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SOLIDARITY

& WORKERS' LIBERTY



Iranian left opposes both the war and the regime

"Workers are the ones caught between the blades"

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STOP THE WAR!

Down with despots in Iran and USA



End the US-Israeli bombing! For a secular republic in Iran, for workers' power!

Two weeks into the US-Israeli war against Iran, on the evening of Saturday 14 March, hundreds of anti-war protesters took to the streets in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Haifa.

Explaining their opposition to the war the organisers said, "Thousands of deaths in Iran, hundreds of deaths in Lebanon, dozens of deaths and injuries in Israel, long nights filled with alarms, murderous violence by settlers and the army in the West Bank and incessant bombings in Gaza. For the right-wing government this state of perpetual war is a blessing. But we refuse to remain silent.

"We must stop the war in Iran and Lebanon, get out of Lebanon, and put an end to the imperialist aggression that talks about security and freedom while it sets the entire Middle East ablaze."

In the US Donald Trump has a net approval rating of -17% (*Economist*, 15 March), and the Iran war is unpopular. CNN reports, "5 of 7 high-quality pollsters show that Americans oppose the war by double digits... Americans don't seem to see the point." CNN's own poll showed Americans think the US war will make Iran more of a threat to the US, by 54%-28%.

The polling (and the lack of big protests) also shows that the depth and strength of feeling about the Iran campaign is, so far at least, shallow. Americans seem much more bothered about inflation and threats to their standard of living. However inflation is now bound up with the Iran war.

Petrol prices are surging following Iranian attacks on ships in the Persian Gulf and its attempts to mine the narrow Strait of Hormuz, through which 20% of the world's oil is shipped. The average price of a gallon of petrol in the US was \$3.80 on 8 March. The cost has jumped by 27 cents in the last week, creating a political problem for Trump with the mid-term elections in November.

US polls currently give the Democrats have a 69%-31% chance of winning a majority in the House of Representatives.

Very few ships are now passing through the Strait of Hormuz, despite the US offering \$20bn towards insurance costs. Trump has called for military support from the UK and other states to help keep the Persian Gulf safe and open to shipping.

Presumably the irony of Trump's appeal is not lost on Keir Starmer who was denounced by Trump for keeping the UK out of the fighting, and, on 8 March, told not to try to enter the war after "we've already won."

However, the war has clearly not been

"won", whatever that means.

We should be glad of the labour-movement pressure that has made Starmer refuse to join the bombing campaign. The UK should not now send ships to the Gulf or take other actions under pressure from Trump which would likely quickly embroil the UK in the fighting.

However if oil and gas products continue to be unable to pass through the Gulf for weeks or perhaps months, inflation will spike across the world as will political instability. China and India will be hit hard and Trump might even be able to leverage the US's relative energy security against China which has been buying Iran's US-sanctioned oil at discount rates on a black market.

The state that is gaining from the war, unfortunately, is Putin's Russia. Trump has temporarily lifted sanctions imposed on Russian oil exports for its brutal war of conquest against Ukraine, in an attempt to ease the unfolding oil and gas crisis. This is not just a financial boost to Putin but a political opening. Putin has a reason to help Iran.

It seems that Trump, full of imperial hubris and ego, had not seriously considered the possibility of Iran closing the waterway to shipping, and what could then be done to deal with that event. Trump is a clown, albeit a dangerous, well-armed clown, who continues to bomb and is moving 5,000 additional marines to the area.

Destroyed

The US war is vastly expensive. Apparently the US military is burning through \$1bn of munitions each day, claiming to have destroyed 5,000 targets. 13 US soldiers have died and 140 are injured as a result of the war.

In response Iran has attacked 27 bases run by US troops, across the Middle East, according to Iran's Islamic Guards (IRGC) aiming to spread the consequences of the war to pressure the US to back off. Air routes through the Gulf and tourism in the area have been badly impacted.

The UN estimates that 3.2mn Iranians are now displaced and a minimum of 1,500 have been killed, including scores of children in a school in Minab. A large amount of Iranian infrastructure has been destroyed; schools, hospitals and public buildings have been damaged.

In Lebanon 800,000 have fled their homes following Israeli warnings of air attacks and 800 have been killed. 19 people have been killed as a result of Iranian attacks in the Gulf states as well as 15 killed in Israel and 3,200 injured.



20,000, mostly young people, were killed, murdered by the state.

However, the Iranian regime is run by people who came to power through a revolution, in 1978-9. That revolution deposed a monarchy-dictatorship, but was also directed against the working class, women and Iran's minorities. The Iranian state is well-guarded by the IRGC, which is an economic power inside the country as well as a disciplined, ideologically-motivated armed force.

The Iranian ruling elite have a set of firmly-held ideas that, as a group, they are willing to fight and die for. They will not be easily deposed. While Ali Khamenei is dead, he was replaced by his son, Mojtaba, who is a hard-liner closely affiliated with the IRGC.

The US and Israel are focused on regime targets rather than blanket terror, but they do not care much about Iranian civilian deaths. Their carelessness with Iranian lives extends to periodic calls for the Iranian people to rise up and depose their leaders, which will not happen during their bombing campaign. The many Iranians that came out onto the streets to celebrate following the killing of Ali Khamenei on 28 February seem to be driven into hiding. The Israeli bombing of Tehran is described as "terrifying... all we aim to do now is survive," by residents.

This enormous human misery is part of the case against this war.

The other element of the case to oppose this war is political. Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu are not going to make life better for Iranians and others in the Middle East. They appear unlikely to topple the clerical-fascist Iranian state. Trump indicates that he would prefer something like Venezuela – transferring power to a faction in the regime which will cooperate with the US. That looks improbable. In the worst case the results of this war will be catastrophic.

The Iranian regime is vastly unpopular at home and the majority of Iranians actively hate the regime. The Iranian rulers are incompetent and vastly corrupt, mismanaging water and electricity supplies and allowing enormous ecological damage to take place, as well as interfering with personal freedoms and beating-down dissent. When the recent pro-democracy movement was repressed on 8-10 January, perhaps

Mojtaba Khamenei appears to have been injured during the air raids that killed his father (and other members of his family, including his wife). Perhaps he is even dead. Nevertheless, the regime is not yet fragmenting, and may well survive in the short term.

Unlike Workers' Liberty, Trump has little interest in democracy in Iran. He allegedly expected to come to an agreement with people immediately beneath Ali Khamenei in the Iranian hierarchy. Whether that was realistic is moot. Trump himself says that those whom the US thought might negotiate were killed alongside Khamenei.

If the regime breaks up, or loses control in large areas of the country, that might cause a country-wide collapse leading to chaos, vast numbers of deaths, and warlords and militias taking power locally.

Such an outcome would lead to an enormous refugee crisis.

Workers' Liberty advocates for the Iranian working class, oppressed minorities and women who suffer from the state-orchestrated misogyny. We know that the only force capable of rebuilding Iran in a rational, democratic way is the working class.

The once-powerful Iranian left parties were destroyed in the 1980s by the clerical terror. The labour movement organisations in Iran exist in semi-clandestine form, beleaguered and battered. Nevertheless, the future depends on them.

Solidarity with the Iranian workers!

For a secular republic and a workers' government! □

Building a third choice

From the "Khuzestan Vanguard Socialist Workers' Cell"

It is absolutely clear that this war was started by American capitalists and politicians and the Islamic Republic, but we, the workers and the hardworking people, are paying the price. As always, we are the ones caught between the blades of a pair of scissors. On the one hand, America and Israel are bombing us, and on the other, the Pasdaran and Basij are massacring us at work and our children in the streets.

You are undoubtedly all aware that the oil regions of Jask and Tehran were attacked by American and Israeli planes. Two days ago, several night shift workers at the flour and starch production factory in the Hyderabad Soldoz in-

dustrial park were killed. Factories, oil depots, power generation centres, airports, roads, refineries, and even the homes of ordinary people are not safe from these damned people's bombings. If we look around us, we see that all the infrastructure is being destroyed.

However, in a situation where American and Israeli fighter jets are bombing our homes and lives from such a low altitude, these people have set up checkpoints on every alley and street corner, and have pointed the barrels of their heavy machine guns at ordinary people in the alleys and markets so that they don't do anything.

The experience of these forty-seven years, and especially these ten or twelve days of war, has shown that neither the internal government will respond to our

cries nor will foreign intervention provide any relief. As long as we don't have our own independent organisation and as long as we don't take action ourselves, even if this government departs and a new government with a new status comes to power, nothing will change for us.

Just as the capitalists and employers have parties and organisations to protect their interests, we too must have our own clandestine cells and vanguard party. We must prepare ourselves in this chaotic situation in every way.

Our stronghold is our own organisation. We must start building our own cells and form our own leadership command centre!

Our strongholds are our factories and workplaces. Our goal is workers'

liberation and the coming to power of the working class and a workers' government, and these goals can't be achieved by themselves. We must work to achieve them, rely on ourselves, and continue our activities inside the workplace.

We must not always be forced to choose between two bad choices: internal repression, and, worse, foreign interference. There is always a third choice, a third force made up of all of us along with the rest of the oppressed and hardworking layers of the country. Experience has shown that only such a force can lead society towards freedom, equality and economic and political independence. □

• 12 March 2026. bit.ly/kh-vwc

Neither bombs nor authoritarian rule!

From IASWI

The International Alliance in Support of Workers in Iran (IASWI) condemns in the strongest terms the war launched on February 28, 2026 by the governments of the United States and Israel against the territory of Iran.

While claiming to support freedom in Iran, the Trump and Netanyahu governments have consistently sabotaged and endangered grassroots protests and independent social movements, imposed devastating economic sanctions, and promoted figures such as Reza Pahlavi, who has openly endorsed this war.

Reza Pahlavi, the son of the deposed Shah of Iran, has issued statements saying: "My heart aches for the three American heroes killed and the five wounded by the regime. The Iranian people are forever in their debt.

To their grieving families: please accept our immense love, deepest condolences, and eternal gratitude." He has also shamefully said: "Iranians are grateful to Donald Trump for targeting the oppressive regime and providing an opportunity for freedom. Now is the time for strong and steady leadership to bring this historic opportunity to fruition." Meanwhile, he has remained silent about the massacre of schoolchildren and other civilians.

This destructive war is not about liberating the Iranian people. On the contrary, it distorts, undermines, and destroys the very struggles for freedom, equality, workers' rights, and social and economic justice in Iran.

The working class of Iran has been clear: neither bombs, nor economic sanctions, nor authoritarian rule will deliver equality and freedom. The path to libera-

tion lies in the independent collective power of workers, women, students, and oppressed communities themselves.

We urge labour and socialist movements worldwide to continue supporting the Iranian working class in their organising efforts against the capitalist and repressive policies of the Islamic Republic, which has imprisoned labour activists, crushed independent unions, massacred protesters, executed political prisoners, and imposed neoliberal and corrupt economic policies that have devastated working people.

We call on all workers, justice-seeking, and freedom-loving organizations and individuals to urgently demand:

Immediate and unconditional ceasefire.

A halt to all US and Israeli bombing and military operations, as well as retaliatory

responses by Iranian military forces.

Protection of civilians and full humanitarian access, including the immediate release of political prisoners whose lives are at grave risk.

We further urge workers, trade unions, socialists and progressive anti-war organisations, and activists internationally to center the grassroots voices and demands inside Iran by:

Strengthening international solidarity against militarism, imperialism, capitalism, authoritarianism, and repression.

Supporting the Iranian people's struggles for freedom, equality, and self-determination without any interference from foreign governments. □

• IASWI is an Iranian exile-leftist group, mainly in Canada. bit.ly/iaswi-s

The death of Ali Khamenei

From WCPIH(OL)

The Islamic Republic confirmed the news of the killing of Ali Khamenei and a number of its military commanders and officials following the US-Israeli military attack on Iran on the morning of Saturday, 28 February...

More than 90 million people in Iran have now lost the opportunity to put the leader of the Islamic Republic and his associates on trial in a public hearing for crimes against humanity. The people's joy in Iran over the killing of Khamenei and other regime leaders is the most natural and rightful reaction. However, their killing by a handful of gangsters, murderers, and war criminals is not a victory for the people of Iran over the Islamic Republic.

Portray

Those who portray the killing of Khamenei and his associates as evidence that the butchers of Gaza are defending the freedom-seeking people of Iran, and who portray continued bombing and war as the path to the liberation of the Iranian people, are accomplices in the crimes of the killers of people in Iran, Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, and Palestine and are the counterparts of the criminal rulers in Iran. □

• Worker-communist Party of Iran Hekmatist (Official Line), bit.ly/wcpihol

Back anti-war people in Israel

By Dan Katz

In Israel, an opinion poll conducted immediately after the bombing campaign began and after the report of the killing of Iran's leader, Ali Khamenei, showed a very large majority of Israelis supporting the war.

That support has reduced somewhat, but amongst Israeli Jews support remains high: those "strongly supporting war" is 68%. Amongst Palestinian

Israelis the majority that "oppose the operation" has increased to 66% (Israel Democracy Institute, 15 March).

Clearly it is important to back the Israeli opposition, groups like Standing Together, who can impact on events. They have our solidarity.

It is also important to understand why the war has support inside Israel. The Israeli people know that Iran has advocated the destruction of Israel, has attempted to build nuclear weapons, has

armed and funded proxy forces which have regularly attacked Israel with missiles. The long-term threat from Iran is real, not manufactured.

Our answer is not that there is no threat, but that we want the theocratic regime overthrown by the Iranian working class, who can forge relations of mutual respect and peace with all the peoples in the region. □



Unite should campaign, not cut affiliation

By Ann Field

On 11 March the Unite the Union issued a statement announcing that it was cutting its affiliation fees to the Labour Party by 40%, amounting to £580,000. This was the first that Unite members heard of the decision.

The statement did not say which body of the union had taken that decision. Presumably, it was the national Executive Council (EC). The EC meets quarterly, with one of its meetings falling in March, and is empowered to determine the level of affiliation fees.

Unite members looking for confirmation of this from EC minutes will have a long wait. The Unite website has published no minutes of EC meetings since March 2023.

According to the statement, the decision to cut affiliation fees had been taken because of “the anger of Unite members” at the “dithering” and “incompetent behaviour” of Labour-controlled Birmingham City Council in failing to reach an agreement with the union to end the now one-year-long strike by the city’s bin workers.

The statement also criticised the Labour government’s policies at a national level, describing them as:

“A failed economic strategy that has left our industrial base fighting for its life. Oil and gas workers facing decimation, buy-British defence promises broken, the public sector undervalued and the elderly and disabled under attack.”

Labour responded with a bland statement:

“The Labour Party is proud to be funded by our dedicated party members, affiliated supporters, trade union members and party donors. The Labour government is delivering the biggest upgrade to workers’ rights in a generation to address low pay, insecure work and poor working conditions, which will benefit 15 million workers across the country.”

Mainstream, the recently formed soft-left grouping in the Labour Party, responded to the announced cut by criticising the Starmer leadership:

“Unite’s decision should set alarm bells ringing across our party. It reflects a growing anger across the labour movement that we are drifting away from the workers, communities and values that made us. Today’s rupture is the direct result of a leadership that has too often taken its own movement for granted.”

Compass, cross-party but Labour-leaning, took a similar line: “This is what the legacy of this hyper-factional project at the top of the Labour Party will be: membership gutted, voters going to the Greens and unions wanting nothing to do with them. It is the latest in a series of existential death indicators for Labour. Unless a significant change in direction is taken, this ship will have sunk itself.”

Mainstream and Compass are right to blame the Starmer leadership. But they are wrong to fail to criticise the cut itself, or the accompanying statement. Presumably the reason is diplomacy: they want to keep in with Graham.

Cutting

The “logic” behind cutting Unite’s affiliation fee is rooted a transactional view of trade union affiliations to the Labour Party: We pay you money, and in exchange we expect...

It ignores completely, and cuts against mobilising, the potential influence which unions can exert on Labour Party policy, through delegations to national and regional Labour Party conferences, seats in the Party’s NEC and National Policy Forum, delegations to local CLPs, etc.

Ironically, this transactional view of the Labour-union link is identical to the approach of (sections of) wealthy business people to the Labour Party: I donate money, and in exchange I expect...

Unite has every reason to be angry about the Birmingham bins dispute. But how can cutting Unite’s affiliation fee bounce local councillors – or force the Labour Party at national level to bounce local councillors – into doing better?

There is no shortage of issues for which Starmer’s government should be denounced and challenged. But the Unite statement’s criticisms are off-beam.

There is no mention of major issues such as the government’s attacks on the right to trial by jury; its attacks on migrant and refugee rights, delays and loopholes in the Employment Rights Act (which can still be shortened or reduced by union pressure); or the need for an “Employment Rights Act Mark Two” to fill the many gaps.

Some of the statement’s criticisms come from the right, not the left: Labour is failing to create British jobs for British workers (“broken buy-British defence promises”) and is supposedly too energetic in pursuing net zero (“oil and gas workers facing decimation”).

Another Unite statement, issued two days later, was even worse: “Unite is calling on the government to stop blocking oil and gas production in the North Sea, and to give the immediate go-ahead to the development of Rosebank and Jackdaw. The government’s position on oil and gas is putting jobs and national security at risk. Blocking oil and gas production in the North Sea, especially now [because of the Iran war] is simply an act of monumental political self-harm.”

The statement describes the public sector as “undervalued”. But it does not advocate a wealth tax to boost public sector spending – despite this being Labour Party policy, based on a composite motion moved by Unite General Secretary Sharon Graham herself at last year’s Party conference.

The statement criticises the government for “attacking the elderly and disabled.” But it makes no mention of the extent to which the government has been pushed back: restoration of the Winter Fuel Allowance, (eventual) repeal of the two-child benefit cap, and abandonment of many of the proposed disabled benefit cuts. Let alone what unions can do to win further pushbacks.

The government has not (partially) backed down on attacks on pensioners and the disabled, improved (within limits) workers’ rights, and stayed out of the Iran war (at least to date) because Starmer has suddenly revealed himself to be a secret socialist. Nor has it done so because the Labour Party has received a lot of money from Unite.

It has done so because Labour Party activists and activists in affiliated trade unions have organised and campaigned (sometimes with a strong wind in their sails from public opinion, sometimes not). Graham has been conspicuously absent from the campaigning, other than on the Winter Fuel Allowance. Grandstanding is not the same as campaigning.

The “Restore Labour Democracy Campaign”, launched in mid-February and backed by 27 Labour MPs, five Labour Party campaigns, and five trade union General Secretaries, may or may not “take off”. But the union general secretaries could make it “take off”. Ironically, Graham gave her signature to that campaign at pretty much the same time as she decided to cut Unite’s actual capacity to restore and use that democracy.

We need more campaigning and less grandstanding. We need a clear set of political demands as a focus for campaigning, not a Mr. Potato Head myopic mixture of right-wing and left-wing populism. And, above all, we need political trade unionism, not Graham’s pseudo-syndicalism. □

THE STOP THE WAR COALITION AND UKRAINE:

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Dale Street, 2024

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Labour Women United

By Colin Foster

Labour Women United has **declared** three candidates for the six Constituency Labour Party places on the National Women’s Committee to be elected at Labour conference on 27-30 September 2026. Nominations have to be in by 26 June.

Their two main planks are “a standalone, democratic, annual Women’s Conference”, the chief demand of the women’s conference left for years now,

and “full inclusion of our trans sisters in our party”.

2026 conference will be a one-day event tacked on to the general Labour conference, and, by decision of the National Executive in December 2025, will exclude trans women from the conference hall and from voting.

The Labour leadership says the exclusion is forced on them by the April 2025 Supreme Court decision. But in fact the EHRC has withdraw its initial “interim” interpretation of that

decision, and new guidance is awaiting finalisation from the government, i.e. from the same Labour leadership. The government can also change the law where it is unclear.

All the unions refused to support the exclusion decision, and Unison (notorious for its legal department’s propensity to ban things on grounds of “legal jeopardy”) ran its women’s conference inclusively on 10-11 February. In the USA, unions make a big deal of having trans-inclusive

LABOUR WOMEN UNITED

National Women’s Committee

Nominate Nikki, Saranya and Cat for National Women’s Committee at your next CLP or Women’s Branch meeting

Nikki Belfield
B009659

Saranya Thambirajah
L1760977

Cat MacLean
L1256755

women’s conferences, and not even Trump has suggested stopping them.

Labour Women’s Declaration,

opposed to trans inclusion, has declared two candidates. (They don’t back the standalone conference demand). Labour Women Leading, linked to the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, has not declared yet, and has not spoken against the exclusion decision.

The Labour Women United candidates are more of the NGO-y soft left than of the class-struggle left, but they deserve support. □

Netanyahu hits Lebanon, West Bank, Gaza

By Ira Berkovic

Since 2 March, renewed Israeli bombing in Lebanon has killed over 750 people, including 100 children. Around one million people are displaced. Some towns, such as Al-Nimiriya, have been entirely emptied of inhabitants. Residents of areas targeted say the bombing is more intense than the 2023-4 war, with fewer advance warnings.

The latest round of war began when Hezbollah, the Shi'a Islamist paramilitary party allied to Iran, launched rockets at Israel. Israel's far-right government sees a new war with Hezbollah as an opportunity to destroy it entirely, and bolster Israeli power in the region. Some ministers, such as Itamar Ben Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich, want Israel to push deeper into Lebanon, occupying more territory, as part of a plan for a "Greater Israel".

Israeli leaders say they want the Lebanese government to disarm Hezbollah. The fragile Lebanese state also sees Hezbollah, a well-armed paramilitary force backed by a regional power, as a threat to its own power and stability. But

the devastation to civilian life caused by Israeli bombing, and the humanitarian crises caused by mass displacement, hinder the Lebanese government's ability to stabilise, and will likely galvanise Hezbollah's popular base.

Terror attacks by armed settlers in the Israeli-occupied West Bank also continue. Settlers tortured a Palestinian man in front of his family in the Jordan Valley, demanding they leave the area. Sawar Salem Al-Hathaleen, a five-year-old child, was injured after being run over by a settler's car.

Intervened

Military security forces intervened, not to arrest the attacker, but to arrest peace activists supporting families in the area. In the village of Qusra, settlers conducted armed raids, murdering 28-year-old Ameer Motasem Odeh.

Settler terror at this scale would be impossible without state backing. Occupation forces either actively abet armed settlers, or stand back to give them a free rein. In Tubas, Israeli soldiers killed four members of the same family. Ali

Khaled Sayel Bani Odeh and Waad Othman Aql Bani Odeh, and two children, Mohammad Ali Khaled Bani Odeh, Othman Ali Khaled Bani Odeh, were killed when troops opened fire on their car.

Inside Israel, charges against guards in the Sde Teiman military prison have been dropped. Leaked CCTV footage appeared to show the men sexually torturing Palestinian detainees, but the case has been dropped on a legal technicality which argues the leaking of the footage compromises the trial. Welcoming the dropping of the charges, Benjamin Netanyahu said, "Israel should be hunting down its enemies, not its heroic warriors."

In Gaza, 39 people have been killed since the latest war with Iran. The left-wing binational (Palestinian-Jewish) social movement Standing Together writes: "Since the so-called ceasefire came into effect, 650 Palestinians have been killed and 1,732 injured. At the same time, the Israeli government has halted the entry of the agreed quantities of food, humanitarian aid, medical supplies, and basic shelter materials like



صفحة قصرة أون لابين
Settlers murdered Ameer Motasem Odeh, a 28-year-old father, in the village of Qusra, after raiding the town, entering homes, and opening fire on civilians

Pic: Standing Together/X

tents and mobile homes. Living conditions in Gaza are deteriorating rapidly while Palestinians remain trapped with nowhere safe to go." □

Co-resistance can create hope

By Standing Together

War with Iran is [continuing], and entire communities in Israel are being abandoned by our extremist government – some have no shelter while others have no food or essential supplies. Here are some things we're doing to make

sure no one is left behind.

We're crowdfunding to install mobile shelters in unprotected Bedouin-Palestinian villages in southern Israel. Tens of thousands of people who live in these communities have been abandoned by the Israeli government, which they pay taxes to. We're stepping in to make

sure no-one is left behind.

Our Solidarity Guard activists are still in the West Bank, providing protective presence to Palestinians under the threat of state-backed settler violence. They're sharing the risk with local families, because the killings, assaults, and attempts to drive people off their land hav-

en't stopped during the war.

We're cleaning bomb shelters and making sure our neighbours have a safe place to go when sirens sound. Many shelters are filled with junk, dirt, or are being used as storage sites. We're continuing to help clean them up so they can actually be used when they're

needed most.

We're organising a food drive for asylum seekers and refugees in collaboration with Aid Organisation for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Israel. In times of crisis, these communities are amongst the first to be forgotten and the last to receive help. Some don't have enough food, infant formula, diapers, or other basic supplies.

We're continuing our resilience campaign to organise against the violent crime epidemic in Palestinian towns in Israel. Already this year, 66 Palestinian citizens have been victims of violent crime. We're continuing our community work and holding Zoom conversations with bereaved families to organise and demand government action.

Our alternative media platform, Rosa Media, launched a news channel on Telegram to share verified information about the war. In times of crisis, disinformation spreads quickly. Rosa Media aims to share accurate updates about what's happening across Israel-Palestine and beyond. □

• First published on Instagram

We must resist this war

By Alon-Lee Green

I'm writing to you between air raid sirens – sirens that have continued each day of this war, which is nearing its third week. As we shelter from missiles multiple times a day with no idea when the uncertainty will end, we need to ask who this war serves.

When Netanyahu tells us that this was inevitable, we should remember that he said the same thing during the last war with Iran in June. And when that war was over, he called it a "historic victory that will stand for generations." Yet here we are once again, in another round of bloodshed, waged by Trump and Netanyahu, only eight months later.

I don't trust that Netanyahu cares about the interests of ordinary people – not Israelis, Palestinians, or Iranians. And I don't trust that Netanyahu is telling us the truth about this war. In the end it is the people, across the Middle East, who pay the price for the decisions of extremists in power.

Freedom

The people of Iran deserve freedom from the oppression and tyranny of the current regime, which they've fought so hard against for decades. But when water desalination plants, power plants, and residential neighbourhoods are bombed and destroyed it harms ordinary people most. Iranians deserve to live in a

democracy and without repression – they also deserve to live without fear of being killed in an airstrike.

We must not accept war as the only answer or the default option. Especially when it comes from politicians who have shown time and time again that they do not care about their own people and basic human rights. This situation is not normal, and all of us across the region deserve better. We must resist this reality and fight for a future of life, for all of us [...]

Our shelter campaign is continuing in full force. [Recently] we were able to install several mobile shelters in the Negev and help unrecognised

Bedouin-Palestinian communities who until now had nowhere to run from missiles. In the last war with Iran we installed 20 shelters, and this time around we're continuing to bring more protection to vulnerable communities. This campaign couldn't have happened without thousands of donors who have already given – but the work isn't over, and several unrecognized communities are still in need. Help us keep providing life-saving shelter. □

• Alon-Lee Green is national co-director of Standing Together. This is republished from the website of UK Friends of Standing Together



Spy scares displace the real horror

By Jim Denham

Anyone writing about the Epstein files needs to bear in mind the words of Marina Hyde, writing recently in the *Guardian*: “all the bits of the fallout we’re focusing on now are a mass displacement activity, driven subconsciously or consciously by men so we don’t have to reckon with the fact that we now have searchable records of the way some of the most powerful guys in the world, who have huge sway over our lives, talk and think about women. And about girls”.

But for John Green, author of the *Morning Star*’s only substantial piece on the scandal (8 March) “while the abuse of young girls is horrendous, that is merely the back story to the whole saga.” Much more important for Mr Green is speculation about Epstein’s links to intelligence agencies – and one agency in particular.

Evidence

There is certainly evidence to suggest the abuser’s network of powerful political figures and business leaders also brought him into contact with various international intelligence and security entities.

From early in his career (circa 1981), Epstein had interactions with the FBI. Officials and prosecutors involved in

his 2008 case were told to back off because Epstein “belonged to intelligence” (probably the CIA) and was deemed “above [their] pay grade”.

John Schindler, a security expert and former US National Security Agency officer, has written that Epstein “was definitely a spy” but is not sure for whom, mentioning Russian and Israeli intelligence.

The files certainly show that Epstein had contact with high-level Russian figures, some of whom had intelligence links. In particular, Epstein’s circle included Sergei Belyakov, a graduate of Russia’s Academy of the Federal Security Service (FSB) and a former economy minister.

Emails from 2015 show Epstein asking Belyakov to collect information on a Russian woman he alleged was trying to blackmail a prominent US businessman. Belyakov then provided Epstein with a description of the woman’s background, including her “business problems”, which he speculated could be behind her blackmail attempts. In a further email (sent to himself and probably a draft response to the woman) Epstein told her that he had consulted “some friends in the FSB” who said she would be “dealt with extremely harshly” if she continued to threaten US businessmen.

Epstein also appears to have introduced Belyakov to US businessmen



Mossad logo

Peter Theil and Thomas Pritzker.

Other documents show that Epstein met with Vitaly Churkin, a former Russian diplomat and representative to the UN, and arranged an internship for Churkin’s son.

Publicist

According to journalist and researcher Craig Unger, Maria Bucher [nee Drakova], a Russian woman who had been head of Nashi, Putin’s youth movement, worked as a publicist for Epstein when she moved to the US. Unger cautions there is no evidence that Bucher was a spy and concludes that Epstein himself was probably a Russian “asset” rather than a spy: “An intelligence asset is someone who’s a trusted contact, you do favours for them, they do favours for you ... but in the end, I think he was

serving himself” Unger told The Cube, Euronews’ fact-checking team.

But you’d learn none of this from John Green’s *Morning Star* piece, lengthy as it is. Green is only interested in one suggested intelligence link: Israel’s Mossad.

There is, indeed, evidence of links between Epstein and prominent Israeli figures (notably the former Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak) and of his involvement in various business deals involving the provision of Israeli surveillance technology and security-related projects in Ivory Coast and Mongolia.

But there is – so far at least – no evidence of a direct link between Epstein and Mossad (the evidence of links between him and the FSB is, if anything, somewhat stronger.)

Having entirely ignored Russia and the FSB, Green concludes his piece with the kind of conspiratorial musing that – like much else in the MS when it comes to Israel – verges on antisemitism: “There are undoubtedly very powerful forces both in the US and Israel determined to underplay these links and Epstein’s role on behalf of Israel. Whether we will ever know the whole truth is a moot point, but there is certainly much more to unearth.” □

• More on “Epstein conspiracy” tropes: p.16

Housing

The lessons and the erosion of “Red Vienna”

By Robert Bau

Vienna is held up as an example of best social housing practice. In this article I will explore that claim.

After World War One, Vienna faced a severe housing crisis. Under Social-Democratic leadership, the city launched an ambitious programme of public housing known as the Gemeindebauten.

Between 1923 and 1934, the city built roughly 60,000–65,000 municipal flats in hundreds of new housing estates, funded through progressive taxes including levies on luxury goods and high rents. These complexes often included courtyards, kindergartens, laundries, public baths and cultural spaces, reflecting a broader vision of collective wellbeing.

The Gemeindebauten were meant to embody and commu-

nicate the values of social democracy – dignity, solidarity, collective welfare, and a lasting social transformation.

The building programme stopped in February 1934 when the Austro-Fascist regime removed the Social-Democratic city government.

Much of that housing stock remains in use today, though. So in a certain sense, Karl Seitz, Social Democratic mayor of Vienna (1923-1934), was right when he said of their building programme: “When we are no longer here, these stones will speak for us.”

World War II

After World War II, the city begun an intensive reconstruction programme. From 1946, Vienna began rebuilding its housing stock at scale, reaching construction levels of up to 10,000 new dwellings per year in the early postwar decades.

As across much of Western Europe, the postwar years saw a broad political consensus that social housing was a public responsibility, and many countries developed large municipal or non-profit sectors during this period. However, what ultimately set Vienna apart was not the immediate postwar policies, shared widely across Europe, but the long-term continuity of these policies.

Where many Western European cities shifted toward privatisation, deregulation, and the shrinking of public housing sectors from the 1980s onwards, Vienna notably did not follow this trend. Instead, the city maintained a large municipally owned housing stock and expanded a tightly regulated limited-profit sector, ensuring that social housing continued to serve a broad social mix.

That said, while the city con-

tinues to provide a large stock of regulated and subsidised housing, market pressures have increasingly shaped both policy and outcomes, pushing the system away from its original de-commodified foundations.

European Union

So since the early 2000s, shifts in national rules and EU competition frameworks have pushed Vienna to rely more heavily on limited-profit developers at the expense of direct municipal construction, signalling the slow erosion of the fully public model that defined Red Vienna.

These structural changes have contributed to emerging inequalities within the system. Long-standing tenants in older municipal or co-operative stock continue to benefit from low, historically anchored rents, while newcomers – in-

cluding younger residents, recent migrants, and lower-income households without long local histories – often face significantly higher entry costs, narrower options and longer waiting times. Recent reports highlights growing pressures from rising land prices, long waiting lists and the shrinking share of social housing relative to total urban development, despite Vienna’s continued political commitment to affordability.

Compared to say London, Vienna still does have a better social housing model and provision, but things are changing. The political fight is to resist these changes but also look to a new model, one that, yes, could take inspiration from Red Vienna, but is of the 21st century. □

Coup at first YP CEC meeting

By Matt Cooper

The 8 March meeting of the newly-elected Central Executive Committee (CEC) of Your Party bore all the hallmarks of a planned coup. Papers were not circulated until nearly 8pm the previous evening, although the metadata shows that many of them had been completed four days earlier. The CEC itself played no role in drafting these documents; the metadata suggests they were written by a staff member.

The Corbyn faction secured a majority in February on Your Party's Central Executive Committee (CEC). Despite winning only 38% of first-preference votes in the regional elections, the faction was able to manipulate the electoral system so that its slate, The Many, won 14 of the 24 seats on the committee, giving it an outright majority.

They could have used this majority to reach out to opponents and share power in order to create a united party. They have done no such thing. Instead, they used the first full meeting of the CEC to concentrate power in their own hands and ensure that everyone else, particularly members organised in proto-branches, is thoroughly marginalised.

In a rushed (online) meeting lasting just two hours and twenty minutes, with pitifully little debate or justification, the coup unfolded in three stages.

Concentrated Power

First, standing orders were adopted that shifted power away from the elected CEC and concentrated it in the hands of the officers' group and a staff secretariat. Amendments were formally allowed but not circulated in advance. Instead they were flashed briefly on screen during the meeting and movers were given around 30 seconds to explain them before votes were taken, usually with perfunctory or no speeches against.

Every substantive amendment aimed at strengthening democratic control was voted down by the Corbyn faction's bloc vote. Proposals that the CEC itself, not the chair and officers, should control the agenda; that meetings be called with 14 days' notice; that the CEC meet weekly during the party's initial formation; and that officers and staff remain accountable to the CEC were all rejected. The result was a set of rules explicitly designed to concentrate power in the hands of the officers group and the secretariat.

The second stage of the coup was the installation of a leadership loyal to the Corbyn faction.

Here the faction faced a constitutional obstacle. At time of the party's founding conference, members had voted for a collective leadership, rejecting the creation of a single leader. The intention was clearly that the leadership should unite the party's main factions. The standing orders also state that the officers' group should contain no MPs, and the constitution implies that officers should be elected by STV, ensuring proportional representation on the leadership body.

Obstacles

The tactic used by The Many to overcome these obstacles was simple: they ignored them. The CEC created the position of "parliamentary leader" and immediately elected Corbyn to it, effectively co-opting him into the leadership despite the constitution. The faction then used its majority to install an officers' group consisting entirely of its



own supporters. The standing orders give this group broad powers to run the party independently of, and largely unaccountable to, the CEC.

Meanwhile, the CEC was given no say over the party's full-time staff and was even warned against revealing their identities. Karie Murphy was clearly orchestrating the meeting, with Artin Giles, Alex Nunns and press officer Angus Satow present. It is not even clear how many staff there are, though around £23,000 per month has been allocated for salaries. This combination of officers and anonymised staff will effectively run the party alongside the parliamentary leader. Typically, Corbyn himself did not attend a meeting with the messy business of solving political differences via brutal bureaucratic diktat.

The final stage was to begin transferring practical decision-making to this leadership-bureaucratic bloc.

Discussion of party finances was cut short and referred to the officers' group. Candidate endorsements were handed to the officers. The drafting of the party's code of conduct was handed to the chair. The pattern was clear: the CEC power was handed over the party bureaucracy.

Local Elections

One revealing discussion concerned candidates for the May local elections. A paper listed twenty-two "independent" groups that Your Party intends to back. The Many rejected a Grassroots Left amendment requiring these groups to have explicitly socialist principles, dismissing it as "purity testing".

The same paper outlined the hoops

that anyone else wishing to stand as a YP candidate would have to jump through, including vetting by the officers' group and the payment of an unspecified fee. Yet the document also states that candidates must be selected by official YP branches, which do not currently exist.

Having achieved everything her faction needed, the chair closed the meeting, leaving large parts of the agenda untouched. This included the question of establishing branches. The issue of whether the Scottish organisation will stand in the 2026 Holyrood elections also remains unresolved, since the Scottish body still requires permission from the central party to use the name.

All of this focus on democracy and procedure can distract from the politics of the two factions. There was one vote that passed unanimously: a statement condemning the US-Israeli attack on Iran. The statement rightly denounces the attack but says nothing about the Iranian theocracy's repression that left thousands, if not tens of thousands, dead only weeks ago. Nor does it mention Iran's support for reactionary militias such as Hamas and Hezbollah or its long-standing backing for Assad's murderous regime in Syria. Despite their bitter internal conflict, the majority in both factions remain united around the same narrow version of "anti-imperialism": one that condemns US aggression but chooses to not to consider that Iranian workers might have enemies closer to home than Trump and Netanyahu.

There is still some fight inside Your Party for democracy and accountability. We should support that struggle as long as it continues. But we should also recognise that the dominant political ideas shaping both sides of the dispute, ideas cut largely from the same cloth, are something that must be challenged as well. □

Activist Agenda

Meetings

Thu 19 Mar: The History of the German Revolution. Bristol AWL. Afghan Tasty Corner, 1 Oxford Pl, Easton BS5 0NR

Template motions

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

Campaigns

See workersliberty.org/agenda.

Socialist-feminist book clubs

workersliberty.org/sf-book-clubs

19 Apr: *Of Women Born*. London: 2pm,

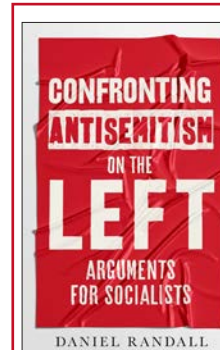
Effra Social, 89 Effra Rd SW2 1DF

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



Anthropocene and Capitalocene

By Stuart Jordan

The AWL ecology reading group recently discussed *The Shock of the Anthropocene* (2014) by Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz.

The Anthropocene is “a geological revolution of human origin” which, in the words of Earth scientists Paul Crutzen and Will Steffen, has pushed the Earth into “a state without previous analogy”.

The authors argue that our understanding of the Anthropocene is obscured because “the scientists who invented the term ‘Anthropocene’ did not simply produce fundamental data on the state of the planet or advance a systemic and fruitful perspective on its uncertain future. They also proposed a history... an authorised narrative... that makes the management of the Earth system a new object of knowledge and government”.

According to Bonneuil and Fressoz, this “official narrative” (of the technocratic, yes-it’s-a-real-problem, wing of the ruling class) states that an undifferentiated humanity unconsciously wrecked our planetary environment and propelled Earth into new, more hostile, geological epoch. Fortunately, in the late 20th century, a handful of earth scientists finally opened our eyes. Now we are aware we can correct our mistake.

The opposition between a blind past and a clear sighted present is historically false and depoliticises the long history of the Anthropocene.

The book provides several “alternative histories”, a history of energy, a history of militarism, a history of consumption,

a history of denialism, and histories of environmental reflexivity and environmentalist struggle.

Our discussion focused on the “Capitalocene” chapter, which is an attempt to synthesise these different histories. They argue “the change in the geological regime is the act of the ‘age of capital’ rather than simply the ‘age of man’”.

It is wrong to regard the Anthropos as an undifferentiated mass. Human activity takes place within systems of social domination with inequalities of wealth and power. We should pay as much attention to the social structure of industrial capitalism as Earth scientists pay to the Earth’s biogeochemical flows.

Their analysis draws initially on Marx’s image of capital as a Moloch that demands endless sacrifice. They draw on the “world-systems” perspective of Immanuel Wallerstein, seeing capitalism as having developed as four successive systems centred on four successive hegemonic powers: the Italian cities, Holland, Britain and the United States.

Flow

Each world-system “organises in a distinct fashion flows of matter, energy, commodities, and capital on a global scale.”

They see flows of matter and energy from the periphery to the core as “unequal ecological exchange”. Using metrics like ecological footprint, acreage needed for the production of different ecological services, embodied energy, material flow, entropy or waste and damage generated, ecologists have

provided a “new rematerialised history of societies illuminated by their metabolism, and the successive world-ecologies they produce and of which they form a part.”

Industrial Revolution

Bonneuil and Fressoz argue that the Industrial Revolution in Britain was dependent on two ecological preconditions: the availability of coal and decades of imperialist plunder. “In 1820 British coal consumption amounted to the equivalent of eight million hectares of rationally managed woodland, or more than 10 times the country’s forest cover... In 1830, sugar from the West Indies was equivalent to 600,000 hectares of good land put to cereals, cotton from North America to more than 9.3 million hectares of sheep pasture, and wood (from North America and the Baltic) to more than 400,000 hectares of domestic woodland.

“In total, even leaving out the coal, the total comes to more than 10 million ghost hectares to fuel British machines and workers — the equivalent of two thirds of the usable agricultural surface of England and Wales.”

Other ecologists have argued that “unequal ecological exchange” has increased in scale and scope especially since the post-World War 2 “Great Acceleration”.

There was some discussion in the reading group of the flaws (bit.ly/iw-c) of “dependency theory” (in which Wallerstein was a leading figure) and of Arghiri Emmanuel’s 1960s terms-of-trade theory of “unequal exchange”

which inspired Stephen Bunker’s 1985 coinage, “unequal ecological exchange”.

To me it seems perfectly reasonable to accept the empirical reality of unequal ecological exchange without reaching flawed political conclusions. We will discuss issues again at our June reading group.

That said, a singular focus on unequal ecological exchange between nations obscures the relations between classes. Britain’s Industrial Revolution did not only drive soil erosion and deforestation, pandemic disease, biodiversity loss and heavy metal pollution in the Americas, but it also substantially shortened the life expectancy of the British working-class. A singular focus on unequal exchange between nations risks obscuring class inequality and overlooking the only force capable of overthrowing capitalism: the international working class.

Stalinism

The book is full of interesting facts and perspectives that could provide material for many more hours of discussion. Take for instance, an insight on ecology and Stalinism:

“The basic ecological difference between the Communist [i.e. Stalinist] and the capitalist systems lay in the fact that the Communist camp, for its development, exploited and degraded its own environment above all, whereas the Western countries built their own growth on a gigantic draining of mineral and renewable resources from the rest of the non-Communist world.” □

No to “100% academisation”!

By David Axon

Maybe, with everything else going on, we have missed something — but where is the outcry over the government announcement that it is returning to Boris Johnson’s policy on Multi-Academy Trusts?

The U-turn was announced in the SEND White Paper, *Every Child Achieving and Thriving*, published on 23 February.

Buried in chapter six is the policy announcement of “moving to all schools joining or forming high-quality school trusts”.

This is quite different to the policy the Labour government has pushed up to now, and of course it was not in Labour’s manifesto.

The Socialist Educational

Association (SEA) explains the background:

The Schools Bill was part of an important policy shift on academies [i.e. schools run by private “trusts”, and funded directly by central government], and sets up a different legislative framework to that of the Cameron-May-Johnson-Truss-Sunak governments, ending the forced academisation that had been Tory policy since 2016.

Regulations

Even before the bill was introduced, one of Bridget Phillipson’s first acts as Education Secretary was to end the previous government’s use of “coasting” regulations to force “double-RIs” to academise, thereby also removing the “co-

ercion” into academy status of any school at risk of getting a second RI.

The Schools Bill went further, with the clause entitled “Repeal of duty to make Academy order in relation to school causing concern” doing exactly that and ending the compulsion for the government to force the academisation of schools “causing concern”.

The government was firmly sitting on the fence: ending forced academisation as a “duty” of the Secretary of State, but leaving the multi-academy trust (MAT) system in place. The Schools Bill does include a few reforms to the MAT system — making academies teach the national curriculum and employ qualified teachers, for example. And the Employment

Rights Act creates a single system for support staff pay whether in schools or academies. The MAT system and school system were going to live side-by-side, according to Bridget Phillipson.

Then no more — out comes the White Paper: “all schools joining or forming high-quality school trusts”.

The NEU’s press statement commenting on the White Paper on the day it was published said some of the right things on SEND, but completely ignored the U-turn on MATs. Not one word.

There are several amendments to NEU conference motions as a result — from Leeds, Rochdale and Stafford — demanding that the NEU oppose this return to Tory policy.

Those amendments are right.

The White Paper includes a measure to help force through that academisation, one copied directly from the Boris Johnson / Nadhim Zahawi policy from 2022: the “local authority established MAT”. This must not be allowed to confuse the issue (it’s not a lightly MAT-ised version of local authority control). The SEA blog explains that, as well as picking apart the other measures in the White Paper to very, very slightly clip the wings of MATs.

The NEU needs to hold firm in its opposition to academies and forced academisation. The debate on motion 61 at NEU annual conference (30 March to 2 April) is an important one. □

Lords push against decriminalisation of abortion

By Ruth Cashman

The House of Commons voted last year for the partial decriminalisation of abortion. Since 2018, there have been 60 criminal inquiries in England and Wales. Last year in England and Wales, one woman was jailed, and five women were taken to court for terminating pregnancies outside of abortion laws, indicating a notable rise from previous years. The law has not yet been enacted and there are still abortion arrests.

The partial-decriminalisation clause was passed as an amendment to the

Crime and Policing Bill, the bulk of which includes increase in police powers and surveillance and attacks on the right to protest. The bill criminalises climbing war memorials.

Clause 208 reads: "For the purposes of the law related to abortion, including sections 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Person Act 1861 and the Infant Life (Preservation) Act 1929, no offence is committed by a woman acting in relation to her own pregnancy."

Untouched

It does not fully decriminalise abortion, it leaves the existing legal framework untouched: it does not alter when, how or on what grounds abortion can be provided. The 24-week limit remains, as does the need for two doctors, and any breach will still carry a maximum life penalty for healthcare professionals or others assisting the woman.

The Bill is in the Lords, and nine amendments have been laid on abortion so far. Further amendments are possible before the deadline on Tuesday 17 March.

Rosa Monckton, a Conservative

peer, has attempted a "striketrough" amendment, which seeks to delete the decriminalisation clause from the bill. An amendment put forward by the Conservative peer Philippa Stroud seeks to end telemedicine abortion and return to in-person consultations in all cases.

There are also pro-choice amendments. Glenys Thornton, a Labour peer has placed an amendment to pardon convictions or cautions for abortion offences. An amendment put forward by Liz Barker, a Liberal Democrat peer, would expand the legislation to include women whose alleged offences were committed before the change in law, ensuring that any current investigations and prosecutions are dropped.

A campaign by the right-wing press and the Catholic Church has been attempting to pile on pressure ahead of the Lords. "Pro-life" campaigners have been arguing for standalone legislation to repeal the Abortion Act 1967.

Workers' Liberty will be mobilising for pro choice demonstrations this September — get in touch to join the mobilisation. □



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Councils

Changing terrain in council cuts fight

By Ruth Cashman

Council budgets have been set this month in the run up to the 7 May council elections.

Labour's current increase in local government funding assumes big council tax rises in most areas, making day-to-day life more expensive for local residents. The increase in funding is not enough to rebuild beleaguered services, but may well be enough to avoid full-service closures in many areas. That means we can expect few big anti cuts campaigns in 2026-7 — instead services will limp on, although with fewer resources — but where councils are still cutting services, there is increased room to push them back.

Local authority "spending power" — the amount of money Councils have to spend from government grants, council tax and business rates — fell by 22.6% in real terms between 2010/11 and 2019/20. Since then, funding has recovered through later Tory and now Labour governments partially improving funding.

There is still not enough funding to rebuild services. In 2025/26, funding was still 8.3% lower in real terms than in 2010/1. When accounting for population growth, spending power fell 27.5% in real terms between 2010/11 and 2019/20 and is due still to be 14.2% lower in real terms in 2028/29 than in 2010/11.

Child Social Care

There is also increasing need in statutory services as austerity in universal services has driven up homelessness and the need for adult and children's social care.

Leaders of Hartlepool council were "furious and appalled" after a meeting with minister Steve Reed about growing cost of children's social care. Pamela Hargreaves, the Labour leader of the council, told the *Guardian* that Reed said the government would not "reward councils for having high numbers of children in care" and then "dismissed" the discussion by saying: "That's life."

"That comment tells you everything," Hargreaves said.

"Shrugging at abused and exploited children is not policy, it is moral bankruptcy."

"Calling proper funding for children in care a 'reward' is obscene and offensive. Protecting vulnerable children is a basic moral and legal duty of the state."

Until late in 2025, the big losers were set to be inner London councils. Funding would be redirected to areas rated as of higher deprivation under new allocation criteria. One Labour Cabinet member had been rumoured to hail losses to his own Council's budget as "Redistribution! Exactly what Labour is about!"

Redistribution of income from working-class communities in London to those elsewhere apparently the redistribution Labour had been thinking of.

Under pressure, with safe Labour councils in London looking set to change hands if cuts went ahead, emergency help emerged for the bigger losers in the funding redistribution.

The government announced several late changes which will



Steve Reed MP

favour councils that received any of a £600 million recovery grant which was allocated in 2025-26 based on councils' tax base and deprivation (using the old allocation formula). Around half of councils received this grant, including almost all metropolitan district councils.

These councils will now retain any recovery grant they were allocated in 2025-26 for the next three years, rather than this funding being redistributed under the new system.

Thus councils set to lose out have three years of buffer. Most councils have made political assessments and held off making cuts now, whether just to take them past the election or on the reasonable judge-

ment that the funding formula in three years' time may change again under pressure given that a general election will then be looming.

Lambeth, the flagship Blairite Labour council, had initially proposed to push on with cuts. It has since pulled a consultation on closing local authority nurseries. However, Lambeth Unison is balloting adult social care staff where a dementia daycare centre is due to be closed.

Where cuts are due, there is still considerable room to push them back in the run up to and after the May elections. □



New guidance is poor but gives space

By Natalia Cassidy

Under new official guidance for schools on transgender issues, not much other than emphasis has changed vis-à-vis parental involvement by schools. Previously the emphasis was that parents should essentially “always” be involved other than when it would constitute a significant risk of harm to the child. Now, the guidance is that in the “vast majority” of cases schools would work with parents to determine what is in the best interests of the child.

But for the most part, this is a description of what already happens in schools. Parents are often involved with children who want to pursue social transition, only not always.

The slight change in emphasis does allow for a greater degree of discernment on the part of schools to decide when it is and is not appropriate to involve parents, short of cases of imminent safeguarding risks. So this is unlikely to change much, compared to more liberal recent times, in terms of the way most schools are approaching situations with transgender pupils.

Cass Review

Under the Tory government, non-statutory guidance was given to schools based on the findings of the Cass review. This guidance said that parents should not be excluded from requests made by children to “socially transition”, including the use of preferred



pronouns. That guidance also advised against ever using pronouns other than those associated with the birth sex for primary aged children.

Schools by and large have not changed the way they approach cases of trans pupils undergoing social transition. The new guidance does allow for school union activists in the NEU to put pressure on skittish SLT [school management] who are overly cautious around legal guidance and shy away from anything that could possibly be interpreted as not to the letter of the guidance.

This change in emphasis will make it easier for those of us working in schools with those fearful leaders to continue

acting in a sensible way that is largely supportive of young trans people without SLT panicking about it.

Implications

The change is very cautious, and the guidance is not especially pro-trans overall, but this change is to be welcomed for the implications of schools being able to support trans pupils in a way that is largely supportive and in step with what the young person wants.

One impactful change is that schools are no longer prevented from facilitating elements of social transition for those students in primary school. It seems clear to me that if a child wants to be called a different name or be called by

different pronouns, the only reasonable course of action is to listen to that child. We can understand that this may or may not be something that represents a permanent choice for the child but we should not outright reject what the child is asking for just because of their age.

This part of the updated guidance seems to be the one that is upsetting the right and transphobic feminists. The rest is either sufficiently vague as not to be seen as hostile to their views, or is representative of their position, as with toilets and changing rooms guidance being kept strictly single-sex. □

Young Labour elections re-run

By Sam Myerson

Elections for Young Labour and Labour Students closed on 2 March, but are now being re-run, from 25 March to 8 April, on grounds of an “admin error” which denied some members votes.

On the first count, there was a majority for the Labour to Win faction Organise!, but Renew won eight out of 21 places on the YL committee, and three out of ten for Labour Students.

Members of Renew slate reported issues with the cut off date for eligibility, so members not receiving ballots, during the election, but to no effect.

Renew could be described as the softest of soft left, but in their election campaigns they rightly denounced the Labour leadership, and

Renew Young Labour

 Catherine Howells Chair L1822025	 Sam Eastoe BAME Officer L1816438	 Ralph Noble LGBT+ Officer L1756750
 Mads Wainman Disability Officer L3094331	 Molly Holland Women's Officer L3104274	 Albert Salimov International Officer L1965275

called for campaigning and for building Young Labour and Labour Students local groups.

In the Corbyn era, Corby-

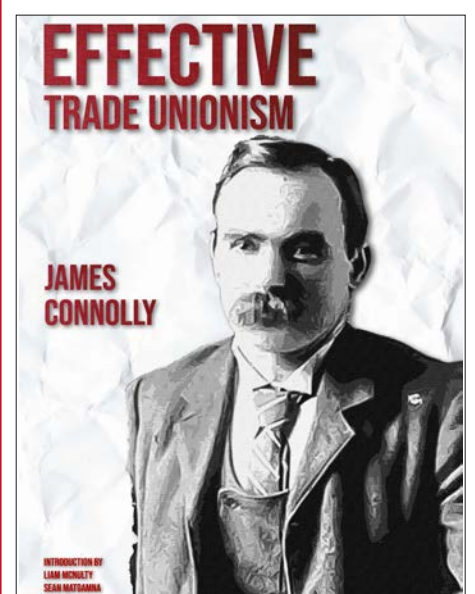
nites took the leadership of Young Labour from the right wing, but left local YL groups weaker in 2019 than in 2015. Labour Students remained

under the control of the right wing, and was eventually formally disbanded.

A left slate won Labour Students when it was re-launched, but did little with its victory, apparently being stymied by the committee's officers (Open Labour, i.e. soft left).

Since Organise (Labour to Win) faction won the last elections, membership of Young Labour and Labour Students has collapsed further, with some Labour university societies defecting en masse to other political formations.

Organise! have been accused of partying on the Thames while preventing Labour Students and Young Labour from holding democratic conferences and blocking motions on Gaza and education. □



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Workers' protests emerge in Venezuela

By Will Roberts

A thousand people marched through Caracas on Saturday 14 March, and broke through a police cordon to reach the National Assembly building before delivering a list of demands. The protest was spearheaded by education unions and public sector unions, which may explain the government's response of increasing the "economic war bonus" in public sector jobs by a quarter.

Current world oil markets are not easy to predict, nor do they instil confidence in investors. But before Trump's current war on Iran began, oil money had definitely started pouring in to Venezuela. The government are using new proposed labour laws to try and ensure that this money stays in the hands of the government and the ruling class.

A useful article by Oswaldo Pacheco from the Venezuelan union C-Cura, published on the [Venezuelan Voices](#) website, states that while the oil sector projects 20% growth in 2026, the government is trying to keep the proceeds out of workers' pockets. "What Roig [a representative of the Fedecámaras business association at the ILO] is proposing specifically is an Emergency Labour Law that would allow bonuses to be paid outside of wages without impacting benefits, vacations, or seniority, and then discuss the substance of the matter. In other words: a nominal wage increase today in exchange for handing over the accumulated future wealth of workers."

Bonuses

This is part of a much broader practice in Venezuela, where "bonuses" have come to replace standard wages in order for employers to sidestep expenses like benefits, vacations or security. According to Pacheco, 96% of workers' income in modern-day Venezuela is from bonuses.

A 2012 law enacted under Hugo Chavez ensured maternity leave, prohibited unfair dismissal and outsourcing, and extended pensions to all workers. Current proposals would gut this law of its content.

In this context, it is promising that Venezuelan unions have begun [mobilising](#) against the new labour laws, and calling positively for the raising of the minimum wage, in part to curtail the practice of wages all being paid through off-the-books "bonuses". The original minimum wage was set in March 2022, but inflation and sanctions on Venezuela have meant the money amount (130 bolívars) has devalued from around \$30 to around \$0.30 (per month). Thus the explosion in "bonuses" to replace baseline wages.

Workers in Venezuela face an uphill battle against not one, but two enemies: their own capitulating (but still military-authoritarian) government, and



the Trump administration. International economic, military and political circumstances are not favourable. But the action being taken in these conditions against their government for better conditions and real wages are the first shoots of a movement for real change in Venezuelan society. It is these movements that socialists in the UK and elsewhere should look to and support.

Otherwise? Venezuela has been spared any further direct military intervention by the Trump administration, and there's been some boost in income for Venezuelan capitalists. Thus ends the good news.

Abduction

Since the abduction of Nicolas Maduro at the start of the year, the political turmoil in the country has led to less political change than one might have expected. In previous articles in *Solidarity* we have noted President Delcy Rodriguez's "tightrope": clinging on to the acquiescence of the population (and the military hierarchy) and giving vent to anger over Maduro's capture, while playing nicely with the US in order to prevent any further intervention or disorder.

That two-faced approach has now clearly tilted in one direction: Rodriguez speaks like a Madurista, but acts like a Trumpist. The streets of Caracas may still be filled with government-endorsed posters calling for the release of Maduro, and the occasional government-backed demonstration; but the government itself is bending over backwards to meet every demand of the Americans, and restructuring the economy in the interests of American capital.

Any hint of demanding that Trump release Maduro and his wife, who are still facing charges in New York, has disappeared from Venezuela's direct engagement with the US government directly.

As of 6 March, Rodriguez has normalised relations and resumed diplomatic engagements with the US. Presumably as part of the same process, relations were also restored with Israel, and a shipment of Venezuelan oil appears to have been delivered to Israel through intermediary companies.

Preparatory

Some predicted it in advance, but certainly in hindsight the capture of Maduro and subsequent tranche of changes to Venezuela's oil industry will be read as preparatory manoeuvres for Trump's war in Iran. Venezuelan oil sales under Maduro as the war broke out could have been a potential thorn in the US's side, and conversely, having access to that oil may now offset some of the impact of the war on the US economy.

That is not to say that the plan was smart, or even coherent: Venezuelan oil is expensive to extract and difficult to process, and even the current ramping up of investment will get the country nowhere near the peak of 3mn barrels a day it was producing at the turn of the millennium.

There were also separate factors at play in the US operation. Members of Trump's cabinet, in particular Marco Rubio, have been angling for intervention in Latin America for years, and Trump himself saw Maduro as "unfinished business" from his first term in office.

Rodriguez is now forced to play by the rules of a familiar game for many coun-

tries in the Americas: restructuring its domestic market in order to make Venezuela an easier site of investment for foreign capital. In February, a law was passed which hugely weakened PDVSA, the state-owned oil company, in order to encourage big multinational oil firms to look to invest in Venezuela. PDVSA also announced that it will supply oil and derivatives to America. Since then, at least Repsol and Shell have made exploration agreements.

This is a fairly blatant undermining of the quasi-Stalinist model of the economy espoused by Hugo Chavez and his successor Maduro. Bourgeois press analysis in the West is keen to highlight Rodriguez's "revolutionary" father and her role in Maduro's government, but the role she is now playing is one of capitulation to US demands.

One element of that capitulation is to be celebrated: the government has released the majority of political prisoners in the country. It is a shame that this victory was not won by the Venezuelan people themselves; but it is still good for the prisoners, many of whom were arrested for protesting obvious corruption and fraud by the Maduro government. There are still hundreds of prisoners not yet been released, and laws allowing for the easy arrest of political dissidents are still on the books. The fight on that front is far from over.

Some of those released include trade union organisers and activists, who had been imprisoned for exercising their right to protest and organise industrially. A statement from the [ITUC](#) celebrated their release and called for Venezuela to uphold the rights of freedom of association and the right to organise. □



Reform's poisonous false answers

By Cathy Nugent

In the 2025 local government elections Reform took control of ten councils and formed minority administrations in three, winning 41% of the seats up for election. In this year's local and Assembly elections they are projected to gain 12 more councils. They are also predicted to become the second largest party in the Welsh Senedd after Plaid Cymru. In the Scottish Parliamentary election Reform is in a close race for second place with Labour, behind the SNP.

Reform's recent headline-grabbing policy announcements clearly emulate Trump's second administration. For example, they plan to sack the top civil servants in every government department and replace them with Reform-friendly political experts.

Their manifesto for Senedd Cymru (the Welsh Parliament) says a bit more. It includes Welsh-specific populist policies such as stopping the "war on motorists" by scrapping the 20 mph speed limit. Racist or xenophobic policies are given a Welsh twist – "we will prioritise Welsh men and women for social housing". (In 2021, 29% of the Welsh population were born in England, or elsewhere outside Wales). And there is ridiculous scandalmongering – "Welsh ministers are pouring money into overseas projects like planting trees in Uganda, while A&E waiting times hit record levels."

Reform will stop "gender ideology" being taught in schools. They promise to sack the overpaid Diversity and Equality and Inclusion officers who promote identity politics across the public sector. Presumably in Wales DEI includes Welsh-centred policies which Reform claims to care about.

Reform's general election policy of insurance-based health-care to replace the NHS has been sidelined. Instead they have a 20-point plan to rescue the NHS in Wales, cutting waiting lists, restoring the NHS dental service. That this can be achieved while cutting taxes and reprioritising budgets is pure fantasy.

In education Reform say they will bring back discipline, league tables and physical education.

In the last three years Reform have moved away from a "Net Smart" policy which favoured some renewables. Net zero is now billed as "net stupid", another mind-trap from the woke brigade. Any fuel that is affordable is good fuel.

In other documents and announcements Reform have promised destruction of anything that smacks of social progress.

They want to scrap Labour's 2025 Employment Rights Act, restricting fire-and-hire, easing union organising and strikes, etc., because, they say, it is a burden on business. Reform, after all,

wants to represent the interests of the bosses and the rich. However, according to the HNH poll a solid 29% of Reform voters would want to keep the Act.

Suella Braverman, Reform's spokesperson for Education, Skills and Equalities has claimed the UK is "ripped apart by diversity, equality and inclusion". Hence, Reform intends to repeal the 2010 Equality Act legal protections against discrimination.

Finally Danny Kruger is very keen to regulate our personal lives in some yet unspecified way. He thinks people spend too much time on dating apps and have too much sex, and women are forgetting that they need to give birth before their biological clocks run down. And be married to a man.

Whether Kruger is a throwback to 1980s Toryism and their campaign for traditional families or one of the new breed of Christian nationalists, he brings a repellent element of pronatalism to the party.

Reform have had 30% or near support in polls across Britain since early 2025 (though their average score has dropped a little recently). They have 270,000 members. Although the defection to Reform of current and ex-Tory MPs (28 at the last count) and Tory councillors (85) and the make-up of the party's members (hardline Tory and further right) makes it look like a reborn Tory party, Reform's voters are more diverse.

Poll

A large poll by Hope not Hate (HNH), reported on by the *Guardian*, showed just one-in-five voters are hardline Tories. The biggest group are middle income people who are concerned about immigration like hardline Tories, but also worried about the cost of living. 26% of their voters are more working-class and more likely ex-Labour voters.

Another group is simply fed up with politics and their biggest concern is the state of the NHS.

The final group is what HNH calls "contrarian youth". They are the least bothered about immigration; they are worried about the future, about jobs, housing, education. Their support for Reform reflects a growing pessimism.

Can Reform's coalition hold together between now and the general election? One factor will be how well or badly they do in local government.

During the 2025 local elections Reform pledged to cut the taxes and slash the waste. They ran into trouble on both pledges.

When they said "cut taxes" voters would have assumed they meant council taxes. Yet every single Reform-run council has put up these taxes. When pressed by reporters Farage claimed cutting tax was a national, not a local pledge. Many in his party didn't get the

REFORMUK will FIX Broken Britain

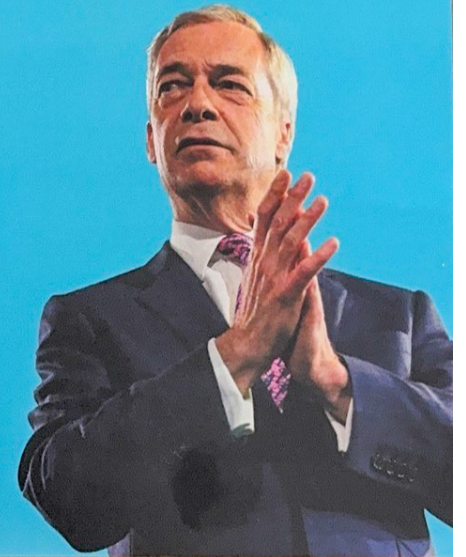
Only Reform can be trusted to turn our great country around.

- ✓ Reform will detain and deport illegal immigrants, quit the European Convention on Human Rights and stop the boats
- ✓ Reform will scrap crazy Net Zero targets and use Britain's oil and gas reserves to cut energy bills
- ✓ Reform will put British people first for healthcare, social housing and welfare benefits, and stop handouts to foreign nationals



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memo. In May 2025 Zia Yusuf told the BBC that voters "don't want their council tax going up" surely indicating "no tax rises" was the election pledge.

Reform is a council-tax raising party. Reform-led (minority control) Worcestershire has, having applied for leave to make an exceptional increase, voted to raise council tax by 9%. Average Reform council increases come out at 3.8%.

Councils of all political stripes have been making cuts year-on-year since 2010. Many council budgets now barely cover statutory responsibilities. Reform can't possibly meet their promise to "slash waste".

At flagship Kent County Council the Reform leader Linden Kemkeran, desperate to keep council tax rises to under 4%, told her councillors to eff off when they said in a meeting that there were no more "efficiency savings". Eventually nine people were sacked, suspended or left after a recording of the meeting was leaked. Seven of them, like many other Reform members, decided to join Rupert Lowe's Restore Britain organisation.

Durham

In Durham, where Reform won 65 out of 98 council seats, they immediately told staff to look for other jobs. At the end of last year they proposed cuts to deal with the council's growing deficit including bus services and the council-tax exemption for low income households. Most people won't see those things are "waste".

Many Reform councillors have resigned, failed to show up for meetings or gone independent. The rate of resignations is said to be much higher than that of other parties. These people are chancers, grifters or delusional. They and Reform members are susceptible to further right views – indeed many are either switching support to or "dual carding" with Advance and Restore Britain.

Reform has treated local government as a dress rehearsal for national government, introducing ideologically loaded policies. For example, Andrea Jenkyns, the Mayor of Lincolnshire, proposed scrapping English language courses because it does nothing for "native born" Britons. It is in this area of policy that Reform has its "cutting edge".

Everyone from Labour through to the further right Reform splinters, Restore Britain and Advance, now adheres to versions of the once-outrageous idea of re-migration, that is mass deportations. Reform says it will set up an ICE-style agency, Deportation Command, to track down "illegal migrants". They will be briefly held in tents or ex-military bases before being flown out of the UK at rapid rate. They will withdraw citizenship from immigrants who commit crimes and scrap Indefinite Leave to Remain.

"Stopping the boats" is top of the agenda. To achieve this they will leave the European Convention on Human Rights so that no one can be granted asylum in the UK (although they say they will make exceptions for small groups of really deserving refugees). Whether all this is practically possible is another matter. As is whether people in the UK will tolerate ICE-style round-ups and deportations.

A Hope not Hate poll of Reform members showed 90% supporting the forcible removal of undocumented immigrants, and ending of Indefinite Leave to Remain. Many are explicitly ethno-nationalist – 49% think non-white British citizens whose parents were born abroad should be forcibly removed or encouraged to leave. Only 4% think white British citizens in the same category should leave.

It is the duty of every socialist and trade unionist to fight hard against these views on the doorstep and in our communities in the coming weeks. □

Active united fronts against far right

Workers' Liberty will build for, and hopes for, a big turnout on the United Nations anti-racism day demonstration "for love, for hope, for unity" on 28 March.

But in the big picture, the unions' policy of financing Stand Up To Racism and the Together Alliance in return for being seen to do something against the far right and racism has failed.

Set piece displays of love, hope, and unity will not turn the tide when the far right can get many thousands on the streets of London, or hundreds outside asylum-seeker housing.

Stewarding has increased on some Stand Up To Racism mobilisations, but they continue to avoid the necessary physical confrontations with the far right, and rely on the police to manage safely-distanced demonstrations.

In the last two years the TUC has produced more of their own resources and training on combating the far right in workplaces. Unison has produced a guide to opposing Reform in the run up to the May council elections. That is good, but again not enough.

Only trade unions, allied to the communities at the sharp end of racist demagoguery, have anything like the strength to beat back the far-right and cohere strong support for self-defence, and only if they work to convince and mobilise their members.

Workers' united front mobilisation on the streets needs to be linked with a coherent and positive 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.

Grass-roots labour-movement organisations are starting to take steps to build activity on these principles. Workers' Liberty will be working to build active local union-community an-

ti-fascist and anti-racist committees uniting trade-union, Labour, other left, Your Party, and Green left activists. □

A victory on the visa rules

By Ben Tausz

National Health Service Healthcare Assistants in Manchester have won progress in their battle to prevent their sacking and deportation under newly tightened visa rules.

300 HCAs at Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust (MFT) faced uncertainty as the minimum earning requirement to renew their visas rose to £25,000 — just £63 more than their £24,937 salaries. They would face sacking and deportation when their current visas expired.

Affected workers organised, and assembled wider solidarity from the trade union and migrants' rights movements. The Unison branch organised a collective petition from MFT workers demanding security for their colleagues. The "Patients Not Passports" coalition mobilised thousands of supporters to write to the employer. Delegations from local Unison, Unite and RMT branches joined campaign actions.

Labour mayor Andy Burnham was pushed to back the workers. Burnham described the impact of the Labour government's reform as "indirect discrimination".

Facing employer inaction, the HCAs and their



supporters lobbied the MFT board's January meeting. Some entered the meeting and confronted directors with their demands.

Now, Migrants Organise reports the board has publicly committed to working to secure "the majority" of affected workers' contracts, and has shown new flexibility in moving workers up the salary band to protect them.

But not all the workers are safe yet, so the campaign continues. And the issue is far broader: thousands of NHS workers around the country face similar threats, as do migrant workers across many industries. □

The stranger's case

By William Shakespeare

In the play St Thomas More — originally drafted by others, but revised by him — William Shakespeare wrote the following lines:

Marry, the removing of the strangers, which cannot choose but much advantage the poor handicrafts of the city.

MORE: Grant them removed, and grant that this your noise Hath chid down all the majesty of England; Imagine that you see the wretched strangers, Their babies at their backs and their poor luggage, Plodding to th' ports and costs for transportation, And that you sit as kings in your desires, Authority quite silent by your brawls, And you in ruff of your opinions clothed; What had you got? I'll tell you: you had taught How insolence and strong hand should prevail, How order should be quelled; and by this pattern Not one of you should live an aged man, For other ruffians, as their fancies wrought, With self-same hand, self reasons, and self right, Would shark on you, and men like ravenous fishes Would feed on one another...

And again:

... Say now the king should... banish you, whither would you go?

What country, by the nature of your error, Should give you harbour? go you to France or Flanders, To any German province, to Spain or Portugal, Nay, any where that not adheres to England, - Why, you must needs be strangers: would you be pleased To find a nation of such barbarous temper, That, breaking out in hideous violence, Would not afford you an abode on earth, Whet their detested knives against your throats, Spurn you like dogs, and like as if that God Owed not nor made not you, nor that the claimants Were not all appropriate to your comforts, But chartered unto them, what would you think To be thus used? this is the stranger's case; And this your mountainish inhumanity.

ALL: Faith, a says true: let's do as we may be done to.

• Audio version at bit.ly/ws-more

Make unions fight for migrant rights

By Harold Storey

The most overt action from trade union leaders so far against Shabana Mahmood's vicious plans on asylum and immigration has been by Andrea Egan, General Secretary of Unison. She signed an open letter in February 2026, with 53 MPs, against the plans.

Some other trade union leaders have previously criticised

the Labour government on immigration. FBU General Secretary Steve Wright previously called for Labour to change direction following Starmer's "island of strangers" speech. He has since, like Sharon Graham of Unite, called for Starmer to resign. But he has said little to nothing about Shabana Mahmood's plans.

The North West Labour conference in January passed a

motion on asylum rights, with unions voting for it. No-one spoke in favour of the government's immigration policy. Several local Labour Parties have voted likewise.

But outcry from the unions? Not yet. Activists will push unions to use their links to Labour on this issue, and more broadly for an opening up and democratising of the Labour Party. □



The forgotten General Strike when workers won

By Bas Hardy

This year marks the centenary of the 4-12 May 1926 General Strike, a momentous event in the history of the British labour movement which sadly ended in defeat and betrayal. The strike was called in support of over a million coal miners who had been locked out of their workplaces for refusing to accept wage cuts and worsening conditions.

Despite nearly two million fellow workers mainly in heavy industries and transport coming out in support of the miners, the Trades Union Congress (TUC) called off the General Strike after nine days. The Labour leaders and trade union bureaucrats preferred to capitulate to capitalist power than stand up for the workers they were supposed to represent!

A lot of books and articles will be coming out marking the anniversary. The BBC, if it's still got the bottle, might even rebroadcast *Days of Hope*, Jim Allen's four part drama series about the strike and the background to it, which went out on the fiftieth anniversary. If so, I doubt it will go out on prime time as it did then!

1972

Yet as we mark this anniversary there is a moment of history somehow missing from historical memory. Another general strike actually called by the TUC, one in which the labour movement emerged victorious and since largely forgotten about. That strike happened in July 1972 following the jailing of five dockers for refusing to obey a court rule to stop picketing.

The post-war Attlee Labour government repealed the 1927 Trade Union Act passed by the Tories following the 1926 defeat, and eventually (in August 1951) the wartime anti-strike decree Order 1305. Strikes grew considerably from the mid-1950s, though they were all localised (no national strikes until 1966).

The fifties and sixties, an era of "full employment", witnessed a considerable tipping of the balance of power from capital to organised labour as trade unions grew in strength, workers were increasingly unafraid to go on strike to advance wage claims and improve their working conditions, and employers preferred to pay out rather than lose buoyant markets.

The right wing press was at the forefront of demands for laws to rein in union power, their ire being particularly



Bernie Steer addresses crowd after release from Pentonville Jail

directed at "unofficial" strikes (the majority at that time).

The first effort to curb the unions was by the Wilson Labour government in 1969. Barbara Castle, Secretary of State for Employment, who had a reputation as a "leftist", produced a White Paper, *In Place of Strife*, but was forced to withdraw the ensuing Industrial Relations Bill by intense opposition, particularly from trade unions affiliated to the Labour Party.

Clamp Down

The Tories had no such problems when they returned to office, passing the Industrial Relations Act 1971 as a centrepiece of their political programme. That law set up the National Industrial Relations Court (NIRC) with a particular brief to clamp down on picketing.

A big campaign was on at the time by London dock workers against containerisation, with some of them picketing a container depot in Newham. The NIRC issued an injunction against this. When the pickets refused to obey it, five of their shop stewards were arrested for contempt of court and slammed up in Pentonville Prison.

The AWL's forerunner, Workers' Fight, declared:

"Defend the dockers! Smash the Act! General strike!

"This is the crunch! Trade unionists

are in jail to be held indefinitely for acting as trade unionists.

"The National Industrial Relations Court has claimed its first victims. The Tories are using their power, the power of the courts, the police and their laws against the labour movement.

"Now we must reply with our power, the power of industrial action – the power of the General Strike".

These sentiments reflected the mood of outrage at the jailing of the dockers. A rolling series of strikes developed, despite the fact that some factories were on an annual shutdown in July. This forced the TUC to get off its collective arse and call a General Strike for 31 July 1972.

Marched

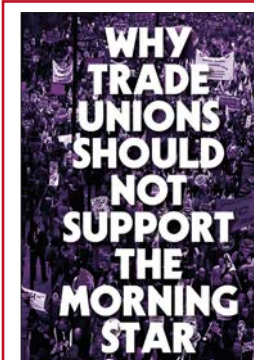
Thousands of workers marched on Pentonville Prison to demand the dockers release. I can remember being on that demonstration, feeling the power of an organised and determined working class. It was the closest I've ever been to a revolutionary situation in my lifetime.

The sheer strength of the protests forced the Tory Heath government to capitulate before the general strike happened. A factotum going by the name of the Official Solicitor, someone never heard of before or since, decided there was insufficient evidence for the dock-

ers' arrests and they were released.

The Tory government went on to suffer further defeat at the hands of the unions as a result of the 1974 miners' strike. Heath sought to call a General Election under the slogan "who governs Britain?" – him or the unions – only to be told by the electorate it wasn't him!

We are beholden to remember the victories as well as the defeats, and learn the lessons from both. That's what the class enemy did under Thatcher, with her deliberate drive to deindustrialise the economy, almost halving union membership in the Tories' term in office, and her anti-strike laws. The Pentonville Five – Vic Turner, Conny Clancy, Tony Merrick, Bernie Steer and Derek Watkins – were the unsung heroes of the labour movement. Their memory (all are now dead) still demands our recognition after all these years. □



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Capitalism is not an “Epstein conspiracy”

By Aaron Post

The phrase “Epstein class” is now in use as a shorthand for the forms of networking and mutual patronage practised by the rich and powerful who moved in Jeffrey Epstein’s circle. As a journalistic artefact calling attention to the horrific misdeeds of such people, it is effective and impactful.

However, when a social analysis is extrapolated from it, or “Epstein class” is used as a synonym for the ruling class, the usage becomes harmful. An example of such extrapolation could be seen on the London demonstration against the US-Israel-Iran war on 7 March, where at least one protester held a placard saying, “Iran is fighting Epstein regimes”.

This positions the Islamic Republic of Iran, a dictatorship which murders protesters and violently oppresses women, as an agent of justice and progress.

Another example of groups on the left implying world politics was organised via a conspiracy headed by Epstein, and somehow remains so today, is the public meeting hosted by the Lambeth branch of Your Party, titled “Iran: The Epstein War”.

The idea of “Epstein regimes” fighting “Epstein wars” also reflects a broader pattern of conspiracy-theorist thinking. A perennial feature of such thinking is a tendency to treat even loose forms of association and adjacency as if they represent a singular, compact entity.

Antisemitism

Antisemitism provides the most readily-available theoretical framework for such thinking, by appearing to illuminate, concretise, and personalise, in the figure of “the Jewish financier”, forms of domination and social harm whose causes seem abstract, incorporeal, and hidden.

Capitalists, including Jewish ones, exploit workers. They do that not out of personal malevolence, but driven by structural imperatives. Some capitalists, like Jeffrey Epstein, are guilty of monstrous personal crimes in addition. That does not mean capitalism was organised by an “Epstein conspiracy” when he was alive, or is organised by a similar personal conspiracy now.

Treating all association as a singular conspiracy miseducates about how class power is actually enacted. Epstein maintained a network. He seems to have thrived on the process itself. He didn’t control the US government via that network, many capitalists operated through other networks, and people in the network were not simply carrying out his orders. There is much to criticise Noam Chomsky for, but he is not a sleeper agent for an “Epstein regime”.

Conspiracy thinking is anathema to genuine class politics. If one believes the world is run via a conspiracy of the



“Epstein class” or “Epstein regimes”, the implied form of action isn’t to collectively organise in your workplace, strike to win better conditions, and aim for the socialisation of production, it is simply to hunt out the various nodes in the network.

Is the idea that the vast majority of capitalists worldwide who were not part of Epstein’s network are harmless? The implied logic maps neatly onto the old antisemitic idea that there are decent, honest, nationally-rooted capitalists who make material goods, and then there are bad, transnational capitalists, who make their money through incorporeal processes of finance and money exchange.

Stereotypes

The stereotype “honest” goods-producing capitalist would be strait-laced and dislike sexual abuse or even Caribbean-island parties. Some capitalists actually fit that stereotype. But the transnational financiers? For them, everything is an abstraction, so why not trade in women and girls the same way they trade in stocks and shares? Such arguments have long been integral for various forms of “Red-Brown” politics, syncretic ideologies that combine critiques of finance with antisemitic nationalisms.

As well as distorting class politics, extrapolating a world-shaping conspiracy from the actions of Epstein and his associates undermines efforts to centre the victims of their sexual abuse. It reduces violence against women and girls to a mere epiphenomenon of the conspiracy, rather than something socially

endemic.

Capitalism (all of it: the “materially productive” and the “financial”) does treat human bodies as raw materials to be churned up and exploited. It is easy to imagine how people trained in techniques of social command and domination might extend that into their sexual psychology. But treating women and girls as disposable sex objects is not simply a byproduct of capitalism.

Wealth and Power

The specific forms of abuse Epstein and Maxwell were able to perpetrate were facilitated by their particular wealth and power, but there are undoubtedly many other little “Epsteins” throughout society, and amongst middle and working-class people too. As one of Epstein’s victims told journalist Lucia Osborne-Crowley: “Obviously it makes a lot of things different that Epstein was a billionaire. But it’s not just about the most powerful people in the world. It’s about the people who are the most powerful in your neighbourhood, your school.”

Many of those casually resharing memes or other online content promoting the idea of an “Epstein class” or “Epstein regimes” may not have thought through the implications, just as many who share memes about the Rothschilds may see them simply as critical of greed and exploitation. It is tempting to see criticisms of individual financiers, or of “financial elites”, as most of the way to socialist good sense, just needing to be nudged a little further. But a critique that sees social ills as caused by a conspiracy of financiers must be

challenged at the most basic level, not treated as if it is merely limited.

When the Occupy movement exploded in 2011, its predominant narrative framing, “the 99% versus the 1%”, became popular. Much of the organised left went along with that framing, seeing a potential shortcut to political hegemony by presenting socialism as simply a slight extension of the catchcry radicalism already prevalent in the movement. The 99% versus 1% framing, like its even looser equivalent “For the many, not the few”, has merits; it is an easily-graspable expression of the deeply undemocratic nature of a society organised through vast inequalities of wealth and power. But in actual fact, the ruling class and its close-knit retinue are more than 1%. Plenty of smaller capitalists and fairly high-up managers are not in the top 1%. The working class may be 80% of the population in developed capitalist countries, and a majority globally, but not 99%.

Such framings therefore blur class politics, rather than sharpening them. By failing to challenge them in the hope of making easy political gains for ourselves, the socialist left gives an unwitting leg-up to reactionary political currents whose ideas really do appear to provide inchoate “anti-elite” populism with an explanatory theoretical framework. To go along with narratives about an “Epstein class”, implying some non-“Epstein class” contingent of harmless capitalists, or, worse, “Epstein regimes”, would be to repeat the mistake, in a much worse form. □



Organise the unorganised! Against TUC expulsion!

By David Axon

It appears almost certain that the TUC disputes committee will hold an investigation into the actions of the National Education Union (NEU), following its Special Conference decision to continue to organise support staff in schools (see report in *Solidarity* 762).

What happens next is far from a foregone conclusion, and is a matter of concern for trade unionists in all TUC-affiliated unions.

There has been a strange fatalism about the TUC in the NEU discussion. Leading people have been heard to say – including to other unions – that the NEU will be out of the TUC soon. The Executive's motion to conference ended, strangely, with affiliation to the General Federation of Trade Unions (GFTU) – which has absolutely nothing to do with the support staff issue unless GFTU is being seen as some sort of “semi-alternative” to the TUC (which does not even pretend to be). At a recent North West regional council it was even proposed that the NEU didn't pay its affiliation fee to the Regional TUC as “we're going to be out soon”.

FAQs on the NEU website refer to NEU actions as a breach of TUC “rules”, without any particular rule ever being referenced. What are the facts?

Expelled

The first and most important fact is this: there has never been a union expelled from the TUC for what the NEU is doing. In fact, there has hardly been a union expelled that didn't want to be. Not in the TUC's whole 158 year history.

The most recent expulsion from the TUC was of the electrical union (then called the EETPU) in 1988. This was for signing single-union “no-strike” deals. The EETPU had sided with the employers (News International) in the Wapping Dispute and colluded with the Thatcher government. In the political situation of the time, the EETPU leadership were happy to be outside the TUC. In fact their leader, Eric Hammond, actually walked out of the congress. But within four years they were back in the TUC, within the AUEW, and are now part of Unite.

Before that it was the electricians' union too. In 1961 the ETU was expelled after vote-rigging by the Stalinist leadership of the union.

No one in the NEU was proposing no-strike or single-union deals with employers. And no-one was proposing ballot-rigging.

The only cases of unions being excluded for doing the right thing were in 1923 and 1959, when a small dock workers' union was expelled after coming into conflict with the TGWU (now also part of Unite). The 1923 case happened after the TGWU had signed a pay-reduction deal with employers. The 1959 case involved the very same union (long since back the TUC) being expelled a second time. The TGWU, through the Dock Labour Scheme, was actually part of dock management. In both cases the risk of temporary exclusion was probably worth taking, but the dockworkers didn't take it lying down; it took four years of this dispute before it reached expulsion.

The TUC rules include no “rule” that the NEU has or would be breaking.

The NUT, main forerunner of the NEU, joined the TUC only in 1972, after 102 years of life, but that was because previously the NUT considered the TUC too militant and proletarian and itself too “professional”. Nothing like that now. The issue is about the NEU organising lower-paid “support” staff in schools into the same union as teachers.

Withdrawal

The NEU has decided to withdraw from a voluntary agreement, the agreement re-made when the NUT and the smaller ATL merged, bringing the ATL's support staff membership into the NEU. Since then thousands of support staff have joined the NEU, primarily through having been un-unionised workers in a workplace with an active NEU rep. That has created “industrial unionism” in many schools.

Withdrawing from that agreement could well lead to a complaint from any of the other support staff unions – Unison, GMB, or Unite. And then the rules kick in, over how the complaint is handled. That has already happened twice. Each time the NEU has complied with the TUC rules, right down to paying “financial compensation” to the other unions. (Supposedly to compensate for their loss of membership fees – though had NEU reps not done their work, no union would have those fees, and those workers would remain unrepresented).

In fact, even without a complaint, the issue was discussed at the TUC executive on 3 March. Unfortunately the NEU member of the executive was not present.

By the time of publication, the matter



will be being discussed at the 18 March TUC General Council. It appears almost certain that the TUC disputes committee will hold an investigation as a result.

Under TUC rules, the General Secretary Paul Nowak has to use his influence to “promote a settlement”, as rule 13a puts it. Ultimately, though, the General Council may have to vote on whether or not “it appears to the General Council that the activities of the organisation may be detrimental to the interests of the trade union movement or contrary to the declared principles or declared policy of Congress”.

Detrimental

Detrimental to the interests of the movement, when two thirds of support staff aren't unionised at all? No. But contrary to declared TUC principles, perhaps? The relevant bit is in Principle Two: “All affiliates of the TUC accept as a binding commitment to their continued affiliation to the TUC that they will not knowingly and actively seek to take into membership existing or recent members of another union by making recruitment approaches, either directly or indirectly, without the agreement of that organisation.”

Can the NEU implement its decision on support staff without breaching this? Yes – the decision was to “begin to actively recruit non-unionised support staff workers”. The NEU motion calls instructs the executive “to make it clear to the NJC unions that we will continue to seek to work collaboratively in the interests of the workforce and will always be open to proposals for an amicable resolution of our disagreements”.

But if the vote does go against the

NEU at a later General Council, under the rules the General Council then notifies the NEU “of that fact, specifying the grounds on which that charge is made and inviting the organisation to present its views to the General Council.” One possible outcome of that (to be resisted) is for the GC “to order that the organisation be forthwith suspended from membership of the Congress until the next annual Congress”.

The issue could come to Congress 2026, 13-16 September in Brighton. More likely is slower, with a vote at Congress 2027, if at all).

The NEU has a good chance of winning a Congress debate – unless it just walks away without a real fight.

Other TUC unions, such as the CWU, have already put motions to Congress about “reform” of the TUC and the way it operates. The NEU issue could easily get caught up in that.

Factor

But probably a bigger factor is Clause 29 of the new Employment Rights Act, “Right of trade unions to access workplaces”. There was a consultation on the details of that last year, so exactly what that looks like is unknown, but it will certainly alter the landscape particularly where there are non-unionised workers in a workplace.

Consider also that a Reform government or coalition would repeal the Employment Rights Act, and bring back Tory anti-union legislation and more. Unions have three years to use the ERA to build membership numbers and organisation in the meanwhile.

This is not a matter of defending the NEU's sectional interests against the sectional interests of another union. It is much, much, more important than that – it is about the future of the union movement as a whole.

The NEU should take its fight to stay in the TUC with utmost seriousness. And members of all other unions should start to discuss the issue, so that a split can be avoided, and un-unionised support staff brought into union membership. □

How to wreck a Labour Party

By Micheál MacEoin

The Irish Labour Party had its roots in the trade union movement in the early twentieth century, on the model of the UK Labour Party.

In the UK, the Labour Representation Committee (LRC) was formed in 1900, following a motion at the Trade Union Congress (TUC), bringing together trades unions and socialist societies to sponsor parliamentary candidates. This was a precursor to the Labour Party, which has been in government 12 times, including minority and coalition administrations.

Irish Labour, likewise, was the decision of the Irish Trade Union Congress (ITUC). Earlier attempts to establish a vehicle for Irish labour political representation had been defeated by Belfast-based attempts to affiliate to the British Labour Party.

By the 1912 ITUC conference, the mood had shifted, as “Larkinism” in the wider Irish labour movement outstripped the skilled craft workers or British-oriented labour unionists.

In May 1912, James Connolly addressed the delegates at the nineteenth Irish Trade Union Congress at the Town Hall in Clonmel. Moving the important motion on political action, Connolly told the delegates that they “all felt the disadvantage, and he might say the humiliation, involved in the fact that the working classes of Ireland were practically the only workers in any country in Europe to-day that had not a definite or-

ganised method of expressing its view upon the political field”.

Home Rule

Following Connolly’s speech, delegates voted 49 votes to 18 to include “the independent representation of Labour upon all public boards amongst its objects”, and put in place the practical steps “to give effect politically to this resolution”. They saw themselves as preparing for labour representation in a Home Rule Parliament, to come after the Home Rule Bill then before the British Parliament was enacted and implemented.

In the event, Home Rule did not come. The outbreak of the First World War saw the postponement of Home Rule, and the weakening of the labour movement.

In the wake of the Easter Rising of 1916, moves were made to revive the political machine of the labour movement, with delegates to the 1916 annual general meeting believing that “the circumstances of the time now compel us to take action or lose the chance of assuming our rightful place in the political life of this country.”

The ITUC would rename itself the Irish Trades Union Congress and Labour Party in 1918. But it never would assume its “rightful place” in politics.

In the December 1918 election, Labour decided not to run candidates, ceding the political terrain to Sinn Féin. Though unions took action against conscription and to hinder the British war effort, Labour and the unions largely

concentrated on economic issues and left the key political issue, national independence, to Sinn Féin.

Sinn Féin split, after the 1919-21 War of Independence, over the issue of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, and the two sides of the split would fight a bitter but short-lived Civil War in 1922-23.

Labour did modestly well in the 1920s as a the de facto opposition to the Free State government, formed by the pro-Treaty Cumann na nGaedheal. When the Anti-Treaty republicans entered the Dail in 1926, however, as Fianna Fáil, they crowded Labour out and ate up its urban working-class support.

Civil War

The two sides of the Civil War eventually, in the mid-1930s, produced a two-party parliamentary system alternating between Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil.

Labour would occasionally enter government as the coalition partner of one of the larger parties. This would be Fine Gael in 1948-51, 1954-57, 1973-77, 1981-82, 1982-87, 1994-97 and 2011-2016, and Fianna Fáil in 1993-94.

Its weakness meant that the trade union bureaucracy often sought to do deals with Fianna Fáil rather than work through their “own” party.

In March 1930, right-wing elements within the Irish Labour Party successfully overturned the Larkin/Connolly strategy and detached the party from the ITUC, though member unions could still affiliate.

In 1939, at the urging of the Catholic

hierarchy operating through the Irish National Teachers’ Organisation (INTO), the party disavowed the aim of a “Workers’ Republic”.

That evolution led American historian Emmet Larkin to describe it, with some justice, as “the most opportunistically conservative Labour Party anywhere in the known world.”

From the late 1960s onwards, Labour declined steadily, falling to a 6.5% vote in 1987 amid division over the European Union and the North. It also faced stiff competition from the Stalinist Workers’ Party.

In 1992, off the back of campaigning on issues such as divorce and contraception, the party hit over 19%, reshaping itself as a party of urban professionals and a vehicle for social liberalisation. Throughout the rest of the 90s and 2000s, the party would hover at around 10%.

Labour had a chance, in 2011, in the context of widespread anger at Fianna Fáil following the 2008 financial crash, to reshape the two-party system in Ireland.

Instead, it opted (again) to prop up Fine Gael in Enda Kenny’s austerity government. Voters punished the party, which received only 6.6% of the vote in 2016. It was overtaken by Sinn Féin as the default “left” electoral choice.

Labour dismantled its union-affiliate structure in 2017. It is now around has 4% in the polls, not dissimilar to the Social Democrats, the Greens, and the Trotskyist-oriented left. □

USA

28 March as a step for 1 May?

By Harold Storey

March 28 is the third No Kings Protest in the USA.

Turnouts for the previous No Kings Protests, in June and October 2025, were reckoned at up to seven million in October. This one could be bigger.

The main movers for 28 March are NGO type organisations such as Indivisible and Mobilize US. These groups, along with many others involved, do not concern themselves with organising the working class, or even with organising around particularly left wing politics beyond wanting a more liberal government.

It is also sponsored by the

Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), the AFL-CIO union confederation, and some unions, notably SEIU. Unions in Minneapolis took part in a general strike (with shopkeepers, small businesses, etc.) against ICE on 23 January. But the signs are that 28 March will be like last October and June: union banners and contingents, but those in the minority, and far from a general strike.

Positive

It is positive that socialist groups and unions are organising their members against Trump. However, they do it without much distinctive message.

Millions of people can be mobilised to go out and protest, and DSA membership is rising again, but the latest figures show union density the same in 2025 as 2024 (11.2%).

Socialist Alternative USA refers to 28 March as a “great intermediate action” and a “structure test” for more action on Friday 1 May.

That idea seems to come from the Minneapolis Workers’ Assembly on 15 February. Organised by communications, transit, and teachers’ unions, and socialist groups including the DSA and Socialist Alternative,



the assembly convened over 300 workers. It voted for a “no work, no school, no shopping”

day aligning with a national day of strikes on May Day. Another Workers’ Assembly is set for 4 April.

The revolutionary left groups should no doubt use 28 March as a place to meet new activists, distribute materials, and recruit. But the main focus must be on making the trade unions take the lead, to recruit and to strike against the bosses and the far right US government.

Maybe 28 March can indeed be made a stepping stone for 1 May. □



Still need to fight in the labour movement

Michael Chessum (in *Solidarity* 762) asks us to acknowledge that a statement in my article previewing the Gorton and Denton by-election was wrong. That was: “the only realistic way that Reform UK can win [in Gorton and Denton] is if the Green party splits the Labour vote”. Yes, that was wrong.

In a follow-up article I did say: “In retrospect a Reform win was always unlikely in a constituency with its diverse and left-leaning population: the combined Labour-Green percentage vote from 2024 held up well (64% in 2024, 67% in 2026).” But yes the calculation was wrong and I’ve gone back to look the 2024 election figures and where the Greens are strong.

What conclusions do I draw? That voters were convinced that the most likely way to keep out Reform was to vote Green in this constituency? Clearly. We must conclude that the two-party system is gone, even as it is constrained by first-past-the-post voting. At the very least, even voters loyal to Labour, or other parties, are prepared to “lend” their votes in all sorts of ways.

Were voters in Gorton and Denton were also won to the Greens? As Michael puts it: “A party to Labour’s left has proven itself to be a more viable vehicle to defeat the right. For many pro-

gressive voters, the prospect of voting with heart and head will be irresistible.” For sure, some were — further data is needed.

Replicated

Can this result be replicated across the country in a general election? If we look at the constituencies where the Greens did well (say, 6,000 or more votes) in 2024 it is possible to make some guesses: that they could win across the board in Bristol, in some places where they came second and Labour’s winning vote was relatively low — some of the Manchester constituencies, maybe Birkenhead, Huddersfield, Sheffield Central... Maybe even some London constituencies where the Labour vote is higher (Hackney, Lewisham).

Those leftists who have migrated into the Green Party will, not unreasonably, be happy with such a result. Or maybe not exactly happy if Reform is in government.

The issue for me is that I do not believe the left is committed to transforming the Greens from an electoral party into one fully connected to the labour movement in a short time frame. Despite every terrible thing Labour has done, now and in the past, it still is that. That’s a problem isn’t it?

YOUR CHOICE ON 26 FEBRUARY:

Dangerous Far-right Reform ✗ Supported by Tommy Robinson ✗ Want to sell off the NHS ✗ Risks giving Trump the keys to Britain Green Hannah Spencer ✓ Born and raised in Greater Manchester ✓ Plumber and Councillor ✓ Someone who will put our area first

It’s a problem because, while the Green Party is gaining ground, we, that is class-struggle socialists, still need to fight inside the labour movement, the unions and Labour, to change Labour’s political direction.

It’s a problem because the left in the UK will have to come together if it is to

beat Reform politically. To be effective we have include Labour supporters and members. Yet now some, not all but some, Green Party leftists and Your Party members wouldn’t spit on Labour people if they were on fire. □

Cathy Nugent, London

Be sharper against Trump and Israel

In *Solidarity* 762 the editorial on Iran gets many things right: the nature of the Islamic Republic, its current weakness, the destructive role Iran has played in the region through its proxies, the risk of it developing nuclear weapons, opposing a monarchist retaking of

power, and calling for a secular republic and workers’ government. On the motivations and actions of the Israeli and US governments it gets the analysis and emphasis wrong.

In the editorial it says “Iran has repeatedly stated its nuclear enrichment programme was for peaceful purposes, but Israel and the US were not wrong in supposing the Iranian state was lying.” And later “Israel has long aimed for the end of the Iranian regime which openly advocated the destruction of Israel. It is not unreasonable for Israel to want to defend itself from such a threat.” Mentioning these facts but omitting how the US and Israel started attacking Iran during negotiations, ones in which Iran was the weaker party and willing to make some concessions over its nuclear program leaves the reader with an incomplete and therefore distorted analysis of the war in the Middle East. The recent Israeli and US attacks on Iran are in part to do with “self-defence” and worries about nu-

clear weapons but are much to do with Israeli and US imperial prowess. “Self-defence” is often the cover that is used to mask these intentions. Israel’s recent siege on Gaza that jeopardised the lives of hostages it was claiming to save demonstrates how little Israel’s far-right government cares even about Israelis’ safety.

Language

The language used to describe Iranian and Palestinian actors on the one hand and US and Israeli actors on the other contrasts sharply. Khamenei is correctly described as having run a “brutal misogynistic, theocratic dictatorship”, Trump on the other hand is merely characterised as being “careless” with the lives of Iranians and showing “contempt” for democratic norms. The Hamas-led attacks on 7 October 2023 are described as a pogrom, the genocidal siege that Israel waged in response is described as going simply “beyond reasonable or proportionate measures of self-defence.”



We should accurately describe the US and Israeli governments, given we are doing that with Hamas and the Islamic Republic. We should describe Trump as running a far-right and increasingly authoritarian government with nakedly imperial interventionist aims. We should describe

the Israeli government as far-right with sub-imperial aims in the region. We should be clear and unambiguous about this and not leave it to readers to generously interpret what we write in the best spirit possible. □

Owen Flood, Bristol

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Living amidst constant war

By Burt Peters

Militantropos is an observational documentary about the impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on both soldiers and civilians. It was co-directed by three Ukrainian filmmakers, Yelizaveta Smith, Alina Gorlova and Simon Mozgovyi, and premiered at the Cannes Film Festival.

The film's title refers to the idea of the "militant human" – a person whose life, behaviour, and environment are changed by the constant presence of

war.

The film begins with quiet shots of ruined towns and empty roads, showing the destruction caused by the war in Ukraine and then shifts to large numbers of people boarding a Kiev train on a platform bound for Vienna. We then see the Kiev Mayor addressing civilians, with one elderly guy defiantly saying he is going nowhere.

There are shots of civilians being trained on how to use AK47s, and soldiers repeatedly firing an artillery gun at an unseen enemy and later watching a football match in their dugout. Ukrainian soldiers train, clean weapons, and rest in trenches, showing the routine of military life. There are images of children playing in dugouts and war-torn ruins as war becomes normalised.

Others repair buildings and roofs to the sound of artillery in the background. There is a blitz spirit feel in a scene where hundreds of Ukrainians listen to a group of singers singing a patriotic song in a huge railway station.

War is Constant

Air-raid sirens and distant explosions remind viewers that war is constantly present as Ukrainians cook, clean and gather supplies. Families and elderly people are evacuated from dangerous areas with the help of soldiers though not everyone opens their gate. Some return later to destroyed houses and



buildings. Paramedics treat wounded people and transport them through damaged areas.

There is no Voice of God narration and there are no direct interviews. Instead there are long observational shots of battle ruins and near destitution while civilians try and get on with life in a very difficult new normal.

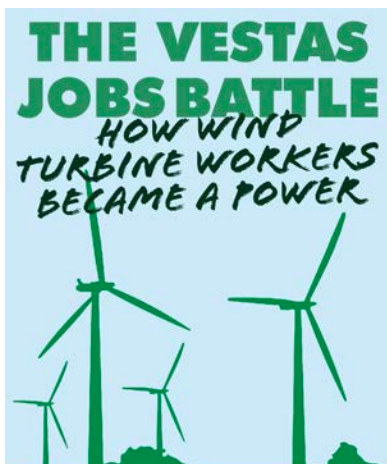
The film uses juxtaposition as a farmer farms his field right next to a large unexploded shell and a dramatic nighttime thunderstorm contrasts with a beautiful sunlit field. There are close ups of soldiers' faces and hands (they always seem to be smoking).

Militantropos is a quiet, atmospheric

film that invites the viewer to think critically about a people and society that are under huge pressure. The main themes are human adaptation to war, resilience and survival, community and solidarity, and the transformation of identity and behaviour during conflict.

It is very different from *20 Days in Mariupol* but nevertheless was short-listed for best documentary at the European Film Academy and won the Film Critics' Prize at the Docudays UA.

If you like atmospheric, slow-paced psychological type documentaries that are usually shown at art-house cinemas, then you will like *Militantropos*. □



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Music

Country Joe McDonald (1942-2026)

By Len Glover

It possibly wasn't the best start in life to be named after Stalin (his mother was a member of the US Communist Party) but Joe McDonald, who died on 7 March, and his band, Country Joe and the Fish, went on to achieve fame (or notoriety) in the 1960 and 70s with his anti-Vietnam war song *I Feel Like I'm Fixin' to Die Rag*. It became a kind-of anthem for the anti-war movement in the USA and elsewhere.

I remember it well as I was nearly attacked in a beer hall in Munich for initiating a (drunken) rendition with a small group of Americans who, like me, were drifting around Europe at the time, doing odd jobs and propping up bars. A group of US servicemen, seated nearby, expressed some disap-

probation at our performance.

And, I suppose for many people, certainly of my generation, Joe McDonald will be remembered solely for this song and particularly his performance of it, captured forever on celluloid, at Woodstock.

However, McDonald was much more than a long-haired, pot-smoking hippy enragé. He served in the US Navy in the late 50s and through his activity in the anti-war movement, particularly visiting convalescing war veterans in hospitals, he became acquainted with and deeply affected by the work of the nursing profession. He studied nursing, its history and the issues surrounding it, particularly the role of nurses in combat zones.

After coming across mention of Florence Nightingale and

her activity during the Crimean war he read everything he could find about her, including consulting documents in the British Library in London. McDonald eventually became a recognised authority on Nightingale, her life and work.

Inspiration

Inspiration also came from nearer home when McDonald met Lynda Van Devanter, a nurse who served in Vietnam and wrote of her experiences in her book *Home Before Morning*. Devanter died in 2002, possibly from side effects associated with Agent Orange, the chemical defoliant employed in Vietnam by the American forces, and McDonald paid tribute to her in his song *The Girl Next Door (Combat Nurse)*.

McDonald believed that

nurses were much more than the rather patronising "angel of mercy" stereotype with which they are usually associated, seeing them more as skilled workers, therapists, specialists and even, at times, combatants. Later in his life he donated his extensive archive on Nightingale and nurses to the University of California San Francisco. You can read McDonald's tribute to Florence Nightingale at countryjoe.com/nightingale.

His music is easily accessible but probably not to the taste of the post-sixties generations; as I have tried to suggest, there is more to his life than that. International Nurses' Day is celebrated annually on 12 May. □



A preview of the Greens' conference

By Simon Nelson

The Green Party Spring Conference on 28 March now has a near-final agenda. The "Zionism is Racism" motion, which has been heavily backed on the Green Party left, [but](#) "treats mainstream Jewish attachment to Israel [however critical] as a moral stain" remains on the agenda. A series of amendments point more towards the politics expressed in the "Peacebuilding in Israel-Palestine" motion and should be voted for, but the whole thing should be voted down, if it is reached, however amended.

Backers of a "leave Nato" motion are certainly motivated by opposition to the current Green Party policy in support of Ukraine, but the "reform Nato" position should be voted down. A motion to strengthen Green support for Ukraine has many worthy points and should be supported, but, as with the policy of the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign, it overpraises sanctions and ignores their

downsides. In any case, it is unlikely to be heard. Motions are prioritised, and then those down the list drop off the agenda, which allows limited time for debate on motions. The main left caucus in the Greens, Greens Organise, has made no recommendations on prioritising, nor pushed any motion apart from unofficially pushing the "Zionism is Racism" one.

Of the two motions submitted on Iran, one has the general Stop the War Coalition position, "No war on Iran" (without criticism of the theocratic regime). "Justice, Not War, for Iran" is better, with some support for the protesters inside Iran.

Ecology

It might appear quirky that very few of the motions relate to climate or ecology. Oddly (see [Solidarity 758](#)) the GPEW approach to ecological issues is not particularly radical or comprehensive. It includes little discussion about what

workers and workers' struggle can do on the environment. One motion calls for affirming the Greens as an ecosocialist party, but with no sense that this means a focus on the working class. A motion supported by the Green Party Trade Union group, however, does seek to get the party to engage more seriously with trade unions, and a useful amendment calls explicitly for support for strikes and workers' struggles.

A motion to end gender-based blanket bans in sport is worthy of support. It is the only motion on the agenda on trans rights. Its perspective on inclusion and on breaking down barriers to trans participation in sport is surely the right one.

A number of motions attempt to address some of the Greens' anti-science bias and propose tentative support for nuclear power and research, for fluoridation, and some scope for animal testing. These are all worthy of support.

The surge in membership of the Greens leaves it with structures, com-



mittees, and ways of organising are designed for a much smaller organisation. Some of the democratic reforms proposed at this conference go some way to address that.

However, Green Party policy-making remains labyrinthine, filtered through working groups and committees, without the structure familiar in the labour movement of local branches debating and submitting motions. □

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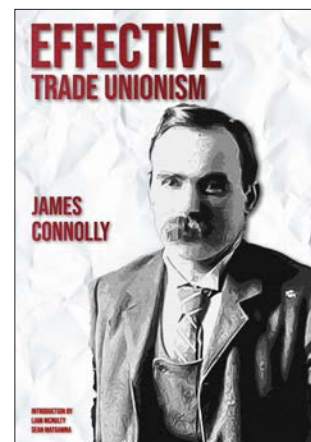
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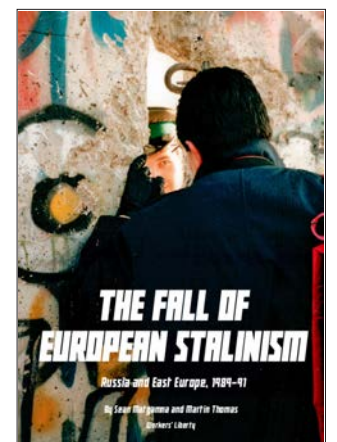
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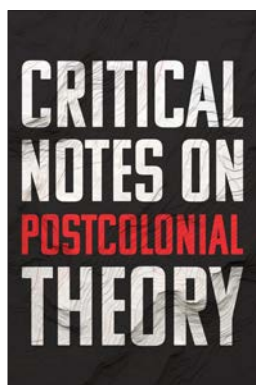
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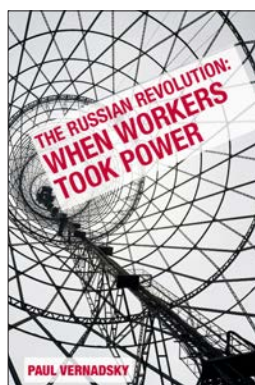
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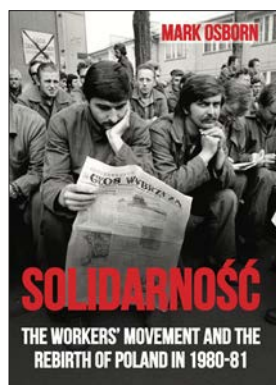
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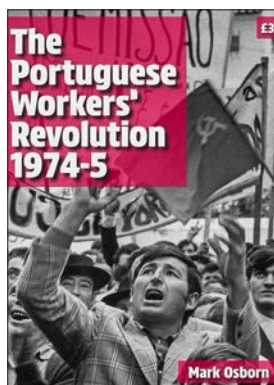
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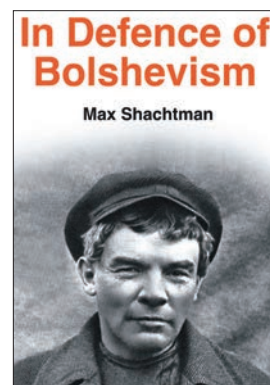
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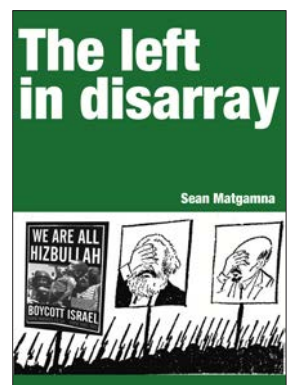
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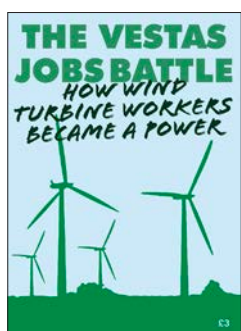
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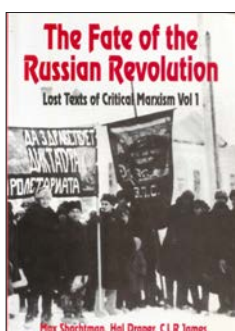
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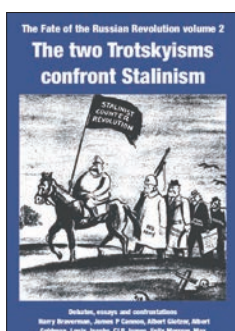
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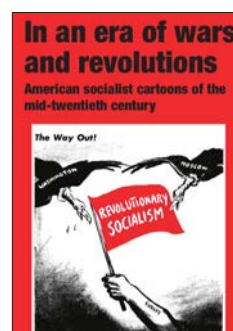
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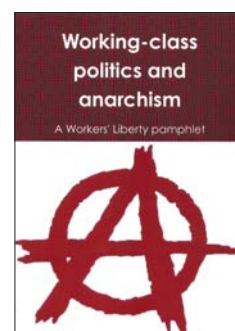
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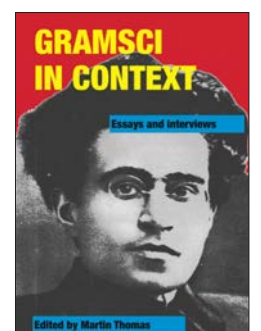
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Solidarity with Iranian women at
All The Rage!

Socialist feminism

“All The Rage” in Manchester

By Cece Standring

On Saturday 14 March, Workers’ Liberty hosted All the Rage, our annual socialist feminist conference. Around 80 people attended the day of talks, workshops and discussions in Manchester.

We covered a host of contemporary issues: how we fight the far-right in the context of increasing attacks on women, trans people, migrants, and racialised people in the UK and abroad; the politics of sex and sexuality in the age of the sexual counter-revolution;

the fight for the decriminalisation of sex work and support for sex workers in the trade union movement (led by an organiser from Decrim Now and the Sex Workers’ Union); how attacks including on trans healthcare, poor provision for women’s healthcare, and increasingly capitalist organisation of our health services are damaging our mental and physical health; and the Iranian resistance to Iran’s clerical-fascist regime, over decades of rebellion and to the forces today that can bring the regime down.

We also had sessions connected to our regular socialist feminist work: a book club session discussing Tithi Bhattacharya’s essay *How Not To Skip Class: Social Reproduction of Labour and the Global Working Class* (on how capitalism exploits us in both the workplace and the home); and a workshop on the Manchester People’s History Museum’s collection of socialist feminist publications, seeing how the culture of these publications has developed through from the *Red Rag* in the 1970s to our own socialist feminist

publication, *Women’s Fightback*, today.

This year’s All the Rage provides an opportunity to reinvigorate our socialist feminist work: using *Women’s Fightback* and our regular book clubs in Manchester, Edinburgh, London, and Sheffield to develop liberatory socialist feminist politics; and bringing more feminists into our work.

Contribute to renewing socialist feminism and write for *Women’s Fightback* by getting in touch with our editorial board – womensfightback@workersliberty.org □

Unite the Union

Vote for Graham slate, but critically

By Dale Street

The ballot for the Unite the Union Executive Council (EC) elections runs from 23 March to 27 April. The two factions competing for control of the EC are Members United and Workers Unite.

Members United is essentially a rebranded continuation of the United Left. For many years after the creation of Unite in 2007, through a merger of the TGWU and Amicus, the United Left dominated Unite. But it is now only a shadow of its former self.

Its membership has declined dramatically. It has suffered a number of splits. Its candidate was defeated by Sharon Graham in the 2021 General Secretary election. And it is irredeemably tainted by its association with the Unite officials involved in the twin scandals of the Birmingham hotel and conference centre and the contracting-out of Unite affiliated services.

Hence its rebranding as Members United. There may be some worthy individuals standing on the Members United slate. But, overall, the record of Members United, in its ear-

lier form of the United Left, has been one of stifling rank-and-file democracy rather than promoting it.

Workers Unite is the pro-Sharon-Graham slate. The election statements of their candidates all contain the words (albeit sometimes with minor variations): “I fully support our General Secretary and her Manifesto”.

The Slate Statement, to which all Workers Unite candidates have signed up, likewise says: “I support Sharon Graham. Change must continue.” Again, there may be some worthy members standing on Workers Unite slate. But the disparaging description of Workers Unite as the Sharon Graham fan club is entirely accurate.

Critical vote

The Workers’ Liberty Unite fraction is [advocating](#) a critical vote for the Workers Unite candidates. The Graham regime has on the whole done better in industrial disputes than the old regime of the United Left and Len McCluskey as general secretary.

But the Workers Unite adulation of Graham is a re-run of the United Left’s adulation of

McCluskey. This does not bode well for the future.

This is underlined by the fact that Workers Unite candidates have not a word of criticism of Graham’s record to date, nor of the state in which Unite currently finds itself.

Their Slate Statement opens with the words: “It’s either the old days of shady hotel developments and playing games within Labour, or continuing the workplace change our General Secretary is delivering.”

This is a demagogic caricature. The “old days” involved a lot more than “shady hotel developments”. (There were actually some pluses in McCluskey’s terms of office.) And attempting a meaningful political strategy, even unsuccessfully, is not the same as “playing games within Labour”.

Since Graham was elected General Secretary, the union’s Organising Department (which she formerly ran, and the staff of which formed the backbone of her election campaign) has been given a centre-stage role in the union.

Criticisms of the Organising Department by Reunite the Union (a political sibling of

Members United, but more [out-spoken](#) in its criticisms of Graham) might be demagogically exaggerated, but have some validity:

“Organisers have been steadily reduced to underappreciated and misused banner-wavers and props for social media content. They are dispatched to tourist traps in foreign locales to take photographs with banners, or [sent to] hold up banners outside chip shops or estate agents. Organising has been turned into a performance with Organisers as misused props.”

Accusations

Within Unite itself, there are multiple accusations of bullying, intimidation and even assault. Some Unite staff went on strike in November 2024, and are currently being balloted on further strike action.

Unite officers have even joined the Community trade union and are demanding that Unite as an employer gives it formal union recognition.

Is that all just conservative officers attempting to block changes in the union? In any case, Unite members have a right to know just what is

going on. And candidates seeking election to the union’s EC should have something to say about these matters.

The multiple weaknesses in the Workers Unite election platform and their unctuous attitude towards Graham underline the fact that the EC elections should not be reduced simply to a matter of who you vote for.

An end to the United Left (now Members United) bureaucratic manoeuvring and dead-end factionalism would be a good election outcome. But that needs to be followed up by ensuring that the newly elected EC members cease to act as Graham’s cheerleaders and act instead as the tribunes of those whom they are meant to represent.

A modest first step in that direction would be for Unite Regions and the larger workplaces and branches to hold hustings meetings with the relevant candidates to discuss what is needed to make Unite a real membership-led and membership-controlled union. □



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

Noon to noon strikes should work better

By Jay Dawkey

"Some will cross and we shouldn't be too relaxed about that". "And it'll be their reps telling them. Maybe some won't want to but they will be told they should". "Their District Organiser will tell people to work on those days". "Has anyone actually asked any of them what they plan to do?"

With less than a week now till our strikes begin over the working week, the question of what Aslef members will do is a big talking point. Will they respect pickets over a deal they want implemented? Is it likely they all think it should be implemented without any negotiation at all?

A dispute resolution meeting on Monday, 16 March, does not seem to have moved the company, and the strikes remain on. "They probably want to see what happens with this first set of strikes", N says. "We need the whole deal off the table before we call anything else off". "Kick it into the long grass would be good enough for me, if they can come back on something and we can keep pushing that will be enough".



With each day's strike starting at noon, we have a better chance of getting people out to picket lines as they finish work. That'll only help us boost the strike. It will be much harder for people on any later shift to cross with more of us, and in front of people they don't consider the

"usual suspects".

"I think this 12 till 12 is brilliant. Will create chaos for management. Trains will be all over the place, extra disruption on top of our two days". "As long as it works, we should do this every time." □

Kino Eye

Bertolucci's Novecento

By John Cunningham

Following on from films about Antonio Gramsci, this week I stay with Italy to look at Bernardo Bertolucci's monumental *Novecento*.

At 317 minutes this at times sprawling epic depicts Italy in the twentieth century up to the post-1945 period, through the prism of two lives: the agricultural worker Dalco Olmo (Gerard Depardieu) and landowner Alfredo Berlinghieri (Robert DeNiro). The two are born on the same day and Olmo works on the Berlinghieri estate. The two become friends, although Olmo never forgets his origins. He is raised in a spirit of socialist collectivity and the label "peasant" is worn with pride.

Come the First World War,

Olmo enlists in the army. At the end of hostilities, he returns home determined to bring about political change. He faces up to the brutal, fascist overseer Attila Mellanchini (Donald Sutherland) and the region is convulsed by strikes against the landowners in which the village women play a leading role.

The rise of fascism and the war is a disaster for the region, but when Mussolini is ousted the village women take revenge on Mellanchini. The villagers are now armed and ready to assume power but the Communist Party tells them to hand over their weapons to the new authorities and the revolutionary impulse is lost. Olmo and Alfredo resume their friendship.



It is difficult to summarise such a long film but it's a fascinating look into the lives of the agricultural workers of the Emilia-Romagna region (where Bertolucci was born,

in Parma: the region also includes Bologna). There were some complaints about the film's length, and there is a cut version which is best avoided. □

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 □

Non-striker sacked after pro-strike protest

By Ken Worthington

At the National Coal Mining Museum, near Wakefield, there has been no new pay offer or agreement to hold negotiations by museum management, despite hopes from the strikers that bosses might want to get the museum fully open for the Easter holidays. (It will take at least three weeks of safety checks and maintenance work to get the mine up and running following a return to work).

Meanwhile, a non-striking museum worker who was dismissed by the museum a couple of days before Christmas has now joined the strikers' union, Unison, and is planning with union support to take the employer to a tribunal for unfair dismissal.

Unison branch officers have informed Solidarity that Subject Access Request (SAR) information shows that the mu-

seum took the decision to sack the member the day after photos were sent to the museum showing the worker at a demonstration in support of the striking workers called by Unison in Wakefield.

Striking workers are concerned that management may have sent people to spy on the demonstration in an attempt to gather "evidence" against the strikers.

The last pay offer received by the striking workers included a "discipline" clause which stated that all striking workers would be placed under management investigation upon their return to work over complaints the museum has received during the strike.

Even before, in the run up to the strike, another worker settled an employment tribunal claim with the museum for unfair dismissal. □



Huge cuts at Hallam

By Sam Myerson

On 12 March students gathered at the University of Sheffield (UoS) for a demonstration against the cuts there. They were joined by students from the SWAG anti-cuts group at Leicester University and the Sheffield Hallam University Anti-Cuts group.

The Sheffield Hallam group has a demonstration on 21 March, 11am-1pm at the Owen

Building Entrance. The UoS Students have their next meeting 18 March at 5pm.

At Sheffield Hallam workers are being faced with wholesale changes to their terms and conditions. Uni bosses want to transfer staff to employment by a third-party company, removing pension commitments being the opening salvo. This means a fundamental change to the way the university is run, with staff bearing the burden.

Sheffield Hallam has faced years of cuts and has tens of millions of further cuts threatened, with their shape unclear. Workers are currently voting in indicative ballots for industrial action.

Student Campaign

Building a strong student campaign is important now. The last term of the academic year and the low point for activists on campus is rapidly

approaching. The current term ends 28 March at UoS, 30 March at Hallam. Uni bosses know this, and will be looking to take advantage.

Hallam, like lots of other institutions, has been making risky bets on out of city campuses. The notorious Brent Cross plan, presented as sound investment, turns out to be nothing more than a sham. Millions of pounds. Sheffield Hallam won't be providing the

teaching, or running the school, but will bear the costs.

While this white elephant is paraded around, the university is planning disastrous cuts at its main campus. Recently the University's athletics facility faced permanent closure. It has lost its licence to host British league and school meets, owing to poor maintenance and repair and woeful under-investment. □

New strikes at Northumbria

By Henry Beaumont

Persisting in their battle against Northumbria University bosses, the University and College Union (UCU) have announced new strikes: 16-17 and 25-27 March, 20-24 April. The UCU plan to hold fast against the management's plans to freeze the pay of staff who do not move from the (better) Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS) to the (worse) Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS). The UCU has put forward alternative proposals to save costs and protect staff.

On top of the attacks on pensions, university bosses they plan to make £25 million worth of cuts by December 2026, and are offering more rounds of voluntary severance. This will seri-

ously affect education at Northumbria, no matter what university management have said.

Closures

They previously claimed that there would be no course

closures, but even before this new round of cuts this has proved to be false. In music, existing courses are being taught until completion, but with no new intakes of students. The UCU has called a national demonstration in

Newcastle on Wednesday 25 March. Workers' Liberty students at Northumbria have been at the picket lines, will be at the national demonstration, and are building support among students for the strike. □



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Tube drivers to strike for controls over work hours

Drivers in the RMT union on London Underground (LUL) have called six days of strikes over three months, starting 24-25 March, against the imposition of a longer working day and shorter notice of shift changes, supposed to deliver a “four-day week”.

Rank-and-file bulletin *Tubeworker* welcomed the decision to call three rounds of action, rather than the usual: call some dates, wait and see, then work out what to do next. That kind of action has lost momentum in past campaigns, allowing the company to set the pace.



With an imminent “pilot” of the longer working day on the Bakerloo line, there is little time to spare in nipping this proposal in the bud before it takes hold. LUL bosses maintain that the scheme is “voluntary” while providing no guarantees that anyone who signs up to it can revert back to five-day shorter shifts and giving no assurance that new drivers will even be given an option. In any case, no depot, and certainly not a whole line, can run a timetable with some drivers on totally different parameters than others.

Reason

The real reason for the longer working day was made clear in a BBC article, in which LUL bosses are quoted as saying: “These changes will help us to... improve our ability to flexibly deploy our drivers and enable us to offer a modern and efficient service while creating no additional cost.”

Newer drivers will also find themselves able to offer the most “flexibility.” How can you plan for childcare and other caring responsibilities if, as a “Line Pool” driver based at Acton Town, you might find out on a Monday morning that your shift the following day, which you thought would start at 07:00, is now starting at 05:00... at Upminster, 40 miles away! Any driver transferring to another depot automatically enters the “Line Pool”, so, unless a driver plans on remaining at their current location forever, these changes can hit anyone. That the company is still not sharing the equality impact assessment tells us something.

Drivers in both unions, RMT (all grades) and Aslef (driver-only), previously rejected these plans when they were known as “Trains Modernisation”. Unfortunately, Aslef’s leadership on the job has worked with management to try to implement this deal.

Aslef members should ask themselves whether an offer that tears through existing agreements, increases our parameters, and makes it nearly impossible for drivers with caring responsibilities to plan their time, is worth it for an extra day off a week. □

Bans on protests at best double-edged

By Chris Reynolds

The police turned out over 1,000 officers, and arrested 12 people, to enforce curbs on the annual al-Quds day demonstration in London and the counter-protest on 15 March.

The demonstration, organised each year by the reactionary Iranian-regime-backed IHRC, was confined to a static rally on Albert Embankment, and counter-protesters were confined to Millbank, on the other side of the Thames.

Meanwhile, the authorities have suspended until 30 July all trials of those arrested on protests against the government’s banning (as “terrorist”) of Palestine Action.

The High Court has ruled the ban unlawful, but the government is appealing.

2,700 people have been arrested on the repeated peaceful anti-ban protests, simply for holding placards saying “I support Palestine action”. At least 16 have lost their jobs as a result of the arrests.

Police powers to ban demonstrations are at best a double-edged weapon, even when first aimed at far-right groups. The labour movement should respond instead with well-organised, well-stewarded, massive counter-protests.

The Public Order Act, first legislated in 1936 against Mosley’s fascists, with new iterations in 1986 and 2023, has done more to inhibit left organising than to push back the far right. □

Far-right threat still large in France

By Rhodri Evans

The first round of France’s municipal elections, on 15 March, showed worrying good scores for the far-right, including the RN, which has generally done worse in municipal elections than national..

The Socialist Party held its ground. Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s La France Insoumise (LFI) made gains in some towns, though it has been weaker than the SP at municipal level even when stronger in national votes. The “centre” linked to president Emmanuel Macron did poorly. The “old” right (LR), held its ground.

On the Marxist left, the NPA-Révolutionnaires stood 29 lists, and got 18,445 votes; Lutte Ouvrière, some 243, with 74,600 votes. Those are somewhat better scores than in 2020 or 2014.

French municipal elections are different from British. Local authorities have more autonomy, turnout (though lower this time than previously) is often as high as for national elections or higher, and there are many more posts to fill: 35,000 mayors and over 500,000 councillors, where England has 17,000 councillors.

In small local authorities, many of those elected are “with no party label”, or “independent left”, or

“independent right”.

The second round is on 22 March. All candidates who got more than 10% on the first round can continue to the second, but outcomes are often decided by who stands down or “fuses” lists with allies or semi-allies.

The NPF and NUPES alliances of leftish parties (SP, Communist Party, Greens, LFI) have broken down at national level, but some local SP-LFI deals are being done.

Current polling for the 2027 presidential election shows the RN’s Bardella around 36%, Edouard Philippe (Macron’s first prime minister 2017-20, mayor of Le Havre since then) 19%, Mélenchon 11%, and Bardella and Philippe neck-and-neck in a second-round run-off.

The core determinant of French politics for the last ten years seems to have been diminished confidence among workers about collective labour-movement effort, industrial or political, winning anything amidst a continuing fiscal and public-debt crisis. Organising for battles and victories to regain that confidence is central. □

• Comments from the French Marxist left: bit.ly/munic-1

Sanders denounces Iran war

By Bernie Sanders

On 14 May, Bernie Sanders said, in a streamed discussion with Iranian-American experts:

Trum is completely undermining international law. Not only the Constitution of the United States, which says it is Congress that determines whether we go to war or not, but international law.

Let’s be clear. A nation does not have the right to unilaterally attack another nation without provocation. Right? Iran was not a threat.

At the same time, we essentially assassinate the entire leadership of the country or the major part of the leadership. And you do this in the midst of negotiations which at least some people were saying were making progress.

Trump is giving a green light to any dictator in the world, any government in the world that wants to go to war.

You know, bombing schools, killing people you’re negotiating with. Really, is that what this country is about? I think it’s not. And I think the American people understand that that is not what we are supposed to be about.

Not to mention the fact that we have so many of our people struggling economically. People want to build schools in this country, not destroy schools in Iran.

Lebanon is not getting a lot of attention, but I saw something which is really quite shocking that something like 10% of the entire population of Lebanon, some 700,000 or 800,000 people have been displaced from their homes.

Trump told us the attack on an elementary school in Iran that killed 175 people, mostly children, “was done by Iran.”

Now the US military admits it was a US strike.

If they are lying about something as obvious as this, what else are they lying about? □

• More on Iran: p.2-3. More on USA: p.17

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