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**Open up Labour
democracy**

Hope for change from the top of Labour? No, push for change from the base

That Labour has pushed out Keir Starmer instead of waiting for Nigel Farage to be his replacement is good. Being both sanctimonious and untrustworthy, both ineffectual and control-freaky, has discredited Starmer beyond repair.

That the replacement is taking place through a "coronation", and that the left Labour MPs in the Campaign Group are not daring even to try to get nominations for a contest, is bad.

In 2007 Gordon Brown replaced Tony Blair as Labour leader and prime minister in a "coronation", and that didn't go well. Getting, say, 70% in a vote gives you credit. Getting 99% or 100% makes you look like a North Korean ruler.

The question was never whether Labour was likely to get a new leader who would hand down better policies from the top. No such leader was likely. Even at the 2025 Labour conference, when Burnham was talking left, the joke circulated. "A Blairite, and a Brownite, and a Corbynite, walked into a bar. The barman said: 'Hello, Andy'."

Bur maybe Burnham would be, or could be made to be, less control-freaky? With an effort from below, it may be possible.

He can still be pushed to open up

Labour conference to real debate, and respect its decisions; and allow local Labour Parties to choose their own parliamentary and council candidates unimpeded.

Democracy

Burnham says that he will stop the use of the party whip system "to create fear or close down debate" among MPs. But the party is much more than the MPs.

He says that he "will build an inclusive team at the very highest level so that all parts of the party... can see themselves reflected and represented in it"; but also that "the political direction I set is not up for negotiation". Negotiation? Excuse us. What about discussion and democratic decision by the whole movement?

Burnham has talked of the "biggest council house building programme in the post-war period". That is good. 245,160 new council homes were built in 1953. The latest official statistics show 42,433 housing starts in the year to April 2026, with just 4,280 for "social rent", and meanwhile council homes are still being lost by "right to buy" and demolitions.

But he offers no detail.

He also says he is for greater public control by regions of water, housing, en-

ergy and transport. Good, but again no detail.

The *Times* journalist Patrick Maguire, who is not left-wing but not naive either, has described Burnham's "No.10 in the North" gimmick as a new variant of the (failed) 1964 venture of a "Department of Economic Affairs" to countervail the Treasury and expand public investment. But we don't know.

The main change since February, when Labour's leaders blocked Burnham from standing in Gorton and Denton, is that Labour's right wing have decided that Starmer is hopeless, and that Burnham is their "unity candidate". They probably think they can make Burnham even more right-wing than Starmer, and a bit better-presented. They won't be wrong unless we prove them wrong.

Unions

Sadly, pressure on Burnham from the right has come not only from right-wing MPs and apparatchiks, but also from two big unions, GMB and the supposedly-left Unite, both pushing him to increase military spending and fossil-fuel extraction.

Slightly more hopefully, TUC general secretary Paul Nowak, a right-winger, has called for "wealth taxes on the rich-



Pic: @gibography2001

est... raising the vital revenues we need for our public services".

Andrea Egan, general secretary of the big public services union Unison, has said that Unison "needs to see... massive public investment and everything brought back in-house. Major sectors back under national public ownership, not just publicly 'controlled' or regulated a bit more actively..."

"Ending the attacks on migrants and protecting our hard-won freedoms. And... investing in our schools, hospitals, councils, transport, our communities".

Solidarity will amplify and assist the efforts of the rank and file to make the Labour-affiliated unions and the local Labour Parties fight for working-class policies and for reopening the channels of Labour democracy. □

The far right is still a huge danger

Reform suffered an electoral setback in the Makerfield by-election on 18 June. Since their May council victories they have had some damaging internal frictions and defections.

Reform is in a mess, but we can't be complacent. To stop the far right we need the labour movement and the left to respond with much more urgency. They need to be confronted in the streets, workplaces and communities. Confronted on the streets in spite of police protection for the far right. On

13 June thousands of people gathered in Brighton to stop the far right from marching and they succeeded. We need more of that.

Nigel Farage is waiting to hear from Parliament's Commissioner for Standards on whether he broke the members' code of conduct by not declaring a £5 million gift from cryptocurrency billionaire Christopher Harborne.

According to the *Local Government Chronicle* a number of Tory councillors who went over

to Reform have been shocked to see how chaotic and disorganised Reform is, while at the same time it is highly centralised. Seven Medway Reform councillors have gone back to the Tories and across the country a number of others have done the same.

Starmer

Since Starmer's resignation, Labour seems to have gone up a few points in the polls, but the shift is only margin-of-error, may be only a blip, and is at the expense of the Tories rather than Reform.

Where Reform councillors are still talking to each other, they've targetted "net zero ideology". In Norfolk they allied with Great Yarmouth First (Rupert Lowe aligned, Elon Musk financed) to push through an investigation into spending on climate-related projects, projects that in fact had no relationship to net zero policy.

In the Senedd the 34-strong Reform group have tabled a debate on Wales's nation of

sanctuary programme. In this, as with much else, Reform is pushing through Farage-issued propaganda-related edicts.

Propaganda efforts may work for a short while with Reform voters, and if the party can ride out this period of disorganisation, it could consolidate its base.

Meanwhile the further-to-the-right Restore (Rupert Lowe's outfit) and openly fascist groups remain very active — quick to exploit the horrific murder of Henry Nowak and a knife attack on a disabled Belfast man. Although these fragmented groups, presenting under constantly changing umbrella alliances, seem disorganised, in their battle cry for remigration — that is, forced repatriation — they have a common cause.

And Reform has inched closer to this policy in recent months. Together, the far right have managed to normalise something that only the most fringe and most virulently racist fascist groups argued for twenty

years ago.

That is why the far right as a whole is a hugely dangerous, increasingly physically violent threat — in the first place to all people of colour and all migrant communities. They are also fuelling online and real world misogyny. Violent attacks on all LGBT people have increased dramatically in the last five years; attacks on trans people even more so. As the far right make inroads into "mainstream" political opinion they will be a danger to the trade union movement.

We preach no toleration for the hateful racist repatriation policy. We fight for our socialist vision which aims to destroy the power of the rich and powerful, so that we can reorganise society and create the conditions for everyone to have a fulfilling and secure life. Only on that basis can we turn working-class people away from the divisive dog-eat-dog policies of the far right. □



Far right protester in Brighton, 13 June

Pic: @gibography2001

Israel out of Lebanon! Back Iran's working class!

By Dan Katz

On Friday 26 June Lebanon and Israel signed an agreement which gives a vague outline of how Israel and Lebanon, acting under US pressure, intend to deal with Hezbollah, the Shia party-militia and Iranian proxy which rules in southern Lebanon.

Hezbollah was not party to the deal and has denounced it. Hezbollah's leader Naim Qassem described the framework agreement as "humiliating, shameful."

The Israeli army currently occupies about 5% of Lebanon and has agreed to withdraw from two small pockets of Lebanese territory along the Litani river, handing control over to the Lebanese Army.

The agreement does not demand full Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has made it plain that Israel intends to stay until Hezbollah is disarmed.

The Lebanese state says 4,192 people have been killed, 11,600 have been injured and 1.2mn displaced since Israel began to bomb Lebanon on 2 March 2026 as Hezbollah began to launch rockets at Israel in support of Iran.

The agreement's main purpose is to prevent the US-Iran peace from unravelling immediately and the Strait of Hormuz again being closed off by Iran.

The US-Iran peace, codified in a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed on 18 June, mandates an end to fighting "on all fronts", including Lebanon. US President Donald Trump has become openly critical of Netanyahu, who continued to order strikes against Hez-



Pic: @gibography2001

bollah after Trump had demanded Israel stop. Trump's attacks on Netanyahu have caused the Israeli leader political problems at home.

Netanyahu has an interest in reviving the war on all fronts. He faces an election in October and needs to consolidate his far-right voting base. If he loses the election he may well face a long-postponed corruption trial and might end up in jail.

The MoU is half-baked, with provisions which are vague and incomplete, only beginning to address some of the issues between the contending sides. The MoU provides a 60-day period of negotiations on outstanding matters, including the Iranian nuclear weapons programme.

US Vice President J D Vance apparently thinks the Arab states around the Gulf, known as the GCC, will now invest heavily in rebuilding Iran. Why would they do that? He mentions a figure of \$300bn, which is fantasy.

So will the peace hold? Quite possibly not.

Opposition

Israel was not party to the Iran talks and opposes the US-Iran peace. It is difficult to see how their occupation can be maintained without repeated military action against Hezbollah.

Iranian negotiators told Reuters that the US-Iran deal specifies that the Strait of Hormuz will reopen and the US will lift the blockade of Iranian ports. The US will waive sanctions on Iranian oil for a period, release \$25bn in frozen Iranian assets, and the US will accept Iranian assurances that enriched uranium will be diluted on Iranian territory and that they will not build nuclear weapons.

However limited fighting continues in both southern Lebanon and in the Persian Gulf-Iran. Over Friday 26 and Saturday 27 June Iran and the US continued

to trade strikes.

On Sunday 28 June Iran launched drones at US bases in Kuwait and Bahrain. Trump commented that the US "may be forced to complete the job... if that happens the Islamic Republic of Iran will no longer exist."

Trump, a contemptable loudmouth who has surrounded himself with sycophants, failed to gauge accurately the resilience of the Iranian regime and did not anticipate the Iranian grip on the narrow waters of the Persian Gulf.

Concern

Trump's main concern now is to extract himself from the mess he has created. He needs the recently resumed flow of oil and gas through the Gulf to continue and the reductions in oil prices to be maintained. Trump has domestic political pressure on him caused by high petrol prices in the run-up to the US November's mid-term elections.

However, Trump also must be able to present an agreement with Iran as a victory. He cannot openly offer Iran lots of money, or sanctions relief, without dealing with Iran's stockpile of enriched uranium.

In particular he can not sign up to any final agreement which compares badly to the deal which former US President Barak Obama signed with Iran in 2015, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which offered Iran sanctions relief in return for nuclear inspections and an agreement to limit nuclear enrichment. Trump denounced the deal and pulled the US out of it in 2018.

When Trump and Netanyahu began the assault on the Iran on 28 February they had the intention of overthrowing the Islamist regime and laying hold of Iran's stocks of near-bomb-grade enriched uranium.

They have failed.

What they did manage, however, is to

kill thousands of ordinary people in Iran and Lebanon and cause vast damage, including to Iranian civilian infrastructure. Perhaps three million Iranian workers have lost their jobs.

The US-Israeli war led to the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, a big spike in oil prices, and consequently inflation across the world, which has hit workers and the poor hardest of all.

Many in the Iranian leadership are now dead but the Islamic Guards (IRGC), set up to protect the clerical state, are firmly in control. During the war thousands of Iranians were arrested on accusations of disloyalty to the regime and a wave of executions of political prisoners is taking place in Iranian prisons.

According to Bloomberg Iran has reconstituted its stockpiles of missiles and drones, possibly with Russian help. It currently holds about 75% of its pre-war reserves and has cleared much of the rubble from the entrances of bombed weapons dumps.

As one of the US-Israeli initial war aims was to destroy Iran's weapon stocks, this is a further failure.

In Israel 35 people died during the war, mostly civilians, and 7,700 were injured. The continued existence of Iranian ballistic missiles and drones is a real threat to Israel, a country that Iran's regime has regularly threatened to destroy.

The only force that can build a stable, long-lasting, democratic peace in the region is the working class.

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The riots and the UDA bosses

By Micheál MacEoin

Enough time has passed since the race riots in the North of Ireland, starting 10 June, for some provisional conclusions to be drawn.

The attacks followed a knife attack on a man, Stephen Ogilvie, in North Belfast. A 30-year-old Sudanese national has been charged.

The following night, race riots began, spurred on by postings on social media. Homes and vehicles were burned out, with migrants being explicitly targeted in what are mostly loyalist areas of Belfast.

One Protestant pastor on the ground described families being put out of their homes "because they're black".

Patricia McKeown, Unison regional secretary, told the BBC that a nurse with "a different skin colour was chased into the Ulster Hospital by four masked men".

Despite her experience, she "insisted on doing her shift." McKeown added: "There is no excuse for any of this. This is racism, pure and simple."

McKeown is right. It has since emerged that some of those targeted in what can only be described as pogroms lived at addresses which had previously circulated online.

Amongst those targeted are nurses, social workers and long-settled migrants who work in the NHS and other vital public services.

Following the worst rioting on Wednesday 10 June, the family of Stephen Ogilvie appealed for calm, saying they wanted to "make it absolutely clear that overnight unrest is not welcome, and peaceful protest is the only way forward".

"We have many migrants who make a deeply valuable contribution to our country, including in our healthcare system and hospitality sector and we depend on them to make our country work." They said they did not want this "terrible tragedy to be used to divide people or fuel hostility".

The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) said this time there was "no evidence" the disorder was coordinated by loyalist paramilitaries, pointing instead to social media. Ofcom too said some of the disorder "appears to have been incited online."

This was echoed by loyalist activist Jamie Bryson who said "it's not loyalist paramilitary organisations" behind this week's disorder. "The leaderships of the organisations have been clear, they're not taking any part in this, they're not encouraging anybody to take any part in this."

The authorities here are being coy, and Bryson is no neutral observer. Despite suggestions that paramilitary leaders were only "observers," only an idiot could truly believe that disorder, organised or spontaneous, could happen in estates such as Rathcoole in Newtonabbey without the active involvement or at least the passive permission of the Ulster Defence Association.

Transition

The state, whose strategy is to encourage paramilitaries to "transition" away from violence through offering generous financial inducements in the form of grants and other funding, has every interest in playing down loyalist involvement.

Loyalist paramilitaries have every interest too in keeping the money taps flowing, while also positioning themselves as vital community gatekeepers, without whom "worse" unrest might occur.

The *Sunday Life* tabloid has been one of few outlets to dismiss this official narrative.

It reported that an arson attack on the car of a Nigerian healthcare worker was ordered by a South East Antrim UDA boss, who had been to the fore in the riots in Newtonabbey. This was the third racist attack on the victim, who said he was planning to flee Northern Ireland.

Loyalist sources told the paper that the UDA commander "hates immigrants even more than Catholics. He's a racist and sectarian thug who has been saying openly that he isn't going to stop until every immigrant leaves Rathcoole," explained one local.

The gang was told not to attack the police during the riots due to its involvement in lucrative transition talks – the UDA in South East Antrim has been promised a share of the government's £2.9m PEACEworks scheme to help members make a "positive civic contribution". Nigerian healthcare workers were, apparently, fair game.

Incidentally, while there is money for the UDA, civil society organisations in the North are seeing brutal cuts. EU funding was replaced by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, which was replaced from 1 April this year by the Local Growth Fund. The latter favours capital funding to revenue funding, meaning day-to-day funding available to community groups in the North drop from £25m per year to

just over £9m. This includes a 64% cut to community-led employment support programmes.

It is these very same organisations who were to the fore in the aftermath of the riots, providing food, shelter and other support to those affected.

Clearly the riots are not reducible to loyalist paramilitary involvement but the official attempt to establish a stringent firewall between the pogroms and loyalism are risible.

A similar sectarian hatred to that which drove the murder of innocent Catholics during the Troubles is translatable into far-right racist terms with few modifications.

Loyalism combines a sort of majoritarian anti-Irish and anti-Catholic bigotry and supremacism in the context of the North, mixed with the insecure defensiveness of a settler-community identity on the wider island. Even though the North is 97% white, migrants have become a target for a sense of insecurity and loss in sections of the loyalist community.

Economic conditions

It is not, however, a simple reflex of economic conditions or simply "understandable" in terms of poverty. Bryson, on BBC Radio, claimed rioting was mostly in loyalist areas due to disenfranchisement of young men, and argued "there is not the same disenfranchisement on the nationalist side".

In strictly economic terms, there are 35% more unemployed young men (16-24) from a Catholic background than Protestant.

Neither are the riots, from the point of view of loyalist paramilitaries anyway, about genuine feelings for the victim of the initial attack. It has since emerged

that Stephen Ogilvie was the victim of a UVF-linked drug gang in Scotland in the early 2000s, who beat, bullied and tortured him with cigarettes.

Opposing Violence

And of course, it has nothing to do with opposing violence against women and girls – as the complete lack of protests against the murder of Natalie McNally by an ex-partner or, indeed, in the wake of former DUP leader Jeffrey Donaldson being found guilty of 18 counts of sex abuse, including one count of rape, against two young girls.

In identity or ideological terms, however, it is clear that Unionist leaders and loyalist groups have spent the last half a decade railing against the "Irish Sea Border" amidst demographic shifts which have seen Unionists pushed into a minority, including in Belfast.

As the North – slowly – becomes more diverse, migrants are a visible symbol of change, which loyalist ideology is conditioned to understand in violently negative terms.

On the positive side of the equation, Saturday 13 June saw Belfast's largest ever anti-racist demonstration, involving unions and political parties, with similar demonstrations in Derry.

Aside from demonstrations, it will be crucial to sustain those networks which provided on-the-ground solidarity during the riots, combined with working-class assertion for greater funding for services and social provision.

As well as this, racist ideas must be confronted wherever they arise in communities across the North. □

Activist Agenda

Meetings

Fri 3 July: Capitalism and Loneliness. London AWL forum. 7pm, Electric Elephant Cafe, 186A Crampton St, SE17 3AE

Mon 6 July: Is Labour finished? North London AWL. Housmans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Rd N1 9DY

At work or on campus

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

Template motions

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

Socialist-feminist book clubs

bit.ly/bc-sf

Manchester: Unwell Women. Sun 5 July, 2:30pm, Manchester Art Gallery, Mosley St, M2 3JL

Campaigns

See workersliberty.org/agenda. □



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Gaza: the daily struggle to survive

By Abdalrahman

Abdalrahman is from Gaza, and now lives in London. His entire family remains in Gaza.

What is daily life like in Gaza for your family and for other Gazans?

Once they wake up in the morning, the first issue is to go and try to find some water, which is the hardest thing. But they don't manage to get water every day, as the trucks don't come every day, they come maybe once or twice a week. And then they go to other neighbourhoods, so they have to change locations to go wherever they know there is water. This takes mostly the whole morning. They spend two to five hours just trying to find water and to bring some water for that day, for washing, for cooking, for drinking. Most of the water comes from underground wells. It's muddy, it's not 100% good for drinking, but they have to drink it.

So, when they finish the water issue, then they try to find some wood to make a fire to cook. Before they find the food, they have to find a way to cook the food. Otherwise, they cannot make the food, at least the bread. This also takes a few hours.

And when they finish the water and food issues, it's nearly night time. So now they have to try to sleep. But sleeping is a struggle, with the insects... mosquitoes, and different types of insects we have never seen before. So they will use a carton or a piece of cloth to make a fan, and will take it in turns [to fan each other] so they can have at least an hour of comfortable sleep.

During the search for food, it is very risky to go outside. I don't want my boys to go outside, because it's very risky and dangerous. Bombing has not stopped, so there's no safety for anyone who is walking around.

Aside from the risk of bombing, what are the ways in which that military occupation affects daily life?

There is a map, and people, especially people who live nearby. The IDF has a map, with its "Yellow Line", and areas that are green and red. If the area is red, that means it's a war zone, and no-one should come to this area. The green areas are the areas the IDF says are safe. But no place is safe; they do bombing and air strikes even in the green areas.

Most of the military operations are in place controlled by the IDF, and the



areas nearby, so no-one dares to move towards those areas. If the IDF sees anyone approaching, they will be targeted.

Has there been any kind of reconstruction?

No, until now, there is no sign of any reconstruction. Some people are using old ways, trying to use mud and stones to rebuild things, using whatever they can find locally, including remnants of destroyed buildings. People who are builders, who worked in construction previously, they will try to make something small, a small shelter to protect people, but it's not enough. There are no tools or building materials coming in.

In the agreement, it said reconstruction will only happen if Hamas disarms, and there is no sign they will be doing that. When the agreement was first signed, people were happy... They expected things to start recovering, but none of that has happened.

Has any sort of economic life resumed?

People with certain skills are able to work, such as electricians, people who can repair phones, they have been able to use their skills.

Maybe 50 or 60%, or more, of people relied on day work... salespeople in the markets, for example. All of that has stopped. No more farming, no shops, no work for drivers, all of that has been destroyed. So many people lost their daily jobs. They have had to find other ways to get by.

The simplest thing is to try to bring some food from the bigger businessmen and to sell it locally to earn a little bit of money. Or the people who can fix damaged things, they will offer to do that. So people are trying to work, but there is so little money. It's the same small amount of money going around in a circle from person to person. Today, this person will need a service from another person, so

they will pay some money, then that person will need something from someone else... So it's the same cash going from person to person.

Some people are salaried employees, for example aid workers or people employed by the Palestinian Authority. They are still receiving their salaries. But these are not many in number, maybe 20 or 10% of the population, and even their salaries are not enough.

Some people have relatives outside, so they send their families a little bit of money. Many people depend on outside help, either aid or direct support from friends or family outside of Gaza.

Is there any travel in and out of Gaza?

Most people who managed to leave Gaza did so through medical evacuation. This is the only way. From time to time, we see in the news that some students are being evacuated, some people with visas are being evacuated, but we don't see any explanation of that, what the rules are, how to apply, what are the requirements... Nobody knows. They will suddenly just see in the news that 20 people were evacuated, 40 people evacuated, 50 people evacuated, but there's no explanation how and why and who. We don't know. The only process that they announced is medical evacuation, and there are only between 100 and 150 per day.

To what extent does Hamas remain a factor in daily life?

The source of their power is that they are using the people of Gaza. They are so powerful and it is not easy for them to be removed. They don't care about our safety; their existence depends on our suffering. The more we suffer, the stronger they become.

Even now, when someone tries to find a simple way of surviving, if he tries to open a small shop or a small business to

make coffee or tea to try to make some money, they come and charge him for tax. They say, "As you are here on government land, you have to pay us tax for what you are doing. You are earning money, you have to pay money."

Even people who are staying at the beach in Mawasi, in the public lands, they tell people to pay money. Otherwise, they have to leave that area. They don't care about the people, they just care about their own power.

We need everyone around the world to take responsibility, and push for us to have our simple rights to live in peace and safety, to help us recover from what we have seen. What's happened cannot be undone, it has already happened, but we must find ways to have a better future, to make sure nothing like this happens again. We must ensure no-one ever experiences this kind of suffering.

Everyone has a responsibility, not just in Gaza or in the West Bank or Israel. It's an issue for everyone. The world needs to find solutions so everyone can live in peace, with equal rights.

This is the only way. For me, I am so worried about my family, my friends, my people there. I am so worried about them. It is beyond imagination. This can't continue anymore. People have had enough, and they want to find peace. When they go to sleep, they want to sleep peacefully, with dignity, and not to be scared.

Friends are crying when they call me. They cry when they see their children crying. They need food, and they are not able to provide for them. This is beyond humanity. Human beings should not allow other human beings to starve. □

• Abridged with thanks from UK Friends of Standing Together.

• UK Friends of Standing Together is cosponsoring "The Hope Cycle", a 1,000+ mile bike ride by Tareq Al-Qazzaz, a Palestinian originally from Gaza, now living in London. The majority of funds raised will go directly to supporting families in Gaza, including Abdalrahman's, with the help of the Gaza Support Network. A small portion of the funds will also go to Standing Together. Please donate: bit.ly/alqaz

Humanist reflections

Activists from Gaza and Tel Aviv speak out: bit.ly/h-refl □

New binational left party launched in Israel

Left-wing activists in Israel have launched [a new political party](#), A Place for Us All (Likulina Makan / Makom Lekulanu in Arabic and Hebrew), ahead of parliamentary elections this autumn. [More online.](#) □

Ten years of “actually existing Brexit”

By Jim Denham

June 23 marked the tenth anniversary of the referendum vote that took the UK out of the EU following a spectacularly dishonest campaign by the populist right and a pathetically inept official “Remain” campaign.

Shamefully, much of the UK left advocated voting “Leave”, but dressed up their capitulation to the populist right by claiming their pathetic efforts (sometimes pretending to be a campaign calling itself “Lexit”) offered options different from those coming from victory for the nationalist and often racist campaigns being run by the two main “Leave” outfits, one run by Dominic Cummings and the other by Nigel Farage.

The most craven and nationalist anti-EU left forces were the people gathered round the Communist Party of Britain and its mouthpiece, the *Morning Star*.

Xenophobic

For years before the referendum the *Morning Star*'s rhetoric against the EU had been virtually indistinguishable from the xenophobic language found in the *Daily Mail*, except the MS would insert the word “socialist” into its tirades.

To judge by the 23 June 2026 issue of the MS, they have learned nothing, even though the vast majority of working class Brits now recognise Brexit has been a disaster, and this includes even a majority of 2016 “Leave” voters.

An article by CPB general secretary Alex Gordon, headed — amazingly — “Brexit — Britain’s revolutionary act, 10 years on”, claims that even establishing closer ties with the EU (“dynamic alignment”) “prevents any British government nationalising rail, mail, utilities and essential public services, let alone practising ‘Manchesterism’ as espoused by Andy Burnham”.

This, of course, wilfully ignores the fact that the EU poses no insurmountable obstacles to public ownership or to an industrial policy involving state aid and does guarantee basic employment rights. And the possibility of EU-wide cross-border worker campaigns against EU bosses.

The little-Englanders at the CPB and MS wilfully and repeatedly ignore the fact that there are state-owned rail companies operating across Europe including some with franchises in Britain. On state aid, there are “social clauses” that enable governments to support firms where there are special local needs. The EU is no more associated with austerity than post-Brexit Britain and it is simply untrue to claim

that EU trade treaties would thwart public sector intervention in privatised services.

It is worth noting that while Corbyn was Labour leader the MS managed to maintain its image as a pretty much uncritical pro-Corbyn publication whilst in the small print opposing Corbyn’s one and only clear policy on Europe — to avoid a no-deal Brexit at all costs.

Paradise

Over the years since the implementation of Brexit, the MS has occasionally acknowledged reality and admitted that it has not brought about a workers’ paradise in the UK, but explains this as the result of it being implemented by the Tories — as though they hadn’t noticed who was in government in 2016.

But the MS (and CPB) cannot be allowed to get away with this: the truth is that the paper supported Boris Johnson’s withdrawal bill, stating (editorial, 21 October 2019): “this government... has, against the expectations and manifest hopes of all those parliamentary

renegades who have repeatedly found ways to subvert the popular will, reached agreement with the European Union. This is the actually existing Brexit. There is no going back.”

The paper also printed the CPB’s statement: “The Communist Party of Britain urges MPs to support the swift passage of the new EU Withdrawal Bill which is due to have its Second Reading vote later today (October 22).”

But it was the logical continuation of their long-standing anti-EU nationalism, and their truly wretched and politically dishonest stance around the 2016 referendum: a shameful betrayal of working class internationalism that the *Morning Star* continues (literally) to this day.

These little-England “socialists” don’t seem to realise something obvious: that socialism requires breaking down international borders rather than building higher barriers between workers. □



Pic: @gibography2001



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Women’s Fightback

India’s women workers and the heat

By Ruth Cashman

Summers in India have gotten longer and hotter. Average temperatures are now 40°C between March and June. The toll on health and social life of global warming is growing.

Schools across Delhi and in about half of India’s 28 states have been ordered to close from mid-May until the end of June, when in many places the

summer break starts. Hundreds of thousands of parents in India are struggling with managing jobs and children as lives are disrupted by prolonged school closures linked to the high temperatures. And as childcare disproportionately falls to women, it is women who are bearing the brunt. The majority of women are being forced either to stay at home or move into precarious, lower-paying work

because they have to care for children during repeated school closures. This pushes some families closer to poverty and shrinks women’s social lives.

Informal sector

More than 90 percent of working women in India are in the informal sector, and the sectors carrying the greatest heat risks, agriculture, construction, street vending, domestic work are where women’s informal employment is concentrated. Some can lose as much as 60 percent of their income during the brutal summer months because their working hours are reduced by almost half, or they have to abandon their work.

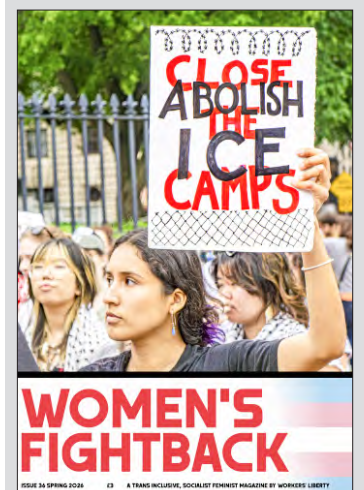
The Lancet Countdown’s 2024 India data sheet estimated that India lost 181 billion potential labour hours to heat exposure in 2023 alone — 50 per cent higher than the 1990s

average. In 2024, that figure rose to 247 billion, a record.

Working outdoors, in unventilated factories, or doing piecework, women face harsh conditions. Public health experts estimate that many more people die of heat-related causes in India than are reported by government agencies. While deaths can be recorded as heat-related when the causes are immediately identifiable, such as a heat stroke or a cardiac arrest on a very hot day, overworked doctors are not sufficiently trained to look for longer-term effects of heat stress. The UN states that women and children are 14 times more likely to die in climate emergencies than men.

Last week, officials in Mumbai restricted water access after the reservoirs dwindled to just 10% of capacity. Rain has begun but will not replenish

the water supplies. nationwide rainfall has been almost 40% lower than the June average. This will further hit agricultural workers and food prices in the already inflation-hit region. □



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Schools should be safe, pleasant spaces

By Dan Katz

The Times Educational Supplement reported that over a quarter of all schools closed early during the week beginning Monday 22 June. Many closed altogether.

I teach at a large secondary in London and by the afternoon of days towards the end of the week classrooms were at 30-35°C. No one was learning anything.

And yet we also got off lightly. The previous hot week hit at half-term. This current spell impacted after Years 11

and 13 had left and two other year groups were on work experience.

The school was much less rammed than it could have been. Kids and staff who suffered from the heat could be comfortably parked in a room with aircon.

The big majority of rooms have no cooling system.

Policy

We — the NEU union reps — could see this coming and began discussions on hot weather policy last year. Recent hot weather plus union

demands focussed our head teacher's mind and we got portable aircon units delivered last week, a promise to put reflective film on the windows, and a substantial relaxation of dress codes.

The contracted-out, and as yet not unionised, canteen staff, mostly women workers, are particularly vulnerable. We spoke up for them.

We advocated early closing of the school, which we didn't win, although some staff were able to leave early on Friday.

The issue is not unproblematic, though. We are not

making washing machines, or digging coal. We teach your kids and, more than that, we care for them.

Children need to be with their mates in school, albeit in a school which is habitable. School is a safe place for a lot of kids to be; safer than anywhere else in their lives.

Any trade union policy that simply addresses the health and welfare of school workers, and doesn't weigh the impact on school children is not Marxist. We're not narrow trade unionists. □

Make union leaders do more!

By Owen Flood

As the heatwave smashed temperature records and led to schools and workplaces closes, it took my union, Unite, until midday on Thursday 25 June to brief reps and branch officers on how to respond. The content of the briefing was useful, even though, from the poor formatting and clunky grammar, it seems to have been hastily put together.

The red alert was announced on Monday 22 June. A responsive union would have sent all members, reps, and officers briefing on their rights, response and emergency measures on that day.

In the briefing no mention was made of

long-term adaptations for workplaces, or of how record breaking temperatures are a result of human-induced climate change. Sadly the lack of reference to climate change is the norm for Unite's leadership under Sharon Graham.

The union leadership calls for stoppages and worker protections to prevent heat exhaustion, but it also pushes for policies such as airport expansions and more oil and gas licenses to burn more fossil fuels, which bring about more extreme heat. The union leaders call for a worker-led green transition — but campaigns for policies which are the exact opposite.

Locally Unite reps have negotiated

emergency mitigations such as work from home agreements, and workers on London buses and elsewhere have refused work on safety grounds. Using their entitlement under Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act 1996, also used by some groups of workers at the heights of Covid. Sustaining these efforts beyond the current heatwave will be crucial to winning the adaptations we need.

We need a union leadership that reacts swiftly and effectively to heatwaves, pursues long-term adaptations to workplaces, campaigns for nationalisation of the energy industry, and implements its commitment to a worker-led just transition. □

Bus drivers refuse overheating

From London Hazards Centre

June 27: Bus drivers across London have taken direct action to protect themselves and the travelling public in this week's heatwave. At the Bow garage, Docklands garage, and elsewhere, drivers have refused to drive buses without air-conditioning on health and safety grounds. Arriva London North Unite branch is now balloting members for industrial action over this issue.

A large part of London's bus fleet lacks effective air-conditioning and temperatures in bus cabs have exceeded 40°C this week. On driver reported 53.5°C which is pushing at the limit of human survivability.

Each year, bus companies risk catastrophic loss of life by insisting

on business-as-usual during heatwaves. Each year they prioritise their profits over the necessary investment in air-conditioning. Some managers have threatened to dock the wages of workers refusing to drive in extreme heat. But such action is illegal under §44 of the Employment Rights Act 1996, which says workers should suffer "no detriment" for refusing work

they believe poses a serious and imminent risk to health and safety. It is also in direct contradiction of a statement issued by Sadiq Khan this week. These bullying tactics of bus company executives in their nicely air-conditioned offices should be met with a robust response from Unite and the mayor of London.

Pandemic

A lot of the air conditioning units that did exist on London buses were taken out during the pandemic, as drivers were put in harm's way by recirculating air. 75 drivers died in the pandemic and London's bus drivers were three times more likely to be infected, suffer long-term disability, or die than the general public. The shift to air-cooling

systems, which cool fresh air drawn from outside the bus, reduced the risk of infection but created a new safety problem in the heatwaves. We live in an age of pandemics and drivers should be protected from respiratory pathogens and excessive heat. Safety reps should insist on air conditioning with HEPA filtration as recommended in healthcare settings by the Covid Inquiry.

With climate change ramping up summer temperatures each year, the dangers increase. Either we force our employers to sacrifice a bit of their profits for the necessary adaptations, or we will pay with working-class lives.

The direct action of drivers and the plans for further industrial action are the way we will win a transport system fit for the future. □

A recent temperature reading from a bus cab



Go beyond short-term fixes

By Gerry Bates

Winning cool-building adaptations and air conditioning where necessary is important for individual workers and protects the vital services that we depend upon. The lack of air conditioning in NHS workplaces in the heatwave week had a major impact on the NHS's ability to function at a time of heightened demand for the service. London's ambulance crews had their busiest day ever in the history of the service but they were taking patients to overheated and overcrowded hospitals. Some nurses reported ward temperatures in excess of 38°C. Machines and IT systems broke down.

But that is not all. Countries like the USA, and increasingly Australia, have "adapted" by near-universal air-conditioning of buildings and travel by air-conditioned car. That, however, increases the temperatures outside, and for those who miss out on air-conditioning.

Large scale (district, uni- or hospital-wide, etc.) systems of heat pumps and hot and cold reservoirs are much more effective for providing heating (including hot water) and cooling the year round than individualised air-conditioning. We need well-ventilated workplaces with HEPA air filtration to guard against Covid and other infections and in preparation for future pandemics and we need workplaces that can stay cool in extreme heat.

There are other impacts we can see coming down the line — many workplaces are built on floodplains and in decades to come we will have to reckon with coastal inundation. AMOC collapse, which is possible in the next few decades, will bring subzero winters to Britain for three to five months of the year. We need infrastructure that can withstand not only extreme heat but also extreme cold. In all these battles, which simultaneously impact hundreds millions of workers across industries and borders, we seek maximum working-class unity to build a movement that can tame the environmental chaos that capitalism has already unleashed.

And we need faster, not slower, or even abandoned, "net zero". We need to stop the burning of fossil fuels in order to halt and reverse the chaos. Even a socialist revolution tomorrow now cannot stop large disruptions and heat waves for many years ahead. Without rapid green transition, enabled by democratically-controlled public ownership of the energy industries and the banks, the disruptions will be on a scale making the 22 June week heatwave look petty. □

Code is riddled with ambiguities

By Simon Nelson

The new Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) Code of Practice on trans rights (or lack of them) is still being scrutinised by Parliament. The regulation forty sitting days since the Code's publication on 21 May takes us to some time mid-July. Even after that period, it is up to the government to decide when it comes into force.

An "Early Day Motion" [submitted](#) by the left Labour MP Nadia Whittome to "disapprove" the Code now (30 June) has 160 signatures, 86 Labour, 54 Liberal Democrat, plus various Plaid Cymru, SNP, SDLP, Green, and Independent.

But the most likely way for actual Parliamentary scrutiny would be for the Lib Dems to use an "opposition day" debate — far from sure-fire. The closest to scrutiny we may have come is the questions posed to the Women and Equality Committee [Hearing on 9 June](#).

That showed the Code as riddled with ambiguity and contradictions. EHRC chief Mary-Ann Stephenson told MPs that "the EHRC cannot tell service providers 'check for this', or 'check for that'" to exclude trans women from facilities,

"because 'that' does not exist", "that" being a ready proof of birth sex.

The by-no-means-woke City of London Corporation has said that the Code will not deter it from keeping Hampstead Heath Women's Ponds trans-inclusive, and seems confident it can see off legal challenges from the trans-exclusionary campaign Sex Matters.

But LGBT+ Labour, the official but opaque affiliated socialist society, has announced details of its AGM and Emergency General Meeting, following the suspension of last year's event, when it decided it could not conduct committee elections without breaking the law.

Legal

"Having engaged with the Labour Party before subsequently seeking legal advice, we were advised that proceeding with our elections without any changes — i.e., with the Women's Officer position and gender quotes open to Trans Women — would pose significant legal risk to the organisation".

They have decided that elections will now be to the National Committee without specific positions. That incoming committee can then allocate roles

among itself.

"The positive action quotas for Women will also no longer exist, although the National Committee will retain the option to propose a re-introduction of the quotas, subject to members' approval at a future EGM."

Challenge

The outgoing committee have urged that these changes are endorsed. It remains to be seen whether a challenge to the Labour-right-dominated committee, as proposed in 2025, will emerge. A left challenge and a slate willing to challenge the previous committee's conservatism would be welcome.

The Labour Party itself has indicated no shift from its decision this year (objected to by all the affiliated unions) to make its women's conference (26 September) trans-exclusionary. It is difficult to see how it can be "legal" to have trans-inclusive swimming pools but "illegal" to have trans-inclusive conferences.

The Code as it stands, with its ambiguities, is a licence for anti-trans vigilantes. The official Office for Equality and Opportunity impact assessment warns that



Pic: @gibography2001

trans people, already at disproportionate risk of violence and sexual assault, could face increased danger from the Code. □

Housing

Who owns land? Open the books!

By Robert Bau

Seeing a name on the land registry might suggest that person owns the property. In reality, the legal position is more complex and differs across the UK.

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the law makes a distinction between two types of ownership: legal ownership and beneficial ownership. The Land Registry records the legal owner, known as the "registered proprietor". This is the person with the legal

right to sell, mortgage or otherwise deal with the property. However, this register does not show who actually benefits from the property financially.

The beneficial owner is the person or organisation who enjoys the benefits of the property. This may include living in the property, receiving rental income, or getting the proceeds if the property is sold. So, the beneficial owner is not always the same as the legal owner.

This split exists because property can be held under a trust. In these arrangements, the legal owner holds the property on behalf of one or more beneficiaries. These beneficiaries have rights to the value or income of the property. Beneficial interests can be shared in different proportions and may arise through formal agreements, such as a written trust, or through contributions to the purchase price.

Separation

In contrast, Scotland operates a different legal system. It does not recognise the same separation between legal and beneficial ownership. Trusts do exist in Scotland, but they work differently. Trustees hold the property as legal owners, while beneficiaries have rights to benefit from it rather than a separate ownership interest in the land itself.

Transparency over who owns what has increased in recent

years, particularly to tackle financial crime. Overseas companies that own UK property must now register their beneficial owners through the Register of Overseas Entities, introduced in 2022. Trusts that hold property often need to be reported to HMRC through the Trust Registration Service, although this information is usually not available to the public.

Early evidence suggested that compliance with these transparency rules was mixed. A significant number of overseas property owners failed to register on time, leaving many properties effectively anonymously owned.

Companies House enforces the Register of Overseas Entities (ROE) using a range of measures. These include warning notices, financial penalties and, in serious cases, criminal sanctions. The most effective tool is practical: entities that do not comply can be blocked

from buying, selling or mortgaging property, making it very difficult to use their assets. Together, these measures make non-compliance difficult but not impossible and of course everything is dependent on the will to enforce.

Let's be clear, there is no rational reason, apart from tax avoidance or financial engineering, to allow the beneficial owner to remain hidden and not to register. So, the law in England, Wales and Northern Ireland should mirror that in Scotland. Alongside this, all trusts should be registered and this register made public. The law and enforcement around the ROE should be strengthened, making it impossible for a property owned by an overseas person or entity to remain hidden.

The old demand of "open the books" applies just as much for property as company financial records. □



Pic: @gibography2001



1964 — Berkeley free speech movement



Third Camp politics in the 1960s-70s USA

Andrew Stone Higgins is the editor of *From the Free Speech Movement to the Factory Floor: A Collective History of the International Socialists*, published by Haymarket in March 2026. Andrew spoke to Daniel Randall from *Workers' Liberty* about the book.

DR: Who were the Independent Socialist Club (ISC) and International Socialists (IS), and what drew you to compile this history?

ASH: The ISC and IS were New Left organisations that grew out of the anti-Stalinist socialist tradition in the US. Where the largest New Left organisation, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), was not explicitly Marxist until the late 1960s, the ISC and IS grew out of a longer trajectory that identified with the pre-Stalinist Communist Party of the 1920s, the (Trotskyist) Socialist Workers Party (SWP) of the 1930s, and the Workers Party/Independent Socialist League (WP/ISL) of the 1940s and '50s.

The Independent Socialist Club was founded at University of California (UC) Berkeley in 1964. The IS, International Socialists, was founded as a much

larger, national organisation in 1969. From the start, the theoretical leader of the organisation was Hal Draper, a long-time socialist. The ISC was founded with 24 members, most of whom were students, but Hal was then fifty years old and working as an acquisitions librarian on the Berkeley campus. His own political history, and that of his wife Anne, stretched back to the 1930s.

I began to look into this history as part of my first book, *Higher Education for All*, which explored 1960s student activism in California in relation to larger political developments. The second chapter of that book focused on the Free Speech Movement (FSM) at UC Berkeley. Working on the first draft of that chapter led me to Hal Draper who, as it turned out, was the lynchpin connecting the FSM to the larger trends I was exploring. As luck would have it, Hal Draper's papers — about one hundred boxes of them — ended up in special collections at the University of California at Davis, where I was then a graduate student.

As I learned more about the Drapers and the ISC, I began to mull over the idea of a book project. I was, in those years, very involved in the student movement

against tuition increases in the wake of the financial crisis and in union organising with United Auto Workers (UAW) 2865. Both of these efforts predated and overlapped with the Occupy Movement. In the wake of Occupy, I was particularly interested in gaining a deeper understanding of Hal Draper's tradition of socialism from below as an alternative to the then-predominant anarchism, on the one hand, and an uncritical embrace of Stalinism, on the other.

While over the next few years I mainly worked on finishing my PhD, teaching, and publishing my first book, I continued digging into the IS tradition through archival and secondary research. When the pandemic began, in 2020, I knew I wouldn't be visiting archives any time soon, so that's when I began reaching out to surviving veterans of the ISC/IS in the hopes of putting this book together.

New Left

DR: You describe the IS as a "New Left organisation", but also rightly situate the IS in a continuity with the pre-Stalinist CP, the SWP, and the WP/ISL, all solidly "Old Left". Combining continuity with

novelty is potentially exciting and innovative but can also be a source of tension that leads to odd zags, and sometimes opportunistic chasing after whatever appears to be the "new" thing. I'm not sure the IS always resolved this tension in the best way. In my view, to put it a little crudely, some of what they ended up keeping from the "Old Left" they probably should've thrown out; some of what they threw out, they should've kept. How do you see this tension in context of the IS's development?

ASH: I generally see the ISC and IS as benefiting greatly from having one foot in each door, so to speak, of the Old Left and the New. Most generally, with regards to the Old Left, I see this in the ISC-IS's appreciation of the labour movement and the centrality of the working class — as opposed to the SDS, which emphasised, in different periods: students, the poor, Blacks, the Third World, etc., but not the working class.

With regards to the New Left I see this, first, in the ISC-IS embrace of the youth culture of which they were a part. The SWP, Progressive Labor (PL, a Maoist group active in SDS), and some others

Timeline of ISC/IS and forerunners

1939-40: The US Trotskyist movement, the SWP (no relation to British SWP), which is then the strongest in the world and one of very few that would be able to operate with some freedom during World War 2, splits in a dispute over whether to back the USSR in its war against Finland (Nov 1939 to March 1940). The USSR "defencists" led by James P Cannon (and supported by Trotsky) expel the minority led by Max Shachtman.

1940, August: Trotsky killed by Stalinist assassin.

Late 1940 to early 1950s: The minority, now organised as the Workers Party (WP), conclude that the USSR has become a new exploiting-class society, the "barbarism" fork in their day of the options long seen as produced when capitalism decays: socialism or barbarism. The SWP also moves from its 1939 stance, becoming more and more swallowed up by "defence of the USSR". By 1951 it sees Stalin's satellite states in Eastern Europe as "deformed workers' states". In 1946-7 there are negotiations to reunify WP and SWP, but they fail, and by 1951 the two groups are bitterly opposed. After 1979 the SWP will spiral off even further, becoming an uncritical pro-Cuba, pro-North-Korea, sect. Most of its members still wanting some sort of Trotskyism, and who remain active, will end up in the Solidarity group formed in 1986 (see below).

1950s: The WP, now more modestly renamed Independent Socialist League (ISL), slowly dwindles, hemmed in by conservative relative prosperity in the USA, working-class quiescence, and the successes of revolutionary Stalinist-oriented movements in ex-colonial countries. Shachtman writes little after 1954. Hal Draper, who had been a youngster in the 1939-40 split, produces the ISL's weekly paper *Labor Action* almost single-handed.

1958, September: The diminished ISL dissolves into the Socialist Party USA and disperses. Draper no longer works with Shachtman. The SP's youth group, YPSL, thanks to a de facto ISL-youth takeover, becomes the biggest left youth group in the USA in the early 1960s, with great activity in the civil rights movement. But that fades. In December 1972, the residual SP-USA splits, a month after Shachtman's death. Social Democrats USA is led by Shachtman associates such as Tom Kahn and Penn Kemble. It soon dwindles. Shachtman had been drawn into string-pulling and politicking with "sympathetic" union bureaucrats and was equivocal on the Vietnam war. Kahn becomes a high-up trade union official, Kemble a high-up government official. In the 1980s they would push Reagan to back the Contras in Nicaragua. The other side of the split, DSOC, a forerunner of today's



Mario Savio, of the Berkeley Free Speech Movement

DSA, is led by Michael Harrington, who had joined the ISL in 1953 but seems always to have been a (feisty, talented) reformist. The DSA will be weak for a long time. It will grow rapidly from the Sanders movement in 2016. It now has nearly 100,000 members, but at the same time has shifted towards "campist" politics, i.e. supporting almost any political force in the world appearing anti-USA. Hal Draper quit *Labor Action* in July 1957. His partner Anne Draper and he spent a year travelling in Europe, then moved to Berkeley, California. Anne Draper worked with unions, especially farm workers; Hal Draper studied for a postgraduate degree and in 1960-70 had a job in the university library. He started writing again, with *Two Souls* for Harrington's *Anvil*, and more for Phyllis and Julius Jacobson's *New Politics* journal, in 1960-1,

1964, September: YPSL members at the university in Berkeley influenced by Draper form an Independent Socialist Club (ISC), which quickly becomes active in and recruits from a big Free Speech Movement on the campus, the first flowering of 1960s US student radicalism.

1965, April: First Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) demonstration against Vietnam war

1967, from June: ISC leads successful drive for 120,000 electoral registrations for a "Peace and Freedom Party" placeholder-party in California to get "ballot line" status.

1967, September: ISC expands outside Berkeley to form Independent Socialist Clubs of America (ISCA).

1967, from October: Radicalisation and agitation against the US war in Vietnam

explodes on US campuses.

1968, November: ISCA backs Eldridge Cleaver, a maverick Black Panther leader, as PFP candidate for President. The Jacobsons (who do not join ISCA) object. Cleaver's politics are anything but working-class and he gets 0.05% of the vote.

1969, June: SDS, which was an old grouping previously connected to Democratic Party meliorism, but had exploded to become the biggest vehicle of student radicalism and dominated by variants of Maoism, splits and collapses.

1969, September: ISCA renames itself International Socialists, and declares itself "democratic centralist". In September 1970s it will move its HQ to Detroit (then seen as the centre of US industry) and rename its paper *Workers Power*. It pushes its student members hard to get jobs in heavy industry.

1971, January: Hal Draper and a few comrades quit IS, saying it is becoming too hectic and mandatory. They propose instead a "political centre", an editorial board seeking educational influence rather than tight activist organisation. They do not do that. After Anne Draper dies in 1973, Hal Draper writes five valuable volumes of exegesis, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution* (1977-1990).

1971, November: Start, in one LA high school, of the Red Tide movement of high school youth, linked to IS. It will become a national organisation in 1975. Hit hard by the 1977 IS split, it continues diminished for a few years after.

1972, January: IS expels Third Camp Tendency (Joanne Landy and others), who object that IS's policy on the Vietnam War has shaded too pro-Stalinist.

1973, September: Revolutionary Tendency (about 100 of the 300 members IS has then) splits. Although led by an old ISLer, Sy Landy, it now wants a more "Orthodox-Trotskyist-like" profile (and a "state-capitalist" designation for the Stalinist states). The RT forms the RSL (soon fades; dissolves in 1980s). In 1976 Landy splits from RSL to form the LRP (small, but extant). Another split from the RSL, Revolutionary Marxist Caucus, enters the SWP and soon dissolves.

1977, March: IS expels a Left Faction led by Barbara and Cal Winslow, linked to the SWP-UK. (Barbara Winslow's raging in Higgins's book against indifference to feminism in the SWP-UK then has come with hindsight, and is unjust). Contrary to what I used to think, the Left Faction is arguing for a more measured approach against hectic "Bolshevisation" (so called) pushed by IS secretary Glenn Wolfe (a former member, though always Maoist-leaning, of a forerunner of AWL, the Trotskyist Tendency in IS-SWP-UK: he had split from us in 1971 to side with the IS-SWP-UK leadership). With the help of Joan Smith and Steve Jeffreys from SWP-UK, the Winslows will form the International Socialist Organization (ISO). The ISO will push out the Winslows a few years later. Then, led by Ahmed Shawki (also arriving from SWP-UK), it will become the biggest group on the US far left before disbanding suddenly in 2019.

1978, October: IS stops publishing its paper, *Workers Power*. Subsequently Steve Zeluck, the now-famous historian Robert Brenner, and others split from IS to form a group called Workers Power (WP), which starts the magazine *Against the Current* (still produced, now under the auspices of Solidarity). Both IS and WP abandon the hectic perspectives of the 1969-77 IS. In 1985 they reunite, and then (spring 1986) merge with "Mandelites" expelled from the "Orthodox Trotskyist" SWP to create a group, still extant, called Solidarity, explicitly designed to be a loose educational network rather than an activist organisation with a binding policy.

1979, February: Kim Moody, Jane Slaughter, Mike Parker and others from IS launch *Labor Notes*, still buoyant and publishing bulletins, briefings, pamphlets, etc. and organising large conferences of rank and file unionists, but explicitly not under IS political leadership. It helps Teamsters for a Democratic Union (launched 1976), the main "success story" from IS's union activity. But TDU now backs Teamsters leader Sean O'Brien, who is better than the gangster-type Teamsters leaders of the 1970s, but also the union leader closest to Trump. □

Martin Thomas

would, for instance, expel members for smoking marijuana. PL wanted men to keep their hair short, and avoid facial hair. Well, if this was your position in mid-to-late 60s Berkeley, you weren't going to win a lot of converts. More substantively, I think the ISC and IS were exemplary in their consistent, if at times critical, support for autonomous Black struggles, which paved the way for their alliance with the Panthers, and their relatively smooth, early embrace of first women's and then gay liberation. A lot of New Left organisations were, early on, dismissive of or even hostile to feminism and gay liberation, so this really stands out to me.

With regards to Old Left baggage, I am still somewhat torn over the organisation's turn toward Leninism and its embrace of democratic centralism. It's easy to cast judgement from the vantage point of fifty years. The US clearly was not heading into a revolutionary moment, despite how surreal the late 1960s and early 70s might have been. I also appreciated Joel Geier's explanation, in conversation with me, that the turn to democratic centralism aided the organisation, helping it keep its coherency, as it went from a small, local organisation in Berkeley where everyone knew one another, to a much larger national organisation in which people did not necessarily know one another. The rapid growth of both SDS and the Panthers, I think, shows us what can happen to smaller, coherent organisations as they spread across the country and are embraced by people with only vague ideas of their politics and strategies.

Still, I think had the IS remained more of a big-tent Third Camp organisation, it would have avoided suffering so many splits and could have survived as a sort of left alternative to the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA, founded in 1982 as a merger of various left-social-democratic groupings). It also could have been a sane alternative to increasingly cult-like organisations like the American SWP or Bob Avakian's Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP). The RCP, one should note, was the largest organisation on the left after the collapse of SDS.

I can envision an IS, sans democratic centralism and such a strong emphasis on industrialisation, that managed to keep in the Drapers and their Reorient Tendency, the Third Camp Tendency, Eric Chester's student power folks, and the Left Faction/International Socialist Organisation (ISO). They still would have split with the Revolutionary Tendency, but that would be no great loss without the other splits from the organisation. A deeper appreciation of the ongoing efforts of academics in the IS, many of whom were then making their way up the tenure track, certainly would have made the non-industrialisers feel a bit more valued. This is, of course, a real counterfactual, but I do think given what we know in hindsight, a bigger, more flexible organisation was probably the way to go. But I wasn't there, and don't intend to cast stones.

Inheritor

DR: *At its foundation, the ISC saw itself as the authentic inheritor of the WP/ISL tradition, given Shachtman's lurch into Cold War social-democracy. But there was obviously a process of evolution. One difference seems to be around the attitude to "Trotskyism". The WP/ISL saw itself as Trotskyist, sometimes even presenting itself as the authentic Trotskyist current, who, despite the break with Trotsky on the question of the USSR, were carrying on his legacy more consistently than the "orthodox" Trotskyists who accommodated to Stalinism. However, Lois Weiner says "the ISC and IS never formally self-identified as Trotskyist". How did its political genealogy inform the IS's development, both in terms of continuations and breaks?*

ASH: This is a great question. You are right to point out the contrast with the "orthodox" SWP, for example. While the IS was not a big tent organisation like SDS, nor was it as ideologically narrow as the SWP or later New Communist organisations.

The ISers I spoke with had different relationships to Trotskyism. In addition to Lois Weiner, members including Jack Weinberg, Sam Farber, and Gabe Gabrielsky pushed back against the notion that they ever identified as Trotskyists and questioned whether their political tradition should be categorised as such. Others, including Joel Geier, who co-founded the ISC with Draper, and Jane Slaughter, who joined in the mid-70s, would disagree, identifying the group as explicitly Trotskyist. I think one of the problems here is the extent to which organisations can, or should, read and embrace Trotsky's work without necessarily applying the label Trotskyist.

I personally identify the ISC and IS more as practitioners of socialism from below. As the late Gabe Gabrielsky noted in his contribution to the book, Hal Draper identified the tradition of independent socialism as "an entirely new tendency." Not an offshoot of Trotskyism, but rather sui generis. Gabe, in particular, identified the Independent Socialist Clubs of America years, 1967-69, as a particularly free-wheeling time. Yet certainly after the founding of the IS in September 1969, key leaders within the organisation wanted to move the organisation in the direction of a more orthodox Leninism or Trotskyism.

At one extreme, the self-proclaimed Revolutionary Tendency, grouped around Sy Landy, Ron Tabor, and Chris Hobson, would push the IS to embrace orthodox Trotskyism, but ended up breaking away from the organisation altogether. Ironically enough, after starting their own organisation, some, including Tabor, would eventually move into the orbit of anarchism.

All this to say, I don't see the IS as Trotskyist myself, but understand that Trotsky was a central influence, and that others on the left, and indeed many within the organisation, understand the IS to be Trotskyist. The WP/ISL tradition of Third Camp socialism, and Draper's interpretation of Marxism as socialism from below, however, seem to me to be

more central with the exception, perhaps, of some years in the mid-70s.

DR: Hal Draper and Ernie Haberkern, another WP/ISL veteran, quit in 1971. David Finkel describes Draper's departure as being over "not entirely clear differences". What do you make of Draper's own eventual explanation for it (the critique of the "micro-sect")?

ASH: My own take on the Draper split is that both sides of it continued to adhere to what they understood to be the WP/ISL tradition of socialism from below, but that they were divided over the question of what was to be done. As far as I can tell, Draper's Reorient Tendency, totaling only eight people, thought that the social tumult of the 1960s was largely a spent force. They left the IS in January 1971 to focus on educational work.

It is hard to argue with Hal. Many of his criticisms of parts of the New Left circa 1970 ring true, but it also seems inescapable to me that Draper's decision marks a sort of political retreat. The New Left did go into decline in the 1970s, but does that mean people should have stopped organising? I don't think so.

I wish I had been able to include a piece by one of the members of the Reorient Tendency in the book, but it didn't work out. I did, however, manage to correspond with Ernie Haberkern before he passed, as well as Mike and Dave Friedman. In my correspondence with Dave, we talked to some extent about what he described as their "fraternal" exit from the IS. After much debate over the IS's emergent trade union strategy — discussions over "struggle groups," dual unionism, and rank-and-file caucuses — it became clear that Draper's group simply did not want to play a part, so they left. They disagreed with the IS's embrace of democratic centralism and wanted to focus on education, what Draper called "a Marxist political center in a non-sect form," on the lines of Lenin's *Iskra* newspaper. While I am very grateful to Hal and the rest of the Reorient Tendency for their continued political work after the split, I do wish they had managed to find some way to remain within the IS because I think they could have continued to exert a positive influence on it.

Vietnam

DR: *There was a debate about how to develop a Third Camp internationalism vis-a-vis the war in Vietnam, in a context in which anti-colonial resistance to US domination was hegemonised by a Stalinist party which, a generation earlier, had massacred Trotskyists. Thomas Harrison talks about concerns that some in the ISC were getting swept up in pro-NLF fervour. He sees Draper's intervention, in his document "The ABCs of National Liberation Movements", as a fudge, an attempt to give a "Third Camp" gloss to that pro-NLF lurch. I think the criticisms he and Joanne Landy made have a lot of merit; what was the significance of those debates for the development of the ISC/IS?*

ASH: As with the case of the Reorient Tendency, the Third Camp Tendency

(TCT) was a relatively small group of people; ten individuals, in this case. And again, the actual debate, in this case over internationalism not trade union policy, was further complicated by the decision to embrace democratic centralism. This was in early 1972, about a year after Draper's group exited the organisation and, again, it was largely a split on friendly terms.

All of this is to say that I don't feel that the debate had all that much significance for the development of the IS. People can and will interpret Third Camp politics in different ways. I understand how the TCT could look askance at the notion of "military but not political support" for the NLF. At the same time, I find convincing the IS position that the NLF was clearly the dominant force within the Vietnamese struggle, if not the only one. If the IS had to take a position on the Vietnam War, and in the context of the anti-war movement you'd think they would, I appreciate their taking a principled stance in favour of Vietnamese self-determination while not sugar-coating the Stalinist politics that Ho Chi Minh and the NLF represented. Walking that tightrope guarantees that a lot of people are going to be unhappy, on both sides, but I think the IS was right to do so.

Once again, I think this is a split that didn't need to happen, but the TCT wanted to leave the organisation, and they continued to do important political and scholarly work then they did. Joanne Landy and Tom Harrison's work in their Campaign for Peace and Democracy was really admirable, and Nelson Lichtenstein and Charlie Capper made really wonderful contributions to their respective fields as historians, Lois Weiner is an important voice in the field of education and on teachers unions, but it's clear these folks were not interested in heading in the direction the IS was going and that's okay.

DR: *What verdict did the IS draw from its rather messy experience with the Peace and Freedom Party (PFP) and its support for Eldridge Cleaver as president in 1968? The IS's approach to the Panthers seems to me something of a break from the WP/ISL approach to anti-racist struggle, developed principally by Shachtman and Ernest Rice McKinney. Is that a fair reading, and if so, what prompted the shift?*

ASH: You are right about the shift in approach to anti-racist struggle within the longer IS history, stretching back to the WP/ISL of the 40s and 50s. Most concretely, the IS shifted from a sort of "Old Left," CIO-era position of "Black and White, Unite and Fight" to an embrace of autonomous Black struggle. Given the larger trajectory of Black liberation politics in the United States, this seems to me a smart move. Whatever preference one might have for interracial organising in the abstract, and I share that preference, there was a period in US history where it was effectively not possible.

The immediate precursor to the ISC was the Young People's Socialist League (YPSL), the youth group of the Socialist

Party, into which the ISL had entered. The YPSL was deeply involved in the emergent civil rights struggle, from the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955-56, through the wave of sit-ins that began with Greensboro in 1960, and the Freedom Rides that followed. This really took off with the participation of YPSL's Tom Kahn and Rachelle Horowitz with Bayard Rustin as part of a tiny organisation called In Friendship, comprised mainly of Rustin, Ella Baker, and Stanley Levinson. Where Kahn, Horowitz, and Rustin would follow Max Shachtman to the right, many of the left YPSLs and SPers who did not later ended up in the ISC and IS.

YPSL involvement in the civil rights movement continued through the deep participation of Berkeley YPSLs in the Bay Areas' civil rights movement in 1963 and 64. These YPSLs who were Berkeley students were mainly active in Campus CORE (Congress of Racial Equality). All of this activism was in tune with the civil rights emphasis on interracialism as part of combating segregation, yet nationwide, tensions were rising around the involvement of increasing numbers of white liberals in the civil rights movement. This came to a head with the Mississippi Freedom Summer in 1964, and the subsequent fiasco around the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party at the 1964 Democratic National Convention. Among other tensions, these developments helped pave the way for the Black Power turn which, in practice, meant an era of racial separatism on the left.

For the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and CORE, the two most important direct action civil rights organisations on the national level, this meant becoming all-Black organisations. This was a disheartening turn for many committed white civil rights activists, but it didn't mean that white organisers just stopped supporting the struggle for Black equality.

In the context of the Bay Area, the IS took the important, trailblazing step of forming an alliance with the Black Panther Party, which was rapidly becoming the widely-recognised vanguard of the Black left. It simply would not be possible, in this era of resurgent Black nationalism, to expect Black activists to go along with the old program of interracial organising. But this didn't stop the Panthers from organising with white radicals. The Panthers had some early, and generally tense interactions with other left formations in the Bay Area — the Communist Party and (orthodox Trotskyist) Socialist Workers Party. But it was the ISC, and to a lesser extent what was called the Radical Caucus of the Peace and Freedom Party, that the Panthers would form a year-long alliance with. This was a precursor to the much better known Rainbow Coalition of Fred Hampton's Illinois Panthers.

The ISC had gotten to know the two-sides of the Panther leadership separately. ISers met BPP co-founders Huey Newton and Bobby Seale on the UC Berkeley campus, which was only two miles, a straight shot down Telegraph



Avenue, from the Panthers' base at Merritt Community College in Oakland. They got to know Eldridge Cleaver before he joined the Panthers, and encouraged his doing so. The ISC's Jack Weinberg, of Free Speech Movement fame, worked at *Ramparts* magazine alongside Cleaver.

Cleaver's abrupt turn away from the Peace and Freedom Party program, just after he had secured the nomination as its presidential candidate, was a real blow. Weinberg, who had worked closely with Cleaver and put months of hard labour into building the PFP, was deeply disappointed. This extended to the whole ISC. Hal Draper wrote a scathing denunciation of Cleaver that never saw the light of day.

When I talked with Weinberg about this, decades after the fact, he had another important takeaway from the PFP. He said, and this is paraphrasing, that it didn't matter if the New Left could win over the coasts, if socialists couldn't win over ordinary, working people in the midwest, then it would never be enough. Mike Parker had a similar read, you could win over the social movements, sure, but what about winning over the whole working class?

It really is in the wake of the PFP that the ISC begins taking steps that would lead it toward a greater emphasis on the industrial working class and their eventual move to Detroit and the wider industrial midwest. I don't want to overstate this, as the ISC had been deeply invested in the labour movement from the start, but this is the beginning of a real turn away from the campus and student organising.

While the alliance with the Panthers ended on a disappointing note, the Black liberation movement would still serve as an inspiration for the organisation. In the industrial period, this was reflected by the influence of the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement and its successor, the League of Revolutionary Black Workers.

New generation

DR: *The Red Tide youth movement seems to be the one place where the IS made significant inroads into black communities and began to recruit black activists. Several contributions, especially those from Tonya English and Kyle Hopkins, give a vivid sense of the vibrancy of Red Tide at its height. But it seems not to have produced a new generation of leaders, committed to taking the overall IS project forward. What's*

your assessment of that?

ASH: I agree with your assessment of the Red Tide, both its accomplishments and the lack of a clear, long-term organisational impact. The main problem, as I see it, is that the Red Tide really came into its full form only as the organisation around it, the IS, was beginning its slow disintegration. If it wasn't clear that the New Left was in decline in the early 70s, it certainly was in decline by the late 70s.

The early 1970s saw three small splits, with the exits of a cohort of campus-based activists in Ann Arbor, Michigan in 1970, and the Reorient and Third Camp tendencies in 1971 and '72, respectively. Then the splits start getting bigger. In 1973, eight-five members left with the Revolutionary Tendency, in pursuit of a more explicit Trotskyism. In 1977, a similar number of members exited the IS as part of the Left Faction, going on to form the International Socialist Organization (ISO). The ISO split included the Red Tide's national secretary, Michael Letwin, as well as long-time RT organiser Susie Bright. The exit of these friends and comrades was disheartening to remaining Red Tiders, but also, I think, the ISO split really paved the way for the end of the IS a couple years later.

All of this is to say, I think the Red Tide would have created, if not an entire generation of leaders, at least a number of new leaders who would have stepped into bigger roles in the adult organisation, the IS. But because the IS collapsed, this couldn't happen.

Key mistake

DR: *In your introduction, you describe IS's "failure to prioritise" entry work in Students for a Democratic Society (SDS, the main "New Left" organisation on campuses, which was eventually hegemonised by Maoist currents) as a "key mistake". Can you explain why? David Finkel talks about finding it "hard to be heard amid the noise" in his SDS chapter; what balance sheet did the IS collectively draw from its efforts to work in, through, and around SDS?*

ASH: SDS dominated the New Left numerically, even as it sometimes drew ideas and influences from outside groups — the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the Black Panthers, and the ISC/IS, among others. To give some sense of scale, the IS probably had 1,000 people go through the organisa-

tion throughout its existence. At no point did it have more than 500 members. SDS, by the late 1960s, had perhaps 100,000 members — 30,000 dues-paying national members, and maybe 70,000 additional members of local SDS chapters. It was by far the largest group on the left. No-one was even close.

Yet SDS started out small, smaller than pre-IS groups like the Young People's Socialist League and the Student Peace Union in the early 1960s. And SDS politics, in the early years, were somewhat vague: participatory democracy, anti-anticommunism, support for the civil rights movement. As the East Coast ISer Gabe Gabrielsky put it, in the early 60s "We didn't think they could organise their way out of a paper bag." But this started to change with the massive antiwar protest SDS organised in 1965. Coincidentally, one of the two main organisers of that protest was Charlie Capper, who would soon move to Berkeley and join the ISC.

The ISC's failure to enter into SDS was related to its failure to expand, or expand much, outside of Berkeley in the early years of 1964-67. At Berkeley, SDS served mainly as a meeting place for representatives of other left-wing organisations. On virtually every other campus in the United States, SDS was the only game in town, it was where budding radicals went to meet up with potential comrades and get involved in the left. As this happened, across the country, members of the Progressive Labor Party (PL) entered SDS in hopes of recruiting new members to their own organisation.

The history of PL's entry into SDS is a sad, destructive, sectarian one. But their militant sectarianism had a boomerang effect. As the sixties marched on, seemingly every year was more tumultuous than the last. And as SDSers struggled to come to terms with American imperialism in Vietnam, and the American government's war on Black radicals at home, SDSers across the country turned away from participatory democracy and towards Maoism, sloganeering, and violent confrontation. This reached its apex with the Weather Underground and the dissolution of SDS in mid-1969. But the fact is, as SDS was radicalising, egged on by PL sectarianism, ISers generally were not there to offer a more thoughtful, grounded, or democratic alternative.

Interestingly, several key IS leaders came out of SDS: Kim Moody, Steve Kindred, Charlie Capper, among others. And when SDS collapsed, first the ISCA and then the IS, founded three months after SDS's demise, managed to recruit various groupings from among ex-SDSers at places like the Universities of Chicago, Michigan, Wisconsin, Washington, and more. Into the 1970s, the IS would continue to recruit small, post-SDS collectives like the Modern Times in Cleveland, Ohio. Such recruitment, however small when compared to the 100,000 member strong SDS, points I think to the possibility that the ISC could have had a greater impact had it left the confines of Berkeley.

DR: In my view, the use of the phrase

“rank-and-file strategy” to describe the IS’s industrial orientation is misleading, as it covers at least a couple of different phases. First, there was “industrialisation”, a conscious effort to get jobs as rank-and-file workers in strategic industries, in order to carry out political work in workplaces and trade unions. This shifts into a different approach, helping develop and connect rank-and-file leaders and caucuses through projects like Labor Notes. In the earlier industrialisation drive, members’ workplace and union activity had the aim of building what David McCullough calls “an organised revolutionary socialist contingent” on the left of the labour movement. Labor Notes is a different type of project. McCullough calls it “politics-free”. Was this just a case of the slightly febrile energy of industrialisation “burning out” into something that felt more sustainable, or a conscious pivot, or a bit of both?

ASH: I think you are right to point to a break. As Joel Geier has pointed out in a recent *Jacobin* article on IS rank-and-file work, the period from 1965-75 is one of working class upsurge, wildcat strikes, and hopes for socialism. But over the course of the mid-1970s, things shifted decisively. This is the early onset of neoliberalism in the United States and what is often referred to as the employers’ offensive. The onset of a newly conservative era, which to be sure had deep structural causes, was hastened by politicians’ decimation of the New Deal, which was the basis of the American welfare state, and capital’s attack on unions. The two proceeded in tandem.

I think of Labor Notes, as well as the organisational turns represented by the ISO focus on campuses, on the one hand, and Solidarity’s efforts at regroupment, on the other, as a response to the larger political and economic shifts which, by the late 1970s, were undeniable. So to talk about IS rank-and-file work, its implementation of what we know as the rank-and-file strategy, is really to focus on the era before Labor Notes.

IS rank-and-file work focused on four key industries: telephone, auto, trucking, and steel. To a much lesser extent teaching and postal were incorporated, and there were even some abortive efforts at organising in the coal mines. But to really understand how it worked, it’s best to approach these efforts chronologically.

To reiterate the US context, the New Left of SDS and Port Huron Statement fame was thought to be dismissive of unions. This is something of an over-simplification, and it changes over time, but it certainly was not the case for the ISC. The ISC was founded as a small group that united student activists, civil rights organisers, and labour militants. Beyond just Hal and Anne Draper, with their deep roots on the labour-movement left stretching back to the 1930s, young ISers were lucky to benefit from the mentorship and wisdom of Stan Weir, a labour organiser with a political history stretching back to the early 1940s. In 1966, Stan released a famous pamphlet, which he first delivered as a

talk, called *The New Era of Labor Revolt*.

With the mentorship of the Drapers and Weir, among others, young ISers who had left college campuses began to get jobs in key industries. In New York City, seven IS members ended up getting jobs in the telephone industry. In January 1971, their local went on a two week strike. Out of that experience, these ISers started a newsletter called *United Action*, and a caucus of the same name followed. This was the first rank-and-file effort made by the IS.

While the IS had a large active branch in NYC going back to the ISCA days, that is, even before the 1969 founding of the IS, the organisation’s presence in Detroit only really began in August of 1970. Within a couple months, ISers began to secure employment at auto plants in Detroit, as well as other mid-western cities. In their work, ISers sought to learn from historical examples, but also the more recent experiences of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers (initially founded as DRUM, Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement). While the League was by that point in decline, suffering a debilitating split, the IS linked up with a longstanding organisation known as the United National Caucus (UNC) in the UAW. The IS joined the UNC in 1971, and helped win it to a number of IS perspectives, most importantly an anti-racist commitment to open up the (then all-white) skilled trades to Black workers.

As Geier notes in his *Jacobin* article, the IS’s high point in auto work was the summer of 1973, which witnessed ten simultaneous wildcat strikes in UAW plants. Unfortunately, the economic crisis of 1974-75 would do much to temper militancy in the auto industry. The same cannot be said for IS efforts in Teamsters, which really took off in 1975.

The IS had been involved with Teamster support as far back as the spring of 1970, with ISers at UCLA organising in support of LA-based Teamsters during a strike. In 1971, Teamster activists formed Teamster United Rank and File (TURF), which became an important model for IS efforts. Unfortunately, TURF fell apart within a year. Over the coming years, the IS became increasingly involved in Teamster activism, and was the only left organisation to do so.

Much IS Teamster work in the early stages consisted of helping write, edit, publish, and distribute Teamster newsletters in half a dozen cities. By 1975, however, IS organisers like Ken Paff, a former Berkeley student and ISC member, and Steve Kindred, a former SDSer from the University of Chicago, became central players in the Teamsters for a Decent Contract and its successor organisation, Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU). At the same time, ISer Anne Mackie, a former SDSer from the University of Washington in Seattle, would form the organisation UPSurge among UPS workers, initially through the production of a newsletter of the same name. UPSurge, which focused on local delivery drivers as opposed to long-haul trucking, would later merge with TDU.

Without getting into IS organising in steel, I’ll note that, like auto and truck-



Student protest against the Vietnam war exploded after 1967

ing, it began later the efforts in telephone, but overlapped with and brought in lessons learned in all of those other industries. By the late 1970s, economic decline, off-shoring, and concessionary bargaining, among other unfortunate trends, had all set in. While some ISers remained in their industries — Wendy Thompson’s example is a fascinating and inspiring one — many lost their jobs as the industries they had entered went into decline. This is the context for the emergence of Labor Notes.

As David McCullough notes in his piece for the book, by June of 1979, he, Jane Slaughter, and Mike Parker had all lost their jobs in the auto industry. Not coincidentally, these were three of the important early figures behind Labor Notes, which sought to impart key lessons learned by the IS, and other militant organisers, in their years in industry.

As far as Labor Notes being “politics-free,” my understanding is that, first, this was part of the IS’s long-term commitment to non-sectarian organising in mass movements, in this case the labour movement. Second, this was a fairly sensible position to take for a group, rightly or wrongly understood as Trotskyist, that was seeking to maintain influence in a left that remained dominated by Maoists. The IS, through Labor Notes, was continuing its work of fighting the bosses and the labour bureaucrats simultaneously, so fighting other leftists was perhaps not the best bet.

UK SWP

DR: Can you talk about the relationship between the ISC/IS and the “Cliffite” current in the UK? Some contributors in the book have a very dim view of the relationship. Joel Geier describes the SWP-UK’s “sponsorship of a faction fight and split to create a clone group that accepted all of their views, not presenting any divergent outlook in their ‘international’”. What did the IS learn from the SWP-UK?

ASH: The relationship between the British IS-SWP and the American ISC-IS is a long and complicated one. I hope someone will look into that history more deeply as it could make for a very interesting article if nothing else. On the one hand, I know that American ISers learned a lot from their British counterparts and I imagine that experience was mutual. On the other hand, there were obviously some major tensions.

Prior to the Drapers’ break from Max

Shachtman and the Socialist Party, Hal and Anne left New York City for ten months in Europe, before settling in Berkeley. I think at this point the writing was on the wall and Draper was thinking about exiting the organisation, he doesn’t, but he does move away from its center in NYC. Across Europe, Draper seeks to connect in person with like-minded socialists who he would later maintain correspondence with. In England, the person Hal really connects with is Michael Kidron. I’ve heard he and Tony Cliff did not get along.

Beyond the sort of theoretical contributions that each side made to one another, there were personal connections and influences. This didn’t make it into the final draft of the book, but originally I had included a footnote about Christopher Hitchens’ time in the states in 1970-71. In his autobiography, Hitchens notes the influence of Hal Draper and recalls his own participation in IS strike support at a GM plant in Fremont, California. In my book, contributors including Joel Geier, Gay Semel, Barbara Winslow, and Michael Letwin, reference shorter or longer trips to the UK, where they worked in or alongside the British IS. Their experiences varied, of course, with Barbara Winslow making note of the sexism, both structural and explicit, prevalent in the organisation at that time.

The real tensions with the British group were two-fold. First, was the arrival and influence of Glenn Wolfe (a nom de guerre) who came to the US, quickly rose to a leadership position in the IS, and pushed a program of Bolshevisation that many members look back on with regret.

Second, was the behind-the-scenes engineering of a split within the American IS, manufactured by what was then becoming the British SWP. To be sure, this split thrived on tensions that were preexisting in the American IS, including the emphasis on industrialisation in the four key industries of auto, trucking, telephone, and steel. I hesitate to speak more about the internal politics and developments of the British IS-SWP, as I am not as well read in this history as I would like to be — my apologies to Jim Higgins (no relation) and all the rest.

DR: What is the story of ISC/IS’s intervention into the feminist movement?

ASH: This is a great question, and one that brings to the fore a sort of sub-

plot running through the book. We can see, early on at UC Berkeley, ISC women leaders like Anne Draper and Joanne Landy who play important roles in the burgeoning organisation. As the group spreads geographically and transitions into the IS, there were leading women like Gay Semel, Marilyn Morehead, and Barbara Winslow at the national level, as well as women who were leaders of their particular fraction/industry like Anne Mackie at UPS, Wendy Thompson in the UAW, Candace Cohn in steel, and more. Ilene Winkler, who didn't contribute a piece to the book, was a leader in telephone in NYC and was one of the two liaisons to the NY Black Panthers, alongside Kim Moody, during the PFP alliance. Jane Slaughter, who joined the organisation only later, in the mid-70s, nonetheless became an important figure in the group and was a key figure in the development of Labor Notes. Nancy Holmstrom, to take another example, emerged from her experiences in the IS and women's movement a leading theorist of socialist-feminism.

So as far as having women whose work was taken seriously, I think the ISC-IS was as good, if not better, than any of their competitors on the left. And the left, despite its continuing problems with misogyny, was better than most other parts of American society at that time. That being said, with the turn to industry, there was conflict around the question of whether women should industrialise in jobs that were traditionally thought of as "women's work," but the decision was made to focus on male-dominated industries. Because of this, not as much work was done in teaching as might have been done, or in hospitals/the healthcare sector which would of course become so important over the decades to come.

The decision to target predominantly-male industries was made with the understanding that, first, those were the unions and industries most likely to be able to "move the class" and, second, that women would be able to become leaders in male-dominated fields. And we see this is the case, as evidenced in the pieces written for the book by Mackie, Thompson, and Cohen.

But even as IS women became path-breaking organisers in UPS, auto, and steel, women across the organisation, those who industrialised and those who did not, continued to organise in women's liberation circles. To take one example, ISC and IS women were involved in, first, the Union Women's Alliance to Gain Equality (WAGE), and later the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW). The first organisation was founded by Anne Draper, and the second, a much larger organisation, built on Draper's early work. The founding conference of CLUW, in 1974, was actually held in memory of Anne Draper, who had died from cancer in the previous year.

All of this to say, while there was certainly interpersonal sexism and lingering questions regarding the industries targeted for industrialisation, I think the IS looks rather good on gender equality compared to other left groups of

the time — SDS, SWP, the Panthers, the LRBW, what have you.

Two Souls

DR: *Many of the contributors in your book describe Hal Draper's "Two Souls of Socialism" as seminally influential. Mike Parker says it "defined his thinking". However, an emphasis on "socialism from below" didn't prevent the IS from developing a leadership culture that could be intolerant of dissent (cf, the expulsion of the Third Camp Tendency in 1972). Joel Geier says the IS "inherited the Workers Party's opposition to Zinovievism", i.e., a proto-Stalinist, authoritarian form of "Leninism", but the "Bolshevisation" drive, that gave the national leadership the right to appoint local organisers, seems to me very much a "Zinovievite" step, and one which the proclaimed adherence to "socialism from below" also didn't prevent. The ISO would consistently cite "Two Souls" as foundational, but demurred only occasionally and minimally from the campist anti-imperialism to which SWP-UK had pivoted midway through the Iran-Iraq war, which saw social forces which were very much not socialist, nor even particularly "from below", valorised.*

In my view, "Two Souls" is the weakest of Draper's well-known works; stirring as a literary flourish, but not really a solid basis from which to extrapolate an entire theory. I covered some of these criticisms of "Two Souls" in a 2018 article for New Politics. I think there may be a relationship between some of the IS/ISO's later development and the thinness of "Two Souls" as a foundational text, especially as the link to the previous WP/ISL culture degraded. Is there anything in that, in your view, or am I being unfair, or "reading too much" into the centrality of this text in particular?

ASH: While this seems fair to me, I think you are on the right track when you mentioned "reading too much" into the centrality of Draper's "Two Souls." I think it was, and remains, an important introduction to the idea of socialism from below (and above). But it was an introduction and not a manual or how-to guide to building a democratic socialist organisation.

The ISC-IS survived through a lengthy historical stretch that witnessed rising hopes and expectations, a climax of sorts, and a pretty clear decline. Over the course of those years it grew from a small, local, predominantly student-based organisation of two to three dozen members, into a national organisation of hundreds of people. Leading ISers and rank-and-file members alike experimented with new ideas and organisational forms while attempting to maintain fidelity to independent, Third Camp socialism from below. In some ways they strayed, to be sure. Bolshevisation, the attempt to build a workers' combat organisation, is something that almost everyone I spoke to now looks back on with misgivings if not regret. But the mid-1970s were a different time, and for a lot of ISers, building a harder, more effective Leninist organisation seemed

to make sense.

DR: *The IS eventually broke up, into at least six fragments. Why did the International Socialist Organization (ISO) survive best of those, at least until 2019?*

ASH: I think the ISO's focus on students, whatever its faults or merits, guaranteed an unending pool of idealistic young recruits, with the time and energy to pour into political education and movement building. If we are thinking about six fragments as the Ann Arbor grouping around Eric Chester, the Drapers' Reorient Tendency, the Third Camp Tendency, the Revolutionary Tendency, the ISO, and Solidarity, I think it makes sense that the ISO would be the most successful.

As far as I know, Chester's group was entirely limited to Ann Arbor, it wasn't aiming to be a national organisation. This grouping later joined the New American Movement (NAM), one of the two organisations that was part of the merger that founded the DSA, but apparently the Chester group left to join Solidarity. The exact chronology is a bit murky for me. Chester himself eventually went into the Socialist Party. I never had luck connecting with Chester, nor Julia Wrigley, another leader in this small Ann Arbor-based group.

While remaining a small grouping, the Draper tendency built the sort of organisation it aimed to build, eventually through Draper's Center for Socialist History, and Hal obviously did a great service in writing his books on Marx. The Third Camp Tendency did not aim to build a membership organisation, although all of its surviving members went on to do good work. The Revolutionary Tendency was, by far I think, the most sectarian outgrowth of the IS, so it makes a lot of sense to me that they didn't go on to do much. That might be unfair, but it's how I see things at least.

As opposed to the ISO, Solidarity seemingly wanted to be part of a larger regroupment strategy on the left, organised around continuing opposition to the Democratic Party. While I've known a lot of great Solidarity members over the years, and they do good work, I don't believe they have had all that much luck with growth, even as they outlasted the ISO. It seems to me that Solidarity's attempt to bring together New Leftists — some 20 years after the birth of the New Left — around continuing opposition to the Democrats was simply not a recipe for growth in an increasingly conservative era in the way that the ISO's campus-based recruitment strategy was.

Lessons

DR: *What should contemporary socialist activists learn from this tradition?*

ASH: There are a number of things that have really stuck with me, but I think the book will provide a range of lessons for leftists with interests or emphases different from my own.

One lesson comes from Nancy Holmstrom who ends her piece with the line, "It is very difficult to be a revolutionary socialist, a Marxist, on your own." If you consider yourself a socialist, then you

should be a member of a socialist organisation. I think this is true even if you want to continue to vote for Democrats in elections; even if you plan on being more of a paper member than full-time cadre. Being in an organisation is crucial.

Two, the late Mike Parker noted in his piece that not every question is a fighting question. His point was, it was less important what positions the organisation took in the abstract and more important what work they were actually doing. If you want to have an effective socialist organisation, don't worry so much about your party line, worry about the organising. This isn't to disregard theory, obviously all activity and no theory would be a bad thing, but to avoid fetishising it and elevating it above the practical.

Third, and this is related to Mike's emphasis on the actual work, over the course of my working on the project Joel Geier has consistently emphasised the importance of the IS carrying out coordinated but non-sectarian mass work. ISers did so in the civil rights movement even prior to forming the ISC, they did so in the Free Speech Movement, in anti-war organising and within the Peace and Freedom Party, in the women's liberation movement, and in the labour movement. The goal is to walk a line. In this case it is walking the line between radical abstentionism, where you refuse to participate in movements that are too liberal and, alternatively, participating in movements only to shout slogans or raid them for members. The IS knew that to win converts, especially given some of the unpopular ideas they had (read: anti-Stalinism), they had to be dependable comrades who did good work, and I think the record shows that they succeeded in achieving this.

Finally, the book, particularly its closing chapters, drove home to me the importance of maintaining a youth group, giving young socialists the space and autonomy to figure things out, while also providing guidance and support. There are millions of young people out there who are horrified by the world they are inheriting, to borrow the language of the Port Huron Statement. Winning a sizeable chunk of them to a committed, principled democratic socialism is going to be a key part of getting through the current political moment. □

• *Further reading on the Workers' Liberty website:*

• "The Third Camp Socialists in the USA", a [symposium](#) of recollections and reflections from activists involved in Third Camp organisations in the USA, including the ISC-IS

• "The legacy of Phyllis and Julius Jacobson", an [interview](#) with Kent Worcester, about the recent book *Third Camp Socialism: A Phyllis and Julius Jacobson Reader*

• "The 1939-40 Split in the Fourth International", [Workers' Liberty 3/30](#), a survey of the split in the Trotskyist movement from which the "Third Camp" current emerged. □

The vicissitudes of the Heterodox

By Martin Thomas

In his introduction to our book *The Two Trotskyisms Confront Stalinism*, Sean Matgamna wrote:

"The Alliance for Workers' Liberty, which had distant origins as '1953', that is, sharply anti-Stalinist 'Cannonites', made our way to the Third Camp politics of the Heterodox Trotskyist tradition by our responses to successive political events, rather than by way of a sudden conversion. Then we revised our ideas about the history of the Trotskyist movement: we 'went back to 1940', to the parting of the ways of the two main Trotskyist currents [when Max Shachtman and the 'Heterodox' were expelled for arguing that 'defence of the USSR' was no guide to working-class policy in Stalin's 1939-40 war on Finland]...

"Despite [the] vicissitudes [of the 'Heterodox' current], and despite the fact that it does not come down to us as a neatly-codified package transmitted by a continuous chain of organisational and intellectual activity, that tradition, and the formulations of its politics form a rich heritage. As well as the political disputes, mistakes, and degenerations, there is also a magnificent record of indomitable devotion and courage in the fight for socialism against both capitalism and Stalinism".

Yet in the USA, there seems to be, or have been until recently, "a continuous chain" of the Heterodox tradition. Andrew Stone Higgins's book, and his interview, tell much much about the "vicissitudes" of a big link in that (in fact) not quite continuous chain, the ISC/IS between 1964 and the late 1970s.

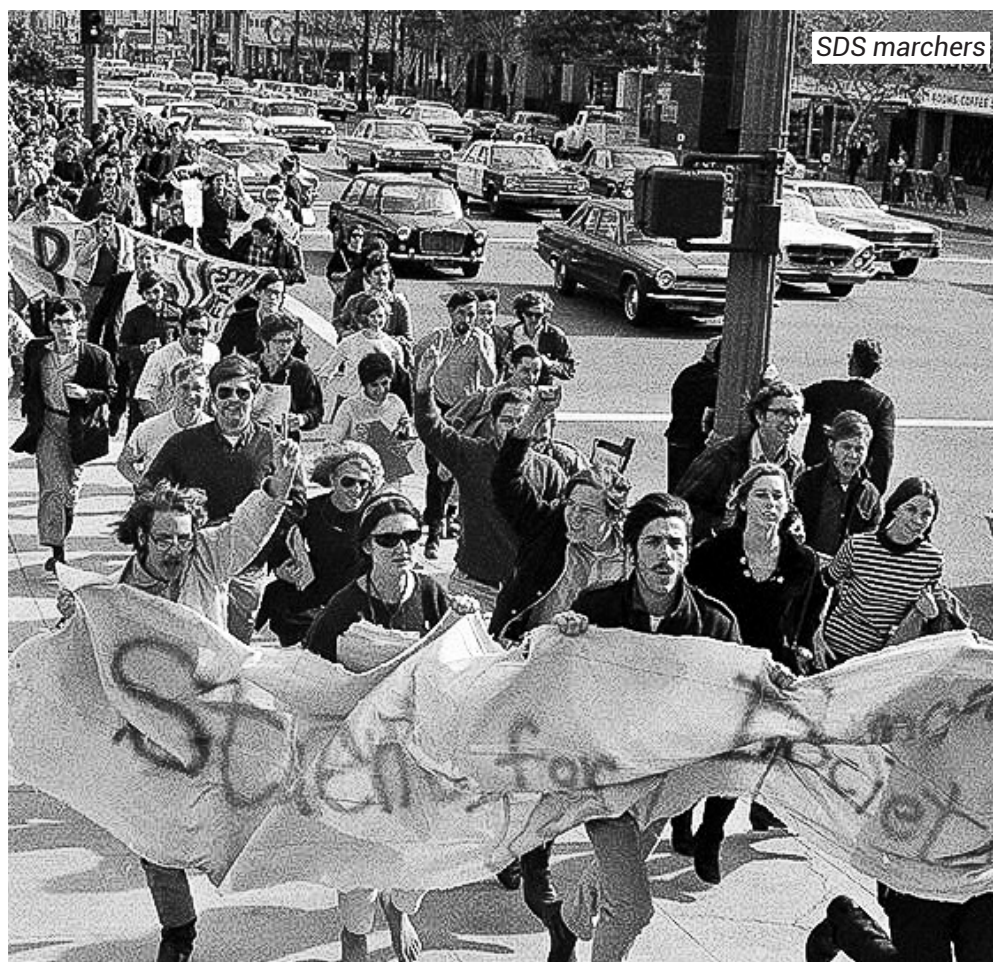
Many of the documents from the ISC/IS are now available online, thanks to the work of the Marxist Internet Archive: see bit.ly/wp-is and bit.ly/is-doc. I have not studied them fully, but such knowledge as I've picked up prompts some comments on the book and the interview.

Authentic

Max Shachtman and the Heterodox Trotskyists of the 1940s insisted (rightly, I think) that they were the authentic continuators of Trotsky's overall ideas, and that the self-styled "Orthodox Trotskyists" had departed from those ideas, pro-Stalinistically.

In the 1950s, however, as Shachtman faded (heart attack 1951, new partner 1951, move to suburban Long Island 1954), and Hal Draper took over as the main writer of the Heterodox Trotskyists (by then called ISL), the take changed. Less "we are the Trotskyists, and the 'Orthodox' are imposters", more "they are the Trotskyists, and we are different".

Higgins cites Gabe Gabrielsky as saying that Draper's "Independent Socialism" was "an entirely new tendency". Draper's actual words were milder: "a new socialist synthesis". Draper cited Marxian, Fabian-Revisionist, anar-



cho-syndicalist, and "Leninist" as the older syntheses.

When the ISC printed Draper's *Two Souls of Socialism* in 1966, the cover had Lenin and Trotsky among the images of the "good" soul. But the valuable "Clipping Books" which Draper produced in the mid-1960s for the Independent Socialist Club campus stalls (yes, they ran stalls every day, followed up by individual discussions with people who showed interest, and frequent well-advertised meetings: that is how they grew, not just by engineering "broad movements" like the Peace and Freedom Party and getting flow from there) — those "Clipping Books" are mostly Draper's own articles from the mid-1950s, not a selection from the whole "Heterodox" tradition.

The "Clipping Books" have much of value, but they are a half-version of the Heterodox tradition, from a period when it was perplexed and losing energy. According to Julius Jacobson, "half the New York membership" (and New York was by far the main centre) were in psychotherapy.

Phyllis Jacobson records that Draper "was remote. He was a wonderfully educated, brilliant guy, who had few real friends in the movement". So he wrote, often very well, but he tended to the scholastic rather than the interventionist.

All that, I think, explains three things.

First, why Draper didn't last long in the ISC/IS. He was reluctant from the start. He seems to have concurred with Phyllis Jacobson's assessment: "we ended up as a sect with practically no members. We ended with zilch", which led her and

Julius Jacobson doing their launch of New Politics (for which Draper wrote) in 1961 on the basis of sponsorship by the Socialist Party's old reformist leader Norman Thomas and agreed access to the SP mailing list. The Jacobsons and Draper were hostile to Shachtman's edging into Democrat and union-boss politicking, but their dissent was not a drive to maintain an independent Marxist organisation.

Draper did excellent work when, later, he turned to writing scholarly exegesis of Marx's writings, often digging out Marx's real meaning from decades of Stalinist "slant" read onto it. But political direction and scholarly exegesis are not the same thing.

Bureaucratic Collectivist

Second: Draper's take on the Stalinist states as "bureaucratic collectivist" fared badly among the post-ISC fragments. Most (including the Australian IS, founded by ex-Berkeley migrant Tom O'Lincoln) abandoned it for versions of "state capitalist" designation, sometimes very poor ones like Tony Cliff's.

The *Introduction to Independent Socialism* "Clipping Book" included a text by Shachtman on "bureaucratic collectivism", but a thin and late one (1954). By then Shachtman had tacitly gone over to Joseph Carter's view, so the text declares: "The first thing to grasp about Stalinism is that world capitalism is at the end of its rope" (emphasis added). Capitalism is collapsing. It could be into bureaucratic collectivism or into socialism. Better the socialist way.

Decades later, Draper's sidekick Ernie

Haberkern told a Workers' Liberty forum in London that the clearest example then in the world of "bureaucratic collectivism" was the International Monetary Fund, because it was more bureaucratic than simple profit-maximisation. That was close to the "convergence theories" popular in the 1970s, according to which the (sort of) liberalising and marketising USSR and the increasingly plan-minded Western powers were converging towards a common future of "industrial society".

Views vary within Workers' Liberty on whether "bureaucratic collectivism" can be rescued. I think not (and that "deformed state capitalism" is a better framework). Probably most in Workers' Liberty disagree with me. However, Draper's stripped-down version of bureaucratic collectivism is now untenable.

Stalinism arose in China because capitalism was "at the end of its rope" there? Look at Taiwan and at mainland China since 1989. In Korea because capitalism was "at the end of its rope" there? In Vietnam ditto? Etc.

Capitalism generates terrible crises and suffering, but it had not come to a halt in the early 1960s, and has not now..

Democratic Centralism

Third: "democratic centralism" became a big issue in the ISC/IS groups. Those who wanted to be more "Trotskyist" also wanted to be more "democratic centralist", but in an addled way.

The term "democratic centralism" was coined by the Russian Mensheviks (yes, Mensheviks, not Bolsheviks) as an approving summary of the organisational changes made by the German Social Democracy (SPD) in 1905 to create more coherence than the ramshackle old structure from its period of illegality (1879-1890). The SPD remained pluralist, more so than the emergency regime which the Bolsheviks had to resort to in the Russian civil war, and nothing like the "Zinovievite" version of "democratic centralism" (called "Bolshevisation") imposed on the Communist Parties in 1924-5.

"Democratic centralism" means, for us, simply an effort to work out the truth of issues, and to seek coherence in action to promote that truth, with wide rights for minorities to voice objections, including publicly. It is the alternative to members being guided more by the immediate pressures on them in their different spheres (in different unions, for example, or when they gain trade-union positions); to a culture of fudge and theoretical indifference; and to a passive, only half-paying-attention, membership which can be manipulated but cannot gain sufficient common conviction for energetic collective activity. The pre-1914 SPD's disease was much more a culture of compromises to reduce conflict than of excessive "centralism".

However, in the ISC/IS, the arguments

were mostly about "democratic centralism" of a "Zinovievite" form (appointment from the central office of local organisers, etc.), with an irrationally hectic perspective (win leadership in the workplaces within a few years by dragging students into factories) and an expulsion-happy culture. Other groups, including ourselves, had ex-students "industrialising" then without the same frenzy. But ISC/IS seemed to flip between frenzy and looseness (don't fuss about "the line", as long as activity looks buoyant and successful).

The "Zinovievism", together with the thinness of the political-cultural base, must be the reason why the ISC/IS was so very split-prone, with at least eight serious splinters between 1969 and 1979. The splits are not explained by a decline in working-class struggle in the USA. The "Orthodox Trotskyist" SWP, weaker than the "Heterodox" YPSL in the early 1960s, had membership growing until the late 1970s. US strike statistics show no sharp fall until the mid 1980s.

The "Heterodox Trotskyist" Workers Party, in its day, had a well-explained alternative both to "Zinovievism" and to flaccidity. But that wasn't presented in

the Clipping Books, and seems never to have got a hearing.

Draper's *Two Souls of Socialism* text, first written in 1960 for Michael Harrington's *Anvil*, a plea for a "from below" "soul" of socialism against the "from above" soul, however, got and still gets a wide hearing.

[Daniel Randall](#) and [I have](#) argued that this most famous text of Draper's is, despite some well-written denunciation of Stalinism, shoddy.

Even in its revised version of 1966, when allocating all varieties of socialism to "from above" or "from below" boxes, it refuses to classify Bolshevism and anarcho-syndicalism.

Its treatment of anarchism is a travesty, equating anarchists in general with the worst of Proudhon and Bakunin. Its treatment of German Social Democracy in its best years is also a travesty (it denounces it as thoroughly socialism-from-above).

"From below" is a poor soft-soap alias for "working class". Many variants of socialism have seen capitalism as being crowded out by socialistic initiatives "from below" (cooperatives, municipal socialism, "liberated zones", etc.) rather

than being overthrown. Consistent working-class socialism seeks to organise the working class, currently "below", to become "above" by overthrowing the capitalist state. Also, on the way, to win reforms legislated "from above" (from the legal ten-hour day onwards).

The text suggests that capitalism will be ousted by one form or another of socialism, whatever we do. Only there are bad socialists who want to do it "from above", and good ones who want it "from below". The difference is a moral rather than a class one.

In his first Clipping Book, Draper included a good 1955 text by himself on "Why the Working Class". But the Independent Socialist Clubs' first manifesto of 1964 is not class politics. It wants a "third party", but "by the labour and civil rights movements and other progressive forces", not a workers' party.

The ISC manifesto wanted a "Third Camp" which is defined as "those who reject both war blocs" (not, as the Workers Party, or all the Trotskyists in 1938-9, had it, as the working class). The difference is not pedantic. In European politics in the late 1940s and early 1950s, "Third Camp" or "Third Force" mostly meant a

hope for Europe, or social democracy, or a Europe led by social democracy, to be a pole against both the USSR and USA.

The ISC/IS's "worker turn" may have been driven as much by "competitive" exigencies as by rational analysis. If young people angry to overthrow capitalism find socialists telling them it can be done quickly (and, in the 1960s, citing say Cuba as an example), and others saying yes, but wait, we want a better socialism, then they are likely to go for the imperfect socialism now (maybe to be improved later). Thus, pressure on IS to "compete" by proposing to do the better socialism quickly, just by getting into factories and soon leading the workers there.

Marx never wanted to be labelled Marxist, Lenin never wanted to be labelled Leninist, and Trotsky never wanted to be labelled Trotskyist. After a while we may have little choice. Saying we are Marxists may convey little, but saying we are not Marxists conveys a lot of bad things. We in Workers' Liberty have little choice now but to go along with the "Third Camp" label, but in awareness of its limitations. □

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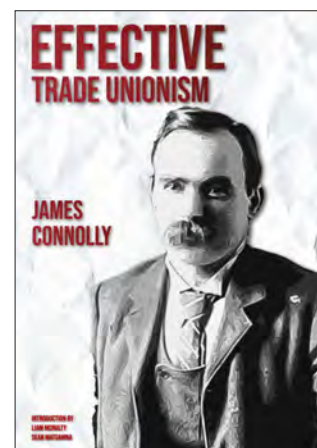
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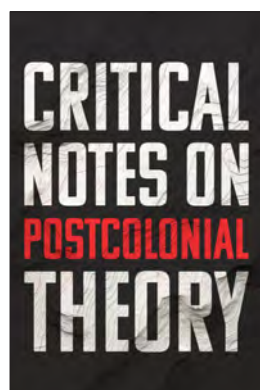
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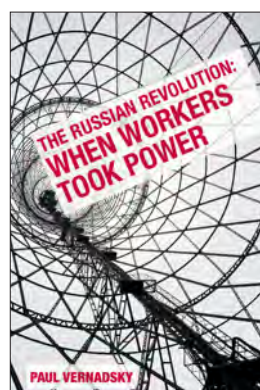
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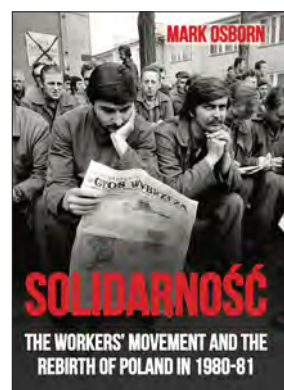
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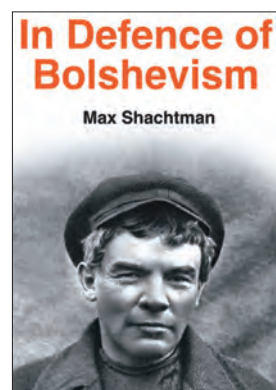
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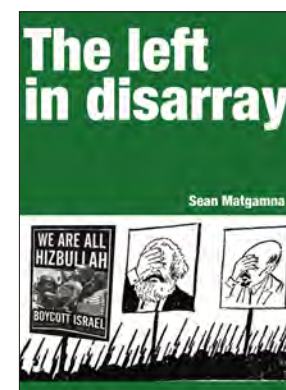
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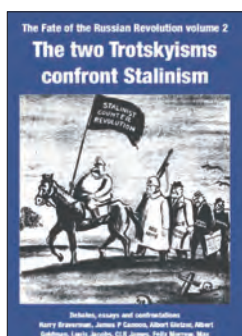
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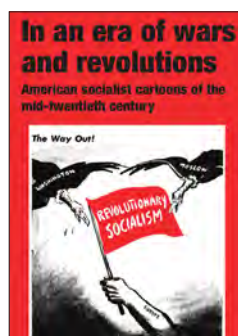
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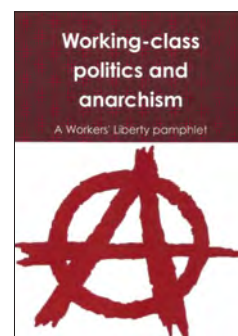
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Political independence of the working class

By Rhodri Evans

This week's "reference point" is Marx's March Address of 1850, a follow-up to the Communist Manifesto of 1848.

In the Manifesto Marx gave us a synthesis of his political movement, between about 1843 and 1847, from philosophic radicalism to a new sort of worker-organising communism.

Others were moving the same way, if not as far or with the same depth of theorising. The 1840s were times of ferment. Famines, not only in Ireland, drove many of the urban poor to anger (and the rural poor too, though more of them to despair). The Chartists in Britain, the world's first organised workers' movement, burgeoned. There was a general strike in large parts of England in 1842.

Conservative, authoritarian regimes, dominated by land magnates, had been imposed on Europe after 1815. The bourgeoisie and sections described as petty bourgeoisie – small workshop operators and shopkeepers, doctors, lawyers, professors, students – had begun to crack those regimes in the 1830s, and were impatient to win civil liberties, at least for themselves.

In February 1848, the same month that the Communist Manifesto was published, revolution erupted in France and then across Europe. The exception, paradoxically, was in Britain, where the Chartists had a limp turnout for their long-planned 10 April 1848 demonstration and then went into decline.

The March Address acknowledged that the Communist League, for whom Marx had written the Manifesto, had been swamped by the upheavals of 1848-9. "Its members everywhere involved themselves energetically in the movement and stood in the front ranks of the only decisively revolutionary class, the proletariat, in the press, on the barricades and on the battlefields... [However] a large number of members who were directly involved in the movement thought that the time for secret societies was over and that public action alone was sufficient. The individual districts and communes allowed their connections with the Central Committee to weaken and gradually become dormant.

"So, while the democratic party, the party of the petty bourgeoisie, has become more and more organised in Germany, the workers' party has lost its only firm foothold, remaining organised at best in individual localities for local purposes; within the general movement it has consequently come under the complete domination and leadership of the petty-bourgeois democrats. This situation cannot be allowed to continue; the independence of the workers must be restored".

According to David Riazanov, we should read there a critical verdict by Marx on his own activity, which had



Town Hall, Paris, February 1848

centred on editing the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, a radical-democratic paper with increasing communistic content, from June 1848 to May 1849, when it was banned.

Subsided

By March 1850 revolutionary tumult had subsided. Marx, Engels, and others, however, still refused to accept defeat. The March 1850 Address expected a new and more radical upsurge.

It would be led first by the democratic bourgeoisie. The League should be on their side against the reactionaries. But "instead of lowering themselves to the level of an applauding chorus, the workers, and above all the League, must work for the creation of an independent organisation of the workers' party, both secret and open, and alongside the official democrats, and the League must aim to make every one of its communes a centre and nucleus of workers' associations... Their battle cry must be: The Revolution in Permanence".

The "moderate" bourgeois liberals had hastened to declare the 1848 revolutions "completed" as soon as the kings and emperors had offered even limited constitutional monarchies. The liberals now wanted to stop disorder escalating "out of hand".

The democrats (then considered a different current from the liberals), wanted the revolutions instead to be "permanent" in the sense of continuing and deepening. The communists too, of course. And, warned Marx, the democrats too, if they gained the lead, would declare the revolution completed long before meeting the demands of the workers and urban poor.

Vladimir Lenin, according to David Riazanov, knew the March Address by heart. His tactic in 1904-6 (the oddly-named "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry", a Provisional Government within a bourgeois envelope but pushing that envelope to the maximum), was near to a direct transposition of the politics of the Address. It, however, had a much more developed perspective on revolutionary

mobilisation of the peasantry. The Address had nothing about the peasants, and in fact they played little role in 1848-9.

Leon Trotsky's revival of the slogan, "permanent revolution", in Russia, developed in 1904-6, was based on Marx's 1850 ideas, but went further, limning development to a workers' government by way of revolution in Russia linking up with revolutions in more industrially advanced countries.

The development of the working class in Europe in 1848 was weak compared to 1904-6, and Marx mostly instead aimed "at forming not the government party of the future but the opposition party of the future", and pushing the future "government party" to the maximum.

"They must check in every way and as far as is possible the victory euphoria and enthusiasm for the new situation which follow every successful street battle, with a cool and cold-blooded analysis of the situation and with undisguised mistrust of the new government. Alongside the new official governments they must simultaneously establish their own revolutionary workers' governments, either in the form of local executive committees and councils or through workers' clubs or committees, so that the bourgeois-democratic governments not only immediately lose the support of the workers but find themselves from the very beginning supervised and threatened by authorities behind which stand the whole mass of the workers".

Lull

By September 1850, Marx and Engels had concluded that the lull was more than a lull. The tumult was over for now. The revolutionaries must turn to long-haul organising. The Communist League split and then dispersed.

Marx criticised those who still talked about uprisings in the short term. "A German national standpoint was substituted for the universal outlook of the Manifesto, and the national feelings of the German artisans were pandered to. The materialist standpoint of the Manifesto has given way to idealism.

"The revolution is seen not as the product of realities of the situation but as the result of an effort of will. Whereas we say to the workers: You have 15, 20, 50 years of civil war to go through in order to alter the situation and to train yourselves for the exercise of power, it is said: We must take power at once, or else we may as well take to our beds.

"Just as the democrats abused the word 'people' so now the word 'proletariat' has been used as a mere phrase. To make this phrase effective it would be necessary to describe all the petty bourgeois as proletarians and consequently in practice represent the petty bourgeois and not the proletarians. The actual revolutionary process would have to be replaced by revolutionary catchwords...

"Some members of the League have called the defenders of the Manifesto reactionaries, seeking thereby to make them unpopular, which however does not worry them in the least, as they do not seek popularity".

Conventional story

The conventional story is that Marx then stepped out of active politics for over ten years to study in the British Museum instead. It is not really true. He continued active enough that when the First International was formed in 1864, the organisers saw him as the immediate choice to represent German workers on its General Council in London.

He did, however, regard many of the radical efforts of the 1850s as flim-flam. He was not above weighing in on the squabbles from time to time, as with *The Great Men of the Exile* (1852) and *Herr Vogt* (1860), but perhaps it is a verdict on the political thinness of those years that few have taken those texts as important reference points for later politics.

He and Engels wrote analyses of 1848 and after, of which at least one (*The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, 1852) must rank as a reference point. After that, his major writings, such as *Capital* (published 1867, at the end of a series of reworkings starting with a would-be complete draft in 1857-8) would be the product of sustained effort to gain an overview of capitalism and its tendencies of development. On that basis, he would develop reference points going further again than the March Address.

The March Address is online at bit.ly/march-a. Audio version at bit.ly/march-aa. David Riazanov's *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels*, a short biography with nevertheless a lot on 1847-52, is useful background. Workers' Liberty notes for study groups on the March Address: bit.ly/dp-march □

Bas Hardy's "In retrospect" column will be back for Solidarity 771

The SWP and its “crisis of leadership”

By Matt Cooper

There is a crisis of leadership in the Socialist Workers Party. Its leading body, the Central Committee (CC), described itself, even before January's purge of its four most experienced members, as having “changed in recent years ... it is a younger, less experienced body, and carries less political weight within the party than it once did, while also being somewhat more hands-on in directing the day-to-day operation of the party.” Maybe as a result, the SWP now seems to be thrashing around for a clear political direction: clinging to its key front, Stand Up to Racism, and looking to the milieu around Palestine solidarity, but without a clear perspective beyond “build the SWP”.

Attempts at building continuity in its leadership as its older generation that fell away have been hollowed out. The fallout from the disintegration of Respect in 2007 led to the group around Lindsey German and John Rees, which became Counterfire, leaving in 2009. The 2011-3 scandal over the SWP leadership's use of the “party machine” to sideline charges against Martin Smith, national secretary and then a CC member, led to a big outflow of experienced members as well as younger ones. (And, of course, Smith himself eventually withdrew too).

By 2014, a much-reduced leadership had emerged round Alex Callinicos, long prominent, though mostly as a polished writer-up of ideas initiated by others, and “loyalist” organisers. The implosion of the SWP's student work after 2013 limited recruitment. Some of the younger leaders who have emerged since came in as the children of aged SWP members, not as youngsters first attracted by campus activity.

Meanwhile, the SWP tried to put the 2013 crisis to rest. In April 2024, it finally issued an apology, admitting that it had failed the women who brought complaints.

Later that year, Amy Leather, a leading defender of Smith in 2011-3, stepped down from the CC. Charlie Kimber stood down as editor of *Socialist Worker*, though he remained on the CC. None of that was publicly linked to 2013.

In the first pre-conference bulletin (PB) of October 2025, a largely unchanged CC slate was announced, with the remaining veterans of 2011-3 still in place. (In the SWP, each new CC is elected via a slate proposed by the outgoing CC. Workers' Liberty has never had anything like that). Then PB3 in December announced that the four veterans, including Callinicos, would stand down from the CC to mark a break with the events of 2013.

It is hardly a clean break, because Alex Callinicos continues to write a regular *Socialist Worker* column which is, in effect, the SW “editorial” for thinking read-



Pic: @gibography2001

ers, the official “editorial” usually being just an exercise in rah-rah. And we don't know whether it happened because Callinicos had just got old and tired, or because some person or group was pushing to take his place as the “theorist”.

Floundering

In any case it has left the SWP with a hollowed-out leadership, and floundering. At the January 2025 conference, the SWP launched the perspective that became Summit of Resistance/We Demand Change (WDC). In its own words, the SWP wanted to become “hegemonic on the radical left”. WDC was launched with a “Summit of Resistance” in London in March 2025, co-hosted with Jeremy Corbyn's Peace and Justice Project.

The “summit” drew 2,000 people. But from the start the purpose of the exercise was unclear. The SWP first suggested it could launch an electoral front, then retreated. It announced that similar Summits of Resistance would be held across the country, but few appeared. It promised a “day of rage” when disability cuts came, but WDC actually organised nothing specific against those specific cuts. (That was left to Labour MPs and CLPs and disabled campaigners, who in the end pushed Starmer back).

When Corbyn was bounced by Zarah Sultana into announcing Your Party in July 2025, WDC was put into cold storage. But the SWP was no clearer about Your Party. In some areas it launched its own Your Party-supporting rallies, in competition with other “proto-branches”. Elsewhere it joined “proto-branches” more ecumenically. In many places it did little. The SWP had members expelled by the YP “office”, amidst great publicity, but made no effort to unite the YP left against the exclusions. Its YP activity quietly faded away.

The SWP limits written debate (except inside the CC, maybe? but no-one knows) to a three-month pre-conference period and three PBs. Even that debate

lacks structure. There are motions, but then conference “commissions” absorb disagreement into vague formulations to be voted on. The SWP claims it has three months of debate, a decision, and then a period of testing the line in practice. In reality, the pre-conference period functions more like a sounding board: criticisms are registered, softened, and absorbed, rather than debated and clarified.

Labour movement

In the run-up to the January 2026 conference, leading SWP trade unionists Jess Edwards and Sean Vernell argued that workplace work had been deprioritised and poorly thought through; that opportunities around Palestine solidarity, anti-racism, and rep-level organisation were not receiving sufficient attention; and urged We Demand Change be revived as a focus for “well-fare not warfare” agitation.

Workers' Liberty disagrees with the politics of Edwards and Vernell. But at least they were thinking about how to develop a political fight inside the labour movement.

Edwards and Vernell gained no clear debate. The post-conference document records commissions duly endorsed by conference, but not a worked-out strategy. It declares an “urgent need for a left electoral challenge to Labour” and, even in January 2026, still looks to Your Party under “collective leadership, including both Corbyn and Sultana”. (By the time the document was published, the SWP had already, de facto, recognised that perspective was fantasy).

In the section of the post-conference document on “Turning the tide”, the SWP states that racism is the glue holding together the far right and motivating many of its voters. But its answer is that “this requires an anti-racist response” and that “our challenge is to present the anti-racist and anti-fascist movement as part of a viable alternative”. But how does that undo the glue? And how does a “love is back” Together Alliance march

become a viable political alternative?

Workers' Liberty argues that trade unions should organise their own anti-racist and internationalist work — drawing workers into activity through union structures, strengthening the rank and file, transforming the labour movement, and relating those outside the unions to it through labour-movement campaigns — instead of outsourcing it to NGO-like “fronts”. It is not that the SWP rejects that idea; it is rather that it seems incapable of debating it.

Since the collapse of any realistic hope that Your Party would become the electoral umbrella the SWP wanted, its politics have dissipated further. In Gorton and Denton it called for a Green vote as a holding position for the socialist Your Party it still hoped would emerge. When the Corbyn clique finally shot that fox, the SWP had no plan B.

In Makerfield (where the Greens had only a paper candidate) the SWP would not call for a Labour vote, the only vote that could stop Reform. Instead it said that many Burnham voters were an audience the anti-racist movement could tap into. And what was proposed? A picnic and Love Music Hate Racism events.

“Build the SWP” is the old reliable slogan, but much of the necessary infrastructure even for that — paper sales, street stalls, well-advertised public meetings, educationals — is in decay. Very often SWPers appear in public more as fix-it people for this or that “broad campaign” or front, or as trade-union functionaries, rather than as political socialists.

The old leadership machine has gone. The new one is thinner, less experienced, and more dependent on fronts whose only purpose is to funnel potential recruits towards the SWP, and which do not even serve that purpose. The result is not SWP hegemony on the left, or even, it seems, real SWP CC intellectual “hegemony” in the SWP. It is drift. □

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Forty years of questioning

Janine Booth talking with Hel Spandler

Asylum, the radical mental health magazine, is celebrating its 40th anniversary. Janine Booth spoke with its editor, Hel Spandler.

Why and how was Asylum set up?

Asylum started in Spring 1986, as the government was closing asylums and introducing "community care". There was consensus that asylums were bad, but the UK had a right-wing Conservative government, so there wouldn't be much community or care. It was as much about money. Asylums were sold off and turned into luxury flats.

Some of Asylum's founders were inspired by Trieste, a more collective, radical mental health initiative in Italy. We wanted to introduce these ideas in the UK, and promote collective provision and responsibility, rather than leaving people to their own devices.

Tell us more about Trieste.

Franco and Franca Basaglia, and mental health workers and patients, wanted to close the asylums for more progressive reasons. Franco Basaglia was a Marxist and an anti-fascist, and in Trieste, they opened up the asylum buildings to the community and created worker-patient cooperatives, with film showings, workshops and creative activities.

The book which helped inspire the Italian movement, *The Institution Negated*, has just been translated into English by John Foot. He also wrote *The Man Who Closed the Asylums* about its history. Trieste still exists, although not in the same form, and is still a global flagship for progressive mental health initiatives.

Asylum's original strapline was "a magazine for democratic psychiatry". What does that mean?

The movement in Trieste was called democratic psychiatry, *psichiatria democratica*. It signalled our aspiration for mental health services to be more democratic, involving patients, workers, family members, friends and the public in decision-making.

Asylum's strapline is now "the radical mental health magazine". Why the change?

We realised that the democratic psychiatry movement was still psychiatrist-led. We were criticised by some survivors who said that psychiatry can never be democratic. Also, mental health services are about more than psychiatry. "Mental health" is a problematic term, but it's the term that people use, and it's possible to have a radical take on it.

Asylum covers the institutional mistreatment of people experiencing mental distress. Why?

No other media does. When people with mental health conditions are covered in the media, it's either they've overcome their struggles or done terrible things. They are one of the most oppressed and marginalised groups in society and are more likely to be victims of abuse than perpetrators. But even otherwise progressive people still use "mad", "crazy" and "bonkers" as terms of abuse. When survivors say what's happened to them, they're often not believed. It's important that someone's standing up for them.

Why is platforming service users important?

They are not listened to in society, unless they endorse a particular narrative. New civil rights movements like the neurodiversity and trans movements are covered in the press, albeit not always positively, but few people even know about the survivors' movement. Asylum platforms workers and activists as well as service users.

The mainstream narrative is that mental health is an individual, medical issue, where people need to be treated or locked away. How does Asylum challenge that?

By a multitude of voices putting forward alternative perspectives. By highlighting that while mental health conditions are felt personally, they are collective, and often relate to political, social, economic and environmental issues. For instance, there are links between poverty, sexism, transphobia,



such as forced treatment, sectioning, and not being believed. Sometimes what unions demand isn't helpful to patients.

The anarchist left has been more receptive to some of the radical ideas in Asylum.

Why does Asylum include poetry and artwork?

When I started reading the magazine, there was poetry and other creative stuff, but there were lots of long-winded essays. Articles might get in your head, but sometimes poems and images get in your heart. People experience the world differently and get messages differently. Some people like reading long reams of text, but some don't. There's a long history of patients and survivors getting across complex, critical messages in more creative ways, like cartoons. I recently wrote a chapter about single-panel cartoons in Asylum. We also include stories, both personal and fiction, and recent Asylum cover images have been like home-made placards you see on demos.

What has Asylum achieved in its 40 years, and what do you hope it will achieve in the next 40?

I guess it's created a community of people who write, buy and circulate the mag. Validating people's experiences is a massive achievement. Whether it gets into the corridors of power is another matter. But it does get around. Our recent article on the dangers of Palantir in the NHS was circulated at a Unison meeting.

It's an achievement to be still here after 40 years. Lots of things in this field are short-term.

There is nothing else like Asylum in the UK. People sometimes ask us how to set something up in their country. Last year in Kosovo, people set up a magazine, (*Çmendje*, in Albanian, directly influenced by Asylum).

In the next 40 years, I'd like to see new voices tackling new issues. Stop OxeVision, which campaigns to stop the use of CCTV cameras in psychiatric wards, took over an issue of Asylum last year. The Neuromancers are taking over the next issue. They are young neurodivergent people challenging society in wonderfully creative ways.

Asylum is open to new ideas. What matters to us is having an open discussion about radical mental health politics, not a preset agenda. □

• More online: bit.ly/40yr-a

The Portuguese Workers' Revolution 1974-5



Mark Osborn

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

workersliberty.org/publications

Teachers' wildcat strikes push back government

By Dyonissis Zoes

School teachers in and around Liège, in Belgium, have been striking for weeks now against government cuts, and will continue to strike until the term ends on 4 July.

These cuts have been coming for two years, but now the two ministers in charge are saying they want to discuss and they're asking for a truce. It shows that if we organise together, they have to listen.

On 23 April, the government sent documents to the headmasters and directors of school on implementing the cuts, "pending approbation by vote".

The unions said it was going to be difficult to get people moving, because the spring holidays were coming. But a few teachers here in Liège, who had some experience with strikes to defend vocational schools, said: "We're not going to wait for the union, we're going to take charge this time".

We had everything planned before we got back to school on the Monday 10 May. On Monday some schools were already on strike, and by Wednesday almost all the schools of our city and the surrounding area were on strike.

It was not a little symbolic strike, as we sometimes do. It was a full-on strike with doors blocked and people on the pavement outside the schools to stop people going in.

The unions were surprised, but then said, well, now we have some arguments to go and talk to the government.

When you're a teacher and you're on strike, your boss saves money but you lose money. This time we organised so



Demonstrators in Brussels, 14 June

that 10% or 5% of teachers were explicitly striking, and the others could get their full salaries even though they weren't in school because they were blocked at the school doors.

We don't want the kids to go back to school for the exams that would usually happen now. There are external exams every year. They are quite easy, but if you fail you may have to repeat the year. We are saying that all the students should go on to the next year.

The strike organisation is very informal, lots of different people gathering in the room, not always the same people, but representing the different schools. We have Catholic schools, we have public schools, we have semi-public schools, and all those different networks are represented by people who are mo-

tivated and have energy that week. And then the next week there'll be different people with different opinions, so it's very organic, and that's why it's working out this time.

The tuition fees for colleges and universities are also going up, some of them eight fold, so lots of students have been with us on the streets defending their right to affordable tuition.

After summer

After the summer, we want to keep the action going. We want to force the powers in place to give more power to the teams and to the schools. People in offices in Brussels decide, and they're disconnected from the realities of the different cities and the different places where people are taught, and we need to

have something that is based on a real consultation of the needs of the people there and the students.

In Brussels, they have only recently started teachers' general strikes, like we've been having for a month. I think because they're in Brussels, where the government is, they went the lobbying way, and with actions that were very visible in the media and on social networks. They thought it was their part of the solution, and honestly both were important.

These measures we've been striking against have been two years in the making. The regional government has now voted for some measures to save money on salaries. People didn't want to be the victims of these managerial decisions that are quite lazy.

As usual in Belgium, we have different layers of powers — federal, region, community — managing the same thing, and they're wasting lots of money on all these layers of power.

The federal government right now is saving as much money as they can, because they want to invest more in the army — invest 2% of the GDP in, basically, American weapons every year. We also have the demographics against us, because fewer people are working-age, and more and more people in retirement.

The demographics are better in Flanders, but they're running low on tax money too, and so they're discussing raising VAT. There are school cuts going on in the Flemish region, but they are a bit lighter, and they are not cutting salaries. There have been two days of strike there, too, but it's less visible. □

GCU strikes against job cuts

By Dale Street

Members of EIS-ULA — the Higher Education section of the Scottish teachers union EIS — are staging a series of staggered strikes at Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) through June to September in opposition to a proposed 100 job cuts.

GCU management announced in March its plan to cut a hundred jobs. The reason they gave was the fall in income arising from the fall in the number of its foreign students, a direct result of the government's clampdown on granting student visas.

But GCU has around £94 millions in reserves, one of the largest cash reserves in any of the post-1992 universities in Scotland. Some of this could be used as interim spending until

University finances recover from the impact of the fall in foreign-student numbers, especially given that GCU says that it needs to make a saving of just £2.4 millions.

Rationale

The rationale offered for the cuts does not align with the targets of the cuts. Some of the courses which GCU is proposing to cut back on have no foreign students, or only a minimal number.

EIS-ULA is also highlighting the damaging impact of the cuts in terms of academic provision for students, and the increased workloads of remaining staff.

But management's refusal to back down on its proposals, including its failure to guarantee no compulsory redundancies, led to a consultative ballot and

then the legally required ballot of EIS-ULA members at GCU. Both produced overwhelming majorities for action.

UCU (teaching staff) and Unison (admin staff) are also currently conducting ballots on strikes, and Unite (janitorial and facilities staff) may do likewise as well.

Freshers

EIS-FELA strikes took place this week to coincide with the GCU's three graduation days. Another strike is scheduled for clearing day in August (for would-be students who have not yet been offered a university place), and then three days of strikes in September, to coincide with freshers week.

Picket lines have been organised for each strike day, starting at 8am at the Cowcaddens Road entrance. □

Resident doctors end dispute

By Wade Ferguson

Resident doctors in England have narrowly voted to accept the government's offer and end their three-year dispute.

The pay element of the deal means residents will receive on average 2.6% more over two years, on top of the 3.5%

residents were already in line to get this year after our most recent pay review. Our next pay review is in April 2027.

The non-pay element includes 4,500 additional training places and funding for professional exams, portfolios and other costs that doctors routinely spend thousands on.

52.9% of members voted yes to the deal, on a turnout of 57.3%. Residents will now wait to see whether the next pay review marks further progress to full pay restoration to 2008 levels. If it does not, a fresh ballot is likely, possibly using electronic ballot regulations that are expected to come into force in August 2026. □



Isolated “content consumption” vs deep reading and discussing

By Ruth Cashman

I am very pro people reading. I work in a library. Last year when I was asked what session I would put on for Ideas For Freedom, Workers' Liberty's weekend of discussion, debate, and education, I proposed a session “Why you should read books”. I write for and sell a newspaper.

I agree with James Marriott and Daniel Randall that there is an interconnected problem of media literacy, reading, social media and thinking. I am worried about that.

Marriott argues we are all becoming stupider because smartphones mean we are not reading books. Books are uniquely good, complex thinking is inseparable from reading and writing and underpins democracy and social progress.

Marriott's initial essay contained serious errors which were largely avoided by Daniel. If we are going to have a prolonged debate in the paper on the essay, those need to be addressed.

Lots of factors drove a massive increase in reading in Victorian Britain. The technology was in place (better cheaper paper and faster printing); literacy increased dramatically, rising wages because of unions and reduced tariffs affecting food meant more people could afford books; the removal of the window tax in 1851 meant people could see books inside their homes. Material conditions are many faceted. Reading is so intertwined into our lives that many factors affect how and what we read.

Full picture

Of course, smartphones and social media are part of the issue, but they are not the full picture.

Standardised testing has a corrosive effect on children and young people's engagement with text. Instead of teaching people to read whole books, to think to be intellectually curious, we teach them to pass tests, often with crafted model answer frameworks. Before working in a library, I worked on a phoneline for the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) the Quango responsible for developing and maintaining the National Curriculum in England. I worked there during the 2008 SATs fiasco where the system performed so badly that the QCA and KS3 SATs were both abolished.

After the announcement of the end of SATs a teacher called me to ask if the end of the KS3 tests meant he should start teaching the whole book rather than one scene of a Shakespeare play. I told him he was always supposed to be teaching the whole book but in truth

his method was the logic of the entire system — drum in test answers, not discover literature.

Marriott also gives no attention at all to austerity; its effect on education and literacy. Could the fact hundreds of libraries have closed, that education at all levels is in funding crisis, that people are poorer with less social support have any bearing on reading habits? There are many other factors to consider the mental health crisis, health effects of covid which are ignored to fuel the simplistic reading.

Marriott makes the absurd claim that the “world of print is orderly, logical and rational” in contrast to the “more emotional, more angry, more chaotic” non print form. It is certainly true that “to engage with the written word”, as the media theorist Neil Postman wrote, can be “to follow a line of thought, which requires considerable powers of classifying, inference-making and reasoning.”

Overstate

Books have many advantages, you can experience ideas from another time and space, you can go back and check, writing helps us clarify things. But we should not overstate their difference, and we certainly should not claim the difference between writing and speaking is that of reason vs emotion.

A series of lectures or in-person meetings does not need to be angry or unreasoned. It would be terrible if we were to lose deep reading and writing but also terrible if we lost human speech and listening. The spoken and written word overlap and inform each other for good and ill.

The fact that Marriott thinks TikTok is uniquely dangerous because you “can charm your audience into submission” suggests to me he has not read many books or love letters. Are books not too spaces of “rage”? Do they not cause people to “weep”? *Treasure Island* is clever and crafted; it is also exciting. *The Colour Purple* can teach you things and make you cry. Reading Marx can teach you economics, make you sad, make you laugh, make you angry.

Much of the potential of literature is the exact opposite of the order and calm Marriott projects. As Keats said of Shakespeare: “...several things dovetailed in my mind, and at once it struck me what quality went to form a Man of Achievement, especially in Literature, and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously — I mean Negative Capability, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching

after fact and reason...”

Some books benefit from clarity and clear reasoned argument, others make you think because you have to work to understand them and leave some questions unanswered. *If on a winter's night a traveller*, the 1979 experimental novel by Italo Calvino, will teach you more about reading and writing than Marriott. It is also chaotic. It is the complexity possible in the written form that makes creating such dizzying, beautiful chaos possible.

Marriott's desire to place books in a special category also leads him to ignore that the “post-literacy” deep-reading problem is happening in other areas too. The majority of films are designed to be watched whilst double screening. Plot points are repeated, themes are literally explained in dialogue, every so often there will be something very loud to get your attention, leading to patronising and unedifying experiences.

There are fewer public debates, fewer in-person meetings, fewer in-public intellectuals. Speech has not taken over text; complex public and social intellectual life has been pushed out in favour of isolated content consumption. The public infrastructure of social democracy — reading groups, workers' education — have disappeared with the defeat of the labour movement.

Daniel does not pretend Marriott is a socialist but his belief in enlightened administration as the route out of our current crisis is wrapped up in his thesis, it is not simply incidental.

Moved

He speaks of illiterate medieval peasants as “moved by irrational appeals and prone to mob thinking.” Certainly, we would not want our political programme decided by medieval peasants — but were they wrong to be moved? Medieval peasant mobs carried out militant actions against tyrannical rule, they drove more social progress than the Catholic scholars who wrote and read extensively. Is it only books that distinguishes the worker from the peasant? Is the world divided simply into periods and classes of reader and non-reader?

Daniel has written convincingly on how much of the left lost its way when it split the political off from the economic, and political action assumed an overdetermining intellectual, moral and voluntarist character. It seems odd to me that he is so soft on this liberal variant.

Reports of the death of

reading are greatly exaggerated and often repeated

We should know we are not alone in worrying about the loss of deep reading. As long as there has been mass reading there has been fears that we are doing it less, or doing it wrong.

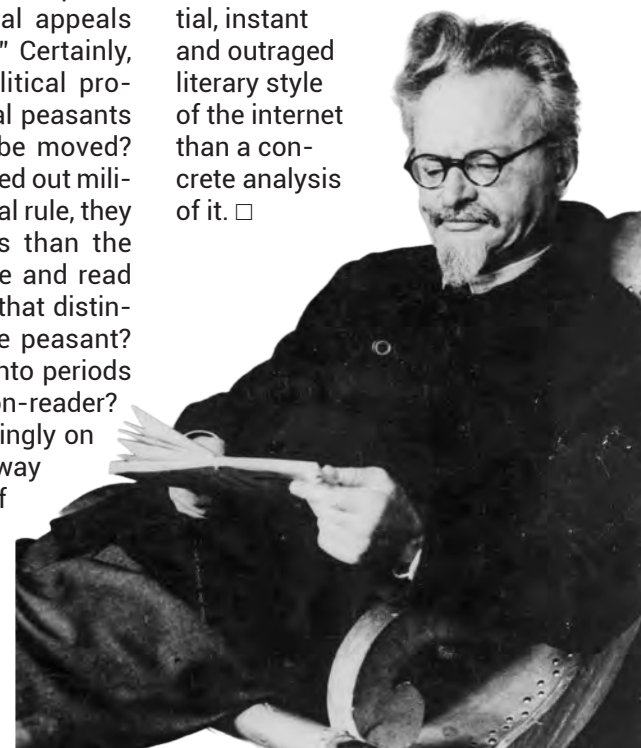
Assassins

Cheap novels, radio, cinema, literary cliquishness, narcissistic autofiction, academic pretensions — many potential assassins have been accused since the “reading revolution”. Literary rescue missions pepper the history of writing. Medieval Latin was shaken up by renaissance bad boys Dante and Petrarch. The Romantic poets insisted on writing in “the language really used by men”. Bell hooks drags a new oral tradition into scholarly writing.

New social movements and struggles will emerge and with them will bring more culture including reading and writing that demands sustained attention. It is possible we cannot reinvigorate writing without reinvigorating our broader social world, as Trotsky says “to create it, the poet himself must feel the world in a new way”.

We are right to worry and sound the alarm, because that is part of the process by which writing reinvents itself, but we should not imagine we are inevitably walking into literary oblivion. Marriott sets out to convince us that if nobody ever read a book again the world would be a lot worse — sure, is anyone arguing the contrary?

My primary worry with Marriott is that his writing is more of a manifestation of the insubstantial, instant and outraged literary style of the internet than a concrete analysis of it. □



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

Unison 2026: “far from out of the woods”

By Vicki Morris

The National Delegate Conference (NDC), 16-19 June 2026 in Brighton, of the big public service union Unison was a cagey affair. It was the first with socialist Andrea Egan as General Secretary, but the union still has a majority right-wing National Executive Council (NEC).

In contrast to some recent years, Egan had a lot of goodwill from the conference floor, and she assiduously worked the fringe circuit. But we are far from out of the woods as regards witch-hunting of the left, and the policy and campaign agenda is moving only painfully slowly toward real action.

Key debates included the following:

- Increasing participation of low paid women in Unison – while this is a worthy ambition some delegates pointed out that we should mainly show ambition to end low pay.
- Justice for migrant workers – Unison has begun to do good work mobilising against the Government's anti-migrant policies, particularly those affecting members working in health and social care.
- Organising to Win – this is the ostensibly left-wing strategy to change the union from servicing individual members to using our collective strength to make real gains on pay, etc.
- Trans rights in the light of the EHRC guidance – good policy was passed, but transphobic delegates felt bold enough to speak and were largely unchallenged by the chair.
- Building on the Employment Rights Act – there is frustration at the slow progress toward abolishing the 50% ballot threshold.
- Israel/Palestine – from the tenor of the debate it seems likely that there

could be a concerted effort by the SWP and others next year to overturn Unison's "two states" position.

- Welfare not warfare – there was bigger than expected resistance to this policy passing.

On the penultimate day the Standing Orders Committee (SOC) pulled Lambeth branch delegates Ruth Cashman and Simon Hannah up for distributing the text of their branch's emergency motion on trans rights, which the SOC had not printed in the conference motions booklet for fear of "legal jeopardy". It's not clear what rules the Lambeth comrades were deemed to have broken.

Expelled

On Friday morning they were expelled from the conference. Supportive delegates raised points of order to ask why, and point out that transphobic speakers were still in the hall, but the chair shut down this debate. Many branches put in complaints – we hope that this will lead to the General Secretary launching an investigation into how the SOC and the conference chair behaved. Ruth and Simon addressed a lively, impromptu demonstration outside the conference centre at lunchtime.

Lambeth's motion has been available on the branch's website since they first passed it.

Angela Rayner MP was the NEC's pick for guest speaker, announced at short notice and received less than rapturously – for starters, many delegates know that Unite suspended Rayner from membership for her lack of support for the striking Birmingham bin workers.

The new right-wing presidential team that starts office from the end of NDC includes Micaela Tracey-Ramos, a supporter of the Communist Party of Britain. In the coming year we will need to expose



the politics of this organisation, particularly its opposition to trans rights.

The Time For Real Change (TFRC) fringe meeting was well-attended but a missed opportunity. It was neither a celebration of Andrea Egan's victory nor a real opportunity to discuss tactics in the new situation. It went on far too long, with too many top table speakers – John McDonnell is far better as a socialist MP than as a chair.

Egan's General Secretary conference speech contained some good passages, and even snuck in some imagery from the Communist Manifesto. She talked about the need to change the union so it can mobilise its members to be a real working-class force that can lead in society.

An important element in this will be defending victimised reps, such as Tom Barker and Ameen Hadi, against their employers but also standing up for left-wing reps and delegates, such as Ruth Cashman and Simon Hannah, against the union bureaucracy. □

Kino Eye

Au Revoir Les Enfants

By John Cunningham

Another "school" film, but this time the school concerned is not "unruly", at least not in the conventional sense.

Based on his own experience as a child at a Catholic boarding school in France during World War Two, Louis Malle's film *Au Revoir Les Enfants* (Goodbye Children) concerns the efforts of the school authorities to hide a Jewish boy, Jean Bonnet (played by Raphael Fejtő), from the authorities. Julien Quentin (Gaspard Manessa), a pupil at the school, senses there is something unusual

about the new boy.

The headmaster, Père Jacques (based on a real person), is an anti-Nazi and keeps a large map of the Eastern front hidden behind a curtain. He shows the map to the pupils regularly and keeps them up to date on the progress of the war.

Quentin soon works out that Bonnet is Jewish – real name, Kippelstein – after overhearing him quietly reciting Jewish prayers at bedtime. He helps the new boy and they become friends. It is a fraught situation which has to be carefully navigated. An unguarded casual remark,

or worse, the action of an informer, could spell disaster for Bonnet and the headmaster.

Eventually, they are betrayed by a disgruntled kitchen worker who has just been sacked for selling provisions on the black market. The Gestapo turn up and take away Bonnet, two other Jewish pupils and Père Jacques. All of them meet a grim fate. Père Jacques died in Linz, Austria after a period in Mauthausen concentration camp. □

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

Pushing for “our work, our way”

By a PCS member

As June ends, members of the PCS Union in the Ministry of Housing (MHCLG) are nine weeks into their campaign of action short of strike (ASOS) in support of their long-running Our Work, Our Way [dispute](#). Under the ASOS, they refuse “attendance requirements” and work from home or in office as they wish.

In its origin, the PCS MHCLG campaign brought together three broad issues:

- The closure of six MHCLG offices, with staff told to choose between “voluntary” redundancy, 100% home working, or long and more expensive journeys to new offices.

- Location and recruitment issues focussed on management’s proposals to remove the right of staff to apply for any post with MHCLG and, if successful, to retain their existing home office, and to effectively run down certain offices (additional to the office closures) by restricting external recruitment to favoured offices. (A recipe for further closures and frozen careers).

- Management’s imposition of individual office attendance requirements on staff allocated to the remaining offices – 50% of contracted hours in most of-

fices, 40% in the others, with a declared intention of moving to 60%, with the variations reflecting insufficient office space

Despite substantial strike and other action last year, management has now closed all the offices with the exception of Birmingham and Warrington, which they still plan to close. Management has also hitherto resisted PCS’s demand for (inevitably reduced) office facilities in the affected areas to enable members to work in an office from time to time with colleagues if they so wish or need to do. Yet movement on the local office space issue would be an easy concession for management.

Similarly, management could easily shift on location and recruitment. For a considerable period MHCLG ran with a “location neutral” policy that allowed staff to apply for posts anywhere in the Department while retaining their current work location, increasing career opportunities and contributing to the Government’s claimed desire to increase opportunities in the regions.

Discussions

Earlier in June, MHCLG representatives reported to members that management wanted to discuss some issues relevant to the dispute. Representatives should be very clear that:

They now need to see substantial movement on location and recruitment issues and upon office spaces in areas where offices have closed.

Movement in these areas alone, if it comes, would not be sufficient for resolving the dispute without substantial movement on office attendance.

At the outset of the renewed action the MHCLG PCS Branch Executive Committee (BEC) advised members to only

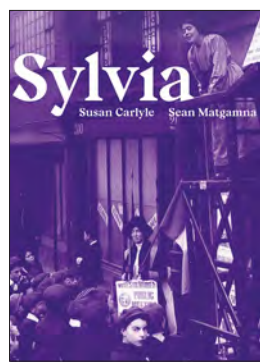
attend the office for as much or as little time as suits them and, additionally for members who are line managers, to refuse to enforce office attendance requirements, explaining that staff legally undertaking ASOS should not be deemed to be acting unreasonably.

This is the correct, balanced, approach, as opposed to seeking to persuade all members to a policy of total non-compliance. The MHCLG BEC knows that some members prefer or need to be in the office more than others, reflecting differences, for example, in dependant care and health.

The Our Work Our Way campaign, rightly focusses on staff controlling their working lives, being trusted to make decisions about how and where they work from on the basis of their circumstances, preferences, and understanding of their jobs. This approach would not prevent management from genuinely encouraging (as opposed to pressurising) people to attend the office and would enable management to establish corporate targets (as opposed to individual focussed targets underpinned by misconduct procedures).

The MHCLG BEC has a solid, renewed, legal strike [mandate](#) for its campaign and for stepping up the action. Members who do not wish to meet an office attendance requirement are standing firm on the ASOS mandate. The BEC is exploring the possibilities for strikes. □

- More online: [bit.ly/ow-ow](#)



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

Tube: pause will benefit the bosses

From Tubeworker

Following London Tube train crew’s most recent strikes, London Underground (LUL) wrote to the railworkers’ union RMT requesting a “seven to ten week pause” in industrial action, to allow further talks to take place, and to allow management to work on draft rosters and schedules that it said might answer union questions about implementation.

An RMT reps’ meeting rightly refused to sign up to management’s time-

table. However, it also held off from calling any further strikes. Tubeworker believes this is a misstep. Especially as we’ll soon need to re-bal-

lot to renew our mandate, a pause of any length at this point feels like de-escalation and demobilisation.

The company’s letter offers no concrete concessions. The draft schedules and rosters it says it will work to provide are only for Phase 2 of its proposal, rather than the final phase which will actually involve the introduction of the four-day-week. So they won’t provide any meaningful answers to anything.

The letter also doubles down on the company’s

position that any changes must be “cost-neutral” – i.e., any cost to the employer must be offset by equivalent savings. This is the crux of the whole dispute.

RMT reps are due to reconvene in a few weeks to discuss the progress of renewed negotiations. Unless those talks have led to some highly unexpected progress, we’ll need to call more action. Let’s step up, not step back! □



More online

Net zero is not the job threat

Green transition will make more good jobs, not less
[bit.ly/nz-ns](#)

Graham? Dubbins?

Debate: should we vote for either?
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Prospect conference

Challenges from the floor
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New low in TSSA

Shenanigans at mid-June conference: [bit.ly/tssa-d](#)

SD Platform Ukraine

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Resist coup in PCS!

From PCS Independent Left

On 11 June the PCS [civil service union] General Secretary (GS), who always acts as a leader of Left Unity [LU, the long-dominant faction in the union; the more left-wing Coalition for Change now has a majority on the NEC], sent an all-members email giving a highly inaccurate and factional account of the 11 June NEC [National Executive] meeting.

The GS has put herself in sole control of our union, in place of the NEC that members elected. The NEC is denied access to PCS comms or control of the union machine and is prevented from communicating directly to members. You can elect the NEC you like as long as it is LU.

Yet the contract of the GS explicitly subordinates the GS to the direction of the NEC.

On a pretext around the issue of Standing Orders (SOs), which was the subject of debate and voting on 11 June, the GS invited “all those who believe in democracy” to leave the meeting. Just to ensure that the elected NEC got the GS’s message that she runs the union, the Zoom meeting was then closed down.

A quorate NEC reconvened on another Zoom link, inviting all the original participants of the meeting to rejoin.

The elected NEC wants to:

- Set up additional sub-committees, for example a pensions committee to action Conference policy to improve members’ pensions
- Ensure that progress on conference motions is a standing item on the agenda of subcommittee meetings, ensuring Conference decisions are acted upon
- Hold more regular NEC meetings
- Issue NEC minutes and records of decisions to Branches
- Allow motions to be discussed and voted on at the meetings
- Remove the gagging clause which prevents NEC members speaking to reps and members about NEC discussions
- Ensure papers are issued to NEC members in good time
- Allow NEC Standing Orders (SOs) to be adopted by a simple majority of the NEC.

The GS’s claims of wilful breach of rules are factional, gratuitous, and false.

The President, Bev Laidlaw [Coalition for Change], did not denounce the GS or make accusations about her or deny her the right to argue her viewpoint regarding the SOs. She merely exercised her own constitutional right as President, under Supplementary Rule (SR) 7.12, to make a ruling when the Rules are silent or ambiguous or in conflict. She ruled that the PCS Rules should



prevail over the “old” Standing Orders and that the Standing Orders to be adopted by the NEC should be settled democratically by majority voting.

The GS wants to run the union with a LU NEC. She does not accept that members, by their votes, have decided otherwise.

But the GS and LU do not have answers to the key issues facing members. They have opted for passivity and “peace” with the Government’s agenda – mandatory office attendance, job losses, AI without membership benefits, pay decline. □

• Abridged with thanks from bit.ly/pcs-nec

Electronic balloting to go ahead

By Colin Foster

The government has now “put before Parliament” the regulations to implement the Employment Rights Act (ERA) changes on union balloting, which at present must, by law, be by post.

From about August 2026: electronic and hybrid (postal-electronic) voting will become available for industrial action ballots, political fund/resolution ballots, union elections, and union merger ballots. Workplace (in-person) voting will also be available for industrial action ballots... but only if the boss agrees.

Abolition of the 50% turnout threshold for industrial action ballots is also expected “some time after August”.

In 2027 electronic and hybrid voting will be extended to recognition and derecognition ballots.

A “Senior Oversight Board” is planned (no date).

Bosses have been pushing hard to delay and limit ERA changes in many areas. *Solidarity* seeks to make unions campaign publicly for speedy and full implementation, and for an “ERA 2” to fix the gaps in “ERA 1”, especially on collective bargaining rights and on curbing zero-hours contracts. □

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Drop the Minnesota charges!

By Harold Storey

Minnesota trade unionists are among 15 indicted by the US federal government on charges of “conspiracy to impede or injure a federal officer” over their opposition to ICE. Their indictments cite their involvement in previously held workers’ assemblies in Minneapolis as evidence of wrongdoing. The charges, from old law and rarely used, can bring up to six years’ jail.

Minnesota had a general strike on 23 January, moving Trump to withdraw ICE thugs from Minneapolis in mid-February. The workers’ assemblies organised in Minneapolis have provided spaces where workers, trade unionists and the left can meet, debate and organise. They are positive for the US workers’ movement, and it is an outrage that workers are being victimised for them.

It is unclear as yet what the timeline for these cases will be. Nonetheless, it is the duty of trade unions and the left, in the US and internationally, to support and stand in solidarity with our comrades victimised for their opposition to ICE and Trump. On the latest official figures, 60,311 people are in ICE detention, and the numbers deported are increasing month by month. The deportation drive is continuing, if for now with less spectacle and bluster.

On 29 June the Supreme Court ruled to allow Trump to sack at will officials of public regulatory agencies, but not to allow him to sack Federal Reserve governors. Trump declared that he will seek ways round that to sack Lisa Cook. The Court also upheld state laws allowing postal ballots delayed in the post to be counted, and refused to take Trump’s bid to overturn the civil verdict against him for E Jean Carroll over his sexual abuse of her.

More rulings may come from the Supreme Court this week on Trump’s attempt to abolish birthright citizenship, and on trans athlete bans.

Mid-term elections to the House of Representatives and Senate are coming up in November, and a sizeable chunk of his right-wing base has not liked his Iran war.

27 June was the latest day of mass protests against Trump across the USA – this time under the slogan “All Of Us 250”, contesting the 250th anniversary on 4 July of the Declaration of Independence which Trump will try to use for self-boosting. Other milestones of protest will be 28 August, to mark the anniversary of the civil-rights March on Washington in 1963, and 15 September, National Voter Registration Day.

In the run-up to November, Trump will probably seek new gambits to try to throw his opponents off balance, and ways of tilting the voting procedures in his favour beyond those already in train in many Republican-controlled states. □



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WIN PROTECTIONS FOR HEAT WAVES TO COME

By Stuart Jordan

The issue of workplace heat dominated many trade-union branches in the week starting 22 June, and many small victories were won.

Some workers, such as London bus drivers, took direct action and refused work on health and safety grounds. Many others won mitigations like agreements to work from home or workplace closures. These actions kept workers safe, but long term solutions require more sustained pressure. At least one union branch, Arriva London North Unite, is leading the way by balloting on this issue.

Many employers introduced

temperature “fixes” during the heat wave, often under pressure from unionised workers. The go-to emergency response has been a scramble for portable air conditioning units. Better than heat stroke. But portable air conditioning is no long-term solution. It is noisy and extremely inefficient. A fully installed air conditioning system may be necessary in some industries (healthcare, public transport, food etc.), but there are significant costs in terms of increased energy demand and heat island effects.

Generally there are better alternatives to air conditioning, or at least necessary supplements.

The summer temperatures we are now experiencing in Northern Europe are equivalent to those that most of humanity has experienced for most of human history. For thousands of years, buildings in tropical and subtropical areas have been designed to keep cool in the hot weather without energy-intensive air-conditioning. Long-term solutions should maximise these passive design strategies such as external blinds or shutters, white roofs, through ventilation, awnings, and facilities such as cool-water fountains everywhere, before or at least as well as installing air conditioning. □

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