

For social ownership of the banks and industry

SOLIDARITY & WORKERS' LIBERTY



Trillions controlled by high finance

A tiny few control huge resources for investment

Page 2

Budget: a cheap paint job

Small adjustments while NHS and social care are in crisis

Page 7

Council house building is urgent

Large public investment the only way to fix housing

Page 9

SEIZE THE BANKS' WEALTH



Seize the bankers' and bosses' wealth!

Scrapping the two-child benefit cap will cost the government £2.3 billion in 2026-7. Starmer's u-turn on that is welcome, 16 months after suspending seven Labour MPs for voting to scrap the cap and two months after manoeuvring at Labour conference first to rule a scrap-cap motion out of order and then (when it was ruled in) to swing the priorities ballot and keep it off conference floor.

But why did it take so long?

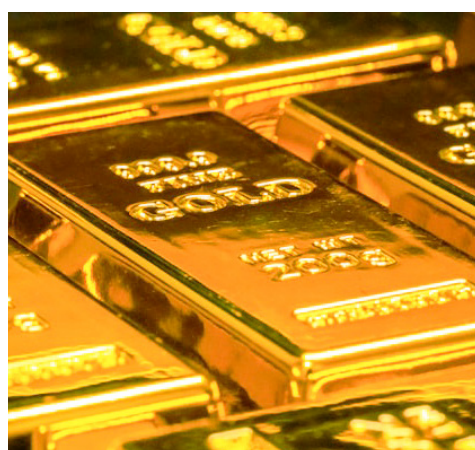
The cost is a 0.2% margin-of-error in the £1,335 billion public spending total. All this government's gestures at "balancing the books" by welfare cuts have been like that.

Ending the winter fuel allowance and cutting disability benefits were also measures hurting large minorities deeply but mending little in budget-balance. The government went for them only in a vain attempt to placate bosses that it would make cuts as well as raising taxes which hurt the rich, even if only a little.

There are much bigger numbers in the budget calculus.

The government pays over £100 billion a year in interest on its IOUs (bonds) held by financiers.

It will pay an average of £26 billion a year to cover the losses of the Bank of England as the Bank sells off bonds bought up in 2008-9 or 2020-1 in order to splash cash into the banking system. This "quantitative tightening" also raises



the interest the government pays on new bonds, because it has to sell them in competition with the old bonds put onto the market.

It pays about £11.5 billion a year to cover interest paid out by the Bank of England on reserves that commercial banks have to hold at the Bank.

The bank bosses, and other sectors of the capitalist class, are doing well out of this. The profits of the "big four" commercial banks were £46 billion in 2024, and will be more this year. The banks and high finance have £26 trillion in assets (about £400,000 per child, woman, and man in UK) on 2022 figures.

Average

CEOs of top firms (the FTSE 100) got an average 11% pay rise this year, to £5.9 million a year. 200-odd top bosses in those firms whose pay was disclosed

received total £1 billion payout, so if just those few top bosses, plus a similar few in firms outside the top 100, were brought down to say £50,000 a year, the money saved would be enough on its own to cover scrapping the two-child cap.

Meanwhile, public services — NHS, social care, schools, universities — crumble, and 4.5 million children are living in poverty, because of escalating rents as well as because of benefit cuts.

Answer: take the wealth into public ownership, and redirect it under social and democratic control.

In 2008-9 the government (totally or partially) nationalised Northern Rock, Bradford and Bingley, RBS, and Lloyds. The government spent £137 billion. It hoped to get money back by selling the banks off again once restored to profit, but by 2018 the official estimate was a £23 billion loss on the operation.

That was socialism for the rich — the public purse bailing out the wealth-holders. The government did not try social or democratic control of the banks, but instead briefed them to regain profitability the best they could as fast they could.

We want socialism for the working class. Public ownership and social control of high finance would cut off the flow of tribute to bank bosses and shareholders, and allow investment to go to social provision.

The banks aren't all of it, of course. Capitalist firms are as rapacious in other

sectors as they are in finance. Energy, water, and social care are equally high priorities for public ownership.

The wealth held by the bosses or shareholders of those firms was all created by workers' labour, not by any miraculous "entrepreneurial ability" or "risk appetite" of the wealthy.

Compensation in the form of new government IOUs (as was done in the US-sponsored expropriation of big landowners in Japan and South Korea after World War Two, when the US saw social reconstruction as urgent to block the rise of Stalinism or revolution), and with a ceiling on the amount for each individual, will be a generous move, but useful to keep small shareholders onside with social reform.

This government will never do that. At best the labour movement may push it into some more slight taxes on the rich. That will be worthwhile. But, especially as capitalist crises loom, *Solidarity* fights to raise the labour movement's sights higher. □

Solidarity 758

Solidarity 758 will be out 7 Jan, not 17 Dec as it would be on our usual fortnightly schedule, because Xmas and New Year would make it hard to circulate a paper printed on 17 December. □

Make unions challenge on "day one" rights!

By Martin Thomas

The Labour government has switched the Employment Rights Bill from giving rights to sue for "unfair dismissal" from "day one" to after six months (rather than after two years, as at present).

Labour-affiliated unions and the TUC gave support-in-advance to the switch rather than see further delay on the whole Bill, or have a nine-months "probationary period" with "light touch" (?) regulation of sackings added to it. Job probation

periods currently have no status in law.

The Bill has been shuttling to and fro between Commons and Lords since September, with the Tory-Lib-Dem-plus majority in the Lords rejecting "day one". The Lords have (since 1949) power to delay laws for up to a year. Before 1911 they could block them entirely, and between 1911 and 1949 they could delay them for two years.

The Tories had a similar issue with the Police Act 2022, where the Lords blocked the nastiest clauses. The Tories took those

out, in order to speed the Police Act, and got them through a separate (delayed) Public Order Act 2023.

Unite has complained about the shift to six months. But, typically, it was passive in the run-up (so "insiders" say about the "inside" meetings, and the rest of us heard nothing from Unite leaders on the issue), then "grandstanded" afterwards. As yet we have no word of any union pressing the Labour government to make day-one rights a separate Bill (or of the government offering to do it).

Why not? And better that than dissolving the day-one rights issue into a larger, though also desirable, Employment Rights Bill #2.

The twist, so insiders say, is that many in the government, and some union leaders too, are glad of the "excuse" to ditch "day one" rights, saying they would clog up Employment Tribunals which already have a 61,000-case backlog.

"Day one" rights are not gold-plating. Gross incompetence, unreliability, abusiveness to workmates or public, etc., or

even (as the law charmingly puts it) "some other substantial reason", qualifies for "fair dismissal" whatever our time in the job, on condition only that the boss documents warnings and such.

Without "day one" rights, workers taken on a long series of five-month contracts, or seasonal workers, have no protection against being sacked with no warning or reason.

Also, why doesn't Labour abolish the unelected House of Lords? □

Lively debate at Ideas for Freedom 2025

By Reuben Williams

Ideas For Freedom 2025 took place over the weekend of 21-23 November, bringing activists from Britain's socialist and labour movements together with speakers from other countries to discuss our times of growing political urgency.

The far right is on the rise, and socialists and the workers' movement must be properly organised against it. This was the driving point of the opening plenary speech from John Moloney (Assistant General Secretary of the PCS, speaking in a personal capacity).

A number of other discussions at the weekend addressed the far-right threat: Americans Dan La Botz from "Third Camp" journal *New Politics* and Natalia Tylim from the Tempest collective discussed how to resist the Trump regime; a comrade from Socialismo o Barbarie, linked to the Trotskyist organisation Nuevo MAS in Argentina, told us about the Milei regime and the fight against it; and Workers' Liberty activists in the UK led a discussion on organising against racists and the far right, ahead of our forthcoming new edition of *How to Beat*

the Racists.

With the far right growing in force, another central theme was the regroupment of the left. We were proud that we organised, on the Friday evening of IFF, the only extended in-person debate there has been between different tendencies about "Your Party" and prospects for the left.

Speakers from rs21's Marxist Unity Caucus, Socialist Alternative and Greens Organise put the case for their respective organisations and their proposals for how the left can work together productively, Ruth Cashman spoke from AWL, and there was good discussion from the floor. We hope to continue the dialogue.

Debates

The weekend saw other debates between the AWL and other left currents: Socialismo o Barbarie debated us on the nature of the Stalinist states; the Italian Marxist group Lotta Comunista debated us on whether national liberation struggles still have a place in the socialist struggle; we heard from three different strands of the French Marxist left on the



political crisis in France; and more. The debates were comradely and insightful, and will continue in the pages of *Solidarity* and elsewhere.

Amid a growing backlash against trans rights and an international anti-feminist wave, we made sure to stand firm in our proud socialist feminist tradition: discussions on defending trans rights, renewing socialist feminism, and whether or not "sex-positive" is still the best term for our feminism which opposes what has been called "sex-negativity", developed thoughts and conversations that have been taking place at our socialist

feminist reading groups up and down the country.

There was a lot more, and the weekend was a great success. Everyone thought this year's new venue for the event was a good choice.

A number of comrades agreed to join AWL, and others decided to get more involved with the struggle in their workplace, in political parties and campaigns, and on the streets. If you're sad you missed out, or glad you came, then why not come to one of our upcoming meetings and get more involved? □

NHS needs real resources, not PFI scams

By Stuart Jordan

Buried in the Budget is a plan to resurrect the zombie policy of Private Finance Initiative (PFI) to fund the flagship policy in the NHS of Neighbourhood Health Centres.

Neighbourhood Health Centres are essentially extended GP surgeries or clinics where you can also access, e.g. benefits advice. Many already exist but they are desperately under-resourced.

Private Finance Initiative (PFI, initiated by the Tories 1992, expanded by Blair) means that instead of the government borrowing (at cheap rates) to fund new schools, police stations, etc., private companies build and maintain the infrastructure and charge extortionate rates of interest to the public-sector bodies.

PFI appeals to government ministers because the borrowing to build facilities is not counted in the national debt. In

reality, it is nothing but an accountancy trick. Instead of a small debt serviced by the national government, the taxpayer gets a big debt serviced by public sector bodies. PFI is a form of socialism for the rich.

In 2018, the policy was abandoned by cross-party consensus after the National Audit Office published a report that found the public had agreed to pay £199 billion for just £60 billion of infrastructure. The NHS has a PFI bill of £80 billion in exchange for just £13 billion of hospitals. Some NHS Trusts spend twice as much on debt payments as on medicines.

Contracts

PFI contracts have often included agreements for PFI firms to provide "facilities management" services (domestics, catering, maintenance, portering etc.). The workers employed by these firms are some of the worst paid in the NHS and often lack basic rights like sick pay,



while the companies who own the PFI contracts make big million profits.

The re-introduction of PFI runs alongside a massive expansion of privatisation. The small reduction in NHS waiting lists (from 7.52 mn in July 2024 to 7.39 mn in July 2025) has been achieved by the NHS paying private sector treatment centres for over five million appointments last year.

Elsewhere, the NHS is experiencing real-terms cuts. The maintenance backlog is at a record high of over £16 billion and Labour is insisting on £2.3 billion "efficiency savings" from the already exhausted NHS workforce. Despite the pretence that the government is "investing in the NHS", front-line services are shrinking as demand grows.

A&E attendances and ambu-

lance call-outs were at a record high in October and hospitals are clogged up from the front door to the social care sector. We may also soon face the worst flu season in a decade.

The resistance to Streeting's policies has thus far been very muted. We need the unions and the wider left to campaign to defend the NHS and its founding principles of social solidarity. □



Israel's anti-war social movement in conference

By Ira Berkovic

The left-wing binational (Palestinian-Jewish) social movement Standing Together held its annual convention on 27-28 November in Haifa.

Around 1,500 people participated in the event, which saw the movement elect its leadership for the coming year. Alon-Lee Green and Rula Daoud were re-elected as national co-directors, and a national leadership committee of 27 people was also elected. The committee is 60% women, and over 40% Palestinian. Further elections are still to be held for representatives from local and campus chapters, who will also form part of the national leadership.

A statement from the movement said: "We reflected on all of our hard work and began to chart the path forward in our struggle on this land. Our movement is continuing to grow despite challenges from the far right, and the convention was proof of it. Those who attended didn't come for a protest action or a lecture on a specific topic; they were there to take part in our movement and build the grassroots power necessary to achieve a future of peace, equality, and justice."

An English translation of the political perspective document voted on by the convention is due to be published soon.

The extent to which Standing Together is seen as a threat by the Israeli regime

was evidenced by the fact the convention was subject to incursions by armed police. Police demanded certain placards and slogans, including one featuring a picture of an activist wearing a t-shirt reading "Get Out of Gaza", were taken down.

A participant at the convention told Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*: "Someone asked what they were doing here, and they said that if there was a 'provocation', they would cut the microphones and disperse the event. When asked what constitutes a provocation, they didn't answer."

Alon-Lee Green said: "It's clear to us that they are trying to intimidate us and threaten our freedom of expression and our very right to organise as Jews and Arabs together."

The convention was particularly significant, as it marked ten years since the movement's foundation. Standing Together was launched in 2015 by a group of left-wing activists, some of whom had backgrounds in the Israeli Communist Party and its electoral front Hadash. They saw an opportunity for a new movement that reached beyond the traditional audiences of the existing left, and sought to mobilise both Jewish and Palestinian workers within Israel in shared struggles around social issues such as wages and housing, whilst also building co-resistance against racism

and occupation.

Since 2015, Standing Together has grown to become the most prominent grassroots movement in which Palestinian and Jewish citizens of Israel organise and struggle alongside one another, with chapters across the country. Its membership has burgeoned, going from 600 in 2019 to 3,300 in 2022 to over 6,000 today. Since 7 October, it has been the loudest voice in Israeli society campaigning for a ceasefire and for aid to Gaza.

A global movement of solidarity with its efforts, Friends of Standing Together, has also been established. Workers' Liberty members have been central to establishing a Friends of Standing Together network within the UK, and promoting support for Standing Together in the wider labour movement.

Currents

Unlike some currents on the left, which see Israeli society as an undifferentiated, homogeneous bloc, fused with the political regime of the Israeli state, we have argued that, without a movement within Israel fighting for social transformation, long-term democratic change is impossible. We have also argued that Israel's 20% Palestinian minority, which, whilst oppressed, has a relatively greater degree of freedom to politically self-assert than the Palestinian populations of the West Bank or Gaza, is a key social and

political actor. This gives the efforts of binational movements such as Standing Together, which seek to organise Palestinians in joint struggle with Israeli Jews, particular significance.

We are not uncritical of Standing Together. Some of its principal sources of theoretical inspiration include the work of Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau, "post-Marxist" thinkers who argued against the view that the working class specifically is the key agent of social change. Standing Together is consistently supportive of strikes, and sometimes talks in terms of class, but does not share our emphasis on workers' struggles as the central element in any effort of social transformation.

Its Theory of Change, which envisions the building of a "new majority" in Israeli society around the shared interests of Palestinians and Jews in equality and social justice, also suffers from a lack of clarity on the question of agency. If that "new majority" is to be organised principally via a "social movement", how will it deal with the resistance it will inevitably encounter on the economic terrain, from organised capital, and on the political terrain, from the political defenders of the status quo?

Demonstrations, even spectacularly disruptive ones, will not be enough to overcome such resistance. There, the "old" forms of organisation — unions and parties — are surely still necessary. The new energies that Standing Together seeks to develop will need to find some expression in struggles to shake up and recompose the Israeli labour movement, currently dominated by a leadership still partially invested in the regime, and the left-wing political scene, where the respectable but increasingly gerontocratic Hadash shows few signs of invigoration.

Notwithstanding such criticisms, Standing Together represents the best hope for developing a socialist current committed to building workers' unity between Jewish and Palestinian workers, including co-resistance in pursuit of a genuinely egalitarian politics on the national question — in the first instance, an end to the occupation and the establishment of an independent Palestine alongside Israel. Socialists in other countries can make the greatest contribution to progress on the ground by developing political solidarity with, and practical support for, Standing Together's work. □

Violence in the West Bank

By Ira Berkovic

Violence against Palestinians has continued in the West Bank, and in Jerusalem, where Israeli teenagers assaulted a Palestinian bus driver on 26 November. The bus sector has a high proportion of Palestinian workers, and assaults against them have been increasing for several years.

Standing Together said: "This isn't just about a few angry teenagers. This violence is unfolding inside a system that allows it — a government that incites against Palestinians daily, that arms and protects settler extremists, and that refuses, again and again, to hold Jewish at-

tackers accountable. There are no police investigations, no arrests, no punishment in court.

"The occupation leads to this kind of violence — not only the walls, checkpoints, or home demolitions, but the daily, grinding reality of Palestinians on this land living with the knowledge that their safety is conditional, their fear is dismissed, and the state that governs them will not come to protect them. And when a government allows this violence to happen again and again, it's shaping a political reality built on Jewish supremacy, where the state protects Jewish citizens at all costs

while Palestinians, including citizens of Israel, are left exposed and unprotected.

"We refuse to accept that this is how it has to be. Because there is another way. A future where every person — Jewish and Palestinian — can move through this land with dignity, equality, and real safety. That future begins with ending the occupation, fully, completely, and for good."

Elections

With elections due in Israel next year, Prime Minister Netanyahu has appealed to President Isaac Herzog for a preemptive pardon for possible convictions for cor-

ruption. Netanyahu faces multiple charges, which allege he took bribes from business leaders, and offered media organisations preferential political treatment in exchange for favourable coverage. He has claimed a pardon is "in the national interest". If a pardon is granted, it will be another milestone on Israel's journey from some form of democracy, albeit one stratified and distorted by the state's policy of occupation, to an authoritarian dictatorship more like Orbán's Hungary or even Putin's Russia, regimes which Netanyahu openly admires. □

Stitch-ups, pushbacks, and Your Party

By Cathy Nugent

There were many positive aspects to the founding conference of Your Party (29-30 November).

It was an opportunity for members to come together, to debate and sometimes to listen to each other.

By the evening of 30 November members had voted for: a collective leadership for the party, in opposition to a model where “one great leader” runs the show; the partial acceptance of “dual membership”, the principle that people can be members of Your Party (YP) and other parties, although this has to be approved by the Executive and national conference; and that YP is explicitly for working-class interests and a socialist party.

On the other hand, by the end of the online voting members had opted to continue to online voting as a way to decide conference matters, undermining the point of delegates attending, if their deliberations are not going to count. Worryingly an amendment calling for the specific inclusion of trans liberation in YP’s organising strategy was won, but it was a relatively close call.

Clique

In truth, the conference was a stitch-up. Its organisers, a clique around Jeremy Corbyn, style themselves as ordinary unpaid volunteers, but they are seasoned bureaucrats — stitch-ups are part of their political DNA.

For weeks now we have seen a performance of “democracy”, culminating in bringing over a thousand but fewer than the two-and-a-half thousand “delegates” entitled from “sortition” to come Liverpool, to debate draft documents, supposedly pre-shaped by the hundreds of people who attended local assemblies and a process of online amending. But neither the sortitioned delegates nor attendees at assemblies, apart from in Sheffield, voted for any proposals along the way. We were there to “feed into” a big pool of ideas that we could not even see as they were being created. Many individual amendments seemed to be spirited away by the power of the algorithm being used by Your Party.

The illusion of democracy was comprehensively shattered on the eve of conference by the exclusion of members of the Socialist Workers Party. Later we heard Lancashire County Councillor (and Counterfire supporter) Michael Lavalette and prominent Zarah Sultana supporter

James Giles had also been chunked out.

Corbyn told the press the SWP were part of a national party registered with the Electoral Commission, therefore their membership of the SWP was, incompatible with membership of YP. But the SWP is not registered with the Electoral Commission! Whether Corbyn was aware of it or not (and Corbyn is often strategically naive) this exclusion was a clear attempt to stop a fuss around a SWP-Counterfire emergency motion aimed at bringing forward elections for an interim executive to this weekend. Unamendable draconian standing orders, ruling out points of order, killed off any attempt to get the emergency motion debated.

By now many more people do not trust Corbyn’s inner circle to run these elections, scheduled for the end of February, without resorting to shenanigans. They are not winning any popularity contests.

One indication of YP-fatigue is the fact that only around 20,000 members (out of a reported 50,000) bothered to verify their membership, allowing them to participate in online voting. Between just over 30% and just over 50% of verified members voted over the course of the weekend (on the more political issues turn out was higher).

Factionalism

The dominance of the leading faction was present in the format of the debate. The final drafts had “Roadmap” sections — texts presenting certain options — prioritised for debate. But many of the options did not map onto the views of those at the conference, so it was impossible to sort out the lack of political flexibility in the format.

A final second round of online-amending of the final drafts produced 500-plus texts, which were mostly ruled out of order. By whom? Nobody knew. On Saturday, of the individual amendments to the constitution, even after an online poll of endorsement involving thousands of members, just one was discussed.

On Sunday delegates stood up to object to the ruling out of an amendment mandating YP-sponsored MPs to take a “worker’s wage”. It was ruled out because it had a typo!

The farcical nature of the format was typified by the debate on “dual membership”. Delegates were asked to speak for one of two options. Option A allowed for Your Party members to be members of other parties but only if approved by the executive and conference. Option B

banned all forms of “dual membership”. Several delegates spoke for an option not on the table — freedom for all tendencies, platforms and groups

to organise. It was pointed out that this option had been popular in discussions at local assemblies and indeed was the subject of a popular final amendment.

Not everyone is happy with allowing dual membership, but given delegates were not allowed to raise their hands in a vote, not even as a way of testing the political temperature of the room, there was no way of knowing the balance of opinion on this, or indeed any, subject.

Reading between the lines the conference was designed to be a show of functionality, a gathering of bodies, the same bodies who will go out and campaign in local elections next year. The question of what policies they will fight on — opposing cuts or not? — would not have been considered if members had managed to force it back onto the agenda through the final round of amendments to the draft organising strategy.

Evidence points to the desire for YP to do electoral deals with the Greens in 2026 local elections. The Green Party has pushed through cuts in local government, not compatible with YP’s anti-cuts policy. (It is, though, compatible with the record of sitting YP-type councillors. at least most of them).

Fringe

Many people who gathered for the Socialist Unity Platform fringe event on Saturday night were very unhappy about spending hundreds of pounds on fares and accommodation to be excluded one way or another from helping to shape an organisation that could be a positive force for socialist politics.

At that meeting SWP National Secretary Lewis Nielsen, one of the expellees, was buoyant about contesting elections next year, citing Zohran Mamdani as an example of mould-breaking politics. But Nielsen’s message completely lacked substance.

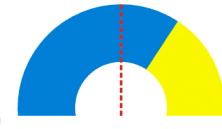
As we have said, we want something much more than “radical insurgency”, as Nielsen put it.

Central to getting a functional democratic socialist organisation will be an end to the opaque internal struggles. We want to get the political differences out

EXPLICITLY MENTION TRANS LIBERATION - QUESTION 1

YES

68.46%



NO

31.54%

46.09% VOTER
TURNOUT

Only active full members with verified identities could vote on this. The total number of members that fit these criteria was 22839. Turnout was 46.09%, therefore 10526 people.

in the open and debated in local groups. We want to build the local groups with a clear orientation to fighting the cuts and challenging far right ideas in our workplaces and communities.

Future

Does Your Party have a future, or will the divisions that have dogged it all along widen? That seems less likely, at least for the time being, now the party has voted for collective leadership and the groups around Corbyn and Sultana will both get a look-in.

Although a few good amendments made it into the Your Party constitution, that will not be what holds the current interim leadership to account in the next few months. And we must hold it to account. Moreover the basic structure is still a mess — a contradictory amalgam of delegate deliberation and atomised online voting. That’s why we voted against the amended constitution, standing orders and organising strategy — in order to register these practical-political problems.

Many of the initial multitude who signed up to YP will be like the Uber driver who took me back to my B&B on Saturday night. Thoughtful people, ex-Labour members, people who work two, three jobs to make ends meet, people who see the problem with YP as lefty factionalism. They may vote Green but have also become inactive. They are decent socialistic people who are rightly scared about the future. Your Party has to do much better and we have to try to make that happen.

We on the left also have to accept our responsibilities and seriously engage with this important political development. If the left — over a longer period in advance of the conference — had organised more, we could have won more. That’s on us as much as anyone else. There are many lessons to learn and relearn. □



End the war? By giving Putin what he wants?

By Jim Denham

Trump's 28-point "peace plan" for Ukraine was simply a Kremlin wish-list. In fact, it may even have been written by Putin's people and then translated by the White House. Crucially, it involved Ukraine giving up territory in Donetsk that it still holds, and accepting a massive reduction in its military. It would have left Ukraine permanently vulnerable to Russian imperialism and encouraged authoritarian regimes everywhere.

By the time the *Morning Star* got round to commenting (26 Nov), Trump's "plan" had apparently been modified to a less one-sidedly pro-Moscow framework, following the intervention of European leaders and Kyiv.

The paper's editorial ("The labour movement must stand up for peace in Ukraine") identified the main "sticking points" as the issues that had given Putin his excuse to invade in the first place: "the expansion of Nato, the rights of Russian-speaking people... and the deployment of foreign troops into its territory" (in fairness the editorial also

included "territorial demarcation" and "the sovereignty of Ukraine" in that list).

The editorial also identified the main obstacle to peace: "Keir Starmer manoeuvring for a prolongation of the war. He is in the van of those advancing demands which are obstructions to any viable peace plan." By "obstructions" the paper clearly meant anything that Putin doesn't like, such as the deployment of British and French forces to police any ceasefire: "That clearly crosses one of Russia's red lines."

Remains

So, in essence the MS line remains what it has been since February 2022: Putin's invasion may have been wrong, but it was provoked by the West and the only way to end the war is to give Putin most of what he wants. Anything else — an in particular, arming Ukraine — is to needlessly "prolong" the war.

If that message wasn't clear enough, Andrew Murray's Eyes Left column in the same paper described Starmer's claim that Nigel Farage was a "friend of Putin" as a "silly jibe, more serving to underline

the Prime Minister's own commitment to continuing the war in Ukraine at whatever cost in British treasure and Ukrainian blood." (This is not the first time that Mr Murray has expressed sympathy with Farage over Ukraine).

Worst

But the best (or worst) was yet to come: on 29 November the MS carried a piece by "former member of the Bundestag" Sevim Dagdelen that can be fairly described as straightforward Kremlin propaganda. Praising Trump's original 28-point exercise in backstabbing as a "peace plan", Ms Dagdelen denounced Chancellor Friedrich Merz and other European leaders for "turn[ing] US President Donald Trump's peace plan into a war plan."

"For in the plan, altered at the insistence of the Europeans and Ukraine, the question of Ukraine's future Nato membership is no longer addressed."

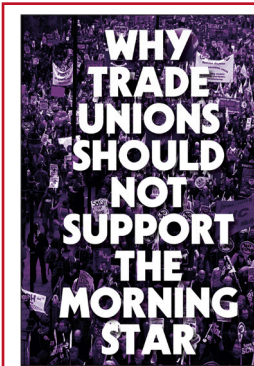
One doesn't have to be a supporter of NATO to point out to the likes of Ms Dagdelen that the question of Ukraine's membership is something to be decided

by the people of Ukraine — not Putin.

But Ms Dagdelen condemned this basic democratic principle as "a rejection of a realistic foreign policy."

By the way, Ms Dagdelen is a prominent member of Sahra Wagenknecht's red-brown BSW, now engaged in political cooperation with the far-right and fascist Alternative for Germany (AfD). The two parties have been drawn together by two shared positions: hostility to immigration and de facto support for Putin's invasion of Ukraine.

The *Morning Star* did not mention any of that, of course. □



£3 (inc. post) □
bit.ly/shop-wl

Eric Lee

Georgia: One year in the streets

I last visited Georgia a bit more than a year ago. National elections were just days away, and despite aggressive campaigning by the ruling Georgian Dream party, everyone I spoke to was convinced that the opposition parties would win a majority. The disputed election results — never certified by foreign observers — triggered some large protests, and members of the opposition parties refused to take their seats in parliament. But those protests began to fizzle out and would have ended but for an extraordinary decision by the country's leaders.

Georgia, they announced, was suspending its process of accession to the European Union. This was extraordinary because the one thing everyone in Georgia seemed to agree on was that the country was on a European path. EU flags flew over the national parliament. Georgians were beginning to benefit from such things as visa-free travel to Europe. There was hardly any anti-European sentiment to be heard.

But there was already cause for concern long before Georgian Dream took that fateful decision. The billionaire behind the party, Bidzina Ivanishvili, and his allies had long spoken of Georgia's need to resist an imaginary "global war party" — and stoked fears of another war with Russia. They also allied with the most reactionary elements in the Orthodox Church to promote homophobic violence, eventually making it impossible for the local LG-BQTI community to hold Pride events. Georgia had already embarked on an illiberal path long ago, meaning that the decision to turn away from Europe and the West could have been foreseen.

The result of that government decision was to energise the opposition and trigger nightly protests in front of the parliament building every single day through the last year. As Georgia began to drift away from Europe — and draw closer to Putin's Russia — the protests grew. The main street in the capital Tbilisi was basically

shut down every evening. The government's reaction was repression.

Protesters were jailed and beaten, and as the BBC revealed in an investigation this week, Georgian riot police deployed a chemical weapon dating back to the First World War in its water cannon, disabling demonstrators and causing long term health problems.

Leaders of opposition parties were arrested. The government announced that it would be banning some of those parties.

Beaten

Journalists representing independent media were beaten and jailed. One of them, Mzia Amaglobeli, a prominent opponent of the increasingly undemocratic regime, was accused of slapping a police officer and sentenced to two years' imprisonment. In response the European Parliament awarded her the annual Sakharov Prize.

A year ago, there were no political prisoners in Georgia. Today, there are scores of them, many quite young. I recently

attended an event, part of the London Georgian Film Festival, showcasing very short films about some of the prisoners. It felt as if an entirely new political movement was emerging, as young activists with very limited political experience were learning how to fight, trained in the regime's jails.

What is happening today in Georgia is a product of a long and complicated history. Everyone in the country remembers the bloody fighting of the 1990s and no one wants a return to civil war. But everyone also remembers the many decades of Soviet rule, decades of repression and lies, and no one wants a return to that either. An increasing number of younger Georgians seem to be inspired by the independent republic of 1918-21, led by social democrats. The flag of that republic has been held aloft by the some of the protestors in Tbilisi's streets.

Just a few years ago, Georgia was seen as a beacon of democracy in the post-Soviet world. That is sadly no longer

the case. Whether the Georgian people succeed in rekindling that democratic spirit and put the country back on a European path depends in part on what the rest of the world does. The American response under Trump has not been particularly helpful. But it also depends on the Georgians themselves. In the last few decades, they have seen off the Soviets, the authoritarian Shevardnadze regime, even the neoliberal Saakashvili.

Though they have managed to carry out non-violent revolutions in the past — most notably the Rose Revolution that brought Saakashvili to power — there is no guarantee that they can do so again. Countries with similar authoritarian governments have managed to thwart popular protests and resist change, including in Hungary, Turkey and Russia. But with their history as an inspiration, young Georgians may once again surprise the world. □

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

Budget: a “cheap paint job”

By Martin Thomas

Rachel Reeves's 26 November Budget conceded a bit to labour movement pressure. It scrapped the two-child benefit cap, and Reeves had already in June 2025 reinstated the Winter Fuel Allowance for almost all pensioners.

But the concessions are feeble. They open no doors to repairing social provision.

John McDonnell MP said scrapping the two-child benefit cap was “a huge win for anti-poverty campaigners and the labour movement. For myself and my colleagues [six other Labour MPs] who were suspended for voting to scrap the cap back in July last year, this is a clear vindication of the stance we took.

“But let's be clear — this would not have happened without a mobilised left demanding change inside the Labour Party”.

McDonnell is right. But Unite union general secretary Sharon Graham is also right: “Health workers, engineers, and tanker drivers will pay through stealth taxes, while city bankers and billionaires go largely unscathed”.

The “stealth taxes” are not actually a new decision. The Tories introduced a freeze on the thresholds for income-tax and National Insurance (at 2021-2 levels) to 2027-8. Reeves said in 2024 she would continue that. On 26 Nov, Reeves said the thresholds will be frozen another three years, to 2030-1. This is a “notional” tax rise to make five-years-ahead projections look better. There are also “notional” cuts (“efficiencies”) pencilled in for four years' time. Reeves won't be chancellor in 2030-1, and no-one knows about economic storms between now and then.

But already, and even with modest inflation, the “fiscal creep” makes more and more low-wage workers pay income tax, and hits harder at better-off workers (around £50,000 a year) than at the rich. The recent revival in popularity of the soft-reformist Lula government in Brazil seems largely due to it drastically raising income-tax thresholds (and planning to

tax the rich more, though it has not got those plans through Brazil's Congress yet).

Meanwhile, and immediately, the wage threshold above which workers have to repay student loans is frozen, and in a few years' time will be not much above minimum wage.

Fire Brigades Union general secretary Steve Wright said: “The increase in the statutory minimum wage is welcome and will help many low-paid workers... However, without meaningful action on taxing extreme wealth, this Budget does not yet provide secure, long-term investment or break with austerity”.

The Budget included:

- no increased tax on bank profits (£46 billion in 2024, more in 2025: revealingly, the *Financial Times* reports that the government had been begging bank bosses to welcome the Budget, citing the tax-stasis as why they should)

- no further move to level tax on capital gains up with income tax (though a small rise in tax on dividends)

- no wealth tax, such as Unite and other unions have campaigned for, and Labour conference 2025 endorsed, only a small “mansion tax”

- no land-value tax, no fixing of the injustices of the anomaly-ridden and regressive council tax (when that was first introduced, left-wingers advocated local income tax instead).

Annoyed

The Budget has annoyed slightly-liberal sections of the ruling class who might have warmed to Starmer in 2024. The *Economist*, outraged, branded this as a “left-wing” government. But:

- no new boost to the NHS, despite waiting lists rising again (other than a £300 million dollop for “new digital tools”); no plan for social care

- no serious boost to green conversion and upgrading the electricity grid

- signals that the general schools budget will be cut to patch up SEND provision

- nothing to halt the cuts in higher education



- the increase in minimum wage is only 4.1%, while the Living Wage Foundation calculated more than 6.8% is needed for low-paid workers to keep up with costs which are rising faster for the worse-off. (The minimum wage for 18 year olds is to be increased towards the adult rate — a little bit).

- no scope for sizeable public-service wage rises

- no large boost to council house building

- every indication that councils will still be pushed to cut almost everything else to meet statutory duties on temporary housing and adult social care

- no lift in the Local Housing Allowance, the ceiling on Housing Benefit rates; thus an increase in the numbers who have to pay differences between actual rents and Housing Benefit out of income calculated as the minimum required to cover other costs.

Lib-Dem leader Ed Davey posed as a “low-tax” alternative: “You can't tax your way to growth”. Actually, the government might do something good of that sort, if it taxed the rich sufficiently for a crash plan of council housing, green conversion, and rebuilding public services. But it is not doing that.

Davey's alternative was “a new trade deal” with the EU. Better to say outright: rejoin the Single Market, rejoin the Customs Union, work to rejoin the EU. In any case, Davey cited it only to evade the need for taxes on top wealth to repair social provision.

Tory leader Kemi Badenoch responded by defending the two-child benefit cap

and complaining about the Budget's (small) tax rise for landlords.

Reform leader Nigel Farage moaned about “a welfare bill that shows no sign of going down” and denounced the Budget as “an assault on aspiration and an assault on saving”, i.e. an irritation to those on high incomes who hope to get tidy extras by feeding unspent money into the financial markets.

The Reform-Tory alternative is to scapegoat asylum-seekers and migrants, and assault public services and benefits in order to ease taxes for the well-off. Still, the Budget offers so little to most workers that the drift of voters towards Reform-Tory demagoguery is likely to continue.

Cracks

Faiza Shaheen of Tax Justice UK summed it up well: “a cheap paint job to cover the cracks in the foundations. After all the talk about fairness, this budget disappoints from a tax justice perspective.

“It is shocking that the biggest revenue-raising measure in this budget, that should have been about taxing the super-rich more, will be a freeze on income tax thresholds...

“Even the proposed mansion tax, which is a step in the right direction, is a messy half measure and raises a relatively small amount”.

Solidarity will work to mobilise the labour movement for substantial welfare wins lifting the whole working class, and for substantial inroads into the wealth of the billionaires and millionaires. □

Student anti-cuts links needed

By Sam Myerson

The University and College Union (UCU) is striking at Sheffield university (17 Nov to 12 Dec) and Sheffield Hallam (days from 11 Nov to 5 Dec).

Students at the University of Sheffield have been campaigning on campus for student support for the strike, and are building towards more devel-

oped action. Anti-cuts meetings are growing in attendance.

Students in Leicester are also continuing to build the anti-cuts group on Campus, Student-Worker Action Group. They are producing materials to distribute to students and share online, and on 21 Nov produced the second issue of their [bulletin](#). They report that there are now student an-

ti-cuts groups at Dundee, UCL, and Nottingham, in addition to Leicester and Sheffield.

Comrades and students around the country should share what they are doing, publish and seek comments.

In the UCU's ballot in Further Education over pay and conditions, 32 colleges got over the line, and all of them will strike 14-16 January. The UCU ballot

in universities over pay, conditions, and jobs, closing on 28 November, got 39% turnout, short of the 50% threshold.

The “National Union of Students England” finally held its inaugural conference in late November. What was discussed and what it will do next have not been revealed to members, but it is safe to say that it will be much of the same suited lobby-

ing and no concrete action.

There is a growing need for students to build cross campus links. The government has signalled the only new funding for Higher Education will come from tuition fee rises tied to inflation and the levy on international students, which has also been earmarked for a return of very limited bursaries. □



Irish Labour goes “Connollyite”?

By Micheál MacEoin

The election of Independent candidate Catherine Connolly as President of Ireland on 24 October both opens up space for left-wing and socialist ideas and is indicative of some underlying shifts in Irish politics.

The 68-year-old former barrister and Labour Party politician might seem a more unlikely figurehead than New York Mayor-elect Zohran Mamdani, but there are some similarities. Both started with negligible support and chances and went on to outstrip the establishment candidates.

In Connolly's case, she defeated Fine Gael's Heather Humphreys, a particularly poor and uncharismatic candidate who was on record defending fox-hunting as a rural pursuit and who ran a negative and graceless campaign. One former Fine Gael minister suggested that, for want of a positive programme, his party should “smear the bejaysus” out of Connolly. Its attempt to do so largely backfired.

Unlike Mamdani, whose focus was on domestic cost-of-living issues such as childcare, grocery prices and rents, Connolly's campaign was marked by her outspoken support for the Palestinians and suspicion of NATO. She was also clear in her support for Irish reunification and made a point of visiting Belfast during the campaign.

This partly reflects Connolly's political

priorities as a candidate, as well as Irish popular opinion which has been strongly critical of Israel's war on Gaza and supports the maintenance of “neutrality”, i.e. non-membership of formal international military alliances. It is also symptomatic of how Connolly's outspoken predecessor, Labour's Michael D Higgins, used the office of President to comment on global affairs.

Some of Connolly's wider politics and political acquaintances are questionable, at best. Although condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Connolly has also described NATO's attitude toward Russia as “warmongering”. She attracted criticism for a 2018 trip to Syria with former MEPs Mick Wallace and Clare Daly. Connolly denies that she supported the Assad regime, which she described during the campaign as a “dictatorship” which “committed countless atrocities and human rights abuses, all of which I have criticised”.

When Fianna Fáil's candidate Jim Gavin withdrew — after it emerged that he had failed to pay back €3,300 to a former tenant — the scene was set, however, for a straight left-right polarisation between Connolly and Humphreys.

Spectrum

Connolly was backed by a spectrum of left-wing and centre-left parties, from People Before Profit and the Socialist Party on the far-left (as well as the Stalinists in the Communist Party and the

Workers' Party), through to the Social Democrats, Labour, the Green Party and, finally, Sinn Féin.

This unity around a left-wing candidate was the product of agitation from People Before Profit and others. Sinn Féin came under particular pressure and backed Connolly when it was clear she could win and that running their own candidate would be a highly risky move.

Connolly won, too, because she was backed by an enthusiastic grassroots campaign, given organisational weight by the existing left but inspiring wider involvement, including through self-organised groups of artists and Irish-speakers, as well as through attractive social media messaging.

The call to back Connolly has had interesting political effects and indicates one potential realignment in Irish politics.

Although the Presidential election has different dynamics to elections to the Dáil, the election shows that unity of parties broadly to the left can, through mutual support and transfers, unseat candidates of the two main establishment parties.

How “left” this alliance is can be criticised and there is definitely an element of political calculation and opportunism from some of the players.

After 2020, the Green Party propped up a coalition of the two main parties. At the 2024 general election the party retained only one of their twelve seats.

Similarly, the Labour Party has historically been a prop for the centre-right Fine Gael.

Now, sensing a leftward shift among some sections of the electorate, both the Greens and Labour backed Connolly. Labour leader Ivana Bacik has even gone so far as to describe the party recently in a speech as “Connollyite Republican” in the tradition of James Connolly, name-check Mamdani and criticising the attacks on accommodation centres for asylum seekers

Tensions

In both cases, this has led to tensions. The Green Party lost a former TD and an ex-Senator in October due to its decision to back Connolly. Right-wing Labour TD Alan Kelly, too, publicly backed Humphreys in the Presidential campaign.

The Connolly campaign clearly created opportunities for co-operation on the left and the involvement of new layers of people in political campaigning.

A measure of its ongoing success will be the extent to which this campaigning can continue and be turned outwards, towards campaigns for housing, support for strikes, solidarity with asylum seekers and migrants and opposition to the growing racism in Irish society.

It will also be necessary for socialists to go beyond a broadly-defined “left”, raising the banner of democratic working-class socialist politics. □

Environment

COP30's failure must spur us to action

By Sam Myerson

In the final moments of the UN COP30 climate-change conference (Brazil, 10-21 Nov) a deal was signed, minimal in commitment but acceptable to the richest nations (other than the USA) and those most reliant on petrochemicals.

The world's best scientists gave clear warnings on climate change, but might as well have gone to the pub. UN Climate chief Simon Stiell admitted as much: “we are not winning the fight, but we are still in it”. With no agreement at all on a road map for a transition from fossil fuels.

Russia, Saudia Arabia, Argentina and others lined up to block and refuse to support commitments to migration

away from fossil fuels. The USA boycotted the event for the first time in 30 years, but Milei's Argentina, increasingly reliant on US sponsorship was there for it, obstructing agreements. Argentina is currently developing Patagonian oil and gas shale deposits.

The *Guardian* said COP30 made “a faltering, inadequate step, and one that will barely interrupt the climate's steady march towards catastrophe”. With modern technologies, much potential exists for bourgeois society to act on confront climate change. COP30 showed it incapable of doing so.

Exceed

The Earth is near-certain to exceed the Paris target of 1.5°C increase in global average tem-

peratures since 1850-1900. We can now expect much talk about the need to limit warming to 2°C — and it's true, 2°C will be much less bad than 2.1 or 2.2 or 2.5 — but with no sense of urgency from the ruling class. This conference, the coalition of the unwilling, has put off addressing cuts to greenhouse gas emissions that are required to limit warming until next year.

In few days since COP30 Canada has signalled that it will create a new oil pipeline to carry one million barrels of oil a day. A cluster of three storms, driven by rising ocean temperatures, has battered south-east Asia. The US Environmental Protection agency, under Trump, is tearing down regulations on clean water and endan-

gered species, and expanding oil and gas drilling in costal areas and a remote Arctic area. Iran is facing its worst drought in generations, with reservoirs at less than 10%.

Johan Rockström, professor of earth systems at the Postdam Climate Institute, wrote years ago that to limit global warming to 1.5°C we would have to have emissions fall by at least 5% a year. Yet Trump, Milei, and the petrostates say that a roadmap to phase out fossil fuels is against national sovereignty. No national sovereignty can save anyone from global climate change.

There is no one coming to save us. Revolutionary socialists know this. The climate movement knows this. But in the last few years we have let

defeats and even despair grind us down. We have to turn that round.

Crisis

The crisis must be paid for by those who caused it and profited from it. Every year the number of billionaires increases. The world is set to acquire its first trillionaire. The billionaires' insatiable thirst for profit is devouring the planet.

The only countervailing force with even a chance of being adequate is the labour movement. The labour movement must play a central role both in forcing every concession, however small, and in pressing for further and faster action. □

Council house building is urgent

By John Moloney

The UK is in the grip of a severe and multi-faceted, interlinked housing crisis. This isn't just one problem; it's an interaction of too few affordable homes in the right locations, underused existing properties, excessively high rents, the right to buy, weak protection for tenants, inadequate Local Housing Allowance (LHA) levels, and other problems.

In this article though, I will focus on two: the underuse of existing accommodation and the fundamental failure to build new homes.

England has over 542,000 empty homes, of which 309,856 are long-term empty (vacant for more than six months). Wales has around 100,000, Scotland 91,000, and Northern Ireland 50,000.

A 2025 report by Habitat for Humanity GB highlighted thousands of empty commercial buildings suitable for conversion. Consultants estimate that converting unused spaces — such as flats above shops — could create up to 300,000 homes.

Unlocking these properties would make a real difference, but it won't solve the crisis alone. We still need new homes, and lots of them.

The root of the building drought goes back to the 1970s, when councils largely stopped building. This was partly caused by the introduction of Right to

Buy, but also by a deliberate shift to building homes for sale. The Tories wanted as many people as possible to buy houses and have a mortgage. They believed this would create what they dubbed a "property-owning democracy" and of course solidify electoral support for them. In other words they wanted to permanently change the UK. (In the 2024 election, people owning homes outright voted 37% Tory, 25% Labour. Renters voted 42% Labour, 13% Tory).

Gutted

Right to Buy has gutted Britain's council housing stock. Since 1980, over 1.9 million council homes have been sold in England, often at discounts averaging 44% below market value. Councils received just £51 billion for homes now worth £430 billion. Worse, rules blocked councils from reinvesting most of the money into new housing.

The result? Social housing is at historic lows, and millions are stuck on waiting lists. Meanwhile, an estimated 780,000 former council homes are now owned by private landlords, driving up rents and housing benefit costs. Councils even buy back homes they sold, and sometimes at four times the original price. Far from creating a "property-owning democracy", Right to Buy has shifted public assets into private hands and deepened a very undemocratic housing

crisis.

Private house-building is dominated by a few "volume builders" who hoard land and control supply. Their goal isn't meeting housing need. It's maximising profit.

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) confirmed this in its 2024 report:

"We have found there is land that is potentially available for development in most areas... however, how much of this land is available on the market at any time will depend on landowners' assessment as to when and if it makes sense to try to sell."

These firms control output, hoard land, and prioritise maximising profit over meeting housing need. They build slowly to keep housing supply low and prices high.

The CMA report also noted:

"The supply of new homes across Great Britain is highly cyclical and has persistently fallen well short of successive government targets... House building has only reached current target levels in periods where significant supply was provided via local authority building."

The lesson is clear: Britain only meets housing targets when councils build at scale. Public-led construction works. Market-led schemes don't.

Despite this evidence, Labour has not

made council house-building central to its plans. Instead, it focuses on market changes — speeding up planning, taxing land banking, cutting regulations, and opening green belts. This focus is partly because of funding considerations — council housing costs money, though it can be self-financing over time — but it is also ideologically driven, e.g. Labour want the mass of homes to be built so they can be sold; they want housing to be a commodity rather than meeting a social need.

The only guaranteed way to provide enough decent, secure homes is for the state to build them directly according to a democratic plan. Councils, mayors, devolved governments, and Westminster all have a role to play. Public-led construction driven by need, not profit.

Britain solved housing shortages before by building council homes. It can do so again. □



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

Letter from Italy

Why the Meloni government is prevailing

By Marco Moretto

The Italian general election in October 2022 brought to power the most right-wing government Italy has seen in decades. It is composed of three parties: Brothers of Italy (Fdi), led by Giorgia Meloni, a post-fascist party descended from the Italian Social Movement and currently leading the governing coalition; Forza Italia, founded by Silvio Berlusconi, a liberal-conservative party that represents the moderate wing, loyal to business interests; and Matteo Salvini's Lega, which is even more extreme than Fdi: openly xenophobic, it admires Putin's Russia and the MAGA movement and mobilises fear and nationalism to strengthen the coalition's grip on power.

Meloni's ideology is based on a strategic combination of cultural conservatism and the defence of neoliberalism. Pursuing the slogan "God, family, and nation," her government

is committed to attacking the autonomy of women, LGBTQ+ groups, migrants, and simply those who hold different views on family. Members of Meloni's government interfere in schools, the media, and cultural institutions to propagate an image of what it means to be Italian, based on Catholic moral values, with no room for feminism or gender studies.

Economically, it has contributed to job insecurity, strengthening the power of capital, while presenting itself as a defender of the rights of "productive workers." Under the guise of strengthening "flexibility" and "competitiveness," there is no doubt that labour laws have been weakened, promoting low-wage, short-term labour. Furthermore, their decision to end the "citizen's income" is more than a simple ideological or political shift, as its primary purpose is to urgently discipline "inactive workers" by pushing them into precarious jobs.

Cuts to social security benefits would serve to "reduce dependency," while tax credits, on the other hand, would "support businesses," once again underscoring the preponderance of Italy's industrial and financial capital.

Deplorable

Immigration policy is the most deplorable aspect of her agenda. By entrusting the processing of asylum requests to countries like Tunisia and Albania, it demonstrates a profound disregard for the lives of migrants. Organizations working to rescue migrants in the Mediterranean Sea are threatened with prosecution, sanctions, or simply bureaucratic pressure. Deaths at sea, caused in part by political initiatives, are used to validate claims that the country is being invaded.

Meloni, despite her nationalist rhetoric, has proven herself a staunch supporter of NATO and the EU. She fully supports

arming Ukraine and aligning Italy with the Western bloc. Her reliability in foreign policy has earned her a certain credibility among other countries, especially in contrast to Salvini's ambivalence and his penchant for Russia. Her alignment now reveals the superficiality of her claims to "sovereignty." Whenever the interests of capital, Brussels, or Washington are at stake, ideological posture gives way to submissive pragmatism.

The opposition remains divided, lacking a clear and coherent political objective. The Democratic Party oscillates between empty centrism and coward social liberalism, incapable of developing any viable alternative to the current status quo. The Five Star Movement (M5S) occasionally advances left-wing ideas (for example, opposition to military spending and welfare cuts), but due to its populist nature, it does not represent a valid alternative (it governed with both the Lega and

the Democratic Party in two different governments). The unions, battered by decades of bureaucratisation, have limited themselves to calling purely symbolic, brief, and inefficient strikes.

For socialists, there is no doubt about what must be done. Rather than simply highlighting the government's reactionary nature, which is obvious to anyone affected by its consequences, we must strive to rebuild, on the foundations of workplaces, neighbourhoods, and schools, a class-based movement capable of opposing, on the one hand, nationalism and authoritarianism, and, on the other, its fuelling power: capitalism. Individual actions will not save us: only through collective organisation, ideological formation, and continuous struggle can we put an end to the hegemony of the far right in Italy, Europe, and the world. □



HKers demand truth on Wang Fuk fire

By Chan Ying

The horrendous fire in Wang Fuk Court, Tai Po is the worst in living memory for Hong Kong residents. Videos show flames rapidly sweeping up inflammable external netting, with winds spreading the fire across the blocks. The death toll so far is 156, with more yet to be accounted for. Nearly 40% of around 4,800 people in the complex are aged 65 or above.

The eight 31-storey tower blocks were built in 1983 under the then colonial government's subsidised purchase scheme for low income families. There are 2,000-odd densely packed apartments (8 apartments per floor, about 450 sq ft each). Hundreds of similar blocks were built in the 80s, no doubt inspired by the Thatcher government's "Right to Buy" 1980 Housing Act. Typically, they had narrow corridors, thin glass windows and lacked modern safety features such as sprinkler systems and refuge floors. Like Wang Fuk Court, many are now undergoing extensive renovation.

The authorities first attributed the styrofoam covering thin windows as the most likely cause of the fire rapidly entering the inside of the blocks, generating lethal toxic fumes and extreme high temperatures. Fire services reported that all the fire alarms had malfunctioned. This is so unusual that residents are speculating that they were switched off during renovation.

Although the HK government arrested a number of people connected with the renovation programme, it is struggling to control the narrative against a public outcry over the causes of this man-made tragedy. Citizens are expressing widespread frustrations, built up over the decades, about the construction industry's corrupt practices, use of cheap sub-standard materials, as well as the government's ineffective regulatory oversight. E.g. fire-retardant netting is legally required but is twice as expensive, and can only be used once because it deteriorates under strong sunlight, making it an obvious target for cost-cutting and corruption.

Government

People accuse the government's subsequent announcements about its policy to replace bamboo with iron scaffolding as a diversion from the real causes of the disaster. Bamboo scaffolding is part of Hong Kong's cultural heritage, it is sustainable, highly flexible and has served Hong Kong well for many decades.

Anticipating government inspections, many contractors are hurriedly removing netting and foam from building renovations, while angry residents are seizing samples of these materials to conduct tests.

Colonial Hong Kong used to follow the UK practice of using judge-led commissions of inquiry, but not any more. There was no public inquiry over Covid. On this

occasion, it has announced an internal inter-departmental inquiry.

After listening to a government official announcing they would press on with phasing out bamboo scaffolding, University student Miles Kwan launched a petition calling for accommodation for displaced residents and an independent investigation to probe regulatory neglect, potential conflicts of interest and to review the supervision system for construction as well as to hold government officials accountable. The next day Kwan was arrested on suspicion of sedition. His online petition is no longer accessible, but a second [petition](#) has since been started by a former Tai Po resident living overseas.

Imran Khan, who represented the bereaved and survivors of Grenfell, said that Hong Kong now needs a public inquiry with court-like powers because "an internal investigation will not get to the truth and there will be no faith in it..." Based on his experience with Grenfell residents, he said "without justice they cannot grieve." HK's Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu has ordered an "independent review committee", which however lacks the powers that a Commission of Inquiry would bring.

In Hong Kong, the heroic fire service does not have independent trade union representation. In the UK, the FBU has a strong track record of defending fire fighters and the public. Its recent publi-

cation, *Culpable: Deregulation, Austerity and the Causes of the Grenfell Tower Fire*, written by Paul Hampton, contains key lessons not just for the UK but for Hong Kong and many cities across the world. □

CULPABLE

Deregulation, Austerity and the Causes of the Grenfell Tower Fire Paul Hampton
Foreword by Steve Wright

A gripping exposé of the 2017 Grenfell Tower disaster and the systemic failures that led to Britain's worst residential fire since the Second World War. £3 □

plutobooks.com/product/culpable/

"Bathroom ban" has increased harassment

By Will Roberts

Campaigning group TransActual has produced a report tracking the effect of the EHRC's now-withdrawn "interim update" in the first few months after the Supreme Court ruling in April.

The report is based on a survey TransActual carried out among trans people in the UK and other "gender non-conforming" people – in this context, that largely means cis people whose appearance differs in some way from the norm (for example, butch lesbians).

Despite all necessary reservations due to only one survey being done, and the survey being opt-in, and for that reason self-selecting, the findings are clear: the knock-on effect of the EHRC's "interim update" has been an increase in harassment and abuse across the spectrum, and significantly more so for trans people.

The focus on the EHRC's update, rather than the Supreme Court ruling itself, is for a simple

reason: the Supreme Court did not rule on toilet access, only on membership of official committees in Scotland, and maintained that trans people should be free from harassment and discrimination under the 2010 Equality Act. The focus on toilets came from the EHRC's later "interim update", which fuelled much of the media coverage (papers were keen to frame the case as "a victory for women's rights" in the specific domain of "single sex" or "women's spaces").

Report

Trans people and gender non-conforming cis people alike report being confronted in public toilets and changing rooms. That happened before, but people have felt particularly bolstered to do so thanks to the EHRC.

The following is a report from a cis woman:

"The most recent is that I went to the ladies' loo at Victoria station. A group of young women

gathered around me and told me I should get out, saying 'don't you know you're not allowed in here anymore'. I... locked myself in a loo. They stood outside and were banging on the door and shouting that they were going to call the police and that I was 'disgusting' and had no right to be born and all sorts of horrible things... I'm a cis woman and just happen to be tall and quite flat chested and wear my hair short. Before the ruling any challenges had been gentle, like 'oh by the way this is the ladies' and people were embarrassed or apologetic when I said 'it's okay I'm a girl', but now it's aggressive and horrible..."

As we said at the time of the ruling, this was an inevitable result of the backlash around the Supreme Court case: anyone who is deemed not to "fit in" will be on the receiving end of hatred that has been whipped up by transphobic campaigners and the right-wing press.

The effect on trans people (who have experienced a much

more significant jump in incidents than cis respondents, according to the report) is also enormous. Many report opting to use no "gendered spaces" at all, restricting the amount they drink and where they go out in public to accommodate this. Such choices, in deference to prejudice, were common enough before, but they have increased; and they have been linked to dehydration and urinary health issues, as well as just being plain humiliating and degrading.

TransActual's survey received a large number of "malicious" responses from transphobes looking to skew or make fun of the results. This is no surprise – the same has been true of any open consultation or survey regarding trans people in the last several years.

Rather than just discard them, TransActual incorporate some findings based on analysing these responses, and plan to release a separate report in the future. Commonalities be-

tween the malicious responses are: justificatory language ("can now", "allowed to", "the law is clear"), suggesting that the ruling has bolstered and lent credence to anti-trans opinions; misinterpretations celebrating things that the Supreme Court ruling did not rule on, such as removing protections for trans people or saying that blanket exclusions of trans people are somehow "required"; and perhaps most significantly, "media mirroring" – language taken directly from reports in the right-wing press that has filtered down into general conversation, particularly phrases like "a win for women", and "common sense prevails".

More research will follow, and unless the EHRC "interim update" is overruled rather than just withdrawn, the uptick in harassment and discrimination will continue. It is vital that socialists join the fight against the current reactionary wave targeting trans people in the UK and beyond. □

Back Ukraine against Trump's plans!

By Michael Baker

The latest round of peace negotiations between Russia and Ukraine is underway. After multiple unsuccessful attempts over the course of Trump's first year in office, this plan appeared, almost out of nowhere, on 20 November. It's the result of a joint scheme by Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, who had played some undefined role in the Gaza ceasefire agreement, and Trump's special envoy to Russia Steve Witkoff.

The American team claims that the initial 28-point plan was drafted with the input of Rustem Umerov, the former Ukrainian Minister of Defence who is himself embroiled in a corruption scandal (see below). If that's true, Umerov did a very poor job. The terms seem almost entirely to have come from the Russian side, where Kremlin bureaucrat Kirill Dmitriev proposed such measures as halving the Ukrainian army, writing into Ukraine's constitution that it would never join NATO, and having Ukraine cede territory in all four of the oblasts that the front line passes through and Russia claims to control. This would go hand-in-hand with Steve Witkoff's campaign to empty the White House of pro-Ukrainian diplomats.

Concessions

There were some concessions to the Ukrainian side, but they were minimal. The line "Ukraine will have reliable security guarantees" is barely worth the paper it's written on, given that it gives no concrete promises, and Ukraine supposedly had the guarantees of the Budapest memorandum in place when Russia invaded in 2022. The financial punishment Russia would receive for violating the ceasefire at a future date is small fry, and would be unlikely to seriously deter it. Some of the "help" Ukraine was due to receive in aid included capitalist investment in Ukrainian industries in which America received 50% of all profits from the investment. In large part,

this was a return to the politics of colonial conquest: two imperial powers were divvying up the winnings from a war-torn country, and then it was presented to the Ukrainians after the fact as a fait accompli.

This seemed to change over the ensuing weekend (22-23 Nov), as talks took place in Geneva. The outcome was a new 19-point peace deal, in which much of the most sensitive topics (territory decisions, Ukraine's security, NATO and Russia negotiations) had been "bracketed" to be decided by Zelenskyy and Trump. These terms have been "developed" by further talks in Florida the following weekend (29-30 Nov), but details were again light.

Negotiations continue as this article is being written, and the exact content of the 19-point plan has not been published. But assuming the bulk of the earlier plan remains, it will be a significant defeat for Ukraine. The financial stipulations alone will bind Ukraine into the worst version of post-war reconstruction, with the vultures of international capital picking at the bones of Ukrainian industry for scraps, while the working class bear the brunt of post-war financial depression and debt. Any freezing of the front line in its current state will resign millions of Ukrainians to living under the boot of their colonial ruler.

Willing

Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov suggested on Tuesday 25 November that Russia were not minded to accept the new 19-point deal, and Putin (due to meet with US negotiators as *Solidarity* goes to press) has suggested he is only willing to talk on the basis of the original 28-point plan.

Putin has long insisted that any deal has to address the "root causes" of the war, by which he means the removal of Zelenskyy from office, and promises that Ukraine will not join NATO. This stems from his own specious reasoning as to why he "had" to invade Ukraine, but could easily tank the current peace offer and leave all sides in the same stalemate they were before. Russian missiles and drones continue to hit Ukrainian cities every night.

If push comes to shove in this, or a future, round of negotiations, Zelenskyy may not have much choice. If the US threatens to withdraw all support, then either Ukraine signs the paper or it is swiftly reduced to rubble via a Russian onslaught. In that circumstance, while



we acknowledge the deal is a bad one, Workers' Liberty would not outright condemn the Zelenskyy government for having signed it. It could be the best of a litany of bad choices.

Bad

This has come at a bad time for Zelenskyy. Members of his administration are still caught up in a corruption scandal that has taken hold of the country over the past couple of weeks. It has now emerged that the proposed changes to the anti-corruption bodies in July of this year were almost certainly an attempt by people in Zelenskyy's circle to kill operation Midas, an enormous investigation into top-level corruption that has hit a number of the president's very close allies. Rustem Umerov spent a while avoiding returning to Ukraine, in case investigators arrested him upon arrival. Zelenskyy's chief of staff, Andriy Yermak, was forced to resign after his role in the energy corruption was revealed. Tymur Mindich, former ally of oligarch Ihor Kolomoisky and friend of Zelenskyy, fled to Israel (where he has citizenship) hours before investigators arrived at his Kyiv flat. The operation is ongoing and could well unveil more big names.

This underlines the significance of supporting not Ukraine's corrupt government, but its struggling working class, in the ongoing war and peace deals. A post-war Ukraine constructed by Zelenskyy and his cronies will be a disaster for Ukrainian workers. Unions and socialists must be central to the fight for a worker-led reconstruction.

The European powers have come

out in force against the initial plan, and statements from Macron and Starmer have insisted on Ukraine's right to decide, at a minimum, questions of its own borders and army. This is little consolation once the deal is already on the table, given that the European governments have done woefully little to keep Ukraine alive. Should this deal collapse, or a future maximalist version of Russia's plan be forced through and America drops all support for Ukraine, we should demand that the European countries take up the mantle and provide Ukraine the weapons needed to defend itself. They should also cancel Ukraine's foreign debt, to stop the country from being locked in to debilitating repayment schemes for generations.

Instead, the EU has spent the month of November removing multiple-entry visas, including Schengen visas, for Russian citizens. This has been one of the primary methods for Russian dissidents and those fleeing conscription to escape the country. It is an idiotic policy to attack this exit route, depriving Russians who oppose the war with a way out of the country, and ensuring that the Russian state can both Hoover up any conscripts it wants, and stoke resentment about the treatment of ethnically Russian citizens of European countries, such as Estonia and Moldova. The policy is wrong both morally and tactically, and distracts from the only solution that socialists should be advocating: solidarity with the Ukrainian and Russian working classes opposing Putin's invasion, and arming Ukraine to win the war. □

THE STOP THE WAR COALITION AND UKRAINE:

a decade of political and factual illiteracy

60 pages. £5 (inc. postage).

Order

bit.ly/stw-pi

Коаліція "Stop the War" та Україна: десятиліття політичного невігластва та незнання фактів
Dain Street, 2024



Events and campaigns: workersliberty.org/events



youtube.com/c/WorkersLibertyUK



workersliberty.org/audio

How the far right h

By Yves Coleman

Workers' Liberty has asked me to explain what is happening with the National Front in France, now known as the Rassemblement National (National Rally), since 2018. This party has steadily increased its electoral influence since its foundation in 1972. Some of its ideological themes have even contaminated the Republican Right and social democracy. The NR's electoral results have varied, but the general trend is upwards. At least since 2014, it has stabilised at around 25% of the vote in every election.

During the 2022 presidential election, Marine Le Pen, obtained 13 million votes in the second round. Therefore Macron with his 10 million votes would not have won without the 8 million votes coming from the left. In the 2024 parliamentary elections, the NR won 123 seats and another hard-right party 16 seats so we have now 139 far-right MPs, that is, a quarter of French parliament. In the 2024 European elections, the NR and another far-right party, won 10 million votes. Therefore, we can conclude that the French far right has a voting share of between 10 and 13 million.

Of course, we can reassure ourselves by pointing to the high level of abstention, particularly among workers and employees. Out of 49 million registered voters, 17 million abstain, almost 30%. Abstentionists are predominantly blue- and white-collar workers: 77% of blue-collar workers don't vote, as do 80% of households earning less than 900 pounds per month. However, these

17 million non-voters do not take to the streets to fight capitalism.

So after these basic electoral data, I would like to raise three points.

1) What motivates workers to support the far right?

2) What activities is the NR engaged in at the local level?

3) Should we be concerned about the rise of far-right grouplets at the local level?

I have previously discussed the first two topics in articles available on the AWL website, so I will focus on new developments, while also clarifying what remains unchanged.

Support

Why do workers support the far right? This represents the most important issue for us. Which specific workers are we referring to? They are typically those residing in what the NR calls "the France of the forgotten people". This notion is very close to a notion introduced by a geographer, Christophe Guilluy. This intellectual claims that there is a huge social and political gap separating residents of peripheral France from those who reside in the country's two dozen largest and wealthiest cities. The "peripheral France" essentially begins 30 kilometres from the centre of these 25 prosperous commercial-economic-cultural hubs.

The NR separates the population into two opposed groups:

On one side, we have the adversaries of the NR who have concluded a kind of United front: the bobos (bourgeois bohemians), the "globalised elites", living in the centres of major cities, are, according to the NR, allied with the residents of the districts or suburbs predominantly inhabited by migrants or their descendants, and they have kicked the Franco-French workers out of the old working-class districts.

On the other side of the frontier, we have the potential supporters of the NR: the residents of rural areas, of small to medium-sized towns, and suburban zones where the "people" reside. The "people" encompasses small business owners, artisans, farmers, professionals, blue-collar and white-collar workers, as well as the security-related professions (cops, soldiers, firefighters, employees of private security companies). This entire social group is presumed to gather French individuals of native descent and Catholic cultural background. This vision of the French population aligns with the NR's voter base: a popular electorate that prioritises law and order.

For NR voters or grassroots support-



ers, the two primary concerns are the fear of crime (insecurity) and immigration. Obtaining a higher purchasing power only ranks third. These voters and supporters exhibit strong xenophobic tendencies; they subscribe to the "great replacement" theory; they adopt a vehement anti-Muslim stance immediately linking the so-called concept of "insecurity" to the presence of African, Arab, Muslim migrants. The term "insecurity" encompasses both apprehension about migrant criminality and anxiety that French culture may disappear under foreign and Muslim influence. Therefore right-wing social democrats denounce both social insecurity and what they call cultural insecurity.

Propaganda

Unlike the National Front of the 20th century, issues such as anti-communism, abortion, death penalty, and traditional family values have become less prominent in the National Rally propaganda.

However, the concept of "national preference" remains unchanged, reflecting an organic, ethnocentric view of the nation. Within this framework, non-European foreigners and Muslims, are seen as the main target. These anti-Muslim feelings did not arise spontaneously; they are driven by four key factors:

1. The Algerian War (1954-1962) and its consequences: the return of 650,000 "pieds noirs" or repatriates.

2. Three significant waves of terrorist attacks, the third commencing in 2012. Apart from the mass attacks of 2015 and 2016 (which caused 275 deaths), we have to mention the murders of two teachers in, or near, their schools; the assassination of a priest in his church; and the killing of 16 Jews since 2006.

3. The role of social media and the internet has evidently increased since 2010, the year two-thirds of French peo-

ple got an Internet connection.

4. A more recent development is that several French billionaires have invested in media outlets to openly endorse the NR's political agenda. This includes a TV news channel, two radio stations, various print magazines, and even cultural-historical shows touring France.

Interestingly, far-left activists and leftist intellectuals who draw parallels between the NR and the Nazi Party compare Macron and his supporters to the German Zentrum and call the French Right proto-fascist. They seem unaware that, in the 1920s and 1930s, the German communist and socialist parties never won more than a third of the votes of workers and employees. This means that either two-thirds of German workers voted for the centre or the right — or abstained.

If we rely only on electoral politics like the left and far left do, we face a big problem: the far right targets workers mainly during local election campaigns. It also targets workers in their workplaces albeit much less openly: as far as I know the NR has no company cells but it does have activists in the trade unions. The far right is present in geographical areas that the left has abandoned or where it lacks activists, cadres and, above all, political will.

It should also be noted that the left's position on Islamist attacks and anti-Semitic murders is ambiguous at best; this ambiguity allows the right and the far right to stir up hatred against so-called "Muslims" and present themselves as the best defenders of Jews.

What is the far right doing at the municipal level? France is divided into 36,000 municipalities, each one led by a mayor. The National Front/National Rally has never had more than 13 mayors and 1,400 municipal councillors (today fewer than 900), far fewer than the left (7,000)

CRITICAL NOTES ON POSTCOLONIAL THEORY

A critical look at theories now dominant in leftist academia. £3

workersliberty.org/publications

as grown in France

and, of course, the right (52, 000).

NR's municipal councillors do not currently represent a stable force: they experience a high turnover; they frequently resign during their term of office; they are not politically trained as the party does not provide resources for this; the apparatus is centred around Marine Le Pen and her close friends; it controls everything and leaves no space to local initiatives, except in the north of France. The NR is not a traditional party which builds from the grassroots.

In the north of France its local strengths stem from the fact it recruited former left-wing militants who were accustomed to the traditional CP approach of recruitment from below.

But, in the rest of the country, the NR has a top-down strategy. Based on its national electoral results, it decides which areas to explore. Usually it's where it gained more than 30, 40 or 50% of the vote; so the NR tries to find these miraculous voters and transform them into activists.

The NR is struggling to become an institutionalised local political force; it has difficulty recruiting and retaining new rank-and-file activists. The easiest tactic for the NR is to recruit activists and cadres from radical far-right grouplets, but this damages its image. This is why the NR prefers to poach local cadres from traditional right-wing parties as well as recruiting apolitical municipal executives. This strategy is working, but more slowly at the local level than the NR's national electoral scores suggest.

The NR also tries to find young peo-

ple with no political background. However their inexperience means they lack credibility to impress local voters; furthermore, when they have good academic training and come from the upper classes or the upper layers of the petty bourgeoisie, they struggle to socialise with ordinary workers, farmers, or housewives...

With an electorate that wants law and order and is xenophobic, anti-Muslim and even racist, a typical NR mayor has ready-made answers:

- He increases the number of municipal police officers and provides them with weapons, bulletproof vests, cars, etc.
- He installs surveillance cameras everywhere.
- He opposes the construction of mosques and makes cuts to subsidies provided to associations that help undocumented migrants.

Fear

Usually NR mayors and municipal councillors create a climate of fear at the local level. Local residents are afraid that they may face negative repercussions if they voice any criticism or even if they are seen with local leftwing friends. This clientelist policy pursued at the local level is consistent with the policy adopted by the former mayors that the NR loudly denounced before conquering the town hall.

NR mayors are all elected on an anti-corruption platform. Once elected, they tend to adopt the same behaviour as their predecessors: they significantly increase their mayoral allowances, they employ family members and friends, they make obscure deals with their family's or friends' companies, etc.

While they do not usually increase local taxes, they reduce all social budgets. They outsource to private companies many municipal services and activities which were previously provided or subsidised by the municipality: child care, swimming pools, school catering services, school recreational centres, etc. They sell municipal land to property developers.

This leads to an increase in the cost of basic municipal services, which affects working class families and voters, but until now the NR does not suffer from this policy.

How have violent local extremist grouplets expanded in recent years? Radical fascist grouplets have decided to establish themselves throughout France: following the dissolution of several national fascist organisations, far-right grouplets have adopted a strategy in-



tended to confuse the state.. The most active are the "identitarians" and national-revolutionaries, also known as Third Position. Activists shift from one group to another. They engage in physical confrontations with left-wing activists, migrants and homosexuals. This strategy of atomisation at the national level complicates police efforts to infiltrate and disband them. And when a local fascist grouplet is disbanded, it is significantly easier to quickly form a new group with a different name, than it is for a national organisation.

These small grouplets are not all active in the same field and establish a kind of division of work:

- Some focus on humanitarian efforts to assist Franco-French homeless individuals, excluding migrants or non white people
- They conduct national campaigns across all their media platforms. They exploit news events such as the brutal murder of a child by an undocumented Algerian woman, the rape of a student by an undocumented migrant, or the killing of a young French man outside a nightclub by a group of youths of North African descent
- They even have "feminist" grouplets that label themselves "femellists" and use the transgender question as a weapon to gain popularity
- They open bars reserved for Franco-French people, where they also host political discussions.

Their stated aim is to "take back the streets from the left".

The rise of these fascist grouplets is indeed concerning, but let's remember, we are not living in the 1930s. For instance, 44 KPD militants were killed in 1930, 52 in 1931, and 75 in just the first half of 1932. We can't predict what might occur if the NR successfully

forms an alliance with the Republican Right and wins either the parliamentary or presidential elections or both. Will these violent fascist grouplets expand? Will they join the NR and push it further towards fascism or towards a much less democratic regime?

I honestly don't know. I just wonder if the Left is able to draw any efficient policy against these dangers and many others which we see coming. □

• Yves Coleman is a migrants' rights activist in Paris and editor of *Ni Patrie Ni Frontières*

More online

History of NATO

Why we're against NATO but don't think "anti-NATO" should define politics

bit.ly/h-nato

Police vs anti-racists

Meanwhile far-right rally in Bristol

bit.ly/cops-b

Farid Mehralizade

Azerbaijani dissident in jail

bit.ly/fm-dt

Trans women oppressed?

Luke Hardy argues that trans women too suffer from sexism

bit.ly/tw-wo

Women and boxing

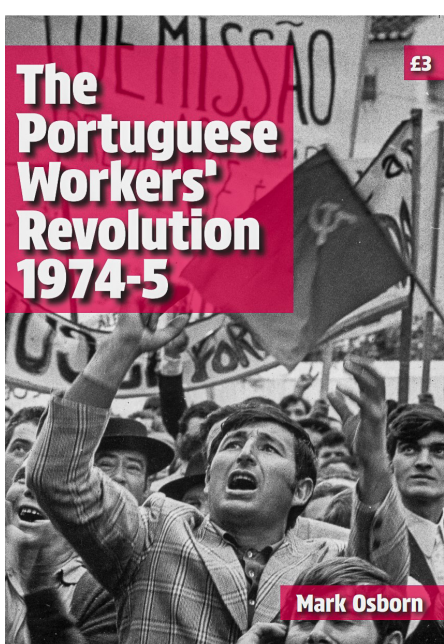
Review of the film *Christy*

bit.ly/c-box

Reply to SoB

More debate with the Socialismo o Barbarie current

bit.ly/r-sob



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

workersliberty.org/publications



From Second to Th

By Rayner Lysaght

Continuation of a series 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.

Helped by the Russian Liberals, the Tsar did manage to crush the [Russian] Revolution of 1905 with the minimum concession of a Parliament (Duma) with limited powers and elected on a limited franchise. The Austrian Government bought off its own radicalising workers with manhood suffrage. In the USA, the most radical trade union leaders formed the International Workers of the World (IWW) with the support of the SLP.

For the International, the Revolution was followed by intensification of existing trends. Though capitalist Europe did not move to repression immediately, it had done so by 1910. Unlike the IWMA after the Commune, the workers' movement was now too strong for its world organisation to collapse. Rather, the Revisionist challenge to its politics intensified and was now matched on the Left by revolutionaries, mainly in Eastern Europe, seeking to develop these politics so that the working class could take State power and begin to institute Socialism. In the centre Bebel, Kautsky and their equivalents led a majority into trying to reconcile two increasingly opposite trends. This position came to give its name, Centrism, to the practice of Social Democratic Party bureaucracy.

Revisionism

At first, Revisionism made the advance. In 1906, Auer and the German Social Democratic Party Executive met the trade union leaders and agreed not to call for any future political strike. The following year, at the International's seventh Congress in Stuttgart, the Executive's Report included a proposal for it to accept colonialism. The Socialist Party of America and the Labour Parties of Australia and South Africa went further, moving to bar non-white immigration, particularly to their countries. The International was still principled enough to reject these proposals.

However, it could not move decisively the other way. The problems created by colonialism were not faced. Moreover, though there was support for an attack by Luxemburg's friend and political ally, Clara Zetkin (1857-1932), on the Austrian compromise that fell short of women's suffrage, proposals for an international campaign for universal suf-

frage in all the States were shelved.

The most significant debate at Stuttgart concerned the prevention of war. From 1905, each frightened State Government had been trying to consolidate support by calling for national unity against others. Now the International debated four motions, three from tendencies in the French section. The most radical was that debated by Gustave Hervé (1871-1944): influenced by Syndicalism, it called for a general strike in the participating countries. It had the sympathy of Connolly, in America, who tended to Syndicalism, but was attacked not only by the German trade unionists but by Lenin and others of the Revolutionary Left as being impossible and, hence, diversionary. Jules Guesde's proposal argued that militarism was just another aspect of capitalism and thus not to be opposed in a single campaign. Jaurès and the old Blanquist Edouard Vaillant (1840-1915) called for action against war but recognised a right of national defence. Bebel was close to this position but stressed both the central role of capitalism and went further in distinguishing between offensive and defensive war. In the end, a compromise was passed unanimously. It included two paragraphs drafted by the Leftists Lenin, Luxemburg, and the Russian Centrist Menshevik, Yuli Martov (1873-1923). They provided the theoretical core for the movement from which the Communist International would arise:

"If a war threatens to break out, it is a duty of the working-class in the countries affected and a duty for their Parliamentary representatives, with the aid of the International Bureau as an active and co-ordinating power, to make every effort to prevent war by all means which vary naturally according to the intensity of the class struggle and to the political situation in general.

"Should war break out nonetheless, it is their duty to intervene in order to bring it promptly to an end, and with all their strength to make use of the economic and political crisis created by the war to stir up the deepest strata of the people and precipitate the fall of capitalist domination."

These guidelines for future action were vague enough but they did represent a position from which Socialists could advance their cause even in the teeth of a crisis such as that which would eventually smash their International.

In the meantime, this continued to grow. Australia had more Labour Governments. The German Social Democrats became the largest single party in the Reichstag. The Socialist Party of America had a member elected to

Congress. Yet, increasingly, this organisational advance was accompanied by political fudges by the centre to keep the movement united.

The International's last two Congresses, Copenhagen (1910) and Basle (1912), showed little political advance and were mainly irrelevant to the debates being conducted within the International's Left wing. The projected Vienna Congress, which the outbreak of the 1914 War aborted, was expected to move to expel the most vital political part of this wing, Lenin's Russian Social Democratic and Labour Party (Bolshevik). Few of the old guard took part in this new left. In 1908 Kautsky tried to relate the day-to-day struggle to the ultimate revolution. He succeeded less in clarifying the probabilities than in annoying his Party's leadership. Under pressure from it, he rewrote the offending sections, making the work more moderate. Plekhanov still blocked with Lenin on the need to maintain a tightly-disciplined and conscious working-class political party in Russia: he opposed him on nearly everything else. In the USA, de Leon had failed to win control of the IWW. His party became an isolated sect.

Weakness

The big weakness of the Left was that its varying answers to the questions it faced kept it divided against itself, weakening what was already numerically small compared to the Centre and the Right. Its members were ready to block with some who can be seen now as its political opponents to defeat other Leftists. By 1910, after five years of repression, the Bolsheviks within Russia itself numbered less than fifty. Lenin blocked with the Right Centrist Plekhanov against the Left Centrist Martov and against Leon Trotsky (Lev Davidovich Bronstein, 1879-1940), who tried to act as honest broker in Russian Social Democracy between the Bolsheviks and the more Right-wing Mensheviks. Trotsky related better to Kautsky than to Luxemburg and Lenin himself could not understand Luxemburg's opposition to Kautsky. For her part, she was not too upset when it looked as if Lenin and Bolsheviks would be expelled from the International.

Of all the Left, history would prove Lenin the greatest. His position as citizen of the most oppressive State in Europe made him less ready than his comrades in countries of the West to compromise on the need for revolution. However, he insisted, against the Mensheviks, that this revolution would have to be led by the workers and small farmers who would provide the revolutionary government, rather than by the bourgeoisie. It required an International of tight homogeneous revolutionary parties to lead the workers; though Lenin did not yet realise this, such parties would be as different from German Social Democracy as that was to Britain's Independent Labour Party. Such parties would be firmly dialectically materialist; the "private" nature of religion [in society] asserted by Marx and Engels and used by Centrists and Revisionists as a party norm could not be maintained as the latter.

Trotsky and to a certain extent Luxemburg recognised that the revolutionary Government [in Russia] would have to move against the capitalists immediately on a social and economic as well as a political front: the strategy of Permanent Revolution.

On the other hand, Lenin recognised well the issue of national self-determination. Marx and Engels had seen this according to three overall principles for recognising the validity of a national claim: the extent of its popular support; its helpfulness to progressive movements in Western Europe; and, not least, its weakening effect on the Russian Empire. Lenin and Luxemburg went beyond this to develop more general theories. Luxemburg's view was coloured by her experience in Poland, where the 1905 Rising had not stimulated nationalism. She rationalised this by referring to the growing interdependence of world industry and trade which made real national economic independence a mirage. In some cases — such as the Balkan States' independence from Turkey — national freedom might help social and economic development, but in general the most a nation could expect was autonomy. Against this, Lenin insisted on the political nature of national self-de-

Lysaght-Matgamna discussion and debate, November 2018

In 2018 Sean Matgamna (AWL) and Rayner Lysaght (Socialist Democracy) had a public debate and subsequent filmed discussion focused on Ireland, the national question and permanent revolution. You can read a full transcript at bit.ly/Lys-Mat.

□

Third International

termination. Its denial blocked the way to Socialism for the proletariat of both oppressed and oppressor nations. It encouraged the first to concentrate support on movements led by its national bourgeoisie (as in Ireland when Labour left the leadership of the national struggle after 1916). Even more certainly, for the second, it offered bribes from the product of the exploited nation and developed in it habits of racism and chauvinism.

A third disagreement between Lenin and Luxemburg was their concept of imperialism. Lenin saw it as centred in the export of capital, Luxemburg in the export of surplus commodities. In practice, they did not argue about it.

The International grew and, despite criticism from the Left, so did its bureaucracy, centrism and revisionism. Then, in July 1914 on the eve of its Jubilee Congress, the latest Imperialist war scare became a reality. The International could not react. First Austrian Social Democracy voted its Government war credits, then the extreme right wing of Russian Social Democracy (including Plekhanov) and then, most devastatingly, the German Social Democrats, followed by the French (including Guesde and Vaillant. and with Hervé's support) and most of the British. Most of these found democratic excuses for their actions. The Austrians and the Russians recalled Marx's fears of Tsarist Russia. The French insisted on their superior democratic rights (they had maintained manhood suffrage since 1881) compared to Prussia. The British cited Germany's breach of Belgian neutrality. Only the Russian war effort could not be masked as democratic. None considered their own States' colonies and oppressed nations. Revisionism had beaten both Centrism and the Left. The Second International had ended.

It reappeared after the War, after a series of conferences held by those who could not bring themselves to accept the new Russian Workers' State, in 1923, organised on such a basis it was completely reformist and, in Lenin's view, by its relationship to its affiliates' national States, bourgeois. It liquidated itself again with the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939; this time it was revived only in 1951.

The Socialist vanguard reappeared as the Third International demanded by Lenin when he heard of the disintegration of the Second. For most of the subsequent war he was alone in his demand. Delegates of his Party attended Congresses of anti-War Socialists in neutral Switzerland at Zimmerwald in 1915 and at Kienthal in 1916. At these,



Second World Congress of the Comintern

their calls for a purged International were opposed by those who wanted to make it easy for the pro-war Socialists (social-chauvinists) to reunite them. Lenin isolated the Bolsheviks and their allies further by insisting on Socialists having a duty to turn their imperialist war into civil class war, rather than just calling for peace.

Then, in March 1917, the workers of Russia overthrew the Tsar. The country's bourgeoisie began a struggle to assert its claim to State power. Against this Lenin developed his views to accept Trotsky's concept of Permanent Revolution and a programme, less than Socialist, but on which the workers could take State power. Trotsky joined the Bolsheviks. In November they led the workers to establish the world's first countrywide Workers' State.

Early

Despite Lenin's early call, it was not until the First World War had ended in November 1918 (and not until a month after a Congress at Berne had started the process of exhuming the Second International) that, in May 1919, what had now become the Communist Party of Russia convoked the founding Congress of the Third, or Communist, International (Comintern).

Two points must be understood about the new International. In one important way it was very different from its predecessors. For the first time, more than two Asian countries were represented in a Socialist International. Besides a Japanese Communist Party there were formed, either in time for the founding Congress or in the next four years, the Communist Parties of China, India, Indonesia, Korea, Persia (Iran) and Turkey. As yet these were small, yet they made the Third International more truly international than the first two and were a pledge that, unlike the Second, it would not hesitate to oppose colonialism.

But how would colonialism be opposed? How indeed would capitalism be fought. These questions were set by the

nature of the International's non-Russian sections. Although it had been founded by revolutionaries, it was not composed of revolutionary parties. The French Socialist Party had been among the most revisionist before the war. It had been among the firmest in supporting its bourgeois war effort; now, it was equally notable in that the majority of its conference delegates voted to affiliate with the Comintern. The Parti Communiste Français being based on this internal majority, its real political change was doubtful.

A more subtle confusion was in the position of Socialist Feminists like Luxemburg's old ally Zetkin and Alexandra Kollontai (1872-1952). Both had opposed the War; Kollontai as the world's first woman Commissar had decreed for women's rights beyond the expectations of the Second International. Whether from age or demoralisation, neither would fight to maintain these standards later. On the other hand, Rosa Luxemburg had doubted the need to found the Comintern though she was murdered before its first Congress.

Friedrich (Fritz) Adler (1879-1960), leader of Austria's Anti-War Socialists and killer of that country's War Minister, wavered between Second and Third International, tried to build a Centrist (Two-and-a Half) International in 1921, but joined the resurrected Second International in 1923.

Although the founding of the Comintern was a major move towards a genuine revolutionary World Party of Socialism, its simple existence could not guarantee such a Party. It could be produced only as a result of a period of revolutionary struggle and sympathetic but firm guidance from the best elements among the Russian Communists.

Certainly, the years after 1918, there were plenty of revolutions. The trouble was that, with the considerable exception of the Russians' struggle against counter-revolution, they were all defeats. Germany and Hungary in 1919, Italy in 1920, Germany again in 1921 all failed to

gain for the workers state power. Save in Hungary, all were defeated by the weakness and treachery of the Revisionists.

The Third Congress the following year passed a set of Guiding Principles for the Communist Parties in their work which, though regarded by Lenin as based too much on the Russian experience, included, even then, useful advice.

Principles

The International agreed to Lenin's Guiding Principles on the National and Colonial Question, which directed co-operation between — but not amalgamation of — Communist and Revolutionary National bourgeois parties in oppressed States. It also passed proposals for joint action on a principled basis between Communist and other non-revolutionary parties of the working-class where, as in France and Germany, the Communists organised between a quarter and a third of the State's workers. This was the strategy of the United Front.

Yet the Communist Parties remained weak and under pressure from a reviving bourgeoisie. This was most aggressive and successful in Italy, with the Fascist takeover of 1922. (The leader of this, Benito Mussolini, 1883-1945 was, like Guesde and Hervé in France, a former Left Socialist turned Social Chauvinist). The non-Russian Communists remained dependent on Russia and were thus open to infection by a new form of bureaucratic degeneration, one that occurred within the Russian Workers' State as it developed. □

• Note from the editor: Some readers have asked what we mean by "*idiosyncratic in its slant on some points*". I have in mind some of Lysaght's passing comments as, for example, in the last instalment on Karl Kautsky's book on the agrarian question. Neither Workers' Liberty nor Lysaght's group (now called Socialist Democracy, in Ireland) have "lines" on such questions, but I will write some notes for the online version of these articles.



When socialism was proposed as the alternative to capitalism

By Colin Waugh

In the article titled *The Chartist workers' fight for knowledge* (Solidarity 751), I set out to show that an important dimension of the Chartist movement was an aspiration towards "really useful knowledge".

A visceral hatred and fear of Chartism was widespread amongst the well-off in the late 1830s and the "hungry forties". The "Corn Law rhymer" Ebenezer Elliott summed up what lay behind this when he wrote:

"Prepare to meet the King of Terrors" cried

To prayerless Want, his plunderer ferret-eyed.

"I am the King of Terrors," Want replied.

In other words, the well-off feared what starving workers might do. Especially after the 1839 events in Newport and the 1842 "Plug Plot", many would have seen the Chartists as a subhuman mob that must be crushed before they could destroy the social order.

However, for much of the second half of the 1840s it seemed as if the Chartist threat might have subsided. Then in the early months of 1848, stimulated especially by the February revolution in France, the Chartists made plans to submit a third petition to parliament, on 10 April. This revival of Chartism stirred up so much fear that 70,000 people across London were sworn in as special constables, cutlasses were issued to the regular police, and a military force, including cavalry and artillery, was lined up to stop the Chartist demonstration moving from its assembly point on Kennington Common to Parliament. This confrontation ended in anti-climax. Nevertheless it was with the aim of forestalling a further revival of Chartism that the first Christian Socialist group was formed that evening, at a house in Bloomsbury.

Group

This group was started by two lawyers, John Ludlow (1821-1911) and Thomas Hughes (1822-1896), and two Church of England clerics, Charles Kingsley (1819-1875) and Frederick Denison Maurice (1805-1872). Within a short time they won support from a substantial body of well-off people and also from a few working-class activists. Their strategy had two linked aspects: a drive to provide workers with religious education and a drive to promote producer cooperatives. In 1854, when the link was broken, the group disintegrated.

The Christian Socialists' conception of religious education derived ultimately from a view put forward by the poet and philosopher Samuel Taylor Coleridge. In 1830, following the two acts of parliament (1828 and 1829) that had removed some of the legal restrictions on Catholics, Coleridge argued that the Anglican church could justify the tithes (ie the compulsory taxes) by which it was supported) if its priests everywhere were to

be organised as a "clerisy" — that is, a national network that would provide education, both religious and general, to the working population.

Then in 1840, when the fear of Chartism was already very high, the influential — and racist — writer Thomas Carlyle published a short book titled *Chartism*. In this he urged that Chartism must be defeated before it was too late, and that the answer was (a) to get workers to emigrate and (b) to teach those who remained to read. He said that the Anglican clergy must do this teaching, and alleged that so far they had failed to do so.

The education strand within Christian Socialism derived, then, from Coleridge's concept of clerisy and this demand by Carlyle.

Important

The single most important organiser of the Christian Socialist group was John Ludlow. He was descended from Edmund Ludlow, the Civil War general who in 1649 had signed the king's death warrant. He was born in India where his father was a soldier, educated in France, and then became a lawyer in Lincoln's Inn. (He spent a good deal of time visiting his sister and her husband in Martinique.) In 1830, when he was ten, Ludlow watched a crowd surging along the street in Paris at the start of the July revolution that overthrew the Bourbon monarchy. Later, having become an adherent of the critical utopian socialist Charles Fourier, he was strongly influenced by the Protestant cleric Louis Meyer. Meyer had founded a movement aimed at getting affluent young men to help the poor. He urged Ludlow to start a similar group in London. Ludlow was also influenced by the strands in French socialism which aimed to build producer cooperatives. Once in England he contacted Maurice, twenty years his senior, and recruited him to both these causes.

Abandoned

Maurice was brought up as a Unitarian, but as a young adult abandoned this to become a broad church Anglican — i.e. he rejected on the one hand the evangelical emphasis on salvation or damnation in an afterlife and, on the other, the high church tendency that sought to move closer to Catholicism. When Ludlow first knew him, Maurice was the Chaplain at Lincoln's Inn and also a professor at King's College, the institution set up in 1829 by Anglicans to counter the supposedly irreligious University College. From the late 1830s Maurice had been firmly convinced that Chartism must, in his word, be "crushed".

Kingsley, no less racist than Carlyle, was an Anglican vicar in Hampshire. He wrote two influential anti-Chartist novels: *Yeast, A Problem* (1848) and *Alton Locke, Tailor and Poet* (1850). (Both these books were heavily influenced by Carlyle, and a character based on Carlyle, Sandy Mackaye, is central figure



Frederick Denison Maurice

in the second.) Kingsley's favourite line was to claim that although he was a parson he was also a Chartist (a barefaced lie). He went on:

I am not one of those who laugh at your petition of April 10th; I have no patience with those who do... But my quarrel with the Charter is that it does not go far enough in reform. I want to set you free, but I don't see how what you ask will give you what you want. I think you have fallen into the same mistake as the rich of whom you complain... I mean the mistake of fancying that legislative reform is social reform, or that men's hearts can be changed by Acts of Parliament. If anyone will tell me of a country where a charter made rogues honest or the idle industrious, I shall alter my opinion of the Charter, but not till then... Be fit to be free and God himself will set you free.

The group of workers recruited by the Christian Socialists included several significant activists. The most important of these was Lloyd Jones (1811-1886). Starting out as a fustian cutter in Ireland, Jones was by 1849 a tailor in London, having been a high profile Owenite socialist organiser across much of Eng-

land, including Lancashire, Yorkshire and London itself. After the Christian Socialist group as such broke up in 1854, Jones would go on to work closely with Ludlow and Hughes in the drive to give cooperatives and unions a stable legal basis. He did this right up to his death in 1886 while at no stage moving from his initial agnostic stance on religion.

Involved

In April 1849 these and many other workers became involved in bible reading and scripture discussion sessions led impressively by Maurice at the Cranbourne Coffee Tavern in The Strand, London, and then in the nearby Hall of Association, which had been built by one of their workers' cooperatives. They persuaded artisans in several trades, notably tailors, bakers and shoemakers, to form cooperatives. However by 1854 most of these cooperatives had either failed or become small capitalist firms.

Following the formation of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE) in 1851, engineering employers throughout the country declared a lockout beginning on 1 January 1852, the aim being to get workers to sign "the document", ie an undertaking not to join the union. There was a long struggle, but by June the engineers had been starved back to work. In this situation, the Christian Socialist group convinced the ASE leader (and co-founder) William Newton to put a motion to the national executive as follows:

That in the opinion of this meeting the resistance of Labour against Capital is not calculated to enhance the condition of the labourers. We therefore advise that all our future operations should be directed to promoting the system of self-employment in associative workshops as the best means of effectually regulating the conditions of labour.

As a result of this, and with Christian Socialist financial support, two cooperative engineering workshops were set up in London, one in Mile End Road and one in Southwark. But like the other Christian Socialist cooperatives both of these failed shortly afterwards — in this case essentially because ASE activists were more interested in organising struggle against mainstream employers.

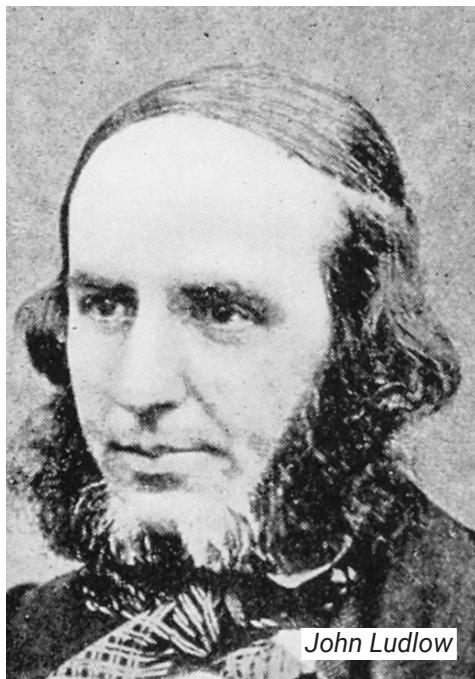
Maurice's idea of "socialism" was that all humans were children of God. In his opinion, then, all workers had to do to change their situation for the better was to recognise this and treat one another as brothers or sisters. Maurice also believed that the class structure of society was made by God and that therefore workers should not seek to change it. He saw producer cooperatives as a means by which they could treat one another appropriately, and his initial support for the formation of cooperatives was based on this. However, he rejected any idea of political organisation, especially any version of it that entailed majority rule, and in 1854 this finally led him to separate himself from the other group

New pamphlets

The Trade Union Movement, New Labour, and Working-Class Representation

JOHN BLOXAM AND SEAN MATGAMMA
WITH A NEW INTRODUCTION AND APPENDICES

"The Trade Union..." reprints a pamphlet from 2004 on the Blairite coup in Labour and electoral challenges to it, with appendices and a new intro covering debates in 2009-10, 2025, and more **£4.50** bit.ly/tu-lp
"Debate on unions..." reprints further documents from 2009 arguing that things were changing, with an afterword. **£6** for both bit.ly/lp-de □



John Ludlow

members.

In 1853 he had been sacked from his post at King's College, on the grounds that he disbelieved in eternal damnation. Early in 1854 he convinced the other Christian Socialists that they should set up the London Workingmen's College, and this opened in the October with Maurice as principal.

Cooperative

Although they continued to work with Maurice through this college, Ludlow and Hughes from this point increasingly devoted themselves, especially in conjunction with Lloyd Jones, to the co-operative movement, working through parliament to improve the legal position both of cooperatives and other workers' self-help organisations, including both burial societies and trade unions. Ludlow drafted two parliamentary bills granting limited liability to these organisations. Hughes became a Liberal MP and Ludlow eventually became the national Registrar (i.e. the top civil servant responsible) for Friendly Societies. (Towards the end of their lives both Maurice and Kingsley became professors at Cambridge. Kingsley was appointed as professor of modern history there in 1860, having been appointed the year before as chaplain to the Queen. In 1861 he also became a private tutor to the Prince of Wales.)

In his 1954 book chapter *The Christian Socialists of 1848*, John Saville, at that stage still a Communist Party member, argued that the main effect of the Christian Socialist group's 1848-54 activity was to make it more difficult than it would otherwise have been for Ernest Jones and others to rebuild the Chartist movement in the 1850s, thereby contributing to a situation in which "the majority of the British working class lived in conditions of semi-literacy and material poverty and insecurity for many decades to come".

A third article will argue that this, though valid in itself, is not the whole story. □

Was Menshevik Georgia a model?

By Paul Abbot

Eric Lee's *The August Uprising, 1924: The Georgian Anti-Soviet Revolt and the Birth of Democratic Socialism* deals with the aftermath of the Soviet invasion of Georgia in 1921 and the lead-up to the failed August Uprising in 1924, picking up where his earlier book *The Experiment: Georgia's Forgotten Revolution, 1918-1921* left off.

His central argument is that the events in Georgia played an important role in the final break between the two internationals, which he refers to as "the birth of democratic socialism". This international context is the real original contribution of Lee's book, and whilst I am unsympathetic to his assessment of the conflict and the conclusions he draws from it, it surely good that he has clearly and lucidly laid out the case for his side.

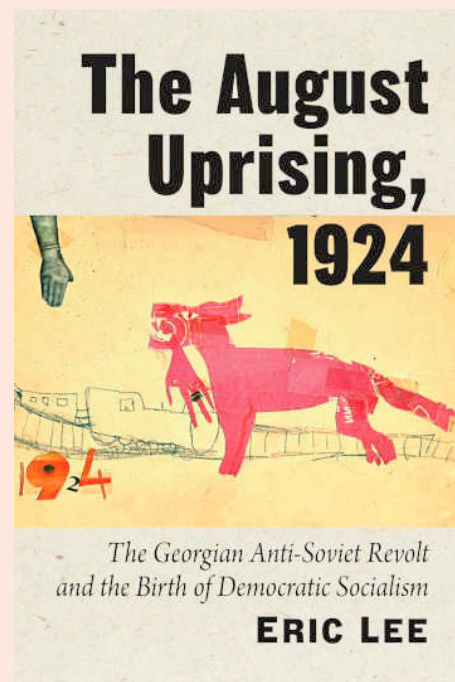
Georgia was a significant base for the Mensheviks, who enjoyed genuine dominance among the working class there. After the February Revolution, the Mensheviks controlled the Tiflis (now Tbilisi) Soviet, but argued that an alliance of the working class, soldiers, and the progressive bourgeoisie were at the heart of the revolution, and it was of utmost importance to preserve this alliance.

Difficult

The Mensheviks in power were faced with a difficult situation: they were a socialist party that drew their power from the working class and overall sought to remain part of Russia, yet were thrust into a position of national leadership at the head of a newly independent Georgia. They opposed dual power, and under their leadership the Tiflis Soviet renounced any claims to state power and subordinated itself to the (also Menshevik-ran) traditional bodies of the state. In their eyes, their task was to rule as befit a nation whose productive forces were unready for socialism: Prime Minister Noe Zhordania argued that they could not "avoid serving in one way or another ... the interests of the bourgeoisie".

For criticism of the Georgian Mensheviks in power, see Paul Vernadsky's [review](#) of *The Experiment* and the ensuing back and forth, and the more recent [debate](#) in *Solidarity* between Lee and Vernadsky over German support for Menshevik Georgia.

In February 1921 a Bolshevik uprising broke out in Lori (disputed between Armenia and Georgia), at the very least in part engineered from Moscow. This came after Stalin's ally Orjonikidze had repeatedly pushed for an invasion of Georgia, and the uprising was used as a pretext for invasion. Trotsky argued for more "preparatory work inside Geor-



gia in order to develop the uprising and later come to its aid", but was away in the Urals when the decision was made. Lenin acquiesced to the invasion, but expressed reservations which would grow over time.

Georgia was quickly conquered, and the new rule certainly was repressive. Lee chronicles the repression carried out against the trade unions, the church, intellectuals, cooperatives, peasants, and the Menshevik Party. Local communists were also badly treated by Moscow, with Stalin and Orjonikidze purging those who counseled more sensitivity towards national sentiment in Georgia: this episode was at the centre of Lenin's final struggle against Stalin, and he worked hard to try and support Georgian communists such as Mdivani.

Despite the repression the Mensheviks endured underground, and in 1923 would form a committee (Damkom) to coordinate an uprising against Soviet rule, alongside the right-wing National Democrats, Socialist-Revolutionaries, Social Federalists, and Skhivists (dissident Mensheviks). Shortly before the uprising was due to take place one of its leaders was captured. He attempted to warn the others that the Cheka knew about their plans, but they carried on with the uprising at the end of August 1924.

Damp squib

For the most part it was a bit of a damp squib: the first shots were fired a day early in the city of Chiatura due to a miscommunication, and other local revolts the next day were small and isolated. The chief exception to this was Guria, an area which had experienced a Menshevik-supported peasant rebellion in the run up to the 1905 Revolution, where large numbers of peasants

joined the August Uprising. Within a few days it was all over, and the government response was bloody.

Events in Georgia were closely followed by the European socialist movement, and Second International figures such as Karl Kautsky saw it as a practical and real-world alternative to Bolshevik Communism. In 1922 the Berlin Conference was held as a final attempt at reconciliation between the Second and Third Internationals (also including the Second and a Half International which was wavering between the two), and somewhat unexpectedly the Soviet invasion of Georgia came to dominate the proceedings. The discussions at the conference were acrimonious, and no practical cooperation came out of the conference.

Following the failure of the August Uprising, Kautsky wrote that Bolshevism had gone "from being the beneficiary of the revolution to its gravedigger", and that when spontaneous revolts arose in the Soviet Union the Second International could not "condemn participation".

Persuasive

Lee argues persuasively that the invasion of Georgia in 1921 provided a model for later Soviet invasions of bordering nations they saw as within their domain: namely, presenting the invasion as aid for local communists, either in power (Hungary and Afghanistan) or involved in a workers' revolution.

Overall however, his conclusions are wrong. His opposition to the Bolsheviks is made less coherent by the cast of characters he selects as worthwhile critics of them: it is a grave insult to put Rosa Luxemburg alongside Samuel Gompers, the racist pro-war American union leader. On the war, Lee largely skirts over the fact that many of the book's heroes fully supported their own government's war efforts, such as Zhordania and Irakli Tsereteli.

The book's epilogue about the re-foundation of the Second International in 1951 is when things really go off the rails. Lee praises them for choosing sides in the Cold War and giving their "full support" to collective security and the foundation of NATO, pointing to former NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg as part of this tradition.

Lee writes off the Bolsheviks as a whole. He is wrong to do this, and his alternatives are not very convincing. However, the invasion of Menshevik Georgia in 1921 was a terrible crime, not only against Georgia but against the Bolshevik project itself. It helped to inaugurate the rule of a bureaucratic anti-democratic clique, and cement the idea that workers' rule could be implemented from outside at the tip of a bayonet. □



The pioneers of women's libe

By Nancy Holmstrom

Haymarket Press has recently published a collection of writings by Nancy Holmstrom (a long-time contributor to the US "Third Camp" socialist journals *New Politics* and *Against The Current*) entitled *From a Marxist-Feminist Point of View*. Here we reprint Holmstrom's review of a large history by Hal Draper of early feminism and socialism.

Hal Draper (1914-1990) was both a master polemicist and an erudite scholar of Marxism and of socialist history, often combining these talents in withering critiques of alternative analyses. These qualities are fully manifested in *Women and Class: Towards a Socialist Feminism*, released by the Center for Socialist History, a collection of essays some of which were written in connection with his multivolume *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution*.

Also evident throughout the book is Draper's passionate commitment to socialism-from-below, as opposed to all forms of socialism-from-above, as these concepts were explained in his seminal *The Two Souls of Socialism* which influenced so many of us.

The "theme of this book is the class line that runs through feminism from the start, and in particular the relations between socialist feminism and bourgeois feminism." Draper skewers liberal and conservative interpretations of feminist history, showing that they are presenting stories of privileged women, not the vast majority of working women.

The best part of the book for me was meeting the many inspiring women (and some men) who have been omitted from most histories, particularly in Part 1, which he describes an "attempt to resurrect" the history of the left wing of the French Revolution.

The first organised feminist movement arose in this context. This should not be surprising, he says, as revolution "suggests to all oppressed people that the power on top can be overthrown.... Feminism — after centuries of existence as an idea, a complaint, a servile grumbling — now takes the stage as a social-political force ... at the same time as the masses do...."

Etta Palm, a moderate, was the first to organise women politically. But it was in the working-class districts that women's rights to political participation made the most headway — because here women were already actively involved in struggles and debates about survival. The first all-women's revolutionary group (Revolutionary Women) was founded by Claire Lacombe and Pauline Léon in the milieu to the left of the Jacobins, who were strongly anti-feminist.

Working women played a critical role in key events of the revolution, from storm-

ing the Bastille to initiating the march on Versailles to bring the King back to revolutionary Paris. Their centrality and militancy has been ignored by most historians; others who did note it were horrified, including Olympe de Gouges and Mary Wollstonecraft, who championed women's rights in the abstract.

As Draper's chapter on the Utopians ("Sex and Sects...") shows, they were a very mixed bag with regard to feminism.

Charles Fourier for example, known for his insight that women's status is a measure of social progress in general, was remarkably modern in championing sexual freedom for both sexes. However, he said little about socio-political rights and his picture of the utopian community suggests this freedom is that of the Playboy bunny.

Disciples of Robert Owen like William Thompson, Anna Wheeler and James Morrison were admirable. Morrison was a union leader who wrote a weekly column in which he championed the interests and rights of working women and actively encouraged their militant self-organisation. (If only all socialists today were as enlightened!)

A true socialist feminist heroine of the 1848 period was Jeanne Deroin, teacher, journalist and tireless organiser — the first woman to run for national electoral office. Like Flora Tristan before her, Deroin proposed a union of workers' organisations — more than a decade before the founding of the First International Working Men's Association!

Most shocking was the chapter on Proudhon. Proudhon's name is associated with the famous statement that "(private) property is theft." He also opposed state ownership, preferring workers' associations. Known as the father of anarchism, he seems basically a libertarian kind of socialist, even if his anarchism was mistaken.

But it turns out that Proudhon's attitude towards the female half of the human race was anything but libertarian. Indeed he was an extreme patriarch in his view of women's nature and their proper role in the family and society at large.

In his *Carnets (Notebooks)*, unpublished until the 1960s, Proudhon maintained that a woman's choice was to be "courtesan or housekeeper..." To a woman, a man is "a father, a chief, a master: above all, a master."

His "justification" for patriarchy is men's (alleged) greater strength; i.e. might makes right. And he recommended that men use this greater strength to keep women in their place. "A woman does not at all hate being used with violence, indeed even being violated."

So much for the idea that anarchism means liberty. In fact, Proudhon's philosophy resembles fascism. Unlike his



Claire Lacombe

anti-semitism, his sexism cannot be regarded as marginal to his philosophy and his vision of a good society. Proudhon's antipathy to women and to sexuality may seem more pathological than political; more disturbing is that this aspect of his philosophy has gotten so little attention — a sad testament to sexism on the Left.

The chapter "The Debate in the Social Democracy" includes wonderful excerpts from the writings of August Bebel, Clara Zetkin, Rosa Luxemburg, and Eleanor Marx, showing that the most radical of socialists are also the best feminists.

Their insights include Luxemburg's argument in 1912 that the foundations for women's political equality had been laid; so many women were in the work force — hence productive in the strict capitalist sense — that patriarchal conceptions of their proper role had become ridiculous.

Double burden

Zetkin analyzed how social class affected relations between women and men: in upper class marriages, "two prostitutions count as one virtue." Among the proletariat, she contended, women do not need to struggle against men of their class for equal access to work as middle class women do.

Eleanor Marx bemoaned the difficulty of organising women workers, pointing out "(I)n the factory they are proletarians...; but they are also household slaves, unpaid servants of their husbands, fathers and brothers." Although she criticises bourgeois feminists, even some well-meaning supporters of women workers, and says "We are not women arrayed in struggle against men but workers who are in struggle against the exploiters," her reference to working women's double burden suggests the need for a two-pronged struggle.

As she says elsewhere "Both the oppressed classes, women and the immediate producers, must understand

that their emancipation will come from themselves."

A lot happened between the early 1970s when these essays were likely written and Draper's death in 1990, and after. I think that an introduction by a contemporary socialist feminist would have been very helpful and reduced possible misunderstandings. While the flowering of writings by socialist feminists (in a broad sense) would not invalidate Draper's theoretical and historical points, it should have made him less scathingly critical of feminist historiography.

It might also have influenced his tone. That he is a man and I am a woman, as well as a Marxist or socialist feminist, undoubtedly makes me more sensitive to his criticisms, just as Black radicals do not appreciate being told by white radicals who are the really radical Blacks and who are not.

The split between Marxist or socialist feminists versus bourgeois or liberal feminists is ever important.

Nevertheless, to make this division the theme of the whole book strikes me as somewhat sectarian. Our relationship to liberal feminists depends on the issue and the context. As August Bebel said, "Working class women have more in common with bourgeois women or aristocratic women than do working class men with men of other social classes."

Moreover, there is not quite as hard and fast a line between "bourgeois feminists" and socialist feminists as there used to be. Before basic democratic rights were won, bourgeois feminists made women's suffrage the number one goal, also pushing for educational and employment opportunities, which would benefit privileged women.

Many opposed protective legislation for women, like maximum hours, saying this would be against women's interests and their right to work as much as they needed. On the other side, socialist feminists supported it (and also suffrage, but less on abstract principles than to increase the numbers of working-class voters).

The United States saw similar debates in the 1960s and '70s over the Equal Rights Amendment, which socialist feminists and many trade union women opposed because they were afraid it would mean the end of protective legislation. But this was more a tactical question of how best to protect the most vulnerable workers, and most feminists ended up trying to think of how to get protection for all workers. Social welfare feminists, while not Marxists, support many policies important to working-class women, such as decent jobs and universal health care.

The harshness of Draper's criticisms of liberal feminists like Olympe de Gouges and Mary Wollstonecraft

ration

might reflect his opinion regarding the issues they stressed. While I was very disappointed to learn from Draper that neither de Gouges nor Wollstonecraft supported the Revolutionary Women's march on Versailles, this does not take away from the importance of their work. (Did a whole chapter need to be devoted to "The Myth of Mary Wollstonecraft?")

They stressed both abstract political rights of equality before the law (Draper notes that Condorcet had preceded them on this) and personal issues like freedom and equality in love and marriage and eliminating the category of illegitimacy.

These "personal" issues are profoundly important to all women, and should not be underestimated, even though they manifest themselves differently for women of different classes.

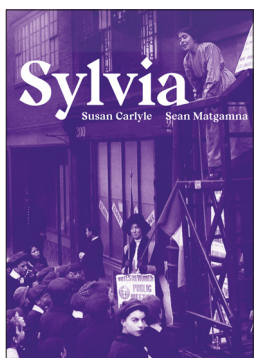
Socialist feminists stress going beyond choice and opportunity to the economic underpinnings of working-class women's control of their reproductive lives, e.g. pushing for free abortion on demand and quality childcare, rather than simply the right to abortion.

As for ideas, Draper says that working-class women in motion simply assumed and showed they were equal, without need of abstract argument. Perhaps. Nevertheless, argument for those liberal principles is still crucial.

Wollstonecraft's philosophical arguments in favor of human equality, which preceded John Stuart Mill's more famous *The Subjection of Women*, are still important, sad to say, even in Western developed countries where there are always new variants of the same old "essential differences" position. Working class women, even in motion, are hardly immune to such ideas.

Perhaps Draper would agree with everything I have said, and the emphasis in the book that makes me uncomfortable stems simply from his very understandable desire to set the historical record straight, or "bend the stick." Inevitably when that is done, the result will seem unbalanced. But set the record straight, and give due credit to our socialist feminist foremothers and fathers — this he certainly did, and it is a most valuable contribution. □

• From *Against The Current*, July-August 2015



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



On the Greens: a response

By Michael Chessum

Michael Chessum is a member of the Green Party, writing here in a personal opinion column. This first one is a response to Simon Nelson's article in Solidarity 747: bit.ly/sn-mc

For the first time in a century, Labour's political monopoly is breaking down. It is not difficult to explain why. On the one hand, Corbynism created mass expectations of political representation. On the other, it hardened the determination of Labour right that such aspirations could never again be realised through Labour.

The best Labour can offer is a soft left Labour leader (remember the glory days of Ed Miliband?) at some point between 2026 and 2040. That was never going to fly with the crowds that sang "oh Jeremy Corbyn" at Glastonbury.

The more fundamental problem is that a Labour Party orientation requires you to tell people to vote for the Labour Party, and this is disorientating. "Wage class war, build industrial action, fight the government" is a call self-evidently undermined by a call to unconditionally vote for the people enacting austerity and mass deportations.

It is a call that only makes sense if followed by an exhortation to join Labour and fight. Except, of course, there is no meaningful way for any grassroots member to do so; they are more likely to waste their time, or become right wing, than they are to achieve anything.

And so those on the far left who still advocate for a Labour-only strategy are left urging us, nebulously, to "transform

the labour movement" — an essential aim, but one which has a decades-long horizon and, in the current context, no compelling link to Labour itself.

I feel compelled to say all this because, in the 16 years I have known the AWL, I think it has become a more Labourist organisation. Your willingness to dissent from 'left common sense' is healthy, but sometimes leads you to miss obvious truths.

The Greens have become the primary home of the left-of-Labour electoral surge. The failure of Your Party is a minor factor. More important is the Greens' existing electoral support and internal democracy. A sovereign conference, federal structure and powerless leader make it a good foil for Starmer's Labour.

Focus

There is an organic focus on electoral work on the left right now. This is a straightforward result of the neo-liberal moment, which has over-reached and produced, at least here and in the US, a sharp leftward drift among the under 40s. It also smashed up the left's institutions and social base. Less than a quarter of British workers are in a union.

Meanwhile, the climate crisis and the electoral success of the far right make everything urgent. So short-cuts are the order of the day: first Corbynism, now Your Party and the Green surge. You can moan this is "cart before horse", but you might as well be moaning about the weather. The task is to turn the mass electoral projects towards struggle.

I am not interested in pretending there are no problems in the Greens.

Our record in local government is patchy, and we are unprepared for what will happen after the May elections. The party is over-cautious, both tactically and politically. It is electoralist, sometimes myopically so. It talks about values too much and interests too little. Its 2024 manifesto was about as left wing as Corbyn's Labour, but could do with sharpening. Even its democracy, while real, is in dire need of reform. My case is that there is a job to be done.

Traditionally, the AWL finds it hard to engage with this perspective; it waves a magic wand and says "bourgeois party". But if you try to find an essential character of Green Parties, you won't find one. In Portugal, they are in a permanent alliance with an orthodox Communist Party; in Greece they joined Syriza; in Italy they could be far left or centrist, depending on the decade; in Germany they have become part of the establishment; the list could go on. In the UK, a small environmentalist party is morphing into a mass party of the left.

Trotskyist groups, even clever ones, like advocating for a single path. The obvious truth now is that the left's advance could come through any one of a number of routes; there is worthwhile work to be done in the Greens, Your Party and in Labour. The Greens have 175,000 members, a radical left programme, proper internal democracy, and an electoral base in the precarious urban working class. I have no idea what is going to happen — but neither do you. □

• Longer version: bit.ly/gr-re



Argentina: Milei and the opposition

By Daniela

Daniela, a member now living in France of the international Trotskyist current Socialismo o Barbarie, and a former activist with its organisation in Argentina, Nuevo MAS, spoke at Ideas for Freedom.

Argentina is a country which has, for the international workers' movement and particularly for Trotskyists, an important weight in our traditions. Trotskyist parties in Argentina are among the largest in the world.

Large portions of the working class are unionised in Argentina, and with very high levels of class consciousness in comparison to other countries in the region. Not only we but most Trotskyists in Argentina today no longer consider ourselves "Morenists", but the Trotskyist movement has still a strong weight in the political landscape of Argentina. There have been Trotskyist deputies in the parliament in Argentina since 2013, with some highs and lows.

It's a strongly mobilised country and a strong women's movement has been developed in Argentina since the return to democracy in the 1980s after the military dictatorship of 1976-83. And since the regaining of democracy in the 1980s, a large and strong sense of democracy and democratic demands is held by the people, who don't hesitate to take the streets to protest.

Large protests have been taking place in Argentina since ever, particularly in 2001. In 2001 there was the overthrow of the government by the crisis and the people's mobilisation, and that established a certain relationship of forces between the classes, which is what Milei is coming to destroy.

The working class achieved a lot of things by mobilisation around 2001, like getting gas and light bills largely subsidised by the government since 2001. All those things Milei wants to butcher. His chainsaw is for things acquired by the working class in the 2001 movement.

The other big political actor is the centre left or left in the larger coalition called Peronism which holds in itself both leftists and right wingers. They had said and tried to make people believe that outside of Peronism you can't gain anything, you don't have any rights. You need to be a Peronist to gain rights. Only a Peronist government will make reforms beneficial to the working class.

But since 2022 the international economic conditions that made Peronist governments able to subsidise fares and light and gas for the people no longer exist.

In the first decade of the 2000s Argentina benefited from increased exports of commodities like soy and wheat (and some oil, but not as much). Since then all those prices have gone down and Argentina has had to take on extreme debt.

From 2000 to say 2009 Argentina paid

the interest on its external debt with the money from its international transactions, but since then many governments have taken on extra debt, particularly the right-wing government of 2015-9.

The estimate is that it would take a hundred years for Argentina to get out of this debt.

All the money had no impact on improving productive structures in Argentina. It was all gambled in financial markets by businessmen who were close to the right-wing governments.

After 2019 the Peronists won elections, in a more centrist version of Peronism, but with a lot of people hoping that this government of the centre left would be able to deliver concessions on salaries and working class condition of living. Those hopes haven't been met because there was the pandemic in 2020 and there was a lot of unemployment. They did promise to deliver abortion rights, and they did that in December 2020, but extreme poverty conditions continue to accumulate.

Public services have got much worse, so public hospitals are in really bad condition, and it's really difficult to get an abortion if you don't have a hospital able to provide it.

And with inflation going up to numbers like 200%, Milei appeared, promoting budgetary cuts with a class-war programme. People voted for him under the impression that an economist will be able to put the Argentinian economy in order.

We in Nuevo MAS don't yet see a far-right movement of social ideology in Argentina. Milei's party doesn't have a strong base of militants, and what he has is not groups going for physical confrontation. It's not like fascism in the 1930s. People voted for him only for economic reasons, and really with naive expectations — that he wouldn't do everything he said, and he wouldn't be as far right as he said, but at least we needed some solutions in regard to the economy.

Quickly people realised the consequences of Milei's budgetary cuts. So since 2024 (Milei took office December 2023), there have been protests every day. His security minister established an anti protest protocol to put police in the streets to deal with the protests. This protocol has never really been enabled. There is effectively no more repression of protest than there was before, because the government doesn't have the necessary balance of forces to enforce stronger repression of people's protest.

There are other social elements that are not defeated yet, even though the conditions are getting worse and the conjuncture is reactionary. Milei made a really disgusting declaration in Davos saying everyone who's gay is deranged



and sick in the head; and after that he saw contestation in the streets by the largest Pride march ever in Argentina, on 1 February 2025.

That was off-calendar — Pride is usually in November in Argentina, and November 2025's march was also still huge — but the February march was called an anti-fascist Pride for the first time.

The women's movement too is not defeated, even though Milei has made massive budgetary cuts in programmes dealing with violence against women. Between 2017 and 2019 I used to work in that kind of programme. All my former co-workers have been fired. Such programmes have been reduced to a strict minimum.

But people still protest and still organise against Milei's government. It seemed really at the brink of being defeated before the elections of 26 October 2025. There were many scandals. In one scandal, Milei's sister was caught on tape asking for 3% on contracts for provision for disabled people.

Milei was on the brink of a defeat in the legislative elections. Then he got saved by Trump, who deployed \$20 billion to buy pesos and stabilise the currency.

Argentina is a really dependent country, but in the last twenty years Argentina has started to open out wider than its American connections, establishing commercial and political links with Russia and with China. Argentina has links with BRICS.

Since Trump's second election, he's determined to reestablish control over South America. He sees in Milei a key ally to establish American influence in the region.

That is why he decided, against all economic evidence, to support Milei's government by a swap in which the United States Treasury takes Argentinian pesos and gives Argentina dollars, to stabilise our central bank. This has really no correlation with the capacity of Argentina to reimburse the swap. It's political support by Trump.

After the swap, Milei became able to say that if he didn't win the mid-term elections, then it would be chaotic for the Argentinian economy. People voted for him out of fear of economic chaos if he didn't win.

There are some nuanced elements in the 26 October 2025 election. It had the

highest percentage of abstention for years. 32% of voters didn't show up to vote, and that in a country where voting is mandatory by law and where, culturally, we are really attached to the act of voting since we regained democracy after the dictatorship. People usually go to vote to signal opposition to the dictatorship when we were not able to.

The trouble was that, against Milei and his "either me or chaos" line, there wasn't a strong programme from the left.

The Peronists weren't proposing anything to the working class other than: if you're angry against Milei, vote for me. And Milei said "it's either me or economic chaos", and that ended up being enough for people to vote to for Milei's candidates.

Previously Milei didn't have a majority in either chamber of the parliament and he has now gotten more seats in both chambers. He's still not able to put measures through without agreements with other political forces, but he has in fact strengthened his position in Congress.

For us at Nuevo MAS, it's clear that the people have still not been defeated by Milei and do not agree with his government. There is not a social-political enforcement of his government. People are still very angry and in disagreement with him.

The bad economy is really people's main preoccupation. People are really tired of inflation at high numbers and not being able to have plans for it for themselves and their families, and they're really scared, but there's still resistance. It's not as much the strength of Milei as the weaknesses of an actual political alternative to Milei.

We at Nuevo MAS have been proposing a programme which we have called an Anti-Capitalist Manifesto for Argentina. We are a small party, but Milei's press attaché picks fights on us on Twitter. He does political Twitter militancy in the Elon Musk way. He always picks on us because we are saying that capitalism is not the way to go, we pose ourselves as anti-capitalist, and that is getting a lot of attention.

Many of us worry about the spread of far right ideas in the youth and especially among young males. We don't see that on a very large scale in Argentina for the moment. The right wingers are really well organised on Twitter and in other social media, but they don't have a presence in workplaces and on campuses.

We are organising our sixth Anti-Capitalist summer camp which gathers between four and five hundred young people. The right-wingers really hate our camp and put out many memes to try to delegitimise it, but young people still have something to say against Milei. □

Understanding capitalism: Marx's Capital vol.1

Residential study course, Friday 19 December to Monday 22 December 2025. At "Hurtwood Hideout", YHA Holmbury St Mary, RH5 6NW (rail from Waterloo to Gomshall, then short bike ride, or long walk, or we can probably fix a lift). Cost: about £32 per night stayed. To book: email awl@workersliberty.org.

Approximate format of each session (we'll allow for some variation):

- 60 minutes reading or re-reading time
- Quick outline of the passages of *Capital* covered, and questions – 10 minutes
- Work in "breakout rooms" on discussing selected extracts and comments – 25 minutes
- Report-back on that work, and discussion – 15 minutes

Every participant should be able to read the whole of Marx's book and discuss it. The book is not difficult, apart from chapter 1 section 3 (and if you are baffled by that, you can continue reading



without losing the thread).

Do not worry about which translation you use (Fowkes, Moore-Aveling, or Eden and Cedar Paul): it's good to have people using different translations in the group, because then you can check what you find difficult passages against

different translations (or we can check them against the German and French). Make sure, however, that the edition of *Capital* you have is the whole book, not an abridgement. Lots of second-hand copies of *Capital* are available quite cheap.

Capital is available as an audiobook at librivox.org/capital-volume-1-by-karl-marx/

Best to read *Capital* in advance of 19 December and then re-read as we study. Fallback: read Otto Rühle's [abridgement](#) of *Capital* volume 1. (It's shorter, though in some ways more difficult, because more compressed). But if you are baffled by some early sections, keep going, and you can read the rest without losing the thread.

We also look at Marx's *Wages, Price, and Profit* (also sometimes called *Value, Price, and Profit*), a short pamphlet written around the same time as he was finalising *Capital* volume 1. Audio for that

is [here](#), starting at 11:34.

Better, of course, if you can read the whole of Marx's book.

See also this [study guide](#). The chapters of Rühle's abridgement correspond roughly, but not exactly, to Marx's chapters, so under each session below the relevant parts of Rühle are indicated where they are numbered differently from the relevant chapters from Marx.

Schedule

- Friday 19th: Preliminary session on how to decipher economic coverage in the serious bourgeois media: debt, interest rates, inflation, tariffs.
- Saturday 20th: Sessions 1 to 4
- Sunday 21st: Sessions 5 to 8
- Monday 22nd: Sessions 9 to 12.

If it proves not workable for you to get Friday and Monday off work to come, it is still worth coming for the weekend, Saturday and Sunday. □

Our books and pamphlets

Browse, basket, and buy books, pamphlets, and publication bundles – and find more info, related resources, study guides, reviews and so on, from the same place. Some books are free to download or as audiobooks.

Prices listed exclude postage and packaging: £1 for small items, £3 for larger items, free over £30. Every third publication is half-price and 15% off over £50. □

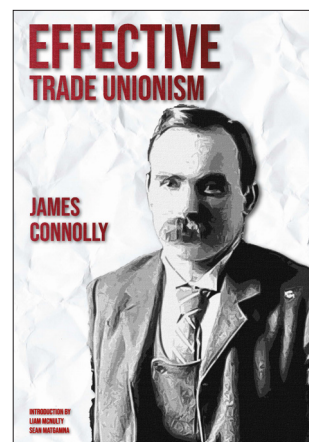
Scan QR code to browse and order:



Lessons for socialist and left activists 60 pages £4



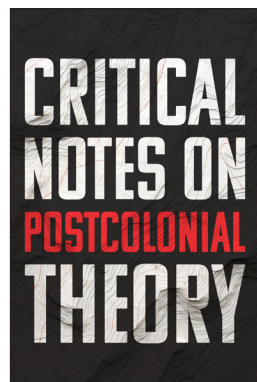
Rühle's abridgement is a good intro 131 pages £6



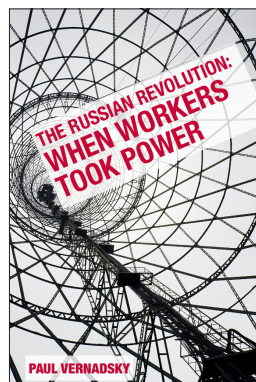
Writings by James Connolly 64 pages £5



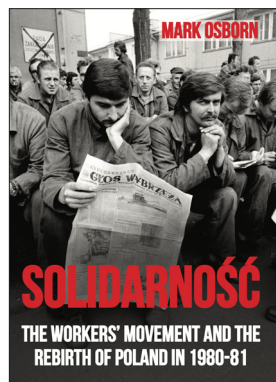
The collapse of the USSR in Europe 202 pages £6



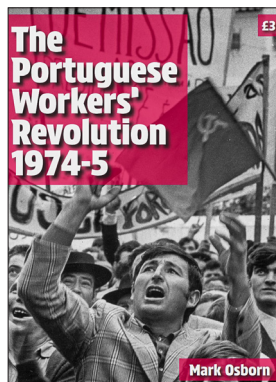
Marxist arguments against academic postcolonial theory 36 pages £3



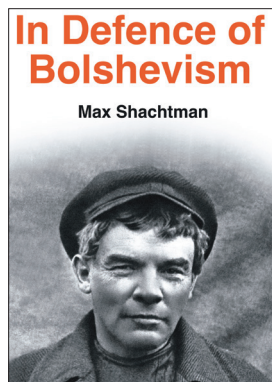
The 1917's revolution's real history, and lessons 374 pages £12



The history of Solidarność, from its dawn until the coup 116 pages £5



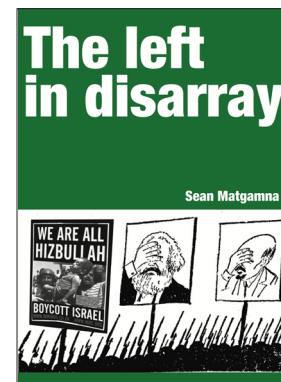
The story and politics of the portuguese revolution 44 pages £3.00



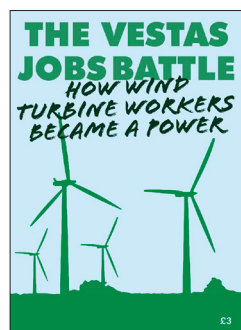
Defending the Bolsheviks and their relevance today 312 pages £10



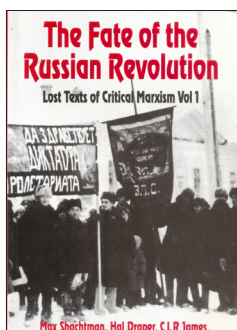
A debate on reform, revolution, Labour, democracy, more 107 pages £5



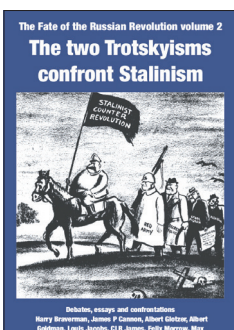
Critical history of the disoriented left, and the way forward 408 pages £12



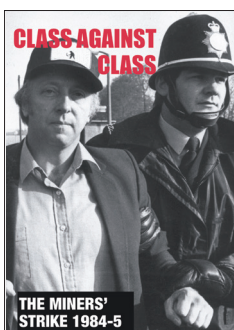
The Vestas Job Battle £8



Fate of the Russian Revolution vol.1 £8



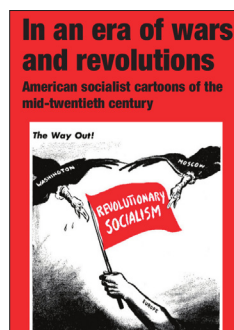
FRR vol. 2: The Two Trotskyisms £20



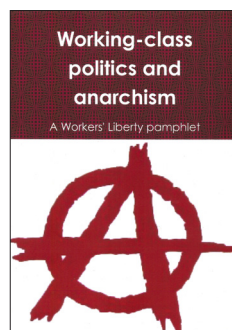
The Miners' Strike 1984-5 £9



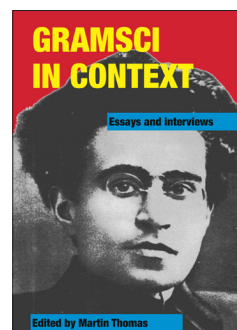
Our key ideas, all in one place. £1



In an Era of Wars and Revolutions £9



Class Politics and Anarchism £5



Gramsci in Context £6

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! □

• workersliberty.org/join-awl

Unison young members demand branch-based conference

By a Unison young member

Workers' Liberty members joined other Unison activists at the union's Young Members' conference, 28-30 Nov. It was overall extremely positive.

One really important thing was that the left won seats on the standing orders committee, which had previously ruled out the majority of motions. It's been both great knowledge-building as to how Unison operates but also I think an example. The Unison left bloc, Time for Real Change, held a fringe meeting with 47 people at it, which was a pretty large chunk of the conference. It was very good, much better than last year's which was dominated by top-table speakers from the Unison presidential team.

The London region had submitted a rule change to make the conference branch-based rather than from regional forums. This would increase the amount of people able to attend the conference as well as put it in line with all other Unison conferences. Some regions don't even elect their delegates – staffers choose them!

Bureaucracy

We hadn't realised beforehand how much the bureaucracy was mobilising against the rule change. YCL (Young Communist League) people (who support the right-wing leadership) and staff members made interventions in meet-

ings in the lead-up, trying to undermine the rule change. They want to have control, and that will become increasingly difficult with larger, more democratic conferences.

Previous motions on this issue from other regions had been ruled out of order by a right wing standing orders committee. The rule change passed.

Our region submitted an amendment to a "welfare, not warfare" motion referencing working with the Palestine and Ukraine solidarity campaigns, both organisations Unison is affiliated to. This came from a young member who has family in Ukraine and just went on a USC delegation.

"Welfare not warfare"

There were two other motions on "welfare not warfare" that were almost identical and mentioned implementing the [Alternative Defence Review](#). The entire debate just became about Ukraine Solidarity Campaign wanting to send guns to Ukraine and claims that means it wants to increase military spending.

The structure of debate was really confusing because they did it as a "group debate": which meant that people in the YCL or near it stood up for both "for" and "against" in order speak against Ukraine.

Our amendment overwhelmingly fell but after the debate in my region we spoke about the problems of pacifism

and Russian imperialism and I think many saw anti-Ukraine politics for what it really was.

A young member submitted an emergency motion on antisemitism and the Heaton Park terrorist attack that was basically right, but called for work with Board of Deputies and CST in antisemitism training. I was worried it was going to be a toxic debate.

An emergency amendment passed to remove working with BoD/CST and replacing with affiliated organisations. That meant a debate which outlined an anti-communist approach to anti racism activity, where we should take cues from socialist and labour movement organisations not establishment ones, as well as criticising antisemitism we have seen in the union.

Two people who spoke in favour of the motion were able to make very heartfelt speeches about security at synagogues etc, which I think was good for the conference to hear and I think would have been impossible if the entire debate was about Israel or BoD etc. One YCL member made a "what about" speech saying Islamophobia is bad too, and someone made a cranky speech only talking about BoD. But overall speeches were for the motion as amended.

Overall, the conference has left me and everybody else really motivated to do more. □

Kino Eye

50 years since Franco; István Szabó

By John Cunningham

Some years ago I attended a conference in Valencia where a Spanish participant told me that in her village, on hearing the news of Franco's demise, the celebrations were such that they ran out of champagne. 50 years on there will no doubt be a more reflective response but the anniversary of this vile dictator's death is still worthy of note.

Pan's Labyrinth (2006), in my opinion one of the best Spanish films ever made, written and directed by (Mexican born) Guillermo del Toro, is set in Spain in 1944. Anti-Franco guerrillas are still active in the north and the thuggish Captain Vidal (Sergi Lopez) is dispatched to sort them out. His wife, heavily pregnant, and step daughter



Ofelia (Ivana Baquero) accompany him.

Ofelia has visions of an underground cave which she visits to see a magical Faun (Pan in the English title) who, despite his rather fearsome, fantastical appearance, befriends her, informing her that she is really Princess Moanna. In the real world Vidal attempts to suppress the guerrillas with utmost brutality. His wife dies in childbirth but Vidal is unmoved, concerned only that

she gives birth to a son. The guerrillas eventually defeat and capture Vidal and extract revenge.

If you are looking for a present for that film-loving friend check out the new Second Run Box Set of three of Hungarian director István Szabó's best films: Oscar-winning *Mephisto* (1981), *Colonel Redl* (1985) and *Hanussen* (1988), all set in Central Europe and featuring the Austrian actor Klaus Maria Brandauer.

Each DVD in the set is accompanied by a booklet giving the historical background to the films and other details. I am duty bound to mention that I wrote the *Mephisto* booklet. Each film has been restored, with new English sub-title translations. The set also includes four rarely seen short films by Szabó. A cine-

aste's delight, highly recommended. □

Join Workers' Liberty!

Want to be part of an organised long-haul collective effort to spread the socialist ideas you read in *Solidarity*, and to link together activities in diverse campaigns and conflicts around that consistent socialist thread? Then take some copies of *Solidarity* to sell each week, and contact us to discuss joining Workers' Liberty, the group that produces and sustains this paper. Check it out and contact us via workersliberty.org/join-awl □

Doctors out again from 17 December

By Wade Ferguson

The BMA will ballot its resident doctor members on further strikes for pay and jobs from 8 December. It has gave Health Secretary Wes Streeting until 1 December to present an offer, and, when he didn't, organised further walkouts (17-22 Jan) before its current strike mandate ends on 6 January.

While NHSE boss Sir James Mackey claimed strike turnout in November was at a record low, final NHSE data confirmed turnout had in fact increased overall when compared to July.

According to the BMA, resident doctor pay is still down by 22% in real terms compared to 2008, and the union is calling for a commitment full pay restoration, if necessary over multiple years.

The BMA is also calling for the government to address the spiralling workforce crisis, which is leaving thousands of doctors unable to progress in their training at a time when the UK is short of roughly 45,000 doctors compared to European OECD average.

For example, for internal medical training – the first step of specialty training to become a hospital physician – there were 8,841 applications for 1,677 posts in 2025, compared to 2,337 applications for 1,678 posts in 2017.

Planning

This is the result of poor workforce planning. The number of UK medical graduates increased by 33% between 2023 and 2025, with medical school places being increased without a commensurate increase in specialty training posts. The number of international medical graduates applying for the same posts doubled over the same period.

The BMA is lobbying for an increase in overall posts and for current NHS doctors (UK graduates and international medical graduates working in the NHS before 5 March 2025) to be prioritised for specialty training from next year over those yet to practise in the UK.

Many worry this risks alienating current international medical graduates, who are often the most exploited doctors in the workplace and least represented in the union. □

Call to settle bins dispute

On 2 December, Strike Map published a list of 115 Labour councillors and MPs saying: "We believe there is a growing level of support amongst Labour

Party members, councillors and MPs to see this [Birmingham bins] dispute resolved... We support calls for... Birmingham City Council to • Negotiate in good

faith with decision-makers in the room • Take on board the new legal advice • Return to the deal supported by all sides during the July negotiations". □

GFM workers consider new offer

By Stuart Jordan

Outsourced workers at Nephew Centre for Mental Health struck from 14-30 November in their ongoing campaign for NHS equivalent pay, terms and conditions.

After 30 Nov GFM workers are back at work for a week and are considering an offer which GFM hope will avert the planned four week strike over Christmas and New Year.

The workers have now had six weeks on the picket line since the start of September. During that time the union has grown in numbers and determination.

Maximise

With loudspeakers, megaphones, and horns the workers have taken their struggle to various sites across London and the South East to maximise the pressure on their employer.

The workers have organised three protests outside the offices of PFI firm Alba



Infra near Covent Garden. Alba Infra is part of a €1 billion fund management company based in Paris but they rent a posh office in central London to count the multi-million pound profits they are extracting from East London NHS Foundation Trust.

The workers have also protested at Trust HQ demanding that NHS management

intervene to insist on an urgent resolution. During the October strike, their union, Unite, did a health and safety inspection of the site, documenting the deteriorating conditions within the hospital as a result of GFM trying to ride out the dispute with poor quality scab labour.

On 20 November, the workers demonstrated at City

Hall in solidarity with the outsourced London Underground cleaners who were organising with the RMT to insist they were brought back in house.

On Tuesday 25th workers travelled to Gravesend to demonstrate outside another GFM workplace and spread the message of solidarity. □

• More: bit.ly/gfm-o

Masked men harass museum pickets

By Ken Worthington

The Unison strike at the National Coal Mining Museum entered its 17th week in early December. On 22 November two masked men turned up and threatened and assaulted picketing workers.

The museum was holding a light-up event. Claiming 10,000 people would come, they had requested that striking workers did not picket the event.

Fences

Members did picket the event but were met with fences to keep them away from the entrance to the museum and force them to picket next to a busy road, where they were abused by security staff at the museum (as they have been from the start of the strike).

When the two masked men arrived,

they called picketers paedophiles, told members of the public to watch their children around the strikers, pushed them, and threatened violence. The chief executive and chief financial officer watched and did nothing to intervene.

Moved

After the masked men were moved away, they attempted to damage striking workers' cars, and that was only prevented by striking workers chasing them off. It has now become known that one of the masked men was an off-duty security guard employed by the museum.

A strike-support demonstration has been called for noon 6 December in Wakefield (at the cathedral, WF1 1HG). □

Subscribe

Get Solidarity every fortnight

Trial sub (6 issues) £11; One year (26 issues) £47 waged, £24 low waged. (Email for outside UK rates.)

Visit workersliberty.org/sub

Or, email awl@workersliberty.org with your name and address, or phone 020 7394 8923. Standing order from £5 a month: more to support our work. □

Contact us

020 7394 8923

solidarity@workersliberty.org

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

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

Stop Mahmood's closed-doors policy!

By Colin Foster

Nigel Farage said Labour Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood “sounds like a Reform supporter”, but said Reform would be more resolute. Tory Shadow Home Secretary Chris Philp, scrambling to outdo Farage for the anti-immigrant vote, said the plans were “not radical enough”.

The plans are horrific. They extend a long story of the Starmer Labour leadership vainly pleading with a stereotype ageing white male “socially-conservative” voter, not by honest argument but by appeasement.

People granted asylum would have to wait 20 years before applying for Indefinite Leave to Remain or Settled Status. Meanwhile they would be reviewed every 30 months, and, if their home country is, however briefly, reckoned “safe”, deported. Refugees would be able to bring spouses or children to the UK only if they meet a minimum income

threshold.

Even the most legal migrants would “only become eligible for benefits and social housing if they first become British citizens, rather than upon being granted settled status”, and they would have to wait between ten and 30 years even for settled status — unless they are rich (“high earners and entrepreneurs”), in which case it will be three years.

A consultation on the general migration policy runs to 12 February. On the asylum clampdown plans the schedule is unclear.

At Labour conference 2025 Unison got through a motion opposing extension beyond the current five years of delay on Indefinite Leave to Remain, and demanding a liberal visa system for care workers.

Solidarity is for open borders, and we will join others to press Unison and other unions to push back for asylum and migrant rights. □

• Template motion from Momentum for CLPs (can be adapted for union branches): bit.ly/a-rights

Still murderous in Gaza

By Ira Berkovic

On Friday 28 November, Israeli troops shot and killed Fadi and Tamer Abu Assi, two Gazan children aged eight and 11 years old respectively. The children were collecting firewood, and crossed the so-called “Yellow Line”, which marks the boundary of Israeli military control in Gaza. They were killed by a drone strike. The IDF later claimed the children were “acting suspiciously”.

Their murders show that, whilst Israel's war has receded from its most brutally genocidal phase, based on daily massacres of dozens or hundreds of people in air strikes and artillery fire, Gaza is still a warzone.

Standing Together wrote: “In what kind of reality is it legitimate for an army to kill children and justify it as defence against suspicious actors? The ceasefire may have brought a sense of calm to many people in Gaza, but it was never meant to bring a complete end to the violence. The Israeli army still never left Gaza, and Palestinians are still being killed. We need more than a temporary pause, we need a permanent ceasefire and a real future beyond this oppression, domination and

endless grief.” According to the *New York Times*, US officials are exploring the possibility of corralling displaced Gazans into compounds composed of prefabricated shelters, similar to those used to house people in Turkey whose homes were destroyed in the 2023 earthquake.

According to the plan, the Israeli military will be able to scrutinise the backgrounds of those who apply to live in the compounds.

The fact that US policy is focusing on building refugee camps, rather than developing any serious effort to rebuild Gazan infrastructure and permanently rehome the millions of displaced people in areas where they want to live and can begin to rebuild their lives, shows the limitations of the current situation. Without full Israeli military withdrawal and enormous international aid efforts, Gazans will continue to face poverty, violence, and semi-occupation. Meanwhile, Hamas is regrouping and redeveloping its own forces. Unless the social misery on which all such far-right movements feed is addressed, it will eventually be able to reassert itself in some form. □

• More on Gaza, West Bank, Israel: p.4



Lift ban on Palestine Action!

By Reuben Williams

Two of the six hunger strikers awaiting trial for taking part in Palestine Action activity have now been hospitalised. Their hunger strike, started in early November, is in protest against their ongoing imprisonment, as well as demanding an end to the activities of Elbit Systems in the UK. One of the hospitalised hunger strikers, Teuta 'T' Hoxha, claimed in September that she was being “punished retrospectively” for PA's proscription by the government, which occurred after her arrest.

Meanwhile, the current hearing at the high court of Huda Ammori's appeal against the proscription is due to end in early December. The case being made is straightforward: that the proscription of a civil disobedience group is unprecedented, and interferes with the rights to protest, expression and thought. The comparison between PA and the other groups listed on the government's page for proscribed organisations is striking: the worst they are concretely accused of is “terroristic” property damage.

Socialists should oppose the ban and demand that the government respond to the hunger strikers. Their cases, as with over 2,000 others arrested for opposing the ban, will be decided by the outcome of this hearing. So far, the representative for the Home Secretary has asserted that the proscription is just. □

No to removal of juries!

By Will Roberts

Justice secretary David Lammy has been subject to widespread criticism after the press got hold of his plans to remove trial by jury in almost all cases.

Juries would remain in cases of serious “public interest” crimes with a sentence of over three years (meaning manslaughter, murder or rape). All other cases would be heard by a single judge.

The right to a trial by jury is an old democratic safeguard. In 2017, a review commissioned by the British government found that jury trials showed a far less prominent racial bias compared to cases with just a judge. The report was authored by none other than David Lammy.

A column by [Kenan Malik](#) in the *Observer* usefully tracks the history of, first, juries opening up and becoming more democratic (women were allowed on them from 1919, and the final property restrictions for jurors were removed in the early 1970s), and then the countervailing movement of juries being removed in an ever greater number of cases.

This move, first floated by the Conservatives a few years ago, is promoted as clearing a backlog of court cases, but it does so at the cost of a basic democratic right. No to the removal of juries! □



For a workers' government

SOLIDARITY **& WORKERS' LIBERTY**



NO TO TRUMP ATTACK ON VENEZUELA!

By Rhodri Evans

As we go to press Donald Trump has had the US Navy attacking ships off Venezuela's coast since 2 September; declared he was shutting Venezuela's airspace from 29 November; and threatens to bomb the country or even invade.

He has also threatened a US Senator, Mark Kelly, with court-martial for telling troops they should refuse illegal orders, like those apparently given by Secretary of War Pete Hegseth to kill all survivors after attacks on alleged drug-smuggling boats.

Even if Nicolas Maduro's regime in Venezuela is not that much better than Saddam Hussein's in Iraq or the Taliban's in Afghanistan, Trump's war on Venezuela is no likelier than the USA's murderous ventures in Iraq or Afghanistan to yield anything good.

Some Republicans in Congress are opposing Trump on



this. Maybe Trump will turn from Venezuela to another target, as he has swerved for now from sending federal troops into Chicago. But whether anything less than working-class mobilisation in the USA can stop Trump is another matter.

On 25-26 November Trump also said he would "permanently pause migration" from all "Third World countries", and halted all asylum decisions from anywhere.

The last anti-Trump "No Kings" day, on 18 October, was maybe

the biggest single-day mobilisation in US history, with seven million counted on the streets across the country. Unions joined protests in many cities.

But we are still far short of full union mobilisation. A recent survey in *The Economist* of how US capitalists are going with access to Trump (in short: pretty well) found that some smaller capitalists prefer to use the Teamsters' Union, one of the USA's biggest, but studiously conciliatory, as their intermediary with the despot. □