

For social ownership of the banks and industry

SOLIDARITY

& WORKERS' LIBERTY



MASS COUNCIL HOUSE BUILDING NOW!



Mass council-house building now!

The working class needs more council housing. Progress depends on government action.

From the 1920s, and more from the 1940s, councils built millions of new homes, improving working-class lives. With the Thatcher government of 1979-90, council housing was put into reverse.

Councils could not get finance for new building. The stock was run down through "Right to Buy" (1980), when the Tories bribed better-off tenants for political support by offering them ownership at big discounts.

Thatcher declared: "I want a capital-earning democracy. Every man and woman a capitalist. Housing is the start. If you're a man or woman of property, you've got something. So every man a capitalist, and every man a man of property." This was class politics with the aim of bribing a base for the Tories by having more working-class people see themselves as part of the propertied classes.

The bribe was paid by councils, remaining tenants, and future home-seekers, not by the Tories themselves. It began a big shift towards private renting and outright homelessness.

We have our own class politics here: to secure the basics of life for the working class as social rights, not strokes of good luck in the property market.

Two million council homes have been sold off since 1980, and 14,000 more just in the year to April 2026.

The government's Social Housing Bill will limit "Right to Buy". It should be scrapped, not just limited.

Council housing has a forced inflation-plus-1% rent rise each year, which should be scrapped too, but decreasing rent income due to decreased council stock has left councils with a "historic" Housing Revenue Account debt of £32 billion to cover.

The labour movement should back

housing charity Shelter's demand for that "historic" debt to be cancelled. But the government, instead, has recently excluded councils from a new low-cost loan scheme for new house-building, available to private developers and to housing associations. (Why? Because including councils would make the overall public debt figures look worse).

Credit and grants

We must also demand a vast increase in cheap credit and outright grants to councils to build and to buy up and refurbish existing housing now privately-owned.

As of now, there were just 1040 council house-building starts in the UK in the year 2025, and 240 in January-March 2025-6.

The total "delivery cost" (not just construction) of a new council home is about £290,000. Those homes, if not sold off at discount, then cover their cost from rent income in about 30 years.

Buy-up-and-refurbish housing is cheaper. The UK has about a million empty homes, 250,000 empty for more than six months, some of them costly mansions held as speculative assets, and councils need more powers to be able to buy them up.

To finance 100,000 new homes might need up to £29 billion a year. A lot? That is just one per cent of total annual income, a small outlay to secure a basic of life for all.

Even if councils can borrow the money to build, they have difficulty getting land, often monopolised by large landowners looking for better returns on their property from luxury ventures. The government should nationalise all building land, making the common basis of society available for social purposes.

Councils have to spend a lot on maintenance and refurbishment to make their housing stock safe and up to standard.

So they should: Grenfell and "Awaab's Law" push councils and housing associations to fix fire safety and damp speedily.

"Awaab's Law" still does not apply to private landlords, and neither does the 2006 "Decent Homes Standard" for social housing. The Renters' Rights Act legislated for "Awaab's Law" to apply, and the government says it plans to extend the "Decent Homes Standard" to private renting. But it has not yet even given dates for implementation.

More refurbishment and retrofitting needs doing, not less. House insulation needs upgrading; fossil-fuel heating needs to be replaced by renewable-powered heat pumps or similar. Only 1% of homes in the UK have heat pumps, as against 16% across Europe.

Regeneration

A lot of recent council house-building has been "regeneration" projects, where councils empty blocks which are difficult to maintain or refurbish then, with private contractors, demolish them to replace by new housing with a big proportion of luxury homes for private sale or rent, in order to pay for the project.

These developments, which often stretch for decades, reduce council housing in the short and even usually in the long term.

Councils used to run Direct Labour Organisations capable of major refurbishment and even construction projects. DLOs were almost abolished by the Thatcher government, and have recovered usually only as smaller-scale repair operations.

The labour movement should demand the refloating of DLOs and public ownership of the whole construction industry to create a nationalised operation capable of training teenagers and others in the skills and offering long-term job security with union rates and condi-

tions. Construction jobs at present are usually fixed-term contracts or spurious "self-employment". Union density in the industry is down to 11% to 14%.

20% of households — in London, 28%, and 69% of households headed by young people (16-24) — are now in private renting, which increased a lot in the early 2000s as a delayed effect of Thatcher policies. The Renters' Reform Act limits some market abuses, banning no-fault evictions, limiting rent rises to once a year, and giving tenants facilities to appeal against above-market-rates rent rises. It does not include "fair rent" controls such as were in force from 1965 until abolished by Thatcher, and are demanded today by the left.

Karl Marx in *Capital* showed that the "labour market" is "a very Eden of... Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham" only when viewed from one angle. When we see it from the angle of production, "he, who before was the money-owner, now strides in front as capitalist; the possessor of labour-power follows as his labourer. The one with an air of importance, smirking, intent on business; the other, timid and holding back, like one who is bringing his own hide to market and has nothing to expect but — a hiding".

Private-renting is also not a "fair" market, even in bourgeois terms. Its transactions are between sitting-pretty property-owners and workers who have to seek shelter however poor, and cannot even combine to shift the balance a little as we do in the "labour market" through trade unions. Private renters now spend about 34% of their income on housing, and the percentage is higher for the worse-off. In London, according to the UCL Bartlett review, "on average, renting a one-bedroom flat costs 46% of gross-median pay... 60% of London's [private] renters live in unacceptable conditions".

Housing benefit covers a lot less since its ceiling, the "Local Housing Allowance", has been frozen or semi-frozen for years, forcing people to cover their rent from benefits or low wages supposed to cover food and other essentials.

The expensive, poor-quality, insecure housing is not even near work: the latest official average commute time for jobs in central London is 56 minutes one way.

Andy Burnham has talked about more council house-building, but almost not at all about how to achieve it. Solidarity will work to mobilise the whole labour movement, including the unions, to get the achievement. □

Intervening in Labour conference 2026

By Gerry Bates

Labour Party conference is 27-30 September in Liverpool. Most delegates arrive, and the Labour women's conference is held, on 26 September. Women's conference this year will be trans-exclusive: most unions are boycotting it in protest, and there is talk of a protest demonstration outside.

Labour conference has never, ever been really democratic. In the Blair-Brown era, 1997-2009, conference was neutered.

However, the conference still draws about 20,000 people (a lot of lobbyists, but most of those from NGOs) and has many and large fringe meetings.

Solidarity is officially banned by the Labour Party (since 2021), but we will be in Liverpool to sell literature and to help friends within the Party.

The conference has been tamped down since 2021, and especially in 2025, though even that conference carried votes against the platform on Palestine, on wealth tax, and on migrant work visas.

Partly the tamping down is by rule changes since 2021 which have pushed back on the mild democratic reopening in the Corbyn era. Mostly it is through "administrative" changes (many motions ruled out of order; motions published only hours before delegates vote on which "topics" will reach the floor; arbitrary subdivision of "topics" to ghettoise critical motions on issues like NHS and housing...) and through a decline in the will of local Labour Party delegates to challenge such things or even to use such openings as moving "reference back" of sections of the National Policy Forum report.

Under a longstanding rule, rule-change proposals from affiliates and local Labour Parties come up only with a year's delay. In 2026 only one such proposal will be debated, an unobjectionable one from Disability Labour.

Groups like Labour Left Internationalists, Labour Campaign for Council Housing (with a motion on housing), Mainstream (with one on water nationalisation), and Momentum will be seeking to get motions and "references back" from local Labour Parties onto the conference floor. □

Solidarity 773

We are on our summer schedule. #773 will be 26 August, #774 23 Sep; #775 7 Oct. □

Iran: arrogant Trump messes up

By Dan Katz

After four months of the US-Iran war, perhaps a million people in Lebanon are still displaced, southern Lebanon is occupied by the Israeli military and two million Iranian workers have lost their jobs.

Despite the well-known US military and intelligence services' assessment that Iran had the ability to close the Strait of Hormuz and shut down the passage of oil and gas tankers out of the Persian Gulf, Trump failed to plan for the possibility. Trump and his inner circle of sycophants did not bother to listen.

Underlying that error was the assumption that the Iranian regime would buckle and either collapse or come to an agreement following the devastating Israeli-US bombardment of Iran which began on 28 February. Israel was fighting to change the regime, Trump seemed to be looking for an accommodation with someone inside the Iranian state.

How either of those objectives was to be met was always unclear. Fantastic schemes have been reported: an Israeli plan to install Holocaust-denying former hard-line Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as an alternative, compliant leader; a project to arm a series of small Iraqi-based Kurdish militias to invade Iran and topple the regime.

How could anyone have thought these plans could possibly work? Ahmadinejad is discredited and has no backing inside the Iranian state power, currently resting on the Islamic Guards (IRGC). And the result of a Kurdish mini-invasion would probably have been inter-ethnic civil war and massacres in a few towns in north west Iran.

It is now suggested that the project

to arm the Kurdish groups was pulled because the Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, objected. No doubt he did object. On the other hand Erdoğan would not have had a veto. The real reason the project was axed is that someone inside the US administration eventually worked out it was bound to fail.

Resilient

The fascistic Iranian regime, which came to power in a reactionary revolution in 1979 has proved resilient, as we said it would. The clerical dictatorship, despite suffering significant losses of key leaders and being riddled with corruption, still has a cadre of people at its centre who believe in the original ideas of Ayatollah Khomeini's Shia revolution: clerical dictatorship and export of that revolution across the Middle East.

As Sanam Vakil from the Chatham House policy institute put it, the Iranian leadership is "not making decisions on the basis of macro-economic data."

On 8 April the US and Iran agreed a ceasefire, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), brokered by Pakistani officials. The MoU was vague and incomplete and, as we wrote, likely to fail as a consequence of that fudging. By April, because Iran had effectively shut down the Persian Gulf to tankers the price of petrol at US garages was over \$4 a gallon, up over 30 percent in one month, Trump was feeling political heat in America where he was elected promising economic prosperity and to avoid foreign wars.

Trump's approval rating in the US is now minus 25 percent (*Economist*, 4 August) and support for his Iran war is only

35 percent (Reuters, 6 August).

On 21 July the US Defence Secretary, Pete Hegseth, told the US Senate Appropriations Committee it was urgent that \$87bn additional funding for the Pentagon was agreed, with \$67bn of that for operations in the Middle East. Hegseth claimed that the Iran war had cost \$37.5bn in direct military expenditures to mid-July. 18 US service personnel had been killed and 624 wounded, as of late July.

Trump then claimed that the US is not running short of missiles. He is lying. The US started the war with 3,000 Tomahawk cruise missiles and now has 2,000 left. It will take until 2031 to rebuild its stocks.

Of the 2,330 Patriot missiles the US held in February, it now has around 800 left. And the US has used about 60 percent of its THAAD missiles.

Settlement

Since April the shooting conflict has continued, spasmodically. Israel's far-right government has opposed a settlement with Iran and continues its occupation of southern Lebanon. Iran has spread the conflict by attacking US bases and civilian infrastructure in Kuwait, Qatar and, recently, in Egypt. Iranian proxy militias in Iraq are actively helping Iran and the Houthi regime, an Iranian ally, ruling most of inhabited Yemen, is attacking Saudi shipping in the Red Sea.

Iran has targeted tankers moving without their permission in the Persian Gulf.

As a result of US-Israeli action against Iran, Saudi and the Gulf states' economies have been damaged and disrupted by the war and their leaders have become sceptical of the US and its ability

to guarantee peace and the safety of their regimes. On Friday 7 August Saudi Arabia announced a defence pact with Turkey and Pakistan which underlines that point.

On Sunday 2 August Trump again said he was calling off new strikes on Iran saying that Saudi Arabia had asked him to negotiate instead. Trump declared that talks with Iran would start on Monday 3 August. But on Monday the Iranian foreign ministry said there were no talks with the US and instead Iran was discussing with Oman a plan to open the Gulf on their terms.

Trump has been flapping around, trying to finesse the opening of the Strait of Hormuz, which is his main concern because its closure has led to the surge in oil prices and is the immediate cause of political problems for him at home.

But Iran has continued to use its effective control over the Strait of Hormuz efficiently. It may well be the case that Trump will settle for some Iranian toll on ships passing through the Strait.

That will be a colossal failure of policy, will almost certainly be temporary and will break down as underlying and unresolved issues impact on any cobble-together deal.

There is a force, however, that can bring peace and stability to the region. The working classes of Iran, Israel, Egypt, Turkey and Iraq are potentially very powerful. The working class has no interest in this Islamist-Trump war.

For a secular republic in Iran
Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, for a Palestinian state alongside Israel
For Kurdish self-determination
For women's equality
For workers' power. □

Housing

Good riddance Steve Reed. Look to Finland

By Robert Bau

Whilst this article is mainly about Finland's Housing First programme, and future articles will look in detail at Andy Burnham's pledge to build more council housing, I first want to say something about the sacking of Steve Reed as Housing Secretary. This is a good thing.

Reed was not an effective Housing Secretary. House-building fell during his time in office and there was no chance of meeting the target of 1.5 million new homes. He also seemed more interested in wearing red "Build, Baby, Build" Maga style hats than actually building homes.

More importantly, Steve Reed does not believe in coun-

cil housing. To him, a home is not primarily a place to live and build a life. It is an asset: something to own, sell, pass on to family members, rent out or use to secure a loan. He does not want homes built; he wants assets built.

Thatcher

In that respect, he would agree with Margaret Thatcher: "I want a capital-earning democracy. Every man and woman a capitalist. Housing is the start. If you're a man or woman of property, you've got something. So every man a capitalist, and every man a man of property."

Had Andy Burnham kept Reed in post, then he would have self-sabotaged his own hous-

ing pledge. But enough about Reed. Let's turn to Finland.

In his policy speech on 29 June, Andy Burnham said:

"Having this focus on council homes again, on having them in all parts of the country, it will represent a decisive shift to a more preventative and productive state, adopting a national Housing First philosophy as has been pioneered so successfully in Finland."

So what is Housing First?

The normal approach to tackling homelessness is by offering temporary shelter and expecting people to deal with problems such as addiction, ill health or unemployment before they can qualify for permanent housing. Finland took a differ-

ent approach. It recognised that a secure home is often the starting point for solving these problems, not the reward at the end of the process.

Stability

Housing First is built on a simple idea: provide people with a permanent home first, then give them the support they need. People are not required to be sober, in treatment or in work before they are housed. Instead, support is tailored to their individual circumstances once they have the stability of a secure home.

Since adopting Housing First as national policy in 2007, Finland has invested heavily in affordable housing and converted many hostels and shelters into

permanent homes.

The results have been impressive. Finland is widely recognised as the only EU country where homelessness has consistently fallen in recent years. Between 2008 and 2017, the number of homeless people living in hostels and boarding houses fell by 76%, while long-term homelessness also declined sharply.

Finland's experience shows that homelessness is not inevitable. By treating housing as a social right rather than something people must earn, it has demonstrated that lasting change is possible. If the UK adopted the same approach, it would be a significant step forward. □

“Lock them up” is reactionary demagoguery

By Sam Myerson

In 1993, then leading Tory Michael Howard declared “prison works”, as part of a “lock them up” response to crime in the UK which paralleled the huge expansion of the prison population in the USA at the time.

His mindset is still around, in outraged reactions (and not only from Tories) to the government’s early-release scheme.

Crimes exist. People do terrible things to each other. Modern capitalist society does not have the “remedies” which older societies had – expulsion from the hunter-gatherer band, family-revenge customs, physical mutilations often for minor offences, exile to remote areas, vast use of death penalties. (In 1800 England had over 200 offences carrying the death penalty). We may not in the near future find better than *some* use of *some form* of prison for *some* people who do crimes.

But now, in over 100 countries prisons exceed their maximum occupancy rates,

and in eleven, over double. Overcrowding is the direct result of government policy decisions. And it has come at a time of generally falling crime rates (and as much in countries like the Netherlands with much lower rates of jailing as in the UK).

Demagogically

Some high-profile cases, such as the death of PC Harper, have been used demagogically as a tool against straightforward proposals to ease prison overcrowding, and they have pushed the government into a regressive partial climbdown.

The number of people held in prison has increased 94% since 1990 and is at around 86,000 peo-

ple. Almost 75% of all prisons in England and Wales are overcrowded. The Ministry of Justice acknowledges that many are crammed into cells that are unfit for human habitation, and in some cases locked up for 23 hours a day.

The government has walked back from commitments to make prisons “fire safe” by 2027, with tens of thousands of people locked up in unlawful conditions. 60 prisons await urgent repair. 15 of

those have had serious and fatal fires in the last 15 years.

The prisons minister, Lord Timpson, resigned in July. He was then, with two years in post, the longest serving prisons minister in 15 years. Timpson had caused some uproar around the time he was appointed by suggesting that

around two-thirds of prisoners should not be locked up.

Timpson was right. A huge number of those in prison are held for minor offences, have had their sentences extended while in prison, or are “recalled” to jail without further trial after being dumped out on the street with little to no support.

Privatisation

A big driver of custodial sentences is the privatisation of “community” sentencing provision. Magistrates and judges have lost confidence in the contractors who run those schemes. Community order sentences declined 61% between 2010 and 2024.

Homelessness, inadequate funding of refuge and support services, cuts to local authorities’ budgets, poor mental-health and SEND provision, all increase offending and re-offending. □

• Abridged. More: bit.ly/up-lock



Ireland

Left must say more about how to unify Ireland

By Micheál MacEoin

In *Solidarity* 771, we noted that the voice of the labour movement was largely absent in the current flurry of “united Ireland” discussion.

The socialist left has not been particularly active on this issue. Part of this is understandable. Just because Sinn Féin is agitating around its Planning for Constitutional Change Bill, introduced in June to “legislate for the planning and preparation for constitutional change and Irish reunification”, doesn’t mean the left should simply jump to it.

That said, an answer to the national question is part of a rounded socialist programme.

Under “Policies” on the website of the People Before Profit electoral party, there is little to go on. However, party theorist Kieran Allen did set out a more programmatic commentary on the current debate, in an article in March 2026 on “What sort of united Ireland?”

Allen comments on the debate in bourgeois circles, deals with some objections to a united Ireland from right-wing economists and states that there “are good reasons for this discussion on Irish unity, even on a capitalist basis.”

That said, Allen argues that

it “may make rational sense from a capitalist point of view, but partition created a monster that cannot be so easily dismantled under the present arrangements.”

He points to the ultimate say of the British Secretary of State in calling a border poll (a point also made in the Dail debate on Sinn Féin’s Bill by Séamus Healy TD, a former member of the Trotskyist League for a Workers’ Republic in the late 1960s and early 1970s.)

Radical voices

Importantly, Allen also notes that “official Unionism destroyed radical voices within the Protestant population, and this must be undermined.” This will be difficult without linking a united Ireland to improvements for workers: only “the prospect of a better Ireland for working people could induce protestant workers to support Irish Unity.”

“A united Ireland must therefore be conceived in radical and socialist terms to tackle the ‘carnival of reaction’ that both the green and Orange traditions have forged.”

This involves being clear-eyed about the challenges of the creating an all-Irish National Health Service and a secular education system, as well as ending relative poverty.

“Only a radical social government can really address these issues,” argues Allen, “by breaking from an economic model that privileges US multinationals.”

This is all true.

Allen’s polemical thrust, however, is saved for those “advocates of a united Ireland [who] attempt to sidestep these issues by claiming that compromises must be made on identity. They suggest that Ireland should either rejoin the Commonwealth or show respect for the Orange tradition. But this assumes that material realities should be ignored and that attention should be focused on flags and national anthems.”

Instead, Allen counterposes this to “a constituent assembly to rewrite a new constitution for the whole island. In such an assembly, we will argue for the right to housing and free health treatment. We will push an anti-war article to prevent any involvement with NATO or an EU army.”

“A border poll,” he states, “can lead to a mass politicisation where the radical dynamic behind a call for a United Ireland comes to the fore. In a situation where working people feel they can begin to take control, is-

sues of flags and anthems can be sorted by a risen people.”

If anything, however, Allen is the one sidestepping issues of identity. However “artificial” these may seem, or however much you may claim they were a product of Partition and not also of communal divisions stretching back centuries, issues of sectarian identity continue to structure politics in the North.

Allen states that it is “claimed that a united Ireland would bring about a loss of a “British identity”. “Yet one survey showed that the strongest identification people had was Northern Irish (52%), as against 48% Irish and 46% British.”

Identity

As these percentages suggest, it is possible to state more than one identity in the census. In Census 2021, 814,600 people (42.8%) living in the North identified solely or along with other national identities (including Northern Irish) as “British”. In the most recent election, in May 2024, even though the DUP lost three seats, the overall share of the Unionist vote was 45.4%, not including Alliance which was another 15%.

This remains a hefty minority to convince in an island-wide context.

Why does a recognition of this fact “assume that material realities should be ignored and that attention should be focused on flags and national anthems”? Is not possible to combine a democratic programme on issues of national identity with a focus on material realities?

Is identity itself not a “material reality” once held by many people. As Marx put it in his *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, ideas become a material force as soon as they have gripped the masses!

What would a constituent assembly say about identity issues, other than that they will be dissolved by the enthusiasm of a “risen people”?

Is it not possible to advocate some concessions to Protestant workers holding a British identity – such as the right to hold a British passport in a united Ireland or a measure of local devolution within a sovereign Irish state – without wishing to “rejoin the Commonwealth or show respect for the Orange tradition”?

As with Allen’s 2021 book, more detail is needed on how the socialist left can make a case for unity capable of breaking Protestant workers from Unionism. □

Support the binational left in Israel

By Ira Berkovic

With elections for the Knesset [Israeli parliament] set for 27 October, electoral campaigning is now underway. Under Israel's proportional representation system, a party must win at least 3.25% of the national vote share to secure parliamentary representation, with the number of seats depending on the size of its vote above the qualifying threshold. A party with 61 seats or more can form a government; no single party has ever achieved this, meaning governments rely on coalitions, temporary electoral blocs, or MKs from smaller parties agreeing to sponsor a government led by a larger party, without formally joining a coalition.

New to the field in 2026 is A Place for Us All, founded by leaders of Standing Together. Whilst organisationally independent of the movement, the new party is widely seen as the expression, in the electoral sphere, of Standing Together's approach: binational co-resistance towards a horizon of equal rights and self-determination for both peoples. A Place for Us All orients in part to Arab-Palestinian communities, and refutes criticisms that it will split the vote by arguing it aims to increase turnout and win support from new voters, rather than haggling over the existing vote share.

Whilst Standing Together itself cannot campaign directly for any individual party, it has been running a "Get Out The Vote" campaign aimed at resisting racist voter suppression and encouraging Palestinian participation in the elections.

A Place for Us All also differentiates itself from Joint List parties by articulating a political vision for the whole of Israeli society, rather than pursuing a politics focused solely or mainly on the Arab-Palestinian minority. Some of its leaders have also criticised the main Arab-based Joint List parties for being overly male-dominated.

All Israeli citizens have an equal vote, including the country's 20% Palestinian minority, and those from other minorities including the Druze. Israeli Jews living beyond Israel's internationally-recognised borders, as settlers in occupied Palestinian territories, can vote. Palestinians living under Israeli occupation, whose lives are profoundly shaped by the policies determined in the Knesset, cannot.

There are also fears that far-right parties will engage in violent voter suppression, as well as concerns that Netanyahu and his allies, who openly admire author-

itarian regimes, will refuse to accept the results if they lose, as polls currently suggest.

Israel's traditional "Zionist left" (i.e., the mainstream left) will be represented in the election by the Democrats, a party formed via the merger of the Labour Party and Meretz, a left-of-Labour social-democratic party. Current Democrat MKs Gilad Kariv and Naama Lazimi spoke at the "It's Time!" peace conference, an event held annually since 2024 that brings together a broad swathe of Israel's anti-occupation and peace movements, and generally promotes a vision of equality between Israeli Jews and Palestinians.

Conditional statehood

However, the Democrats' leader, Yair Golan, continues to peddle the historic line of Israel's political establishment: a two-state solution is necessary because Israelis must eventually "separate" from Palestinians. For Golan, Palestinian statehood is the end point of a lengthy process, and must be conditional, rather than being an inviolable democratic right to which the Palestinians are entitled simply because they are a national people.

The "gradual two states" perspective, which was hegemonic in Israeli politics for generations, has been utterly sidelined by the one-state policy of the current government, which insists on an "exclusive" right to Jewish sovereignty over the entire territory of pre-1948 Palestine. The pro-settler authoritarianism of the Netanyahu regime can only be fought by a radical alternative, not an effort to rewind the clock to the late-1990s.

The Democrats' list for the election includes a number of Palestinian and Druze candidates, although the highest-placed of these, Somaya Bashir, is in 10th place, and highly unlikely to be elected.

The Palestinian parties running in the elections are the National Democratic Assembly (at-Ta-jammu' al-Watanī ad-Dīmuqrātī, known as Balad, which is both the acronym of its Hebrew name and an Arabic word for "country"); the Arab Movement for Renewal (Ta'al); and the United Arab List (al-Qā'ima al-'Arabiyya al-Muwahhada, often referred to by its Hebrew acronym Ra'am). The former two are secular-nationalist parties.

Ta'al, led by Ahmad Tibi, broadly aligns with the dominant politics of the Palestine



Pic: @gibography2001

Liberation Organisation, and advocates a two-state settlement to the national question. Balad has a one-state position, advocating a single state across the whole pre-1948 territory, and advocating for greater rights for the Palestinian minority in Israel in the meantime. Ra'am is an Islamist party, aligned with the Islamic Movement, a longstanding Islamist current in Palestine with historic links to the Muslim Brotherhood. However, it has evolved in a more moderate direction, with its leader, Mansour Abbas, positioning himself as a reasonable pragmatist. Ra'am joined the 2021-22 anti-Netanyahu coalition, becoming the first Palestinian party to participate in an Israeli government.

Ra'am is running independently in the elections, while Ta'al and Balad are running as part of the Joint List bloc, along with Hadash. Part of the reason for Ra'am's refusal to align with the Joint List, which it participated in in 2020, is its desire to have the freedom to join a government coalition again, which Balad, Ta'al, and Hadash are all opposed to.

Nominally

Hadash is nominally a binational party, but its membership and voter base is overwhelmingly Arab-Palestinian. In its internal primaries, Yousef Jabareen won the contest to replace retiring MK Ayman Odeh as the head of its list. The other top slots, who are likely to be elected based on previous performance and current polling, were won by Jafer Farah, Ofer Cassif, and Yousef Atauna. Cassif won the election for the third slot, which is, by convention, reserved for a Jewish candidate, against a challenge from younger activist Noa Levy. Cassif's victory means that, following the retirement of Aida Touma-Suleiman and for the first time since 2013, the top positions on Hadash's list will all be held by male candidates.

The international left is unlikely to pay a great deal of attention to the Israeli elections. For a left which sub-

stantially sees the very concept of an Israeli Jewish national entity, on any political basis, as a necessarily colonial endeavour, the outcome is immaterial: whichever party leads the government, some form of Jewish chauvinism will remain dominant. It is true that there is no likely outcome to these elections that will automatically lead to any significant advance in Palestinian rights. However, some outcomes (coalition parties scraping enough seats to continue in power, or form a minority government) could lead to regressions, and other outcomes (Netanyahu, Ben Gvir, and Smotrich being ousted) could open up space to build resistance.

The refusal of much of the left to see Israeli society as just that, a society, blinds it to the connections between struggles within Israeli society, and the struggle against occupation. Outcomes in the election — for example, how many seats are secured by Palestinian parties — could be directly, materially consequential for the lives of Israel's two-million-strong Palestinian minority. Left-wing parties such as Hadash and A Place for Us All seek to connect immediate class struggles over wages, housing, and other domestic issues to the question of national equality, arguing that policies of settlement and occupation benefit a settler elite. Good results in the elections for these parties will help the anti-occupation movement grow.

Winning real equality in Israel-Palestine, including an equal right to self-determination for both peoples, will require much more than a change in government. It will require a thoroughgoing democratic revolution, to abolish constitutional reforms such as the Nation-State Law and roll back the settlement project. The political forces advocating such a revolution are currently an embattled minority. But it is, in part, precisely because they are a minority that their struggles need our support and solidarity. □

• Abridged. More: bit.ly/bi-n-left



Clacton, Farage and “buon senso”

By Jim Denham

In general, Marxists tend to be sceptical about the concept of common sense, but sometimes, like Antonio Gramsci, we recognise good sense (“buon senso”) as the rational core within common sense.

So, *Solidarity* agreed with the decision of Labour and the main parties (including the Greens) to boycott the by-election called by Nigel Farage in a brazen attempt to undermine the parliamentary enquiry into the £5m donation he secretly trousered from a crypto billionaire and to detract from the other byzantine financial scandals (often involving the convicted criminal “Posh” George Cottrell) now engulfing him and his Reform party.

As a result of mainstream parties’ refusal to play his game, Farage’s stunt has backfired hilariously. He will undoubtedly be re-elected, but his credibility and personal popularity have both plummeted.

One of the few non-Reform-supporting commentators to disagree with the boycott was one John McNally, writing in the *Morning Star* (16 July).

In a piece that seemed to endorse

Farage’s claim that “state forces, including the BBC ... now want to break him”, McNally denounced the boycott and the “liberal left” who [are] “associating themselves with this tactic.” McNally seemed to be particularly incensed by the involvement of the comedy candidate Count Binface, who, according to McNally “embodies” the Establishment.

Polemic

Here’s a small taste of McNally’s polemic: “Socialists and communists should not endorse this wizard wheeze by a rotten political establishment that drives repression, cuts and privatisation, which is entirely subservient to corporate interests, including from the arms industry and with many taking donations from the Israeli ruling class.”

McNally does not explain to us how, exactly, the “Israeli ruling class” is involved in the Clacton boycott or the Binface candidacy. But what he is clear on is that the failure of the left to stand a candidate is a “scandal” that “history may remember as a real low point for the left [because] we are obliged to rely on a liberal comedian to fight our battle against a class enemy like Farage?”

Leaving aside the fact that at the time McNally’s piece was published no organisation or publication of the left had publicly supported Binface (though on 5 August the MS itself did carry a piece backing Binface!) who in practice could and/or should have stood? Surely not the Communist Party of Britain (the people who control the *Morning Star*): they have no presence in Clacton and you can’t have a serious candidate without some people on the spot to campaign for the candidate. The SWP has organised some Stand Up to Racism activity in Clacton, but didn’t stand a candidate (they have a few contacts there but apparently no active members), and Clacton is a long way from London.

Credibility

But the central argument remains a simple one: all a left or even Labour candidate in Clacton would have achieved would have been to give Farage’s stunt some credibility and increase the turnout. That’s simply “buon senso”.

By the way, John McNally comes from an ostensibly Trotskyist background (he was head honcho of the Socialist Party’s PCS operation in the days when they

dominated the union). He is now a recurrent “feature” writer for the *Morning Star*. He writes frequently about the Ukraine war, and his support for Putin’s narrative is even more blatant than the paper’s official line.

In a previous MS piece (December 14 2023: “Built to fail: Nato is rapidly changing course on Ukraine”) he called for Ukraine to capitulate and put all blame for the war on, interchangeably, “the west”, or “Washington”, or the “US elite”, or Nato, somehow linking it with “Biden’s complicity in Israel’s genocidal war in Gaza”. The piece referred to “the US-backed Maidan coup”, supported the pro-Russian Minsk accords and regurgitated the discredited conspiracy theory about Johnson being “dispatched” by Biden to sabotage peace negotiations – all of which, together with the obvious approval with which he hailed the fact that “Global South nations increasingly conclude their interests lie with China and Russia in Brics” – clearly identified him as an ex-Trotskyist whose world view is entirely in line with the politics of the MS: i.e. neo-Stalinism with a generous dash of Third Worldism. □

Eye on the Left

Your Party: from inactivity to crisis

By Matt Cooper

Your Party has lurched from inactivity to crisis. In the first year of its existence it has built no campaigning profile and had virtually no role in May’s local elections. Since then, its leadership clique has attempted to suspend members of its Central Executive Committee (CEC) critical of the leadership. This has caused the Corbyn-aligned The Many to fragment and the CEC to all but collapse.

Its belated attempt to create a branch-based structure is floundering. This suggests an ignominious fate for a project that only a year ago attracted over 800,000 expressions of interest.

The latest crisis started in early July when the CEC chair, Jenn Forbes, and secretary, Dawn Aspinall, suspended three CEC members for involvement in the Socialist Federation’s launch conference. (The Socialist Federation sought to rally dissident Your Party

members, though it is falling apart over the anti-trans views of its main mover, Richard Gerrard). Whether Corbyn or Karie Murphy sanctioned this political witch-hunt is unclear. Confronted at the SWP’s Marxism, where, by speaking, he was ironically committing the same “offence” as the suspended three, Corbyn claimed ignorance and the suspensions were dropped.

No confidence

This attempted purge created a backlash that fractured the Corbyn-aligned group on the CEC. An emergency CEC was called to consider motions of no confidence against Forbes, Aspinall and membership officer Cassie Bellingham. It was initiated not by the critical Grassroots Left but by The Many supporter Jo Rust. This 12 July meeting was boycotted by the narrowing band of Corbyn supporters but was, nonetheless, quorate.

Of the CEC’s 22 members, The Many held 14, against an

effective Grassroots Left bloc of seven. That has previously given the Corbyn clique a free hand to act without constraint.

The results of the no-confidence votes were 13 to oust Forbes, 12 against Aspinall and 11 to remove Bellingham, showing both that a majority had lost confidence in the leadership and that The Many was deeply split, with six of this bloc voting against Forbes, along with the independent Sam Gorst, who had previously been Corbyn-loyal.

The response of the Corbyn clique has been to double down. They declared the meeting unconstitutional. A CEC meeting was convened with Forbes in the chair, where she made the bizarre ruling that no-confidence votes can only be taken at the AGM, effectively making them impossible. She then effectively prevented any procedural challenge to her ruling, removing the ability of the meeting to take any decisions other than those allowed by the

chair. A large number of CEC members walked out, making the meeting inquorate.

Fallout

The fallout has been immense. Sam Gorst has resigned from the CEC, and a number of officers have resigned their posts – national spokesperson Noor Begum, Political Officer Louise Regan and possibly others. Their resignations are a potentially fatal blow to Corbyn’s project: Gorst and Begum are councillors from the Liverpool Community Independents and Redbridge Independents respectively, exactly the kind of community-based groups that Corbyn sought as the basis of Your Party.

The clique now running the party has also sought to silence the CEC by requiring members to sign a non-disclosure agreement legally binding them not to comment on the CEC’s or officers’ actions. Anyone refusing will effectively be removed from the CEC. So much for accounta-

bility to members.

Against this backdrop, the leadership clique’s eventual push to set up branches was always likely to fall flat. In my local branch, based on a London borough, fewer than twenty people, three per cent of the declared membership, attended. This appears to be in line with a general lack of interest, and some areas do not have enough volunteers to fill the officer posts. To top this off, in her August newsletter, Zarah Sultana failed even to mention Your Party.

It is difficult to see where Your Party goes from here. It will become neither a viable member-based party nor an umbrella for community independents. Its shrunken officers’ group and unaccountable full-time staff do not have the support of the CEC, let alone the broader membership. Your Party looks like coming to an end, strangled by its own bureaucratic methods and lack of purpose. □

East London health workers fight cuts

By Jane R, ELFT worker and Unite rep

I have recently joined Unite the union, and have become a rep in East London NHS Foundation Trust (ELFT). I have become part of the campaign to fight against the Trust's plan to make £24.9 million "efficiency savings", i.e., cuts. As part of these cuts, the equivalent of 331 posts will be deleted.

This is following from the recent 'Going Further, Going Together' initiative, a "financial sustainability" initiative launched by the Trust in 2024. Our campaign also includes the demand for the reinstatement of Unite branch secretary Mark Dunne, after he was made redundant from his substantive post, which the Trust claimed was due to "service redesign".

Staff cuts are being made across all boroughs covered by the Trust: Tower Hamlets, Hackney, Newham, as well as Luton and Bedfordshire, where the Trust has run mental health services since 2015. ELFT face heavy criticism due to their lack of formal public, staff, or political consultations. By claiming cuts are "service redesign" conducted under "Going Further, Going Together", the Trust is hoping to circumvent consultation processes and avoid a backlash from unions. Their efforts have failed: our Unite branch is fighting the cuts, and plans to launch a ballot for industrial action, taking advantage of new laws allowing unions to ballot electronically.

ELFT union reps meet weekly to discuss building the campaign. We have also been coordinating walkabouts at ELFT sites in Mile End, Newham, and

Hackney. We also have regular members' meetings to share updates and plan next steps. An important part of our work is to spread the word about the cuts. The walkabouts we've conducted revealed there is a lack of awareness at some sites about the proposed cuts. Our work has led to an upsurge in Unite membership.

We have held demonstrations at ELFT HQ, to make our views about the cuts and Mark's redundancy known. Unfortunately, we were unsuccessful in preventing Mark's redundancy. His last day at work was 31 July.

Labour

At a demonstration on 29 July, we heard from Apsana Begum, Labour MP for Poplar and Limehouse in Tower Hamlets. In a letter to the chief executive of the Trust, Begum has said: "I simply cannot envisage that cuts of that scale could be implemented without creating a substantial variation in how services are accessed by patients."

I am planning to at-

tend a local Labour Party meeting to raise awareness of our dispute and build support. We will continue spreading the message, encouraging all those that can to attend our demos, which we have held at 8am or at lunchtime.

Our next day of action is Thursday 20 August, when we have lunchtime demonstrations across all three sites. Then, attention will turn to getting the vote out in the industrial action ballot.

These cuts are a choice that NHS bosses are making.

ELFT is currently running a balanced budget for the 2025/26 fiscal cycle. Although it reported a £12.7 million adjusted deficit for 2024/25, it has over £150 million in reserve. It does not "have" to make cuts.

The Trust has already made £70 million worth of cuts in the last two years. The plan for further cuts is not a local financial necessity, but a political choice made in line with national directives to reduce deficits. These financial pressures are coming from NHS England

and, ultimately, from government policy. The Integrated Care Board for North East London says it is "targeting efficiency savings through a 50% reduction in running costs". Those cuts are being passed on to individual trusts.

Increasing demand

Workers are under-resourced, despite being faced with increasing demand. When people face rising living costs, and a possible reduction in living standards, mental health is likely to be impacted. We know from existing data that reductions in staffing levels mean increased risk for patients. Shortages of beds mean patients aren't admitted, meaning they could be waiting at home when they are at greatest risk. Whilst not from our Trust, the cases of Martin Bryant and Sapphire Bernard, patients who took their own lives whilst waiting for beds to be made available in 2025 and 2023 respectively, show the risks cuts pose.

A *Guardian* article about the cuts neatly summarised how sweeping they will be, writing that the cuts will "involve the 'redesign' of at least 10 key services such as child and adolescent mental health care, talking therapies, addiction support, help for adults undergoing a mental health crisis and community programmes, including for ethnic minorities and poor people."

Our fight is not only a fight for staffing levels and our working conditions: it is a fight to defend the service we provide to our patients. □

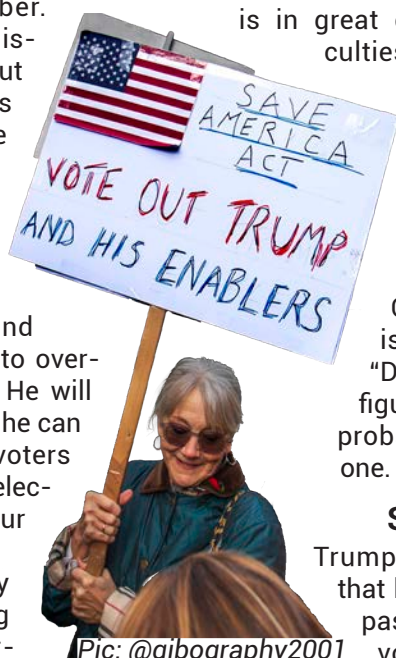


Trump's threats to November vote

By Harold Storey

The Republicans could lose both Houses of Congress in the US midterm elections on 3 November. Trump has a history of lashing out at losses, as following the 2020 presidential election which led to the 6 January 2021 storming of Congress and other attempts to overturn the result. He will stoop as low as he can to either win voters back or rig the election in his favour or both.

Trump may stage some big spectacle sur-



rounding Cuba to win back support, maybe a forced "regime change" as he did with Venezuela or talked of having done in Iran. The Cuban regime is in great economic difficulties following the Trump coup in Venezuela and the USA's addition of a blockade to its 64-year-old embargo on Cuba. The US is looking for a "Delcy Rodriguez" figure in Cuba, but probably can't find one.

SAVE act

Trump has claimed that his losses in the past were down to voter fraud and

large numbers of illegal immigrants falsely voting. His SAVE Act would make it mandatory to present proof of citizenship to vote. (Very few non-citizens vote. But many poorer citizens, and citizens of colour, do not have citizenship documents to hand). This has been blocked in the Senate (where the Republicans do not have the needed 60-40 majority to pass it). Courts have blocked Trump's attempts to achieve similar ends by executive order and to restrict postal voting, but the Supreme Court could yet help him.

Many Republican states, however, have already stepped up gerrymandering and limitations on voting. Trump probably will not be deterred from other attempts at curbing people's ability to vote, and certainly won't stop claims of voter

fraud come Republican losses. He can flood areas near polling stations with ICE thugs. Trump could even use the rule that, though the states run the voting, each House of Congress has the final say on the "elections and returns" of its own members, to have "his" outgoing Congress invalidate results.

Workers' movement

Trump's attacks on voting rights must be opposed by the workers' movement, by the trade unions and the left. As Trump continues his imperialist rampage, or tries to overturn the midterms, lessons must be learned from the Minnesota general strike this year, which did push back ICE, and the large-scale worker mobilisations for May Day. □



The fall of European Stalinism was a turning-point in world history, and one which obliged socialists everywhere, including those most hostile to Stalinism, to re-evaluate and reorient..

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The lies of capitalist fish-farming

By Sam Myerson

The biological and ecological impacts of salmon farming are disastrous. Far from the soft, nature-resilient image that fish farming attempts to paint, this is a destructive industry that pours millions of barrels of pesticides and waste into waterways and sea lochs. Consumers are sold a lie about the sustainability of the fish, and the environment pays the price.

Sea lice are abundant in salmon farms and spread to non-farmed fish stocks in the vicinity. Infected fish which cannot be saved are often illegally dumped. Pesticides and antibiotics go directly into waterways untreated. The downstream release of nitrogen, phosphorous and organic carbon from fish farming in Norway alone may be the equivalent of between that from 20 and 30 million people.

Seafood, by value, is the most traded food commodity worldwide, and only a few species dominate that market. One third of all seafood is catfish, salmon, shrimp, and tilapia, and 90% of that is farmed.

Farmed salmon are fed on a diet of minced stock fish. It relies on tonnes

of pelagic fish (those that live at mid-depth in oceans) like mackerel, sardines and anchovies. Those fish form big proportions of the bulk of protein in the diets of many humans in South America and West Africa, but maybe one quarter of catches go towards producing fish oil for feed in Norwegian fish farms alone.

The Norwegian farms have recently attracted coverage. However, the issue isn't limited to Norway. What applies there, applies in Scotland and the world over.

Havoc

The impact of the releases of nitrogen, phosphorous and organic carbon, predominantly from feed pellets, is an increase in phytoplankton that can lead to repeated large algal blooms which wreak havoc on marine ecosystems. They massively deplete oxygenation of bodies of water, many of which are semi enclosed.

While there is a moratorium on new farms in Scotland, and there has been a run of rejected applications in Norway, the global trend is that these farms will increase in size and number.

In Chile, the second largest producer of salmon after Norway, the salmoneras, or salmon farms have been cited by a United Nations special rapporteur as one of the main threats to Chilean waterways. They are creating aquatic death zones.

Salmon are not a native species in South America. They were imported

by Norway in the 1980s, and in the 2020s now form the largest non-mining part of the Chilean export market. Chilean salmon farming is more loosely regulated than Norwegian salmon farming, and uses nearly 500 times as much antibiotics, approximately 350kg, most of which ends up in environment.

Chile's new far-right government, under President José Kast, looks set to water down or repeal recent legislation to tackle the environmental impacts of aquaculture. Nova Austral, one of the largest fish farming firms, was fined multiple times under the legislation.

AquaChile, another of the farmed fish giants in Chile, has a large feed factory in the de Los Lagos region, an area of made up of national parks and protected indigenous land.

If aquaculture were regulated in Scotland even as tightly as terrestrial farming, most of the fish farms would be facing at least serious fines, or closure due to repeated breaches. But they are still regularly flouting the lax controls that are in place.

Terminal decline

The pelagic fish that are used to make fish oil to feed to farmed salmon provide, via smaller portion sizes, higher yields or similar yields of micronutrients than the salmon they are fed to. Over one million tonnes of mackerel in excess of scientific recommendations have been vacuumed from the sea. If the current trend continues many pelagic stocks, including mackerel, will be depleted so far as to go into terminal decline. On current predictions, quotas need to be reduced by three quarters immediately to prevent a collapse of marine ecosystems reliant on the migrations of the fish.

Transformation of how we produce food is a vital part of tackling the ever-growing issue of man-made climate change.

Workers

Workers in these sectors have a vital role to play, many work in poor conditions, for low pay. In Chile dozens of workers have been killed on the farms.

Some types of aquacultures should continue. Fish protein makes up a dominant proportion of some coastal communities' diets and cannot be immediately replaced. And there are some alternatives to aquaculture that are less harmful, or even beneficial, to marine ecosystems. Aquatic food production can mean much lower levels of CO2 per g of protein than terrestrial farming.

Seaweed, mussels, and oysters for example, can remove excess carbon and improve carbon cycles. Non-animal aquatic food like seaweed and kelp can be important in transforming food production.

Oysters, mussels, scallops and similar shellfish clean the waterways in which they are grown, and require no extra feed. Maintenance and management of facilities is required to ensure avoidance of contamination.

More modestly, just moving away from fish oil based feed can reduce greatly the numbers of pelagic fish that are caught.

The intensive nature and drive for profit in fish-farming has contributed greatly to the destructive impacts. But while the balance of forces remains stronger on the side of capital it seems less and less likely that the change required will be implemented. □



Unions' strike votes

When will the 50% threshold go?

By Gerry Bates

According to the latest government [update](#), electronic and workplace balloting for statutory trade union ballots will be implemented as from 25 August 2026.

Previously unions have been compelled to use postal ballots.

Like many other measures, this comes from the Employment Rights Act 2025, but has been delayed in implementation while the government negoti-

ates details.

One notable "detail" is that workplace balloting is legalised only if the boss has agreed to it in advance (and only for industrial action ballots). It is to be run by outside scrutineers setting up ballot boxes in portacabins or vans or such in or near the workplace, not by mass meetings, though the Code of Practice does say that the ballot-box place must be "out of the direct sight of man-

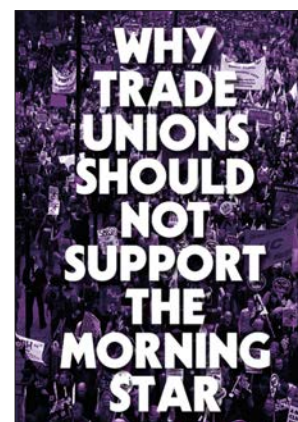
agement and/or team leaders" and "should not, wherever possible, be actively monitored by the employer via CCTV or other methods".

Usually, briefings about scheduling have linked the introduction of electronic balloting to scrapping the requirement that at least 50% of the "constituency" being balloted must cast a vote in order for an industrial action ballot result to be valid, and it

has been suggested that the the 50% threshold might be scrapped at the same time as electronic balloting comes in.

The latest government timeline mentions no schedule for scrapping the 50% requirement.

It is urgent that unions step up their pressure on the government to deliver. Employers have not been slow to step up pressure to delay or dilute the Act's measures. □



Trade unions should not be giving support to a newspaper which is the mouthpiece of the Communist Party of Britain. £3 (inc. post) □ bit.ly/shop-wl

How to cool your workplace

By Will Stephens

What are the most effective “passive cooling” measures for buildings? (Passive measures stop buildings from getting hot in the first place, where active measures cool the buildings down once they are already too hot).

The answer varies depending on the age and type of building. Older buildings built before 2000, while sometimes having better ventilation than more contemporary buildings, tend to overheat due to large amounts of poor quality and fully transmissive glazing. Newer buildings may already have overheating measures in effect, and so a bespoke overheating assessment is probably the first step.

Research commissioned by the Climate Change Committee found that several interventions, considered low cost, consistently performed well in buildings constructed before 2000:

- Internal solar blinds with a solar reflectance greater than 0.35, kept closed during the hottest parts of the day. This is one of the most effective measures, reducing the time spent in the year over the maximum comfort temperature by around 80% (defined in CIBSE TM59, it varies based on the average outside temperature).

- Low g-value solar-control film applied to the outside of windows, reducing the amount of the sun’s heat that enters the building (g-value is a proportion of transmission of radiation through the window 0-1).

- Ceiling fans — these help occupants stay cool during the hotter parts of the day with increased airflow over the skin but mainly increase ventilation during cooler parts of the day, helping the building to cool down at night. These were surprisingly one of the most effective solutions and very affordable, with low energy demand.

There are also some external solutions that are highly effective. The cost of them might be an order of magnitude higher, mainly due to the requirement of external scaffolding, but these should be considered when a larger building can benefit from the cost saving at scale, or for low rise buildings.

- External shutters, which were the single best-performing measure tested. In some cases they reduced the num-

ber of hours above 28°C by almost 90%, because they block solar heat before it enters the building.

- Replacement glazing, using modern low-g-value solar-control glass to reduce the amount of heat transmitted through windows.

- Fixed or temporary external shading, such as canopies, brise-soleil or awnings above windows. This was the second most effective intervention overall, but often comes with higher installation costs.

- Other studies point out the benefits of natural planting around the exterior of buildings. Trees can provide shading for the external windows, and provide passive cooling to the local external air as well.

Behavioural

As well as these measures, some of the most effective solutions are behavioural. For instance, if the air is hotter outside than inside, windows and blinds should be kept shut, unintuitively. For a more comprehensive list of measures that might be suitable to your home or workplace, check out the overheating adaptation guides at bit.ly/shade-uk.

Some solutions that are often proposed may not be the first port of call in adapting old buildings, such as painting the roof white (high cost, limited effect).

In the consecutive heat waves we have experienced this summer, many of our homes and workplaces have been unbearably hot. According to recent overheating studies, hospitals, care settings, and schools are among the building types most at risk. NHS buildings regularly exceed recommended temperatures in summer, putting patients and workers at risk, while overheating in classrooms affects learning and concentration. Many of these buildings were designed for a cooler climate than the one they now operate in and are increasingly struggling to cope with extreme heat.

The predominant active cooling measure is air conditioning. While many are aware of active measures, a recent study found that nearly 10% of UK energy use currently goes to air conditioning during the summer, and this is set to grow rapidly as the summers get hotter.

Ecologically minded socialists should be demanding passive solutions in their workplaces as well. Air conditioning will still have a role to play, particularly in places where overheating could be life-threatening such as intensive care units, but relying entirely on air conditioning would mean higher energy use and higher emissions. Wherever possible, passive measures should come first, and a combination will become increasingly necessary as the climate continues to heat up.

Studies show that buildings overheat

for two main reasons. First, sunlight enters through glazing and becomes trapped as heat inside the building. Second, poor ventilation prevents that heat build during the day from escaping when the temperatures cool at night.

Passive cooling measures vary enormously in both cost and effectiveness, but the common theme is simple — the most effective interventions stop sunlight reaching the inside of the building. Once solar radiation has entered through the glass and heated internal surfaces, removing that heat becomes far more difficult. Researchers have identified which measures deliver the biggest reductions in overheating for the lowest cost. Being educated on this means we do not have to accept employers’ or landlords’ claims that nothing can be done. We can demand improvements and show which measures provide the greatest benefit for the money spent.

During Covid, many unionists challenged their employers over unsafe working conditions, calling on section 44 of the Employment Rights Act 1996, which protects workers who reasonably believe that they face a serious and imminent danger. This can be used as a tool, where unsafe working conditions can be confronted through impromptu walk-outs, and was used successfully by many, including workers from my own branch who collectively refused to come into the office in 2020, leading to flexible working arrangements.

We are now seeing similar campaigns emerging because of overheating. Bus drivers organising in Unite have been refusing to work during heatwaves and now many have balloted to strike, calling for proper cooling systems, regular

breaks, access to water and a maximum safe working temperature.

Demands

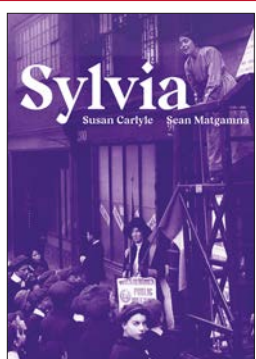
That might be the best solution for a bus. Most of us work in buildings and passive measures should be fought for here as well. Demands might include:

- An overheating action plan — a strategy for keeping the building cool through behavioural changes, with training and compensation provided for workers who operate the building, especially for janitorial or security staff who might be asked to open windows and purge heat during the evening or early morning. This should also have provision for drinking water, cool rooms, and a maximum working temperature.

- Passive cooling measures for the workplace, to be developed based on the specific building, but at least making use of low g-value window film, thermal blinds, and provision of freestanding or ceiling fans for all staff as a temporary response to deal with the immediate heat.

- Ultimately for full upgrades of our workplaces, making use of all possible passive measures, as well as the installation of air-conditioning or other active measures, to be used primarily just during the hottest days or for the most vulnerable users.

Walking out of an overheated workplace does not mean workers escape the heat, but it can be a powerful way of forcing employers to act. We should have safe places to work, to live in and to travel; a comprehensive solution is required to adapt to climate change, and this is likely to require a wider reorganisation of society. □



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



Ideas for Freedom is an annual festival of social debate, discussion, and education hosted by Workers’ Liberty. We invite you to join us to discuss the past, present, and future of working-class, socialist political ideas, and to become active along side in making those ideas a living reality.

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Halfway to solidarity with sex workers

By Dominika Szarek

Nancy Holmstrom's chapter "Sex Work and Capitalism", in her book *From a Marxist Feminist Point of View*, left me genuinely puzzled about the underlying message she intends to convey about sex work. She opens by acknowledging her own frustration with the topic, though she maintains that engaging with opposing positions can generate productive debate. Holmstrom notes that many feminists argue that criminalising sex work does more harm than good, yet she believes the stance of full decriminalisation carries its own set of problems.

Although she recognises that all forms of sex work should be understood as work, she focuses the chapter specifically on prostitution — the aspect of sex work that provokes the sharpest disagreement across the feminist political spectrum. Much of this disagreement stems from moral concerns about implying that it is morally acceptable for a person's body to be used in the absence of desire or erotic attraction on their part.

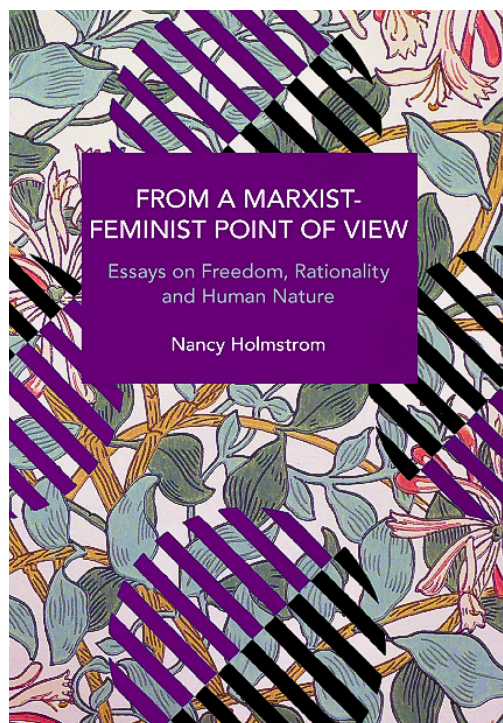
Holmstrom then turns to the question of freedom and choice within capitalism, arguing that in a system where every human need is monetised, the very conditions that shape "choice" are already constrained. Drawing on *Capital*, Holmstrom concludes that prostitution is a form of exploited labour shaped by the coercive pressures of capitalism and mediated through exploitative intermediaries such as pimps, brothels, and even multinational corporations.

Unique

This point aligns with her broader analysis of freedom elsewhere in the book. However, when she applies this framework to sex work, the argument becomes more difficult to parse. Holmstrom seems to suggest that women enter sex work primarily out of desperation, and that the work is uniquely humiliating. She delves onto the question in the next section named "Is Sex Special" where she states that prostitution is a "domination at the most intimate level," where sexual satisfaction — and by extension consent — becomes a one-directional transaction. This, she argues, is fundamentally different from other forms of labour where capital hires workers to use their bodies to produce commodities, and where those bodies can eventually be replaced by machines. Not so, she claims, in prostitution.

This is only semi-convincing now. With current developments in artificial intelligence — including AI dolls and brothels, such as the first one established in Berlin — it is increasingly unclear whether any job is immune from technological replacement.

The mechanisation aspect of Holm-



strom's argument is interesting for another reason. Marx notes in *Capital* that mechanised industries often pay higher wages than non-mechanised ones. And emotional-care work — from nursing to childcare — remains largely irreplaceable by machines (although, given the pace of technological development, even that may not be guaranteed).

By extension, we might ask: are these women violated in the same way as sex workers? Perhaps not. But they still provide comfort, intimacy, and embodied care. People — overwhelmingly women — who look after the elderly or other people's children perform intimate acts such as hugging, holding, and soothing.

Where, then, is the dividing line? It is blurry and murky. We can argue the two sorts of work are not the same thing, but still question Holmstrom intentions in this chapter. Holmstrom goes on to state that sex work in her description is the "ultimate alienation... similar to sex in patriarchal marriage" once again showcasing the foggy of the argument at hand.

Victorian moralism

Although Holmstrom insists that her position does not stem from sexual prudery, romantic sentiment, or Victorian moralism — and that she does not view all prostitutes as victims — her concern is framed as political, grounded in the epistemological values she outlines in the introduction: mode of production, rationality, freedom, and human nature/women's nature. Yet it is difficult to avoid the sense that a Victorian moral undertone still lingers.

What is even more troubling is her growing sympathy toward the Nordic Model of regulating sex work. This model, which criminalises the purchase of sex rather than its sale, has been controversial on many fronts. Its consequences have not granted sex workers

full rights; instead, it has pushed them into deeper socio-economic precarity by attacking their source of income and driving their work underground. In these conditions, clients become harder to screen, and sex workers are more vulnerable to abuse — the very harms the law claims to prevent.

Holmstrom acknowledges these objections, stating that she is only "sympathetic to their goals," yet she still proposes a variant of the Nordic Model. In her version, both selling and purchasing sex would be decriminalised, while pimps and brothels would be criminalised, with all financial gains going directly to sex workers.

The immediate question is why criminalising pimps and brothels would be beneficial, given that many sex workers rely on these structures for protection. Criminalising brothels also invites police raids — a practice already well-documented in the UK. Raids conducted between 2006 and 2008 under the banner of anti-trafficking resulted primarily in arrests for prostitution and immigration offences. Rather than protecting anyone, these operations entrenched cycles of abuse. One study found that raids increased the likelihood that sex workers would resort to behaviours that left them more susceptible to exploitation and rights violations. Police also routinely seized sex workers' earnings, with no meaningful avenue for reclaiming confiscated assets.

Holmstrom's answer is that sex workers could organise collectively and provide these services themselves — hiring bodyguards, drivers, and renting apartments together. Yet this proposal sits uneasily with the legal reality she does not address. Brothels in the UK are illegal under the justification of preventing trafficking, but the majority are in fact run by sex workers themselves and provide safety, affordability, and stability.

Research from Ireland shows that 85% of those convicted of brothel-keeping are women. This raises an obvious question: does Holmstrom's model oppose brothels, or does it inadvertently align with the very structures sex workers already use for collective organisation?

Even when brothels are not run by sex workers, many still rely on them for protection. Holmstrom's suggestion that sex workers simply organise their own infrastructure overlooks the material realities of the labour market. Renting premises, hiring security, and establishing safe working conditions all require capital — an upfront investment most sex workers do not have. People entering any form of work rarely possess the resources to build

an entire workplace from scratch. Holmstrom's proposal therefore risks assuming a level of economic stability that fails to account for the structural precarity of the people it aims to support.

Engagement

What is most concerning, however, is that Holmstrom arrives at this conclusion without including any testimonies or perspectives from sex workers themselves. She even concedes, "I am far from an expert," and admits that the crucial question is how such a model would work in practice. Yet she proceeds to outline a legal framework without engaging the very people whose lives would be shaped by it.

Her suggestion that laws must be carefully crafted to minimise arrests, and that police require better training, amounts to an appeasement with capitalist policing rather than a challenge to it. Historically, police have never been allies to sex workers; their institutional role is to protect property and enforce social order, not to deliver liberation. Trust in the police among sex workers remains and will remain extremely low, with many unwilling to report crimes committed against them. Those who do often face further harm, lack of legal representation, or even prosecution.

Sex workers in the UK continue to fight for the removal of Section 21 of the Policing and Crime Act 2009 and other provisions such as brothel-keeping laws which make it an offence for sex workers to work together. Holmstrom opposes criminalising sex workers for working collectively, yet simultaneously advocates a model that would continue to criminalise brothels — the very structures through which sex workers already organise for safety.

This contradiction undermines her claim to support sex workers' autonomy and raises serious questions about whether her proposed model can meaningfully contribute to liberation. More troublingly, the chapter reveals a tension between Holmstrom's stated commitments and the policy model she proposes, raising doubts about the internal consistency of her argument. □



Pic: @gibography2001

New network launched against uni cuts

By Sam Myerson

Over 31 July and 1 August, students and some higher education workers got together in Sheffield to discuss the formation of a new anti-cuts campaign. The nascent campaign does not yet have a name and as we go to press activists are working that out.

In building for the conference and spreading the work of the loose network of the anti-cuts groups have started to do the necessary work of rebuilding a student left. We have seen activists from Workers' Liberty, Workers Power, Socialist Students, and the Communist Workers' Organisation, along with students not in organisations, debate our differences and agree to found a new campaign.

The spread of activists across campuses and the willingness to work together, travel to meet activists, and build the campaign is commendable. We have to recognise that we are starting from a low base. The conditions in which we are organising are very different from even the 2010 generation.

The crisis in Higher Education is at a scale and spread that has not been seen



before; it is still varied. Some institutions are making cuts on the back of budget shortfalls, others are using the situation to reshape the university they run. Humanities and the arts have faced some brutal cuts; however, they are not the only courses facing attack. On the national level, the Labour government has made some small moves, including the introduction of a very limited maintenance grant, and under the new Education Minister, has said that university funding and tuition fees are a priority issue – a welcome change from the previous minister who refused to move.

More than half of all students are working more than 16 hours a week. Students on average have “working weeks” of 48 hours, going up to 56 for some who must work even more to support their studies. Many students are not around on campus other than for specific classes.

Unrest

There is growing unrest about the financial situation for students and graduates; this is coupled with unprecedented job losses and cuts in universities. More than 15,000 jobs have been lost in the last 18 months. Entire departments and courses have been closed.

Tuition fees, while rising, are not sufficient for university funding, and maintenance loans that only some students receive are woefully inadequate.

Student “leadership” has fallen back considerably in this time. NUS is a hollowed-out organisation, from the reformist left to the revo-

lutionary; campus organising is also at a low ebb. The movements that started the encampments in solidarity with the Palestinians have not given rise to new layers of activists.

Demands

Conference agreed on a minimum set of demands: oppose all cuts, abolition of fees for all students, universal maintenance grant at the level of the living wage, restoration of funding. That education should not be for profit.

All motions and statements passed at conference will be published shortly. We also agreed that we should, as a priority, campaign against the transphobic and unworkable EHRC guidance. Understanding that while some institutions, like the NUS, have said they will resist, they are very likely to fold when they come under pressure from legal challenges.

We also discussed tactics. This was an interesting discussion; there was one motion which sought to clarify the position on boycotts, titled “Ethical consumption and boycotts”. The motion made the case that support for boycotts must be on a case-by-case basis, and on the presumption that it is to support workers' struggles.

The campaign is going to continue to meet fortnightly for planning and to bring new activists into the work. Before freshers, we will compile, publish and distribute the *Student Worker Fightback* bulletin to activists ready for distribution at the start of term.

The student movement must be continuously refreshing and rebuilding itself. There are almost 3m students in



Pic: @gibography2001

higher education, with around 500,000 of those being new each year. The campaign plans to organise a series of educational events for activists on the history of the student movement. These will be local initiatives run by activists on the ground, coupled with some national meetings held online.

The campaign has to take the opportunity ahead of it. We have a new Prime Minister, and there is growing unease about the spiralling debt burden on graduates. We can change the balance of forces and make gains. That is going to take serious and diligent work. We will have to work out differences and debate tactics.

We need a class struggle student left, one that takes the fight seriously. Free education is a reality in many places in Europe; in Iceland and Germany it is free for international students too. We have to make links with workers, not just in Higher Education. Free lifelong education is a trade union issue as well as a student issue. □

Police clampdown in Bristol

By Owen Flood

Police used horses, batons, and unprovoked arrest against an anti-far-right counter-protest in Bristol on 8 August. Police were brought in from Devon and Cornwall, Wales, and Thames Valley, a step up from previous imports from outside Avon and Somerset have been brought in on occasion, this a step-up compared to more recent demonstrations.

The 200-300 strong counter-demo opposed 50 to 60 far-right agitators seeking to whip up fear around migrants and so-called “two-tier policing”. The far-right were outnumbered.

Their march had to be re-routed on a number of occasions as the counter-demonstrators repositioned themselves and blocked streets. Had the police not effectively made it their mission to escort the entire bloc, the far right would have never set off in the first place.

Bristol has generally had a healthy confrontational approach to the far-right. This past year the far-right have attempted to march nearly every two weeks. On

each occasion they have been outnumbered and needed the police to ensure their demonstration could go ahead.

Workers' Liberty argues for

working-class organisations, like trade unions, to take a lead fighting the far-right and in doing so promote and fight for working-class demands around

jobs, homes, and rebuilding public services and opposing anti-migrant, anti-LGBT+, and misogynist division. We work with groups like Trade Unions Fighting the Far Right and others who share this vision and approach. □

Police pushing against anti-far-right protesters in Bristol, August 8



Pic: @gibography2001



Women's Fightback is a socialist feminist magazine by Workers' Liberty. We stand for trans-inclusive, sex-positive, class struggle feminism.

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How strikes c

By Ruah Carlyle

There have been strikes against cuts in schools in Liège and other areas of French-speaking Belgium since 10 May, and they're due to restart on 24 August, when schools end their summer holidays (which started 4 July).

The background to these latest strikes was strikes in late 2024 against a new law threatening education. The vocational schools came out, and there was some solidarity action from other schools. It spread to most of the city schools, which means schools that are, not financed, but administered and organised, by the city government, and it lasted a week.

Recent action has built on and gone beyond this.

The current movement began principally with some vocational schools, serving more working-class students, coming out initially. Other schools quickly followed them.

Belgium has a variety of publicly-funded secondary schools: Catholic schools, schools run by the language "Communities" (with funding from the regional governments), federal schools, city-run schools, etc.

At that stage, none of the Catholic schools or the federal state schools came out.

Over the following two years, there was considerable animosity towards the organisers of the strike from the local union (which in Liège means mainly the FGTB, historically linked to the Socialist Party, as against the CSC, the Catholic union confederation). The national union strategy was essentially to call regular one-day strikes to let off steam, meaningless in terms of an industrial strategy. This was true of all industries, not just schools.

Great dissatisfaction developed amongst the rank and file, and a considerable number of people started not bothering to heed the call every time the union called a strike.

After a while, the activists won grudging acceptance from the local union, with minimal support – legal cover, a press statement and the helpful prediction "You will get nowhere". "You", not "we".

So there was a union strike authorisation in April. Some schools then voted to go out on 13 May, two days into the final (exam) term and following the last aimless one-day national strike, and more

Student protests in Brussels



from 18 May. And so by the end of that week, virtually every secondary school in Liège was out.

Rank and file

Since the end of 2024 activists in the schools which took the initiative had been making contact and talking with union representatives, and essentially building a rank and file organisation. We just went and spoke to people in the Catholic schools and the Community schools, whereas in usual official union procedure they are firmly siloed.

This meant a great deal because the culture of many of the Catholic schools is far more bourgeois, with more "aspirational" parents sending their kids there in the expectation of something better, while city schools have become more and more underfunded. Ring any bells, England?

Now we had flying pickets going to schools where there were not enough active people to make an effective picket on their own. We overcame the local bureaucracy of both unions.

These have been what in Belgium are called "blocking" pickets, as distinct from "filter" pickets. No-one crosses the picket lines. This has meant that we could continue the strike far longer, by a few teachers striking in each school and "blocking" out the other teachers by pickets. Those blocked would then in effect form a picket, or go and picket out other schools. Myself, I have lost on average maybe one day's pay a week since the strikes started. Importantly, low minimum numbers of official pickets means the strike can last longer. Where schools negotiated naively higher numbers –

ten or twenty – they found it harder to maintain the strike.

From the second week, schools outside the city in the province of Liège started to come out, in places like Verviers and Visé. The national unions covered strikes until the end of the year in Wallonia and Brussels.

Although the cuts, broadly speaking, apply across Belgium, with differences between the two big "Communities" which run schools, French-speaking and Flemish-speaking, there was nothing like this action and organisation in other cities.

Despite the natural tendency of bureaucracies to be bureaucracies, and despite shenanigans, we get to vote in the general assemblies in Liège, and when we get massive majorities, they can't really argue.

The first general assembly was about 200, and 80 to 90 has been the lowest. Usually 150 is a reasonable estimate.

By contrast, in the capital city, Brussels, the teachers haven't had a general assembly in two years. The union is weaker in its organisation and weaker in its democracy. When we started to come out, they were not ready to join us.

Most of what they were doing there was performative, demonstrative. You do rah-rah-rah for an hour, and then you go and work. Without denigrating their enthusiasm, they had no

experience of organising strikes without the bureaucracy.

A melodrama unfolded in parliament around the next, rushed, laws passing cuts, and a national demonstration – illegal within the "neutral" zone around the Brussels Walloon parliament – was organised for 4 June.

Student outrage

The students got impatient, and went into the city centre in their thousands. A few burned things, mainly bins and rental bikes. I didn't know they were so flammable, but they're really flammable.

The students were out because they were absolutely outraged at what was being done to them and to support their teachers. But they were not attacking the police or anyone else physically, and they ranged from 12-year-olds up to 18.

The police response was very violent, snatch squads, water cannon, baton charges, indiscriminate beatings. Many colleagues were utterly astounded. It was an eye opener, because the police were going for children who were not a threat in any way to people. There had been violence in the last two years, but this was brutal.

It galvanised the Brussels teachers, forming peace lines between the kids and the police scum over several days of confrontations. The same scenes were repeated in Namur – also weak in terms of strike action – where local government closed the schools. In a sense, the children showed the more industrially disorganised teachers the right road: out!

By contrast, in Liège, we had a de facto truce with the police. The city government is opposed to the cuts. They're not going to do anything about them, but they have no real objection to our protest, and the municipal police have (for now) backed off. There is ongoing individual harassment, seemingly stemming from cops with connections to a manager. A manager actually hit a picket with a car, but, don't forget,

it's us teachers who are violent, right? They also backed up the sheriffs.

The first sheriffs we saw were privately employed by a parent at a posh school who happened to be linked to a Tory government minister. For 500 euros they had the



Change people

pleasure of sending a court mandated sheriff to break the picket. More on that later. The later wave of sheriffs came when we blocked the exams. Again more on that later.

Strike committee

We had a highly effective strike committee where all the active schools were represented – an unofficial committee, the union leadership had nothing to do with it. There was at least one rep from each school, and they would alternate. It was a very practical affair: who needs help, what's going on, deconstructing management bullshit, avoiding bad agreements.

The initial organisers were from those few vocational schools who'd been on strike two years before. The committee would meet bi-weekly to weekly, depending on events, with about 30 schools represented by the end.

There were motions formulated from the strike committee that were then disallowed bureaucratically in the union general assemblies. Nonetheless, this committee led the strike. Mostly it was a very practical affair. Strategy evolved, and exchanged tactics and practical help. The different conditions of struggle – some schools are harder to organise for multiple reasons – would initially lead to divergence on tactics and barriers to collective mandates. Many were at first hesitant when the need to stop the exams ourselves became clearer.

The arguments were won. Constantly the idea that each school's "reality" was not the same got in the way. No, cuts are universal!

My school had a lot of people available for picketing, and because it's a Pédagogie Active school, everyone thinks we're Che Guevara. So activists in a school would say: We need help. Send 20 lunatics. And it worked. We had concerts. We had a band. We had singers, a demented singing baker; we recycled all the things we do for the school fete. Also, some professional musicians turned up and started doing songs with us on picket lines.

We would turn up in the morning at six or seven to catch the workers trying to sneak in early, and stayed there until the head teacher closed the school. The record was 09:46. We had a few hard nuts, but nowhere was uncontested, and no secondary school could open.

In the early stages, the students were a fundamental part of the movement. They

turned up and helped block the schools. Later on they actually saved one picket from being broken. Sheriffs (huissiers) were on our case, and then a thousand kids came and filled the road! The head teacher's shoulders sank, the rented dogs of the rich drove off, and another one bit the dust!

The strike committee and the pickets were the best team building ever.

The strike lasted seven weeks, and it got very hot, and the students are kids, and so understandably were not at the pickets at six in the morning every morning. They did support us, but their motives were varied, and not going to school was a big one.

Parent response

We had a parents' evening at my school during the strikes, for parents of the children of the key exam years. The gym was full, and one guy started saying like, "What are you doing?" Then another parent interrupted: "I am pleased that the teachers are anti-capitalist!" Round of applause. Very heartening.

Online, in the Facebook world, there was parent opposition; but there was a considerable amount of support online as well; and on the ground parent opposition to us was zero.

After we'd been on strike three weeks, and most of Wallonia [French-speaking Belgium] was affected, officials were still trying to say, "No, all the kids are going to take exams"

In Belgian secondary schools, students take end-of-year exams, set by external authorities but run and marked by the schools, in years 2, 4, and 6 (age 14, 16, 18). They are pass-fail exams, and usually over 80% pass. If a student fails, they may have to repeat a year.

We said: how can these children take these exams? They've been out of school for three weeks. What is the pedagogic value of these exams? Zero. We voted to stop the exams happening.

They had a system whereby guards brought the papers for various schools to a safe-deposit site, and then the head teachers were supposed to go there to pick up the papers.

We found out where the safe-deposit sites were, and we had high-on 24 hour pickets in some places. We won. In one case we managed even to talk round the exams organiser for the region who barracked his superiors: "This can't be done. You can't have these exams".

There seemed to be in some kind of

agreement with the union and the local government that there will be no primary school action. Primary schools have slightly different regulations in terms of the law. There is a minimum service required and picketing has to be sensitive. You can picket, though, again showing how important it is to communicate to members what they can do, not just a list of don'ts that discourage any action.

One union full-timer, in charge of primaries, would walk into primaries that had started strikes and tell them to lift their pickets. Strike breakers! Union strike breakers!

In the end, the primary schools, apart from a few cases, didn't come out. Reversing this will be high on the "to do" list next term.

We had a members' meeting about a week before the end of term where we had an overwhelming two-thirds vote to strike from 24 August. The union leadership immediately tried to make that into an advisory suggestion, as opposed to saying the general assembly had voted for it.

Of course, you have meetings at the school or on the picket rather, and that's where you make your decisions. Nonetheless a thumping majority in a general assembly cannot just be a mild "suggestion".

My school strike meetings were for me the most eye-opening part of the strike. There was more democracy in those meeting than I've seen anywhere else in my life – certainly more than at work, and we're supposedly a progressive school.

Probably different schools will do different things during the first week back. My own school wants to have the first day as strike, but on the second day to greet the first years. I'm worried about that becoming a management tactic for walking us back in. In a more optimistic view, I think we've gone too far to climb back in the box.



The top placard reads: We want a future, not an invoice

Sustained strike action really changes people.

Considerable numbers of teachers have been sacked in the meantime, i.e. not had their contracts renewed. That is one of the things that we've been fighting. In Belgium, you have to teach for several years before getting "nomination" to a permanent position. "Nomination" is also one of the things being ripped up.

The official plan that the teachers teaching the older kids will have extra two hours added to their lesson-load. That's played in the media as lazy teachers being called to account, but what it actually means is considerable number of teachers are going to lose their jobs.

Lessons

There are many lessons.

- While in no way replacing the union, rank and file organisation can overcome, browbeat and force legal cover from even the shittiest bureaucracy. Lead yourselves.

- Students are great. They are cavalry!

- Laws against trade unionism become brittle in struggle and are there to be broken. The state's agents don't always obey the state, and workers by argument at the picket or by force of numbers can bend those arms of the state until they break. Courts are for fools. No re-runs in the class struggle!

- Once a strike starts, keep the union leadership as far away from decision making as you can. Keep them away from pickets.

- Trade unions are organised so as to make action between sectors as hard as possible, even within the same industry. Cut out the middle-men and talk to the base, at the factory gate, the bus depot or the next school. Reps at those work places are often waiting for you with open arms.

- Defeats or false starts are practice and preparation. 18 months later we have seen the fruits of our efforts. □

How to win strikes, even some difficult ones

By Ken Worthington

Ian Allinson's *How to Win a Strike* is a practical guide for trade unionists and rank-and-file workplace activists. It provides a useful overview of industrial action and a practical guide to building and running a dispute. It covers the key stages of a dispute, from building organisation among members and developing a strategy, to planning and carrying out strike action from a rank-and-file perspective.

The pamphlet is particularly accessible to new activists. Allinson avoids unnecessary jargon and presents complex ideas in a straightforward way. He emphasises the importance of planning, democratic participation and understanding where power lies within a dispute. The book encourages readers to think strategically about targets, escalation, solidarity and the practical realities of taking industrial action.

The pamphlet discusses how strikes can build confidence, strengthen workplace organisation and leave workers better prepared for future campaigns, rather than seeing industrial action simply as an end in itself.

A central theme of the pamphlet is the collective power of workers. Allinson argues that workers can influence, and ultimately force, employers to respond to their demands through collective action, particularly by disrupting production, services and profits.

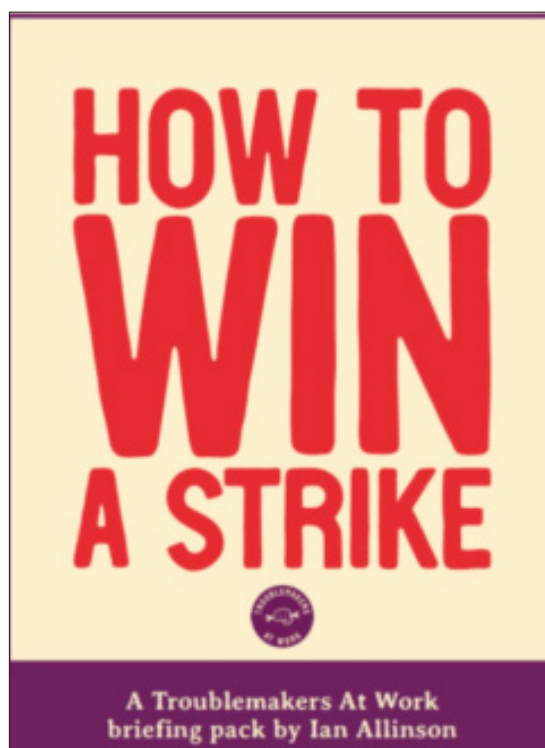
Limitations

My experience during the recent eight-month dispute at the National Coal Mining Museum for England (which we won) demonstrated some of the limitations of this approach. Despite continuous industrial action, it was extremely challenging to translate disruption into sufficient pressure to force the employer to seek a settlement.

This is particularly relevant in public-service or NGO workplaces and organisations that are not primarily profit-driven. Where an employer is not directly dependent on profit, the ability of workers to exert pressure through disruption can be significantly weaker. In these circumstances, relying primarily on disruption to services or organisational activity may not be enough to force an employer to concede.

This raises an important question which the pamphlet could explore further: what forms of leverage are available to workers when the economic cost of strike action to the employer is relatively limited?

The pamphlet rejects the idea that winning a strike is simply about taking the most aggressive industrial action possible. Instead, Allinson emphasises the importance of planning, identifying where power lies, understanding who has the authority to settle the dispute and choosing tactics that put pressure on the most critical points.



I think this is one of the pamphlet's most useful contributions. However, it could engage more critically with recent disputes where industrial action has been prolonged but insufficiently coordinated or escalated.

For example, disputes such as those involving postal workers and NHS workers demonstrated the difficulties that can arise when industrial action becomes infrequent, fragmented or overly reliant on isolated one-day strikes. Where action is not sufficiently coordinated or does not progressively increase pressure on the employer, there is a danger that industrial action becomes a series of individual strike days, announced to workers from above, rather than a coherent collectively-decided campaign designed to win.

The pamphlet is therefore strongest when explaining why strategy is important, but less developed in examining why disputes sometimes fail to develop or implement an effective strategy in practice.

Decision-makers

Allinson places considerable emphasis on identifying decision-makers before industrial action begins. Workers need to understand how an organisation makes decisions and identify those who have the authority to concede to their demands. Strikes should then be part of a coherent strategy of escalation, rather than action being called in the repeated vague hope that after the next round "something will turn up".

I believe Allinson is correct on this point. However, the pamphlet is less convincing when considering what happens when escalation does not work.

During the National Coal Mining Museum dispute, industrial action was escalated to indefinite action, but this still had a limited impact on forcing the board to concede to the workers' demands. This raises a difficult strategic question:

what should workers do when they have identified the decision-makers, applied increasing pressure and escalated their action, but the employer still refuses to settle?

The pamphlet is particularly strong on the importance of member involvement and democratic control through bodies such as rank-and-file strike committees. Allinson argues that workers themselves need to have ownership of their dispute rather than leaving decisions solely to union officials.

This is an important principle. There can be a significant gap between the interests of a union bureaucracy and those of workers directly involved in industrial action. Officials may have institutional, political or organisational considerations that do not always correspond with what workers believe is necessary to win their dispute.

Rank-and-file involvement is therefore not simply an issue of internal union democracy. It is also a question of effectiveness. Workers who understand the strategy, participate in decision-making and feel ownership over the dispute are more likely to remain active and committed during difficult periods.

Solidarity is another important theme throughout the pamphlet. Allinson explains how support from colleagues, other trade unions and community organisations can help sustain workers and strengthen a dispute.

This is particularly important during long and continuous strikes. Industrial action can become a difficult and grinding process, and workers can become demoralised when there appears to be little progress. During the National Coal Mining Museum dispute, there were periods when there were no negotiations or movement from the employer, and it sometimes felt as though the dispute was unwinnable.

During these periods, solidarity from other unions was critical for the dispute and its final victory. Visits to the picket line, fundraising and even simple messages of solidarity helped maintain morale and gave striking workers the confidence to continue.

I think the pamphlet could go further in exploring solidarity as more than simply a mechanism for supporting an individual dispute.

During the coal mining museum strike, we developed links with the striking Birmingham bin workers. We visited each other's picket lines and attempted to connect our cam-

paigns. This had a very positive impact. It helped demonstrate to striking workers that they were part of something bigger than their own workplace dispute and connected them to a wider struggle within the labour movement.

Solidarity can potentially become a source of power in its own right. Sometimes it can be a way of moving from a losing small-section dispute to a more extended and generalised winning dispute. Linking disputes together can help build confidence, create wider political pressure and develop relationships between workers that can be used in future campaigns. The pamphlet touches on this but could explore the strategic potential of coordinated solidarity much further.

Core argument

The core argument of *How to Win a Strike* is that successful strikes are not won through spontaneity or determination alone. They require organisation, democratic participation, strategic thinking, effective escalation and strong solidarity.

The pamphlet succeeds as an accessible introduction to the practical organisation of industrial disputes. For new activists, it provides a useful framework for thinking about how to build workplace organisation, identify sources of power and develop a strategy for action. Its emphasis on rank-and-file involvement and democratic control is particularly valuable.

However, the limitations of the pamphlet become more apparent when considering difficult, prolonged disputes where the conventional sources of leverage do not work. The experience of the National Coal Mining Museum dispute demonstrates that disruption does not always translate into employer pressure, that escalation does not always produce concessions, and that identifying the decision-maker does not guarantee that employers can be forced to change their position.

Overall, *How to Win a Strike* is a very good introduction to industrial action and an excellent resource especially for new workplace activists. Its greatest strength is its practical, rank-and-file approach. Its main weakness is that it is less developed on the problems that arise when a well-organised and escalating dispute still fails to force an employer to settle. Those limitations do not undermine the value of the pamphlet, but they provide an important basis for further discussion about how trade unions can develop strategies for winning difficult and prolonged disputes. □



Pic: @gibography2001

Wages, Price, and Profit

By Martin Thomas

So far, in surveying Marxist reference points, we have covered writings by Marx and Engels in the run-up to and around the revolutions of 1848.

They developed a school of socialism which:

- Connected socialism to democracy. "The first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class, to win the battle of democracy".

- Showed that "the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves" (Marx wrote that wording only in 1864, in the rules of the First International, but the thought is there in the 1840s)

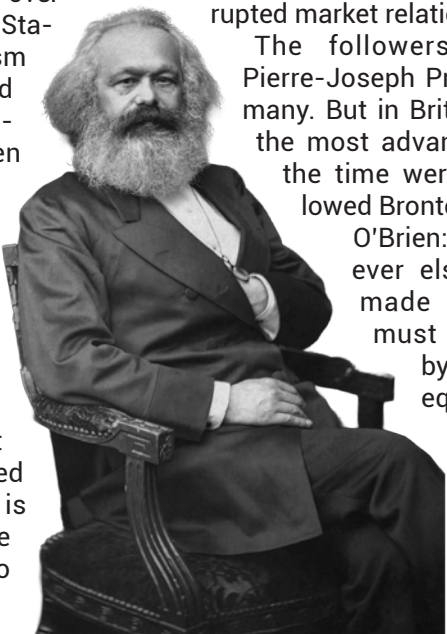
- Looked to long-term worker organisation and self-education, with persistence over ups and downs, not just to sudden rebellion. "The workers begin to form combinations (Trade Unions)... they found permanent associations in order to make provision beforehand for these occasional revolts... Now and then the workers are victorious, but only for a time. The real fruit of their battles lies, not in the immediate result, but in the ever expanding union of the workers... This organisation of the proletarians into a class, and, consequently into a political party, is continually being upset again by the competition between the workers themselves. But it ever rises up again, stronger, firmer, mightier".

Those ideas were radical departures in their time. Trade unions, for example, then existed with any size only in Britain, and were usually small, un-radical groups of better-off minorities of workers, often more mutual-aid societies than class-struggle outfits.

Common-sense

Yet Marx's ideas would gain such grip from the 1860s as to appear almost common-sense. They were overshadowed in the heyday of Stalinism by ideas of socialism as the product of militarised fighters for industrial development, and have been somewhat overshadowed since by ideas of socialism as a composite product of "social movements" (in practice, of left NGOs).

Between the early 1850s and the mid-1860s when Marx helped shape the First International and published *Capital*, the usual story is that he withdrew from active politics to devote himself to economic studies.



The story is not quite true. But on many issues on which he wrote in that interlude, his writings were relatively scrappy, and the best "reference points" come from later codifications by the Marxists of the Second International (1889-1914). Marx made his main writing effort in economic studies, as no previous socialist had done.

Why? Distinctively, he analysed capitalism not just to show that it is bad, but also that it creates new social possibilities. As he put it in the Communist Manifesto: "The advance of industry... replaces the isolation of the labourers, due to competition, by the revolutionary combination, due to association. The development of Modern Industry, therefore, cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products. What the bourgeoisie produces, above all, are its own grave-diggers".

Or, in *Capital* volume 1 (chapter 15): "The concentration of capital... by maturing the material conditions, and the combination on a social scale of the processes of production... matures the contradictions and antagonisms of the capitalist form of production, and thereby provides, along with the elements for the formation of a new society, the forces for exploding the old one".

In 1859 he published the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. But, as he wrote to a startled Engels "don't collapse... these sections do not yet contain anything about capital", only about value-form and money. He was still not sure enough of his ground, though he rationalised by writing that the *Contribution's* analysis of money could "win a scientific victory for our Party".

Polemically, he rationalised by saying that "communism must above all dispose of this 'false brother', the idea of a socialism which improved on capitalism by instituting more equalised and uncorrupted market relations.

The followers in France of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon were still many. But in Britain, too, probably the most advanced socialists of the time were those who followed Bronterre O'Brien.

O'Brien: "Land, and whatever else the Deity has made for man's use, must be expropriated, by commutation, on equitable terms for the general good, and never again be made private property. Credit must be accessible for every member

of the community, on terms beneficial the individual, and just and safe for the public. And all commerce must be gradually reduced to equitable exchange on the principle of equal values for equal values, measured by a labour or corn standard".

The first ripe fruit of Marx's economic studies was *Wages, Price, and Profit* (WPP), a talk in 1865 to the General Council of the First International to reply to John Weston, who argued that trade-union struggle was worthless. (Weston, a carpenter, was an Owenite, a follower of Robert Owen. He may have been playing "devil's advocate", because there were Owenite trade unionists, and one of the First International's staple activities was support for trade-union strikes).

Marx rejected proposals to publish the talk at the time, apparently worried that it would gazump *Capital*. (*Capital* does not cover wage struggles in any rounded way, as WPP does. I don't know why. In Workers' Liberty study courses on *Capital*, we add WPP as an "extra chapter"). WPP was published, by Karl Marx's daughter Eleanor, only in 1898. It is sometimes titled "Value, Price, and Profit".

Pauperisation

WPP refutes the ideas of inevitable working-class pauperisation or an "iron law of wages" often attributed to Marx. Early on in it Marx draws "attention to the real rise of wages that took place in Great Britain from 1849 to 1859", and to the fact that wages are higher in advanced capitalist countries than in poorer ones (in his day, higher in the USA than Britain, and higher in Britain than in France).

He does argue that capitalism will tend to reduce the exchange-value of labour power. In context he means it will reduce the hours of labour necessary to "cover" wages, not necessarily the equivalent product in goods and services of those hours. Research finds that nowadays in advanced capitalist countries maybe one-quarter of working hours correspond to the labour-time necessary to produce wage-goods, where Marx's estimate for his day was about a half. The one-quarter of working-time today produces much more than the one-half 150 years ago.

Marx did underestimate the elasticity of capitalism, though not half as much as many other socialists or even bourgeois economists in his day. In 1880 he objected to French socialists demanding a legal minimum wage on the grounds that it was implausible under capitalism. "Guesde insist[ed] on putting in his foolish minimum wage demand", wrote Engels, "and... we finally let him have his

way although he admitted that theoretically it was nonsense".

But Marx showed that workers' organisation can win improved wages and shorter hours. In the short term we do this at the expense of profits. In the longer term (as Marx demonstrated in *Capital*), it stimulates smarter technology and may not even reduce profits.

To those who disdained wage struggles he asked, should the workers "abandon their attempts at making the best of the occasional chances for their temporary improvement? If they did, they would be degraded to one level mass of broken wretches past salvation... By cowardly giving way in their everyday conflict with capital, they would certainly disqualify themselves for the initiating of any larger movement".

Which is another way of saying: by bravely fighting and winning our everyday conflicts with capital, we can upgrade our confidence and our leeway for socialising and organising and self-educating; we can qualify ourselves for the initiating of larger movements.

The text is at bit.ly/mx-wpp. Audio version at bit.ly/ptref-audio. Workers' Liberty study notes bit.ly/wpp-n1 and more at bit.ly/wpp-notes. □

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Ethnic minorities in the far right

By Bas Hardy

If ever Sara Pochin, Reform MP for Run-corn, is remembered at all it will be for her bigoted comment that the sight of "too many" black and Asian people on TV "drives me mad." Yet strangely she hasn't said the same about black and brown faces amongst the leadership of Reform.

A number of prominent Faragists come from first or second generation immigrant backgrounds. Suella Braverman, Zia Yusuf, and Nadhim Zahawi are from Asian backgrounds. Laila Cunningham, Reform candidate for London Mayor, has Egyptian parentage. Reform Kent County Council leader Linden Kemkaran describes her Trinidadian father as a member of the Windrush generation. Why have these people assumed leading positions in obviously anti immigrant and pretty much racist political outfit?

Drawing up the ladder is the most common charge. A desire to become part of the ruling establishment another.

Class definitely plays an important part. You've made your fortune at Goldman Sachs so obviously you are far superior to the Filipino nurse who works in the NHS or the care worker who comes from Nigeria. You belong, they don't.

Farage had the cheek recently to complain that his ethnic minority candidates in the local elections were on the receiving end of racist abuse via X – "utterly appalling in every way". Perhaps a lot of that abuse came from supporters of loathsome Rupert Lowe's Restore outfit, which seeks to outflank Farage in the racist stakes, but I would imagine it was from many Reform voters as well.

His newfound concern for politicians subject to racist abuse has never extended to Diane Abbott, Sadiq Khan, or even Rishi Sunak.

The obvious elephant in the room for those from ethnic backgrounds who involve themselves with the far right comes from the base of such parties. Look at any Reform gathering and it's a sea of white faces. They might not at the moment tell it to your face, but they don't like you for the obvious reason you are a different skin colour.

Last April Reform launched a "Stop the Boris Wave" pamphlet held aloft by both Yusuf and Farage picturing "migrants" in a similar manner as those in the notorious Goebels-style Brexit

"breaking point" poster. One wonders about Yusuf's mental alacrity at his failure to recognise that the people depicted on its front cover looked a lot more like him than old frog-face Farage!

Of course the real reason far right parties welcome ethnic minority individuals into their leadership is down to "proximity denial". How can we possibly be racist or anti-Muslim if we have Asians like Yusuf or Muslims like Laila Cunningham among our leading figures?

The quasi-Nazi AfD in Germany are up to the same trick with leading member Alice Weidel in a relationship with a Sri Lankan woman and her adopted children. Ethnic minorities and the LGBT community in Germany will be safe under an AfD government just like they were during the Nazi regime some in the AfD leadership make no secret being fond of.

Warning

History carries a definite warning for members of ethnic minorities foolishly opting to ride the ethno-nationalist tiger. It would be pretty flabbergasting to learn that Jews in Nazi Germany leant support to Hitler. The vast majority of the German Jewish population were pretty certain their future in the Third Reich was going in a dreadful direction.

However, the Association of German National Jews, led by Max Naumann, believed that Nazi antisemitism was political posturing to "stir up the masses". It didn't apply to them, anti-Communist, anti-Zionist and anti-liberal-cosmopolitan. Their attempts to accommodate to Nazism didn't stop their journey to the concentration camps though.

Nazi Germany is an extreme example of the dangers of ethnic minorities getting entangled with European racist political parties. A more pertinent example is Italy under Mus-

solini. Many in the Italian Jewish community were fervent supporters of the fascist movement and state for

much of its existence. Italian fascism was not blatantly antisemitic in its first decade or so. Jewish Italians joined the Fascist party in proportions three times higher than the rest of the Italian population.

Mussolini declared in 1934 that "there has never been antisemitism in Italy" (a blatantly historical false statement – think ghettos!). In 1938 his regime enacted racial laws which stripped Italian Jews of their citizenship. From then on

as his regime became increasingly subservient to Hitler no one in the Jewish community was safe. Ettore Ovazza, a Jewish financier who bankrolled Mussolini and regarded him as "a personal friend", was murdered along with most of his family by the SS in 1943.

Nearly 8,000 Italian Jews perished in the Holocaust, out of a population of 45,000. A classic work of twentieth century literature, *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis*, by Giorgio Bassani, portrays the impending menace faced by Italy's Jewish communities before the walls caved in.

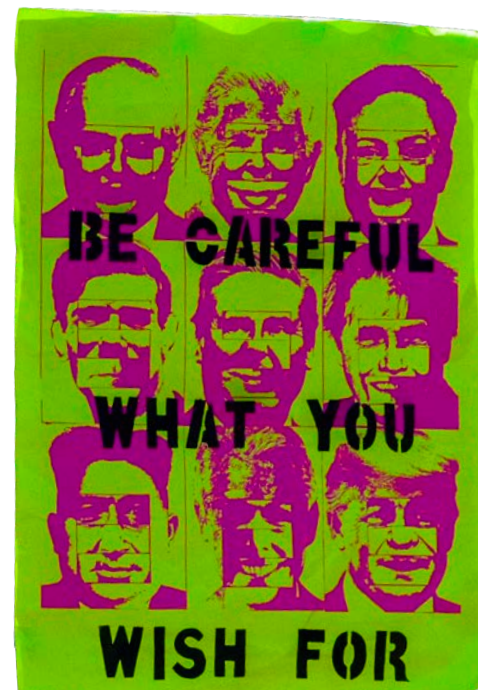
It's less likely leading far right figures from ethnic backgrounds today would meet such extreme fates as that which befell Ovazza, but they should be worried about the kind of politics they are promoting, assuming they are capable of thinking about the consequences of what they are doing. How many of those actually voting for them really believe they are "British"? It's pretty certain many Reform and Restore voters don't think black and brown people are, even those who've been living in the country for several generations.

Dilemma

The emergence of Restore, which makes no pretence at not being a racist party and indeed positively welcomes neo-Nazi and fascist types to its ranks, poses an acute dilemma for Farage on top of all the scandals surrounding how he and his party are financed. With the odious Lowe syphoning off some of his extreme racist base, will Farage attempt to recapture that ground by upping the ante with ever more virulent anti immigrant and anti foreigner rhetoric and risk jeopardising his project of Reform becoming a "centre-right" party?

Farage has tacked to the further right recently with claims that middle class white men are somehow subject to "anti-white discrimination", in an effort to win back some of the support he's lost to Lowe's outfit. Yet going down that route must make the likes of Yusuf and Cunningham very uncomfortable particularly when in the distorted minds of Lowe followers Farage is being portrayed as a "Muslim puppet".

Yusuf resigned as Reform chairman after Pochin made a "ban the burka" call in parliament despite it not even being Reform policy. He was quickly brought



back into the leadership and now enjoys the title of "shadow home secretary", even though he isn't. His return to the fold probably signified that he wasn't all that bothered about Muslim women or indeed women in general.

Yusuf has admitted that he has never been proposed as a Reform parliamentary candidate, yet failed to explain why. Some say it's down to his obnoxious personality. Others sus-

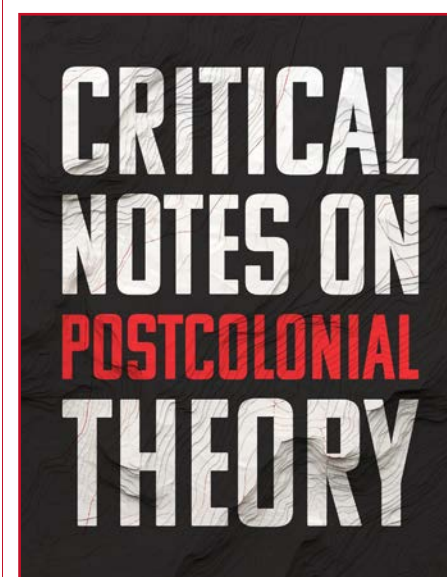
pect it's because he won't get many Reform supporters canvassing for him for some inexplicable reason.

Pandering further to white racism can also cause problems for Laila Cunningham as wannabe London Mayor. Her attempt to win over an ethnic minority audience recently didn't go down well recently when she declared "some of my best friends are Pakistani."

Yusuf, Braverman, et al can always go and live in Dubai – a popular bolthole for leading Faragists – should things ever get too hot for them. That option is not open to working-class people of colour who must be extremely worried about the potential racist violence these individuals have helped stoke up. Ethnic minority leaders in far right parties are there to provide a facade for racism and as such need to be called out. □



Pic: @gibography2001



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Farage's outrider on the further right

By Luke Hardy

The labour movement and anti-racist movement need to wake up to the threat of Rupert Lowe and his party, Restore Britain. This may seem strange to say about a party founded in March 2026 which has only one MP and got less than 7% in the recent Makerfield by election. But read on.

There is much that is depressingly familiar in Restore Britain's politics for anyone who has been keeping an eye with the British far right over the decades. It's the politics of ethno-nationalism, of "rights for whites", of mass deportation of migrants, of bringing back the death penalty, bans on burqas, outlawing kosher and halal meat, and general "anti woke" culture-war posturing. Restore Britain takes live social and political issues from the news and tries to find a way to racialise them or blame migrants.

They are increasingly pushing the policy of "remigration" of millions of non-white people, regardless of their status, to restore what they see as the ethnic homogeneity of Britain. Recent posts on Facebook and Twitter by Rupert Lowe have talked of "colonisation" by migrant communities and "demographic vandalism". This is the rhetoric of Enoch Powell reheated with a particular post-9/11 Islamophobic twist.

These politics are familiar, but their reach and potential influence are new. The BNP at its height, around 2007-8, had maybe 15,000 members. The latest figures released by Restore Britain claim 130,000 members.

Maybe membership of Restore Britain, often online, means less in reality than being a BNP member did back in the day (usually meaning some in-person link), but undeniably there is a large following for Restore Britain and Rupert Lowe on social media. Lowe has 1.4 million followers on Facebook and 880,000 on Twitter. Interviews with Lowe on YouTube often get multiple million views.

While Lowe does not have the open door Reform has to some parts of the more traditional right wing media, he is on channels like GB News and Talk TV relatively regularly.

Lowe's political origins outside the far right and generally affable and posh demeanour give him a respectability and access to platforms Nick Griffin could never dream of. The no platform approach that UAF used against Nick Griffin was not particularly effective, but Lowe has long escaped containment by any such policy.

Background

Rupert Lowe's background and political trajectory is quite similar to that of his great rival on the far right, Nigel Farage.

Lowe was privately educated, worked in the City in the 1980s, and was a Thatcherite Tory who split with them to go into single issue Eurosceptic politics in the 1990s. After a failed run as a Referendum party candidate he dropped out of politics for nearly 30 years, becoming known as a multi-millionaire businessman and a much-hated owner of Southampton FC.

Farage brought him back into the political front line to stand first for the Brexit Party and then Reform. Lowe won the deprived coastal seat of Great Yarmouth for Reform in the 2024 General Election.

After the election Lowe quickly fell out with Farage. Lowe was open to working with the likes of Tommy Robinson and other more violent and street-based far right figures that Farage has studiously kept his distance from. He was vocal against other senior Reform figures, especially Zia Yusuf. He was publicly manoeuvring for the leadership of Reform. Eventually Reform stripped Lowe of the whip for bullying behaviour.

Since then Lowe has gained the support of Elon Musk and many others on the right who think Farage is too soft and not right-wing enough.

Lowe also seems also to have moved rightward. As Hope Not Hate reports, some of Lowe's key lieutenants like Charlie Downes and Harrison Pitt have spoken at anti-immigration demos, were early promoters of "re-migration", and are part of the far right podcaster universe.

Neo Nazis and fascists from the likes of Patriotic Alternative and the Homeland party have flocked to Restore Brit-

ain while maintaining their membership of those more extreme groups. There is no sign so far of Lowe repudiating them. In fact Lowe seems to be embracing some of their rhetoric and politics.

It's unlikely that Restore will get very far electorally while Reform still dominate the far right, but they have already managed to push Reform rightwards by creating a new threat on its right flank. Nigel Farage had said mass deportations was fantasy politics, and Reform generally avoided talking openly about race and instead focused on identity and civic nationalism.

Under pressure from Restore, Reform has adopted a mass deportation policy and has started talking about police discrimination against "whites". Even that hasn't stopped Reform losing a string of councillors or activists through defection to Restore Britain.

Effective

Lowe seems to be using his parliamentary seat more effectively than Farage. For instance, he used it to give his "report" on grooming gangs a quasi parliamentary sheen. He has used EDMs, questions to ministers, and his place on the Public Accounts Committee (which the Tory party shamefully gave him) as a platform for clippable moments.

Lowe and Restore Britain have helped emboldened a more openly racist and far-right political discourse, especially on social media. Lowe often says he doesn't care if what he says is perceived as racist. That gives licence to more open racism from his supporters.

Restore Britain is still primarily electoral, but open to getting involved in street demos, with its flags appearing prominently on many demos and its activists speaking from the platforms. Lowe supported and promoted the "Unite The Kingdom" demos and the "Raise the Colours" campaign of putting Union Flags and St George's Crosses up everywhere.

We shouldn't overplay Restore Britain's prospects. 7% at the Makerfield by election is no better than the BNP got in the constituency back in 2010. Other than Lowe, it has no other figures with

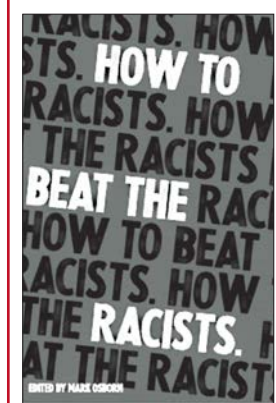
any real public profile.

For all its posture as radical outsiders and Lowe's nose for seizing on populist talking points, economically Restore Britain offers the exact same ultra-Thatcherism as Reform and the Tories. This may limit their appeal to voters who are desperate for economic change. It is also a potential cleavage in the party, as the far right movements Lowe has welcomed into the party have more populist and corporatist economic views than he has.

Restore Britain clearly has money but it has very little national infrastructure, and where branches are forming, they are often going to be dominated by existing far-right figures. People whose history of petty factionalism and grudges, long criminal records, embarrassing neo-Nazi social media posts and inability to organise piss-ups in breweries will take its toll.

However, Farage and Reform are struggling. If they are overtaken by The Tories and seriously lose momentum, Restore Britain may be well placed to make some gains electorally beyond their Great Yarmouth redoubt. Every Restore councillor elected will embolden local racists and bigots and make life harder for migrants, racialised minorities, and LGBTQ people.

The left, trade unionists and anti racists need to recognise the threat of Restore Britain alongside the continued threat of Reform, organise and mobilise against them where they stand, expose their politics and offer a socialist alternative to the despair and disillusion they exploit. □



Racism and fascism will only be defeated by united working-class mobilisations, and a fight for socialist policies. £3(inc. post) □ bit.ly/shop-wl

Wakefield's Reform council, flags, and landlords

By Ken Worthington

Wakefield Council's meeting on 29 July exposed the political priorities of the new Reform UK administration. Faced with declining town centres, struggling high streets and growing concerns from local communities, the administration spent much of its political energy on symbolic issues while retreating from stronger

action against the economic interests contributing to local decline.

After other proposals were pushed off the agenda Reform councillor Jamie McGrevy introduced a motion restricting flags flown from council buildings to just four: the Union Jack, the St George's Cross, the Yorkshire flag and the Armed Forces flag. The motion ultimately passed.

Yet the real political significance of the meeting came not from the flag debate itself but from what happened next.

Kate Dodd moved a motion calling on Wakefield Council to use powers available under recent legislation to tackle long-term vacant retail units. Empty shops remain one of the clearest signs of economic decline in Wakefield, Castleford, Pon-

tefract, Knottingley and many other parts of the district. The motion proposed using powers designed to bring persistently empty units back into use for businesses, community organisations and other social purposes.

But Reform amended the motion. The original proposal was replaced with a commitment to further investigation and a

report back through scrutiny structures. Wakefield needs democratic debate, investment in its town centres and action against those contributing to decline.

What it received instead was a culture-war motion and another six months' patience for the landlords. □

• Abridged. More: bit.ly/wakefield-f □

Tax the rich, says China

By Chan Ying

According to the *Financial Times*, 5 August 2026, the People's Republic "has launched a global hunt of billions of dollars in unpaid taxes going back decades as Beijing seeks to fill a deepening fiscal hole by targeting the ultra-rich."

Those who still consider China to be a socialist country may feel vindicated. Is this not surely decisive action against capitalism compared to anything that Burnham might consider doing?

Who are these ultra-rich Chinese, and how did they become wealthy right under the nose of a supposedly socialist government? What assets do they have and where are they tucked away?

The ultra-rich's wealth stems from a combination of systemic corruption within the Party State and the unleashing of private enterprise in the past three decades, as the CCP regime made its decisive turn towards market capitalism in the 1990s. In 2026, China has overtaken the USA as the country with the largest number of billionaires.

In the new capitalist Wild East, whilst there are those like Pony Ma of Tencent and Jack Ma of Alibaba who are self-made billionaire entrepreneurs, many relied on their family connections to influential cadres to make their fortunes. CCP membership doubled from 50 million in 1990 to over 100 million in 2026. Since 2001, the CCP has permitted entrepreneurs to become party members. CCP members have privileged access to government jobs and influential positions in media, education, trade and industry, banking – virtually every sector of society.

Privatisation of government land and other assets, plus easy credit, generated real-estate speculation, probably the main source of newly acquired assets for those who divested their fortunes based on property before the housing bubble burst in 2021, leaving most banks with severe bad debts.

Overseas assets of Chinese enterprises are estimated to be around \$8 trillion, of which around \$1.8 trillion are estimated to be the wealth of private individuals (well buried in off-shore trusts and shell companies).

There is a whole industry of advisers and brokers helping China's nouveau ultra-riche to get their capital out, investing in not just Hong Kong but right across the globe – from purchases of real estate, companies, precious metals, cryptocurrencies, global stock markets, even UK football clubs.

However, the regime has abruptly launched campaigns to retroactively tax overseas assets, levying a 20% tax on dividends and interest earned overseas, and to introduce reforms bringing the PRC's tax system closer to... not so-

cialism, but how the US taxes American taxpayers on worldwide income.

Tax authorities are working closely with Chinese banks to step up scrutiny of capital gains, going back as far as 2000, freezing bank accounts until satisfied that tax has been paid. Furthermore, controls restricting Chinese citizens from opening new overseas bank accounts and investment trusts are now strictly implemented and further tightened.

The government's budget revenue has plateaued since 2021 at around RMB 21.6tn (\$3.2tn). The sale of land leases, once a core revenue source for the regime, has slumped from RMB8.7tn (i.e. about 40% of budget revenue) in 2021 to Rmb 4.15tn (down to 20% of budget revenue). This fiscal shortfall appears to be the key reason for the regime's attempts to tax the ultra-rich, many of whom are their own elite.

Agenda

If taxing the ultra-rich is aimed at redistributing wealth to the most deprived 10% that would be welcome, although it is more likely that the regime will persist with its own agenda of sponsoring high tech development and subsidising exports, a dead-end strategy because of protectionist push-backs in G7 nations.

The Chinese economy has been in the doldrums since the massive debt-fuelled property bubble crashed in 2021 – with real GDP growth at around 1.5 to 2% rather than the officially published 5%. Discussion within the elite is now in the public domain.

Li Daokui, dean of the Academic Center for Chinese Economic Practice and Thinking at Tsinghua University, and former member of the Bank of China's monetary policy committee, remarked on 11 July at the China Macroeconomic Forum that "the biggest problem facing China's macroeconomy today is not K-shaped divergence, but that the economy as a whole is running cold – and this has already persisted for three years". Referring to the high-tech export boom diverging from rest of the economy, he added "once we start talking about K-shaped divergence, it is as though we are placing our hopes on the upward arm of the K and expecting it to pull the entire Chinese economy forward. That actually leads us away from the real problem." He further said:

- The real unemployment rate is 10.2%. (The official rate is 5%)

- Fixed investment has fallen by 4.1%. "The intensity and duration of the current decline exceed previous historical extremes (famine and split with the USSR in 1961 and the Cultural Revolution in 1967)".

"The overall judgment is that new drivers of growth have not yet been created,

while the old growth engines of recent decades have already faded. Over the past 20 years, China's rapid economic expansion has been driven primarily not by household consumption – whose share of GDP has been roughly 35 to 38 percent, excluding services consumption – but by two major engines. The first was large-scale infrastructure investment, sustained for nearly two decades and arguably the largest infrastructure buildout in human economic history. The second was the broad upswing in real estate, which unquestionably exerted an enormous pull on the economy."

"Local governments were the main pillar of infrastructure investment. Our repeated calculations show that, in the past, local-government infrastructure investment plus routine expenditures averaged 41 percent of GDP each year, far exceeding household consumption and making local governments China's largest source of economic demand. Infrastructure spending accounted for roughly 75 percent or more of local-government expenditures. Only a small portion went to routine operations; the bulk went to construction. From construction and building materials to migrant labour, land development, and the transfer of income to households through land development, the pull on the Chinese economy was enormous. Today, both real estate and infrastructure have stalled." He goes on to remark that local government is mired in debt and real social expenditure lags escalating interest payments. "Local governments already rely on central fiscal transfers. If they do not borrow to repay debt, they struggle even to maintain normal operations, let alone pay interest. The more they issue new debt to repay old debt, the more the new borrowing exceeds the debt being

retired, and the total stock of local debt continues to expand."

"This produces the following situation: households are unwilling to borrow to consume; firms are unwilling to turn financial resources into investment; and the money borrowed by local governments circulates largely within the financial system, as new borrowing is used to repay old debt. This is the 'blockage' visible in the financial dimension of the economy."

Local government decline

"In the real economy, this appears as a decline in total local-government expenditure – including routine personnel and operating expenditures plus capital spending – from 41 percent of GDP to 35 percent. Capital expenditures have contracted sharply. At the same time, local governments are seeking money from companies in every possible way: clawing back previously promised tax concessions, collecting taxes in advance, and so on. Local governments have thus become a part of the economy that absorbs heat. A computer chip needs to dissipate heat to operate, but local governments have become 'heat absorbers' and energy 'black holes'. This is the fundamental reason the economy is running cold."

"The economy as a whole is running cold. We should not focus only on the small segment that is still rising, because it cannot pull the entire Chinese economy forward."

Such plain speaking without censorship is a clear indication that factional infighting over Xi's attempt to secure a fourth term next year, amidst intractable economic problems, has loosened up public discourse. □

• Abridged. More: bit.ly/china-tax

Activist Agenda

Meetings

Sat 15 Aug: Chartist walking tour. Organised by London AWL. Meet 2pm, Parliament Square, London

Fri 28 Aug to Mon 31st: Workers' Liberty summer camp. Near Haslemere, Surrey. Book at workersliberty.org/camp

At work or on campus

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

Template motions

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

Socialist-feminist book clubs

bit.ly/bc-sf

London: The male gaze. 2pm, Sunday 6 Sep, Effra Social, 89 Effra Road SW2 1DF

See workersliberty.org/agenda. □



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The first 24 days of Andy Burnham

By David Axon

Polling averages show a rise for Labour of around eight percentage points since the Makerfield by-election on 18 June. Since mid-July most polls have been placing Reform behind Labour, ending a 15-month period of Reform leading the polls created by the increasing popularity of the Starmer government.

Reports from activists around the country suggest that there has also been a small uptick in Labour Party membership since Burnham assumed leadership, but it leaves us a long way off Labour's most recent peak in 2017, and may well not yet be enough even to reverse Labour's loss of over a fifth of its membership in 2025 alone.

Burnham's first few days in office saw several high profile policy announcements to indicate a shift from the priorities of the Starmer government. In scale these are in reality more symbolic than material, even though they aren't things anyone would have expected if Starmer was still in office: VAT off electricity bills (in reality worth about £45), reinstating the £2 bus fare cap, a drive to "end" rough sleeping (with £340 million announced to go towards acquiring homes: but then even Steve Reed announced £3.5 billion, widely criticised as a made-up figure, to "end rough sleeping", back in December 2025).

That Burnham has declared for a "change of direction" in the government is an opportunity for socialists in the Labour Party and unions – if it is taken up with concrete campaign demands.

Burnham says, "Britain took a series of

wrong turns in the 1980s: political power was centralised, and economic power was privatised. The country surrendered control of the essentials: housing, water, energy, transport, and left people exposed to higher costs, that in turn led to the concentration of more wealth and power in the hands of fewer people and fewer places".

Public ownership

This is in reality an argument for public ownership of housing (through an expanded council housing programme), for the public ownership of water (as called for by the big unions and at least one Labour Party region), for the gas and electricity companies to be taken back into public ownership, and for public transport to be publicly owned (including rail freight and the trains themselves

– currently leased at profit to train operating companies).

Burnham does not mean public ownership. He talks about "public control" without public ownership, and the "public control" in Manchester he talks of is based entirely on privately-owned bus companies and privately-owned trams.

Such issues – housing, public ownership – should be key policy debates at Labour's forthcoming annual conference at the end of September. Conference motions being passed by

CLPs on housing (drafted by the Labour Campaign for Council Housing) and on public ownership of water (drafted by Mainstream, among others) are important. Campaigning like this openly in the grassroots of the party and the unions is the way to build pressure on Burnham, not the union leaders' usual reliance on back-room conversations and "persuading" him.

It remains to be seen to what extent – or whether at all – Labour's 2026 conference will be any more democratic than those of the Starmer era, where numerous CLP motions were "ruled out", delegates were denied sight of motions until the morning conference opened, and composites passed were often ignored by the party leadership. Burnham does say that he will not be "seeking to suspend or punish members who

have principled views that may be different from mine", and the return of the Whip to Diane Abbott appears to symbolise this, at least as far as the parliamentary party goes.

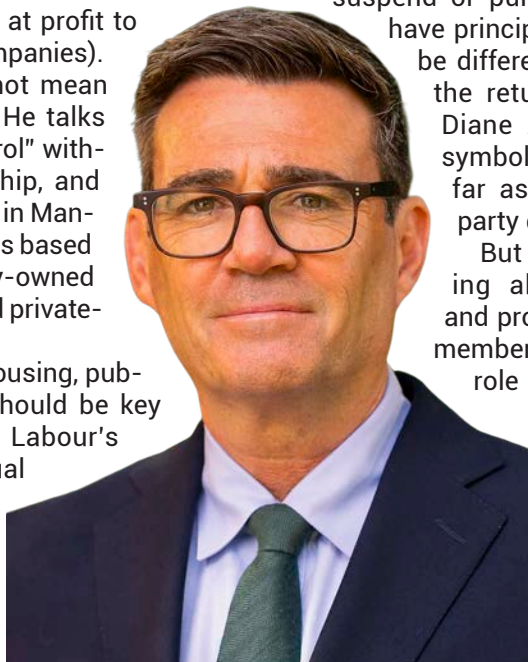
But he has said nothing about ending bans and proscriptions for party members, or increasing the role of the party's democratic structures – let alone respecting the decisions of party conference, enabling CLPs to send meaningful motions to

conference, and scrapping the undemocratic National Policy Forum. His own record on party democracy is not strong; when he became Greater Manchester Mayor, the GM-wide party structures established under his predecessor (interim mayor Tony Lloyd) simply ceased to operate and were quietly shelved. And of course he became party leader with no contest, vote, or involvement of party members.

Fragile

That Labour is again ahead in the polls is of course good news for all those concerned about the risk of a far right government taking office at the next election. The progress is fragile still, and only half way to the polling in the summer of 2024. Burnham not being Starmer is a good thing, but not enough.

The opportunities presented by Burnham's disavowal – in words, if not in policy – of the Blair and Starmer leaderships are important too. They are important particularly for revolutionary socialists in the Labour Party who aim to revolutionise the working class movement as a whole to fight for a subordination of the market to social control, and the abolition of wage slavery. For Marxists, the work of explaining and educating about the need to abolish capitalism goes hand in hand with intervention to help the broader labour movement to grow, organise, and develop in that political direction. It is important to understand both the opportunities and their limitations in order to intervene actively. □



Scottish Labour: a critical vote for Monica Lennon

By Ann Field

Nominations for the Scottish Labour Party (SLP) leadership contest triggered by Anas Sarwar's desertion to the House of Lords opened on 3 August and will close on 17 August.

Three candidates are seeking to stand: Michael Marra, Joe Fagan, and Monica Lennon.

Unfortunately, Campaign for Socialism member Katy Clark MSP is not standing. True, Clark took a seat in the House of Lords after she lost her Westminster seat in 2015. Even so, she represents a socialist current much more rooted in class politics than Lennon's.

When Lennon stood against Sarwar in the 2021 SLP leadership contest, we wrote:

"In other circumstances, she

would not be a natural candidate to win support from the left. But the current circumstances are defined by the fact that the other candidate in the leadership contest is Anas Sarwar. A vote for Monica Lennon is a vote against Anas Sarwar. It's as simple as that."

Similar considerations apply this time round: She is neither Michael Marra nor Joe Fagan.

Lennon has chaired the Scottish Labour Trade Union Group for the past five years, and also works closely with the STUC Women's Committee. She is the one candidate who does not support lifting the ban on new North Sea oil licences.

Unlike Marra and Fagan, she also has been open in criticisms of the internal regime in the SLP, especially in the Labour Group

in Holyrood. But she is not left-wing.

At the time of writing, it is not clear whether Lennon will make it onto the ballot paper. She has enough trade union support (with nominations already in from Unison, Unite and the TSSA) but still needs nominations from a third MP and a third MSP.

Marra

In an interview with the *Holyrood* magazine in 2022 Marra said: "I've always viewed myself as being probably on the soft left of the Labour Party." But if the adjective fits at all, then the emphasis is very much on the "soft". He is in fact the "continuity" candidate.

Fagan, former leader of South Lanarkshire Council, presents himself as a Scottish Andy

Burnham: "Greater Manchester cannot simply be lifted and dropped into Scotland. But Andy Burnham's approach of starting with the place itself is worth learning from."

Fagan boasts of his achievements as South Lanarkshire Council leader (free swimming for under-16s!). But as Fagan coyly admitted in a LabourList article: "We also set difficult [i.e. cuts] budgets."

Fagan presided over a minority administration (Labour 25 seats; SNP 25 seats) propped up by the Lib Dems and Independents. The way he ran the Labour Group was summed up by a Group member in a complaint to the then SLP leader Sarwar:

"The inner circle around Fagan instinctually close ranks

at the first sign of anything that might rock the boat. They can be vicious when they do so. The group is kept in the dark about many big decisions until they are already made. We are instructed on how to vote on motions that we cannot even see the wording of. [The Group] is run by secrecy, fear and intimidation."

Who wins the SLP leadership contest is not an irrelevance. But given the current poor state of Scottish Labour, much more than a change of leadership is needed. The left needs to re-organise itself into a serious campaigning force to turn CLPs outwards and re-root them in local communities and workplaces. □

• Abridged. More: bit.ly/monical

A European convoy to keep Ukraine from disappearing

By David Acosta

After four and a half years of large-scale war, Ukraine keeps fading from the media and European public debate. But the war and attacks on civilian infrastructure grind on, and millions are already preparing to face the horrors of another winter under Russian fire.

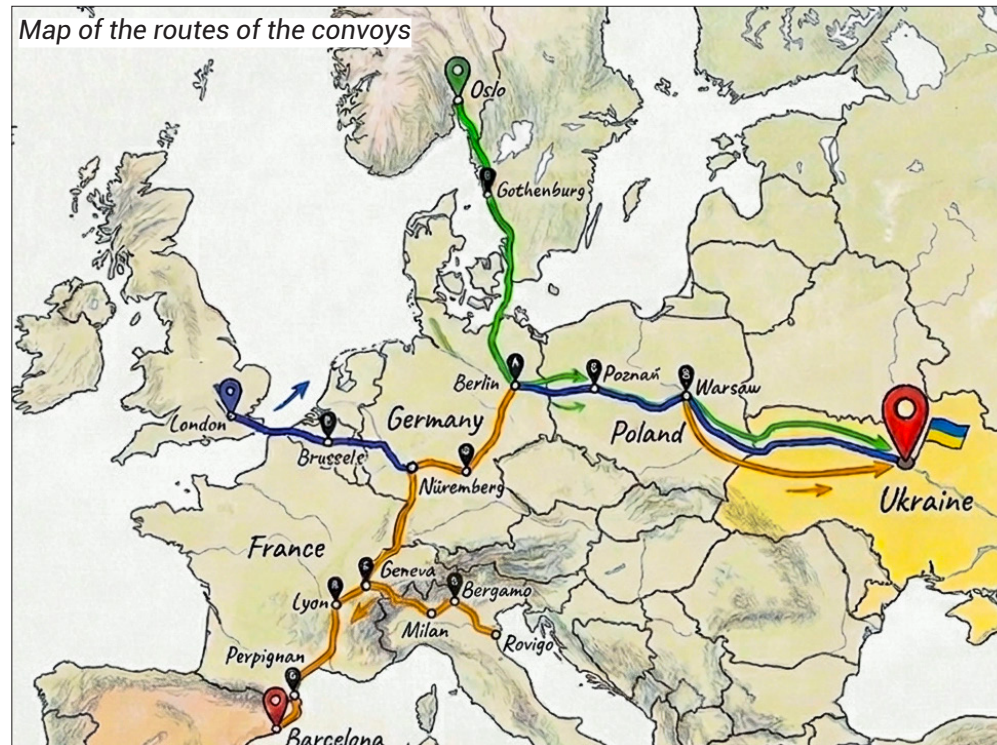
Faced with this "normalisation", the International Network of Solidarity with Ukraine (INSU, formerly the European Network for Solidarity with Ukraine) has launched the International Solidarity Convoy with Ukraine. The initiative combines aid delivery with building people-to-people awareness and solidarity.

INSU links trade unions, social movements, political representatives and individual activists who defend Ukraine's national and social rights. Its position is based on the conviction that no coherent internationalism and anti-imperialism can ignore the Kremlin's aggression and the Ukrainian people's right to defend their sovereignty and future.

INSU advocates for a just and lasting peace for Ukraine, not one imposed on the victims.

The convoy has three main goals.

To return Ukraine to the centre of European public debate. The months leading up to the convoy's departure in late November will feature conferences, film screenings and meetings with representatives of Ukrainian civil society. To bring humanitarian aid to the communities facing greatest difficulties, especially with the arrival of winter. This aid will be determined jointly with Ukrainian



organisations, those best acquainted with people's needs. To build a stable network of collaboration between European and Ukrainian civil society, creating ties allowing ongoing solidarity initiatives. As well as strengthening cooperation between trade unions and social movements, this effort will include building city-to-city cooperation.

International "ground flotilla"

The convoy is an international "ground flotilla" made up of vehicles, organizations, volunteers and representatives from different European countries. It

will follow three routes. The southern column will depart from Barcelona and Italy (city still to be decided). The central column will start from Ireland, England and Scotland, and the third, the northern column, from Norway. The different columns will pass through Belgium and Germany (and possibly other countries), before meeting up in Poland and crossing over into Ukraine. The final routes, aid recipients and the logistical decisions involved will be agreed upon with the Ukrainian side and be adapted to the security situation. The project will stress "last-mile" aid delivery, ensuring

traceability from collection point to final beneficiary.

Two other organisations besides INSU are central to the convoy initiative. The NOVACT Non-Violence Institute brings expertise in peacebuilding and cooperation with Ukrainian civil society. The Catalan branch of the General Workers' Union (UGT) contributes its mobilisation capacity, international trade union experience and close ties with Ukrainian trade unions. The participation of the Ukrainian community in the countries the convoy will pass through will also be essential.

Ukrainian left and progressive movements remain little known in Europe, while in Ukraine itself the left still carries the burden of association with the repression and crimes of the Stalinist era. However, a democratic, anti-authoritarian Ukrainian left exists, in independent trade unions, feminist organizations, social movements and volunteer networks defending labour, social and democratic rights in the midst of war. The convoy aims to give visibility to them, listening to and supporting those who resist and keep the country's social fabric alive. The convoy's overall message? As long as Ukraine resists, so does our solidarity. □

• David Acosta is President of the Catalan committee of INSU. You can support the International Solidarity Convoy to Ukraine and volunteer your contribution at solidarityconvoyukraine.com. More weblinks in online version.

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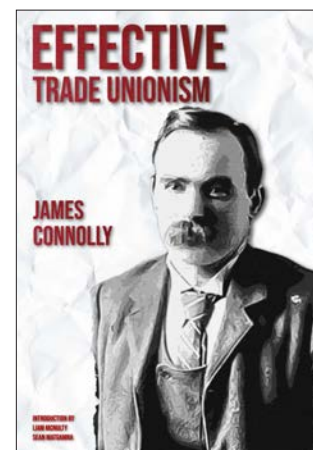
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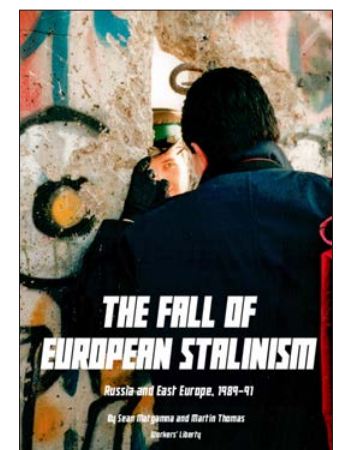
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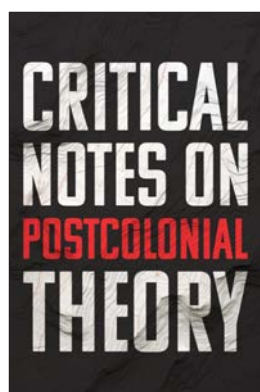
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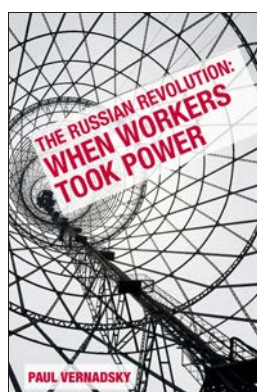
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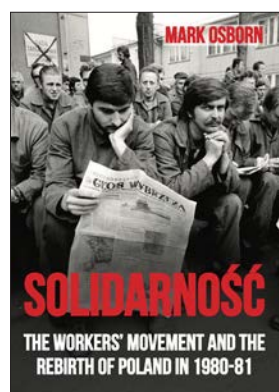
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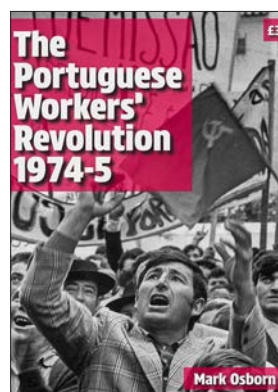
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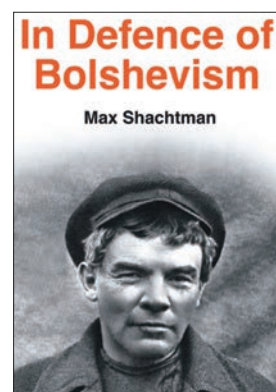
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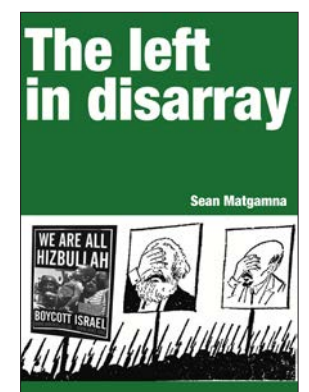
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For Ukraine, against Russian imperialism. Against Ukraine's attacks on civilian infrastructure

By Dan Katz

The battlelines in Ukraine remain relatively static and the war grinds on at enormous human cost. Ukraine has developed the ability to strike military targets with drones that the Russians are finding difficult to deal with. Unfortunately the Ukrainians are also using their new power to do damage in ways that are problematic.

On 13 July Ukraine again accused Russia of executing a prisoner of war, a soldier who had apparently been interrogated and then shot after been taken captive in Yalta, a small village in Donetsk, eastern Ukraine.

Ukraine has documented over 300 cases of POWs being murdered by Russian forces, although according to Ukrainian military intelligence the real figure is around 900 executed POWs. In addition, Ukraine believes 206 POWs have died from torture and medical neglect while in Russian custody.

According to the UN's Human Rights Office there have been 65,000 Ukrainian civilian casualties since the full-scale Russian invasion of February 2022, including 16,400 deaths. CNN reports that at least 377 Ukrainian civilians have been killed in July and 2,129 injured, the worst month since April 2022, as Russia targets housing blocks, transport, public buildings and power plants.

Ukraine has recorded 230,000 alleged Russian war crimes including use of chemical weapons, murder of civilians, destruction of schools, hospitals and civilian housing, abduction of children and sexual violence.

Ukrainian turn

Unfortunately Ukraine has recently taken a turn towards also destroying civilian infrastructure. It is no justification that Russia's dictatorship commits war crimes, and on a vast scale, as all such attacks contravene the rules of war. Socialists should argue against them.

In Crimea the electricity grid which serves a population of 2.4mn is being systematically destroyed by newly effective mid-range Ukrainian drone strikes. By 15 July 42 substations had been hit.

A further 18 "energy nodes" were attacked over 25-27 July, bringing the total to 154 in the last month. Most of Sevastopol was without power on 27 July and there were restrictions on water supply and public transport. Widespread petrol shortages continue.

The Medusa news site has analysed recent night-time light patterns in Crimea. On the night of "3 July, illumination across the peninsula was 83 per cent below its April level."

Electricity blackouts have been particularly severe in northern and central Crimea. Some areas are operating a three-hours on, three-hours off system. Electricity cutouts also cause water

shortages, sewage disruption and intermittent mobile connections.

Tatyana, quoted by Radio Free Europe, from the coastal town of Chornomorske near the western tip of Crimea, has been charging her phone from a power point set up by local authorities using a generator in a park. "We only had five hours of electricity over four and a half days," Tatyana said. "My husband brings water in buckets from the hydrant."

Military bases have alternative power sources and fuel dumps, but not so for civilians.

On 14 July Ukraine attacked the Balaklava gas-fired thermal plant and did serious damage. Crimea's main sources of electricity are from two thermal plants at Balaklava and Tavriiska with a combined capacity of 940 megawatts, and the Kuban-Crimea undersea cable, through which the Krasnodar region is able to supply 400 megawatts more.

Many bridges, roads and fuel sources are dual-use, military and civilian. But every Ukrainian drone used against a Crimean substation would have been better used against a clear military target. Destroying the electricity and water supplies in Crimea undermines Ukraine's case, and so also its war.

The attacks on military vehicles along the M-14 in occupied southern Ukraine are justified, of course. And the destruction of rail tracks and bridges in the occupied south of Ukraine is understandable too.

If the Ukrainian offensive we are beginning to expect in the Russian-occupied south takes place we back the Ukrainians, of course. Such an offensive will have been made possible following the radical disruption of Russian supply lines and may well be accompanied by further steps such as the destruction of the Kerch bridge or the rail and vehicle routes along it.

However, obliterating the Crimean electricity grid does not help a Ukrainian victory, it simply makes workers in Crimea unemployed, makes life there more difficult, alienates many in the region from Ukraine.

If we were Ukrainian nationalists we might join in with social media comments like: "Now they know how we feel," or, simply, "Fuck them." Those may be understandable emotions, but are also not reasonable or politically useful. We want decent lives for all workers, not every worker to feel as bad as the most wretched and miserable. We want workers' unity against the Russian occupation, and that means attempting to appeal to Russian workers, not alienate them unnecessarily.

Ukraine has also begun attacking shipping — tugboats, oil tankers and cargo vessels — in the Sea of Azov and Black Sea. Using the codename MoLoCHka (Moscow Will Fall Through Crimea),

launched on 6 July, 183 Russian ships, mainly oil tankers — were hit in the first 15 days.

Predictable

The predictable Russian response has been to ramp up attacks on Ukrainian cargo ships, undoing a tacit agreement with Ukraine. According to the Ukrainian Sea Ports Authority Russian forces have attacked 23 port infrastructure facilities and 17 civilian vessels during the first two weeks of July, killing 11 workers.

On 20 July a Turkish-owned grain ship was attacked killing 10, and on the evening of 25 July a ship carrying 2,800 tons of grain to Greece was attacked by drones after departing Odessa. Seven crew were rescued and two are missing.

Lloyds List Intelligence says that world wheat prices have increased as a result, as shipping companies weigh up the risks of operating in Ukrainian waters.

Drone attacks and disruptions to Russian oil refining and storage and hikes in petrol prices inside Russia might make the Russian population anxious and angry, but do nothing to stop the war.

Socialists distinguish between actions that might stop the war and those that simply cause damage. They are not synonymous. We see the danger in the disruption of the grain trade to the populations of poorer nations and how the dismemberment of oil supply might feed into crises in the world economy.

Wildberries

Beginning on the night of 17-18 July Ukraine began to destroy warehouses belonging to Wildberries, a Russian equivalent of Amazon, burning down facilities in Tambov and Elektrostal and killing eight workers.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy justified the spectacular strikes by claiming Wildberries supplies drone parts and bulletproof vests to the Russian army. It is true that these things are available from Wildberries, which sells a vast range of goods.

Let's not exaggerate. Wildberries doesn't sell weapons. It is used — together with its main competitor, Ozon — by over 90% of economically active Russian citizens to buy gadgets, household goods, books, clothing and food. The retailer employs 4mn workers and sells goods worth the equivalent of 8.5% of Russia's GDP. Wildberries overwhelmingly serves the civilian marketplace.

Zelenskyy was making an excuse for this type of Ukrainian attack because he understands he will be accused of hypocrisy and perhaps war crimes for destroying civilian infrastructure. The reality is that Ukraine and Russia are locked in a battle to see how much economic damage they can cause to each other. And that's not a battle Ukraine can win, given its relative economic size and

the lack of military help from Trump-led America to stop Russian ballistic missile attacks.

Russia launched a large-scale attack on Kyiv on 19 July launching 40 ballistic missiles in one hour at the Ukrainian capital. In retaliation Ukraine launched 400 drones at Moscow on 20 July hitting oil storage facilities and Wildberries distribution centres.

If we were Ukrainian nationalists we would join in with those who are laughing at a video of a Russian woman who says, crying, "The Ukrainians killed my husband... now my business is destroyed [in flames as a Wildberries depot is destroyed]". As we are socialist internationalists, we are not laughing, and we advocate a different policy: attack Putin's ability to wage war on Ukraine while working for solidarity from Russian workers.

The response from Putin's regime is to launch more missiles at civilian targets in Ukraine. In the week up to 26 July Russia launched 1,700 drones, 1,630 guided bombs and 95 missiles at Ukraine.

Putin looks likely to expand his war against Ukraine, not to negotiate and quit. It is probable that after the Russian elections in September Putin will order a new draft, perhaps aiming to increase the armed forces by 500,000. And he seems to be looking for another 30,000 troops from North Korea, too.

It is instructive to consider how a Ukrainian workers' government might differently approach the anti-imperialist fight against Russian occupation. In the first instance it would consider the workers of Russia as potential allies, continually emphasising a common interest in defeating Putin. It would avoid actions that needlessly harm Russian workers, emphasising the need for solidarity.

If Ukraine has 400 drones to spare, launch them at military targets, not Russian oil infrastructure or electricity substations in Crimea. □

THE STOP THE WAR COALITION AND UKRAINE:

a decade of political and factual illiteracy

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- 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 green 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! □

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Diary of a Tubeworker

Planning without enough workers

By P Ennar

In a decently-sized London Underground station, especially one with more than one ticket hall, there are inevitable challenges running the station and keeping enough staff in the right places.

Plans for each day detail meticulously who is going to be where for which period, accounting for meal breaks, staff taken away for other duties like security checks (a full patrol of the station at regular intervals), and making sure that each ticket hall has enough people in it to, theoretically, evacuate the station at a moment's notice, should an emergency occur.

But good plans on paper don't always work out in practice. A plan can't take into account that an elderly customer was unable to get up the escalator out of the station without

assistance, so a member of staff had to go with them. Or that three people with visual or mobility impairments would arrive within 20 minutes of each other, each requiring a member of staff to accompany them from train to train, or out of the station. Or that several of the staff members on shift that day have long-term health issues, and are restricted from carrying out "safety critical" duties on the platform.

None of these makes me envious of the station supervisors, who are forced to resolve these issues in real time and keep things at an even keel. It's also compounded by other, less directly urgent factors: staff members having preferences for particular bits of the station, not wanting to be in a ticket hall that regularly hits the high thirties during a heatwave, or

wanting to talk to particular coworkers.

A regular subject of scorn from station staff is other members of staff who leave you on your own, or without enough people, to run a busy area of the station. It's not at all uncommon to arrive back from a break, or dealing with a specific task, to find coworkers asking "who's over the other side?" "how many they got over there?" "They're taking the piss", etc.

Scorn

Sometimes it's a fair point. More often, there actually aren't loads of people "over the other side" either. Sometimes the same conversation is happening in multiple places at once, each picturing the other as lazing around, when in fact the station is running at a skeletal staffing level, struggling to stay open.

The burden this puts on the Customer Service Assistants would be relieved if some of the old jobs they've now absorbed still existed: cus-

tomers queries about tickets and Oyster cards wouldn't drag you away from helping at the gates if there were still staffed ticket offices. People wouldn't be dragged away to do time-consuming security checks if the station still had staff on the platforms, and station supervisors would be able to help with more emergencies if there were enough of them around to fill the roster, instead of them being stuck in the control room on their own, trying to pass out instructions to us. And all of these at once would be relieved if the company simply hired more station staff than it does.

Each of these represents a series of losses for the unions and the workers over a period of decades. To reverse it would take a series of successful struggles by a rejuvenated and expanded activist layer. For the moment, it leaves us often more angry at each other than we need to be, and our days feeling longer and more stressful. □



Kino Eye

Billy Liar re-released

By John Cunningham

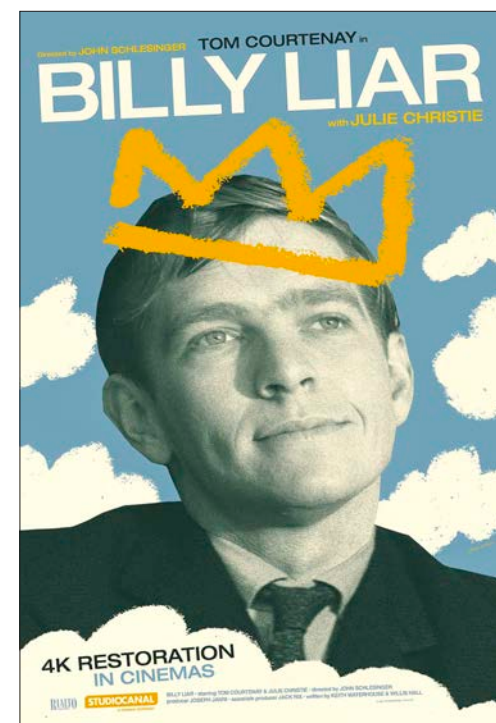
Based on the novel by Keith Waterhouse, *Billy Liar* (John Schlesinger, 1963) is a classic of the British social realist "new wave", along with films like *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. However, it can be viewed as the last of its kind. A critic once wrote that it was the moment when British filmmaking left the North behind, caught the train to London and geared up for the so-called "Swinging Sixties".

Billy, played by Tom Courtenay, lives in a Northern city (based on Bradford) and works in an undertaker's office. He wants to shake off his dull existence, move to London and become a writer. The problem for Billy is that he is a fantasist and a hopeless dreamer. In the Bradford of the early Sixties these are not qualities that

will take you very far.

He is hemmed in on all side, by his two fiancées, his parents and his employer, Mr Shadrack (played by the brilliant Leonard Rossiter). In response, he escapes into the fantasy world of an invented kingdom, Ambrosia, where (in his dreams) as a general on horseback he leads a military parade, cheered by adoring crowds.

Spurred on by his friendship with Liz (Julie Christie) he finally decides to make the break and accompany her to London and establish himself as a writer. But he doesn't. He gets as far as the railway station, buys his ticket but dithers about and misses the train. Liz departs on her own and Billy remains stuck in Bradford. The restored version of *Billy Liar* is in cinemas from 31 July. □



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PCS NEC aims to change the union

By a PCS member

The National Executive (NEC) of the civil service union PCS is back up and running following the attempted coup against the lay leadership by the right-wing ("Left Unity") General Secretary. Good. The NEC majority is united on a platform of increased industrial militancy following years of declining Civil Service pay and continued onslaught on terms and conditions from governments of all shades.

The NEC now needs to get to work and provide visible leadership both for the coming fight and in delivering for members on the range of other demands members raised the PCS annual conference in May, ranging from providing better access to members data for reps to raising a serious fight for trans liberation.

This will all no doubt be continued to

be frustrated by the right-wing bureaucracy and their supporters organised around the General Secretary in the ironically named "Left Unity" faction.

This makes it essential that supporters of a transformed, fighting, and rank-and-file union must continue to organise and build support among a wide layer of members and squeeze the bureaucracy out entirely.

Agitation

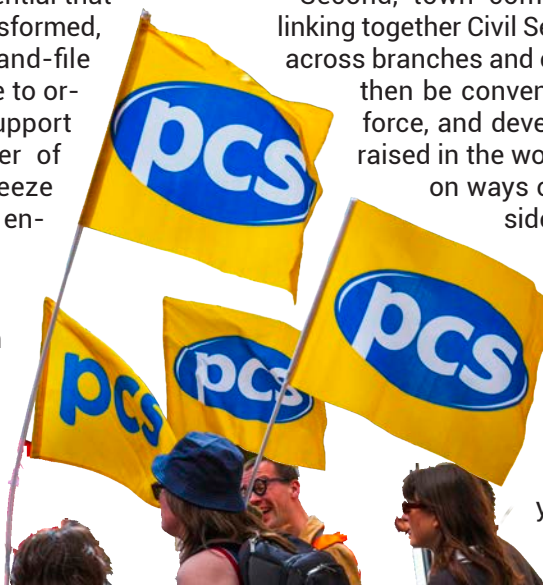
First, meetings on the "Our Work, Our Way" campaign should be held in every workplace, transforming discussions on hybrid working, rotas and

other ways-of-working disputes into serious political agitation around what workplaces would look like if we, the workers, were in control.

Second, town committee meetings linking together Civil Service workplaces across branches and employers should then be convened to unify, reinforce, and develop the demands raised in the workplace meetings on ways of meeting alongside the demands for

pay restoration into a coordinated campaign with the support of the NEC.

Over the coming months and years, PCS members should take up the demand



for the refounding of PCS with the same degree of seriousness of any of our industrial demands. Members are surely now learning – if they have not already – that for a serious fight on any issue which matters to them, the union must be torn away from a comfortable clique of full-timers and into the hands of lay members. □

Theatre assistants strike in Leeds

By Gerry Bates

Operating Theatre assistants at Leeds Teaching Hospital took another two weeks of strike action from 20 July.

Unison is demanding they are paid a Band 3 rate for their work. Their current Band 2 pay is the lowest on the NHS pay scale and lower than what other workers doing the same job in different hospitals receive.

Their duties include reducing infection risk for patients, assisting with specialist surgical equipment, and helping patients recover after surgery.

Unison's own figures show that in 100 NHS trusts and health boards across England and Wales, back-pay settlements for healthcare support workers have already been agreed.

The workers have already taken strike action over this issue in June and February of this year in a dispute that started in December 2025. □

Glasgow Caledonian on strike

By Dale Street

Around 50 members of the AUCU and EIS-ULA (Higher Education section of the Scottish teachers union EIS) picketed Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) on Tuesday 4 August on the latest day of a programme of rolling strikes.

Despite years of operating surpluses, despite £94 millions in reserves, despite having been ranked last year as the UK's top modern university, and despite the fact that GCU is not running a deficit, management announced in March that it planned to cut a hundred jobs.

The proposed job cuts would mean increased pressure on remaining staff, less student support, reduced re-

search capacity, and larger classes. Despite its status as the UK's top modern university, student-to-staff ratios at GCU are already amongst the worst in the UK.

To add insult to injury, GCU management has also just announced that it has spent £5.4 millions on buying a local vacant piece of land. Whatever they plan on building there will cost several millions more.

Unfortunately, but consistent with other campaigns against job losses (and not just in Higher Education), both the UCU and EIS-FELA are demanding no compulsory redundancies rather than no job losses at all.

The first three days of the rolling strike action took place

in June, to coincide with degree award ceremonies. 4 August's strike coincided with "clearing day" (for would-be students who did not achieve the grades needed for the university places they had been offered).

Funding from the Scottish Funding Council requires universities to "recruit" a fixed number of students for the courses they offer, with a leeway of 3% on either side of the figure. Funding is cut if the university "recruits" less than 97% of its target for a course, and no additional funding is provided if the university "recruits" more than 3% over its target for the course.

The chance of a university place can therefore be determined by the funding package

rather than by what students wish to study.

This also has the knock-on effect of universities offering places to fee-paying students from outside of Scotland while rejecting Scottish students with the same or better grades (because they are "surplus" to the targets fixed by the Scottish Funding Council).

Fee-paying students are more "profitable". And, given the marketisation of Higher Education, that is what counts.

The next strikes will be during GCU freshers week (7, 8 and 10 September). Picket lines will be organised for each strike day, starting at 8am at the Cowcaddens Road entrance. □

RNLI workers strike for increased redundancy payments

By David Pendleton

Workers in Unite at an RNLI lifeboat manufacturing site in East Cowes have gone on strike on Tuesday 11 August to increase the redundancy payments offered to them over the closure of the site.

Over 70 jobs will be lost when the facility moves to Poole. The RNLI are offering redundancy slightly above the statutory level. They have a large relocation fund to support workers relocating to Poole. However, the cost of housing and living is much greater in Poole, and the workers

don't want to relocate.

The Unite demand is to triple the redundancy payment, arguing that they should use the relocation fund and the RNLI's huge reserves to fund this.

Turnout in the strike ballot was over 90% with a large yes vote for action. The pickets have had almost half the affected workers attending, and the strike is solid. They will strike again on 19 August and 25 August and then seek to escalate if no movement from the RNLI.

The workers have mostly only recently joined Unite, once the closure was announced, and this is their first dispute.

In 2009 workers on the Isle of Wight threatened with redundancy over the closure of the Vestas wind turbine factory went into occupation. Workers' Liberty activists played a prominent role in the workers' campaign. You can read more about it in our [pamphlet](#) about the occupation.

An occupation of the boat manufacturing site and the opportunity to save the jobs, not just increase the redundancies, should not be ruled out. □

• Sign Unite's petition against RNLI job losses here: bit.ly/4xrcSLY

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Councils defy EHRC Code of Practice

By Simon Nelson

The EHRC (Equality and Human Rights Commission) Code of Practice restricting trans people's access to public facilities is now in force, from 5 August. Positively, a number of London councils (all Green-led) have stated they will not comply with its provisions. More local authorities should follow their lead.

They will need to be prepared to contest legal challenges to them from organisations like Sex Matters. That will mean not just being prepared for court hearings but helping to drive campaigns in the community and within the labour movement to help resist these attacks.

The National Union of Students (NUS) has issued guidance for student unions and societies on how to resist the Code of Practice and put pressure on Universities to uphold trans people's rights to access public spaces, particularly toilet facilities.

However, a case brought by a Unison member at Nottingham College to the Certification Officer has found Unison to be in breach of its own rules by allowing a "biological male" to run for one of the female seats for Disabled members on the union's National Executive Committee. That candidate was unsuccessful, and as a result the Certification Officer has decided to merely confirm the union's own rules were broken and has imposed no penalty on the union. Andrea Egan, Unison's General

Secretary, has said: "I personally find the ruling unpalatable, and it goes against our Unison policy positions".

This is yet again an illustration of why the Certification Office should be abolished and its powers removed. Unison ran the election under policies voted on by the union and, importantly, supported by its own women's section. The objections of one member have now led to an unelected state functionary deciding that the union's own members are wrong. Unison should be able to amend its rules so that reserved "female" seats are reserved for women, cis and trans.

A number of unions have said they will boycott the Labour Party Women's Conference over its decision to exclude trans members. Unison is said to be organising a demonstration, which is very welcome. The entire labour movement should continue to campaign for trans inclusion in self-organised women's sections, and that includes having the fight in the Labour Party. □

Iran: stop the war!

By Dan Katz

Donald Trump: "It is a four week [war to defeat Iran]. Four weeks, or less" (early March)

"We'll finish Iran off pretty soon" (late July)

"We've had regime change already, they're all dead" (late March)

"I never cared about regime change [in Iran]" (June)

"We've totally destroyed [the Iranian] military" (May)

"Open the F----- Strait, you crazy bastards" (April)

"We control the Strait [of Hormuz]" (late July)

"[Iran will be] hit very hard [if the Strait doesn't open] very soon." (August)

By misunderstanding the most basic political facts about the Islamist Iranian dictatorship, US President and imperialist bin fire Donald Trump has made himself responsible for the deaths of a lot of people, and made a serious political and economic mess for himself and for us all.

The total number of deaths, across all states, due to the current Iran war, is probably over 9,000 with 47,000 injured. □

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Ebola, democracy, and mining profits

By Matt Cooper

Since the current Ebola epidemic in DR Congo was first detected in May, it has become the fastest-spreading outbreak of the disease and is likely to become the most deadly since Ebola was first identified in 1976. This strain of Ebola is one for which there is no effective vaccine. It is concentrated in the conflict-ravaged eastern province of Ituri, and probably has killed more than 4,000 people.

The outbreak likely started in January but went unnoticed because of cuts in overseas aid, particularly the Trump-Musk dismantling of USAID. There is also well-justified distrust among the local population towards the central government nearly 4,000 km away in Kinshasa. The response to the epidemic has been limited by aid cuts. The WHO estimates that the response has less than half the funding needed. Infection prevention and control teams are overstretched, while clinics, ambulances and isolation facilities are inadequate. USAID cuts have also impacted clean-water programmes.

Health workers are paying the price. By late July, 37 had died, amid serious shortages of appropriate protective equipment. Many have also gone for months without wages, which are low anyway. In July, doctors, nurses and security workers at the Elikya Ebola Treatment Center in Bunia stopped work, following an earlier strike at Bunia General Hospital over unpaid salaries.

There have also been protests and attacks on Ebola treatment centres by the local population. Such actions can further endanger both health workers and patients. But the hostility is based on experience of the 2018–20 Ebola epidemic in the region. International agencies worked with Congolese security forces and armed groups, sometimes paying them directly.

The response became increasingly militarised, while local people complained that international organisations had done little about years of war and violence. Suspected patients were sometimes reportedly removed by force and funerals broken up, in one case leading to a fatal shooting. There were also sexual abuses of local women by aid and medical workers.

Consequently, the local population views the current response with suspicion. They see resources mobilised against Ebola while cholera, typhoid, poverty and armed conflict are neglected. Containing this outbreak will require not only

properly paid health workers and restored levels of aid and health funding, but also a response that treats local communities as participants. □

Burnham challenged to reverse PA ban

By Will Roberts

Defend Our Juries has announced another action defying the ban on Palestine Action, this time on 27 September outside Labour Party Conference in Liverpool. This is a clear test of the resolve of new PM Andy Burnham.

At the end of July, another 117 people were arrested for taking part in another demonstration against the proscription of Palestine Action. Defend Our Juries now claims over 3,500 people have been arrested in similar actions.

The Metropolitan police, who previously announced that they would no longer comply with the unworkable legislation, have now resumed arrests. This is not because the legislation has become workable — few of the thousands arrested have been charged, let alone tried — but because the government put increased pressure on them with the overturning of the original high court decision in February that the government's decision was unlawful.

The government's case at the Court of Appeal succeeded in June, reinstating the proscription. Huda Ammori, PA founder, has now been granted the right to appeal this decision at the Supreme Court, with the case being heard later this year. And four people in a March 2025 action at the Bristol headquarters of Elbit Systems have had a hung jury on the criminal damage charges they face, though they may face a re-trial.

The fact that a protest group was put in the same category as organisations who have committed actual atrocities against civilians would be laughable if it weren't so serious. The Labour movement must put pressure on Burnham to reverse the decision and release all those facing charges or trial for exercising their right to protest. □



Pic: @gibography2001

For a workers' government

SOLIDARITY

& WORKERS' LIBERTY



By Sam Myerson

Strike dates have been announced in the Arriva North London dispute. Drivers are set to take action between 14 August and 20 October.

Most buses operated by Arriva North London have air cooling systems rather than more effective air conditioning. The air cooling system has only managed to reduce temperatures by around two or three degrees during the recent series of heatwaves and driver cabs can reach 40 degrees and higher.

Working in hot weather is dangerous for bus drivers. It can exacerbate the problem of fatigue, which puts drivers and the general public at risk.

Some drivers have experienced health problems from driving in hot weather this sum-

mer, including heat exhaustion, heat stroke and dehydration. It will be a series of two and three days strikes, some of which are timed to coincide with the planned closures of the Tube's Piccadilly line in August and September, maximising disruption on those strike days.

London Mayor Sadiq Khan has previously backed the letter from Unite the union distributed to drivers advising them on their rights to refuse work in dangerous conditions, and a Bill of Rights motion has been passed through City Hall. London Assembly members should back this dispute.

Unite has a real chance to show other depots and drivers across London that industrial action can win. For too long conditions on the buses have fallen, with new drivers often

brought in on worse terms and conditions.

The extreme heat is causing issues outside of the depots in dispute, and outside of London. Workers in National Express in the East Midlands have reported dangerous cab conditions there too.

This dispute is also about the victimisation of reps and activists who have taken action against unsafe working conditions and have then been suspended and sacked.

Strikes will take place at the Barking, Edmonton, Enfield, Grays, Palmers Green, Stamford Hill, Tottenham and Wood Green depots, on: 14-15, 18-21 August; 4-5, 7-8, 18-19, 21-22 September; 2-3, 5-6, 16-17, 19-20 October. □

• More: bit.ly/arriva-n1