writers, journalists, lawyers, rights activists, organisations and political parties that:

- Advocate for Jumma Indigenous Peoples’ rights
- Demand full implementation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord
- Support traditional land rights under ILO Convention 169
- Fight for constitutional recognition of indigenous identities

These allies amplify our movement, showing that not all Bengalis support the state’s marginalisation of indigenous rights.

The political reality in the Chittagong Hill Tracts has never favored the Jumma people. Whether under Awami League or BNP governments, the CHT remains uniquely subjected to military administration unlike other parts of Bangladesh where martial law isn’t enforced. With temporary camps proliferating, indigenous lands still occupied by state-sponsored Bengali settlers, I see no evidence of meaningful improvement in the CHT’s condition.

During the Awami League government, AL leaders fabricated false cases against PCJSS members to suppress the organisation. Consequently, over a thousand PCJSS leaders and activists remain in hiding to avoid arrest- a crackdown that has targeted everyone from central committee members to village-level organisers. During the Awami League period not only was the Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord left unimplemented but its provisions were systematically violated through staged “arms recovery” operations used to

falsely implicate PCJSS supporters and activists, leading to their arbitrary arrest and imprisonment. Even under the current interim government [since the overthrow of the Awami League government in August 2024], we have witnessed communal attacks by Bengali settlers against the Jumma people in the Chittagong Hill Tracts within just one month of its taking power. Additionally, religious minorities and indigenous communities in the plain districts have faced house demolitions, looting and arson attacks.

While this interim government claims to promote an inclusive Bangladesh, we observe no genuine willingness to implement the CHT Accord. Instead of withdrawing temporary military camps, their numbers continue to increase, with no intention to end de facto military rule in the CHT. The rhetoric of inclusion contrasts sharply with the erasure of the term “indigenous” from official discourse, while rising fundamentalism poses growing threats to Jumma and other minority communities.

Furthermore, we see systematic efforts to forcibly convert Jumma people to Islam through monetary inducement or coercion. Even the upheaval that overthrew the Awami League government appears to have only paid superficial attention to indigenous rights issues – like the 1996 abduction of Kalpana Chakma by Lieutenant Ferdaus as a show for public consumption. In reality, like previous governments, they continue to label us Jumma people sometimes as “terrorists”, other times as “separatists”.

No government of the Bangladesh state thus far has done any beneficial work for our Jumma people. All governments have carried out oppression and persecution. However, in this context, some words about the Pakistan period can be mentioned. During the Pakistan period, a dam was constructed on the Karnaphuli River in Kaptai Upazila of Rangamati in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, and a hydroelectric power plant was established in the name of so called “industrial development”. This submerged more than 54,000 acres of land under water. More than one lakh (100,000) Jumma people, especially the Chakma people, became refugees. Among them, more than 40,000 took refuge in Tripura, Assam, Mizoram and Arunachal in India. Besides, more than 20,000 took refuge in Myanmar. Other refugees took shelter in different places in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. At the time of the construction of this Kaptai Dam, the late great leader Manabendra Narayan Larma, then a student, protested against it. For this, the Pakistani government arrested him on charges



of treason. He saw this dam as a death trap and perceived it as a conspiracy to break the economic backbone of the Jumma People.

During the 1971 Liberation War, H T Imam served as Deputy Commissioner of the Rangamati District. When Manabendra Narayan Larma organised local youth and approached him to join the freedom struggle, Imam rebuffed them, declaring: “We can fight this war without you.” This incident reveals the entrenched exclusion of Jumma people from the Bengali nationalist narrative – a historical grievance that continues to fuel resentment. Moreover, during a 1972 speech in Rangamati, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman declared: “From today, I promote you all. Henceforth, you are all Bengalis.” Hearing this, the Jumma people immediately walked out of the event. The seeds of resentment were likely sown at that very moment by Sheikh Mujib’s assimilationist speech.

We consider all organisations tirelessly working for indigenous rights as our natural allies. While no specific indigenous organisations from neighboring countries come to mind at this moment, we must acknowledge international bodies like International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) and Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation (UNPO), who have consistently advocated for our rights. Notably, PCJSS is a founding member of UNPO. We believe all nations and organisations committed to indigenous

rights globally should stand in solidarity with our struggle.

Regarding Bangladesh’s leftist, socialist or communist parties – they primarily focus on national issues and operate as registered political parties. By contrast, PCJSS exclusively struggles for the rights of the Jumma indigenous peoples in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. However, those national progressive political parties and individuals who do stand for indigenous rights do express solidarity with our movements.

The Jumma diaspora communities residing in various countries – those who are aware of the ongoing oppression by Bengali settlers against the indigenous Jumma peoples in the Chittagong Hill Tracts – are typically the ones who stand in solidarity with our struggle.

At this moment, I cannot recall any specific international leftist political parties that have expressed solidarity with our struggle. However, we wholeheartedly welcome support from all progressive national and international parties that stand with indigenous peoples. We urge them to demand full implementation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord through domestic protests, international platforms, social media and other media channels. Personally, I believe they should pressure the Bangladeshi government to enforce to implement the CHT accord, ensuring the indigenous Jumma people reclaim their rightful rights and achieve the right to self-determination. □

The revolutionary left

By Martin Thomas

On 16-18 May two of us from Workers' Liberty were at an "internationalist conference" in Paris organised by the French NPA-R together with others, notably including the sizeable Italian group Lotta Comunista.

Lotta Comunista initiated this series of conference with meetings in Italy in 2023-4, and a fourth meeting is to follow in spring 2026 in Paris.

Workers' Liberty has had links with Etincelle, the main component of the NPA-R, since the late 1990s, when they were the minority faction of Lutte Ouvrière. We had learned a lot from LO in the 1960s and 70s.

28 groups were there – activists or exiles from Iran, Russia, Bulgaria, Greece, Turkey, Austria, Germany, Portugal, Spain, USA, Argentina, Australia, as well as Italy and France – and the big majority have no or minuscule affiliates in Britain. The format was for each group to do two 15-minute presentations on international questions, and two six-minute presentations on activity in workplaces and trade unions. The tone was civil and reasonable. NPA-R organised simultaneous translations, food, and accommodation, and deserve many thanks.

Listening to 28 different groups from different backgrounds has to broaden your mind. We also had conversations outside the formal sessions with several groups, including the French group ALPS which, again, we have long had links with, and which did not attend the actual conference.

In some ways, though, I found the Paris meeting a wake-up call because it dramatised how much the would-be

Marxist left has fragmented over recent decades, how debate among us has generally withered, and how much we must brace ourselves to march uphill.

The series of meetings was initiated, if I've got it right, in response to the rearmament drive in Europe and the threat of further wars. Exactly what Lotta Comunista and NPA-R calculate they will get from it, I don't know (though we asked Etincelle about that).

Clashes

Franco Grisolia of the PCL (Italy), whom we also know of old, and have had sharp political clashes with, spoke pointedly on where the PCL disagrees with Lotta Comunista. PCL is more oppositional in the unions, joins Gaza protests, sides with Ukraine against Putin; Lotta Comunista declares that national questions have been "obsolete" and "reactionary" since the mid-1970s, and is, as far as I can make out, fairly passive in the unions. LC does not go on Gaza protests. (In fact, there has been a furore in Italy, not discussed at the Paris meeting, about LC running stalls at campuses on which they argue against "boycotting" Israeli universities, and consequently getting into scuffles with boycott enthusiasts). Grisolia, by contrast, saw the clash between Hamas and Israel as analogous to that between the FLN independence movement in Algeria and the European settlers there.

We used our presentations to argue about Ukraine and Israel-Palestine. Most presentations, though, were just presentations.

There were some who de facto sided with Putin over Ukraine, saying that the war is a "proxy war" between NATO and Russia, and our main push must be to oppose NATO. Quite a few apart from us, though, were broadly pro-Ukraine. Socialist Alternative (S Alt) Australia, which comes from and subscribes to the "Cliffite" (SWP-UK) tradition, though it parted from the SWP in 1995, has a pro-Ukraine stance different from the SWP's.

On Israel-Palestine, there was more than you would get at a left meeting in Britain of "the only answer is socialist revolution in the whole region" and denunciation of Hamas. For example, Contravento, a splinter from the PCL, makes its slogan socialist revolution in the region which will accommodate a "de-Zionised Israel", and does not join Gaza protests in Italy because it sees them as Islamist-dominated.

The CWI (the Socialist Party's international network) said that there is "no solution on a capitalist basis" and envisaged a future of a socialist Palestine alongside a socialist Israel. Internationalist Standpoint, a splinter network from the CWI centred round Xekinima

in Greece, has as far as I can understand a similar view. Yet we know in practice that the SP has slogans like "socialist intifada" and "Smash Israeli state terror" (an oh-so-subtle reworking of the SWP's "Smash Israeli terror state").

No-one explicitly supported our argument that self-determination for both nations, Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews, i.e. a real independent Palestinian state alongside a secure Israel, is an essential democratic demand which both can and must be fought for right now, and must be part of the basis for uniting Israeli-Jewish and Arab workers. Most people seem not to have heard of the Standing Together Palestinian-Jewish social movement in Israel and its anti-war activity. (ST supporters have been thrown off "all the Gaza demonstrations in Australia", claimed S Alt, apparently happy about that though saying that "of course" they opposed the expulsion).

Some groups paralleled the "British consensus left" – "support the resistance", smash Israel, replace it by a "secular democratic" Palestine in pre-1948 borders.

Virtue

Gael from the A&R component of the NPA-R made it a point of virtue that they had "never condemned the attacks of Hamas", though he said, there is no answer short of the triumph of revolutionary workers' movements in Israel and Palestine. IZAR (Spain) and Okde-Spartakos (Greece), which are linked with A&R in a [dissident-Mandelite](#) international network, were on similar lines. Josh from Socialist Alternative said that S Alt is moving towards saying "a socialist Palestine in a socialist Middle East" and dropping the interim "secular democratic Palestine" slogan, but emphasised that S Alt's prime criticism of Hamas is that it sometimes does deals with Israel.

"Morenist" groups were numerous at the Paris meeting, and tend to have similar attitudes.

Nahuel Moreno was an Argentine Trotskyist linked from the 1950s to the 1970s to the SWP-USA (no relation to SWP-UK). In 1979 the "Morenists" split from the "Mandelite" USFI network (with which the SWP-USA had realigned in 1963), in protest at the USFI's almost-uncritical attitude to the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. After a few years of having a common international network with the France-based "Lambertists", the "Morenists" split from them in 1982, having in the process acquired groups in several countries outside Latin America.

Despite what you might think from the dispute over Nicaragua, generally the "Morenists" were more enthusiastic than the "Mandelites" about Stalinis-



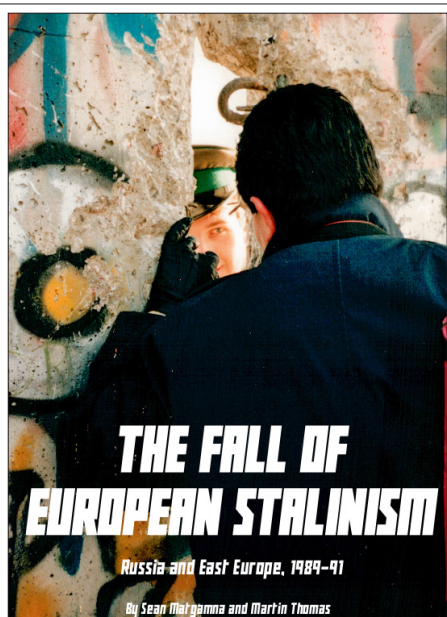
Guido La Barbera, a leader of Lotta Comunista

tic revolutions, less concerned about democracy as a pivot of working-class organisation and emancipation, and much more on the "smash Israel" wavelength.

In 1987 Moreno died, and since then the "Morenists" have fragmented. If I count right, there are now four "Morenist" international networks – LIT-IWL, LIS-ISL, FT-TF, and UIT-IWU – as well as smaller splinters, and some groupings like [Socialismo o Barbarie](#) (with which Workers' Liberty is in continuing discussions) of "Morenist" origins which consider themselves no longer "Morenists".

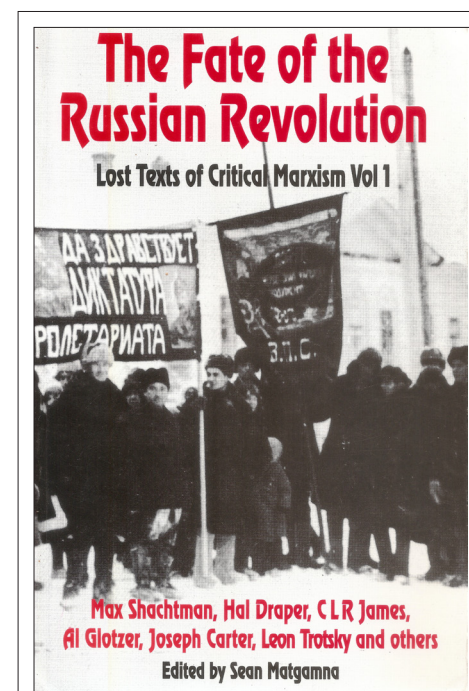
The LIS-ISL and other "Morenist" groups were in Paris. We heard that they are about to merge with the ITO (a small network, originally of dissident-Mandelites), and that Workers' Power and its L5I network may also join in.

MST (LIS Argentina) criticised the PTS (FT Argentina) as transposing student-movement functioning into trade unions, and criticised PO (another Argentine group, of not-quite-Morenist



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

workersliberty.org/publications



Fate of the Russian Revolution volume 1: £8

workersliberty.org/publications

34 years after 1991

origin) for taking over the leadership of unions then establishing no democratic functioning.

But I have little broader picture of the differences in the “Morenist” and “ex-Morenist” spectrum. We should read more.

Many of the groups at the conference are tiny, with not much more than a website, and sometimes not even that. The more sizeable ones there were NPA-R and S Alt, which both sustain fortnightly papers; MST and Xekinima, which both seem to get out publications about twice a month; and of course the Socialist Party and CWI.

Activities

Lotta Comunista is a sizeable group, said to sell about 40,000 copies of its monthly paper as well as publishing many books. It is unlike any British group in its ideas (Leninist; denouncing Stalinism as state capitalism) and activities (assiduous paper sales plus “workers’ clubs” and food banks).

What marked out LC most at the meeting was that all its people had smart haircuts, ironed shirts, ties, usually suits. I’m told that LC women at the conferences in Italy turned out in tailored business suits and crisp blouses.

I think John McDonnell has a case for his habit of appearing at events smartly-suited, presumably to show workers that he takes the events and himself seriously, as they themselves would “dress up” for big family events. I don’t mock LC. Still, it was odd.

And the LC people limited themselves to straight (sometimes cryptic) expositions of their ideas, without polemic. I sought conversations outside the formal sessions to find out exactly why they think national questions became “obsolete” in the mid-1970s, but I still don’t understand. Again, I need to read more.

I found it dismaying, in a useful and intelligent conversation with the delegate from Xekinima, to hear him say that Xekinima had split from the CWI, and then from the post-CWI ISA network, not because of any big political or theoretical issue, but because they found the running of the networks too bureaucratic. No, no fundamental ideas needed to be reconsidered.

Surely better to grit your teeth, stick in there, seek to improve the organisation through bringing new people forward, and conclude, if that proves impossible, that there must be some basic rethinking done? But in fact the Paris meeting, 34 years after the collapse of the USSR, shows a Trotsky-tradition left which is weaker and more fragmented than in the 1980s, and with little rethinking.

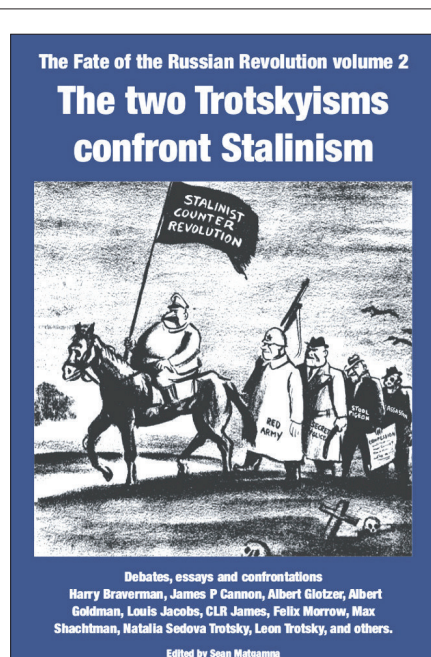
The “mainstream” Mandelites did

some rethinking around 1991. Their main writer, [Daniel Bensaïd](#), came to argue that all their concepts of “transitional societies”, “deformed workers’ states”, “post-capitalist systems”, and so on, had been false. But Bensaïd never got to trace through implications and alternatives (he died in 2010), and his comrades have ended up making their “reorientation” as one towards “broad parties”, consensus-leftism, de facto left social democracy.

The “Orthodox Trotskyists”, those who accepted the expansion of Stalinism as one of “deformed workers’ states”, survived the dog days of the 1950s and early 60s on the whole better than the “Heterodox Trotskyists” who saw clearly the expansion was centrally about destroying working-class movements. By the time of the great revolutionary-socialist revival around 1968-9, the “Heterodox Trotskyists” had become almost invisible, and were faded even where they were visible.

World revolution

Why? Illusions can sustain movements in the short or even not-so-short term. The “Orthodox Trotskyists” could believe that, however difficult it was to sell their papers or fill their meetings, still, the World Revolution was driving forward. In deformed shape and led by alien forces, true, but forward. The “Orthodox Trotskyists” themselves had an irreplaceable role in the advance, first because they were the only people who really understood the revolutionary processes (the Stalinists were “empirical”, or moved only “under mass pressure”), and second because it would fall to them to complete the process by “full” socialist revolutions.



Fate of the Russian Revolution
volume 2: The Two Trotskyisms
£20

workersliberty.org/publications

Metropolitan capitalism was retreating and decaying (the expansion of Stalinism was said to be proof of that), and so it would soon fall into the crisis which would give them their chance. The “Heterodox Trotskyists” lacked such comforts.

Mass movements, too, can be sustained by illusion. In France, Italy, and other countries there was a rise in class consciousness of a sort after World War Two, a rise which could fuel great workers’ struggles in 1968-9, for example, but a rise that was shot through with and embedded in illusions.

After 1956, at least, the Communist Party workers knew that the USSR had many faults. But they still saw it as “actually existing” proof that something different from capitalism was possible. Though imperfect, it was improvable (maybe Cuba was as an example of how). History was going their way. When its waves reached their countries, they could do at least what had been done in Cuba (or wherever), and surely better. Meanwhile, they could win trade-union struggles, and make progress with campaigns for peace.

Illusions can last decades and sustain mass movements. And, of course, if we wait until we are sure that we ourselves are free from illusions, we will never start building anything. But if the illusions are deep-seated, pervade the movements, and are even cynically manipulated to repair confidence, then they will destroy those movements over time.

Collapsed

Thus the Communist Parties collapsed very quickly after the late 1980s. The disappointed CP workers did not swing to Trotskyism: they went to inactivity or Social Democracy. Social Democracy did not collapse, but its left lost momentum and morale, and the horizons of the Social Democratic parties and unions narrowed down even more to damage-limitation and incrementally better social administration. The temper and tone of the “Corbynite returners”, people who had been left Social Democrats or some sort of “Orthodox Trotskyist” in the 1980s, had lapsed into inactivity by 1989-91, and then “returned” to the Labour Party after 2015, shows that.

The decline of labour movements since 1989-91 is not primarily a matter of neoliberalism allegedly offering no space for reforms (fightbacks have won reforms), or winning great ideological victories (it didn’t), but of the political left dispersing as its illusions crashed. New segments of the working class might have been organised on a larger scale; but we have not had sufficient concentrations of political activists,

equipped with a rational long view of history, to do the work.

A new “1968-9”, no doubt very different in detail, will come in time. The question for us is: will the new radicals mobilised then find no “stock-in-trade” beyond tired, mechanical, increasingly unrealistic reworkings of “Orthodox Trotskyism” to guide them? Or will those of us who have made an effort to think through the implications of the epoch of Stalinism and its collapse be visible and accessible, educated and energetic, enough to intervene then? Can we sustain ourselves better than the “Heterodox Trotskyists” did in the 1950s and 60s?

The history of the “Heterodox Trotskyists” tells us there is no guarantee. “Being right” (or, realistically, less wrong) politically does not of itself ensure sufficient recruitment, stability, effectiveness to see us through to better times.

Conditions

The Paris meeting confirms something else. It is much more possible for revolutionary socialist organisations to grow in current conditions than it was in the 1950s. Among those which have grown – Etincelle (NPA-R has 711 members), S Alt (650), Lotta Comunista, are examples – the common factor is not common politics. Their substantive politics differ widely. “Being wrong” (or even “more wrong” than others, within limits) does not preclude recruitment and “cadre-building”.

I suspect all those groups are helped by their sober, even downbeat, assessments. There was a lot in Paris of us being harangued about revolutionary leaderships and general strikes and “turning struggles into socialist revolution” as immediate answers, but that rings hollow from groups which find it a strain even to keep their websites updated. Rings hollow to me, and probably also soon to the haranguers.

By contrast, an honest explanation that we are working for the long haul can “work”. Regular visibility. A reliable and accessible routine of purposeful activities, done effectively, to draw in new contacts and recruits. Sufficient education to create a growing body of activists confident and competent to approach contacts, to gain conversations, to sell literature, and to do effective interventions into union and campus milieus. That will do it.

So I came from Paris with two conclusions: that we need to read more from the different strands on the left, and seek more debate; and that we need to renew our attention to regular visibility, accessibility, political education. We’ll be at the Lutte Ouvrière fete near Paris on 7-9 June to continue that work. □

PKK to disband, but Kurdish rights doubtful

By Pete Boggs

The PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party, a Stalinoid party long strong in the fight for Kurdish rights in Turkey and in Syria) has announced its intention to dissolve itself and lay down arms, following a decision at its 12th Congress on 5-7 May.

The PKK congress declared that the organisation has "fulfilled its historical mission" of "bringing the Kurdish issue to a point where it can be resolved through democratic politics". Whether the democratic possibilities are in fact as extensive as that remains doubtful.

The Turkish government had made almost a year of tentative hints about a coming peace. Last year both Turkish president Erdoğan and his coalition partner Devlet Bahçeli (leader of the far right MHP (Nationalist Movement Party, closely associated with the Grey Wolves) made comments about the need to strengthen the "internal front" at home due to increased violence across the Middle East. In October Bahçeli went and shook hands in parliament with his long-standing enemies, the pro-Kurdish DEM Party (the successor to the HDP).

Bahçeli invited Öcalan to address parliament and announce the dissolution of the PKK, and multiple delegations went from the DEM Party to visit Öcalan in the prison on İmralı Island where he has spent the last 26 years. On 27 February his "Call for Peace and Democratic Society" [called](#) for "all groups" to lay down arms and for the PKK to dissolve itself.

That was accepted two days later by the PKK leadership, who declared a ceasefire and promised that they would not initiate any armed action against the Turkish state unless provoked. They [decided](#) to "dissolve the PKK's organisational structure and end the armed struggle, with the implementation process to be led by Leader Apo [Öcalan]".

This declaration clearly means different things to the PKK and to the Turkish state. Erdoğan [stated](#) that it also applied to the "Syrian branch", meaning the YPG. However, it has been [interpreted](#) by some in the Kurdish movement as an aspirational call that could only be implemented after the Turkish state itself made concrete steps towards peace. This is far from the first ceasefire between Turkey and the PKK, and there have been multiple abortive peace processes and name changes since the 1990s.

It is difficult to be hopeful about any

democratic overhaul of the Turkish state led by the AKP. Erdoğan has called for a new constitution, but this should be viewed as a cynical move to maintain AKP rule, similarly to earlier constitutional referendums. The first reform proposal put forward by the AKP does not offer much cause for optimism: its much-feted draft law on prison reform removes none of the parole exclusions for those convicted of "terrorism"-related charges (used as catch-all accusation against pro-Kurdish enemies of the regime such as Selahattin Demirtaş, the imprisoned former leader of the HDP).

But why is all this happening now? One reason is that Erdoğan is trying to divide the opposition to his rule, winning over Kurds (who at various points have been an important base of support for the AKP) and hoping that the new spirit of performative friendliness towards the DEM Party might further erode the already fragile alliance between them and the main opposition party, the secularist nationalist CHP. The government launched an all out attack on the CHP by arresting its most visible figurehead, Ekrem İmamoğlu, the Mayor of Istanbul, in March.

Divisions

There are serious divisions within the CHP over Kurdish issues. Traditionally the CHP has lent hard into Turkish nationalism and even criticised Erdoğan from the right for agreeing to a temporary ceasefire during the 2019 invasion of Syria, but in recent years it has tried to bring Kurds into the CHP-led opposition. The DEM Party did not take part in the CHP's Nation Alliance in the 2023 general election (which included the far right anti-Kurdish Good Party), although they did call for a vote for the CHP presidential candidate Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu. There was some limited cooperation between the CHP and the DEM Party in the 2024 municipal elections, referred to as the "urban consensus": that has been the basis of the terrorism charges brought against CHP figures such as İmamoğlu.

The most likely next presidential candidate of the CHP is the Mayor of Ankara, Mansur Yavaş, a rival to İmamoğlu from the right-wing of the party who until 2013 was a local politician for the Erdoğan's coalition partners, the MHP. He has positioned himself as an anti-Kurdish voice within the party, saying that PKK fighters who lay down arms will "surrender to the justice of Turkey" and [calling](#) Kurdish flags flown at Newroz, Kurdish New Year, "rags".



The moves towards peace in Turkey have coincided with the fall of the Assad government in Syria, which has opened up huge possibilities for the Turkish state and put the future of the Kurdish-controlled autonomous region into jeopardy.

Syrian National Army

The day after Aleppo fell to HTS-led forces, the Syrian National Army launched a renewed assault on areas held by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). The SNA is the coalition of armed groups affiliated to Turkey, and during the civil war primarily worked to advance Turkish interests in Syria: fighting against the SDF in the north and creating "safe zones" where Turkey could forcibly deport Syrian refugees to. SNA people have also served as Turkish mercenaries in Libya, Nagorno-Karabakh, and West Africa.

After some intense fighting, with serious Turkish air support and grisly reports of SDF soldiers being executed in hospital beds by the SNA, an unofficial ceasefire came about which seems to have held, more or less. It has been [reported](#) that either the Turkish Foreign Minister, Hakan Fidan, or the head of the Turkish intelligence services, İbrahim Kalin, has offered to meet with the SDF commander-in-chief Mazloum Abdi, but the SDF categorically [denies](#) this.

The agreement between the SDF and the interim al-Sharaa government in March was that the SDF would integrate into the Syrian Arab Republic and Syrian Kurds would be recognised as "an integral part of the Syrian state". The interim government said that would be completed by the end of 2025. Erdoğan has been pushing for this process to happen more rapidly.

It is unclear how that process has been implemented since then, though

the recent ISIS attack on an SDF patrol accompanying an oil convoy to areas held by Damascus shows that the al-Sharaa government is being supplied by SDF-held oil fields.

Recent defence appointments by the al-Sharaa government paint a grim picture of future attitudes towards the Kurds. Multiple leading figures from the SNA have been given senior posts, particularly with responsibilities for areas with large Kurdish populations, moves which have been [condemned](#) by the US and [the EU](#).

Ahmad al-Hayes (aka Abu Shaqra), who trafficked Yazidi women and children and murdered the Kurdish politician Hevrin Khalaf, has been made the commander of the 86th Division (responsible for areas such as Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor, currently held by the SDF). Muhammad al-Jassem (aka Abu Hamsha), whose Sultan Suleiman Shah Division brutalised the city of Afrin, was made commander of the Hama Brigade in February, which a month later played a central role in the massacres of Alawites. Sayf Boulad Abu Bakr, whose Hamza Division carried out similar crimes in Afrin and Aleppo, has been made commander of the 76th Division, again taking part in the recent anti-Alawite violence. And the leader of a Turkmen brigade which took part in Turkish operations against the SDF, Fahim Issa, has been made the Assistant Minister of Defence for the Northern Region.

Moves towards peace and reconciliation are to be welcomed in both Turkey and Syria, but the Turkish state or their proxies have not dropped their murderous opposition to Kurdish existence, and the new Syrian government continues to style itself as the Syrian Arab Republic. □

Quiet conference, tense year ahead?

By Adrian Noble

The Fire Brigades Union held its first conference under new general secretary Steve Wright on 20-23 May in Blackpool. The tone was unity and support for Wright, with many motions withdrawn or remitted at the executive council's request and close votes few and far between.

But during the debates on pay and on the Labour Party, the mood of both conference floor and the leadership set the next 12 months up as something of a reckoning for the political and industrial strategy of the union.

The first substantial debate was on pay strategy. The day before conference the ballot result on a 3.2% offer came in, with 82% in favour on a 59% turnout – a higher accept vote than for a lower offer than the previous year under previous general secretary Matt Wrack.

Wright set out the strategy of winning pay progression through broadening the role and getting better remuneration for time served as opposed to a campaign on headline pay without changes to terms and conditions. That is the same strategy as Wrack. Partly it is a result of years of fire services cir-

cumventing collective bargaining to introduce capabilities such as terrorist responses, advanced water rescue, and emergency medical response, often without further pay or FBU involvement in developing policies, but it also indicates a lack of industrial confidence.

The leadership made much of its behind-closed-doors influence on Labour ministers.

Failure

Despite the high accept vote, there is significant dissent at a succession of at-or-below inflation pay rises and a failure to make progress on pay loss. The tone from conference floor and Wright was that an industrial dispute is likely next year if progress isn't made, but the motion itself made no commitments. An amendment committing the union to pay restoration narrowly fell. The question is whether the direction of travel towards a dispute translates into greater organising at branch level.

Labour disaffiliation was debated for the fourth year running, and gathered a lot of support. The arguments revolved around the undeniable moral case against Starmer's Labour versus the fact that having a "seat at the table" via affiliation is central to the leadership's polit-

ical strategy. The Executive managed to get the disaffiliation motion withdrawn on the basis of giving Wright time to pursue his political strategy, but speech after speech argued it was a one-year stay of execution. Without significant changes in Labour policy, or industrial wins, it is almost certain a disaffiliation motion will return next year with a real chance of passing.

Between the possibility of a dispute on pay and the looming prospect of disaffiliation, Wright is under pressure to deliver results in the next 12 months.

The LGBT+ committee submitted policy for upholding trans rights in the wake of the Supreme Court ruling. There was broad support. Several delegates objected to the description of the ruling as "driven by far right ideologies", arguing that it implied anyone who agrees with the ruling or is "gender-critical" is far right. Those arguing for the motions said they did not intend that implication, but drew out the connections between transphobia and the far right. The motion passed after assurances by the EC and LGBT+ committee.

Conference also passed a policy statement against the far right, notable because during the debate several delegates acknowledged the popularity of

Reform among a section of the membership. The friction between such members and "the FBU", briefly allayed by Wrack's election defeat, is likely to grow, and points to choppy waters ahead. □

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PCS leaders fold on pay

By a PCS member

On 21 May the conference of the PCS civil service union passed by a clear majority a motion requiring the NEC to build a campaign to defeat government attacks; to submit a claim for the UK civil service which includes 10% consolidated pay rises, £18 ph minimum, pay restoration, shorter working week, and a job security agreement; and to proceed to ballot no later than mid-September if satisfactory progress is not made. The motion was shaped by PCS Independent Left (IL), a principled group of activists including AWL supporters.

The next day the government published its 2025-26 pay remit "guidance" for staff below the Senior Civil Service (SCS), restricting awards to an "overall average" of "up to 3.25%" (meaning some people might receive less), with "flexibility" to "target" an extra 0.5% "at specific departmental workforce issues", which can only benefit a minority of workers.

With annual inflation running

between 3.5-4.5%, civil servants are heading for below inflation awards or a real terms standstill, with pay restoration off the table. Treasury will not fund the awards, so they will be paid for by job cuts. The gap between government and PCS is yawning. The response of the "Left Unity" (LU) leadership of PCS has been woeful.

On 22 May PCS General Secretary and LU supporter Fran Heathcote said, "we're disappointed (!) with the headline figure of 3.25% as inflation hits 3.5%." She gave no sense to members of the urgent campaigning conference had agreed to. She decried as "derisory" "the 0.5% extra allocated to address low pay" (a claim repeated by the "leadership" on 29 May), but that pot is not allocated to low pay, it is just one possible area.

Heathcote claimed, for the first time, that the government had pitched 2.8% in national talks, but had been shifted to 3.2% (repeated on 29 May). In reality, the government's adoption of 3.2% for the non-SCS flowed from its political decision to bend to the rec-

ommendations of Pay Review Bodies for higher than 2.8% pay awards elsewhere in the public sector, including the SCS. PCS has not shifted the government.

On the 29 May the LU dominated NEC decided to:

- Reject motions, supported by IL/Coalition for Change, to implement the conference campaign decision and to fight office closures and job loss in London with work transferring to other parts of the country.

- Pay back strike levies to members, cutting £3m from the Fighting Fund and, – unless the money is taken from elsewhere within PCS – signalling its retreat to the government.

- Consult branches on the future form levies could take, signalling that there will not be a levy for a 2025 pay fight (at conference LU cynically "talked out" an IL constitutional amendment to place the Fighting Fund on a sustainable basis).

- Authorise delegated bargaining unit level pay talks, "to try to secure as much money in members' pockets as soon as



possible", while making clear that remit figure offers will be unacceptable: a recipe for imposed awards and further delay to consideration of a ballot.

- Seek a faster pace of talks on pay and jobs, "particularly in light of recent government announcements on restructuring and speculation in the press on job cuts..." [a shocking downplaying of a known threat].

- Get ballot ready and be clear that industrial action will be required if further talks fail to deliver satisfactory progress.

LU is deliberately undermining the prospects of mobilising members. It has asserted that "3.75%... will be above inflation, provided it remains at its projected (by whom?) figure of 3.2% across the [unidentified] relevant period". But it knows that 3.25% is not guaranteed to everybody, the 0.5%

pot can only benefit a minority, all measurements of inflation are currently higher than 3.2%; and the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee has forecast CPI inflation will be 3.5% in 2025 Quarter 3.

The LU leadership has no intention of leading a pay and jobs fight and is already preparing its cover. This is the same leadership that disgracefully [quashed](#) debate at conference around trans rights in the wake of the Supreme Court's recent regressive decision. □

More online

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What the word has meant over centuries: bit.ly/lib-w

"Mission-driven"

Another bit of "policy wonk" nonsense: bit.ly/m-driv

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- 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
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Help us out of this rut!

We appear to have entered a slow period for donations. And one that needs to be resolved quickly!

With thanks to a few smaller donations in the last week we have finally got to over £12,000, but only just.

Tickets to our Summer Camp are now on sale and we hope

to be able to announce that we've hit our target by the time of the camp, at the very latest. If you can't join us at the camp itself, please do donate!

• Donate: workersliberty.org/fund

When it all goes wrong at once



Diary of a Tube driver

By Jay Dawkey

Sometimes it all goes wrong at once, and there isn't much you can do about it. Passengers trying to use the Piccadilly line on 29 May at about 21:00 found themselves with nowhere to go. A track fire at one end of the line and a trespasser at the other meant a near-complete shutdown for an hour. Passengers were stranded, and the majority of us drivers stuck not where we needed to be, and in many cases, well past our official finish times.

At times like that, the fire brigade and the police become the people really in charge, and there is not much you can do. London Underground management wants things up and running as quickly as possible, and their increasingly frantic radio communications asking for deadlines and estimates show that. But a fire is a fire, and a person wandering about the track is a clear safety risk. No trains will move with passengers until



they are cleared.

Drivers fortunate enough to be stuck at a station with an interchange would hope to get rid of as many passengers as possible and then just wait it out. You tot up how many minutes overtime you'll have to claim, whether you've

missed the train home, and just how busy things are going to be once you start moving. In the meantime, chaos swirls around us while we twiddle our thumbs, hoping to get back on the move. □

Marcel Ophuls (1927-2025)



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

Born into a filmmaking dynasty, Marcel Ophuls (son of Max Ophuls: see *Solidarity* 713 on his *Letter from an Unknown Woman*) was a documentarist most famous for *The Sorrow and the Pity* (1969), his four-and-a-half-hour film about the Nazi occupation in France. Ophuls shows in often painstaking detail how many French people collaborated with the Nazis, including in the deportation of the Jews. His focus was on the city of Clermont-Ferrand and the Auvergne region but the implications were nationwide.



The film ran counter to the post-war legends or myths about anti-fascist resistance to the Nazi regime and its French collaborators. Although there was resistance, and many brave fighters died, for years the dark underside of the occupation years was kept quiet and buried in what

French historian Henry Rousso described as the "Vichy syndrome". Ophuls' film, in the words of an obituary in *Le Monde* "... blew the lid off the French cauldron of collaboration and antisemitism". There was a strong counter-reaction; the film was banned and not screened on French TV

until 1981. He later went to make other documentaries including *Hotel Terminus* (1988), about the crimes of the notorious Nazi collaborator Klaus Barbie. □

• The film is not available to watch online, but there is a 30-minute documentary about the film at bit.ly/so-a-p

Planning next steps against the closures

By a PCS member

Following strikes that saw staff across six regional offices that have been earmarked for closure walk out for up to two weeks last month, PCS members in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) are continuing their dispute over office closures, location-based recruitment, and rigid office attendance policies.

At the end of May Newcastle-based staff wrote directly to Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner, who heads up the department, challenging the decision to close regional offices that undermines the government's commitments to regional equality, stripping good, unionised jobs from communities that need them most and urging

her direct intervention to stop office closures.

Rayner, who is currently overseeing the passage of the Employment Rights Bill, is under increasing pressure to show she means what she says when claiming that she wants to give "working people their voice back" as she manages a strike in her own department from workers who demand a say in decision making in their workplace.

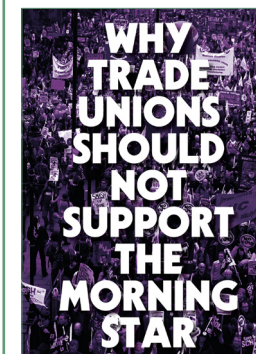
Importance

New developments in the department have added to the importance of the dispute with the announcement that London-based staff will be moving from 2 Marsham Street to a new office in future. This announcement has raised serious concerns amongst PCS

members about the department's continued pursuit of ideologically driven demands for staff-presenteeism in the form of arbitrary office attendance mandates; with no guarantee that sufficient workspace will be made available to staff in the future.

PCS members in MHCLG will meet this week to plan the next phase of their campaign, and consider how best to utilise their existing mandates for strike action and action short of a strike, whilst the campaign has been further buoyed with the passing of policy at PCS national conference that calls for national union support in coordinated industrial action to maximise the pressure on the government and the escalation of campaigns calling for the removal of attendance mandates.

The MHCLG dispute isn't just about buildings – it's about respect, regional equality, and the role of workers in decision making. Workers are clear: they will not be moved around or pushed about without a fight. The campaign continues – in Newcastle, London, and across the country. □



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Our 31 May day school

By Alice Hazel

Workers' Liberty hosted a day school on Marxism and Trade Unions in Sheffield on 31 May. Sessions included Being a Revolutionary in your Workplace; Trans Rights; Transforming our Unions; and Can unions help save the planet? Speakers included Joel Mayfield, Unite and Sheffield Veolia striker, John Moloney of PCS, Vicki Morris of Unison, and others (all in a personal capacity).

Comrades contributed experiences from organising in workplaces in the civil service, in education, in health, in transport, in a call centre, among food courier workers, and elsewhere. We discussed transformation of the trade unions through democratic struggles, cross-union organisation and direct action. Key to building and transforming unions, and winning battles, are socialists in workplaces with a class-based, not sectoral, and historical perspective, who also know how to couple our broad union activity with one-to-one political outreach which recruits and trains new socialists.

We highlighted the need to challenge a conservative legalistic approach, very visible in the "running scared" by several trade unions since the Supreme Court ruling on trans rights and the EHRC's contrived "interim update" which followed it. A Q&A on trans rights will follow for use in workplace bulletins and workplace discussions. The climate session looked at using some of the ideas in the "heat strike" project to build workers' power at work. □



Nottm strike steps up 9-13 June

By Rob Hudd

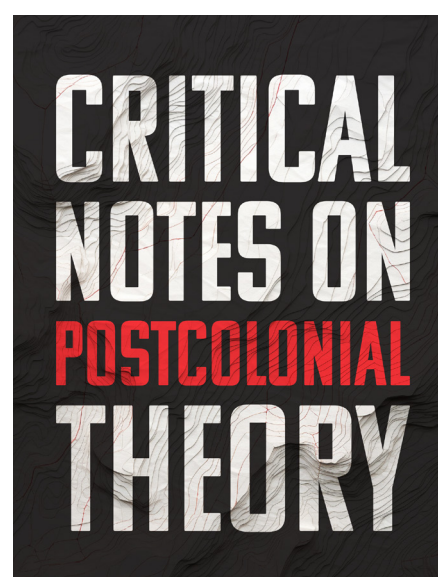
In Nottingham, the health care support workers' (HCSW) strike that has been running for the last few weeks is escalating to a five-day strike from 9 to 13 June.

The Nottingham University Hospitals Unison branch has also launched a [petition](#) of no confidence in management for workers and the public to sign. Instead of settling the back pay for up to six years, as many other trusts have done, they have dug their heels in and seem to want to spend more money (already over £2 million) covering with agency workers, forcing nurses and other staff to cover duties. It would take £5m to pay workers for the higher, level 3 work they have been doing for the last up to six years.

On the last strike day, 20 May, I spoke to Raouf from Unison who said other trusts like in Northampton and Leicester, also in the East Midlands, had already settled. So have many other trusts. "We've recruited over 500 HCSWs in this campaign, and we're determined this ridiculous stand-by out-of-touch management will not win"

Lots of workers bought Solidarity on the picket line at QMC hospital and thanked it for coverage. Adam

Turner, the branch's Welfare Officer, said other workers in other specialisms and grades are noticing the impact the strike is having. They are seeing that they are working above their pay levels and approaching him and other union reps to join the union. □



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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 □



Build on union-Labour revolt against benefit cuts!

By Cathy Nugent

In advance of the 11 June Spending Review prominent Labour politicians have become more vocal in their opposition to the government's welfare measures, including the retention of the two-child benefit cap and cuts to the non-means-tested Personal Independence Payment (PIP).

Stella Creasy MP has called for the scrapping of two-child policy to take "350,000 children out of poverty overnight". Andy Burnham (mayor of Manchester) told a meeting of the soft-left Compass group that Labour should, abandon cuts to health and disability benefits and impose higher taxes on wealth.

These politicians, encouraged by Starmer's partial U-turn over pensioners' winter fuel allowance, may be looking to further their personal political ambitions, and their criticisms do not go far enough, but they are right to criticise.

As Farage tries to outflank Labour by backing full restoration of the fuel allowance and scrapping of the two-child cap, opposition inside Labour is widening. Dozens of constituency Labour Parties have passed policy against the disability benefit cuts.

Ministers are reported to be considering tweaks to their Green Paper proposals for the assessment rules for PIP which would see claimants not qualify unless they scored a minimum of four points on a single daily living activity.

The Resolution Foundation had calculated that new assessment rules could mean about 620,000 people lose £675 a month on average. Reportedly, tweaks may allow 200,000 people to keep their benefits.

Tweaks may buy off some of the 100 or so Labour MPs who are concerned about the current proposals. But all the cuts must be stopped!

Since March loyal Labour spokespeople – the likes of Liz Kendall and Stephen Timms – have argued for the changes by insisting disability benefits discourage people from seeking work and that the "bill to the taxpayer" is unsustainable. So cutting PIP, a benefit which in fact helps many disabled people stay in work and ... pay their taxes, is the answer?

The government are echoing and building on Rishi Sunak's reactionary condemnation of "sick note culture". In March Wes Streeting, in referring to the PIP proposals, claimed there had been an over-diagnosis of mental health conditions. The

evidence suggests the opposite is true, not least because of decades of underfunding in mental health services.

Around a third of new claims for PIP are for mental or behavioural conditions and among claimants under 25 that figure rises to 70%. However the share of claims for these conditions has changed little over recent years. Moreover it is a younger age group who will suffer most from the government's decision to cut the proportion of NHS funding allocated to mental health services – amounting to an estimated £300 million less money this year.

Kendall has said £1 billion will be spent on a "support conversation" for people who have a health condition or disability to help them get into work. "Inadequate" does not cover it. After years of cuts to health and social support for young people this is a pathetic, miserable, and insulting response.

On Saturday 31 May members Leeds DPAC alongside local trade unions held a protest in the heart Rachel Reeves' constituency. Newham DPAC protested against Steven Timms. On 14 June Leicester Trades Council plan a demonstration in Liz Kendall's constituency. Let's keep up the action! We do not know when a vote in Parliament will come or what the final proposal will look like. Let's build on the dissent in local Labour Parties and among councillors and MPs, press the unions at every level to put their stated opposition to the cuts into active campaigning, and turn this one round! □

Gaza: ceasefire now!

By Ira Berkovic

Dr. Hamid al-Najjar, a doctor who lost nine of his 10 children in an air strike on 23 May, has died from his injuries. His wife Alaa, also a doctor at the Nasser Hospital, and their 11-year-old son Adam are the only surviving members of their immediate family.

This catastrophic loss of life illustrates the human cost of the seemingly never-ending war of destruction Israel is inflicting on Gaza. Israel's current military offensive is aimed at "concentrating", in Israel's words, the entire population of Gaza in an area in the south, comprising just 25% of Gaza's entire area.

People who are unwilling or unable to evacuate and crowd into a dangerously cramped patchwork of tent encampments, with no adequate sanitation, food supplies, or healthcare, will be deemed enemy combatants.

Israel is forced, by the logic of its own war, to pursue ever more extreme and destructive measures. Its aim, of the total destruction of Hamas via military means, is impossible. Although many courageous Gazans have taken to the streets to demonstrate against Hamas authoritarianism, many others have joined the Islamist party, seeing it as the strongest form of resistance against an oppressive power that has devastated life in Gaza.

A flurry of reporting in the last days of May suggested progress was being made towards agreeing a 60-day truce that would have seen 10 living hostages released, and aid provision increased. Hamas has refused that deal, saying it will not agree to a ceasefire without guarantees that Is-

rael will not simply break it again, as it did with the previous ceasefire agreement. Hamas has its own motivations, strategy, and perspectives, but it would hardly be unreasonable for Gazans to look unfavourably on deals that Israel clearly feels entitled to break.

However, even a precarious, temporary ceasefire is better than an unchecked continuation of slaughter. A pause in fighting will allow for increased aid distribution and perhaps further evacuations of critically ill and injured people who can no longer be treated in Gaza due to the destruction of healthcare infrastructure. That pause could be used by campaigners internationally, in social movements and trade unions, to step up demands for an extension of the ceasefire and more external pressure on the militarist Israeli state, such as arms embargoes.

A conference on 18 June chaired jointly by the governments of France and Saudi Arabia is an opportunity for more states to announce recognition of the state of Palestine. This is a diplomatic entity covering the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem. It is currently recognised by 147 of 193 of the United Nations' member states. Neither Britain nor France currently recognises Palestine. Diplomatic recognition would not make Palestinian independence a reality on the ground, but it would give Palestinian diplomats access to channels from which they are currently excluded, and increase international pressure on the Israeli government's intransigent refusal to accept Palestinian sovereignty over any territory whatsoever. More: pages 2-3. □

Lambeth libraries vote for strikes

By Wilson Gibbons

Lambeth's library workers are set for strikes after their union ballot has come back in favour of going out over the proposed cuts to the service. 100% of workers who returned their ballots were in favour of action, and the 50% threshold was met easily, in spite of some workers not receiving ballots on time. Strike dates are pending but we are set for the second strike against cuts in Lambeth in 2025, after school staff struck across the borough against school closures. As Lambeth faces down £99 million in cuts by 2030, we will need to see many more ballots and many more strikes to defend our services. □

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UNIONS MUST MOVE AGAINST TRUMP AFTER 14 JUNE

By Chris Reynolds

On 28 May the USA's Court of International Trade ruled most of Donald Trump's 2 April tariffs unlawful.

Trump quickly got another court to allow him to continue the tariffs for a while. He will keep pushing to higher and higher courts for permanent validation.

It was probably the biggest load of sand yet thrown into the gears of Trump's autocracy-machine.

But to stop Trump, not just slow him, will take working-class and social-movement action. The next big protest is due on 14 June, the day Trump has planned a big military parade in Washington to mark his personal birthday. 50501, a NGO-y, left-Democrat-type network, is organising hundreds of "No Kings" events across the USA.

Unions backed the last major anti-Trump protest, on 1 May, though on a fairly small scale. This time, few besides the leftish [UE](#) union have done so. The US left needs to turn the unions round.

Unions are agitating against the cuts in Medicaid (for low-income people, while Medicare is for older people) likely from the budget bill passed by the House of Reps and now going to the Senate. But the United Auto Workers (UAW), despite

talking of a general strike (in 2028...), have backed Trump on tariffs. The Teamsters, who courted Trump even before November 2024, have backed him on film tariffs.

Trump's hand is surely now weakened in his attempt to force trade concessions from other countries. But then his tariffs were never likely to "work" well in the way he wanted. His tariff war continues, and will continue to disrupt world trade, maybe to the point of full crisis.

No previous would-be autocrat in history has found his trickiest obstacles in the courts, but the USA is uniquely dense with lawyers. It has about 70 million court cases a year (UK figure: 3.5 million). In his first term, Trump drove hard to fill the federal courts with right-wing judges. He is disappointed that for some "right-wing" may not exactly equal "backing Trump". He now denounces Leonard Leo, co-chair of the Federalist Society and an ally over judge appointments, as "a sleazebag... a bad person, who in his own way, probably hates America".

In the case of Kilmar Abrego Garcia, sent with no charge or trial to a notorious prison in El Salvador, the official White House line is that now they can do nothing to bring him back, as courts have ordered. Trump himself says he "could"

do it. Otherwise, he has mostly swerved the courts rather than directly confronting them.

Trump gutted the National Labor Relations Board with sackings, faced orders to reinstate, and has now got the sackings through after all, leaving the Board inoperative so unable to make decisions. The US Institute for Peace, taken and shut forcibly by DOGE agents, is now open again after a court order, but so far can restore no more of its website than a landing page and one resource page.

Trump's head-to-head with Harvard University continues, with Trump blocking enrolment of international students and moving against the (not-university-controlled) Harvard Law Review.

The looming next step in Trump's autocracy-drive is the promised mass deportations. Trump continues preparations, most recently getting courts to remove legal protections from hundreds of thousands of temporary-leave US residents. He wants to add 20,000 National Guard to an augmented ICE deportation-cop force, and says he is "not necessarily against" a scheme by an ally to build a 100,000 strong armed civilian-auxiliary force.

It could be a while yet before he has all his ducks in a row for that. Seize the time! □