The Tory government promises that it can find a fudge to solve the Irish border riddle, or at least to push it a safe distance into the future.

Somehow they think they can combine:

• Northern Ireland being sufficiently integrated into the EU Single Market and Customs Union to allow the Border within Ireland to remain almost invisible
• Britain being sufficiently outside the EU Single Market and Customs Union to satisfy Tory nationalists
• No economic barrier between the Northern Ireland which is “almost in” the EU and a Britain which is definitely out.

How long, and how well, they can fudge, we don’t know. What concerns us is what the labour movement, Irish and British, says and does about this.

Pressure mounts on Saudi Arabia over murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

Workers at Glasgow council strike for equal pay.

Eduardo Tovar begins a series of reviews of books by Robert Fine.
By Eduardo Tovar

In the US, Teamsters working for the package delivery giant UPS are once again fighting on two fronts: against their bosses and against the union bureaucracy itself.

UPS and the International Brotherhood of Teamsters have negotiated a contract that covers 243,000 workers who will introduce a new class of driver with lower pay.

On 5 October 2018, 54% of Teamsters in UPS who voted on the deal chose to reject it. Activists achieved this result through serious on-line organizing efforts in the rank-and-file, including rallies in car parks and online videos that reached up to 50,000 viewers.

Shockingingly, the union leadership still chose to ratify the deal. The Teamsters brass have pulled off their bureaucratic manoeuvre by exploiting a loophole in the union’s constitution, claiming that for such a rejection to be valid, there needs to be either an overall voter turnout of over 50% or a two-thirds supermajority out of those who do vote. Since the 54% vote to reject was on a turnout of 44%, the Teamsters International pushed the deal through anyway.

UPS employees face conditions of surveillance, harassment, and over-working. Moreover, the pay rate in the new UPS contract is only $13 an hour, while Amazon has recently announced a rate of $15 an hour for its own workers following industrial action: a development that empowered the UPS Teamsters’ “No” campaign. For the union bosses to use such cynical, legalistic tactics to stifle their rank-and-file at a time when UPS workers need the strength of organised labour most is a slap in the face.

The betrayal of the membership is even starker in light of how the Teamsters International did not adopt a countermajoritarian interpretation of the by-law in question after a similar vote on a UPS contract in 2013. Only 64,000 members voted then, as opposed to the 92,000 members who voted on this year’s deal.

The rank-and-file caucus Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU) are preparing a fightback against the leadership of James P Hoffa, son of the famous Jimmy Hoffa, who was murdered in 1976.

Our eyes should also turn to Teamsters Local 705 in Chicago, which has a separate contract to that of UPS, but is nationally and so might see its own strike action against UPS.

By Dan Katz

Saudi Arabia’s regime is a stain on the modern world.

And the Saudi state’s decades-old campaign to export an extreme, fundamentalist version of political Islam, funded by vast amounts of oil money, is a world-wide political pollutant.

All technical and workers’ rights are severely restricted in Saudi Arabia. All public gatherings, including peaceful demonstrations, are prohibited under a 2011 order made by the Ministry of the Interior. The country’s significant Shia minority, based in the oil-rich East, is seriously repressed. Women’s rights are restricted by segregation and a male-guardian system.

Now, with the murder of Saudi disinterested journalist Jamal Khashoggi inside the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, Turkey, Saudi Arabia is under intense scrutiny and political pressure. It seems that the Turkish authorities have a great amount of evidence that links the Saudi leadership directly to the crime.

How can the incompetence and brazenness of the murder be explained? And the unusual strength of international condemnation of the Saudis?

In his early 20s, Khashoggi began his journalistic career as a supporter of the Saudi monarchy covering the muhajidin’s Afghan war against the USSR.

Jamal Khashoggi

Russians in the 1980s. In Afghanistan he met Osama bin Laden and was sympathetic to the Islamists’ war.

By A W L students

11-18 November: students move to change NUS and Labour Students

Things are moving forward with the founding of the Socialist Feminist Campus Collective and talks about launching a Student Left Network.

These came out of the Student Activist Weekender and Student Feminist Campaign Day, co-hosted by a range of local and national student activist groups in early September.

Attendees from over twenty campuses agreed to launch a socialist feminist organisation active in NUS Women’s Campaign, and to go for a national student left organisation to facilitate joint activism across campuses and form the left bloc of NUS and Labour Students.

Two meetings on 17-18 November in London will work out the details of these new organisations and agree an outline of a constitution and founding statement.

Saturday 17 November will be the launch of the Socialist Feminist Campus Collective, which will work on agreeing the founding statement which describes it as a feminist network “rooted in class struggle, anti-racism, trans liberation, environmentalism and radical social change — we want a student feminist movement driven by political ideas, openness and unity in action.”

It will also discuss more detailed plans for campaigns such as a nationwide speaker tour on sex workers’ rights and decriminalisation, plus student mobilisations for protests at immigration detention centres.

Workers’ Liberty students will argue for the Student Left Network to be a broad coalition of students involved in left-wing campaigns, linking up and spreading current big struggles such as rent strikes, student-worker solidarity, mental health services and divestment from fossil fuels, and bringing them into NUS and Labour Students.

We will argue for it to campaign for a left-wing “Student Network” to facilitate tactical demands in NUS and Labour Students, such as rent caps, an end to zero hour contracts and outsourcing, and free education, as well as a programme for democratising these structures.

We will also argue for the Network to endorse candidates in NUS elections who agree with the principles and demands in the charter.

The launch of the Socialist Feminist Campus Collective and the Student Left Network will form the basis of a left unity programme, and agitate for Labour Students and NUS to organise to elect left-wing students as leaders, and to work against the leadership if it resists.

Workers’ Liberty students are arguing for a network to organise as a left faction in Labour Students and agitation around a left unity programme, calling for Labour Students to join with us and making the case for a open, democratic left youth movement in Labour that is capable of opposing the leadership if it acts against the working class movement and in favour of capital.

Labour members involved in the moves for a Student Left Network are producing a bulletin for Labour Students Political Weekend, in Liverpool on 10-11 November, holding a fringe meeting on Brexit and free movement.

The Socialist Feminist Campus Collective will hold a launch meeting from 12.5-1 at UCL on Saturday 17 November, while plans for the Student Left Network will be formed at the National Student Left Organiser Meeting from 11-5 at UCL on Sunday 18 November.

The session is free and open to all for both events, and all attendees are invited to bring motions to the meetings.

• bit.ly/sfccc-17nov
• bit.ly/sln-18nov

Jamal Khashoggi was close to various royals, who were held at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, Turkey, and imprisoned with him. Bin Laden refused, saying he had a duty to drive America from Saudi Arabia.

Khashoggi was a slap in the face.

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It is a slap in the face.
Left must reshape the Remain movement

By Lizzy Brooks

The headlines following from Saturday’s People’s Vote demo have, understandably, focused on its size. Organisers say 670,000 people took part.

If true, that is bigger than the Trump demo this summer. It’s plausible that it was bigger that the anti-austerity March for the Alternative in 2011, at the height of the public-sector strikes. It’s possibly the largest since the anti-war demonstrations in 2003-4.

Whatever the truth, it certainly dwarfed the overwhelming majority of protests that have taken place in recent years.

Workers’ Liberty took part in the “left bloc” organised by Another Europe is Possible. The bloc was loud and vibrant and visible. It foregrounded migrants’ rights, anti-racism and freedom of movement and, by and large, was warmly received by others marching on the demo, with only the odd fracas with disgruntled Liberal Democrats.

All those that took part should be proud, because it was a much needed intervention into a Remain movement that, though largely well-meaning, is politically vacuous.

There’s no use shying away from the fact that the “left-bloc” could never have been more than a drop in the ocean. It punched above its weight, but it was only hundreds in a sea of hundreds of thousands. The organised left was almost entirely absent.

Over recent months public opinion has steadily shifted towards Remain, in a context of no official support from either of the two main parties, and minimal activity from the wider labour movement.

And yet, despite an almost universal failure of leadership by the left, over half a million people took to the streets. Yes — they were mostly liberal. Yes — we are socialists, and want to stop Brexit for different, and better, reasons. But the fact that our politics have not transitioned into a militancy, socialist Remain movement is not their fault, but ours.

Let’s imagine how much bigger our demonstrations could be — and how much further we could shift opinion, not just to remain but to the left — if the Labour Party came out strongly against Brexit.

At conference, the party’s leadership used the unions to stamp on the membership, and we came out with a fudge policy. All options on the table, and no guarantee of a referendum on the deal despite overwhelming support for it.

As a result the Remain movement is still being led by the political establishment, by centrist dads and liberals. If this continues then it will not be able to advocate a programme capable of solving the problems at the root of the Brexit vote.

As socialists, we need to provide the antidote to the scapegoating of migrants, and offer solutions to the housing crisis, poverty and a collapse in public services.

Next time hundreds of thousands of people take to the streets, we must make our intervention needs bigger and louder.

Let’s hope the rest of the left turns up.

Decriminalise abortion!

By Charlotte Zalens

On Tuesday 23 October Labour MP Diana Johnson introduced a ten-minute rule bill in the House of Commons to decriminalise abortion in the UK. 208 MPs voted in favour, and 123 against.

The Offences Against the Person Act 1861 makes abortion illegal in the UK, and this Act was only partly superseded by the Abortion Act 1967. This means that the “compromises” built into the ’67 Act, such as the two-doctor rule and giving a reason for termination, must be followed for an abortion not to be a criminal offence. In theory anyone breaching the law could face life in prison. It also means that abortion is a criminal offence in Northern Ireland, which is not covered by the ’67 Act.

Speaking to LabourList, Diana Johnson said “I was talking to a consultant in Hull who worked in women’s health about abortion. I thought that the 1967 Act had been in place for a long while and whenever we’d raised it in parliament it had always been about restricting and time limits. I asked: ‘What would be a progressive step in terms of abortion law reform? Would getting rid of the requirements for two doctors be a sensible step forward?’ She said: ‘What you need to do is decriminalise abortion, get rid of the stigma, take abortion out of the criminal courts out of the whole issue — what is essentially a healthcare matter between a woman and her doctor. Have proper regulation but get rid of the criminal element.’

The bill forms part of a mounting pressure on the government to act over abortion rights in Northern Ireland. After the repeal of the Eighth Amendment referendum in the Supreme Court case this summer found that Northern Ireland’s law was incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights, the government’s position that abortion is a devolved issue has been under pressure.

Last year the government confirmed women from Northern Ireland may have free abortions in England and Wales.

The bill also contains provision for the creation of a new offence to prosecute anyone who causes a woman to miscarry — a “non-consensual abortion” — protecting women who suffer domestic violence during pregnancy.

Although it is unlikely that this bill will go much further, it will strengthen the case to repeal a law that criminalises women, and prevents women in one part of the UK from accessing abortion.
Help raise money for the AWL?

Workers’ Liberty has launched a new fundraising appeal to raise £15,000 between now and June 2019.

Workers’ Liberty exists to build support for the argument that capitalism must be replaced by collective ownership and sustainable planning for people’s needs – socialism. Please help us amplify our voice.

£15,000

We have no big money backers. We rely on supporters, friends and readers who consider our work to be a good cause to help us financially. February 2019 marks the thirtieth anniversary of the fall of Stalinism. Why not organise a fundraising dinner or a talk to celebrate? Also, later on, next year an anniversary of the Paris Commune, the first workers’ government.

So far we have raised £2605 (after a recent donation of £1,000 from a comrade in Wales. Thanks!).

Other ways in which you can help:

- **Subscribe to Solidarity**
  You can subscribe to Solidarity for a trial period of 6 issues for £7, for 6 months for £22 (waged) or £11 (unwaged), or for a whole year for £44 (waged) or £22 (unwaged). See back page for form.
- **Take out a monthly standing order**
  Taking out a standing order, of any amount. If you take out a standing order you will also receive Solidarity. Go to workersliberty.org/donate for instructions.
- **Make a one-off donation**
  You can donate by sending us a cheque, setting up a bank transfer or via Palpal. Go to workersliberty.org/donate for instructions.
- **Organise a fundraising event in your local area**
  A fundraising film showing, quiz night, walking tour, theatrical performance or sponsored activity?
    - **Buy some of our books or pamphlets?**
      www.workersliberty.org/books
    - **Distribute some of our fundraising leaflets.**
      Contact office@workersliberty.org to order some.

In defence of ‘cis’

By Natalia Cassidy

The use of the term cisgender (hereafter cis) has been a matter of some discussion within the Workers’ Liberty. There has been some discussion suggesting that the term has become a term used by trans people or other advocates of trans rights to invalidate and silence those that disagree with their view. Before addressing this argument, it is important to first define what exactly we mean by cis, particularly given the deficiency of some attempted definitions. Some argue that cis people are those who feel “at ease” or “comfortable” with their socially assigned gender, whilst others argue that cis is simply synonymous for non-trans. These definitions are, to varying degrees, insufficient. To say that cis people are necessarily comfortable with their assigned gender is to ignore the coercive nature of social assignment of gender in society based upon sex differences perceived at birth. Cis people are no less coercively socially regimented and re-trained by gendered society than others. None of us are afforded a say in the matter at birth all. Rather, it is their gender identity that is broadly consistent with their assigned gender, though not necessarily with gendered signifiers or behaviour.

To say that cis simply means which is not trans is also deficient as its own definition of cis. To define things by opposition necessarily leads to problems. To define cis as “not trans”, woman as “not man” or vice versa allows us only to view that group through the lens of “otherness”. This is to say nothing of the fact that there are those who do not feel they sit in either of these categories, such as many non-binary people.

For the purposes of discussion then, a proposed definition of cis is someone whose gender identity is consistent with their socially assigned gender at birth and does not feel compelled to identify outside of that gendered category in a broad sense. This is said with the understanding that gendered behaviour and signifiers are not tied to gender identity.

Given this, is the term cis useful? In as far as it is descriptive of a majority of the population and effectively describes a feature of their gender identity: yes. Is it sometimes used flippantly as a way of invalidating the input of certain people to debates around the issue of trans rights? Again, yes.

But is this phenomenon in any way unique to debates around trans rights? It must be said, no. Throughout almost all questions of “identity politics” people are told they should not be involved in the discussion of certain issues because they are men, they are straight, they are white etc. I don’t for a minute think we would advocate for an end to any of these terms as useful, descriptive terms simply because they are sometimes used to stifle debate in the same way cis is used.

The misapplication and misuse of terminology in certain contexts by some groups of people does not mean that we should do away with the language altogether for fear of this misuse. Certainly not whilst the language still has descriptive value.

Making things up since 1930

By Jim Denham

The Morning Star is known in some circles, because of its stance on Brexit, as “the Daily Mail of the left.” But, increasingly, this description is becoming unfair — to the Daily Mail.

Since Geordie Greig (a friend of George Osborne who voted Remain in the referendum) took over as editor from fanatical Brexiteer Boris Johnson supporter Paul Dacre, the Mail has noticeably toned down its anti-EU and anti-Remain stridency (“Crush The Saboteurs” etc). Meanwhile, the Morning Star has continued with its fanatical and largely fact-free anti-EU rhetoric, regularly claiming (against all the evidence) that the EU would prevent Labour implementing its manifesto and regularly carrying articles by the Arron Banks-funded Trade Unionists Against the European Union (a recent example blamed the EU for the danger of a hard border in Ireland).

So Monday’s editorial, in the aftermath of weekend’s 700,000-strong anti-Brexit march, was entirely predictable: “Their patronising demand for a ‘People’s Vote’ with its implication that extraterrestrial celebrities” paid for the transport to the demo), or simply misguided liberal simpletons.

But most typical of all is the nonsense about the “neoliberal media, including the BBC” being “wholesalely behind the People’s vote project.” Where is the Morning Star’s evidence for this sweeping statement? After all, despite the Daily Mail’s recent change of tone, it — together with the vast majority of the UK press — remains implacably pro-Brexit. As for the BBC: its supposed pro-People’s Vote stance will come as news to those who have watched Nigel Farage’s regular appearances on Question Time (more than any other politician) or listened to John Humphrey’s ill-disguised pro-Brexit commentaries on Radio 4’s Today programme (now produced, incidentally, by Boris Johnson’s friend Sarah Sands).

What lies behind the Morning Star’s blatant misrepresentation of the facts surrounding Saturday’s march and Brexit more generally? Is it paranoia or simple dishonesty? Given the nature of the Stalinist clique that produces the Morning Star, it could well be both.
The Tory government promises that it can find a fudge to solve the Irish border ridge, or at least to push it a safe distance into the future.

Somehow they think they can combine:
• Northern Ireland being sufficiently integrated into the EU Single Market and Customs Union to allow the Border within Ireland to remain almost invisible
• Britain being sufficiently outside the EU Single Market and Customs Union to satisfy Tory nationalists
• No economic barrier between the Northern Ireland which is “almost in” the EU and a Britain which is definitely out.

How long, and how well, they can fudge, we don’t know. What concerns us is what the movement do?

Owen Reidy, assistant general secretary of the (all-island) Irish Congress of Trade Unions, wrote in an Irish Times op-ed (22 October):

“The possibility of a no-deal Brexit and a hard border on the island is unacceptable to us.

Equally we argue that a border in the Irish Sea within the UK between Britain and Northern Ireland is also unacceptable.

“An economic border within the UK will damage workers’ interests in Derry, Newry and Belfast irrespective of those workers’ views on the constitutional issue...

“The only possible Brexit that can emerge is the softest possible...

“The UK as a whole should be in a customs union with the EU. This would get us to negotiate the need for a hard border, facilitate a free-trade agreement and address unionist concerns regarding Northern Ireland being treated differently from the rest of the UK”

Jeremy Corbyn, on a visit to Northern Ireland in May 2018, said:

“Labour will not support any Brexit deal that includes the return of a hard border to this island... We are all clear there must be no effective border created in the Irish Sea”.

He also said that “the UK government should be neutral in a border poll” this was reported (and Corbyn didn’t contest it) as indicating that Labour should be neutral in a border poll.

Declan Kearney of Sinn Fein spoke recently at an ICTU event, saying:

“The labour movement will only successfully put its mark on the Irish unity debate by asserting the primacy of economic democracy, and a rights based society in a new Ireland.

“That will require Irish trade unionists to take strategic positions on supporting an Irish unity referendum and then to campaign positively for constitutional change”.

For decades Sinn Fein were quasi-autarkic nationalists, and in 1982 they dropped their previous policy of a federal united Ireland, designed (though clumsily in detail) as “a hand of friendship to unionists”. They thought their best hope was to push the British government into “persuading” (coercing) the British-Irish of the north-east into a united Ireland. Since the late 1990s they have shifted into reducing instead on EU integration and the demographic changes in Northern Ireland (Belfast now has a Catholic majority) to nudge towards a united Ireland.

In 1971 the Sinn Fein program called for a “campaign to revoke the 1965 Anglo-Irish Free Trade Agreement” and declared: “Ireland must be forced into the EU on England’s heels, Sinn Fein will resist and oppose Brussels domination just as the Irish people have resisted British domination for centuries”.

Now Sinn Fein talk of “promoting a United Ireland as a location for investment and access to the Single European Market”. Sinn Fein president Mary Lou McDonald also says: “British identity can and must be accommodated in a united Ireland, and I believe nationalist Ireland is open to constitutional and political safeguards to ensure this”.

Up to the middle of 2018, Sinn Fein said that the question of a border poll in the North should be put to one side while uncertainty about Brexit remained. Since then they have insisted that they will campaign for a new referendum in Northern Ireland on Irish unity if there is a “no deal” or “hard” Brexit.

The language of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), the biggest party of the British-Irish in Northern Ireland, has changed too.

On 15 October DUP leader Arlene Foster went to Dublin to seek common ground with the Dublin government on Brexit, and spoke of Northern Ireland and the South as “two semi-detached houses” with different interests but in the same community”.

The communal divisions and the “Peace Walls” in Northern Ireland remain, but the government around the Border finds an Ireland which, mostly thanks to the slow processes of EU economic integration, is more open and fluid on the issues than before.

The labour movement, Irish and British, should not only oppose the hardening or erection of borders, but also positively campaign for a federal united Ireland, allowing local autonomy to the British-Irish-majority north east, and closely linked with Britain through Britain remaining in the EU.

More than at any time before, perhaps, there is a possibility of uniting the Irish working class, north and south, around a programme that, combined with unifying social and economic demands.

The Brexit plan isn’t working

Prime minister Theresa May told Parliament on 22 October that her Brexit deal is “95% complete”.

This was like saying that a boat has 95% of the construction necessary to stop it sinking. Call it 95% or call it 99%, the boat will still sink.

The Tories will still do some sort of deal eventually. The bulk of the ruling class both in Britain and in the EU wants a deal, and a fairly “soft” deal, and the odds must be that they will find negotiators able to pull it off.

Probably, though, only at the 11th or the 13th hour. In the nature of such negotiations, neither side will want to settle a deal until they are sure that they have squeezed the maximum concessions by pushing the talks as near breakdown as they dare.

The problem of the Irish border remains unresolved.

The Tories’ current plans for remaining partially in, or “almost in”, the Customs Union and the Single Market, remain unclarified.

The Tories talk of abolishing free movement across European borders in favour of a regime where migrant workers from wherever have to show they are “high-skilled”, by commanding a high salary to get in. (So a young quantum-physics researcher, or a carpenter, is “unskilled”, and a banker is “skilled”).

That remains to be tested, though, on how it fits with what the Tories will want on an approximation to Single Market access and on ability for British people to move to the continent.

The “missing 5%” is huge. Even if the Tories eventually get a deal, it will probably include blurs and fudges, and leave issues to be worked through and disputed for years to come.

It may get a “well, not so bad after all” reaction from some people, but it will surely also evoke a new right-wing mobilisation from strongly nationalist Brexit supporters who will feel that they have been cheated.

The question is, what will the labour movement do?

Labour Party conference on 23-26 September was railroaded into rejecting debate in favour of a session organised around a single, heavily-fudged, composite motion, with no alternatives on the table.

Everything in Labour Party policy remains unclear other than rejection of free movement, a promise to vote against more or less any Tory deal, and a promise somehow to negotiate better than the Tories.

Public opinion is moving against Brexit. A 46%-42% majority now says that Brexit is wrong (though a chunk of the 46% say Brexit should still go ahead because of the June 2016 referendum). Opinion is divided about 50/50 on a new “people’s vote”.

Although Workers’ Liberty was there with stalls, banners, placards, and red flags, at the 700,000 strong march on 20 October for a “People’s Vote” on any Brexit deal the visible Labour Party presence was minimal. Labour had nothing to say about the march.

Only 37% of Labour voters say they think Brexit talks are going well, 61% of Tory voters say they back May’s.

The Tories’ Brexit plans aren’t working well, and Labour’s equivocation is not working well.

Whatever Labour people may have thought about Brexit in 2016, we now have the evidence that any even halfway likely Brexit deal, though not necessarily “hard”, will be a mess, damaging in Ireland, and regressive.

After 20 October, socialists should step up efforts to win Labour to:
• defending the free movement which already exists across European borders, and committing to extend free movement beyond that
• opposing Brexit
• positively advocating a democratic and socialist united Europe
• saying that no Brexit deal should be allowed to go through without a new “people’s vote”, and committing to oppose Brexit in such a vote.
French Trotskyists debate Israel-Palestine

THE LEFT

A debate is ongoing in the pages of French revolutionary journal Convergence Révolutionnaires, on the topic of Israel and Palestine. Convergence is the publication of the Étincelle group, with whom Workers’ Liberty has longstanding links.

An article by Pierre Hélelou and Gil Lannou, Israël-Palestine : une nouvelle donne [Israel, Palestinian: a new beginning] argues that the only solution which is acceptable, albeit not necessarily desirable, for all, but then continues, puzzlingly: “a democratic binational state is now the only solution which is acceptable, albeit not necessarily desirable, for all”, but it goes on to conclude with a call for a single binational state: “a single binational state is now the only solution which is acceptable, albeit not necessarily desirable, for all”, but then continues, puzzlingly: “a democratic binational state is now the only solution which is acceptable, albeit not necessarily desirable, for all”. Bitterly, given the fact that since 1948 wars of occupation of the Palestinian civilian population and cannot resolve the contradictions of the Zionist project.

But it goes on to conclude with a call for a single binational state: “a single binational state is now the only solution which is acceptable, albeit not necessarily desirable, for all”, but then continues, puzzlingly: “a democratic binational state is now the only solution which is acceptable, albeit not necessarily desirable, for all”. Bitterly, given the fact that since 1948 wars of occupation of the Palestinian civilian population and cannot resolve the contradictions of the Zionist project.

This kicks the question into the long grass of the creation of separate, Jewish and Palestinian, states, it also concedes that “the bloody division created by a hundred-year national antagonism will probably necessitate the creation of separate, Jewish and Palestinian, revolutionary parties.” This is a mess. It doesn’t propose a policy for the here and now, or map out a path to resolving the conflict. This article confusedly wraps up by saying that the situation is essentially so dreadful that only a workers’ revolution and the creation of a workers’ state can resolve the conflict. Of course, a socialist revolution probably would resolve the conflict. But one won’t fall from the sky, and the lack of a democratic settlement of Israel’s war on the Palestinians is a roadblock to effective class-based, internationalist politics.

For some that may be because they mistakenly equate the Bolshevism of the faction, with the party, and within the Russian labour movement of 1903-17 which built a revolutionary organisation and then led the revolution of the workers’ councils in October 1917, with something very different. They may equate 1917 Bolshevism with the “Bolshevism” exported to the world in the “Bolshevisation” drive of 1924-5, which was shaped by the bureaucracy which had emerged in the civil war and then congealed. The world has both even with the Stalinism which over the following decade crushed what was left of 1917 Bolshevism. The equation is wrong, and the idea that 1917 Bolshevism is outdated is also wrong. Or so I shall argue.

Examine 38 Degrees. It is broadly on the left. It describes itself as working to “defend fairness; protect rights; promote peace; preserve the planet; deepen democracy”. But its members are just people who have signed up to its e-list. There are e-consultations about the choice of campaigns, but voting figures from those consultations are never (as far as I can find) published, and almost surely only a tiny fraction of the three million take part.

There are no conferences or elected committees. In practice everything is decided by its 37 office staff, paid between £20,000 (for “interns”) to above £50,000 (for “higher” staff: no figures seem to be available for the highest). There is also a “board” of worthies (chosen by whom? it doesn’t say). The board meets, on its own description, only a few times a year. 38 Degrees is floated on money from charitable trusts and foundations back in 2009, but now subsists on donations from the minority of the three million who choose to make them.

38 Degrees mostly does e-petition campaigns, though it says that it “sometimes... acts offline, like visiting an MP or minister, writing ads in newspapers, holding public meetings or fundraising for legal action.” Fundamentally, members pay money so that the office can do politics (of a sort) on their behalf. The loose (or zero) obligations for members are seen by some as a signal of democracy. In fact the opposite. If the decisions of the organisation imply no or few obligations for members, then there is no real collective life of the membership other than mediated through the office, and no possibility of real collective decision-making.

NGOs like 38 Degrees construct activities from an office with the aim of nudging and lobbying established power in a particular direction, and seek general public consent or support for those activities. And the Bolsheviks? By contrast, their work was designed to encourage and stimulate the working class (and to some degree other groups, e.g. students) to organise their own activities, from the base, and to educate themselves and those around them on the potential and scope of those activities in winning new political and social forms. Their members had high obligations. They educated themselves. They threw themselves into the party’s ideas and debates. Every day, everywhere they could get a hearing, they promoted the party’s democratically-adopted ideas and initiatives through circulation of its newspapers and books and through meetings. They were always to the forefront in workplace union organisation, in strikes, in demonstrations.

If members disagreed with the current majority view, they felt the duty (not just the right) to argue out the issue, not just to dissociate passively. Lenin discharged that duty often and vigorously.

That was why the party (or, strictly speaking, the Bolshevik faction until 1912, “party” only after that) was democratic. It was “democratic centralist”. For the Bolsheviks — as for the Mensheviks, who coined the term “democratic centralism”, and pretty much all active socialists of the time — that meant just that they strove to act as a coherent collective. That was difficult, in the conditions of illegality in which they had to operate. Although from 1912, the policy of...
GO politics, in history and today

The Bolsheviks had been to organise separately (initially, together with “pro-party Mensheviks”) from what they saw as the “liquidationist” Mensheviks, as late as early 1917 Bolsheviks outside the major cities were often in a single organisation with the local Mensheviks. But the Bolsheviks worked at coherence.

The “centralism” was not imposed by a big, well-paid office staff. Until August 1917, when they were able to set up a small “secretariat”, the Bolsheviks mostly had to improvise their “office” operations by a series of makeshifts from exile (often from Switzerland).

**GENERAL SECRETARY**

In April 1922 Josef Stalin was elected “general secretary” of the Bolshevik party. The title, taken I think from British trade unions, was new to the Bolsheviks. Between August 1917 and 1922, Elena Stasova, Yakov Sverdlov, Nikolai Krestinsky, and Vyacheslav Molotov had been successively “chair” or “secretaries” of the “secretariat”. No-one imagined that “general secretary” meant “leader”, rather than “admin back-up person”. It was to the surprise of the Bolsheviks, and by the destruction of their old norms and traditions, that Stalin made “general secretary” mean “supremo”.

The German Communist Party, the most important one outside Russia, did without any notion of “general secretary” as “supremo” even into the Stalinist period (Ernst Thälmann was “chair of the central committee”).

The job titles are revealing. Despite the aura of despotism that the term “general secretary” acquired through its use in Stalinist parties, it is not sufficiently managerial and top-down for many leftist NGOs. NGOs have renamed their top officials as “Executive Director” or such. David Babbs, whom 38 Degrees calls its “Executive Director”, describes himself as “CEO”.

The managerial trend has seeped into the labour movement, too. Some trade unions have renamed their “general secretary” as “CEO” (example: the Australian MEAA, where Michael Crosby, the foremost ideologue of the so-called “organising model” of trade unionism, used to work). In the Labour Party now, key jobs have titles like “Executive Director of Strategy and Communications” and “Chief of Staff”.

Global Justice Now (formerly the World Development Movement) is among the least hierarchical, most open, of the NGOs. It has its council (equivalent of the unelected “board” of 38 Degrees) is elected by a conference. It publishes the pay rates of its office staff.

All that, however, shows how far the NGO model of politics is from the organised workers’ movement model represented in its best, most lively, form by the Bolsheviks.

“Global Justice Now” has a “Director” in charge of its staff. The Director gets paid a conventional manager’s salary, £44,000 in 2017. GJN takes pride in the fact that they limit the top person’s salary to 2.5 times the lowest wage for their staff.

In organisations like the Bolsheviks, the office staff are people who have stepped up from being exceptionally vigorous activists “in the field” while scraping a living in “ordinary” jobs, or as unemployed, or as students, and are ready to subsist on a minimal stipend because they want to put their full energies into changing the world.

No-one in such organisations would imagine that the “senior” people on the office staff should be paid more than the “junior”.

Instructively, even the British Communist Party in its last years, utterly raddled from decades of Stalinism, was more influenced by traditions of workers’-movement activism, less hierarchical, than these supposedly “people-power” NGOs. When Gordon Maclean was appointed last-but-one general secretary of the CP in 1973, he was paid £2000 a year — the equivalent of £16,000 in today’s prices, or about 15% below the average worker’s wage then. Even the CP paid organiser on the basis of getting the maximum number of activist-hours for politics from a limited budget, not of creating a conventional managerial office staff.

In the NGOs, the “Directors” and “Executive Directors” and “CEOs” are people making a career in the NGO world. They come to their well-paid posts not from “rank-and-file” activism in the NGO — generally, that scarcely exists — but from less-high-up managerial jobs in other NGOs.

Of course they have chosen careers as leftist NGO managers rather than as arms-dealers or bankers. Probably they could have made even better money if they had gone the arms-dealer or banker road instead. They are not insincere. But they are in a sort of politics which is about nudging, influencing, lobbying, not about educating, mobilising, emancipating.

Two decades on from 1917, Leon Trotsky summarised the rules of Bolshevik politics like this: “To face reality squarely; not to seek the line of least resistance; to call things by their right names; to speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be; not to fear obstacles; to be true in little things as in big ones; to base one’s program on the logic of the class struggle; to be bold when the hour for action arrives...”

NGO politics is more about always seeking the line of least resistance, finding “tactical” formulas, basing them on calculations about how best to nudge established power. The Blair-Brown epoch boosted NGO politics, and now cultures and norms originating in it are endemic in the labour movement. It represents not a bright innovation, but much more a recycling in changed form of the aristocratic modes of politics current before the workers’ movement pioneered the idea of the democratic political party.
With the passing of Robert Fine on 9 June 2016, the British left lost a truly exceptional figure. As well as being a sociologist at the University of Warwick, Fine was a long-time sympathiser of Workers' Liberty. Though he was less involved in frontline activism towards the end of his life, he never lost his commitment to working-class struggle. In short, Fine never became a stereotypical "Marxist academic".

To highlight Fine’s work, Eduardo Tovar will review five of his major books, starting with Democracy and the Fate of Law: Marx’s Critique of the Legal Form (Blackburn Press 2002; originally published by Pluto Press in 1984).

Fine seeks to reappropriate Marx’s perspectives on the relationship between law, the state, and private property. He does so by placing Marx in light of the classical jurists who preceded him, as well as later scholars seeking either to build upon or to criticise the Marxist tradition. For context, as in other academic fields, there is a tendency in legal and political philosophy to characterise Marxist approaches as “ecological” or “antagonistic.” This characterisation is often rooted in a crude explanation of the “base” and “superstructure” metaphor.

In other words, the standard claim is that, as he reduces all law to nothing more than an ideological “superstructure” which obscures class power and exploitation in the economic “base” of productive forces, Marxism fails to grasp (a) the more complex nature of law itself and (b) the role of law’s merit as a political-philosophical value. As a result, late or Marxist figures who clearly do not reduce law to mystification and ideology are frequently treated as having introduced a level of sophistication or nuance absent in the writings of Marx himself.

Admittedly, some of this uncharitable characterisation of Marx stems from people reading about him secondhand from later authors within the Marxist tradition. As Fine himself puts it, there are “two polar versions of Marxism” that are “equally mistaken.”

It is this second version of Marxism which appears as little more than an extension of liberalism, emphasising the achievements of Parliamentary democracy, the rule of law, and civil liberties in the face of both private power and state tyranny. In the second version, Marxism appears as little more than a negation of liberalism, presenting liberal conceptions of freedom, democracy, and equality as nothing more than fraudulent instruments of class rule.

One should bear in mind that Fine wrote the book at a point when democracy and legality were being heavily re-appraised from the perspective of civil liberties falling victim to the “wars on terror.” Legal guality were being heavily re-appraised from speculatively attempt to construct the common sense of law.

In his re-examination of Marx’s analysis of the legal form, Fine does not seek to build an ideological “superstructure” which obscures class power and exploitation in the economic “base” of productive forces. Neither does he seek to re-conceptualise the role of law in the way that legal positivists have.

Fine takes pains not to be overly dismissive of the key contributors to classical jurisprudence, notably the 17th-18th century social contractarian, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and /or classical liberal thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Adam Smith as well as GWF Hegel. For Fine, these diverse philosophers all helped judge social relations as mere masks concealing class relations.

Fine’s approach provides novel and lucid insights into how Marx appreciated the new freedoms gained with the rise of bourgeois liberalism. He demonstrates that Marx’s radical modernity—yet also sought to transcend them.

Fine’s breakdown of the different stages in Marx’s critique is significant for several reasons. First, it shows that most portrayals of Marx’s standpoint on law as “instrumentalist” or “reductionist” stem from isolated readings of the third stage Fine identifies; that is, the stage Marx had reached by The German Ideology.

Second, by adopting a method of critiquing jurisprudence that parallels the method Marx developed in critiquing political economy, Fine demonstrates how a Marxist analysis of law should point not to its illusory nature, but to its contradictory nature. In other words, like money, law has multiple functions that it performs in necessarily contradictory ways: it is simultaneously “a measure of rights”, “a normative standard”, “a medium of association”, and “a means of regulating relations.” (p. 139-40)

Third, Fine develops how, by analysing them as emergent from historical conditions rather than timeless reason, Marx was able to understand law and the state as evolutionarily related, but distinct. In other words, the state emerges out of law as a more complex form of social life, but in making this transition, “the state acquires properties that go beyond the properties of law as such”, just as “money-capital has properties not possessed by money.”

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ADVANCE

Accordingly, the great advance of classical jurisprudence over traditional natural law theory was its presentation of law as a “human product in its entirety.” (Laws are created by people and can therefore be changed by people). (p. 20)

This was the value in, for example, Hobbes’ theory of “public authority,” Rousseau’s theory of the “general will,” Smith’s theory of “natural liberty,” and so on, by the “theory of the state,” and so on. In all of these cases, they all revealed law’s human origins and subjected legal institutions to rational scrutiny.

However, in demolishing traditional natural law, the theorists of classical jurisprudence realised naturalised positive law in its place: “they concluded that it is in the nature of humans to posit law,” and “presented bourgeois private property, law and state as the embodiments of reason” (p. 66). Whilst such theorists had correctly identified natural law’s “isolation of reason from human history”, they ended up projecting “the achievements of human history as the realisation of reason”, (ibid). This is the key to understanding how Marx related to these theorists.

Marx recognised the advance of classical jurisprudence, but saw these advances as incomplete and thus sought to rationalise the break from natural law they had already achieved.

As Fine deftly shows, Marx’s radicalised critique had several overlapping and contrasting stages. In his first stage, Marx looked to Hegel’s attempt to synthesise individual freedom and collective authority with the Christian notion of the external bond and the embodiment of rational will. In contrast to Hegel, Marx sought to demonstrate how little the existing state corresponds with the ideal of the rational state. He used the laws on, for example, wood theft and press censorship to illustrate the corruption of the state’s universality “through the subordination of the state to private interests or through the elevation of the state as a special power above the people” (p. 70).

In his second stage, marked by such essays as On the Jewish Question (1844), Marx shifted towards emphasising the insufficiency of constructing a rational state by revealing the contrast “the universality and freedom inherent in the idea of the state with the egoism, the abstractness and dependence associated with private property.” (p. 205) This is because “[t]he historical process which released the public domain from its private fetters also released the pursuance of interest from all social obligations” (ibid). Accordingly, political emancipation through a rational state is necessary for social emancipation, but is not itself enough since a rational state remains “compatible with enslavement within civil society” (p. 206). In his fourth and final stage, marked by such essays as The German Ideology (1846) Marx and Engels began to characterise the state itself as an “alien form”: its communality is purely formal and, by its very nature, it “represents the alienation of power from the mass of the people”. (p. 206)

Freedom and equality before the law are not only insufficient, but also “engendered unwillingness and inequality as their substratum” (p. 206).

It is true that traditional natural law theory “derived the purely formal freedom and universality ‘through the subordination of right’, a ‘human product in its entirety’: “[l]aws are not only insufficient, but also ‘engendered unwillingness and inequality as their substratum’” (p. 206). Likewise, “the [traditional] obligations attached to property served to exclude the majority from new forms of property.” (ibid) For example, peasants were unable to access private property. Significantly, by characterising some laws as eternal and immutable, traditional natural law theorists restricted human agency in the process of lawmaking.

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by money as such”. (p. 146) As well as shore up that Marx acknowledged non-state forms of law long before the explosion of literature on “legal pluralism” made this topic fashionable in the academy, this helps illustrate how the state takes on forms other than law: for instance, the army and the bureaucracy.

In breaking down the different stages in Marx’s critique, Fine lays the groundwork for his critical analysis of three 20th century theorists who view themselves as either contributor to or detracting from the Marxist tradition: namely, Evgeny Pashukanis, EP Thompson, and Michel Foucault. In his 1924 masterwork Law and Marxism, Pashukanis put forward his theory that law derives from commodity exchange, as opposed to commodity production. To Pashukanis, the elemental legal category of “the juridic subject” and the juridic subject’s consciousness and will to law, are understood as a function of law itself. This leads us to the last 20th century theorist that Marx acknowledged non-state forms of law long before the explosion of literature on “legal pluralism” made this topic fashionable in the academy, this helps illustrate how the state takes on forms other than law: for instance, the army and the bureaucracy.

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Today one class, the working class, lives by selling its labour power to another, the capitalist class, which owns the means of production. The capitalists’ control over the economy and their relentless drive to increase their wealth causes poverty, unemployment, the blighting of lives by overwork, imperialism, the destruction of the environment and much else.

Against the accumulated wealth and power of the capitalists, the working class must unite to struggle against capitalist power in the workplace and in wider society.

The Alliance for Workers’ Liberty wants socialist revolution: collective ownership of industry and services, workers’ control, and a democracy much fuller than the present system, with elected representatives recallable at any time and an end to bureaucrats’ and managers’ privileges. We fight for trade unions and the Labour Party to break with “social partnership” with the bosses and to militantly assert working-class interests.

In workplaces, trade unions, and Labour organisations; among students; in local campaigns; on the left and in wider political alliances we stand for:

• Independent working-class representation in politics.
• A workers’ government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.
• A workers’ charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
• Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.
• A workers’ movement that fights all forms of oppression. Full equality for women, and social provision to free women from domestic labour. For reproductive justice: free abortion on demand; the right to choose when and whether to have children. Full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender 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 openness in debate.

If you agree with us, please take some copies of Solidarity to sell — and join us!

Where we stand
Glasgow council strike

By Anne Field

GMB and Unison picket lines covered Glasgow on Tuesday 23 and Wednesday 24 October in a two-day strike by City Council employees.

A lunchtime demonstration on the first day of the strike also saw four thousand people march through Glasgow to a rally in front of the City Chambers.

It was the biggest strike for equal pay in British history. The target was years of pay discrimination against City Council women employees, resulting from the Workforce Pay and Benefits Review (WPBR) which was introduced and defended by successive Labour administrations.

The then Labour-controlled Council rejected the equal pay schemes used by all other local authorities in Britain. The WPBR which it chose to use was unique to Glasgow and systematically discriminated against women.

Employees on full-time contracts, for example, automatically got extra points (and pay) for being on part-time contracts. But female employees are more likely to be on part-time contracts than full-time ones.

The WPBR awarded the same basic pay to jobs of equal value. It then invented reasons to award extra pay to male-dominated jobs.

The result: a male doing a job of equal value to a job done by a female was paid up to £3,000 a year more.

The City Council unions walked out of the job evaluation process involved in the WPBR, lodged a collective grievance about it, and also lodged a formal complaint with the City Council leader.

In October of 2006 the Labour-controlled Council approved the WPBR – despite the absence of any agreement with the Council trade unions. Employees were given three “chances” to accept the WPBR in late 2006 and early 2007. Then it was imposed.

SEPARE

Without counting this week’s strike, in the period 2006 to 2017 there were 14 separate WPBR disputes (short of strike action), and ten strikes which related to the WPBR.

A total of 6,000 City Council employees were balloted about those strikes, and 3,500 of them took part in the strikes.

Apart from the strikes in opposition to the WPBR, 12,000 legal claims about pay discrimination have been lodged by women council employees, many of them dating back to 2008. They have been “on the go” ever since.

£2.5 million was spent by the City Council under successive Labour administrations in attempting to persuade the courts that it was not discriminating against women workers.

This was spent not just on the employees’ claims about pay discrimination but also on the “logistics” of legal proceedings about the nature of the WPBR itself, and the Council’s claim that a woman working for an ALEO could not compare her rate of pay to that of a man working for the City Council.

This was the record of successive Labour administrations (Purcell, Matheson, and McAveety) over eleven years (2006-17).

In May of last year Labour lost control of the Council to the SNP. The new SNP administration initially continued with the Labour-legacy legal proceedings but then abandoned them and promised a negotiated settlement.

But it has not lived up to its promise. There has been no progress in the seventeen months since its election.

Although the SNP’s failure to progress talks was the trigger for the strike, the blame lies fairly and squarely with the Labour administrations of 2006-17. The SNP has failed to resolve in 17 months a problem which Labour administrations created over eleven years.

The last Labour Council leader, Frank McAveety, is still leader of the Labour Group. And as long as he remains Labour Group leader, the Scottish Labour Party’s promise of “Real Change” will remain a dead letter.

London Underground Central Line disputes

By Tubeworker bulletin

RMT drivers have three ongoing disputes on the Central Line.

We’re resisting the removal of the detainment staff on the Waterloo and City Line, where drivers operate out of Leytonstone depot; we’re demanding reinstatement for Paul Bailey, a driver we believe was unjustly sacked; and we’re fighting against an out-of-control management culture.

Management have backed off for now on their plans to remove Waterlooo and City Line detainment staff. They were planning to implement “flash-and-dash”, whereby, rather than the train being physically checked by a station assistant, the driver would simply be expected to flash the cab lights on and off and hope that would be enough to remind any passengers to get off, then take the train into the sidings.

In the Paul Bailey case, there is a lot of propaganda being circulated by the Central Line Operations Manager. Paul was sacked after “failing” a drugs test, for the presence of cannabis substances, but a second test on a sample taken at the same time showed he was well within the cut-off limit of 50-ng/mL.

Management are now moving the goalposts and saying the limit is 15-ng/mL, even though all the documentation says 50. They won’t release the results of Paul’s initial test, they’re just saying “he failed”. When pressed on why they won’t release the results, managers say, “we don’t have to”. So there’s obviously something dodgy going on in terms of openness and transparency.

The third dispute is over what the union calls a “breakdown of industrial relations”. There are a raft of issues involved here, which affect drivers at all Central Line depots. They’re similar to the issues in the Piccadilly Line dispute. Drivers feel like they’re being pushed around by management. They knowingly run trains late then effectively force drivers to work past their shift finishing times. There’s also a big issue with the authorisation way the attendance policy is being applied, drivers are at work with no issues are being hauled in for medical case conferences and told they’re at risk of losing their jobs.

In the Waterloo and City Line and Paul Bailey disputes, there are clear demands: retain detainment staff, and reinstate Paul. In the other dispute, we’re fighting for a whole scale change in management culture.

We’ll strike on 7 November, alongside Aslef, who have a parallel dispute on the Central Line over similar issues. Aslef also have a live ballot mandate over cab security, but it’s not clear what their strategy is for that.

The issues with Central Line management have been ongoing for years, surfacing over and over again. It feels like we have to strike to keep the bosses in check.

UCU pay ballots miss threshold

By a UCU member

Despite a clear vote in favour of strike action in a UCU ballot which closed on 19 October, only a handful of institutions met the 50% turnout threshold for action in the universities’ dispute over pay, casualisation and equality.

Across the board turnout was 42% with a 68.9% vote for action, the best UCU has ever achieved in a pay ballot. The band ballot which also closed on 19 October also went down to defeat in the face of 79% vote against.

In a consultative vote HE members had clearly rejected the employers’ 2% pay offer and failure to act on the growth of insecure posts within the sector, but not enough were convinced of the need for industrial action.

The timing of the ballot (which began in the summer break), fatigue after strikes on pensions earlier this year, and a general sense of workload, not pay, is the key issue for permanent staff may all be factors here. Branches need to act to ensure that casualised staff — many of whom played vital roles in the pensions dispute despite having no guarantee of a long-term career in the sector — do not become alienated from the union given the failure to secure a vote for action on their pay and conditions. Effective local campaigns will be central to that.

Meanwhile, the row over the USS pension scheme in pre-92 universities continues with increasingly embarrassing revelations for the employers’ side about miscalculations underpinning their
Trump calls for aid cuts as caravan moves through Mexico

By Gemma Short

A “migrant caravan”, which has since 12 October been making its way from Honduras to the USA, has swelled to around 7,000 people as it starts to make its way through Mexico.

The caravan is usually a yearly event, although there have been two this year. Known as Via Crucis del Migrante (“Migrant’s Way of the Cross”) the caravan has previously been organised or supported by Pueblo Sin Fronteras (People without Borders) but this one has not been directly organised by them and has had a more organic formation.

At the start, migrants from Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador, who are fleeing increasing violence and political repression in Central America, gathered in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, and set off to walk to the USA.

On Saturday 20 October the caravan reached the Guatemala-Mexico border, and after a series of stand-offs with Mexican border officials and riot police some people entered Mexico on a variety of legal asylum visas, temporary visit visas, or without any documentation by crossing the Suchiate River on rafts.

Some migrants were transported by Mexican officials to temporary camps near the border, others scattered.

By Sunday 21 October the caravan started to reform with migrants who had crossed the border the day before, and some who were already in Mexico and began to march north.

The caravan is only one part, and largely symbolic and political part, of the flow of migrants from Central America. However many have chosen to join the caravan in order to seek protection in numbers.

Many in the caravan are women with children, and feel safer travelling in larger numbers — not only to protect themselves against violence but also in dealing with border crossings and officials on the way.

The caravan made international news after Trump issued a series of inflammatory tweets and media against it. He suggested the migrants were economic migrants from Mexico, rather than potential asylum seekers from violence in Central America. He claimed the migrants must first apply for asylum in Mexico (although international laws says they do not have to).

Trump has tried to whip up anti-migrant feeling against the caravan and has used it to repopularise ideas about building a wall on the Mexico-US border.

Doris Meissner, the director of the US Immigration Policy Program at the Migration Policy Institute, told Time magazine: “As a signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, Mexico is obligated to protect people who are outside of their country and afraid to return due to a well-founded fear of persecution based on religion, race, nationality or membership to a particular social or political group. The United States is also a signatory.”

And while Mexico is required to offer protection for refugees under international law, migrants have no obligation to request it there. If migrants like those travelling in the caravan that began in Honduras want to seek asylum in the United States, they have the right to try.”

Despite this, many of the migrants in the caravan have applied for asylum in Mexico. Applications for asylum in Mexico have risen massively since the rise in violence in Central America. In 2017 alone there were 14,986 requests, a 66% jump from the year before.

In a final act of malice, Trump threatened to cut off US aid to Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador over the so-called “failure” of these countries to prevent the exodus of migrants.

Previous caravans have dwindled in numbers during the long journey through Mexico to the US border, as some opt to stay and work in Mexico and others are deported.

However this is unlikely to be either the biggest or last migration north from Central America. Already on Sunday 21 October Guatemalan authorities reported that another 1000 migrants had entered the country from Honduras.