

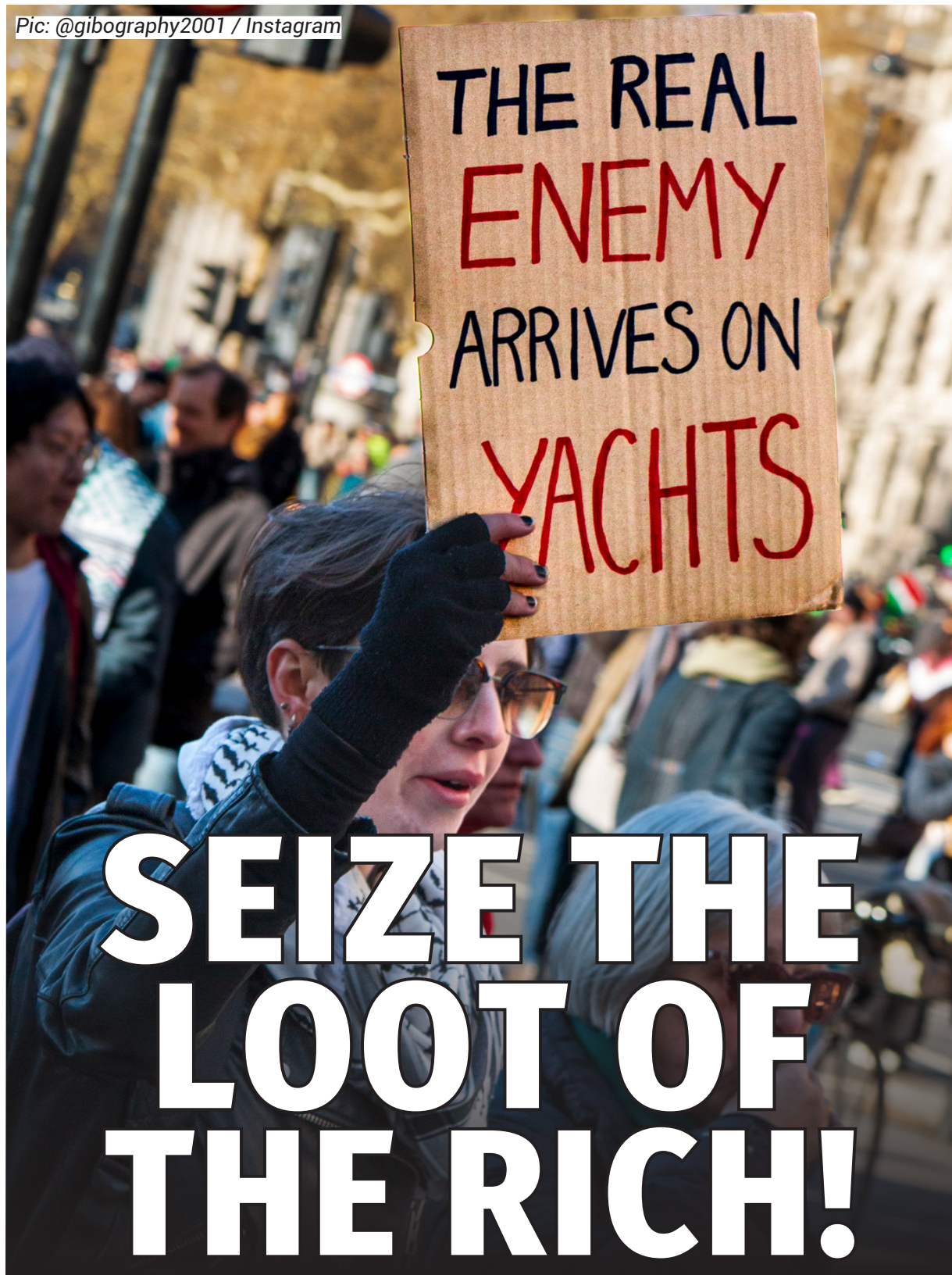
For social ownership of the banks and industry

SOLIDARITY

& WORKERS' LIBERTY



Pic: @gibography2001 / Instagram



SEIZE THE LOOT OF THE RICH!

Seize the loot from the rich

The top ten per cent in Britain own 43% of all wealth, according to the latest figures from the Equality Trust.

The top 0.1% in the UK own 9%, double their share in the early Thatcher years.

Nine per cent seems not that much. But the top 0.1%, and the top 10%, own a much bigger part of the wealth that brings power – financial wealth, and ownership of companies.

Even among the “next” 20% who are much more well-off than average readers of *Solidarity*, most of the wealth is “personal”, their own houses and pension rights.

The statistics bounce around from year to year as share prices vary, but the constant is that a small minority control the means of production, the factories, the equipment, the offices, the software systems and databases.

Luxuriate

They luxuriate in income from property, while the majority scrape by income from selling our labour-power.

With top income-tax rates lower now, since Thatcher and even since Osborne, the rich take more of their income in the form of “salaries” for being bosses. CEOs in top firms, according to the latest report from the High Pay Centre, are now

on an average of £6.2 million a year.

That's not a wage. It is a pay-out, awarded by your cronies on the “compensation committee”, for being in command of the means of production.

The rich may also get multiple pay-outs for being “non-executive directors” of big firms, a post which pays around £80,000 from each firm for attending meetings and reading reports for maybe two or three days a month.

Yet politicians wail about “the benefits bill” taking too much.

Benefits

As it happens, working-age benefits are fairly level. The Labour government increased Universal Credit a bit this year, but its real value remains very diminished.

Housing benefit, and the housing benefit element of Universal Credit, remain limited to a maximum of the Local Housing Allowance, frozen since 2024 while rents have risen, so many claimants have to cover rent out of benefit payments designed to cover food, energy, clothing, etc.

The only element of benefits rising markedly is state pension payments, thanks to the “triple lock” introduced by the Tories in 2010 in a (successful) bid to get the votes of the elderly. That means there are many fewer elderly people dying from cold in the winter: there were over 100,000 in 1950-1. But old people relying on the state pension are still poor.

The root issue behind the claims that there is “not enough money” for the NHS, for schools, for social care, is the inequality of wealth.

The working class, the people who produce everything, live by selling our labour power to those who own and control the means of production.

They pay us roughly a going rate for our labour power – a fairly comfortable “living wage” for some, scanty for others. They control the much greater value that our labour-power yields when put to work. They become rich and powerful from that surplus value.

Drips and drabs of the surplus value can be clawed back from them to finance public services, but only by class struggle.

Wealth tax

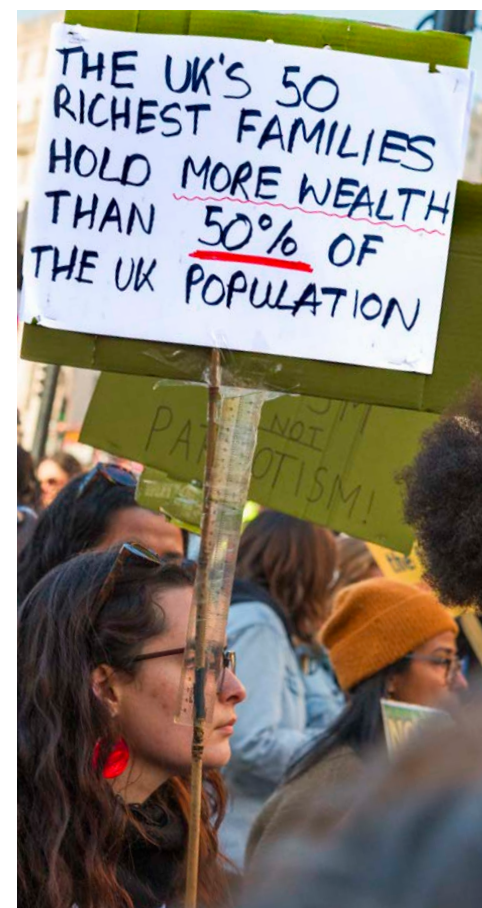
The big business magazine *The Economist* is worried about calls for a wealth tax, and publishes many articles claiming it won't “work”.

Actually, Spain, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Norway all have wealth taxes. France still has one, though in 2017 Macron cut its scope. Denmark's right-wing Social Democrat leader Mette Frederiksen scraped through her country's recent general election by promising one.

Wealth taxes are workable, and they can make a difference at important margins.

It's true they are limited. As with the very high rates of income tax for very high incomes which the UK had from World War Two through many years of Tory government until Thatcher, beyond a limit they can be evaded.

As long as the billionaires and multi-millionaires command the heights of wealth and power, they will never allow themselves to be salami-sliced from



those heights by incremental taxes. They will find ways round it.

The differences at the margins are important. To go beyond that, the working class needs to take back control over the value-added we produce, that is, to seize the major means of production. All of those, after all, were produced by our labour. As the masthead of *Solidarity* puts it, “social ownership of the banks and industry”. □

Solidarity 770

Because of paper staff's commitments in the Workers' Liberty residential study course on Capital, 19-22 June, *Solidarity 770* will be dated 1 July. Copy date 27-28 June. □

Things may get much worse

You wouldn't think it, but the figures show real wages rising modestly over the last two years (on average, though that means many have suffered falls); the minimum wage and Real Living Wage rising more; resort to food-banks dwindling; more spent on the NHS and on central funding for local councils.

Price inflation has bounced around, and is a bit higher than it was on average from the early 1990s to 2021, but is much lower than in 2022-3.

The Employment Relations Act is limited, but a real advance. Ditto the Renters' Reform Act.

Yet working-class people wanted a real turnaround in 2024, after the global crash

in 2008-9, Cameron-Osborne austerity from 2010, the Covid lockdowns, the economic hit from Brexit, and the inflation spike of 2022-3.

Disgusted

Many are disgusted that Keir Starmer promised “change”, and has offered so little. Part of the disgust must be down to Starmer's manner, as the epitome of the bureaucratisation of politics, sanctimonious and untrustworthy, ineffectual and control-freaky, apparently unable to deal with political challenge other than by calling security guards or ordering bans and expulsions.

Things could get much worse, soon, and to respond we will need class-struggle combat-

ivity, not just fed-upness and disgust.

Prices are likely to rise faster as the effects of the closure of the Strait of Hormuz work through the system.

The consequent dislocations may be magnified by the bursting of any one of the economic bubbles now keeping profits fairly lush: the AI bubble, the cryptocurrency bubble, the private-credit bubble, and the bubble of private buying of US Treasury bonds. That could bring a crash like 2008-9.

Whether with Starmer or Streetering or Burnham, the Labour government will be at sea, and we will face cuts and unemployment on a large scale. Appetite for the fake easy promises of the far right will

rise, even if the crisis unsettles Trump.

We will need a labour movement capable of insisting on public ownership and democratic control of high finance and of defending jobs through big strikes and occupations.

We are in our plight now because the labour movement was not able to rise to those tasks in 2008-9 and after, and the nationalist right was mostly able to “capture the market” for discontent.

What we can do in the coming crisis – whether it comes soon, or not for several years – depends on the organising and educating we do in the labour movement now. □

THE VESTAS JOBS BATTLE



The 2nd edition contains new material, plus photos from the campaign and occupation. £4 (inc. post) □ bit.ly/shop-wl

Neither Washington nor Tehran, but workers' liberty

By Dan Katz

While the theocratic-fascist regime in Iran is still standing, with power shifted towards its military-wing, the Islamic Guards (IRGC), the economy is in very serious crisis.

Under the cover of a separate cease-fire a connected conflict is playing-out in southern Lebanon where Israel continues to expand its occupation, demolish homes in dozens of Lebanese villages, and fight the Iran-aligned militarised Shia party, Hezbollah.

Israel now occupies one-fifth of Lebanese territory, or 2,000 sq km, and on 7 June the Israeli military ordered the evacuation of the major Lebanese town of Tyre.

Israeli troops continue to suffer casualties in occupied Lebanon even though they face a diminished Hezbollah, however now armed with fibre-optic drones.

On Monday 1 June Israel Katz, Israel's Defence Minister, announced the intention to resume bombing Hezbollah strongholds in the densely populated southern suburbs of Beirut. Trump, alarmed that Israeli attacks might derail his attempts to patch together a deal with Iran, and against the background of Iranian threats to resume and widen the war, phoned Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to tell him to call off the strikes.

Apparently Trump yelled at Netanyahu, calling him, "fucking crazy", adding, "you'd be in prison if it weren't for me". Netanyahu faces a long-running corruption case, and Trump has repeatedly argued he should be pardoned.

That phone call and the fact Netanyahu called the Beirut bombing off reveals the real relationship between the US and Israel. Israel is a highly developed capitalist state with its own interests, but it is still subordinate to the US when their concerns clash.

Iran has threatened it might attempt to close the Red Sea to shipping by attacking boats attempting to pass through the narrow Bab al-Mandab Strait. Such a threat is not implausible as an Iranian ally, the Houthi regime based in northern Yemen, probably has that capability.

3,500 people have been killed in Iran, 3,400 in Lebanon, 118 in Iran and 26 in Israel.

In addition over 10,000 have been injured in Lebanon, 26,000 in Iran and nearly 8,000 in Israel.

Iranian officials claim the 40-day US



Pic: @gibography2001 / Instagram

and Israeli bombing campaign, which began on 28 February, caused \$270bn of direct damage. Probably Iran is exaggerating the figures, but, even so, Iran's total income for exports last year was only \$45bn.

The war damage will take many years to repair.

The latest estimates for job losses in Iran caused by the war is: one million directly from infrastructure and plant destruction; two million indirectly caused by new sanctions, supply chain and power disruption.

Hojattollah Mirzaei, an Iranian academic and economist, estimates a further 3.5 to 4.5mn people will fall into poverty in Iran this year and believes Iran's economy will shrink by at least 10%. Inflation, as it impacts on workers, is over 100%.

A sociological survey from Eghtesad News suggests that the Iranian "middle class", estimated at 65-70% of the population in 2010, is now only around 50% of the population. In the same period 10% of wage workers fell into precarious, informal employment.

Executions

The economic misery in Iran, coupled by the very widespread hatred of the regime, makes new social crises inevitable. In an effort to repress and intimidate the population a new wave of executions is taking place in Iran's overcrowded prisons. 40 political prisoners were hung between 18 March and 1 June.

Over the week beginning 1 June Iran's internet began to partially re-open following nearly 12 weeks of almost complete, regime-orchestrated blackout. Immediately new video was posted of the anti-regime protests, the Dey Protests, in January 2026, when at least 7,000 pro-democracy protesters — and possibly as many as 30,000 — were shot or hacked to death by IRGC and Basij militia members. According to state officials 10mn people in Iran earn some or all their income on-line; all internet-related economic activity in Iran was prevented during the shutdown.

Iran appears to be moving towards a Russian/Chinese model of internet service which is heavily state regulated.

The war has cost the US \$27bn so far.

Iranian drone and missile attacks have caused damage to over 20 US bases across the Middle East and the US has lost 13 troops, 381 injured, and has had 42 aircraft destroyed during the conflict.

The impact of the Iran war is very widespread. According to Al Jazeera 146 countries have increased petrol prices and the International Energy Agency describes the impact as "the largest energy shock on record."

There is little open, visible progress towards a US-Iran peace agreement. And if an agreement is fudged and signed-off, it might well not hold.

Iran wants at least \$24bn frozen assets, held by foreign banks and 60mn barrels of oil stuck on tankers trapped in the Persian Gulf by the US blockade, released. But that would only provide temporary relief.

More generally Iran wants the US-led sanctions regime relaxed and ended.

Trump trumpets that Iran says it does not intend to produce nuclear weapons. But of course it has often made that claim, and they are lying.

US President, Donald Trump, ignorant as always and mesmerised by American military power, failed to anticipate the effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz and the economic consequences that inevitably followed on.

Trump desperately wants the Strait of Hormuz opened to shipping and the semblance of an agreement with Iran, one that he is able to spin as a victory. Trump is caught between serious

domestic pressure caused by a steep increase in petrol prices and the unwillingness to come to an agreement with Iran that compares badly to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) deal US President Obama made with Iran in 2015.

Trump pulled out of JCPOA in 2018, denouncing Obama's agreement which restricted Iran's nuclear programme for a relaxation of sanctions.

Regular petrol now costs \$4.22 per gallon on average in the US, up 40% from March, as the US closes in on November's mid-term elections. Increases in the costs of living is now a major issue in US political life.

According to the *Economist* Trump's approval rating has slumped to minus 25%, with 60% disapproving of his presidency. The latest opinion polls show 57% of Americans in opposition to the US war on Iran with only 36% in support. The Democrats are given a 75% chance of taking control of the House of Representatives in November and are now accorded a 51% chance of winning the Senate, too.

On Wednesday 3 June Trump lost a vote in the House which aimed to end the war on Iran. The House is currently Republican-led, and four Republicans joined the Democrats to vote against Trump. The Democrats denounce the war as "illegal and costly."

No doubt Trump will ignore the vote, but it adds legitimacy and weight to the anti-war case in the US. □

Free Yaser Ahmadinejad!

From the Shahrokh Zamani Action Campaign

With the internet partially restored after 88 days, we received news that Yaser Ahmadinejad, a militant worker in the oil industry in Iran, has been sentenced to 33 months in jail.

In June 2024, while Iran's blood-soaked regime was acting out its fake "presidential election", thousands of skilled contract workers in the petrochemical industry went on strike. This was the only way they could improve their living standards. The strike kept growing, eventually involving over 20,000 workers from around 100 contractors.

Just before the strike started, Yaser Ahmadinejad, an Arkan Siless Drilling Company worker, recorded a short

video message. In it, he respectfully voiced the contract workers' basic demands. These included a call on the regime to pay the contract workers their approved 35% pay rise. (The contract workers have pay and conditions that are significantly worse than those of the National Iranian Oil Company's official workers.)

Since then, Yaser Ahmadinejad has been sacked and accused of trumped-up charges that include propagandising against the Islamic Republic system, threatening behaviour and publishing lies. He has been arrested several times, including once again as the latest war started.

The Shahrokh Zamani Action Campaign strongly

condemns the harassment of Yaser Ahmadinejad and all other labour activists in Iran. We demand that all fake charges against labour activists be dropped immediately and unconditionally, all sacked workers return to work, and all political prisoners be freed. We urge all trade unionists, socialists and other political activists to help us in defending the rights of all workers, political prisoners and social rights' activists in Iran. □



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Socialist Worker's mess on Makerfield

By Matt Cooper

The Makerfield by-election has exposed deepening problems in *Socialist Worker's* approach to fighting Reform UK. Andy Burnham was confirmed as Labour's candidate on 19 May. The same day, *Socialist Worker* (#3006) published an editorial entitled "Class struggle, not lesser-evil politics", refusing to back him against Reform.

Socialist Worker argued against calls for the Greens to withdraw, stating that these assumed "Burnham is the best placed candidate to win – and this is not a foregone conclusion". However, early polling showed Burnham on 43% and Reform on 40%, with the Greens on just 3%. SW's own other reporting (#3008) states that the race is 50-50, without identifying who Reform's main challenger is.

SW still will not call for a vote for Burnham, even though the Greens have only a "paper" campaign (and SW doesn't campaign for the Greens). It begins by saying that "anti-racist campaigning is key to exposing the lies about immigration" and that "focusing on Farage's free-market policies and ducking the argument about immigration... will not work".

The editorial acknowledges that its Stand Up To Racism campaign "has pushed up the progressive vote in some key battlegrounds". But for Makerfield, instead, it places its hopes in a future upturn in industrial struggle. "A whiff of class struggle could transform the political atmosphere and terrain."

But no such upturn has yet occurred, and Makerfield voters must choose between actual candidates now. The paper then claims that "popularising the slogan, 'We won't pay for Trump's war', and pushing for strikes this year is vital". How will that help in Makerfield?

The editorial finally declares that "unity in action is key to beating the likes of Farage ... and Robinson". But that unity does not extend to voting for Burnham. In the most bizarre twist of all, SW suggests that voting for Burnham represents a "popular front" approach.

Popular Front

The term "popular front" was used in the 1930s to describe the Stalinist Communist Parties' coalitions with capitalist parties, on programmes set by those capitalist parties, allegedly to beat fascism. Stalin counterposed that to the earlier, politically healthy Communist position, maintained by Trotsky, of seek-

ing a united front of workers' organisations.

Is it that *Socialist Worker* thinks the Labour Party is no longer in any sense a "bourgeois workers' party" (as Lenin put it), based on the trade unions? Alex Callinicos writes in SW #3008 of Labour's "roots in the organised working class through the part played by trade union officialdom in financing the party and shaping its policies". Although he continues that "under Starmer, these links have grown increasingly threadbare", he does not deny they exist.

Supporting a bourgeois workers' party against the far right is therefore dismissed as the politics of the "popular front". At the same time, the SWP has been central to organising the Together march, which brought under its umbrella all manner of non-working-class bodies, from religious groups and NGOs to liberals – an actual popular front. And it has not been fussy about the Independents and Greens it has backed in elections elsewhere.

In one last twist, *Socialist Worker* suggests that it should "focus on winning people to a strategy based on mobilisation from below". This recalls the disastrous "united front from below" formula

of the Stalinist German Communist Party in 1932, under which SPD workers were invited to join Communist-led anti-fascist organisations rather than defend themselves through agreements between their existing parties and unions. Trotsky denounced this as an ultimatum, not a united front.

None of this will defeat Reform in Makerfield. Worse, SW seems more interested in campaigning against Burnham than in defeating Reform.

The front page of the paper on 27 May (#3007) screamed "Burnham bends to the right", while a two-page article declared that "Burnham adds to Labour's record of racism". The next issue carried another two-page attack, "Manchester is no oasis", focusing on Burnham's poor housing record as mayor. Much of this criticism is true, but why is it splashed now? Is defeating Labour, rather than Reform, now SW's main target?

Apart from defeating Reform, there is another good reason for supporting Burnham. His victory would likely produce a Labour leadership contest and a wider debate among Labour members and, more importantly, within the affiliated unions, about reopening Labour democracy. □

Ireland

DUP blocks N Ireland's "ERA"

By Micheál MacEoin

Trade unions are pushing for the Northern Ireland Executive to agree the Good Jobs Bill, which seeks to align with or improve upon workers' rights in Great Britain and the 26-countries.

Employment law is entirely devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly. NI workers used to have better rights in some areas than in Great Britain but, with the passing of the Equality Act 2010 and the Employment Rights Act 2025, divergence in employment law and the gaps in workers' protections has significantly increased.

The proposed Good Jobs Bill, introduced by Sinn Féin Economy Minister Caoimhe Archibald, began life in a public consultation almost two years ago.

Some of the key provisions include a day-one right to a written statement of terms for all workers (not just employees), that fire and rehire practices will be automatically unfair (except

in very limited cases), and an end to exploitative zero-hours contracts, replaced by a band-ed-hours model.

The Bill would also introduce a Code of Practice on the right to disconnect, helping employees maintain work-life boundaries.

Pushed Back

Employers have mostly pushed back on the proposals to introduce changes to trade union access and recognition, including e-balloting and lowering recognition thresholds.

Unions would have the right to request access to workplaces, including digital access. Employers will not be able to unreasonably withhold access.

The statutory recognition threshold would be reduced from 21 to 10 workers. The notice period for industrial action is already at seven days in NI, lower than the current Great Britain period of ten days (which was reduced from 14).

Unlike in Great Britain, how-

ever, no changes are proposed to broader protections from unfair dismissal, which have a one year qualifying period in NI, though flexible working would become a day-one right.

The Bill would also introduce enhanced redundancy protection for women returning from maternity leave and introduce paternity leave changes in line with Great Britain.

Executive Bills must first be agreed within the Executive then introduced the Northern Ireland Assembly. Despite widespread support from the public, the DUP blocked the bill at the Executive on 28 May, preventing it from going forward to the Assembly as an agreed Executive Bill for debate.

It cited (predictable) concerns and lobbying from business groups, posing the party as "pro-business". This should not be lost on those workers voting for the party.

Unions' concern is that delays could prevent the Bill being passed before the Assembly

elections in May next year.

Despite this, in polling over 80% of people back key elements of the proposed Bill. In particular, 83% of people believe that workers on a zero-hours contract have the right to be offered a contract reflecting the hours they actually work.

The *Belfast Telegraph* reported: "This is supported by more than nine in ten nationalists and Alliance voters, and seven in ten DUP and UUP voters."

While business are opposed, 80% believe that everyone should be able to access a trade union in their workplace for help with employment issues such as requesting flexibility.

Again, it was reported: "This proposal is supported by 99% of SDLP, 96% of Sinn Féin, and 92% of Alliance voters along with six in 10 DUP and UUP voters."

The Bill, of course, could go further. Gerry Carroll, the People Before Profit MLA, rightly said that "this can fairly be charac-

terised as a 'catch up' bill, rather than an effort to genuinely end exploitation and oppression in the workplace. A majority of the proposals are designed to make sure workers in the north benefit from the same basic protections recently introduced – or soon to come into force – in Britain."

He called it "a missed opportunity to shift the balance of power away from bosses and towards workers, and establish the conditions for sectoral collective bargaining. Unions should be empowered with robust rights to access and organise workplaces, and workers should be allowed to engage in solidarity and secondary action."

That said, the Bill is a modest step forward and introduces much-needed alignment with standards in Great Britain and on the island of Ireland.

Unions should keep up the pressure for the Bill to be passed before the next elections – and fight to go further. □

Laying waste southern Lebanon

By Ira Berkovic

Even before its exchange of missiles with Iran on 7-8 June, Israel was continuing its war in Lebanon. A ceasefire of some sort has been nominally in place since April, but never observed.

A renewed ceasefire, brokered by the USA, was agreed between Israel and the Lebanese government. But Israel's military opponent in Lebanon is not the central state, but Hezbollah, the Shi'a-Islamist paramilitary party allied with Iran. Hezbollah has stated that it does not recognise the ceasefire, and continues to launch rocket attacks against Israeli positions, both within Lebanon and inside Israel itself.

Israel's war includes air strikes against Hezbollah-supporting areas of the country, as well as a ground operation. Israeli bombing continues to cause considerable destruction to civilian infrastructure, including housing. 1.2 million people, around 20% of Lebanon's population, are displaced as a result of the war, including more than 300,000 children. Tens of thousands of people are living in tents, in displaced persons' camps. Around 3,500 people have been killed, with 10,000 injured.

Migrant domestic workers, predominantly from African and South Asia, who work in Lebanon under the exploitative "Kafala" system, have been especially impacted.

On Sunday 31 May, Israeli troops seized Qalaat al-Shaqif/Beaufort Castle, a medieval cliff-top fortress around nine miles from the Israeli border. The castle was also occupied by Israel during its 1982 war in Lebanon. Whilst military experts state that the fort itself has little strategic value, its capture has symbolic significance, both in evoking the 1982 war, which led to an Israeli occupation

of Lebanese territory lasting 18 years, and because it emphasises the extent of Israel's current territorial expansion. The current operation represents the deepest Israeli incursion into Lebanese territory for 26 years.

Mohanad Hage Ali, an analyst at the Carnegie Middle East Centre based in Beirut, told the *Guardian*: "Given the level of destruction in the so-called 'yellow zone' [the area currently conquered by Israel], the range of possibilities is between denying the return of the population, and annexation/settlement in a similar fashion to the West Bank. Annexation is no longer a wild conspiracy theory. There are ministerial statements to this effect from Israel's finance and national security ministers, among others."

Hegemonising

Israel's finance and national security ministers are, respectively, Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben-Gvir. They represent the furthest-right extremity of Benjamin Netanyahu's far-right coalition. Both have a religiously-inspired commitment to territorial expansion. Whilst both represent minority currents, they have adeptly succeeded in hegemonising much of Israel's polity.

A colonial settlement of Lebanese territory, of the kind Israeli settlers have pursued in the West Bank since 1967, remains unlikely, but the combination of messianic Jewish supremacism and militarist hawkishness that characterises the Netanyahu coalition's strategies means a prolonged occupation, of the kind that followed the 1982 war, is eminently possible.

Hezbollah is also a problem for the central Lebanese state, and the people of Lebanon. The existence of a powerful, well-armed force, which organises itself as a militia, political party, and, in

some areas, as an alternative state, is a source of profound instability. There is widespread popular resentment at Hezbollah's ability to embroil the whole of Lebanese society in destructive wars, often because of its alliance with Iran, a regional-imperialist power which many Lebanese view with mistrust and hostility. In recent polling reported by Lebanese television outlet Al-Jadeed, 58% of respondents supported the state pursuing the disarmament of Hezbollah. But answers were radically split along communal-religious lines. 88% of Shi'ite and 70% of Sunni respondents opposed disarmament, whilst 89% of Orthodox Christians, 87% of Maronites, and 77% of Druze supported it.

At the end of the 2010s, a wave of anti-austerity protests took place across Lebanon, many of which took on an anti-sectarian character, denouncing the institutionally-sectarian state structures as corrupt. In the 2022 general election, broadly anti-sectarian candidates won 13% of the vote, equating to 13 parliamentary seats. The next general election was due in May 2026, but has been postponed until 2028 as a result of the war.

In Palestine, Israel has continued air strikes in Gaza, despite the nominal ceasefire. 11 people were killed in bombings of residential buildings on 4 June. Humanitarian crises remain acute, with the flow of aid still well below the levels stipulated by the so-called "peace plan". Renewed mediated negotiations between the US, Israel, and Hamas are due to begin on Sunday 7 June.

Violence continues in the occupied West Bank, carried out by both armed settlers and Israeli security forces. Israeli police arrested five students from Birzeit University in dawn raids on their homes.

Standing Together

Standing Together, the binational (Palestinian-Jewish) left-wing social movement active in Israel, said: "The truth is that settler terror would not be happening if the Israeli government didn't want it to. Settlers post where they're going to be and when — they publicise their plans to attack Palestinians. They brag about the attacks they've carried out. And they know they won't face justice because this violence is state-backed. Both the army and the government help ensure that this violence against so many families and communities continues. This is the reality in the West Bank that we have to change. These horrors must end. The occupation must end."

Standing Together's Solidarity Guard, a unit which organises "protective presence" activity to support Palestinians against settler attack, has recently been mobilising to defend Khan al-Ahmar, a Bedouin-Palestinian village threatened



Pic: @gibography2001 / Instagram

with demolition and displacement. The movement said: "About 300 people, or 45 families, are at risk of being expelled from their land according to a government plan to take over the village and use it to split the territory of the West Bank. We've set up a solidarity encampment in the village which will be a base for organising and protective presence actions over the next few weeks as we fight to stop the threats on the community. We cannot allow our government to carry out this ethnic cleansing!"

Meanwhile, the Israeli Supreme Court has struck down legislation prohibiting International Red Cross aid workers from visiting Palestinians detained in Israeli jails, ruling that the visits must be allowed. The Supreme Court has occasionally been a brake on the worst anti-Palestinian excesses of Israeli administrations, which has motivated Netanyahu's long-term project to hobble it and bring the judiciary under the direct political control of his regime.

Israel's parliament, the Knesset, is currently debating a bill to set a date for general elections, which must take place by 27 October at the latest. A new *Times of Israel* poll shows the anti-Netanyahu bloc of right-wing and centrist Jewish parties winning 62 seats, one more than the number required to form a government. According to the poll, the current coalition parties would win 50 seats, with Palestinian parties and the binational left-wing party Hadash winning eight between them.

While ousting Netanyahu, and his fascist allies, from government would be welcome, the anti-Netanyahu parties are barely distinguishable from him on military policy. Liberal leader Yair Lapid, and Yair Golan, leader of the Democrats, a merger of left-Zionist and social-democratic parties, pay lip service to support for Palestinian statehood when speaking to international audiences, but domestically pander to right-wing talking points about Palestinian statehood threatening Israeli security. Recent polling suggests the candidate with the highest support to replace Netanyahu as prime minister is Gadi Eisenkot, a former IDF general who founded a new party in late 2025. □

Activist Agenda

Meetings

Thu 25 Jun: The history of workers' sports. Lewisham AWL. 7pm, Deptford Lounge, 9 Giffin St SE8 4RJ

Sun 28 Jun: The Myth of Lenin's Revolutionary Defeatism. N London AWL reading group. 11am, 20E Tower Workshops, Riley Rd, SE1 3DG

Mon 6 Jul: Is Labour finished? N London AWL. 7pm, Housmans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Road, N1 9DY

At work or on campus

We organise: among health and local government, school and education workers, on the railway and London Underground, in the civil service, on uni campuses, and more. See [workerslib-](https://workersliberty.org)

erty.org/work-unions, Insta @work-erslibertystudents, and email awl@workersliberty.org for more.

Template motions

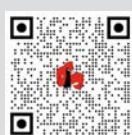
Texts: to adapt for union branches and Labour Parties: bit.ly/mo-pe

Socialist-feminist book clubs

See bit.ly/bc-sf

Campaigns

See workersliberty.org/agenda. □



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The CPB's rotten curate's egg

By Jim Denham

The Communist Party of Britain's executive committee, meeting on May 31st, agreed a statement which duly appeared in the *Morning Star* under the heading "Block the far right. Bin Starmer. Build the united front!"

The statement can fairly be described as a curate's egg, but only if you use that expression in its original, ironic, 19th century sense (see below).

The statement begins by noting that "the collapse in authority of the Starmer government is paving the way for a government of the far right." But what do the comrades propose to do about it? Building the so-called Together Alliance, a top-down amalgam of celebrities and a few union leaders, urging "unity" in the face of the far right, but little in the way of a challenge to the politics of austerity, privatisation and cuts that the statement itself identifies as "fuelling the rise of the far right."

When Tommy Robinson and his supporters marched in London on 16 May, the Together Alliance didn't call a properly stewarded counter demonstration, but hid away inside the annual Nakba

demonstration, called on the same day.

The statement correctly calls for a vote for Andy Burnham in the Macclesfield by-election, while noting that "Burnham's own politics are famously opportunist" (so much for the CPB's earlier declaration that only proper "left" Labour candidates could be supported). It says that he's the candidate best placed to defeat Reform (true) and that his victory would trigger a Labour leadership contest (also true).

Guidance

But beyond supporting Burnham in Macclesfield and hoping he goes on to "sweep Starmer's failed leadership from office", there's no guidance as to what the left and affiliated unions should be doing in the Labour Party (the channels for union input still exist but are rarely used) and no indication of the policies that we should be campaigning for — just what the CPB is against: "austerity, privatisation and war."

That word "war", it turns out, actually means one war in particular. When the statement eventually gets round to proposing a positive policy (the only one in

the entire document) it is counterposed to support for Ukraine: "We need public investment in new green technologies to transform Britain instead of endless public money for war in Ukraine and profits for arms manufacturers."

Russia

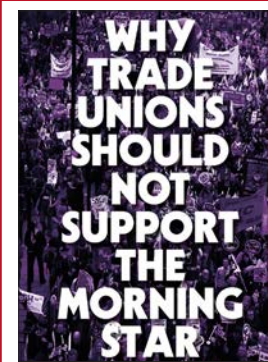
The CPB/*Morning Star*'s de facto support for Russia against Ukraine, always thinly veiled, is now becoming more and more obvious. These days they rarely bother with even the perfunctory condemnations of the invasion that used to appear in the MS and in CPB statements.

It seems that for the CPB, the choice is between either investment in green technologies or providing Ukraine with the weapons it needs defend itself: the idea of, say, taxing the rich to pay for both doesn't seem to occur to the comrades. And as for the profits of the arms industry, what about nationalisation under workers' control?

So it's no surprise that the statement closes with a call on "peace campaigners and trade unionists" to support the so-called International Meeting against War on 20 June — a gathering organ-

ised by fake-left charlatans whose idea of "peace" is to undermine Ukraine and hand military victory to Putin.

By the way, Wikipedia gives the following explanation of the term "curate's egg": it is "something described as partly bad and partly good. In its original usage, it referred to something that is obviously and entirely bad, but is described out of politeness as nonetheless having good features that redeem it. This meaning has been largely supplanted by its less ironic modern usage, which refers to something that is in fact an indeterminate mix of good and bad, possibly with a preponderance of bad qualities". □



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Housing

No land without an owner?

By Robert Bau

A fundamental principle of UK law is that property cannot exist without an owner. Where no private individual can be identified, the law must prevent assets from falling into a legal vacuum. In the United Kingdom, that role has historically been fulfilled by the Crown, which acts as the ulti-

mate holder of property where ownership otherwise fails.

This principle is found in the doctrine of bona vacantia — "ownerless goods" — under which property without an identifiable owner passes to the Crown (as mentioned in the last article, in specific historic areas that right rests with the Duchy of Lancaster or the Duchy of Cornwall rather than

the Crown).

Today, bona vacantia most often arises where a person dies without heirs or a company is dissolved, leaving assets unclaimed. This is not a rare event, with a few thousand properties a year falling into Crown hands.

Origins

It is not only that the Crown steps in when ownership fails; rather, all property rights ultimately derive from the Crown in the first place. This idea has its origins in the Norman Conquest of 1066, when William I asserted control over all land and redistributed it to his followers in return for service. From then on, land was held "of the Crown," and independent, absolute ownership ceased to exist.

Modern law has retained this framework in simplified form. In England and Wales, the Crown is still regarded as the only absolute owner of land, while

others hold "estates in land," such as freehold or leasehold. In practical terms, a freehold estate gives extensive rights — to occupy, sell, mortgage, and pass on land indefinitely. It closely resembles outright ownership, yet legally remains a derived title.

The position in Northern Ireland broadly follows the same model. Its land law is rooted in the same common-law tradition, and the principle that land is derived from the Crown still applies. However, Northern Ireland retains more historical complexity, including layered chains of ownership and extensive leasehold arrangements, making the structure more visible in practice.

Scotland has taken a different path. Although it once operated a feudal system with the Crown at its apex, the Abolition of Feudal Tenure etc. (Scotland) Act 2000 formally dismantled that structure. The Crown is

no longer a feudal superior, and landownership is conceptually more direct. However, key Crown rights remain under which the Crown still acquires ownerless property or estates without heirs.

So, do we complete the bourgeois revolution and demand that something similar to an Abolition of Feudal Tenure Act be passed for the rest of the UK? Certainly the state should look to passing on properties falling under bona vacantia to councils for housing or building purposes.

The notion of bona vacantia could also be extended to assets where the owner cannot be found or the asset is seemingly abandoned, but more importantly where the owner cannot be identified or where the true owner hides. More about hidden ownership in the next article. □



Pic: @gibography2001 / Instagram

Green councils, reversing cuts, and the Lib-Dems

By a Workers Liberty activist in the Greens

After ousting the hard-right Labour council, Lambeth's left-wing local Greens have formed a new minority administration. The council is balanced on a knife-edge — 27 Greens, 26 Labour, eight Lib Dems and two vacancies (a former Green candidate suspended for antisemitic social media posts did not take their seat, and one Green electee quit for health reasons).

The Starmer Labour leadership has [banned](#) Labour councillors from cooperating with the Greens — see below. Even without that, Lambeth's ultra-Blairite-controlled Labour group were unlikely to collaborate with Lambeth's leftish Greens.

The Greens had pledged a switch from the cabinet to the committee system of government, viewing the latter as more democratic and open (though in a “hung” council the effect might be to paralyse rather than scrutinise). New national legislation against committee governance meant this would have had to be done at breakneck pace or not at all — complicated even if they had a majority, let alone without overall control. Nevertheless, it initially seemed the Greens would work with the Lib Dems to do it.

At the last moment the Greens swerved to a compromise — forming a Green cabinet to govern as a minority, but in a hybrid system with committees where opposition councillors could still have some more input.

In response, while still assenting to a Green administration, it appears that the Liberals also cut a deal with Labour to assign leadership of statutory committees to the opposition parties, and to raise the allowances of posts they were taking while reducing the allowances of posts that Greens would hold.

I still don't have a complete picture of how real power will be distributed in this system. But for other Green manifesto pledges — including organising with workers, communities and other councils for a campaign to reverse austerity — it is positive that the Greens have not gone into coalition with the Lib Dems, and the formation of a Green cabinet may offer the best chance of positive action. Promisingly, the administration's first significant act was to halt the planned closure of a day centre for residents with dementia, whose workers had struck to save the service and jobs.

However, the Lib Dem and Labour councillors will have plenty of scope to obstruct and possibly veto, if they choose. Activists and trade unionists locally must push the Green councillors forward to achieve as much as possible, while also exerting all labour movement possible pressure on Labour councillors — at the very least, for them not to obstruct positive measures.

Green councillors will come under significant institutional pressure to moder-

ate and compromise the radicalism of their manifesto. The upcoming Lambeth Green Party AGM will consider the party's democratic structures. It's important that discussion of the big strategic and political questions remains open to activists and anchored in the local party, rather than being hived off to the council group.

Struggles

The local party must increase involvement in local struggles beyond electoral campaigning, and if unelected senior managers at the Council show unreasonable resistance, councillors must be urged to look to outside power and knowledge — especially that of unionised council workers.

The two vacancies mean there will be by-elections on 9 July, which could tip the balance of the council (though the Greens are favourites to win at least one of the two). Local Workers' Liberty activists will continue to campaign for the Greens in those elections, while pressing inside and outside the Lambeth party to take forward key pledges on organising and anti-austerity campaigning, particularly including unionising the borough's workers and tenants, and building the campaign to reverse austerity to rebuild local public services and jobs. We are also pressing for discussion and polit-

Lambeth's new left Green councillors



ical education around left-antisemitism.

Lambeth is not the only London council in a precarious balance. Political fragmentation on both left and right produced a record nine London councils with no majority for any one party. With the multi-seat first-past-the-post voting system, results were still not proportional to voters' preferences.

Lambeth is one of many councils across the country, and a number in London, where the Greens are in cooperation with the Lib Dems. In Southwark the Greens went further, forming a coalition cabinet with Lib-Dems. It is certainly a strange outcome that a shift of left-wing voters from Labour (or not voting) to the Greens has led to greater leverage for an outright bourgeois party who were the

co-architects of post-2010 austerity.

Lib Dem partners will be an obstacle to radicalism, particularly on any serious effort to challenge central government over reversing or even stalling cuts. Doubtless, some more “moderate” Greens are rather too comfortable with these partners, and some others may not remember 2010-6.

Responsibility

But primary responsibility for the situation rests with the Labour Right's unhinged factionalism. Starmer's leadership issued a ban on Labour councillors cooperating with Greens — while in Birmingham the new Labour leader seems to have sprung an attempted deal with Reform (about committees, trying to thwart the Tories) on the Labour group. In Southwark, the Green councillors did approach Labour first as their preferred partners — they were rebuffed. Labour councillors in Brent protested after Starmer's edict left them with no way to form an administration other than a deal with the Conservatives.

In Barnet, Labour councillors preferred to collaborate with the Conservatives than to offer anything to the lone Green councillor who would otherwise have held the balance of power. Starmer and co would rather empower Lib Dems and even Tories — and drive us closer to a Reform victory — than countenance co-operation with leftist Greens.

While remaining sober about the challenges, activists must grasp the opportunities afforded to us. The summit against austerity in local government, proposed by Greens Organise and pledged by many councillors and Zack Polanski, is set to be hosted by Hackney Council in September. Organisers promise they intend an open, cross-party event, and to include union branches and community groups — a window for rank-and-file trade unionists not just the General Secretaries.

We need to push at this open door: get our union branches and relevant local campaigns involved in the conference, and press for it to include space for democratic discussion and organisation for action. And in the meantime, organise: spark union fights over jobs and services, build local campaign coalitions anchored in the labour movement, and pressure Green, Labour and independent-left councillors alike to get on board. □

The TUC's ERA toolkit: check the small print

By a union rep

The TUC has produced a reps' toolkit for the Employment Rights Act (ERA) 2025: bit.ly/tuc-tk. It is useful as a broad introduction, but some of the new rights are less clear-cut than the toolkit suggests.

Before addressing the toolkit, we must be clear that the Act does improve workers' rights, and to a more limited extent union rights. However, it also has significant limitations. So the unions must campaign for a second ERA to secure a clear right to strike, sectoral bargaining, and other reforms.

Back to the toolkit. Take fire and rehire as an example. The toolkit states that from January 2027, dismissing someone and rehiring them on worse terms will be automatically unfair in most cases, with an exception for genuine financial difficulties. However, government guidance makes clear this is not absolute. It says dismissal will not be automatically unfair where employers use fire and rehire to introduce non-restricted changes, such as altering location or job role. The toolkit also does not fully reflect differences between sectors. For local authorities, the ERA allows fire and rehire where a “relevant intervention direction” is in force — such as central government appointing commissioners.

On stronger unions, the toolkit highlights a new right of access for unions to workplaces, both in person and online, to organise, recruit and communicate. While a welcome step forward, the limitations are significant. There is no right of access where the purpose is to organise industrial action, and the right does not apply where an employer has fewer than 21 staff. In addition, employers retain considerable control in practice: they can delay access, shape how it operates, and influence the conditions under which unions engage with workers.

A final example is balloting. The toolkit says that from August 2026, electronic and workplace balloting will be allowed alongside postal voting, with rules phased in through 2026–27. This is correct, but it understates the constraints. These methods will operate within a controlled framework set out in a statutory Code of Practice, with limits on when and how they can be used. Through late 2026 and into 2027, the system will be expanded and refined, rather than introducing full flexibility immediately.

Overall, the toolkit is a useful signpost to change, but it does not fully capture the complexity or limitations of the new laws. Reps still need to delve into the detail. □

What we saw in Lviv and Kyiv

By Gerry Bates

A delegation of Alliance for Workers' Liberty members visited Lviv and Kyiv in late May. This followed on from earlier delegations in 2022 and 2023, and participation in NEU and PCS/EPSU delegations in 2024 and 2025.

We met with trade unionist, socialist and feminist activists in both cities and made contact with more whom we hope to meet in future. As bad luck would have it, a delegation from the German Ukrainische Linke Initiative was leaving Lviv just as we were arriving.

In Lviv, we spoke to the Centre for Urban History of East Central Europe, and INDEX (Institute for Documentation and Exchange); especially on the work of the latter on telling the Ukrainian experience of war to a wider audience, including through art. Dr Sacha Dovzhyk, Director of INDEX, spoke about the programmes and scholarships that they run. We were shown a VR experience made by the Media Initiative for Human Rights, demonstrating the conditions that Ukrainian detainees (including illegally abducted civilians from the occupied territories and prisoners of war) have been subjected to while in Russian captivity. The environment had been meticulously recreated from the drawings of Serhiy Ofitserov, who had been abducted from Kherson, and still has not been released.

In Kyiv, we met with representatives from the KVPU trade union federation, including Olesia Briazgunova, International Secretary.

There are two trade union federations in Ukraine. One is the FPU, which draws its existence from the pre-1991 state "trade unionism" of the Soviet Union, but is still a genuine and independent trade union federation, and the other is the KVPU, which is was founded after independence to aspire to a modern, Western European concept of trade unionism, although both federations do not yet meet the standards of democratic structures that we would want, and much important and vital trade union work is done by trade union staff rather than by rank-and-file members. This won't be unfamiliar to members of UK unions.

Themes in the meeting with the KVPU focussed on the ongoing struggle for the voice of trade unions, as the organised representatives of workers, to secure a higher profile and influence in both the workplace and the political sphere, where conflict over a proposed new Labour Code (which we have written about previously) continues apace — as well as newer proposals for reactionary changes to the Civil Code that among other things would weaken LGBTQ+ rights, and which has sparked several protests.

It was clear the KVPU (and FPU) face



challenges not on the current agenda of Western European trade unions. Most obviously, the impact of the war. But other challenges they face are more familiar: a government with a pro-privatisation agenda, and international aid being made conditional on implementation of neo-liberal policies.

This underlines the need for stronger links to be built between Western European trade unions and their Ukrainian counterparts, not just in the form of material support but also in terms of cross-border campaigning to push back against the international capitalist drive for privatisation and cutbacks in the welfare state.

Privatisation

One of the KVPU's affiliates is the Free Trade Union of Medical Workers of Ukraine. The delegation met with Oleg Panasenکو, the union's President, and will publish a full interview in a future issue of *Solidarity*. Oleg raised the enormous negative impact of the government's pro-privatisation agenda on Ukrainian health services, such as low pay; cuts in jobs and working hours; cuts in the funding of public health institutions; cuts in the provision of public medical care and a growing but deeply inequitable reliance on private medical businesses; cuts in the availability of services in the form of "mergers" of medical institutions; and falling levels of staffing as healthcare workers leave for other jobs in Ukraine or abroad. Oleg made the point that the government was failing to provide or plan to provide the socially necessary amount of provision, and that despite much of Ukraine's pre-war population having had to flee abroad, if the current level of provision was inadequate for even 30 million people then it would be completely deficient to care for 45 million — and yet the government's plan would only decrease, not increase, this capacity.

The union places particular emphasis on the World Health Assembly Pandemic Agreement of 2025, which defines

state responsibilities in the provision of healthcare, as a form of "leverage" to try to get the Ukrainian government to implement those standards.

That is consistent with the overall KVPU approach of highlighting EU Directives and international labour standards as a means of "leverage" in working to improve workers' rights in Ukraine. Many Ukrainian unions want Ukraine in the EU.

The delegation had meetings with members of Sotsialny Rukh (SR, Social Movement) in Lviv and Kyiv. SR is a small socialist organisation trying to argue for socialist politics in adverse conditions. Its membership, including in its branches in Lviv, Kyiv and Kryvyi Rih, as well as clusters of individual members in other Ukrainian cities like Odessa, has been dispersed as a result of many members being drafted into the army, or moving abroad, which has especially impacted on its student work. SR has made efforts to coordinate the work of its members abroad (such as in Die Linke).

SR has also attempted to raise political demands among soldiers at the front. But dissatisfaction with conditions in the army results in individual desertions, not in being won over to the idea of collective organisation.

Even so, SR continues to campaign in workplaces and trade unions (one SR member the delegation met was Oksana Slobodyana of the grassroots medical workers organisation "Medical Movement — Be Like We Are"), and around local issues, such as proposed Metro fare increases in Kyiv, and the lack of adequate air-raid facilities in some kindergartens.

SR also publishes useful materials pushing back against the misrepresentation of the nature of Russia's war against Ukraine that has been relentlessly promoted by the likes of the Stop the War Coalition (STW) — although, after more than four years since the full-scale invasion and twelve years of war since the Maidan Revolution and the subsequent Russian-backed separatist

insurgency, one wonders whether those people will ever learn.

The delegation also met with Katarina and Oleksandr of the Social Democratic Platform (SD Platform), another political organisation, who place a heavy emphasis on providing members with an interactive political education and training, and avoiding top-down methods of organisation. In that sense, it seems to have much in common with Standing Together in Israel.

The SDP distinguishes itself politically from pro-market liberalism and various right-wing political currents in Ukraine. Above all, it distinguishes itself from the tradition that "political parties" have taken in Ukraine: non-ideological, devoid of inner-party democracy (or actual members), and merely the tools of oligarchs to promote their own interests.

SD Platform members acknowledged that socialism was a toxic term in Ukraine — due to the country's experiences of "Communist" rule, and so too was social democracy — due to misplaced associations with (Russia-supporting, Putin's personal friend) Medvedchuk's now defunct Ukrainian Choice party. But, they argued, there has been a historical social-democratic tradition in Ukraine which they believe they can now revive and further develop.

Civil Code

Campaigning against a proposed new Civil Code was the main theme of the meeting with Olha Yashchenko from Feminist Workshop. Some of the worst elements of the proposed Code; such as legalisation of marriage for fourteen-year olds if they are pregnant, and a ban on divorce during pregnancy and the first year after giving birth, have been dropped under the pressure of popular campaigning.

Even so, the new draft Code — initiated and being driven by Ruslan Stefanchuk, a member of the ruling Servant of the People party (Zelenskyy's party) and chairperson of the Verkhovna Rada (Ukrainian Parliament) — is still in serious need of further amendment. It seeks to enshrine in law, for example, the concept of 'good morals'. No-one can explain what that actually means, making it open to abuse at the expense of women's safety, women's rights and LGBTQ+ rights. "Accountability for violence, not vague good morals", is what Feminist Workshop advocates as an alternative. Other issues discussed with Olha included abortion rights in Ukraine (good on paper, but not in practice) and the impact of the war on the work of Feminist Workshop, which despite the obvious challenges has given the organisation a new lease of life and attracted a new

continued on page 9 →

layer of activists.

A week in Ukraine — or any other country — does not allow anyone to speak with any authority about its politics and political conflicts. But what was certainly obvious was just how far removed from reality is the depiction of Ukraine promoted by the STW and its counterparts in other countries.

Trade unions are not banned. We met with their members. Socialist organisations have not been banned. We met with their members as well. Street protests have not been banned, as evidenced by protests organised by Feminist Workshop. And democracy has not been stifled — civil organisations, for example, are particularly active in Ukraine.

Nor was there any sign of what the German politician Sahra Wagenknecht (politics similar to those of STW — only worse) recently called “the explicit Nazi-cult of the Ukrainian government” to justify her demand of “not a penny more for Ukraine”.

The contents of the exhibition “The Ukrainian-Jewish Century” at the Babyn Yar site — and the staging itself of the exhibition — indicate that the situation of Jews in Ukraine is not what Putin and some in Western Europe, who call Ukraine Nazi or near-Nazi, suggest. While there is a discussion to be had over some of the early-20th century figures that the Ukrainian government commemorates due to their association with the Ukrainian independence movement (Melnyk being a recent example), this is hardly different from the British state’s commemoration of figures like Churchill whom we, or the Ukrainian left, would not endorse either.

A delegation by a small British socialist organisation is not a substitute for delegations by British trade unions for the purpose of laying the groundwork for practical working-class solidarity, and we will continue to participate and push for these to occur in addition to future delegations we are planning ourselves — we need to make more solidarity with our Ukrainian friends and comrades, build better links between the UK and Ukrainian labour movements, and increase understanding that support will need to continue well after the war to ensure a just and pro-worker reconstruction, rather than any imposed deals, carve-ups, neoliberal privatisations or watering-down of rights.

It is all very well for trade union General Secretaries to put their names to a statement of solidarity with Ukraine. But some of them have yet to actually do anything in terms of active solidarity. Unite the Union, for example, adopted policy at its 2025 conference to organise national and regional delegations to Ukraine, organise speaking tours by Ukrainian trade unionists, and promote the twinning of Unite branches with Ukrainian union branches. Nearly a year later, the policy remains a dead letter. That needs to change. And change is needed in other unions as well. We will do everything we can to make that happen. □

• More: Ukraine Left Initiative, bit.ly/dl-uli

Women’s Fightback

Young men in USA turn religious

By Natalia Cassidy

In the US, primarily, the older you are the more likely you are to be religious. Gender has played a significant secondary role. Women are still in general more likely to be religious than men. But now, in the USA, young women are less religious than young men overall, according to recent polling by Gallup.

Young men are much more likely to lean Republican than young women (48% vs 27%). Given the link between political affiliation and religiosity in the US, this is likely a key explainer.

Historically, religious practice and identity have been more popular among women than among men in Christian majority countries.

In Islam and Judaism, the picture has historically been mixed. According to research by the Pew Research Centre in 2016, men are much more likely to engage in public worship, whilst women are overall more likely to engage in daily prayer and to profess belief in God. In Islam, this is in large part due to differences in expectations around the

fulfilment of prayer between men and women. Men are obligated to attend a Masjid to fulfil a prayer on Jum’ah (Friday prayer), whereas women can fulfil this obligation at home.

The primary driver of the recent change in the USA has been along partisan lines. “Republican-leaning” men and women have seen a 7% and 8% increase on religious attendance respectively. “Democrat-leaning” men have also increased their attendance by 3%, whilst Democrat-leaning women have seen nearly no change whatsoever.

Overall, the increase in religiosity is more pronounced in terms of the professed importance of religion in people’s lives rather than its weekly practice. Weekly practice in Christianity is still dominated by women despite the rise in men’s religiosity. This suggests that there is an element of performance in the new young men’s religiosity, using faith as a signifier of social and political values rather than of other-worldly devoutness.

Online there is a phenomenon of so-called “orthobros”, Western men con-

verting to Orthodoxy and emphasising the traditionalism of the Church and the male-centricity of the religion particularly its Russian branch. Data from the Orthodox Church in America notes a 78% increase in conversions since the pandemic, whilst the Pew Research Centre’s data reveals that 64% of these converts are male, up from 46% in 2007.

There is a similar trend in Catholicism. Many young men are joining the Church and using it as a signifier of traditionality. Often these young people grew up in fairly low-church Protestant denominations in the US and have stated their desire to return to an imagined tradition of the Church, often stating a desire to return to the pre-Vatican-II pre-Novus-Ordo Tridentine Mass.

These young men have very little to say about Catholic social teaching which does not fit with their existing political convictions, but emphasise the exclusion of women from the priesthood, an opposition to abortion, and a traditional family structure as the bedrock of their conversion processes. □

Africa

Ebola, capitalism, and Trump’s aid cuts

By Paul Abbot

The current outbreak of Ebola in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is growing rapidly. It is centred in Ituri, a province in the northeast of the country which borders Uganda and South Sudan. So far there have been roughly a thousand suspected cases and a quarter as many deaths, with cases now being reported in Uganda as well.

The DRC government’s response to the outbreak has been ineffective and unpopular. This is particularly the case regarding the decision to ban almost all flights in and out of Bunia (the capital of Ituri), which has severely hampered aid efforts. A recent report in [The Lancet](https://www.thelancet.com) argues that travel bans in the 2014-2016 West African Ebola epidemic did more harm than good, as they had “little effect on preventing international spread while disrupting the movement of healthcare workers and es-

sential supplies, damaging local economies and encouraging informal border crossings that were more difficult to monitor”.

Previous Ebola outbreaks in the DRC have been accompanied by price gouging and kickback schemes, where people hired on contracts to do jobs like grave-digging or disinfecting have been pressured into giving a portion of their salary or sexual services to the person who got them the job.

However, those responsible for containing and treating the outbreak are obviously in an unenviable position. Many people in the area understandably have no trust in the government or local authorities, and this has provided a fertile environment for online conspiracy theories. Additionally, there have been outbreaks of violence against measures to restrict burials of (still infectious) victims. Like much of the DRC, Ituri Province is subject to extractivism and

fighting between militias.

The ideological austerity and “America First” policy of the Trump administration have also severely hampered the global ability to fight disease outbreaks. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has been gutted, and the “America First Global Health Strategy” has replaced the US’s contributions to the WHO (which it left in January this year) with bilateral “memorandums of understanding”. The actions of USAID (the American foreign aid agency which Trump has effectively abolished) in other countries often had inadvertent or purposeful negative impacts, but the massive cutback of aid has been devastating.

The US had planned to open a facility in Kenya to quarantine and treat Americans who had been in contact with the virus, but this is on hold after a challenge in court and protests. This opposition comes both from a fear of bringing ebola pa-

tients into Kenya, and outrage at setting up treatment centres solely for Americans. The general secretary of the Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists and Dentists Union (KMPDU), Davji Bhimji Attelal, threatened strikes against the deal, condemning it as “an apartheid healthcare model” and attacking the government for its “apparent willingness to trade national biosecurity and the lives of its citizens for foreign aid”.

Outbreaks of zoonotic disease have become one of the defining characteristics of the twenty-first century. Ramped up agricultural production, consumption, and deforestation have brought people into much greater contact with viruses than before. Capitalism, a system based on short-term maximisation of profit is responsible for this outbreak, as it was responsible for the development of HIV, SARS, and Coronavirus into global pandemics. □

Use legal rights against workplace heat!

By Stuart Jordan

At the Ecosocialist Conference in London on 30 May, I ran a session called Preparing for a Heat Strike. I argued that the most fruitful focus for joint activity is to build the campaign by Heat Strike and London Hazards Centre campaign around hot buses.

Many attendees at the conference signed up to take part in a London Hazards Centre and Heat Strike initiative to campaign around hot buses. Temperatures on London buses can soar to over 40°C, posing a serious and imminent risk of heat exhaustion. Every bus without sufficient air cooling is a potential catastrophe not only for the individual bus drivers but for every pedestrian and road user in the city.

The talk discussed the substantial but much underused rights we have in the UK under Health and Safety law.

Workers have a right under s.44 of the Employment Rights Act to refuse unsafe work "without suffering detriment" if they have a "reasonable belief that it may cause a serious and imminent danger". Employers have a legal duty under section 2 and 3 of the Health and Safety at Work Act to provide safe working conditions for their workers and any member of the public affected by their work. The TUC argues there should be a maximum working temperature of 30°C (27°C for strenuous work). Risks of heat stroke and heat exhaustion escalate rapidly above these temperatures. Workers should feel confident to use these rights and force their employers to make the necessary adaptations.

Legal Right

Health and safety reps are the only trade union reps with a legal right to paid time off for union duties. These duties include the right to inspect the workplace, investigating hazards of the representative's own choosing. Under Health and Safety Executive guidance, management have a duty to facilitate private conversations

between reps and individual workers during these inspections.

In most workplaces the health and safety structures are hollowed out and it is very easy to be elected as a new health and safety rep. Anyone wishing to organise around the heat strike idea can use these rights to organise on the bosses' time.

The s44 right is an individual right and unions are nervous about any appearance of organising collective action around it for fear of legal repercussions. Unite has issued a letter to bus drivers explaining these rights. But without some collective organisation it is unlikely that individual workers will take the initiative. London Hazards Centre is hoping through leafletting drivers and passengers across London to build that collective organisation.

Range

There was a good range of trade union activists at the event and a useful discussion about how to progress this campaign. Workers in other industries can use the dangers of travelling on overheated public transport to argue for heat furlough, work from home arrangements, or flexible hours. Activists stressed the need to engage union-sponsored Labour MPs and demand representation on this issue.

Fast food workers and delivery drivers in the USA and Italy have walked out over extreme heat. Bus drivers in Rome and Naples have refused to drive hot buses. In Barcelona last year, hundreds of workers participated in a union demonstration following the death of street cleaner, Monse Aguilar, who died of heat exhaustion. They marched behind the banner "Extreme heat is workplace violence". Even last week, there were reports of London Underground drivers refusing to drive trains.

Organising to force employers to act on heat is a way we can link immediate and deeply felt issues of workplace safety with the wider goal of building a working class movement capable of halting global warming.

As capitalism drives us ever deeper into the Anthropocene, the world and hence our workplaces will become ever more unsafe. We saw this very clearly during the pandemic and we saw it with the May heatwave too.

These escalating risks are not only bad for individual workers but they also undermine the essential services that we all depend upon. In 2021 the government's own Climate Change Committee reported that progress with climate adaptation is either "too slow, has stalled or is heading in the wrong direction". Five years of inaction later, it's so much worse.

The experience of the pandemic has given us a lesson in how the capitalist class will respond to our deteriorat-

ing environmental conditions.

They will load the burden of suffering onto the working-class and the poor.

The will seek so far as possible to socialise the losses and privatise the gains. This is why they have done nothing on climate mitigation and why they have done almost nothing on climate adaptation.

But the pandemic also demonstrated the power we have as workers when we organise and are prepared to take collective action. The battle for Anthropocene resilient workplaces is a new site of struggle and workers are already taking collective action.

For a few weeks each year the issue of workplace heat impacts very large numbers of workers simultaneously, across industries and across borders and it is a problem that is not going to go away. Each summer we face the prospect of longer and hotter heatwaves until the point we build the social force that can wrest the power over economic life out of capitalist hands. Each group of workers who take action now has a good chance of success and each success may inspire other workers. In this way, organising around workplace heat not only makes us safer but also helps build the movement we need to tackle the climate crisis.

Representatives

The Ecosocialism conference on 30 May was an good initiative and drew a friendly and interesting crowd, including a representatives from a variety of different socialist traditions, Green party activists and a few trade union militants.

The dominant politics of the event was anticapitalist rather than positively socialist. Everyone seemed to agree that capitalism was the underlying driver of the climate and ecological emergency but ideas about positive solutions were varied.

Greens Organise people (in matching T-shirts) were prominent throughout expounding a kind of Green reformism and brought NGO vibes to the event. They were obviously buoyed by recent electoral success but less clear on how to use their position given the limited power and resources of local government.

The key organisers, Anti-Capitalist Resistance, created comradely forums for debate and did bring some more traditional socialist ideas like public ownership and planning to the conference agenda. There was a useful session on planning as a transitional demand highlighting different struggles across Europe. But there was no sense that ACR were trying to win an argument or cohere the conference around an ideolog-



ically coherent vision.

Eclecticism was built into the conference agenda. Throughout the conference there was a muted argument between those, like science writer Fred Pearce, who talked up China's green credentials. and those with a more realistic assessment of the world's biggest emitter.

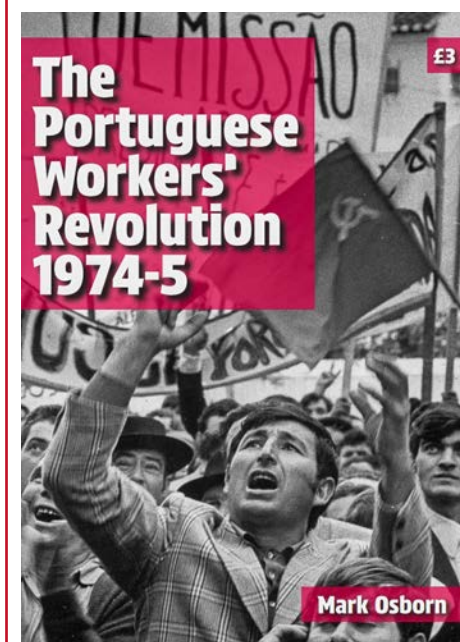
Workers' Liberty activists attended and argued for our class struggle socialist politics. In various sessions, our people made the case that the organised working-class is the only social force with the power and interest to take capitalist property into public ownership and start the green transition that we need.

The eclecticism made it difficult to pull conference delegates together on for collective activity. Greens Organise were enthusiastic about people joining the Greens but there was also lots of vague NGO talk of "coalition building" and "engaging with community groups". Two hundred committed ecosocialists could achieve a lot through collective ideological and political struggle e.g. around demands for public ownership and planning. But disperse that force into "engaging with community groups" and it will achieve little. □

• More online: What alliances? bit.ly/eco-all



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The story from the 25 April 1974 overturn to the 25 Nov 1975 restabilising coup. £3 □

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To open up Labour, win Makerfield

By David Axon

In the latter part of the 1950s, Labour's right wing believed that the advent of television — and the party political broadcast in particular — increasingly meant that the party did not need an active membership. "With the increasing penetration of the mass media", wrote Anthony Crosland, "the traditional local activities, the door-to-door-canvassing and the rest, are largely a ritual".

By the time he wrote that, Labour's 1959 election result had already proved that view to be mistaken.

The party's right moved to a strategy of removing members' rights within the party, rather than removing the members themselves. The set piece battle of 1960-1 over nuclear weapons was one that the right sought as much as the left, to openly defy a conference decision so that "the policy-making role of the conference would be to some extent devalued", as Crosland put it.

Historian Lewis Minkin notes that: "In December 1955, when Gaitskill became leader of the party, its concept of intra-party democracy, in which policy in theory flowed upwards via the party's conference, was still a cherished symbol". More symbol than reality, because the platform *always* won conference votes then; but, since the unions ceased to be always-reliable supporters of the parliamentary leadership, a war against the idea of control of the party by its membership and that of the affiliated unions has gone on for decades.

The Labour base has pushed back at times, particularly in the late 1970s to early 1980s, but, from the top, that war has brought in the National Policy Forum to undermine the policy role of conference, restrictions on CLPs' rights to select their own parliamentary candidates, and the current high (20%) threshold for MP nominations for someone even to be a candidate in a leadership election.

Labour's membership has been falling again since its most recent peak of just under 600,000 in 2017, which was a big leap from the 150,000 or so in 2009. Some of that loss is through expulsions, but the vast majority is members heeding Starmer's 2023 message, "If you don't like the changes that we've made, I say the door is open, and you can leave". In ones and twos, members have been dropping out every day since — some to the Greens, a few to Your Party, and far

greater numbers to nowhere in particular.

But now LabourList reports after the May NEC: "Labour officials have seen a jump in party membership since Andy Burnham emerged as a possible contender in a future leadership contest".

In my own CLP, membership has increased this month for the first time in that period, and I have met others who report the same in their areas too. It's small, but it's an about-turn.

In Makerfield on Saturday 6 June, the number of party members engaged in "traditional local activities, the door-to-door-canvassing and the rest" for the by-election were high. The whole constituency has already been door-knocked, and my team were speaking with many people who had already spoken with a Labour canvasser. By lunchtime on Saturday, already over 300 people had gone out from the campaign base in the Stubshaw Cross Labour Club. Those figures are close to the numbers in Gorton and Denton at its very peak.

Anecdotally, the figures include left-wingers who have previously dropped out of Labour Party activity, or have even been expelled from the party.

Change

At the campaign's launch, Burnham spoke to party members about a vote for him being a vote to change the Labour Party. "My own party needs to change — a vote for me in this by-election is a vote to change Labour — to be a party that is solidly on the side of working-class people and working-class communities".

I have heard several canvassers talk about doorstep conversations where a voter says they want to vote Reform because they hate Starmer, and the canvasser has pointed out that the quickest way to get him out is to vote Burnham. The election material we are putting through doors says simply "Vote Andy", with the word "Labour" relegated to a small logo on the back. This is not a campaign based on "Labour's record in government".

At the launch, Burnham presented a case that government has been on the wrong course for four decades. Implicitly disavowing the Blair government (and his own part in it), he spoke about the damage done by successive privatisations, and called for more council housing ("the biggest council housing building programme since the Second World War"), for "care on NHS terms", and improved public transport.

Presenting the Greater Manchester Mayoralty as an example of an alternative approach, he contrasted the £2 bus fare anywhere in Greater Manchester to the £364 fare from Wigan NW to London.

Sources including *Socialist Worker* have referred to Greater Manchester buses as being in "public ownership". They are not — they are owned by companies such as First, Metrolink and



Stagecoach, and franchised to Transport for Greater Manchester. The Manchester trams are owned jointly by Keolis and Amey, franchised to Metrolink. So when Burnham very carefully refers in public interviews to "public control" rather than "public ownership" he is being accurate, unfortunately.

Campaign Group MP Clive Lewis very accurately skewered the difference, speaking at the May "Organising Forum" of the soft-left group Mainstream. "Public control is what we already have with water; what we need is public ownership". Interestingly, that meeting discussed questions such as how to hold a future Burnham leadership to account if he becomes leader.

On the BBC's "by-election special" Question Time, Burnham presented the alternative his mayoralty represents rather differently, as politics that was "problem-solving", "long-term", and "collaborative". In a response to an audience member asking him directly what changes he would make to the Labour Party, he ducked the question.

He said nothing about Labour Party democracy, made no mention of Labour conference policies such as wealth tax, and said nothing about the importance of trade unions as organisations and in the Party. Instead he just said that he wanted to "change politics such that it works for here". His focus on "collaboration" is much more in line with the Compass electoral alliance "pluralism" of "Mobilising the Progressive Majority".

However, Burnham has spun the bus franchising and other local policies as an alternative to "40 years of Thatcherism" and he does help us open up discussion of the record of Labour governments and of alternatives.

Democracy

If Labour win this by-election, and if that success is followed by a Labour leadership election — neither is certain — then we have a chance to open up space within the party on party democracy, on tackling Reform, and on taxing the rich. There is little doubt that if Labour's NEC had not blocked Burnham from Gorton

and Denton, Labour would have won that by-election, and Reform's growth would have been somewhat paused.

We hope that the Campaign Group of Labour MPs put up a "left candidate", as they did with Bell Ribeiro-Addy for last year's Deputy Leadership election. The moment that they do so is an opportunity for left activists to propose support for that candidate in trade unions, union "Labour Link" committees, CLPs and Labour Party branches. They can call on their MPs to nominate that candidate.

Even before that, such activists can propose that those same bodies demand of the NEC that rules are operated fairly this time, rather than with a repeat of last year's NEC invention of an "MPs' stage", preventing CLPs and trades unions from even nominating anyone who has not *already* passed the MP nominations threshold.

The desire to remove Starmer goes well beyond the left, and well beyond Burnham's centre. Catherine West MP's 9 May threat to trigger a contest if no-one else came forward to do so reflected a feeling very widespread across the party. Many MPs and party activists who saw so many councillors lose their seats on 7 May because of voters' dislike of Starmer want a change of leadership, but with no significant change to party democracy or policy, or even with a policy shift to the right.

There is no certainty about Makerfield. This by-election involves taking on Reform at their peak. Polls show a lead for Labour, but one very close to the polls' margin of error of that polling, and dependent on the Restore vote not collapsing into Reform.

If Labour win in Makerfield, Reform will have been pushed back at their height, in a constituency where they were by far the winners in the local elections. Opportunities will open up within the Labour Party. If Reform wins, the indictment of Starmer will be even stronger, but the chances of it producing an opening-up or shift to the left much smaller. Readers who are able to go to Makerfield should do so. □



Corbynism: What went wrong? £4 (inc. post) ☐ bit.ly/shop-wl

Rosa Luxemburg on renewing M

By Colin Waugh

Karl Marx died on 14th March 1883, in London. His collaborator, Friedrich Engels, died there in 1895.

Twenty years to the day after Marx's death, the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) published in its newspaper *Vorwärts* a memorial feature which included two articles by Rosa Luxemburg.

Luxemburg was born in 1871 and grew up in the part of present-day Poland then ruled by Russia. She became a socialist activist while still at school. In 1889 she was smuggled out of Poland for her own safety, and for the next nine years was a student in Zurich, eventually completing a PhD in economics and mingling there with other leftwing exiles, especially from Germany. In 1898 she became an activist of the SPD, rapidly rising to national and then international prominence for her fight against the movement aimed at "revising" Marxism headed by Eduard Bernstein.

One of Luxemburg's *Vorwärts* articles is titled *Marxist theory and the proletariat*. Near the end of this, referring to "the transition from the capitalist to the socialist phase of history", she says:

"The historical transition that Marx identified can not take place without Marxian knowledge having become the knowledge of a particular class in society, the modern proletariat. That Marx's theory become the working class's form of consciousness... is the precondition for the realisation of the historical revolution formulated in Marx's theory".

This would surely require that the "theory" should be in a healthy state and as accessible as possible to working-class people.

However, Luxemburg's other article was titled *Stillstand and Fortschritt im Marxismus*. (The usual English transla-

tion of this is *Stagnation and progress of Marxism*.) In this article she starts from the assumption, then widespread, that Marxist ideas were at a standstill, and goes on to look at possible reasons why this was and what it might mean. She is quite clear that these ideas were not "out of date or incapable of being developed".

At a practical level the nominally Marxist SPD must have seemed in 1903 to be very far from stagnating. In that year's Reichstag (i.e. national parliamentary) elections, 3,010,771 people, or 31.7 per cent of the electorate, voted for its candidates, up from 27.2 per cent in 1898, and it won 81 seats. It had several hundred thousand individual members and controlled dozens of daily newspapers. Within two years the daily print run of *Vorwärts* alone would reach 112,000 copies. Millions of workers belonged to unions set up by and affiliated with the SPD.

Defeated

On top of this, when Luxemburg wrote her "stagnation" article it must have seemed to many people in and around the SPD that the attempt by Bernstein and his co-thinkers to "revise" Marxism had been defeated. However, the situation of socialism elsewhere in Europe would have looked less favourable. For example, in France there was a powerful "possibilist" (i.e. reformist) trend. From 1899 to 1902 a prominent possibilist socialist, Alexandre Millerand, had taken part in a bourgeois government that included Gaston Gallifet, the general who in 1871 had organised the slaughter of Parisian workers.

Meanwhile, the left in the Russian Social Democratic and Labour Party (RSDLP) was struggling against "economism", i.e. the notion that workers should stick to union activity and leave ideas to liberal intellectuals. (In 1902, Lenin had written *What Is To Be Done?* as part of this struggle.)

Or again, in Italy, the single most influential intellectual, Benedetto Croce, having for several years sympathised with Marx's thinking, now dismissed this as at best a technical device by which academics like himself could investigate historical change.

In her *Stillstand* article Luxemburg begins by noting that "stagnation in Marxist doctrine... has been noticeable for a good many years", with the result that "the substance of [Marxist] theory remains just where the two founders of scientific socialism [ie Marx and Engels] left it".

She considers first whether this stagnation may have happened because Marx's writings were too all-encompassing and "rigid", leaving no room for others to contribute ideas. She remarks that

"Beyond question, a system of ideas which is merely sketched in broad out-



line proves far more stimulating than a finished and symmetrical structure which leaves nothing to be added and offers no scope for the independent effort of an active mind".

Noting that: 'it is only where economic matters are concerned that we are entitled to speak of a more or less completely elaborated body of doctrines bequeathed us by Marx', she accepts that this elaboration may have been "a somewhat restrictive influence upon the free development of theory in the case of many of his pupils". But she then points out that, despite this: 'the most valuable of all [Marx's] teachings, the materialist-dialectical conception of history, presents itself to us as nothing more than a method of investigation, as a few inspired leading thoughts' and these "offer us glimpses into the entirely new world, which open us to endless perspectives of independent activity, which wing our spirit for bold flights into unexplored regions".

Economic doctrine

Many of her readers would have been taken aback by this, because an accepted view in the SPD was that "Marxism" was purely and simply an economic doctrine. But at any rate she then goes on: "even in this domain... the splendid new weapon rusts unused; and the theory of historical materialism remains as unelaborated and sketchy as it was when first formulated by its creators". In her view, then, 'the rigidity and completeness of the Marxist edifice' on their own do not explain "the failure of Marx's successors to go on with the building".

She next looks at the possibility that the "stagnation" results from "our movement [lacking] the persons of talent who might be capable of further elaborating Marx's theories". She agrees that "such a lack is, indeed, of long standing", but then discounts it as a cause of stagnation, arguing that "the lack itself demands an explanation", because "if in any period there is a genuine need for

theoretical exponents, the period will create the forces requisite for the satisfaction of that need".

At this point she now deepens the discussion, inviting readers to think whether there is "a genuine need, an effective demand, for the further development of Marxist theory?"

In relation to this question she assesses the response of activists to the publication, first of *Capital* Volume 1 (in 1867) by Marx himself and then to the publication by Engels of Volume 2 (in 1885) and of Volume 3 (in 1894). She says that "as far as the socialist movement as a whole was concerned", Volume 3 in particular, despite its theoretical importance, has 'made practically no impression'. This is because "however important from the outlook of pure theory", the problems solved in Volume 3 "are comparatively unimportant from the practical outlook of the class war". She goes on:

"As far as the class war is concerned, the fundamental theoretical problem is the origin of surplus value, that is, the scientific explanation of exploitation; together with the elucidation of the tendencies toward the socialisation of the process of production".

Since "both these problems are solved in the first volume", the workers, "being actively engaged in the class war, have no direct interest" in the questions answered in the later volumes". The result is, then, that "for socialists in general, the third volume of *Capital* remains an unread book".

Moreover, although "the workers' craving for knowledge is one of the most noteworthy cultural manifestations of our day", the working class "will not be in a position to create a science and an art of its own until it has been fully emancipated from its present class position" — in short, until it is, to quote the *Communist Manifesto*, "organised as the ruling class". Till then, all the proletariat can do is "safeguard bourgeois culture



Rosa Luxemburg at her books, 1907. In her day she was almost the only activist in the world socialist movement with advanced academic qualifications

Marxism

from the vandalism of the bourgeois reaction and create the social conditions requisite for a free cultural development". But workers have only one avenue for doing this, namely to "create for themselves the intellectual weapons needed in their struggle for liberation", and this in turn requires, in Luxemburg's view, that they gain access to "Marxist doctrine". So, given the "stagnation", how can this happen?

Her answer to this is as follows. The root cause of stagnation at the level of ideas is that activists' existing familiarity with the ideas of Marx and Engels, for example as expressed in *Capital* Volume 1, remains sufficient for the point that the class struggle has reached so far. But because of its position within capitalist society the working class must sooner or later push struggle to a more advanced stage. And when this happens, as it inevitably will, people will go back to the sources and draw new understandings from them, with the result that progress in the field of ideas will start up again.

Solutions

Luxemburg's article was almost certainly more important for raising and defining problems than for presenting unchallengeable solutions. What it reveals about the situation with regard to ideas in the SPD at the time needs to be investigated.

In the late 1920s interest in this article revived amongst some key socialists.

One of these was the Russian Marxist David Riazanov, through whose work much of what Marx and Engels wrote is available to us now. (He was shot by the Stalin regime in 1938.) In 1927 Riazanov brought out *Karl Marx: Man, Thinker and Revolutionist: a Symposium*. In this book he gathered reminiscences of Marx by Engels, Eleanor Marx, Georgi Plekhanov, Franz Mehring, the evolutionary scientist K. Timiryazeff, the German tailor and First International activist Friedrich Lessner, Wilhelm Liebknecht, co-founder of the SPD, and Lenin, and along with these he included Luxemburg's Stagnation and Progress article.

This prompted the German socialist Karl Korsch to comment specifically on her article and on Riazanov's introductory remarks about it.

As well as this, Antonio Gramsci had a copy of the French translation in his cell, and in his *Prison Notebooks*, written in the early 1930s, he referred repeatedly to what Luxemburg had written in 1903, exploring at length what he judged this to mean for the contemporary situation. □

Our reference points

The Communist Manifesto of 1848

By Rhodri Evans

Karl Marx and Frederick Engels moved decisively from philosophical radicalism to working-class activism in 1845-7. In 1847 they joined the Communist League, a group mainly of young German craft workers, who in that era would travel widely and internationally in their apprentice years.

The League's committee was in London, but it had members elsewhere in Europe. It was moving away from model-community or military-conspiracy communism, and marked that by renaming itself from League of the Just to Communist League. Its main slogan would also change, from "All Men Are Brothers" to "Workers of the World, Unite!"

Marx and Engels went to a ten-day Communist League congress in London in November-December 1847, and won a commission to write a new manifesto. The result was published in February 1848, only days before revolutions erupted across Europe. It was titled "Manifesto of the Communist Party", party here meaning "trend of thought". It was not billed as the special manifesto of the League, but League members distributed it widely in the upheavals of 1848 in Germany.

It was translated into English and gained some currency, though the other translations claimed in the preamble did not get done in 1848 or any time soon after that. It got more translation and distribution in the 1860s and the years of the First and early Second Internationals. By the 1890s it was the standard handbook of Marxists, and has remained so since.

It pulls together ideas outlined in the earlier texts of Marx we have cited as reference points: *Theses on Feuerbach*, *Poverty of Philosophy*, *On the Question of Free Trade*, and *Wage Labour and Capital*.

Preconditions

It starts with the revolutionary role, not of the working class, but of the bourgeoisie. Socialism, it contends, can become real because capitalist development creates the material preconditions for it, not because this or that group has become more enthusiastic for age-old ideals.

- "What the bourgeoisie... produces, above all, are its own grave-diggers", namely the wage-working class, a class with greater potential than other classes of poor people such as peasants or small shopkeepers

- The wage-working class becomes a positive force through its struggles (for wages, etc.) — "the real fruit of their battles lies... in the ever-expanding union of the workers" — and through the fusion of political education with the organisation thus generated

- The socialist future is shaped by the

material reality of the working class and its struggles, not by speculation on ideal forms

- The Communists seek to transform the labour movement, not to construct "our own" labour movement alongside the existing one. This, I think, is the meaning of the passage which starts "the Communists do not form a separate party opposed to other working-class parties". Puzzling, because the Communist League had formed a "separate party", but Hal Draper in his book on the Manifesto unpicks the quirks of translation from German here.

- Communists seek to change "the social character of the property", i.e. of the means of production which are at present "bourgeois property", into "the property of all members of society", so that it loses its "class character" (i.e. its character of being controlled by and operated to enrich and empower an entrenched minority)

- "United action, of the leading civilised countries at least, is one of the conditions for the emancipation of the proletariat". No "socialism in one country". "The Communists... point out and bring to the fore the common interests of the entire proletariat independently of all nationality".

- Communism is not a blueprint, but is not just reactive anti-capitalism, either. Anti-capitalism can be conservative or even backward-looking.

- Communism is about "winning the battle of democracy". To use socialist phrases to craft "anathemas against representative government... bourgeois freedom of the press", etc., in the midst of a battle to win (or defend) such beginnings, is reactionary.

There's a lot there. What isn't? Why don't we conclude our study of "Marxist reference points" here? Why did Marx and Engels labour for decades on theory after writing the Manifesto?

Marx and Engels indicated at least two things in a preface to an 1872 edition. The list of immediate demands in the Manifesto would be "very differently worded today". Indeed, Marx largely picked up those demands from others, and he praised the economic section of the French Workers' Party programme of 1880 as "consist[ing] solely of demands that actually have spontaneously arisen out of the labour movement itself". Of course that general approach plays out differently today, when we can learn from another 150 years of demands "arising from" workers' struggles.

Marx and Engels noted that the Paris Commune of 1871, where the workers held power for nine weeks, showed that "the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes". The Manifesto was incomplete on the state.

And, in fact, as we shall see, on more. Some examples... It contained some residues of the "German-philosophical" terminology (as Engels later ruefully put it) of Marx's earlier writings. Marx used Hegel's favourite word, *Aufhebung* (which variously means abolition, or preservation, or supersession), in e.g. a passage translated as "abolition of the family", where he evidently meant something like "supersession of the current form of the family" (as distinct from ordinary usage like "abolition of children's factory labour").

Incomplete

The Manifesto was also incomplete on economics. Marx spent much effort on the critiques of "the value-form" and "commodity fetishism" which he would expound in *Capital*, and which built on but were clearer and deeper than his convoluted critique in *The Poverty of Philosophy* of Proudhon's idea of "constituted value".

The Manifesto seems to claim that the "middle class" will disappear. Draper argues that the seeming is due to mis-translation, and asserts (rightly) "that the alleged 'disappearance' theory... is most thoroughly quashed when one looks at Marx's mature economic writings".

In the Manifesto, Marx reverted to the idea that capitalism would reduce wages to physical subsistence level, though he had already gone beyond that in *Wage Labour and Capital*. In *Capital* he found, as Engels put it, that "the laws governing wages are very complex... by no means iron but... on the contrary, exceedingly elastic". That is important for all our wages battles, and for understanding the potential of trade-union organisation, its propensity to generate conservative bureaucracies, and the causes and effects of inequalities *within the working class* (which were probably greater in Marx's time than they are in ours).

The Manifesto clearly identifies working-class struggle as the agency for socialism, but a great deal more would have to be worked out on that by Marx and Engels and later Marxists. The Communist League largely dissolved into the movement in the upheavals of 1848 — David Riazanov's *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels* is lucid on that — and, as we shall see, fell apart as the movement receded.

We'll see a bit of that further working-out in the next "reference points" in this series, the *March Address* of 1850 and *The 18th Brumaire*.

An audiobook of the Manifesto is at bit.ly/cm-aubk. Workers' Liberty study notes for it are at bit.ly/cm-sc. The Bolshevik David Riazanov's classic, giving detailed background and references to other writings by Marx and Engels is at bit.ly/cm-dr; Hal Draper's book with bibliographic and translation-difficulties information, at bit.ly/cm-hd. □

Well short of what's needed

By Patrick Yarker

The latest addition to the Reimagining Education series published by the Socialist Educational Association is *After the Review: Reimagining Curriculum and Assessment*, edited by Jane Coles. I recommend it.

To fulfil its manifesto commitment, the government set up the Curriculum and Assessment Review (CAR) in 2024. The previous review of England's National Curriculum ran from 2011 until 2014 and implemented Gove's "reforms". The CAR looked to modernise and broaden the curriculum and judge the testing system's efficacy. It considered in particular the "attainment gap" between richer children and those poorer and/or with Special Educational Needs; how the curriculum might become more representative and inclusive; and whether qualifications post-16 might be improved.

The Review's Final Report appeared in November 2025. A succinct overview of main findings is at bit.ly/CAR-r. A new National Curriculum based on the Report will go live from 2028 when, for the first time, academised institutions will be legally required to teach it.

Young people are increasingly disaffected from school. Teacher recruitment and retention remains in crisis. As John Bolt and Ian Duckett make clear in their contribution to *After the Review*, a very accessible collection of critical rejoinders published in book form by the Socialist Educational Association, the CAR Final Report is complacent and conserv-

ative. Its recommendations fall far short of what is needed.

Contributors to *After the Review* acknowledge the little good the Report contains even as they highlight its grave inadequacies and offer better alternatives. Astute comments from teachers begin the book: Gove's curriculum has fostered shallow learning, alienated young people, sapped morale and damagingly constrained practice. Foregrounding practitioners' voices is an important corrective to the way the CAR worked.

As Dave Barter notes in his contribution, most CAR panel-members were drawn from multi-academy trusts at CEO level and from the university sector. Trade unionists, teachers from non-academised schools, and members of subject specialist organisations were excluded.

Eighteen

The CAR Panel received written evidence from individual teachers and organisations, but there's a world of difference between making a case on paper and arguing it as part of the decision-taking group. One reason why, as Dave Barter writes, education unions should consider affiliating to the Labour Party.

Eighteen concise essays make up the bulk of the book. They cover a range of educational concerns and subject-specialisms from Key Stages 1 through 5, and share a view of the curriculum as a space for young people to develop in educationally beneficial ways by engag-

ing in worthwhile activities. Such a view, progressive and attentive to the learner's personhood, is anathema to those for whom the curriculum is chiefly a device for transmitting authorised content.

I'll spotlight a handful of essays to convey something of the book's scope and stance.

Tony Eade condemns the Review's failure to build on the success of the Early Years Foundation Stage. He calls on teachers to see themselves as curriculum makers, and on senior leaders and school governors to support teaching which emphasises oracy, the arts and relational pedagogy.

Phonics

James Whiting is scathing about the DfE's fixation with phonics teaching, and (in a separate essay) criticises over-specialisation at A Level and the defunding of International Baccalaureate and BTEC courses. Martin Allen weighs up the proposed V Levels (a post-16 qualification endorsed by the Review which Whiting has little time for) but comes down in favour of retaining BTEC and replacing A Levels with a general diploma.

Against the Report's conception of teaching as delivery, Jane Coles and Maggie Pitfield declare teaching "an intellectually creative practice" (p.39). They decry the "deadening load" (p.41) which the Govian knowledge-centric approach imposes on young people. They note the Review's blindness to enjoyment as an enabler of learning, and urge the importance of creativity across all

subjects.

The creative dimension inherent in maths is celebrated by Hilary Povey. Creative and co-agentic maths teaching helps confirm in pupils and students that necessary sense of "trust in oneself as an author of knowledge" (p.85) and as someone who can "challenge, critique and decide" (p.85). Povey challenges the Review's support for "ability" grouping, and critiques its faith in the value of instant factual recall and time-limited examinations.

Richard Reiser outlines the history of disabled children in school, sketches the political repositioning of disability in education and wider society, and urges support for the struggle for full inclusion. He is uncompromising about the damaging nature of the current testing regime.

In the final essay Diane Reay contends that the review merely attempts to refresh a tired system. She urges "investment in infrastructure, staff [and] students... [and in] trust, well-being, expertise" (p.105). She sketches the harm done to working-class pupils and students by the low level of UK welfare spending as a percentage of GDP compared with many European countries. Funding must shift away from the increasingly costly assessment system and the overbearing Ofsted inspectorate.

After the Review is a handbook of useful information and vital argument for all those campaigning for better curriculum and testing policy. Every staffroom needs a copy. □

School support staff need new union deal

By Patrick Murphy

The TUC has threatened its fourth largest union, the National Education Union (NEU), with what they call "a partial suspension" from the organisation. The ruling made by General Secretary Paul Nowak follows an investigation into an alleged breach of rules by the NEU.

It is the latest development in a long-running dispute about the increasing numbers of school support staff opting to join the NEU and the negative reaction to this of Unison, GMB, and Unite, which are the only unions officially recognised for the purposes of bargaining on the NJC for support staff. Since the creation of the NEU in 2018 support staff have been eligible to join it, though a joint framework was agreed in 2017 which

required that the NEU would not actively recruit or organise support staff. Nor would it seek national bargaining rights.

Despite these restrictions, the intervening years have seen a dramatic increase in support staff membership of the NEU. In part this is down to the fact that the NEU is a more industrial union, focused only on the education sector and with active union reps in schools and colleges. The NEU's more active and front-footed response to Covid and falling real pay have also drawn in thousands of support staff. It is estimated that there are well over 60,000 support staff members in the NEU, much more than Unite and very likely more than GMB.

In February this year a NEU special conference voted to abandon the 2017 agreement. This was the result of a long

campaign by support staff in the union and their allies, including AWL activists who advocate industrial unionism as the most effective model for organising workers. The decision to withdraw from the previous agreement was taken in the full expectation that there would be a response from the NJC unions and a likely sanction from the TUC. So, there can be little surprise about this latest move.

Directive

The detail of the TUC ruling is, however, interesting. It issues a directive to the NEU requiring it to "pause its active recruitment of school support staff and commit to a TUC-convened process to establish a new joint framework". Unless the NEU confirms compliance with this by Friday 26 June it will be subject to a "partial suspension"

which removes the NEU from positions on the General Council and Executive Committee and the right to submit motions and amendments to Congress 2026. It will not apply to lay reps on regional councils, trade councils or equality structures.

The ruling also makes a direction to the NJC unions, though. It requires them to "engage meaningfully with the NEU in a TUC convened-process to develop a new framework for school support staff representation. It goes on to say that the new framework "must respect existing, long-standing arrangements while also practically reflecting the reality that a significant number of support staff have chosen to join the NEU".

In the often ambiguous and evasive language of the TUC, this is an acceptance for the

first time that the NEU is a force in support staff representation and that the 2017 agreement is no longer an effective way of dealing with it. That, at least, is real progress.

The NEU leadership will now be deciding whether it's worth complying with the directive (pausing active recruitment and any ballot of support staff) in order to be part of the process of developing a new framework which recognises its role in representing tens of thousands of support staff. That's a decision that needs to be discussed across the union, especially among support staff members. It's also a discussion that needs to be aware of the dangers of a filibustering by NJC unions who would prefer to prevent rather than pause the NEU's organisation of these workers. □

Milei attacks the working class and its unions

By Daniela

Daniela of Socialismo o Barbarie talked to Solidarity about Milei and Argentina

Javier Milei's first phase as the far-right president of Argentina (since December 2023) was social cuts, with the promise this would reduce inflation. Now he has moved on to the next phase, which is directly attacking the position of the unions.

The one that's getting most of the attacks is the far-left union organising tire workers (SUTNA).

There are three main enterprises, one has been shut down, and the government let the enterprise close with hundreds of employees on the streets, no jobs, since February.

The factory just didn't open up again after works holidays, the summer holidays. In Argentinian law, since 2001, if the capitalist abandons an enterprise, the workers can take control and run it as a cooperative. We are demanding that the state buy the company and put it back to work, but Milei is not going to do that. There will be no nationalisation of this company,

The workers are still in the factory, but they can't produce anything because they don't have supplies.

One of our members who is a worker there said in April that they want to put the factory back in motion by themselves. He's been working there for 32 years, and he was the vice-presidential candidate for our party in 2015. They have general assemblies of a hundred workers or more in the factory.

In Argentinian law, when you do massive layoffs in companies, you need to justify it with the labour ministry, and Milei's letting all the job cuts go ahead. He hasn't changed the law.

He has, in March, reduced, redundancy pay. You used to get one month's salary



for each year that you had of work in the enterprise.

He is also making budget cuts for health and universities. Universities in Argentina are mostly public, funded by the state. There are private universities, but they're not as prestigious as the public ones.

There have been really big protests. The salaries of many university staff are under the poverty line, and some researchers are working as Uber drivers on the side.

Other researchers may have other means of funding their lives. For instance, university law teachers have private law firms, and some of them are judges. Philosophy teachers do secondary school courses to be able to still keep working. Scientists in hard sciences migrate to labs that could pay them in the private sector or to Europe.

In health, Milei started by defunding programmes of assistance for disabled people. In Argentina, retired people used to get five medications for free, and he has withdrawn that.

Hospitals are free in Argentina. But when you go to the pharmacy, you usually have to pay for your medicine. If you have insurance, you will get discounts. Health coverage of health is either public, private, or social. Social health insurance is administered by unions.

Inflation is not as high as it was, but it's still there, and there is no indexation of salaries whatsoever, so workers are still losing against inflation., even if it's not as big as inflation as

Unions are not talking about general strikes any more, because they say that we need to preserve jobs. if workers ask

too much, they're going to be laid off.

Unemployment is about 7.5%, but still many people have two jobs or three jobs and still are under the poverty line. There's massive informal employment with no legal conditions and this is the kind of workers who do not get union coverage.

Right now, people are not asking for the unions to do more. People are calling for Milei to quit, more radicalised people are asking for the Peronists to do something, but the Peronists are not doing anything.

Milei does not have demonstrations of people in the streets chanting his name or anything like this. He has young right-wing people who support him and are anti-LGBT rights and anti-feminist movement.

He is getting a lot of bad press now because his government has many corruption scandals.

Argentina used to be the country in the world with the best trans rights in law, and the law is still there, but things have got a little more violent against LGBT people. Milei has dismantled the office where you would go to say you have been discriminated against

But is still possible and legal to get to be recognised in your gender identity, and you can change identity just by going to a public office and asking.

There was also a law for 1% of public jobs to go to the trans people. That is no longer being implemented. The law still exists, but Milei doesn't apply it.

Milei is not anti-migrant like Kast in Chile. He's "anti-corruption" or "anti-state", and he is kind of racist against Argentinians of indigenous background

who are browner.

Also, religion is not a fundamental part of his programme. In Argentina, we don't have as much progress by the evangelicals as in Brazil. Catholicism is still very strong, since we had an Argentinian Pope, and many people also like the new Pope, because he is opposing Trump.

We have some Venezuelan immigration, and Russian immigration. And we have local immigration, from Bolivia, Peru, Paraguay. Some of the Venezuelans migrants vote for Milei because they hate "communism", and Milei hates "communists" too.

Moods of resignation are really strong. Discussions are beginning for the presidential election next year. There are no clear alternatives to Milei.

Milei is expecting to get investments of capital, foreign capital, for developing lithium. Soybeans to China are still a big export. Argentina has exported lithium to China, Japan, South Korea, and United States.

Argentina reckons it is going to be the world's second largest producer of lithium by 2030, more than Chile and China. Milei is passing laws to ensure that this exploitation assures extractivist forms of profit for foreign capitals. □



Debate on the unions and the Labour Party

Workers' Liberty 3/23. July 2009

Note

John Maxwell Keynes

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

JOHN BLOXAM AND SEAN MATGAMMA
WITH A NEW INTRODUCTION AND APPENDICES

This pamphlet was first published in 2004, after years of debate about how to respond to the Blairite coup within Labour from the mid-1990s; and to electoral challenges to New Labour. A new intro puts it in the context of subsequent developments. Appendices reproduce AWL's perspectives from 2010-11 and 2025 in detail. Much has changed, yet parallels remain. Agree or disagree – read and debate it. 104 pages **£4.50**. Also available, pictured above and behind, is another contribution to the debate. □

workersliberty.org/publications

Marx, Thatcher, and Sunday shopping

By Bas Hardy

Sunday was a strange day growing up in the late fifties and early sixties. My grandfather would send me on fruitless errands to buy newspapers that no longer existed: *Lloyd's Weekly*, or if they didn't have that *Reynold's News*. Both publications were politically left of centre, the latter owned at one time by the Co-operative Party, but they'd folded many years prior. Unfortunately the replacement for these half-way decent journals in our house became the *News of the World*.

Another oddity arose when my parents sent me out for ice cream. "Go up Pascal's (corner shop owned by an Italian family) and buy a block of Wall's Neapolitan ice cream". Any other day Pascal didn't bother, but on Sundays he put said block in a paper bag.

It was all to do with Sunday trading laws. Shops weren't supposed to sell ice cream on Sunday. Neither apparently could they sell bibles, although the purchase of semi-pornographic magazines was OK. Corner shops had to close by 1pm. More or less all other shops didn't even open on a Sunday.

We had no trips to IKEA or B&Q, as they weren't around at the time. Seven o'clock at night was the magic hour when the pubs opened.

The hour before that was for me the most depressing in the entire week. There were few things halfway entertaining to watch on the two TV stations available. No joy was to be found on the only three radio stations (all BBC) allowed to broadcast in Britain at the time, only one of which – The Light Programme – deigned to cater for "popular taste" (i.e. the majority of the population!).

Should anyone ever get a pub quiz question, "what was the longest-running continuous music programme in the world?" the answer is Sing Something

Simple. Featuring a group of singers accompanied by an accordion, it ran for 42 years, before the BBC mercifully wound it up in 2001.

The lyrics to its opening theme began:

*Sing something simple
As cares go by
Sing something simple
Just you and I*

Yet what does all the belly aching about how shite Sundays were back in the day and the laws governing them have to do with socialists? Interestingly, historical opponents of Sunday Trading Laws include Karl Marx and Margaret Thatcher. One of them opposed legal changes harmful to the working classes, whilst the other supported them. You don't need to be a genius to work which was which!

Agitation

Although Sunday is still regarded as "a day of rest", a section of the English ruling class in 1855 wanted to make it a day where the working population were unable to do pretty much anything. Marx reported on agitation against the Sunday Trading Bill that year, calling it an attempt at religious coercion against the working class by the English aristocracy and the Established Church.

At that time factory workers did a six day week, their working hours only recently reduced to ten a day by the 1847 Factory Act.

"The working class receives its wages late on Saturday," Marx wrote. "Sunday trading, therefore, exists solely for them. They are the only section of the population forced to make their small purchases on Sundays, and the new Bill is directed at them alone."

Sunday was an ideal day for mass demonstrations in Hyde Park against the Bill, and one attracted at least 200,000. The protesters particularly targeted the Sunday parade of the aristocracy along the roads around the Serpentine in "their magnificent carriages with all their trappings ... followed by swarms of lackeys."

The Chartists plastered the following poster throughout London:

"New Sunday Bill prohibiting newspapers, shaving, smoking, eating and drinking and all other kinds of recreation and nourishment ... which the poor people still enjoy at the present time. An open air meeting of artisans, workers and 'the lower orders' ... will take place in Hyde Park ... to see how religiously the aristocracy is observing the Sabbath and how anxious it is not to employ its servants and horses on that day".

Chartist leader James Finley declared on the demo: "We are enslaved for six days a week and Parliament wants to rob us of our bit of freedom on the seventh." The crowd formed circles around Finley to prevent the police arresting him.

The working class were additionally outraged by the Bill because they didn't have a voice in parliament. The strength of numbers and feeling shown on the demonstrations, which involved numerous arrests and battles with the police, obliged the government to drop the Bill. Some soldiers recently returned from the Crimean War had been among protesters fighting the police.

Universal suffrage and the growth of trade-union power led to the five day working week becoming standard for some British workers by the 1930s, and for most by the 1960s. The Holiday Pay Act 1938 gave many a week's paid holiday. Saturday became an added day's relief from work, and Friday and Saturday nights chances to socialise.

The 1960 film of Alan Sillitoe's novel *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* paints a pretty accurate picture of how many working class people spent their leisure time in the early 1960s. In another film from that era, *The Ipcress File*, the Michael Caine character encounters his boss in a supermarket declaring: "I don't really care for these American shopping methods. One has to move with the times, I suppose."

Transformed

Indeed the advent of the supermarket in the 1960s transformed the way people shopped for groceries. Before we would ask the shopkeeper to give us the goods. Now shoppers got them off the shelf, and later scanned the shopping and bagged it.

The welfare of shop workers was an important provision of the 1950 Shop Act passed by the Attlee Labour government. It laid out mandatory working conditions, including limits on hours, mandatory breaks, and a legal stipulation to provide suitable seating for female workers. There was also a requirement for half-day closing during the working week. Although enacted before the advent of supermarkets, the Act prohibited them from opening on Sundays.

Just like those in the time of Karl Marx, the rich always like workers to be at their beck and call. That's why they find places like Dubai, with no workers' rights, so attractive to live in. It was therefore unsurprising that Margaret Thatcher wanted to get rid of Sunday Trading laws when she proposed the Shops Bill in 1986 which aimed to make retail outlets "open all hours".

The Labour Party and the unions opposed the bill for the understandable reason that shop workers would be forced to work on Sundays. "Social conservatives" in the Tory Party didn't like it either, and it became the only government Bill thrown out during Thatcher's tenure. A watered down version of the bill was subsequently passed under John



Major in 1994, with large shops opening on Sundays with restricted hours.

Retail workers are a neglected ten percent (2.75 million) of the UK working class. You rarely hear of them going on strike, perhaps because the main union representing them is Usdaw, which claims 360,000 members, is affiliated to the Co-operative Party and considered to be on the right wing of the Labour Party. Back in the seventies its executive members were exclusively male despite the fact that most of the membership were women. It took 45 years from its foundation before a woman, Audrey Wise, became Union president in 1991.

The current Usdaw stance is to oppose extending large shop opening from the maximum of six hours on Sundays and to give workers the right to opt out from working Sunday shifts. How the latter demand is to be enforced is problematic given the weak union organisation of retail workers.

Employment in the retail sector is also in decline due to the growth of shopping online. The bigger the loss of shops on the high street, the more likely people in those areas are likely to vote for Farage. Shop workers are also at the sharp end of the cost of living crisis when it comes to abuse and threats from some shoplifters, and many are subject to zero-hours contracts.

Sunday has certainly changed since Marx's time. An enforced "day of rest" has now become a day for conspicuous consumption, albeit with limited shopping hours. And as for those effectively forced to stack the supermarket shelves in the likes of Tesco on Christmas Day, let there be an end to it!

A socialist society will not bow down to God or Mammon. There should be free time for all to enjoy and the unions should do more to protect the pay and working conditions of those who work in the retail sector. □



Pic: @gibography2001 / Instagram

How the General Strike was lost

By Micheál MacEoin

Edd Mustill has written an accessible history of the General Strike of 1926, aimed at the general reader but with plenty to interest those already well-informed about the dispute.

The opening chapter of Mustill's book places the strike in a vital context. Coal, and therefore coal-mining, was a crucial power source for the British economy, powering the railways, the metal industry and the Navy. It was, therefore, also "the first requisite of Empire".

Propelled by telling statistics — "on average a miner was killed every six hours" — and vital anecdotes, such as that of the future miners' leader Arthur Cook carrying a dead colleague's body out of the pit on his first day in the mines, Mustill's account brings home the dangers of the industry and the conditions facing the miners.

He also traces the development of coal-mining communities, and with them, the growth of mining trade unionism throughout the nineteenth century, culminating in the foundation of the Mining Federation of Great Britain (MFGB) in 1888.

The MFGB was radicalised during the "Great Unrest" period, 1910-1914, leading to the emergence of a new layer of activists and leaders, influenced by syndicalism. From amongst this ferment emerged Cook, who would lead the MFGB through the strike.

As Mustill recounts, the General Strike had its roots in ruling-class attempts to unwind the statification of the industrial economy during the First World War and restore laissez-faire and private profit-making.

The working-class had emerged from the war years, however, in a position of organisational strength. The 40-hour week was won in Clydeside in 1919, as was a 30% wage increase for 300,000 Lancashire cotton operatives. In 1920, working-class assertion in the "Hands off Russia" campaign averted British intervention against the victorious Bolshevik revolution.

By 1921, the position was in reverse and the employers were on the offensive. Unemployment reached two million and union membership fell by over two million by 1923.

1923 saw a short-lived recovery, which saw a rise in morale and a halt to the decline in union membership. Added to this, the disappointment of the first Labour government in 1924 encouraged workers to rely on trade union struggle.

The new Tory government of Stanley Baldwin was returned in November 1924 with a huge majority. It decided to return to the gold standard and press home employers' demands for wage cuts and longer hours to restore profitability.

As the largest industry in Britain, the miners were in the firing line for the bosses' offensive. The mine-owners



Soldier guarding scan bus

had locked the miners out in 1921, forcing them back on worse terms when they were abandoned by the transport and rail unions on "Black Friday", 15 April 1921. In 1925, they returned again, seeking the wage cuts, the abolition of the national minimum wage and an end to national collective bargaining.

Embargo

A TUC threat to impose an embargo on the movement of coal on "Red Friday", 30 July 1925, was sufficient to force the government to announce a 9-month subsidy to the industry, and to establish a Royal Commission (the Samuel Commission) to draw up proposals for the future.

The unions, however, had made little preparation to actually enforce an embargo. In the nine-month gap, the government lost no time in making preparations for what it saw as an inevitable conflict. Plans were made for strike-breaking on a national scale, including the recruitment of volunteers.

When the Samuel Commission reported, the government insisted the MFGB accept the principle of wage cuts before discussing the general organisation of the industry. The scene was set for a conflict for which the government were prepared and the TUC had always hoped to avoid.

As Mustill argues, the TUC insisted on restricting the scope of the dispute to a limited industrial dispute over terms and conditions in the mining industry. The government and the press, however, saw it as an attempt to overthrow the constitution.

While the TUC genuinely had no intention of such a thing, and the government's claims were dishonest, there is one sense in which the ruling-class had a point. As Trotsky wrote, general strikes have a logic of their own and, after a certain point, force the issue of who ultimately rules in society: "The general strike is one of the most acute forms of class war. It is one step from the general strike to armed insurrec-

tion... If carried through to the end, the general strike brings the revolutionary class up against the task of organising a new state power... A real victory for the general strike can only be found in the conquest of power by the proletariat."

That was something the TUC were determined not to face up to. The TUC and its various sub-committees also jealously guarded their power, limiting local initiatives. An example is the use of the press during the strike. The Government published the *British Gazette*, giving its account of the strike. The TUC responded with the *British Worker*, but the extension of the strike to the printing of labour movement and socialist publications, such as the ILP's *New Leader*, deprived the movement the ability to discuss strategy and hold its leaders to account. Local strike bulletins were published, however, and many thankfully continued despite TUC demands to cease.

By contrast, working-class enthusiasm for the strike was unprecedentedly high with millions of workers rallying behind the miners. Many trades councils co-opted labour movement political organisations and began to resemble "Councils of Action", which enforced the strike locally.

Confusion

As Mustill also notes, the "general strike was not a general strike, or so the General Council said", preferring the term "national strike", as the TUC had offered to keep food supplies moving. The TUC strategy also involved sending workers out in waves — the "first line" included transport, print, metal and heavy chemical, and construction with the "second line" involving engineering, chemicals and related industries. This was a source of confusion to many workers, leading to inter-union tensions at a local level as members managed the tactical practicalities of the TUC's instructions.

Mustill provides useful information, based on local sources about the interplay between the TUC General Council

and local trades councils and Councils for Actions. Paradoxically, the demand for "All power to the TUC" and for solidarity and centralisation tended to concentrate power on those leaders who wanted nothing less than to settle the strike.

This is ultimately what happened. As Mustill argue, the TUC ultimately "had never really shared the miners' position of absolute opposition to wage cuts." On 11 May, however, a final "settlement", which still included wage cuts, was drawn up between Sir Herbert Samuel and the TUC Negotiating Committee. The TUC accepted it over the heads of the miners, to whom it was put with an ultimatum.

Surrendered

The TUC had surrendered at a time when there were many more workers out than on the first days of the strike. Worse, it had not secured any guarantees against victimisation and the replacement of striking workers with scabs. This led to what Mustill highlights as the "second general strike" in which unions fought a rearguard action to secure the return of their members on less unfavourable terms.

The miners, however, had to fight on alone for seven months before finally returning to work on 1921 wage levels, with the loss of national collective bargaining.

Mustill also briefly addresses the issue of the revolutionary left, namely the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). He quotes party historian James Klugmann who, writing in 1969, echoed the contemporary analysis of J. T. Murphy, namely that the CPGB was too weak to ultimately influence the course of the strike and had to make do with raising consciousness and providing support.

At the same time, Mustill highlights Trotsky's criticism of the Russian bureaucracy's attempt to force diplomatic relations with the "left" leaders on the TUC, through the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Committee. This, Mustill writes, "unavoidably blunted the revolutionary zeal and agitation of the Communist Party."

The book far from neglects the wider politics of the strike but its focus remains on workers' self-organisation and assertion.

Mustill closes with a quote from Birmingham socialist J Stuart Barr, who noted after the strike that: "A lot has been said in the past of the need for the workers having faith in their leaders; I would humbly suggest that if the strike taught us nothing else, it certainly taught us that it is just as important for the leaders to have faith in the workers."

It is this attitude, "and the confidence and organisation to put it into practice, that need to be rediscovered." □

A case against the under-16 ban

The recent coverage in *Solidarity* on protecting under-16s from harmful social media has been good. We should also note some important arguments against copying Australia's remedy of a blanket ban on all social media use by under-16s.

The Molly Rose Foundation, a group set up after 14-year old Molly Russell was pulled into killing herself by algorithms on social media taking her further and further into thinking that way, notes:

"Recent... polling... revealed a majority of Australian children still use restricted social media apps despite the

ban for under-16s". That's just counting under-16s who report that their social media accounts are still functioning despite the ban.

It doesn't include the under-16s who will not report using their ingenuity (often sharper than the wit of government officials) to evade the ban via devices and accounts registered to older people.

A shortcoming of the "ban" remedy, it seems to me, is that by driving under-16 social-media use into a "black market", it works against troubled under-16s seeking help from parents, carers, teachers,

or peers when they feel dragged down by what they get on social media.

Harm

And, of course, being 17, or 71 for that matter, does not make you immune to harm from social media.

The Molly Rose Foundation wants "a strengthened Online Safety Act to go further than a blanket ban and tackles harm at source on all platforms, including gaming and AI".

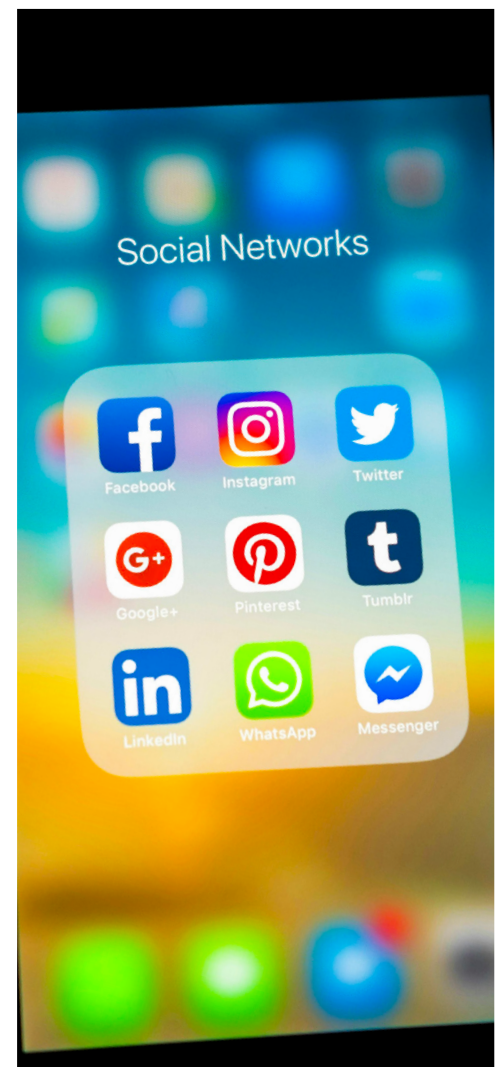
It notes that "social media platforms put profit before safety and exposed Molly to a dark world of harmful content which played a significant role in her death... product choices... continued to feed her with depressive content, and an endless stream of recommended posts that promoted suicide and self-harm".

Trying to fix that "at source" – by public ownership and democratic control of those social media platforms – could of course drift towards censorship. That could have bad effects politically, and be counter-productive safety-wise by creating space for outside-the-law "black market" platforms.

But more or less no-one, scarcely even Elon Musk, denies outright the case for some "moderation" of social media. That can surely be done democratically rather than relying on the tech billionaires to rein in their lust for market share.

And then there's the argument made by Ruth Cashman, with which I agree entirely, for more scope for young people to socialise in real life rather than online. □

Colin Foster, London



A false polarisation

The debate between Stuart Jordan and Luke Hardy, in recent letters in *Solidarity*, has fallen into a false polarisation, I think.

Luke stresses the need for immediate demands, some of which may to some extent be won even from capitalist government. That does not mean that he is advocating that capitalist governments can be persuaded by a bit of lobbying to avoid "false choices".

Capitalist governments can be forced to do un-capitalist things. Forcing them to do things "contrary to nature" is part of the struggle to overthrow them.

Stuart stresses the need to demand expropriation and comprehensive social control. That does not mean he is saying "one solution, revolution".

He positively stress struggles to win adaptations for reasonable workplace temperatures, which can surely be won short of triggering full revolutionary crisis.

As the Communist Manifesto puts it, "in the various stages of development which the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie has to pass through [i.e. there are various stages, it is not revolution or nothing] they [the Communists] always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole [i.e. we always push towards the next stages]". □

Chris Reynolds, London

Learn from Chayanov

"How the labour movement can change agriculture" (*Solidarity* 768) was a welcome contribution on a subject that has been neglected for too long. Rhodri Evans mentions the Land Workers' Alliance whose work also deserves to be better known. I want to put in a plug for the bi-annual journal, *The Land*, which I have read (somewhat unsystematically) for a number of years.

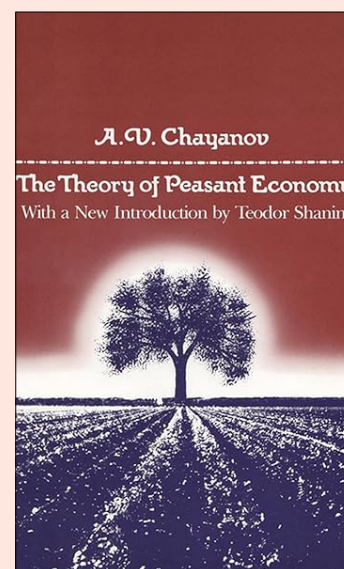
It contains a wealth of material covering almost all aspects of agriculture,

land ownership, economics, ecological issues etc. It is from reading *The Land* that I learned about the work of A V Chayanov, who at one time held the leading chair of agricultural economics in the Soviet Union. His Theory of the Peasant Economy is considered a classic of its kind and was first published in Berlin in 1923. An English translation is available from the American Economic Association, published in 1966.

An independent thinker, his writings were increasingly viewed with suspicion by

the Stalinist authorities. In 1930 he was accused of involvement in a "counterrevolutionary conspiracy", just at a time when Soviet agriculture desperately needed someone who actually knew what he was talking about. He was arrested and shot by firing squad in 1937.

John Cunningham,
Lancashire



Buy "Two Nations Two States" and "Arabs, Jews & Socialism" discounted together for £ 6.50. Individual prices online. □

• workersliberty.org/2-i-p

Print is not just another medium

Sericus' [reply](#) to my article on socialism and post-literacy ([Solidarity 767](#)) seems to have missed the point of my original.

I do not "underestimate" non-textual forms of communication. I am a fairly avid podcast listener and a regular cinemagoer. I believe strongly in the emancipatory potential of art, including literature but also music, dance, and visual arts. Nor am I a neo-Luddite; unlike James Marriott, I am a smartphone user, and likely to be one for the rest of my life.

Non-textual forms of communication and expression are valuable. "A picture paints a thousand words" is a hoary cliché, but, to give one example, a purely-textual explanation of the class function of the police is undoubtedly positively reinforced if accompanied by photos of the cops trying to break the picket at Grunwick, or the iconic image of a mounted policeman swinging his baton at Lesley Boulton's head at the Battle of Orgreave.

I remember a talk given by my comrade Jill Mountford about the role of women during the miners' strike, which she began by displaying Picasso's "Two Women Running on the Beach". She used the painting as a metaphor for the growth and transformation many women in mining communities underwent as a result of their experiences of struggle. I daresay the talk would have been less powerful, for me at least, had Jill just given us all a textual handout to read.

The role there, though, is reinforcement, not replacement. Ideological claims, analytical arguments, and historical reflections cannot be communicated through purely visual formats. They require text.

Consider this exchange. How could Sericus and I carry it out, except by text? We could record our contributions and have an exchange of podcasts, or short videos. But that would make it more difficult for anyone who wanted to engage in anything more than a passive way to do so. Anyone listening who wanted to reflect on or review a particular sentence would need to rewind to find it... or, follow along using a transcript. Back to text.

Conclusive

I am not opposed to reading from screens. How could I be? I live in 2026. There is no return to a pre-digital age. But numerous studies, some of which I referred to in my original article, show fairly conclusively that information retention from screen-reading is lower than retention from reading printed texts. That seems at least noteworthy. Screen-reading technology can help that and perhaps, as it improves, the retention gap between texts read in printed form and texts read on a tablet screen will disappear. Fine. But left groups will still require a means of communicating our ideas that continues after an initial verbal exchange. Of course, we can send links to articles, or PDFs of whole newspapers, pamphlets, or books, via



WhatsApp. I do plenty of that. But printed literature distributed or sold after a conversation is surely more likely to be read, and more of it retained, than a single URL, which for many will simply be one more snowflake in the digital blizzard.

Sericus says "it is time the political left moves beyond traditional media methods and engages". What do they mean by this, in practise? That left groups should cease production of printed materials, and rely solely on digital output? For all the reasons I set out in my original article, that approach would dramatically hinder, not help, our fundamental

project: encouraging fellow workers to become "democratic philosophers" and "permanent persuaders".

As I wrote, this "requires the ability to think, reason, argue, debate and persuade, and to produce and refine ideas." How can these skills be taught except through a discursive and educational culture primarily – not exclusively, but primarily – organised around text, and text in the formats most conducive to maximum retention, i.e., print? □

Daniel Randall, London

Who's the "behaviour", and who's the "management"?

I agree with David Axon's articles on "unruly schools", and want to add one further idea.

Too often, "behaviour management" carries an assumption that the teachers are the "management" and the students the "behaviour". Teachers do not have "behaviour", only students do. Students are by definition the "managed", not "managers".

I do not mean that "better behaved" students should be made bailiffs to "manage" the rest. My younger daughter, in one of her secondary schools, was, because considered "well-behaved", compelled to carry round the class behaviour report-card, to be marked with each teacher, with punishment to come for the whole class if the balance of reports was poor.

She resented that. Rightly,

I think. The same daughter was described by her Year 3 teacher as "more my teaching assistant [she had no adult TA] than a student", but was by my daughter's choice and the teacher's ability to open up that choice. The adult who knows the subject being taught has a duty to lead, but can best do that by aiming to lead collective self-management by the whole student-teacher body. The free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.

That same daughter "adopted" two classmates in year 8 who were floundering in maths, and tutored them up to A grades within a few weeks. She maybe saved those students from falling into despair in later maths classes. (Consider students made to cram GCSE

probability who never "got it" with fractions. Little wonder if they become "badly behaved").

My older daughter, from year 6 onwards, made a habit of "managing" teachers' behaviour more directly, just by talking to them, patiently and constructively. That often "worked", though only, I think, because her school was liberal, and she was known as polite and industrious. For example, in her year 10 maths class, she stopped a bumptious teacher teasing two timid students, one of them an earnest greenie.

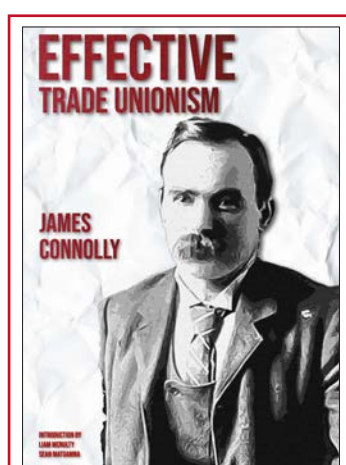
I've had poor behaviour of my own, as a teacher, usefully "managed" by students correcting me. But many school regimes give little chance of that. And less, if one teacher proves stubborn, of a wider constructive discussion including other

teachers.

I have ideas about sets of rules and consequences, about whether there should be "punishment" regimes, etc. (I've worked in "problem" schools where deliberately no-punishment systems "worked" much better than the punishment-heavy regimes common in England: detentions, detentions; sending students to stand in corridors; isolation rooms; exclusions; etc.)

But more fundamental is this. "In order to change the conditions of life", wrote Trotsky in 1924, "we must learn to see them through the eyes of women". In order to change school collective behaviour, we must learn to see it through the eyes of students. □

Martin Thomas, London



Aiming to replace capitalism with socialism, one idea James Connolly clung to was industrial unionism, workers' solidarity across grades and trades, and sympathetic strikes. 64 pages £5 □

workersliberty.org/publications

Overturn and subvert the Code of Practice

By Simon Nelson

Close to a hundred MPs have signed an Early Day Motion from Nadia Whittome MP calling on the government to reject the EHRC Code of Practice (CoP) which (with some loopholes) bans trans women from "women's" facilities. While it is difficult for that motion to get heard, it is a start to formal opposition to the CoP from MPs. More pressure should now come from local Labour Par-

ties to get their MPs to sign and to join the majority of trade unions, plus LGBTQ and trans rights organisations, in calling for the CoP to be scrapped.

A campaign to overturn the CoP can win. Its fundamental flaws should also be poked and prodded. The allowance it makes for organisations to remain trans-inclusive but not "single-sex" provides some limited leeway for, if not defiance, then at least manoeuvre and subversion.

Remain

The conservative City of London Corporation (CLC) has said that Hampstead Heath Women's Ponds will remain trans-inclusive, citing improvements being made, including more private cubicles.

The consultation carried out by the CLC received a lot of publicity, not least because Sex Matters has tried to take the CLC to court over its existing and now ongoing policy. The City of London

Corporation policy chair, Chris Hayward, said, "Whilst the Supreme Court judgment confirmed the legal definition of 'sex', it did not decide that all trans-inclusive services must become single-sex services.

"We have continued to listen and take detailed legal advice throughout this process. The approach agreed today protects the character and unique spirit of the ponds while ensuring they remain welcoming to all."

There is no legal requirement to provide "single-sex" leisure swimming facilities, so the CLC's move does not apply to the NHS wards or other services. Similarly, the CLC has deeper pockets than other organisations, enabling it to quickly upgrade or provide alternative facilities. In many cases, smaller businesses and services may downgrade the availability of accessible toilet facilities, as those will now become the de facto non-single-sex toilets available.

Organisations that want to run

trans-inclusive women's conferences, or organisations like the Girl Guides or the Women's Institute, can cite the case of the Hampstead Ponds as a reason to continue as they were before the Supreme Court decision of April 2025. Women and LGBTQ campaigners in the Labour Party should step up the fight for a standalone and inclusive women's conference in 2027. □



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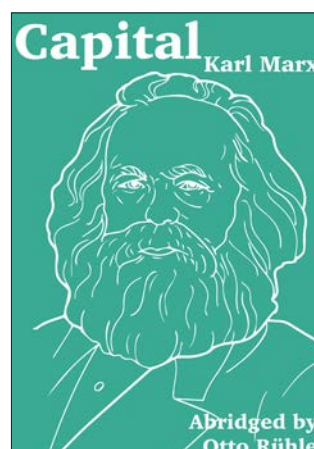
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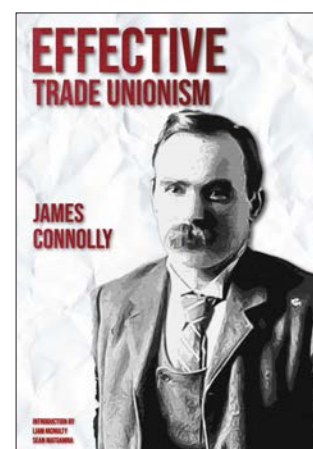
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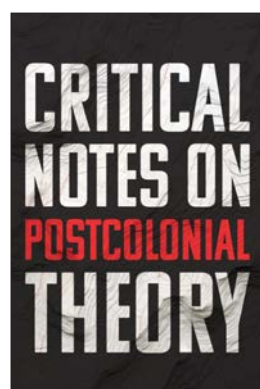
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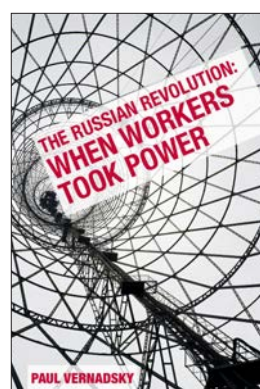
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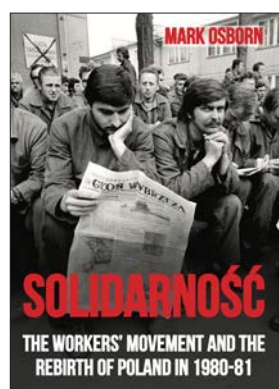
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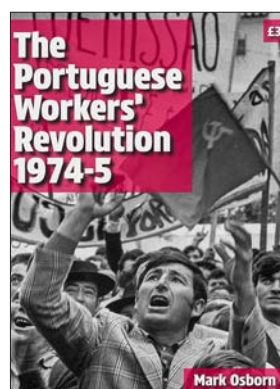
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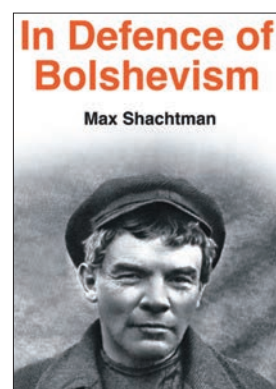
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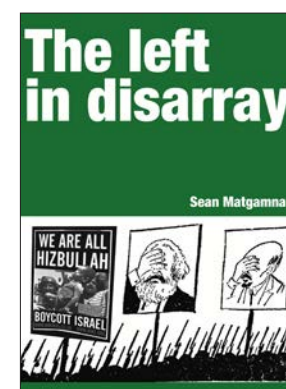
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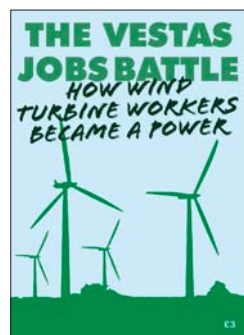
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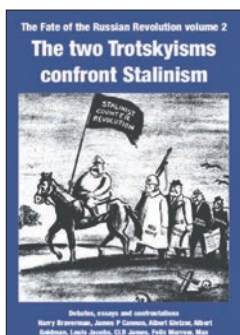
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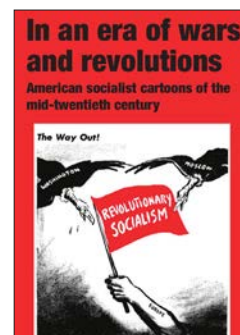
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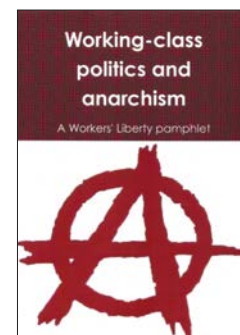
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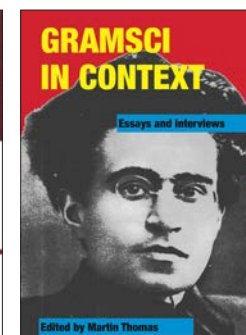
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Conference and Andrea Egan's first 139 days

By Ruth Cashman

The 2026 National Delegate Conference (NDC) of the public services union Unison runs from 16-19 June, with the Local Government service group conference on 14-15 June.

This will be the first ever NDC under a left General Secretary. Andrea Egan took office on 22 January. How has the union changed, and what is still to win?

Egan faces a difficult task implementing her manifesto, as the union's right have control of the NEC and there is a vast and entrenched bureaucracy. The union is facing new challenges with Reform now controlling a growing number of councils.

Egan's manifesto promised to deliver "a members' union":

- Conducting a comprehensive review of our union machinery, to ensure that the decisions and policies decided by members are implemented
- Taking a social worker's wage, rather than the £181k plus benefits of her predecessor Christina McNea.
- Improving the support branches receive from their Regional offices and from Legal Services.

Unsurprisingly, she faced push-back on taking a worker's wage. To try and push her to break the commitment, sen-

ior staff have insisted Egan stays in London during the week rather than working from home in Bolton. Without accommodation provided by her own union, the Unison general secretary currently resides at an RMT building, Maritime House.

Bureaucracy

It has become standard for the Unison bureaucracy to ignore conference decisions or carry them out so badly that it barely constitutes playing lip service. Conference calls for a national demonstration against cuts have been routinely ignored by the union staff. More recently we have seen the return of badly advertised lobbies of Parliament.

With no formal democracy within the union's left caucus, Time For Real Change (TFRC), it is hard for activists to decipher what the General Secretary has attempted and what battles are happening behind the scenes with staff. It seems the bureaucracy have made the decision to try to co-opt Egan, agreeing some changes whilst retaining control of the union, rather than launch all out war against her. If a review of staffing begins to democratise the union, that might change.

A big factor in Egan's win was the fail-

ure of Unison to stand up to the Labour government or to the right wing within the Labour Party. Still the left does not have control of the union's Labour Link. Egan herself was expelled from Labour whilst sitting on the Labour Link Committee.

However, public statements about the government and the party have improved under her leadership. There has been opposition to government policies that conflict with Unison policies, and there have been interventions on democracy in the Labour Party.

There is a big overlap between the Labour and Unison bureaucracies and they will work together to prevent a democratisation of the Labour Link.

On trans rights, the union's public statements have vastly improved. The statement following the new EHRC draft Code of Practice committed the union to fighting it as well noting that the guidance is not intended for employers.

Combativity

We are yet to see much change in the union's general combativity with employers. The national pay campaigns seem lacklustre, the national anti-cuts strategy is being outflanked by the Green Party to the left, and Unison is facing an-

other flurry of rep victimisations.

Connor is a Unison libraries union rep at Newham council in east London. He was suspended from work due to his participation in the "Save Newham Libraries" public campaign. Ameen Hadi has been placed under investigation by Salford City Council, following an allegation driven by far-right activists targeting Ameen for his involvement in Stand Up to Racism. The union will not carry out named campaigns for victimised reps. Public statements from the General Secretary could help turn that around.

It will be impossible to support Andrea Egan or hold her to account in carrying out her Manifesto pledge without TFRC itself having some national internal democratic structure. Most members who would want to support pushing forward the promises of the campaign do not know what is going on or what they can do to be more involved.

Activists in London are organising to put forward a elected regional delegate structure alongside open regional and national meetings. For most people their contact with TFRC is simply being asked to vote in an election, not actively engaging in transforming the union through day to day work. □

Scotland

What we can learn from the SNP scandal

By Ann Field

There was nothing sophisticated about Peter Murrell's embezzlement of £400,000 when CEO of the Scottish National Party (SNP). He spent money on items of personal consumption — or for consumption by his partner (and SNP leader) Nicola Sturgeon — and simply recorded the money as having been spent on something else.

And SNP members who raised questions about the state of the party's finances were brutally slapped down, including by Sturgeon herself.

At a meeting of the party's NEC in 2021, Sturgeon warned those asking awkward questions: "There are no reasons for people to be concerned about the party's finances and all of us need to be careful about not suggesting that there is."

Murrell's record of carefree embezzlement reveals a party which took no steps to safe-

guard the membership's financial contributions, and which brutally suppressed legitimate calls for accountability.

And now there is the issue of the missing £600,000.

Appeal

In 2017 the SNP launched an appeal for donations to finance a campaign for a second referendum on independence. All donations, the SNP said, explicitly and repeatedly, would be ring-fenced for that purpose. The appeal brought in £600,000.

But now SNP leader John Swinney has admitted that all the money has been spent on routine SNP purposes. So much for earlier SNP claims that it was "categorically not true" and "utter nonsense" to suggest that the donations had been spent by the SNP on its own election campaigning.

Murrell's embezzlement was the act of a singular individual. Using £600,000 of ringfenced

funding for the SNP's own expenditure was the conscious action of an entire layer of leading figures in the SNP, for which the party as a whole bears legal liability.

Murrell's embezzlement came to light only after Sean Clerkin, formerly a member of the three-strong "Scottish Resistance" and then the two-strong "Scottish Action", turned up at a police station in 2021 to complain that his donation to the 2017 appeal had been mispent.

It is impossible to be further away from our politics than is Sean Clerkin. But, again, he has been vindicated — and potentially changed the course of history. The SNP is now more of a lame duck than a reincarnation of William Wallace.

Murrell's embezzlement raises a number of other issues, even if some of them stray into potential conspiracy theories.

Was holding Murrell's trial only after the Holyrood election

of 7 May a deliberate decision? Has there been defrauding of public money (in the form of grants from the Electoral Commission to the SNP, and VAT refunds on Murrell's fraudulent expenditure)?

Why was Murrell allowed a plea bargain (pleading guilty in exchange for £60,000 of fraudulent expenditure, spent on gifts for Sturgeon, being deleted from the charge sheet)? And why was Sturgeon herself, certainly no innocent bystander, not charged?

Lesson

It is not the job of socialists to help clean up the SNP. It is not "our" party and never will be. But Murrell's fraud does have a lesson for socialists.

Corruption comes in many forms. Some of it is illegal (Murrell), and some of it legal (freebies from lobbying companies, the revolving door between politicians and big business, getting too pally with the bosses,

donations to the Labour Party from big business, giving your mates plum jobs even if they are pals with convicted paedophiles, etc.). Corruption is always immoral, but not necessarily illegal.

Socialists need to root out the "legal" corruption of the labour movement — by way of full accountability of elected representatives, elected representatives to take only a worker's wage, full transparency of the accounts of trade unions and the Labour Party, and a culture of democracy in which those who ask critical questions are not driven out of the movement.

In that sense — bizarrely, and only in that sense — the likes of Sean Clerkin, Stuart Campbell ("Wings Over Scotland") and Joanna Cherry have ended up as virtual role models. While others kept shtum and looked the other way, they spoke out. □

• Abridged. More online: bit.ly/snp-ld

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 Tubeworker

Keeping it safe when it's hot

By P Ennar

Nobody is happy about the temperature hitting 34 degrees. Not while they're at work, anyway. The ticket hall in our station has machine rooms on either side, meaning station staff are sandwiched in the middle of radiating heat, with little circulation to bring cooler air in as we stand there for hours in a row helping thousands of passing customers.

A barista at the coffee shop next to the station is from the Middle East, but when I visit for an iced coffee she complains that unlike the buildings and infrastructure back home, Britain is not designed for the heat. If that's true in the air-conditioned coffee shops, it's certainly true of the Victorian era underground stations

that still have asbestos in the walls.

M hasn't worked at the station for much longer than I have, and we're both strategising. We search Amazon, discuss wearable fans that wouldn't look too obtrusive on our uniform, which drinks cool you down best (iced, not chilled), and how to do our duties while expending as little energy as possible. When walking along the hot platforms, do you rush, to get it over with faster, or go as slowly as you can, to try and keep the body temperature low? Unfortunately, we have lots of opportunities to experiment, and neither option is good.

There are real consequences here, beyond the patch of sweat spreading across the back of my uniform. If a pas-

senger falls on the tracks, staff have to make a judgement call in a matter of seconds to identify the best way to stop an oncoming train and prevent deaths. Lethargy and distraction are real factors that inhibit our ability to do that task effectively.

Thanks to the Heat Strike campaign, I have some ready-made examples of how we might change things. Bus drivers in London and Manchester have been recording temperatures in their cabs, and when they hit above 40 degrees, they've been demanding to stop work on grounds of risking their own safety. If it hits the high thirties later this summer, as it has for every year in memory, there's no chance the station doesn't get that hot, too. I show coworkers pictures of thermometers at workplaces up and down the country, and we talk about how there should be a maximum working temperature.

We're a little luckier than bus drivers: we have mess rooms with air conditioning, and there's usually enough of us at any one time to allow for people to switch out and cool off for a few minutes. But the number of staff on the station has been shrinking for years now, and the basic requirements to keep the station functioning come into direct conflict with the health and working conditions of the staff when more breaks are needed than usual to do our job properly. □



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 □

Kino Eye

Unruly schools on film

By John Cunningham

Following David Axon's excellent series on unruly schools, here is a consideration of some films on the topic. One of the best known, although now rather dated, is *Blackboard Jungle*, based on the novel by Evan Hunter (Richard Brooks, 1954).

Glenn Ford stars as newly arrived teacher Richard Dadier at an inner-city school in the USA. To say that the school students are "unruly" is a major understatement. Attitudes among the teachers vary from conservative, "lock 'em up and throw away the key", to a soggy liberalism, "the kids aren't bad they're just ignorant".

Dadier is having none of this. He singles out Greg Miller, a black student (early role for Sydney Poitier), as a potential leader and wins his confidence. In doing so he drives a wedge between the main problem student Archie West and the rest of the class.

Frustrated at his growing isolation, West pulls a knife on Dadier, but the teacher faces him down and wins the day. I am no expert but it all appears a bit simplistic.

Blackboard... caused a sensation at the time, when "juvenile delinquency" appeared to be everywhere, one of the "moral panics" that hit many societies throughout the 1950s, 60s and 70s (Teddy Boys, motor bike gangs, Mods, Rockers etc.). It was banned in certain states in the USA and withdrawn from the Venice Film Festival.



Other "unruly schools" films include *Class of '84* (Mark Lester, 1982, based on *Blackboard...*) and *Zéro de Conduite* (Jean Vigo, 1933) from France which inspired Lindsey Anderson's film *If...* (1968). □

Tube: successful strike. Now escalate!

From Tubeworker

Yet again, RMT union strikes have had a significant impact, when train crew struck on 2-4 June against longer-working-day plans. All but one line was suspended or running with severe delays.

RMT members, and many members of Aslef (a driver-only union) too, have made a stand against the company's attempts to force through productivity savings dressed up as something beneficial for workers.

LUL has agreed to resume talks at Acas, the independent conciliation service, from 9 June. There's an RMT reps' meeting scheduled for the following day.

We need to name further strikes as soon as possible. Those strikes must escalate beyond the two-day strikes we've held so far.

There's been plenty of discussion on picket lines about what would constitute a win in this dispute. Our headline demand remains the full withdrawal of



LUL's proposal. But short of that, we need concrete concessions on the substance. That means LUL moving away from its position that the actual detail of its plan is "non-negotiable". The only way to do that is to put

additional money on the table.

It is self-defeating for any union to accept the principle of "cost-neutrality", meaning any costs to the employer must be offset by equivalent savings.

When the company says "There's no money available", what they actually mean is, "We don't want to spend it on this."

They're making a political choice. We need to increase the pressure to persuade them to make a different one. □

Uni strikes spread

By Sam Myerson

The QMUL UCU *HE is Shrinking* website's latest update, 6 June, shows another almost 1,000 jobs are on the line at six universities. But at Sheffield Hallam, Goldsmiths, Nottingham, and London South Bank, UCU members are moving to, or taking, sustained action against the cuts and job losses, not just odd days.

The cuts planned at South Bank are shaping up along a national trend. Two years ago a restructuring program saw scores of staff lose their jobs. Now bosses are back with course and program restructures and more. As at Sheffield Hallam, and others, staff are effectively being faced with fire and rehire to get the university out of its current pension obligations. A two-tier workforce will have some staff still directly employed by the university; others, and all new staff, working for a third party.

Still asleep at the wheel, the UCU national leadership came under pressure at the union's congress on 27-29 May. Motions called for the General Secretary and the union to put weight and organisational capacity into a national coordinated campaign against cuts. In the last year alone, some 15,000 jobs have been lost across the sector.

UCU branches know they must fight, and where action is being ramped up they are reporting increases in membership. They also know they need a coordinated national dispute.

Workers need to keep the pressure up, building the strikes and consolidating action. And student anti-cuts groups have been or are being formed at many of these universities. Students can and should take direct action, like the Goldsmiths students did with their library occupation. They could look to picket and encourage students to walk out of lectures and seminars being taught by strikebreakers. □

• Online: "why I rejected Bath uni pay offer", bit.ly/bath-pay

Aerospace workers strike for pay

By Owen Flood

GKN Aerospace workers in Filton, near Bristol, struck from 26 May to 8 June to oppose falling pay. GKN has offered workers a below-inflation increase of 3.3%, up from an initial offer of 3%. The demand from the workers' union, Unite, is for a 5.5% increase – although this is down from an initial 8% pay claim. Unite got a mandate for strike action with 76% turnout, and 97% voting for industrial action. This is the first strike in the Filton area for 40 years.

The workers make less than their counterparts at nearby Rolls Royce and Airbus. The top directors at GKN

received bonuses of £208 million, the CEO of Melrose industries (parent company of GKN) received a £45.4mn bonus.

Depending on how pay talks progress, there may be further action. Around 900 out of the 1,500 employees have struck. The union density in different departments varies but can be as high as 90%. Membership surged during the ballot and after strike action had been declared. From talking to strikers on the picket lines, the mood is optimistic.

Workers' Liberty encourages disputes to go for ambitious and specific demands and with maximum transparency for the workers involved.

Strikes by Unite (as with many unions in the UK) tend to be quite top-down affairs with talks taking place behind closed doors. This dispute follows much the same pattern.

Workers Liberty has been visiting the picket lines, talking to workers, and understanding what they need to win their dispute. Beyond this we have talked to workers about the democracy and demands of their own dispute and opened up discussions about broader political issues that affect them. Get in touch if you would like to join us the next time we visit picket lines. □

• Donations: see bit.ly/gkn-f

Strike saves daycare centre

By Ruth Cashman

Unison union members have saved a dementia care service in Lambeth, south London. Industrial action forced the council to pause plans to close its adult daycare centre on the Central Hill estate. The council's plans would have resulted in the loss of ten jobs.

With around 2,000 people currently living with dementia in the borough, a figure expected to rise as the population ages,

the proposed closure raised serious concerns about the future of local care provision.

A day after the election of left-wing Green Martin Abrams as Leader and the appointment of the Green Cabinet, the council published a statement of "a pause to all closure activity and any voluntary or compulsory redundancy processes while the Council undertakes a detailed review of the proposal and alternative options".

Lambeth will reinstate referrals to the day centre. Those had been paused for over 18 months, after which the council argued for closure citing under-use. Unison struck for four days, and was in the middle of a week of strikes when the reversal was made.

Joint Branch Secretary Simon Hannah said: "This is a real win for Unison members fighting for proper public services. I'm so proud of everyone that took action and fought for what is right. Public services don't have to be destroyed in the name of austerity."

Research studies have found that day centres produce benefits for older people with dementia and for their carers, both long-term and short-term. Yet half the adult day centres in the country have closed since 2010. □



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Printed by: Iliffe Print □



Expand jobs, not cut benefits!

By Will Roberts

The headline finding from Alan Milburn's report on young people and work is that over a million people aged 16-24 are "NEETs" – not in education, employment or training. In the next five years, that could rise to one in six young people.

Given that the socialist movement, and the workers' movement more generally, relies on an influx of young workers, this is sobering news that deserves our attention. But it would be easy to jump to wrong conclusions, as several prominent politicians already have.

Milburn's report cites a combination of multiple factors leading to the rise: young people are more likely than preceding generations to be open about their mental health status, and to take help and support where needed (Milburn emphasises that there is no evidence for young people inventing mental health problems, simply that they report them more consistently); Covid's effects on workplaces and on practices among young people set trends for staying home rather than entering the world of work; years of declining high street activity, particularly in retail, means that there are fewer entry-level jobs available for young people, and more entry-level jobs now require that applicants have work experience.

Milburn also posits that Labour raising the minimum wage may have had the effect of discouraging businesses from hiring young people, when paired with the effects of war and price spikes over the last few years.

A full explanation requires careful research and expert insight. Neither are present in the Tory response, echoed by some in Labour's ranks: to get the youth into work by cutting benefits.

Universal Credit is currently so low that it leaves recipients fighting just to stay alive. The idea that young adults are sat at home gorging themselves

is a laughable caricature. Cutting benefits would have the effect of further punishing those who've been shut out of traditional paths to a decent living, including those who, for a number of good reasons such as long-term disability and chronic health conditions, are not able to work at all.

Any serious answer to these questions must throw out this dangerous idea from the start; and instead look to expanding public services and to green conversion, which create millions of good new jobs. □

Doctors strike 15-19 June

By Gerry Bates

Resident doctors in England will strike again from 7am 15 June to 7am 19 June.

This is part of their continuing battle for pay restoration, i.e. to have their real wages restored over time to their levels of 2008-9. Resident doctors agreed a deal with the Labour government in September 2024 which gave a sizeable rise for one year and some hope of progress, but the government has stalled them since then.

Under the pay issue is also one of training places. While Accident and Emergency departments remained understaffed, only one in 14 of doctors applying for an A&E training place gets one.

Resident doctors in Northern Ireland, where the NHS is in an even worse plight than in England, announced a ballot result on 9 June and will strike over pay on 25 and 29 June.

Support the doctors! Restore the NHS! □ □

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Bookings and details: bit.ly/cap-j26 □

Iran war: for peace with equal rights!

By Dan Katz

New missile exchanges between Iran and Israel on 7-8 June have stopped for now, and an unstable and occasionally broken US-Iran ceasefire remains in place. The US and Iran face each other in a standoff, with each state attempting to squeeze some advantage from the bloody mess created by the war.

On Wednesday 3 June Iranian drones hit Kuwait's main airport, killing one person and injuring over 60. The attacks followed US strikes on radar sites on Iran's Qeshm island.

Workers' Liberty continues to back the potentially powerful Iranian working class in the fight for democracy, women's liberation, and workers' power in Iran.

We demand Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon and a democratic peace with the Palestinian people: a two-state settlement, allowing a free, independent, contiguous Palestinian state alongside Israel.

We back the US workers against Trump and his brutal policies which batter and impoverish workers across the world.

Workers of the world, unite! □

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SOLIDARITY

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PUSH BACK THE RACISTS

For democratic controls on the police

Nigel Farage, Rupert Lowe, JD Vance, and Elon Musk are seizing on the 3 December 2025 death of Henry Nowak, and the 14 May to 1 June trial of his killer Vickrum Digwa, to whip up race-hate.

The far rightists rallied on 2 June outside a police station in Southampton. The fascist group Britain First will use the case to fuel its 20 June rally in Birmingham for "mass deportations".

What are the facts?

- Police are biased against Black people. Police stop and search Black people four times as often as white people, and Asian-background people 1.4 times as often as white people.

- Despite that, Asian-background people have lower arrest rates as well as lower conviction rates. They do less crime.

- Vickrum Digwa killed Henry Nowak after a late-night street clash set off by Nowak being bumptious, probably after seeing the large knife Digwa was carrying. Digwa has not been "let off", but given a life sentence in jail.

- Sikh authorities say that the knife Digwa used was not a kirpan. The knife carried by Sikh men as a religious token is usually much smaller, blunt, and worn under clothing (Digwa had one of those, too). There is little recent history of the "religious" knives being used for harm.



- Vickrum Digwa is in fact a citizen, born in the UK. Anyway, in the UK, non-citizens have lower crime rates (adjusting for age) than citizens. They have lower rates of conviction or jail for robbery or violence against the person.

Medical

- The police grossly mistreated Henry Nowak, handcuffing him and ignoring his pleas as he died from his knife wounds. The court found that Nowak would have died even if the police had got prompt medical help (and the one doctor who questioned that has backed off), but the mistreatment is gross.

- The police regularly mistreat working-class people and students, white as well as of colour. They are an authoritarian force trained to think of themselves

as "the law".

- The police mistreatment of Nowak is being investigated by the IOPC, which is independent of the police. However, the IOPC is under no elected control, and in its "Executive Team" of seven, five are posh ageing white men, of top civil service or police background. Just one is a person of colour, and she is the organisation's HR person.

- In 1985 the South Yorkshire Police Authority, which included elected councillors, tried to pause the police violence against miners at Orgreave. Like Manchester councillors earlier in the 1980s who tried to curb far-right Chief Constable James Anderton, they were told they had no "operational" control.

Since then, the Tories tried to tidy up. They abolished part-elected Police Authorities in favour of only notional supervision by Police and Crime Commissioners.

- In a capitalist society the police will always be pro-property and anti-worker. But degrees of mitigation and curbing — as for example between US cops who kill over a thousand people a year, and British forces who shoot dead maybe two or three — are important. We are for elected democratic controls over the police. We discuss this more in our book on the 1984-5 miners' strike, [Class against class](#). □