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SOLIDARITY

& WORKERS' LIBERTY



The people, not Trump, should rule Venezuela

Trump is open about his oil-grab ambitions.

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We don't forget that Maduro was de facto a military dictator

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BACK VENEZUELA'S WORKERS, NOT MADURO



US OUT OF VENEZUELA

US out of Venezuela!

Less than four days after declaring that his New Year's resolution was "peace. Peace on earth", Donald Trump bombed Caracas and kidnapped the president of Venezuela, Nicolas Maduro.

In a subsequent press conference at Mar a Lago, Trump made a series of baffling claims. Chief among them: the US will "run the country until such time as we can do a safe, proper and judicious transition". Trump stated that he was "not afraid of boots on the ground", but also that he didn't envisage a lot of US troops being present.

There seems to be (at least) a difference in emphasis between Trump and Marco Rubio. Trump has since repeated his claim that "we're going to run things", and named himself as "in charge". Rubio made different comments to the press on Sunday 4 Jan, while avoiding overt contradiction. "It's not running," he asserted, "it's running policy". For now, the model appears to be that Delcy Rodriguez will be persuaded or coerced to bring Venezuela's military-based government in line with the White House's decrees, in order to facilitate American-led restructuring of Venezuelan oil, with some side pay-off for Rodriguez's people.

Trump claimed at the press conference that the US had spoken to Rodriguez and she had agreed to cooperate. At first, Rodriguez declared that the US had illegally invaded, and that Maduro was the country's "only" president. In an Instagram post on the evening of Sunday 4 January, she changed tack, inviting the US to "collaborate with us on an agenda of co-operation oriented towards shared development within the framework of international law". This was no doubt influenced by Trump's threat of a second strike, earlier that day.

Rodriguez is an obvious go-between choice: she was central to the discussions during the Biden administration that allowed oil company Chevron to be given special license by the US to operate in Venezuela. She is also a trusted member of the Maduro government. She has helped oversee multiple openly fraudulent elections, and was certainly no opponent to the government arresting and imprisoning thousands of protestors. If a deal is possible where the Venezuelan army retains control but shifts to work with the USA, she is the person to work it.

Trump stated that he had not been talking to oppositionist Maria Corina Machado, who he claims lacks support. Machado declared about an hour before the press conference that she wanted Edmundo Gonzalez Urrutia, who many say "actually" won the last election, to be named president.

The US have announced that Maduro will face trial in New York on charges related to "drugs and weapons offences". Trump also repeated his recent warning to Colombian president Gustavo Petro, whom he has accused of similar involvement in cartels and drug trafficking. He repeated and strengthened these threats on Sunday and Monday, 4-5 January, saying that Petro's "time was up" and that a military operation in Colombia "sounds good". He also repeated his claims that Cuba, reliant on Venezuelan oil imports, will collapse any day now, without any US intervention needed.

Trump has been framing Venezuela as a "narcostate" since returning to office, and is clearly trying to clean up unfinished business from his first presidential term, where his campaign against Maduro failed to achieve tangible results. The role played here by Trump's alarmingly simplistic worldview is real and significant: Maduro is a "socialist" (in Trump's eyes) who scorned the US, and Trump sees it as his role to retaliate.

Imperialist

But there are other significant factors at play. Capturing Maduro matches Trump's general swerve of America back to a more "hands-on" imperialist force in world politics, after its recoil from its Iraq and Afghanistan fiascos. Trump has declared that "American dominance in the Western hemisphere will never be questioned again," quipping that the "Monroe doctrine" should now be called the "Don-roe doctrine". His line includes both more overt policies — bombing Iran, threatening to capture Greenland — and admixtures of political and economic foreign policy, such as Trump's garish plans to renovate Gaza, and the direct profiteering proposed in Ukraine peace plans.

Venezuela has the largest proven oil reserves in the world, around five times those of the US. Since US sanctions imposed in 2017, it has been unable to sell much on the global market. In recent years it has pivoted almost entirely towards selling to China (Maduro was kidnapped during the middle of a Chinese diplomatic delegation to Venezuela — something the US government will have been aware of).

In the press conference, Trump was outspoken about the central role American oil companies will play in Venezuela going forward. A stranglehold on Venezuelan politics and the oil industry would, he claimed, be incredibly lucrative development and significantly bolster US companies' status in global oil markets. The oil companies themselves have been reserved when responding. Chevron first issued a statement say-

ing that they would work with America to "strengthen US energy security", then retracted the statement and released another, stating just "we continue to operate in full compliance with all relevant laws and regulations". Exxon has pointedly reserved judgement.

As yet, there is no clear picture what the outcome will be in Venezuela itself. The US only just announced that it would restore its embassy in Caracas, and there is no visible US military presence on the ground. We do not know what the Cuban and Russian military units reported as being in Venezuela are doing, though Cuba has said 32 of its people were killed in the Maduro abduction.

Starmer

Keir Starmer has been even more weaselly than usual on Venezuela. He has refused, in multiple interviews, to call the US attack illegal, and waited until after Trump's press conference to state that Maduro was an illegitimate dictator, and the government would "continue to talk to the US". MP Emily Thornberry has been the most prominent Labour figure to break ranks and declare that the US had violated international law.

Maduro's government has long been a nationalist military regime with Stalinist overtones, reliant on mass repression of political expression and austerity for Venezuelan workers. The Venezuelan presidential election in 2024, was so clearly corrupt that its critics included not only fellow Latin American left leaders like Gabriel Boric, but even the previously pro-Maduro Communist Party of Venezuela. 2,400 people were arrested in protests after that election, the majority of whom have now been released — a tranche of 88 were released just hours before Maduro's kidnapping. Even in the days since Maduro's capture, the National Union of Press Workers (SNTP) reported that 14 journalists have been arrested and released, all but one of them foreign reporters. A democratic future, with open elections and space for workers' organisations to operate freely, should be the desired goal for socialists the world over.

That future will be won by the Venezuelan working class itself, not by American military intervention. Workers' democracy cannot be instituted through the barrel of a gun; it is not spread by missile shrapnel.

Maduro's legitimacy or illegitimacy gives the US no right to attack and kidnap him, and Maduro should be released and returned to Venezuela. But the legitimacy of the Madurista government is an entirely relevant question for the country's future.

The demand for free and open elec-

tions in Venezuela is not new, and has been necessary throughout Maduro's presidency. The current US invasion does not negate that fact. Regardless of potential deals and the need to oppose US imposition and invasion, the fundamental question remains: who should rule?

A likely candidate in any free election would be Maria Corina Machado, or Edmundo Gonzalez Urrutia, the candidate who stood in her place when she was banned from standing in the last election. Given that Machado had previously called for American intervention in Venezuela, and even now stresses applause for Trump, a government under her leadership promises little for the Venezuelan working class.

Yet calls for free elections, indeed free elections for a Constituent Assembly to draft a new constitution that would replace the existing 1999 "strong presidency" text, are just and should be supported. The anti-Chavista left is small and disorganised, but it exists, and should be the force we look to.

Prerequisites for those elections to be "free and fair" include other demands: restrictions on trade unions to be lifted, political prisoners to be freed, freedom for the press and freedom for left parties to organise. We want an election on that basis.

Socialists must stand against Trump's drive to "run" Venezuela and against his threats to Colombia, Greenland, and Iran. Solidarity with the Venezuelan people. Defend their right to self defence. And solidarity in particular with any independent working-class forces in Venezuela. □

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Build for 28 March, and for a stronger workers' united front

By Ben Tausz

On 2 December 2025, the “Together Alliance” against the far-right launched. Backed by an assortment of celebrities, Stand Up To Racism (SUTR), NGOs and trade union leaders, Together is a vehicle to build for a national demonstration against the far right in London on 28 March 2026 (this year’s British version of the annual UN Anti-Racism Day protest).

It is welcome that trade union leaders may finally be mobilising to protest the far-right. Workers’ Liberty activists will be building for the demonstration, especially in our unions. But the politics and strategy of Together are seriously inadequate for the threat we face. We must keep arguing and organising for better.

Together shares, and in many ways deepens, many of the problems of its key initiator, SUTR (itself led by the Socialist Workers’ Party). It approaches the organised workers’ movement as just one source of attendees for a set-piece protest, not as the key driver of social transformation, whose self-activity is central and indispensable to beat the far-right.

Its launch statement offers little more than abstract platitudes about the values of “unity”, “solidarity across communities” and rejecting “division and racism”.

It says nothing about the far right’s hostility to organised workers, or to LGBT+, women’s and disabled people’s rights. Nor about the Labour government’s concessions to far-right agitation on these issues.

It notes that the far right feeds on “the very real economic problems people face” but offers no demands for real answers to those problems, let alone any suggestion of organising for class struggle. Pronouncements headed by a list of celebrities, urging unity without any answer to these issues, could be seen as condescending.

Vital

A stronger response to the far-right on the street is vital. But it is just one piece of the puzzle. Together replicates SUTR’s focus on bringing together an existing anti-racist audience for a set-piece demonstration, under the banner of lowest-common-denominator liberal platitudes. They give little to no attention to the deeper work of challenging far-right political ideas to halt their rapid spread. That would require offering a persuasive and positive alternative — class struggle politics — which the SUTR/Together/SWP strategy sets aside. They aim instead for a broad — but shallow — appeal. Such negative unity is a desperately limited and limiting sort of unity. Both historic and recent experience

show it is inadequate against a surging far-right whose influence, worldviews and demands are making major inroads into the mainstream.

Workers’ Liberty argues and organises for the workers’ movement — in the first place, our unions — to step up and confront the far right both politically and on the streets, under its own banner rather than contracting-out to campaign groups, as the only social force with the potential weight, reach and interest to meet this challenge. We need open, democratic coordinating committees against the far right in every town and city, rooted in local union branches and trades councils and including socialists, Labour members and community groups.

These efforts need a political edge beyond vague appeals to love and togetherness. They must take on the far right’s arguments and lies (defending, for example, migrants and trans people) in communities and workplaces, and put forward credible and positive political alternatives. The fight against the far right must not be siloed off from A. specific demands to defend and advance migrants’, LGBT+ etc rights, and B. struggles to meet the needs of the whole working class — decent jobs, homes, services and social security for everyone, won by taxing and expropri-

ating the rich. We include the latter not because we imagine better material provision, handed down from above, could simplistically dissolve bigoted ideas. But drawing people into shared struggle for common needs can help open them up to the possibility of working-class solidarity in place of suspicion and resentment.

Notts TUC recently called a conference against the far right (see article on this page). In London and the South-East, the PCS regional committee invited union branches to come together for a rank-and-file initiative against the far right — nearly 30 branches from at least 10 unions sent delegates to a first meeting in December. More such initiatives are necessary — discuss and work with us if you agree.

On 21 February, the TUC leadership and SUTR will co-host their annual Workers Against The Far Right Organising Conference. Rather than taking direction from a parade of top-table leaders, we propose that union branches should call for this conference to allow proposals and a real, open debate about what strategy this dangerous situation requires. Bring this model motion to your union branch: bit.ly/b-frt. We can’t afford to keep sleepwalking on the path set by SUTR and the union bureaucracies. □

Notts trade unionists against Reform

By Liam Conway

On Saturday 29 November 2025, Notts Trades Union Council hosted a conference to discuss how the Labour and Trade Union movement should respond to the growth of the far right and the electoral successes of Reform UK.

The conference was addressed by Nadia Whittome (Nottingham East Labour MP), Paresh Patel (Unite Regional Secretary), Greg Marshall (Broxtowe Alliance) and two asylum seekers from a Long Eaton hotel.

Four workshops focussed on:

- Strategies for unions to counter the threat of Reform UK, including organising effectively online and in the workplace.

- Busting scapegoating myths and demanding safe routes for refugees.

- How do we combat the discriminatory hatred of the far right in our neighbourhoods?

- How can unions influence current government policies of cuts in living standards and public services whilst scapegoating migrants and refugees?

A short general motion was passed at the end of the Conference, as below, and the Notts Trades Union Council on 2 December endorsed the motion and agreed to call a follow up meeting in January to assess the way forward.

“This conference agrees on the importance of combating the influence of the anti-refugee, racist and anti-union Far Right and their enablers Reform UK. We affirm our determination to stop the spread of their malicious propaganda within our communities and prevent any further electoral victories for their movement in either

councils or Parliament.

“We oppose making concessions to the racist narrative that blames migration for the problems of working-class people. In particular we oppose and will help coordinate opposition to the latest proposals from Home Secretary, Shabana Mahmood and the Government that would deny refugees Indefinite Leave to Remain for up to 20 years along with the threat that their refugee status could be revoked after every 30 months.

“We call on the trade unions and all political parties within the Labour Movement to step up their campaigning against attacks on refugees and minorities and instead campaign for policies that are real alternatives to the poverty of austerity and the political despair that they have endured for so long.

“We need united action wher-

ever possible and constructive ongoing debate on how we effectively oppose Reform UK in elections.”

Since our conference at the end of November there has clearly been some soul searching at the top of the trade union movement and a flurry of initiatives. A TUC event took place in London on 2 December (“How can unions tackle the far right?”), then a Unite meeting was called online on 8 December attended by about 80 people. Next a national demonstration was called for 28 March under the title “Together”, endorsed and promoted by some 50 celebrities. Now we have a national TUC/SUTR event on Saturday 21 February entitled “Workers against the far right — organising conference”.

All of this is good up to a point but all of it follows the same pattern of SUTR and the

TUC/TU leaders organising from above with no obvious wider consultation rather than urgently mobilising union members and workers from below in a collective endeavour.

We should get Trades Councils, union branches, local branches of the Labour Party, Your Party, the Green Party and many others to endorse these events and get activists to them, especially rank and file trade unionists. At the national demonstration we need to see a sea of union placards and banners rather than the predominance of SUTR stalls and placards.

What we face is much too serious to leave to SUTR and a rag, tag and bobtail of celebrities. This is a job for a United Front of workers, not a popular front of the “great and the good”. □



“For Venezuela”? For the people and the workers!

By Will Roberts

On the left, the US capture of Maduro has been met pretty much universally with condemnation and calls for the US to get out of Venezuela.

Of organisations that have a Venezuelan section, the LIS (post-Morenist “Orthodox Trotskyists”) have released a [statement](#) that “categorically rejects” the aggression and calls for those outside of Venezuela to come out on the streets to call for the US to leave. They are clear that: “Our strongest condemnation to this criminal and cowardly attack against the Venezuelan people comes from a Left-opposition perspective. Maduro leads a repressive and authoritarian regime with hundreds of political prisoners and is implementing a brutal capitalist austerity, subjecting the working people to starvation wages and terrible public services.”

The Venezuelan Communist Party released a statement before any clear detail had been released condemning the

attack. Given Maduro’s previous attacks on the PCV and their previous condemnation of his corruption in elections, it should come as no surprise that they have since published articles [condemning](#) the state imprisoning the families of dissidents (given this makes no mention of Maduro’s capture, it is likely it was written before).

In Britain, responses have ranged from uninteresting to irresponsible. Your Party have repeatedly condemned the invasion and Corbyn has been a speaker at multiple events since 3 January, ably sidestepping the question of Maduro’s government to focus exclusively on Maduro’s capture being unjust.

Perhaps best of the far left, unusually, is the SWP’s international network, IST, who declare that “to oppose these attacks has nothing to do with supporting Maduro’s corrupt authoritarian regime. It is the sole right of the Venezuelan masses, with their long revolutionary history, to remove him.” There will doubtless be problems down the line, but this

is the correct stance. The Fourth International (post-Mandelite) statement repeats that “it is up to the Venezuelan people alone to elect and throw out their governments” — without venturing an opinion on the nature of that government.

The RCP have previously been well known for their outspoken Chavismo. Their statement does make sure to call the Venezuelan working class “those who have benefited from the Bolivarian revolution”, but notes that “It is true that many people, especially on the left, have no confidence in the present government in Caracas.” Nevertheless, they call for “full and unconditional support for Venezuela”.

Very little of substance has been said by the CPB, publishers of the *Morning Star*. But their initial article gives a full throated defence of Maduro against Trump’s slander: Rob Griffiths is quoted at a meeting of the central committee, asking “where are the torture centres and death squads in Maduro’s Vene-



A protest in Venezuela in 2023 for the release of two trade union leaders in state run industries

zuela? Where are the mass executions of political opponents?” This is somewhat dodging the point that Maduro’s government has imprisoned hundreds of political prisoners, and threatened to ban the CPB’s sister party in Venezuela.

The left’s opposition to American imperialism is correct. But as time goes on and the Venezuelan political crisis unfolds, socialists will need to address the stranglehold in which Maduro and his party have held Venezuelan politics for decades, and how the working class of Venezuela can fight back against it. □

Antidoto

Trump puts “multipolarity” into practice

By Jim Denham

One of Aesop’s fables warns “be careful what you wish for, lest it come true!”

The *Morning Star* has spent years promoting the desirability of multipolarity — a world in which the post-war “rules-based order” is replaced by a range of global alliances that pay little or no heed to platitudinous “rules” and “human rights”.

What the *MS* and its political masters, the Communist Party of Britain, had in mind was China’s Belt and Road initiative and the Chinese-led BRICS alliance of non-Western nations.

Now, multipolarity has arrived in a slightly different form, courtesy of Donald Trump: on 4 December his administration released a new National Security Strategy, signalling the end of any pretence of a “liberal” international order and embrac-

ing a world of regional spheres of influence, dominated by the US in the Americas and the near Pacific (the “Western hemisphere”), China in Asia, Saudi Arabia in the Middle East and a “strategic balance” with Russia in Europe (the EU being openly disparaged and, indeed, threatened, in the wording of the document).

The document calls for ending the Ukraine war as swiftly as possible, with strong hints that this will involve major concessions to Russia. No wonder the entire strategy was welcomed by Moscow, who said it “aligns with [their] vision.”

While the strategy was making headlines and generating comment in most of the serious media internationally, the *MS* had nothing to say about it for over a week — perhaps because, like the Kremlin, the paper found itself in agreement

with much of what the document contained (but, unlike the Kremlin, didn’t care to acknowledge this).

When the *MS* did finally comment (in its editorial of 12 December), it was to claim that the document is “dismissive of Britain” when, in fact, it is specifically dismissive of the EU (which, of course, the *MS* also hates, albeit for somewhat different reasons).

Menace

After complaining about “Washington’s ... menace to democracy [and the threat of] interference in our internal political affairs” the editorial then goes on to berate Starmer for hypocrisy by having praised Trump while “actually working might and main to obstruct the US push to end the war in Ukraine.”

So, it seems, when it comes to Ukraine, Trump is a genuine

man of peace as far as the *MS* is concerned and the warmongers are those who are trying to prevent a capitulation to Putin.

Then came last weekend’s attack on Venezuela and a practical demonstration of what the Trump version of multipolarity or spheres of influence means in practice. Maduro’s big mistake, in the eyes of Washington, is not that he rigged the last election and has driven organised opposition underground (Trump must surely approve of that) but that he has been cosy-ing up to Beijing and Moscow.

Trump is clearly sympathetic to Putin’s territorial ambitions in the former Soviet Union, and willing to allow Xi’s China its own sphere of influence in Asia, he will not tolerate Russia or China to muscle in on Latin America — if he is going to respect Russia’s sphere of influence, he demands reci-

procity.

The *MS* editorial of 5 January (“The United States is out of control. Stand by Venezuela”) contains an entirely correct denunciation of Trump’s attack on Venezuela (“an outrage against international law”) but then goes on to object to the use of the word “authoritarian” to describe the Maduro regime on the grounds that in Britain “mass round-ups of peaceful protesters is now routine.”

“Venezuela’s revolution needs solidarity, not carping criticisms [and] purity tests”, those of us who believe it is possible to oppose Trump’s attack and denounce Maduro’s authoritarianism are lectured.

There’s no mention of “spheres of influence” or “multipolarity”, though: I wonder whether we’ll ever again read those words in the pages of the *Morning Star*? □

Netanyahu's new "war on Palestinians"

By Ira Berkovic

Aside from its new curbs on aid agencies (see outside pages) Israel has already all but outlawed Unrwa, the UN agency responsible for providing humanitarian aid in Palestinian territories, and which is one of the few bodies with sufficiently extensive infrastructure to ensure aid is widely distributed.

There is no indication from the Israeli government that any additional measures will be put in place to make up for the shortfall of aid that will be caused by the new restrictions.

Meanwhile, Israel has allowed private-sector commercial bodies to import equipment such as generators and construction materials into Gaza. Importation and distribution of similar equipment by aid agencies is heavily restricted.

Speaking to the *Guardian*, Tania Hary, executive director of Gisha, an Israeli NGO which campaigns for greater freedom of movement for Gazans, said: "On the surface the private sector [shipments of items on the dual-use list] can appear to be very confusing and an inconsistency. But I see it as very consistent with their policy of trying to strengthen the hand of certain actors and weaken the hand of others. It's a question of: whose hands is it in? Where is it? How is it being used?"

The left-wing binational (Palestinian-Jewish) social movement Standing Together said: "The Israeli government's ban on dozens of international aid groups in Gaza is a new phase in its mission to make life for Palestinians impossible and to entrench Israeli power across the land. After two years of anni-

hilation, this is the next step.

"The same government that needs war to survive is finding new ways to wage war on Palestinians, even during a 'ceasefire'. But we won't accept it. This horror must come to an end, the Israeli government must leave Gaza, and all of us must move towards a different future.

"The only way we can achieve the future we want is through an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement that guarantees us all a different reality – one of true freedom, equality, and safety for everyone. That's what we're fighting for."

53% of Gazan territory remains under direct Israeli military control. Despite withdrawal being stipulated in the so-called "peace plan" Israel has agreed to, Israel says it will not withdraw until Hamas has fully disarmed.

There is still no clarity on how the rest of the plan's phases, which include the administration of Gaza by an international security force, which will then hand power to a government composed of Palestinian technocrats, will work in practice.

Settlers

On Friday 2 January, 15 people were injured in attacks by settlers in Khalil al-Louz, south of Bethlehem in the occupied West Bank. The attacks were part of a wave of violence by settlers, often protected and sometimes abetted by Israeli military forces, against Palestinian homes and farms in the West Bank through the final weeks of December and into the new year.

Throughout 2025, 41 settlements previously deemed unofficial were granted "legal" status by the Israeli government,

the highest number on record. Plans for 28,163 settler housing units were approved throughout 2025, another record. On 21 December, the Israeli security cabinet approved a plan to legalise a further 19 settlements in the West Bank.

The explicit intention of the Israeli government's settlement policy is to prevent the emergence of a Palestinian state by atomising the territory on which it should be based. Yair Dvir, from the Israeli human rights campaign B'Tselem, said: "Israel continues to advance ethnic cleansing in the West Bank, both through the construction and retroactive legalisation of outposts and new settlements, and through the forcible displacement of Palestinian communities and the violent takeover of vast areas of Palestinian lands."

Protests

On Friday 26 December, Standing Together activists protested the early release of men who attacked Hanan Kh'mal, a Palestinian resident of Jaffa, two weeks previously. Standing Together said: "In that attack, Hanan, who is nine months pregnant, faced racist chants and was pushed and pepper sprayed in front of her children.

"In moments like these, we know that our role is not only to stand in solidarity with one another, but also to fight to make sure it doesn't happen again."

Standing Together also released a statement condemning the 26 December attack in northern Israel by a Palestinian from Qabatiya in the West Bank, who killed one Israeli, Shimshon Mordechai, in a car-ramming attack and another, Aviv Maor, in a stabbing.

In the last week of December, Stand-

ing Together organised a "People's Climate Conference", involving a series of events at their Purple House social centres throughout Israel. Standing Together said: "We heard from former Knesset members, researchers, and activists about the importance of confronting climate change head-on, and how it intersects with the struggle for peace."

Standing Together activists also disrupted a conference organised by Netanyahu's Likud party at a venue near the Gaza border, calling for the resettlement of Gaza: "The event was full of dangerous plans for annexation and ethnic cleansing. We showed up to say clearly: we refuse settlements in Gaza, and we refuse horrific messianic delusions that only lead to more violence and bloodshed."

Speaking on the Third Narrative podcast, Sally Abed, a Palestinian leader of Standing Together and a municipal councillor in Haifa, said:

"I do believe socialism is the answer. The crimes against humanity, the injustices, the decades of subjugation... they're symptoms of something much deeper in the world order, and that's what needs to change." □



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

Antisemitism after the Bondi massacre

By Janet Burstall

On 14 December 2025, 15 people were shot dead at a Bondi Beach Hanukkah event by two gunmen identified as ISIS-inspired.

Debates continue to rage in Australia on how the Government should respond, who amongst police and intelligence agencies failed to prevent the attack, what does and doesn't need to be done to stop antisemitism in Australia, and how limits on gun ownership can be made more strict.

The Albanese Labor government had received a controversial report from the Australian Special Envoy to Combat Antisemitism (ASECA) in July 2025. Pro-Palestinian groups opposed the report because they saw it inhibiting freedom of

speech and protest. Soon after the Bondi massacre, Albanese announced the full adoption of the ASECA plan.

The right-wing LNP Opposition has been strident in proposing other measures, including cutting immigration, especially Muslim immigration, and demanding a national Royal Commission of inquiry. The activist right, including federal politicians, has taken up the anti-Muslim response, and there are many reports of Islamophobic abuse.

The left broadly calls for "social cohesion" and argues that the actions of two Muslim men who were present in the area of the massacre and one of whom disarmed one of the shooters show that the shooters do not stand for Muslims.

Pro-Palestine protest organ-

isers reject the ban by NSW Labor Premier Chris Minns on protests against Israel, arguing that they are not in any way responsible for the Bondi massacre.

So far, so good. But there is too much silence about what could foster a belief in the minds of two men that an effectively suicidal antisemitic attack was virtuous and justifiable.

Time

It is time for the anti-Zionist left to take responsibility for their contribution to fostering antisemitic attitudes. The boycott of "Zionism" and "Zionists" spills readily over into antisemitism. The result of the cultural and academic boycott of Israel is that many Jewish people have been ostracised and shunned

in progressive circles. This political culture is not the cause of the attacks at Bondi. But it creates a social milieu in which anti-Zionism flourishes and on its fringes is readily translated into antisemitism.

I don't trust governments to protect free speech and take genuine action against the antisemitic attitudes and beliefs that can lead to exclusion, hate speech and violence. Community attitudes can be changed by grassroots action, including community building, identifying precursors to antisemitism, and by vigorous resistance to antisemitic behaviour and its precursors.

It is preposterous that Friends of Standing Together are ostracised at pro-Palestinian rallies in Sydney, whilst antisemitic flags, slogans, and participants

go unchallenged. The designation of the Hamas attack on 7 October 2023 as an act of resistance is to endorse military attacks on Israelis and Jews as legitimate. The pro-Palestinian movement leaders could instead specifically make welcome all supporters, regardless of their views on Zionism, reject the cultural and academic boycott of Israel, and offer to support Jewish individuals who come forward with complaints that they have been targeted for ostracism or exclusion by supporters of Palestinian liberation.

We can better resist the imposition of repressive measures by committing to taking our own measures for change. □

• More online: The left's duty to fight antisemitism, bit.ly/lduty



Simone de Beauvoir on Brigitte Bardot

By Jill Mountford

I hope that she will not resign herself to insignificance in order to gain popularity. I hope she will mature but not change." Those are the last sentences in an essay for *Esquire* magazine written by Simone de Beauvoir, 1959, *Brigitte Bardot and the Lolita Syndrome*.

In this essay De Beauvoir celebrated and delighted in the 25 year old Bardot, her youthful, unashamed sexuality, the impression of naturalness, the tousled-haired nymph, the new earthy eroticism. She analysed her agency as the "sex symbol of liberation" within the constraints of the bourgeois patriarchal culture. And she did that taking a sex-positive, feminist-solidarity position at a time when Bardot's persona provoked division in France.

De Beauvoir deconstructed Bardot's

role as Juliette in *And God Created Woman* and the male gaze, Bardot's big break-through movie, a film co-written (with Raoul Levy) and directed by her then husband Roger Vadim. She said he "invented a resolutely modern version of the eternal female and thereby launched a new type of eroticism." She went on to say "Vadim presented her as a 'phenomenon of nature' 'She doesn't act' he said 'She exists' 'That's right' confirmed Bardot". Bardot was not born, but rather became her after her role in this defining film.

De Beauvoir observed "the dream-merchants" moving in a new direction which she called the "erotic hoyden", with Bardot as epitome. The "nymphet", a term coined by Nabokov in his book *Lolita*, where Humbert Humbert, a middle aged man is obsessed with the 12 year old

Lolita (first published in France in 1955), and Arthur Miller's play *A View from the Bridge* (1955) where "the heroine has just about reached puberty" reflected this trend. De Beauvoir says a "new Eve" has been created "by merging the green fruit with the femme fatale".

Bardot didn't have the agency to invent the sexual revolution of the 1960s but she was the Marianne of this revolution from 1956.

Squared

This does not have to be squared with the fact that she was a "crazy cat lady" who turned her back on the film industry and celebrity to care and campaign for animals while caring not a jot for migrants. She was homophobic, against the #Metoo movement, and a supporter of the far-right, indeed was married for

33 years until her death) to Bernard d'Omale, former adviser to Jean-Marie Le Pen, founder of the National Front (now the National Rally).

Roland Barthes book *Mythologies* (1957) described Bardot as a new form of eroticism and labels the intense scrutiny of her life as a "national soap opera". That was in 1957. She had been acting only since 1952 and only in 1956 had she had her first big role. Seventy years on the national soap opera continues in Bardot's death, as in life. □

Eric Lee

Eric Lee is taking a break from his opinion column in *Solidarity* for a few months to complete work on a book he is writing. □

Inside the Greens

Greens in power after May 2026?

By Michael Chessum

In May, Labour will be routed in local elections across England, as well as in national elections in Scotland and Wales. Their collapse is well-deserved. Starmer offers broad continuity with Tory economic policy, infusing it with Reform's anti-migrant and culture war programme.

In Scotland and Wales, the Greens will do well, though the progressive vote will go primarily to Plaid and the SNP. In England, however, and especially in London and other cities where council elections are all-out, the Greens can expect to make the running. It is entirely possible that we will end up in power across the country.

Your Party's impact on these elections will be minimal, though where they are stronger we can expect cooperation between the two parties, who are competing for the same pool of voters with roughly identical policies.

Green gains in May will precipitate the first big internal debate within the new Green left. Taking over councils will mean being told by the Labour government to administer austerity.

Without an alternative plan, Green councils will default to implementing cuts, not be-

cause they are ideologically wedded to doing so, but because it will not have occurred to them that there might be an alternative. Most will not have significant local anti-cuts campaigns, and will have little or no knowledge of the rate-capping rebellion, Clay Cross or Poplar. Outside the organised left, few do.

The law has changed since the 1970s and 1980s. When a housing commissioner was sent in to Clay Cross to enforce rent increases in 1972, council workers were told not to lend him so much as a pencil. Now, to cut a long story short, if you set an illegal budget, you don't get martyred and you can't control the staff; commissioners are sent in, usually with hawkish consultants in tow, and cut without remorse.

Needs budget

The needs budget no longer delivers a needs budget, and the dented shield is no longer a shield. Community wealth building, in-housing, and various other measures have a role to play — but they will barely touch the sides of councils' deficits. We need a new strategy that goes beyond sloganeering.

There are some obvious basics. Left councils should coordinate nationally to chal-

lenge austerity. They should fight central government alongside their communities — and should mobilise, building renters' unions, trade unions and neighbourhood networks as an emergency. To give us time to fight, reserves could be deployed to halt any immediate cuts.

What are the prospects for delivering this modest initial programme? That depends on what like-minded people do. The Green Party is open. Activists who show up to meetings will find themselves in a position to steer the manifestos and select the candidates in their local party (the party's decentralisation is both a blessing and a curse). In my experience (I live in a central London borough and joined in the summer) the atmosphere is curious and generous, including among long-standing members.

Most of the far left understand the Greens using analogies based more on their own prejudices than an understanding of what is happening now. So, we're just like the German Greens, or a reinvention of the Liberal Party in the 1960s, or you met some Greens once in the 2000s and they were a bit right wing, or into homeopathy, or whatever.

The reality is the Greens are now a mass party and a

complex organism. They have effectively been refounded in the past 12 months by radicalised youth, eco-socialists, and ex-Corbynistas. Behind all of that, it retains a deep commitment to internal democracy and a consensus-building culture that makes it reluctant to talk in terms of class struggle; it was this lack of edge that Zack Polanski's "eco-populism" was designed to disrupt.

I get the feeling that some in Workers' Liberty are determined not to understand the Green left. That is an easy path to follow. Set the test that Green councils "must defy the

cuts" (How? And then what? We need a new strategy — what is it?) and no doubt you will find enough councils that fail it, enabling you to point the finger and issue a boiler-plate critique of the Greens that could have been written before most of its current members were born.

More interesting is to ask: there are almost 200,000 people in a left party, they're about to win some elections, and they're up for listening. What's the plan, and how do we make it happen? □

• Michael Chessum is a Green Party activist, writing here in a personal opinion column.

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2026: prepare for crises!

The writer Adam Tooze describes the world today as in “polycrisis”. He is right in a sense, but the term can dull us into ignoring new threats of more full-blown crisis.

“Crisis” is often used to mean “trouble”, “untenable situation”. Plenty of that around. But it also, and more usefully, means the sharp point at which untenability tips over into temporary breakdown.

Capitalism has shown great powers of reconfiguring itself after temporary breakdowns. As Lenin said, there is no crisis without some makeshift way out for the ruling class.

“Revolutionaries sometimes try to prove that there is absolutely no way out of the crisis. This is a mistake. There are no absolutely hopeless situations... One cannot ‘prove’ that the bourgeoisie has absolutely no possibility of lulling some minority or other... or suppressing the movement or uprising of some section of the oppressed and exploited”.

The question now is — what “ways out” will come with a real temporary breakdown?

World capitalism is not in a temporary breakdown now. Ecocide poses dangers of going beyond “tipping points”, but is as yet far from its likely worst effects. Unemployment is relatively low in many countries, and profits high. Even real

wages are rising modestly in many countries. Wars are localised in small areas.

Some of that could change in 2026.

Some Marxists present capitalist economic crises as an orderly sequence, as if, say, the average rate of profit declines steadily and every so often dips below a threshold of crisis. Marx never said that. More importantly, it is not true.

Each capitalist economic crisis results from a unique concatenation of imbalances. We can’t tell in advance when those concatenations will come together, or when imbalances will resolve less drastically.

There are at least three factors in world capitalism now which could set going a spiral into crisis.

Tariff

One, Trump’s tariffs. Although their effect is muted so far, for various reasons, they have wrecked the relatively free-trade regime constructed gradually over decades from 1947. They reduce the fluidity and flexibility of world trade, and the degree to which it can offer vents from crisis. The status and fluidity of the dollar as world money is more shaky than ever since the early 1970s.

Two: the AI “bubble” (speculative boom) in the USA has enabled Trump to claim economic success. Yet research shows most firms buying AI provision as

getting little out of it. They are unlikely to buy much more soon. The bubble is likely to burst.

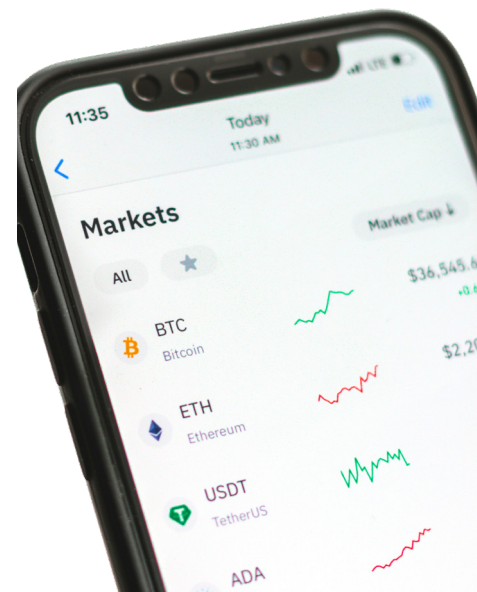
Three: Trump has boosted cryptocurrencies. The essential “virtue” of those cryptocurrencies is that they enable shady capitalists to make transactions difficult to trace. Cryptocurrencies are a quicker and smoother way of circumventing bank records than dealing in physical dollar cash.

Yet cryptocurrencies’ value is much more volatile than paper dollars’. The next dip in cryptocurrency value could trigger a sequence of collapses.

We do not know when, or even whether, these three factors may come together into a temporary breakdown. But the risk is high.

After attacking Venezuela, Trump said he would assert US dominance in “the Western hemisphere”, and threatened Colombia and Cuba in particular. Iran too, despite not being “Western”. Either the Trump operation in Venezuela will lead to a big and long war there, or, if it encourages Trump by “succeeding” more smoothly, it heightens the threat of further wars.

The far right has surged worldwide, and so far on the basis of accumulated exasperations since the 2008-9 crash, the Covid lockdowns, and the 2022-3 energy-prices spike. A full-scale crisis will



give the far right greater and more violent pools of incoherent anger to draw from.

Mild policies of seeking “growth” through “stability” will be no bulwark. A way out of the likely crisis for the working class, rather than allow many of us to be dragged along by the most vicious expedients of the ruling class, can be mapped only with radical socialist policies — comprehensive social ownership, expropriating the billionaires, workers’ control.

We publish *Solidarity* to get visibility for those policies. Our work is urgent. □

Iran: the working class is key

By Dan Katz

Trade union organisations, including the teachers’ union, pensioners’ unions and the truck owners and drivers’ union have issued statements of support for the protests in Iran. The Syndicate of Tehran bus workers stated: “Deprived people are fully entitled to take to the streets against the authorities’ repressive policies, the state’s all-out attack on livelihoods, structural corruption, deep class divides, to confront runaway inflation. The solution for workers and labourers is unity and organisation.”

The clerical Iranian regime has replied with brutality. The so-called Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, denounced the protesters as “rioters” who should be “put in their place.” The state is using tear gas and, occasionally, live fire.

Over a dozen protesters have been killed and scores arrested, so far. Blindfolded men have appeared on state television confessing to fantastical anti-regime conspiracies allegedly organised by foreign powers.

Repression is particularly harsh in the Kurdish area in north west Iran and Balochistan in the south east as well as in provincial towns.

Internet coverage is being restricted.

Many shops, schools, universities and government offices have been shut since Wednesday 31 December, when the government announced closures due to cold weather and the need to manage electricity supply. In fact the state intended to prevent opportunities for the opposition to meet and organise.

Thursdays and Fridays are weekend days in Iran, and Sat-

urday 3 January was a national religious holiday. It is yet not clear if retail and other enterprises will reopen from Sunday 4 January.

President Masoud Pezeshkian has attempted to show some verbal conciliation, knowing very well that the suffering of Iran’s workers and poor is real and support for the regime is narrow. Official inflation is running at 52%, one third of Iran’s wealth is now in the hands of one percent of the population, perhaps 40mn people are living below the official poverty line.

Power cuts

Iranians suffer regular power cuts, water shortages, and air pollution levels which are responsible for tens of thousands of deaths each year.

The prestige of Iran’s regime suffered badly in June when

the state was battered by a US-backed Israeli bombing campaign aimed against Iran’s nuclear weapons programme. Across the region Iran’s allies, including Hamas and Lebanese Hezbollah, have also been badly beaten following the Hamas pogrom of October 2023 and the Israeli war on Gaza which followed.

Now Israel and the US are threatening a further wave of bombing. A new wave of foreign attacks on Iran would help the regime, at least in the sense of allowing it to rally the population on a nationalist basis.

Probably 80% of the population oppose the clerical state, although the working-class opposition lacks coherence, depth and breadth of organisation. However, the working class remains the key to the only type of “regime change” which could produce a new society

which benefits the big majority of Iran’s population, our people, the workers and the poor.

Despite some indications last month that members of the police force were angry that their pay was forcing them to take second jobs to survive, the central mechanisms of the repressive state, the IRGC and Basiji militia, remain intact and coherent. The state will not easily fall.

The statement of the Tehran bus workers contains the key. The working class must use any opportunity it now has to strengthen its organisation in the factories and enterprises. And all left organisations with any influence in Iran must see this as central: build up working class self-organisation, confidence and power.

For women’s freedom and workers’ power in Iran! □



HK government stamps on dissent after fire

By Chan Ying

The Hong Kong government is trying to prevent public mourning after the Wang Fuk Court fire on 26 November 2025 escalating into a city-wide grievance against corruption and shoddy unsafe practices in the building industry and governmental incompetence and lack of accountability.

Mourners have been discouraged from gathering near the site, which is now sealed off. National security laws were used to arrest four people and stymie a press conference.

One, Wong On-yin, was slated to appear at a civil society-led press conference about the fatal Wang Fuk Court fire. The press conference was cancelled at the last minute after some of the speakers, including Wong and Bruce Liu, a solicitor and chair of the Association for Democracy and People's Livelihood (ADPL), were taken in by national security police.

The University of Hong Kong denied student societies the use of the campus to mourn the victims, citing concerns about "social instability" and "force majeure". The university also reportedly urged student groups against organising any form of memorial activities. The Hong Kong Baptist University suspended the operations of its student union after messages were posted on a "democracy wall" managed by the union, which expressed condolences and urged the government to address public concerns regarding the fire. The university also used barricades and hoarding to cover the message board from public view.

Two weeks after Chinese University of Hong Kong student Miles Kwan (who launched an online petition calling for an independent inquiry) was arrested, his university refused to recognise two of its college-based student unions, causing them to disband.

The government pressed on with the "patriots-only" 9 December elections for the Legislative Council, working with pro-Beijing parties to incentivise voters to turn out, to no avail. The turnout was 31.9%, versus 30.2% in 2021 (in the aftermath of disbaring pro-democracy parties and candidates), which was the lowest since the former British colony returned to Chinese rule in 1997. Actual numbers were lower than four years ago. Four people were arrested for inciting voters to abstain or spoil their ballot papers. Spoilt votes reached a record 3.12%, topping the previous record of 2.03% in 2021.

The death toll from the fire has risen to 161, with missing people still not yet accounted for. Among the dead were overseas domestic workers from Indonesia and the Philippines. Many elderly and young children survived because of their bravery.

The survivors are still reeling from the trauma of losing their neighbour-

hood, homes and loved ones. For now, most of them (around 3,500) are being accommodated in rent-free temporary housing provided mainly by NGOs. Their short-term financial needs are being met by massive donations from all sectors of Hong Kong civil society, totalling HK\$3.8 billion (£380 million) to date, dwarfing by ten times the HK\$300 million allocated by the Government. However, the road to normalcy for the former residents is long and challenging.

The Government's judge-led investigation on the disaster, which stops short of a Commission of Inquiry, plans to report in about nine months' time. So far the police have arrested 16 persons connected to the renovation project on suspicion of manslaughter. The Government has sought to dissolve the owners' management committee. The Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) had apprehended the present and former chairs of the owners' management committee.

UN Human Rights Chief Volker Türk said on 9 December: "At a tragic time like this, the space for discussion and debate on issues of major public interest and concern is more important than ever... The people of Hong Kong understandably want answers and accountability, so that the hundreds of victims are properly compensated and to avoid such a tragedy occurring again... I am deeply concerned by reports that the territory's draconian security laws are being applied against individuals who have called publicly for a transparent and independent inquiry, a review of construction oversight, government accountability, and support for affected residents, among other things. I urge the authorities to drop these cases against those seeking accountability."

Background

Since the disaster, local and international journalists have uncovered the horrendous background to the disaster.

The colonial government's housing policy for Hong Kong had been a never-ending catching-up exercise, with demand overwhelming supply every post-war decade. The 1950s baby boom in Hong Kong was multiplied several-fold by waves of migrants from across its border with China, particularly during the years of famine (1959-1961). This was a catastrophic event following Mao Zedong's disastrously utopian Great Leap Forward project, resulting in tens of millions of deaths from starvation, a disaster largely man-made due to radical collectivisation, exaggerated grain reports leading to excessive state seizure etc, compounded by the 1960 Sino-Soviet split, which disrupted the PRC's economic development.

Since the 1997 handover, housing has continued to be a major blemish for the HKSAR Government's narrative of Hong Kong as a world-class city. In a city of around six million people, in

1997, the waiting time for public housing for around 150,000 families was about 6.5 years. The first HKSAR Government pledged to reduce it to three years by 2005. The waiting time in 2025 is about 5.3 years, with 116,000 on the waiting list, according to the HKSAR Housing Bureau.

Most of Hong Kong's working-class housing estates were built from the 1950s onwards. While each decade represented improved standards, their overall quality, especially in Hong Kong's sub-tropical climate, was put second to speed of completion. Systemic problems existed and continue to exist in terms of construction quality, durability of materials and projects, corruption, regulatory framework and working conditions. The high-risk construction industry recorded 3,097 industrial accidents in 2023, 3,046 in 2022. The accident rate per 1,000 workers was 27.6 in 2023, 29.1 in 2022.

Sea water

The construction industry right up to the 1980s had typically used sea water in making reinforced concrete because fresh water was scarce and chlorides in seawater sped up cement hydration. That gave quicker initial strength and more rapid construction – and a time-bomb of corroding concrete which affects thousands of buildings today.

Wang Fuk Court was part of the public housing Home Ownership Scheme (HOS) construction wave in the early 1980s, probably inspired by the Right to Buy scheme introduced by Thatcher's Government in 1980. During that era, there was widespread short-piling fraud and corruption, where contractors deliberately installed piles shorter than designed, leading to severe building settlement, tilting, and even demolition. The Government announced on 21 November 1985 that structural problems were found in a total of 577 blocks built between 1982 and 1984, with 26 identified as beyond repair and for immediate demolition. In 2000-1 two HOS blocks in Yu Chui Court, Yuen Chau Kok, Sha Tin, also in the New Territories had to be demolished because of short-piling problems.

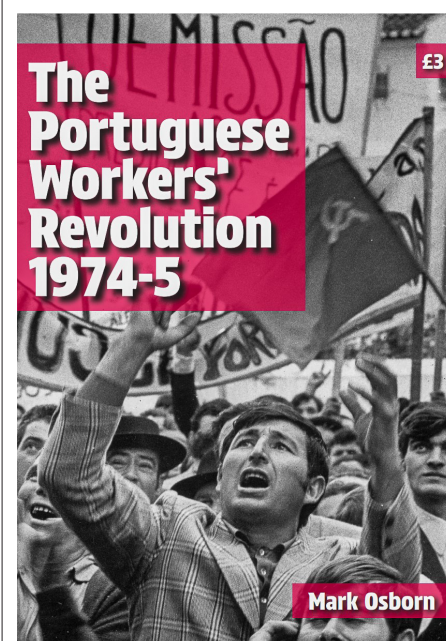
Eventually, after the collapse of a 50-year old five-storey building in Kowloon, the HKSAR Government introduced in 2012 a Mandatory Building Inspection Scheme for buildings more than 40 years old. The scheme requires owners to complete inspections and repairs within a limited timeframe, greatly reducing owners' bargaining power over maintenance projects, with construction consultants and companies exploiting this fertile ground for bid-rigging and pressurising owners into higher prices and unreasonable terms. Property owners are often left powerless to intervene once a consultant is appointed by the owners' management committee, especially when the two collude.

Hong Kong Free Press and the New York Times have both interviewed Chiu Yan-loi, a member of the Property Owners Anti-Bid-Rigging Alliance, who explained the practices of collusive tendering, common fraudulent tactics, limitations in government oversight, and general corruption in the building maintenance industry, as well as the power of large syndicates who monopolise the bidding processes.

In the case of Wang Fuk Court, since renovation began in January 2024, the owners had unearthed previous conviction records of the companies concerned. They had complained about various malpractices and their suspicions of collusion to various government departments including the ICAC. 16 site inspections since July 2024 were conducted by various government departments, the last one a week before the fatal fire, to no avail. The fire department revealed that fire alarms in all eight blocks did not sound in previous tests they had conducted. Multiple government agencies played down concerns, performed perfunctory inspections, or relied on reassurances from contractors.

On 2 January the ICAC arrested 21 people allegedly involved in manipulating two other renovation project contracts elsewhere in Kwun Tong, Kowloon. More can be expected as the Government tries to assuage public anger. Scapegoating bamboo-scaffolders, one of Hong Kong's iconic cultural heritages, has only increased anger.

Despite the purge of all pro-democracy opposition in Legco and the decimation of civil society institutions like a relatively free press has proved to be a hollow victory, the saga of Wang Fuk Court could start a fire of public discontent. □



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Deadly stalemate in Ukraine

By Michael Baker

No progress has been made in achieving a peace deal in Ukraine, bad or good.

Zelensky and Trump's latest meeting in the US resulted in both sides claiming advances, particularly on security guarantees, but no agreement reached. Zelensky had previously called for the US to upgrade its 15-year security guarantee to 50 years, claiming that the former would not deter Russia from invading again in future.

The current deal serving as the basis for negotiations is a 20-point plan unveiled at the end of last year. Zelensky claims that it "mirrors" Nato's Article 5 guarantees.

Russia appears to have attempted to spike the talks by announcing that Ukraine had fired 91 drones at Putin's personal residence. Despite providing absolutely no evidence for this claim, and the fact that it contradicts information from the Russian Defense Ministry hours earlier about the number of drones detected overnight, Trump told the press he was "very angry".

Sergey Lavrov announced that while

Russia wouldn't be leaving negotiations as a result, they would be "revising their negotiating position". This will not be good news for those hoping for an end to hostilities.

This stunt also justifies a "retaliatory" attack from Russia, most likely through missile strikes on government buildings. Russia has continued strikes throughout the peace talks.

The sticking points for negotiations are questions of territory, and the specifics of who controls the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant. Zelensky has held to his offer of a demilitarised zone along the line of contact, though has also said that Putin is unlikely to agree to it.

Satellite

Recent satellite images of the captured city of [Toretsk](#) have made a strong case against a Russian propaganda narrative. Russia often argues that once Ukraine's military loses control of cities and territories, it responds by destroying them. In Toretsk, this is demonstrably untrue: satellite images taken as Ukraine fled the city show that 98% of civilian buildings had been destroyed by Russian missile fire.

Mediazona [report](#) that contrary to those who might think the war has ground to a halt, 2025 was the deadliest year so far for Russian soldiers. Russian tactics, including sending out small groups of soldiers in incredibly dangerous journeys, where most die but those that survive set up forward positions, have caused untold deaths on the side of the aggressor. The average age for volunteer soldier deaths in 2025 was between 46 and 52, showing that the army is significantly ageing as younger conscripts and volunteers die quickly.

Zelensky has been forced into something of a reshuffle by the recent corruption scandal at the heart of the Ukrainian government. Kyrylo Budanov has been moved from head of the intelligence service to chief of staff, and Mykhailo Fedorov has been appointed the new defense minister. Budanov's new role is a notable development: he has been one of the few people in the Ukrainian government in constant contact with Russia, and will likely play a central role in negotiations.

All of this, for now, happens over the heads of the Ukrainian population. There



will have to be a referendum on any final peace deal that involves territorial concessions, but representatives from the labour movement, minority groups such as the Crimean Tatars, and social movements more broadly have been left in the cold. Any just future for Ukraine will need these groups to play a central role in determining questions like reconstruction, territorial agreements and peace. A worker-led reconstruction must be central to demands socialists in Britain make regarding Ukraine. □

Health

NHS needs funds and worker control

By Todd Hamer

Another winter, another flurry of panicked press briefings that the NHS is on the brink of collapse. The winter flu surge has come about a month earlier than previous years', threatening much higher rates of infection, serious illness and death.

The NHS reports that flu hospital admissions are falling, but they have been high. Flu season tends to peak around the first few weeks of January and the course of the annual epidemic is unpredictable.

We cannot know how the flu season will proceed. What we do know is that the NHS was worse prepared for this year's flu season than in any previous year.

The staggering lack of preparation for this year's flu season is a result of an abject failure to learn the lessons from the Covid pandemic and a government agenda which is cutting bed capacity and life-saving

frontline services. The flu season should be a wake-up call for NHS workers and everyone with an interest in saving the NHS.

It was obvious during the pandemic that a coalition of work-from-home officials and managers put frontline workers in harm's way and turned a deaf ear to workers' demands for improved workplace infection control. While almost everyone made extraordinary sacrifices for the public health effort, while children went without education and care-home residents were refused visitors, the capitalist class refused to introduce two essential workplace safety measures: sick pay and improved ventilation.

At time when almost all indoor social mixing between households occurred in workplaces, millions of keyworkers lacked sick pay and could not afford to isolate. At the same time, employers took almost no action to prevent airborne

transmission and ensure a good supply of clean indoor air. Government supported them.

This top-down "management knows best" approach to workplace safety was particularly pronounced in the NHS. Lack of sick pay, inadequate ventilation and respiratory protective equipment in the NHS led to alarming levels of hospital-acquired infection, death and long term disability of staff and patients. Two thirds of Covid-positive mental-health inpatients had hospital-acquired infections.

Infection

Poor infection control standards through the pandemic were the start of a general deterioration of safety standards in the NHS. Our under-resourced NHS is no longer able to offer timely assessment and treatment; patients get sick on the waiting list and present at A&E trying to gain access to hospitals that are clogged up from

the front door to the care home.

The Royal College of Emergency Medicine estimates that last year in England there were more than 16,600 deaths associated with long A&E waits before admission. The deliberate policy of NHS cuts and privatisation is a health and safety problem for every worker in the UK. For NHS workers it is a daily struggle, with 41% of staff telling the NHS Staff Survey that they feel unwell due to stress.

Despite a claim by government that there is £29 billion additional funding for the NHS, most Trusts appear to be making cuts to frontline services, with thousands of frontline staff facing redundancy and life-saving services being closed.

Many health workers are alarmed at the deterioration of safety standards within the NHS and many have been mobilised in strikes in recent years. However, the week-in week-out union organising that we need

in the NHS remains very weak, and frontline workers' involvement in health and safety structures is near non-existent.

Health and safety law gives workers the legal right to paid time off from our work duties to organise around issues of workplace safety. By using this right we can build a powerful network of safety representatives, building union density and winning real improvements for both staff and patients.

Healthworkers were ignored during the pandemic and denied a hearing by those in power. We cannot allow this situation to continue. The lives and wellbeing of millions of workers depends on enforceable rights to workplace health and safety and the restoration of the NHS.

Both of these goals are achievable through trade union organisation and reviving the struggle for workplace safety within the NHS. □



YP members organise for committee elections

By Matt Cooper

Members of Your Party are lining up candidates for the elections to the party's Central Executive Committee (CEC). Nominations will have to be collected between 5 and 29 January.

The 29 November 2025 Your Party conference saw members forced to accept a botched constitution, cobbled together by the Corbyn faction. The lack of structured debate, combined with online voting, meant that participants were not party to informed discussion. Although the left secured some important victories, the end result was an incoherent mess.

This became evident almost immediately. First, the organisational plan passed by conference required that the next phase be overseen by a sortitioned

committee of members. This provision appears to have been ignored, with Corbyn's office running the show. Second, the requirement that sixteen members of the Central Executive Committee (CEC) be elected regionally sat uneasily alongside the requirement that at least half its members be women.

In response, the Corbyn faction's shadow leadership offered two options. The one that prevailed, again without debate, gave every English region two seats, inflating the total to eighteen, while Scotland and Wales were each allocated a single seat. This creates several problems.

Scotland and Wales have only one seat each, despite Scotland and Wales having comparable membership to the English regions. Neither currently has a process in place for electing that seat.

Second, English regions vary wildly in size, yet each has equal representation. London alone contains 21% of English members, the North East just 2%, but both elect two CEC members. The three largest regions (London, the North West and the South East) contain over half of English members yet can be outvoted two to one by representatives from the smaller regions.

Active branches in higher-density regions may find themselves overruled by a CEC reflecting the views of less active, largely online members.

Besides, the timing is disastrous. The CEC will not be elected until late February, and branches cannot be formally constituted without its approval. So Your Party branch will be unable to select official candidates in time for the May local elections. Corbyn's office has advised

proto-branches to stand candidates as independents. In Corbyn's home patch, Islington, "Corbynite" councillors have organised an "Islington Community Independents" meeting, with an ad hoc ICI membership for the occasion, to assemble candidates for May (who will seek a tacit or explicit pact with the Greens). This brings YP suspiciously close to the kind of rattle-bag of unaccountable federated left-leaning councillors which Corbyn originally favoured.

Yet the political composition of the CEC remains undecided. Candidates require seventy-five endorsements to stand, favouring those with organisational backing or name recognition. This points to a contest mainly between a Corbyn-backed slate and one associated with Zarah Sultana, though some regionally rooted candidates may break through.

An "United Left" slate is emerging under the name, "Grassroots Left slate", ranging from Sultana and her supporters to the SWP and Counterfire (but not including the Democratic Bloc and Mish Rahman). The inclusion, in the Corbyn faction's rules for the contest, of a ban on membership of other socialist organisations, clearly against the spirit of the decision taken at conference, has led the SWP to (so far) decline to seek a candidate. The Socialist Party has declined invitations to be involved in discussions. This United Left is assembling a slate (likely to be a very mixed bag) and has adopted a statement calling for branch development, opposing proscriptions, and demanding a democratic conference to resolve November's constitutional mess.

Sultana has balked at workers' representatives being paid a workers' wage, and the supposedly baseline statement also contains an unqualified commitment to "anti-Zionism", a term that is problematic because it can mean many different things, from sound opposition to current Israeli government policy to a call for Israel to be wiped off the map, or coded antisemitism.

The election will be held under STV which allows transfers, but candidates closer to *Solidarity's* ideas may well transfer preferences to the "Grassroots" slate in the hope of keeping open possibilities of Your Party becoming part of a process of rejuvenating working-class struggle and representation. Even so, the endorsement threshold is a serious barrier. Despite claims of 55,000 members, only around 10,000 voted online, and candidates do not have access to well-organised branch meetings in which to seek nominations. High-profile departures, including Jamie Driscoll to the Greens, underline the fragility of the organisation. There are also serious doubts about YP's ability to deliver an online STV election. □

The SWP dumps Alex Callinicos

By Matt Cooper

The election of the Socialist Workers Party's Central Committee (CC) would not usually be news. The process is tightly controlled and predictable. In the run-up to the SWP's annual conference (this year's due this month), the outgoing CC nominates a take-it-or-leave-it slate. Alternative slates can be put forward, but the barriers are such that the outcome has been a self-perpetuating leadership, insulated from meaningful challenge.

In the first pre-conference bulletin (PCB1), published in October, the CC presented a familiar-looking slate, with only minor changes among junior members. In December PCB3 announced a revised slate excluding four long-standing figures, most strikingly Alex Callinicos, the SWP's leading writer and speaker since Tony Cliff died in 2000. Alongside him were Charlie Kimber, former editor of *Socialist Worker* and previously National Secretary; Weyman Bennett, central to the party's anti-racist and anti-fascist work; and Mark Thomas. Although this could be read as generational change (Callinicos is 75 and Kimber 68) the explanation given suggests otherwise.

The bulletin stated that the changes were made "to confront the legacy of the 2013 crisis, when the SWP failed two women who raised complaints of sexual misconduct". This refers to the Comrade Delta affair of 2010-13, when the SWP leadership covered up allegations of rape and sexual abuse against Martin Smith, National Secretary 2004-11. He quietly left that post after (milder) allegations were first made in 2010, but remained on the CC, and a standing ovation was organised for him at 2011 conference.

The crisis came to a head at the 2013 conference, where a large minority, likely representing a majority of the membership, rejected the leadership's handling of the case. Continued obstruction led to mass resignations (even the SWP admits to around 700) and the collapse of the SWP's student organisation. Smith quietly resigned later that year, but there was no public or internal reckoning then or since. The four retiring CC members were those who remained from 2013, with both Kimber and Callinicos playing leading roles in quelling opposition at the time.

A central problem in the affair was the lack of independence in the investigatory process, particularly the role of Amy Leather, who led the investigation into her fellow CC member and became a staunch defender of Smith. The SWP subsequently attempted to bury the issue in the hope it would fade

from memory.

That it did not is evidenced by the party's apology issued in May 2024, more than eleven years after the events. Even this acknowledgment was limited. While it outlined procedural changes, particularly that allegations against CC members would no longer be investigated by other CC members, it avoided any recognition of the leadership's collective role in protecting Smith, including expulsions and the denial of members' democratic right to change the party's course. The resignation of Leather in November 2024, followed by Kimber stepping back from editing *Socialist Worker*, may have cleared the way for the current shift.

So why now? The SWP is slowly rebuilding its student base but remains vulnerable to criticism over Comrade Delta. More broadly, it continues to struggle to establish viable student groups. The SWP attributes this to "horizontalism" but more likely it reflects resistance to the party's centralised command-and-control culture. The Comrade Delta cover-up remains a recurring reminder of this problem.

The case is also an obstacle to the party seeking deeper involvement in broader left initiatives, particularly Your Party. At that organisation's conference in November 2025, an opponent of SWP participation explicitly raised the events of 2013. Meanwhile, Dave Renton, who left the SWP in 2013 with a group who became rs21, is due to publish a book later this year based on extensive interviews with those involved. These pressures may explain the new moves.

However, the central issue remains unresolved. Even if safeguarding procedures have improved, and there is anecdotal evidence that they are still inadequate, the events of 2013 still resonate because they fit a wider pattern: an organisation in which leadership authority trumps accountability and dissent is treated as disloyalty.

The SWP has a motion to this year's conference, likely to be passed, to end the slate system for CC elections, allowing members to nominate individuals and delegates to vote for candidates rather than a bloc. It is a small step, but a real one.

The SWP feels compelled to take some limited steps to account for its past and of internal reform. How far that opening goes remains to be seen. Who will take up the responsibilities of political and ideological initiative within the SWP, and whether a substantive turn from Callinicos's politics is on the way, also. □

• More online: Alex Callinicos and the SWP, bit.ly/ac-swp

Not a home but an asset

By Richard Bau

After Angela Rayner's self-inflicted fall from grace, the Labour government task of delivering 1.5 million new homes has fallen to Steve Reed.

In his previous ministerial role he had been a strong champion for the private sector retaining control of water companies, claiming that the real problem wasn't who owned what, but of governance and regulation.

With these views, it wasn't much surprise that Reed has wasted no time in setting out his stall, borrowing rhetoric straight from Donald Trump:

"I want us to build, baby, build, so we can put the key to a decent home into the hands of every single family that needs it. We are doubling down on our plans to unleash one of the biggest eras of building in our country's history and we are backing the builders all the way."

In fact developers build homes that many cannot afford, build only when it is profitable to do so, avoid areas where social need for homes is great, but profit margins are thin, and often deliver poor-quality housing. So why go down this route when history shows that only mass council house building can solve the crisis?

Reed doesn't see homes as primarily places where you live. He sees homes primarily as assets which you own (for most via a mortgage) that can be sold, bequeathed to relatives, rented out, use as collateral for loans. He doesn't want homes built; he wants assets built.

In this, he would agree with Margaret Thatcher, who said:

"I want a capital-earning democracy. Every man and woman a capitalist. Housing is the start. If you're a man or woman of property, you've got something. So every man a capitalist, and every man a man of property."

No doubt he will also have in mind house inflation, with house prices in the UK increasing since 1979 by well over 1,000% in nominal terms. So you not only get an asset when you buy a house, you become a capitalist in the language of Mrs Thatcher and you get an appreciating asset (you hope), where you make capital gains without working for them. Therefore he is fundamentally opposed to mass building council homes as yes, this would meet a social need, but won't do so on the basis of profit (for the builders or the home owner).

So, almost as parody, Steve Reed has allied himself with a grouping called Labour Yimby ("Yes, in my backyard")

which is described by the *FT* as encompassing local councillors, activists along with developers and those working within the housing industry.

This grouping is registered with the Electoral Commission and raises funds and campaigns for what are described as pro-development MPs and councillors whilst also staging events to bring together politicians, activists, think-tanks, and construction industry.

According to the *FT*, during September's Labour party conference, it held a rally with Reed handing out MAGA style hats with "Build, Baby Build".

Of course, what they are talking about is private sector building. In London, the government wants 88,000 homes finished before January. Always a huge stretch, but it now it looks like a joke: in the first nine months of 2025 ground had broken on just 3,248 new units. The figure comes from the consultancy Molior, which says that one in every six major housing projects is frozen: "schemes are halted, with the gates padlocked."

From July 2024 to June 2025, 186,600 net additional homes were delivered in England – well short of the annual target of 300,000 and down from 221,000 the previous year under the Conservatives.



In contrast from 1948 to 1951, under Labour, completions averaged around 200,000 per year, a remarkable achievement given shortages of materials and labour.

Council housing is the key to resolving the crisis. Without that the acute housing crisis will simply drag on, and enhance the chances of a reactionary right-wing government at the next general election. Andy Burnham is right on this:

"The government should make building hundreds of thousands of council homes its defining purpose. No other policy achievable within a Parliament would have greater social and economic benefits." □

Ireland

New report exposes MI5 role in "dirty war"

By Micheál MacEoin

A nine-year police investigation, known as Operation Kenova, has uncovered much new detail about the British Army agent "Stakeknife", who has been linked to 14 murders and 15 abductions.

"Stakeknife" is widely believed to be Belfast man Freddie Scappaticci, a former member of the Provisional IRA, who died in 2023. Scappaticci operated within the IRA's notorious internal security unit – or "nutting squad" – which was tasked with uncovering, interrogating and ultimately executing alleged informers.

Deference

However, absurdly, the Report itself was not allowed by the British Government and the security services to name Scappaticci, in deference to the policy of "Neither Confirm Nor Deny". This approach was

defended by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in the House of Commons in the wake of the Report's publication.

The "nutting squad's" victims were often tortured and dumped at the side of roads, as a warning to others; taped "confessions" were played to their families, who were forced to live for decades with stigma.

In a horrible irony, the man who led the brutal unit was himself an army intelligence asset from the late 1970s to the 1990s, working primarily with the Force Research Unit (FRU), a covert military intelligence unit of the British Army's Intelligence Corps.

The FRU were able to use their "golden egg" within the IRA to steer the group's own internal security, protect assets and provide intelligence into the IRA's inner workings.

An interim report, published

last year, found that "Stakeknife" had probably cost more lives than he saved. Operation Kenova discovered 3,517 intelligence reports from "Stakeknife" but these were not used to protect lives. Quite the opposite. The Report does not, at times, pull its punches: "Time and again, it would appear that protecting the agent outweighed protecting the life of a victim or protecting the right of their families to see justice for the crimes committed against their loved ones."

Holiday

Worse than this, army intelligence handlers twice took "Stakeknife" out of Northern Ireland on holiday when police began to suspect his involvement in serious criminality. The Report also found that when the resettlement of Stakeknife was originally being considered in the 1990s, "there was communication within the Army

about arranging a 'Farewell Dinner', including a list of those who would attend and a likely venue."

When "Stakeknife" was ultimately exposed in 2003 by journalists, he was set up in a series of large and comfortable houses in England and allowed to live on the generous proceeds of his "work".

Report

The report was authored by former Police Scotland chief constable Sir Iain Livingstone. Current Police Service of Northern Ireland chief constable John Boutcher previously led the investigation.

It accuses MI5 of "serious organisational failure" in trying to restrict the investigation. Documents about the agency's involvement with Stakeknife were passed to the investigation only last year, after the interim report was published. MI5 even broke into a safe used by Kenova in-

vestigators based in its London headquarters in Thames House and accessed restricted material.

The Report states that: "The further material revealed MI5 had earlier and greater knowledge of the agent than previously stated" and that the "revelation of the MI5 material was the culmination of several incidents capable of being negatively construed as attempts by MI5 to restrict the investigation, run down the clock, avoid any prosecutions relating to Stakeknife and conceal the truth."

Many victims are angry that the Report was prevented from naming "Stakeknife". That is justified.

At the same time, the Report is nevertheless a step forward in exposing the role of British military intelligence and the security services in Britain's "dirty war" in the North of Ireland. □



The Greens a

By Martin Thomas

The Green Party is gaining members and better poll scores with messages shaped round a wealth tax and a more civilised asylum policy. It is promoting itself as the liberal and egalitarian alternative, primarily to Reform, secondarily to a Labour Party whose leaders are swamped by desire to placate big business and socially-conservative voters.

The main purpose of this article is to discuss the Greens' policies on ecology, which is surely a central issue both for them and in reality, but has been surprisingly un-central in their recent agitation.

First, some background. On other issues, the Greens mostly parallel Labour left policies of the last decades, though their immigration policy falls pointedly short of the free-movement plan voted through by Labour conference 2019 (and then immediately disavowed by the Corbyn leadership).

There are oddities. For example, the Green manifesto of July 2024 called for £8 billion a year more for the NHS. Rachel Reeves has allocated an increase of £29 billion a year phased over three years. Much of that has gone to paying private providers for procedures to try to slim waiting lists, but in any case it is visibly not enough. £8 billion (0.6% of public spending) would be even further off.

No wonder, though, that many voters encouraged by Labour's 2017 and 2019 manifestos, or even Keir Starmer's Labour leader manifesto of early 2020, warm to the Greens.

But Green parties are middle-class parties. They are tied to an electoralist mode of politics ("vote for us and we'll sort things out for you"). When they have gained electoral strength, then, whatever the manifestos, they have ended in government coalitions of at best minimal-reformist colour.

They are not the "political wing of the environmental movement" even in the very qualified sense that the Labour Party could be described as the "political wing of the labour movement". Anecdotally, of course, some people coming into politics first through environmental street activity (student climate strikes, XR, JSO...) end up in Green Parties, but often, in fact usually, there is surprisingly little overlap between street-active environmentalism and Green Parties.

The Australian Greens in their early years, and the German Greens in some

phases, were more radical and street-active than the current England and Wales Green party, but they have become more like moderate coalition parties as they have grown.

The Scottish Greens were in coalition government 2021-4; the Irish Greens, 2007-11, executing austerity policies. As of 2024 the Greens in England and Wales ruled, or were in ruling coalitions, in 42 councils. None of them is super radical.

The Greens England and Wales have sharpened their "image", using Zack Polanski's social-media skills.

As yet I know of little where they are substantively more left-wing than they were under Caroline Lucas as Principal Speaker or Leader from 2003 to 2010, Derek Wall as another Principal Speaker in 2006-8, or even Darren Johnson in 2001-3. All those leaders described themselves as socialists. Polanski says that "on a personal level" he "agrees with the majority (?) of socialist principles". He thinks it decisive to avoid annoying "all the people who are anti-socialist who might have voted Green" but wouldn't if the Greens "said we were socialists". Lucas's pre-Greens background was Greenham Common, Polanski's the Lib-Dems.

Manifesto

What about Green policies specifically on ecology, as set out for example in their July 2024 election manifesto?

The international Green Party movement started with the United Tasmania Group, in Australia, in 1972, well before the modern scientific consensus on climate change was established. (The "greenhouse effect" was known about in general terms, but its actual result was unclear. Average global temperatures had dropped from the 1940s to the 1960s). The chief early "Green" issues were conservation of congenial wilderness and opposition to nuclear power (of which more later).

But Green Parties have kept pace with the world scientific consensus about expanding renewables, phasing out fossil-fuels, and retrofitting and redesigning buildings, and so has the Green Party England and Wales. So far, so good.

They are for a carbon tax as their chief means to "phase out" fossil fuels (with no indication of schedule). In my view, such tax may have a part to play. Market mechanisms will continue for a long



time even under a workers' government (although hegemonised by planning), and taxes can help reduce consumption here as they have done with tobacco and alcohol.

But carbon tax needs to be an auxiliary to other comprehensive policies of socialist planning and workers' control. Posed as the primary measure, it has regressive effects and becomes very unpopular. Canada was the one country in the world with some approximation to a carbon tax, but it still has the highest carbon emissions per head in the world after Australia, and Mark Carney abolished the tax for households on taking office in March 2025.

The manifesto section on "a fairer, greener economy" is illustrated by an image of a solar-panel-roofed house (sizeable, new, prosperous-looking, with a car parked outside it). Very nice, but not the key to breaking the way the race for profit is trashing the planet.

Solar panels on houses are good. 40% of houses in Australia have them, generating about 12% of its electricity; and only 5.5% of houses in Britain. But large solar farms are a much bigger and more efficient way of generating electricity. And what about those of us who live in flats in cities?

Thin

The manifesto is thin on transport. It wants no new airport capacity and a frequent-flyer levy, it supports rail rationalisation (already under way), and it wants local authority control over (though not ownership of) bus services. But it says nothing about developing high-speed rail and (oddly) says nothing about converting road transport to electric vehicles.

The "fairer, greener energy" section of the manifesto shows an offshore wind farm. Good. But Green MP Adrian Ramsey has spoken against having the new

pylons necessary to connect those offshore wind farms to the grid in his constituency (rural, 98% "ethnic white", 73% home-owners, 90% car-owners, previously Tory, etc.) on "not in our backyard" grounds. The Greens are somewhat like what the Liberals were in their "left" "community politics" phase of the late 1960s through the 1970s: electoral opportunists apt to tailor what they say to local prejudice as well as to coalition openings.

The manifesto calls for "communities to own their own energy sources", implying an unviable system of small-scale local electricity generation with little capacity to use grid connections and energy-storage to "electrify everything" (as ecological-socialist writer Matt Huber puts it: the idea does not appear in Green policy).

More generally, the manifesto hails, not the working class, but "small and medium enterprises" (SME) as "the lifeblood of our economy". SMEs include not just tiny workshops, but sizeable capitalist firms with up to 250 employees and up to £38 million on their balance sheets. Small capitalists are by no means generally less rapacious, exploitative, and eco-reckless than big capitalists.

The Greens are for public ownership of the biggest retail energy companies, but not of the whole energy industry, from electricity generation through the grid to retail.

They want to "phase out" nuclear power. The sobering historic fact about Green parties is that their major political achievements have been ecologically harmful, not helpful. The German Greens played a good role in getting the anti-gay §175 deleted from Germany's constitution, but for them the bigger victory was to get Germany to phase out nuclear power. That was regressive.

Germany has increased renewables, but the replacement for "baseline" power was coal and gas. Germany's carbon emissions per person are much higher than those in France, where the Greens were unsuccessful with the same scrap-nuclear demand.

On land use, the Greens propose only "almost tripling" financial support for farmers, plus setting aside 30% of land area for "nature [to] receive the highest priority and protection". I don't know exactly what that means, because 37% of land is already subject to pro-

nd ecology

tection-of-nature rules. They don't talk about reforestation.

The Greens want food "grown and traded in the UK, and as locally as possible", rather than produced where most ecologically suitable and (these days) often transported with little extra ecological cost. They have no plan for radical transformation of agriculture to reduce emissions (which will mean a shift from livestock, especially beef, farming to plant-based and farm-free food).

Their manifesto is very much "Greenery in One Country". Yet if anything is a global rather than local issue, it is today's environmental poly-crisis. The manifesto says nothing about aid from rich countries like Britain to poorer countries where the people want to have electricity and clean water supply, and often have good conditions for developing renewables, but can't do that without investment aid.

Equally, the Green manifesto says nothing about adaptation to the climate changes already baked in by carbon emissions to date. That adaptation is

probably already urgent in Britain, and very urgent in poorer countries.

Morsels

To be unkind but true: Green eco-policy is a collection of morsels which look tasty from the viewpoint of a socially-concerned, mildly prosperous, not-very-political householder who would like to see things "greener" locally. It is not a plan with a coherent historical, economic, and global perspective.

We surely wish good luck to new left-wing Greens in their striving for what the new Greens Organise faction, in their "Manchester manifesto", vaguely though sympathetically call "an internationalist, anti-capitalist, and ecologically transformative agenda". But the Greens Organise manifesto, unlike the platform of the older Green Left, does not even mention socialism. It mentions the working class only as an auxiliary to be "mobilised" for getting "a broad [electoral, presumably] mandate".

Many of the Greens Organise people are ex-Labour-left, and bring from

that an interest in unions and workers' struggles. A 30 October public meeting at the Unite union's London offices, animated by Greens Organise though formally organised under different banners, showed some issues there.

Simon Coop, Unite's lead official for energy, and Steve Jackson of Greens Organise spoke. The draw-a-crowd speaker was Verity Burgmann, an Australian socialist who wrote the definitive book on Australian building workers' "green bans" in the early 1970s.

Coop expounded Unite's policy for public ownership of the whole energy industry, but Jackson said nothing about battling to make that Green policy. The not-so-good side of Unite's policy that it opposes government curbs on new North Sea oil and gas extraction unless and until the government nominates specific alternative jobs for the workers who might get employment on new rigs. If the Australian building workers had had the same approach, then they would have campaigned against government protection for areas like Kelly's Bush un-

less and until the government offered a different project with similar jobs. There would have been no green bans.

Of course, a fight for new jobs has to go with demanding rundown of fossil-fuel use and extraction; of course, the boom in the building industry in Sydney then was important in giving building workers confidence to take action: when the Kelly's Bush job was stopped, they could reasonably hope for jobs elsewhere within weeks rather than months. Still, Jackson made no criticism. Do Greens Organise support green-bans-type action, or do they oppose curbs on environmentally harmful industry "for now"? They should work it out. Diplomacy with top union officials is not the same as an orientation to working-class action.

In our view we need a working-class socialist plan, and not just a generic "popular opposition". Let's hope the new young Greens will get closer to that. But they should realise that the Green party is far from already going that way. □

An emergency plan on climate change

By Vicki Morris

The 30th annual United Nations climate meeting, COP30, in Belém, Brazil ended in November with no substantial progress, no roadmaps toward phasing out fossil fuels, and a key player, the USA, not even sending an official delegation.

What should the workers' movement and socialists advocate? What would we do if we were able to impose our solutions, if we were in charge?

Many socialists and some trade unionists already talk about a "worker-led just transition" from reliance on fossil fuels, but something more ambitious is needed. We propose, and fight for, an "emergency plan".

The main elements of a workers' emergency plan for the climate crisis would include:

- Rapid and wholesale move away from reliance on fossil

fuels. Massive investment in renewables and nuclear, and in upgrading the electricity grid. Electrification everywhere. No new fossil fuel extraction.

- All major industries should be socialised — taken into public ownership, under democratic control of workers — to facilitate transition. Expropriate the banks, and the wealth of the rich, to fund planned and rapid transition and adaptation. Nationalise banks and finance, transport, water, the whole energy industry, etc. Reorient them to support conversion of production under the control of workers and service-users, not business owners and bureaucrats.

- A worker-led just transition: conversion of industry with no loss of jobs, on the contrary, the expansion of well-paid, socially-useful jobs retrofitting buildings, developing new sustainable council housing, widening public services, etc. Cut

the working week without loss of pay.

- Moratorium on airport expansion. Expand high-speed, affordable, electrified and efficient rail. Increase taxation on flights, phase-out short-haul flights

- Expansion of democratic rights and institutions. This would include at work where workers would develop transition plans for their workplaces/industries.

- Adaptation for now-unavoidable climate change; flood defence, adapting workplaces and homes to deal with higher temperatures and pandemic risks, etc.

- Aid from richer nations to poorer nations, where the impacts of climate change can fall heaviest. International co-operation to discuss and deal with the crisis effectively and equitably.

- Repeal of all anti-union laws and a positive charter of work-

ers' rights — to unionise, strike, picket, take solidarity action and so on.

- Democratise the media, and a massive expansion of education, for its own sake but also to counteract disinformation about climate change and increase scientific literacy.

- Transforming agriculture, using public ownership and democratic control of the agro-chemical, seed, food-processing, and food-retail industries as a lever to do so. A societal shift away from animal-based food to more plant-based or farm-free food can reduce carbon emissions and would free up substantial land for carbon sequestration through reforestation. Genetic engineering is in itself not problematic, and genetic engineering of low-emissions substitute foods is positive. Ecological restoration and mass tree planting to increase biodiversity and carbon sequestration.

- Against the strength of capital, fighting for workers' control, social ownership and planned use of the world's resources and technology to end hunger, illiteracy, poverty, and ecocide.

This emergency plan will be worthwhile insofar as we can use it to inspire and mobilise the forces that can make it happen: unions, workers' political parties and organisations, and wider layers of working-class people. It has to be argued for in the workers' movement.

Fighting for such a plan can help build the strength, independence and confidence of workers to achieve short term goals but also to aspire to take power in society and run it for the benefit of all. Join us to discuss what other measures would be necessary and how we can fight for this plan now! □



A new mode

By Martin Thomas

Incrementally since 2008-9, and faster with Trump's tariff war since April 2025, a new mode of capitalism is developing. It draws much from the neoliberal globalisation era which had its high days in 1991-2008, as generally each regime of capitalist operation continues or adapts much from what came before, but it is distinct.

Branko Milanovic's new book *The Great Global Transformation* sets out to map the transition. I think it is wrong on many points, but "usefully wrong", in the sense of challenging us for a better account.

For Milanovic, the new regime is "national market liberalism", and its driver is "the workers of the Western countries" or "Western middle classes" rebelling against their "loss of jobs, income, and self-esteem" under globalisation.

"National"? The new regime is nationalist, but not narrowly "national". World financial-market flows continue to rise.

The ratio of world imports-plus-exports to world output has stagnated around 60% since 2008-9 after rising steadily from about 20% in 1950. China has developed a wider range of industrial capacities and has become less an assembly park for components made elsewhere, more a site of integrated production chains, so its ratio of trade to output has fallen. But that process seems to have levelled out about 2016, and China's trade is still rising in absolute terms. Its outbound direct investment remains high.

China continues exchange controls, but there is no visible large trend for countries which have scrapped those controls to reintroduce them, i.e. to withdraw from immersion in world financial markets.

The US imports less oil and gas, but oil and gas trade is still huge. Trump aspires to push the US toward economic self-sufficiency. But he cannot succeed, and other countries without the US's vast size and resources will not even try.

"Market"? World financial and goods-and-services markets still frame national economies. And the new regime does not reverse the "marketisation" of the decades since 1980. But it also includes the huge state bail-outs of 2008-9, and more recently the US government taking shares in Intel (under Trump) and deploying vast subsidies to speed chip production in the US (under Biden). Mariana Mazzucato's thesis of "the entrepreneurial state" has been taken up across

the political spectrum, while under high neoliberalism it would be dismissed as a foolish exercise in "picking winners".

"Liberalism"? Viktor Orban proudly claims to be illiberal, and neither Trump nor Xi, neither Erdogan nor Modi, neither Putin nor MBS in Saudi Arabia, is liberal, even in the narrow sense of "economic liberalism".

So, "national market liberalism" is wrong. A term like "nationalist-authoritarian within-world-markets developmentalism" is clumsier, but nearer accuracy. Sven Beckert, in his big new "global history" of capitalism, puts it like this: "Capitalism may have reached a new moment of reinvention in which tariffs, nationalised [maybe better: alliance-ised] commodity chains, immigration restrictions, and statist industrial policies [are] re-emerging as important policy tools". Maybe "new nationalism" will do for short. I will explain why after offering a picture of the previous era, and how the new regime is developing from it.

In other articles, I have called the world regime from 1945 to 2008-9 "the imperialism of free trade". That regime had two phases.

From 1945 to maybe 1980 much of the world had a regime of developing multinational free-trade-ism. Trade barriers declined. The old European colonial empires were dismantled. Sea freight costs went down over 50% between 1950 and 1990. US-based multinationals, the leading contingent in many areas of industry, spread their operations; at the same time, advanced industry grew fast in other countries, notably West Germany and Japan, and began to be transformed, worldwide, by microelectronics. The transistor was invented in 1947, the integrated circuit in 1958, computer-numerical-control machine tools in the 1960s.

Domination

The USSR's sphere of domination and in China, by contrast, saw state-driven industrial development. Many states balanced between the Cold War blocs, or even allied with the USA, but also had state-driven industrial development, whether "import-substitution" or "export-oriented".

From 1980 to 2008-9 the shift was to neoliberal globalisation. World financial markets became much busier and more free-flowing ("financialisation"). Global internet traffic exploded from the mid-1990s. More corporations went beyond operating or selling in several countries



to complex international supply and production chains. US hegemony in its sphere came to operate more through financial-market centrality, and the US ceased to be dominant in microelectronics, though US-based production still dominated in many areas of advanced industry. After 1989-91 the former Stalinist states were integrated into the US-keystoned system. Privatisation flourished, including in countries where previously the state dominated development.

The shift from one phase to another was, of course, in many ways gradual and piecemeal, not an all-at-once transformation in a few years.

In the 2008-9 crash, all the big powers agreed, and largely stuck to, only one thing: it was unwise to raise trade barriers. On the whole they held that line. But their confidence about sailing the seas of the world market was qualitatively shaken. Trump's tariffs from April 2025 are both a continuation of that trend, and a dramatic shift to a new level.

So far other states have largely responded not by raising their own tariffs — except China, as a gambit to stare down Trump — but rather by seeking more sectional free-trade deals, for example between the EU and Mercosur. The "rules-based order" which many US writers celebrated in the early years of the 21st century, tracing it back to Bretton Woods in 1944, is being replaced, not so much by a world of rival blocs, but by a "deals-based order". It is inherently more fragile and unpredictable.

The political slogans are "Make America Great Again" (literally trademarked by Donald Trump in 2016, though introduced, with different connotations, by Reagan in 1980); "Make Hungary Great Again" (2011); "the great rejuvenation for the Chinese nation" (2018), "Century of Türkiye" (2023).

So nationalist, for sure. Developmentalist, for sure. Not withdrawing from world markets, or seriously suppressing

market forces domestically, but often managing markets more than in the neoliberal heyday. Often authoritarian (Trump, Orban, Erdogan, Xi, Modi, Putin, etc.) both to control foreign capitalists operating in the territory, and to control domestic workers to boost domestic-based capital's competitiveness.

Neoliberalism was not primarily an ideology. The decisive steps to institute it in many countries were driven by "ideological" politicians like Thatcher, but even with them the "ideology" evolved along with the regime, rather than the ideology coming first and then creating the regime in its image. It was primarily a world regime. Governments adapted to a world regime of fast-flowing financial markets, relatively free-flowing trade, and rapid industrial restructuring (microelectronics, etc.), sought to draw footloose global capital to their territories, and developed and promoted ideologies to suit.

Rebellion

I do not believe Milanovic's argument about the "Western working class" or "middle class" as the driver, in rebellion against losing out relatively, being the driver of the new regime.

Milanovic's argument is based on his "elephant chart" of 2013 which seemed to show that between 1988 and 2008, income was stagnant for people at the world 80th percentile worldwide (i.e. better-off than 80%, worse-off than 20%), whereas it grew sizeably for poorer people and hugely for the better-off. Thus, he says, US and West European workers become envious and resentful of Asian workers, and demand nationalist measures as redress.

The "elephant graph" itself has been criticised. It compared those at the 80th percentile in 2008 not with the same people, or even the comparable demographic, in 1988, but with the different demographic at the 80th percentile in 1988.

of capitalism

Many surveys show large sections of middle-class and working-class people resentful about growing gaps between themselves and the rich in their own countries. I know of no evidence of high anger about the narrowing of the gap between, say, better-off Chinese workers, and European or American workers. Average wages in Wales have been lower than in South Korea since probably the mid-1990s, but there is no evidence that support for Reform in Wales is based on Wales-Korea comparisons.

That many express resentments by anger, not against the domestic rich, but against immigrants or importers, is a product of political structuring. Milanovic claims that Trump, Xi Jinping in his anti-corruption campaigns, and Putin, all represent “reaction to the dominant political and economic position of the neoliberal ruling class”. But really their reactions are not against the billionaire class. Trump rages against “deep state” functionaries, liberal university professors, and such. Xi targets corrupt or dissident business people. Putin mostly targets “the West”, the “godless”, etc.

The political narratives of nationalist authoritarian market developmentalism are in fact generated by billionaires. Not all the billionaires, of course, but a sufficient strong group in each country that they can bring a strong-enough section of the billionaires along with them. They hegemonise large sections of the worse-off by developing and adapting narratives brewing in American far-right politics since the 1970s at least: resent-

ing and blaming the educationally-credentialed, the immigration, the “woke”, the green.

This is not a direct translation of economic trends into politics. In fact, the evidence is that most voters for Brexit, for Trump, for Milei, etc. have little confidence that those will help much economically. Rather, the strength of the right-wing ideologies draws from belief that left-wing parties will not deliver their promises, however desirable those may be. Remedies for the working class are not available, so the right-wing voters are minded to try “something different” which at least offers to make “the nation” “great again”.

Suppressing crime which they believe to be escalating, and mostly due to immigrants, ranks high in the priorities of far-right voters, although crime rates have fallen sizeably since the 1990s in the USA, UK, France, etc. It was in the 1970s that large areas of the USA, the UK, etc. became “rust-belt”, and even earlier that small-town USA declined economically with accelerated mechanisation of agriculture, while in more recent years manufacturing employment in the USA has risen and unemployment is relatively low.

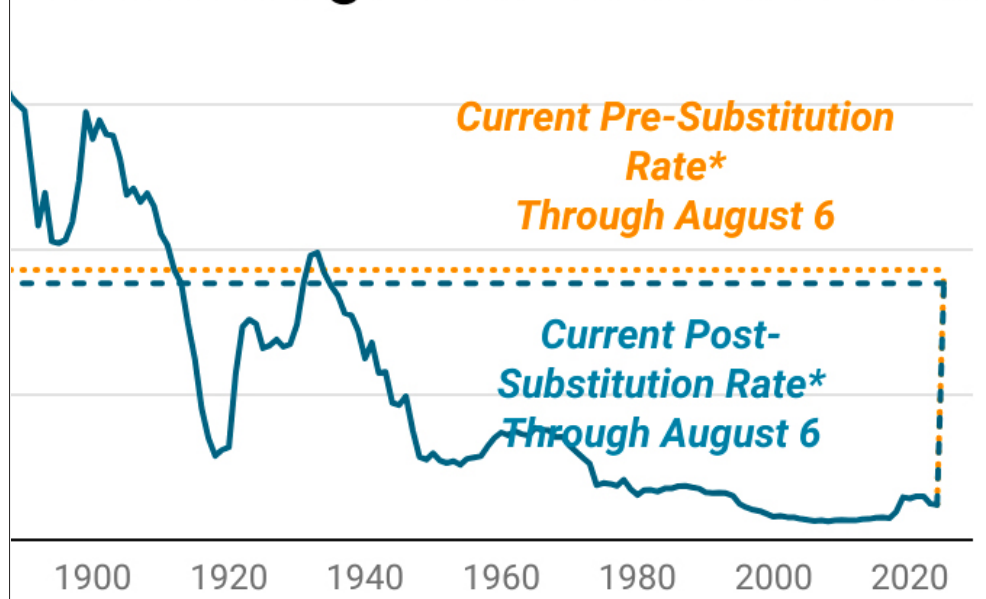
Hegemony

In 1965 the USA's GDP per capita in the USA was almost twice France's, almost four times Japan's. By 1980 France's GDP per capita was above the USA's, and Japan's not far behind. In 1986 Japan's GDP per capita outstripped the USA's. The US bourgeoisie had an empirically-evolved mix of responses which nonetheless preserved and regained US hegemony (its GDP per capita is now modestly bigger than France's and Japan's): delinking the dollar from gold, establishing the USA as the centre of world financial markets, moving industry to the Sunbelt, and, oddly in terms of Trump narrative, increasing immigration (Hart-Celler Act, 1965).

The far-right nationalist response is not an automatic product of relative economic deterioration for “Western” workers and middle class, or even of the new jolts of world-market competition hitting the USA. Partly it is a response to intensified competition facing every billionaire class. Part of it, as a world level, is shaped by world responses to the particular variant pursued by Trump.

Milanovic is of course against Trump, but he sees Trump's essential policies as a reflection, give or take “modest adjustments”, of economically-based “his-

U.S. Average Effective Tariff Rate



toric processes”. “Tariff wars, sanctions, trade blocs, halt to immigration, and ethno-nationalism”, all based on “beliefs unrelated to whether Trump is in power or not”.

This is wrong. Even neoliberalism was never symmetrical. In particular, although “globalisation” often meant “Americanisation”, and the USA was the centre of its system, the USA was paradoxically less neoliberal than most leading capitalist countries. So, of course, was China, with its exchange controls and heavy state financing and control of industry.

The new nationalism, too, is not the same in every country. Pretty much every country other than the USA wants to circumvent or evade tariff wars, rather than fire back in kind. Few states are content with a defined trade bloc; instead, they mostly want as many deals as they can get, even if also, often, a secure “bloc” wider than the country itself as solid base. While vicious against asylum-seekers, Meloni has increased immigration to Italy, not decreased it. Sanctions have been a staple of US foreign policy since World War Two: other states often cooperate with the US sanctions, but are scarcely strong enough to use them as an effective policy for themselves. Even ethno-nationalism (as distinct from other forms of nationalism) is not a constant. Modi's Hindu-chauvinism is not “ethnic”, nor really is Erdogan's neo-Ottomanism (“Turkish” is not an ethnicity).

A few pages later Milanovic describes the actual specifics of Trump's regime. “He considers citizens as [if] he can push around and fire at will... He can

do anything, almost unconstrained by any rules and laws. He understands politics... as... akin to the management of his real-estate fiefdom”.

That authoritarian line — “entrepreneurial state”, if you like, though in a very different sense from Mazzucato's usage — the state as “entrepreneurial” boss — is central to the threat from Trump to the labour movement and civil society, and more universal in the emerging new regime than Trump's particular tariff policies.

Milanovic's book is a blizzard of conjectures and statistics-clips about many issues other than his central one of “global transformation” to “national market liberalism”. Most of them, I think, are wrong or misleading, though they make the book a stimulating read.

The central argument, however, is the one about “national market liberalism”. And the central flaw there, I think, beyond the ones already mentioned, is that he obscures the place that the defeats, failures, and collapses of the left have played in the transformation.

The defeats of the left and labour movements in the 1980s cleared the way for the consolidation of neoliberalism. The left had a new chance after the 2008-9 crash shook neoliberalism. Whether with Lula in Brazil, Corbyn in Britain, Tsipras in Greece, or Sanders in the USA, we failed or were defeated. The new regime is rising on the rubble of our defeats.

It will have its crises, many of them, with new openings for us. The quality of our preparations now may decide whether we can win next time. □

CLASS LINES

COLLECTION OF
AND

25 POEMS
RED RHYMES

All the tricks my mind knows
crafted through the years
puzzled by people's prejudice
and their peculiar fear of queers
If I could message my younger self
Advice from me to me
Enjoy the ride and Stride with Pride
Self-acceptance is the key

• A piece of verse by Claire Stroud,
one of many in a new booklet,
compiled and edited by Janine Booth,
available from bit.ly/cl-rr



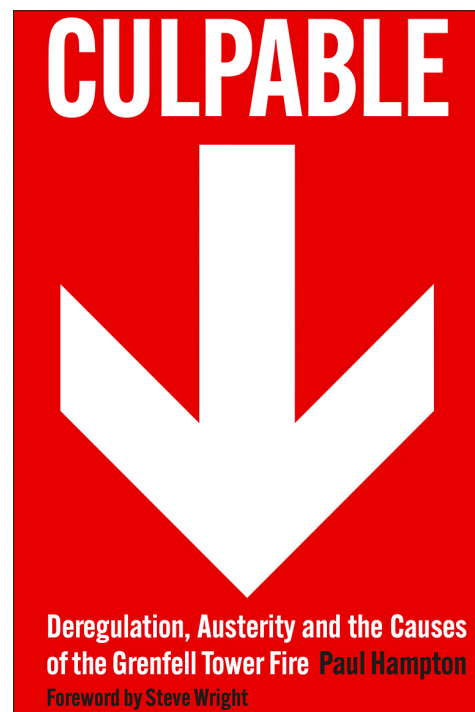
Grenfell shows need for class politics

By Adrian Noble

In the near decade since the Grenfell Tower fire which claimed 72 lives, much of the attention has rightly been directed at the building safety crisis that led to the fire, alongside the corrupt and unscrupulous cladding manufacturers and construction firms. They have been exposed as having a consistent disregard for human life in the pursuit of profit. Less focus however has gone towards the political factors, specifically the deregulation agenda carried out for decades by successive governments of all three main parties that provided the regulatory environment for the industry's reprehensible practices. *Culpable* by Paul Hampton illustrates this political process and its results in exhaustive detail, alongside the Fire Brigade Union's consistent warnings and fightbacks.

Crosshairs

Also in his crosshairs is the fragmentation of previously resilient national and local fire safety architecture, neoliberal attacks on democratic oversight of fire services, including attempts at wholesale privatisation, and the savage public



sector cuts that have led to record response times. Overall, he makes a compelling case that the deregulatory free market evangelism that homogenised Whitehall in the decades before the fire is primarily responsible for the avoidable deaths of 72 working class, mostly

minority ethnic, people.

Hampton clearly sets out the process of deregulation, exemplified by the reduction of the mandatory building regulations from 300 pages to 25 (Lord Young's cabinet-level deregulation committee considered scrapping them altogether). He quotes the 1980 Review of Fire Policy, which with chilling prescience reassured ministers that "It could well be some years before any significant multi-death fire occurred as a result of reduction in building controls". From privatising the Building Research Establishment to Blair's scrapping of the fire inspectorate and national standards in favour of local fire chiefs racing each other to the bottom, the scale, depth and duration of actions undermining public safety are shocking. Hampton emphasises that these are the conditions under which Grenfell tower was refurbished in 2014-16, drawing a direct link between the ideological drive to facilitate private profit above all else and that tragic night.

The villains are too numerous to mention, but reading it I felt particular disgust for Eric Pickles, the minister responsible for housing and building safety under the coalition government, during which

lethal flammable cladding was installed on Grenfell tower. Giving evidence to the inquiry, not only did he lie about building safety being exempt from deregulation, when in fact he was among its staunchest advocates, but the revolting man couldn't even remember how many had died. Yet the chances of him being in line for potential criminal charges alongside his private sector and local government colleagues are minimal.

Campaigns

Hampton describes the many campaigns and protests by the FBU across the years, perhaps most tellingly the narrow victory in staving off the privatisation of the London Fire Brigade's control room during Boris Johnson's tenure as mayor — a near-miss of likely catastrophic proportions. Throughout the book the callous and deadly ideology of deregulation is counterposed by the union's attempts to defend the service, maintain terms and conditions and uphold public safety. The positive message — that working class politics is central to the struggle for public safety — is clear. □

Letter from Italy

EU backs Meloni's "Albania Plan"

By Marco Moretto

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's "Albania Plan" has been touted as a bold innovation in migration policy. It is exploiting the lives of desperate people for her own nationalist propaganda.

From the outset, the agreement with Albania was more of a spectacle than a solution. The Italian government invested hundreds of millions of euros in detention centres in Shëngjin in order to showcase its tough stance on migration, while concealing and ignoring the violence of the system.

The promise was simple: fast-tracked procedures and removal of people from Italy within a few days. In practice, the only thing that moved quickly was the propaganda. Human beings were shunted back and forth through the courts, while the extremely expensive centres remained largely empty.

Reality repeatedly contradicted Meloni's narrative. Italian judges ordered that all 73



people transferred to Albania between the end of 2024 and the summer of 2025 be repatriated to Italy. Subsequently, the European Court of Justice also dealt a severe blow to this "great reform" by ruling that Italy's list of safe countries violated European Union law, because states cannot simply declare entire populations safe and deprive individuals of the right to challenge that label.

However, instead of drawing the obvious conclusion, EU interior ministers chose to follow Meloni's example. In December 2025, they approved the use of Albanian camps as repatriation

centres under the new EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, turning a failed Italian experiment into a model for the entire bloc, thereby validating Meloni's "Albania Plan" at least in part.

States most affected by immigration, such as Italy, Greece and Spain, are promised solidarity, but the substance of the pact is more fences, faster pushbacks and a longer list of safe countries to which people can be returned. Human rights organisations warn that this will lead to more detentions, more legal loopholes and more people trapped in limbo at the EU's externalised borders.

Fiasco

Even from an anti-migrant point of view, the project is a fiasco. The money spent on the Albanian facilities far exceeds what would be needed to house and manage people in Italy, while the actual expulsions are a laughable number. The project has reliably produced only one thing: a talking point for a government that prefers to wage culture wars against migrants

rather than confront bosses, landlords and the wealthy. The whole operation highlights how the far right uses migration to reorganise politics around fear of difference.

From a class perspective, the "Albania Plan" is an attack on today's migrant workers and tomorrow's entire working class. A system capable of depriving migrants of their rights in camps abroad will use the same logic (segregation, exceptional rules, weakened protection zones) against other undesirable groups whenever it suits capital and its states.

Meloni's agreement with Albania is not just a bad solution; it is a deliberate project to strengthen borders, divide workers and shift politics even further to the right. It should be opposed not with complaints about practicality, but with a clear socialist demand: open the routes, defend asylum rights and organise migrants as part of the working class, not as people to be herded to the periphery of Europe. □

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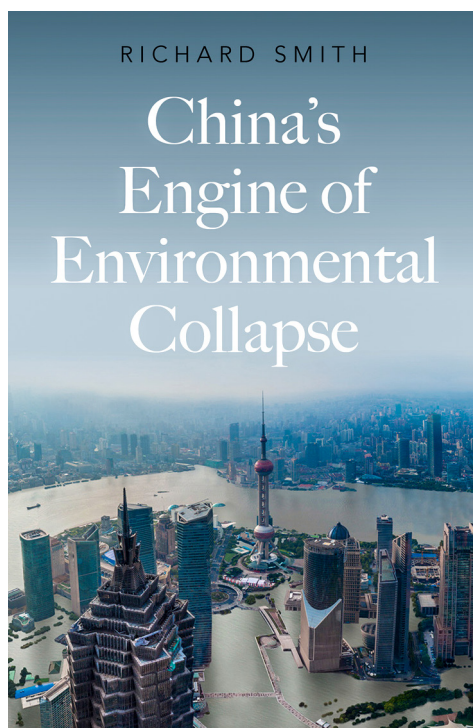
By Owen Flood

China is responsible for over 30% of GHG emissions. It is responsible for more emissions than the next five highest emitting countries combined (USA, India, Japan, Russia, and Germany). However, China's population is two-thirds the combined population of those countries and its GDP is 32% of their combined GDPs. Is there something special about China's economic model that makes this the case? This is the conundrum that Richard Smith tries to answer in *China's Engine of Environmental Collapse*.

The book was written in 2020 and covers the extent of China's environmental destruction, with a focus on the past 20 years. Richard Smith covers how from 1978 China has ramped up its emissions. He covers a range of topics from pollution of soil and rivers to excessive building and construction, to the inner workings of the CCP. The book was published before the Covid-19 pandemic and so does not cover the period of China's ultra-lockdowns.

China is now fully integrated into the world economy. It has played an ever-increasing role in the renewable technologies market. Since 1978, China's economy has grown on average 10% per year. Its rapid growth and growing share of world manufacturing (now at around 30%) has been due in no small part to its ever expanding capacity to burn coal. Coal plays a massive role in China's economy not only in its energy supply but also in its iron and steel production. China leads world production in the latter and is the third largest producer of iron-ore after Australia and Brazil.

A significant part of the left cheer on China and play down its authoritarian-



ism. Smith's book is a useful antidote for anyone who needs a reminder of the extent to the Chinese state suppresses national minorities, intimidates and eliminates political opponents, leads the world in executions, and regularly crushes dissent with police violence – whether this to repress Uyghurs, Hong Kongers, Tibetans or to attack and crush the labour and other progressive movements.

Vivid

Smith paints a vivid picture of China's environmental destruction. He describes at length China's excessive construction projects that have led to entirely redundant office blocs, railway stations, airports, districts of cities, and even so-called "ghost cities" that lie completely empty. In its populated cities, Smith describes the extent of the air pollution, the heavy use of cars and massive multi-lane motorways that nonetheless have not abated China's massive traffic and congestion issues. China's rivers, lakes and soils are massively polluted and in large part this due to a combination of unenforced but existing environmental and health and safety legislation, corruption within the CCP bureaucracy, and of course a rapacious drive to grow the economy at nearly any cost.

Since 2017 Xi Jinping has announced his intention to make China into an "ecological civilization". This has included promoting the State Environmental Protection Agency to ministerial rank, which gives the agency more powers to intervene and the real steps being taken to tackle small polluters, limit combustion vehicles, tackle issues of plastic and e-waste, and bring in more protections for natural reserves. Yet as Smith argues even if Xi Jinping were serious about tackling environmental issues, he

runs a state and economy where it is near impossible to decarbonise without a massive overhaul of the political system. As Smith puts it Xi Jinping "runs a politico-economic system characterized by systemic growth drivers which are, if anything, more powerful and more eco-suicidal than those of 'normal' capitalism in the West."

Smith's explanation of what drives China's internal growth and environmental destruction is in parts clear and in other parts confused and contradictory. In his earlier writing Smith argued that China was bureaucratic-collectivist. He has since revised this position to argue that it is some mix of bureaucratic-collectivist and capitalist. And he breaks down the drivers of China's emissions as being: intra-bureaucratic competition, nationalist and imperialist ambitions, employment maximisation, consumer maximisation, and corruption. These are all major drivers, however, an important aspect of China's growth that Smith leaves out (or at least understates) is its integration into the world capitalist economy.

Moreover, at various points in the book Smith seems to be at pains to say that the mix of the economy being both bureaucratic-collectivist and capitalist provides a more potent mix when it comes to growth and environmental destruction than if it was just capitalist or just bureaucratic-collectivist. Broadly speaking Smith argues that there is something qualitatively different about China's political-economic system from that of capitalist states in the rest of the world.

I am not convinced there is something qualitatively different about China, so much as the world is more capitalist and more capable of driving development from a low starting point – and China provides a prime example of this.

Much of what Smith claims about China being uniquely different from capitalism does not stand up to scrutiny. For example, Smith argues that Xi can't stop his party subordinates and other officials from wasting resources and pol-

luting because if he did, he would have to challenge their economic interests. Do we not have this in the West and nearly any capitalist economy? If states try to impose regulations on waste and pollution they get push back from sections of capital and reactionary political forces. Smith does not account for why the supposed bureaucratic-collectivism in China makes this so qualitatively different.

Competition

On a different occasion Smith argues that the main driver for growth under capitalism is competition. The only limit to growth is if profits can't be made. So far so good. Smith goes on to argue that this is not the case for China. He maintains that because China is a hybrid of bureaucratic-collectivist and capitalist, the system is "largely exempted from the laws of capitalism". He argues that exemplary of this is that not one SOE has gone bankrupt or failed. Smith seems to have blinded himself to all the ways in which companies and banks under capitalism are regularly kept afloat, subsidised and saved by the state – in fact it is something distinct about how a capitalist state acts. If anything, China under the rule of the CCP does this aspect of capitalism better than other countries. And if anything its combination of lack of regulation in health and safety and the environment and its willingness to keep SOEs going at any cost, along with China's nationalist ambitions to be dominant on the world stage, account very well for why it has outdone itself in economic growth and environmental destruction.

Smith's book is a great primer on China's environmental and economic record. While I think Smith's analysis of China in part is confused and the analytical conclusions he draws are mistaken, his insights into how the CCP functions and what ambitions drive it are valuable. Anyone who wants to learn more about China and the environment should make time to read and discuss this book. □

New pamphlets

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

JOHN BLOXAM AND SEAN MATAMINA
WITH A NEW INTRODUCTION AND APPENDICES

Debate on the unions and the Labour Party
Workers' Liberty 3/23, July 2009

Note
This pamphlet was first published in 2004. It was reprinted in 2009 with a new introduction and appendices. It is now being reprinted again with a new introduction and appendices.

Introduction, July 2009
The pamphlet was first published in 2004. It was reprinted in 2009 with a new introduction and appendices. It is now being reprinted again with a new introduction and appendices.

1. How the new facts change the prospects
How the new facts change the prospects

"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
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Is gender oppression real? Or only biological disadvantage?

Letter from Andrew Northall

Your piece *CPB Votes for Backlash* (*Solidarity* 756), which asserts among other things “the party’s (the Communist Party of Britain) years-long habit of supporting anti-trans-rights arguments and campaigns” and this is a “shameful attack on trans rights”, really is a disgraceful smear and the opposite of the truth.

The Communist Party and the socialist daily *Morning Star* (which is not “controlled” by the CPB) have consistently demanded for all oppressed sections and groups in society, whether on the basis of gender, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, culture, immigration status, language, culture, or whatever, their full rights for equality, justice, dignity, respect and freedom from discrimination and prejudice. People should be free and respected to live their lives as they choose, as long as they are not impinging on the rights of other people. This, obviously, includes people who identify as “trans”.

Counterposing the rights of (say) trans people to (say) women is crass, stupid, divisive and, as we see with current debates, utterly destructive.

Rights of course are not and cannot be absolute or completely unfettered. Everything is relative. So the Communist Party does argue that for example trans rights do not and should not extend to the “right” for biological males to enter designated women only settings and spaces. These include settings in health-care, prisons, rape and sexual assault crisis and health centres, refuges for women at risk of abuse and exploitation. Often the settings themselves by their nature can make women additionally vulnerable (through their power structures, organisation and cultures), plus the fact many women accessing such settings are themselves already especially vulnerable.

These women-only settings and resources are generally badly funded and far too few. We should be demanding many more of these facilities and services, not less, and for them to be genuinely safe and protective spaces.

Women in modern capitalist society are, despite real advances in rights and equality over time, still an oppressed majority of the population. This oppression is against women as a biological gender and also integral to capitalist political economy and class exploitation.

Political parties claiming to be pro-working class should surely be try-

ing to build effective alliances between different oppressed sections of the working population, the majority also exploited as different sections of the working class, to build maximum unity of the working class, and to promote class and socialist consciousness. This includes being able to produce unified and integrated demands which promote the specific interests of different sections of this potential coalition and promote much greater unity of the working people as a whole.

It should surely be obvious that the “right” of biological men to access women-only spaces would represent a gross violation of the rights and demands of women for dedicated and protected safe settings and spaces, and highly destructive to the wider cause of building working class unity and socialist consciousness.

It must surely be possible to meet the genuine needs of trans people especially for respect, dignity and equality without undermining very hard won and precarious rights for women. That is the opposite of being “anti-trans”.

Andrew Northall, *Kettering*

Reply from Will Roberts

It’s a pleasure to receive comrade Northall’s letter, a mere five times longer than the article it responds to. I’ve been following with — well, not interest, nor anticipation, but let’s say amusement — his recent exchange with the *Weekly Worker* on the same topic.

Much of his letter is verbal window dressing that doesn’t require a response. The central claim is that we are “smearing” the CPB by framing their position as anti-trans.

The reasoning for this is the same one comrade Northall brings out everywhere: only true communists understand that all oppressed groups should be united in one struggle as part of the working class. True enough, as far as it goes. But why, then, did the CPB “welcome” the recent decision by the supreme court, and immediately pass policy in conjunction with it to go on the offensive against “gender ideology in the labour movement”? Why, also, have they firmly taken the side of Sandie Peggie — whose employment tribunal explicitly found her to hold transphobic views and deemed her testimony unreliable because of it — and in doing so opposed the right of trans women to change in changing rooms that match their gender? If the working class are at their best united, why try to ban trans workers from using the same



toilets and changing rooms as cis workers?

The answer seems to hinge on comrade Northall’s understanding that women are oppressed “as a biological gender”. I would agree that there is an initial logic rooted in biology from which women’s oppression stems — the ability to give birth and breastfeed, most centrally — but only once that biological fact has been transmuted into the broader social category of “women”, regardless of their specific biological makeup. Otherwise, a woman with no uterus would be unaffected by gendered oppression. Gender is not identical to biological sex, and the former, not the latter, is the target of women’s oppression. This is what allows for trans women to be affected by misogyny.

We would agree with comrade Northall that not only are women’s services like shelters, health services and refuges important, they also need significant expansion and funding (we would disagree on women’s prisons, which we think should be vastly curtailed, alongside all other prisons). There is an obvious parallel here, too: gender affirming care in the UK now has wait times of comfortably over five years for an initial appointment, leading to the avoidable deaths of trans people who are denied the care they need.

I am glad to see comrade Northall claim that “counterposing” the rights of trans people and women is “crass, stupid, divisive and ... utterly destructive.” But we do not counterpose them — we argue, along with the majority of the feminist movement, that the fight for trans rights against the current backlash is central to the modern feminist struggle.

To exclude trans women from women’s spaces requires there to be a conflict between the rights of the two groups, and in simple terms, comrade Northall and his organisation think this conflict exists because they do not think

trans women are women. To talk about trans women as “biological men accessing women-only spaces” is to deny the very existence of trans people, at best calling them mentally ill or confused (as comrade Northall does quite explicitly in one of his recent letters to the *Weekly Worker*). This is an explicitly anti-trans argument, and it lies at the basis of the CPB’s policy. Our article was correct to say so.

There is one point from the prior article that I will readily concede was wrong: it turns out that the CPB are not, in fact, finally fighting for this policy across the trade union movement. At Unison Young Members’ Conference this November (after the CPB conference policy was passed), members of the Young Communist League not only failed to bring a motion challenging “gender ideology”, they failed to even raise their hands to speak in the debate over a motion on trans rights. They didn’t even respond to a speech from the floor directly attacking the policy of the YCL and the CPB, and given there were no opposing votes, they either voted for the motion or quietly abstained.

Comrade Northall does say in a recent letter to the *Weekly Worker* that when it comes to oppressed groups, “Communists [...] should and do inject the politics of class and of Marxism-Leninism into all such struggles, *where appropriate*” (emphasis mine). Perhaps a union conference simply wasn’t the appropriate time or place to put forward the CPB’s politics. Either that, or young members of comrade Northall’s organisation might not be as enthusiastic about the party line as he is himself.

Workers’ Liberty will continue campaigning for a class-struggle feminism that centres trans liberation. We shall also continue to call the *Morning Star*’s line exactly what it is — confused and embarrassing transphobia that has no place in the labour movement. □

Will Roberts, *London*

Some wins for trans rights, but setbacks too

By Will Roberts

Press reports of the ruling (8 December) in the “Sandie Peggie vs. Fife Health Board” employment tribunal have generally framed it as a “victory”, if “narrow” or “partial”, for Peggie, but it really wasn’t that.

The victory for Peggie is that it has been found that NHS Fife did “harass” her in four ways, including not providing separate changing arrangements during the period of her complaint against Beth Upton, a trans woman working at her hospital, and telling Peggie not to discuss the case with others (as opposed to not discussing the internal investigation about the incidents).

However, the ruling rejected all other claims of harassment and rejected all the claims Peggie made against Upton specifically. Peggie’s claims of discrimination and victimisation against her by NHS Fife were also dismissed.

Trans rights campaigning groups and charities have generally responded positively to the ruling – a spokesperson from Translucent described the ruling as “balanced”, while the Good Law Project has celebrated that “the court didn’t decide which changing room a trans person should use”. In contrast, anti-trans campaigners such as Sex Matters have said they are deeply disappointed by the ruling.

As the Good Law Project notes, the tribunal found that Peggie’s remarks to Upton (calling her a man, enquiring about her chromosomes, etc.) were similar to hate speech, and therefore not covered under protections for an individual to express their beliefs. The tribunal also rejected the argument from Maya Forstater, who was the subject of another key legal case regarding trans rights, that “trans women pose a greater risk to cis women than other cis women in a changing room environment”.

Peggie has a number of other outstanding legal challenges. She is in the process of suing the Fife health board (again), and individually its chief executive and its head of “people and culture”. She is also suing her union, the RCN, claiming that it has insufficiently supported her. She is very explicit that her overall goal is the banning of trans women from women’s changing rooms.

Another employment tribunal, Kelly vs. Leonardo, ruled recently that the employer was correct to provide trans people access to toilets in line with their



gender. This ruling was based on the idea that while contradicting the principle of the recent Supreme Court ruling, it did so as a “proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim”, the latter being avoiding discrimination against trans people by not providing them with access to toilets.

Outcomes

Both of these rulings are good outcomes in the struggle for trans rights, and give further support to the idea that the Supreme Court ruling, and whichever version of guidance the EHRC ends up proposing, are unworkable and discriminatory.

There have also been setbacks in other areas. In the last couple of weeks, three different institutions have all pre-emptively over-complied with the Supreme Court ruling, and banned trans women from particular spaces or services.

The Women’s Institute has announced that it will stop offering trans women “formal” membership from April 2026. The statement expresses “sincere regret” and implies that they will allow some form of workaround by promoting trans-inclusive monthly-meeting “sisterhood groups” that are at an arm’s length from the organisation itself.

Girlguiding UK announced that they will not be allowing trans girls to take part. They announced the “difficult decision” with a “heavy heart”, and like the WI insisted that it was because they were legally registered as a women-specific organisation, meaning the Supreme Court judgement bound their hands.

In both cases, it would be better for the organisations to refuse to ban trans girls or women and take the case to

court. There are clearly contradictory and unenforceable elements in both the Supreme Court ruling and the EHRC’s draft Code of Practice (which has not yet been officially approved, and can be challenged in Parliament before it can go into effect). As reported in *Solidarity*, the Women and Equalities Minister recently said that the EHRC’s “interim update” (now removed from its website by EHRC) had been hurried and overzealous in the action it recommended for policies around “single-sex spaces”.

The Labour Party has also now announced a plan for Women’s Conference in 2026, after postponing the 2025 conference for fear of legal action if it went ahead. The new policy will ban trans women from taking part – from voting, taking part in debate, or hearing

speeches. The plan is being announced as a “compromise”, because trans women will be allowed to go to fringes and a “reception event”. This is no substitute whatsoever to being allowed to participate in the conference as an equal political activist.

The scheme was pushed through the National Executive with the chair giving no possibility to vote against and offering only the alternatives of banning trans women from fringe events too or of having no conference at all. 18 voted for it, and eleven refused to do so, including the trade-union reps. According to left CLP rep Gemma Bolton, “trade unionists raised concerns regarding their inclusive women’s policies and felt that, if such a Conference were to go ahead, they would be unlikely to be able to send delegations”.

The trade unions have direct avenues within the structures of the Labour Party to demand a re-think. Members and CLPs should also kick up as much of a fuss as possible about the banning of trans women from women’s conference, and pass motions calling on the decision to be reversed.

As the party in government, literally discussing and perhaps amending the EHRC’s draft code as this article is being written, Labour has the power to allow this conference to go ahead without excluding trans women. The labour movement must make them feel the pressure to reverse this decision. □

Activist Agenda

Meetings

Sat 24 Jan: Sheffield AWL day school, 11:30 to 5, Gallery Room, University of Sheffield Student Union

Sun 25 Jan: The Shock of the Anthropocene? AWL ecology reading group. 8pm, on Zoom, bit.ly/eco-rg

Sat 23 to Mon 25 May: Lutte Ouvriere fete, near Paris. Email awl@workersliberty.org if you are interested in coming with us.

At work or on campus

We organise: among health and local government, school and education workers, on the railway and London Underground, in the civil service, on uni campuses, and more. See workersliberty.org

workersliberty.org/work-unions, Insta [@work-erslibertystudents](https://www.instagram.com/workerslibertystudents), and email awl@workersliberty.org for more.

Template motions

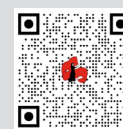
Texts: to adapt for union branches and Labour Parties: bit.ly/mo-pe

Socialist-feminist book clubs

bit.ly/bc-sf

Campaigns

See workersliberty.org/agenda. □



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Will Starmer go?

By Colin Foster

Starmer will go. Sooner, to be replaced in a new Labour leadership election; or later, to be replaced by Nigel Farage or a Tory prime minister.

Soon is best. To swing that, members have to continue active in the Labour Party, or resume activity if despair about Starmer and Reform's rise has made them drop down. Unions have to use their clout in the party structures, not defer as they have done over "day one" rights on unfair dismissal in the Employment Rights Bill or (so far) over trans exclusion from Labour women's conference, or "defer" another way by disaffiliation or disengagement.

The left will want to run a left candidate in a leadership election, as it tried to run Bell Ribeiro-Addy for deputy in October 2025. Even if undemocratic MP-nomination quotas block the left candidate from

the ballot, forcing a contest will be good.

Starmer's "favourability" poll rating is now 18% for, 72% against him, almost as bad as Liz Truss's low of 10%-80%.

Labour members and trade unionists dislike Starmer and other Labour figures linked to him like Rachel Reeves and Morgan McSweeney.

Even the soft-soft-left newly-re-launched Tribune group of MPs, Louise Haigh and others, says (5 Jan): "we haven't clarified who we stand for [and] clarity is just as often gained by who we stand against. We must approach the economy differently. We must challenge the failing status quo. We must change how it is run once and for all".

Unclear, but anti-Starmer.

Starmer is hated both by voters going to Reform, and by those going to the Greens or not voting.

It seems even other top Labour

right-wingers want him to go, thinking that another right-winger would do better.

Starmer's course of promising to be Corbyn-cleaned-up (remember 2020), then telling us again and again in bureaucrat-speak that we must go right-wing, and anyone who complains doesn't understand the realities of government, has taken him beyond hope.

The u-turns into which labour movement pressure has forced him – Winter Fuel Allowance, two-child benefit cap, PIP access, recognition of Palestine – are, as these things go, numerous. But he has become so discredited that they can't help him. They have just lost him what credit he had with big business.

Full-scale economic crisis in 2026, which is a real possibility, will make all that worse.

Probably few trust Farage or Polanski

to mend society, either. But visibly many think Farage or Polanski might do a few things, and doubt anyone will do more.

A different Labour leader, even only marginally different in general politics from Starmer, might "reset" the polls. (Hard to remember, but Gordon Brown did that briefly when he replaced Blair in June 2007). If a new leader breaks the McSweeney backroom-rule and reopens Labour Party political life, then the reset could be more than brief.

Starmer as far as the eye can see may not quite bring Labour to the collapse the French Socialist Party had under François Hollande as president, from 52% of the vote in the 2012 presidential election, and 174,000 members then, down to 2017 (6%), and 2022 (2%), and 22,000 members in 2021. But it will increase the risk of Farage becoming Britain's Trump. And after that...? □

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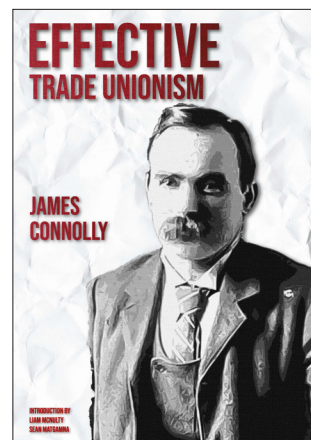
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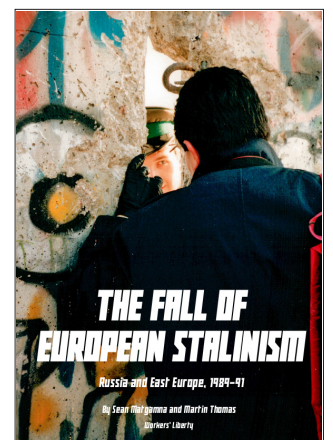
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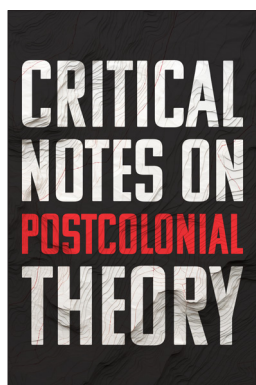
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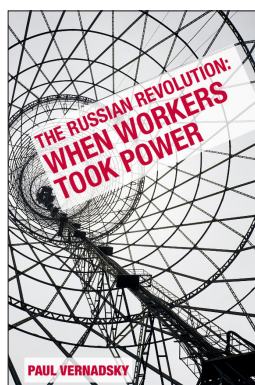
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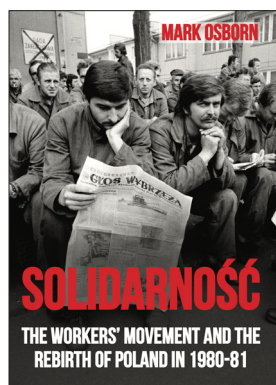
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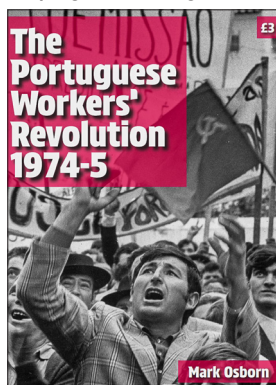
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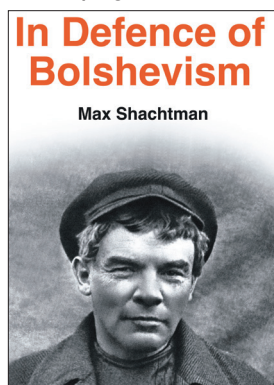
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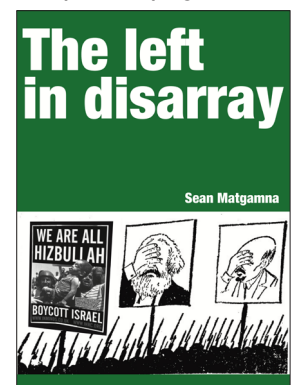
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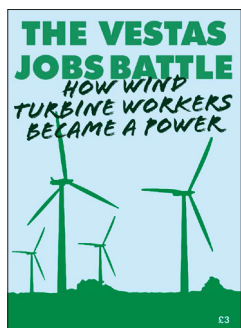
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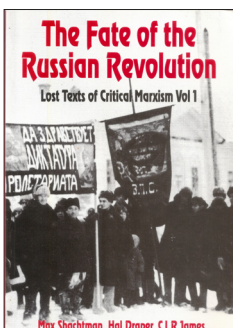
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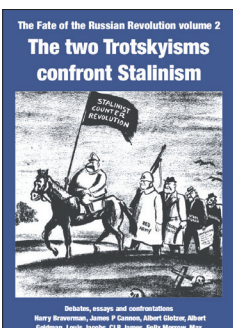
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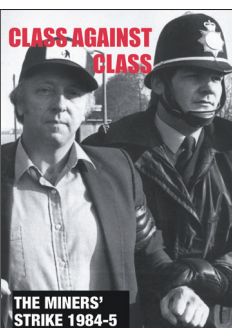
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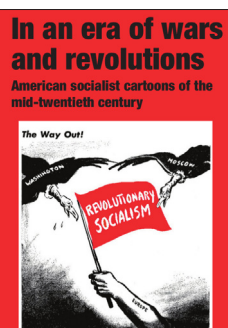
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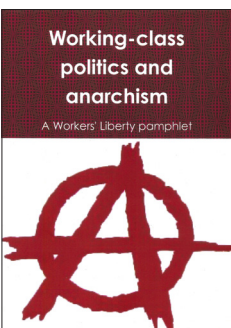
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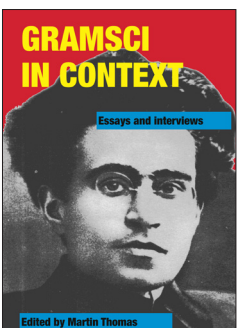
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Resident doctors rebalot to strike

By Wade Ferguson

The BMA is balloting resident doctors in England for a fresh mandate to strike over jobs and pay, after its members in Scotland last month voted in favour of industrial action by 92% on 58% turnout.



Museum strikers ready to go for months more

By Ken Worthington

The strike at the National Coal Mining Museum for England is continuing and has now entered its 20th week. There has been very little movement in the dispute in recent weeks. The employer is still refusing to hold negotiations with the workers' union, Unison, and find a solution to resolve the dispute.

Members from Workers' Liberty attended the picket in the run up to Christmas and found that the striking workers were in good spirits and determined to fight on. They believe that winning the dispute is vital to secure a decent pay rise for all workers but is also critical for the future of the museum. Many of the workers on strike are over 65 and are concerned that with the current rates of pay on offer, the museum will not be able to recruit skilled workers to replace them. Qualified electricians, joiners, fitters and deputies currently only earn £12.82 per hour.

On 6 December a demonstration was held in Wakefield city centre in support of the dispute. Around 300 people attended the event which included Denise Jeffery (council leader), John Trickett MP, a striking Birmingham bin worker, and a striking worker from the museum. There is also a petition bit.ly/ncmm-e calling for the board of trustees and directors to resign.

The workers are currently in the process of being re-balloted as the strike heads towards six months.

Workers are confident that they will vote to extend the action for another six months. □



Across the UK, competition for training posts for qualified doctors continues to soar, with a projected 40,000 applicants applying for just 10,000 jobs this year. This leaves thousands locked out of further training, reliant on zero-hours work or even unemployed — at a time when the UK is 40,000 doctors short of the OECD EU average. Those doctors who are able to find work face a real-terms pay cut of 21% when compared to 2008, according to the BMA.

This ballot comes after last month's five-day walkout in England, which Health Secretary Wes Streeting attempted to avert with a last-minute offer of 4,000 training posts created over three years. This was criticized by many as an insufficient number of jobs created not by a net increase in capacity but by decreasing the number of alternative non-training posts, with no plan to avoid additional bottlenecks in future and with no movement on pay. The deal

was overwhelmingly rejected by 83% on a 65% turnout.

Streeting now faces potential strike action by residents across the UK in 2026 and well as a possible ballot by their consultant colleagues this month.

The BMA is calling for a commitment to full pay restoration, if necessary over a number of years, and a clear plan to end the jobs crisis. Its latest ballot closes on 2 February. □

Turning point in MHCLG

By a PCS member

The MHCLG National Branch Executive Committee (BEC) of the PCS union is faced with urgent and important decisions regarding the branch's long running dispute with MHCLG.

After six weeks of talks commencing in October, on 2 December management sent limited proposals (supposedly) to resolve the dispute to the PCS BEC

PCS had been demanding work spaces in those areas where offices have been closed or are slated for closure (without compulsory redundancy), to enable affected members who want to spend at least some of their working week in a local office environment to do so (for instance, for mental health reasons or because of a lack of suitable "work" space at home). In response management has proposed to "endeavour to provide drop in spaces" in these locations, but has subjected that endeavour to considerable caveats. The provision of "drop in spaces", subject to size, location, and suitability for individual and team working, would be a gain for PCS members but at present there is nothing tangible on the table.

Management has not budged one inch in response to PCS's demand that MHCLG's office attendance policy be based on the self-management of staff as opposed to an arbitrary, required, weekly office attendance figure.

In response to PCS's opposition to a recruitment practice which favours a small number of office locations, thereby slowly running down offices in the other locations, management has proposed moving to formal consultation with all the Trade Unions (i.e. including

the two smaller unions not involved in the dispute) on a new recruitment policy.

The BEC is of the view that if the Department's proposed new policy sticks to the principles seemingly agreed during negotiations, then a final written policy should reduce the arbitrary "cutting out" of some offices from many job adverts. However, as the BEC has advised members, management's proposal include any detail about the intended policy, making it impossible for the BEC to evaluate the management proposal.

Formalise

Management has indicated that it will formalise the current location-neutral approach to postings and promotions, which enables staff to retain their existing office when applying for new MHCLG roles (exceptionally important for members in areas with few opportunities).

Despite the inevitable nuances of evaluation and next steps in the December membership meetings, there was a clear indication that members do not believe the management offer is either clear or good enough.

In this situation the choices now facing the BEC are straightforward: accept the offer; reject the offer but see what talks produce around drop in spaces and recruitment policy before deciding on further action; consult members on acceptance or rejection and willingness to take further strike action if legally balloted; reject the offer and commence legal balloting for further action.

Accepting an offer where the positive aspects are shrouded in unclear caveats or subject to further negotiations, while

management steam ahead with office closures and continue to enforce office attendance mandates, would undermine PCS's credibility. Entering further talks without any leverage is unlikely to produce significant gains. Formal consultation to ascertain members' willingness to strike but which consumes at least another four weeks — on top of the time since mid-October — risks further demobilising members but is preferable to the first two options.

Under the circumstances, the BEC should hold mass members' meetings to explain again the weaknesses of the management offer, to explain the need for leverage, to test the mood, and, if there is a basis, to move to a legal strike ballot. □

50% turnout threshold to go soon

By Colin Foster

According to the official arbitration service ACAS, the "threshold" of 50% turnout for valid strike ballots, introduced by the Tories' Trade Union Act 2016, will be abolished on 17 February, two months after the Employment Rights Act became law on 18 December. Some other briefings say the same as ACAS, but some employment lawyers say that the "threshold" will go only in April. *Solidarity* is investigating. More: bit.ly/50erb □



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

Diary of a Tube worker

No time for Maduro, but...

By Jay Dawkey

"It is pretty fucking mad". S says. "He just does what he wants", he adds, smirking. "Narco-terrorist, they say. So he is a drug dealer?" N asks, quizzically. While we've been out driving on one of the coldest afternoons this year, Trump had launched a bombing operation on Caracas and kidnapped President Nicolas Maduro and his wife.

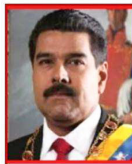
I'm catching up on the bourgeois media and what we've said on my meal break. Not many of us, for a Saturday. Engineering work and a Xmas temporary timetable mean we have a few fewer trains running than normal. "Have you seen the picture they've put out?" N shows us

his phone, Maduro handcuffed, possibly blindfolded or in wraparound shades, and the same ear defenders some of us carry around with us.

"I've got no time for Maduro, he isn't a legitimate President by any marker of even limited democracy, but you can't just remove someone you don't like by military force". N asks again if it can be true that he is part of an international drug smuggling operation. Not from any of the coverage you'll find. It seems whatever crimes Maduro has committed, being a "narco-terrorist" isn't one of them. "He [Trump] is crazy", N says, and with that, the room is empty again. □

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Kino Eye

Dr Zhivago, 60 years on

By John Cunningham

David Lean directed a number of grand-scale epics (e.g. *Lawrence of Arabia*) but *Doctor Zhivago* (1966) was, arguably, his masterpiece. Based on the eponymous novel by Boris Pasternak (1890-1960) and set in Russia during the First World War and the Bolshevik Revolution, the film follows the fortunes of Yuri Zhivago (Omar Sharif) and Lara (Julie Christie) the woman to whom he dedicates his poetry.

The manuscript was completed in 1957 but was banned outright. When Pasternak, who Stalin once denounced as a "cloud dweller", was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, he was forced to refuse it.

Robert Bolt's adaptation drastically changes the original story. The result is a narrative that is easy to follow, but many characters are changed or disappear altogether. To take just one example: we first encounter Lara's lover and later husband Pasha Antipov (Tom Courtenay) distributing leaflets outside a factory while later he commands a Red Army military train. There is a chance encounter with Zhivago where Antipov, now called Strelnikov, is portrayed as a merciless brute.

However, in the novel Strelnikov is warm and friendly towards Zhivago. For whatever reason Bolt and Lean transformed the dreamy student of 1905 into a monster. So, I suggest, watch the film and read the book. □

Ollie Maurer, 1948-2025

By Len Glover

In the late seventies and eighties, Ollie Maurer, a former Sheffield University student who re-trained as a plumber, was a supporter of Socialist Organiser (a forerunner of the AWL). A man of boundless energy and commitment, he played a key role in helping Socialist Organiser establish a presence in the Sheffield Labour Party and contributed in many ways to the work of the Socialist Organiser branch. In later years he moved to Manchester where he was, again, a tireless militant and organiser within NATFHE (National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education) and later in the UCU.

He possessed a wonderful sense of humour. He was a great lover of music and a keen footballer who refused to "hang up" his boots and continued playing into old age, at a time when most of struggle to get to the nearest pub. He will be sorely missed. □

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Andrea Egan wins Unison general secretary

By Ruth Cashman

Andrea Egan, the left candidate of Time For Real Change, has been elected in the 2025 Unison general secretary election, and will take office on 22 January.

Voting in the ballot was: Andrea Egan 58,579 (59.82%); Christina McAnea 39,353 (40.18%)

This is a phenomenal win against an incumbent and reflects a great campaign and an appetite for change.

The election comes as the Labour government is continuing austerity in the public sector. Unison members have had 25% real-terms pay cut since 2010, thousands of job losses, the decimation of local council services, and continuing privatisation and crisis in the NHS. We want to make the union more democratic internally and more combative and confident in its dealings with employers and the government. It is an incredibly

important election not just for Unison but for the entire labour movement.

Andrea's campaign was professionally organised, with a real effort to reach out beyond TFRC-aligned branches. The Socialist Party supported the left candidate rather than running their own campaign. There was also growing dissatisfaction with the Unison leadership, in particular since the Labour Party took office. Andrea doubled branch nominations relative to Paul Holmes in 2020.

Unison has a particularly powerful and vicious bureaucracy which has witch-hunted left activists, shut down branches and uses "legal advice" to prevent discussion within branches and the national conferences of issues considered normal in other unions. The left of the union will now have to discuss how to use this win to build democracy and dismantle the bureaucracy's stranglehold on the union.

Andrea Egan is committed to take the

wage of a social worker and refuse the "eye-watering £181,000 salary package the current general secretary takes home."

Andrea Egan was a Labour member before being expelled for sharing an article about Unison from Socialist Appeal. The Unison leadership have failed to fight Labour on welfare, cuts or pay since the new government came in. Egan has vowed to end the union's "subservience" to Labour.

Review

Her campaign promises included launching a "comprehensive review" of the union's relationship with the party and opposing funding for Labour MPs who "fail to stand against welfare cuts and other attacks on members' living standards and policies". It is yet to be seen what ending the subservience to Labour could entail but it could include pushing Unison policies in NEC meet-

ings and Labour Party conference, and demanding stand-alone legislation on the day one protections shaved off the Employment Rights Act.

Pressure on Labour is made more difficult within the union as the structures separate off Labour Link decision making from the rest of the union's democracy.

If Labour in government fails to act for the working-class majority, improve workers' living standards, attack the gross inequality in our society and rebuild public services, it will further feed the right-wing politics we have seen. Labour has sought to triangulate with the right on issues such as immigration and trans rights. This will embolden, not dampen, a far-right upsurge. Time for Real Change have been the voices in the union demanding socialist answers to the right wing surge.

Part of an anti-racist program is to build Black, Asian and white working-class unity by advocating socialist answers to the social crisis we all face. Unison as the country's biggest union has an important role to play.

The biggest win from the time of Time For Real Change's control of the National Executive was the introduction of strike pay from day one at £50. This has made it easier to run small disputes. The bureaucracy have placed hurdles in the way of branches they don't control starting and continuing disputes. There has also been an almost total absence of national action.

Andrea Egan's win will be a huge boost to the left, militant and activist bases in the union. We should use it to reignite the union industrially and politically. □

GFM workers win 15% pay rises

By Gerry Bates

Outsourced NHS workers at Newham Centre for Mental Health have won a tremendous victory in their campaign for NHS equivalent pay, terms and conditions. After six weeks of escalating strikes this autumn, Unite members voted to accept a significant uplift in pay, terms and conditions. They started their strikes as some of the lowest paid workers in London's NHS. They return to work as union people, on union terms.

Through their solidarity and determination, Newham's domestics, porters, kitchen and reception staff by Grosvenor Facilities Management have won a 15% pay rise for the lowest paid workers (10% for middle grade, 5% for supervisor grades), an extra week's annual leave, and two months full sick pay. The company has also agreed to end victimisation of union members and recognise the union.

The GFM strike began in September 2025 but initial organising started during the pandemic. During a 2021 union health and safety inspection, safety reps first met GFM workers and discovered they were not entitled to occupational sick pay. If they had to isolate following public health advice, the most they would

receive was Statutory Sick Pay paid at less than £100 a week. The financial pressure was driving infectious workers into work, undermining hospital safety.

After union activity on isolation pay and repeated safety inspections, in 2023 a group of workers joined the union and started organising, recruiting to the union and raising the idea of a strike. We organised a mass meeting in the canteen, addressed by reps from neighbouring Bart's Unite branch who had just won a successful insourcing campaign through sustained strikes.

Meeting

Following this meeting, many more workers joined the union and in autumn 2024 Unite applied for union recognition and submitted a pay claim for NHS equivalent pay terms and conditions.

Over the summer the workers delivered a 100% vote for strikes and set out their first dates with a view to escalating. The picket lines from the start were a noisy and attracted support from the wider trade union movement. Armed with horns, megaphones and speakers, the GFM pickets took their protest from the hospital gates to the offices of the PFI company, NHS Trust HQ and other GFM sites.

Unite has a policy of offering £70 a day strike pay, and that came close to covering the lost wages for the lowest paid workers who made up the bulk of the union group. However, the success of the strikes was dependent on building a strike fund that could sustain us for a long battle.

The strike demonstrates an important truth: our work is essential and without our labour our workplaces cannot function. For six weeks the company tried to run the hospital with bank staff, probationers and workers bussed in from sites outside London. For six weeks, conditions within the hospital deteriorated while the most experienced staff were on the picket line.

United

In every negotiation, and at every opportunity, the message to the employer was that the workers were united and were not going to stop until their demands were met.

The strike brought into focus the disgusting waste involved in the NHS's PFI schemes. In 2001-2 Newham Centre for Mental Health was built for about £14.5 million as a Private Finance Initiative. In exchange for the use of this hospital, the NHS agreed to pay the

PFI company £213 million over the next 30 years. This year the NHS paid over £8 million in PFI fees. Perhaps as much as £6 million of this sum is extracted in profit and executive salaries by GFM and their PFI partners, with little left over to pay the workers actually doing the work of servicing and maintaining the hospital.

The East London Mental Health Unite branch is seeking to build on this victory. First it is important that GFM workers at other sites are aware of this victory and are given the opportunity to organise their own disputes to level up pay, terms and conditions. Most urgently, as concern rises for winter flu season, the union will insist that full sick pay is implemented in all GFM sites as an urgent infection control measure. Second, the branch is planning to coordinate a campaign for full sick pay for all across the NHS.

The strikes at Newham, Bart's and elsewhere show that trade union organising can achieve what reasoned argument alone has not been able to achieve. Through organising around health and safety in the NHS we can rebuild union power and create a force that can win safety-critical improvements in the health service even at a time of cuts. □

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solidarity@workersliberty.org



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



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



Israel blocks aid for Gaza

By Ira Berkovic

Thirty-seven NGOs and aid agencies may be forced to cease operating in Gaza, after new Israeli regulations placed intense restrictions on their activities.

The agencies, which include major global NGOs such as Doctors Without Borders, are involved in providing desperately needed humanitarian and medical aid, including essential healthcare and food supplies.

The restrictions include much more extensive background checks on aid workers, including regular monitoring of their whereabouts. Israel has claimed, without foundation, that aid agency staff have links to Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Agency officials have said they fear disclosing staff whereabouts to the Israeli government will lead to air strikes and other attacks.

The restrictions worsen an already dire humanitarian situation in Gaza, exacerbated by harsh winter conditions. 1.3 million people urgently require



shelter. 740,000 are at risk of exposure to toxic flooding, due to the destruction of the sanitation system by Israeli bombing. 1.6 million people, the majority of the population of Gaza, face high levels of food insecurity. □

• More: page 5

Iran's new surge of protest

By Dan Katz

The protest movement which began on 28 December 2025 amongst the conservative merchants in the Tehran bazaar has spread across the country. The bazaaris, many of whom traditionally support the Islamist regime in Iran, are motivated by the crisis in the Iranian currency, the rial, which continues to fall to new lows against the dollar.

Demonstrations have taken place in over 70 towns and cities.

In Harsin in the country's west protesters chanted against poverty, corruption and inflation. In the religious centre of Qom protesters fought off the security services. In Darreh Shahr posters of Iran's leaders were pulled down. Street fighting has taken place in Hamedan, Kermanshah, Marvdasht, Kouhdasht and Ilan.

The protests spread quickly to university students and large meetings have taken place on at least ten campuses including in Tehran, Shiraz, Isfahan and Mashad. State forces have raided student dormitories beating students and claiming they are looking for "ringleaders."

Work stoppages in support of the protests have been reported in the oil industry and steel. □

• More: page 7

Hunger strikers at risk of death

By Will Roberts

Four of the Palestine Action hunger strikers are still going, as of 6 January. The other four have stopped, several of them after being hospitalised or due to underlying health issues.

One of those who remains on hunger strike is diabetic, and so alternates between days of fasting and not fasting (which is still a considerable health risk).

For the three still on continuous strike – Heba Muraisi, Teuta Hoxha and Kamran Ahmed – the risk of death is serious and imminent. They are reported to "move in slow motion" and some (Ahmed in particular) are unable to "gather their thoughts together" and engage in conversation. We must call for the government to act now, meet with the strikers and address their demands, or else their lives are at immediate risk.

Over 2,700 people have been arrested for protesting against the ban on Palestine Action as supposedly "terrorist". The most recent arrestees – several hundred, just before Christmas – included Greta Thunberg. The government's proscription remains a terrible decision, and pressure from the labour movement to reverse it is vital. □

Pic: Gemma Short

People's Vote demonstration 2019



Reverse Brexit wholesale!

By Rhodri Evans

Keir Starmer says he wants piecemeal re-entry to the EU Single Market, but without the

free movement of people that goes with it. David Lammy says he wants a customs union with the EU (like Turkey: no tariffs between UK and EU, and common tariffs with the rest of the world, but continued barriers due to different regulations and standards). *Solidarity* is for reversing Brexit: restoring free movement, rejoining the Single Market and Customs Union, and negotiating to rejoin the EU. Lower barriers between countries are better for the working class. □

New megapicket 30 January

Following the Megapicket in solidarity with Birmingham bin strikers on 9 May, which shut down Lifford Lane, and Megapicket II on 25 July, which closed all five sites across Birmingham and Coventry, Strike Map is now organising Megapicket 3-D, targeting all sites on 30 January 2026.

These workers have been in dispute since January 2025, and have been on all out strike since March 2025. Agency staff employed by Job & Talent have joined the strike since November 2025. Sign up at bit.ly/30ja26 for notifications and more details. This action is supported by many groups including ASLEF, Bakers Union, Fire Brigades Union, National Education Union, and PCS. □

Next anti-Trump day 20 January

The next all-USA anti-Trump day is planned for Tuesday 20 January, a "Nationwide Free America Walkout" called by 50501 and Women's March. They are calling on workers to "walk out" at 2pm local time on that day. □

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2026: PREPARE FOR CRISES