

For social ownership of the banks and industry

SOLIDARITY

& WORKERS' LIBERTY



Farage hires anti-abortion absolutist

Reform hardens its right-wing pitch

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Trump threatens New York City

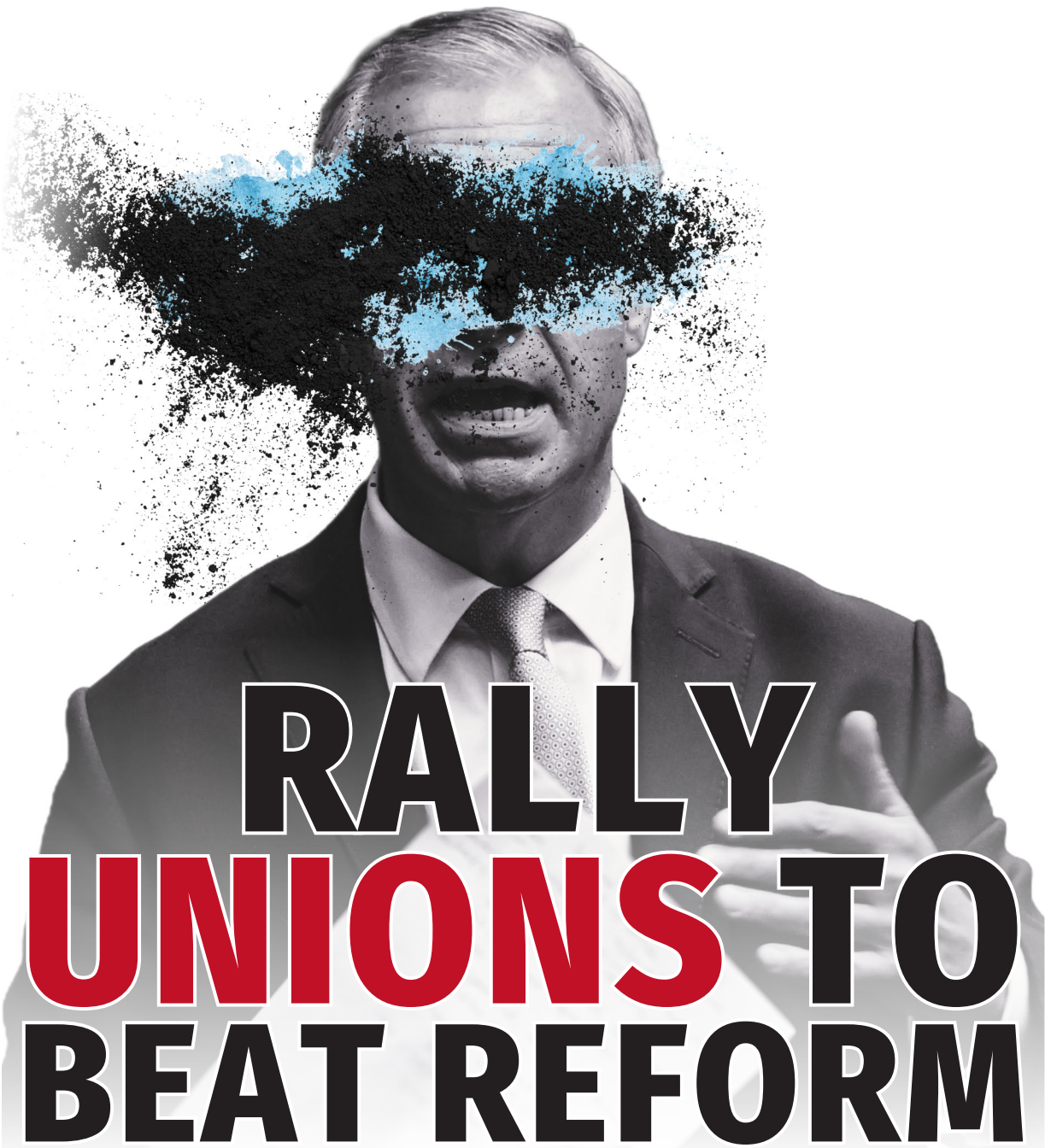
He'll cut funds to thwart the city's democratic choice

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Far from peace in Gaza

Writing for the Israeli +972 Magazine, Gazan journalist Muhammad Shehadeh has described how the Israeli military is using the “Yellow Line” to which it has withdrawn under the terms of Trump’s plan to pursue a new strategy of occupation in Gaza: “With the so-called ‘Yellow Line,’ Israel has divided the Strip in two: West Gaza, encompassing 42 percent of the enclave, where Hamas remains in control and over two million people are crammed in; and East Gaza, encompassing 58 percent of the territory, which has been fully depopulated of civilians and is controlled by the Israeli army and four proxy gangs.

“Under the Trump plan, this line was intended as a temporary marker — the first stage in Israel’s gradual withdrawal from the Strip as an International Stabilisation Force assumed control on the ground. Instead, Israeli forces are digging in, reinforcing the division with earthworks, fortifications, and barriers that suggest a move toward permanence.”

Humanitarian supplies currently unde-livered due to Israeli restrictions include tents and prefabricated shelters, desperately needed to address the homelessness and displacement crisis caused by Israel’s destruction of Gazan infrastructure.

The anti-Hamas militias Israel is now sponsoring in Gaza include the so-called Popular Forces, led by former drug trafficker Yasser Abu Shabab, which has alleged links to Islamic State (Daesh). As well as helping to stoke violent conflict within Gaza, this approach surely risks even worse eventual consequences than Israel’s longstanding previous approach of selectively aiding Hamas to undermine the Fatah-led PLO.

Whilst the 9 October deal has semi-paused and constrained the immediate war, there are no viable mechanisms for the implementation of its (vague) stipulations around post-war reconstruction, governance, and security. Point 19 of the plan envisions “a credible pathway to Palestinian self-determination and statehood”, but Benjamin Netanyahu has repeatedly affirmed that blocking any possibility for genuinely independent Palestinian sovereignty, over any territory, is a key political aim of his government. Ministers have variously described the aim of Israeli policy in the West Bank as being to “erase” or “bury” prospects for Palestinian statehood. Despite the plan’s commitment that “no one will be forced to leave Gaza”, several prominent Israeli leaders, including Netanyahu, have described Israeli strategy as aiming to encourage “emigration”.

As Shehadeh puts it: “Even after fail-



ing to achieve mass expulsion through direct military assault, Israel’s leadership is now pursuing the same outcome through attrition and engineered despair, using rubble, siege, and periodic bombing as instruments of demographic redesign. The prospect of ethnic cleansing has not disappeared with the ceasefire; it has merely evolved into a new policy, disguised and normalised through bureaucratic planning.”

On 1 November, up to 150,000 Israelis joined a demonstration in Tel Aviv to mark 30 years since the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin by a far-right settler activist. The assassination is seen by many as a key milestone, perhaps a turning point, on the road to Israel becoming what it is today. In 1995, Yigal Amir, Rabin’s assassin, was seen as an extremist terrorist. Today, leaders of the same movement Amir was part of hold the balance of power within the Israeli regime.

Legacy

There is much mythologising about Rabin’s legacy. Far from a dovish peacemaker, he was, as defence minister, the architect of the so-called “Break-their-bones policy”, the brutally violent Israeli response to the first Palestinian intifada (uprising) in 1988. The “peace process” he is now lauded for leading was deeply flawed, and risked leaving the Palestinians with semi-autonomy in a series of separated pockets of land rather than meaningful independence. Nevertheless, it is a fact that few Israeli

leaders since have even entertained the prospect of direct negotiations with the representatives of the Palestinian people towards a comprehensive peace settlement.

For a period, some Israeli leaders claimed that, whilst they desired a settlement, there was no “partner for peace” on the Palestinian side. In reality, the primary obstacle to peace for a generation has been the lack of a “partner for peace” on the Israeli side. Successive administrations allowed settlement building to continue unchecked, sometimes directly encouraging it. Gaza was blocked and bombarded every few years. Palestinians within Israel were treated as second-class citizens.

Speakers at the Tel Aviv demonstration included Yair Lapid and Yair Golan, leaders of opposition parties in the Israeli parliament (Knesset). But while they eulogise Rabin and lament the influence of far-right figures such as Itamar Ben Gvir, they have helped maintain the consensus across mainstream Israeli politics against the idea of ending the occupation and conceding a Palestinian state. Golan has criticised the recent international wave of recognition of Palestinian statehood, and MKs from Lapid’s party recently voted for a Knesset bill proposed by the hard-right Avigdor Lieberman in support of formal Israeli annexation of sections of the West Bank.

The role of the official opposition thus far makes abundantly clear that, even if Netanyahu is ejected from office at next year’s elections, as most polls still

predict, renewed social pressure from movements such as Standing Together will be necessary to push any new government towards real concessions. Standing Together describes its aim as building a new majority within Israeli society for a genuine peace based on equal rights for Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs, including equal rights to self-determination and statehood. □

UK Friends of Standing Together

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

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

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

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

Caerffili, the unions, and us

By Martin Thomas

The Caerffili Senedd by-election result on 23 October, ongoing opinion polls, and analysis of the Labour Party conference at the end of September and of Labour's deputy leadership poll, all paint a bleak picture. The 26 November Budget is likely to make them worse. The key to turning this round lies with the unions, and in what organised socialists can do in the unions and workplaces.

- Labour went down from 38% of the vote in July 2024 in the Caerffili Westminster constituency (just slightly different from the Senedd area) to 11%. Reform went up from 20% to 36%.

- Plaid cannot win by unifying a "stop Reform" vote, as it did in Caerffili, outside of Wales. Nothing about Caerffili rules out similar Labour declines being replicated in many other places. It is a largely working-class town, with somewhat lower unemployment than the UK average. Its proportion of people over 50 is only fractionally above the UK average. It has few asylum-seekers anywhere nearby, and very few in hotels.

- Britain-wide opinion polls have Labour around 19% and trending downwards, and Reform stable at over 30%.

- Analysis of the deputy leadership contest figures by [Charlie Mansell](#) indicates that Labour's individual membership is probably now about 270,000. Labour HQ now refuses to release figures (until it must, to the Electoral Commission). Its last figure was 309,000 early this year.

- The deputy leadership contest gave unions a (weak) chance to flag up disquiet with Starmer. Unison, GMB, and four other unions backed Phillipson, the "Starmer-insider" candidate. Usdaw exerted itself to get votes out for her. Three unions backed Powell, CWU, FBU, and Aslef, but did almost zero to get votes out. Unite stated no preference. Powell is surely feeble, but that is no excuse. This is saying to Starmer: yes, the unions got some motions past you at Labour conference, on wealth tax, Indefinite Leave to Remain, and Gaza, but don't worry, we



Trade-union contingents, including from Tower Hamlets Unison, joined a protest against the far right in Whitechapel, east London, on 25 October

won't flag up disquiet.

- Mansell's analysis of conference votes by local Labour Party delegates concludes that Labour To Win (LTW) hegemonised 58% of delegates. That was up on 2024, but down on 2023. Not all the 58% back the right-wing LTW on every policy issue. But what Mansell calls the "CLPD-Momentum" left has slid from 35% of conference in 2021 to 8% in 2025. We are back to the days when delegates are more right-wing than the average member because the left-wingers lack the energy to get elected as delegates. In other words, the boost to Labour left energy from forcing a partial climbdown on disability benefit cuts and Winter Fuel Allowance has been smaller than the depressing effect of the rise of Reform. A time may come when voters and even activists rally back to Labour as the only (however poor) way to beat Reform. But it's not coming now.

- And probably it won't come soon. In the 26 November Budget, Reeves will raise taxes, not only on the rich (as we advocate) — maybe even in the basic rate of income tax. She will cut. The unions are quiet about it. Talk of scrapping the two-child benefit cap has dissolved into speculation about tweaking it. Labour councils will face further Westminster-imposed cuts. NHS waiting lists are now rising again, even before winter starts. This will consolidate disgust with Starmer, and support for Reform, including from people who are by no means incorrigible racists, but want "something different".

- More and more factors are being assembled to make a world economic recession likely in the next couple of years. That could make everything worse.

There is possibly a slight "Welsh dimension" to Caerffili. Labour started sliding in Wales in early 2024, with the fiasco of Vaughan Gething's brief period of leadership. He dropped Welsh Labour's long-standing stance of "clear red water" (placing itself fractionally to the left of Westminster Labour), then resigned in a messy corruption scandal. But Eluned Morgan restoring the "clear red water" has had no effect so far. And why did we have Gething? He won leader because the unions backed him (against

most of the Labour Senedd members).

The Greens are gaining votes, but even Greens Organise co-chair Steve Jackson (speaking in London on Wednesday 29 Oct) admits that the Greens cannot win a majority in the next general election. They will, he said, win some councils in May 2026, but they have no plan to fight cuts.

The Sultana-Corbyn project also has no plan to fight cuts, and it is a mess.

Reform is not invincible. It may yet be discredited by internal clashes, or by fiascos in the councils it controls. But we cannot rely on that. It did well in Caerffili despite its candidate being a former sidekick of Nathan Gill, the ex-leader of Reform in Wales now pleading guilty to be bribed by Putin.

Confidence

How will things be turned round? We, the Marxist socialists, cannot turn round broad working-class opinion, let alone general opinion, just by catchy slogans or slick social media. Our confidence in the future is based not on any such conceit, but on workers' historic ability to redress ourselves and raise our heads high again after setbacks.

That redressing is unlikely to come linearly, simply through the Marxist-socialist core becoming bigger and more united. Probably it will first take skewed forms, shaped by the pre-existing patterns of the labour movement. We hope for forms lively enough that if we Marxists have maintained and educated ourselves sufficiently in the down-times, then we can intervene to reshape them.

For now, no big worker redressment is coming down the road for us to hop onto and make, by running repairs, into a coherent socialist force which can win a majority.

But the unions exist, and with more strength than they actually use. They showed some revival in 2022-3, only too little to convince enough workers that we can mend living standards, repair social provision, and stave off ecocide by union action, industrial and political (demonstrations, political strikes, political pressure on or where available within political parties). That can be changed only by initiative by the socialist-activist

minority within unions.

Some local union organisations are starting work against Reform and the far right, mobilising for street demonstrations, leafleting workplaces against racism, and so on. That is vital.

We need also to work on more:

- On unions mobilising to show they can win industrial disputes and improve conditions that way

- On unions mobilising (on the streets, and, those that have weight in the Labour Party, within Labour) to show that working-class activity can win on social issues like NHS and schools and housing and child poverty

- On unions educating their members about workers' solidarity across differences of skin-colour, gender, country-of-birth, and in the idea that we can win only by taking control of the vast wealth extracted from our labour by the super-rich, not by scapegoating other workers.

In short, on unions and the left showing workers a way forward.

In the unions and workplaces, too, socialist minorities like Workers' Liberty cannot sway things just by willpower. But activity there can have more leverage there than on broad public opinion; and, from each battle, it can build a stronger lever for the next battle and for bigger battles after that where the difference between a stronger (even if still small) and a weaker socialist lever may be decisive.

This is no time to wait for the next time the sun shines on the left. We have to make our own sunshine. Join Workers' Liberty. Be active as an organised socialist every week and every day, in your workplace, in your union, on the streets. Help make socialist politics not just a good idea awaiting its day, but a force. Help us in our challenges to the other organised left groups to unite in action where we have agreement, and debate honestly and educatively where we don't. □

- Caerffili is the Welsh name; Caerphilly is more common, but oddly half-Anglicised (cf fully-Anglicised Cardiff for Caerdydd).





Government backs off, for now, on disability cuts

By Janine Booth

The Disability News Service has reported that the government's plans to "reform" (i.e. cut) welfare benefits for disabled people lie "in tatters".

New Work and Pensions Secretary Pat McFadden is trying to put together a package of "reforms" to replace those that his predecessor, Leicester West MP Liz Kendall, had to withdraw in the face of fierce protests earlier this year.

McFadden told a meeting of Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) in October that he would scrap a draft White Paper. However, he now intends to pur-

sue his "reforms" agenda one cut at a time.

He can surely expect disabled people and our allies to resist these attacks, one at a time if necessary.

At the same time, the government has kicked plans to reform the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) system into next year. SEND is woefully under-funded, and with schools generally also desperately lacking in resources, disabled kids are losing out twice over.

There has been a lot of discussion about the rising numbers of SEND chil-

dren, with a usually unspoken implication that many are bogus. However, the reality is that cut after cut has left schools able to meet the needs of fewer and fewer students.

It is not that children's needs have increased, rather that more children's needs are special, greater than those which a starved school system can meet.

Disabled people need far-reaching changes to both welfare benefits and SEND. However, the current Labour government is more likely to make damaging changes than positive improvements.

Campaigning by disabled people, allies, trade unions and Labour's rank and file, together with a rebellion by Labour MPs, has the government on the back foot on these issues.

If we step up that campaigning, we can force the government to back down again. We can also shift the political narrative to demanding improvements rather than defending ourselves against attacks.

Such a fight has the potential to challenge the whole direction of government policy and even to force Labour's current leadership out. □

How a revolution turned into a coup

By Reuben Williams

A number of socialist groups are looking to the protests in Madagascar as a sign of a dawning "Gen-Z" revolutionary consciousness in world politics. The RCP in Britain have started a whole new podcast series, *The World on Fire*, to document uprisings around the world, with Madagascar taking pride of place. In France, the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste-Révolutionnaires (NPA-R) and *Lutte Ouvrière* have looked to Madagascar as inspiration for France's strikes and protests.

The protests there are certainly inspiring in some ways.

Launched on 25 September by the "Gen Z collective", thousands have flooded the streets of Antananarivo, the capital, in protest over electricity and water supplies. Many Malagasy people have neither, and even in the capital they are erratic. The protests broadened in scope to cover corruption at the heart of government. Three quarters of the people live under a (very low) poverty line.

On the 11 October, two and a half weeks into enormous protests, things took a turn when the Capsat militia, central to the 2009 military coup that also ousted a corrupt president, came out in support of the protests. President Andry

Rajoelina, himself installed by that same 2009 coup, fled the country the next day.

The Gen-Z movement have celebrated the president's exit as a major victory. Mass protest certainly played a key role. But the newly installed government far from a "Gen-Z" government — it is a "transitional presidency" for 18-24 months run directly by Colonel Michael Randrianirina, the head of Capsat. What good this means for the angry youth of Madagascar remains to be seen.

Explosions

Not all recent explosions of popular unrest have ended the same way. In Nepal and Bang-

ladesh, the "Gen-Z wave" has so far produced caretaker governments led by vaguely-liberal elderly figures, but a rightward shift seems the most likely next stage. Jumping back a generation, Tunisia and Egypt, the leading stars of the "Arab Spring" revolutions of the early 2010s, ended up with popular assent to regimes worse and more authoritarian than previously.

The lesson here is not "don't try", nor even "only socialism is the answer". A workers' revolution led by a developed socialist party implanted in major industries is our aim, but even a democratic party with some level of regional organisation and solid

democratic demands, with even limited bourgeois-electoral accountability, would bring a better outcome than Madagascar is currently seeing. Popular anger is letter A of the revolutionary alphabet, but without a B and C of political organisation generated and based on deliberative democracy, it spells little.

Not just in Madagascar or Nepal, but in Britain, France and everywhere else, socialists should call not to "follow Madagascar's lead", but to *organise* for socialist politics. The working class is strong only with our most powerful weapon: democratic and deliberative organisation. □

Stop Putin grinding down Ukraine!

By Michael Baker

The Russian offensive on Eastern Ukraine which began this spring continues into the autumn. Russia's military high command has claimed that it had encircled the city of Pokrovsk, but aerial footage shows this is not the case. The Ukrainian army will still likely have to withdraw from Pokrovsk in the short-to medium-term, but that is a much less drastic defeat than the city being surrounded and cut off from supplies.

The overall aim of the offensive appears to remain the capturing of the Sloviansk-Kramatorsk urban area, one of the last and largest areas of Donbas still held by Ukraine. Russia intends to squeeze Ukraine out of Donbas as a means of pointing out the futility of Ukraine continuing its war effort — as if to say that one way or another, Russia will capture all of this territory, so continuing to fight will just bring more casualties. As well as the immediate territorial gains, this would increase pressure to force Ukraine to the negotiating table on worse terms, and potentially trigger a political crisis over Zelensky's handling of the war.

The actual changes in the front line are not as drastic as Russia makes out. Ukraine has deployed additional troops to Pokrovsk, and the open-source monitoring group DeepState claims that much of the city is a "grey zone", controlled by neither side.

On 2 November it was reported that Nato "will stand with Ukraine up to the day in which we will have them sitting around the table for a long-lasting peace", in the words of Giuseppe Cavo Dragone, chair of Nato's military committee. That may sound like news Ukrainians would be happy to hear, but it came with a barbed tail: the BBC reports that "from an operational point of view he considered the Russia-Ukraine war was bogged down, and it was almost time to sit and talk because it's a waste

of lives".

Ukrainians living in Pokrovsk, as well as any number of other front-line cities and in the 20% of Ukraine occupied by Russia, might not agree. Russia's indiscriminate attacks on civilian targets and barrage of energy infrastructure as the country heads into a cold winter show just how much care will be given to caring for the people of Ukraine, should its Eastern section be given over to Russia in a peace deal.

Nato is not the only force trying to back Ukraine into a corner. Trump announced on 2 November that he was "not really" considering supplying Ukraine with Tomahawk missiles. Trump's constant hot-and-cold attitude to Putin and peace negotiations has been a dangerous distraction of the world's attention away from Ukraine itself, where Russian troops continue to ruin and cut short countless lives.

Occupied

In the occupied territories, Russia continues to give ample evidence of how deeply it cares about peace and the Ukrainian people. In the last week, the Kharkiv Human Rights Group has reported on two different stark cases of repression. A delegation of 16 Crimean Tatars attempted to test the limits of Russia's commitment to democratic procedure, travelling into Russia proper to meet with the human rights ombudsman to lodge a complaint. They were protesting the arrest of four Crimean Tatar women who were recently arrested on suspicion of being members of Hizb ut-Tahrir, an Islamist group that is currently not outlawed in Ukraine, but is in Russia. Despite no evidence to support the arrests, the four women are still held in remand, where they have been forced to remove their headscarves against their will. The delegation to the ombudsman was itself given a pretty sharp reminder of how the Russian state felt



about them using their voices — they were arrested four times in 24 hours en route.

The occupying Russian government have also enforced a ban on "historical memory" in the occupied territories — events and actions marking or remembering the lives lost to Stalinism in the 20th century. In many regions of the former Soviet Union, this is synonymous with "Russian imperialism", which may explain the Russian state's fierce opposition. Nevertheless, Ukrainian citizens still used the past week to mark remembrance of the Holodomor (a man-made famine targeting Ukrainians in the USSR in the 1930s), by putting illicit candles in their windows and public spaces. Similarly banned is any mention of the 1944 Stalinist deportation of Crimean Tatars, a foundational part of the torturous shared history of that people.

New reporting by the Russian site [Verstka](#), translated by Meduza, reveals the gruesome reality of torture and execution being carried out in the Russian army against its own soldiers. Among

the horrific stories gathered are: soldiers sent into battle with live grenades attached to their uniform; soldiers beaten to death personally by particularly zealous commanders; snipers being placed behind the Russian front line and told to aim at any soldiers who appear to be retreating against orders; and any number of summary executions for failing to carry out direct orders or avoid taking part in particular battles. These stories are harrowing, but hardly surprising — when analysts talk abstractly of Russians "winning by numbers" or "throwing their soldiers in like lambs to the slaughter", these are the acts they are obliquely referring to.

It is now, as powers West and East alike try to force Ukraine to capitulate, that clear and loud solidarity with the Ukrainian working class is most vital. Workers' Liberty continues to campaign for Ukraine's victory and for the West to arm Ukraine sufficiently to win. If arms supplies had come earlier, then the daily life of people in [Pokrovsk](#) need never have turned into the horror it is now. □

Retaining "business" vs freeing research

By Will Roberts

Sheffield Hallam University has allowed a professor to resume her work on Uyghur forced labour in China after forcing her to stop the research for eight months. Though the university vociferously denies it, it seems extremely likely that the decision was based on protecting financial ties with the Chinese government and Chinese companies.

Laura Murphy and her researchers were forced to stop working on supply chains and forced labour. Internal emails

leaked to the Guardian reveal university staff weighing up the cost-benefit analysis of allowing the research vs. protecting Chinese investment in the cash-strapped university. "Attempting to retain the business [student recruitment] in China and publication of the [Helena Kennedy Centre for International Justice] research are untenable bedfellows".

This brings together two issues currently under increasing scrutiny: a panic within the British establishment about security threats posed by China, given Chinese capital's increas-

ing role in the world economy, and the culture war over free speech at universities, provoked most recently by debates around students protesting for the Palestinians.

It should be noted that the 2023 Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act does nothing to protect the rights of researchers to carry out such work. That bill was an attempt to stifle protest and little else.

Links

There are multiple interweaved links between China and UK Higher Education. The Chinese

government provides a number of contracts directly for research; Chinese companies, particularly tech giant Huawei, are central in providing funding to university tech research, especially in the emerging AI field; and with a privatised HE market wreaking havoc across the country, universities are almost entirely dependent on tuition fees from international students, a third of whom come from China.

It is not in the interests of the working class to resolve capitalist states' security concerns, and many Chinese students

come to the West to study precisely to gain the freedom to explore the world and criticise their own government freely. But all of these interconnections have a common root: the drive to make universities depend on what they can get in fees and commercial and institutional research grants. To protect free speech and free investigation on campus and in academia, and to save the crumbling sector in the long-term, the answer is simple: tax the rich to fund free higher education for all! □

“The Fraud” and antisemitism denial

By Jim Denham

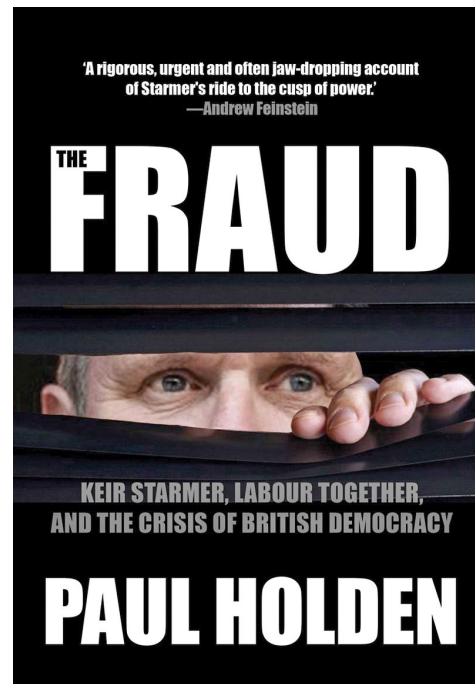
There is no shortage of tomes examining Keir Starmer's rise to power and Paul Holden, the author of the latest, acknowledges that he has made use of them.

Holden's book, *The Fraud: Keir Starmer, Morgan McSweeney and the Crisis of British Democracy*, has the advantage of being largely based upon what he calls “a substantial leak of documents from within the Labour Party” and thus contains information unavailable to previous authors on the subject.

As a result Holden is able to produce convincing evidence that Starmer's promoter (or enforcer, or right-hand man) Morgan McSweeney misled the Electoral Commission and broke electoral law by failing to declare donations worth £739,492 to his pro-Starmer front organisation Labour Together and then sought to pass it off as an “admin error”.

Another of the book's revelations, about vile messages about imagined sex acts on Diane Abbott, exchanged between Labour staffers in 2017, has led to the resignation of Paul Ovenden, No 10's director of strategy.

But the book's central concern is what Holden describes as “Labour's ‘antisemitism crisis’”. Indeed, in an interview with the Morning Star (which has been plugging the book), Holden claimed “the anti-semitism issue was absolutely central to all of that process [the right-wing takeover of the party] and has had seri-



ous material long-term impacts” [meaning the party's response to Israel's war on Gaza].

Holden writes: “Perhaps the Labour Together Project's most consequential intervention was to insert itself into the high-profile Labour Party ‘antisemitism crisis’ that embroiled the Corbyn leadership from 2018. Further investigation is needed to establish the full extent of the project's involvement.”

“Further investigation” may be needed, but Holden has no hesitation in stating: “What is known for certain is that the Labour Together Project worked closely

with national media to place arguably alarmist stories that painted the Corbyn project as irredeemably tainted with antisemitism. With the passage of time, many of these stories have not withstood scrutiny. There are also indications, not yet fully fleshed out, that the project helped ‘engineer’ the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)'s investigation into antisemitism in the Labour Party”.

The book provides very little detail about the “stories” that “have not withstood scrutiny” (one of the few examples cited is the case of Jo Bird, which was indeed, ridiculous) and none whatsoever to back up its claim that that particular EHRC report, finding Labour under Corbyn guilty of unlawful harassment of Jewish members, was “slapdash”. Exactly the same can be said about the book's claims against the BBC Panorama documentary “Is Labour anti-Semitic?” and the programme's journalist John Ware: no clear-cut case is made and, indeed, Holden admits that it is beyond his “competence” to do so — but that doesn't stop him raising “questions about the factual accuracy of the piece.”

This typifies the entire approach of the book when it comes to antisemitism claims: it's suggested that things were exaggerated, or the result of a right-wing conspiracy by the Jewish Labour Movement and various front organisations run by McSweeney, while Holden covers his back by writing that “there was and is antisemitism in the Labour Party.”

The book's author seems unable, or unwilling, to recognise two central facts. One: the “antisemitism crisis” kicked off in 2016, i.e. before Labour Together “turned its attention to the subject” which, according to Holden, was 2018. Two: it was started by gratuitous comments from Corbyn's (then) ally (and nominee to run Labour's “defence review”) Ken Livingstone about Hitler having “supported Zionism” (and “Israel”). Livingstone's comments, like almost all the instances of antisemitism that circulated in and around Corbyn's Labour, had no connection with supporting Palestinian rights. Most of the instances were in fact not even “smash Israel”-type anti-Zionism, but “Rothschild conspiracy” or “Jewish power” stuff.

One aspect of the antisemitism crisis that seems to particularly annoy Holden is “denialism”: what he describes as “any person or organisation questioning the substantial truth of any of the... allegations, or suggesting that any of them were driven by antipathy to left-wing politics or Palestine solidarity was engaged in ‘denialism’ which was its own form of antisemitism.”

Actually, few people claimed that “denialism” was in itself a “form of antisemitism”.

But “denialism” was — and is — is a refusal to face up to the scale and reality of antisemitism in Labour under Corbyn. Holden's book is a classic example. □

Eric Lee

Serbia air traffic controllers: Echoes of Ronald Reagan

Two leaders of the union representing Serbian air traffic controllers were recently sacked as part of a union-busting campaign.

Ranko Radovanovic (president) and Igor Hajderpašić (secretary), leaders of the Sindikat kontrole letenja (SKL), were dismissed from their jobs and had their access to airport control towers revoked. They were told that this was based on a vague “negative opinion from the security services.” The SKL is convinced that this sacking, which followed upon a successful 40-day strike, is part of a deliberate attempt to bust the union.

Both men played key roles in this year's lawful and successful strike which was aimed at improving working conditions and strengthening the safety and efficiency of Serbia's air traffic control system — objec-

tives aligned with both union and national interests.

This attempt to decapitate the union appears to have been initiated by Serbia's ruling party. As the union described it, this raises “serious concerns of political interference and retaliation against trade union representatives, threatening fundamental rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining.”

Strike

Ranko and Igor, whom I interviewed this week, emphasised that the strike was entirely legal and they seemed quite surprised at the government's actions.

Meanwhile, the European Transport Workers Federation (ETF) and the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) recently sent a joint letter to Serbia's President Aleksandar

Vučić and Prime Minister Đuro Macut, urging them to urgently intervene. In their letter, the European trade union leaders wrote:

“Unfortunately, this recent development in Serbia is no isolated case — it comes after other concrete attacks to the fundamental right to organise of Serbian aviation workers in recent years. In this regard, we recall the pending ILO complaint against the Government of Serbia concerning Serbia's failure to adequately respect, protect, and uphold trade union rights and the principles of freedom of association enshrined in ILO Conventions No. 87 and No. 98, which Serbia ratified in November 2000.”

The ETF and ETUC letter reminded “Serbian authorities that, as a candidate for EU membership, Serbia has committed to progressively align

its laws and practices with the EU... including Article 28 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union — which enshrines the right to collective bargaining and action and carries the same legal value as the EU Treaties.”

This is not the first time that a right-wing government has chosen to attack air traffic controllers as part of a campaign to destroy independent, democratic trade unions.

Back in 1981, shortly after Ronald Reagan was elected US president, the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO) began contract negotiations with the federal government. When these failed to produce an agreement, they went on strike in early August. Reagan cracked down on the striking workers without hesitation. He sacked 11,345 air traffic controllers and massive fines

were imposed by courts on the union for every day it continued industrial action. Reagan used the full power of the notorious 1947 Taft-Hartley Act — which is still in force today — to destroy PATCO. Two months later, the union was decertified.

If the Serbian air traffic controllers are not to face the same fate as their American counterparts did in 1981, they need the full support of the European and global trade union movements.

At the request of SKL and the ETF, a campaign was recently launched on LabourStart. Please support it and share it: bit.ly/lr-rs. You can listen to the interview with Ranko and Igor here: bit.ly/r-r-ih. □

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

YP members still want democracy

By Matt Cooper

The promised regional assemblies for “Your Party” began from the week-end of 25 October.

So far, each has followed a similar pattern: groups of about ten participants, each with a facilitator of varying quality, were asked to discuss sections of the draft documents. Notes were collected for later collation, though given the party’s meagre resources it is doubtful this material can be processed meaningfully. No votes were taken; there was no collective decision-making.

The only real breakthrough came in Sheffield, where a comprehensive motion was brought by the city-wide committee of the proto-party. That allowed genuine debate on alternative drafts of the YP documents and policy amendments. Sheffield proposals: bit.ly/sy-res.

By the start of November, nine of the planned twenty-two assemblies had been held. Every venue featured empty chairs. The Manchester assembly on 2 November drew fewer than 200 people to a hall advertised for 500. South London, having booked extra space, filled less than half its advertised 650 capacity. Sheffield saw similar numbers. With such figures, and with funds still locked up (see below), the national organisers may take this as the excuse to scale back the scheduled 29 November conference.

As meetings have progressed, activists have become better organised and more vocal. Early gatherings saw participants dutifully divide into breakout groups. By 2 November both Manchester and South London saw attempts to move motions from the floor, only to be ruled out by chairs representing the unelected leadership. In South London, Artin Giles, a Corbyn office employee whom no one elected, refused to permit votes.

What all these assemblies have shown is a deep desire for a grassroots-led movement and strict limits on central authority. In the next few weeks the final round of assemblies and the national conference may determine whether members can force a coherent, democratic structure onto the leadership faction, or whether Your Party will harden into a centralised vehicle around Corbyn and his circle.

There have been new moves over the frozen £800,000, held in the accounts of MOU Operations Ltd., which the officials of “Your Party” are trying to get. (Corbyn has now announced that “Your Party” is actually his preferred name for it). MOU was set up in April 2025 as the legal arm of the organisation preparing for a new party, under the “Collective” organising group. The money raised from the party’s launch on 24 July was paid into MOU; even after Your Party Ltd. was

established a week later, funds continued to flow into MOU’s account until 22 September, after which all control was transferred to the newly established Your Party Ltd.

Why two entities were maintained remains unclear, though tensions had already flared after Sultana’s defection from Labour in early July, which forced the Corbyn leadership faction’s hand in declaring the new party.

The situation worsened in September when Zarah Sultana launched her unofficial membership portal. Funds and data from this also went to MOU, where they remain. Andrew Feinstein, the most vocal of the MOU directors, has claimed the money would be transferred as soon as legal formalities were tied up, but no action has followed. Some blame the small scale of the regional assemblies on the frozen funds, though even modest venues have largely been half empty.

Events escalated on 28 October, when the *Guardian* published an [article](#) based on unattributable briefings from the leadership faction, claiming the MOU directors had “gone rogue” and refused to transfer funds and data to Your Party, and that they were attempting to hold YP “to ransom”. However, they were silent on what MOU’s demands might be. The article said legal proceedings were being prepared, continuing a pattern where the leadership favours legal action over establishing a democratic and transparent structure at the top of the nascent party.

Response

A response came via The Canary, which three days later published an [article](#) based on a cache of communications between MOU and the leadership faction. The Canary, however, has strongly promoted Sultana over Corbyn in recent weeks and should not be considered neutral. It reported that MOU was not involved in Sultana’s membership portal. Although it gave MOU as its legal identity, the directors say this was done without their consent, but both the funds and data went to MOU.

The leadership faction referred the matter to the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO), alleging that the portal represented a data breach by MOU. The legal basis for this is unclear (and, for my money, tenuous). According to The Canary, MOU was willing to transfer the funds subject to a few legal provisos, but the leadership refused unless the three MOU directors (Feinstein, Jamie Driscoll, Beth Winter) personally indemnified YP against possible claims, some-

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thing the MOU directors would not sign.

Both accounts leave a lot unanswered. A limited company can avoid ICO penalties by dissolving itself, this is a limited company and the directors would be off the hook. But MOU has not done this. No clear reason has emerged why. The directors insist they have no factional allegiance between Corbyn and Sultana, but Sultana recently claimed on X that the directors had stepped down and she had become sole director (this was not reflected in Companies House records at the time of writing). She claims that this is to expedite the transfer of funds and data to YP, which is likely accurate: any attempt to seize control of MOU’s assets to create a rival centre of power would be both legally and politically unsustainable.

The idea that Sultana might split from the new party is not far-fetched. As reported previously, the long-awaited YP documents published in late October contain provisions seemingly designed to marginalise her. Each is presented without debate, as if too minor to discuss, yet together they are telling.

First, there is no provision for a deputy leader, a post Sultana would likely win. Whatever the general arguments for or against a deputyship, its deletion clearly serves to marginalise Sultana.

Second, the proposed rules state the leader must be an MP or councillor. This is a strange distinction: councillors have no national profile or special qualification to lead a national party, and a “member-led” movement should allow members to choose their leader freely. The rule looks targeted. Corbyn is ex-

pected to lead through the next election and then stand down, by which time he will be around 80. Sultana might then be disqualified from standing even as a recent ex-MP and one of the party’s best-known figures.

Third, the rules forbid a sitting MP from seeking nomination in another constituency. Sultana is reckoned likely to lose in her current constituency (Coventry South), and has floated standing against Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood in Birmingham Ladywood, a race she could plausibly win. This clause exists solely to prevent that.

Advocated

Additionally, the co-leadership model Sultana has long advocated is nowhere to be seen, replaced by a vague promise to review the leadership structure in the party’s first year.

In this context, Sultana’s recent high-level activity, ceaseless meetings and social media, makes sense. It points either to a future leadership challenge or to her preparing to split off entirely, positioning herself to Corbyn’s left. Her appearance on BBC Radio 4’s Political Thinking on 1 November, once disdained as “mainstream media”, signalled a conscious effort to further raise her profile.

On Ukraine she was slightly better than the Stop the War line, condemning Russia’s invasion and affirming Ukraine’s right to self-determination, but then undercut this by calling the conflict a “proxy war,” urging negotiations, and suggesting support for Ukraine is driven by the arms industry. On Israel-Palestine she was closer to the SWP than to Corbyn, again burnishing her “anti-Zionist” credentials, arguing that Jewish people as a group have no right to a state and that a single democratic state should replace Israel and Palestine without explaining who could achieve this and how. This was left populism of the most facile kind.

Domestically, she was indistinguishable from left-wing social democracy: nationalise industries, build council homes, create jobs, use state power to “make people’s lives better.” She offers no link between that programme and her sometime rhetoric of class struggle. Corbyn, for all his limitations, promotes a coherent, if not particularly left-wing, vision based on community assemblies and a cosy communitarianism, a gentler form of politics that will melt class struggle in the warmth of homemade jam. Sultana’s politics are a collection of leftish tropes without structure or depth. □



Protest for net zero on 15 November

By Colin Foster

Saturday 15 November is a global day of action to press the governments assembling at COP30, the 30th annual United Nations climate meeting, being held in Brazil 10-21 November.

The prospects for movement from the governments are not good. In October, an agreed and UN-backed Net Zero Framework for shipping was due to be formally approved by governments at an International Maritime Organisation meeting in London.

Approval was delayed for a year because officials from Trump's USA — although it is not a big factor in the world shipping industry — intervened to press representatives from smaller and weaker countries.

"It was like the New York street", the *Financial Times* reported a representative as saying. Their country had been threatened with visa restrictions for shipping crews and increased fees to access US ports. "They went from delegation to delegation... threatening them. Telling them to go back and speak to their capitals, warning what would happen if they didn't change their minds".

"There was a combination of economic threats as well as very personal delegate-level threats... some negotiators had been told they would face restrictions if they planned to travel home via the US".

It's not just Trump. Though less crassly, other governments, and banks and corporations too, are rowing back on "net-zero" promises. They have reached a point where further "green" policies would mean cutting sharply into short-term profits, and heavy taxes on the rich to fund social investment.

It is down to the labour movement to revive itself and become the decisive force for "social provision and social foresight", as Karl Marx put it. Actions on 15 November include:

London: noon, protest opposite Downing Street, SW1A 2AT

Newcastle: 11am, rally at Civic Centre, NE1 8QH

Glasgow: 11am, march from Glasgow Green, G40 1AT

Sheffield: 11am, rally at Devonshire Green, S1 4GT

Brighton: 11:30am, Peace Statue BN3 2WN

Manchester: 1:30pm, All Saints, M15 6BX

More: bit.ly/c15nov □

An eco-manifesto and a critique

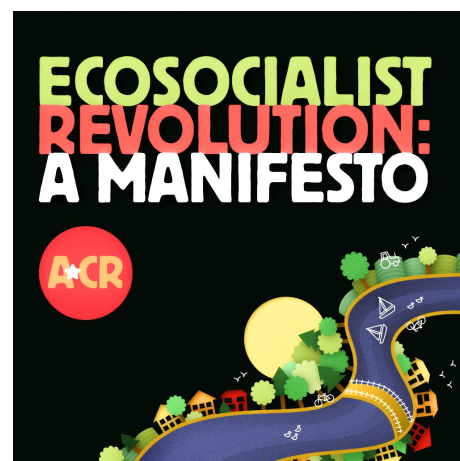
By Sam Myerson

Anti-Capitalist Resistance (A*CR) adopted an eco-manifesto at their conference in 2024. It has been the moving force in a number of annual Ecosocialism conferences, and, between them, an Ecosocialist Action Network. Workers' Liberty activists have taken part. A*CR is the current version in Britain of the "post-Mandelite" "Fourth International" network, linked with the spectrum of groups in France coming from the old LCR and NPA — Ensemble!, Gauche Ecosocialiste, NPA-A, NPA-R.

The manifesto is in three main parts. The first is an indictment of capitalism as the engine of the crisis. The comrades announce that the fight to limit warming to 1.5°C is lost because of the failures and delays since 2016, and call for urgent effort at least to limit it to 2°C.

The analysis of how capitalism is a scourge for the environment is set out. Marxists understood that there is the contradiction between the knowledge and scientific capabilities capitalist society produces and how it chooses to use them. The manifesto puts to the fore that man-made global warming has been known as a danger since about 1977, and yet governments' action has always lagged behind science, and is now lagging even further. (Concern about the impact of carbon dioxide released from burning fossil fuels dates back at least to 1896 — Arrhenius — but clarity about the actual net effects took much longer to establish).

Ecosocialism is defined as "a society where the economy has been taken out of the hands of the capitalist class through being socialised, becoming



a collectively owned part of human society" and "a fair economy that is consistent with human needs within a sustainable relationship to other life forms and the environment". The manifesto also argues for "eco-feminism", but that is not elaborated in the text.

Rejects

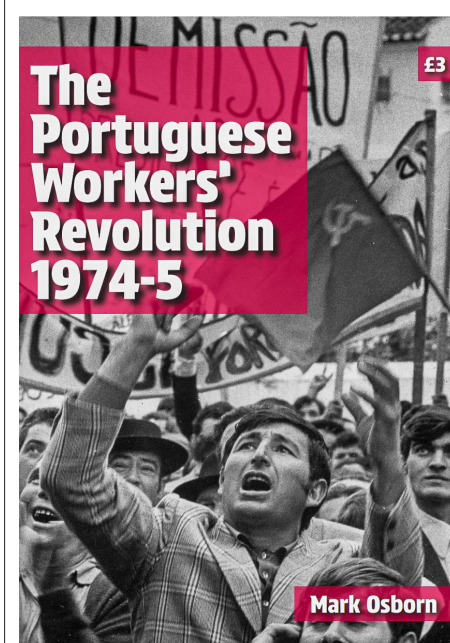
A*CR rejects the slogan of "degrowth" quoting Michel Löwy as saying that it is not sufficient, because it does not define what alternative society will replace the current one. It takes up John Bellamy Foster's coinage, "metabolic rift", as an indicator on Marxism and ecology, but does not elaborate.

The manifesto suggests that the working class is central, but argument is scant and seems to be contradicted by the vision for democratising society. The movement that we need to win relies heavily on the amorphous blob of "the people". The comrades state that we need a new kind of political power, "mass popular participatory democracy", but do not explain, beyond saying that there will be a new kind of "forum", not "toothless citizens' assembly" but

with real power.

It rejects Universal Basic Income as a panacea to the issues facing the working class, rightly seeing that it leaves intact the current mode of production and organisation. But the calls for "community-based" and "co-produced services", coupled with the "forums" of democracy, leave me wondering how central the working class is to this plan for an ecosocialist transformation of society.

I do not have space here to discuss the "emergency plan" A*CR proposes, but another contributor to this column will be writing soon on our ideas about that, and it may be useful to compare and contrast. □



The story from the 25 April 1974 overturn to the 25 Nov 1975 stabilising coup. £3 □

workersliberty.org/publications

This part of curbing aviation's eco-impact should be easy

By Martin Thomas

A recent article by Hannah Ritchie on "Sustainability by Numbers" tells us that nearly half the current global-warming impact of aviation comes not from its CO₂ emissions but from "contrails" — "condensation trails", wispy clouds formed by water droplets condensing round particles emitted from the back of jet engines. To cut that half is technically easy, but blocked by airline bosses' greed for extra profit.

Those contrails have a cooling effect when sunlight reflects off them, but a warming effect when radiation reflected back from the earth's surface bounces

back from them. Generally the warming effect exceeds the cooling effect.

In any one year the warming effect from that year's contrails is almost as big as the warming effect from all the CO₂ emitted from aviation (since it began) and remaining in the upper atmosphere.

Warming

The warming effect from old CO₂ emissions will abate only slowly whatever we do now. Cutting new CO₂ emissions from aviation is necessary, but also difficult. We've discussed that in other articles.

But contrails are formed only in particular conditions,

mostly in colder and more humid parts of the atmosphere. Three per cent of flights generate 80% of the warming effect from contrails, and three-quarters of flights generate no warming (or even some cooling).

So, says Ritchie, the contrail warming can be largely abolished by re-routing a minority of flights for small parts of their journeys to avoid the areas where warming-contrails form. We have the technology to do that.

Ritchie offers calculations to show that the extra flight time, and extra cost per passenger, would be small — a few minutes, a few pounds.

But it is hassle for the airline bosses. So they don't do

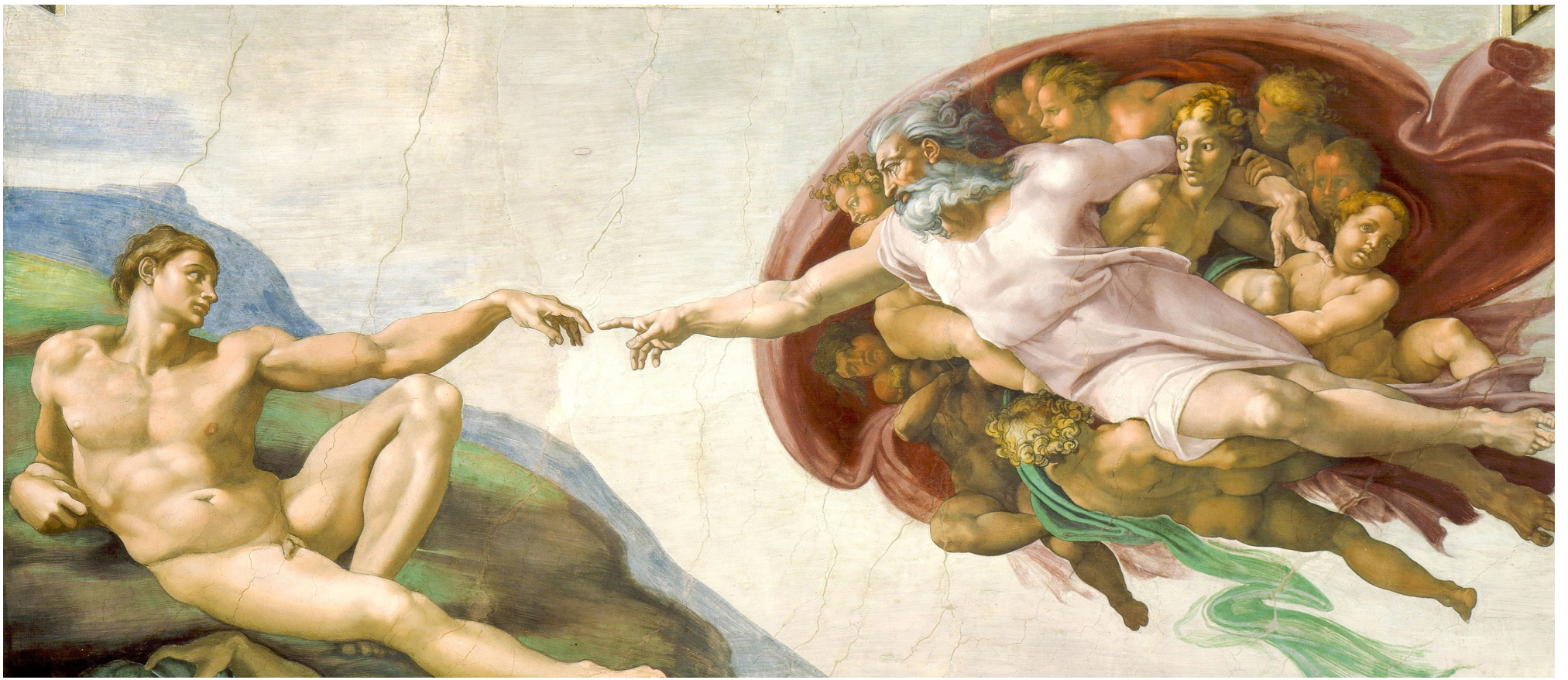
it. Ritchie comments: "the United States could have led this effort domestically, mandating that internal flights eliminate their contrails..."

"The European Union... has already been making some progress... Earlier this year, its trading system regulations were updated to require airlines to monitor and report non-CO₂ impacts..."

Push-back

"Unsurprisingly, it has received pushback from the aviation industry, with them asking for these reports to be voluntary".

The aviation unions, and the labour movement, could win this one. □



Women's Fightback

A divine mandate for Nigel Farage?

By Jill Mountford

Theology helping to create a “hell on earth” might be one way of describing the project of Professor James Orr, a member of the Cambridge University Divinity Faculty.

His manic self-promoting activity in right-wing organisations and think-tanks has inevitably attracted the interest of such figures as J D Vance and Nigel Farage, and Farage has now appointed Orr, who is a “ban all abortions” absolutist as well as a “curb immigration” ideologue, as an official policy adviser to Reform UK.

This is a concerning development. There comes a time in the evolution of rightwing populism when it feels a need to acquire some degree of intellectual respectability, in this case, to ground its politics in the authority of God himself.

Not a task for any ordinary mortal, the professor must be an alchemist with powers to turn gibberish, poison and hostility to most of humanity into the ideological basis of a new civilisation.

This is not a new thing. The far right's

evolution, and its possible evolution into fascistic movements, has often involved rummaging around history's dustbin of ideas and beliefs for ones that were anti-democracy, anti-liberty, anti-women, anti-secular. Although many of those backward ideas were routed by Enlightenment thinkers who inspired the English, American and French revolutions and by radical movements after them, societies in a deep crisis can easily revive them.

We are in a deep crisis. America and Trump present the most stark example of this, and are thus the inspiration for the current assault on democracy, rationalism, and in particular, women. The authoritarianism of a Trump or Farage in politics must be complemented by the authoritarianism of an Andrew Tate in the relations between men and women.

The fear and anxiety produced by decades of economic crisis and social decay demand the “strong men” and the strong men must be ideologically underpinned by the ultimate strong man, God, or an ultimate “father”, Hitler.

Recent opinion surveys of young men consistently show them moving to the right. They speak of the “old society” of post-war welfarism and liberal democracy letting them down. The project of this generation of right-wing thinkers like Orr and politicians like Vance is to create an attractive “radicalism”, the “move fast and break things”, the sweeping away of the “old world”.

In the 1920s and 30s the fascists in Italy and Germany were perceived as “radicals” and “modernisers” by many young people and sections of the intelligentsia — and look at the common fascination with Musk currently — until the

fascists drove their societies “off a cliff”.

It is surely our job as socialist feminists and the left generally to become the modernisers and the radicals of the labour movement, make it a fit place for their hopes and aspirations, make it the great lever to prize capitalism off our backs. That will be the beginning of our civilisation, underpinned by our collective humanity, not God or Father.

The Times and the *The Spectator* won't

be interested in our idea of civilisation and provide us with the respectability which Orr gets of full page interviews. One doesn't expect these publications to interview the school girls made pregnant by rape who should, in Professor Orr's opinion, be refused the right to an abortion. That is a glimpse of the “civilisation” he wants to build. It is a glimpse of hell. □

Activist Agenda

Meetings

Thu 6 Nov: How did Hitler come to power? Lewisham AWL. 7pm, The Shirker's Rest, 9 Lewisham Way SE14 6PP

Sat 8 Nov: “Free the Hong Kong Alliance 3!”. 2pm, Embassy of China, 49-51 Portland Pl W1B 1JL

Mon 10 Nov: Socialist chat. Newcastle AWL. 6pm, Northumbria Students' Union

Mon 10 Nov: Mao's cultural revolution. North London AWL. 7pm, Housmans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Rd N1 9DY

Tue 11 Nov: Organising the unorganised. Manchester AWL. 5:30pm, The Salutation Pub, 12 Higher Chatham St M15 6ED

Wed 12 Nov: Workers' climate action. Sheffield AWL. 6pm, University Arms, 197 Brook Hill S3 7HG

At work or on campus

We organise: among health and local

government, school and education workers, on the railway and London Underground, in the civil service, on uni campuses, and more. See workersliberty.org/work-unions, Insta @workerslibertystudents, and email awl@workersliberty.org for more.

Template motions

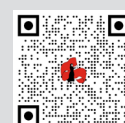
Texts: to adapt for union branches and Labour Parties: bit.ly/mo-pe

Socialist-feminist book clubs

workersliberty.org/sf-book-clubs
London: Sun 9 Nov. Rage Becomes Her, by Soraya Chemaly. 2pm, Effra Social, 89 Effra Rd SW2 1DF

Campaigns

See workersliberty.org/agenda. □



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



Women's Fightback, £3 □ bit.ly/shop-wl



Events and campaigns: workersliberty.org/events



youtube.com/c/WorkersLibertyUK



workersliberty.org/audio

Will AI take our jobs?

By Will Roberts

An article from the *Times* is currently doing the rounds. “The 20 jobs most at risk from AI – and the 20 safest” has clearly had quite a bit of traction, not least because the *Times* has been paying to promote it on social media.

The article is a report of work done by Microsoft, who have analysed their own Copilot chatbot and determined which jobs it is most regularly being used to “ape”. Questionable source and research methods aside, the results are in: “while embalmers and ships’ engineers are in less danger, translators and historians are stuffed”.

I report to you from the belly of the beast: for the last several years working as a freelance translator, the subject of every discussion over dinner, industry event, and phone call with the grandparents has been the inevitable death of my sector thanks to “this new AI thing”.

There have been a great number of articles written about how feasible this truly is. Literary translator Daniel Hahn has a useful [article](#) exploring all the questions a translator has to address that a chatbot can’t. Does it matter that these characters were using a different form of address 16 pages ago and have changed now? Is the way this sentence uses grammatical gender in French, which English has no equivalent for, significant here? ChatGPT has no idea, but every translator I know does.

Automated translation has improved enormously in recent decades, and doubtless AI can improve it more. But paid translation (for legal documents, for literature, for scientific texts...) has always required more than automated renditions. Human translators can certainly use new AI-based translation tools, but they are just that — tools, which need to be used by a human, ideally a human who has been trained in how to use them. You wouldn’t hire a hammer to build your shed.

This is not to say that publishers and employers, seeing the potential cost saving of using a £200 application rather than employing a freelancer like me for thousands, won’t go for the hammer. The website [GlobeScribe.ai](#) has been launched, offering translations of novels at a fraction of the price (and quality) of a human translation. Many translators, including of sensitive and highly nuanced work, are [finding](#) their clients offer them “Machine Translation Post-Editing”, or MTPE — getting a machine to do the actual translating, then asking a translator to edit that translation for a fraction of the rate of pay. Many translators (including myself) are simply leaving the industry due to lack of income, or relying on translation only for a minimal part of

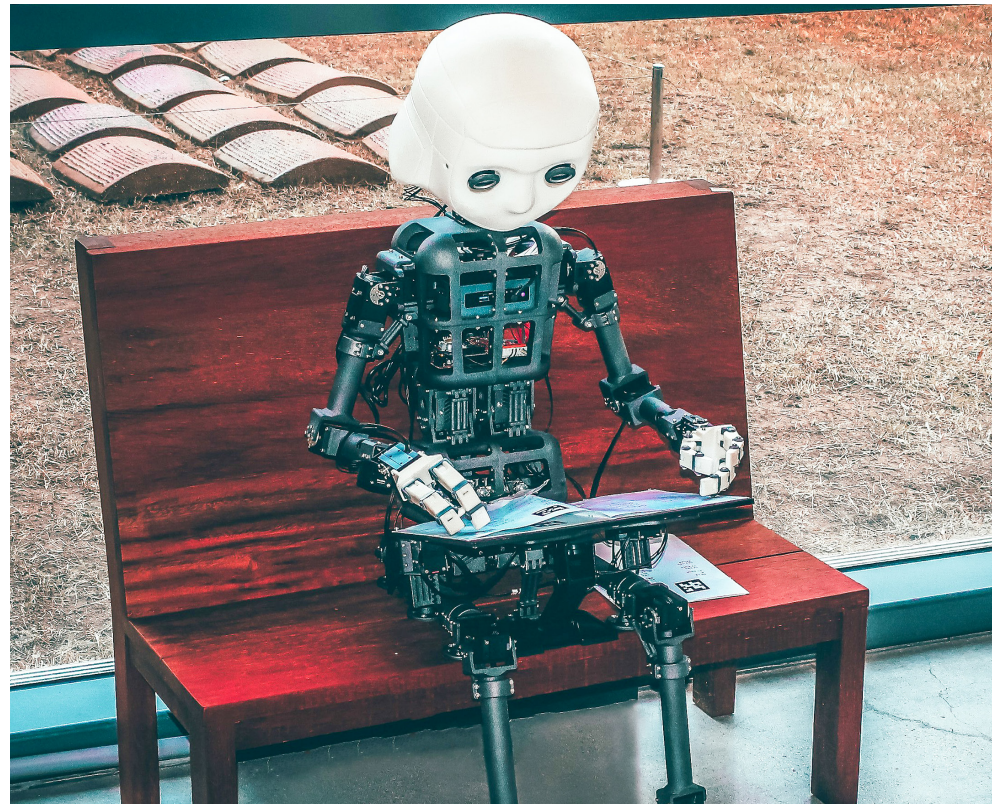
their income. For those that do choose to stay, a separate fight against AI impacts is on their hands: as explained in *Solidarity* [754](#), Large Language Models are trained on an extraordinarily large quantity of text that has been scraped from the internet. Recent court [documents](#) reveal that, at least in the case of MetaAI, this included the full database of LibGen, a book pirating website that stores enormous quantities of copyrighted material. This means that, when you ask MetaAI to write you a paragraph in the style of Elena Ferrante, it will generate a response using the copyrighted language choices of Ann Goldstein, Ferrante’s translator. The Society of Authors has been [consulting](#) its members and [lobbying](#) around AI training data and copyright, in line with a government proposal to amend copyright law, allowing AI companies to use copyrighted material unless the copyright holders “opt out” – a first in copyright law, which has previously always operated “by permission”. As socialists, we can have a range of opinions on the role copyright plays in either current or future society – personally, I’m open to the idea of abolishing it. However, many people currently working in creative industries rely on the income from royalties to pay their bills, and the current proposed changes to copyright law are a naked attempt to bend the laws in order to justify mass theft by Silicon Valley companies post-hoc.

Archives

I’m not an archivist, so can give a far less detailed summary of that industry, but articles online [suggest](#) a similar story: the job that AI can do is not “the same job”, it is a poor, but less costly, copy. In a tightening economic market, that will seem a feasible option for more and more employers, at least for the time being.

There are many areas where automation has already speeded work, but the result is that more work is done, differently. An example: lawyers and paralegals used to search hard-copy libraries for rules and precedents. Now they search online databases. The result so far: more legal documents, more lawyers, more paralegals, only working differently. Will AI change this pattern? Quite likely not.

It was a nice moment of relief to see another sector put into the limelight earlier this year: in March, Starmer announced plans to use AI to save £45 billion in the civil service, by having AI replace civil servants’ work “where it can be done to the same standard”. According to our glorious leader, “no person’s substantive time should be spent on a task where digital or AI can do it better, quicker, and to the same high quality



and standard.”

Whether lots of whole jobs can, in fact, be done to the same standard, rather than AI being used as an ancillary, is very much a live question – the civil service is an enormous sector covering a vast array of different jobs, and as I said last week, one of the benefits of employing humans is their ability to change or adapt the labour they’re doing as circumstances change. But with the optimism it’s known for, Labour is ploughing ahead with the proposal, with Rachel Reeves announcing that they’re aiming for [10,000 jobs](#) to be cut by the end of this parliament. An FOI by Politico revealed that the government estimates around 60% of the work done by lower grades of civil servants could be automated, and a flat 0% of the work done by higher-ups in the civil service — go figure. No specific information about which jobs are planned to be cut has been made available, and little has come out about the plan since its announce-

ment in March. In all likelihood, this is because the rollout for implementing AI across an enormous sector will require months, if not years, of testing, trialling and passing policy. If ministers are to rely on an AI tool to make decisions, that will need a rigorous set of safeguards and checks (most of which will need to be done by humans) to make sure that it doesn’t lead to basic errors in day-to-day work.

As with most Labour announcements about savings, the likelihood will be that the amount of money saved will be smaller, and the end result in service provided worse. That said, automation certainly has had a significant impact on civil service jobs in the last few decades — almost no jobs still exist on the lowest civil servant pay grade. AI will, in time, come for more of these jobs, and the civil service unions, most prominently the PCS, will have a leading role to play in fighting the proposed cuts once they take a more concrete form. □

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- Black Lives Matter
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- The struggle for LGBTIQ rights in the labour movement
- An introduction to Marx’s Capital, in 19 parts, with Martin Thomas
- Tubeworker/Off The Rails, videos by the producers of the bulletins □

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Magnus Hirschfeld, LGBT pioneer

Modern political agitation for gay, lesbian, and transgender rights started in the late 19th century with German socialists.

By Peter Tatchell

Over 100 years ago, the gay German sexologist Dr Magnus Hirschfeld pioneered the understanding of human sexuality and the advocacy of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) human rights at a time when it was deeply unpopular to do so. That took immense courage — and determination. He was battling against the ignorance and prejudice of centuries.

While Oscar Wilde was being tormented in Reading Gaol, Hirschfeld launched the world's first gay rights organisation in Berlin. Whereas Wilde merely lamented the persecution of LGBTI people, Hirschfeld organised to fight it.

His Scientific Humanitarian Committee, founded in Germany in 1897, trailblazed the struggle for homosexual emancipation. A similar movement did not emerge in Britain until the 1960s, over half a century later. He truly was a man ahead of his time.

Hirschfeld was born into a conservative Jewish family in what was then Prussia in 1868. During his childhood he developed a curiosity and fascination with sex. Against the conventions of his era and the moralism of his elders, even as a young boy he viewed sexuality as something entirely natural and wholesome.

At medical school, he was traumatised by a lecture on “sexual degeneracy”, where a gay man — who had been incarcerated in an asylum for 30 years because of his homosexuality — was paraded naked before the students like a laboratory animal. Hirschfeld was the only student revolted by such mistreatment. All the others, even his best friend, viewed it as normal and justified.

Further trauma ensued when, soon after setting up himself as a doctor in Berlin in 1893, he was waylaid outside his apartment at night by a soldier who was deeply disturbed by his homosexuality. Hirschfeld resisted the soldier's pleading for a consultation there and then, telling him to come to his surgery the next day. Overnight, however, the soldier committed suicide.

Hirschfeld's terrible guilt and remorse motivated him to begin studying homosexuality and, eventually, to write a pamphlet calling for the decriminalisation of gay sex, which was then outlawed under Paragraph 175 of the German penal code [not fully repealed until 1994].

When his family advised him to study something more worthy and respectable like cholera, arguing that research into homosexuality will not bring him any acclaim or joy, Hirschfeld riposted: “What are you saying: that cholera brings you



more joy than sexuality?”

As his pro-gay reputation spread, more and more men who were unhappy with their homosexuality came to him as patients. Hirschfeld's prescription? Lots of gay parties and plenty of boyfriends!

One of Hirschfeld's biggest problems was hostility from other gays and lesbians. They mostly accepted their second-class legal status. Many did not like him rocking the boat. He was seen as a trouble-maker. They refused to co-operate with his sex surveys and law reform campaigns.

Realising that his lone efforts were not enough, in 1897 Hirschfeld founded the Scientific Humanitarian Committee (SHC). Its strategy was to promote research and education on all sexual matters; in particular to debunk homophobic prejudice and to present a rational case for the decriminalisation of homosexuality.

Demanding

The 1890s equivalent of the UK gay lobby group Stonewall, the SHC's motto was: “Justice through science”. Some of its more radical supporters adapted the battle cry of the French Revolution, demanding: “Liberté, Fraternité, Egalité, Homosexualité!”

As well as having to contend with the complacency and disparagement of other gay people, Hirschfeld was also attacked from left by militant Out-Rage!-style campaigners led by Adolf Brand. Advocating direct action and the outing of homophobes, Brand denounced Hirschfeld's “queeny committee” as a talking shop of respectable, middle-class homosexuals.

Much as I admire Brand's defiant, assertive gay activism, his criticism of the SHC was a bit unfair. In those ignorant, bigoted days, to have a group like Stonewall was truly radical — almost revolutionary. This is confirmed by the way the SHC and Hirschfeld were put under police surveillance as subversives and subjected to repeated harassment.

Thanks to Hirschfeld's tireless campaigns, in 1898 the German parliament debated the repeal of Paragraph 175. Leading the call for its abolition was August Bebel, head of the left-wing Social Democrats (Hirschfeld was also a prominent member of the SPD). Although defeated, the debate put homosexual equality onto the mainstream political agenda for the first time.

Undeterred by this setback, Hirschfeld

decided to tackle the police, in a bid to stop them enforcing the unjust anti-gay laws. He took the police commissioner of Berlin on a tour of gay bars and clubs. Instead of the dens of debauchery that he was expecting, the commissioner found that LGBTI people were witty, stylish, polite and well behaved — and he enjoyed their company. “I wanted to see Sodom and Gomorrah,” he complained somewhat disappointedly.

To strengthen the rational, scientific case for law reform, Hirschfeld proceeded with his medical research into the causes and nature of homosexuality, in the hope that understanding the facts would discourage prejudice and promote acceptance.

Far in advance of others, he concluded that everyone is a mixture of male and female. But this perceptive true analysis led him to erroneously advance the idea that lesbian and gay people were an “intermediate sex” that was biologically predetermined at birth. In his view, male homosexuals possessed a “woman's soul trapped in a man's body.”

This well-intentioned misjudgement aside, Hirschfeld was right on most other things. He can and should be forgiven.

As well as his concern for the welfare of homosexuals, he was also a strong advocate of the rights of transgender people — again, decades ahead of his time. Good fortune shone on Hirschfeld when he was paid a fabulous sum to perform one of the world's first gender reassignment operations. The payment enabled him to establish the Institute for Sexual Science (ISS) in 1919, which predated Dr Alfred Kinsey's US sex research institute by nearly three decades.

As well as its research role, the Institute promoted sex education, contraception, marriage guidance counselling, advice for gay and transgender people, the treatment and prevention of sexually-transmitted diseases, gay law reform and women's rights. It saw over 20,000 people a year.

These were novel ideas at the time, and Hirschfeld's fame and notoriety spread worldwide. When told that the American newspapers were hailing him as “the Einstein of sex”, he wittily replied that he would feel much happier if they called Einstein “the Hirschfeld of physics.”

But his work brought him into conflict with the Nazis. They ranted against his “perversions” — attacking his public meetings and beating up him and his lover and assistant Karl Giese.

While he was away in the US lecturing in 1933, Nazi stormtroopers attacked and ransacked the Institute for Sexual Science, destroying its priceless research archives. The vast library was burned in the great bonfire of “enemy books.” The newsreel footage of these burning books features in almost every



documentary about the Nazis and in all the main history books. But it is rarely acknowledged that it was Hirschfeld's sexological institute and the headquarters of his German gay rights movement that were the main targets and victims of the stormtroopers' wrath.

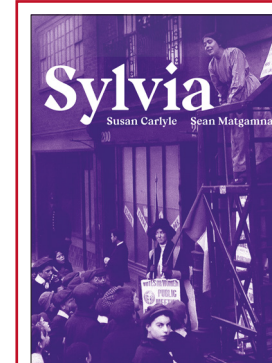
The Nazis also seized the Institute's huge list of client's names and addresses. These were used by the Gestapo to compile their notorious “pink lists”, which identified homosexuals and led to their arrest and deportation to the concentration camps.

With the Nazis publicly denouncing Hirschfeld as one of the country's leading “Jewish criminals,” which was effectively a death sentence, friends advised him not to return to Germany. He went to the south of France instead, where he died suddenly of a stroke in 1935. His partner and fellow researcher and campaigner, Karl Giese, committed suicide in 1938, while on the run from the Nazis. Both died sad, lonely deaths; unbefitting their enormous humanitarian contributions.

It took many decades for Hirschfeld's life and work to be properly documented and for him to receive the social acclaim he so richly deserved.

His extraordinary endeavours are thankfully now well documented... his political campaigns, sexual research and the myriad ups and down of his own less than joyful personal life. As with so many other human rights campaigners, Hirschfeld often sacrificed his own happiness and comfort for the love and welfare of others. A true pioneer and hero of the struggle for sexual human rights and queer emancipation! □

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The story of Sylvia Pankhurst including her working-class organising in the East End of London. £4 (inc. post) □ bit.ly/shop-wl



The First and Second Internationals

By Rayner Lysaght

Abridged from a pamphlet, "The First Three Socialist Internationals", published in 1989. Though idiosyncratic in its slant on some points, this tells the story of the three large-scale efforts so far to make socialism an organised international movement.

Even before the founding of the official First International (The International Workingmen's Association) in 1864, three attempts were made to form an International Alliance of workers against their common oppressors. Two of these were based in Britain, one in Germany and France. The British attempts were those of the earliest of modern working classes, created by the original Workshop of the World. Its length in history of Socialist theory was equalled only by that of France, which it surpassed in numbers and technical development. This British pre-eminence would soon reveal its drawbacks. As yet, it was a positive factor.

In 1845 the British Chartist (democratic working class) leader, George-Julian Harney (1817-1897), founded a Society of Fraternal Democrats, Chartists and foreign political refugees. It never developed outside Britain and disappeared with the Chartist movement itself after 1848. Shortly after its foundation, the Communist League began in France — a working-class movement which, though weak, had had its consciousness stimulated by its democratic revolution — and in Germany, where such a revolution had yet to occur and where the bourgeoisie would not be able or willing to lead the country's still tiny working class to achieve it.

Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820-1895) were leading theoreticians of the Communist League, writing its Manifesto in the revolutionary year of 1848. After that year's defeats the League declined, under the pressure of European reaction. In 1852 it was liquidated by Marx and Engels to save comrades imprisoned in the German State of Prussia.

During the 1850s, the British skilled workers built up their industrial strength in a series of "new model" trade unions, which were to survive as such bodies had not done before. This encouraged the ex-Chartist Ernest Jones (1819-1869), to start a third International Association, named thus, in 1855. Marx was invited to join but refused because it included (already) among its leaders the Russian Liberal refugee Alexander Herzen (1812-1870), who was making his peace with the new Tsar. The Association lasted four years before it collapsed.

The traditions set by these three bodies were strengthened by events after 1860. Not only had British trade unionism grown but the French workers were



also active and were even helped, for a time, by the Government of what was then the Second Empire, against the Republican capitalists. This misalliance did not last long, but resulted in a delegation of French workers visiting the British World Exhibition of 1862. There the more radical of them met their British comrades and agreed to work jointly on matters of common interest. On their return home they sponsored election candidates and agitated for the repeal of the anti-trade union laws, which were reformed partially in May 1864. In what was then merely the German Confederation, in 1863 a mass agitation to form a working class political party was started by Ferdinand Lassalle (1825-1864). Lassalle claimed to be a follower of Marx yet he kept his belief in an "Iron Law" by which real wages could not rise under capitalism, which Marx had renounced. He was also opposed to the emancipation of women.

Consciousness was raised too by several international democratic struggles: by the War of Italian Unity (Risorgimento) from 1859; the American Civil War from 1861; and what was, in fact, the most effective of these as a catalyst for Anglo-French working-class unity, the Polish Uprising of 1863.

The First International

Just after Lassalle's murder, on 28 September 1864, a meeting of representatives of English, French and German workers was held in London. It resolved to set up a Committee to form a new International Workingmen's Association (IWMA). Twenty-five out of forty-nine seats on this Committee were occupied by British representatives, mainly from the skilled unions. Karl Marx was just one of six who represented the German workers. However, he wrote the new International's Inaugural Address and its Rules.

The IWMA was, in practice, a European body (albeit with branches in the USA and, eventually, Australia). In 1871 an attempt to start an Indian section was agreed on the understanding that it be open to native Indians, but it never prospered. In fact, both Marx and Engels insisted on limiting the new International's scope to "countries in which modern capitalism exists", as the Rules put it, and emphasised the role of the "most advanced countries" in the struggle. Their reason was that large areas of the world were still pre-eminently tribal, Asiatic, or even, as with Cuba and Brazil, dominated by slave economies. Few of these had a proletariat in the modern sense.

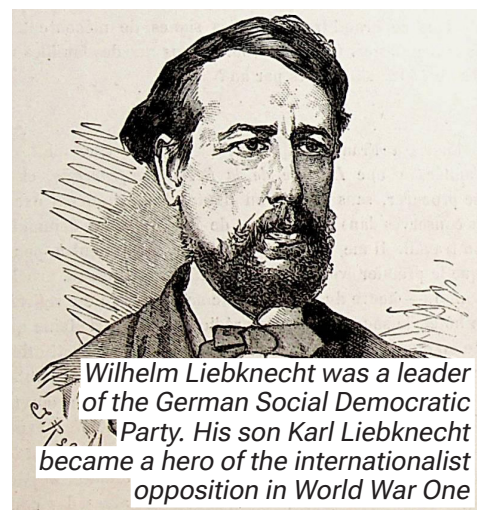
The new International had more immediate problems. The largest national working-class political organisation was that of the German followers of Lassalle, organised around the paper Sozialdemokrat. Their new leader, Johann von Schweitzer (1833-1875), declared that they were in full solidarity with the IWMA, but asked to remain only as an associate member due to the laws of Prussia, the largest German State. Though this was later to be agreed in this and other cases, the International rejected this proposal, with Marx and Engels in full agreement. They had always considered Lassalle's perspective too much limited to Germany and they may have suspected what has been established since: that Lassalleism was helped on its way by a Prussian State bribe. The International's German Section remained limited to Marx and his small group of German followers, led by Wilhelm Liebknecht (1826-1901).

Within the International too, the Marxists were in a minority. To their right was the largest group: the British craft union leaders, whose initiative had started it. Their perspective was limited to the need for democratic rights, particularly for their unions which were still handicapped by Combination Acts, and for the vote for all heads of household in general elections. Beyond these demands they would be content to conform to the British Liberal Party but, as they had yet to be won, they stayed loyal to the International and practically militant. To Marx's left were the groupings dominating French socialism: the Proudhonists and the Blanquists. The former were followers of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865), who is best known as the pamphleteer who exposed the moral and legal illegitimacy of private property titles. He advocated a system of communally-based craft economics rather than the new factories. The Proudhonists agreed with the Lassalleans about the uselessness of trade union action and in their opposition to women's rights. They also opposed claims for national self-determination (particularly the Poles).

The followers of Louis-Auguste Blanqui (1805-1881) were formally more extreme since they advocated that the working-class leadership be organised



Blanqui



Wilhelm Liebknecht was a leader of the German Social Democratic Party. His son Karl Liebknecht became a hero of the internationalist opposition in World War One

as a secret society to seize State power by a coup. When no coup was obviously possible, however, they were ready enough to accept Marx's lead.

Their support and that of the British trade union leaders — who recognised his ability to relate to the situation's practical needs — enabled Marx to give the IWMA guidelines to make it relevant to the Socialist and democratic struggles of the time. Though it was only being formed at the end of the American Civil War, it sent a goodwill message to Abraham Lincoln on his reinauguration and received a very friendly reply from the first President of what has become the party of Nixon, Reagan and Bush. Partly to radicalise the British, an overture was made to the head centre of the Fenian Brotherhood, James Stephens (1826-1901) but though he is said to have agreed to join, nothing seems to have developed beyond this apart from the International's defence of his movement against its repression by the British State.

The IWMA was more immediately effective in other democratic and trade union campaigns. In the first, it was most successful in Britain, its campaign bringing about urban household suffrage in 1867. For the latter, it did not initiate so much as support the trade union struggle that developed over Europe and America. By 1869, even the Proudhonists had been involved in these struggles. Regularly defeated in the International on issues in which their principles proved irrelevant, they were disintegrating. The Lassalleans too were forced to recognise that trade unionism had its uses. However, their intervention in them was handicapped by excessive political control, particularly the dogma of the Iron Law of Wages. Weaker vis-à-vis the International, they voted to affiliate in 1868.

The Basle Congress

The next year, the IWMA reached its highest point at its Congress at Basle. Its previous assembly had demanded workers' control of production and resources and the nationalisation of transport and communications. Now it called for the

nationalisation of the land. However, it also saw the first appearance of a Russian delegate, Mikhail Ivanovich Bakunin (1814-1876). Against Marx, he passed a proposal to abolish the rights of

inheritance, which he claimed would win the peasantry to Socialism. His contributions challenged Marx from all points. He intensified Proudhon's hostility to the State and to religion and his mistrust of trade unionism. He developed Blanqui's concept of the coup into counterposing to the working-class party a small international society ready to organise acts of "propaganda by deed". Even the British were wooed through Bakunin's opposition to the International's support for the Fenians and his demand for a Federal Committee, independent of the International's General Council, to run the British struggle. For all this, other than on inheritance, Bakunin won support immediately. In the eighteen months after Basle, his supporters' chief achievement was to split the International's affiliated Franco-Italian-Swiss Federation.

The IWMA's chief problems were still those set by its class enemies. Basle was followed by a general intensifying of class war. In Britain, the Liberal reluctance to run working-class candidates was answered by the forming of a Land and Labour League as a distinct independent working-class political body. In Germany, the Liberals who had sought to ally with the Marxists ended their approaches. In France, the Imperial Government raided the International's bureau.

However, these problems were reduced by the French defeat the following year in the Franco-Prussian War. Not only did the French Empire fall as a result, but most of Germany was united as an Empire under the Prussian hegemony. This encouraged further Socialist unity between the Marxists under the anti-Prussian Liebknecht and August Bebel (1840-1913) and the pro-Prussian Lassalleans, all of whom could oppose the new capitalist order and its first repressive move — the imprisonment of the Marxists for opposing the new Empire's seizure of Alsace-Lorraine. In France, the new regime's attempt to hold back too radical a change had the immediate result of provoking the Paris Commune, was influenced less by Marx than by the communal perspectives of Proudhon and the insurrectionism of Blanqui, the followers of both of whom dominated its government. Nonetheless, Marx drafted the IWMA's statement of unconditional support for the Commune as a working-class state in insurrection against the state of the capitalists.

Disintegration

The Commune's defeat intensified the pressures weakening the International. Their identification was used to justify new repression of working-class bodies in France, Spain and Germany. The IWMA was not strong enough to weather the storm. Its more right-wing British trade union leaders had achieved their aims as

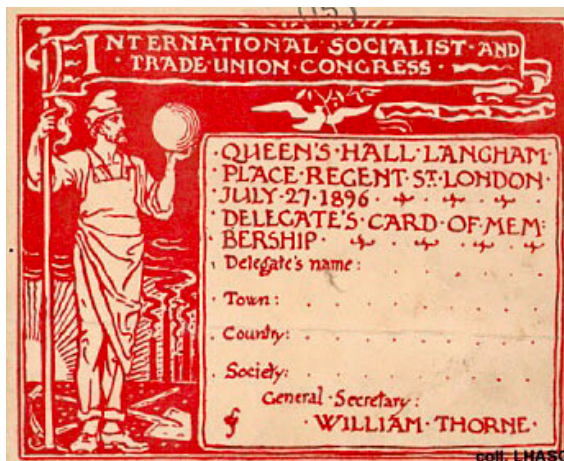
regards the franchise, expected to get freedom for their unions and were, in any case, annoyed with Marx because he supported both a successful rank-and-file movement for a nine hour day and the Commune. His support for the latter gave them an excuse for resigning. In Germany the growing unity of the Socialists, both Marxist and Lassallean, was stimulated by the persecution of the new Empire but this also gave both groups the excuse to distance themselves from an International body that compromised them more than it helped them. At the same time the Commune's rising and its suppression by the new French Republican State encouraged illusions in the local communalist hostility to all (save, in effect, localised) state power: the illusions of Bakunin's followers, the Anarchists. Marx's support for the insurrection could not be related accurately to his belief in working for political reform. The Anarchists grew in number to dominate the International's sections in Switzerland, Spain, the Netherlands, Belgium and Italy; in France itself the Blanquists remained dominant.

The IWMA tried to remain united. At its London Congress in September 1871, it promised to investigate many of the issues raised by the Anarchists. The remaining British members were allowed their own Federal Committee, though a separate Irish section with its own place on the General Council was formed at the same time. The attempt failed: mutual ill-feeling increased as European capitalism's attacks increased. Marx and Engels blamed the Lassalleans as well as the Anarchists for disrupting the IWMA.

This merely caused their German followers to react towards national unity and against internationalism. However, the Anarchists themselves were divided; the Italians broke with the IWMA before the next Congress. There, at the Hague, their comrades were expelled. The Blanquists were alienated by the decision to move the International Centre to New York. Finally, the remaining British leaders, who objected to Ireland's independent section, attacked Marx when he reasserted the principle of independent working-class political action against class collaboration. They left the International to block with the Anarchists, whose objections were to political action as such. From 1873 world slump weakened the working-class and hence the IWMA. It liquidated at Philadelphia in 1876. The Anarchist breakaway survived it by a year. Harried by capitalist economics and politics, particularly in Germany, the labour movements retreated tactically to concentrate on immediate matters.

The Second International

Attempts were made to revive the IWMA. In 1878 an international bureau was founded after a Congress at Ghent but it only resulted in a new Congress in 1881, after which it expired. More significant were efforts made by groups of French



Reformist Socialists [Possibilists], from backgrounds unconnected to the IWMA, to start an International based on the trade unions. Between 1883 and 1889 they called four World (in fact, again, European and American) Congresses to discuss the demand for an eight-hour working day. Stimulated partly by this and partly by opposition to these Congresses' refusal to admit political parties, the French Marxists counterposed to the 1889 event an International Congress in Paris. It founded a Labour and Socialist International: the Second International.

It was able to do so partly because the world's Labour and Socialist movement had grown stronger since 1876. Recognisable Marxist parties or groups existed in most West and Central European countries (though not, yet, in Ireland) and in the USA and Argentina. In Britain the skilled workers unions with their reformist leaders were being matched, at last, by more radical organisations of the unskilled. In the German Empire in 1890 the Socialist Party won 1,650,000 votes.

Though the numbers of Socialists had increased, the divisions between them had been rationalised. The chief ideological division in the new International was now clearly between Marxism and Anarchism. Though there were different degrees of enthusiasm in approaches to the programmes of each, this was as yet an academic question when so much of either programme had to be won. Outside the International there was a third current, equivalent to that of the British skilled unionists in the IWMA, though distinguished from them by its commitment to independent working-class political organisation. Closer to Marxism than to Anarchism, it rejected much of what it regarded as the political dogma of each, committing itself only to lead the workers to improve their lot. They often accepted Marxist economics, but so did many Anarchists. Their chief stronghold was not Britain where, in 1889, there was still little mass support for any Socialist organisation, but France. There the Possibilists held more parliamentary seats than the Impossibleist Marxists. Of the other currents in the IWMA, Lassalleans and Proudhonists had their traditions remain an influence within the mainstreams, particularly German and American Marxism (Lassalleanism) and Anarchism (Proudhonism — but unadulterated Proudhonism would be revived as an inspiration for French proto-Fascism, which could accept a Socialism

opposed to trade unions and women's rights). Blanquism survived as a distinct current in French Socialism but, weary of preparing for a re-run of the Paris Commune, its members found themselves dividing increasingly on Possibilist-Impossible lines.

What had not changed was Socialism's Eurocentrism. During the Second International's quarter-century of life, only three Afro-Asian countries had their workers represented at its Congresses. These were the white proletariat of South Africa, the new industrial proletariat of Japan and, at the end, the workers of Armenia. This fact was not because the other Afro-Asian countries lacked modernity: though less advanced than Japan, they were developing. Increasingly, Eurocentricity reflected a general political problem in the Second International.

In its early years it looked as if the new body's major crisis would be repeat of that which had hastened the collapse of the IWMA. Marxists and Anarchists fought a battle for control. This was expressed on the programmatic issue of "political action": recognition of the State so that the organised workers could seize its power. Against this Marxist idea, the Anarchists posed the view that any State was bound to be the workers' enemy so their class could only be the loser by having dealings with it. At the new International's Third Congress at Zurich in 1893, the Marxists had a motion passed limiting affiliation to organisations that accepted political action. This was reaffirmed at the Fourth Congress, in London in 1896. From then on, the Anarchists were outside the Second International. Their exclusion came at the same time another development moved the organisation further to the right. □

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Marx on debt and finance

Karl Marx opened *Capital* volume one with the words: "The wealth of those societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails, presents itself as 'an immense accumulation of commodities', its unit being a single commodity".

But Marx himself was aware that this is only a first approximation, and, as things have developed, the wealth of the wealthy is more and more not just houses, yachts, private jets, cars, etc., but paper wealth, shares, bonds, and other financial assets which are in essence "tickets" to future surplus-value. A sizeable part of it is government bonds, paper wealth giving title to interest payments from the state, now running at over £100 billion a year in the UK. In *Capital* volume 3, Marx wrote (our notes in italics):

In so far as we have hitherto considered the peculiar form of accumulation of money-capital and of money wealth in general, it has resolved itself into an accumulation of claims of ownership upon labour. The accumulation of the capital of the national debt has been revealed to mean merely an increase in a class of state creditors, who have the privilege of a firm claim upon a certain portion of the tax revenue.

By means of these facts, whereby even an accumulation of debts may appear as an accumulation of capital, the height of distortion taking place in the credit system becomes apparent. These promissory notes, which are issued for the originally loaned capital long since spent, these paper duplicates of consumed capital, serve for their owners as capital to the extent that they are saleable commodities and may, therefore, be reconverted into capital.

Titles of ownership to public works, railways, mines, etc., are indeed, as we have also seen, titles to real capital. But they do not place this capital at one's disposal. It is not subject to withdrawal. They merely convey legal claims to a portion of the surplus-value to be produced by it. But these titles likewise become paper duplicates of the real capital; it is as though a bill of lading were to acquire a value separate from the cargo, both concomitantly and simultaneously with it. They come to nominally represent non-existent capital. For the real capital exists side by side with them and does not change hands as a result of the transfer of these duplicates from one person to another.

They assume the form of interest-bearing capital, not only because they guarantee a certain income, but also because, through their sale, their repayment as capital-values can be obtained. To the extent that the accumulation of this paper expresses the accumulation



of railways, mines, steamships, etc., to that extent does it express the extension of the actual reproduction process — just as the extension of, for example, a tax list on movable property indicates the expansion of this property. But as duplicates which are themselves objects of transactions as commodities, and thus able to circulate as capital-values, they are illusory, and their value may fall or rise quite independently of the movement of value of the real capital for which they are titles.

Their value, that is, their quotation on the Stock Exchange, necessarily has a tendency to rise with a fall in the rate of interest — in so far as this fall, independent of the characteristic movements of money-capital, is due merely to the tendency for the rate of profit to fall. [Marx, like almost all other economists of his day, believed that the general ratio of surplus-value to capital-stock would fall over time. Interest rates did drift down in the 19th century, but generally are not lower than in Marx's day, and in some recent periods have been higher.] Therefore, this imaginary wealth expands...

Gain and loss through fluctuations in the price of these titles of ownership, and their centralisation in the hands of railway kings, etc., become, by their very nature, more and more a matter of gamble, which appears to take the place of labour as the original method of acquiring capital wealth and also replaces naked force. This type of imaginary money wealth not only constitutes a very considerable part of the money wealth of private people, but also of banker's capital, as we have already indicated...

As the financial system develops, and becomes more convoluted, the accumulation of loanable money capital — though fundamentally it is an offshoot of real accumulation — tends to increase disproportionately.

Money is by no means just an intermediary in transactions over real goods and services. At any time they are large pools of money in the hands of the capitalist class, stashed in banks; and much of that money is used in transactions over

titles to future surplus-value, not in current real transactions.

Elsewhere Marx explains: "There must be a continuous plethora of money-capital in definite phases of the cycle and this plethora must develop with the expansion of credit".

Bankers, and other financiers, thus become central. "The control over this capital falls completely into the hands of the banker in his capacity as middleman... The banker appears in the role of a supreme benefactor".

Marx suggests that the "financialisation" often described as developing since the late 1970s is the default organic tendency of capital. The question for economic history then becomes how and why "financialisation" was suppressed between the 1930s and the 1970s.

The "plethora of money capital" is normal, but also drives towards crisis. "Simultaneously with it, the necessity of driving the production process beyond its capitalistic limits must also develop: overtrade, overproduction, and excessive credit".

Marx hints towards the sort of analysis of capitalist finance later sketched by Hyman Minsky. According to Minsky, in capitalist prosperity an increasing proportion of units in the financial markets shift from "hedge" to "speculative"

to "ponzi" positions. A "hedge" unit can cover interest and principal payments due from current cash flows. A "speculative" can cover interest payments from cash flow, but depends on new borrowing to repay principal. A "ponzi" unit depends on an increasing value of the financial paper it has borrowed even to cover its interest payments. Eventually there are so many "ponzi" units that the expansion of credit implodes.

As finance expands, the rich gain control of others' savings and profit from them. It is the workers and poor who really scrimp and save, but often lose their savings. "The last illusion of the capitalist system, that capital is the fruit of one's own labour and savings, is thereby destroyed."

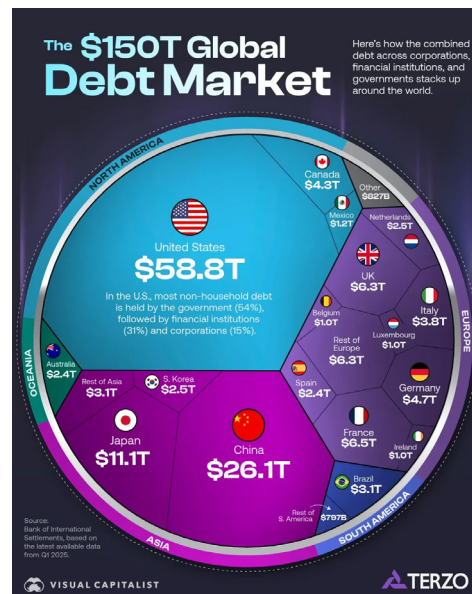
The financiers cluster. "Great concentrated money-markets are created, such as London, which are at the same time the main seats of trade in this paper. The bankers place huge quantities of the public's money-capital at the disposal of this unsavoury crowd of dealers, and thus this brood of gamblers multiplies".

Marx describes bank deposits as "claims to money" as distinct from money. "Prima facie loan capital always exists in the form of money, later as a claim to money, since the money in which it originally exists is now in the hands of the borrower in actual money-form. For the lender it has been transformed into a claim to money, into a title of ownership".

Modern monetary statistics consider the "monetary base" to include only notes and coin outside the central bank plus commercial banks' deposits with the central bank. They track "broader money" as a more significant indicator of liquidity in the economy, and always include demand-deposits in that "broader money" measure; but usages differ from country to country in how much beyond demand-deposits is included in "broader money".

The mention of "claims to money" points to the need to clarify the dividing lines along the spectrum from money to "near-money" to less reliable financial paper. (In a sense every commodity, and every piece of financial paper, is a "claim to money". The term "near-money", which is a loose one, apparently dates only from 1942).

But Marx considers the hegemony of finance to be organic: "The value of commodities is sacrificed for the purpose of safeguarding the fantastic and independent existence of this value in money... For a few millions in money, many millions in commodities must therefore be sacrificed. This is inevitable under capitalist production and constitutes one of its beauties". □



Why a 6.8% pay rise is only modest

By Chris Reynolds

The “Real Living Wage”, calculated by one sort-of-Blairite think-tank, the Resolution Foundation, for another, the Living Wage Foundation, went up on 22 October by 6.8%.

Its calculators reckon that is the minimum rise necessary for lower-paid workers to keep up with price rises over the past year.

The new rates are £14.80 per hour in London and £13.45 outside for everyone over 18. The legal Minimum Wage (also called Living Wage) is £12.21 per hour. It is expected to go up 4.1% to £12.71 in April 2026. It covers those 21 and over, with a lower rate for younger workers.

There has always been a gap between the “Real Living Wage” (calculated since 2011) and the legal Minimum Wage (since 1999), though the gap has trended smaller over recent years.

6.8% rise! Even Tube workers, industrially strong, are accepting 3.4%. In August 2025 the average wage rise since August 2024 was reported as 6% in the public sector and 4.4% in the private sector. Maybe the sort-of-Blairite calculators are overdoing it?

In fact, if you read their small print, the calculators arrived at 6.8% only because they said in advance that the “Real Living Wage” (RLW) increase in any year can be no more than CPI (Consumer Price Index) plus 3% (and no less, they say, than CPI minus 3%, though it is hard to see how that limit would ever kick in).

Why? To avoid excessive short-term shifts, they say.

CPI increased 3.8% between September 2024 and September 2025, so the RLW rise could be no more than 6.8%. The detailed calculations (so the report says) indicated a higher rise (they don’t say how much higher), but became irrelevant once they indicated more than 6.8%. They explain, though. Water bills, gas, electricity, and rent, which account for more of lower-paid’s spending than of better-paid’s, have risen much more than 3.8%. Food prices have risen above average, too.

The calculators have dropped their previous (implausible) assumption that all single parents and second-earners in households with children work full-time, and slightly upgraded the “Minimum Income Standard” basket of essentials. (Socialistic nonsense? Think. Would a “basket” from 1970, which would not include a phone or a microwave, still be good today?)

Factor

Another factor pushing up RLW is frozen tax thresholds. More low-paid workers pay income tax. The two-child benefit cap hits more households year after year, because it applies only to children born after 2017, so each year a bigger proportion of families with more than two children fall victim to it.

Other prices have risen less than water, rent, etc., so, yes, better-off

workers may be able to keep their living standards with less than a 6.8% rise. But over recent years, more and more workers, especially young workers, have become clustered near the Minimum Wage or RLW level. In the civil service and local government, swathes of pay-grading have been compressed into single rates by Minimum Wage rises pushing up the floor.

Another factor does not come into the RLW calculations, but remains important for workers considering wage claims.

The figures are usually quoted in the style of “CPI inflation was 3.8% in September 2025”. But that figure of 3.8% does not tell us what happened to prices *in September*. It tells us what happened to prices *over the 12 months* between September 2024 and Sep 2025.

There are good reasons for the statisticians reporting that way. Prices bounce around short-term, so one month’s figures can mislead. But reading 3.8% as “the inflation rate now” misleads, too. CPI has risen more sharply since January 2025 than in 2024. Even though September’s price index turned out, unexpectedly, flat, the same as August’s, the rate of price rises *this year so far* is 4.4%. CPI, as the RLW calculators show, also underestimates inflation for the low-paid, and not just now: there is a long-term, though not invariable, trend for many (not all) basic items to rise in price faster than say laptop computers, or air fares.



RPI (the Retail Price Index) is genuinely more faulty than CPI in technical times. But it usually comes out a bit higher than CPI, so unions sometimes use it as a rough-and-ready measure of a price index geared to working-class rather all-classes-average consumption. This year so far RPI has risen at an average of 5.6% p.a., closer to the “RLW index” value of 6.8%.

A world economic recession, and worse conditions for winning pay rises, is a serious possibility for 2026. That may mean lower inflation, though not necessarily. But it would be foolish for any workers to accept a low pay rise this year with the thought that 2026 will bring better conditions to win gains.

The RLW’s 6.8% is a minimum baseline for what is required to keep workers, or lower-paid workers at least, ahead of the rising waters of inflation. □

Three bubbles show risk of recession

By Rhodri Evans

The US capitalist economy, and in serious part, the world economy, currently depends on three bubbles: AI, crypto-currency, and various forms of “shadow banking”.

Big IT companies developing AI software or specialised semiconductors for AI, and builders of data-centres as infrastructure for AI, are booming in the USA as a wider range of firms buy AI software in the hope it will improve their operations.

There is little evidence, as yet, that the buyers are getting much for their money. They may do, in time, as AI software improves and workers become more adept at using it well, but meanwhile it is very likely that this “AI spring”, like the smaller previous one around 2012, will be followed by an “AI winter”.

Crypto-currency is near-money that can be moved across borders and between accounts without passing

through bank or government procedures. For black-market and shady trading it has many of the advantages of cash (actual dollar bills), and more convenience.

Lacking reserves or institutional guarantees to support them, crypto-currencies are subject to, and have been through, periodic sudden crashes in value. Trump has facilitated a crypto-currency boom in the USA. It will surely be followed by another crash, and maybe soon.

Less murky, but still murky, is the spiral of credit offered to capitalist firms via outfits smaller and less regulated than institutionalised banks. They can pool together funds from rich people looking for high returns on their stashes, offer them out to risky ventures on the assumption that enough of them will flourish even if others fade, and cash out and walk away from the mess if things go bad.

The September 2025 bankruptcy of the US auto parts company First Brands, with liabilities of \$10 to \$50 billion against assets of \$1 to \$10 billion, all made possible by “opaque off-balance sheet financing”, shows how such operations can allow dodgy speculative enterprises to expand.

An economic “bubble”, for these purposes, is when credit and spending in the hope of dubious future returns runs far ahead of the current or plausible near-future growth of real production.

Paper

Pieces of paper which are essentially tickets to future real surplus-value can for a considerable period run far ahead of the actual course of production. It is possible for those “bubbles” to deflate gradually. But more often an economic disturbance (maybe “exogenous”) leads firms to think they

must retrench, and call in the payments due to them quickly so they get in first while there are still funds to draw from. The increased calls for payment inhibit credit. Everything snowballs into a crash, from which the capitalist class emerges smiling again only when a lot of chancers are purged — and, along the way, workers who had no part in the folly lose their jobs and their homes. The disturbance may arise from profit rates dwindling as more firms compete for “first mover” advantage. US statistics show a slight decline in profits since Quarter 4 of 2024, but too slight to draw great conclusions from.

Marxists are sometimes inclined to say that such declining profit rates are the axiomatic root of each crisis; but the statistical record shows more profit-decline in the slump phases *following* crises than in the *run-up* to them, and Marx himself wrote: “Business is always thoroughly sound and the cam-

paign in full swing, until suddenly the debacle takes place”.

The general root of crises, according to Marx and I think in reality, is rather that the capital’s insatiable and “abstract” drive for profit makes “it... in the nature of capitalist production to produce without regard to the limits of the market”, to create conditions where “too much has been produced for the purpose of enrichment, or that too great a part of the product is intended not for consumption as revenue, but for making more money (for accumulation); not to satisfy the personal needs of its owner, but to give him money, abstract social riches and capital, more power over the labour of others, i.e. to increase this power”.

We are heading for a crisis of that sort. When — or, in the short term, whether — it will be produced, we can’t say. But in the USA Trump has fostered, not really a new boom, but conditions for a new crisis. □



Eric Lee is wrong about Tommy Robinson

Eric Lee's column in *Solidarity* 754 deals with Tommy Robinson's (and Geka Geladze, the Georgian Minister of the Interior's) recent trip to Israel. What Lee has written here is wrong, not our politics, and not really representative of a broader view that we regularly encounter among people we seek to win over. It is good that our newspaper has the rare distinction of promoting external debate with people who disagree with us, but giving Lee a regular and seemingly unedited column is not the best way to do this.

In his latest article we are told that Israel "seems more friendless now" than at any point in its history, yet it has been allowed to carry out a war of annihilation against Gaza and ramp up the pace of colonisation in the West Bank with no response from its big imperialist backers other than lame censure and some minor sanctions. Because of this friendlessness, it supposedly "makes sense for Israelis to welcome foreign politicians who don't hate them, such as the current U.S. administration", and that the current "Trump-mania" is "understandable". Trump's predecessor Joe Biden did not hate Israel, but rather adopted a "bear-hug" strategy of gentle parenting following October 7 in the final act of his career-long support for Israel. If hate for Israel means an international community that has largely stood aside as they pulverise Gaza and colonise the West Bank,

it is horrifying to imagine what a more friendly international community might look like.

The bulk of the article is about Robinson's tour. Compared to other parts of the far right, Tommy Robinson has largely prioritised support for Israel and the worst aspects of its political scene over flirtations with antisemitism. Like many far-rightists of the early twenty first century, he was much more concerned with anti-Muslim racism than passé antisemitism, and in fact built alliances with far-right Jewish organisations: he was previously allied with the Kahanist activist Roberta Moore, until she left the English Defence League in 2011 over its Nazi elements.

Robinson has trafficked in antisemitism on occasion, however. In response to the Board of Deputies criticising the Israeli Diaspora Minister for inviting Robinson, he attacked "the woke liberal elitist Jews ... the ones who want mass open-border immigration". Back in 2022, he wrote a since-deleted article titled *Tommy's Statement: The Jewish Question* which dealt with Kanye West's antisemitic outbursts and claimed that "powerful Jewish people ... have their fingers on buttons of power" in various media industries.

The Jewish conspiracy as it exists in the far right's imagination is rootless, cosmopolitan, and liberal. Israel, both in this imaginary and increasingly in reality,



is none of those things: its government is guided by a racist supremacist vision which ties Jews to a specific piece of land at the expense of the Palestinians. Netanyahu is not even the far right of this politics: Kahanism has gone from an extremist insurgent force in Israel banned and repressed by the state to a part of the current coalition government.

Supremacist

The attraction to Israel for people like Robinson is this racist supremacist politics, and the fact that it is carrying out a war of annihilation and expulsion against an enemy which is predominantly (but not universally in reality) Muslim. He is right that people like him are in power there, and they are right to see them-

selves in him.

And to the editors of *Solidarity*: if we wanted coverage of Robinson's visit beyond the mention in the editorial, it should have criticised the Israeli government from our political perspective and centred the agents on the ground opposing it. It is not really a scandal that the far right genocidally anti-Arab government of Israel invited Robinson: they are in fact to his right in words and deeds.

Sometimes Lee writes useful and informative articles about trade union struggles in other parts of the world, we should publish those. What we should not do is give him carte blanche to argue his liberal and anti-revolutionary politics (a generous description!) in a regular column which isn't especially clearly marked. If we want a regular section which includes politics that are not our own, we should mark that more clearly and solicit a broader range of voices that actually represent more popular strains within the labour movement that we argue against. □

Paul Abbott,
Newcastle



Biden and traditional values

Claureen Ryan, in *Solidarity* 754, resurrects his claims that Biden was "quite good". If he should be remembered for attending a picket line, and he probably should, then he must also be remembered for blocking a rail strike. Unfortunately, this is not the worst statement in the article.

While its transformation under Kash Patel to be a private investigator of Trump's enemies is a real shift, it

would be a mistake to lean on the FBI's previous "objectivity" or "legal restraint".

When it was founded in 1908 as the Bureau of Investigation, we, the left, were its target. And it hasn't given up yet. Under J. Edgar Hoover, it became a vast, all-encompassing domestic intelligence operation, surveilling millions. Cointelpro in the 1960s-70s sought to disrupt and destroy civil rights, socialist, and black nationalist

movements with disinformation, spying and murder. With no legal consequence.

In more recent memory, the FBI has played a key role in the war on drugs and later, terror; it is a bosses' force targeting minorities and supposed dissidents.

And what of "traditional American values"? That they have dwindled or become conventional lies would surely be a good thing. Sons and daughters of a minor-

ity terrorist revolution, as Hal Draper put it, operating their traditional values, slavery, white supremacy, the nuclear family with a stay-at-home wife and nice heterosexual children who don't race-mix. There are values we defend: solidarity, equality, and democracy. They all run counter to the traditional values that the right thinks are under threat. □

Simon Nelson,
London

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200 years of rail – and workers' battles

By Will Sefton

"The unity of the working masses is paramount; they will establish their own discipline of equals and, using the technical and cultural achievements, make the railways run like clockwork... When this is done scientific and technical knowledge will no longer help a handful of men to get rich and stuff their money-bags, but will help to improve the operation of the railway system as a whole"

— V I Lenin, Extraordinary All- Russia Railwaymen's Congress January 5-30 (January 18-February 12), 1918

September marked 200 years since George Stephenson's Locomotion No. 1 took the first passenger service train from Stockton to Darlington. The Rail200 anniversary has thus seen many thousands of words and speeches on what a momentous feat the work of Stephenson, Brunel, Trevithick and Locke have delivered. Janine Booth's book *Railworkers 200* tells us about those whose labour built, ran and at times defended the railways.

"Railways combine within themselves the basic capitalist industries: coal, iron and steel; ... and they are the most striking index of the development of international trade and bourgeois-democratic civilisation." Lenin said in *Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism*. Booth's book *Railworkers200: Two centuries of*



rail workers and their struggles details the class conflict and solidarity that created the modern railway.

Booth's own experience as a railworker on London Underground and activity in the RMT and with the *Tubeworker* bulletin gives her an insight into the industry missing from many other accounts.

Using bulletins produced by other socialist and Marxist activists, official union records, parliamentary debates, and other testimonies, *Railworkers200* gives the perspective of the "servants of the rails".

Railway history is fairly central in the history of the labour movement. Booth charts the formation of Britain's first rail unions, from the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants to Aslef, the Railway Clerks' Association and eventually the National Union of Railwaymen (now the RMT), and shows how these organisa-

tions transformed industrial Britain and played a key role in the formation of the Labour Party.

Alongside the 1919 strike, the 1926 General Strike, Beeching cuts, and the colour bar, the book also recounts lesser-known stories of rail history, such as Bakerloo line women who struck for equal pay in 1918, and the parallels with the fights of outsourced cleaners on the current privatised railway.

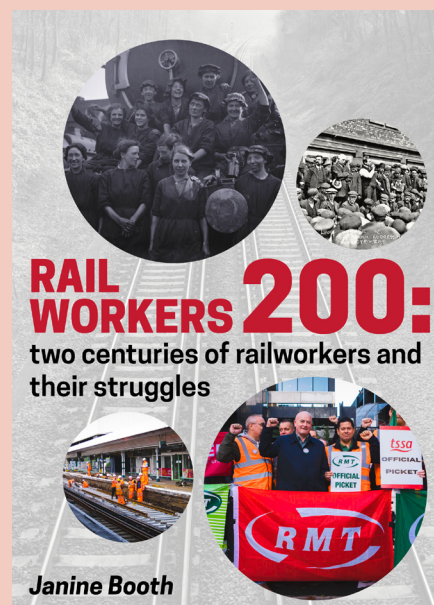
The book covers everything from the first actions by 1830s navvies right through to the strike wave of 2022-23. As we now enter, in Britain, a period of what should eventually be all-encompassing renationalisation, the struggle of railworkers has a new political edge.

An argument made convincingly in the book, and long advanced by Workers' Liberty and *Solidarity*, is that of industrial unionism. Booth backs up the case that gains in safety, pay, equality and dignity have been won, and held onto when solidarity across grades has been at its strongest. Railworkers' organisation, at a rank-and-file level, has been vital in pushing their unions to fight, not just industrially, but also for gender equality, LGBT+ rights, and against racism.

As Booth has said in a promotional video for the book, rail workers have built, operated, maintained, defended and fought for the railway. To build a democratically run railway operated in the interests of passengers and workers,

we must learn from the struggles of the past 200 years to forge a vision of the railways as a system run for social need rather than private profit. □

Order online



This book records two hundred years of railway workers and their struggles. It educates the reader about the work they did (and do), the conditions that they did (and do) it in, and their struggles to improve their conditions of work. 94 pages £5 □

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Socialism v capitalism

Gramsci on "only in it for themselves"

By Martin Thomas

The idea that politicians do bad stuff because they are "only in it for themselves" has become more current among left-minded people.

It seems like an expression of class resentment by worse-off people against political leaders who live in high comfort. But it is a snare.

In fact, policies are shaped by the collective ideas and interests of whole ruling classes, or fractions of classes. Even for Trump, individual enrichment is a side-benefit, not the determinant of his whole tariff, deportation, etc. policy. Those concerned only with individual enrichment, and unconcerned about collective ruling-class interests, will choose private enterprise rather than public office. Even in the exceptional cases, like Stalinist states, where public office is more or less the only road to riches, the

Stalin or Mao will reach the top only if seen by a large social layer as their champion.

As a fully-fledged "theory", the idea that public policy is dictated by the personal enrichment of individuals is the property of ultra-free-market economists (the "public choice" school). What is publicly-run, they say, will always be badly run, because the managers will tilt it to the personal advantage of themselves, their friends, or those who lobby them.

(Democracy instead? They would say, and with some truth, that even the best democracy can't check detail much, and the self-interested managers can tilt things by skewing detail. Yes, socialism depends on society developing people who will do jobs of managing and coordinating in a public-spirited and accountable way. In fact, even capitalism can develop such people: the question

is, what is their idea of public spirit, and whom are they accountable to?)

With private-profit capitalists, by contrast, the economists say, it is positively a virtue that they are "in it for themselves". To maximise profits they will produce more, better, cheaper, and thus increase general welfare despite themselves.

Dictator

The "only in it for themselves" idea can also generate right-wing conclusions by sending people on the search for a dictator thought to be (by way of exception) frugal, or for one they think rich enough that he won't need to plunder the public purse.

The Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci wrote about this, and particularly about the reduction in his day by some would-be Marxists of "historical materialism" to "historical economism",

a search for individual cash interests as determining behaviour.

"Historical economism... in the search for historical connections... makes no distinction between what is 'relatively permanent' and what is a passing fluctuation, and by an economic fact it means the self-interest of an individual or small group, in an immediate and dirty sense. In other words, it does not take economic class formations into account, with all their inherent relations, but is content to assume motives of mean and usurious self-interest...

"[Such would-be Marxists] forget that the thesis which asserts that men become conscious of fundamental conflicts on the level of ideology is not psychological or moralistic in character, but structural and epistemological; and they form the habit of considering politics, and hence history, as a

continuous *marché de dupes*, a competition in conjuring and sleight of hand. 'Critical' activity is reduced to the exposure of swindles, to creating scandals, and to prying into the pockets of public figures...

"Thus the political struggle is reduced to a series of personal affairs between on the one hand those with the genie in the lamp who know everything and on the other those who are fooled by their own leaders but are so incurably thick that they refuse to believe it...

"The 'economist' hypothesis asserts the existence of an immediate element of strength — i.e. the availability of a certain direct or indirect financial backing... — and is satisfied with that. But it is not enough. In this case too, an analysis of the balance of forces — at all levels — can only culminate in the sphere of hegemony and ethico-political relations". □



The story of the Cultural Revolution

By Martin Thomas

The high days of China's Cultural Revolution ran from August 1966 through to mid-1967. School students, university students, and, later, some groups of workers, were mobilised to get rid of "capitalist-roader" officials and the "four olds", old ideas, culture, customs, and habits.

At that time it had some of the shine of an actual revolution. It was seen as an inspiration by many revolutionary-minded people across the world, even by some who puffed themselves as very "correct" Trotskyists, like the Socialist Labour League in Britain. [*]

"Taken as a whole, the movement and its demands constitute an undeniably progressive factor and a deterrent to bureaucracy in China... This is not a 'cultural revolution' but a movement for political reform which, given a Marxist leadership, could develop into a political revolution.

"That is why the greatest support for Mao's programme has come from the youth. More than a hundred million student and working-class youth have responded to the call to fight bureaucracy.

"As in Hungary [1956] they have fearlessly stormed police stations and barracks, communes and factories risking torture and execution to fight the bureaucrats. And as the 'Time' magazine commented: 'China is going through an upheaval the like of which has not been seen since the French Revolution'.

"In appealing to the workers and students to follow the example of the Paris Commune Mao has given a new impetus to revolutionary thought and practice in China". (Newsletter, 14 January 1967).

Caricature

The "Cultural Revolution" was always a caricature of a revolution. The students and even workers were fundamentally make-weights for one faction in the bureaucratic ruling class against another. Even in the most out-of-top-level-control moments, there was no deliberative democracy. Meetings would be "struggle sessions", in which unlucky officials would be denounced, forced to "self-criticise", often beaten, sometimes beaten to death. The elaborate CCP "cadre ranks" system (27 ranks of pay and privilege), for criticising which Wang Shiwei had been denounced as a Trotskyist and killed in the early 1940s, remained intact.

Many individual officials were purged, but Mao always remained beyond challenge. Mao's personality cult was ratcheted up, with billions of copies of his Little Red Book (from the army's publishing house), portraits of Mao everywhere, and 600,000 statues of him erected in Shanghai alone.

Its background was:

- The 1958-62 "Great Leap Forward", in which China's rulers attempted a crash industrialisation, was in some ways modelled on Stalin's efforts in the 1930s. But where Stalin imported advanced machinery from the West to build giant new enterprises, Mao pushed small-scale enterprise dependent on mass labour with little mechanical aid: backyard steel furnaces, hand-dug irrigation works, etc.

- The GLF was economically disastrous and killed 30 million people, or more, through famine and repression. The furnaces produced junk; most of the irrigation works were useless. Mao had to retreat.

- In July 1960, Russia pulled out its specialists advising Chinese industry. In 1963-4 the Chinese and Russian government exchanged bitter polemics. The Khrushchev regime in Russia was then trying (with little success) to boost its economy by unleashing market forces and individual-enterprise profit motives. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) denounced this as "revisionism" and conversion from "socialism" to "state capitalism". Liu Shaoqi, China's head of state at the start of the Cultural Revolution, and known as a critic of the GLF, was denounced as "China's Khrushchev".

- In 1962-4 Mao, seeking to regain hegemony after had been forced to back down on the GLF, had pushed through a "Socialist Education Movement" in which maybe five million officials were purged. Further purges in the immediate run-up to the "Cultural Revolution" hit the top levels of the armed forces and Chinese Communist Party organisation.

Those "cold" purges were not enough. Despite other purges in the 1950s, much of the administrative, managerial, and academic apparatus was still run by people from the old Nationalist regime. The Maoist takeover of 1949 had been much more a military conquest than a revolution.

Very many people welcomed the takeover as bringing Chinese independence from foreign powers; stable, less-corrupt government; and a prospect of economic growth, after many decades of invasion and civil wars. The Cultural Revolution showed that, in the cities at least, Mao still had immense personal prestige remaining from that. But the Maoists needed the "bourgeois experts", and the "bourgeois experts" were happy to co-operate. The CCP had governed sizeable areas of China for some time, but poor rural areas, small on China's vast scale.

And many of the veteran "Communist" cadres had been formed, politically, as fighters for Chinese independence and for land reform. A vague idea that "the Soviet Union's today is our tomorrow" (the big slogan of the 1950s) committed them only to economic development,



not to ultra-statist or ultra-voluntarist experiments.

So Mao and the voluntarists had to, and could, resort to popular mobilisation.

It started with a "big character poster" campaign at Beijing University in May 1966, instigated by a junior academic with top-level connections. The whole Cultural Revolution was very "literary" in some ways, with many initiatives developed through wall-posters and through "instructions" in the official newspapers. (There were no dissident ones).

In June 1966 classes were suspended for primary schools (103 million students), secondary schools (13 million), and universities (500,000). Most schools remained shut for a year or more; many universities, until well into the 1970s.

The Red Guards

In August "Red Guards" mobilised at two elite secondary schools in Beijing, mostly attended by children of CCP officials and "bourgeois experts". At one the students beat a vice-principal to death. Half a million, maybe up to two million, people would be killed or pushed to suicide over the coming years.

The Red Guards movement fanned out on the streets, attacking high heels, long hair, short skirts, jeans, and under-age drinking. They destroyed ancient structures and artworks. They looted the homes and offices of many better-off people, and abandoned most of the loot. Across China, around seven million library books, and many more from private homes, would be destroyed. Books other than Mao's writings became largely unavailable. (In the fading years of the Cultural Revolution, a wider range, including foreign literature, would become available again, under the counter. Especially popular then would be translations of Alexandre Dumas's *The Count of Monte Cristo* and J D Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*. Leon Trotsky's *The Revolution Betrayed* also got some circulation).

In late 1966 the major activity of the Red Guards became travel from city to

city (free trains and accommodation provided), and rallies outside the Zhongnanhai government precinct in Beijing addressed by Mao.

In November 1966, Wang Hongwen, a security chief in a Shanghai factory with good top-level connections (he would later become vice-chair of the CCP), initiated a "Red Worker" movement in Shanghai, mainly among temporary and contract workers. The city officials responded with "Scarlet Guards", with workers with permanent jobs in large state-owned enterprises, a minority in the working class who had done relatively well since 1949. There were strikes and armed clashes, by the end of which half the schools in Shanghai had been seriously destroyed, and 20% written off entirely.

The Red Workers, with top-level support, won, and the new administration was named the Shanghai Commune. It resembled the Paris Commune of 1871 not at all. Troops took over security in the city from January 1967. In February, by decree from Mao, the "Commune" was replaced by a "Revolutionary Committee", supposed to be one-third military, one-third old officials, and one-third new people.

The extirpation of political alternatives, such as the Chinese Trotskyists, by the Guomindang after 1927, and by Mao in the cities after 1949, had been complete enough to stop new substantial politics taking root in the tumult.

Revolutionary committees became the model for government across the country. There were local clashes similar to Shanghai, won by pro-Mao people, in July 1967 in Wuhan, and another spasm of open conflicts in mid-1968; but generally Mao now steered to military control, and to reintegrating compliant officials.

From August 1968 the Red Guards were formally wound down, and many millions of students were sent to the countryside, supposedly to "learn from the people". Officials were sent to "May Seventh Cadre Schools", also in the countryside, to be re-educated.

Changes in CCP

The CCP was substantially reshaped by the Cultural Revolution. At the semi-secret 9th CCP congress in April 1969, only a small minority of the outgoing Central Committee would be re-elected.

But this did not produce a “Maoist” CCP, one committed to forced-march economic methods and to sustaining the “people’s communes” (large state-run farms) in the countryside which had been introduced in the GLF but had begun to fall apart even before 1962. Mao’s faction would eventually lose the fight within the CCP, and Deng Xiaoping, general secretary of the CCP in 1956-66, would win, despite being called the “number two capitalist roader” at the height of the Cultural Revolution. (Liu Shaoqi was no.1).

There was a series of centrally-directed “campaigns” in 1968-71, with the army holding the ring as the structures of the CCP melted into chaos. Even the Standing Committee of the Politburo stopped meeting. The “campaigns” sifted out the new people, leaving in place at the end those who both had stamina and were deft in adapting.

From March 1968, the “Three Loyalties and Four Boundless Loves” (all to or for Mao). Then, “preparing for war”, a drive for military and industrial construction in inner China in case the US invaded the coastal areas. (This would be phased out after Henry Kissinger visited Beijing in July 1971, and Mao had a rapprochement with the USA). “Learn from Dazhai”, to restore rural “people’s commune” structures. “One Strike, Three Antis”, against “counter-revolutionaries”, graft, profiteering, waste. “Clean-up of May 16th elements”, supposedly to eliminate ultras who had overdone early Cultural Revolution rhetoric.

In September 1971, Lin Biao, minister of defence and officially designated at the April 1969 CCP congress as no.2 and successor for the ageing and ill Mao, died when a plane by which he allegedly aimed to defect to Russia crashed. The

circumstances remain mysterious, but Lin had in some way fallen out with Mao.

Mao purged the military command again to keep it loyal, but also shifted away from the military and back to the old CCP structures and the “old cadres”. In February 1973 he brought back Deng to central government from his exile as a mechanic in a remote tractor factory.

In January 1976, Zhou Enlai, Mao’s indispensable no.2 since 1931, died. Throughout the Cultural Revolution, Zhou had manoeuvred to curb excesses and sustain ordinary economic life while keeping onside with Mao. That stance was well enough known that on 4-5 April 1976 hundreds of thousands gathered officially in Tiananmen Square to mourn Zhou, and clashed with police. The Cultural Revolution enthusiasts from 1966 had been disillusioned, battered into cooperation with whatever came from above, or dispersed.

The remaining enthusiasts at the top were strong enough to get Deng ousted again. But that was only to furlough, not to exile, and it was short-lived.

In September 1976 Mao died. In January 1976 he had already appointed Hua Guofeng, a former provincial official who had won Mao’s favour by deft management of his “revolutionary committee”, to replace Zhou as premier, and to be successor to Mao himself. Hua moved quickly to arrest the “Gang of Four” ultra-Maoists (including Wang Hongwen and Mao’s semi-estranged widow Jiang Qing) and put them on trial.

Deng Xiaoping

Deng returned to office, and soon sidelined Hua. He began the process which has boomed over the last almost-50 years of developing world-market private-profit capitalism in China. The “people’s communes” were officially dissolved in 1982, and agriculture shifted to individual farm households, with security of tenure on their land though it is still owned by the state.

The Cultural Revolution was soon declared to have been a damaging aberration. There was a political semi-demi-liberalisation in the 1980s, curbed by Deng after it spawned worker and student revolt in 1989, and further curbed by his successors, especially Xi Jinping.

The conversion to private-profit capitalism has happened differently in China from in Eastern Europe and the USSR, and in ways partly shaped by the Cultural Revolution.

Even before 1917 Trotsky remarked that Russia had an unusually small quotient of urban small workshops. What there was, was further suppressed by the Civil War and then by Stalin’s turn to forced-march economics from 1928-9. The Russian model of extirpating small capitalist enterprise even at the workshop or shop level was largely exported to Eastern Europe, too.

Conversion to private-profit capitalism after 1989-91 was done by “shock therapy”, with former bureaucrats taking



Wall-posters in Shanghai, 1967

over large state enterprises, cut-price, as their individual property.

China’s cities had lots of small enterprises. The Maoists did not eliminate them. In 1958-62 they were supposed to come under “urban communes”, but the voluntarist drive for low-tech development also had the effect of multiplying them. Certainly after 1962 many were de facto private enterprise.

The chaos of the Cultural Revolution encouraged more underground or semi-underground ventures. For example, some small businesses made good money producing Mao badges when the state-owned factories could not keep up with demand.

Deng left the state-owned enterprises intact, and they are still a large part of China’s economy today. Alongside them he nurtured small private enterprises, municipal enterprises, joint enterprises with foreign capital, and outright foreign investment (at first often in relatively small factories owned by overseas Chinese capitalists). Many of today’s Chinese-capitalist world-market giants, like BYD and Huawei, originated as small private firms. The CCP state nurtures them with credit and keeps a hand on them with compulsory CCP committees in every firm.

Small private capitalist firms have also developed in the countryside, selling agro-chemicals and hiring out machinery to farmers.

The Cultural Revolution was not good for the rural economy, but it laid some basis for what came later by shaking the administrative structures of the “people’s communes” and by developing basic health care and elementary schooling in the countryside by way of the students exiled to the countryside in the 1960s and 70s. That, in turn, will have augmented the supply of literate workers from the countryside available for the growing businesses in the cities.

Reactionary socialism

The Cultural Revolution was a “reactionary socialist” upheaval, in the terms used by Marx in the Communist Manifesto. It echoed elements from different segments of history. Some of it was like the medieval European revolts of the

poor which rallied to allegedly-returned kings previously “lost”, like the huge uprising behind the “pseudo-Baldwin” (someone claiming to be the lost Count of Flanders) in 1225-6. Or like China’s Taiping rebellion of 1850-64, whose leader claimed to be the brother of Jesus Christ. (But the Cultural Revolution was urban, not rural).

Some, like a military coup with popular support. Some, like Stalin’s great purge of his party machine in 1937-8. Some, even, like the big student revolts in England’s “public” (i.e. elite) schools in the 18th century and up to 1851, which sometimes needed troops to suppress them.

In the decade from 2010, there was another wave of popular rebellions based on street action but without (or with little) structured and deliberative political organisation — the “Arab Spring” and much more, very usefully chronicled by Vincent Bevins in his book *If We Burn*. Unlike the Taiping and pseudo-Baldwin revolts, these were not leader cults, but democratic and social-reforming in bent.

However, because of the lack or shortage of structured and deliberative political organisation, they were all diffused, or, worse, were hi-jacked by the right. The recent “Gen Z rebellions”, in Bangladesh, Nepal, Madagascar, or Morocco, show a similar pattern. In Madagascar, the army has taken power. In Nepal and Bangladesh, elderly “above the fray” figures have been installed as interim governors, but the risk of them being replaced soon by clearly right-wing forces remains large.

There may be other revolts like the “Gen Z” or 2010s movements, but with the higher temperature and more millenarian tone which the early Cultural Revolution had. If so, knowing the precedents and lessons of the Cultural Revolution will be important. □

[*] The “Healyite” SLL was then by far the most active avowed-Trotskyist group in Britain, possibly in the world; and a real force, though sectarian and erratic in politics. In the years up to its collapse in 1985 it would become a miserable affair dependent on funding from the Libyan and Iraqi governments and the PLO.

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French government staggers on: will the unions act?

From Interventions Syndicales

The most important political issue of the moment in France concerns the trade unions, or more precisely the trade union leadership. The separation of the "trade union" and the "political" is a political position which inevitably leads to the alienation of the independence of the trade unions, in the name of that independence.

Seeking to abstain from national action at the time of the budget debate in the National Assembly means risking losing out on demands and cancelling the suspension of pension reform...

The decay of the executive, and thus the whole regime of the Fifth Republic, is clear: to protect itself, it had to concede, through Prime Minister Lecornu, the suspension of the pension reform and the renunciation for this autumn of the constitutional clause allowing government decisions by decree without a vote in parliament.

Macron... made it clear that the "post-

ponement" of his pension reform was neither a repeal nor even a suspension...

[And] this budget and this Social Security Financing Act include the worst hospital budget we've ever seen, the doubling of out-of-pocket medical expenses, the imposition of daily allowances on the long-term sick, the freezing of social benefits and pensions in 2026, a reduction in funding for social housing and energy renovation, thousands of fewer civil servant posts, including more than 4,000 in the national education system and the already catastrophic freeze on recruitment of helpers for pupils with disabilities, etc...

The exclusively parliamentary arena offers no way out, as most of the votes in the National Assembly's Finance Committee chaired by Eric Coquerel (LFI) have shown. A majority not elected as such, and therefore anti-democratic, of RN [Le Pen's far right party], LR [mainstream right], and ex-Macronists, can vote for Macron's anti-social budget.

The question is not who is right be-

tween [Mélenchon's] LFI and the Socialist Party. The question is what will be the fate of the great majority. And the crux of this question can and must be decided by them!

The communiqué from the Intersyndicale [the consortium of France's union confederations, by calling no action]... in fact blocks the way to... stopping the pension reform and all the other attacks that have been launched and announced.

Pressure

There is pressure within and outside the organisations to cut the knot. Action by the pensioners on 6 November, civil servants, and school workers are going to change the tempo.

The key phrase is: Let's unblock everything!...

That's why in France, too, the question of a central demonstration to force the Assembly to vote on the budget and defeat the current government and the RN has been raised, and that's why the call

for 15 November makes so much sense.

What is at stake in France is this: will Macron and with him the Fifth Republic be totally defeated or not before the RN and the Union of the Right take over this regime and try to restore it in the most authoritarian form?

To stop the false RN-LR-ex-Macron majority from voting through an anti-social budget and saving Macron's pension reform... to deny this false majority the right to do what Macron no longer manages to do! □

Correction

The subhead over the last para of "Leaflet yes, disrupt no" (*Solidarity* 754) was "policy", but only the first sentence quoted in that para was in our resolution in 2018. The other sentence was from a previously published article and pull-out. □

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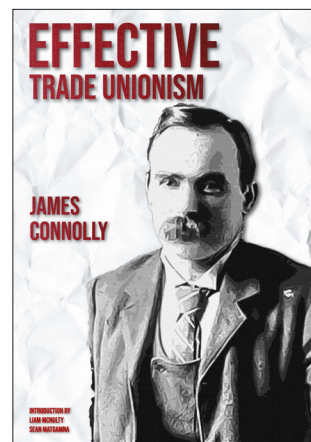
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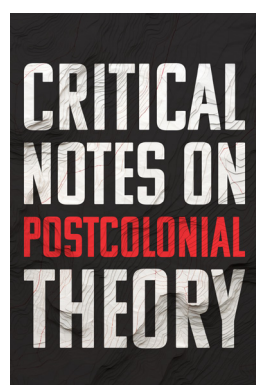
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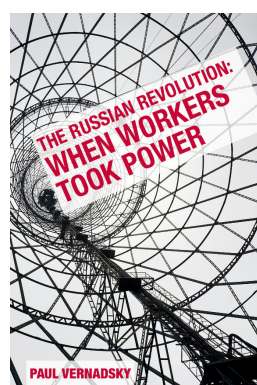
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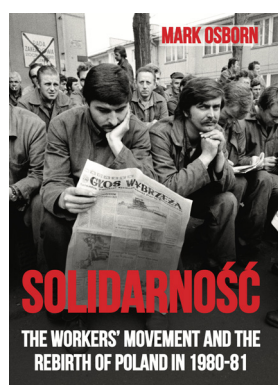
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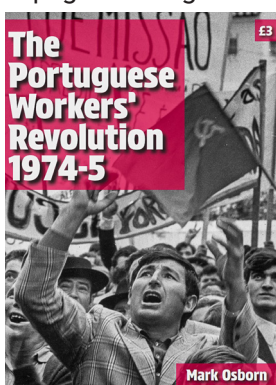
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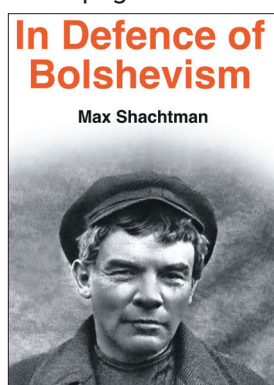
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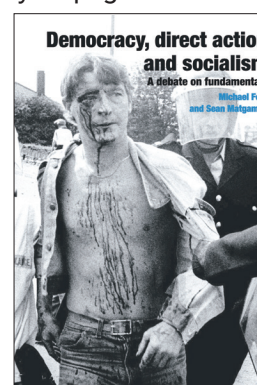
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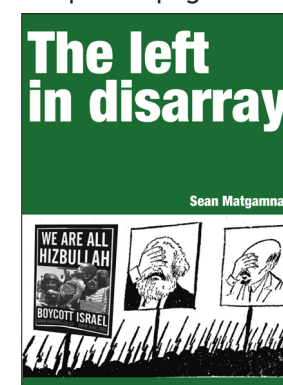
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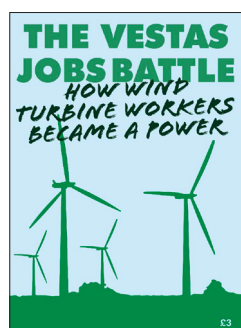
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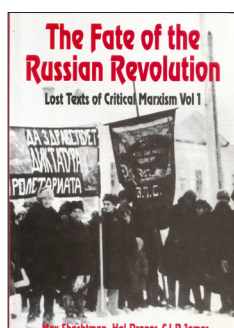
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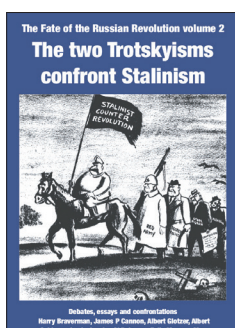
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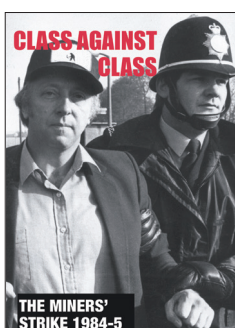
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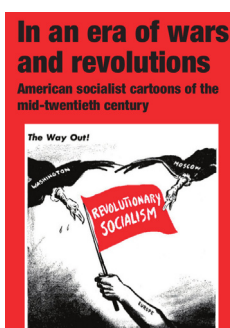
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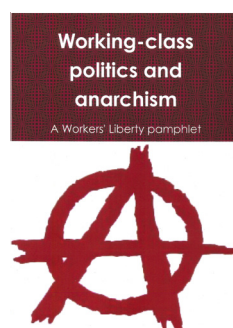
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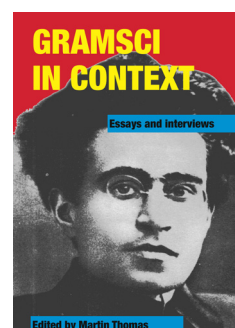
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Bristol school support staff strike

By Anthony Gardner

Support staff members of the NEU and Unison at Cathedral School's Trust (CST) in Bristol will strike from 5 November over back-pay.

Each year, a cost-of-living pay rise is agreed for support staff, and this should be back-paid to staff from April. However, CST management have been paying back staff from September and pocketing the difference: that's five months' worth of pay for each support staff member per year.

Support staff in CST schools, many of whom are on minimum-wage, term-time only contracts, and some of whom work second jobs to survive, have been left worse off than their colleagues in other schools in Bristol where the money is paid back from April.

Support staff will be striking and picketing at CST schools on 5, 6, 11, 13, 18, 19 and 20 November. Over 100 teachers so far have pledged not to cross picket lines in solidarity with support staff. It is already hoped that a third of the 12 schools involved will have to close as a result.

A hardship fund has been set up to provide financial support for striking staff. Educators' Fightback and Workers' Liberty stand in solidarity with CST support staff in their struggle for better pay and working conditions and we call on all teachers at CST to follow the example of other teachers and refuse to cross picket lines. □

British Library strikes over pay

By Will Roberts

Around 300 workers at the British Library are in the middle of a two-week strike over pay. The workers, organised by the PCS union, are demanding an above-inflation pay rise of at least 10% to recoup the real-terms losses of the

last 2 years. The British Library has currently offered a paltry 2.4%.

The library is continuing to function with limited capacity, although striking pickets on the first day of action were right to doubt that services would continue to operate: reading rooms and

other services were shut down due to strike action later in the week. PCS organises the majority of the "front-line" staff, responsible for dealing with library users.

Picket lines will run until 9 November, with rallies on some dates. □

GFM strikes step up from 17 Nov

By Todd Hamer

Outsourced workers at Newham Centre for Mental Health employed by GFM have announced a further six weeks of strikes, in a significant escalation of their campaign for NHS-equivalent pay, terms and conditions.

The strikes are set from 17-24 November, then 10 December to 5 January. Their employer is equivocating on making an offer and is victimising striking workers by denying them bank shifts and overtime.

The company claim that their ability to settle the dispute is being hampered by their PFI

partners. In reality, the various individuals profiting from this lucrative PFI deal are squabbling among themselves over the question of who pays, and scheming to find a way of loading the costs of settling the dispute onto the taxpayer.

The GFM workers and the wider hospital community can-

not wait for the idle rich to conclude their negotiations. The patients and staff of Newham Centre for Mental Health deserve clean wards and a hearty Christmas dinner this year. That will only happen if GFM's millionaire owners are forced to put their hands in their pockets.

No NHS worker should lack

sick pay. No NHS service or worker should suffer while the NHS subsidises private sector profits. Please support these workers fighting for an publicly owned NHS that is fit for purpose. □

Tubeworker

Tube: mobilise all the grades

With RMT train operators keen to use our Jobs and Agreements ballot mandate to take action to resist the imposition of Aslef and LUL's "four-day-week", aka Trains Modernisation 2.0, [this deal creates longer shifts for drivers] there's been some discussion about how to deliver the most effective

action possible.

Tubeworker believes strongly that any action under the J&A mandate should involve as many functions and grades as possible. Trains Modernisation 2.0 does not just affect drivers; it will impact other grades by restricting promotional

opportunities into the trains function. It also entrenches a model of industrial relations whereby any concession from the employer must be "paid for" by giving up some of our existing rights and protections. This is bad news for other functions too.

Furthermore, almost every other

function has its own set of J&A issues around which action could be taken, whether that's staffing levels, holding vacancies, or restructures.

Let's take action together to defend and improve our staffing levels and framework agreement. □



What we stand for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Diary of a Tube driver

How to make a shrug received wisdom

By Jay Dawkey

It has now been eight weeks since the week of strikes, 7-12 September, that brought almost the entire Tube network to a five-day standstill. Since then, we've had a revised pay offer.

The difference from the previous offer of 3.4% this year is that there is now a percentage underpin in years two and three of what is now a multi-year deal, and a guarantee of 0.2% above RPI in year three. This represents a marginal improvement and would guarantee an above-inflation pay rise for 2026-7.

There is no real feeling of victory in my depot, but increasingly one of resignation. Following the action, there was enthusiasm that more strikes would be needed, that they were possible, and that more could be won.

With two months having passed and a great deal of silence prevailing, the slow churn is towards accepting the current situation now, and turned to continue the fight over the proposed Aslef-backed longer working day proposals. Just how we do that is still up for discussion.

The drivers I work with now think or hope that simply driver-only action will defeat the plan. I raise the idea that we would be better fighting across all grades, at least with stations and trains



together. My view is not particularly met with disapproval in the mess room, but to most, I think, it appears unrealistic for now. And certainly much harder, given how long we have taken to respond to the pay offer.

"What was the last meeting for?" J asks, referring to a union reps' meeting on 8 October. It isn't the way I would ask the question, but it is the exact words. J is asking in good faith what that meeting was called to discuss, because, as far as communication from the union goes,

that meeting was called to decide on the next action or response to the offer.

Still, weeks later, we have heard very little. When I put the question to myself, I'm asking a question about union procedures: what was the point of a meeting where the consensus was more strikes, and we were told to wait for a National Executive decision the following day? We have since heard very little other than the sigh of the momentum from the dispute slowly dissipating while a reluctant acceptance becomes received wisdom. □

Kino Eye

Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1922-1975

By John Cunningham

It is 50 years since the Italian film director, poet, and writer Pier Paolo Pasolini was brutally murdered on a beach near Rome. There is still some mystery attached to his death though it seems likely that it was the work of a criminal gang with extreme right-wing connections.

Pasolini was a complex man and his life and work is difficult to summarise. Openly gay in a society which, at the time, had little or no sympathy with sexual difference, he was an idiosyncratic Marxist with a problematic relationship to the Italian Communist Party. Unsurprisingly, in a country deeply influenced by the Catholic church, he was concerned with — and troubled by — questions of religion, as attested in his 1964 film *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, where Christ is portrayed as a "man of the people" siding with the poor.

His last film *Salo, or the Hundred Nights* (1975), a portrait of political-sadism set in the final days of the fascist dictatorship, has been described by some critics as the most controversial film ever made. There isn't a single film of Pasolini's that is not worth seeing but if I had to choose one to watch, I would suggest



Oedipus Rex (1967), for the simple reason that it is brilliant.

Sometimes, these obituary type articles can seem a bit dry, so I want to finish with a short story which, I think, brings Pasolini, briefly, to life. The Hungarian film director Miklós Jancsó, who spent a few years in Italy and came to know Pasolini very well, told me that Pasolini had once been invited to speak at a meeting but had to cancel at the last minute. As a "substitute" he sent the organisers his speech and a framed photo of himself and asked that the picture be placed on the podium when his speech was read out. Jancsó laughed as he recounted this. "It was very Pasolini".

Pasolini was an accomplished writer, and that aspect of his life also deserves

our attention. His best known poem, written in 1954, is a long and complex reflection on post-war Italian society: *The Ashes of Antonio Gramsci*. Here are a few lines.

A red rag, like those partisans furred around their throats and, nearby the urn in waxen soil differently red, two geraniums. Here you lie, exiled with cruel Protestant neatness, listed among the foreign dead: Gramsci's ashes... □

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Unite ballots agency workers in bins dispute

By Jim Denham

One of the agencies supplying scab labour to Birmingham council in the long-running bins dispute there, “Job & Talent” is facing an industrial action ballot over bullying, harassment and threat of blacklisting. A manager was caught on camera telling agency staff that council chiefs had told him workers will be banned from permanent roles if they refuse to cross picket lines. Unite is now demanding an independent inquiry. The strike ballot closes 11 November.

A growing number of “Job & Talent” staff are refusing to cross the picket lines due to unsustainable workloads and the toxic and bullying workplace culture at the council’s refuse department.

Workloads for agency staff are unsustainable because there are no recycling or garden waste collections, meaning that all refuse ends up in a single bin, which is often extremely heavy and overflowing.

One agency worker said: “Management try and give you extra work every day, even if you genuinely don’t have the time to do it they will force you to do it. If you speak up for yourself and your colleagues and if they don’t like what they hear it’s one phone call to the agency and you’re gone. It’s a really toxic environment. The way the managers speak to you is rude, there is no respect. You’re not talked to like a person and there’s constant pressure.”

Birmingham bin workers have been on strike since January over effective fire and rehire cuts of up to £8,000, and have voted to maintain their action, if necessary, until at least March next year.

Now, however, Birmingham’s Labour council has begun the process of com-



pulsory redundancies by giving notice to a number of bin workers.

The workers remain determined but the dispute seems to be at an impasse. Unite’s General Secretary Sharon Graham said: “The Birmingham bin dispute just keeps getting worse because of the complete and utter mismanagement and vindictive behaviour of the council.

“Government ministers and Birmingham councillors need to step in and ensure a fair deal for all Birmingham bin workers, which is the only way strikes will come to an end.”

Settled

However, Unite seems to have settled mostly into just keeping on keeping on, and the council has also “settled” into a mode of managing the strike which it seems it can sustain long-term.

It is perhaps understandable that Unite recoils from organising unlawful solidarity strikes. Nevertheless, “parallel” disputes could be pursued which, though

also having their own specific demands, would augment the pressure on the council: there is no evidence that this has even been considered over the long months of the bins dispute.

Unite has also largely failed to use its leverage in the Labour Party. It put a motion through TUC congress asking for full support for the dispute from all unions, but that seems to have had no practical edge in terms of getting any other union to do anything. Rather, it served for Unite to present itself as the union with a big dispute which everyone else should support verbally.

Unite could use the TUC decision as leverage to press all the affiliated-union delegates on the Labour National Executive to raise the issue in a united way. It has not even done that.

There has been no drive by Unite to get union delegates to Constituency Labour Parties across Birmingham, and other supporters, to press the Labour council through Labour Party channels. Given

the council’s acquiescence to government-appointed commissioners since October 2023, and the poor state of local Labour Party organisation, an effort on those lines, though desirable, must be, by now, very unlikely to have effect in a useful timescale.

Unite got a motion passed at Labour Party conference which mentioned the dispute, but with no conclusions beyond a general wish that the government lean on commissioners (sent in to run councils which are unable to set a balanced budget) to settle industrial disputes.

Birmingham City Council has settled the historic equal pay case said to be at the root of its inability to make ends meet, and sold off hundreds of millions in assets, but remains under commissioners. □

Sheffield students back UCU strikes

By Benji Moore

The University and College Union (UCU) at Sheffield University will start strikes against cuts on 17 November.

The strikes will be accompanied by other industrial action, and will run over four weeks: 17-19 and 21 Nov; 24-26 and 27 Nov; 1-2 and 4-5 Dec; 9-12 Dec.

The student Anti-Cuts Coalition is calling for a student walk-out on 17 November so that students can join their lecturers and other staff on the picket lines.

After £23 million cuts last year, the University plans further cuts this year, and more in 2027-8. Over 350 members of staff have already left through voluntary severance, and the University has refused to rule out compulsory redundancies. Five departments face restructures.

Yet the University has little debt, still

makes a surplus (£6 million last year), and has, according to its own 2023-2024 financial review, “healthy cash balances” of £221 million. The Vice Chancellor, Koen Lamberts, and the Executive Board refused to cap their own salaries to £135,000 a year (the highest salary on the professorial pay scale) or forgo bonuses.

Various political groups, including Workers’ Liberty, the SWP, and Socialist Students, and unaffiliated student activists, organise together in the Anti-Cuts Coalition. We pushed for the student referendum last year in which students overwhelmingly voted in support of staff strikes (83%) and for no confidence in the University Executive Board (89%).

This year, we began our activities with banner drops and leafleting at the Careers Fair on campus, and have since leafleted, knocked on doors, and spoken in lectures about our cause. We have

been getting in touch with student societies to ask for their and their members’ support. We have also made contact with the Leicester Student-Worker Action Group and plan to join them at the UCU demo in Leicester on 12 November.

We demand:

- Stop the cuts and redundancies
- Protect student services
- Improve working conditions for staff and students
- Parity in treatment for home and international students
- Students support staff strikes

We campaign for a university without a gender or ethnic pay gap; where staff are treated fairly; where teaching staff have a manageable workload which doesn’t make them physically ill; where academics don’t fear for their jobs from term to term; where a better quality of education is delivered in a healthier environment for everyone. □

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New wave of ban-defiance

By Will Roberts

Defend Our Juries reports that over 2,000 people have now been arrested at its demonstrations since the 5 July banning of Palestine Action. A new round of demonstrations is planned from 18 November.

The protests have all been against the government's initial proscription. That was triggered by a group of Palestine Action activists sneaking into Brize Norton RAF base and spray-painting a plane red, in protest against the British government allowing arms supplies for Israel's destruction of Gaza. The government has steadfastly refused to reverse the proscription, which is unique in its application: PA are the first peaceful protest group ever to be proscribed.

Defend Our Juries advises activists in the next round of demonstrations (who are all offered training and encouraged to sign a document acknowledging the risks before taking part) not to take "street bail", but to be taken to a police station for processing. The former option does not require any legal representation to be given, whereas it is legally required in the latter case. According to Defend Our Juries, had all of the 532 protestors arrested on 9 August refused street bail, the police would have been unable to process them all.

Workers' Liberty has had, and continue to have, criticisms of Palestine Action's politics and tactics. But the fundamental demand to reverse the proscription is a just one, and those protesting it will be looked upon much more kindly by generations to come than those dragging them away to police vans. □

Jobs, homes, and benefits for asylum-seekers

By Michael Baker

The government has announced the first two sites for a new scheme in which disused military barracks will be repurposed to house asylum seekers.

The barracks, in Inverness and East Sussex, are planned to house around 900 asylum seekers – a small dent in the 32,000 currently staying in repurposed hotels as their claims are processed.

Though the hotels are a terrible solution, there are several factors that suggest barracks will be even worse – often isolated in the countryside, kept away from any potential social networks or communities that people may have developed elsewhere.

Free movement

The ultimate "solution" to this problem is free movement for all – no long bureaucratic asylum process, no specifically hived-off accommodation for immigrants that keeps them separate from the general population. Before that is reached, we should demand that asylum seekers get regular housing and accommodation – which they would be able to get themselves if they weren't banned from working or receiving benefits while their application is processed (which often takes years).

Councils

Just calling for asylum seekers to be housed by local councils effectively puts them in competition with homeless people applying for accommodation. Rather than getting locked into debate about who should get priority over limited council housing stock, we must demand a mass expansion of that stock – by building new houses, yes, but also, and in a shorter timescale, by buying existing buildings and converting them to make them comfortable to live in. □

Trump, Mamdani, Supreme Court

By Alan Gilbert

On 4 November voters in New York City and in races for governor in New Jersey and Virginia are giving verdicts on Trump. Zohran Mamdani, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America standing on a left-wing platform, looks likely to win New York city mayor. Trump threatens he will cut federal funding to the city. We will cover Mamdani more in *Solidarity* 756. More immediately decisive will be a Supreme Court case on the legality of Trump's tariffs, starting 5 November, with a decision expected not instantly but soon. Most predictions, however, are that the Supreme Court will rule for Trump, or, if it doesn't, that he will find some way round it.

Trump has announced another truce in his tariff war with China. Oddly, it means that tariffs on China are in many lines lower than on India and Brazil. This is only a pause in the tariff whirligig. Before long that whirligig will take its economic toll.

Trump has announced that he will restart nuclear weapons tests, stopped since 1992. He continues his unofficial (limited) war in the Caribbean against



Venezuela. He continues his drive to build up ICE as his militia, and to deport millions (though on 23 October he paused deployment to San Francisco).

The latest big anti-Trump protest was 1-2 November, against deportations, under the title "Disappeared in America". The next will be 22 Nov, in Washington. Much depends on whether the labour movement will step up to lead future resistance. □

No king, no prince, no palaces!

By Reuben Williams

Considering the weight of the evidence against him in the Epstein scandal, Prince Andrew should consider himself lucky that his punishment in Britain will consist of having his title as prince removed and being made to move out of his official royal residence (to another luxurious royal property on the Sandringham estate, where he will live in comfort with a royal subsidy).

He has also been stripped of his final honorary military title, after having lost the rest of them in 2022, after a civil case for sexual abuse was brought against him in the US. That case was settled with an out-of-court payment, with Andrew never admitting guilt. Nor has his brother, King Charles, ever formally conceded any of the alle-

gations against Andrew.

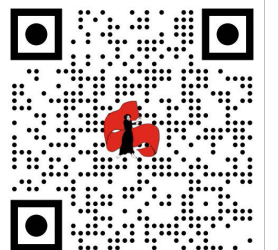
The reason for this seems simple: if a case against him is admitted, Andrew might have to be extradited to the United States and formally prosecuted. He should be.

There is one honour that has not been "stripped" from Andrew – his hereditary right to rule. The former prince is still 8th in line to the throne. Just a big fire at dinner-time at Buckingham Palace, and our official head of state and the Church of England would be this pariah.

This is patently ridiculous – as is the continued existence of the British monarchy. Send Andrew to America, send the rest of the Mountbatten-Windsors to apply for council housing, and give the Sandringham Estate over to accommodation for asylum seekers. □



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*Standing Together protest,
Israel*



Gaza needs a real ceasefire

By Ira Berkovic

Alon-Lee Green, co-director of the left-wing binational (Jewish-Palestinian) social movement in Israel, Standing Together, has said: "The ceasefire [in Gaza] is not yet a ceasefire. People are dying in Gaza every day, and [the remains of] Israeli hostages are still being held there. In the West Bank, Palestinians face daily terror from Israeli settlers and soldiers. This is the opposite of peace. This

is the reality we are fighting to change."

Although the daily slaughter on a genocidal scale has now relented, the "ceasefire" in place in Gaza is a long way from being the "peace" it is claimed to be by Donald Trump. It is barely even a ceasefire.

Aid flows into Gaza are still well below the levels needed, with Israeli state forces continuing to weaponise aid provision and put administrative and bureaucratic obstacles in the path

of aid agencies. The ceasefire agreement stipulates that 600 trucks per day should enter Gaza. UN figures suggest only around 100 have actually been allowed to enter.

In the occupied West Bank, settler attacks on Palestinian olive farmers bringing in the annual harvest have continued, with 126 attacks reported since the start of the harvest season. 4,000 trees and saplings have been vandalised. □