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SOLIDARITY

& WORKERS' LIBERTY



The case for working-class solidarity

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BACK UKRAINE

PUTIN AGAINST

Back Ukraine against Putin

The end of winter is in sight. For millions of Ukrainians, this winter was the most gruelling they will ever have faced. Temperatures in January were an average of minus five degrees Celsius, the coldest since 2010. With Russia targeting Ukrainian energy infrastructure to cut off heating to millions of homes across the country, this has spelled disaster.

Huddled in frozen homes, you could forgive the Ukrainian population for being angry at the discussion the rest of the world is having around their country and their war. As the fourth anniversary of the full-scale invasion arrives, we have been faced with a solid eighth months of talk about peace deals and negotiations, with almost nothing to show for it. Russia analyst Sam Greene titled a [recent newsletter](#) on negotiations “the Fog of Peace”, a useful way of looking at the role these talks are having on the world’s reaction to Russia’s invasion.

Prisoner exchanges have been welcome, and some may be buoyed by the constant talk of “progress made” coming from each of the camps involved in a series of summits, phone calls and backroom negotiations. But the underlying fact is that each negotiation hardens, grows cold and falls dead to the ground around one and the same issue: territory. Ukraine, and Ukrainians, want to exist; Russia want to deny them that right. At some point, either before or after a major military defeat for either side, a negotiation will force a conciliation on that point. But current signs offer no guarantee of any conciliation being good, mutual, or lasting.

The Fundamentals

Ukraine is fighting a war to assert its right to exist. It does so because if it did not — if it agreed to peace on any terms, as many are currently clamouring for it to do — it would cease to exist as a nation in its own right, and would return to its former existence as a colony of the Russian empire.

This sounds, at first, like an abstract question: why should Ukrainians care what they “really” are, anyway? And why should revolutionaries care which flag a bourgeois ruler flies above a bourgeois national parliament? Ukrainians from the areas currently controlled by Russia are currently living out the realities of this “abstract” question. Children are abducted en masse and sent to live in the Russian care system; access to schooling, housing, central heating, hospitals and transport are made contingent on accepting a Russian passport; national minorities like the Crimean Tatars are imprisoned, and their rights horrifically suppressed; Ukrainians speaking their own language in public places, or ex-

pressing support for the country they’ve lived in for their entire lives, are put on trial and imprisoned.

Even outside of Russia-controlled territory, life in Ukraine has become unrecognisable in the four years of the full-scale invasion. As of July last year, 3.7 million Ukrainians were internally displaced, and 5.7 million were refugees elsewhere. A confirmed minimum of 15,000 Ukrainian civilians have died, with 40,000 wounded. Ukraine’s total military casualties (killed and wounded) are nearing a million, while Russia’s are likely comfortably clear of that milestone.

No Ukrainian life has been untouched by the war. Every part of the country has been torn apart in one way or another, the economy is in freefall and the damage to infrastructure will take decades to recover, if it ever does so fully. A generation of Ukrainian children are yet to experience a night’s sleep without the threat of a missile or drone strike on their home.

Marx and Engels said that no nation can be free which oppresses another. Modern Russia is an apt illustration. Life in the country has been put under lock and key; workers’ organisations have been decimated, and thousands have been imprisoned for opposing a nakedly unjust war — or even just for calling it a “war”, rather than Putin’s preferred “special military operation”. Russia’s national minorities, those from Dagestan, Bashkiria, Tatarstan, Ingushetia and Chechnya (among many others) have been disproportionately funnelled to the front lines and killed. The war on LGBTQ+ people that has been underway for over a decade has now reached a fever pitch, with the LGBTQ+ community as a whole named an “extremist organisation”. The economic impact from sanctions and the patchy reorganising of the Russian economy onto a war footing has emptied the national coffers, and Putin remains in power purely because he has neutered anyone he thinks may have the opportunity to oppose him.

Catastrophic

The war has proven a catastrophic decision, but the degree to which that catastrophe will have an effect on Russia itself is dependent on the ongoing reorganisation of global economic and political blocs. The war in Ukraine has become one of the defining moments of a new era of capitalism, away from the unstable international stand-off after the Second World War and the free-market reign of neoliberalism; towards something even more unstable and uncertain.

It is by no means impossible that we will look back on the war in Ukraine as the overture of a new era of world war. For now, the “blocs” are far less concrete



and defined than those of the previous eras of war, but that would be no impediment to such a war breaking out. If that is to be the case, then socialist and democratic principles will be our guiding line, not good countries and bad ones. It is on the basis of a consistent opposition to imperialism, and a consistent support for the right of national self-determination, that Workers’ Liberty calls for victory to Ukraine.

Forced

Some on the left argue that Ukraine is being forced into war by the West, and that without Western support, Ukraine wouldn’t want to fight on. The extremely questionable record of the Western governments on the war is evidence enough against that argument. The general policy of the major European powers, and the US under the Biden administration, has been to give enough weapons that Ukraine doesn’t collapse, but not enough to actually sustain the war effort. Fearing a defeated Putin lashing out, they have preferred to defer the problem to a future date, encouraging Ukraine to impossible negotiations while giving them the means only to struggle on.

It is in this context that we and others on the pro-Ukraine left have called for arms to Ukraine — real arms, in the quantity required to win. The failure to build sufficient pressure to achieve this has left us in one of the worst possible scenarios: a Trump presidency, where all previous bets are off and all alliances are being re-formed. Rather than being the battlefield on which the first and second camps re-stage the Cold War, Ukraine is now straining under the immense pressure of a combined US-Russia camp that wants to force them to capitulate in the short term.

In actual fact, Ukraine was always going to have to fight against both sides. Even in the event of a peace deal under ideal conditions, reconstruction was always going to be a generation-defining

issue for Eastern Europe. The Ukrainian government, led by Thatcherite Zelensky, has embraced the false salvation of Western investment, with Blackrock and the IMF calling the shots. Unless the working class of Ukraine are able to wrench control of the process from their corrupt government, we are set for a re-run of 1990s shock therapy: lifelong debt repayment, lowered life expectancies and widespread poverty for decades to come.

What now?

The path to a better future for Ukraine is both treacherous and unclear, but it exists. Protests against the Ukrainian government’s corruption scandals last Autumn showed a population unwilling to nod along to the whims of oligarchy. Similar campaigning and fights against the restrictive labour laws brought to the Ukrainian Rada earlier in the war showed a working-class movement that had not yet admitted defeat, either to its own ruling class or the imperialist invasion.

Talk of the war may have grown stale or shifted to “endgame” perspectives. The day-to-day brutality of the war, and the resilience of Ukraine and its workers, continues apace. It is our duty to fight their battle too: by making the British labour movement stand for a Ukrainian victory, by building what links we can between workers and trade unions in both countries, and by opposing those on the left who campaign against Ukraine. □

THE STOP THE WAR COALITION AND UKRAINE:

a decade of political and factual illiteracy

Коаліція "Stop the War" та Україна: десятиліття політичного невігластва та невідома фактів
Date Street, 2024

60 pages. £5 (inc. postage).
Order
bit.ly/stw-pi

Four years of Russia's war

1991 — Ukraine becomes independent of Russian rule for the first time in centuries

1994 — Budapest memorandum. Ukraine (alongside Belarus and Kazakhstan) gives up nuclear weapons in exchange for promises from Russia to guarantee Ukraine's borders, and never to enact military aggression on Ukraine, "except in self defense or otherwise in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations".

2014 — *February*: Maidan revolution. Millions of Ukrainians, most of them pro-EU, win the removal of pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich and a return to Ukraine's less-strongly-presidential 2004 constitution (which Yanukovich had annulled after taking office in 2010).

March: Russia occupies Crimea, and Russian-backed forces begin military conflict in the Donbas, attempting to set up the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR and LNR).

September: First Minsk agreement signed, attempting (and failing) to end hostilities.

2015 — *February*: After a major military defeat, Ukraine is forced, partly by pressure from the French and Germans, to sign the Minsk II Agreement: allowing 'self-rule' for areas of the Donbas without formally recognising the DNR or LNR. Fighting in the Donbas continues until 2022.

2019 — *March*: Volodymyr Zelensky elected President of Ukraine, partly on promises to end the conflict in the Donbas.

2022

Jan-Feb: Buildup of Russian troops on Ukrainian border.

21/22 Feb: Russia officially recognises DNR and LNR.

24 Feb: Beginning of the full-scale invasion. Putin gives rambling address announcing that Minsk agreements "no longer exist", and declaring it Lenin's fault that Ukraine exists. Missiles fired at Kyiv, Kharkiv, Odesa and the Donbas, and troops seen in Mariupol and Odesa. Russia attempts to crush Ukraine's major cities in the course of a couple of



days.

24 Feb — Early March: All-out Russian assault on major Ukrainian cities. Kyiv and Mariupol surrounded, Ukrainian defense holds out. US intelligence assumed Ukraine would last 96 hours.

25 Feb: Zelensky address: "We have been left alone to defend our state. Who is ready to fight alongside us? I don't see anyone." Calls for a no-fly zone to stop Russian aerial bombardment.

28 Feb: First (inconclusive) peace talks.

3 March: First fire at the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant. IAEA put on high alert.

4 March: NATO rejects no-fly zone over Ukraine.

8 March: Peak of Russian advances on Kyiv. City holds out, and eventually Russian forces are pushed back to border.

10 March: Sanctions package against Russia announced. Many predict that these sanctions will force Russia to back down: they don't. Russia leaves Council of Europe.

11 March: UK freezes first assets of Russian billionaires.

15 March: 3 million Ukrainians have now fled the country.

21 March: Pro-Kremlin sources cite 10,000 Russian soldiers dead and 16,000 wounded. For comparison: the USSR lost 15,000 soldiers in 10 years of war in Afghanistan.

September-November 2022: Ukrainian counteroffensive focusing on Kharkiv regains a great deal of territory around the city. Kherson recaptured by Ukraine. Majority of Donbas remains under Russian control.

towns.

Autumn: Second Ukrainian counter-offensive ends, largely considered a failure. Russia resumes slow advance in the East.

2024

18 February: Russia takes Avdiivka after long battle.

May: Russia opens up new front in Kharkiv.

6 August: Ukraine takes part of Russian Kursk region, taking Russia by surprise and claiming a bargaining chip for future territorial negotiations.

2025

Jan: Trump takes office, announcing intentions to end the war quickly. War continues.

April: Russia claims all Ukrainian troops have been driven out of Kursk. *Second half of year*: Fighting continues to centre around key cities on frontline like Pokrovsk, but attention on both sides turns to developing and deploying long and medium-range drone strikes on enemy positions and infrastructure.

1 June: Operation Spiderweb. Ukrainian drones constructed and hidden onsite in Russia are deployed deep into Russian territory, destroying major airfields.

June-July: Russia claims to have taken full control of Luhansk region, and the strategic city of Chasiv Yar.

August — present: Renewed period of negotiations begins with Trump-Putin Alaska summit. Months of repeated negotiations and redrafted peace deals refine numerous points, but all trip up on one key issue: territory. Russia does not cease hostilities at any point in negotiation process. □

2023

January: Ukraine has regained half of the territory Russia initially seized. Ground fighting restricted to Donbas, though missiles and drones at other Ukrainian cities remain a regular feature of the war.

May: Russia claims the city of Bakhmut after months of "meat grinder" battle.

6 June: Launch of second Ukrainian counteroffensive interrupted by the destruction (likely by Russia) of the Kakhovka Dam. 18.2 cubic kilometres of water released, damaging over 5,000 km² of land, flooding or outright destroying 60,000 buildings and numerous

Activist Agenda

Meetings

Sun 22 Feb: Understanding capitalism. Sheffield AWL day school. 12 to 5:30, Harlequin, 108 Nursery Street, S3 8GG
Sun 1 March. Is "state" the answer to "market" on ecology? AWL ecology reading group. 8pm on Zoom, bit.ly/eco-rg
Mon 2 March. What is the "third camp?" North London AWL. 7pm, Housmans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Rd N1 9DY

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

workersliberty.org for more.

Template motions

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

Socialist-feminist book clubs

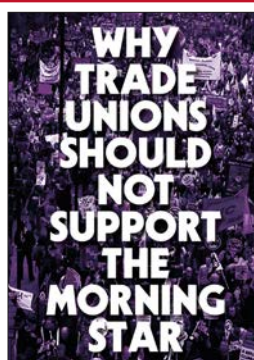
London: Mother State by Helen Charman. 2pm, 22 Feb, Effra Social, 89 Effra Rd SW2 1DF.

Campaigns

See workersliberty.org/agenda. □



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



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Corbyn faction ups stakes in YP

By Matt Cooper

Voting in Your Party's Central Executive Committee (CEC) elections closes Monday 23 February, and results are due 26 Feb.

The hustings are over. In London, Ruth Cashman, a regular contributor to this paper, has clearly set out a working-class socialist case. We call for a first-preference vote for her, with later preferences to Grassroots Left candidates.

The Corbyn-aligned slate, The Many, proclaims a "people's party", also billed as "a mass left party... organising in working-class communities". The word-ing tells: "left", not socialist; organising in communities, not rooted in the working class. In the official office-holders' hustings, none of The Many candidates talked about socialism or the working class in their introductions, instead offering a welfare and community pitch. Grassroots Left, closer to Zarah Sultana, at least talks about socialism and about more democracy in YP.

The endorsement stage suggested a close contest, with the Grassroots Left having an edge. The possibility of losing a CEC majority seems to have surprised the "Corbyn faction" around Karie Murphy which controls the YP "office", but many active members are angry about the faction's record: a powerless conference, tightly managed online votes, and a refusal to release membership data which hindered "proto-branches".

The "office" has also failed to make the party any sort of campaigning organisation. Publicly, Your Party has been quiet while Corbyn makes political comment through his Peace and Justice Project (PJP). Despite earlier promises,

members keen to stand in the May local elections have been told they cannot use the Your Party name.

The Corbyn faction's response has been two-fold. First, it has changed the voting system. (A promised sortitioned oversight committee was appointed in late January. When Karie Murphy found that one sortitioned member belonged to Workers' Power, she was removed. It is unclear whether the others have met).

The election now uses the antiquated Imperiali quota rather than the usual Droop quota. In two-seat STV contests, Droop requires a candidate to have roughly a third of the vote (with transfers) to win; Imperiali allows election on a quarter, making outcomes less representative and increasing the chance that The Many can sweep both seats in some regions.

Second

Second, the Corbyn faction has campaigned for its slate by appealing over the heads of active members to a passive base. The Many candidates have largely avoided proto-branch hustings, denouncing branches as being in the thrall of "sects", claiming that only they can represent "ordinary individual members" and that the party cannot work unless they win.

If Corbyn secures a majority through these tactics, relying on inactive members, his faction's rhetoric suggests a witch-hunt against the organised left, as Labour has done. They promise policy commissions that would bypass the wider membership, replicating the mechanisms introduced into the Labour Party under Blair. At best they offer on-



line one-member-one-vote consultative "democracy", rather than collective and deliberative democracy.

The Many's CEC campaign is run through Corbyn's PJP, which holds data from its supporters, Your Party members, and the original 800,000 sign-ups. It is unclear which lists are being used. Its tone has hardened, with messages urging "Make Jeremy Parliamentary Leader of Your Party", a post that does not exist. A Corbyn ally told the [New Statesman](#): "The Many simply has to win for the party to survive". This amounts to an attempted coup against the collective leadership agreed by conference.

This hardening of Corbyn's position has already driven out many members. The Socialist Party appears to have followed them. It has not formally announced a break, but its paper has decoupled its call for a new mass workers' party from Your Party and is preparing

to stand TUSC candidates in the May elections. It seems the SP sought only the freedom to stand candidates under a label that Corbyn would give mass appeal. A more prosaic left unity, within which they would have to fight for democracy and for policies, is not something that interests them.

For all the talk of a "member-led" party, Corbyn now appears unwilling to accept members' decisions, seeking instead to mobilise the inactive to secure control.

On 15 February, GL candidates Mel Mullings, Riccardo la Torre, and Chloe Braddock had an [article](#) in the *Morning Star* calling for "fresh new leadership" in YP.

Further trouble is likely to follow any outcome of the election. If The Many wins, GL people drifting away or being pushed out. If GL wins, a drive to secure de facto supremacy for the Corbyn YP office over the elected committee. □

What made the 1945 government different?

By Martin Thomas

Sharon Graham, general secretary of Unite the union, is right in her *Financial Times* [op-ed](#) of 12 February in denouncing the Labour government's feebleness. She is wrong to make a threat of union disaffiliation from Labour (instead of a more purposeful use of the union's clout within Labour structures) her answer. And wrong again in identifying the problem with the government being about "fiscal rules".

That last problem is odd, because up to now Unite has centred its argument on a wealth tax. Nothing about wealth tax in the op-ed, but instead the ex-

clamation: "Would we ever have had an NHS if the 1945 Labour government had adopted this worship of fiscal rules?"

In fact, the 1945 Labour government was more fiscal-rule-minded than Reeves. It quickly reduced the huge budget deficits run in World War 2, and by 1948-9 was running big budget surpluses. (Reeves is running big budget deficits). Stafford Cripps, chancellor from 1947, openly called his policy "austerity", and imposed a wage freeze in 1948.

Dispute

The government wanted to reduce the huge debt overhang from the war, and did.

For all its reforms, it was a capitalist government. Its differences from Starmer-Reeves were:

- It taxed the rich, albeit just by continuing the high rates (95%+ on top incomes) introduced for war purposes by the wartime Tory-led government
- In a world where financial markets were much more nationally fenced-off, it was able to make the rich lend to the government at low interest rates ("financial repression") and to pay for nationalisations with government IOUs at low interest rates
- It managed economic conversion from military to civilian effectively, unlike

Starmer-Reeves with their non-plans to increase housebuilding

- Politics was less bureaucratised. Its leaders were reformists, but serious reformists with roots in the labour movement, not managerial types shielded from working-class discussion and pressure by layers of chiefs-of-staff, directors-of-communication and other officials. Where other European governments introduced only social health insurance, rather than an NHS, and the Australian Labor government backed down from plans for an NHS when faced with doctors' rebellion, Bevan, Attlee, and Dalton pressed ahead with it.

- Perhaps crucially, it operated in a world where a Tory MP had already declared, in 1943: "If you do not give the people social reform, they will give you social revolution". They remembered the huge upheavals after World War One.

Reforms

We'll get social reforms when we have a working-class movement with clear socialist ideas and active on the streets and on the picket lines for much more. Not by peddling the idea that big reforms can be won just by being more relaxed about deficits and without troubling the rich. □

To win democracy, organise

By Martin Thomas

A real democratisation of the Labour Party would take substantial rule changes. Such democratisation has been done, with some substance, only once (in the Labour Party's whole 126-year history), in 1980-1. Then the changes were rolled back or modified over the next years. Drastic adverse rule changes followed in 1997. Some of them have been rolled back since then, partially and piecemeal. Some positive changes were made in the Corbyn years, though many fewer than would have been possible if we had pushed the unions and the Corbyn leadership more effectively on the issue.

But it is not just a question of waiting for a big bang. Sizeable changes could be made just by forcing changes to procedures within the rules — the NEC refraining from arbitrary imposition of shortlists, for example, or the union-controlled Conference Arrangements Committee “ruling out” fewer motions. And by unions or CLPs being more assertive within the existing rules — for example, CLPs protesting more at conference against ruling-out of their motions, and moving more references-back of sections of National Policy Forum reports, or unions moving more motions on issues like the two-child benefit cap instead of bland consensus texts.

Serious bourgeois journals like the *Financial Times* and the *Economist* are now disgusted with Starmer because of his u-turns on the two-child benefit cap, disabled access to PIP, winter fuel allowance, etc. They fear that, with McSweeney and others gone, Starmer will be more vulnerable to union and CLP pressure. Janan Ganesh writes angrily in the *FT*: “On balance, it is better that Sir Keir Starmer [survives longer]. ‘On balance’, because there is no good outcome here. Starmer can only survive by pleasing the many Labour MPs to his left. If he falls, the likeliest successor

will come from that same quarter”.

If the union leaders who have signed the new declaration exert themselves, they can make Ganesh's fear realistic. Limitedly, but enough to revive currently-depressed Labour Party life and open doors for a snowball effect, a visible Labour left rebooting discussion on socialist politics.

Ousting Starmer soon will help. Not because Andy Burnham or Angela Rayner are really left-wing. They aren't. But the effect of a leadership change in a party like the Labour Party can depend as much on the pressures under which it takes place (and which follow it) as on the individuals.

I've previously cited the case of Anna Bligh, life-long Labor Left member, being replaced, after she crashed the Queensland (Australia) Labor Party to its worst-ever defeat in 2012, by Annastacia Palaszczuk, a life-long Right faction member. The Electrical Trades Union and its secretary Peter Simpson had fought Bligh. Labor expelled Simpson in 2011, but after 2012 the ETU forced Palaszczuk to reverse Bligh's privatisation policies, got Labor to reinstate Simpson as a life member, and became the main force in Labor's winning campaign in 2015.

Shift

Conversely, when life-long Labor Rightist Kevin Rudd was replaced by life-long Labor Leftist Julia Gillard at the head of the federal Australian Labor Party in 2010 (by a vote of federal MPs), that was a shift to the right, under pressure of the giant mining corporations.

It is important to push MPs to nominate a real left candidate when Starmer goes. It will probably be important even to back a looks-slightly-left candidate then (Rayner? Burnham?) against a right-wing one (Streetering?). It will surely be better to do that than retreat into a weary “nothing makes any difference”

passivity. But the strength and assertiveness of activist organisation in the CLPs and in the unions is most important.

A comrade recently expelled from Labour (on arbitrary grounds) recently told us about a meeting in Brighton organised by the soft-soft-left Mainstream group. 80-plus there. “Very angry at Starmer. Good on inequality and taxing the rich. Missed the point a bit on class and why people are turning to parties like Reform”. And there was a more critical weakness: scant organised follow-up. But even small minorities can make a difference in organising local Labour left caucuses.

Sharon Graham, general secretary of Unite, has backed the new Burgon statement. That is a welcome move from a op-ed she published (in the *Financial Times*: why?) only three days before (12 Feb), focused on trying to scare Labour with the threat of Unite disaffiliating. Generally, under Graham, Unite has scarcely used its considerable political clout in the Labour Party, failed to co-ordinate with other unions, and instead sounded off arbitrarily and uncoordinatedly.

Disaffiliate

There is pressure in other unions (Aslef, FBU) to disaffiliate. It's not good.

- Being affiliated to the Labour Party does not hinder unions criticising Labour. FBU, Aslef, CWU, Unite have been more vocally critical than most unaffiliated unions. As affiliated unions, they have the possibility of making the criticism into real political action, and sometimes (far too patchily and weakly) they have done so.

- The left-wing Bakers Union disaffiliated in 2021. It claimed then “it means we will become more political”. Not so. Recent Bakers Union political output is scant beyond invitations to *Morning Star* readers' groups and support for one “independent” in the Your Party CEC elec-

tions (Hilary Schan: no special political reason given for backing her rather than others). Good if, but only if, you support the *Morning Star*.

- The Bakers' disaffiliation, the previous disaffiliation by FBU (2004), and the RMT's expulsion (2004), were, whatever else you thought of them, clearly left-motivated. The groundswell in some unions now for disaffiliation is not. Whatever the left top-dressing, the groundswell now is chiefly propelled by union members leaning towards the right-wing Reform party or who want the union to “stay out of politics”. It cannot produce better union politics.

- Unions have let Labour leaders weaken the Employment Rights Act. But that was done primarily through the TUC and the TUC General Council's employment rights “lead”, Mike Clancy of Prospect. Prospect is an unaffiliated union. That hasn't made Clancy assertive for union rights.

The Corbyn surge never got deep enough — for example, Young Labour, under Corbynite leadership, was weaker in 2019 than it had been in 2015 under right-wing leadership — and a lot of its forces have dissipated. Some of those reassembled, a bit worse for wear, in the Sultana-Corbyn Your Party. Now many of those are dispersing again or going to the Greens.

Left activists pushed out of Labour in the waves of exclusions since 2015 will reasonably be interested in investigating the Greens' recent membership surge, or may still see prospects in YP. Of course. But activists still in Labour, or politically unorganised, should step up activity.

In Greens, in YP, and in Labour, we will press for unity in action by activists across all three parties in mobilisations, for example, against the far right, or to support strikes. And for dialogue and debate.

Unite to transform the labour movement! □

Gorton and Denton

Vote Labour, fight Starmer's policies

By Cathy Nugent

The Gorton and Denton by-election is on 26 February. In 2024, nearly 80% of the constituency backed either Labour, the Greens, or the Workers' Party. The only realistic way that Reform UK can win, then, is if the Green party splits

the Labour vote. The Greens are currently the bookies' favourite (though the first few, very unreliable, polls put Labour ahead of the Greens).

Problem

That's a problem. Although it is understandable that many voters will switch from Labour to

the Greens, that party has not replaced Labour in its connections to the labour movement, and is very unlikely to do so any time soon. The main trade unions remain affiliated to Labour, and that gives the party a unique structure. If the unions were to use their great latent power, at all levels of Labour

from constituencies to conference, to pressure Starmer's Labour on cuts, on rebuilding the NHS and more, then politics in Britain would be much better.

Best

For these reasons we think the best electoral alternative to Reform in Gorton and Denton

is still Labour. And we would urge trade unionists in the local labour movement to fight inside their unions to promote the necessary pressure on this government. □



One cheer for Starmer in Beijing

By Jim Denham

Just as the icy waters seemed to be closing over his premiership and the abyss seemed to beckon, Keir Starmer received some praise from an unlikely quarter — the *Morning Star*.

Admittedly, it wasn't particularly enthusiastic, but praise it undoubtedly was: in his Eyes Left column of 4 February, Andrew Murray gave "One cheer for Keir Starmer". Murray, a leading member of the Communist Party of Britain, conjured up a somewhat bizarre image: "the monkey at No. 10, furiously pounding at the typewriter of governance for the past 19 months has finally produced, if not Shakespeare, at least a line or two of coherent prose."

The cause of this unlikely show of support was Starmer's visit to Beijing. Echoing Chinese state media's coverage, Murray wrote: "Pragmatism may be entirely useless as a principle for leadership, but occasionally it can land you on the right decision when coupled with a sober recognition of realities. Rebuilding relations with the People's Republic of China is surely one of those."

Murray was particularly contemptuous of the Liberal Democrat Daisy Cooper, who, in a Commons speech (or "rant"

according to Murray), had raised concerns about human rights and "the unevicted campaign China is purportedly running to hunt down pro-democracy protesters on the streets of Britain with bounties on their heads."

"Unevidenced"? The MS and CPB regularly cite Amnesty International when that organisation produces reports they approve of, but not when it writes "Chinese and Hong Kong students studying in the UK, other parts of Europe and North America are being intimidated, harassed and silenced by the Chinese authorities as part of a sinister pattern of 'transnational repression'".

Ignored

And if Amnesty is to be ignored, so is the evidence of "Hong Kong Scots" submitted to a parliamentary committee last year: "One of the tactics which Hong Kong authorities adopt to repress Hong-kongers residing in the UK is to issue arrest warrants and issue bounties over individuals who expressed criticism against the Hong Kong authorities."

Then there is the GMB, though that union's support for Ukraine means it's already out of favour at the MS: "The GMB union is actively lobbying the UK government to protect Hong Kong trade

unionists and activists based in Britain from harassment and transnational repression by Hong Kong authorities. GMB condemned the use of bounties and arrest warrants against activists like Christopher Siu-Tat Mung, labelling it an abuse of power and an attack on freedom of association."

And clearly the BBC's political correspondent Damien Grammaticas is not to be believed when he reported (11 Dec 2025) that Carman Lau, a prominent Hong Kong pro-democracy activist, claimed that letters delivered from China to addresses near where she lives in Maidenhead included her name and images made to look as though she was either naked or in underwear and offering sexual services. Previously, according to Grammaticas, many of the same neighbours had received letters sent from Hong Kong offering a bounty of £95,000 to anyone who would hand Ms Lau over to the Chinese embassy in London.

But concerns like these, according to Mr Murray, are comparable (if only at "a stretch") to "Lords Palmerston and Melbourne... architects of the opium outrages [who] similarly claimed to be actuated by vital human rights, in that case the right of British drug-pedlars to trade freely whatever any other sover-



eign power felt about it."

But, Mr Murray assured his readers, the "bourgeois establishment [is] desperate for stable capitalist growth and profit [and so] there is in fact no major constituency in Britain which gains from confrontation with China, beyond the liberal-imperial humanitarian complex."

Clearly, Mr Murray reckons he and his comrades are on the winning side for the first time since the fall of the USSR and the "Soviet bloc" in 1989-91: Starmer's meeting with Xi's team in Beijing "was between the representatives of a growing power — possibly the most rapidly growing in human history — and those of a shrivelling one."

Oh yes: I scoured Murray's piece for the word "socialism" but it wasn't there, even once. □

Anti-union laws

50% threshold to stay until August or later

By Rhodri Evans

The introduction of electronic or in-person balloting for union votes, and the removal of the 50% turnout threshold for industrial action votes, have been put back to "no earlier than August 2026".

The information in a new update from the official arbitration service ACAS. The government's own update says August (definitely, not just "no earlier than") for electronic balloting, and gives no date for removing the 50% turnout rule.

The changes were legislated in the Employment Rights Act which became law on 18 December 2025. At first there was talk of the electronic balloting and threshold changes being implemented in April 2026 or even February.

Evidently bosses' lobbying for delay has been more effective than unions' lobbying for speed.

Solidarity supporters in trade

unions are calling for those unions to agitate openly and publicly for speedy implementation of the balloting and threshold changes ("no earlier than August" allows great scope for further slippage) and for tightening-up of the Employment Relations Act provisions where much detail has been left to "secondary legislation", as only zero-hour contracts and fire-and-rehire.

Another article (page 10) takes up the latest on fire-and-rehire.

Agitation

Union agitation for an Employment Rights Bill #2 is good, but should not be allowed to become a substitute for union action to get delivery of the promises in Employment Rights Act #1.

Unions affiliated to the Labour Party are obviously in a stronger position for that action.

Despite talk in some left-wing circles about union disaffiliation being good because it would "free" unions to take that sort of action, the opposite is nearer the truth. Affiliated unions like FBU, Aslef, CWU, and even (in its own odd way) Unite apply more public pressure than disaffiliated unions. The backsliding on the Employment Rights Act has all been negotiated with the whole TUC, where the General Council's lead person on employment rights is Mike Clancy of Prospect, not affiliated but much more deferential to the government than a number of affiliated unions.

The Economist, a serious big-business magazine, ran a feature on the Act on 5 February. The feature focuses on the Act's changes on union access to workplaces and recognition, due to come in from October 2026.

It quotes Petros Elia, the gen-

eral secretary of United Voices of the World (UVW), as saying that the changes could produce a "massive spike in membership".

UVW is a combative mini-union oriented to organising new groups of workers, and neither affiliated to the Labour Party nor deferential to Starmer, so, whatever else, Elia is not dressing up his assessment in order to "do a job for Starmer".

Workers

"Unions will be able to formally request that they are let into a workplace to recruit members and set up branches. They will also be able to contact workers digitally. (Firms that refuse must show to a tribunal why it would 'unreasonably interfere' with their business.) Employers must periodically tell workers of their right to join a union. For organisers, it changes the game: meeting workers in the first place is half the challenge.

'You've basically just got to hang around on street corners', says Mr Elia, who launched UVW in 2014.

"Unions will secure recognition (giving them the right to negotiate on pay and conditions) more easily. Currently, a union must show it has at least 10% of the workforce as members before a recognition ballot is held; this may be reduced to as little as 2%, pending a consultation. The act also scraps a clause requiring the support of at least 40% of the entire workforce, so ballots could be won by a simple majority on low turnouts".

How this will all turn out depends on union action to stop Labour softening the changes in detailed implementation, and on union action to take advantage of the legal changes. Nothing will happen automatically. □

Against the forever war!

By Ira Berkovic

The binational (Palestinian-Jewish) left-wing social movement Standing Together has said about recent Israeli government moves in the West Bank and East Jerusalem (see inside-outside pages):

"This is more de facto annexation, and the impact is clear. It means families losing land they legally own because they cannot meet impossible bureaucratic demands. It means more home demolitions, more displacement, and more Palestinians forced to leave areas where they have lived for decades. It means farmers cut off from their fields, workers blocked from reaching jobs, students delayed at checkpoints, and entire communities living with constant uncertainty about whether their homes or land will be taken next.

"And it's yet another way that our extremist government is abandoning the interests of all of us, Palestinians and Jews. This government is choosing a forever war because it serves its political survival. We not only need to stop these messianic plans of annexation, we need to end the occupation, and we need to break the cycle of endless bloodshed. All of us deserve a different future, and the only way we will get there is through a real, lasting peace."

Activists from Standing Together's student chapters at two universities in Jerusalem visited Silwan recently to offer solidarity to Palestinian families facing displacement. Standing Together wrote: "Jewish and Palestinian students went together to meet families who are

currently facing forced displacement in Silwan and the Al-Bustan neighbourhood of East Jerusalem.

"During the visit, we met families who have already experienced home demolitions and families who are now living under active threat. They shared what the legal process looks like, how demolitions have affected their stability, and what it means to try to plan a future while facing possible displacement. The purpose of the visit was to express solidarity, to listen, and to build ongoing partnership.

"Palestinian families should not have to raise their children with demolition orders hanging over their heads. They deserve safety, stability, and the guaranteed right to remain in the homes and neighbourhoods they have built their lives in for generations."

In Gaza, Israeli airstrikes continue, with 24 people, including at least five children, killed in a strike on 4 February. 580 people have died since the nominal ceasefire came into effect, with around 1,500 wounded. 11 children have reportedly died from hypothermia so far this winter. An Israeli law effectively banning 37 aid agencies and NGOs from operating has led to significant restrictions on the distribution of food and medical supplies. Although the Rafah crossing into Egypt has now reopened, Palestinians report significant delays due to prolonged interrogations by Israeli soldiers.

Elections

Elections for the Knesset (Israeli parliament) must take place by 27 October, but many commentators expect an earlier election date. Following a recent mass protest in Sakhnin, a Palestinian city in northern Israel, against the crime wave engulfing Palestinian communities due to years of social neglect by Israeli administrations, the leaders of four Palestinian parties announced their intention to run a joint slate in those elections.

Those parties are the United Arab List (Ra'am in Hebrew), a conservative Islamist party headed by Mansour Abbas; Ta'al, a secular Palestinian nationalist party led by Ahmad Tibi; Balad, also secular-nationalist but generally seen as more radical than Ta'al, led by Sami Abu Shehadeh; and Hadash, the electoral front of the Israeli Communist Party, which is nominally binational but whose membership and voter base is overwhelmingly Arab-Palestinian, led by Ayman Odeh.

The four parties ran together as the Joint List in Knesset elections in 2015, winning 82% of the Palestinian vote and becoming the third-largest parliamentary bloc. The List subsequently fractured, with Balad splitting in 2019,



followed by Ra'am in 2021. Whilst reviving the List would be positive from the point of view of Palestinian representation in the Knesset, the unstable nature of the coalition, containing both left-wing and deeply conservative forces, means it cannot be a vehicle for radical social transformation.

Voter turnout by Palestinian citizens of Israel has long been low for national elections, though high for local-authority elections.

Dozens of Palestinian and Jewish activists have also recently co-signed a call for a new binational party, initiated by Ghadir Hani, a Palestinian leader of Standing Together, and Israeli Jewish peace activist Maoz Inon. Writing in support of the call, Palestinian doctor and left-wing activist Basheer Karkabi said: "There are [...] problems with the parties representing Palestinian citizens – not only Hadash and Balad, but also the United Arab List and Ta'al. The traditional (and especially male-dominated) structure, alongside the small number of young people in leadership, alienates broad segments of the Arab public. We must ask why less than half of Arab women and only around one-quarter of those aged 18-24 go out to vote, and what kind of alternative political message will bring them to the polls en masse.

"Another critique suggests that as long as we live in a reality of apartheid and genocide, a Jewish-Arab party is nothing but a reproduction of the existing power relations. According to this approach, what is required is for Jewish Israelis to accept Palestinian leadership in the existing parties. However, this critique ignores a fundamental question: Who will act in order to change the current political reality inside Israel? Can we rely on Trump or the international community to do this? [...]

"Building a shared political home for Jews and Palestinians is a long-term task, and will certainly extend beyond

the current election cycle. But it is up to us to take this initiative; we cannot rely on external powers. We will join hands with all who will strive with us to challenge the existing order."

Many Palestinian citizens of Israel feel understandably alienated from official politics. Representation in the Knesset has secured few material improvements for their communities, and their compatriots in the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem have faced intensifying occupation and oppression. But Karkabi is right to stress that Palestinians, nor Jewish Israelis who want to live in peace, "cannot rely on external powers", and must develop forms of organisation, including on the political terrain, capable of advancing a joint struggle for equality. □

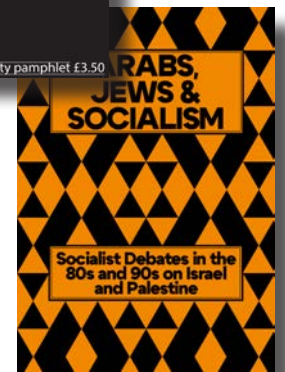
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Sinn Féin's austerity in Northern Ireland

By Micheál MacEoin

In January, Sinn Féin's Finance Minister in the Northern Ireland Executive, John O'Dowd, published his draft multi-year budget for 2026 to 2029/30.

The word "his" is deliberate, for this is O'Dowd's budget, or at most his party's, for it has not yet been agreed by his Executive colleagues in the DUP, UUP and Alliance. There will yet be much political haggling and horsetrading before a final budget is published in April.

Nevertheless, the draft Budget is as interesting for what it does not propose to do as for what it does — and for what it indicates about Sinn Féin's political priorities.

Despite the suggestion that a multi-year budget provides more room for strategic spending in key areas, the fiscal outlook is tight.

Under the draft budget for 2026/27, only four departments would see mild increases in their budgets for next year. These are education, health, justice and infrastructure.

The draft also does not consider departmental overspends, which are already widely anticipated — especially in health which is forecasting an extra £100m.

The next fiscal year is especially tight, up 0.8% in cash terms when in the recent past the Executive had been used to around 5%.

It is often said that Stormont has the taxation powers of a glorified county council. This is true, but it can also be an evasion of responsibility by those parties who have overseen austerity in the North.

O'Dowd announced that "any spending increase in one area will inevitably mean a reduction in another".

But this is far from inevitable. As People Before Profit's Gerry Carroll said: "At a time of record corporate profits across these islands, the Finance Minister hasn't made a single proposal or raised his voice to argue for higher levels of corporate taxes."

As a matter of course, O'Dowd blames the British Labour government for the overall funding situation.

Framework

Even within the framework of what the Executive can currently do, however, Sinn Féin refuses, for example, to revisit the policy of industrial de-rating, the 70% reduction to business rates for properties used for manufacturing.

A Freedom of Information request by Act Now has revealed that the total cost to the ratepayer of industrial de-rating in the 2024/25 financial year reached £76,314,810, up by approximately £3m from the previous year.

The policy has been raised recently by campaigners who have pointed to

Larne- and Belfast-based company Caterpillar, with a turnover of £542.6m and pre-tax profits of £18.4m.

More specifically, Caterpillar was named in UN Rapporteur Francesca Albanese's *From economy of occupation to economy of genocide* report as one of 60 companies profiting from Israel's military activity in Gaza through its production and sale of the D9 bulldozer for use in demolitions of Palestinian properties.

One of the main taxation levers available to the Executive is the regional rate, a property tax used to supplement departmental revenue. It co-exists with the district rate, levied by local authorities, which is roughly equivalent to English council tax.

O'Dowd is proposing to increase the regional rate for households by 5% across the board and the regional rate for businesses by 3% year on year. Individuals, then, will be hit more than businesses.

There are also no proposals to make more valuable properties pay a higher rate. Indeed, for the purposes of rates, there is a £400,000 cap, with properties valued above this amount taxed as if they are worth only £400,000.

On top of this, valuations were last carried out in 2005 so, according to the Department of Finance, only 282 homes are valued at £1m or more for rates purposes. We know, however, that the

standardised house price has gone up 84% from the beginning of 2015 to the end of 2025, from £105,000 to £193,000.

Now, of course, property values are a blunt enough instrument. It is possible, especially for some older people, to have benefited from rising property values on once-modest homes without necessarily being cash-rich. At the same time, it is a fair assumption that it takes significant income in general to own a mansion in the North of Ireland.

Sam McBride in the Belfast Telegraph has speculated that Sinn Féin's fiscal moderation is an electoral calculation, reflecting the party's now predominant status as the mainstream party of the Nationalist community — mansion-owners included.

Of course, there can be no "socialism in one Stormont", any more than cuts can be resisted in one council area. Nor is raising rates, including on working-class people, a strategy to end cuts or rebalance wealth.

But overall, O'Dowd's plans will mean cuts, in the context of rising needs. Those limited revenue-raising levers which could be pulled are left untouched.

It is certainly not a radical left set of budgetary proposals, nor even a particularly social democratic one, despite how Sinn Féin presents itself or is understood by some on the left in Britain. □

Environment

Little progress for green hydrogen

By Owen Flood

We do not claim to be experts on technology, or advocates for this or that particular technology as "the answer" to ecocide. Still, we try to keep ourselves informed, as people have to be for any democratic social planning in future.

In the early 2020s hydrogen fuel was all the rage and projected to make up 20% of the world energy mix by 2050. The short story since then is that problems in scaling up the technology from experimental to large-scale, especially with infrastructure, and uncertainties in policy have dampened optimism.

Investment in green hydrogen production and storage has grown every year, yet current green hydrogen production is only being done at laboratory or

pilot scale and less than a fifth of what it was projected to be in 2022.

Some companies that had invested in hydrogen projects have either pulled out or reduced funding. Last year 60 projects were either cancelled or postponed (though there are 2,600 projects ongoing). Reasons for cancellations? Cost. Lack of investors. Trump's attacks on net zero and green energy transition.

Ongoing

The International Energy Agency reckons only a quarter of ongoing hydrogen projects will be online by 2035. Even if all projects were completed by then, that would still be ten times less than projected for net zero targets.

The costs of hydrogen plant construction have proved much more than originally projected,

while batteries for electric vehicles have progressed fast.

The EU, China and other countries are still pushing forward with hydrogen plans to help reduce fossil fuel imports.

But in chemical, cement, steel and iron production, where hydrogen was feted as potentially offering industrial quantities of high-temperature heat, what now looks as or more promising is electrothermal energy storage (using electricity at times when it is cheapest to heat up bricks or similar which later provide heat on demand). Hydrogen could still have a role to play in decarbonising steel production, air travel, and shipping, and in the production of ammonia and fertilisers, but, at the very least, much slower than projected. Airbus is working on a hydrogen-fuel plane, but keeps on putting back its expected date and complaining

about costs, engineering hold-ups, and lack of the necessary infrastructure at airports for such planes.

Also, what sort of hydrogen?

Almost all the hydrogen produced in the world today is so called "grey" hydrogen, extracted using fossil fuels. "Green" hydrogen is extracted with renewable energy, and "blue" with fossil fuel but using carbon capture and storage.

Green hydrogen is the only one that can be reasonably viewed as renewable. The main obstacles to scaling up green hydrogen are the relative scarcity of renewable energy infrastructure and the high cost of electrolysis (the process of extracting it). As renewable energy technology expands and its production cost declines, that should make green hydrogen production cheaper. Other "colours" — black/brown, pink,

turquoise, yellow, white hydrogen — denote other ways in which hydrogen is extracted.

But low-emission (i.e. both green and blue hydrogen) make up less than one per cent of hydrogen production today and green hydrogen makes up only 12% of that one per cent.

Meanwhile, heat pumps and domestic thermal energy storage have expanded more than green hydrogen fuel for heating homes.

Under capitalism, initiation and continuity in decarbonising projects is left to the market and to corporations' decisions about what looks profitable, rather than systematic socially-controlled investigation and development. Only through public ownership and social control of the whole energy industry and of high finance can we see systematic progress. □

Reform surges, Labour flounders

By Dale Street

With less than three months to go to the Scottish Parliament election on 7 May, Scottish Labour is heading for a defeat of historic proportions.

The precise figure varies from one opinion poll to another, but current polling consistently puts Labour on or around 15% in both the first-past-the-post constituency vote and also the regional-list vote.

This would leave Scottish Labour with just 15 seats at Holyrood – its worst performance in a Westminster or Holyrood election in 116 years. At the same time, it would continue a well-established pattern: In each election since the first Holyrood election in 1999 Scottish Labour has always performed worse than in the preceding one.

Polling puts the SNP on 34% in the constituency vote (14 points down since the 2021 election) and 29% in the list vote (11 points down since 2021). This would make the SNP the largest party by far in Holyrood (60 seats, five short of an absolute majority).

Based on current voting intentions, Reform would be the opposition in Holyrood: 20% of the popular vote, resulting in 23 seats. The Scottish Greens are on course to win ten seats, compared with eight in 2021. They were in government coalition with the SNP from August 2021 to April 2024, so do not have the same pull on left voters as the Greens in England, whose local government coalitions are less well known.

The SNP splinter Alba – whose Glasgow Region list candidates will include Tommy and Gail Sheridan, formerly of the once-strong Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) – is on 2%. Support for “Others” fluctuates between 1% and 2%, making the election of a non-Labour left candidate unlikely. That 1% or 2% covers the SSP, TUSC, Your Party (Scotland), and the Scottish Family Party (which gener-



Your Party Scotland had a founding conference on 7-8 February, with some 250 attending. It voted against bans and proscriptions, and to stand candidates in the May Holyrood election

ally outperforms all left candidates).

Labour's sorry polling is in stark contrast to its performance in the July 2024 general election: 35% of the vote (up from 18% in 2019) and 37 MPs (up from one in 2019). By contrast, the SNP share of the vote fell to 30% (from 45%) and it lost 39 MPs.

At that time it seemed that Scottish Labour Party leader Anas Sarwar was heading for the post of First Minister in this year's Holyrood election. The strategy was simple: Constant attacks on the SNP's record in Holyrood, especially in relation to the NHS, which would result in a massive desertion of voters from SNP to Labour.

But it clearly has not worked.

Partly because the strategy did not exist outside of television studios and the Holyrood debating chamber. There has been no active campaigning by Scottish Labour in alliance with trade unions and community groups against SNP cuts.

Wrong

Partly because it was wrong to assume that discontent with the SNP would automatically lead to increased support for Labour. Other than moral denunciation, the strategy of #SNPbad has had no answer to counter the massive growth in support for Reform.

Partly because the Scottish Labour leadership has neither the will nor the ability to rebuild Labour grassroots organisation, transforming it into an active campaigning force. There was very little “Corbyn surge” in Scotland, and now there are no longer Labour Party branches there, only all-member CLP meetings. And many of those now struggle to achieve a quorum.

But mainly because of the Keir

Starmer factor. In Scotland, as is the case nationally, Starmer is the most unpopular Prime Minister since records of prime-ministerial (un)popularity began. This is confirmed not just by opinion polling but also by on-the-doorstep conversations in the Holyrood election “long campaign” which is already underway.

Starmer – quite rightly – is seen as weak, evasive and untrustworthy. The vague and limited promises of “change” on offer in the 2024 general election have not been fulfilled. His successive u-turns are not taken as evidence that he “listens to people” but as further proof of his indecisiveness and lack of leadership.

This provides the context for Anas Sarwar's call last week for Starmer to resign.

Did he really believe that Starmer would actually resign? Or, more likely, did Sarwar just calculate that Scottish Labour's election prospects (and his own careerist aspirations) could only be improved if he publicly distanced himself from Starmer?

Either way, Sarwar's gambit has not worked.

Starmer has not resigned. A minority on the Scottish Labour left has even uncovered a conspiracy: Sarwar's call for Starmer to resign was orchestrated in advance, in order to trigger precisely a display of support for Starmer at Westminster and divert attention away from the Mandelson scandal...

In Scotland only two Labour MPs have publicly backed Sarwar. Off-the-record media briefings, probably from Douglas Alexander or Ian Murray, have denounced Sarwar's call for Starmer to resign as “idiocy, immature, incoherent and self-defeating. Bad for the country,

playing into our opponents' hands, and without any idea of an end game.”

A minority on the Scottish Labour right has its own conspiracy theory: Sarwar's speech was part of a coordinated plot involving Andy Burnham, Wes Streeting and Angela Rayner, aimed at ousting Starmer.

Sarwar's statement is unlikely to have impact on Scottish Labour's electoral fortunes. The fact that Sarwar is now being publicly undermined by Starmer loyalists probably does not help. And it will take real campaigning on the ground, not just a one-off speech to assembled journalists, to change Labour's electoral prospects.

Sarwar has not switched to the left. His call for Starmer to resign was apologetic in tone and carefully calibrated. There was nothing even vaguely left-wing in what he said.

His call for Starmer's resignation, he said, was rooted in “loyalty to my country, Scotland.” He had to “do what's right for my country – Scotland, my first priority and my first loyalty is to my country, Scotland.”

The fact that Jackie Baillie, Scottish Labour's very right-wing deputy leader, has backed Sarwar is the final proof, if any more were needed, that Sarwar has not swung left.

Even so, Scottish Labour activists should take the opportunity provided by Sarwar's electoral gambit. They should argue and move motions in CLPs in support of Sarwar's call for Starmer to resign, and that what is needed is not just a change of leadership (Streeting or Mahmood in place of Starmer?) but also of politics. □



“Plans” without social housing won’t work

By Robert Bau

In December, the Labour government proposed major reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). At the heart of the proposals is a strengthened presumption in favour of development.

There will also be a default “yes” to housing and mixed-use schemes within roughly 800 metres of railway and tram stations. This applies both in big cities and in so-called “well-connected” stations outside urban areas. The plans also impose new minimum density rules: 40 dwellings per hectare near most stations and 50 per hectare around the best-connected ones.

The fundamental weakness in the NPPF changes is that they do nothing to improve housing affordability.

Yet housing costs have risen for decades, especially for low-income households.

- The IFS shows the poorest house-

holds spent 9% of income on housing in 1968; since the 2000s they have consistently spent over 20%.

- ONS data shows typical private renters paying 30–36% of income on rent.

The reforms rely on a familiar indirect approach: loosen planning rules to encourage private developers to build more homes, and hope that this increase in overall supply improves affordability. Yet there is no historical evidence that simply easing planning restrictions leads to genuinely affordable homes or meets social housing need.

Dense

Now developers will almost certainly build in these newly permissive station zones, but many already deliver dense, transport-oriented projects in London and other major cities without such sweeping national reforms. What is new is the scale of the deregulation, not the pattern of development.

The most urgent housing need is for

social housing, not market-rate homes. A rough proxy for this need is the number of households waiting for social housing — now around 1.58 million in the UK. This understates the real figure, as many councils tightened waiting list criteria, excluding people who would previously have qualified.

The severity of need is stark in London, where average waits for a family-sized home have reached:

- 107 years in Westminster
- 105 years in Enfield
- 102 years in Merton

The crisis is not confined to the capital: Mansfield (75.5 years), Slough (74.3), Solihull (27.9), Bolton (27.3), and Broxbourne (23) also face extreme pressures. Waiting lists in the Northeast have risen 28% in three years, erasing the traditional North–South divide—just in the worst possible direction.

None of this need will be met by private developers building near train stations.



Even if the reforms boost private construction, they will not significantly reduce social housing waiting lists or address affordability. The private sector builds for profit; it does not build the low-rent homes that millions need.

The only proven solution is direct public investment in social housing: funding councils and to build genuinely affordable homes at scale. Without this, the crisis will continue, no matter how much planning policy is rewritten. □

Employment Relations Act

Loopholes on “fire and rehire”

By a concerned trade unionist

The TUC says the new Employment Rights Act ends “fire and rehire”, the practice of firing workers only to re-employ them on worse terms.

Whilst the Act makes the practice more difficult, it includes significant loopholes. An employer can still legally use fire and rehire if they can prove:

- the reason for the variation was to eliminate, prevent or significantly reduce, or significantly mitigate the effect of any financial difficulties which at the time of the dismissal were affecting (or were likely in the immediate future to affect) the employer’s ability to carry on the business as a going concern or otherwise to carry on the activities constituting the business; and

- in all the circumstances the employer could not reasonably have avoided the need to make the variation.

Then:

- For public sector bodies — the exception will apply if the employer faces financial difficulties that are likely in the immediate future to affect “the financial sustainability of carrying out the employer’s statutory functions”; and

Governance

- For local authorities — the exception will apply if financial difficulties have resulted in a “relevant intervention direction” relating to the financial management or governance of the authority.

So a council such as Birmingham going into special measures would have cover to fire and rehire.

Equally importantly, the Act just makes fire and rehire dismissals unfair, rather than prohibiting it. You still have to make an Employment Tribunal claim and win (which might take years given the backlogs of cases at Employment Tribunals). So P&O could happen again. Just this time it would be more expensive.

Firms

It’s always good in these circumstances to look at what employment firms are saying. You find:

“Do you have variation clauses in your existing contracts of employment? If so, these may be a way of imposing unilateral change. Ensure that all new contracts contain variation clauses. If you’re thinking about varying terms and conditions, then do it be-

fore the new law comes in!”

All this is at the “consultation” stage. Unions need to campaign publicly to narrow the loopholes, rather than see them expanded by bosses’ pressure.

And to actually ban fire and rehire, and address the multi-

ple defects of the Employment Act, whilst acknowledging and using its good points, we need to start campaigning for a follow up Employment Act. □

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Trump steps up threats to November polls

By Bas Hardy

An outlandish belief held by sections of the MAGA movement, particularly QAnon devotees, saw the USA run by a secret cabal of wealthy paedophiles from an HQ in the basement a pizza parlour in Washington DC. The picture painted by the Epstein files is less lurid, but still shocking.

A major promise from the Trump camp during the 2024 election campaign was that the identities of all evil-doers in those files would be released. On taking up her post as Attorney General in January last year, Pam Bondi declared that the Epstein "client list" was on her desk ready to be made public. Half a year later a DOJ memo declared that no "client list" existed, there was no credible evidence Epstein had blackmailed prominent individuals and there would be no public disclosure.

True to form, Trump denounced it all as "a hoax" dreamed up by his political opponents. The MAGA base, together with the Democrats were having none of it. Congress passed the Epstein Files Transparency Act last November by a 427 to 1 vote, forcing Trump to sign it into law.

Ghislaine Maxwell, Peter Mandelson, Andrew Mountbatten Windsor, Thorbjørn Jagland, Ahmed bin Sulayem, and Kathryn Ruemmler are the main people who've suffered serious consequences from this cause célèbre so far — none of them close to Trump. That shouldn't be surprising given the release of materials,

and what gets redacted, are controlled by the Trump administration.

Former MAGA loyalist Marjorie Taylor Greene, now branded a "traitor" by Trump, said in late 2025 that he had told her he didn't want the files to see the light of day "because my friends would get hurt." Trump's name appears in them more times than God's does in the Bible. His professed ignorance as to what Epstein was up to is also contradicted by a former Florida police chief he phoned in 2006 to say that "everyone" knew about Epstein's behaviour.

Slippery

Slippery as ever, Trump probably won't get tied to any egregious behaviour before his time in office is up, if only because all the info is under his control. However, Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick and Navy Secretary John Phelan are in the frame for "social connections" to Epstein, and it will be difficult for Trump to rise above the corrupt stink emanating from the corpse of Epstein.

Attorney General Pam Bondi didn't help matters with her recent contemptuous performance before the House Judiciary Committee in which she suggested Congresspeople focused on Epstein only to detract from how well the Dow Jones Index was doing under Trump. She also refused to recognise Epstein victims at the back of the hall. Some of their names were not redacted "by mistake", and supporters regard that as an attempt by the regime to intimi-

date them.

Trump is sinking in the polls for other reasons too, with an electorate not too pleased they are paying for 90% of the tariffs he's imposed. Latino voters (and others) are not happy about ICE goons harassing them (or their friends, workmates, or neighbours) because of their skin colour.

"If we lose the midterms [the 3 November 2026 votes for the House and a third of the Senate], if we lose 2028, some of us are going to prison — myself included." Thus (in November 2025) spoke Steve Bannon, another Epstein associate. He should know because he's been in jail already, only next time Trump won't be around for the pardon.

The Trump retribution agenda isn't just about getting back at individuals who've crossed him like Comey, Jack Smith and Letitia James. He also hates those people who dared to vote him out of office in 2020. Particular fury has been directed at Fulton County, Georgia, where Trump minion Rudy Giuliani made baseless claims that two election workers had tampered with votes and Fulton County DA Fani Willis attempted to prosecute Trump for racketeering.

That the FBI have now become Trump's political police needs no further evidence than their raid on the Fulton County election offices where they seized ballots and voter registers. The rationale behind the raid was based on a debunked claim from a lawyer who sought to overturn the 2020 election.



These actions are connected to a wider Trump strategy to undermine the electoral process. Trump's call to "nationalise" elections (place them under federal rather than state control), demands for states to hand over voter information, the placing of election deniers on election boards, gerrymandering of electoral districts, and threats to demand photo ID from voters, are all part of the process. And there is the threat of ICE goons being around polling stations to intimidate voters.

Are the American people, the working class, trade unions and community organisations going to stand for any of this? Minneapolis has shown the way forward. General strikes and community shutdowns are major weapons needed in the fight to end Trump and his increasingly dictatorial regime.

The third big "No Kings" protest against Trump will be 28 March. □

"Epstein files" shows us how the rich rule

By Chris Reynolds

Peter Mandelson. The former secretary of the Council of Europe. The boss of the huge Dubai-based DP World multinational. The former Treasury Secretary for Clinton and then President of Harvard. The former top lawyer for Obama, then top lawyer for Goldman Sachs.

The list of those felled by the Epstein files gets longer. And others are so far shrugging it off, from Steve Bannon to Noam Chomsky.

The conspiracy theories spun from this which focus on the Jewish minority in Epstein's circles and see him as a lynchpin of "Zionist" or "Jewish" power are baseless and harmful.

Epstein did not try to shape public policy, and his "connections" were very various in their politics. He thrived on the very

process of connections, consultancies, schmoozing, women and girls delivered as victims, and on the pay-offs from it.

A variety of people who wanted to gain "access" to other powerful people used him as a means, and he thrived on being the means.

Some ruling-class people revelled in the atmosphere of wealth and privilege, including power over entrapped women and girls; some, maybe, didn't, but thought that's what goes with getting "access".

Many

Many continued around Epstein even after he was first charged, in 2006; after he entered a guilty plea in 2008; after he was jailed in 2009; and after the MeToo surge which followed the indictment of Harvey Weinstein in 2017.

Riches are not essential to sexual abuse. A lot of it happens within "ordinary" homes. But riches, and the conviction that money must buy everything, help.

Capitalist classes generally prefer the procedures of bourgeois democracy as more stable, flexible, and responsive than individual despotism. But day to day they rule through networks of individuals — CEOs, prime ministers, presidents. The individuals can be replaced, by corporate boards, by party votes, or by general elections, but meanwhile the individual rules.

The individuals are not chosen for expertise. After the bank crashes in 2007-8, an official committee asked British bank bosses what qualifications they had for their jobs. Embarrassed answer: none.

The working model is that each CEO or prime minister has around them an army of advisers and consultants who do have expertise. The "CEO" role is arbiter, deal-maker, spokesperson.

Donald Trump openly solicits favours like his jet from Qatar, and the Labour Party is open about organising high-priced dinners and "receptions" so business people can bend the ears of party leaders.

Level

But beyond a certain level a capitalist ruling class wants something subtler than "the biggest bribe wins".

Because of that, and because of the dense bureaucratisation of politics and business, "access" to top-boss figures, or at least to their entourages, becomes the potion for politics.

In that who-has-access-to-whom world, so the Epstein story shows, offerings of private islands and abused young women are highways.

There are other ways. It is routine for former top politicians then to become high-paid "advisers" and "consultants" to big corporations, despite having zero expertise in the corporations' production processes, because they can help with "access".

The rule of the rich is incompatible with human equality and dignity, and cuts against far-sighted policy of any sort.

Socialism promises collective and deliberative democracy, the clearing-out of privilege, official jobs done at workers' wages, and transparent, unbureaucratic administration. □



For a free Ukraine!

By Leon Trotsky

The Ukrainian question, which many governments and many “socialists” and even “communists” have tried to forget or to relegate to the deep strongbox of history, has once again been placed on the order of the day and this time with redoubled force. The latest aggravation of the Ukrainian question is most intimately bound up with the degeneration of the Soviet Union and of the Comintern, the successes of fascism and the approach of the next imperialist war. Crucified by four states [the USSR, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Romania all ruled Ukrainian populations], the Ukraine now occupies in the fate of Europe the same position that was once occupied by Poland; with this difference — that world relations are now infinitely more tense and the tempos of development accelerated. The Ukrainian question is destined in the immediate future to play an enormous role in the life of Europe. It was not for nothing that Hitler so noisily raised the question of creating a “Greater Ukraine” and likewise it was not for nothing that he dropped this question with such stealthy haste.

The Second International, expressing the interests of the labour bureaucracy and aristocracy of the imperialist states, completely ignored the Ukrainian question. Even its left wing did not pay the necessary attention to it. Suffice it to recall that Rosa Luxemburg, for all her brilliant intellect and genuinely revolutionary spirit, found it possible to declare that the Ukrainian question was the invention of a handful of intellectuals. This position left a deep imprint even upon the Polish Communist party. The Ukrainian question was looked upon by



Leon Trotsky

Introduction

By Martin Thomas

Ukraine has had a history of national awareness for centuries, but until 1991 was mostly ruled by foreign empires, Lithuanian, Polish, Ottoman, Russian (Tsarist then Stalinist).

In 1917-20 Ukraine was a major battleground in the war between the new workers' government and counter-revolutionaries and foreign powers, especially Germany and Poland. By 1921 Ukraine was divided between an eastern “Soviet Ukraine” and a western Ukraine which was “eastern Poland”, under Polish rule. Smaller areas were ruled by Czechoslovakia and Romania.

In eastern Ukraine, the Bolsheviks promoted “Ukrainianisation”, under which Ukrainian national awareness flourished. Soon, however, the developing Stalinist counter-revolution made this a bureaucratic mockery. In 1932-3 Stalin imposed a great famine on Ukraine, the Holodomor. Trotsky knew no details of the famine, but by 1939 he did know that Ukrainians hated Stalin.

In Western Ukraine, or “eastern Poland”, under Polish rule, and with a large Polish minority (over 30%) holding the official and professional positions, the Ukrainian population resented the semi-fascist Polish state.

In 1939 Hitler demagogically courted Ukrainian nationalists. Alexander Kerensky, leader of the (unelected) bourgeois government in Russia overthrown by the workers in October 1917, supported Russian hegemony in Ukraine as a lesser evil. (It was somewhat as some leftists today say the main thing in Ukraine is to oppose the NATO powers, but with more excuse, as Hitler's actual plan was to conquer Ukraine and settle German farmers there, with the surviving Ukrainians as semi-slaves. Poland, France, Germany, etc. have no similar plans today). Trotsky, who was himself of Ukrainian Jewish background, responded by backing Ukrainian self-determination against Russia, Germany, Poland, and all overlords. □

the official leaders of the Polish section of the Comintern as an obstacle rather than a revolutionary problem. Hence the constant opportunist attempts to shy away from this question, to suppress it, to pass over it in silence, or to postpone it to an indefinite future.

The Bolshevik party, not without difficulty and only gradually under the constant pressure of Lenin, was able to acquire a correct approach to the Ukrainian question. The right to self-determination, that is, to separation, was extended by Lenin equally to the Poles and to the Ukrainians. He did not recognise aristocratic nations. Every inclination to evade or postpone the problem of an oppressed nationality he regarded as a manifestation of Great Russian chauvinism.

Bureaucratic Interest

After the conquest of power, a serious struggle took place in the party over the solving of the numerous national problems inherited from old Czarist Russia. In his capacity as People's Commissar of Nationalities, Stalin invariably represented the most centralist and bureaucratic tendency. This evinced itself especially on the question of Georgia and on the question of the Ukraine. The correspondence dealing with these matters has remained unpublished to this day. We hope to publish a section of it — the very small section which is at our disposal. Every line of Lenin's letters and proposals vibrates with an urge to

accede as far as possible to those nationalities that have been oppressed in the past. In the proposals and declarations of Stalin, on the contrary, the tendency to bureaucratic centralism was invariably pronounced. In order to guarantee “administrative needs,” i.e., the interests of the bureaucracy, the most legitimate claims of the oppressed nationalities were declared a manifestation of petty-bourgeois nationalism. All these symptoms could be observed as early as 1922-1923. Since that time they have developed monstrously and have led to outright strangulation of any kind of independent national development of the peoples of the USSR

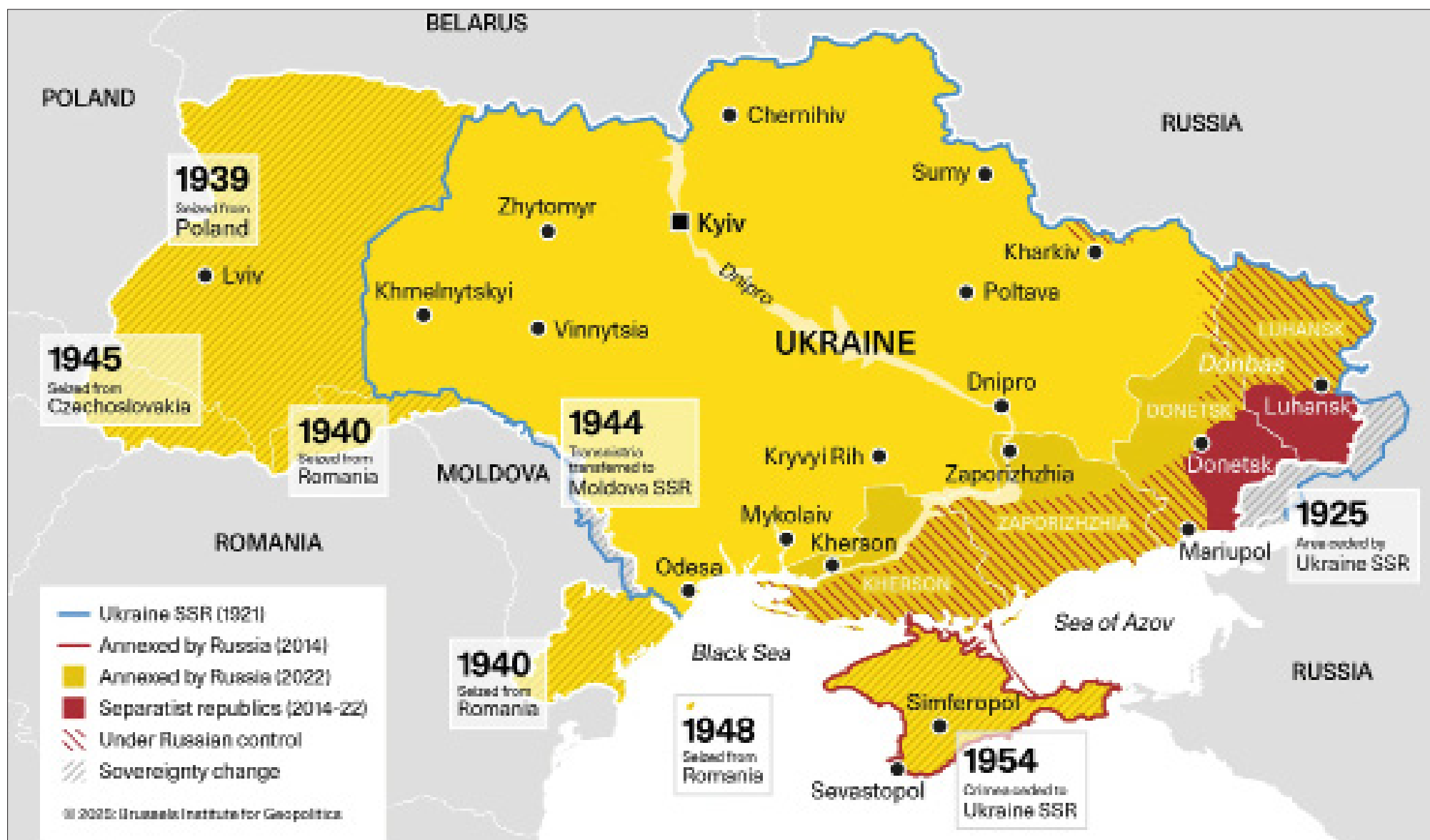
In the conception of the old Bolshevik party Soviet Ukraine was destined to become a powerful axis around which the other sections of the Ukrainian people would unite. It is indisputable that in the first period of its existence Soviet Ukraine exerted a mighty attractive force, in national respects as well, and aroused to struggle the workers, peasants, and revolutionary intelligentsia of Western Ukraine enslaved by Poland. But during the years of Thermidorian reaction, the position of Soviet Ukraine and together with it the posing of the Ukrainian question as a whole changed sharply. The more profound the hopes aroused, the keener was the disillusionment. The bureaucracy strangled and plundered the people within Great Russia, too. But in the Ukraine matters were further com-

plicated by the massacre of national hopes. Nowhere did restrictions, purges, repressions and in general all forms of bureaucratic hooliganism assume such murderous sweep as they did in the Ukraine in the struggle against the powerful, deeply-rooted longings of the Ukrainian masses for greater freedom and independence. To the totalitarian bureaucracy, Soviet Ukraine became an administrative division of an economic unit and a military base of the USSR. To be sure, the Stalin bureaucracy erects statues to Shevchenko [an Ukrainian nationalist hero of the 19th century] but only in order more thoroughly to crush the Ukrainian people under their weight and to force it to chant paeans in the language of Kobzar to the rapist clique in the Kremlin.

Towards the sections of the Ukraine now outside its frontiers, the Kremlin's attitude today is the same as it is towards all oppressed nationalities, all colonies, and semi-colonies, i.e., small change in its international combinations with imperialist governments. At the recent 18th Congress of the “Communist Party,” Manuilsky, one of the most revolting renegades of Ukrainian communism, quite openly explained that not only the USSR but also the Comintern (the “gyp-joint,” according to Stalin's formulation) refused to demand the emancipation of oppressed peoples whenever their oppressors are not the enemies of the ruling Moscow clique. India is nowadays being defended by Stalin, Dimitroff and Manuilsky against — Japan, but not against England. Western Ukraine they are ready to cede forever to Poland in exchange for a diplomatic agreement which appears profitable at the present time to the bureaucrats of the Kremlin. It is a far cry from the days when they went no further than episodic combinations in their politics.

Fictitious Independence

Not a trace remains of the former confidence and sympathy of the Western Ukrainian masses for the Kremlin. Since the latest murderous “purge” in the Ukraine no one in the West wants to become part of the Kremlin satrapy which continues to bear the name of Soviet Ukraine. The worker and peasant masses in the Western Ukraine, in Bukovina, in the Carpatho-Ukraine are in a state of confusion: Where to turn? What to demand? This situation naturally shifts the leadership to the most reactionary Ukrainian cliques who express their “nationalism” by seeking to sell the Ukrainian people to one imperialism or another in return for a promise of fictitious independence. Upon this tragic confusion Hitler bases his policy in the



Ukrainian question. At one time we said: but for Stalin (i.e., but for the fatal policy of the Comintern in Germany) there would have been no Hitler. To this can now be added: but for the rape of Soviet Ukraine by the Stalinist bureaucracy there would be no Hitlerist Ukrainian policy.

German Imperialism

We shall not pause here to analyse the motives that impelled Hitler to discard, for the time being at least, the slogan of a Greater Ukraine. These motives must be sought in the fraudulent combinations of German imperialism on the one hand, and, on the other in the fear of conjuring up an evil spirit whom it might be difficult to exorcise. Hitler gave Carpatho-Ukraine as a gift to the Hungarian butchers. This was done, if not with Moscow's open approval then in any case with confidence that approval would be forthcoming. It is as if Hitler had said to Stalin: "If I were preparing to attack Soviet Ukraine tomorrow I should have kept Carpatho-Ukraine in my own hands." In reply, Stalin at the 18th Party Congress openly came to Hitler's defence against the slanders of the "Western Democracies." Hitler intends to attack the Ukraine? Nothing of the sort! Fight with Hitler? Not the slightest reason for it. Stalin is obviously interpreting the handing over of Carpatho-Ukraine to Hungary as an act of peace.

This means that sections of the Ukrainian people have become so much small change for the Kremlin in its international calculations. The Fourth International must clearly understand the

enormous importance of the Ukrainian question in the fate not only of South-eastern and Eastern Europe but also of Europe as a whole. We are dealing with a people that has proved its viability, that is numerically equal to the population of France and occupies an exceptionally rich territory which, moreover, is of the highest strategical importance. The question of the fate of the Ukraine has been posed in its full scope. A clear and definite slogan is necessary that corresponds to the new situation. In my opinion there can be at the present time only one such slogan: A united, free and independent workers' and peasants' Soviet Ukraine.

This program is in irreconcilable contradiction first of all with the interests of the three imperialist powers, Poland, Romania, and Hungary. Only hopeless pacifist blockheads are capable of thinking that the emancipation and unification of the Ukraine can be achieved by peaceful diplomatic means, by referendums, etc. In no way superior to them of course are those "nationalists" who propose to solve the Ukrainian question by entering the service of one imperialism against another. Hitler gave an invaluable lesson to these adventurers by tossing (for how long?) Carpatho-Ukraine to the Hungarians who immediately slaughtered not a few trusting Ukrainians. Insofar as the issue depends upon the military strength of the imperialist states, the victory of one grouping or another can signify only a new dismemberment and a still more brutal subjugation of the Ukrainian people.

The program of independence for the Ukraine in the epoch of imperialism is directly and indissolubly bound up with the program of the proletarian revolution. It would be criminal to entertain any illusions on this score.

Self-Determination

But the independence of a United Ukraine would mean the separation of Soviet Ukraine from the USSR, the "friends" of the Kremlin will exclaim in chorus. What is so terrible about that? we reply. The fervid worship of state boundaries is alien to us. We do not hold the position of a "united and indivisible" whole. After all, even the constitution of the USSR acknowledges the right of its component federated peoples to self-determination, that is, to separation. Thus, not even the incumbent Kremlin oligarchy dares to deny this principle. To be sure it remains only on paper. The slightest attempt to raise the question of an independent Ukraine openly would mean immediate execution on the charge of treason. But it is precisely this despicable equivocation, it is precisely this ruthless hounding of all free national thought that has led the toiling masses of the Ukraine, to an even greater degree than the masses of Great Russia, to look upon the rule of the Kremlin as monstrously oppressive. In the face of such an internal situation it is naturally impossible even to talk of Western Ukraine voluntarily joining the USSR as it is at present constituted. Consequently, the unification of the Ukraine presupposes freeing the so-called Soviet Ukraine from the Stalinist boot. In this matter, too, the Bonapartist

clique will reap what it has sown.

Revolutionary Regeneration

But wouldn't this mean the military weakening of the USSR? the "friends" of the Kremlin will howl in horror. We reply that the weakening of the USSR is caused by those ever-growing centrifugal tendencies generated by the Bona-

continued on page 14 →

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partist dictatorship. In the event of war the hatred of the masses for the ruling clique can lead to the collapse of all the social conquests of October. The source of defeatist moods is in the Kremlin. An independent Soviet Ukraine, on the other hand, would become, if only by virtue of its own interests, a mighty southwestern bulwark of the USSR. The sooner the present Bonapartist caste is undermined, upset, crushed and swept away, the firmer the defence of the Soviet Republic will become and the more certain its socialist future.

Naturally an independent workers' and peasants' Ukraine might subsequently join the Soviet Federation; but voluntarily, on conditions which it itself considers acceptable, which in turn presupposes a revolutionary regeneration of the USSR. The genuine emancipation of the Ukrainian people is inconceivable without a revolution or a series of revolutions in the west which must lead in the end to the creation of the Soviet United States of Europe. An independent Ukraine could and undoubtedly will join this federation as an equal member. The proletarian revolution in Europe, in turn, would not leave one stone standing of the revolting structure of Stalinist Bonapartism. In that case the closest union of the Soviet United States of Eu-

rope and the regenerated USSR would be inevitable and would present infinite advantages for the European and Asiatic continents, including of course the Ukraine, too. But here we are shifting to questions of second and third order. The question of first order is the revolutionary guarantee of the unity and independence of a workers' and peasants' Ukraine in the struggle against imperialism, on the one hand, and against Moscow Bonapartism, on the other.

Emancipation

The Ukraine is especially rich and experienced in false paths of struggle for national emancipation. Here everything has been tried: the petty-bourgeois Rada, and Skoropadski, and Petliura, and "alliance" with the Hohenzollerns and combinations with the Entente. After all these experiments, only political cadavers can continue to place hope in any one of the fractions of the Ukrainian bourgeoisie as the leader of the national struggle for emancipation. The Ukrainian proletariat alone is capable not only of solving the task — which is revolutionary in its very essence — but also of taking the initiative for its solution. The proletariat and only the proletariat can rally around itself the peasant masses and the genuinely revolutionary national intelligentsia.

At the beginning of the last imperi-



German army in Ukraine, 1940s

alist war the Ukrainians, Melenevski ("Basok") and Skpropis-Yeltukhovski, attempted to place the Ukrainian liberation movement under the wing of the Hohenzollern General, Ludendorff. They covered themselves in so doing with left phrases. With one kick the revolutionary Marxists booted these people out. That is how revolutionists must continue to behave in the future. The impending war will create a favourable atmosphere for all sorts of adventurers, miracle-hunters and seekers of the golden fleece. These gentlemen, who especially love to warm their hands in the vicinity of the national question, must not be allowed within artillery range of the labour movement. Not the slightest compromise with imperialism, either fascist or democratic!

Not the slightest concession to the Ukrainian nationalists, either clerical-reactionary or liberal-pacifist! No "People's Fronts"! The complete independence of the proletarian party as the vanguard of the toilers!

This appears to me the correct policy in the Ukrainian question. I speak here personally and in my own name. The question must be opened up to international discussion. The foremost place in this discussion must belong to the Ukrainian revolutionary Marxists. We shall listen with the greatest attention to their voices. But they had better make haste. There is little time left for preparation! □

• *The Problem of Ukraine*, 22 April 1939. *Socialist Appeal* 9 May 1939

Answering Kerensky's objections

By Leon Trotsky

In Kerensky's periodical *Novaya Rossia* for July 12, 1939, my article on the independence of the Ukraine is subjected to a "criticism" of its own kind. From the standpoint of socialist, scientific, literary, etc., criteria, *Novaya Rossia* is of course of no interest at all. But it possesses this merit, that it enables one to peer into the heads of the Russian middle and petty bourgeois democrats. Scratch any of them hard enough and you will find a feudalism.

The periodical fumes over the fact that I wholeheartedly and completely stand for the support of the Ukrainian people in their struggle for national and state independence. "The separation of Soviet Ukraine from the USSR doesn't embarrass L. Trotsky at all." Absolutely so! As regards Messrs. Democrats, they are not only embarrassed but deeply roused by the prospect of the separation of the Ukraine. The democratic urge of an oppressed nationality to gain its complete independence cannot fail to arouse the ire of feudalists. "The question of how this rev-

olution (the national Ukrainian revolution) will be utilised by Hitler for the realisation of his plans is not touched by Trotsky." The gentlemen of *Novaya Rossia* consider that "the separation of the Ukraine will lead to the military weakening of the USSR," and they come very close to the conclusion that Trotsky's politics serve Hitler. The same opinion is held also by the Kremlin. Great minds run in the same gutter, reads a French proverb."

Let us grant that the separation of the Ukraine does actually weaken the USSR. What to do then with the democratic principle of the self-determination of nations? Every state which forcibly retains within its boundaries some other nationality considers that the separation of the latter would weaken the state in economic and military spheres. Hitler annexed the Czechs and semi-annexed Slovakia precisely because this leads to the military strengthening of Germany. Wherein does the criterion of our democrats differ from the criterion of Hitler? As regards the nation or the Ukrainians, the democrats of *Novaya Rossia*

following the not uncelebrated democrat Miliukov are perhaps ready to answer to this question that the Ukrainians are "by and large and in general" in all likelihood a nation, but after all there are limits. In other words, if they are a nation, it is a second-class one inasmuch as the fate of the Ukraine must be determined by the interests of Russia, i.e., the Great Russian majority. And this is precisely the viewpoint of the chauvinistic feudalists.

In the sad and sorry days of the February revolution, the Provisional Government brazenly refused to extend to the Ukrainians not only independence — the Ukrainians did not demand this at that time as yet — but also mere autonomy. Messrs. Democrats haggled over, the national rights of the Ukraine like horse-traders. They then took their direct and immediate point of departure the interests of the old Great Russian "masters" of the landlord, bourgeois and democratic type. Today they are translating the very same great and glorious tradition into the language of the émigrés.

From a much higher histor-

ical standpoint, namely from the standpoint of the socialist revolution, it would be quite possible to subordinate for a certain period of time the national interests of the Ukraine to the interests of the international proletariat if they came into conflict with one another. But there is no sign even of such a conflict. The Ukraine is being strangled by the very same Bonapartist reaction that strangles the whole of the USSR and undermines its capacity for self-defence. The Ukrainian revolutionary movement aimed against the Bonapartist bureaucracy is the direct ally of the international revolutionary proletariat.

The far-sighted democratic feudalists are very much concerned lest Hitler utilise some time in the future the national Ukrainian revolution. They close their eyes to the fact that Hitler already today is utilising the suppression and the dismemberment of the Ukrainian nation.

In contrast to Messrs. Democrats of the Menshevik and Narodnik variety, we do not at all proceed from the consideration that there is no beast more



Aleksander Kerensky

powerful than the cat. Hitler's strength in general, and in relation to the Ukraine in particular, lies not in himself but in the worthlessness and rottenness of democracy, in the decomposition of the Second and Third Internationals, in the vast wave of disillusion, decline, and apathy among the masses. The triumphant revolutionary movement in any country will sound the knell for Hitler. The national revolutionary Ukrainian movement is an integral part of the mighty revolutionary wave which is now being molecularly prepared underneath the crust of triumphant reaction. That is why we say: Long Live Independent Soviet Ukraine! □

• *Democratic Feudalists and the Independence of Ukraine*, 5 August 1939. *Socialist Appeal*, 31 October 1939

Against far right, for a workers' united front

By Cathy Nugent

With the Tories still to recover from their post-Johnson implosion and the deep unpopularity of Labour in government, both parties face serious-to-catastrophic electoral results in the 7 May council elections. The main political party alternatives (Lib-Dems, Greens, Reform) are likely to benefit and Reform the most. Longer-term, a Reform, or Reform-Tory, government are possibilities.

The threat from Reform is greatest for the Tories. The threat to Labour is more unpredictable. Voters switching from Labour to Reform may be in favour of more immigration controls and even deportations and some will be socially conservative. However they are also likely to be in favour of the welfare state and taxing the rich. A "mixed" political outlook can be absorbed by a populist far right party such as Reform but there are limits.

Labour's "tough" stance on immigration has made opinion on that issue more reactionary. A YouGov poll (August 2025) has equal numbers of voters (26%) "strongly supporting" and "strongly opposing" admitting no new migrants and deporting large numbers. A majority – 14% "strongly supporting" and 42% "somewhat supporting" – wanted "tougher controls". The disgusting spectacle of Tories and Reform competing for the most radically racist immigration policy, with Labour tagging along behind will continue, unless we can build a stronger opposition on this issue.

Failure

Labour's failure to reverse most Tory cuts and its new cuts, and the politically weak and not sufficiently combative opposition to Starmer, increases the threat of Reform. We cannot rely on a positive switch back to Labour, or tactical voting in Labour's favour, to stop Reform.

The [Green Party's policy](#) on asylum and immigration is much better, and many socialists have joined the Greens. But they find themselves in a social-democratic-at-best, electoralist party. Across the country they do not have a sufficient electoral base to overtake Reform.

Even if Your Party's subterranean political faction fight is resolved after the CEC election, the party has no policies, a poor democratic structure and an already-diminished local organisation. The prospect of it immediately impacting support for Reform are small.

Workers' Liberty will be urging activ-

ists on the left in all these political milieus to press the urgency of a labour movement mobilisation, in the first place of the unions, to counter the far right.

A key dynamic behind the rise of Reform is their political convergence with the Tories, beginning with the various iterations of anti-EU populist far right groups led by Nigel Farage.

The context is the global rise of the right and the far right, the fall out from the financial crisis, Brexit, the pandemic and the partial implosion of the Tories in the wake of these events. Within the broad right spectrum the Tories are "national conservatives", the victory of the hard Brexiteers over "one nation" Toryism.

Reform is a populist far right party. To win over voters the party has distinguished itself from the street fighting more fascistic far right – Tommy Robinson, UKIP, and other groups. This distance may not hold; in any case Reform's success will encourage the "further right".

The fascistic and street-fighting right remains fragmented, but regular mobilisations outside migrant hotels and elsewhere have helped this movement grow. The far right micro parties – Homeland, Patriotic Alternative, UKIP and Advance UK (ex-Reform members and now the political home of Tommy Robinson), have benefited somewhat. The broader movement includes: Tommy Robinson and some of his associates such as YouTuber Liam Tuffs; other national and local influencers, vigilante groups; fly-the-flag campaigners; Christian nationalist leaders.

Cuts

Reform's 2024 election manifesto promised cuts to income tax, stamp duty, business rates and corporation tax and a cut in regulation. While this counts as Thatcherism in the 21st century, they have a more radical edge in their threat to deport all illegal immigrants and foreign criminals, a policy boosted by Trump's terrifying expansion of ICE. Reform's deportation policy is also pushed by that of the further right, for example the much more explicitly anti-Muslim deportation policy of UKIP (promising 5-6 million deportations). Reform dabbles in conspiracy theory – scrapping net zero is a favourite, as is hostility to "gender ideology". Farage has recently argued the 24-week abortion time limit should be lowered.

At the estimated 110-150,000-strong

Unite the Kingdom march on 13 September 2025 demonstrators on the Stand Up to Racism (SUTR) counter-demonstration were left without stewarding or clear direction. The lack of organisation alienated a layer of trade unionists and other activists.

The unions' policy of financing SUTR in return for being seen to do something against the far right and racism has failed. Set piece mobilisations which demanded not much more than endorsement, or, in the case of the NEU a table full of unused merch, won't work when the far right can get many thousands on the streets of London, or are outside migrant hotels week-in-and-week-out, or when hate crime is [on the rise](#).

SUTR/SWP has turned to organising more local protests and launched the starry Together Alliance. They have not created organising space for activists to democratically shape this increased activity. Worse, SUTR have counterposed their own organisation to that of others. For example, in October in East London SUTR organised an anti-fascist "assembly" without involving the local branch of Unison which is very active on this issue.

Stewarding has increased on some SUTR mobilisations but they continue to avoid the necessary physical confrontations with the far right and rely on the police to manage set piece demonstrations.

Resources

In the last two years the [TUC has produced](#) more of their own resources and training on combating the far right in workplaces. Some unions have begun to make specific initiatives. For example, [Unison has produced](#) a guide to opposing Reform in the run up to the May council elections. As with the TUC, the guide builds on the idea that workers will trust the trade union in a workplace. However there is no indication that the union will be urgently recruiting people to do the talking with potential Reform voters.

For Workers' Liberty, only trade unions, allied to the communities at the sharp end of these attacks, have anything like the strength to beat back the far-right and cohere strong support for self-defence, but the union must take more than a perfunctory initiative.

We also think the labour movement needs a coherent political response based on working-class solidarity – for unity with migrant workers, for a reversal of cuts, for public services, housing,

jobs, for a working-class offensive to take wealth and power from the rich.

Labour movement organisations are starting to take small steps to build up a fight based on these principles and all of these initiatives need now to be consistently built up:

- In the RMT, members on the London Underground have called on their union to "produce literature making the political case against Reform and the far right."

- In Nottingham the trades council supported a conference held in Beeston in November to combat Reform and racism; the conference has set up an ongoing campaign.

- In Sheffield the trades council's anti-far right committee is organising around stewarding and leafleting workplaces.

- London members of the PCS have set up a Trade Unions Against the Far Right campaign. They are organising around mobilising unions for a counter-demonstration against Tommy Robinson in May and seeking to spread the network beyond London.

Workers' Liberty are discussing what we can do to help these efforts. We think we should:

- Sustain and publicise existing labour movement initiatives; share materials for organising and leafleting in local areas and workplaces.

- Advocate the setting up of local committees/networks involving all left activists, trade unionists and community activists to oppose the far right, fight the cuts and defend migrants. In our view, it is necessary to make specific appeals to Labour Party, Your Party and Green Party members to join initiatives.

- Encourage face-to-face political discussion in these groups.

- Organise work to combat Reform on campuses where we are active as students or workers and draw them into campaigns in their cities.

- While we have criticisms of SUTR and the Together Alliance it is better to push for them to open up to democratic decision-making (by making speeches and talking to people face-to-face).

Finally, we will argue these political lines inside our trade unions, at trade union conferences and continue to oppose Labour Party policy inside the party. □



The great council house giveaway

By Bas Hardy

There has always been a housing crisis in Britain. Engels wrote about it in the 1870s and a century later people were still living in some of the Salford slums he described. Even in the time of “full employment”, homelessness had not gone away as the groundbreaking BBC TV drama *Cathy Come Home* reminded viewers in 1966.

The housing crisis in Britain was drastically worsened by the “right to buy” legislation in the early days of the Thatcher government, involving a massive sell off of communally owned assets, namely council housing.

It was a form of social engineering. The intent was to transform sections of the working class into property owners and therefore Tory voters. Discounts of up to 70% were offered, and, together with other knock down sales of public assets, that served to keep the Tories in office for nearly two decades. At the same time, councils were barred from building new housing. That bar has been lifted only marginally in recent years (2,260 council homes built in England in 2024-5).

The flogging off of council houses turned them from homes into marketable assets. Over 40% of the maybe two million council homes sold since then have been acquired by private landlords who are renting them out, often at exorbitant rates.

A major vote-driver in Zohran Mamdani’s election campaign was the resentment felt by New Yorkers that although

they were born in the city they couldn’t afford to live there. Many Londoners would have similar feelings, and I for one take it personally.

That situation didn’t, however, apply to my maternal grandparents, courtesy of progressive housing policies adopted in the 1920s.

If you are in London in the summer with time to spare take a trip on the Jubilee line to Bermondsey station, go for a short walk north to the Thames, and enjoy a drink in a riverside pub if you can afford the prices. Along there you will come across the statue of Alfred Salter, who represented the area as a Labour MP in the interwar years.

On your walk you might also encounter some houses in Wilson Grove and Janeway Street. These were held to be pioneering housing for the working class. Their construction was aided by the Wheatley Housing Act, the only significant measure of the first and short-lived 1924 Labour government.

Salter

In Salter’s words “A large part of Bermondsey needs pulling down and rebuilding... Thousands of dark, wretched, out-of-date hovels, erected 150 or 180 years ago are totally unfit to house a growing family.” Infant mortality rates were almost double the London average.

My mother and her six siblings were rehoused there from a slum prone to flooding from the Thames. Their new home was a “garden cottage”, with bathroom, indoor toilet, garden. She remembered visits from European (prob-



Wilson Grove

ably German) delegations “fact-finding” about social housing. Apparently they opined that such housing in their country would be regarded as “far too good for working people”.

Being rehoused didn’t make them any less poor. I can remember going to my grandmother’s house when I was a kid and letting myself in via a key dangling on a string the other side of the letter box. People weren’t worried about being burgled when they had bugger all to nick! The point was that they lived in decent housing, and only paid fractionally more than in their previous slum conditions.

Salter’s desire to turn the whole of Bermondsey into a garden city was stymied by the Tory governments in power for most of the inter war years. Such were the limits of municipal socialism. As far as the workers’ cottages on Wilson

Grove go nowadays, you are welcome to buy one if you can rustle up a million quid!

It is a sad state of affairs that working class people can’t have the types of housing offered to some of their predecessors a hundred years ago. The sale of council houses must end, and councils must be empowered to build affordable housing. Those who hoard land which could be used for housing should have it confiscated. Nationalisation of the building industry is another must.

Returning to Engels, the “housing question” can be addressed permanently through the socialist reorganisation of society. “As long as the capitalist mode of production continues to exist it is folly to hope for an isolated solution to the housing question”. □

Trans rights

High Court mostly backs EHRC

By Simon Nelson

The High Court has dismissed a judicial review brought by the Good Law Project (GLP) and three anonymised claimants against the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC). It upheld the lawfulness of the EHRC’s “interim update” from April 2025 on single-sex toilets and changing facilities.

Although the EHRC later withdrew that “update”, the Court concluded that it accurately reflected the legal position after the *For Women Scotland* case, and that the EHRC had not acted unlawfully.

The judgment marks a set-

back for trans rights campaigners, although not necessarily a total or unexpected one.

The Court did find that there was “scope for a strong argument” that allowing a trans woman to use a female toilet did not amount to discrimination against a cis man. Frivolous lawsuits by gender critical activists against trans-inclusive organisations may now have less grip.

However, the ruling effectively endorses workplace policies to compel trans employees to use gender-neutral toilets, even where they have long used toilets of their own gender without comment or problem. It thus increases the

risk of outing and stigma, but the judge sidelined that with the comment: “being the subject of comment by others is a burden that anyone can expect to bear from time to time”.

Supreme Court

The case followed the Supreme Court’s judgement (16 April 2025) in *For Women Scotland*, initially just about women representatives on official committees in Scotland, but including comment on the Equality Act 2010. The EHRC rushed out an “interim update”, explaining how employers and service providers could lawfully provide single-sex facilities, and when they might restrict access by

reference to “biological sex”, effectively barring trans people from toilets of their own gender, or, if there no gender-neutral toilets, from any toilets at all in public spaces.

The GLP and the individual claimants argued that this update misstated the law and encouraged discriminatory practices against trans people. It was a de facto exclusion of trans people from public life and breached both the EHRC’s statutory duties and the European Convention on Human Rights.

Recent reports say that the Women’s Institute, which declared itself forced to comply and ban trans women, has had

local groups shutting down as a consequence, because organisers no longer want to go on or because, with the ban, they cannot attract young women. The WI plans to launch a network of non-exclusionary “sisterhood groups” in April 2026 to compensate, but how that will work has yet to be seen.

The High Court stated that the GLP itself lacked “standing” to bring its case, granting permission only to the individual claimants. That aspect of the ruling may have broader implications for public-interest litigation brought by campaigning organisations. It will cost the GLP over £300,000. □

The alternatives in Cuba: a different view

By Martyn Ahmet

Paul Abbot's article of 21 January (*Solidarity* 759) gives a bleak but a pretty accurate description of the immediate crisis facing Cuba. Blackouts, shortages, deteriorating public health, and the loss of Venezuelan oil supplies are real, material facts. So too is the renewed aggressiveness of US policy in the region. Where the article goes wrong, I believe, is not in its description of hardship, but in how it explains it and what it treats as politically plausible outcomes.

The framework running through the piece is familiar: Cuba is presented as a single-party dictatorship consolidated early on, ruled by an elite that suppressed autonomous working-class politics, and now facing a crisis that may open space for "genuinely democratic working-class forces" to emerge in the event of collapse. That framing sounds radical, but it rests on a profound abstraction from power and history.

The US blockade is acknowledged but not treated as determinative. This is not a minor omission. Cuba has endured the longest and most comprehensive economic blockade imposed on any country in modern history. It is designed explicitly to produce scarcity, demoralisation, and political breakdown. To discuss Cuban bureaucracy, shortages, or "alternatives" without placing this fact at the centre is to misidentify cause and effect.

What kind of "capitalist" country responds to underdevelopment by abolishing illiteracy in the space of a single year? In 1961, under Education Minister Armando Hart, Cuba reduced illiteracy from roughly 23 percent to under 4 percent through a nationwide mobilisation of workers, students, and peasants. This was not welfare reform administered from above, but a mass social mobilisation rooted in the revolution itself. Capitalist states do not act this way. They manage inequality; they do not uproot it through collective action.

The article's reliance on an abstract debate about whether the working class played the "correct" theoretical role in the revolution compounds the problem. Serious historical work has long challenged the idea that the Cuban Revolution was simply a guerrilla substitution for working-class struggle.

Steve Cushion's *A Hidden History of the Cuban Revolution* documents the decisive role played by workers through

strikes, sabotage, urban networks, and logistical support that made the guerrilla victory possible. Armando Hart's own account in his book *Aldabonazo: Inside the Cuban revolutionary underground* further illustrates the depth of underground organisation and popular involvement. These works do not present Cuba as a textbook proletarian revolution, but they decisively undermine the idea that workers were marginal or passive.

Insisting on measuring the Cuban process against an idealised model of proletarian revolution imported from very different social conditions turns theory into a veto. It has been one of the recurring dangers besetting socialist analysis of Cuba: endless argument about what the revolution should have been, rather than concrete engagement with what it actually was and is.

Trotsky once argued that socialists defend trade unions even when they are bureaucratised, conservative, or badly led, because they are products of the historical struggle of the working class. Their weaknesses do not negate their class character. When capital attacks them, we defend them not because they are perfect, but because they are ours.

The same method should apply to Cuba.

Dismantled

The Cuban Revolution dismantled the old ruling class, abolished capitalist domination, and created new social relations. Its institutions are deformed, bureaucratic, and often deeply frustrating, but they are not neutral instruments of a new exploiting class in the straightforward sense implied by Abbot's analysis. They remain the outcome of a revolution that working people continue to identify as their own, even while criticising it sharply.

This point is reinforced by the concrete evidence contained in Helen Yaffe's excellent book, *We Are Cuba*, which examines how participation, debate, and consent have functioned within Cuban society under conditions of permanent economic warfare. Yaffe's account does not deny bureaucracy or repression, but it shows a society in which popular identification with the revolution has persisted precisely because its social gains are understood as collectively won and collectively defended. That reality sits uneasily with claims that Cuba has sim-



ply crystallised into a new class dictatorship.

This is also why the article's conclusion is troubling. Collapse is treated as a possible opening. In reality, under conditions of blockade, US pressure, and Miami-based exile politics, collapse would not produce democratic working-class alternatives. It would produce a scramble dominated by pro-US, pro-market forces with vastly greater resources, organisation, and external backing. To suggest otherwise is not realism. It is hope substituted for strategy.

Framing the situation primarily in terms of "alternatives" also risks posing the problem incorrectly. In a society under prolonged blockade and external threat, the immediate question is not which political model might replace the existing one in the abstract, but how existing social gains can be defended and extended under worsening conditions. For Cuban workers, the alternative to the current system is not a menu of democratic options waiting to be selected, but the very real prospect of social collapse, mass privatisation, and the dismantling of universal provision under conditions shaped decisively by imperial power.

Economic debates within the revolution further complicate the picture. Carlos Tablada's book *Che Guevara: Economics and Politics in the Transition to Socialism* and Helen Yaffe's *Che Guevara: The Economics of Revolution* both show that Cuban leaders were acutely aware of the dangers of bureaucratisation and market restoration. Che's Budgetary Finance System was an attempt, however

limited, to resist managerial self-interest and commodity logic, not an embrace of bureaucratic rule. These were not decorative debates. They shaped real policy choices under severe constraints.

Internationalist socialism does not mean defending everything the Cuban state does. It does mean opposing the blockade unconditionally and rejecting analyses that treat the weakening or collapse of a besieged post-capitalist society as politically neutral. In the present context, it is not.

The question is not whether Cuba has contradictions. It clearly does. The question is whether socialists respond to those contradictions by defending the historical gains of a revolution under siege while supporting struggles to deepen participation and accountability, or by theorising collapse as an opportunity. On that point, Abbot's article, I contend, offers the wrong answer. □

Further reading

Steve Cushion, *A Hidden History of the Cuban Revolution: How the Working Class Shaped the Guerrillas' Victory*

Armando Hart, *Aldabonazo: Inside the Cuban Revolutionary Underground*

Carlos Tablada, *Che Guevara: Economics and Politics in the Transition to Socialism*
Helen Yaffe, *Che Guevara: The Economics of Revolution*

Helen Yaffe, *We Are Cuba* (2020)

Cuban Ministry of Education data on the 1961 National Literacy Campaign



How Iran became a despotism

Iran's Islamic Republic came out of a mass movement against the bloody dictatorship of the Shah, but produced a regime no less repressive than that of the Shah. The regime tightened during the eight-year war with Iraq, 1980-8, but was despotic even before that. Yet left-wing ideas had been common in the movement against the Shah. How did they get sidelined, and why did much of the left praise the Islamic Republic as "anti-imperialist"? This excerpt is abridged from *Workers' Liberty* 3/5, bit.ly/wl-3-5

By Paul Hampton

Part of the explanation for the left's failure lies in its repression at the hands of the Khomeini's government. For example when the Fadaian refused to return the weapons it seized during the insurrection on 9-11 February 1979 and organised a demonstration at Tehran University, Khomeini denounced them as "a group of bandits and unlawful elements" and "non-Muslims at war with Islam". The left was harassed by Hezbollah from the beginning – and by other forces of the new state such as the Pasdaran until it was finally driven underground.

But the central failure of the left in Iran and internationally, which conditioned all else, was its ideological errors. Almost the entire left was Stalinist, and the impoverished Stalinised pseudo-Marxism prevented any of its constituents from charting an independent working class path.

The left perceived the Shah largely as a puppet of the US, and Iran in general as simply dominated by imperialism.

The result was the "theory" of the two-stage revolution, whereby the Iranian working class was expected to play a subordinate role in a general "democratic" struggle to overthrow the Pahlavi dynasty. It meant that the leadership of such a "democratic revolution" was assigned to other social forces, providing they were sufficiently "anti-imperialist".

This led the left towards political subordination to the mullahs. Almost the whole of the left failed to grasp the specific character of Khomeini's movement and the type of state he explicitly envisaged creating after replacing the Shah. At its worst, the Tudeh party peddled the illusion of the potential "non-capitalist" path of development for the regime. But most believed that because the regime was "anti-imperialist" (i.e. anti-American) it was in some sense progressive.

The left did not grasp that, given the forces involved in the opposition movement, the state that would emerge after the overthrow of the Shah could be pro-national capital, independent of global capital, and simultaneously viciously anti-working class. The lauding

of "militant Muslims" blurred the reactionary nature of Khomeini's rule.

The absence of a class perspective led to the underestimation of the strike committees and later the factory shuras, built by workers to defend their interests. As Assef Bayat put it: "Almost all of the left was surprised by the sudden emergence of the shuras. Almost all the left-wing organisations, as well as the shuras themselves, were confused about what to do and about what kind of possible role the shuras could play politically."

The left was also unable to grasp the important dynamic of the struggle for women's liberation. From the International Women's Day protests in March 1979 and in the two years that followed, women waged a persistent struggle against the regime. But the left did not understand that the fight against the veil and other restrictions on women were a vital part of the struggle for democracy and for women's liberation.

Nor did the left fight the right to self-determination of the national minorities.

Bayat summed it up: "The most important limitation, however, was the absence of an effective political force committed to organising the working class for the strategic objective of socialist construction."

The largest left organisation, the Fadaian, had around half a million supporters. It already had some credibility after its guerrilla campaign against the Shah.

Sharply

However, it did not sharply attack the new regime until it was attacked in August 1979. One measure of the Fadaian's ideological confusion was its split in June 1980, when the majority joined the Tudeh party, i.e. the Communist party and representatives of the USSR in Iran.

The Tudeh party pledged its support for Khomeini's government in February 1979 and remained its staunch ally. This went as far as actually helping the state smash the left. The Tudeh party told its supporters in August 1981: "Uncovering the policies of the counter-revolution in the workplace, in the family and in any place where the masses are present is one of most important duties." It was clear what this meant when the Fadaian Majority and the Tudeh party received letters of thanks from the army commander responsible for suppressing the Kurdish revolt.

There were some small organisations that attempted a more serious analysis and intervention. The Organisation of Workers' Path, ex-Fadaian and ex-Muja-



hedin supporters who opposed Maoism, argued that Khomeini's rule was a "religious-Bonapartist" regime composed of the petty bourgeoisie, bazaar bourgeoisie and semi-proletarian population, under the leadership of the clergy. The Organisation of Communist Unity (OCU) was anti-Stalinist and took part in building the women's movement.

There were also some Iranian Trotskyists. The founders became active in Britain in the 1960s. They formed an Iranian Commission within the "Mandelite" international network, the USFI. Trotskyists who had been in exile in the United States and Europe formed the Hezb-e Kargar-e Socialist – HKS (Socialist Workers' Party) in early 1979. It was publicly announced in Tehran on 22 January 1979.

The HKS faced repression from the outset. Its first public meeting on 2 March 1979 was suspended when Islamic students and Maoists attempted to break it up. However its leader Babak Zahraie held two televised debates in April and May 1979 with Khomeini's spokesman Bani-Sadr, who later became president of the regime.

The HKS was active among oil workers in Khuzestan and in the women's movement. After a series of strikes, workers in the oil and steel industries were rounded up in May 1979, including 16 HKS members. In August 1979, 14 HKS members were tried by the local "Imam's Committee", with 12 sentenced to death – later suspended.

Zahraie led a split from the HKS in the autumn of 1979, to form the Revolutionary Workers' Party (HKE). The HKE effectively offered critical support to Khomeini's regime, as did another Trotskyist group, formed in January 1981, the Workers' Unity Party (HVK). But they suffered the same fate as the HKS, and were finally snuffed out by 1982.

The international left had the neces-

sary materials to analyse the Iranian social formation, the nature of mullahs and the lessons of past defeats – but it largely failed to do so.

The group that deserves particular ignominy is the US Socialist Workers' Party (US SWP). Once the pride of the Orthodox Trotskyist movement, it had become a Castroite, semi-Stalinist sect. The US SWP deserves particular dishonour because it had close relations with HKS and the other Trotskyist organisations – and was the intellectual author of the political line of critical support for Khomeini.

The US SWP defined Khomeini's regime "an anti-imperialist government" (*The Militant*, 10 July 1981), exaggerating the "gains" of the rev-

olution and downplaying or simply denying the counter-revolutionary nature of the regime towards the working class.

Even in late 1981 the US SWP claimed "these shuras continue to exist under the Khomeini regime" and that Iranian Trotskyists continued to operate openly in the factories and by publishing newspapers. They argued: "Efforts to stifle debate and roll back the gains won by Iran's workers and farmers have not succeeded. Efforts to disband the workers' committees, roll back land reforms, or eliminate political parties have failed."

The British *Socialist Worker* (28 October 1978) compared Khomeini to Father Gapon to justify their tail ending.

"It is almost as though the masses have seized on a tradition that is embodied in their history – the tradition of religious opposition – the one thing they know is common to all, understood by all, and hammered this religion of theirs into a mighty weapon, that has nothing to do with godliness, or holiness and everything to do with mass power." (Joanna Rollo, *Iran: Beginning of a Revolution*, SWP pamphlet)

Brian Grogan, a leader then of the IMG (forerunner of A*CR) boasted of chanting "Allah Akhbar" on a demonstration in Tehran, justifying it on the grounds that it meant the people were stronger than the Shah's army.

"We have already explained what really lies behind this mass movement and had nonsensical it is to characterise it as a religious movement. Regardless of whatever force that may be at its head and despite whatever demands through which it may express itself, the mass movement has absolutely nothing to do with religion of any kind, let alone a reactionary one." (Saber Nickbin, *Iran: The Unfolding Revolution*, IMG pamphlet)

An active, interventionist third camp approach was exactly what was missing in Iran in 1978-81. □

How the Islamists crushed the workers

This excerpt recounts how Khomeini established clerical fascist rule over a population which had risen up against the Shah's dictatorship. From Workers' Liberty 3/5, bit.ly/wl-3-5

By Paul Hampton

The Shah left Iran on 16 January 1979. Crowds celebrated on the streets of Tehran. Khomeini had already appointed the Islamic Revolutionary Council in exile. He returned to Iran on 1 February 1979, greeted by millions at the airport. On 5 February he appointed Bazargan as his provisional prime minister.

An insurrection on 9-11 February 1979 brought the end of the remnants of the Shah's regime. On 11 February the army's supreme command ordered the troops back to barracks and backed Bazargan to form a government.

As the old state began to crumble, working class people took control of the basic societal functions – most importantly set up shuras (councils) in workplaces. These shuras took many forms – in Tehran alone there were as many as a thousand – and in the first months of 1979 they thrived.

The level of working class struggle remained high. The new provisional government estimated that 50,000 workers took part in new strikes in the first few months of 1979. Between February 1979 and February 1980 there were 350 separate industrial disputes.

Workers struck for higher wages, with average wages increasing by over 50% in 1979 and the minimum wage more than doubled.

Khomeini's attitude towards the working class was clear from the outset. He made preparations to confront the strike committees before his return to Iran – and began attacking the burgeoning labour movement from the moment he returned.

On 20 January 1978 Khomeini established the Committee for Coordination and Investigation of Strikes (CCIS), which included Bazargan and future president Rafsanjani. Its main tasks were to "call off those strikes which jeopardise the work of the main industries involved in the production of people's urgent needs, and those threatening the country's survival".

Immediately after the insurrection [9-11 February 1979] oil strike leaders were arrested by the new regime and charged as counter-revolutionaries.

Bazargan's spokesman said: "Those who imagine the revolution continues are mistaken. The revolution is over. The period of reconstruction has begun".

Three days after the insurrection Khomeini ordered all strikers to return to work "in the name of the revolution". The provisional government opposed the shuras and set up a special force of

appointed inspectors inside the plants to report on their activities. Instead the government advocated syndicates.

On 18 February the Islamic Republic Party. Militias and other storm troopers such as the Hezbollahi (Party of Allah) were organised to attack opponents in the streets and in workplaces.

Speaking in Qom on 1 March 1979, Khomeini said: "Democracy is another word for the usurpation of God's authority to rule... What the nation wants is an Islamic republic; not just a republic, not a democratic republic, not a democratic Islamic republic. Do not use the term 'democratic'. That is the Western style."

In March 1979 Khomeini resorted to threats: "Any disobedience from, and sabotage of the implementation of the plans of the Provisional Government will be regarded as opposition against the genuine Islamic Revolution. The provocateurs and agents will be introduced to people as counter-revolutionary elements, so that the nation will decide about them, as they did about the counter-revolutionary regime of the Shah".

Interest

On 31 March the Minister of Labour announced that the government "was in favour of Syndicates and believes that workers can defend their interests only through a healthy Syndicate; therefore the ministry will support such organisations and intends to dissolve any other forms of organisation which are wasteful."

The government began interfering in the workplaces, appointing its own representatives as managers and trying to downgrade the role of the shuras. It encouraged groups of supporters to establish Islamic societies in workplaces to emphasise the priority of religion and Islamic attitudes to work and property.

Many workers did not accept this. But the provisional government pressed ahead with plans for an Islamic constitution. On 30-31 March they organised a referendum, with the question: Yes or No to an Islamic Republic. The voting slips were red for No and green for Yes. Members of local Komitehs handed voters their preferred voting slip and stamped their identity cards.

In May 1979 the government introduced the Law of Special Force to prevent shuras intervening "in the affairs of the managements and of the appointments" of government-nominated managers.

On 6 May Khomeini ordered the creation of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards, the Pasdaran, which were formally founded on 16 June.

The regime nationalised 483 factories, 14 private banks and all insurance companies in June 1979. It took control of 70% of the private sector, paying compensation to foreign and domestic cap-

italists. They did so in reality because workers in many plants had already effectively ousted their bosses and the regime wanted to regain control by imposing its own managers.

In addition, the Islamic Mustazafin Foundation took over the assets of the Shah's family Pahlavi Foundation, which included 20% of the assets of all private companies. State managers were appointed to impose government policy.

The regime also used economic sabotage to undermine factories with shuras.

On 22 June a demonstration at Tehran University demanding a popularly elected assembly was broken by the Hezbollahi. The government decided that an Assembly of Experts would draft the new constitution. The new constitution, endorsed by referendum in December 1979, contained articles designed to restrict the shuras. For example Article 105 said that, "decisions taken by the shuras must not be against Islamic principles and the country's laws".

During Ramadan, on 25 July 1979 Khomeini announced a ban on music on radio and television, comparing it with opium.

On 7 August 1979 the government enforced a two-month old press law, with the Pasdaran occupying the offices of the liberal daily paper, *Ayandegan*. Later that month the government banned 41 opposition papers and took over two large publishing houses. This was a significant blow to the left, whose papers had a circulation of around a million.

In August Khomeini created the Reconstruction Crusade, to repair roads and government buildings. Workers from General Motors, Caterpillar and Iran National, were sent out on this, on the grounds that parts were not available in their factories. Strikes and sit-ins were declared illegal, as "communist conspiracies".

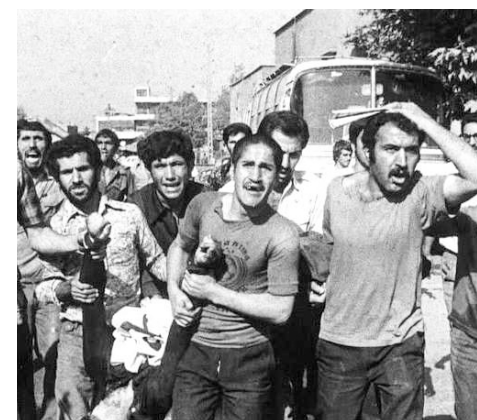
Repression

The first widespread wave of outright suppression against the shuras was launched in August. Many independent shura activists were arrested and a number of them executed.

Khomeini's forces also attacked the left. On 12 August a demonstration called by the National Front, Fadaian and Mujahedin was attacked by Hezbollahi and Pasdaran. The following day the offices of the Fadaian and Mujahedin were besieged by Khomeini's forces.

Khomeini made his attitude clear in a speech on 19 August in Qom: "We made a mistake. If we had banned all these parties and fronts, broken all their pens, set up gallows in the main squares and cut down all these corrupt people and plotters, we would not be facing all these problems."

The government also used Islamic Associations and "Islamic shuras" to



undermine independent organisation in workplaces.

These Islamic Associations had the following functions: indoctrination of labour with the ruling ideology; policing the workplace; mobilising workers behind the regime. According to Bayat they were viewed by many workers as "new SAVAK agents who grow beards instead of wearing ties".

When Iraq attacked Iran in late September 1980, the result was "an hysterical chauvinist wave which rapidly engulfed the country, including the working class and most of the left". The other major effect was the militarisation of society, with the regular army revived, the Pasdaran trebled and new organisations such as the Basij corps set up. Even the Islamic Associations were armed.

Even in 1981, militant workers were defying the dictates of the government. But by June 1981 the last traces of independence by the shuras were stamped out. In the Iran Cars factory, the armed Pasdaran had rushed into the factory and begun arresting shura members and other activists according to a blacklist prepared by the Islamic Association.

The number of industrial disputes fell from 180 in 1980-81 to 82 in 1981-82. Workers in the oil industry, who had won a 40-hour week through struggle, lost it as the Revolutionary Council decreed a 44-hour week.

As Assef Bayat described it: "As for workers, Islamisation of workplaces goes hand in hand with Islamisation (better to say regimentation) of leisure. The factory is assumed to be a barricade against kofar (infidels), where the agirs (labourers) have to listen to official religious sermons as well as perform 'the divine duty of production'. Hence, massive dispatches of factory mullahs, a religious transformation of the atmosphere in factories, the putting up of special pictures, posters, huge slogans on the walls and the loud broadcasting of official speeches during break and lunchtimes etc."

The subordination of workers was summed up by the head of the judiciary in March 1983: in the factories "the management is the brain, the Islamic Associations are the eyes, the rest the hands". □



Beating Reform and beating racism

By Martin Thomas

In *Solidarity* 760, Bas Hardy asked: “are racist views and attitudes less prevalent in working-class communities [now than in the 1960s]? Is Britain less racist than it was all those years ago?”

As Bas also writes, it is difficult “even to measure the extent of racial prejudice”. We have no racist-o-meter. But we have to try for some approximations.

I’d say that, in inner London anyway, and probably elsewhere, racism has decreased markedly. It seems to be reviving now, but in a complicated way.

For some years I taught maths at the school (built 2005) just down Lynton Road from Bas’s childhood home, described by him in his article.

For the school’s “induction” of new teachers, it used to take us (maybe still does) to Southwark Park Road, the nearest “shopping street”, to impress us with how run-down the area is. It is in fact smarter than it was when I moved

to London in 1972, but in this bit of Bermondsey if not others “gentrification” is limited.

The students at the school (from Peckham as well as Bermondsey) are mostly working-class, and mostly people of colour (of diverse backgrounds), with maybe 20% white British. When I started teaching in London, in 1972, in Dalston, the white students and the Afro-Caribbean (there were few from other backgrounds) usually chose to sit separately, and almost all the teachers were white. None of that in Lynton Road. (Also, the Lynton Road students do vastly better at maths than the Dalston ones used to).

Anecdotally

There is less racism. Anecdotally, I see that also in previously almost-all-white working-class areas, like where I live in south-east Islington.

Things are worse elsewhere than in London. But the 1960s were worse again. Britain-wide surveys from 1964-

79 showed over 85% saying “too many” immigrants had been let in (and that was a time of net emigration). The long-term trend since then has been positive. Fewer (20-odd % to 40-odd) said yes to similar questions in 2023.

In recent years, several comrades have told me about more open racism or anti-immigrant talk in their workplaces.

We know that the period before Trump’s election victories and his mass deportation drive was a decline in anti-immigrant feeling.

Maybe in Britain, too, a political-party shift is driving more people to develop and express racist strands in their thinking, rather than increased racism coming first.

Brexit

A majority voted for Brexit, even though on the evidence very few think it has improved anything, and most aren’t surprised about that. Brexit has been the only political victory Nigel Farage can

credit himself with. But voters are flocking to Mr Brexit.

Lots of working-class people have become fed up with the left and the labour movement, seeing us as unable to “deliver” anything on our ideas even if they are good in the abstract. They look instead for politicians who may deliver “something” which might make “the nation” “great again”, even if they can do nothing about changing the world. That angle enlarges all the nationalist, anti-immigrant, or racist strands in their thinking which may have been there before, but less expressed and less decisive.

If that’s even half-accurate, then fighting back has to be as much about showing in action that the labour movement and the left can win some of “our” things as remonstrating that empathy is good and Reform is bad. □

Our books and pamphlets

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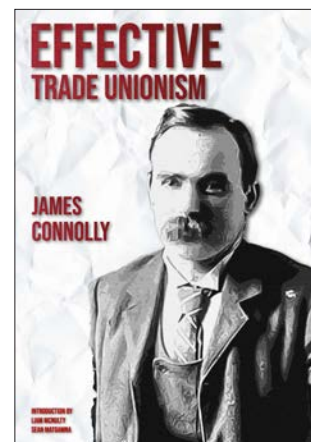
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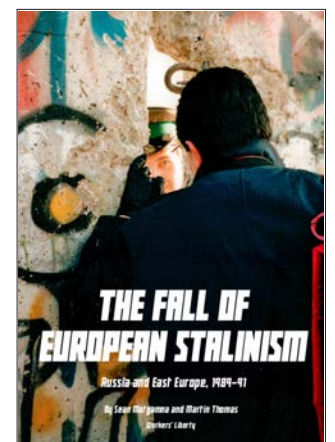
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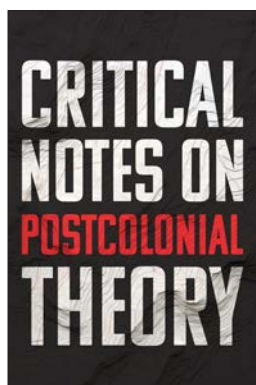
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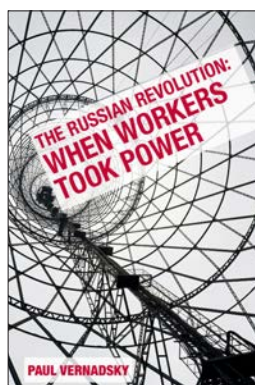
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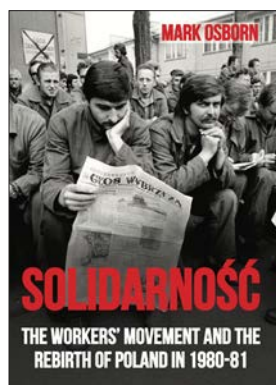
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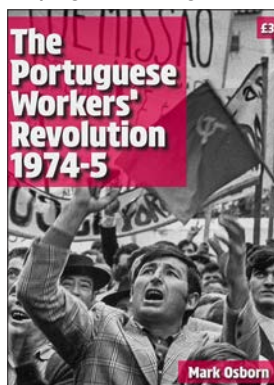
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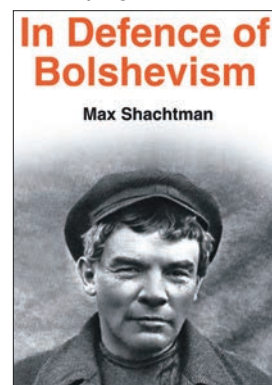
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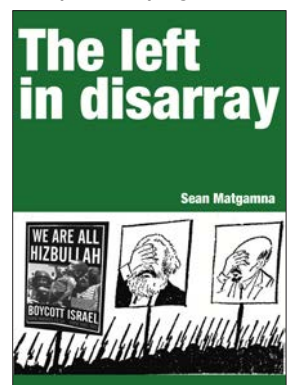
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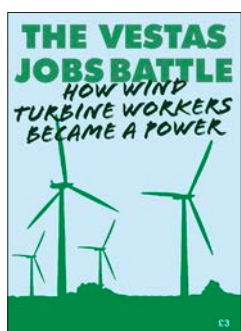
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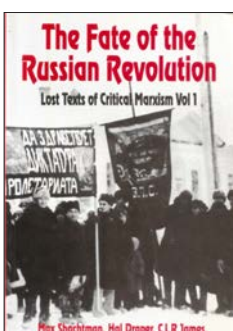
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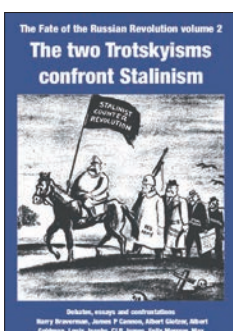
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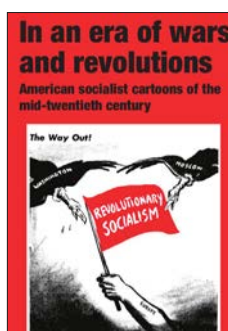
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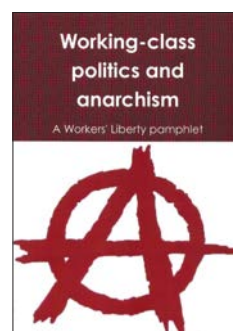
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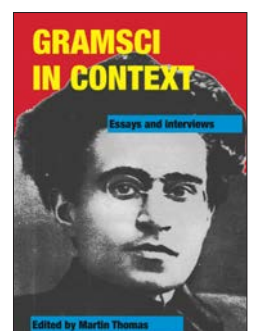
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Turn for the worse since July Revolution

By Colin Foster

Tarique Rahman, who had been in exile in London from 2008 until a few weeks ago, was sworn in as Bangladesh's new prime minister on 17 February, after his Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and allies won 212 seats out of 350 in the 12 February election.

BNP is an old, corrupt, and right-leaning party, so this is a poor outcome from the "July revolution" of 2024.

Then, brave student rebels, coming back onto the streets again and again despite killings, finally forced the army to abandon the Awami League government, in power since 2008, and prime minister Sheikh Hasina to flee to India.

As with other recent youth revolts – Nepal, Madagascar, Morocco – the students had no formulated political programme, and no party. A caretaker government was formed under the 84-year-old economist and Nobel Prize winner Muhammad Yunus, with some student ministers.

As always, if the movement from below cannot assert its own coherent politics, then someone else, from above, will assert theirs.

The BNP and the now-banned Awami League have dominated Bangladesh's politics since independence in 1971. Both of them have been corrupt patronage-machines, with the Awami League have a slightly more secular, welfare-ist,

and pro-India shading.

The biggest political setback came before polling day. On 28 December 2025 the National Citizen Party, formed in February 2025 by student rebels from 2024 with a neither-left-nor-right pitch, made an alliance with Bangladesh's long-established Islamist party, Jamaat-e-Islami. The Jamaat-led alliance won 77 seats, including just six for the NCP. Opinion polls before the election had suggested a better score.

Going from those polls, some activists in the region had feared that Jamaat could even win the election, despite its huge historical discredit from having supported Pakistan against the 1971 war for independence of Bangladesh (which from 1947 to 1971 had been "East Pakistan", though separated geographically from and linguistically and culturally distinct from the main body of Pakistan).

Organised

Hein Htet Kyaw wrote: "National Citizen Party, the political party led by the student activists who organised the 'July Revolution', was marginal and decided to form an alliance not with more centrist BNP but with Islamist Jamaat-e-Islami



which publicly stated women were unfit for leadership and condemned working women as prostitutes. This highlights how the early democratic goals of the student-led movement have been superseded by a tyrannical theocratic agenda. This transition mirrors how the 'Islamist-leftism' stole the 1979 Iranian Revolution from the secular left, where such coalition ultimately devolved into a fascistic and despotic regime".

In 2024, Sheikh Hasina had tried to "consolidate power by using the political image of her father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who was the revolutionary figure within the Bangladesh liberation movement. During the 'July Revolution', she accused the students who were protesting against the quota system under which around 30 percent of government jobs were reserved for descendants of freedom fighters from the country's 1971 liberation war against Pakistan as the 'Razakars'. The Razakar militia were the pro-Pakistan paramilitary group that played a role in ethnic cleansing against the Bengali people along with the Pakistan Army.

"The students pushed back by owning the word 'Razakars' with slogans such as 'Asked for rights and became a Razakar' and 'Who are you? Who am I – Razakar, Razakar?' ... Statues of... Sheikh Mujibur Rahman were destroyed, since the protesters considered the influence of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was being appropriated by Sheikh Hasina".

"Even though Bangladesh Nationalist Party had historically allied themselves with Islamists and conservative factions such as Jamaat-e-Islami in the past, it seems to have a strategy to use persuade the secular and liberal voter base of Awami League during the 2026 Bangladeshi general election".

The BNP government is likely to continue a tilt made by the caretaker government after India gave refuge to Sheikh Hasina, allying more with China and Pakistan rather than India. Bangladesh used to ally with India because its victory in its 1971 independence war owed a lot to Indian aid.

Meanwhile, Hindus and other minorities in Bangladesh are under threat.

"In 1951, Hindus were 22% of the population of the East Pakistan (contemporary Bangladesh). By 1974, it decreased to 13.4% and now in 2020s, Hindus are about 8%, a tremendous drop in population over 70 years, with reasons ranging from exodus to massacres". In the Chittagong

Hill Tracts region, bordering Myanmar, 98% of the population had been minority "Jumma" peoples. By 2022 that was below 50%.

"There were 258 incidents of violence against minorities in the first half of the 2025 alone according to the Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council".

Some ten years ago Workers' Liberty had communication with the Communist Party of Bangladesh Marxist-Leninist which, despite its name, had moved away from Maoism towards the ideas of [Trotsky and Gramsci](#).

We have not been able to re-establish contact more recently, and do not know whether that group is still operational.

A "Democratic United Front" of nine parties, most of them apparently splinters of the old Stalinist movement, stood in the 12 February election, but won no seats. Opinion polls before 12 February showed low scores for groups other than the BNP-led and Jamaat-led alliances.

Bangladesh has seen lively workers' struggles, especially in its huge garment industry. Working-class political representation there is still weak. □

• See workersliberty.org for other coverage around the Bangladesh election: [Hein Htet Kyaw](#) – [Sapan News](#) – Comment by [Taslima Nasrin](#) – [Left Renewal](#) blog □

More online

Syria and the Kurds

Dashty Jamal on the Syrian offensive against the former Kurdish autonomous area:
bit.ly/s-dashty



Strong pickets at Northumbria

By a Northumbria student

Staff at Northumbria university struck on 12-13 February against bosses' plans to transfer them from the TPS (Teachers' Pension Scheme) to the USS (Universities Superannuation Scheme). Turnout was great at picket lines on both days. Despite the adverse weather conditions, the shouts of discontented staff could be heard across Northumbria's City Campus.

The pickets started around 8:45 in the morning, at various locations

around the campus. At 11am they gathered at the Sutherland Building, where University bosses are based, to make some noise.

There is further action in the coming weeks: 17-19 February and 2-6 March. The pressure appears to be mounting. Strikes could continue beyond the dates the UCU have already stated. 28 MPs have signed a petition condemning the management's actions, and a petition to "stop the steal" is gaining traction, with 1,000 signatures so far. □



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

"Good for them!" And now coordination?

By Jay Dawkey

"We've heard very little about it from the press?" "Well, they only care when it's drivers. If it's an all-out strike, it's all about drivers wanting more money. They've no idea about anyone else".

The lack of press attention and the lower-key nature of a strike at a single Fleet maintenance depot have meant the four days of action have come as a bit of a shock even for some drivers.

"I'm not crossing their pickets". Management had foreseen this and the likely disruption, and made it possible for people to book on at alternative locations or at the station where they would pick up their train.

Lots of drivers welcome the extra disruption. "Good for them, we need to stick up for ourselves more".



London Underground Fleet workers at Northfields depot are taking four days of strike action against an overbearing and dismissive management culture. After more than two years of complaints of unsafe practices, bullying and the suspension of a rep, RMT members got an 80% yes vote for strikes and an overtime ban, which they've had in place for four months. Threats of sacking staff, refusal of annual leave, and abuse of "goodwill" have created a hostile environment, pitting senior fleet managers against the entire workforce. Cockfosters Depot, at the other end of the Piccadilly line, has refused to take on their work for the duration of the strike. The mood on the pickets is positive, with a total shutdown of trains moving in or out of the depot, and all maintenance and defect repairs stopped.

If we can coordinate this Fleet dispute with the train ballot currently under-

tion to push management back across grades. □

Kino Eye

HOUSING PROBLEMS

A landmark documentary on housing

By John Cunningham

Bas Hardy's article "Racism, housing and Winfred Atwell" (*Solidarity* 760) had me searching in the archive.

Housing Problems (1935), directed by Edgar Anstey and Arthur Elton, was one of the key films in the British documentary movement of the 1930s and introduced techniques which are now commonplace in documentary. In the film, slum dwellers in Stepney speak directly to the camera about the appalling conditions they are forced to live in: overcrowding, vermin infestation, cramped and damp rooms, and innumerable structural problems.

Direct address to the camera was new and much talked about, although today it looks rather stiff and formal. Graham Greene, writing in the *Spectator*, asked his readers to "compare the

characters in *Housing Problems* with the frightened ironed-out personalities with censored scripts whom the BBC present as documentary."

It wasn't quite so straightforward; Ruby Grierson (sister of John Grierson, the producer) worked with the speakers beforehand, although she didn't coach them. The film was sponsored by the gas industry and much was made of their role in supporting new dwellings where people were rehoused. The overall approach was described by John Corner, in his book on documentary, as "managerialist."

There is no sign of any self-activity or campaigning by the people of Stepney. They are shown as victims of capitalism to be delivered from their suffering by the powers-that-be. Nevertheless, *Housing Problems*, along with *Coalface*

(made in the same year), was an important landmark in the history of documentary. □

Join Workers' Liberty!

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

MHCLG to re-ballot from 2 March

By a PCS member

Following well attended membership meetings and a survey of members, the MHCLG (Housing and Local Government) National Branch Executive Committee (BEC) of the PCS civil service union has decided to re-ballot members for renewed industrial action in the face of the [very limited](#) management proposals to resolve the union's long running dispute.

The BEC's decision has been approved

by the PCS National Disputes Committee. The ballot will run for six weeks from 2 March to 15 April. It is the right decision.

Accepting a management "offer" in which the positive aspects are subject to ill defined caveats and further negotiations, while management steam ahead with further office closures and are free to increase and enforce office attendance mandates, would undermine PCS's credibility. But entering into further talks

without any leverage, even on the basis of refraining from formal acceptance of the weak offer, is very unlikely to produce significant gains which were not forthcoming in the six weeks of talks towards the end of last year, which followed extensive action.

Indeed, members were further upset last week (9-13 Feb) when senior management reiterated their intention to instigate a 60% office attendance and to roll out a new system for monitoring

attendance, with a clear intention of disciplining people who do not meet the attendance mandate.

By the time the ballot is launched four months will have elapsed since the last legal strike mandate expired. Every representative and every committed member will therefore have to work extremely hard, prioritising this campaign, to persuade enough members to vote "Yes" and to do so with a commitment taking industrial action. □

Battles over uni cuts and student loans

By Sam Myerson

Leicester university branch of the University and College Union (UCU) has just voted to renew its strike mandate for another six months. A general meeting of the UCU branch will debate and plan further strikes.

Strikes against redundancies have been running since the beginning of the year, and the focus on the ground has recently been on getting over the line in the rebalot.

Across the country there are new and continuing disputes at universities. UCU members at Southampton Solent University are, like those at Northumbria, fighting to keep their pensions in the TPS. Solent bosses have already taken 250 non academic staff out of the Local Government Pension Scheme. It is a fire



and rehire scheme by stealth.

Essex University has announced plans to close its Southend campus. This has been met with large demonstrations of workers and students. Many students

choose to study at Southend in order to stay at home and avoid additional costs.

This is all taking place under the shadow of a row brewing over payments on student loans. Many students on "Plan 2" (2012-23) loans, especially those who now work in the media, are making their voices heard.

been odious. Now no longer committed to the abolition of fees, they are calling for the government to "reform" the loan system. While this weak and vulnerable government is coming under pressure elsewhere, NUS can only mobilise seven people dressed in shark suits. □

Strike against zero pay offer

By Sam Myerson

University and College Union (UCU) members at the Sheffield International College, a subsidiary of the University of Sheffield, offering preparatory course for uni study, are striking over pay on 16, 18, 20, 24 and 26 Feb. The University have refused to offer a pay rise this year, which means a real-terms pay cut of maybe 4.2% (the Jan 2025 to Jan 2026 RPI price rise).

The university student Anti-Cuts co-

alition has been building for students from the University to join the picket lines. Meanwhile UCU at the University itself has put its anti-cuts action on ice, and students are also looking at the fight against the far right as an area of work where students have much to do.

At "re-freshers" (11 Feb) the Anti-Cuts coalition ran a stall and targeted students with leaflets against the cuts.

The campaign will meet again in the coming weeks to plan action. □

Thresholds

These loans have had the income thresholds above which ex-students have to repay repeatedly frozen (i.e. reduced in real terms), and face another freeze. Interest rates on them have [also](#) been raised. The prospect now is that a graduate earning the national minimum wage and working a 40 hour week would have to make repayments.

Fees, debt, loans, are no way to fund education. The response from the National Union of Students (NUS) has

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Mining museum bosses still stubborn

By Ken Worthington

The strike at the National Coal Mining Museum in Wakefield has now entered its 27th week. Members of Workers' Liberty have visited the picket line regularly during February and it remains strong. The striking workers remain united and determined to win the dispute despite the wet and freezing

temperatures.

But, according to the strikers' union Unison, the management at the museum has completely cut off communication since the rejection of the last pay offer. Despite the public statements from the trustees at the museum that they are working with the official arbitration service ACAS to resolve the dispute, they have failed to respond to

requests made by the union for greater financial transparency and openness over the affordability of the pay claim made by Unison.

The museum management team are also refusing to formally ask for an exemption to allow a company to come in to carry out maintenance on the mine which is part of the museum. Managers had informally requested that

workers grant an exemption, but they have refused to put this request in writing. Unison and the workers are concerned that the museum management are willing to let the pit go to rack and ruin to pressure the strikers back to work out of concern for the future viability of the museum's offer to show underground realities. □

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Ban on Palestine Action ruled unlawful

By Will Roberts

Defenders of civil liberties — and Palestine Action activists — have had two distinct reasons to celebrate since the last issue of *Solidarity*.

First, a jury cleared the “Filton Six” of all charges relating to a break-in at the factory of defence company Elbit Systems in Filton, outside Bristol. This included charges of criminal damage to property against all of the defendants, violent disorder charges for three of them. No verdict was reached on a GBH charge for allegedly attacking a security guard with a sledgehammer.

It seems that, at least to some degree, the jury were politically convinced by the goals of Palestine Action, or at least motivated to defend their right to protest, rather than on the detail of evidence. The specifics of this case may be murky, and the politics behind the action and PA more broadly may be off-beam (trying to replace an Israeli-based supplier to the British military by a non-Israeli-based

one does not particularly help the Palestinians), but the victory for the right to protest was good.

It was followed a few days later by a court ruling that the proscription of Palestine Action as a whole was “unlawful”. The Metropolitan Police announced that they would no longer be enforcing the ban (though it stays in place pending appeal), and Defend Our Juries announced that they would consequently be seeking recompense from the government for all of some 2,787 protestors arrested for supporting PA. (Around 700 have been charged). Shabana Mahmood doubled down on her decision to ban (made immediately after entering the Home Office), and announced that the government would be appealing the decision.

The proscription of PA was a dangerous affront to the right to protest. The most that had been established against PA is damage to property by individuals. The ban is plainly untenable, given the large numbers of people willing to risk jail by peacefully defying it even at the risk of arrest. □

Fascists attack left benefit gig

By Gerry Bates

On Monday 16 February, according to Bristol Anarchist Federation, “masked fascists drove to East Bristol in a van and a couple of cars and attempted to force their way into the Red Lion [a pub], while a benefit gig was starting up.

“They attacked people outside before more locals and cops arrived, then they drove off.

“Despite some reporting saying otherwise this was not a protest. It was an attempt to attack a local Bristol boozer and any antifascists they could find”.

Another online report says: “Many of the 30 plus fascists were wearing stab vests and had knuckle-duster gloves on... Right at the start they

tried to drag a woman from her car. As soon as people tried to challenge what the fascists were doing they tried to attack those intervening and the police.”

“Brave locals stood up to them with numbers increasing as time passed. When it became clear that numbers countering them were quickly building and the fascists were soon going to get destroyed... they ran away”.

The growing far right is a threat to the left’s ability to operate. It can be defeated, but it will take solid, well-prepared, organisation though union-based local anti-fascist committees, not just episodic set-piece celebrations of “love” and “hope”. □



Stop demolitions in Silwan!

By Ira Berkovic

Since 2023, close to 40 homes in Silwan, a Palestinian neighbourhood in occupied East Jerusalem, have been demolished. A further 140 face demolition in the coming weeks. The pretext for the demolitions is that the houses are “unauthorised structures”, erected without permission. Palestinian residents who apply for building permits routinely have those applications rejected.

On 8 February, the security cabinet of the Israeli government passed new measures making it much easier for Jewish settlers in the West Bank to buy land and property throughout the territory. A development plan also announced in February proposes 2,570 new homes for Jewish settlers in East Jerusalem. The moves entrench a status quo whereby, despite notional Palestinian sovereignty over patches of the West Bank, the Israeli government maintains ultimate control.

The demolition, displacement, and settlement policy is described by its architects as aiming to “erase”, “bury”, or “kill” the emergence of a Palestinian state. Throughout the West Bank, settlement expansion and plans to construct new roads aims to atomise the territory on which a future Palestinian state could be based. □

• More: page 7

Women’s Fightback

Our bodies, our choices

By Ruth Cashman

Anti-choice campaigners are beginning a period of vigils and protests. 40 Days for Life is an international religious anti-abortion campaign that campaign outside reproductive health clinics during Lent and attempts to prevent women from having terminations or accessing “baby-killing propaganda”.

The group describes itself as “an internationally co-ordinated 40-day campaign that aims to end abortion locally through prayer and fasting, community outreach and a peaceful all-day vigil in front of abortion businesses”. In previous years they have been accused of harassment of people coming to access abortions. Techniques promoted include singing hymns, giving out plastic rosary beads in baby pink and baby blue, leaflets that appear to be from healthcare providers.

Buffer zones, 150-metre areas around clinics and hospitals in England and Wales where anti-abortion protesting, intimidation, or influencing is now illegal, limit them. UK protests are planned in London (Brixton and Ealing), Reading, Bournemouth, Leicester, Nottingham, Sheffield, Glasgow and Liverpool.

In July 2025, abortion law in Britain was partially decriminalised. Women and pregnant people are no longer subject to prosecution for ending their own pregnancies. However, the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act remains in force. Those who support others in accessing abortion, including friends, family members and some medical professionals, can still face investigation and prosecution under this law. Reform leader Nigel Farage has argued for reduced legal abortion term limits and has been linked to US anti-abortion lobbyists. A meeting, reported by the New York Times, took place between Farage and representatives of Trump’s state department, was brokered by the Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) group. ADF is a US based anti-abortion, anti LGBT+ rights organisation.

In London and Sheffield plans to counter 40 Days for Life are being organised through trade unions and local ad hoc groups of residents. An “Our Bodies, Our Choices” demonstration is planned in Brixton on Sunday 1 March sponsored by Lambeth Trades Council. □

For a workers' government

SOLIDARITY

& WORKERS' LIBERTY



RESTORE LABOUR DEMOCRACY, MOBILISE, UNITE IN ACTION

By Rhodri Evans

Keir Starmer has been re-prieved as Labour leader by dumb luck. For now, and probably until after the 7 May council elections. All his likely leader challengers, Andy Burnham, Angela Rayner, Wes Streeting, want him gone soon, but each has their reasons for wanting “not just yet”. And other MPs who want rid of him will wait until they see some better, or at least lesser-evil, candidate up for it with a chance of winning.

A new declaration (bit.ly/R-L-D) initiated by Richard Burgon (secretary of the left Campaign Group MPs' caucus) and signed by the general secretaries of Unison, Unite, CWU, Aslef, and FBU, demands “restore Labour democracy” without waiting for a leadership spill. The text is vague, but it is a move in the right direction. □

• More: page 5

