

For social ownership of the banks and industry

SOLIDARITY

& WORKERS' LIBERTY



A cooperative commonwealth

We work for public ownership and radical democracy

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Against Starmer, for socialism!

Starmer is a dead duck. The question is, what alternative?

On 24 January, Starmer strong-armed the officers of Labour's National Executive Committee to stop Andy Burnham standing for selection as Labour candidate for the Gorton and Denton by-election due on 26 February.

That wasn't because Burnham is specially left-wing. He isn't. It obviously wasn't for the "official reason" either (cost of a mayoral by-election).

It was because Starmer thought Burnham would win in Gorton, and then, as an MP, be able to force a new Labour leader election, probably after the 7 May council polls.

And that Starmer would lose that Labour leader election, if he stood again.

Starmer is further discredited everywhere except among his few loyalists. He will be ultra-discredited if Labour now loses the Gorton and Denton by-election. (The one [poll](#) so far shows Reform on 36%, Labour 33%, Greens 21%. But it was a tiny and unreliable sample).

Reform is on a roll, and its Gorton candidate, Matt Goodwin, is a Reform "ultra", not so long ago denounced even by another Tory who has now joined Reform as "an explicit racist".

The root of it all? The impossibility of squaring even Labour's faint social promises with Starmer's pledge to be "pro-business".

Squaring mild promises with pro-profiteering might have been possible in a time of buoyant capitalism without a huge government debt overhang. But GDP growth has been 1.1% pa from quarter 2 2024 to Q3 2025. It was steadily 3% pa in Blair's 1993-2007.

The government is paying financiers over £100 billion a year in interest on a debt overhang around 96% of GDP. It was around 44% from 1997 to 2007. The "budget balance" (excess of public spending over tax and other government revenue) is high at 5.5%. The interest rate on UK government debt is 4.4%, the highest rate for any richer capitalist country. Inflation (CPIH) over 2025 has been 3.6%, and is now again higher for food than for more "luxury" items.

Rachel Reeves did not invent capitalism, or direct the Tory governments from 2010 to 2025, and in that sense, none of this is her "fault". But nothing she has even considered doing will turn it round any time soon. It will get worse if and when Trump's tariff wars finally force a slump, or the AI or cryptocurrency or "non-bank" finance bubbles burst. The capitalist world is in turmoil, in a transition from the "globalisation" regime of 1980-2008 to an as-yet-unmapped shape.

Pressure from the labour movement or from public opinion has shifted Starmer

and Reeves on Winter Fuel Allowance, disabled access to PIP, the two-child benefit cap, recognising Palestine, and compulsory digital ID. When the shifts are small and come together with assaults on asylum rights and on trial by jury, they "redeem" Starmer in no-one's eyes. The government's modest positives (Employment Rights Act, Renters' Reform Act...) don't, either.

The unions have leverage. But they are doing little. GMB and Usdaw backed Starmer's Burnham ban. Steve Wright of FBU and Andrea Egan of Unison protested, but no more. No union has kicked off about the NHS or asylum rights.

No wonder many activists have looked to the Green Party instead. The Greens' policies are limited. In their July 2024 manifesto they proposed an NHS budget boost less than a third even of what Rachel Reeves has actually instituted. A recent survey in these pages found them weak on ecology.

Yet they are for a wealth tax and for asylum rights.

Some look to the Sultana-Corbyn Your Party too, expecting that it will speak on similar lines when its internal troubles are tamped down.

Muted

Labour left agitation is similar — the North West region Labour conference on 24-25 January called for asylum rights with no votes against — but muted and defensive. Too many activists are in despondent and defensive mode.

Such limited fightbacks are not enough.

A wealth tax would be good. Together with levelling up capital gains tax to income-tax rates, it would enable sufficient increase in NHS budgets to make a real difference.

But our sights need to be set higher. Spain, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Norway all have wealth taxes. France still has one, though in 2017 Macron cut its scope.

All those countries still have the capitalist priority of profit over social provision and social foresight. Indeed, an OECD report in November 2025 showed that even oil-rich Norway has worse health waiting times than England.

As long as the ultra-rich dominate society, they will find ways to minimise wealth taxes, as before Thatcher they minimised 80%-plus taxes on top incomes.

We need a broader horizon, broader aims.

Public ownership and democratic control of all utilities and major businesses, and land, will allow social direction of investment and of green transition, and choke off the siphoning of resources to the ultra-rich. Radically more democratic



politics, with right of recall of representatives; representatives and officials on workers' wages; and direct control by elected assemblies over the "executive" government, will allow real social control.

In a word, socialism. Not what the USSR called "socialism", but what socialists before Stalin's counter-revolution called "the cooperative commonwealth". Working-class rule.

Reforms

It won't happen tomorrow, of course. But if you limit your vision to places you can walk to within a day, you won't see much of the world. And smaller reforms are best won when those on top fear revolutionary movements.

If socialists do not speak out for socialism, no-one will. And if no-one speaks out for more than damage-limitation measures, we won't even get those.

The advantage of forcing a Labour leadership election — before Keir Starmer has to resign because he has

paved the way for a Reform-Tory government — is not that a new leader will be really left-wing. It is that it could — not necessarily will, but could — reopen Labour politics, and jolt socialist-minded people out of despondency.

We produce *Solidarity* in order to inform readers, especially about battles and campaigns which other media don't report. More fundamentally, though, we produce it as an "organiser" in spreading the word of socialism — to rally people to proclaim working-class socialism as the alternative to all the "business-friendly" options. Indeed, as the only way to save society from escalating militarism and nationalism, and from ecological calamity. □

Correction

The claims that Bristol NEU had received threats of violence over the Brunel Academy affair which we reported in *Solidarity* 759 are uncorroborated. □

Kurdish forces defeated by Syria's central government

By Pete Boggs

The Kurdish-led armed forces of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria have agreed to abandon their region's autonomy and submit to the Syrian government.

That agreement followed a ceasefire, which in turn followed months of sporadic violence in eastern neighbourhoods of Aleppo such as Sheikh Maqsood and Ashrafiyah, which escalated in recent weeks. Government soldiers entered these (Kurdish majority) neighbourhoods, forcing an SDF retreat and an accompanying mass exodus of Kurds.

After the victory in Aleppo, government forces pushed deeper into SDF-held territory, taking control of large parts of the Raqqa, Deir ez-Zor, and Al-Hasakah provinces. In addition to the territory itself, the other two "assets" that have changed hands are large oil and natural gas fields and prisons full of former Daesh/ISIS fighters (and their families, and various other prisoners).

The Syrian government and the SDF agreed a ceasefire on 18 January which did not hold, and a new ceasefire was put into effect on 20 January. Then on 30 January the SDF signed a US-backed deal which established a framework for incorporating SDF fighters into Syria's national army and police forces, and integrating the region's civilian institutions into the central government structure.

This recent fighting was very violent, and there are reports of atrocities carried out by government-aligned forces. The Syrian Arab Army in its current state is not a regular and uniform army. It consists of the merger of countless different organisations into various divisions, and these divisions still retain much of their pre-unification character. For instance, the 72nd Division which is in Aleppo and was involved in the recent violence comes from the merger of five pro-Turkish militias.

Murderers, rapists, and human traffickers who acted as mercenaries on behalf of Turkish imperialism have been integrated into the army, and were to be found at the centre of all the big ethnic and massacres of the last year: against Alawites in March, against Druze over summer, and now against Kurds.

Violent ethnic and religious sectarianism is not unique to the Turkish-aligned militias now allied with Damascus. The Minister of Endowments (effectively responsible for religious affairs) Abu al-Khair Shukri told mosques to celebrate the "conquests and victories", opening his statement with a verse from the eighth chapter of the Quran, named

al-Anfal (The Spoils of War). This was interpreted by many Kurds as a direct reference to Saddam Hussein's genocidal 1988 Anfal campaign against the Iraqi Kurds.

Throughout the Syrian Civil War the US treated the SDF as their primary local ally in the fight against Daesh-ISIS. The SDF relied heavily on American arms and air support, but there were constant worries about what would happen once they outlived their usefulness to the US.

That has now happened. Since the Assad government fell, the US has gradually re-opened relations with the al-Sharaa government. Early on during this process the brief for Special Envoy for Syria (effectively an ambassador role) was given to Tom Barrack, the US Ambassador to Turkey: a former billionaire and long-time Trump ally who brokered his relations with various Gulf princes.

He has led the charge in Washington to normalise relations with post-Assad Syria. On Tuesday 20 January he tweeted that "the original purpose of the primary anti-ISIS force on the ground has largely expired", having been superseded by the Damascus government.

Obstacle

This last year has also seen the US-Turkish relationship grow closer. The primary obstacle to that had been American support for the SDF: the Turkish government sees the SDF as indistinguishable from the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), and despite the supposed peace process underway in Turkey is implacably hostile to any perceived expressions of Kurdish national identity.

The Turkish interest in Syria is built on the twin pillars of violent opposition to the Kurds and a desire to profit from the rebuilding of Syria, particularly through Turkey's large but corrupt construction industry.

Throughout its existence the AANES was largely reliant on large imperialist powers. This was primarily the US, but at other times it benefited from Russian bombing campaigns in Syria. When the US was willing to stand aside it was shown to be incredibly vulnerable, such as in 2019 when Trump's withdrawal of troops was immediately followed by a Turkish invasion. Following this troop withdrawal the AANES grew closer to the Assad government.

Our support for national struggles is not predicated on a refusal to take any aid from imperialist powers (or authoritarian governments), nor does it rely on those struggles being led by socialists and the working class. There is a basic negative right to live free from national

oppression, and this oppression is a barrier to the development of an independent working class movement, both in the nation being oppressed and in the nation doing the oppressing.

The guiding ideology of the AANES, "democratic confederalism", has been lauded by some on the left as a practical renewal of libertarian socialist ideas, but that is not the basis on which we support the Kurdish national struggle. This model comes from the founder of the PKK Abdullah Öcalan: the ruling party in the AANES, the Democratic Union Party (PYD), began as a Syrian offshoot of the PKK and the two parties remain affiliated. The official mythology states that Öcalan became convinced by the ideas of Murray Bookchin and initiated a transformation of the movement from a tightly controlled nationalist Stalinist guerilla outfit into a libertarian universalism: Alex de Jong has written critically about this history.

Authoritarian

AANES rule was often violent and authoritarian. It failed to win comprehensive support among Arab populations it ruled over, who faced discrimination and repression. There are numerous reports of Arab activists being arrested, and during the collapse of the Assad government in December 2024 SDF soldiers fired upon protests in Arab-majority areas. Civil society was largely centred around the ruling party, and organisations such as trade unions were largely used as tools of state control.

Much of the SDF relationship with Arabs whom it ruled over was mediated through tribal leaders, who proved to be wholly unreliable allies: many of them were reportedly in talks with Damascus for months in the planning of this latest offensive, and then largely abandoned the SDF.

The record of the AANES in power is important to note, but it has no bearing on the basic fact that Kurdish people constitute a shared community bound by language, culture, and territory. Kurdish people deserve the right to decide their own future for themselves, and to be free from the racist and sectarian violence they have faced at the hands of religious reactionaries, bandits, and imperial armies. The AANES's collapse makes the immediate prospect of any realisation of Kurdish national self-determination unlikely.

On 17 January al-Sharaa promised that Kurdish would be recognised as a national language and Nowruz would be made an official holiday. According to Al Jazeera, "government forces will

avoid entering Kurdish-majority areas. However, small Interior Ministry security units will take control of state institutions in Hasakah and Qamishli, including civil registries, passport offices and the airport. Kurdish local police will continue security operations in both cities before eventually merging with the Interior Ministry".

How this will work out over months and years remains to be seen.

Left

There are oppositional forces within Syrian society who took a courageous stand against the assault. The Revolutionary Left Current of Syria is a revolutionary socialist organisation in the Cliffite tradition – they were seemingly part of the British SWP's International Socialist Tendency in December 2024 (or at least described as comrades), but are now not listed among the IST's organisations on its [website](#).

On 20 January they released a statement responding to a call for a general mobilisation in defence of the AANES by the SDF. It is overwhelmingly supportive of the SDF and promises to put their own resources at "the service of the Kurdish people's steadfastness and the protection of the Autonomous Administration [AANES]", condemning the al-Sharaa government as "the foreign-dependent Thermidorian authority – the descendant of tyranny, ISIS, and Al-Qaeda". The socialist activist Joseph Daher who is (or at least was previously) associated with the Revolutionary Left Current also condemned the government assault, whilst being more critical of AANES rule. □

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Trump keeps a grip on Venezuela

By Will Roberts

Venezuela's government continues to develop an uneasy, but ultimately subservient, relationship with the Trump administration. Delcy Rodriguez has held onto power, and seems to have pulled much of the Venezuelan government into line behind her.

There are still elements of a "tight-rope" approach, where Rodriguez tries to posture as an anti-American leader who will refuse to bow down to Trump's unreasonable demands and flatter anti-American sentiments in her support base. But the posture seems only a posture.

At an event on 27 January, Rodriguez told a group of oil workers "enough already of Washington's orders over politicians in Venezuela [...] Let Venezuelan politics resolve our differences and internal conflicts. This Republic has paid a very high price for having to confront the consequences of fascism and extremism in our country."

Strong words. But less than two days later, it was announced that the country's oil industry was being completely overhauled, undoing great swathes of the nationalisation that occurred under Chavez in order to appeal to international oil companies — particularly American ones. It's possible this will face legal challenge in Venezuela before becoming reality.

Marco Rubio (left in charge of much of the aftermath of Trump's kidnapping of Nicolas Maduro) announced that the Venezuelan government would provide a monthly budget to the United States, which would then release funds from a Qatar-run account receiving the income from Venezuela's oil sales. Rubio described this as a "short-term measure" to deal with a "fiscal crunch", rather than in Trump's more brutal terms: the US running Venezuela's economy month-to-month, indefinitely. Either way, it is nakedly imperialist, and leaves behind any norms of even bourgeois economic diplomacy.

An external power controlling the purse strings is terrible news for any workers' action in Venezuela. What concessions can a strike in the oil sector win if the government doesn't even have control of its own money?

It may seem tempting to paint Rodriguez as a renegade, cutting the "true" leader, Maduro, away and betraying his legacy in order to do an easy deal with the US. If that's true, then she has pulled some high-profile Madurist figures along with her. Maduro's son, Nicolas Maduro Guerra, [announced](#) on 16 January that he would be open to establishing diplomatic relations with both the US and Israel, "because it is our self-determination".

The workers' movement has no dog in this fight: whether or not the capitalist



states of the world have embassies in one another's capitals has little bearing on our vision of politics. But it is a useful demonstration of how starkly the Madurists are bending over backwards to accommodate every whim of the American regime — ditching ideas that would previously have been seen as central to their worldview.

All this manoeuvring may have won the Venezuelan government dribs and drabs of income, but little recovery from the country's drastic economic decline under Maduro. Oil companies remain entirely sceptical about the idea of returning to the country unless they have concrete guarantees that their property won't be nationalised again, and the large quantities of oil on the international market continue to make Venezuela's reserves of heavy, expensive-to-process oil a difficult sell.

Airspace

Trump has attempted to offer new benefits: on 29 January he announced after a conversation with Rodriguez that he would open Venezuela's commercial airspace for the first time in years, hoping to encourage American businesses and consumers to explore the renewed possibilities. The brilliance of American diplomacy in full force: they take away your dictator, and they replace him with holidaygoers, all before you've had time to offer an opinion yourself.

The reopening of the US embassy has coincided with a significant change: Rodriguez announced on 31 January that she would be rolling out a mass amnesty for political prisoners, thousands of whom have been arrested throughout the Maduro reign. The plan also involves closing El Helicoide prison, notorious for housing and torturing opponents of the government.

The Venezuelan working class, for now, remains a muted force. Freeing political prisoners is an encouraging development, but without positive rights to establish and operate independent trade unions and other civil society organisations, the country's democratic urges will remain stifled. Commentary from those on the anti-Maduro, anti-Chavista Venezuelan left such as [Venezuelan Voices](#) is valuable, but still a long way from building a movement capable of winning the struggle for democracy.

Vacuum

Many on the left in Britain have expressed opposition to the naked imperialism of Trump's government, and the unjust nature of their military attack on Maduro. Workers' Liberty agrees, but politics can never be purely negative: in opposing American imperialism in Latin America, you must also name the force that you wish to see victorious over it,

or else that vacuum will be filled with corrupt and reactionary forces, like the Rodriguez government that is currently dismantling Venezuelan independence in the hopes of placating the US.

When socialists here call for solidarity with independent working-class activists in Venezuela, we do so not as something to look to at some point in the future, once things have calmed down, but as an urgent answer to the current political crisis in the country. Given free reign over an election period, Rodriguez will cling onto power by repressing her opposition through strong control of the military, much as her two predecessors did. It is vital we support struggles to prevent that outcome.

Against Trump and the Maduristas, back Venezuela's workers, and their right to decide their own fate! □

Activist Agenda

Meetings

Wed 11 Feb. Iran: workers and the revolt. AWL London Forum, with Morad Shirin, Azadeh Neman and Mark Osborn. 7pm-9pm, Marchmont Community Centre, 62 Marchmont St WC1N 1AB

At work or on campus

We organise: among health and local government, school and education workers, on the railway and London Underground, in the civil service, on uni campuses, and more. See workersliberty.org/work-unions, Insta [@workerslibertystudents](https://www.instagram.com/workerslibertystudents), and email awl@workersliberty.org for more.

Template motions

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

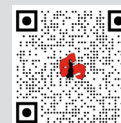
Socialist-feminist book clubs

bit.ly/bc-sf

London: *Mother State* by Helen Charman. 2pm, Sunday 22 Feb, Effra Social,

Campaigns

See workersliberty.org/agenda. □



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

Israel is still bombing Gaza

By Ira Berkovic

At least 32 people were killed by Israeli air strikes in Gaza on Saturday 31 January, further highlighting how the “ceasefire” exists only in name. The bombings were reported to be the heaviest since the nominal ceasefire came into effect.

The death toll from Israel’s war on Gaza now stands at over 70,000. The real figure is much higher, as this total does not capture those who have died from diseases caused by damage to healthcare and sanitation infrastructure. Through the war, the Israeli military persistently disputed the figures published by the Hamas-run Health Ministry, but on 29 January, Israeli media reported that Israeli security officials now accepted the 70,000 figure. Over 500 people have been killed since the 10 October ceasefire.

The so-called “Board of Peace”, instituted as part of the “Trump Plan”, is now nominally in operation. The Board is, by design, more akin to a club for business investors than anything aimed at instituting democratic, or even functional, governance for Palestinians in Gaza. The fact that both Vladimir Putin and Benjamin Netanyahu have seats should be enough to assess its character.

Trump himself may view Gaza primarily as a potential real-estate investment opportunity. But the wider Trumpist milieu is split between an America-First isolationist pole, exemplified by white-nationalist “anti-Zionist” influencers like Nick Fuentes, which opposes support for Israel, and right-wing Zionists, both Christian and Jewish, who want the US to sponsor the Jewish-supremacist, annihilationist ambitions of the Israeli far right and settler movement.

In reality, probably only the UN has the potential infrastructure to maintain basic social provision whilst steps towards genuinely democratic governance, including free and fair elections involving Palestinian parties, are held. Israel’s restrictions on the operation of UNRWA, the UN agency responsible for aid provision in Palestinian territories, severely restrict its role.

West Bank

Deadly violence has also continued in the occupied West Bank, with armed settlers raiding two villages in Masafer Yatta on Wednesday 28 January. Three people were seriously injured. Standing Together reported that the Israeli army blocked ambulances from attending to treat them. Recent weeks have also seen Israeli military raids on Hebron. Bedouin residents have also been expelled from Ras Ein al-Auja in the Jordan Valley.

Standing Together said: “Ras Ein al-Auja was strangled, suffocated slowly by years of settler violence that escalated into open terror in recent weeks, until the last remaining Palestinian Bedouin families were left with no future to imagine on land they had lived on for generations.

“This village was home to around 700 people from more than 100 families who built their lives there over decades, and it was destroyed deliberately. Settlers stole their sheep, cut off their water, harassed them day and night, and systematically wrecked any possibility of normal life, all while knowing they would never be stopped or punished because the Israeli government made a clear, conscious decision to look away and let it happen.

“The images coming out of Ras Ein al-Auja are unbearable precisely because they are so familiar: families loading what they can onto trucks, homes abandoned, a landscape of loss that echoes the photos of the Nakba in 1948.

The violence on the ground is carried out by extremist settlers openly backed by far-right ministers sitting in government, but the goal of shrinking Palestinian land and livelihood is a long-standing project of the state.

“The violent ethnic cleansing and land in the West Bank ramped up in the shadow of the war on Gaza and has continued in full force ever since. For Palestinians in the West Bank, it is a daily reality of terror, with no one to turn to and no way of protecting themselves. As long as our government continues to choose military occupation and supremacy over millions of Palestinians with no civil rights, this reality will continue. That’s why it’s up to us to push our society in the opposite direction — toward a future of freedom, equality and real safety for everyone.” □

Palestinian strike against social neglect

By Ira Berkovic

On 22 January, strikes and protests took place across Palestinian towns and cities in Israel, demanding an increase in social provision in order to combat an epidemic of violent crime.

Social services in Palestinian communities have been historically underfunded by the Israeli state. The poverty and marginalisation this has caused have proved fertile breeding grounds for criminal gangs. Recently, the police force, which is controlled by the ministry headed by far-right minister Itamar Ben Gvir, has increasingly

adopted a policy of non-intervention and refuses to investigate murders, seemingly happy to let Arabs kill each other.

Around 20% of Israeli citizens are Palestinian. Whilst they have a measure of formal equality, including the right to vote, with political representation in the Israeli parliament, they face considerable racism and discrimination. This has intensified since 7 October and the genocidal war on Gaza, with many Palestinian citizens of Israel who spoke out against the war facing disciplinary charges or dismissal from

work. Palestinian bus drivers have also faced a spate of attacks from right-wing Jewish youths.

A further mass protest against the social neglect that has led to the crime wave took place in Tel Aviv on Saturday 31 January.

Strikes

The left-wing binational (Palestinian-Jewish) social movement Standing Together, which has been involved in the strikes and protests, said: “We’ve been naming the crisis for what it is: a national emergency. The media tries to frame this as a problem unique

to the nature of Palestinian society. This is far from the truth. It is the result of years of a policy of government neglect and police abandonment.”

Standing Together organised a conference on the issue in Nazareth on Friday 30 January, and co-organised the Tel Aviv demonstration the following day. Ghadir Hani, a Palestinian leader of Standing Together, said: “This is an excruciating time for me and my community, but it’s also a reminder of the immense power that we have as a collective.” □

For national rights, against nationalism

By Ira Berkovic

For the internationalist, class-struggle left, supporting national liberation struggles is a source of tension. Nations are necessarily cross-class blocs, and victorious national liberation struggles invariably institute capitalist states based on class exploitation. Class-struggle politics require moving beyond, and against, the idea of “national unity” and “national interest”, and the notion that we should fundamentally identify with others who happen to share our national background, rather than workers, of any national or ethnic

background, who share our class position.

Some currents on the left, including left-communists and some anarchist groups, resolve the tension by dismissing struggles for national self-determination as reactionary side-tracks from the class struggle. Other currents ignore the tension entirely, preferring to lean into the “nationalism of the oppressed”, often implying that the more vigorous, revanchist, and maximalist the dominant nationalism of an oppressed people, the more progressive it is.

A better attitude to ideas of

nationalism and national belonging was expressed by the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish in a 1996 interview. Darwish quoted an exchange between the French writer Jean Genet and the Spanish writer Juan Goytisolo: “Genet said that a homeland is a stupid idea, except for those who still don’t have one. Goytisolo, the Spanish poet, answered him: ‘And when they have a homeland?’ Genet said: ‘Let them throw it out the window.’”

A similar idea was expressed recently by the Palestinian musician Tamer Nafar, in an interview on the *Unapologetic: The*

Third Narrative podcast. Nafar said: “Ever since I started my career, I’ve always thought, don’t put me in that box of ‘Palestinian’. I didn’t choose to be a Palestinian, it’s just there. My priority is being an artist. And every time the media was interested in me because of Palestine, I used to get mad. Be interested in me because of my songs! But since 7 October, my art is not in danger. The side that faces genocide is the Palestinian side. That’s why I hold onto it.

“I don’t give a fuck about flags. If you tell me to order the colours in my flag, I might con-

fuse it. Honestly, I don’t know. But for the last two years, I feel that my Palestinian body is in danger. That’s why I hold onto it, and take care of it, not the patriotic part of it. I want to reach a point where nobody is destroying or killing my people. I want to free Palestine so I can free myself from Palestine.”

The left can support struggles for national self-determination without draping ourselves in any flag, and whilst understanding that the reason we fight for a world free of national oppression is to better enable us to fight for a world beyond nations. □



Trump? “No problem”? Or fascist?

By Jim Denham

From the moment Donald Trump emerged from his gilded escalator on 15 June 2015 to announce his run for US presidency, debate has raged about whether he can be called a fascist.

There was soon plenty of fuel for the “fascist” claim: his white nationalism, his rhetorical anti-elitism and anti-intellectualism, his vilification of racialised internal and external enemies, his dehumanising language and open encouragement of violence, were all suggestive of fascism.

The main objection to the idea of Trump being a fascist was that “classic” fascism was inseparable from the revolutionary conditions of its emergence in Europe between the two world wars (meaning Trump – and indeed, anyone else – simply cannot be called a “fascist” in this day and age).

Initially, the *Morning Star* didn’t have much to say one way or the other on this, generally taking the view that though boorish, Trump was nothing particularly out of the ordinary in terms of US politics (though the paper, like the US Communist Party, did quietly support a Democrat vote).

Before the 2020 presidential election, Andrew Murray used his Eyes Left column to opine that Brits shouldn’t

concern ourselves with the outcome. In particular, we should stop worrying about Trump. Murray assured us that Trump’s threats and possible “civil conflict” were “nothing to fear”. After all: “there is no progress without conflict, and in the USA most likely no socialism without an awful lot of it.” And a further Trump presidency would bring one great benefit: “A weakened US is a gain for the rest of the world.”

As for “a fascist US presidency” not to worry, it will “surely give cause for protest here before long” and “the most aggressive powers on record have been impeccably liberal British and US imperialisms, with not a day of fascist rule between them... There is the main enemy, not the orange demagogue.”

Promises

After the 2020 election, regular MS contributor (and, like Murray, a leading Communist Party of Britain member) Nick Wright argued that the Trump administration had been “delivering on its promises” to workers and that Biden’s victory represented a “restoration of the violent neoliberal order.”

When Trump incited his supporters to storm the Capitol, the paper (editorial, 8 January 2021) seemed to sympathise with the mob: “the most significant event

... [was] the decision of Vice-President Mike Pence to throw his bloated boss overboard and line up with the Republican leadership ... It was this, as much as anything else, which so enraged the mob and sharpened their sense of betrayal. In this, they have more finely tuned political instincts than the host of liberal commentators on both sides of the Atlantic who saw an existential threat to US ‘democracy’.”

How things have changed: these days the MS habitually refers to Trump as “fascist”, the change initially brought about by his kidnapping of Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro (whom the paper refers to – against all the evidence – as “democratically elected”) but now also by the murderous impunity of Trump’s masked ICE thugs in Minneapolis and elsewhere.

On 27 January (appropriately, Holocaust Memorial Day) the MS editorial referred to “Trump’s fascist revival”; the next day it described (accurately) the ICE commander Bovino as “strut[ting] around... for all the world like a nazi gauleiter on the eastern front in the second world war.”

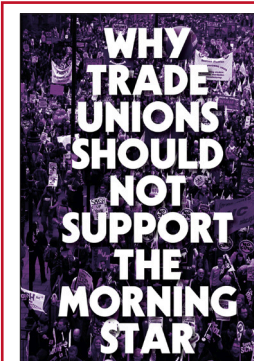
Perhaps most significantly, on 23 January the paper quoted retiring CPB general secretary Robert Griffiths’ political report to the party’s executive commit-

tee: “Inside the US today, Trump’s regime ignores national and international law, rules without accountability to the elected US Congress, persecutes political opponents and deploys its own ICE paramilitary forces against racial minorities and democratic local government.

He continued: “The US has embarked on the road to fascism ...”

Griffiths conveniently forgot about the time, just a few years ago, when leading CPB members strongly hinted that Trump was preferable to Biden (Nick Wright) and that although he may or may not be a fascist, he is not the “main enemy” (Andrew Murray).

In fact, Murray’s 2020 claim that “civil conflict” brought about by Trump would be “nothing to fear” should go down in the annals of Stalinist stupidity. □



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Iran

Open letter to Corbyn from an Iranian leftist

By Saeed Arman (WCPI-H)

In Iran the people have risen up, demanding freedom from one of the most brutal regimes in contemporary history. To survive, the ruling murderous regime cut off the internet and telephone communications. Shielded by a media blackout, it killed more than 35,000 people.

Among them were small children, school students, and ordinary men and women who confronted the Islamic government with nothing but their bare hands. Virtually every major international outlet has reported on this massacre. Now, with the internet gradually restored, more horrific details are emerging daily.

Beyond those killed, the regime has severely injured tens of thousands with live ammunition, leaving hundreds blinded or with life-altering eye injuries.

You have been a principled and steadfast activist in defend-

ing the rights of the Palestinian people for decades. You have consistently exposed and condemned the crimes of Israel’s fascist and racist government, mobilizing people for marches and protests. This makes your silence now so confounding. Why? Why have you not raised your voice against the slaughter of tens of thousands in Iran in just a matter of days? What awakened conscience can excuse this silence of yours?

Freedom-loving

We are freedom-loving, equality-seeking people who have resisted the tyranny ruling Iran for the past 47 years. This regime has long masqueraded as “anti-imperialist and anti-American” to deceive you and segments of the international left. Over 100,000 of us have lost our lives in this struggle.

Now, as you plan solidarity rallies for Palestine [31 January], we ask you to see our

struggle too. We have always stood with the people of Palestine, especially Gaza. We oppose the Islamic Republic, the inhumane military interventions of the US government, the fascist regime in Israel, and the imposition of any alternative like the old monarchy. In this existential battle, we need the solidarity of freedom-loving people worldwide – not the armed forces of governments that destroy the very fabric of societies.

We call on civilized humanity, on every anti-war, justice-seeking force: condemn the mass murder by the Islamic Republic. At the same time, stand against potential military escalation and imperialist bullying by the US and its allies. Do not abandon the Iranian people. Stand with those fighting to overthrow this regime and build a future that is free, equal, and humane. Your global voice can help neutralize this deadly path.

No to the murderous Islamist regime in Iran!

No to war and military intervention!

No to right-wing puppet alternatives!

Long live the struggle of the

working and oppressed people for freedom, equality, and prosperity for all! □

Saeed Arman, secretary of
Abroad Committee, Worker-
communist Party of Iran-
Hekmatist. 29 January 2026

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Trump's spite turns sourer

By Bas Hardy

When Donald Trump talked about retribution on his enemies, he didn't just mean individual political opponents or members of the legal establishment seeking to hold him accountable. A large amount of his spite was directed at American cities, particularly those with black mayors, which had the temerity to reject him at election time.

They would be met with collective punishment in the form of invasion by ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) agents, who'd intimidate their communities and place them under siege.

Despite pathetic efforts by the Trump regime to besmirch Renée Good and Alex Pritti as "domestic terrorists", both were known to many as decent human beings. In Alex Pritti's case he looked after the care of military veterans. Efforts by Trump lackeys to spin things otherwise ran up against overwhelming video evidence in both cases of cold blooded murder.

In addition to the strike, communities have organised themselves to monitor the activities of ICE and help those who fear getting swept off the streets should they venture out of their homes. Volunteers are taking children to school, delivering groceries, and offering rides to medical appointments. That citizens are expected to show proof of identity to masked men who don't show any is beyond ironic and reminiscent of those old war movies where the Gestapo demand "your papers".

Adding to the oppressive air of fascism has been Greg Bovino, the thug in charge of ICE, strutting around in an SS style greatcoat.



Trump awarding Mexican Border Defence Medals

Right-wing fans of the US constitution's Second Amendment have imagined a conspiratorial government (aka "deep state") encroaching on their individual freedoms to justify the right to carry guns everywhere. Now the National Rifle Association has taken particular exception to Trump and co. criticising Pretti for carrying a gun. It might start to dawn on them that the very people they've been supporting politically all these years are the true enemies of freedom.

Two murders and 3,000 arrests so far, and some Republican politicians are getting cold feet. A particular low in despicable ICE behaviour was the use of five-year old Liam Ramos as "bait" to lure his father out of their house.

Public outrage at ICE antics has led a Republican candidate for Minnesota state Governor, Chris Madel, to drop out, declaring "Driving while Hispanic is not a crime. Neither is driving while Asian."

Racial profiling has accounted for a massive drop in Hispanic support for

Trump, while even Cubans are being deported in record numbers.

The government is currently engaged in a damage-limitation exercise given the bad optics. It has scaled down ICE numbers in Minneapolis. The two federal agents who murdered Alex Pretti have been placed on leave, although we still don't know their identities. A federal judge has blocked attempts by the ad-

ministration to alter or destroy evidence in the killings.

Yet the situation in Minneapolis stays tense, and the ICE presence in the city remains.

Calls from Attorney General Pam Bondi for Minnesota to hand over its electoral rolls to her have been met with outrage. And not just because that's nothing to do with immigration. It also shows the extent to which Trump is pursuing voter suppression as an option to subvert the mid-term elections. The continuing presence of ICE on the streets may serve to prevent people of colour from going to the polls.

The FBI, now operating de facto as another personal police force for Trump, and has raided offices in Fulton County, Georgia to seize ballots and records related to the 2020 election in a fresh attempt to undermine trust in the electoral process. It is a further example of "pay-back", this time against Fani Willis, the Fulton County DA who sought to prosecute Trump for his efforts to fraudulently overturn election results in Georgia in that year. □



Local government

Councils need better funding

By Ruth Cashman

The Labour government set a 4.1% real terms increase in spending power for councils between 2024-25 and 2025-26. However, that included £502 million to compensate local authorities for the rise in employers' national insurance contributions announced at the 2024 autumn budget. Excluding that funding, spending power rose by 3.3% in real terms. This funding, and the funding for 2026-7, are not enough to restore services.

In 2026-7 a few authorities

will push through big cuts. In other areas there is stable managed decline, where services are slowly cut, not prompting big fightbacks. This is further driving the growth of the far right. Local authorities need immediate cash injections to rebuild service and a restructuring of funding away from regressive taxation.

Local authorities have three main sources of revenue: government grants (money from central government), council tax, and business rates. Unlike central government, councils cannot borrow for day-to-day

spending. According to the Institute for Government, local authority "spending power" fell by 22.6% in real terms between 2010-11 and 2019-20. Since then, funding has recovered somewhat, though in 2025-26 it was still 8.3% lower in real terms than in 2010-11. The councils which have lost most through cuts to government grants have been the most deprived.

Spending power is set to increase further through this parliament, but still be to be 0.5% lower in real terms in 2028-29 than in 2010-11.

Accounting for population growth, spending power fell 27.5% in real terms between 2010-11 and 2019-20 and will still be 14.2% lower in real terms in 2028-29 than in 2010-11. As well as councils having less to spend, more of what they do have comes from Council tax. Council Tax is a regressive tax which should be scrapped and replaced by progressive taxation.

Since 2009-10, local authorities have spent more on services required by law, such as adult and children's social care. More recently, local authori-

ties' budgets have come under pressure on temporary accommodation and special services. That is in part driven by loss of preventive services.

Between 2018 and 2023, seven local authorities issued a total of ten Section 114 notices because they could not balance their budgets — a legal requirement for all councils. There were two in the 30 years before.

Since the end of 2023, there have been no new Section 114 notices. Local authorities are increasingly relying on "exceptional financial support" and other unsustainable funding. □



Greens should steer away from antisemitism

By Dan Jacobs

The Green Party of England and Wales has accepted Motion A105 for debate at its Spring Conference in late March 2026. Public descriptions of the motion say it declares that “Zionism is racism”, commits the party to an explicitly anti-Zionist stance, endorses BDS-style pressure, and backs a “single democratic Palestinian state” across historic Palestine with equal rights and the right of return. The motion also calls for steps such as de-proscribing Palestine Action and the release of Palestinian political prisoners including Marwan Barghouti.

Spring conference and a by-election

By Simon Nelson

The Green Party Spring Conference (online) is 28 March. Motions are submitted by individual members, and until the end of January, they could gather individual Green Party members as supporters. The motion with (by a long way) the most supporters (332) is A105 “Zionism is Racism”. A motion from supporters of Standing Together in the Green Party A117 “GPEW support for peacebuilding in Israel and Palestine”, has, sadly, only 19.

The Standing Orders Committee for the conference has removed a clause from A105 rejecting the IHRA and JDA definitions of antisemitism, but accepted the rest. Meanwhile, George Galloway’s red-brown Workers Party GB has said it will not stand in Gorton and Denton. The Greens rushed out a welcoming statement on X, to say they agree with the WPGGB on the need to beat Reform, anti-racism, opposition to the genocide in Gaza and austerity, though not on everything. Yet the WP candidate in the last by-election it contested attacked Reform [from the right!](#) □

Even if you agree with its underlying anger, this is a bad way to write politics. The result is a word that holds a whole range of Jewish self-understandings is treated as if it has one fixed, damning meaning.

Start with the obvious descriptive problem. Zionism has never been one thing. It has included: a refuge project after European catastrophe; a language-and-culture revival; socialist nation-building; liberal nationalism that imagined partition; religious messianism; and, in its ugliest strands, a politics of permanent hierarchy, oppression, occupation and supremacy politics. Treating all of that as “racism” is like treating “anti-colonialism” as an ideology responsible for every atrocity committed by anyone who ever invoked it, including people cheering on Assad or Putin.

Maintained

You can say: the Israeli state has built and maintained systems that discriminate, dispossess, and entrench domination. You can argue that these systems are racist in effect, and often in design. Plenty of serious human rights reporting uses that kind of framework. The motion doesn’t do that. Instead of naming policies and structures, it condemns the organising idea and makes every Zionism answerable for its worst expression.

In Britain, “Zionist” is not used like “Gaullist” or “Fabian”. It’s used as a social category. In practice, it often means “the Jews I don’t like”, or simply “the Jews”, full stop. That slippage is part of how antisemitism adapts in public settings where explicit Jew-hatred is disreputable.

The motion isn’t targeting a tiny sect. A very large share of British Jews report emotional attachment to Israel, and many self-identify as Zionist, including plenty who despise Netanyahu and oppose settlement expansion, occupation and support Palestinian rights.

A party policy that brands “Zionism” as racism does not land as a clear critique of an ideology out there. It impacts the community here. Because it isn’t only a



label. It also points at an end-state: the dissolution of a Jewish state, without spelling out what guarantees replace it.

One link in the chain is usually left implicit. The motion doesn’t just say “Zionism is racism”; it backs a single state across historic Palestine. Whatever you think of that as an end-point, it is widely understood as ending Israel’s status as a Jewish state. For many Jews, Zionism is, at minimum, the claim that Jewish self-determination includes statehood, and that a state matters because minorities do not get permanent guarantees. After the Shoah, Israel became, for many, a last-resort refuge in the imagination and often in practice. If you ask Jews to relinquish that, you need to say what replaces it. Otherwise you’re not offering a new framework for safety. You’re just removing the old one.

A lot of people have spent the last decade claiming “anti-Zionism is antisemitism”. That claim is sometimes true in specific cases and false in plenty of others. The error is making it broadly true, and using it to smear anyone who argues for Palestinian rights.

Motion A105 repeats the same structure in reverse. It turns “Zionism is rac-

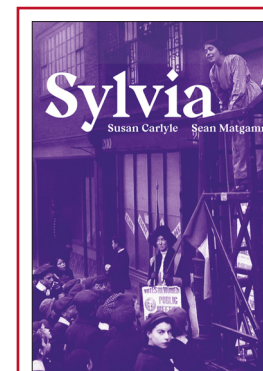
ism” into a blanket moral judgement, and treats mainstream Jewish attachment to Israel, including the peaceful versions of it, as a moral stain.

Anti-racism, when its functioning, is meant to protect minorities from being told their identity is illegitimate. It’s meant to stop the move where you take a complex group, pick its worst representatives, and declare the whole thing rotten.

Writing “Zionism is racism” as party policy does that to Jews. It takes the most egregious reading of Zionism then hands every bad actor a get out of jail free card. The same thing happens on the other side when “anti-Zionism is antisemitism” is used to smear anyone who demands Palestinian rights. The Green Party shouldn’t be choosing between two versions of the same mistake.

If the Greens want a policy that supports Palestinians and avoids laundering antisemitism, name systems and laws, not identities. Say what you oppose in Israel-Palestine: settlement expansion, discrimination, military occupation, collective punishment, ethnic supremacy, denial of political rights. Say what you support: equal civil and political rights, safety for all civilians, Palestinian self-determination, and a future political settlement chosen by the people who live there, not by British activists playing with absolutes. □

• Abridged from the Socialists Against Antisemitism website, bit.ly/g-zj, with thanks.



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

Time for “Time For Real Change” to change

By Ruth Cashman

Andrea Egan took office as General Secretary of Unison, the biggest trade union in the UK, on 22 January. A former social worker and member of the left Time for Real Change group, Egan is the first lay member to be elected into the post.

Egan won 59.8% of the vote, slightly increasing the combined left score from the last election. Christina McAnea, the right wing incumbent, saw her vote collapse by almost 25,000 votes to around 40%. The turnout was 7%, the worst in the union’s history.

ion’s history.

If the left wants to get anything out of this victory, we must drive up member engagement in the union.

Democratisation will not be easy. Egan faces a strong and determined bureaucracy. Unison full-timers are well known for blocking strike ballots and witch-hunting activists (two Unison presidents in the last five years).

An investigation into the 2015 General Secretary election found staff using union resources to campaign for the right-wing candidate. The judge

described the tone of London regional secretary Linda Perks as “not just confident and swaggering in so openly breaking the rules, but chilling in its brazenness and demonstration of unchecked power”.

Structure

Time for Real Change has no democratic structures and will need to quickly implement some. In London TFRC has elected a committee and is discussing a national delegate committee and regular national all-member meetings to discuss strategy and expectations

of elected representatives.

Much of TFRC decision-making is currently done ad hoc. If we are to beat the bureaucracy and change the union, our battles have to be brought into the open. The union machine will use the expectation of confidentiality in bureaucratic manoeuvres against lay activists, but we should campaign transparently, telling the truth about what is happening.

The NEC currently has a slight right wing majority. The General Secretary should put plans to enact existing conference policy to the NEC. If they refuse,

they should be called out. If it passes the General Secretary should ensure staff carry out union policy.

National demonstrations and campaigns have been decided at conference and then left to languish.

Your average Unison member will be brought into battles to democratise the union only when those represent more than theoretical democracy but necessities to remove blocks on campaigning or strikes. Our best campaign for union democracy is to try and make the union act. □

"Saving" the USA from immigrants?

By Natalia Cassidy

The pro-Trump think tank Heritage Foundation is intent on "Saving America by Saving the Family" (its new report, January 2025).

More specifically, the settled-American, married-man-woman family,

The crude birthrate has halved from about 24 births per 1000 people to about 12 per 1000, or 1.8 births per woman. That is below the "replacement rate" of 2.1 births per woman.

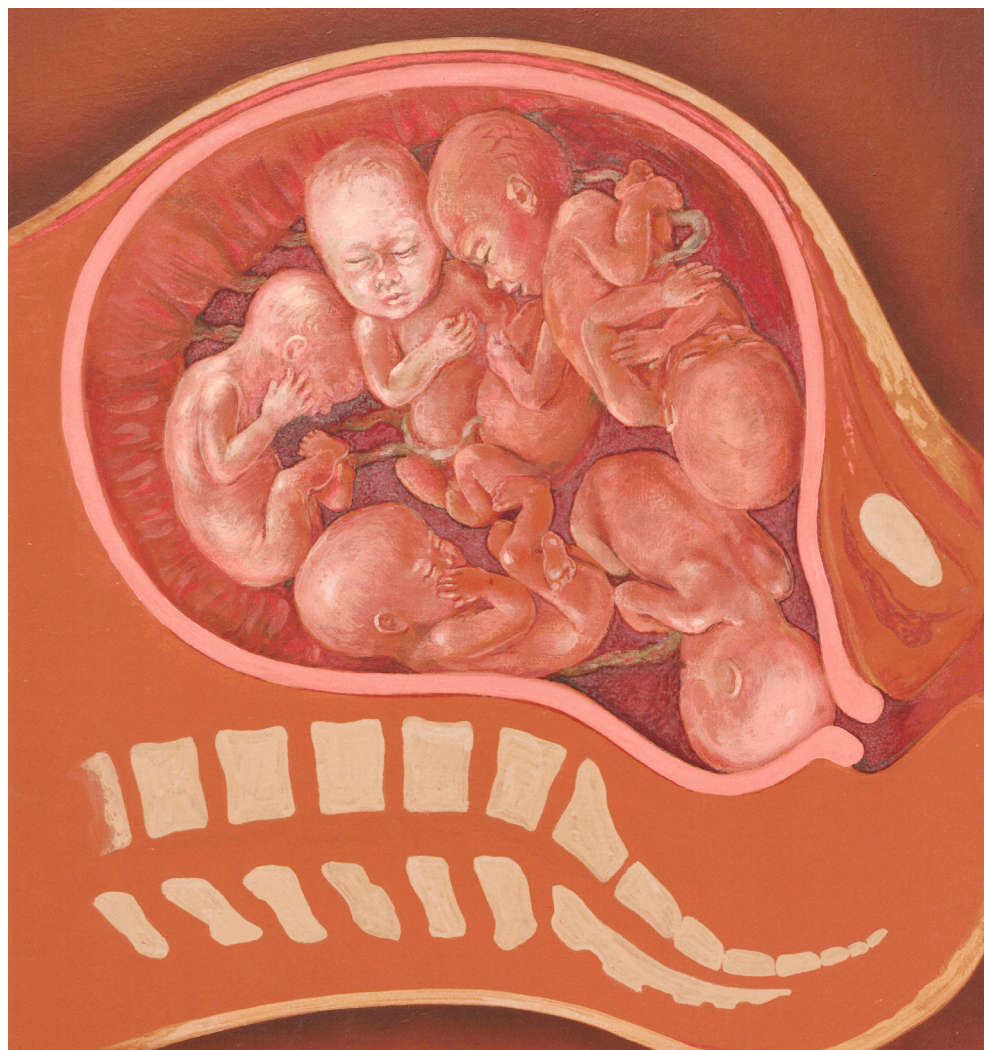
The Heritage Foundation is not primarily concerned with the falling birth rate as it pertains to falling contributions to transfer payments between workers and non-workers, and over time creates a higher ratio of people too old to work vs people working.

Its worry is intertwined with the racist and sexist conception that white women in particular should be having more children in order to "save" the white race from becoming a minority population in the US and having to look to immigrants to fill the workforce.

The report stress that white people have the lowest proportion of births to unmarried women and the highest proportion of children living in two-parent homes.

The Heritage Foundation suggests that the government stops "prioritising" welfare for single parent families, reduces public spending to reduce national debt, apply tax credits currently given to adoptive parents to married parents, and pays a 25% "large family bonus" for each child after the second.

Trump has recently announced his own (sort of) pro-natalist policy, the so-called baby bonus: \$1,000 paid to newborn babies upon their parents' opening a "Trump account" for them. Parents, relatives and employers can then pay up to \$5,000 each year into this account. The



money accrued will then be invested in US-based index funds and become accessible upon the child turning 18.

Gimmick

This gimmick is quite a long way from what the Heritage Foundation is suggesting, and offers almost nothing on the costs associated with raising a child. It may have some impact on the perceived cost of child rearing and a minor impact on higher education affordability, but is unlikely to do much to

shift the birth rate. Historically, children were often an economic necessity for parents. Otherwise, when the parents got older, they would have no-one to do the heavier work on the land. Now, children are a heavy cost.

A separate Heritage Foundation document on New York says, yes, there should be more, and cheaper, but criticises Mamdani for not planning to reduce wages for the workers and health and safety standards.

Europe's far-right talks "natalist", loudly, but has not done much about it economically. Italy's Meloni government is giving relatively meagre tax breaks. The Hungarian Orbán government pays out significantly more, with significant tax breaks and spending on families (approximately 4% of GDP is spent on family related policy). Yet the birth rate in Hungary has remained fairly constant since the introduction of those measures.

Policies that give economically-stressed people who wish to have children the ability to do so are of course a good thing. But the Heritage Foundation's goal here is not support for those on low incomes, but an ideological push for women, particularly white women, to have children to bolster the nation state and offset the economic loss from deporting or deterring immigrant workers.

As socialist feminists, we are for a more collective approach to child rearing where the family unit is diminished in its primacy. We oppose pressure on women to have children, or more children, when they don't want to, particularly it comes with a racist, anti-migrant subtext. □



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Environment

A socialist plan without taking the banks?

By Sam Myerson

In *Solidarity* 755 I discussed the ecosocialist manifesto of AntiCapitalist Resistance (A*CR) and said I would come back on their "emergency plan" (AWL's draft "emergency plan" is at bit.ly/em-pl).

A*CR rightly highlight the scale of the task facing us in fighting climate change, and say we must fight for mitigations and concessions as well as a full socialist programme.

They also say, rightly, that no plan can be a finished piece or

a stone tablet.

However, on transport, A*CR say nothing about curbing airport expansion or about expansion of rail. They do propose free public transport, which is good; but, without any measures to tackle private car use, that has often not provided as many benefits as expected, and has reduced biking and walking.

Some of the demands of the emergency plan read like things thrown out in a focus group. End food speculation, ban supermarkets throwing out food,

end single-use plastics. Food waste accounts for roughly 4% of all CO2 emissions, mostly from waste meat and fish, but in Britain is much more at home than in supermarkets. The plan says nothing about transforming agriculture and food distribution, or moving away from animal-based food towards more plant-based diets.

Little

The plan has little mention of the need for immediate adaptation for the now-unavoidable or already-present impacts of

climate change.

The emergency plan does not use the fantastical language of the FI (A*CR's international network) against nuclear power ("deploy[ing] sorcerer's apprentice technologies"), but, wrongly I think, it does not see nuclear as part of a transition in energy.

The plan has no mention of finance or banking, other than a call to end "investments of finance capital in extractivist and polluting industries". No call to nationalise the banks. The banking system's organic

investment priorities run counter to that of a rational society that confronts and faces the challenges of hunger, illiteracy, poverty and ecocide.

The task of revolutionary socialists is to take an "emergency plan" and broader socialist ideas, argue them out, and build in the unions, in other working-class organisations, and in student groups and student unions, the political base which can carry out these tasks. □



“Biscuit of socialism” has crumbled

By Micheál MacEoin

“Once they start nibbling the biscuit of socialism,” warned Northern Ireland Prime Minister Basil Brooke of voters during the 1945 election campaign, “before they knew where they were, their children would be tied hand and foot”.

Despite this, when it came to it, the Northern Ireland Unionists, facing strong labour movement pressure, passed the necessary legislation to implement the British Labour Party’s post-war reforms, including the National Health Service (NHS).

In the half-century to follow, the existence of the NHS in the North became a key argument for the maintenance of the Union.

Compared to the patchwork of state, private and voluntary provision in the 26-counties, it was not difficult to see why.

The 26 Counties system is now a public-private model, with the Health Service Executive (HSE) at the apex of a complex mix of providers run by the state, voluntary or religious organisations. Just under a third of the population — including those entitled to some welfare benefits and retirees — can attain a Medical Card enabling free access to GPs and other care. Over two-thirds cannot, and those who can afford to therefore skip the queues in the public system and use private healthcare.

Before 2004, the 26 Counties health service was run instead by ten regional health boards. However, the boards system only came into place in 1970, before which the Catholic Church effectively ran many health services, with doctors operating as sole traders and a very lim-



ited role for the state.

In the North, health outcomes were traditionally better and provision was free at the point of delivery.

NHS in crisis

Today, however, that argument no longer convinces. Since austerity and Covid-19, the NHS in the North is in crisis and health outcomes are worse than in the 26 Counties. Healthcare might be free but, due to waiting lists and acute pressures, the system can often no longer provide care in time for those who need it.

“If you are ever in Northern Ireland,” *The Economist* wrote in 2024, “pray that you never need a gallbladder removal, a neurology appointment or a hip replacement.” Wait times for these treatments routinely stretch to several years. As the article states, attachment to the NHS remains high but increasingly “they admire a service that no longer exists.”

In reality, there is what journalist Sam McBride has described as a “two-tier Northern health system: rich and moderately well off have private health insur-

ance or pay for treatment as they need it, while the poor are left to live in agony and die before their time.”

The statistics are stark. According to British Medical Association analysis of NI Department of Health data, in September 2023, there were “almost 116,000 patients waiting for an inpatient or day case admission and about 429,000 patients waiting for a first consultant led outpatient appointment at hospitals.” That makes a total of approximately 545,000 people waiting for elective care in Northern Ireland — around a third of the population and “the highest recorded since the dataset began in June 2008.”

For cancer, the current target is that 98% of patients diagnosed with cancer should receive their first treatment within 31 days of a decision to treat. This was consistently at or near the target until it gradually declined over the last decade, and is currently at 85%.

As for those suspected of cancer and referred for treatment by a GP, the target of 95% of patients being seen within 62 days has never been met and the gap is only widening. In December 2024, only 33% of patients started treatment within 62 days.

In March 2025 — the latest A&E data available — about 67,871 people attended A&E departments in Northern Ireland. 43% of those patients were seen in under

four hours, a major decline against the 91% seen within four hours in April 2008, when this data collection began. Approximately 19% of patients waited over 12 hours for an emergency admission in the same month.

Waiting lists are merely a symptom of a system which is not working. The NHS in the North is chronically underfunded when measured against the needs of its population. It also faces a staffing crisis, exacerbated by the loss of pay parity with Great Britain in 2019 (only very recently restored). Many GP, consultant, nurse and dentist vacancies are unfilled.

Failing

This has been exacerbating by the North’s failing political system, which is unable to function long enough to provide any long-term or strategic decisions on public services or indeed any other aspect of public policy.

The existence of the NHS in the North is therefore no longer an argument for the Union with Great Britain.

Yet, aside from advantages of scale, a bourgeois united Ireland which merely joins the existing failing system in the North to the mishmash of public and private provision in the 26-counties would not necessarily be an improvement.

The Irish labour movement, North and South, as part of a programme for a Workers’ Republic, should demand an all-island publicly-run and democratically accountable health service, funded by taxing the rich. □

North-West Labour votes for asylum rights

By a delegate

Only eight organisations submitted motions to Labour’s Regional Conference in the North West, held over the weekend of 24-25 January 2026, but some of those that did enabled the conference to positions quite different to the current government.

Motion Two (Bury North and Oldham East & Saddleworth) called for Serco to be stripped of its contract for asylum accommodation in the north-west, and for the funding to be returned to local authorities to undertake this duty within the public sector. The motion also supported those who had taken part in counterprotests to the far right over the summer and supported safe and

legal routes for refugees.

Speakers from seven different CLPs and unions spoke for the motion, as well as the two moving CLPs. Delegates from Altrincham & Sale described how they had taken part in opposing far right demonstrations at an asylum hotel in their constituency.

Not a single delegate spoke to defend the national government’s position of retaining asylum accommodation in the private sector. The motion was passed with no votes against.

[The other motions passed were more bland]. Of course — just like the motions passed at national conference — what matters is what happens next with them... Efforts will be needed to ensure that the Regional Executive follow the

instructions to them in the motions passed. Whether they did or not after 2024’s conference is entirely unknown, as the Regional Executive once again failed to submit a report to conference...

The debacle of Keir Starmers blocking of [Andy Burnham from] Gorton and Denton... broke only towards the very end of conference. The chair of Gorton & Denton CLP was applauded loudly on the Saturday when he referred to the importance of the CLP being able to make its own choice, as was Angela Rayner on the Sunday saying the same thing. □

• Excerpted, with thanks, from a report on the Labour Left Internationalists [website](#).

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For a workers' alternative to Khamenei, not Trump's

By Dan Katz

The 12-day-war against Iranian nuclear installations and regime targets by Israel, with US help, in June 2025 substantially undercut Iranian prestige and self-confidence.

Trump now says he wants to force Iran into an agreement that it will not produce nuclear weapons. He has threatened Iran repeatedly over the past month, although changing his reasons for doing so.

Probably Trump has already decided to bomb Iran and perhaps even try to kill its leadership. However, it remains unclear what Trump's exact intentions are, or even if they are clear to Trump himself. We oppose US military action, which Starmer has signalled the UK will help. It is difficult to see a positive result, even if Khamenei is killed.

Protests

The Tehran teachers' union has demanded the release of all detainees arrested during the recent wave of anti-regime street protests. The union states: "In less than one week one of the bloodiest chapters of repression in recent Iranian history had unfolded. Tens of thousands of children, women and men have been drenched in blood."

Units of the teachers' union have begun to publish the photos of all the children that were killed during the recent demonstrations.

The latest protest movement erupted on to the streets after 28 December, sparked by a fall in the value of the Iranian currency, the rial. The rial lost over half its value against the US dollar in the last six months and the Tehran bazaaris, traditional supporters of the Islamist dictatorship, shut their shops and demonstrated at the economic chaos in the country, a catalyst to mass protests in at least 400 Iranian towns and cities.

The key issues for protesters are in-

flation which has run at 50% for over five years, job insecurity, corruption, spectacular ecological degradation, electricity outages and a set of misogynistic and religious rules which allow the clerics to interfere with the normal freedoms women and men should expect in modern society.

Perhaps half of Iran's population have been driven below the official poverty line and wealth has become ever-more concentrated. One percent of rich Iranians now hold one-third of Iran's wealth.

Protesters rallied shouting, "Death to the Dictator [Ali Khamenei, Iran's so-called Supreme Leader]!" and, "Neither Gaza nor Lebanon, my life for Iran!"

The US-based civil-rights organisation, HRANA, says it has confirmed 6,221 deaths and it is investigating a further 17,091 fatalities. Perhaps as many as 30,000 were murdered by the Islamic Guards (IRGC) and regime militias.

Ali Khamenei has admitted that "thousands" were killed by the regime, some "in an inhuman, savage manner." Khamenei blamed Trump for the murders of oppositionists. No doubt Trump is guilty of many outrages, but he wasn't responsible for shooting unarmed protesters with automatic weapons.

The official death-toll is 3,117, which includes regime casualties.

HRANA estimates that more than 42,000 people have been arrested.

By contrast, over sixteen months of mass protests following the killing by Iran's religious police of a young Kurdish woman, Jina Amini, in September 2022, 550 people were killed. The scale of regime brutality has sharply ramped up as the state now fears for its existence.

Iran's weakness

The clerical fascist dictatorship in Iran has now little room for manoeuvre. A big majority of the population bitterly hate the religious ruling caste. And US President Donald Trump, aware of Iran's weakness, has sent a heavily armed fleet to coerce the regime.

The US government is aware that Iran has been a major loser from the aftermath of the October 2023 Hamas pogrom against Israeli Jews. Hamas has been obliterated by Israeli military power, Lebanese Hezbollah has been decimated too, the pro-Iran Assad regime in Syria has fallen and the Yemeni Houthis have, effectively, a ceasefire deal with the US.

Yet the central mechanisms of state control appear to be intact, despite chatter from regime supporters who consider themselves "reformers".

The IRGC controls the Basiji and the IRGC is an ideologically-selected army answerable directly to Khamenei.



"Reformers" are now calling for an independent, or UN-led inquiry into the recent killings of oppositionists. The Reform Front, a grouping that worked for the election of "reformist" President Masoud Pezeshkian, has asked for an independent committee to "investigate this unprecedented disaster."

But the "reformers" don't control the IRGC.

Former President Hassan Rouhani has called for the formation of political parties and an end to the blocking of opposition election candidates.

Trump appears to be looking for regime insiders, from inside the ranks of those who hold direct power, to break with Khamenei and the hard-line clerical establishment.

government based on the working-class majority. Otherwise, others will come to power, and maybe worse or no better than the old regime.

There is no point in the Iranian left simply applauding those brave citizens who take to the streets to show their opposition. And particularly given the street protests have only made the best of Iran's youth targets for the IRGC and Basiji militia.

The left in Iran and in the diaspora is weak. It must turn to building in the country, specifically in the factories, the oil and gas fields, the enterprises. The Iranian left must attempt to stop leaderless protests spilling out to be massacred.

How does the Iranian left win influence? It must begin to advocate a clear alternative programme both to the regime and to the Iranian monarchists. Advocate specific demands to take the movement forward, now. Set clear aims.

The Iranian left should ditch demands which will be ineffective (close the London embassy, demand the UN acts for the Iranian opposition, kick Iran out of the International Labour Organisation, ILO), and stop simply acting as an echo of the street protests.

In *Solidarity 759* we offered suggestions for a democratic and socialist programme, centred around calls for a constituent assembly, for public ownership and workers' control, and for social provision. We seek further discussion on that: bit.ly/iran-p. □



The left in Iran

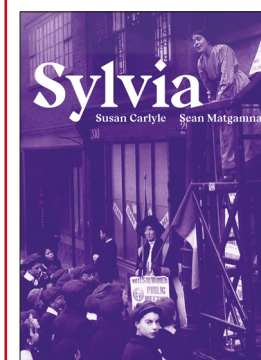
What should the Iranian left do?

A series of youth-led rebellions took place in 2024-5, in Bangladesh, Morocco, Nepal, Madagascar and Serbia. None (except Bangladesh, and even there things look worse now) led to a clearly positive change of government, and in Madagascar the military took the opportunity to take over.

Rebellions need working-class political organisation, built in advance, capable of directing events, to fight for a new



Protest in Iran on the 8th January



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



A united Europe?

By Leon Trotsky

1. How Can Europe Be United?

Briand [then prime minister of France, member of the liberal Socialist-Republican Party] senses the need of improving the historical lot of 350 million Europeans who are the bearers of highest civilisation but who find it impossible to live through a single century without a dozen wars and revolutions. For the sake of pacifying our planet, MacDonald [then Labour prime minister of Britain] has crossed the Atlantic. On the agenda are the United States of Europe, disarmament, freedom of trade, peace. Capitalist diplomacy everywhere is cooking up a pacifist stew. Peoples of Europe, peoples of the world get out big spoons to swallow it with.

Why all this pother? After all, aren't the Socialists in power in the most important countries in Europe, or else preparing to assume power? Yes, that is just why! It is already apparent that Briand's plan and MacDonald's plan pursue the "pacification" of mankind from diamet-

rically opposite directions. Briand wants to unify Europe as a defensive measure against America. MacDonald wants to earn the gratitude of America by helping her oppress Europe. Two trains are rushing to meet one another in order to save the passengers from — trainwreck.

A frown by the United States sufficed to cancel the Anglo-French naval agreement of July 28. This fact amply demonstrates just what the relationship of forces is in the world today. "Are you by any chance entertaining notions," America intimated, "that I propose to adjust myself to any negotiations you may conduct on either side of the Channel? If you want to discuss seriously then take the trouble to cross the Atlantic." And MacDonald promptly reserved a stateroom. This proved to be the most realisable part of the pacifist program.

At Geneva the would-be "uniters" of the European continent felt scarcely more at ease than the bootleggers on the other side of the ocean. They kept their eyes warily cocked on the American police. Briand began and ended his speeches

by vowing that the unification of Europe must in no case and under no circumstances be directed against America. God forbid. In reading these avowals the American politicians must have derived a twofold satisfaction: "Briand is rather scared of us. But he won't put anything over on us, just the same."

While repeating Briand's words with respect to America, Streseman [German foreign minister, a conservative who had drifted to liberal international-agreement policies] at the same time launched into a veiled polemic against him. Henderson [British foreign secretary] polemicised against both of them, especially against the French Prime Minister. By and large the discussion at Geneva fell into the fol-



lowing pattern:

Briand: "In no case against the United States of America."

Streseman: "Absolutely so. But some people have hidden plans — America can rely only on Germany."

Macdonald: "I take my oath on the Bible that loyalty in friendship is exclusively the endowment of Britons, especially the Scotch."

That is how the "new international atmosphere" was created at Geneva.

The weakness of present-day Europe

Introduction

By Martin Thomas

Donald Trump has announced the end of 80 or so years of close US-UK and US-EU alliance. He has threatened to grab Greenland and to quit Nato. He has branded Europe as economically weak, culturally decadent, flooded with migrants, confused on Russia and dangerously dependent on China. He has had his people openly back far-right parties in Europe which aim to disrupt or at least weaken the EU.

For now Trump has backed down substantially on Greenland. He may stay that way. And he will not rule forever. But even if Trump is seen off soon, and his successor is more attuned to international diplomacy and cooperation, it is unlikely that the toothpaste can be pushed back into the tube.

A previous era of US-European conflict came in the 1920s. Since the UK was then the biggest European power, with the world's biggest navy, a lot of that was US-UK conflict. Far from the US and UK having some eternal "special" alliance, they had fought wars in 1775-83 and in 1812-15, and nearly came to war again in 1861 when the UK tilted in favour of the South during the US Civil War.

In the 1920s, in an era of relatively high tariffs (which would become much higher in the 1930s), the US resented the UK's hold over a huge trade bloc via its colonial empire.



This article by Trotsky was written in 1929, just before the Wall Street crash which led into a great depression across the capitalist world in the 1930s. The USA had boomed between 1918 and 1929, sharpening its dissatisfaction with entrenched British and European trade-bloc power.

As Trotsky comments in the article, "more than once in history... when the revolution is not strong enough to solve in time a task that is mature historically, its solution is undertaken by reaction" in its own addled way.

First the Nazis unified almost all of Europe by conquest, then after 1945 the US had such industrial and financial supremacy that it could take a long view in helping European reconstruction and fostering (west) European unity to create a better terrain for US multinationals and a solid counter to the Stalinist USSR, which had conquered Eastern

Europe. The European Coal and Steel Community was created in 1951, the EEC (forerunner of the EU) in 1957. The EU expanded greatly in the 1970s, and again after the collapse of East European Stalinism in 1989.

Even in the 1970s, when France's demand to cash its holdings of US dollar debt into gold forced the USA to abandon its gold standard for the dollar, and when West German high-tech imports started outcompeting sectors of US industry, the US was still able to take a long view, and, stumblingly, evolve a new US-centred world system, neoliberal globalisation.

World capitalism is, stumblingly again, edging into a new era of nationalist home-base-building politics and overlapping ad hoc trade deals.

A sort of United States of Europe exists now, no more socialist than Bismarck's united Germany of 1871, though a tad

less undemocratic. Trotsky's article tells us the folly of demagoguery which wants to tear it down as a "capitalist club". It is that, but a multitude of small countries walled off from each other by tariff barriers and military defence-lines would be worse.

It shows the folly of Starmer's course, which maybe even he is now abandoning, of trying for a special US deal with Trump as an alternative to winding back the damage of Brexit.

It tells us that the return to overt trade and territorial rivalries, and the renewed military build-up, all the nonsense about making America (or Britain, or Germany, or elsewhere) "great again", poses terrible threats.

Capitalist globalisation, with the US military as the police force overseeing the capitalist world market, certainly brought wars and horrors. But this new era brings even worse threats.

The necessary unification of Europe was done "by reaction", in a bureaucratic way. Its relations with the USA were never settled in a cooperative, friendship-of-peoples way, but only by evolving calculations of what "worked" for profit-making at the time.

The only force that can deal properly and lastingly with the rivalries of competing capitalist state powers is an international labour movement unified on an internationalist and socialist programme. □

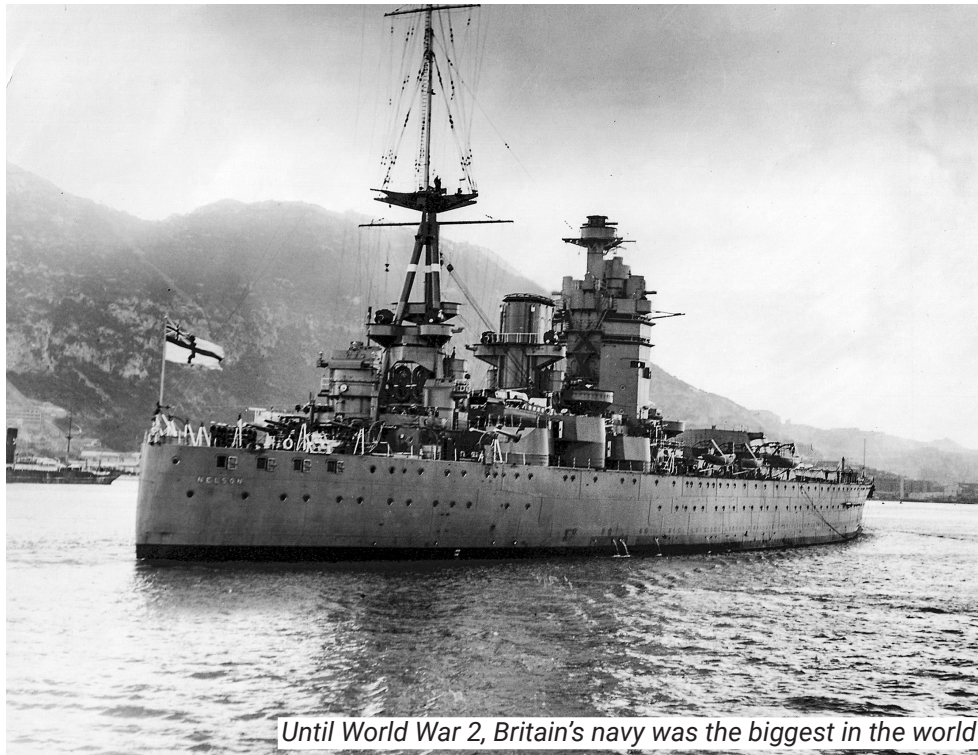
1929 and now

flows first and foremost from its economic dismemberment. The strength of the United States, on the contrary, is derived from its economic unity. The question is: How to arrange matters so that the unification of Europe is not directed against America, i.e. without changing the relationship of forces to America's disadvantage?

The *Daily Herald*, MacDonald's semi-official organ, September 10, 1929, characterised the idea of the United States of Europe as "grotesque" and even as a provocation. Should, however, this fantasy be realised, then the United States of Europe would erect a monstrous tariff wall against the USA, so argued MacDonald's semi-official organ, and as a result Great Britain would be caught between two continents as in a vice. And the *Daily Herald* then went on to add: How could one expect aid from America by steering a course toward the unification of Europe? "To act in this way would be insanity or worse." One could not speak more plainly.

No one knows just what the United States of Europe is supposed to signify in practice. Stresemann reduced the whole question to a common monetary unit and postage stamps. That's a bit thin. Briand proposes to "study" the problem whose content nobody knows.

The basic task of unification must be economic in character, not only in the commercial but also productive sense. It is necessary to have a regime that would eliminate the artificial barriers between European coal and European iron. It is necessary to enable the system of electrification to expand in consonance with natural and economic conditions, and not in accordance with the frontiers of Versailles [the peace conference after World War 1]. It is necessary to unite Europe's railways into a single system, and



Until World War 2, Britain's navy was the biggest in the world

so on and so forth ad infinitum. All this, in its turn, is inconceivable without the destruction of the ancient Chinese system of custom borders within Europe. This would, in its turn, mean a single, All-European customs union – against America.

2. Disarmament à la Americaine

There can be no doubt whatever that if the internal tariff barriers were swept away, capitalist Europe, after a certain period of crises of regroupment and readjustment, would attain a high level on the basis of the new distribution of productive forces. This is just as incontestable as the fact that, given the necessary economic conditions, large-scale enterprises are decisively superior to small ones. But we have yet to hear of small entrepreneurs voluntarily renouncing their businesses for this reason. To conquer the outlets the big capitalist must first ruin the small one. The situation with states is similar. Tariff barriers are erected precisely because they are profitable and indispensable to one national bourgeoisie to the detriment of another, regardless of the fact that they act to retard the development of economy as a whole.

Following the economic conference convened by the League of Nations in order to restore the reign of free trade in Europe, there has been an uninterrupted increase of tariffs. The English government has just proposed a two year "tariff vacation," i.e. no increases in tariffs for the next two years. Such is the modest contribution toward the United States of Europe. But even that still remains on paper.

To defend the tariff walls, which have grown uninterruptedly since the (first world) war, there stand the national ar-

mies which have likewise increased above the prewar level. This adequately shows how precious its own national tariff wall is to each national bourgeoisie of the thirty European countries. If a big capitalist must ruin a small capitalist, then a strong state must conquer weaker ones in order to batter down their tariff walls.

Comparing present-day Europe with old Germany where dozens of little German fatherlands had their own customs borders, Stresemann tried to find in the economic unification of Germany the precursor of the economic federation of Europe and the world. The analogy is not a bad one. But Stresemann omitted to point out that to achieve her unification – solely on a national basis – Germany had to pass through one revolution (1848) and three wars (1864, 1866 and 1870) – not to mention the wars of Reformation. Meanwhile to this very day, after the "republican" revolution (1918), German Austria still remains outside Germany. Under the existing conditions it is hard to believe that a few diplomatic luncheons will suffice for the economic unification of all European nations.

But after all isn't the question of the reduction of Europe's armaments placed on the agenda side by side with the problem of unifying Europe? MacDonald has declared that the road of gradual disarmament is the surest way of guaranteeing peace forevermore. A pacifist may raise this as an objection. Of course, if all the countries disarmed, it would constitute a serious guarantee of peace. But self-disarmament is just as excluded as the voluntary demolition of tariff walls. In Europe today there is only one major country which is seriously disarmed, to wit, Germany. But her disarmament was

accomplished, as everybody knows, by crushing her in a war, in which Germany herself had sought to "unite Europe" under her domination.

In general it is not hard to show that the problem of "gradual disarmament," if examined closely, assumes the aspect of a tragic farce. The question of disarmament has been replaced by the question of reducing armaments. And finally the latter problem has been reduced to establishing naval parity between the United States and Britain. Today this "achievement" is being acclaimed in advance as the greatest guarantee of peace. This amounts to saying that the surest way of suppressing duels is by regulating the size of pistols to be used by the duellists. Common sense would indicate that the situation itself points to just the contrary. If two of the strongest naval powers haggle so furiously over a few thousand tons, then this only goes to show that each of them is simply jockeying, through diplomacy, for the most advantageous position in the coming military conflict.

However, what does the establishment of "parity" between American and English navies signify from the standpoint of the international situation? It signifies the establishment of a colossal disparity between them – in favour of America. And this is of course perfectly understood by all the serious participants in this game, above all by the Admiralties of London and Washington. If they keep

continued on page 14 →

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quiet about it, it is solely out of considerations of diplomatic shyness. We have no reasons for emulating them.

After the experience of the last war there is no one who does not understand that the next war between the world titans will not be brief but protracted. The issue will be determined by the relative productive power of the two camps. This means among other things that the combat fleets of the sea powers will be not only supplemented and renovated but also expanded and newly created in the very course of the war.

We have seen what an exceptional role the German submarines played in the military operations in the third year of the slaughter. We have seen how England and America, in the very course of the war, created gigantic new armies and armaments, infinitely superior to the old armies of the European continent. This means that soldiers, sailors, ships, guns, tanks and planes available at the outbreak of war represent only the initial stake. The issue will be decided in dependence upon the extent to which a given country is able, while under fire, to produce ships, guns, soldiers and sailors. Even the Tsarist government [of Russia] proved capable of preparing certain reserves for the outbreak of war. But what was beyond its strength was to renew and supplement these reserves under fire. In the event of war with America the one theoretically conceivable condition of success for England is to assure herself, before the outbreak of war, a very great military-technical preponderance which would in some measure compensate for the incomparable technical and economic preponderance of the United States. But the equalisation of the two fleets prior to the war means that in the very first months of war America will possess an incontestable preponderance. Not for nothing did the Americans threaten several years ago to turn out cruisers in an emergency like so many pancakes.

In the negotiations between Hoover [US president] and MacDonald it is not a question of disarmament or even of limiting naval armaments, but solely that of rationalising war preparations. Types of ships are rendered quickly obsolete. Today when the colossal experience of the war and the resulting flood of inventions and discoveries are just being elaborated for military needs, any and all instruments of military technology are rendered obsolete in a far briefer space of time than was the case before the war. This means that the main section of the fleet may prove outdated even before it has been placed in action. Under such conditions, what sense is there in accumulating ships in advance? A rational approach to the problem demands that the fleet be just large enough for the initial period of the war and of sufficient size in peacetime to serve as an adequate laboratory for testing and checking new inventions and discoveries with a view to placing them in standardised mass production in the



Crowds on Wall Street as the financial markets crash at the end of October 1929

course of the war. All the great powers are more or less interested in the "regulation" of armaments, especially such costly ones as naval armaments. But inexorably this regulation becomes transformed into the greatest advantage for the economically strongest country.

In recent years the US war and navy departments have applied themselves systematically to prepare the entire American industry for the needs of the next war. Schwab, one of the magnates of maritime-war industry, recently concluded his speech to the War College with the following words: "It must be made clear to you that war in the present period must be compared with a great big industrial enterprise."

Incite

The French imperialist press has naturally done everything in its power to incite America against England. In an article devoted to the question of the naval agreement, *Le Temps* writes that naval parity by no means signifies the equalisation of sea power, inasmuch as America cannot even dream of securing such naval bases as England has acquired in the course of centuries. The superiorities of British naval bases are absolutely incontestable. But after all, the accord on naval parity, if it is concluded, will not represent America's last word on the subject. Its slogan is "Freedom of the Seas," that is a regime that must first of all place restrictions on Great Britain's use of her naval bases.

No less significant is another slogan of the United States: "The Open Door." Under this banner America will act to counterpose not only China but also India and Egypt to Great Britain's naval domination. America will conduct her offensive against British naval bases and points of support not by sea but by land, i.e. through the colonies and dominions of Britain. America will put her war fleet in action when the situation is ripe for it. Of course all this is the music of the future. But this future is not separated from us by centuries nor even decades. *Le Temps* need not worry. The US will take piecemeal everything that can be taken piecemeal, altering the relation-

ship of forces in all fields — technical, commercial, financial, military — to the disadvantage of its chief rival, without for a moment losing sight of England's naval bases.

The American press has referred with a contemptuous smile to England's acclaim of Snowden [British chancellor] when the latter gained at the Hague conference, with the aid of terrifying gestures, twenty million dollars to England's profit, i.e. a sum of money that American tourists perhaps spend on cigars. Is Snowden the victor? asked the *New York Times*. No! The real victor is the Young Plan [loans from the USA to allow Germany to continue paying reparations from World War One], i.e. American finance capital. Through the Bank of International Settlements, America is enabled by the Young Plan to keep her hand firmly on the golden pulse of Europe. From the financial shackles on Germany's feet, there extend solid chains which encumber the hands of France, the feet of Italy and the neck of Britain. MacDonald, who nowadays fulfills the duties of keeper to the British lion, points with pride to this dog collar, calling it the best instrument of peace. And mind you, to attain such results all America had to do was exhibit her magnanimity by "aiding" Europe to liquidate the war and "agreeing" to naval parity with a weaker Great Britain.

3. The Imperialist Dictatorship of America

Since 1923 we have had to conduct a struggle to have the leadership of the Communist International deign, finally, to take notice of the United States, and to understand that the AngloAmerican antagonism constitutes the fundamental line along which world groupings and world conflicts occur. This was considered a heresy as far back as the era of the Fifth World Congress (middle of 1924). We were accused of "overestimating" the role of America. A special legend was invented to the effect that we had proclaimed an epoch of the disappearance of European capitalist contradictions in the face of the American peril. Ossinsky, Larin and others spoiled

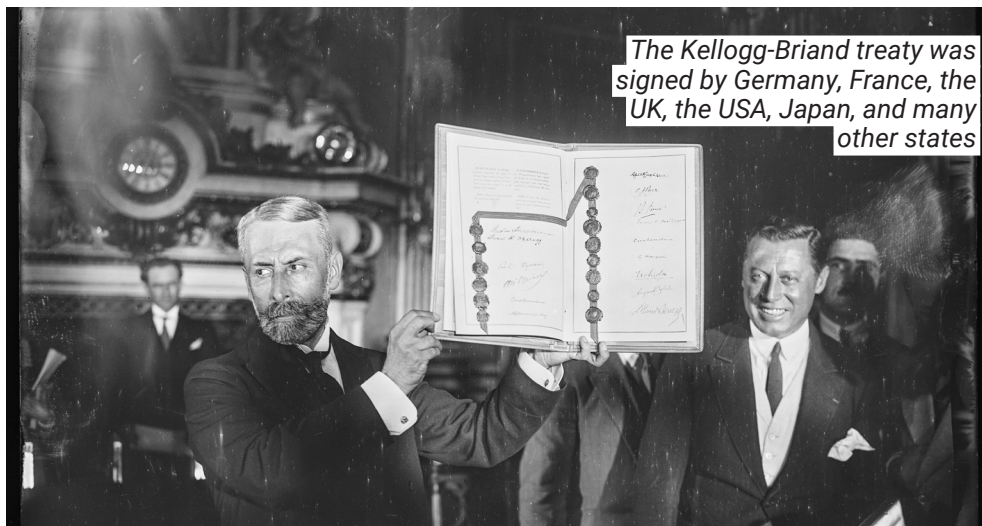
not a little paper in order to "dethrone" the might of America. Radek, in the wake of bourgeois journalists, demonstrated that ahead lies an epoch of Anglo-American collaboration. Temporary, conjunctural, episodic forms assumed by the reciprocal relations have been confused with the essence of the world process.

Gradually, however, America came to be "recognised" by the official leadership of the Comintern which began to repeat our formulas of yesterday, without forgetting, naturally, to add each time that the Left Opposition overestimates the role of America. The correct appraisal of America was at that time, as everybody knows, the exclusive prerogative of Pepper and Lovestone.

However, no sooner was the course "to the left" inaugurated, than all reservations were cast aside. Today the official theoreticians are obliged to proclaim that England and America are heading directly to war. In this connection I wrote in February last year to friends exiled in Siberia: "The antagonism between England and America has finally broken to the surface in a serious form. It seems that now even Stalin and Bukharin are beginning to understand what it is all about. But our newspapers oversimplify the problem by depicting matters as if the antagonism between England and America is being steadily aggravated and must lead directly to war. Undoubtedly several more breaking points will occur in this process. War would prove too dangerous an enterprise for both sides. They will still make more than one attempt to come to an agreement and to reach a peaceable solution. But on the whole the development is proceeding with giant strides toward a bloody culmination".

The present stage has once again assumed the form of military-naval "collaboration" between America and England, and some French newspapers have even expressed fears of an Anglo-Saxon world dictatorship. The United States of course can and probably will utilise the "collaboration" with England to tighten the reins on Japan and France. But all this will represent phases not toward Anglo-Saxon but American domination of the world, including Great Britain.

In connection with this perspective, the leaders of the Comintern may once again repeat that we are unable to see anything ahead except the triumph of American capitalism. In much the same way, the petty bourgeois theoreticians of Narodnikism (Russian Populism) used to accuse the pioneer Russian Marxists of failing to see anything ahead except the victory of capitalism. These two accusations are on a par. When we say that America is moving toward world domination, it does not at all mean that this domination will be completely realised, nor, all the less so, that after it is realised to one degree or another, it will endure for centuries or even decades. We are discussing a historical tendency which, in actuality, will be criss-crossed and modified by other historical tendencies.



The Kellogg-Briand treaty was signed by Germany, France, the UK, the USA, Japan, and many other states

If the capitalist world were able to endure several more decades without revolutionary paroxysms, then these decades would unquestionably witness the uninterrupted growth of American world dictatorship. But the whole point is that this process will inevitably develop its own contradictions which will become coupled with all the other contradictions of the capitalist system. America will force Europe to strive for an ever increasing rationalisation and at the same time will leave Europe an ever decreasing share of the world market. This will entail a steady aggravation of the difficulties in Europe. The competition among European states for a share of the world market will inevitably become aggravated. At the same time under the pressure of America, the European states will endeavor to coordinate their forces. This is the main source of Briand's program of the United States of Europe.

But whatever the various stages of the development may be, one thing is clear: The constant disruption of the world equilibrium in America's favour will become the main source of crises and revolutionary convulsions in Europe throughout the entire coming period. Those who hold that European stabilisation is assured for decades understand nothing at all of the world situation and will inevitably sink head first in the swamp of reformism.

If this process is approached from across the Atlantic Ocean, i.e. from the standpoint of the fate of USA, then here too the perspectives opened up resemble least of all a blissful capitalist idyll. The prewar power of the United States grew on the basis of its internal market, i.e. the dynamic equilibrium between industry and agriculture. In this development the war has produced a sharp break. The United States exports capital and manufactured goods in ever greater volume. The growth of America's world power means that the entire system of American industry and banking—that towering capitalist skyscrapers resting to an ever increasing measure on the foundations of world economy. But this foundation is mined, and the United States itself continues to add more mines to it day by day. By exporting commodities and capital, by building up its navy, by elbowing England aside, by buying up the key enterprises in Europe, by forcing its way into China, etc., American finance

capital is digging with its own hands powder and dynamite cellars beneath its own foundation. Where will the fuse be lit? Whether it will be in Asia, Europe or Latin America — or what is most likely in various places at one and the same time that is a second-rate question.

The whole misfortune is that the incumbent leadership of the Comintern is totally incapable of following all the stages of this gigantic process. It shies away from facts by means of platitudes. Even the pacifist agitation in favor of the United States of Europe has taken it by surprise.

4. Soviet United States of Europe

The question of the United States of Europe regarded from the proletarian standpoint was raised by me in September 1914, i.e. at the very beginning of the (last) imperialist war. In the pamphlet, *The War and the International*, the author of these lines sought to demonstrate that the unification of Europe was irrefutably advanced to the forefront by Europe's entire economic development, but that the United States of Europe was conceivable only as the political form of the dictatorship of the European proletariat.

In 1923 when the occupation of the Ruhr once again posed acutely the fundamental problems of European economy (primarily coal and iron ore) and coincident with them also the problems of the revolution, we succeeded in having the slogan of the United States of Europe officially adopted by the leadership of the Comintern. But the attitude toward this slogan remained hostile. Not being in a position to reject it, the Comintern leaders regarded it as an abandoned child of "Trotskyism."

After the collapse of the [October] 1923 German revolution, Europe lived the life of stabilisation. The basic revolutionary questions disappeared from the agenda. The slogan of the United States of Europe was forgotten. It was not included in the program of the Comintern. Stalin explained this new zigzag with remarkable profundity: Since we cannot tell the order in which the various countries will accomplish their revolutions, it follows that it is impossible to predict whether the United States of Europe will be necessary. In other words, this means that it is easier to make a prognosis after the event than before it. As a

matter of fact, it is not at all a question of the order in which revolutions will be accomplished. On this score one can only speculate. But this does not relieve the European workers, nor the International as a whole from the necessity of giving a clear answer to the question: How can European economy be snatched from its present state of dispersion and how can the popular masses of Europe be saved from decay and enslavement?

The trouble, however, is that the economic ground for the slogan of the United States of Europe overthrows one of the basic ideas of the present Comintern program, namely: the idea of building socialism in one country.

The essence of our epoch lies in this, that the productive forces have definitely outgrown the framework of the national state and have assumed primarily in America and Europe partly continental, partly world proportions. The imperialist war grew out of the contradiction between the productive forces and national boundaries. And the Versailles peace which terminated the [First World] war has aggravated this contradiction still further. In other words: thanks to the development of the productive forces capitalism has long ago been unable to exist in a single country. Meanwhile, socialism can and will base itself on far more developed productive forces, otherwise socialism would represent not progress but regression with respect to capitalism.

Framework

In 1914 I wrote: "If the problem of socialism were compatible with the framework of a national state, it would thereby become compatible with national defence" [i.e. with socialists supporting their "own" capitalist governments in World War One]. The formula Soviet United States of Europe is precisely the political expression of the idea that socialism is impossible in one country. Socialism cannot of course attain its full development even in the limits of a single continent. The Socialist United States of Europe represents the historical slogan which is a stage on the road to the world socialist federation.

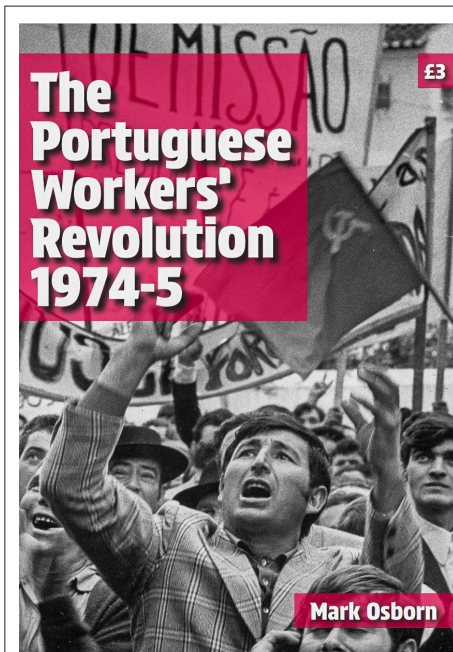
It has happened more than once in history that when the revolution is not strong enough to solve in time a task that is mature historically, its solution is undertaken by reaction. Thus Bismarck unified Germany in his own manner [in 1871] after the failure of the 1848 revolution. Thus Stolypin [in Russia] tried to solve the agrarian question after the defeat of the 1905 revolution. Thus the Versailles victors solved the national question in their own way, which all the previous bourgeois revolutions in Europe proved impotent to solve. The Germany of the Hohenzollerns [i.e. of World War 1] tried to organise Europe in its own way, i.e. by uniting it under its helmet. It was then that victorious Clemenceau [then French prime minister] decided to utilise the victory in order to slice up Europe into the greatest possible number of pieces [by recognising in Eastern Europe, previously dominated

by huge Russian, Austrian, and German empires] many small states with contentious borders, many under dominant French influence]. Today Briand, armed with needle and thread, is preparing to sew these pieces together again, even if he doesn't know where to begin.

The leadership of the Comintern, and particularly the leadership of the French Communist Party are exposing the hypocrisy of official pacifism. But this is not enough. To explain away the course toward the unification of Europe solely as a means of preparing war against the USSR is, to put it mildly, puerile and only compromises the task of defending the Soviet Republic. The slogan of the United States of Europe is not a cunning invention of diplomacy. It springs from the immutable economic needs of Europe which emerge all the more painfully and acutely the greater is the pressure of the USA. It is especially now that the Communist parties must counterpose the slogan of the Soviet United States of Europe to the pacifist concoctions of the European imperialists.

But the Communist parties have their hands tied. The living slogan, with a profound historical content, has been expunged from the program of the Comintern solely in the interests of the struggle against the Opposition. All the more decisively must the Opposition raise this slogan. In the person of the Opposition the vanguard of the European proletariat tells its present rulers: In order to unify Europe it is first of all necessary to wrest power out of your hands. We will do it. We will unite Europe. We will unite it against the hostile capitalist world. We will turn it into a mighty drill-ground of militant socialism. We will make it the cornerstone of the World Socialist Federation. □.

• Written 4 October 1929. First published in Russian in the *Bulletin of the Opposition*. English translation in *The Militant*, 7 December 1929.



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“More revolutionary, not susceptible to bourgeois

Colin Waugh tells the story of Bronterre O'Brien

My [Solidarity 751](#) article explained that there was in the 1830s amongst many workers a drive to develop “really useful knowledge”, the spirit of which soon became key to the movement for a People’s Charter. In essence, “really useful knowledge” was class consciousness that could underpin and sustain workers’ efforts to take control of the socio-economic order. We can explore what happened to this drive by following the life of James O’Brien.

O’Brien, who often wrote under the pen-name “Bronterre”, was born in Ireland in 1804. After a very liberal schooling, he graduated from Trinity College Dublin in 1829, having already undergone three years of legal training. In 1830 he transferred to London’s Grays Inn. Almost immediately, however, he became a full time activist and central figure in the War of the Unstamped, i.e. the struggle to publish illegal newspapers aimed at working-class readers. In doing so he was fired especially by the poverty he had seen as a result of British rule and absentee landlordism in Ireland. Regarding this poverty he wrote:

“I have seen thousands of Irish who have never had animal food or fish or wheaten bread twice a year since they were born. I have seen them whole days together without even potatoes or salt... I have seen them living, or striving to live, on nettles and other weeds... I have seen them living, or striving to live, in sooty mud cabins, or rather sties, and in deep holes burrowed under bushes on the roadside, or under turf banks... All this... have I seen in Ireland — not in solitary instances, but over whole districts... and often did my blood boil with rage that I could not strike the assassins dead who caused such misery...”

In 1836 a change in the law cut the ground from under the Unstamped movement. Also in that year, O’Brien pro-

duced an English translation (from the French) of Philippe Buonarroti’s 1828 book describing the 1796 “conspiracy of equals” led by Francois Babeuf. This was a grassroots uprising against the Directory, which by then had taken control of events in France. With O’Brien’s added comments, the book ran to 454 pages, and is said to have sold 50,000 copies, one of them later owned by Karl Marx.

O’Brien moved on to become one of the two or three most prominent national leaders of the Chartist movement. He served an 18-month prison sentence for this in 1840-41. The top Chartist leader, Feargus O’Connor, called him the “school master” — meaning the main theorist — of the movement. Visiting London in 1839, the Franco-Peruvian socialist Flora Tristan was given access to a secret Chartist meeting where Feargus O’Connor was also a speaker. She described O’Brien’s speech at this meeting as “controlled, lucid, well-reasoned, showing thorough knowledge of past events”.

Decline

In 1849, with the decline of Chartism as a mass movement, O’Brien split from O’Connor and set up a group called the National Reform League (NRL). This was composed of about 500 other Chartists. In 1850, using a hall in Soho, the NRL founded an oppositional adult education organisation, the Eclectic Institute. O’Brien sustained this and, along with many other activities, gave regular lectures in it every week till shortly before his death in 1864. He died from ill health brought on by poverty.

People inspired by O’Brien’s ideas continued to organise. For example, In 1871 Karl Marx said of followers of O’Brien who were involved in the council of the International Workingmen’s Association (IWMA, i.e. the First International) that they constituted: “an often necessary counterweight to trade unionists in the Council”, because “they are more rev-



Bronterre O'Brien's grave

olutionary, firmer on the land question, less nationalistic, and not susceptible to bourgeois bribery in one form or another”. The O’Brienites continued NRL activity in and around the Eclectic Institute and in other London workers’ clubs. Then in 1885, a group of them published in book form a series of articles that O’Brien had written in 1849-50, under the title *The Rise, Progress and Phases of Human Slavery: How It Came Into the World, and How It Shall be Made to Go Out*. The ideas set out in this book can be summarised as follows.

There have been in the history of the world two forms of slavery — direct and indirect. “Direct” slavery arose originally from the dominance exercised by fathers over their children and other family members. In the ancient Greek and Roman worlds this dominance was extended to people who were forced to work for the family, either as domestic servants or in agricultural production. Although this direct slavery sometimes took brutal forms that drove slaves to rebel, no spokesperson for the slave-owning class (including for example Homer, Hesiod, Plato and Aristotle) ever questioned its existence as an institution, and neither did any of the slaves, not even those led by Spartacus in 73-71 BCE.

However, there arose eventually a movement — Christianity — which required believers to challenge slavery as a system. After three hundred years during which converts to Christianity withstood ferocious persecution, a point was reached at which the Roman ruling class, following a “sham conversion” of the Emperor Constantine, switched round and imposed a bureaucratised version of Christianity across the Mediterranean world and much of Western Europe. From this turning point on there developed over many centuries forms of what O’Brien calls “indirect slavery”. One of these forms was agricultural production carried on by villeins under feudal overlords. But eventually “indirect” slavery took on the extreme form of exploitation imposed by industrial capital-

ists in O’Brien’s own day. He says: “What are called the ‘Working Classes’ are the slave populations of civilised countries”.

O’Brien was aware that in his own day there were peoples amongst whom there was no working class, for example “Arabia... the Nomad tribes of Africa, the Red-Indians of America, and the hunter tribes of Tartary”. However, he also maintains that, by comparison with the industrial form of “indirect” slavery, “direct” slavery, both as it existed in the ancient world and in the modern USA, was relatively benign. In contrast to this, he further maintains that under industrialism the savagery of “indirect” slavery was and is such that, for the first time, large scale movements aimed at overthrowing it have arisen amongst its victims. Chartism is one such movement, and others have spread across mainland Europe in the revolutions of 1848. O’Brien thought that these movements constituted a modern re-awakening of early Christianity. As he put it: “In this present century and in this present year [i.e. 1850] [Christianity] is reviving again under new names and forms”.

Ownership

O’Brien goes on to say that, in this country at least, destroying indirect slavery would entail radically changing parliament, as per the People’s Charter. This would allow the state to take ownership of all landed property, which it could then rent out in plots to industrial workers and their families. He also wrote:

“Railroads should not be private property; neither should canals, docks, fisheries, mines, the supplying of gas, water, etc. Works of this sort, designed for the use of the public... should not be suffered to fall into the hands of private speculators, for whom they are only a legal disguise to enable them to rob the public. A universal suffrage parliament would never sanction such a system, unless it were stark mad”.

Other measures O’Brien thought a democratised parliament would take included: scrapping the 1834 Poor Law Reform Act; creating a national network of “marts” where workers could exchange



A Chartist meeting

s bribery”

their produce without interference from financiers; setting up a publicly owned banking system; and substituting a paper currency for one tied to the fluctuating value of precious metals.

There are major weaknesses in O'Brien's presentation of “direct” slavery. For example, he makes no reference either to the Atlantic slave trade or to the revolts by enslaved Africans on plantations across the Caribbean, and especially in Haiti. His references to slavery in the USA make it sound much less oppressive than it actually was. His focus was always on the hypocrisy of ruling-class abolitionists, seemingly forgetting that the cotton processed in Lancashire was grown by slaves in the US.

O'Brien had a strong belief in Christianity. For example in his 1849-50 writings he calls the historical Jesus “our redeemer”. But he was also an unyielding opponent of institutional Christianity, whether Catholic or Protestant. This tension was evident in some of his Eclectic Hall lectures, which claimed to be “illustrative of the real character of Christ's Mission on Earth, and of the frauds and delusions with which the various sects and churches have mystified this important subject in the interest of tyranny and crime”. But his politics and those of the upper class Anglicans who in April 1848 organised the first Christian Socialist movement were different in kind.

O'Brien's view of world history was for all practical purposes a revolutionary socialist one. Regarding the struggle in which workers aligned themselves with industrial capitalists to win the 1832 Parliamentary Reform Act he wrote: “it's not that we [i.e. the NRL] regret the social revolution which has taken place, but that it did not take place in the right way, and that, in consequence, another and greater revolution is still indispensable and inevitable for the major part of the human race”. And with regard to the class he calls “Profitmongers” — i.e. industrial and financial capitalists — he says:

“As this iniquitous class can grow rich only by grinding and cheating their fellow-creatures, that is, by robbery and oppression, they are, by the very nature of their pursuits and practices, irreconcilable enemies of society. It is their interest that the working-classes should be always at variance amongst themselves — always a prey to ignorance — given to mutual jealousy and mistrust — and filled with prejudices and superstitions, by which they may at all times have their passions inflamed against those who would unite, enlighten, and emancipate them from bondage”.

In short, he thought that a working-class democratisation of parliament could lead to a valid socio-economic order only if workers at the same time organised themselves on the basis of “really useful knowledge”. □



Bermondsey around World War 2



Alma Grove today

In retrospect

Racism, housing and Winifred Atwell

By Bas Hardy

I grew up in Bermondsey, South East London, in the days before the area became synonymous with “gentrification”. Our terrace house was a hundred years old and just over the road from the Bricklayers Arms, then the biggest rail depot in London, now given over to housing.

Some of the surrounding roads were named after battles in the Crimean War — Alma Grove, Balaclava Road — because the houses were built shortly afterwards. Our house was a seven roomed terrace with an outside toilet. In the winter the cistern froze. You couldn't flush it! Not wishing to parody the Monty Python Yorkshiremen sketch, but during pre-teen years I had to wash in a tin bath.

In 1960 the landlord who owned this estate of around 790 dwellings wanted to sell up. He didn't want to fork out for putting in the bathrooms and inside toilets new housing regulations demanded.

I must have been about nine when I was at a church hall meeting where the fate of the estate was up for discussion. The racist rumour mill whispered that it would be bought up by Winifred Atwell, an extremely popular Trinidadian television star at the time.

No doubt many present at the Bermondsey meeting enjoyed and even bought her records and were amongst the millions who watched her shows on ITV and then BBC. Atwell was the first black artist to have a number one on the UK singles chart. Her signature tune “Black and White Rag” became the theme tune in 1970 for the snooker programme Pot Black, snooker being more watchable as people acquired colour TVs. (For those watching in black and white, the pink ball is next to the green!) Couldn't have a black person for their landlady, though, no matter how famous.

Although Winifred Atwell did own a few properties elsewhere in London

(apparently the family of young Sharon Osbourne were tenants of hers), the idea that she had the financial resources to buy up a big estate in Bermondsey was frankly preposterous. Yet this was one of those times of racist moral panic in this instance directed against the Afro-Caribbean community, with the “fear” Bermondsey would become the new Brixton.

Bermondsey's Labour-run council (to be merged into Southwark in 1965) decided to buy up the private estate. The decision was laudable in the sense that tenants would be much more secure with the council as their landlord than some private owner. The extent to which the decision was taken to pander to white racism could only be known if council deliberations could be accessed. ITV did a programme dealing with this, *The Secret History of Our Streets*, episode 3 (available on YouTube), which glossed over the racial aspect.

Racist

The MP at the time and right up until 1982 was Bob Mellish, who was an old style right-wing Labour and racist. He was particularly opposed to welcoming Asian British passport holders fleeing from the dictatorial Hastings Banda regime in Malawi.

Mellish described himself in parliament as an “anti-racist”, (a variant of “I'm not a racist, but...”) and talked about problems becoming “worse and worse for our own people” if Malawian refugees were given sanctuary. He bemoaned the six year housing waiting list for people “born and bred” in his constituency without questioning why there was such a housing shortage in the first place. Blaming immigrants for the housing crisis is a perennial trope.

Sixty-five years on from that church hall meeting, are racist views and attitudes less prevalent in working-class communities given the arrival of Farage

and Yaxley-Lennon onto the scene? Is Britain less racist than it was all those years ago? Is it possible to realistically even to measure the extent of racial prejudice?

I have not been much interested in football mainly because my local team was Millwall. Never a team to reach the heights in the football league, but some so-called Millwall supporters have certainly been up there as premier thugs and racists. The club board have taken a number of anti-racist initiatives, but racist behaviour from the team's followers unfortunately continues to run deep.

Bermondsey itself has become much more socially diverse in part due to Thatcher “right to buy” legislation which allowed the flogging off of council houses. A noticeable decrease in far right activity in the borough was also evident. Was part of this down to “white flight” — movement to Farage territory in Essex?

In places like Clacton many of the predominantly elderly population have racist attitudes in varying degrees. To what extent have these have been passed on generationally?

Growing up in my circa-Crimean-war built house I'd heard of Florence Nightingale, but had no knowledge of Mary Seacole. Her contribution as a black woman regarding the welfare of the troops had been hidden from history. Hers was one of the many examples of positive black role models cited as educators worked to raise awareness and combat racism. Did any of it stick? Or are working class communities still sectioned off into “tribes” along ethnic lines?

And how was it for my family when the council took over as our landlord? A proper bath arrived in the early sixties, although they didn't do anything about the outside khazi. My mother still had to traipse out there in the winter until she was moved to sheltered accommodation in 1987. □



Vote Ruth Cashman for CEC, transfer to GL

By Matt Cooper

The completed endorsements of candidates for Your Party's Central Executive Committee (CEC) elections, voting 9 to 23 February, suggest this is mostly a two-faction race.

Ruth Cashman (a regular *Solidarity* contributor) in London is the only candidate to get on the ballot with a clear working-class socialist-internationalist pitch. We ask YP readers in London to vote for Ruth. We also ask for transfers to go to Grassroots Left (GL) candidates.

In every English region, Corbyn's The Many (TM) slate and Sultana's Grassroots Left (GL) both reached the required 75 nominations, and in most regions they filled the top four nomination spots.

The system used to elect the CEC is an example of what happens when a constitution is constructed without proper debate. Electing two members per region by STV produces nothing close to proportional outcomes. In a two-member STV contest, the seats go to the first two candidates to reach a third of the vote as votes are redistributed according to preferences. A slate will need two-thirds support to win both seats. As a result, most regions are likely to return one GL and one TM member.

Although the endorsements may not reflect votes, they suggest the only regions where one slate might win both seats is GL in London and possibly Yorkshire. In the North West, a strong independent, Sam Gorst of Liverpool Independents, could disrupt the pattern and is a candidate worth considering. In Scotland, the GL-aligned candidate looks best placed. Wales is too divided to call. The public office holder positions are likely to be split two-two, not least because two Independent Alliance MPs



on the TM slate are relatively unpopular. So, Corbyn has a problem. The evidence suggests the best he can hope for is an even split between his supporters and the GL slate, which would be expected to back Sultana. GL may even secure a narrow majority. He may hope that more members will vote in the CEC elections than in the endorsement stage, and that this less engaged section of the membership will lean towards his endorsed candidates.

Corbyn's electioneering

Corbyn and his allies seem to be throwing everything into boosting their vote. Unusually, the Corbyn faction which runs the YP office has declared that anyone can join at any point and vote immediately. The Corbyn-controlled Peace and Justice Project circulated an email stating, "The Many campaign has announced that if its candidates win a majority in Your Party's leadership elections, they will vote to make Jeremy the

party's Parliamentary Leader," and inviting people to join at a concessionary rate of £1.50. (This is an unethical, and possibly illegal, use of PJP data).

The collective leadership model adopted by conference states that the CEC's chair, vice-chair and spokesperson (not a "parliamentary leader") will serve as the public political leadership. Despite that being one of the options his faction offered conference, Corbyn appears unwilling to abide by it or even to campaign for change at the next conference. His faction wants to railroad the party into accepting him as unchallengeable leader. It is therefore important that The Many do not win control of the CEC. Even if the politics of the GL are poor, and they are, a GL majority on the CEC is more likely to allow democratic space in YP than a TM majority.

It is worth differentiating between GL candidates. In most regions, only one will win, and that will be the candidate who secures the strongest first and transfer

preferences. Where one appears more politically better, more grounded in the working class, and less likely to waver under pressure, they should be ranked first.

The other candidates bar Ruth are not better than GL. The DemBloc broadly agree with Corbyn's proposed model, and several candidates they backed have made the ballot: Andy Walker (North East), Jenny Curtis (North West), Kadira Pethiyagoda (London) and Alex Fox (West Midlands). In London, Piers Corbyn should be put last on ballot papers. He is a climate-change-denying anti-vaccine transphobe whose conspiratorial obsession leads him into (literally) standing with the far right. Valerie Coultas is on the left, but widely reported to be backed by the transphobic "Your Party Left Materialists" and figures from Counterfire. She has been approached for comment, but transfer to GL before her.

Because of the elongated process of selecting the CEC, there will be no candidates standing under the YP banner in May's local elections. Contradicting earlier statements, Corbyn has made it clear that there will be no official YP endorsements.

However, many YP proto-branches are standing in the May elections, with some registering with the Electoral Commission. In Corbyn's Islington, the "Islington Community Independents" (at present two ex-Labour councillors) have registered with the Electoral Commission and plan to stand 12 candidates in the 51-seat council election, with a tacit deal with the Greens, and no connection to the Islington YP branch, whose chair is standing as a GL candidate for CEC. □

Waiting for politics?

By Rhodri Evans

Behind the clouds of smoke from the internal workings and rows of the Corbyn-Sultana Your Party a grim fact looms: YP as such, or even the "proto-branches" of YP, have done almost no politics.

Whatever our criticisms of Zack Polanski, he has done politics. It has been only on the level of social-media output and electioneering, not on the level of street or workplace intervention, or solid political education, but it has been politics of a sort. Nothing like that from YP. That is why GP has so outstripped YP.

YP was publicly launched in July 2025, seven months ago.

Its operational core, the people who ran the YP conference on 29-30 November and are organising its Central Executive elections now, the people "behind" Jeremy Corbyn, have operated publicly as a proto-party (Collective) since March 2024.

When a new political formation is started, of course there will be anomalies. They have to be resolved "on the hoof", in the flow of activity and discussion. The initiating group must campaign politically to show what new it offers at the same time as it forms structures to clarify, consolidate, or correct the "new".

Plenty has happened in the world since March 2024, or

even since July 2025. Politics is not just, or even mainly, elections. What are the political responses of YP? What Jeremy Corbyn has said in his own name? (Often poor politically, in our view, even compared with Corbyn's imperfect pre-2024 politics). What Zarah Sultana has said (sometimes poor in different ways)? Or just zero?

Why the paralysis? Maybe because since July 2025 there have been rival claims to be the "initiating group", the Corbyn group's and Sultana's. Maybe because Corbyn is reluctant and unsure.

The only answer was to improvise while proceeding

rapidly to set up structures to establish majority and minority at least provisionally. Instead, we have had months of internal-focused wrangling.

Where people have joined YP (rather than the Green Party, say, or the Labour left), it must be because believe YP will eventually become active on Corbyn's line, or Sultana's. Or because they envisage a minority in YP close to their own views, and democratic structures through which that minority can make progress. But it all has to be hopeful waiting.

This has allowed clouds of political activists to swirl around YP which are outright right-wing (like Piers Corbyn)

while at the same time leftists are excluded (SWP people from the November conference, SP people and initially others from the Executive elections). A young student activist told me yesterday that "all my friends who liked YP are now not interested".

On our observation, also, few local "proto-branches" show much external political initiative, even in YP's "heartland" of Islington.

The world won't wait forever. We say to people who looked to YP as a new political start: being YP is not really doing politics. Do politics with Workers' Liberty in YP or elsewhere, but do politics, not just waiting. □

Back to... union democracy

By Owen Flood

Workers' Liberty Unite fraction critically supports the pro-Sharon Graham Back to the Workplace (BTTW) slate in the upcoming Unite Executive Council elections (voting from 23 March to 27 April). The main alternative slate is Members United promoted by Reunite the Union – the rebranding of United Left.

When Unite formed (2007), United Left was a significant force in the union. It was primarily a machine for union-internal elections and largely Morning Star influenced. Nonetheless, it promoted some positive union reforms (e.g. a shift from geographical branches to workplace branches) and engaged in some low-level campaigning. Internally, it was a fairly democratic organisation. It has since degenerated.

By the end of Len McCluskey's time as General Secretary (2011-2021), UL had largely become his uncritical praetorian guard. Critics of McCluskey within UL were variously sidelined, suspended, or driven out. Rather than attempting to exercise lay-membership control over the union and its bureaucracy, membership of UL became the ticket for entry into the bureaucracy.

Despite all the fine words in its election manifesto about "a member-led union", the record of UL has had nothing in common with such noble sentiments. Members should not have illusions in its pleas for unity.

Back to the Workplace

The election of Sharon Graham in 2021 has resulted in more wins in industrial disputes and settlements, investigations of historical corruption, and a somewhat improved democratic culture. In part it must be said that the industrial and internal improvements under Graham reflect how low the bar was set on these matters by the end of the McCluskey leadership.

The improved industrial strategy has largely been top-down. It has been welcome but has not necessarily resulted in greater rank-and-file activity.

Under Graham, Unite has started investigating allegations of corruption during McCluskey's leadership. An interim report on allegations of historical corruption highlighted major issues of financial irregularities around the Birmingham hotel project (the construction was



overvalued by as much as £70m), Unite's affiliated services, a cosy relationship between McCluskey and the Flanagan Group (this included one of the Flanagan bosses paying to watch Liverpool matches and flights to go see them), and more. Furthermore, it highlighted how UL controlled the EC and facilitated these practices (e.g. the UL controlled EC would deliberately make meetings inquorate in order to block investigations into Birmingham hotel).

It is good that the union is investigating and communicating these events. Nevertheless, Workers' Liberty have been critical about the way this has been done (e.g. members often hearing first about things via the bourgeois media rather than union communications) and how this has been weaponised in part by Graham's leadership (e.g. using the official staff and communications of the union to warn members against the United Left faction in the run up to Policy Conference).

While we support the Back to the Workplace slate, we are critical of it defining itself as a pro-Graham slate. Slates for elections should define themselves on a set of policies and principles not cult of personality. The existing slate is a mix of some decent socialist trade unionists and some who were UL aligned and have now presumably thought it prudent to switch.

The main industrial and political substance that can be found is an endorsement by each candidate of "Sharon's Vision for Change" from 2021. Industrially we welcome: Sectors receiving dedicated budgets and bargaining support, the establishment of Combines, an overhaul of Unite Education, organising the biggest-worst employers, and organising the unorganised. Yet, since 2021 there have only been marginal improvements in these things. For example, in Hospitality more financial and staffing resources were promised than were actually delivered.

Political strategy

On the political front the position of Graham, and by extension of BTTW, is that before 2021 the union spent too much time focussing on its relationship to Labour at the expense of industrial or-

ganising. Instead Graham calls for the union to support political candidates who have been union reps – but she doesn't specify on what basis the union would support them.

The Political Strategy adopted by Unite under McCluskey was summed up by "Win Labour for working people, and win working people for Labour." There was effort made to do that, but in a top-down way.

Once Corbyn became Labour leader McCluskey became an uncritical defender of Corbynism. In fact, the Unite machinery under McCluskey's direction had more influence on Labour than others. Some of what was pushed was good and some of it bad (e.g. for keeping Trident, opposing freedom of movement, and endorsing Brexit).

Under McCluskey the link between Labour and the union was opaque and labyrinthine, and it remains so under Graham. Graham has certainly been more critical of Labour under Starmer than McCluskey was of Labour under Miliband or Corbyn. This is no surprise. If McCluskey was still GS, he would probably be just as critical of Starmer.

Unfortunately, Graham's criticisms of the Starmer government are not part of a broader and coherent political strategy. In fact, Graham's rhetoric about "back to the workplace" and "the Westminster bubble" are a cover for the lack of any such strategy.

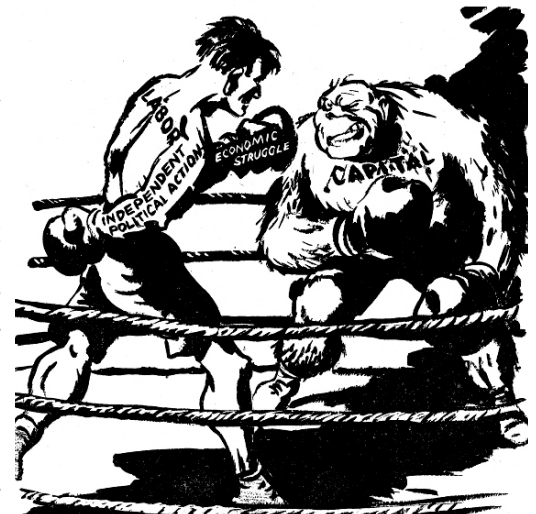
The union should use its link to put more pressure on Labour. Since Policy Conference Graham has said that if the membership were asked now they would vote to disaffiliate from Labour. This claim may be true but so far it is unsubstantiated and points more towards Graham's own position. Breaking that link or deciding to do less, creates a danger of the union becoming less politically relevant and impactful, not more.

Wrapped up in all of this is a danger that disaffiliating from Labour would most likely come more from pressure of a growing right-wing base within the union that seeks to make the union more apolitical. Graham's pseudo-syndicalist posturing accommodates to and amplifies the drive within Unite for apolitical trade unionism.

Democracy

On internal democracy, the proposals are vague and largely underwhelming. Graham called for a democracy commission, which has now been launched. What will the commission investigate and overhaul? Why has it taken over four years to launch? Unclear. Moreover, Graham's Vision for Change called for establishing a Shop Stewards Parliament within the union. It is unclear what exactly this would do and what powers

Use Both Hands!



Labor Action cartoon from 1943. Carlo

it would have that are different from the existing structures of RISCs, NISCs, and conferences.

The democratic, industrial, and political vision of Unite must go further. This is especially urgent given the rise of Reform and the far right. Support for these has increased amongst Unite and other union members. Following the general election in 2024 a survey initiated by the TUC found that 10% of union members had voted for Reform and 26% had considered voting for them. It is not uncommon to hear union reps and members who openly say they would vote Reform. This issue has only worsened as the far-right have grown.

Programme

To transform Unite into a democratic, militant and winning union, that can push back against the far-right threat, Unite must:

- Launch a serious national campaign for a £15 minimum wage and secure jobs and homes for all
- Seriously level up its recruitment and activity in industries with low-density and low-engagement
- Use its leverage and link to the Labour Party to win a repeal of all anti-union laws
- Ensure all elected officials take a workers' wage
- Ensure all national negotiators are elected by members. □



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An American fight against fascism

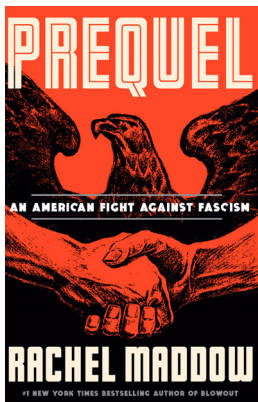
By Richard Abernethy

Between Hitler's rise to power in Germany and the United States' entry into the Second World War, fascist ideas and organisations burgeoned in America.

Henry Ford's paper, the *Dearborn Independent*, distributed through the network of Ford dealers; and the radio broadcasts of Father Charles Coughlin, estimated to reach a quarter of the U.S. population, both projected virulent antisemitism.

Organisations such as the Silver Shirts and the Christian Front held rallies, marches, and military drills. Children at summer camps were taught to give Nazi salutes before the swastika flag. The movement had supporters in high places: senators, congressmen, state governors. Propaganda leaflets, printed in Germany, were mass mailed to millions of homes, taking advantage of the privilege of members of Congress of free postage to their constituents. At the hard core of the movement, there were serious plans for an armed insurrection to overthrow the government, and for mass lynching of Jews. Supporters in the army and national guard stole heavy weapons from armouries to arm the fascist militias.

Rachel Maddow's book, a gripping



read, is titled *Prequel* because she sees this episode in U.S. history as prefiguring the current moment. She does not explore the similarities and differences between then and now very much, leaving her readers to form their own conclusions.

Despite the subtitle, *An American Fight Against Fascism*, the book is more informative about fascism in the USA than anti-fascism.

The good guys in Maddow's narrative are a few campaigners, investigative journalists, low-to-middle-ranking government officials and concerned citizens who worked to expose, disrupt, and sometimes prosecute (mostly without success) the fascists.

Mass action

Only one instance of mass action is recounted here. In July 1935, the German liner SS Bremen docked in New York flying the swastika flag. Two thousand people turned up to protest. Five protestors boarded the vessel, captured the flag, and threw it into the Hudson River.

Apart from a two-page account of the Communist Party, the book misses out anti-fascist campaigning by socialist, labour, Black, and (with one exception) Jewish organisations. But this was not insignificant. There were mass pickets,



The pro-Nazi German-American Bund marching in October 1939. The US Trotskyists, the Socialist Workers Party, led the organising for a rally of many tens of thousands against a Bund meeting in New York in February that year.

counter-rallies, boycotts, public shaming, and education campaigns. The Jewish Labor Committee, in the Bundist tradition, also did important work in helping European socialists escape from fascist (and Stalinist) oppression in Europe.

Maddow observes, correctly, that this first wave of U.S. fascism receded when

America entered the war, and sympathy for the Third Reich became unpatriotic. That is a troubling thought, but a historical reality. To defeat the far right this time around, we must look (critically) to the tradition of mass organisation and activity, which are largely absent from her book. □

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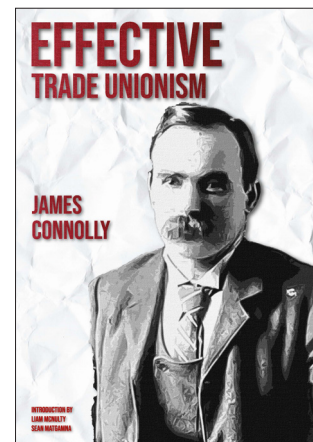
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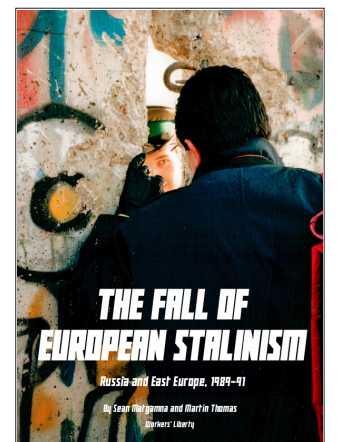
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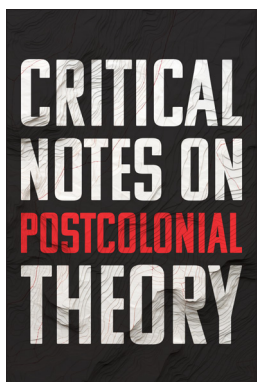
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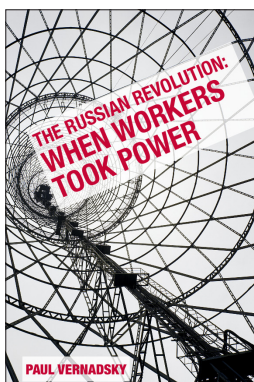
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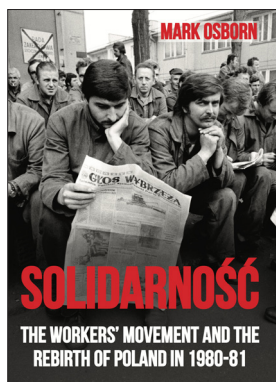
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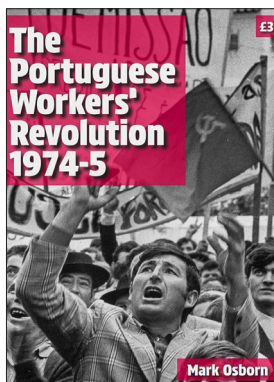
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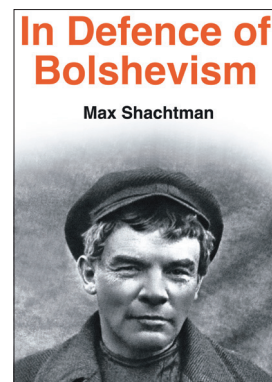
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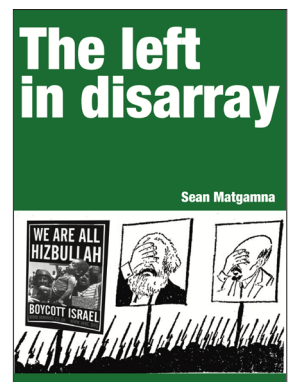
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Leicester scales up its cuts

By Sam Myerson

The latest from Leicester University management on cuts and redundancies is staggering. They propose to close in their entirety both the modern languages department and Film Studies. Students can complete current studies, but only with a skeleton staff who will lose their jobs at the end of that period.

Uni bosses also plan to dramatically reduce the teaching and research in the already amalgamated School of Chemistry and School of Geography, Geology and the Environment.

A "substantial number" of professional services staff are to lose their jobs, and technical and infrastructure staff too.

As we go to press, strikes continue and the branch is in the middle of a reballot. As of late January, staff had struck for 28 days. Much more, and more concentrated, disruption will be needed to beat management.

Late last year over 1,000 staff and stu-

dents voted no confidence in the vice chancellor — the same vice chancellor who received a knighthood in 2025 for services to education, ha!

Leicester Student Worker Action Group has been out on picket lines alongside staff, and mobilising other students. At the start of the dispute comrades from Sheffield joined the Leicester students. We encourage others to make solidarity visits, and for Sheffield comrades to return.

University bosses around the country continue to make cuts, while maintaining their exorbitant pay. The sector remains in acute difficulty. Tuition fees are set to rise in line with inflation, and student financial support remains stagnant.

There is one rule for the bosses — increased pay, and one rule for the workers and students, cuts and job losses.

We have to forge the links now that can turn around the fights in Higher Education. □

Sheffield uni gives ultimatum

By Sam Myerson

Sheffield university is continuing its program of cuts to courses and jobs. Workers at the university involved in the UCU union dispute over those cuts have been given an ultimatum: make up the teaching time, and any other duties, lost in strikes, or receive no pay at all. The UCU branch is branding this behaviour a lock out.

However, the UCU branch has voted to suspend action and keep a watch on events until the reballot, effectively throwing away the remaining three months of its industrial action mandate. It was a narrow vote.

The student anti cuts group continues to meet. They plan organised intervention at the re-freshers fairs on 11-12 February, a further meeting, and leafleting. Students need to build, both for the campaign to put pressure on the university, and students union, while also encouraging the UCU branch to resume action.

On Thursday 29 January the UCU branch held a small demonstration outside the Vice Chancellor's office, and a small contingent of students came to give support. □

Unison strikes in universities

Unison members in universities will strike over pay on the following days:

Uni of Brighton: 10, 11 March; 14, 15, 16 April; Uni of Bristol: 10, 11, 12 February; 10, 11 March; Uni of Gloucestershire: 17 March; 24, 25 March; 14, 15, 16 April; Manchester Metropolitan: 10, 11, 12 February; 10, 11 March; Royal Northern College of Music: 10, 11 March; King's College London: 10, 11 March; 24, 25, 26 March; 14, 15, 16 April; SOAS: 10, 11 March; 17 March; 24, 25, 26 March; 14, 15, 16 April □

Northumbria UCU strikes from 12 Feb

By a Northumbria student

On 23 January Northumbria University UCU (University and College Union) released the results of a ballot on strikes at the university. The branch voted 80% in favour of strikes, with a 60% turnout. UCU will start indefinite Action Short Of Strike on 12 February, and strike 12-13 Feb, 17-19 Feb, and 2-6 March.

The UCU at Northumbria University has been in dispute with the management about the transfer of uni-

versity staff from the TPS (Teachers' Pension Scheme) to the USS (Universities Superannuation Scheme). If staff do not transfer, they will have their pay frozen. If they choose to transfer, they will lose benefits and have lower employer contributions to their pension. Northumbria University management say that this will amount to an £11 million saving.

The UCU's belief is that the actions of management amount to a clear attack on the retirement security of university staff. This is not an

isolated case. Solent University management is also trying to move staff off the TPS to make a cost saving.

Workers' Liberty comrades in Newcastle attended a demonstration outside a meeting on 21 January between university management and the UCU. The purpose of it was to disturb the meeting and put pressure on management. The demonstration was small, with around 15 people, mainly staff, with a few Workers' Liberty students standing in solidarity. □



Uptick planned at Birmingham bins

By Sacha Fox

On 30 January, the third in a series of Megapickets took place in Birmingham, expressing solidarity with the bin strikers now entering their 13th month of industrial action. It shut down three depots, as well as a backup site being used for scab labour.

It was far from the start of the month's protests. Activists had blocked depots and incinerators eight times in the month. That, combined with bad weather, ensured major disruption to the service, putting increased pressure on Birmingham City Council and the government-appointed commissioners to return to negotiations.

The dispute looks set to heat up significantly, with agency staff slowly

but surely coming out, as well as likely industrial action by the street cleaning teams who have been pushed into poorly paid overtime as deputised bin workers.

And 30 January will also not be the end of the shutdowns. After some much deserved rest, activists will be drawing up new plans for further actions to halt services, build solidarity with strikers, and convince more workers to come out.

Send donations either to support costs for the activists at Yorkshire Shop Stewards Network 08-92-99 65704396, or to support the bin workers via Unite Solidarity Fund 60-83-01 20502672. Please include ref: "BCC strike donation". □

More online

Retirement and SWP

Getting Alex Callinicos to retire is no step forward
bit.ly/sretire

Change funding model

A priority for HE unions
bit.ly/he-fm

Raytheon not a win

Sadly, PA hunger strikers won little
bit.ly/ray-th



What we stand for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

• workersliberty.org/join-awl

Diary of a Tube driver

A poor sort of 4-day week

By Jay Dawkey

"This is what I just cannot understand". I haven't really ever discussed much workplace stuff with T, not for any particular reason, but we happen to both have some time on our hands after cancelled trains. The issue at hand is the longer working day or "compressed working week" proposal dreamt up by management and currently being abetted by Aslef [the driver-only union].

And it is this that is causing consternation. "Isn't the whole point of a union to negotiate? But with this deal, they have

just taken it and said, yes go for it, implement it. Even if you want this, wouldn't you want some scrutiny, some questions asked?"

It is a question to ask Aslef members: are they happy with their union accepting the first offer given to them? Others see conspiracy. "It isn't the first offer though is it?" N is more cynical about the real process of getting this proposal together. "They were in there drafting it with management, that is why they want it rushed through. They have already negotiated it, via the backdoor".

RMT is about to start a ballot of the train grades against the proposals. It is not a proposal for a four-day week based on a meaningful reduction of hours which could potentially, as a whole, improve the work/life balance of everyone in the grade. The management see it as a way to make all drivers more "flexible". In other words, our shifts will be longer, and our workload when at work will intensify. Getting a good ballot return is achievable; getting a hard-hitting strategy that can win the dispute is the next step. We aren't out of the woods yet. □



Kino Eye

Blow Up and the Sixties

By John Cunningham

Blow Up was the first English language film of the Italian director Michelangelo Antonioni, set in London at the height of the so-called "Swinging Sixties".

Despite being billed as "the" film about this period, *Blow Up* is not a celebration of flared trousers, marijuana, the Rolling Stones and kaftans. The London it depicts, with the characters swanning around in it – Vanessa Redgrave, Jane Birkin, David Hemmings (to name a few) – splutters with surface glitter, but underneath it is soulless.

Hemmings plays Thomas (we not told his full name), a photographer whose life and work echoes those real life photographers such as David Bailey, and

Terence Donovan, who were central players in the landscape of Swinging London. While taking photographs in a park Thomas thinks he sees a murder. He locates a body, but for some reason doesn't report this to the police. When he returns to the park, the body has gone.

In his studio he enlarges the photos which seem to reveal a gun being pointed at someone from behind a bush. Despite numerous enlargements it is never really clear if this is the case. Like his fashion photographer's world, reality seems elusive. As the film concludes, reality and illusion meld into one.

Six years after *Blow Up*, the Marxist John Berger made his landmark TV programme *Ways of Seeing*, saying: "The relation between what we know and what

we see is never settled." □

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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 □

Left groups agree PCS slate

By Gerry Bates

Two groups have agreed a joint slate for the PCS civil service union National Executive elections, under the title Coalition for Change. Workers' Liberty members are part of the Independent Left, and the Socialist Party (SP) is strong in the Broad Left Network. Both oppose the PCS ruling faction, Left Unity, led by ex-SP people.

PCS branches can submit nominations up to 5 March, and voting will be 16 April to 8 May.

The coalition candidate for president of the union is Bev Laidlaw of the Independent Left, and the candidates for vice-presidents are Ellie Clarke, Rachel Heemskerk, Dave Semple, and Hector Wesley.

The joint manifesto opens by declaring: If elected, we will fight for an immediate 10% pay rise and to end low pay, as part of a strategy to deliver above-inflation pay restoration over time. We will fight to restore national pay bargaining and end multi-tier pay and terms and conditions by harmonising all pay and terms and conditions upwards. We will fight to reverse major detrimental changes to our contractual rights, on pensions, sick pay, annual leave and other rights...

Leadership

The current PCS leadership under Martin Cavanagh, Fran Heathcote and PCS Left Unity (LU) have been ineffective in stemming increasing workloads, the erosion of hybrid working, fighting unilateral rota changes by management, opposing office closures, tackling the rising threat of AI to civil service jobs and the deliberate attack by the government on London-based civil service jobs through Places for Growth...

We will build on important Group and Branch disputes to develop a co-ordinated approach to these issues, as opposed to leaving these disputes to languish in isolation, which is the current approach of the LU-led NEC. A Coalition for Change-led NEC will build momentum towards a co-ordinated industrial fight, including national and selective strikes, and action short of strikes, to force the government to concede members' legitimate demands on pay, pensions and jobs, but also to secure genuine freedom and flexibility for our members in how and where we do our work... □

• More: pcsindependentleft.com

Egan pledges help to NCMM strike

By Ken Worthington

On Friday 30 January, Andrea Egan, the new general secretary of Unison, and Jon Trickett MP visited the picket line to speak to striking workers at the National Coal Mining Museum in Wakefield.

Andrea had visited the picket line at the start of the strike, many months ago now,

but this was her first visit to a picket line as general secretary. Andrea told members that times are changing in Unison, and personally guaranteed that under her leadership the national union will provide all the support to the dispute that it can. She gave her personal guarantee that she would be arranging meetings with Labour ministers

and the Charities Commission to discuss the dispute. Museum bosses depend on government funding to keep going.

The Museum wrote to schools in West Yorkshire a couple of weeks ago, encouraging them to come to the museum, and offered that if they did not want to cross a picket line, the museum

would open on a Monday and Tuesday (when it is normally closed) to get round that. Another example of museum bosses seeking to break the strike rather than find a negotiated solution.

Striking workers are now picketing on Mondays and Tuesdays too, seven days a week. □



Tetrosyl dispute needs workers' control

By David Axon

Workers at the Tetrosyl distribution centre in Rochdale have struck for a sixth day against fire and rehire.

A ballot at the end of November returned a 94% vote for action.

The strike on 30 January 30th was well supported, though agency workers were brought in again by management. It attracted solidarity visits from the Rochdale NEU, Oldham Labour Party, the two local Labour MPs, and Blackpool Trades Council.

On the picket line, strikers explained that they had just received their first pay since the pay cut, around £500 less for the month. Workers have lost around £4,000-£7,000 a year as a result of a new contract being imposed without negotiation.

Officials of the strikers' union, Usdaw, are talking about working to achieve union recognition, and fighting on pay

in future years. It is not clear what strategy — if any — Usdaw have for spreading this dispute now, even to the other workplaces within the Tetrosyl group. Other than some social media posts, Usdaw have done little to amplify the strikers' voice. Usdaw delegates at the recent regional conference of the Labour Party, for example, did not even raise the dispute on the conference floor, let alone organise for strikers to address the conference.

Both MPs have made helpful public statements about the dispute, but that has not led to any higher profile nationally or high-profile Labour figures getting involved. The two Rochdale CLPs have not yet mobilised Labour Party members or affiliated unions even to support the picket lines.

It is vital that the strikers retain control of next actions, and that their union and local supporters swing behind them. □

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



Minneapolis general strike against Trump

By Bas Hardy

Trump and his gang chose the wrong target if they expected little resistance to their lawless ICE goon squads from the people of Minneapolis. Friday 23 January saw the first city-wide strike in the USA for eighty years. The Minnesota Federation of Labor backed the strike, 700 businesses shut up shop, and an estimated 75,000 citizens marched in -10°C weather.

The marchers were particularly incensed by the 7 Jan murder of Renee Good as she drove away from a squad of ICE agents raiding her locality. The very next day, 24 Jan, ICE would commit another murder, pumping ten bullets into ICU nurse Alex Pretti after they'd pepper sprayed him and pummelled him on the ground.

As Bernie Sanders has said the only movement capable of stopping Trump will come from the streets. Minneapolis, with labour unions playing a key role, has shown the way to fight back. The follow-up nationwide "shutdown" on 30 January was organised at short notice, mainly by NGOs and such, and without unions, so mostly took the form of student walkouts, shops shutting for the day, etc. But these "shutdowns" are a promising development that can be built upon. □

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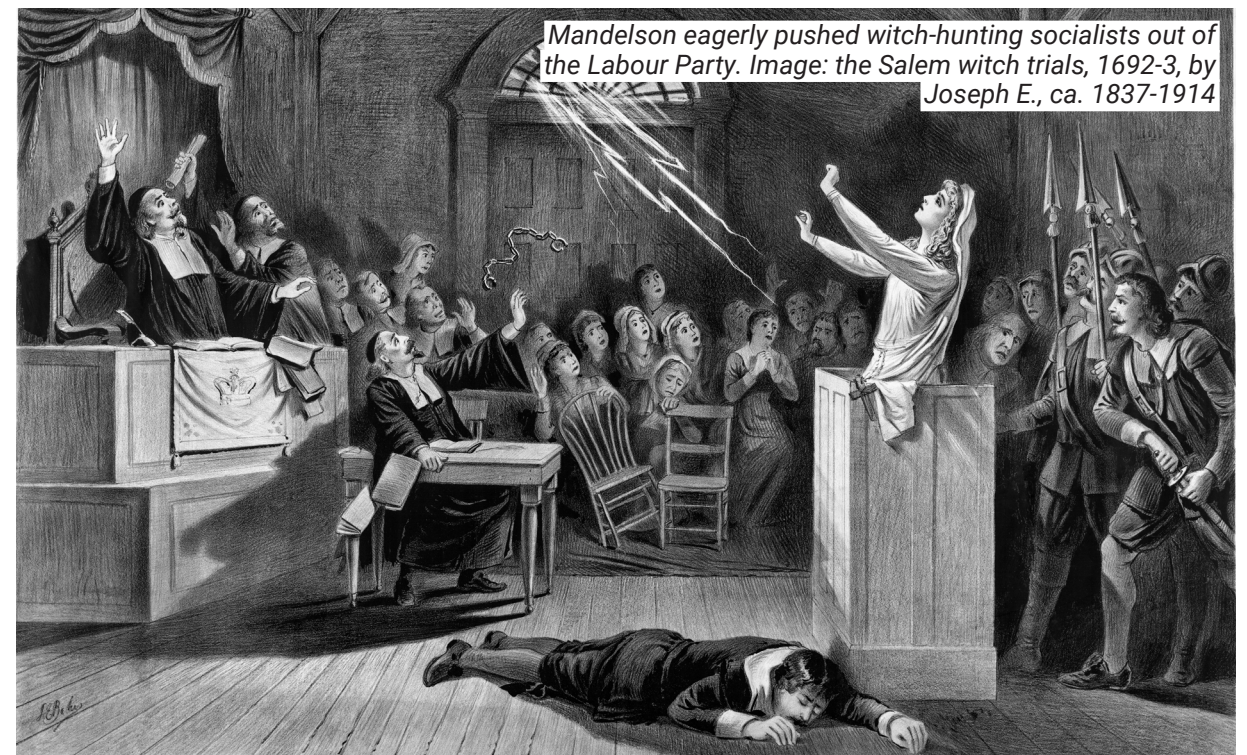
Follow Spain's example

By Chris Reynolds

The Spanish government has decreed that undocumented migrants in the country can be "legalised". People who arrived in Spain before 31 December 2025 will be granted legal residency for one year if they can demonstrate, upon submitting their application, that they have been living in the country for more than five months and have no criminal record. The process will run from April to 30 June.

The government reckons that this will give legal status to half a million people or more. Spain is estimated to have about 840,000 undocumented immigrants at present.

Limited, but so much better than Trump's ICE rampages. So much a better model for us in countering anti-migrant and anti-refugee demagoguery. □



Throw Mandelson's project out with him

By Colin Foster

Almost a year ago we demanded the Labour government sack Peter Mandelson as British ambassador to the USA.

We'd been against him being appointed in the first place, of course, but we called on Labour people to think again after Mandelson gave a TV interview lavishly lauding Trump, including over Ukraine.

Little response then. But now, at last, Starmer has sacked Mandelson as ambassador, and pushed him into resigning from the Labour Party and the House of Lords.

The driver now is the revelations of Mandelson's sleazy relations with Epstein. But then Mandelson had to resign as a minister under Blair twice, on 23 December 1998 and on 24 January 2001, over corruption and cronyism scandals.

Those resignations may have been important in losing momentum for the full programme of breaking Labour's links with the unions which Blair had played with in 1997, and which Mandelson and another Cabinet minister who resigned after scandal (in 2002), Stephen Byers were vocal for.

Mandelson made it clear he thought he was back on the inside after Keir Starmer's Labour leadership victory in 2020. He used the occasion to push for a hard Labour swing to the right, and for the expulsion of anyone who protested. "If people don't want to sign up to that project, then they should go off and fight elsewhere under their own colours".

If Labour's leaders don't want to sign up to Mandelson, and surely by now they don't, they should

sign off from his political project and fight Reform under Labour colours. □

Reform's promises shown empty

By Alan Gilbert

Kent county council, the jewel in Reform's local government crown, has added to another to the series of Reform admissions that they can't cut council tax by removing unspecified "waste".

They promised something on the lines of Elon Musk's DOGE, but it has been even more a fiasco than that.

The best Reform's Kent councillors can say for themselves is that "we haven't cut frontline services other than what the Conservatives had already planned to do", and they are raising council tax only 3.99%. A Reform councillor mourned that there "just weren't big cuts to make, because services had already been hacked away for years and years" (and – though he didn't say that – much of what's left, the council is legally obliged to deliver).

Reform's promises at a national level both to cut taxes and somehow, somewhere, to improve some bits of social provision, are equally shoddy accompaniments to their anti-migrant racism. □

For a workers' government

SOLIDARITY

& WORKERS' LIBERTY



ALL OUT 28 MARCH! FOR A WORKERS' UNITED FRONT!

By Cathy Nugent

The “Together Alliance” — composed of the TUC, Stand Up to Racism, union leaders and celebrities — has called a demonstration against the far right for Saturday 28 March 2026. All left-wing activists should build this demonstration in their workplaces, on campuses and in communities.

The by-election in the once-safe-for-Labour constituency of Gorton and Denton on Thursday 26 February is an important reason why. There, Reform UK expect their candidate, former politics academic Matthew Goodwin to win. If he does, it will boost Reform in the May council elections and help them build towards the general election.

Goodwin, who once analysed the rise of the far right, is now

thoroughly “red-pilled”. Standing in a constituency where 28% of the population are from a Muslim background, Goodwin is especially obnoxious on the issue of immigration.

Labour’s prospects are bad. Their failure to reverse most Tory cuts and their new cuts have only increased Reform’s appeal. The banning of Andy Burnham from standing in the by-election has not helped. Yet a vote for Labour remains the most likely way to keep Reform out. (There is only one tiny-sample poll so far, and maybe a Green win is possible too).

Power

The unions still have a lot of latent power to push back against Labour’s leaders. We can help get the unions out of a passive mode by demanding they are the

driving force behind 28 March.

Only the unions, allied to the communities at the sharp end of far right attacks, have the strength to beat back the far-right threat. Activists must call on their union structures to book coaches from every major city, to leaflet workplaces and build a huge trade union bloc.

Militants

And the demonstration needs to hear from less celebrities and more class-struggle militants — strikers and people campaigning day-in-day-out against racism and the far right.

It also needs a better political message, based on working-class solidarity — for unity with migrant workers; for taxing the rich to pay for public services; for jobs and homes. □