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SOLIDARITY

& WORKERS' LIBERTY



Why we back the revolt in Iran

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Health workers in
southwest Iran,
27 December

Pic: bit.ly/hw-iran



IRAN: WORKERS AT CORE OF REVOLT

Reflections on the Iranian resistance

After the big recent wave of street protests, the repressive mechanisms of the Iranian state remain intact. The current regime came to power through a reactionary revolution in 1978-9. It was not our revolution, but was a revolution nevertheless. Those in power are ideologically committed and have made sure they hold onto power through their own organisations, in particular the IRGC, which is both an armed force which exists above the army and police, and a powerful economic force. This is not a "normal" military dictatorship.

The Iranian left must turn to organising workers, especially inside the factories and enterprises. Unless the Iranian working class becomes a more coherent political force, not just adding to the numbers on the streets but directing the opposition movement, these massacres will recur.

For decades now street rebellions against the clerical fascist regime have been occurring with increasing regularity, and are being met with increasing savagery.

- In July 1999 student protests against the closure of a "reformist" newspaper, Salam, led to days of rioting after Islamist paramilitaries raided student dormitories, killing one student, in Tehran. Scores of students disappeared and 1,500 were arrested.

- June 2009. Following a rigged vote for an already narrow presidential election in which the conservative Islamist candidate, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, was declared victor over the "reformist" Hossein Mousavi, very large numbers came out in protest.

Criticise

Mousavi had criticised the incumbent, Ahmadinejad, for economic incompetence.

Mousavi's active supporters drew in much wider layers of the public and initially the demonstrations were peaceful. Perhaps a million people rallied behind Mousavi in Tehran on 15 June 2009. Some protesters chanted "Death to the Dictator [Ali Khamenei, the so-called Supreme Leader of Iran]". Several dozen people were killed or injured by gunfire. Hundreds were arrested, including many Islamist political leaders from the "reformist" wing of the regime; some were released after being threatened.

Protesters wore Green; this became the Green Movement. However, Mousavi was placed under house arrest in 2010

and the movement subsided.

The result of the failure of the Green Movement was the partial eclipse of the "reformist" wing of the regime. Mousavi was eventually allowed to leave his home, once a week, in 2019.

- On 28 December 2017 largely spontaneous, leaderless movements erupted. Starting in Mashhad the protests spread to 140 cities over the next two weeks. In the background was an unpopular budget announced in December 2017 which kept generous funding for the regime's Islamic Guards (IRGC) and religious foundations connected to influential clerics, but cut fuel subsidies.

- In January 2018 the internet, phone lines and satellite links were disrupted in an effort to stop information about the movement from becoming widely known and to prevent protesters coordinating.

People chanted, "People are paupers while the mullahs live like gods!" and in opposition to large Iranian subsidies to client groups across the region. *Le Monde* reported that 25 people were killed during these protests. Many others were arrested and tortured.

- Similar public demonstrations erupted in November 2019 following the announcement of a fuel price rise. Protests took place in over 100 cities and towns across Iran and probably thousands were arrested. Protesters raised slogans against poverty and dictatorship, shouting, "No to Gaza, no to Lebanon. We sacrifice our lives for Iran!"

At least 300 people were killed and 3,000 arrested. The Tehran bus workers' syndicate described the events as, "a massacre and bloody suppression."

- In January 2020 bus and taxi drivers in protested Tehran against corruption. These protests spread.

- And after 8 January, following the shooting down of a civilian airliner by the IRGC, Ukrainian Airlines Flight 752, with 176 deaths, thousands protested against the regime, its lies and incompetence. Mass protests in Tehran were tear-gassed.

- Later in 2020, from May to August large waves of workers' actions took place against the regime's heartless, utterly uncaring response to the Covid outbreak. 5 (February 2022) estimated Iran suffered 270,000 deaths.

- A mass movement erupted against the forced imposition of the hijab on Iranian women following the murder of Mahsa Jina Amini in September 2022

by religious police. The mass movement was eventually repressed with over 550 killed and 25,000 arrested.

However the regime has now backed off from enforcing the hijab law in many towns across Iran.

Since 2006 sanctions have been imposed on Iran in response to its uranium enrichment programme aimed at producing nuclear weapons. In 2018 US President Donald Trump pulled out of a deal aimed at limiting Iran's nuclear production and imposed sweeping sanctions which have substantially isolated Iran.

The Iranian regime was a major loser in the aftermath of the Hamas pogrom against Israeli Jews in October 2023. Israel has largely destroyed the Iranian client, Hamas, and battered Lebanese Hezbollah. The Twelve Day War Israel launched against Iran in June 2025 exposed Iran's weakness and substantially diminished the regime's prestige.

Revolt

That has fuelled the latest revolt. But still there are no substantial working-class political or trade union centres inside the country and the émigré left is weak. The monarchists have made a lot of noise recently in the bourgeois media but it is unclear how much solid support they have in the country. Some Iranian protesters have held up photos of the Shah's son, Reza Pahlavi, but probably his support has been exaggerated. He is the only well-known opposition figure and so it is understandable some currently chant his name.

But for the monarchists to come to power the Islamist regime-state would have to split and the winning side would have to accept him. So the monarchists have a difficult route to power. In addition Trump is sceptical of Reza Pahlavi and is refusing to meet him.

What is certain is that the Iranian opposition must turn away from these periodic street protests which simply allow the murdering regime to mow down young people and workers. As the regime becomes more isolated from the population, more hated, the regime is becoming more violent.

Trump and Reza Pahlavi have called on the Iranian people to continue street protests. They don't care how many people are killed. But we do. That's why we say: turn to other tactics.

A similar problem was faced, for example, by Polish workers in the 1970s

who faced Stalinist tanks with bricks in their hands. After massacres they turned to workplace occupations in 1980-1.

The émigré Iranian left, in so far as it has influence, is also frustratingly unclear about what it stands for. It shouts "Down with the Islamic republic of Iran!" and "Release political prisoners", but those slogans do not go beyond what any decent bourgeois could back. The various groups are visibly and generally "socialist". But it is unclear about exactly what they intend.

We offer this draft programme as a contribution to a discussion about programme. We think the Iranian left would be well-served by discussing such a programme, fleshing it out and fighting for it:

Secular, democratic republic

Constituent assembly

Abolition of the IRGC and regime militias. Abolition of the death penalty, flogging and amputations. Free all political prisoners

Free association, free speech, free trade unions, the right to strike

Full equality for LGBT people and women. No compulsory hijab; abortion rights; end sex segregation in education and public life

Nationalisation of the banks, oil-gas, key industries and IRGC-controlled enterprises

Seize the wealth of the clerical elite and tax the rich to fund decent health-care and a welfare state

Pensions and wages linked to inflation. Hike and enforcement of the minimum wage

A public housing programme to provide affordable accommodation

Self-determination for the Kurds, Balochs; equality for national minorities

An end to the persecution of Afghan migrants, religious minorities

Rejection of nuclear weapons, recognition of Israel's right to exist alongside an independent Palestinian state; end support for Hamas, Lebanese Hezbollah, sectarian Iraqi parties and militias and the Houthis

Workers' government

A workers' government would set up commissions to discuss and help structure the work required to solve the crises in health care, air pollution, water and electricity. Plan and work for a green transition; develop peaceful nuclear power and solar power; a plan to phase out fossil fuel extraction. □

For Venezuela's workers, against both Trump and Maduristas

By Will Roberts

The unsteady balance of power in Venezuela since Trump's capture of Nicolas Maduro on 3 January has managed to hold into the later part of the month.

Interim President Delcy Rodriguez has kept her post, despite the difficult line she has to walk between the military-authoritarian nationalists in her government and the Trumpists knocking on the door.

Her party appears to have continued to rule in the manner it did before: responding to public outcries with harsh punishment and refusing to relinquish their grip on power. But now the president is a go-between for the Venezuelan ruling class and Trump rather than a nationalist demagogue basing their popular appeal on strident defiance of the USA and alliance with Russia, Cuba, and China.

On Friday 16 January, Rodriguez met with CIA director John Ratcliffe in Caracas. The CIA stated that the purpose of the visit was "to deliver the message that the United States looks forward to an improved working relationship" and that they would work together to target "narcotraffickers", while the Venezuelan government declined to comment.

This is a pretty stark about-turn from the Rodriguez that came out the day of Maduro's capture to demand his release and denounce the US for their intervention. Rodriguez has not publicly called for Maduro's release since that day, and is now meeting with a force that boasted of playing a central role in spying on Maduro and infiltrating his government to aide in his capture. Will anyone from Maduro's circle or the army attempt to replace her? We don't know.

Trump's intention in "taking" Venezuela remains impossible to summarise in anything but the broadest terms: a wish to expand his power. Trump said the operation was about oil, but there is a problem with the facts on (or under) the ground.

Venezuelan oil deposits are more difficult to process than much other oil – including the large quantities America already holds in reserve. "Heavy" oil, containing an array of contaminants and resembling more "green sludge"

than "black gold", takes much more time and machinery to refine than more liquid variants.

The complex refinement is possible, including in plants that are currently operational in the US and indeed were designed specifically for Venezuela's output. But the extra cost and effort of doing so, and the years-long and expensive process of repairing and renewing the oil infrastructure to get more regular output beyond just seizing what Venezuela already had in storage, is not an attractive prospect in a world market tipping towards over-supply of oil.

Chevron

Responses from the major oil companies have reflected this. Chevron – which produces a quarter of Venezuela's daily oil output – has promised to remain in operation, but other companies have been far more cautious. The chief executive of Exxon called Venezuela "uninvestable", in large part due to the risk of assets there being expropriated by the state, as happened before in 1976 and again in 2007.

Whether oil companies choose to invest in Venezuelan oil or not is not a matter of the utmost importance for revolutionary socialists, but it indicates that Trump's stated strategy is threadbare and doesn't have the backing of his own capitalist class. The Trumpian reshaping of world politics that we are currently witnessing has a rudderless feel to it, leaving even experts constantly second-guessing his next move and the underlying logic.

Chief among those who have attempted to woo the president is Maria Corina Machado, who visited the White House in order to ceremonially hand her Nobel Peace Prize over to Trump. Her wishes were clear: flatter the president into naming her the next president of Venezuela, something he very bluntly rejected in his press conference following Maduro's capture. She stated to the press that she hoped to lead Venezuela "when the right time comes".

Trump has not changed his position, and Machado is down a Nobel prize while getting no closer to her goal.

Trump's attention, and the world's with him, have shifted to Iran and Greenland in recent days. But there are unresolved tensions still at play in Venezuela, and currently there is a distinct risk that the Rodriguez government will reconsolidate their power and resubdue the population, this time with the backing of the US, rather than its antagonism.

The PSL, Venezuelan section of the UIT-CI (one of the "post-Morenist" "Orthodox Trotskyist" international net-

Venezuela, crude oil production, million barrels per day



1 Nationalisation of the oil industry; creation of PDVSA

2 Venezuela opens up to foreign investment

3 Second wave of nationalisations; Exxon and Conoco leave

4 Nicolás Maduro elected president

5 First wave of US financial sanctions

6 Sanctions relief in return for promises of free elections

7 Maduro declared re-elected

Sources: Rystad Energy; *The Economist*

works), has usefully summarised the role that the Rodriguez government is playing:

"We must be categorical: if a pact is made with imperialism, there will be more misery and plundering of our resources and no benefit for the working people [...] There will be no benefits or better wages with the US and its transnational corporations. They care little about the needs of working people [...]"

"Between 1999 and 2014, Venezuela received more than \$960 billion from oil exports. Very little of this vast amount of resources reached workers and the popular sectors. Only some welfare policies and the Misiones (missions) were implemented, which eventually faded away. Most of that money went to shady deals and corruption, arms purchases, and contracts with large transnational corporations.

"We must mobilize for an emergency increase in wages and pensions, equal to the basic basket of goods. No more austerity for working people! No more wage bonuses! Let's discuss collective

bargaining agreements; for the right to strike and freedom of association; for the full freedom of political prisoners, including those who have already been released, freedom for those imprisoned in the context of the protests against electoral fraud in July 2024."

The demand for free trade unions, the right to strike, freedom of association and the release of all political prisoners are fundamentally important in Venezuela now. They could form the basis for democratic elections for a new constituent assembly, able to remove the president's excessive constitutional powers.

To call for these things now is not to "distract" from the Trump attack on Venezuela: it is the only just way to fight back against it. The Venezuelan working class is the force we must look to, and its ability to wage war on the ruling class both of its own nation and its imperial enemy relies on freedoms that must be won in struggle. □

Correction

The statement attributed to the LIS in *Solidarity* 758 was in fact from the UIT-CI group in Venezuela. Both LIS and UIT-CI are "post-Morenist" "Orthodox Trotskyist" networks. □



The left and Venezuela

By Will Roberts

The [Morning Star](#) on 16 January framed a statement by Venezuelan president Delcy Rodríguez statement calling for foreign oil investment as a radical departure from collaboration with the United States. They quote her as saying “a new policy is being formed”, without mentioning Rodríguez welcoming the head of the CIA for a meeting earlier the same week, or Venezuelan oil being sold under US government direction with revenues going to US-controlled bank accounts. The need to defend the record of the Maduristas has led the CPB into a world of fancy.

An article by former Labour MP (turned Your Party conference chair) Claudia Webbe went even further. Rubbishing “early claims [that] Rodríguez was co-operating with the US”, Webbe asserts that “the evident continuing popularity of the Bolivarian government and Maduro personally underscored Rodríguez’s show of strength”. Webbe also boasts that among the demonstrators in support



of Maduro were “civilians carrying automatic weapons, many of them women”.

The RCG’s newspaper, *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!*, cut out the middle man: instead of doing left apologetics for Rodríguez’s government, it simply republished the official [statement](#) of the Venezuelan government, with an extra [article](#) highlighting that “Venezuelans” are demanding the return of their “dem-

ocratically elected president”. They ignore the fact that Maduro’s election has widely been recognised as entirely undemocratic, and critics of it include almost the entirety of the Venezuelan left, appear to be of no consequence here.

The RCP (formerly Socialist Appeal) have relaunched their long dormant “Hands Off Venezuela!” [campaign](#), which in its high days made Socialist Appeal only a publicity agency in Britain for the Chavez regime (which was, to be sure, better than the Maduro sequel it generated, but still left-military rather than working-class in any sense). The campaign aims

to “educate workers and young people on the reality of British imperialism, on the real legacy of the Bolivarian revolution, and how we can build a movement to overthrow imperialism”.

Some of *Socialist Worker’s* coverage has given too glowing a picture of Chavez, but Camilla Royle’s “In-Depth” [article](#) was well-researched and nuanced, with reasoned criticism of Chavez him-

self. Counterfire’s Chris Bambery has also produced an useful [article](#), based on his firsthand experience on an SWP delegation to Venezuela in the 2000s: “The army was the thing that worked” in handing out reforms financed by the high oil revenues of the time. □

CRITICAL NOTES ON POSTCOLONIAL THEORY

A critical look at theories now dominant in leftist academia.

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Flickering green light for exclusion

By Will Sefton

The “Darlington nurses” judgment in *Hutchison v County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust* is, unlike the Peggie and Leonardo judgments, is a straightforward step back for trans-inclusive workplaces.

The tribunal says that the NHS Trust’s decision to allow Rose Henderson, a trans woman operating department practitioner, to use the women’s changing room at Darlington Memorial Hospital amounted to harassment and indirect sex discrimination against a group

of nurses. The tribunal found that Rose Henderson’s conduct was entirely proper and that she had not harassed anyone. Yet it also suggested that the Trust’s decision to respect her gender-identity created a hostile, humiliating and degrading environment for “some 300 females” using the facilities.

Unlike the Sandie Peggie vs Fife NHS Trust decision, where the tribunal accepted that permission for a trans woman to use a female changing room is not automatically unlawful after the Supreme Court judgment, the nurses here have won a victory for the belief that a trans woman’s mere presence in a women’s space is a violation of their cisgender colleagues’ dignity.

Supported

The complaining nurses were financially and legally supported in this tribunal by the right-wing Christian Legal Centre and

Christian Concern.

As a liberal blog, A Just Society, says: “Employers across the UK will read this judgment and draw the obvious conclusion: inclusion is risky. The safe option is to exclude trans people from shared facilities, provide inadequate alternatives, and defend exclusion by pointing to *Hutchison*.”

“Trans workers will read it and understand they’re welcome only so long as nobody objects too strenuously. HR departments will cite it to justify policies that segregate. Other tribunals will treat its reasoning as persuasive even if not binding”.

Trans workers, like Rose Henderson and Beth Upton, are entitled to use facilities in their workplaces that match their gender-identity without the unease of some colleagues being elevated above their rights.

We have now had two tribunals that say the Supreme



Pic: Christian Concern

Court decision doesn’t require segregation, but this latest decision suggests that to deny segregation amounts to harassment of cisgender women.

Clarity

There is still no clarity on when the EHRC guidance will be issued. The Judicial Review against the EHRC and their

“interim update” is ongoing. If that review, following Bridget Phillipson or trans rights campaigners, questions the necessity and legality of bathroom bans, that would be a small step forward in the fight for trans equality. It may well be that the government is delaying a decision until the outcome of the Judicial Review. □

Eric Lee

Eric Lee is taking a break from his opinion column in *Solidarity* for a few months to complete a book. Michael Chessum’s *Inside the Greens* column should be back in #760. □

What are the alternatives in Cuba?

By Paul Abbot

The Cuban government is now in a very precarious position. There are regular 14-15 hour blackouts, food and gasoline shortages, and illnesses such as dengue and chikungunya are becoming common due to rubbish not being collected and attracting mosquitos. At the end of last year senior government officials were reportedly told that “the state can no longer provide many entities with even the minimum resources they need to continue operating”.

The attack on Venezuela and kidnapping of Maduro has signalled a more aggressive approach to Latin America from the Trump government, and Cuba is next in the firing line. But Trump has claimed that he has no plans for military action in Cuba as the government will fall on its own anyway.

It is certainly unlikely that Cuba will be able to depend much on external help from its allies. Russia has shown itself time and time again to be an unreliable ally to governments in its sphere of influence like Iran, Armenia, or Assad's Syria.

The American preoccupation with Cuba precedes the 1956-8 guerrilla war led by Fidel Castro, Castro winning power on 1 January 1959, and his subsequent alignment with the USSR. The Spanish-American War of 1898 was largely fought over Cuba, and many of the exports and imports that go through ports on the Gulf of Mexico in Texas and Louisiana go through the Florida Strait, the 90-mile gap between Florida and Cuba.

During the guerrilla war against the dictatorship led by Fulgencio Batista, the future of US-Cuban relations was unclear. The US had its quarrels with Batista. Fidel Castro led the 26 July Movement, which was separate from and sometimes at odds with the smaller Moscow-aligned Popular Socialist Party (PSP).

However, there was overlap. The 26 July Movement had leading figures who were sympathetic to USSR “communism” such as Che Guevara and Fidel's brother Raúl.

Guevara's forces captured the city of Santa Clara on New Years' Eve 1958, and the next day Batista fled to the Dominican Republic. “Communism” was only one strand within the independence movement, and at first Castro balanced between different factions. The United States employed a guarded approach to Cuba until the Agrarian Reform Law was put through in May 1959. After that its caution transformed into outright hostility, and Castro became more openly critical of liberal politicians such as President Urrutia, who resigned in July 1959 and fled to the USA.

At the same time the labour movement was going through what historian Samuel Farber has called “the most impor-



tant exercise in autonomous grassroots democracy during the revolutionary period”. The internal union elections in spring 1959 saw an overwhelming victory for 26 July Movement candidates, whereas the PSP only received 10% of the votes. The elections for delegates to the Tenth Congress of the CTC (Confederation of Cuban Workers) went similarly. Castro stepped in to prevent a complete defeat for the PSP, imposing a slate led by the pro-PSP wing of the 26 July Movement led by Jesús Soto. The congress was followed by a purge of non-communist trade union leaders who were accused of being collaborators with the Batista regime, and the democratic life of the unions was smothered by the government. Then a notorious PSP Stalinist, Aníbal Escalante, was purged in March 1962.

Elite

A new ruling elite was being assembled from elements of both 26 July and the PSP. As René Dumont put it: “A new leading group is being constituted in Cuba, certainly benevolent towards workers and the poor people, but... the latter no longer have the right to speak out if they become too critical”.

In 1961 the 26 July Movement merged with the PSP (and the Revolutionary Directorate group) to form a single unified party. By this point the Cuban government had thrown its lot in with the USSR and nationalised much of the economy. The unified party was renamed the Communist Party of Cuba in 1965.

The regime that was consolidated in Cuba was a single-party dictatorship, along the lines of other Stalinist states across the world. This combined the establishment of a welfare state combined with the suppression of all autonomous working-class politics. The Cuban “Orthodox Trotskyists” were suppressed from 1962, and extinguished in 1965.

Cuba has been under embargo by the US since 1960 (and subject to various attacks such as the failed Bay of Pigs

invasion). That has severely worsened standards of living and helped maintain an atmosphere of siege.

Throughout the Cold War, Cuba was kept afloat by aid from the Soviet Union. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 led to a decade of serious hardship known as the “Special Period”. There was some political liberalisation then, too, as the government's ability to carry out repression weakened and concessions were seen as unavoidable.

The election of Hugo Chávez in 1999 in Venezuela was a lifeline to the Cuban government, and the relationship between the two governments became even closer after the failed coup against Chávez in 2002. Cuba has relied heavily on Venezuelan oil, and in return the Chávez government has relied on Cuban security forces and medical personnel.

In recent years, as Venezuela's once-huge oil revenues have dwindled, Cuba's economy has crashed, and living conditions are now worse than during the Special Period. Venezuelan oil imports had already declined massively, falling from 90,000 barrels a day under Chavez to only 35,000 for the last three months of 2025 according to the *New York Times*. The latest shipment left Venezuela in mid-December, and that could be the last if Trump is to be believed.

The tourism industry also declined after Covid. That was not just an important source of revenue in general but particularly foreign hard currency.

There have been a number of marketisation reforms in Cuba, albeit no comprehensive programme of capitalist restoration as in China or Vietnam. In December a trial of “partial dollarisation” began which allows some organisations to have dollar bank accounts in order to bring into the official economy the existing illicit trade in dollars which had created a sort of “dual economy”, with many items accessible only to those who could get an income, or second income, in dollars. Since 2021 there have been legal “small and medium enter-

prises” (MiPyMEs), which have grown in number over time.

Russian investment has become important to the Cuban economy, and the two country have strong military as well as economic ties. Despite a scandal in 2023 over a Russian human trafficking ring recruiting Cubans to fight in Ukraine where the Foreign Ministry stated that “Cuba is not part of the war in Ukraine” and made arrests, Ukrainian military intelligence now reports that over 1,000 Cubans are fighting in Ukraine, echoing claims from the US government (which are denied by Cuba).

Collapse

It remains to be seen whether Communist Party rule will collapse, or the US can work a deal with a faction in the government, as in Venezuela. The deal with Rodríguez and the sidelining of María Corina Machado by Trump was clearly not Marco Rubio's first choice, but he has already made concession's to Trump's “America First” programme at the expense of his own base. Billboards erected in Miami have branded him a “traitor” since Trump revoked the temporary residency of three thousand Venezuelan migrants (many of whom live in Miami) and deported thousands of Cubans.

Independent civil society in Cuba is politically heterogenous; pro-Trump and right-wing religious elements, such as María Payá Acevedo, a long-time ally of Marco Rubio, are a real force if not hegemonic.

There are also more left-wing dissidents, though with no substantial organisation that we know of, and genuinely democratic working-class forces could emerge in the turmoil of a political collapse.

It is our job to support such forces both against the current regime, and against the imperialist free-for-all, mass privatisation, and roll-back of social provision likely after a collapse of the government in Cuba. □



They're all CIA/Mossad/Daesh agents in Iran?

By Jim Denham

In its editorial of 13 January ("Hype over Iran embassy flag masks growing danger of Trump's wars"), the *Morning Star* objected to the publicity given to the tearing down of the flag at Iran's London embassy on 10 January. (It was torn down again on 17 January).

Instead, argued the editorial, publicity should have been given to the "No to Trump's war on Venezuela" march the same day. And in any case, the flag was replaced by "the [Lion and Sun] flag of the still-hated regime of the Shah, deposed in 1979."

Publicising the flag incident in London, "together with the promotion of unverified reports from inside Iran ... helps to contribute to an atmosphere which could lead to Western military attacks."

What exactly these "unverified reports" actually were was not explained. Nor was the simple fact that, although at Trafalgar Square on 17 January for example the monarchist protest was both explicit (portraits of the current aspirant, son of the Shah deposed in 1979) and larger than the Iranian socialist protest beside it, many Iranians see the Lion and Sun not as a symbol of the monarchy but as a marker of resistance, of Iran without the mullahs.

If the editorial was cryptic, the next

day's front page story ("Iran accuses us of using ISIS to stir up violence — Jihadists sent by Washington and Israel have killed police and civilians, says Tehran") was straightforward — straightforward regime propaganda.

The piece, by Roger McKenzie quotes, without comment and without citing any evidence, the regime's claim that "to compensate for their defeat in last year's 12-day 'holy defensive war,' the US and Israel had 'unleashed Isis terrorists on our great people ... These mercenaries, who are worse than wild beasts, killed civilians and law enforcement officials.'"

Noting

While noting in passing that "many observers salute the bravery of protesters on the street of Iran," the bulk of McKenzie's piece is devoted to warnings about "foreign interference" and (fair) denunciations of the hypocrisy of some of those claiming to support the protests. He even quotes the Assad-supporting "journalist" Richard Medhurst [who] "slammed the supposed concerns about the human rights of the Iranian people ... Former CIA officials and Israeli media are openly saying the riots ... are their doing. That's not a detail. It's the entire point. You don't get to omit key facts and the geopolitical context ... All the frauds who did this in Syria are doing it again

with Iran." If Medhurst's campist musings weren't enough, McKenzie goes on to quote "activist and writer" [and regime supporter — Google her!] Calla Walsh: "Protests are hijacked by CIA, Mossad, National Endowment for Democracy and counter-revolutionary organisations who pay people on the ground to foment violence, attack government buildings and destroy critical infrastructure, coupled with massive media campaigns against anti-imperialist governments, portraying them as violent dictatorships that must be overthrown."

The MS of 19 January carried a lengthy piece by Sevim Dagdelen of the pro-Putin German BSW party essentially claiming the same thing: the US (encouraged by Israel) "creates the crisis", then uses the crackdown "as a welcome pretext to openly threaten an unprovoked, illegal war of aggression", though Dagdelen reckons Trump's main motive is to get his hands on Iranian oil.

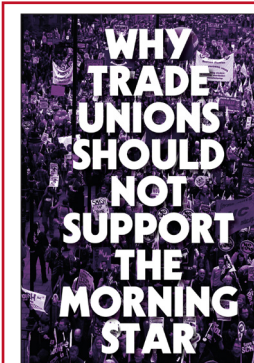
By the time Dagdelen's piece appeared Trump's attention seemed to have moved on while the regime doubled down on the prosecution of protesters.

In stark contrast to the bulk of its Iran coverage, the MS (17-18 Jan) carried an interview with Mohammad Omidvar, a senior figure in the Tudeh Party (effectively the Iranian Communist Party).

Asked about the regime's claim that the protests are a "foreign plot", Omidvar accepted that "US imperialism and its allies ... have a vested interest in hijacking the peaceful protest movement", but insisted:

"This popular protest movement is a class struggle and not a product of US imperialism or the genocidal Israeli regime. It is rather the direct consequence of the disastrous neoliberal economic policies of the ruling capitalist regime, as well as widespread corruption, insecurity and sweeping oppression imposed upon the nation by the regime's leaders and their collaborators."

As a leading figure of the Tudeh Party Omidvar is almost certainly an unreconstructed Stalinist — but at least, when it comes to the protests in Iran, he knows which side he's on. □



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Why Labour needs a housing sector plan

By Richard Bau

In June 2025 the Labour government launched an industrial strategy described as a "10-year plan to increase business investment and grow the industries of the future in the UK." In June 2025 the Labour government launched an industrial strategy described as a "10-year plan to increase business investment and grow the industries of the future in the UK." This strategy was made up of sector plans for key industries. But there was no sector plan for housing.

Yet having sufficient, secure, genuinely affordable housing for all is a key social need. More than that it would help tackle many other problems. For example, councils are spending huge sums on temporary accommodation and topping up housing benefit so that people can stay in private rented accommodation. These costs are pushing many councils close to bankruptcy.

Now Labour might argue that a sector plan is unnecessary

because they have pledged to deliver 1.5 million homes during this parliament. But Labour will not build these homes themselves. Instead, they hope private developers will respond to incentives. Hope, however, is not a plan. What we need is a clear, actionable strategy.

The UK housing market is dominated by the top ten firms, which produce up to 50% of all new homes. This concentration gives them structural power to influence policy and resist reforms that would increase affordable housing obligations. These firms prioritise profit margins over housing volume. Despite rising profits, they have not significantly boosted output because they control large amounts of development land and slow-build to keep prices high.

This objection is always trotted out when demands are made to build council homes en masse. Our fiscal rules won't allow it, we can't incur more debt etc.

It's a cliché but true that governments can always find

money when they want to do something.

For example, Labour has agreed to provide a loan of up to £36.6 billion to finance the construction of the Sizewell C nuclear power station.

For that same amount you could build in the region of 200,000 flats.

You can of course levy a tax to fund council building or stop the Treasury paying tens of billions per year to the Bank of England in interest payments. So the money is there.

Build

Of course if you build a council house you get an income in return. Say you build a house for £300,000 and it is built to last at least 30 years. If rent pays back that cost over the 30 years then building is self-financing — provided you take the long view.

So social bonds could be issued by, say the Bank of England to finance large scale building programmes, with debt service being covered by net rental income.

A real plan would involve the

state taking responsibility for removing bottlenecks in the supply chain, scrapping Right to Buy, ensuring enough trained workers, and guaranteeing fair conditions for those workers under a national union agreement, with councils and regional authorities being funded and tasked with building homes directly.

Currently, UK house building faces severe supply-side pressures. There is a shortfall of up to 500,000 construction workers, and prices for key materials like bricks and cement have risen by more than 37% since 2020. Without intervention, these shortages will keep driving up costs and slowing delivery. Only the government can address these problems by investing in construction skills and stabilising supply chains.

Of course we don't have to build all homes by traditional methods. We could look to Modern Methods of Construction (MMC), such as modular and prefabricated homes.

History shows what works. In 1944, the Emergency Factory

Made Housing Programme used centralised planning, standardisation, and industrial capacity to meet urgent housing needs. We need something similar today. Labour should lead by building homes, not just hoping others will.

For decades, government policy has focused on making house building more profitable, hoping this would lead to more homes. It hasn't worked. The private sector will not build at the scale required unless profits are guaranteed. Councils and regional authorities have the motivation to meet social needs, but not the money. The solution is simple: give them the funds and the mandate to build.

Labour's industrial strategy talks about growing future industries. But housing is not just an industry. It is a basic human need. Without a sector plan for housing, Labour's strategy will fail to address one of the most pressing crises in Britain today. We need bold action, not wishful thinking. □

Swap accusations? Or clean up yourself?

By Ruth Cashman

Senior leaders at the TSSA transport union have been accused by another union, GMB, of presiding over a culture of bullying, harassment, and trade union victimisation, including the recent suspension of a TSSA employee who is a GMB union representative. GMB alleges an attempt to smear and silence their representative.

TSSA has faced ongoing scrutiny over its internal culture, culminating in the Kennedy Report, which found women working at the TSSA had been subjected to sexual assaults, inappropriate and

sexual touching, and coercive and manipulative behaviour. GMB is currently in dispute with TSSA over its failure to implement the report's recommendations, as well as "its failure to treat staff fairly, with dignity and respect".

Stress

TSSA General Secretary Maryam Es-lamdoust has hit back. She has accused GMB officials of bullying her and other TSSA staff in campaign to force a merger of the two unions. She says the actions of GMB officials caused her significant stress, and suggests that a male leader would not have been treated in

the same way. The Monaghan report in 2020 found the GMB was "institutionally sexist" with remarkably similar internal culture to that described in the TSSA's Kenndey report.

A independent inquiry by Bruce Carr KC into the Royal College of Nursing, which reported in 2023 revealed similar trends. Carr found evidence of bullying, misogyny and sexism and a leadership team "riddled with division, dysfunction and distrust".

The GMB is currently facing Employment Tribunal cases by former senior staff, including accusations of sexism and bullying.

The business of different unions accusing each other of sexism and bullying does not stop there.

Bullying

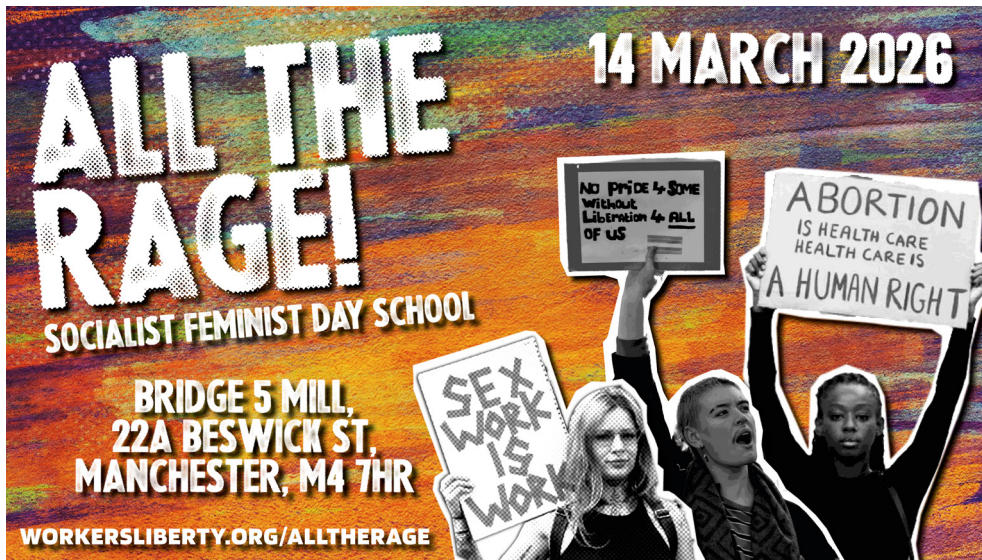
In 2024 GMB members employed by Unite held a four-day strike alleging bullying and a toxic workplace culture at the trade union's National Bargaining and Disputes Support Unit. The pickets were met by a banner which accused GMB of sexism and defending the harassment of women staff.

#MeTU, a network of women and non binary union staffers fighting sexism and harassment, has called on the TUC and all unions to conduct independent and transparent inquiries into structural

sexism, harassment and bullying. The Fire Brigades Union has commissioned and published a report into sexual harassment within the union, but such action has been rare.

#MeTU accuses unions of focussing on training courses rather than supporting victims or rooting out harassment. There is no evidence that such training courses reduce rate of harassment. This "symbolic compliance", is primarily focused on legal and public-relations box-ticking rather than actually reducing harm or poor conduct.

Harder recommendations such as democratic oversight and transparency have been largely ignored by union leaders. □



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Palestinians in Israel fight back

By Ira Berkovic

From 10 January, a school strike took place in East Jerusalem, as students and teachers protested new rules imposing tighter travel restrictions on Palestinian teachers travelling from the West Bank.

The strike, which involved Christian schools, saw the participation of up to 25,000 people, according to Palestinian

politician Mustafa Barghouti.

The left-wing binational (Palestinian-Jewish) social movement Standing Together wrote: "While Netanyahu claims that Israel is 'the best place for Christians in the Middle East' — dozens of Christian schools in Jerusalem are striking because his government is restricting work permits for Palestinian teachers coming from the occupied West Bank.

"Christian Palestinian schools in Jerusalem are among the oldest and most prominent educational institutions in the city. Yet more than half of the roughly 300 teachers employed in private schools are affected by the permit restrictions. More private schools are now joining the strike, which is now in its fifth day, and has already disrupted education for around 20,000 Palestinian students, in-

cluding 8,500 pupils in 15 Christian schools.

"This is not an administrative issue. It's part of Israel's long-standing effort to sever Jerusalem from the rest of the occupied West Bank — through land grabs, settlement expansion, and movement restrictions. Education is simply another front.

"By disrupting who can teach, what can be taught, and whether schools can function at all, the Israeli government can reshape the educational experience of Palestinian children in Jerusalem and weaken their social, cultural, and national ties beyond the city."

Marginalisation

Standing Together's recent activity has also focused on supporting Palestinian communities in Israel facing a wave of violent crime. The marginalisation and lack of social provision suffered by Palestinian communities in Israel has proved

a fertile breeding ground for criminal gangs. 17 people have been killed already in 2026.

Ghadir Hani, a Palestinian leader of Standing Together, said: "We've been building community resistance to the crime epidemic through our 'resilience campaign' for months, and over the past few weeks, we've taken the fight to the streets in a massive show of force. We organised protests and mobilised thousands of Palestinians and Jews in a cry for government action to stop the rise in homicides. Our campaign is a national one, and it's happening everywhere — from Tur'an and Shfaram in northern Israel to Tirabin al-Sana in the Negev/Naqab and even in front of Israel's parliament in Jerusalem, where I stood alongside the mother of Firas Abu Faneh, a Palestinian citizen who was murdered at his workplace two months ago, simply because he was in the wrong place at the wrong time." □

Impasse in Gaza

By Ira Berkovic

In Gaza, US president Donald Trump has announced the commencement of "Phase Two" of the so-called peace plan, with various boards and committees charged with Gaza's governance having now been appointed. These include a committee of Palestinian technocrats, overseen by two further boards made up of international diplomats, politicians, and business leaders, including former UK prime minister Tony Blair.

It remains unclear, however, how these bodies will actually function, and whether they will be able to "govern" in any meaningful sense. Both Hamas and rival armed factions continue to operate in Gaza, with no sign from Hamas that it plans to disarm, as nominally required by the current stage of the ceasefire. Meanwhile, a BBC report has shown that Israel has moved the "Yellow Line", which demarcates the extent of its military position, deeper into Gaza. □



Use these briefings in your union

By Stuart Jordan

On 27 November, over 1,200 politicians and other representatives of bourgeois society gathered in Central Methodist Hall in Westminster to hear a series of 10-15 minute talks from the UK's experts on the "climate and nature emergency". The talks, now available as [online videos](#), are alarming.

Professor Kevin Anderson explained that there was a very real risk of 2°C warming by 2050 and 3 to 4°C warming by the end of the century at which point, "we would face the widespread breakdown of society, geopolitical instability, and the loss of any meaningful global economy." Anderson blew apart the myth that the UK (or any other country) was a "climate leader". When emissions from shipping, aviation and offshored manufacturing were taken into account, the UK's emissions reductions are very modest and far short of what is necessary. At current rates of fossil fuel combustion, the carbon budget to remain under 2°C will disappear within 13 years and warming will only accelerate until we stop using fossil fuels.

Professor Timothy Lenton spoke about climate tipping points beyond which change becomes unstoppable and extremely difficult to reverse. There are many tipping points but Lenton focussed on the collapse of the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation which would make the UK unrecognisable. The AMOC is already slowing and could well collapse at around 2°C to 3°C warming. This would bring winters of -20°C in Lon-

don and below freezing for three months of the year and -30°C in Edinburgh for five and a half months of the year, with Arctic sea ice likely to reach down as far as East Anglia. But this is also a 2°C hotter world, and summers would be hotter than they are today. Lenton says such extreme seasonality would "end large-scale agriculture in the UK".

Professor Paul Behrens explained that the climate that gave us reliable harvests is now at an end. Three of the five worst cereal harvests have occurred this decade and 80% of farmers say their livelihood is threatened by climate change. The UK imports about 40-50% of its food and mostly from areas that are experiencing even more extreme climate impacts. Behrens also explained that current agricultural practices are a major driver of the crisis and a switch to a plant-rich diet will either be planned or forced upon us.

Security

Lt General Richard Nugee argued that climate change is now a core national security risk and that food price shocks and other impacts means we now face the prospect of an "ungovernable state". Nugee explained how climate impacts in arid regions of the world had been a factor in driving recruitment of Daesh and similar non-state armed militias and will create further global instability and conflict.

Professor Hayley Fowler discussed how we were already experiencing extreme weather now and could expect much more flooding and extreme heat to

come. Our infrastructure was built for a climate that already no longer exists and yet this year will be the coolest climate we will know if our lifetime. Plans for adaptation are completely inadequate.

By 2050, one in four homes will be at risk of flooding and the extra rainfall could lead to dam overtopping of the UK's 2000 raised reservoirs. An event like Storm Boris that hit central Europe in 2024 would take not weeks, but years to recover from. Such extreme weather could result in cascades of failures involving utilities and energy infrastructure, transport networks and basic services we rely on with attempts to rebuild and recover interrupted by further, escalating extreme climate impacts.

One implication of this was explained by ICU doctor Professor Hugh Montgomery. Climate change and associated problems like increased prevalence of communicable diseases and air pollution will increase risk to health and lead to higher mortality rates. This will happen when climate impacts disrupt the smooth functioning of the health service. It is well established that it is the social determinants of health that are the main driver of disease, suffering and death: "without a functioning economy, without a food supply available to us, we cannot run a health service."

Other talks focussed on the Economy, the Energy Transition and "Nature" with similar warnings of the need for "transformational change" or "social tipping points." The main demand from the event is that a similar set of talks should form a National Emergency Briefing

broadcast on all major television channels. The organisers hope that cutting through the disinformation could create an amorphous social force that can drive change and force government to act with the same decisiveness as shown "in WW2 or during the 2007-9 financial crisis".

Mode

However, the experts fail to identify the capitalist mode of production as the driver of the emergency and appear to be unable to imagine that the united working-class is the social force that can chart a route out of the emergency. They fail to explain that capitalism will add artificial, socially-constructed scarcity onto the real scarcity that climate change and the other impacts of the Anthropocene will bring. There is some handwringing about inequality, but they fail to argue that the necessary "social transformation" requires social ownership and control of our productive forces.

These limitations should not dissuade working-class militants from engaging with the content and supporting the key idea of emergency briefings and emergency governmental action. The talks are an accessible way to understand the scale of challenge that we face and the trajectory we are on. Socialists should use these briefings to convince our fellow workers that the need to organise for social control of the means of production is now a battle for survival. □

• See the talks at nebriefing.org

Rail plan leaves issues unanswered

By Simon Nelson

The proposed extension of Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR) may now actually go ahead. It is billed as the most significant rail upgrade in northern England for a generation, with a £45bn funding cap and a phased plan to connect the major city regions more quickly and reliably.

But we have been here before. Until "spades are in the ground", there is little ground for optimism that this will happen as announced. Or that it will fulfil its planned scope, come in on time, or buck the trend of HS2, which is now one of the most expensive rail infrastructure projects ever started.

The government have said NPR will be a three-phase programme that both upgrades existing lines and constructs

new ones across the north of England. It would help link Liverpool, Manchester, Warrington, Leeds, Bradford, Sheffield and York, with through services to Newcastle via Darlington and Durham, to Hull, and to Chester to support North Wales connections.

Phase one: electrification and capacity improvements between Sheffield and Leeds, Leeds and York, and Leeds and Bradford, alongside development work on reopening the Leamside Line in the North East. Phase two would deliver a new route between Liverpool and Manchester via Warrington Bank Quay and Manchester Airport, including major new stations at Manchester Piccadilly and the airport. Phase three: trans-Pennine links between Manchester, Leeds, Bradford, Sheffield and York.

An initial £1.1bn has been released to fund the development, with main construction expected to begin in the early 2030s. That this will not be high-speed rail and that there is a sequence to the upgrades means the government can argue it is much more likely to fall within the £45bn they have earmarked for it.

The proposed new Birmingham-Manchester line is explicitly framed as a separate project from the cancelled HS2 Phase 2b, longer-term, and planned to follow NPR rather than revive the earlier scheme. What that really means remains to be seen.

The Labour mayors Steve Rotherham, Andy Burnham and Tracy Brabin have framed NPR as the backbone of a "Northern Growth Corridor", enabling housing development, inward

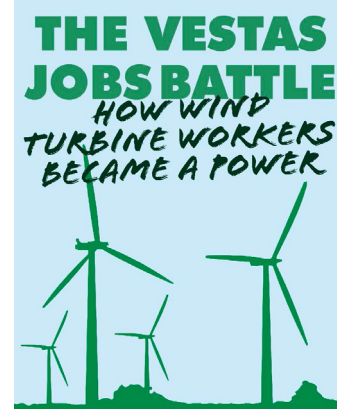
investment and shorter, more reliable commutes for millions of people across the region.

The electrification of the railway across the whole country is badly needed, both for efficiency and for ecological reasons. Expanded public transport, free at the point of use for shorter trips, would be a major part of a just transition to anything close to net-zero. That the expansion should be happening under the Great British Railways semi-nationalisation of the rail industry should, in theory, allow for better integration with the existing network.

But the piecemeal nationalisation of just the passenger services still leaves the rolling stock leasing companies and thousands of outsourced contractors in private hands.

The rail and construction unions should start the fight now

to secure recognition on these projects and push for an end to outsourcing and false self-employment across the industry. □



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WORKERS' LIBERTY



LATIN AMERICA, OIL OWNERSHIP, AND US IMPERIALISM

We carry two texts by Trotsky from 1938 on confrontations between Latin American countries and US and UK imperialism, and an article by us from 1982 about why their conclusions could not be simply copy-pasted onto the British-Argentine war of that year over the Falklands-Malvinas, in which we opposed both sides.

The current US-Venezuela conflict has more in common with 1938 than with 1982.

It's not exactly 1938, either. Venezuela has long been a much more developed capitalist country than Brazil or Mexico were in 1938. By the late 1990s Venezuela's GDP per capita (a poor indicator of welfare, but a passable one of capitalist development) was higher than the

UK's in 1938. The current US policy in Venezuela is not to overthrow the Madurista regime, but to decapitate it and force the rump Maduristas into having the US "run policy" for them and control the sale of Venezuelan oil.

Whether that will "work" for Trump we do not know. There must be a good chance that it will break down under internal opposition in the USA and/or the rump Maduristas refusing to cooperate sufficiently. We hope so: a fiasco for Trump will allow workers and democrats all over the world to breathe a little easier.

Sense

On the other hand, "oppose both sides" makes little sense here, because the

"two sides", the Maduristas and Trump, are for now anyway "one side", in collaboration. We support the workers of Venezuela against Trump, against the Maduristas, and against the Trump-Madurista collaboration.

Restricted

And Trotsky as it turned out, was wrong in some aspects about World War Two. The USA and the UK restricted, but did not eliminate, bourgeois democracy in their countries during the war. After victory, the USA reckoned that old-style colonial empire was too costly and unviable. Although it had armies occupying Germany and Japan, it soon allowed them self-rule, and it aided the restoration of bourgeois democracy elsewhere

in Western Europe (even if it long continued to ally with Franco in Spain).

It does not, of course, follow that Marxists should have been neutral between Mexico and the USA in 1938, comforting themselves with the thought that maybe in a few decades' time the US would, at least for a while, consider it more sensible to accommodate Mexican ownership of oil.

As it turned out, after 1945 the USA gradually it pushed for an "imperialism of free trade", securing economic advantage mostly through market and financial pressures, rather than by direct political domination. That world regime reached its peak in 1990-2008, and is breaking down now into a world of overlapping ad hoc trade deals. □

National liberation cannot be annulled by "anti-fascism"

By Leon Trotsky

Mateo Fossa, an Argentine trade-unionist and Trotskyist, interviewed Trotsky on the eve of World War Two. The Stalinists in Latin America had a policy of backing the then-bourgeois-democratic powers, the USA, Britain, and France, for the sake of opposition to fascist Germany. They dropped agitation for the independence of the colonies of those powers.

Trotsky: In order to understand correctly the nature of the coming events we must first of all reject the false and thoroughly erroneous theory that the coming war will be a war between fascism and "democracy." Nothing is more false and foolish than this idea. Imperialist "democracies" are divided by the contradictions of their interests in all parts of the world. Fascist Italy can easily find herself in one camp with Great

Britain and France if she should lose faith in the victory of Hitler. Semifascist Poland may join one or the other of the camps depending upon the advantages offered. In the course of war the French bourgeoisie may substitute fascism for its "democracy" in order to keep its workers in submission and force them to fight "to the end." Fascist France, like "democratic" France would equally defend its colonies with weapons in hand. The new war will have a much more openly rapacious imperialist character than the war of 1914-18. Imperialists do not fight for political principles but for markets, colonies, raw materials, for hegemony over the world and its wealth.

The victory of any one of the imperialist camps would mean the definite enslavement of all humanity, the clamping of double chains on present-day colonies, and all weak and backward peoples, among them the peoples of

Latin America. The victory of any one of the imperialist camps would spell slavery, wretchedness, misery, the decline of human culture.

What is the way out, you ask? Personally, I do not doubt for a moment that a new war will provoke an international revolution against the rule of the rapacious capitalist cliques over humanity. In wartime all differences between imperialist "democracy" and fascism will disappear. In all countries a merciless military dictatorship will reign. The German workers and peasants will perish just like the French and English. The modern means of destruction are so monstrous that humanity will probably not be able to endure war even a few months. Despair, indignation, hatred will push the masses of all warring countries into an uprising with weapons in hand. Victory of the world proletariat will put an end to war and will also solve the

Spanish problem as well as all the current problems of Europe and other parts of the world.

Those working class "leaders" who want to chain the proletariat to the war chariot of imperialism, covered by the mask of "democracy," are now the worst enemies and the direct traitors of the toilers. We must teach the workers to hate and despise the agents of imperialism, since they poison the consciousness of the toilers; we must explain to the workers that fascism is only one of the forms of imperialism, that we must fight not against the external symptoms of the disease but against its organic causes, that is, against capitalism.

Fossa: What is the perspective for the Mexican revolution? How do you view the devaluation of money in connection with the expropriation of wealth in land and oil?

Trotsky: I cannot dwell on these ques-

tions in sufficient detail. The expropriation of land and of the natural wealth are for Mexico an absolutely indispensable measure of national self-defense. Without satisfying the daily needs of the peasantry none of the Latin American countries will retain their independence. The lowering of the purchasing power of money is only one of the results of the imperialist blockade against Mexico which has begun. Material privation is inevitable in struggle. Salvation is impossible without sacrifices. To capitulate before the imperialists would mean to deliver up the natural wealth of the country to despoliation, and the people—to decline and extinction. Of course, the working class organizations must see to it that the rise in the cost of living should not fall with its main weight upon the toilers.

Fossa: What can you say on the liberating struggle of the peoples of Latin America and of the problems of the future? What is your opinion of Aprismo?

Trotsky: I am not sufficiently acquainted with the life of the individual Latin American countries to permit myself a concrete answer on the questions you pose. It is clear to me at any rate that the internal tasks of these countries cannot be solved without a simultaneous revolutionary struggle against imperialism. The agents of the United States, England, France (Lewis, Jouhaux, Toledano, the Stalinists) try to substitute the struggle against fascism for the struggle against imperialism. We have observed their criminal efforts at the recent congress against war and fascism. In the countries of Latin America the agents of “democratic” imperialism are especially dangerous, since they are more capable of fooling the masses than the open agents of fascist bandits.

I will take the most simple and obvious example. In Brazil there now reigns a semifascist regime that every revolutionary can only view with hatred. Let us assume, however, that on the morrow England enters into a military conflict with Brazil. I ask you on whose side of the conflict will the working class be? I will answer for myself personally — in this case I will be on the side of “fascist” Brazil against “democratic” Great Britain. Why? Because in the conflict between them it will not be a question of democracy or fascism. If England should be victorious, she will put another fascist in Rio de Janeiro and will place double chains on Brazil. If Brazil on the contrary should be victorious, it will give a mighty impulse to national and democratic consciousness of the country and will lead to the overthrow of the Vargas dictatorship. The defeat of England will at the same time deliver a blow to Brit-

ish imperialism and will give an impulse to the revolutionary movement of the British proletariat. Truly, one must have an empty head to reduce world antagonisms and military conflicts to the struggle between fascism and democracy. Under all masks one must know how to distinguish exploiters, slave-owners, and robbers!

In all the Latin American countries the problems of the agrarian revolution are indissolubly connected with anti-imperialist struggle. The Stalinists are now treacherously paralyzing both one and the other. To the Kremlin the Latin American countries are just small change in its dealings with the imperialists. Stalin says to Washington, London, and Paris, “Recognize me as an equal partner and I will help you put down the revolutionary movement in the colonies and semicolonies; for this I have in my service hundreds of agents like Lombardo To-

ledano.” Stalinism has become the leprosy of the liberating movement.

Worthy

I do not know Aprismo sufficiently to give a definite judgment. In Peru the activity of this party has an illegal character and is therefore hard to observe. The representatives of APRA at the September congress against war and fascism in Mexico have taken, so far as I can judge, a worthy and correct position together with the delegates from Puerto Rico. It remains only to hope that APRA does not fall prey to the Stalinists as this would paralyze the liberating struggle in Peru. I think that agreements with the Apristas for definite practical tasks are possible and desirable under the condition of full organizational independence.

Fossa: What consequences will the war have for the Latin American countries?

Trotsky: Doubtless both imperialist camps will strive to drag the Latin American countries into the whirlpool of war in order to enslave them completely afterwards. Empty “antifascist” noise only prepares the soil for agents of one of the imperialist camps. To meet the world war prepared, the revolutionary parties of Latin America must right now take an irreconcilable attitude toward all imperialist groupings. On the basis of the struggle for self-preservation the peoples of Latin America should rally closer to each other.

In the first period of war the position of the weak countries can prove very difficult. But the imperialist camps will become weaker and weaker with each passing month. Their mortal struggle with each other will permit the colonial and semicolonial countries to raise their heads. This refers, of course, also to the Latin American countries; they will be able to achieve their full liberation, if at the head of the masses stand truly revolutionary, anti-imperialist parties and trade unions. From tragic historic circumstances one cannot escape by trickery, hollow phrases, and petty lies. We must tell the masses the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

Fossa: What in your opinion are the tasks and the methods facing the trade unions?

Trotsky: In order that the trade unions should be able to rally, educate, mobilize the proletariat for a liberating struggle they must be cleansed of the totalitarian methods of Stalinism. The trade unions should be open to workers of all political tendencies under the conditions of discipline in action. Whoever turns the trade unions into a weapon for outside aims (especially into a weapon of the Stalinist bureaucracy and “democratic” imperialism) inevitably splits the working class, weakens it, and opens the door to reaction. A full and honest democracy within the unions is the most important condition of democracy in the country.

In conclusion I ask you to transmit my fraternal greetings to the workers of Argentina. I don’t doubt that they do not believe for a moment those disgusting slanders that the Stalinist agencies have spread in the entire world against me and my friends. The struggle that the Fourth International carries on against the Stalinist bureaucracy is a continuation of the great historic struggle of the oppressed against the oppressors, of the exploited against the exploiters. The international revolution will free all the oppressed, including the workers of the USSR. □



The Mexican oil expropriations of 1938

In the vocabulary of all civilized nations there exists the word “cynicism.” As a classic example of brazen cynicism, the British government’s defense of the interests of a clique of capitalist exploiters should be introduced into all encyclopedias. I am therefore not mistaken if I say that world public opinion awaits the voice of the British Labour Party regarding the scandalous role of British diplomacy in the question of the expropriation of the Eagle joint-stock oil company by the Mexican government.

The juridical side of the question is clear to a child. With the aim of exploiting the natural wealth of Mexico, the British capitalists placed themselves under the protection and at the same time under the control of Mexican laws and the Mexican authorities. No one compelled Messrs. Capitalists to do this, either by military force or through diplomatic notes. They acted entirely voluntarily and consciously. Now Mr. Chamberlain and Lord Halifax wish to force mankind into believing that the British capitalists have pledged themselves to recognize Mexican laws only within those limits where they find it necessary. Moreover, it accidentally occurs that the completely “impartial” interpretation of the Mexican laws by Chamberlain-Halifax coincides exactly with the interpretation of the interested capitalists.

The British government cannot, however, deny that only the Mexican government and the Supreme Court of the country are competent to interpret the laws of Mexico. To Lord Halifax, who nourishes warm sympathies for the laws and courts of Hitler, the Mexican laws and courts may seem unjust. But who gave the British government the right to control the inner politics and legal procedure of an independent state? This question already contains part of the answer: the British government, accustomed to command hundreds of millions of colonial slaves and semislaves, is trying to fit those same methods also to Mexico. Having encountered courageous resistance, it instructs its lawyers hurriedly to invent arguments in which juridical logic is replaced by imperialist cynicism.

The economic and social side of the problem is as clear as its juridical side. The executive committee of your party would, in my opinion, act correctly if it created a special commission for studying what British, and in general foreign, capital has contributed to Mexico and what it has extracted. Such a commission could within a short period present to the British public the stunning balance sheet of imperialist exploitation!

A small clique of foreign magnates, in the full sense of the word, pumps out the living sap of Mexico as well as of a series of other backward or weak countries. The solemn speeches about foreign capital contributing “civilization,” about its assisting in the development



President of Mexico, Lázaro Cárdenas reading the proclamation on Oil Expropriation day 1938

of national economy, and so forth, are the sheerest Pharisaism. The question, in actuality, concerns plundering the natural wealth of the country. Nature required many millions of years in order to deposit gold, silver, and oil in the subsoil of Mexico. The foreign imperialists wish to plunder these riches in the shortest possible time, making use of cheap labour power and the protection of their diplomacy and their fleet.

Development

Visit any centre of the mining industry: hundreds of millions of dollars, extracted by foreign capital from the earth, have given nothing, nothing whatever, to the culture of the country; neither highways nor buildings nor good development of the cities. Even the premises of the companies themselves often resemble barracks. Why, indeed, should one spend Mexican oil, Mexican gold, Mexican silver on the needs of faraway and alien Mexico, when with the profits obtained it is possible to build palaces, museums, theatres in London or in Monaco? Such are the civilizers! In the place of historical riches they leave shafts in the Mexican soil and ill health among the Mexican workers.

The notes of the British government refer to “international law.” Even irony powerlessly drops its hands in the face of this argument. About what kind of international law are we talking? Evidently about the law which triumphed in Ethiopia and to which the British government is now preparing to give its sanction. Evidently about that same law which the airplanes and tanks of Mussolini and Hitler are already announcing in Spain for the second year with the British government’s invariable support.

The latter held endless conversations about the evacuation of foreign “volunteers” from Spain. Naive public opinion long thought this meant the halting of intervention by the foreign fascist bandits. Actually the British government demanded of Mussolini only one thing: that he remove his armies from Spain only after he guaranteed the victory of Franco. In this case, as in all others, the problem consisted not in defending “international law” or “democracy” but in safeguarding the interests of British capitalists in the Spanish mining industry from possible attempts on the part of Italy.

Paralyse

In Mexico, the British government carries on basically the same politics as in Spain — passively in relation to Spain, actively in Mexico. We are now witnessing the first steps of this activity. What will be its further development? No one can yet foretell. Chamberlain himself does not yet know. One thing we can affirm with assurance: the further development of the attempts of British imperialism against the independence

of Mexico will to a great degree depend upon the conduct of the British working class. Here it is impossible to evade the issue by resort to indefinite formulas. Firm resoluteness is necessary to paralyse the criminal hand of imperialist violence. I therefore finish as I began: world public opinion awaits the firm voice of the British Labour Party!

Postscript

P.S. — Several imperialist newspapers have attempted to represent me ... as the initiator of the expropriation. Such nonsense does not even deserve refutation. I, a private person, enjoying the hospitality of this country, have learned only from the papers all the stages of the struggle of the foreign capitalists against the Mexican laws. But this was completely sufficient to form an opinion. To state this opinion aloud is the elementary duty of every participant in the liberating struggle of the proletariat. □

• Letter written to the *Daily Herald*, published not there but in *Forward*, 7 April 1938



Leon Trotsky's house outside Mexico City, where he lived from 1937 to 1940



1938 and 1982: the texts and the method

By Sean Matgamna

Time and again the same quotations from Trotsky have been used to justify a pro-Argentine stance in the Falklands/Malvinas war. But the main thing the quotations prove is the pro-Argentine comrades' [those in our organisation advocating positive support for Argentina then] lack of grip on the points in dispute.

Everyone in the majority [those for opposing both British and Argentina governments] would agree that if the comparison with China and the other colonies and semi-colonies of the 1930s referred to by Trotsky is legitimate, then we would not invoke the character of the Argentine regime as a reason for not siding with Argentina.

We could immediately arrive at agreement if the pro-Argentine comrades would — or could — tell us how, in what way, for what real national-liberation goals, or in what social/economic/political sense Argentina is fighting imperialism in the Falklands. But they can't.

Pro-Argentine comrades quote Trotsky (*Writings 1938-9*, p.34) saying that he would side with "semi-fascist" Brazil against "democratic" Britain in a hypothetical war because: "If England should be victorious, she will put another fascist in Rio de Janeiro [i.e. will control Brazil] and will place double chains on Brazil [i.e., conquer it, or force territorial concessions from it, or unequal treaties, or impose political conditions which tie it economically to Britain's empire]".

Trotsky was quite right, in our view. If a similar situation arises today, what he wrote will be a blueprint for our attitudes.

They quote Trotsky in 1937 rejecting defeatism for China which was, under Chiang Kai-shek, beginning to organise a national war of liberation to drive out the Japanese armies that had been on Chinese territory since 1931 and against which the Trotskyists had consistently called for a national war of liberation.

We believe Trotsky was 100% right about China. His comments as quoted would serve perfectly to guide us for any more or less comparable situation today.

But what Trotsky wrote about China naturally cannot serve as a concrete analysis of any situation today! That we must make for ourselves. And only on the basis of that analysis can we decide how much of Trotsky's blueprint is relevant to the given situation.

The comrades quote Trotsky advocating world working class support for Mexico (*Writings 1938-9*, p.64), whose radical, perhaps quasi-revolutionary, bourgeois government had nationalised British oilfields.

Yes indeed. Trotsky was a good communist! But he was also a good Marxist.

They quote him pledging support for even the "barbarian" Bey of Tunis to drive

out France! (*Writings 1938-9*, p.66). Yes! Trotsky had attended the Second Congress of the Communist International. He even wrote its manifesto, which said this:

"The Socialist who aids directly or indirectly in perpetuating the privileged position of one nation at the expense of another, who accommodates himself to colonial slavery, who draws a line of distinction between races and colours in the matter of human rights, who helps the bourgeoisie of the metropolis to maintain its rule over the colonies instead of aiding the armed uprising of the colonies; the British Socialist who fails to support by all possible means the uprisings in Ireland, Egypt and India against London plutocracy — such a socialist deserves to be branded with infamy, if not with a bullet, but in no case merits either a mandate or the confidence of the proletariat".

Wretched

He had supported the wretched Negus, Haile Selassie, against the Italian invasion. He even wrote this, which is a tremendous statement of the principles that must animate us on the national question:

"What characterises Bolshevism on the national question is that in its attitude toward oppressed nations, even the most backward, it considers them not only the object but also the subject of politics. Bolshevism does not confine itself to recognising their 'right' to self-determination and to Parliamentary protests against the trampling upon of this right. Bolshevism penetrates into the midst of the oppressed nations, it raises them up against their oppressors: it ties up their struggle with the struggle of the proletariat in capitalist countries, it instructs the oppressed Chinese, Hindus or Arabs in the art of insurrection and it assumes full responsibility for this work in the face of civilised executioners. Here only does Bolshevism begin, that is, revolutionary Marxism in action. Everything that does not step over this boundary remains centrism" (*What Next?*).

But these quotations merely beg the question — are they relevant to the Argentine situation? Was the Falklands war remotely, or at all, comparable to what Trotsky is talking about? Essentially, no.

Even in the shortest quote, the concrete issues involved — struggle for liberation against colonial armies, defence of the right of a backward state to expropriate foreign capital, etc. — is spelled out or referred to. Imperialism still operated through colonial empires, and the struggle for such empires and for their redivision was the substance of World War Two.

But Argentina was not threatened with double chains. The Argentine regime is a protector of foreign capital. They didn't

even expropriate British capital as a gambit in the war.

Any comparison of Argentina with Tunisia, Mexico, or China of the 1930s is preposterous. In terms of its level of development, role in its region, and place in the economic network of imperialism, it might be better compared with Italy or Japan of the 1930s — except that it is more developed than Japan was, and has a more or less fully-developed bourgeois social structure, which Japan and even Italy did not have.

Repugnant

The pro-Argentine comrades' way with quotations seems to me to be repugnant to the spirit of Marxism and the opposite of the practice of Marxist analysis. It rules out specific analysis, substituting instead dogmatic recipes and formulas. They mechanically apply texts derived from past use of the Marxist method in concrete circumstances of the past. Those circumstances are not with us any more. They have evolved and developed and permuted to the present situation which is different — more or less radically different, but certainly different.

Even where changes are not very profound or major, we cannot just assume that the Marxist text dealing with some apparently similar situation is a sufficiently detailed and concrete depiction. That is to operate blindly dogmatically.

It is possible to "get by" when the changes are not all that great, and the chosen texts not too markedly ill-matched to the concrete situation (but that means that whoever matches them has done at least some work on the concrete situation). On the basic ideas worked out by the geniuses of our movement, it is possible to "get by" for a very long time indeed.

Even the most miserable of "Trotskyist" sects works from a stock that retains a tremendous potency and relevance. But to adopt the method of dogmatic text-worship is to cut the roots of Marxism and to make renewal and living development difficult and ultimately impossible.

Sooner or later it is no longer possible to "get by". The texts become dogmas preventing us from relating to reality, acting like distorting spectacles.

The notion that what Trotsky wrote in a very different world (dominated by colonial imperialism, for example) about countries like China can provide us directly with answers to the Argentine war is ridiculous. The principles, methods and ways of looking at the world remain what they were when Trotsky wrote, but to conclude that the texts embodying their results when applied to working through a concrete problem can directly offer us guidelines now, the comrades would have to establish that similar or roughly similar conditions exist — that Argentina was faced with colonial invasion or something similar.

Since many comrades in fact admit that there was no real issue of Argentine national liberation served by the seizure of the Falklands, it is a culpable departure from the Marxist method to pretend to call Trotsky's voice from the grave to tell us what he thinks we should do over the Falklands war, and to cite what he said about China's resistance to the Japanese invaders as his answer.

It is sleight of hand, sand in the eyes, asking the relics to speak — but not Marxism.

Marxists should use — or try to use — the classic texts of our movement in a different way: as models of analysis, and as guides and checks in the practice of living Marxist analysis.

If you compare any of Lenin's serious work with the texts of Stalinism, from the 1920s to the 1960s, you cannot fail to see the difference between Marxism and pseudo-Marxist scholasticism. The Stalinists quote the classics (as it suits them, of course) as themselves proof, themselves giving answers. Thus, for example, the theory of "socialism in one country" was "proved" true and Marxist by a few lines from an article by Lenin written in 1915.

Lenin's writings are studded with quotations from Marx and Engels. He cites them to establish Marx's and Engels' views on a relevant issue at a given time. He then asks if the concrete reality has changed and evolved, and if so in what way, and how does it relate to other connected issues. He asks what modifications, additions or deletions to the views of Marx and Engels must be made in accordance with their method, criteria, principles, in the light of developments.

He thinks, works it through, reworks it, concretises the answers for his own time and conditions, on the basis of scientific analysis. (See *State and Revolution* for example).

He frequently insisted against all dogmatists and quotation-mongers that "the truth is concrete". Political development in a revolutionary Marxist spirit is possible only by an unrelenting struggle for concreteness, for science.

The classic texts here are our starting point, our models, our historic "memory", our theoretical and political arsenal. We ourselves, however, must work out the political responses to our own problems and our own concrete reality. The books cannot think for us.

Quotation-mongering and "proof from texts" was, and in some cases still is, the method of our anti-Marxist opponents. It is the measure of the state of the Trotskyist movement that the same quotations on China, Brazil and so on have been almost universally cited as if they could tell us anything directly about Argentina.

It is worth following through in detail a key text of Trotsky's — his letter to Diego Rivera, a profound and brief text which



In April 1982 the Argentine military dictatorship, in power since 1976 but now fading, invaded the Falkland (Malvinas) islands in an effort to regain prestige. The islands, 400 miles off the coast of Argentina, had been British-populated since the early 19th century, and largely unpopulated before then. The dictatorship reckoned the chances of Britain retaliating scarcely higher than those of Denmark defeating a US military seizure of Greenland. However, the British Thatcher government sent ships and won a two-month war. The war boosted the Thatcher government, previously very unpopular, and enabled it to win the 1983 general election. Argentina's defeat quickly led to the fall of military rule and the restoration of parliamentary democracy. Socialist Organiser, forerunner of Workers' Liberty, opposed the war on both sides, though with a big minority going along with most of the "broad left" and positively supporting Argentina. The SWP, believe it or not, also opposed the war on both sides. More: bit.ly/f1982 □

applies the principles we all share to China in 1937.

What is the issue? "China is a semi-colonial country which Japan is transforming, under our very eyes, into a colonial country. Japan's struggle is imperialist and reactionary. China's struggle is emancipatory and progressive." "Semi-colonial" meant that until the 1930s China suffered imperialist interventions, it ceded territory to the big powers, it ceded ports, it gave them special privileges — and then in 1931 Japan invaded Manchuria, in 1937 the rest of China.

And Argentina? Argentina is a region "big power", dominating Uruguay and Paraguay, vying for influence in Latin America with Brazil, skirmishing with Chile over disputed territory. Its national integrity has been undisputed for 100 years at least. It is subordinated to imperialism not through the Falklands but by the agency of its own ruling class. Until 1930, or even 1948, it was one of the world's richer countries. It is a developed capitalist economy.

"Today he [Chiang Kai-shek] is forced despite himself, to struggle against

Japan for the remainder of the national independence of China..." This was not a symbolic war in which an aspirant regional imperialism and agent of big-power imperialist penetration led a fight over an irrelevant issue — it was a real national liberation war, against national subjugation.

Scandalous

Trotsky's example of the strike has been scandalously misused by the IMG [forerunner of today's *Anti-Capitalist Resistance*]. The union exists apart from the hideous things its leaders may do — or even its members (racist strikes). We are for the union, despite everything. It is a class organisation. We criticise it fundamentally by way of fighting to transform it. Trotsky uses the analogy of the union to point to what is threatened and worth defending, irrespective of what Chiang Kai-shek may do: the freedom of the Chinese people from Japanese control.

The Argentine people were not struggling to throw out an invader, they were not threatened with subjugation.

"If Japan is an imperialist country and if China is the victim of imperialism, we favour China. Japanese patriotism is the

hideous mask of world-wide robbery. Chinese patriotism is legitimate and progressive. To place the two on the same plane and to speak of 'social-patriotism' can be done only by those who have read nothing of Lenin..."

Argentina is not the victim of colonial imperialism (which Trotsky is talking about). It never has been. In his World War One writings, for example, Lenin distinguished Argentina from the "semi-colonies" and bracketed it with Portugal (which itself had a vast colonial empire) as an economic satellite of Britain though politically independent. (Since then Argentina has long ceased to be an economic satellite of Britain.)

The exploitation of the Argentine workers is in part conducted by foreign capital — in tandem with the Argentine bourgeoisie. What have the Falklands got to do with that? What did the war have to do with that?

Chinese patriotism was not primarily backward-looking, xenophobic, etc., but progressive. Why? Not because it had been entirely purged of those aspects, still less because those aspects could ever be progressive, but because it was

the patriotism of a people rousing itself to modern political life, and rousing itself to struggle to throw out its conquerors. It was an expression of that struggle.

The attitude to the patriotism of the Chinese was determined by the real content of the struggle, which was a progressive struggle.

And our attitude to Argentine patriotism? We evaluate it as internationalists. We ask what cause it serves, what role it plays, how it relates to the struggles which have to be fought. We cannot answer these questions without an assessment of the issues in the war.

Argentine patriotism was as progressive as the cause it served — as progressive as the bourgeois military junta, on whose coat-tails the masses followed, tied by it. It was not progressive in the war. In relation to the Falkland Islanders it was chauvinist.

Independence

The sentence from Trotsky's article "A Fresh Lesson" usually cited on support for Mexico against Britain is preceded by this comment: "We deem it not only the right but the duty of workers in these [backward colonial and semi-colonial



countries] actively to participate in the 'defence of the fatherland' against imperialism, on condition, to be sure, that they preserve the complete independence of their class organisation and conduct a ruthless struggle against the poison of chauvinism." In the Chinese war of national liberation we would denounce as Chinese chauvinists any anti-imperialist militants — and especially any communist militants — who would treat any national, ethnic or religious minority the way Argentina wanted to treat the Falklanders.

We might have to say: the Argentine masses are chauvinist on the Falklanders, but that's a detail — if it were a mere detail. It was not: control over the islands was the issue over which the rival ruling classes, guided by prestige and chauvinism, clashed.

In fact, the attempt to treat Argentine nationalism as pure anti-imperialism is nothing but wishful thinking as far as I can make out. The comrades do not present any arguments, but only assertions and assumptions. At best they derive the progressive character of Argentine nationalism from the reactionary character of British imperialism: but the conclusion does not follow. We do not always put a plus where our enemies put a minus.

It does not follow that because mass militant mobilisation even on the Falklands issue could have opened channels in Argentina blocked [by the military coup] six years ago and (like the consequences of any wild adventure or gamble often do) created great dangers for the junta, that Argentine nationalism is progressive or that we should support it.

A movement is progressive by its goals and its own logic, not by its possible side-effects. If the nationalist upheaval opens opportunities for Argentine socialists, we should be glad of the outcome. We cannot derive our own assessment of nationalism from that hope.

Argentina suffered British and French intervention some 140 years ago. Modern Argentina, however, has essentially taken shape over the last 100 years. Argentina had no war of liberation. Its population is, to within one per cent, of European immigrant origin — most from immigration within the last 100 years. Its mass popular nationalism dates from the 1920s. This nationalism was, especially in its labour movement manifestations, shaped and consolidated by Peronism.

Peronism was not and is not fascism. But corporatism and fascism are its essential ideological sources.

Peron had been in diplomatic service in Italy at the end of the 1930s, and consciously copied fascism. Peronist nationalism is narrowly Argentine — directed against Chile and Brazil, for example. It has been antisemitic: the murder gangs sponsored by the last Peronist government (1973-6) daubed walls with the slogan, "Kill a Jew a day". (There are about half a million Jews in Argentina.)

The "anti-imperialist" rhetoric of Per-

onism was a variant of the envious jingoism common to all fascist or fascist-coloured movements. It was hostile to the USA and Britain... and Brazil. In 1973 Peron called for a Spanish-speaking alliance against the English-speaking and Portuguese-speaking Americans.

The anti-imperialism of the Peronists is like the anti-bourgeois sentiment of the fascists — imprecise, lacking scientific content, lacking definite, rational goals or means of struggle. It was and is harnessed by the bourgeoisie. To be progressive, the anti-imperialist sentiment needs to be refined and organised into an independent working-class movement with rational goals which will really strike at imperialism.

The pro-Argentine comrades' position amounts logically to this: we must follow any predatory junta in a (relatively) backward country when it clashes with an imperialist power — for the sake of the symbolism of the clash! But no, comrades! We need an independent working-class point of view.

Communist anti-imperialism gives us that. It is not derived from a spurious two-camp pattern imposed on the world. It is derived from a unified working class viewpoint.

Everywhere that the working class exists, revolutionary Marxists identify it as the protagonist. Where national oppression exists, we still look to the working class as the protagonist.

From that point of view we approach a situation like 1937 in China where a Chiang Kai-shek may be beginning to fight "our war". We never abandon our own politics, which include the drive to replace the Chiang Kai Sheks — even during a life-and-death war like the Sino-Japanese.

In contrast, the pro-Argentine view would turn us into passive consumers of world politics. We must pick and choose within the options. We dare not refuse our support to one side, even in a miserable business like the invasion of the Falklands. We strap the distorting spectacles tightly on our eyes, and we see the world around us not in terms of facts, class rule, class interests and real interactions — instead just imperialist and non-imperialist nations.

Obviously the hierarchy of the capitalist world economy is not irrelevant. But it cannot transform oppression into liberation, predatory pro-imperialist juntas into anti-imperialist fighters, the concrete realities of the Junta's petty land-grab into episodes of a supposed world liberation drama.

The two-camp spectacles are altogether too crude, too thick with layers of petty bourgeois politics, with the layers of previous accommodation by the post-war Trotskyist movement to various national liberation and Stalinist movements. In the notion of treating Argentina as meaningfully anti-imperialist — and necessarily so, despite the issue it clashed with imperialism on! — a whole trend in post-war Trotskyism reached the outer limits of a recurrent swing away from class politics.



"In a war between two imperialist countries, it is a question neither of democracy nor of national independence, but of the oppression of backward non-imperialist peoples. In such a war the two countries find themselves on the same historic plane. The revolutionaries in both armies are defeatists. But Japan and China are not on the same historic plane."

Note well: Trotsky uses not abstract categories and labels, or static comparisons, but dynamic interactions as his criteria. It is possible for countries to be on the same historic plane (in relation to a concrete conflict or issue) without being identical. The idea that there is an absolute and stable division between imperialist and non-imperialist capitalisms is unhistorical and undialectical.

Reality

Trotsky did not get drunk on words and phrases, mistake images for concrete reality, or chase will-of-the-wisp "symbols" into the misty realm of fantasy politics where a Galtieri is designated the banner-bearer of anti-imperialism without reference to concrete analysis.

Trotsky continues: "The victory of Japan will signify the enslavement of China, the end of her economic and social development, and the terrible strengthening of Japanese imperialism. The victory of China will signify, on the contrary, the social revolution in Japan and the free development, that is to say, unhindered by external oppression, of the class struggle in China."

This "terrible strengthening of Japan" would not be a matter of prestige, "authority", or the figure it cut in the world. It would be strengthened by the plunder of China and the exploitation of hundreds of millions of Chinese — which was why Japanese victory would be the end of Chinese economic and social development.

What goal does Trotsky spell out for the Chinese war of liberation? "Free development... unhindered by external oppression." And he speaks particularly of free development of the class struggle.

Concrete, precise, definable — not something derived from a different type of situation and imposed as a pattern on the Chinese events. The programme and attitude of the Marxists were grounded in the concrete situation, the real choices, and the consequent necessary development of the workers' struggle in China.

Chiang Kai Shek was to be "supported" with gritted teeth because the war was necessary and at that point he headed it. This did not mean political support to Chiang Kai-shek — on the contrary.

In Argentina? Few comrades would venture the view that the Falklands war was necessary. They would say only that defeat of Britain by the Argentine junta's army (not by the British working class) was necessary for its symbolic importance to anti-imperialism. The war was not necessary — but we should have supported Galtieri in the war because of the symbolic significance of it, once the junta had set it going. And that despite the fact that no-one on the left would have campaigned for the starting of the war (the invasion), and many condemn it!

Wherever the pro-Argentine stance comes from, it is not from Trotsky's and other communists' attitude during the wars of the Chinese and others against colonial imperialism. That's for sure!

What does defencism mean?

Trotsky's attitude was: "But can Chiang Kai-shek assure the victory? I do not believe so. It is he, however, who began the war and who today directs it. To be able to replace him it is necessary to gain decisive influence among the proletariat and in the army, and to do that it is necessary not to remain suspended in the air but to place oneself in the midst of the struggle. We must win influence and prestige in the military struggle against the foreign invasion and in the political struggle against the weaknesses, the deficiencies, and the internal betrayal. At a certain point, which we cannot fix in advance, this political opposition can and must be transformed into armed conflict, since the civil war, like war generally, is nothing more than the continuation of the political struggle.."

If Trotsky's arguments for supporting China were relevant to Argentina, then so also should have been this approach. Pro-Argentine comrades should have focused their criticism of Galtieri on his weakness and insufficient ruthlessness in fighting for the islands.

The Peronists of course did that, so apparently, did the PST (Socialist Workers' Party, Morenist). But most pro-Argentine comrades shy away from this conclusion. Is it because they are half-aware of the falseness of treating Galtieri's war as a national liberation struggle?



The Japanese Army killed some 300,000 civilians in the conquest of Nanking, 1937

Further: for Trotsky defencism did not exclude working for civil war in nationalist China. On the contrary, the fight for national liberation demanded it — and anyway working class politics did.

Yet the WSL minority write:

“Defeatism means the defeat of your own ruling class by the working class. It means ‘the main enemy is at home’. It means ‘British workers and soldiers turn your guns on your own officers and ruling class’, because our own ruling class is an imperialist ruling class. That is a basic Marxist position that we hold in all wars at any time which are being waged by our own ruling class. The question is what position do we hold for the other side in the war, in this case Argentina? If we hold a revolutionary defeatist position for the Argentine working class, then we are saying, ‘Both working classes defeat your own ruling class; the outcome of the war is irrelevant; a victory for one side would not be more progressive than the other’.”

That’s exactly what we are saying.

But you don’t have to be a defeatist to say “Both working classes defeat your own ruling class”. That is what Trotsky said in 1937 — even while standing with Chiang Kai-shek against Japan. Not to say it is to abandon the ground of working class politics (“for the duration”).

In China in 1937 it was a real struggle for liberation against imperialism. Chinese “patriotism” flowed from our politics. We could therefore have an independent view on the matter from that of the Chinese nationalists.

Abandoned

We provisionally and conditionally arrived at the proposal of a national liberation bloc with them on the basis of our independent politics, which were never abandoned or shelved, never in any circumstances and not to the slightest degree.

On the Falklands, the pro-Argentine comrades have passively adopted

someone else’s viewpoint. They have proceeded not by analysing the concrete issues, but by fitting the war into a super-abstract image of the world as two camps, imperialist and non-imperialist capitalist states being separated by an unbridgeable chasm.

To fight in a war of liberation like the Chinese is not to abandon our politics — on the contrary, it is the only way we can maintain our class viewpoint as a living political force. By participating we serve, promote and develop our politics. We serve our politics by following where the logic of the class struggle and the real struggle against oppression and exploitation directs us.

“We were the first to propose [a military bloc of the CP with the KMT]. We demanded, however, that the CP maintain its entire political and organisational independence, that is, that during the civil war against the internal agents of imperialism [In the mid 20s, Chiang Kai-shek led one side against the regional warlords of Northern China], as in the national war against foreign imperialism, the working class, while remaining in the front lines of the military struggle, prepare the political overthrow of the bourgeoisie. We hold the same policies in the present [anti-Japanese] war. We have not changed our attitude one iota, The Oehlerites and the Eiffelites, on the other hand, have not understood a single bit of our policies, neither those of 1925-7, nor those of today.”

Likewise in 1982 the inverted Oehlerites and Eiffelites of the right fail to understand. In China there was an anti-imperialist war — defined as such by an independent Trotskyist assessment of the issues.

Either there is or there isn’t a real issue of national liberation. If there is, then we have our own criteria, and a vast range of political independence in relation to a Chiang Kai-shek (or a Galtieri). If there is not, and if we side with Galtieri for the symbolic anti-imperialist significance of

his war, then for all the concrete issues we have to accept (for the time being) someone else’s viewpoint.

If we go begging to the table of the Argentine junta for symbols, then we must take what we get — take things as they define them, rally to the issues they raise (which “in themselves” we may not even accept). We have to dance to their tune, on their terrain.

For the Trotskyists in China, the starting point was: this is our war. They started from the issues. In contrast, a position on the Falklands war which starts from a vague, symbolic “anti-imperialist” identification with Argentina can only proceed by shelving independent judgement on the issue of Argentina’s claim to the islands and adopting someone else’s judgment instead.

This is the method pursued by Trotsky’s epigones for 30 and more years. It is not Marxism. It is not building in the class struggle.

It is instead an utterly artificial approach: the un-concrete, un-Marxist construction of a scenario, a world-picture, in which comrades ascribe an anti-imperialist role (that it isn’t playing) to the pro-imperialist and sub-imperialist ruling class of the comparatively developed capitalist state of Argentina.

The scenario approach comes from a vision of two great camps, imperialist and non-imperialist. We have argued that this is a falsely static and undialectical view of capitalism. It seems to me that the comrades are borrowing a pattern from the view of the world as divided between the Stalinist states and capitalism.

Now between the USSR and imperialism there is a difference of class character. [In 1982 we still held to a “degenerated workers’ state” description of the USSR]. For imperialism and “non-imperialism”, both “camps” are capitalist.

The vision is therefore false. But the method of taking sides on issues automatically with the “progressive” camp is

radically false even for the USSR.

A model of how to judge from an independent proletarian standpoint even those states (China in the 1930s, the USSR) that we may have good and imperative reason to support, is given in a discussion by Trotsky with Li Fu-Jen [in fact the American Frank Glass].

“Trotsky: ... The slogan ‘for revolutionary unity with the Soviet Union, with the proletarians of the whole world’ should rather be, ‘Unity with the proletariat of the whole world. and for an alliance with the Soviet Union on the basis of a concrete programme in the interests of the liberation of China.’ The Soviet Union is now the bureaucracy — no blind confidence in the Soviet Union!

Li Fu-jen: If the Nanking [Chiang Kai Shek] government should enter into an alliance with the Soviet Union, and the alliance should be of such a nature as to harm China and benefit only the Soviet Union, what should our attitude be towards it?

Trotsky: A military alliance against Japan would be in any case preferable for China, even with the bureaucracy as it is. But then we must say that we demand that the Soviet Union deliver munitions, arms for the workers and peasants; special committees must be created in Shanghai, in workers’ centres; the treaty must be elaborated with the participation not only with the KMT but also with the worker and peasant organisations.

We ask for an open proclamation from the Soviet bureaucracy that at the end of the war no part of China would be occupied without the consent of the Chinese people, etc.

Li Fu-jen: Do you then think that the Soviet Union could be capable of conducting an imperialistic policy?

Trotsky: If it is capable of organising frame-ups, killing the revolutionaries, it is capable of all possible crimes.”

(Trotsky on China, p.562-3, emphasis added).



Remarkable dialogue! Carefully, precisely and with the brutal honesty we need in order to be revolutionaries able to grasp and change reality, Trotsky sizes up the allies he is supporting (and he supported the USSR against imperialism unconditionally).

Would Trotsky be capable of forgetting about the concrete issues like the Falklands, or of consoling himself with the idea that Argentina was non-imperialist and therefore the junta could not possibly conduct an "imperialistic" policy?

No, he would not. He did not accept the Chiang Kai-shek clique or the Stalin bureaucracy for their symbolic value. He had concrete class reasons for allying with them. Those set the limits of the alliance. There was no ideological or political subordination. He never ceased to look at them in all their details with the eyes of a mortally hostile opponent. He never let the dark shadows of their imperialist opponents obscure the hideous anti working class features of Chiang Kai Shek or Stalin.

Trotsky could never have fallen into the method which allowed comrades to reach pro-Argentine conclusions on the Falklands.

This method was to take the elements in the situation (war, working class chauvinism in Argentina expressed in Peronist "anti-imperialist" terms, etc.) and rearrange them into a superoptimistic scenario culminating in revolutionary working class victory.

The chauvinist mobilisation on the political coat-tails of the bourgeoisie became transformed — in some people's heads — into a mobilisation against the system.

Faded

Everything "favourable" to the scenario was highlighted, the rest faded out. The most blatant example was when the USFI [Mandelite] press reprinted a speech by the junta's foreign minister, Costa Mendez, as anti-imperialist good coin. More widely, much was made of a jingo Argentine demonstration where the slogan was chanted, "Malvinas Yes, Galtieri No". Faded out was the other part of the same chant — according to the Economist — "The Malvinas are Argentina's, the people are Peron's". And Peron's legacy was what Galtieri was trying to appropriate: he was attempting to answer the call of the Peronist leaders

for a new caudillo.

The scenario was constructed; then, in deference to the great revolutionary prospects, assessment of the war was read backwards from the scenario. The sordid details of Galtieri's sally were transmuted by the assurance that it was only the first stage of a process due to culminate in the most militant anti-imperialist struggle.

Breaks

This has been the method of "Pabloism" (a bad term, but a common one) for 30 years. It is not Marxism. It is even below the level of the serious bourgeois commentators. It breaks with what Trotsky defined as a cardinal rule of the Fourth International: "To face reality squarely... to call things by their right names, to speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be."

In the final analysis, "scenario" politics is fantasy politics, and fantasy politics is passive politics. Instead of using Marxist realism as a preparation for a revolutionary changing of the world, it means "changing the world" in our heads by way of wishful thinking.

It means failing to follow the cardinal

injunction of Marxism, expressed by Trotsky in the Transitional Programme thus: "To be guided by the logic of the class struggle."

The "logic of the class struggle" includes for us the logic of genuine liberation movements. These can be complementary to, and not counterposed to, the class struggle of the working class internationally and in the oppressed country. But if there is no issue of liberation struggle actually involved in the war, then it becomes possible to take sides only outside of the logic of the class struggle.

In the letter to Rivera Trotsky describes the sectarians as following closely behind and "correcting" him: "When it is a woman, they decorate her with a heavy moustache. When we draw a rooster, they put an egg under it..." He did not foresee that 45 years later most of those calling themselves Trotskyists would use the art of collage to cut out the picture he drew of China in 1937 and to paste it over the figure of Argentina in 1982 — an Argentina that has more in common with the Japan of 1937 than with the China of that time. □

• From *Workers' Socialist Review* #2

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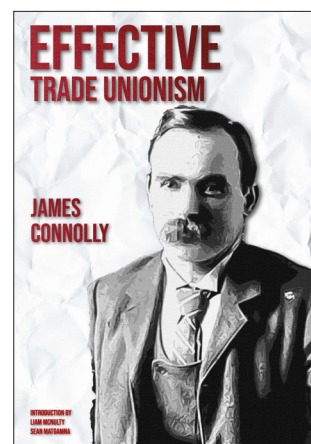
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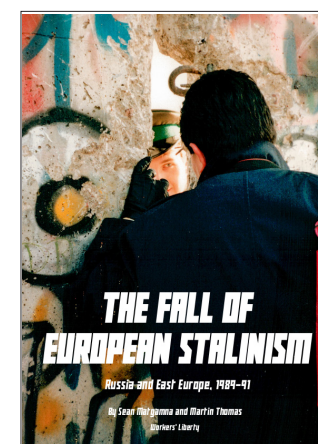
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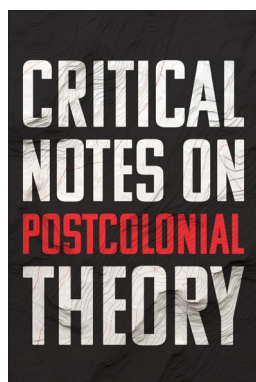
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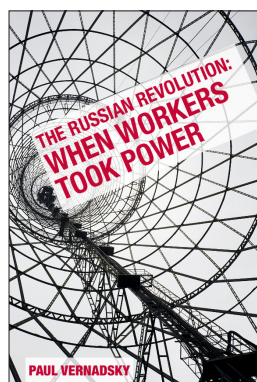
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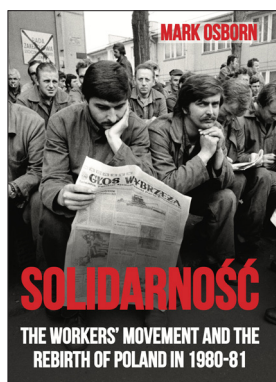
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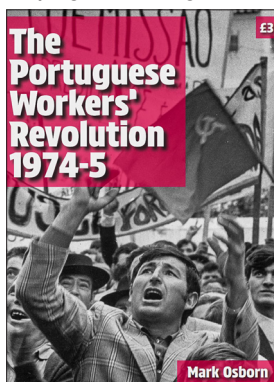
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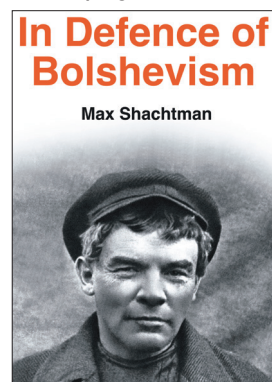
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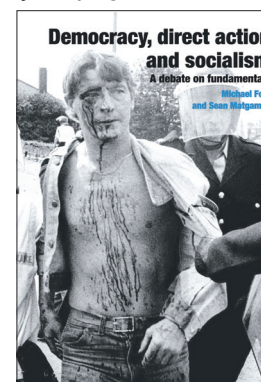
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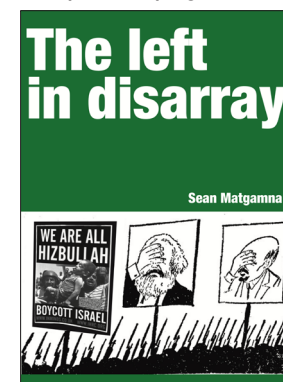
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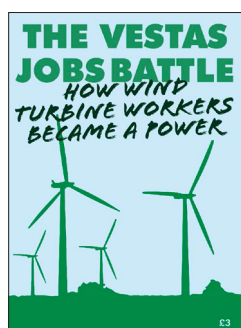
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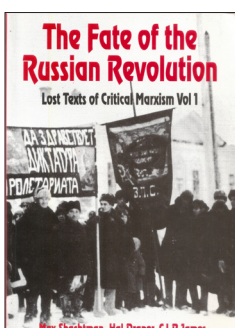
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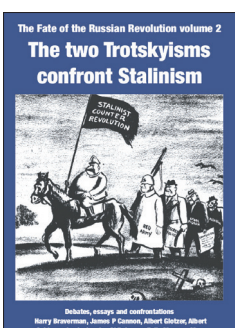
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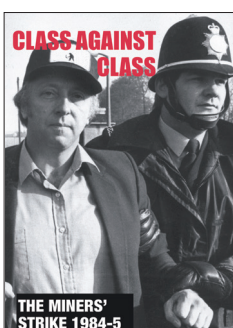
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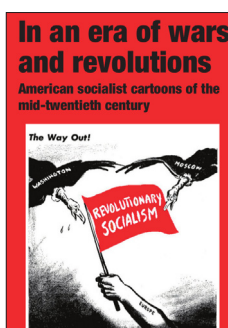
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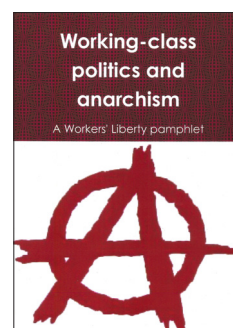
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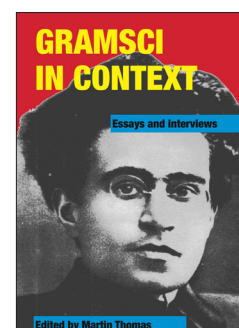
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For class, women's, and trans rights!

By Riki Lane

Workers' Liberty supports trans and gender-diverse (TGD) people's rights. Some left feminists (sex based rights activists or SBRAs) see those as threatening women's rights. A series of articles has attempted to thread a path for left-wing activists to reach more agreement, and this one summarises.

I am a university and gender-affirming health clinic researcher, who identifies as a gender-non-conforming man (he/they). Nothing I write here represents my employers' stance.

Trans people are not a new phenomenon. Records go back thousands of years. There is great variation in social acceptance, coming-of-age rituals, etc., across time and cultures, and what "trans identity" means changes between cultures too. But there have been few societies with just two genders and a rigid "Chinese Wall" between them. Current estimates are that around 0.5% of people identify as trans and 1% as non-binary.

Early 20th century Europe saw serious activism, the start of gender affirming care (hormonal and surgical), and scientific inquiry centred around the socialist Magnus Hirschfeld in Germany. Later science shows Hirschfeld to have made errors, but he and the socialists who campaigned with him did huge work against the idea that lesbian, gay, and trans people were dangerous and to be suppressed by law. That work was smashed by the Nazis.

Since the 1950s there has been a gradual liberalisation of scientific and medical thinking and then "educated opinion". Gender-affirming medical care has become more available (and safer and easier); and social acceptance of trans people has increased, as for gay, lesbian and bisexual people, but trailing them by around 20 years.

Liberalisation has been less for working-class trans people, who have difficulty affording the medical care and have to look to public venues rather than their own private facilities for social life. The famous trans woman economist Deirdre McCloskey, though a pro-capitalist (anti-Trump) free-marketer herself, notes in her memoir that "working-class gender crossers are routinely abused" by officials and bureaucracies where upper and middle-class ones can escape: "Class matters".

There have been zig-zags along the way, for example radical-feminist polemic against trans people in the late 1970s. In recent years right-wing forces have focussed on restricting rights for trans people (and LGBTIQ more broadly), especially in Hungary, Russia and the USA. The UK is now caught up in that backlash.

Some left-minded "sex-based rights

activists" (SBRAs) agree with some of the attacks by governments and courts on trans rights, arguing that trans rights, or at least trans women's rights, and beyond a certain point anyway, threaten women's rights. They oppose trans people being sacked from jobs for being trans, but also oppose allowing trans women in "women's spaces", or access to puberty blockers for young trans people.

There is a disconnect in these debates: trans people are not warriors for the ruling class, or sycophants for woke professors, or predators "dressing up" the better to attack cis women. Historically their rights have risen or fallen with general women's rights. They are an oppressed group that needs support from the working class, in line with Lenin's idea that the working class needs to be a tribune for all the oppressed. And their demand is very simple: just to be allowed to live as they are, without harassment.

Cass Report

The Cass Report of 2024 has had a hurtful impact on trans people's lives, especially trans women. The backlash has also hurt masculine-appearing cis women. They are now more likely to be harassed when they use "women's spaces".

For many of us it comes to seem "obvious", from very young, that we are female or male, and difficult to understand how anyone can "cross" from one gender to another.

Trans identity is different from divergence from gender stereotypes. Since the 1960s, gender stereotypes have generally become looser, and divergence from them less censured, but at the same time trans identification has multiplied.

The scientific research is not entirely clear, but studies point towards a complex interaction of biological and social factors in trans identity. Gender identity usually settles by around three years old, and many trans people have felt incongruity with ascribed gender since that age. Others develop a less binary gender identity.

We do not develop gender identity by being "told" we are male or female. Nor do we do it by observing external physical differences between male and female, which at age three are small. Gender identity is not a fiction or fantasy, but (like personal identity more generally) a material part of human development. It usually correlates with sex observed at birth, but for a significant minority, it does not. There is another significant minority for whom sex at birth is unclear or assigned in error.

In the USA, and now even more in the UK, there are pushes to exclude trans women from women's toilets, prisons, sport, and even conferences and social



groups like the Women's Institute and Girlguiding.

Most trans people try to avoid public toilets or only go to single-cubicle or non-gendered ones. They often avoid change rooms and seek toilet cubicles to have privacy. Australian trans organisations advocate for converting single sex toilets into all-gender ones with single cubicles, and for "labelling what facilities are available... whether the bathroom has toilets, urinals, or change table".

There is no evidence that trans people using toilets or changing rooms, let alone participating in conferences or social groups, aligned with their gender identity, pose an actual danger to cis women.

Cases

In a few cases, trans activists have tried to ban SBRA speakers, or to deny SBRA trans-exclusive groups meeting spaces. We are against that. If radical lesbian groups, for example, want cis-only meetings, they should have them. But the bans and exclusions against trans (and intersex and gender-nonconformist) people are a far greater issue.

Some cis women feel uncomfortable sharing spaces with trans women. But trans women face actual danger in using men's facilities, and face social exclusion or forced "outing" if they are banned from conferences and social groups and from using women's facilities in workplaces, swimming pools, cinemas, etc. The social cost of "bathroom bans" and of the anti-trans vigilantism that is the only way of enforcing them far outweighs any gain.

There are a few recorded cases of sexual assault by trans women in women's prisons. Perpetrators of sexual assault are dangerous in prison as they are outside. But trans women represent a very

small part of the problem of violence in women's prisons. The vast bulk is perpetrated by prison guards (often cis-male) and cis women prisoners. Fewer than three per thousand prisoners in England and Wales are trans. Trans prisoners are at much greater risk than cis.

Vastly fewer people, especially whose conviction is not for violence, should be in prison. In England, 70-odd% of women prisoners are for non-violent offences. England jails about three times as many people, in proportion to population, as the Netherlands.

Any resident (cis or trans) in person deserves protection from potential perpetrators. And all inmates should have some choice over whom they share a cell with, or whether they are in a single person cell. But trans women are overwhelmingly more likely to be the victims of violence in prisons than the perpetrators.

Trans people generally have difficulty with access to sport. In school, community, and recreational sports, as distinct from elite sport, the answer is simple: let all trans women and trans girls participate as they wish. A recent Californian high-school contest calmed "cis exclusion" fears by saying that where a trans girl won a gold medal (as one did), a second gold medal would go to the cis runner-up. That brought no complaints from either trans or cis competitors, and maybe could help towards a happy compromise.

Elite sport with financial high stakes raises more complicated issues, which I don't discuss here, but the record of decades shows that the "cis exclusion" fears are unfounded. Medical gender transition impairs sport performance, and by a comparable amount to the 10% or so advantage of men's performance over women's at the top level. Trans women have participated in women's elite sports for many decades, yet no trans women have won top prizes, let alone the 0.5% or so you would expect from an even field. At Tokyo 2021 New Zealand weightlifter Laurel Hubbard was the only known trans woman to reach the Olympics, and she had little success.

Being trans is not a mental illness or an expression of predatory impulses. Rather, it is a less common alignment of gender identity with a particularly sexed body. Trans people have been around, in different ways, for all human history and across all cultures. We should support the extension and reinstatement of the greater acceptance they have found in many countries since the 1970s and 1980s, and especially for working-class trans people, who suffer worst from discrimination. □

• Weblinks for previous articles: bit.ly/cw-t



Your Party? Whose elections?

By Matt Cooper

Ruth Cashman, a regular writer for *Solidarity*, has been banned from standing for the Central Executive Committee of Your Party on grounds that YP rules exclude members of “other national political parties”. She is appealing.

The SWP has been involved in YP, but has not proposed candidates. The Socialist Party declined involvement in talks for an “opposition” slate, but want to stand former Labour MP Dave Nellist for the CEC. They sent a long, pleading letter (reproduced in *The Socialist* of 15 January) to the YP office asking to be permitted to stand, but he has been barred, as has a *Weekly Worker* candidate on the “Grassroots Left” slate.

As far as we know, other left groups in YP, A*CR, rs21, Socialist Alternative, Workers’ Power, etc. have not proposed candidates.

By the time you read this article, we have a fuller picture of who has nominated themselves to stand (and who has been allowed to do so by the Corbyn faction which controls the “machine” of the incipient party).

Endorsements are due between 21 and 29 January. Regional candidates need 75 endorsements, with each member in the region able to make two.

In London we have already supported RMT activist Mel Mullings. We will publish other recommendations once we have the full set of candidates and a clearer picture of how the rules have been applied. The online voting will be 9-23 February.

These elections matter. In a speech in Bradford on 10 January, Corbyn made clear he intends to overturn decisions made at the inaugural YP conference and by online voting, despite it being held under rules designed by his faction and with options for voting crafted by them. In particular, he has argued for a single leader rather than leadership rooted in the CEC, and suggested a blanket ban on dual membership which would effectively proscribe organised socialist groups.

The CEC will guide and structure the party as it continues to form. So, the CEC matters. It could shape YP’s political character and organisational direction.

The Corbyn faction slate, “The Many”, was launched on 16 January. This is fundamentally the continuity slate, seeking to cement the Corbyn faction’s control of the party. In the best spirit of spin, it is therefore presenting itself as the force to unite the party.

The first thing to note is the narrowness of the Corbyn slate. The four office-holders are Corbyn himself, along with Laura Smith, elected as a Labour

MP from 2017 to 2019. Smith is best remembered for resigning from Corbyn’s front bench in 2018 in order to vote for a hard Brexit, and later opposing a second referendum. That did not prevent her losing the pro-Brexit seat of Crewe and Nantwich in 2019. Her candidate blurb presents her as a trade unionist, but as far as I can tell this rests largely on historic Unison membership dating back to her work as a teaching assistant before entering Parliament. Her main “qualification” seems to be that she is young-ish and female and thus a plausible substitute for Zarah Sultana, who unsurprisingly is nowhere on Corbyn’s slate.

The other two nationally visible figures are the remaining YP-aligned Independent Alliance MPs: Shockat Adam and Ayoub Khan. As previously highlighted in this column, neither can plausibly be described as left wing, still less as aligned with workers’ struggle. Khan, for example, is an ex-Lib-Dem who called for troops to be used to break the Birmingham bin strike.

The eighteen candidates for the English regions are somewhat stronger, though not in ways that suggest a turn to class-struggle politics. Eight claim trade union involvement, but five of those are from Unite, whose staff were the backbone of Corbyn’s Labour leader’s office, including Karie Murphy, now a key (unelected and unaccountable) organiser in YP. There are a couple of individuals with a stronger record both in trade unionism and on the Labour left (notably Jenn Forbes in the South West and Cath Davis in the North West) who might, in another context, attract support from class-struggle socialists.

But the overall tone of the slate is not rooted in labour movement politics. It is overwhelmingly local and community-focused. This view was underlined in The Many’s launch online rally on 18 January, where it was repeatedly emphasised that the slate is, and should be, rooted in “communities”.

Independent

There is a strong element of current “independent” councillors, largely ex-Labour, alongside other figures who have stood as independents without success. One of the amendments passed at conference allows councillors to stand in both the “public office-holders” section and as elected members; this now seems sloppy-on-purpose drafting. Beyond that there are genuine community activists, some more rooted than others. Many candidates appear to have little record in national politics.

The slate’s logic seems twofold. First, these are people likely to be personally loyal to Corbyn and to enable the party to develop as he wishes. Second, it reflects

THE MANY For A People's Party

his long-standing vision of a party built around “independent” community-based councillors and localised campaigners, rather than a serious working-class political organisation.

The main organised competition comes from the Grassroots Left slate, aligned with Sultana. On one important measure it is stronger: the slate appears to be made up of people active in building YP’s proto-branches, something which is far less true of Corbyn’s candidates.

However, in terms of serious roots in working-class organisation and trade union struggle, it is surprisingly thin. Only seven candidates declare any union activism, and once we strip out those where this is historic, marginal, or merely employment by a union, there appear to be only two or three candidates with a current or very recent significant level of trade union activity.

Instead, the slate is heavily populated by figures from the milieu of small groups that preceded and/or emerged within YP. The Democratic Socialists in YP and Transform are both well represented, though neither seems to have much base.

That narrowness reflects how the slate was assembled. It emerged from meetings involving three forces: first, Sultana’s own narrow circle; second, Ken Loach’s Democracy Platform in Your Party (also narrow); and third, the Socialist Unity Platform, formed at a meeting at The World Transformed in October 2025. In theory SUP could have been a forum for a broad left to cohere. In practice it became dominated by a strange double act: Max Shanly (a former student Labour-left type, now billed as DSY, but who may not genuinely represent DSY) and the tiny and previously semi-dormant CPGB (*Weekly Worker*).

The slate-making process benefited some more than others. Transform and DSY did well. Since neither has more than a rhetorical working-class orientation, that helps explain the slate’s thinness. Counterfire won only one place (Preston councillor Michael Lavalette) and then departed. Loach’s Democracy

Platform also left, along with several other small forces.

The more right-leaning Democratic Bloc received nothing and appears likely to dissolve. Its main figure, ex-Labour NEC member Mish Rahman, has joined the Greens. As a result, two candidates, Michael Lavalette and Naomi Wimbourne-Idrissi, are only endorsed by the slate and not part of it. The reason for this appears to be a combination of these groups feeling carved out and the centralisation of control of the campaign in staff picked by Sultana (including Shanly, who has now moved on from SUP).

So there is a slate with no durable organisation to campaign for it, let alone hold it to account.

Early

As we go to press, Michael Lavalette’s candidacy has been accepted despite him being in Counterfire.

Zarah Sultana’s, too, despite previous moves which looked like preparing the option of excluding Sultana on the grounds of “outstanding investigations”.

The CEC election rules (again, drafted by the Corbyn faction) state: “Candidates ... shall not be subject to any outstanding investigations relating to misconduct that may have brought the party into disrepute.” On 9 January someone from the Corbyn camp leaked a story to the *New Statesman* claiming Sultana’s unauthorised membership portal might be subject to a police investigation. This is almost certainly untrue: criminality would require financial or fraudulent benefit, and the Information Commissioner is not pursuing the issue further (it likely considers internal organisational use of the data outside its remit).

We also need to see what independents will stand. In London alone there are currently at least six intending to run.

And there is a further question over the voting system itself: there are rumours that the platform YP is using cannot handle the only viable preference system, STV. □

For Trump the main enemy remains at home

By Bas Hardy

Despite lawless military adventurism abroad, the main enemy for D J Trump has always been the American people. They are the ones most likely to hold his thoroughly corrupt white-supremacist regime to account. That's why he and his minions are doing their damndest to prevent that from happening. Intimidation and fear are the principal features of Trumpian rule, with the goons of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) as shock troops let loose on the American public.

Who are these people who drive round peaceful neighbourhoods in SUVs with blacked-out windows abducting people off America's streets? Who wear masks and refuse to provide proof of identity or legal warrants? Essentially they are the paramilitary force of a wannabe dictator whose regime has now declared them above the law and allowed to kill with impunity.

The murder of Renee Good by an ICE agent in Minneapolis this month has proved particularly shocking in a political climate with shocks aplenty. Good was shot three times in the face by ICE agent Jonathan Ross as she drove away from an ICE convoy sent to intimidate her neighbourhood. A probable explanation for Ross murdering her was his dislike of "lippy" women. Evidently the mild sarcasm Ross got from Good and her wife was enough to occasion Good's murder. He's on video saying "f*****g b***h" immediately after he shot her.

Ross, described by neighbours as a hard core MAGA supporter, has "absolute immunity" from prosecution for his actions according to VP J D Vance. That is tantamount to saying ICE agents have a license to kill. So long as killings are being done in the name of Donald Trump there is nothing to fear. In the unlikely event of him being found guilty, a presidential pardon is always in the offing.

Since Good's murder ICE agents have

been saying "have you not learned?" to intimidate protesters. Ross and his cohorts reflect a particular dislike on the far right of articulate women questioning those abusing their authority. The misogynistic acronym AWFUL (affluent, white, female, urban, liberal) reflects their hatred of "uppity" women getting in the way of macho men throwing their weight around.

The video footage makes it pretty clear that Good's shooting was totally unjustified, yet Trump and his cronies in Orwellian fashion have told people not to believe the evidence of their own eyes. There will be no FBI investigation into Ross (absolute immunity after all!), with the Feds under Kash Patel now totally subservient to Trump. Minnesota State bodies have been blocked from investigating.

The FBI instead intends to investigate the victim and her partner in a ludicrous attempt to paint them as "domestic terrorists". Six federal prosecutors in Minnesota have resigned in protest, not wishing to participate in such a farce.

The extent to which ICE has been responsible for other shootings, abuses of power and general lawlessness can't be fully determined as only a fraction of such incidents have been caught on camera. Nonetheless, what's been going on in Minnesota has placed under scrutiny just what types of individuals are swelling the ranks of ICE.

Weapons

Ross has been there for ten years. He is said to have suffered PTSD, in which case he had no business being on the streets with deadly weapons. This fact highlights the general criticisms of ICE as inept, sloppy and downright dangerous.

ICE held a major recruitment drive last year which more than doubled its numbers, adding 12,000 new officers. It no longer has its 16-20 week programme which included Spanish language in-



struction and extensive firearms training. Now it's a maximum of eight weeks, with administrative mistakes down to AI errors meaning some only get four weeks training.

As it's all about swelling the ranks so the detention centres can be packed with potential deportees, ICE hasn't been too choosy about who's been handed the joining bonuses of up to \$50,000 either. Six minute interviews and poor vetting for criminal records, domestic violence, drug abuse, etc are claims laid against ICE for its "wartime recruitment".

The recruitment posters' messaging is reminiscent of wartime propaganda. One has Uncle Sam doing the "your country needs you" plea to join ICE. Another finds a saluting Trump under the slogan "Defend the Homeland". The general shtick is the call for "professional patriots" to stop an "invasion".

You don't need to join the dots to imagine those who attacked the Capitol on 6 January 2021 would be ideal recruits for ICE. How many of the 1,500 convicted then pardoned have joined up? Or how many who didn't get arrested but were there on the day? What about Proud Boy or other fascist group members enlisting in ICE ranks? Information on that won't be forthcoming.

The community response to the ICE raid in Minneapolis has been excellent and ICE actions are deeply unpopular. Yet protesters armed with whistles want protection from the State authorities against ICE violence they are unlikely to get. The Trump regime also hopes to exploit community opposition to ICE as an excuse to enforce the 1807 Insurrection Act.

Trump unbound in his second term appears to be getting away with everything at home and abroad. Maybe there's damaging stuff about him in the Epstein files which will upset his base, but it's also pretty certain that none of that will see the light of day in the next three years, given that only one per cent has been released so far.

Will November's Congressional Elections halt the march of MAGA authoritarianism? Trump has "joked" about not holding them, and that's no joke really. Anything is possible from someone who says his only constraint is his own morality.

Socialists and labour unions must redouble their efforts for community opposition to ICE and struggle against Trump's dictatorial power grab. □

No, we don't endorse this top cop

By Keith Road

Salma Yaqoob, Ayoub Khan SMP and some others in the West Midlands have gone out of their way to defend the Chief Constable of West Midlands Police over his role in the banning of Maccabi Tel-Aviv fans

from a game against Aston Villa.

Yakoob has tried to rally Your Party activists in the West Midlands to ask the Labour Police and Crime Commissioner to keep Chief Constable Guildford in place. Shortly after her efforts started, they were un-

dermined by Craig Guildford's retirement.

Statement

A statement sent round YP groups by Yaqoob said:

"You do not have to agree with every police action or all of Craig Guildford's views to

defend him in this Zionist witch hunt".

That socialists should line up to help keep a top police officer in their job is odd. Unfortunately, it seems there was little pushback against doing so. It may be notable, and in the context of the upcoming Your

Party Central Executive Committee elections, that Zarah Sultana MP said nothing about the issue of Guildford.

The left needs to clean up its politics on both antisemitism and the police. Quickly. □



A labour movement without political weight

By Micheal MacEoin

The North of Ireland is a clear demonstration that workers' economic power is no necessary guarantee of the political strength of labour.

According to the latest Labour Force Survey (LFS) data, 34% of workers in the North are members of a trade union. This is comparable to 29.5% in Wales and 27% in Scotland, while only 20.6% of workers in England are union members.

Some of this is down to the relative weight of the public sector in Northern Ireland. The public sector made up 27.4% of all NI employee jobs in Sep-

tember 2025 and Northern Ireland has consistently had a higher proportion of public sector jobs per population than the whole of the UK (11.9% compared to 8.7% for the whole of the UK).

In late 2023, the North was hit by a transport strike in the publicly-owned operator Translink, when more than 4,000 bus and rail workers from Unite, GMB and SIPTU held joint strike action in a row over pay. An improved offer was agreed in early 2024 after a threatened 72-hour transport strike.

More recently, in November last year, threatened strike action from Unison and Unite health members forced the Northern Ireland Executive to permit a £100m "overspend" in the Department of Health to restore pay parity between the North and the rest of the UK. Nurses, midwives, doctors and others health workers have faced repeated delays and, at points, lower settlements than colleagues in England, Scotland and Wales since 2019, when the North fell behind other parts of the UK on health service pay.

Criminal barristers in Northern Ireland commenced an indefinite strike on 5 January 2026, in protest against the level of legal aid fees, which have not been increased since 2005. Until the strike is resolved, criminal barristers are refusing to participate in any legal aid-funded Crown Court cases.

But it is not only the public sector. In the private sector, Unite members working for Diageo workers in Belfast struck for eight days in December last year for fair pay. The Belfast plant is the world's biggest producer of Guinness Zero, and the company made €2.5 billion in global profits last year, yet it is refusing to end the pay gap between workers in Belfast and their counterparts in Diageo in England.

Despite a relatively strong trade union movement, though, workers in the North are politically disenfranchised as work-



Diageo canning plant workers picket in December 2025

ers.

A Belfast Labour Party was formed as early as 1892 and merged into the Northern Ireland Labour Party (NILP) in 1924. The NILP, which attracted strong support in Belfast, was "neutral" on the national question until 1949, when it adopted an explicitly pro-Union position, alienating much of its Catholic support.

As politics polarised after 1969, the NILP all but collapsed. Today, there is no trade union-based Labour Party in the North, although there are individual members of both Irish Labour and UK Labour.

The Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) is nominally aligned to both but attracts support overwhelmingly from the Irish nationalist population.

Banner

In the Northern Ireland Assembly, People Before Profit alone raises the banner for socialist politics.

The fundamental reason is that workers in the North remain divided on the national question. It is convenient for the trade union bureaucracies to maintain a sort of "neutrality" on this issue, so as to preserve a measure of workplace unity, but this is in effect an opting out of politics.

Many of the issues – from public sector pay and funding for services to

equalities issues and the rise of anti-migrant racism in the North – are indelibly political.

To tackle them effectively, that requires a workers' voice in politics and working-class political representation to take on the bosses' sectarian parties.

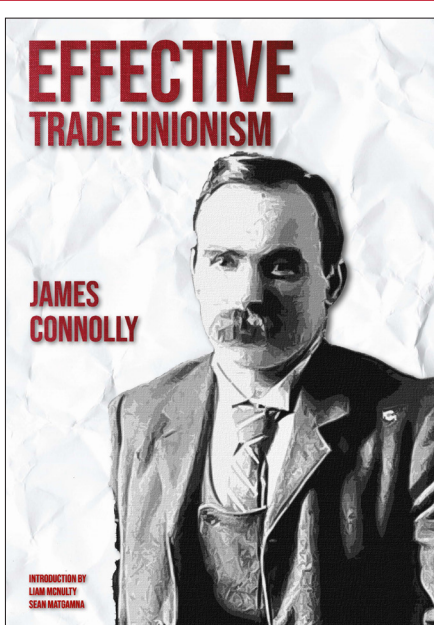
To develop that voice, the labour movement has to at least begin to discuss an independent working-class position on the national question and partition, which still structures all forms of politics in the North.

Workers' Liberty has advocated a democratic programme involving self-determination for the people of Ireland as a whole and, within that, a democratic policy for the minority question.

We therefore support the maximum democratic rights for the Protestant minority within a united Ireland compatible with the rights of the majority, sometimes referred to by the short-hand of a "federal united Ireland."

Ultimately, it is for the labour movement to debate and discuss how workers with different national identities should democratically relate to each other.

Until this discussion happens, and the labour movement establishes a voice in politics, workers will continue to fight with one hand tied behind their backs. □



Aiming to replace capitalism with socialism, James Connolly's organising and ideas evolved considerably. One idea he clung to from the turn of the century to his death was industrial unionism, workers' solidarity across grades and trades, and sympathetic strikes. That is how he saw his work in the Irish Transport Union. 64 pages £5 □

workersliberty.org/publications

"Friends of Israel" should not be banned

By Rob Gordon

Some union reps and officers in Bristol National Education Union (NEU) have received threats of violence, including from far-right groups, after a row about a cancelled school visit by local MP Damien Egan. The threats should be condemned.

Ofsted's emergency inspection of Bristol Brunel Academy after the cancellation is also over the top, if less alarming.

But Bristol NEU's statement about the cancellation raises

other questions. It says: "This is a clear message: politicians who openly support Israel's genocidal assault on Gaza are not welcome in our schools. Egan is Vice Chair of Labour Friends of Israel and has visited Israel since the current onslaught on Gaza began, demonstrating his support. We celebrate this cancellation as a win for safeguarding, solidarity..."

No words from Damien Egan have been provided to justify the accusation that he "openly supported Israel's genocidal

assault on Gaza". The assertion that Egan "visited Israel since the current onslaught on Gaza began, demonstrating his support" is not backed up by details. LFI reported the visit as exploring "how we can work towards a two-state solution." Mealy-mouthed, but not "open support" for "Israel's genocidal assault on Gaza". LFI, though belatedly and though it is limited in many other ways, has repeatedly called for a ceasefire; for increased aid to Gaza; for a halt to settlement expansion.

And what is the "safeguarding" issue? Students are entitled to object strongly to an MP's opinion, but that is not a safeguarding issue. Anyway, Egan was not visiting the school to speak on Israel and Palestine.

Bristol Palestine Solidarity Campaign say Egan "has a long record of complicity in Israel's human rights abuses in Palestine". They say that he "consistently voted in line with Israeli positions in the UK Parliament", but cite no specific votes.

It is a sorry situation that NEU reps and members in Bristol have become embroiled in saying a Jewish Labour MP should not be allowed to visit schools because, it seems, he holds a position in a "Friends of Israel" group. LFI is on the right of Labour and is overly defensive regarding the state of Israel, but it has also made clear statements against the current Israeli government and its extreme anti-Palestinian racism. □

• Abridged. More: bit.ly/foi-b

Where is the Mamdani movement going?

By Dominika Szarek

“I’m not interested in a bromance with the federal regime.” Michelle Wu’s line captures exactly the discomfort I felt watching the strangely warm exchange between Donald Trump and Mayor Zohran Mamdani during Mamdani’s visit to the White House on 21 November. Before then, Trump had attacked Mamdani relentlessly — questioning his immigration status, dismissing his left-wing campaign, and framing him as a threat to the nation. Yet in Washington, the hostility evaporated. Suddenly Trump was praising him:

“I expect to be helping him, not hurting him — a big help. I think this mayor can do some things that are going to be really great.”

When a reporter pressed Mamdani on whether he still considered Trump a fascist, he hesitated — visibly caught between his past statements and the political theatre unfolding beside him. Trump jumped in to rescue him: “You can just say yes. That’s easier. It’s easier than explaining.”

The moment was revealing. Two men who claim to stand on opposite ideological poles found themselves performing a kind of mutual populism — a choreography of friendliness that obscures the deeper political contradictions at play. And it raises a sharper question: what does it mean when a self-described socialist mayor begins his term by signalling comfort with the very power structures he once denounced? Maybe Mamdani is not the revolutionary figure we hoped he was, and consolidating an insurgent left movement from out of his election campaign is further away than we hoped?

In the midst of escalating ICE raids across the United States, the question becomes unavoidable: what is Mamdani doing? ICE’s violence is well-documented. Trump’s politics are authoritarian; his record makes that clear. Mamdani was never going to say that beside him in Washington, but the urgency of the moment makes his silence harder to ignore.

ICE’s actions are accelerating, not slowing, and Trump is actively encouraging them. The killing of Renee Nicole Good — which Trump defended by blaming the victim — is only the latest example of how emboldened federal agents have become.

Against this backdrop, Mamdani’s posture looks less like strategic diplomacy and more like pragmatism that blunts radical commitments. His recent response to NYPD officers killing two men echoed, disturbingly, Trump’s own rhetoric. He insisted the officers “were placed in incredibly difficult and dangerous circumstances.” Yet these were precisely the kinds of encounters reformers argue should be handled by trained men-

tal-health responders, not armed police. Mamdani’s instinct was to defend the officers rather than question the structure that produced these outcomes.

This marks a sharp departure from his earlier stance. In 2020, he aligned himself with the call then popular on George Floyd protests to “defund the police” (and the not-so-left mayor then, Bill de Blasio, cut the police budget by hundreds of millions of dollars).

During Mamdani’s mayoral campaign, he retreated, framing those statements as “frustration” and insisting the police are not “racist, anti-queer, and a major threat to public safety.” He emphasised “public safety” with NYPD inclusion and the 3% drop in the murder rate.

His appointment of Jessica Tisch as police commissioner crystallises this shift. She is a billionaire heiress who has opposed bail reform and whose family funded Mamdani’s political opponents. She has resisted civilian oversight and previously cooperated with ICE during a major raid on Canal Street. Yet this is the commissioner Mamdani has chosen to keep.

Comfortable

Taken together, these actions suggest a mayor more comfortable with institutional sustenance than structural change. His flirtation with the very edifice of power he once promised to dismantle resembles progressive managerialism more than socialism.

NY state Governor Kathy Hochul and Mamdani have announced a plan to expand child care access to nearly 100,000 young children. The governor aims to guarantee child care for all four year olds statewide by autumn 2028. For New York City, this would allow Mamdani to make the preschool program for three year olds universal and to launch a new free child care system for two year olds, beginning with 2,000 toddlers this coming autumn. The expanded system would be universal and not means-tested.

Yet as Mamdani himself has acknowledged, universal childcare is not simply a question of funding. It requires qualified educators, stable staffing, and the infrastructure to sustain a system of this scale. These are precisely the areas where the city is weakest — and where collaboration with unions is indispensable.

Mamdani’s distance from the United Federation of Teachers and District Council 37 is therefore not a neutral stance but a structural obstacle. Without deep partnership with the unions that represent early childhood educators, universal childcare cannot move from aspiration to reality. His criticism of the two-tiered pay system created in 2014 — with public-school pre-K teachers earning far more than those in commu-

nity-based programs — remains largely gestural.

Furthermore, his broader promise to make New York affordable for the working class is also being eclipsed by federal policy. As many as 230,000 New Yorkers are set to lose access to food stamps due to changes in SNAP eligibility, while new tax cuts will transfer billions of dollars from low-income residents to the wealthy.

Mamdani is inheriting a city deeply entrenched in racialised economic inequality, where unemployment stands at 3% for white workers but 8.6% for Black workers.

Lauren Melodia has emphasised that alongside progressive taxation, collaboration with community-based organisations is essential to help working-class New Yorkers navigate SNAP and Medicaid assistance. Yet Governor Hochul has already stated that federal budget cuts will not be backfilled. In this context, the absence of meaningful partnership with unions and community-based organisations creates a structural abyss — a widening gap between policy ambition and political capacity.

Mamdani will be judged by his first 100 days after taking office on 1 January. His campaign promises — from universal childcare to a rent freeze and fast, free buses — now collide with a political terrain structurally hostile to the reforms he pledged. In his final weeks in office, former Mayor Eric Adams appointed two new members and reappointed two others to the Rent Guidelines Board, which sets rents for roughly one million stabilised apartments. The result is a board dominated by Adams’s appointees, many of whom are likely to oppose Mamdani’s proposed rent freeze.

To counterbalance these constraints, Mamdani has brought Lina Khan into his administration — a prominent progressive legal scholar known for her work on antitrust and corporate accountability. As chair of the Federal Trade Commission, she pursued major cases against Amazon and sought to curb corporate consolidation across the economy. Her résumé is impressive, and her instincts align with Mamdani’s critique of corporate power. But there are limits on relying on internal expertise alone to hand affordability down from City Hall.

Khan’s own record illustrates these tensions. Despite her pro-worker stance, she was unable to secure a long-term contract for FTC employees before stepping aside after Trump’s inauguration — a move that left staff vulnerable to the administration’s crackdown on telework and job security. Reports suggest she hesitated to include telework protections in the contract out of concern it would “put a bull’s eye on the agency’s back” with the White House.

If even Khan has struggled to confront

institutional pressure, how far can Mamdani’s affordability agenda go without the organised power of unions and a socialist movement behind it?

Mamdani was sworn into office in early January, using two Qurans — one from his grandfather and another from the New York Public Library — a symbolic gesture meant to signal a break from the political past. He presented himself as a different kind of mayor: not white, not Christian, and bringing a new era. “My fellow New Yorkers: Today begins a new era,” he declared.

Fed

His speech fed that hope. He promised a city no longer governed by the one percent, a politics rooted in collectivism rather than rugged individualism, and an administration that would “answer to all New Yorkers, not any billionaire or oligarch who thinks they can buy democracy.”

Yet this collectivism — and this supposed rejection of oligarchic influence — somehow excludes confrontation with Jessica Tisch and Donald Trump.

Boston’s mayor Michelle Wu claims no more than to be a “pragmatic progressive”, yet she refuses to meet with Trump, calls his actions “despicable”, and insists she will fight a federal government “intent on attacking its own people.”

What Mamdani confronts is not a series of isolated policy failures but a system that behaves like a metastasising cancer, infiltrating housing, policing, labour, and social services, embedding itself in the very texture of working-class life. Will the revolution he promised begin to fade into governance defined by caution, compromise, and accommodation.

At his inauguration, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Bernie Sanders stood proudly beside him. Can they help build the resilient, organised left needed to resist authoritarian and capitalist encroachment — or will we be limited to hoping for temporary bandages to a system whose wounds run far deeper than any single billionaire or far-right figure? □

More online

Response to Michael Chessum

On Greens and local government
bit.ly/lg-mc

No “saviour complex”!

Hein Htet Kyaw on Venezuela and a response
bit.ly/ven-deb

Reconnaissance in Greens

Exploring the new Green influx
bit.ly/recon-g



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

50% turnout threshold may go on 6 April

By Colin Foster

The "threshold" of 50% turnout for valid strike ballots, introduced by the Tories' Trade Union Act 2016, may go on 6 April. Or later. It depends on unions organising pressure.

The official arbitration service ACAS had said it would go in February, but recent government documents show ACAS was wrong.

On 8 and 9 January the government published an "explanatory memorandum" on ballots and "guidance" on other aspects of the Employment Rights Act which became law on 18 December 2025.

Those give no date on the 50% threshold, where repeal requires a special "commencement order" with the government "having regard" to the impact on turnout levels of the Act's changes to allow eballoting and workplace balloting on strikes. (Currently, since Thatcher, unions must do postal ballots).

Quick action is far from certain, and is unlikely unless unions get on the case.

Unions have usually welcomed the Employment Rights Act in general terms, but, worryingly, few have published anything, and none anything clear and trenchant about the schedules, on the thresholds or anything else.

Not only on schedules, but in the detail

of much substance yet to be filled in with so-called "secondary legislation", strong and public union campaigning is vital to maximise gains from the Act.

Unions do say they want further legislation, which is good, but it must go together rather than replace action to maximise the current Act.

The Fire Brigades Union says that, alongside other unions, it is "fighting for an 'Employment Rights Bill 2' [with] a complete ban on fire and rehire practices, mandatory sectoral collective bargaining, and a single status of workers so all workers are protected regardless of visa status".

Solidarity has advocated unions campaign also for a single-clause Bill for the right to claim unfair dismissal from "day one". The Labour government can and should stick with it until the Lords' maximum one-year delay is over (or until the unelected upper house is abolished, as it should be).

The Employment Relations Act removed the Minimum Service Level rules for strikes immediately on 18 December 2025.

From 18 February 2026:

- A reduction in the notice period a union must give an employer for industrial action from 14 days to 10 days.
- Threshold of 40% of all entitled to vote for strike ballots in public services

removed.

- Strike ballot mandates increase from six months to 12 months.
- Removing the requirement for trade unions to appoint a picketing supervisor.
- Much less information legally required for strike ballot notices.
- Protection against dismissal for all strikers, not just for the first 12 weeks of strike
- Union political funds become "opt out" rather than "opt in" for new members

From April 2026:

- Union ballots can be electronic or (for strikes) in workplace
 - Easing trade union recognition
 - Paternity leave becomes a "day one" right (currently: after 26 weeks)
 - Ordinary parental leave becomes a "day one" right (currently: after one year)
 - Statutory sick pay (SSP) to be paid from the first day of illness (currently: from fourth day), and lower earnings limit removed
 - Maximum "protective award" for failure to consult in collective redundancy doubles from 90 days' pay to 180 days' pay
 - Protection from detriment and unfair dismissal for whistleblowers making a sexual harassment disclosure.
- More measures follow in October 2026 and in 2027: bit.ly/era-50 □

Kino Eye

Béla Tarr, 1955–2026

By John Cunningham

For many, the Hungarian Béla Tarr is one of the greatest film directors ever. Writing in the *Guardian* Peter Bradshaw described Tarr as the "vividly disquieting master of spiritual desolation." His films consist of long takes, measured pace, minimal dialogues and austere, gloom-laden settings. So don't expect any thrills.

Tarr was unrelenting in his efforts to portray life at the bottom, of people stuck in apparently hopeless situations. His first feature, *Family Nest* (1979), was set on a grim, claustrophobic housing estate. *Damnation* (1987) focusses on a singer in the seediest night club ever put on the screen, and the setting for *Satan's Tango* (1994) is a dilapidated former collective farm where everything is in a state of advanced decay.

Werkmeister Harmonies (2000) is his strangest film. A small town receives a visit from a large dead whale, pulled in



on a trailer. Unsurprisingly, this attracts the town's populace but it also appears to trigger a wave of mass hysteria as crowds ransack the local hospital. *The Man from London* (2007) is based very loosely on the eponymous novel by George Simenon.

In *The Turin Horse* (2011), a couple, dependent on their work horse for survival, fall ever deeper into poverty.

In 2011 Tarr announced he would make no more films. He later established a film studio in Sarajevo, The Film Factory, where he helped produce a number of films by young would-be directors. □

Join Workers' Liberty!

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



Strike against “fire and rehire”

By David Axon

Workers at Tetrosyl in Rochdale will have their sixth day of strike on 30 January, against “fire and rehire”.

Tetrosyl, a manufacturer of car care products, has refused to recognise the workers’ union, Usdaw, which comments: “The business was able to pay shareholders a dividend of £2 million last year. Yet, as it stands, warehouse staff are set to lose between £4,000 and £7,000 per year, due to the removal of terms such as a shift supplement and paid breaks.”

The picket on 30 January will be joined by supporters from the local labour movement. Rochdale NEU has a striker speaking at its meeting two days before. Local Labour MP Elsie Blundell has shown support on the picket line: “Workers at Tetrosyl are trying to protect their livelihoods, and the protest this morning was a lively and passionate one”.

Linked

She also linked the dispute to the government’s restrictions on fire and rehire through the Employment Rights Act, saying: “I’m glad that Labour have now changed the law to make ‘fire and rehire’ illegal”.

This is not quite right. Labour’s manifesto commitment was to “end fire and rehire”, but in fact the Act amends unfair dismissal legislation (with effect from October 2026) so that fire and rehire is automatically considered an “unfair dismissal” at an Employment Tribunal. There is a loophole even then: an employer gains exemption if it can “show evidence of financial difficulties”.

A company like Tetrosyl, which splits its business into seven different companies (all with the same directors and company address) would no doubt try to do exactly that. The provisions of the Act still need strengthening to gain the effect Blundell claims they will have. □

Homerton phlebotomists set a marker

Callum, a shop steward from the Homerton Unison branch, talked to *Solidarity*.

Phlebotomists at Homerton NHS Trust have won a significant victory as part of Unison’s rebanding campaign.

“The campaign actually started in 2015 when phlebotomists tried to get rebanded from band 2 to band 3. In that instance they were not successful and the campaign died down. Then last year, the Unison branch ran a high profile campaign to reband healthcare assistants and maternity support workers from band 2 to band 3. This campaign was successful, with the Trust agreeing to reband around 250 workers.

“The key battle in rebanding campaigns is around back pay. After 15 years of austerity and pay cuts there has been wage compression at the bottom of the Agenda for Change (NHS) pay scale and the difference between band 2 and band 3 can be as little as £472 a year before tax. Much bigger sums are possible by winning the argument on back pay.

“The negotiations around back pay are made complicated because band 2s get a higher rate of unsocial hours payments and some NHS employers have attempted to subtract these additional payments from back pay settlements.

“Phlebotomists contacted the branch wishing to have another go. Within two weeks, the initial group of four or five workers had organised 80% density among the Trust’s phlebotomists. We put the case for rebanding to management and it was quickly agreed.

“The initial offer was just over one year’s back pay, but the phlebotomists were determined to fight for more. Some of these workers had worked in these roles for over 20 years. Additional evidence was put to management and we were clear that the phlebotomists were ready to ballot for industrial action.

“Phlebotomy is essential for diagnostics within the hospital and the workers have a lot of industrial muscle. Understanding the strength of the union organisation, the Trust agreed to pay over four years back pay.

“Rebanding is a flagship campaign in Unison but in some areas there has been pushback because the union has failed to negotiate good back pay settlements. The lesson from our campaign is that you have to back up negotiations with strong industrial organisation.

“The rebanding campaigns are important for rebuilding union density and organisation, but they have only become necessary because of year on year pay cuts that have degraded NHS pay. Ultimately, we need a fight for proper pay increases.

“This is an important victory because it sets a reference point for other phlebotomists across the country. In Gloucestershire, phlebotomists seeking rebanding have been on strike for nearly 300 days, in the longest strike in NHS history. This



Good enough for Homerton, good enough for Gloucester

NHS WORKERS SAY NO!

Museum workers win reballot

By Ken Worthington

Striking workers at the National Coal Mining Museum at Caphouse Colliery, Overton, near Wakefield, have voted to extend their industrial action. Unison members voted 92.1% to continue, on a turnout of 86.4%, gaining a legal mandate until July.

Bosses have offered a pay rise of 84p per hour for all workers with a clause to place all striking workers under management investigation on their return to work. Workers unanimously rejected the offer. Wakefield district Unison branch secretary Sam Greenwood told *Solidarity* “it is unheard of for an employer to include a discipline clause in a pay offer. Members have been threatened with disciplinary action for liking or sharing Facebook posts. Until the threat from management is removed, there can be no agreement to end the dispute”.

On the back of the rejection strikers

have put a counter claim for a two-year deal to take the lowest paid to around £15 per hour. The museum has not responded.

The Charity Commission has launched an investigation into the museum “to assess wider information about the charity’s governance and management, and determine any next steps”. Striking workers, Unison, MP’s and Wakefield Council have written to the Commission to raise serious concerns about leadership failings, poor decision making and a lack of accountability at the top of the organisation.

Resolve

A press release from Unison says: “The Charity Commission’s involvement underlines that this issue goes beyond our pay dispute... our members have shown extraordinary resolve in standing up for fair pay, dignity at work and the future of this important heritage institution”. □

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

Now drop Palestine Action ban!

By Will Roberts

The Palestine Action hunger strikers have called off their strike, with the longest of them going 72 days without food.

Concessions have been made allowing meetings with prison management in several cases, and, most significantly, the British government has opted not to renew its contract with Israeli arms manufacturer Elbit Systems.

It is a relief that some of the strikers' demands have been met and that they have ended their strike, but a disgrace that it took this long for the

government and prison administrations to respond. Some of the strikers may now have lifelong health problems as a result of their strike, and it's a miracle none of them died. The labour movement should step up pressure for the ban on Palestine Action as "terrorist" to be lifted.

Some of the strikers — those involved in the Brize Norton action — were immediately met with a court hearing for their case on 16 January. The five activists pleaded not guilty to charges relating to the throwing of paint on an RAF plane. □

What now in Iran?

Probably over 80% of Iranians oppose the regime now, and many bitterly hate it.

Iran's inflation has been running at 50% for over five years. The richest 1% own one third of Iran's wealth. Corruption is endemic.

There are crises in provision of electricity and water. Air pollution kills tens of thousands each year in Tehran.

The Iranian currency fell from 300,000 rials/US\$ in 2020 to 1,450,000 rials/US\$ at the end of 2025, which was the final spark for the bazaar is of Tehran to kick-off the recent rebellion on 28 December.

The casualties in the recent protest wave are staggering. The *Sunday Times*, quoting a network of Iranian doctors, calculated that "at least 16,500-18,000" people had been killed by the regime, and 330,000 injured, many over a few days from 7 to 9 January.

What now? See page 2. □

Against YP exclusions!

Ruth Cashman, a regular contributor to *Solidarity*, and other organised socialists, have been excluded from the Your Party committee contest, for which nominations open 21 January.

Jeremy Corbyn himself said when *Solidarity's* forerunner *Socialist Organiser* was banned by Labour: "The strength of the labour movement ought to be the ability of all to express views freely. Instead we have the serious curtailment of free speech in the Labour Party. I am totally opposed to all bans and proscriptions in the Labour Party." The same should apply to YP.

We are urging YP branches to send messages of protest to the YP office, treasurer@yourparty.uk. □

• More: page 18

**Billionaires are looting the world.
We're not in the middle of a recession; we're in the middle of a robbery.**



Anti-Trump day in USA

By Rhodri Evans

Tuesday 20 January is another day of action in the USA against Trump, with a call for people to walk out of work or school at 2pm.

Sadly, no union is promoting this call. It comes from NGO and community groups.

Unions have joined previous days of action, if only, so far, with small contingents. The United Auto Workers (UAW) has called for unions to work together for a general strike... but only in May 2028.

Meanwhile, Trump is:

- Directing ICE thugs' terror on the streets of Minneapolis and other cities
- Withdrawing the USA even from international frameworks to assess ecological threats (let alone to mend them)
- Seizing Venezuela's oil and saying he will "run" the country
- Beating war drums over Greenland
- Trying to push out US Federal Reserve (central bank) chief Jay Powell.

Solidarity has no brief for Powell, or for the idea that central banks should be outside elected control.

But, equally, Trump's arbitrary autocracy is not made democratic by his 49.8% vote on 5 November 2024. Good democracy requires control over the executive by elected assemblies; right of recall of representatives; and officials on workers' wages, not on Trump's give-me-a-plane rake-offs. □

• More: page 19



New settler drive in West Bank

By Ira Berkovic

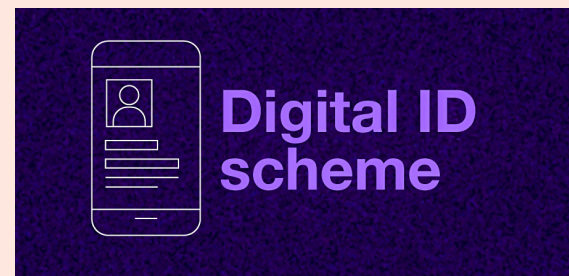
The Israeli government plans to begin construction in February on a new bypass in the occupied West Bank, intended for use by Palestinian vehicles only. This will allow Israeli authorities to bar Palestinian vehicles from other roads, effectively cutting them off from parts of the territory.

The road construction plan is part of a wider scheme to build a large new settlement in the "E1" area of the West Bank, between East Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Ramallah. Should the plan reach completion, it will effectively bisect the West Bank and exclude Palestinians from more of the territory. Road construction will also require the demolition of some Palestinian communities, such as As Saraiya.

Israeli ministers have described the government's policy variously as aiming at "burying" or "erasing" prospects for a Palestinian state. Netanyahu's coalition has accelerated and intensified the settlement-building project in the West Bank partially in response to growing international recognition of the State of Palestine. The settlement movement, which has now effectively hegemonised much of mainstream Israeli politics, wants to ensure the territory of a future Palestinian state is so pockmarked with Jewish settlements, and divided by roads and checkpoints, that Palestinian sovereignty is impossible.

Overthrowing that political hegemony is key to progress. Speaking at Workers' Liberty's Ideas for Freedom event in November 2025, Israeli socialist activist Asaf Yakir was asked whether settlement expansion will prevent the emergence of a Palestinian state. Yakir replied that developing the political will inside Israel to end the occupation must be the primary focus, rather than the logistical questions of how settlers will be removed.

The Israeli government has told the lawyer representing Palestinian families who filed a petition to block the road construction that they have 45 days to file a further appeal, before construction commences. □



After the U-turns

By Chris Reynolds

The financier Amschel Rothschild, spooked by the 1848 revolution, walked the streets of Frankfurt trying to placate people with chunks of cash, and explaining that he had calculated the amount by dividing his fortune by the city's population.

The gesture did not stop the revolution. Keir Starmer has now discredited himself so much that even if he were to go on the streets offering a wodge of money to every passer-by, that wouldn't help.

The latest u-turn, on compulsory digital ID, is welcome, and those on the Winter Fuel Allowance, PIP access for disabled people, and the two-child benefit cap were a tribute to labour-movement pressure. The withdrawal of government's wrecking amendment to its own Hillsborough Bill is welcome, except that it comes with indefinite postponement of the Bill.

But Starmer will go. The question is: who will replace him, when? A new Labour leader, soon? Or Farage, later, flanked by Jenrick and other Tory bigots, later?

Labour activists and unions should cast off the "nothing makes a difference" mood, and step up efforts to call Starmer to account, force a leadership election, and get as left a replacement as we can installed, under as much pressure (and continued pressure) as we can organise. □

For a workers' government

SOLIDARITY

& WORKERS' LIBERTY



Workers' unity across borders



I do **not** want Venezuela

I do **not** want Greenland.

I do **not** want Cuba.

I do **not** want Canada.

I do **not** want Mexico.

I just want healthcare.

Pic: SEIU

By Alan Gilbert

Out of pique at not getting the Nobel Peace Prize, Trump now says he might go to war to seize Greenland. Or rather, he's definitely going to trade war, and perhaps for military war too. We:

- Support the right of Green-

landers to decide the future of their island

- Look to the US left and labour movement to stop Trump
- Oppose tariff retaliation, which can create a vicious spiral of rising prices, decreasing trade, and higher barriers between nations.

This latest twist shows the folly of Starmer wooing Trump. Peter Mandelson, as official British ambassador, was servile and vocal in praise for Trump for months until Epstein scandal at last forced him to resign. Yet the much-touted "US-UK trade deal" has still not been signed.

Answer

Our basic answer is workers' unity across borders, and to help that we want lower borders. Majority opinion now in Britain is

for rejoining the EU. Solidarity campaigns in the labour movement for the Labour government immediately to re-enter the Single Market (including free movement) and the Customs Union, and to go for negotiations for rejoining. □

