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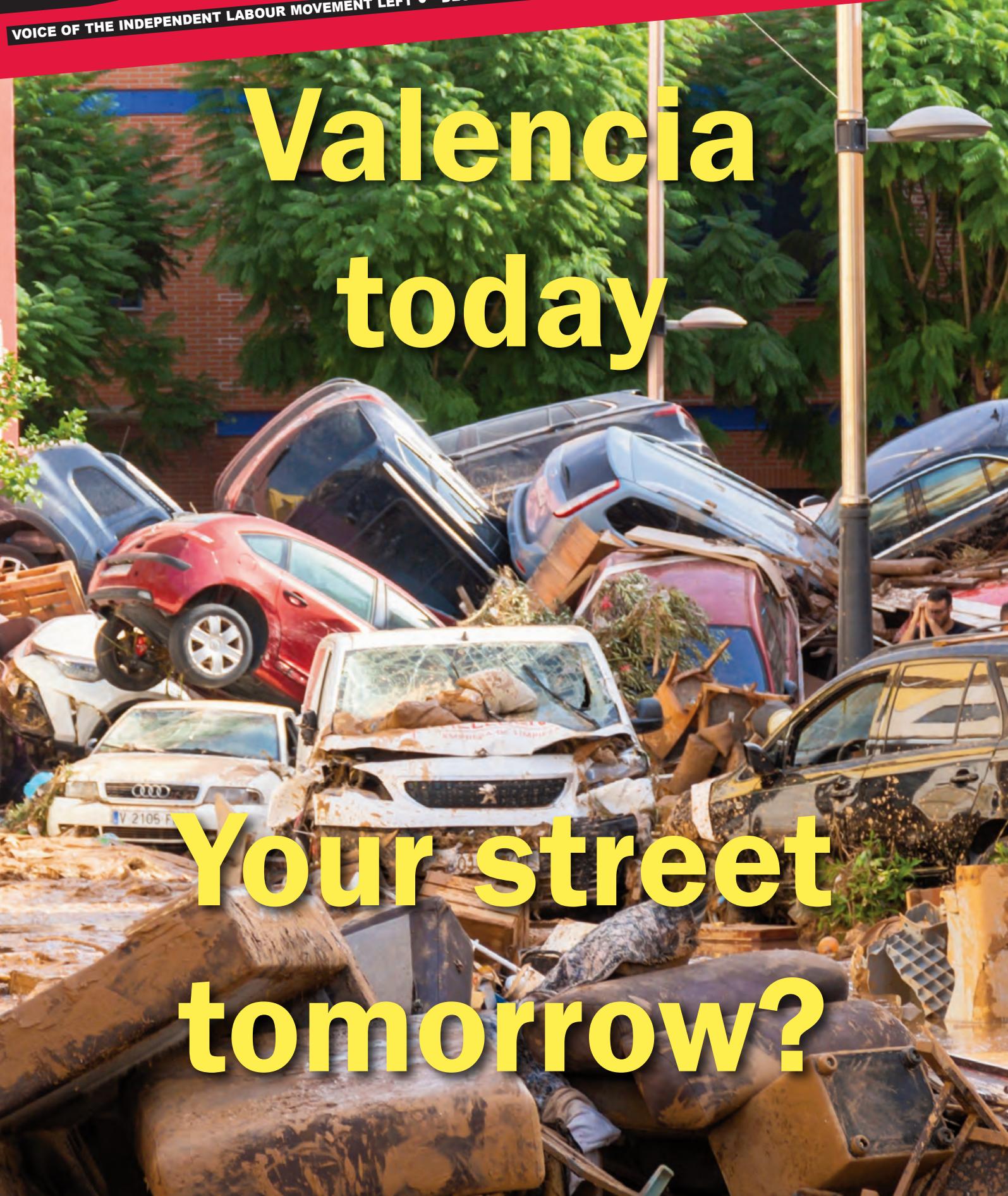
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The Agenda

Editorial: Goodbye to all that?	3
Paul Atkinson: Are you a robot?	4
Obituary: Alex Salmond	5
Save Windermere: What lies beneath?	6
Barry Rodin: Unhealthy democracy	7
Matt Willgress: Organise and fight back	8
George Binette: Don't fund weapons industry	9
Martyn Shrewsbury: Happy new year?	10
Mark E Thomas: Baby steps	11
Protect the Wild: Unspeakable in pursuit	12
Kevin Flack: Uphill struggle	13
DMG: Striking back against fascism	14-15
Unite: Not so glad it's Friday	16
Time for real change: The time is now	17
Steve Price: The greed game	18
Peace & Justice Fn: Nightmare in Washington	19
Ihsan Qadir: Time to unite Kurdistan	20
Keith Veness: Back for good	21
Keith Veness: Steaming ahead	22
Keith Veness: The Party's over	23
Steve Price: All in a day's work	25
Letters	26
Periscope	27
Christine Shawcroft: Behaving badly	28

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Goodbye to all that?

It would be quite natural, on reviewing the events of 2024, to be glad to see the back of such a benighted year. The death toll in the ever-escalating wars continues to climb into the hundreds of thousands. British governments of both major parties seem more than happy to turn a blind eye to war crimes and plausible genocide. They send more weapons whilst hypocritically calling for a ceasefire.

As climate change really starts to get into its stride, incredibly there are still right wing climate change deniers doing the rounds. As disastrous storms hit Florida and Spain, the fossil fuel industry will brook no threats to their profits. Documents prove that Exxon Mobil, to take just one example, knew *thirty years* ago that the exploitation of fossil fuels would lead to climate disaster, and did their best to hush the matter up.

Extensive lobbying of the new Labour government, meanwhile, has led to a rapid policy change and a massive investment into unproven carbon capture and storage technology. The industry regards this as a get out of jail free card, and intend carrying on with the activities that caused all these problems in the first place. By the time it becomes apparent that these schemes are not the panacea that we are being told they are, we will all be struggling, literally, to keep our heads above water.

And the elections! Don't get us started about

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the elections. Faced with a choice between two right wing candidates, the American electorate chose the one who pretended to be against elites and to be standing up for the ordinary Joe. Or did they? Rumours of election fraud and demands for recounts are circulating.

Regardless, the Democrats decided that they should go into the election on a platform of support for the never ending wars which are draining their economy just as they are draining ours. Palestinian-Americans were treated with contempt, just as Muslims are being treated here. If the Dems looked across the pond and thought: 'Well, Starmer got a huge majority standing on a right wing platform of cuts and more cuts, so maybe we should try that' they really weren't looking closely enough.

Sick of the Tories as we all were, Starmer still managed to get fewer votes in 2024 than Jeremy Corbyn got in 2019, and many fewer than he got in 2017. So much for 'We would have won in 2017 if we'd had a better Leader'. If Starmer thinks he has a mandate for all the cuts and privatisations that he's carrying out, he is mistaken, and will soon have to face the wrath of the electorate.

Because in May of the brave new year of 2025, there are County Council elections, the first major electoral test for the new government. No matter how bad 2024 has been, maybe 2025 is when the chickens really come home to roost.

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Are you a robot?

Since the roll-out of the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) service in 2007-8, NHS primary care psychological therapy has been monopolised by short-term cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). What is now called NHS Talking Therapies (NHS TT) hardly qualifies as psychotherapy at all. It might more appropriately be called psychological education, encouraging people to adapt to the conditions of their lives.

At the same time, the service is grossly ineffective and wasteful of resources. Nearly two million people were referred to NHS TT last year. Two-thirds of them dropped out before finishing a course of treatment. Less than 20 per cent of referrals were deemed to have recovered from their mental health condition. Nearly half of NHS TT providers are private companies or charities. At the moment, they see about a fifth of patients, but the proportion is growing. At the same time, the recruitment and training of therapists is growing significantly faster among private providers. Between 2019 and 2022, the NHS therapy workforce grew by 37%, while the non-NHS sector grew by 84%.

It is the private companies that are currently developing Artificial Intelligence – in partnership with American Big Data companies like Google and Microsoft. They are recording millions of NHS TT sessions, and using machine learning to break these sessions down into key words and phrases that therapist and client use. By comparing these ‘language events’ with patients’ session-by-session self-assessment, AI is learning therapy talk and presenting itself as human. Private providers developing AI therapy include: ieso (sic) Digital Health; Limbic Access and Limbic Care; Trent Psychological Therapies, partnered by the US company Lyssn; the Indian company Wysa; and Silvercloud,

Mental health practitioner Paul Atkinson is concerned about AI and the future of NHS Talking Therapies.

owned by Amwell (American Well) and partnered with Microsoft. For example, ieso has over 12,000 NHS TT referrals a year across 25 NHS Trusts. It has recorded over one million NHS therapy sessions, broken down into 20 million language events. See ieso’s 2020 TED talk for a visual representation of the kind of session-by-session analysis ieso is programming into its machine learning processes. The company wants to expand its AI into the US, European and African markets.

Digitalisation involves a rapid expansion of ‘partnerships’ between NHS services and the private sector tech companies. As we know, digital tech is being welcomed enthusiastically by government and policy makers as ‘technosalvation’ for the NHS. NHS data is being harvested by private providers and the Big Data companies. The development of AI therapy is expanding the sale of confidential data and providing the basis for digital programs and software platforms, which will be sold back to the UK and all round the world.

NHS TT is already offering a very truncated and utilitarian version of psychotherapy, in the form of short-term Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and its derivatives. Courses of therapeutic treatment average eight sessions, and only a third of its 1.8 million patients actually complete a treatment plan. Its one-size-fits-all approach, which includes tick-box assessments at the end of each session, will be baked into AI therapy via machine learning and algorithms. The digital therapist will be programmed to offer what appears to be a personal response to patients’

communications, including simulated empathy and spontaneity. In fact, its responses will be framed within a very simplistic model of human emotions and experience, a sophisticated mimicry of what it ‘learns’ from its clients, and a tool-box of behavioural strategies for recovering our capacity to adapt to the conditions of our lives.

An important dimension of the hollowing out of NHS therapy by AI is the deskilling of its workforce. Before IAPT, NHS counsellors and psychotherapists were characteristically trained over three or four years, usually requiring their own personal therapy and a number of training clients individually supervised weekly. Currently, the training of NHS TT therapists consists of one year (45 hours) for Low Intensity, and one year (60 hours) for CBT High Intensity practitioners. Neither are required to have experience of their own personal therapy.

AI will initially be used to support human therapists and to gradually provide more access for a service currently unable to cope with demand. However, over the next few years, AI will begin to replace therapists. Job growth will be in the area of managing the technology performing the tasks of triage, referral and administration, as well as conducting and recording the therapy and procuring outcome results. Human therapists, like other care workers, could soon be among the lowest-paid workers in the economy.

For the full article go to <https://freepsychotherapynetwork.com/machina-ex-deo-ai-and-the-future-of-nhs-talking-therapies/>

Alex Salmond 1954 - 2024

It's not often I start off a *Briefing* article by quoting Keith, aka The Beloved Leader who said that Alex Salmond "leaves behind a lasting legacy, he was a monumental figure of Scottish and UK politics for over 30 years." Love him or loathe him – he was something of a Marmite politician – you couldn't ignore him.

Born in 1954, he died suddenly, just before his 70th birthday. Salmond had joined the SNP in the early 70's at a time when liberation and independence struggles were going off all over the world.

He started on the radical left, so much so that he was suspended from the party for a couple of years. The SNP was at a pretty low ebb when he joined, and he can take credit for organising and mobilising them.

He stood for the SNP at the 1987 General Election, and got elected to the Palace of Varieties. In fact, he was an MP for 23 years until 2010, and then again from 2015 to 2017.

He became SNP leader for the first time in 1990, was the first 'First Minister' of the devolved Scottish parliament in 1999, and was the very visible 'face' of the SNP right up until the Independence Referendum, which was lost in 2014. After which he stood down.

Salmond was a smart operator, and tough. He was also an outstanding orator with a quick wit, and an ear catching turn of phrase. Some saw too much ego, smugness at times. I didn't.

Some in the independence movement thought he had sold out in going along with devolution, which they saw as a poor compromise. But Salmond was also a pragmatist, and the new devolved government introduced

Activist Steve Price pays tribute to Alex Salmond, the main driver of the campaign for Scottish independence for many years.



photo: Shutterstock, Altopix

some striking, radical, left looking policies like the abolition of student fees and free prescriptions.

The Referendum was in some ways perhaps his finest moment! Even getting an overall majority in a Parliament designed to make that exceedingly difficult, was some achievement. That led to him forcing Cameron to agree to hold a referendum.

The 'yes' campaign took 45% of the vote despite an all-out campaign by the Establishment to defeat it. Not least secret Gordon Brown and David Cameron collusion, and of course the party's opposition to Independence damaged Labour in Scotland for several years.

It's difficult to precisely locate Salmond politically. He wasn't consistently of the left, he was something of a maverick. He was good on Iraq, but at one time seemed to advocate Scotland becoming a low-tax 'haven'.

This, he seemed to suggest, would attract investment and ensure its finan-

cial viability. Above all he was a nationalist, which can be problematic for socialists who are by definition internationalists. Obviously, it's complicated, and the left have often supported liberation struggles.

His career ended in controversy, when a number of complaints of inappropriate sexual conduct (and worse) were made. There were 14 charges, one of which was dropped, one 'not proven' and 12 found not guilty.

Nevertheless, the damage to his reputation remained, 'no smoke without fire' and all that. For a very different, pro-Salmond, take on all that I suggest you hear what Craig Murray has to say.

Charismatic, larger than life, he will be missed. As one commentator said, 'the constitutional history of Scotland will now forever be divided between 'before' Salmond and 'after' Salmond.'

What lies beneath?

Save Windermere plays a key role: fighting United Utilities to release environmental information. Save Windermere and Windrush Against Sewage Pollution (WASP) have spent years trying to obtain complete data from United Utilities to assess this illegality and expose these issues, yet the data remains incomplete as UU continues to withhold critical information. This refusal persists even after they recently reiterated their 'commitment to being more transparent' after Save Windermere's involvement led to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) issuing an enforcement notice against them.

We are the only organisation around Windermere actively trying to access this information, which is vital for understanding the lake's condition. Not only has United Utilities refused to provide information, but they are now appearing before a judge to challenge the Information Commissioner's decision and attempt to have it overturned. This is an ongoing battle, and we will continue to fight it.

Compounding the problem, the Environment Agency (EA) has repeatedly failed in both requesting the necessary data and in detecting these illegal spills. Without reliability from either the water companies or regulators, we must turn to independent experts. Sites are mandated to process a specified flow rate (litres per second) to sewage treatment plants before overflow can occur.

If a site spills at a time when this pass forward rate isn't being met, it's an illegal discharge. Through cross-referencing flow data (the amount of sewage directed to treatment works) with EDM logs (which track discharge duration into the lake), WASP has uncovered the shocking extent of illegal spills around Windermere.

The Save Windermere campaign reports that United Utilities are still hiding crucial data about spillages.

From 2018-2023, Professor Hammond's WASP analysis has shown over 500 days with illegal spilling in and around Windermere and Coniston. All six sites discharging untreated sewage around Windermere have illegally spilled, reflecting a lack of capacity due to inadequate investment. This demonstrates a complete failure to protect England's largest and culturally significant lake, revealing the pitfalls of privatisation in stark terms.

However, the issue goes beyond illegal discharges in Windermere. OFWAT is nearing the end of its draft determinations, where it will decide how much water companies can increase bills over the next five years. Evidence of illegality is critical, as OFWAT's CEO David Black has stated that customers should not be charged to bring sites into compliance, "We do not expect customers to pay to regain compliance with existing permit conditions... companies must evidence that the additional funding is to enhance the functioning of the asset beyond existing permit compliance. This includes demonstrating that: the company is operating the assets in compliance with its permits."

But if OFWAT relies on the EA to identify non-compliance at sites nationwide, what happens if the EA won't or can't detect illegality? The EA received a portion of Professor Hammond's



photo: iStock, Barry Davis

report in January but has neither acted on it nor launched an investigation. While UU's motive is clear—maximise dividends—why is the EA failing to hold them accountable? This isn't just a matter of resource constraints; we believe deliberate decisions within the EA are preventing UU from being held accountable for its exploitation of England's largest lake. To support this, consider recent coverage on illegal spills in Windermere, where the EA claimed to possess 2023 data for Glebe Road pumping station. Yet, as of Wednesday, 6th November, we have confirmation from the EA that they hold no flow data for Glebe Road or any other site, apart from small samples of data from Ambleside, for 2023.

OFWAT, the EA, the Environmental Audit Committee, and the government have all acknowledged the validity of Professor Hammond's analysis. Given the EA's failure to address the extent of illegality, particularly around Windermere, his work is the most reliable indicator of non-compliance. Alongside WASP, we've presented this evidence to OFWAT, and the analysis provides even more comprehensive and conclusive data than before.

Unhealthy democracy

A high turnout of voters in major elections is one sign of a healthy democracy. Voters are engaged and generally supportive of the political system. However, the 60% turnout of eligible voters at the 2024 general election was the second lowest for 100 years and consistent with the downward trend since the early 1950s when over 80% of eligible voters cast their ballot. Turnout in 2024 was highest in South West and South East England and lowest in more deprived areas, especially the Midlands and North.

Election turnout is declining globally, regardless of the voting system. For example, in Europe where PR systems predominate, turnout has fallen in the past 50 years from an average of over 80% to under 70%. In post-Communist countries the decline has been more dramatic falling from an average of nearly 80% in the early 1990s to below 60% now.

Ominously, lower turnout can suggest that fewer citizens consider elections the main way to legitimize political parties' and politicians' control over political decision making. This can leave the door open to authoritarian populism as experienced in some East European countries such as Hungary.

In contrast, other forms of people activism have emerged, such as mass protests (e.g. Gaza demonstrations), occupy movements and increased use of social media as a new platform of political engagement. Such a change from traditional political party activity to new forms of democratic participation and representation, reflects not only individual governments' increasing inability to deal with emerging global challenges such as climate change, and increasing inequality but also a growing disconnect between elected representatives and both grassroot political activists and voters.

Barry Rodin, Orpington CLP, calls for campaigning on the issues that matter to people to increase involvement in politics.

This is evidenced by the fall in Labour's membership. Also, it is still only too common to hear when canvassing: 'we only see you on the doorstep at election time.' There is much historical evidence that individual popular campaigns alone are insufficient for a progressive transformation of society. A political strategy allied with democratic involvement of individual party members in policy making and selection of candidates for elections seems essential to ensure both accountability by elected representatives and also greater participation by voters.

A major negative influence is successive governments' almost slavish adherence to the neo-liberal agenda, which has generated almost obscene inequality of wealth, and dashed the expectations of many young people of secure well-paid employment and decent housing. The result is disillusionment with politics, especially among the young. The 2024 turnout rate among registered voters was only 50% in constituencies where one quarter of the population is between 25 and 34 years old, compared to 63% in constituencies where only one-tenth of the population is within that age bracket.

Constituencies with a high proportion of people from minority ethnic backgrounds had a lower turnout rate than areas with small minority ethnic populations. Turnout among registered voters was only 54% in constituencies where three in every five people is from a minority ethnic background, compared to 61% in constituencies where just one in ten people is from an ethnic minority ethnic background.

Is it any wonder that the 'Tweedle Dee' and 'Tweedle Dum' politics of the two major parties, where choice is essentially restricted to who is most competent to run the country, has turned off so many people from political participation?

How can turnout be improved? On a local level my CLP are regularly canvassing between elections, focusing initially on areas where we have potentially most support but turnout is low. Previous canvass returns are analysed targeting non-voters who are potential supporters and encouraging them to vote. Local campaigns, addressing issues of concern to residents such as poor housing and crumbling infrastructure, are important in both improving engagement and increasing long-term political support.

Other ways to improve participation include encouraging the use of postal voting, especially among the older and disabled electorate. Given that the incidence of voter fraud is historically low, stipulating the need for voter identification must be stopped. There is evidence that when lowering the voting age to 16 the chances of participating in elections throughout adult life increases (e.g. Brazil).

The message is clear. Political engagement flourishes when people sense they have a direct influence on the collective decision-making process and the political agenda is to reduce economic inequalities, and eliminate alienation and social isolation. This is especially important among the young, disabled and marginalised people and ethnic minorities.

Organise and fight back

Matt Willgress



The US election result raises the spectre of Trump renewing his interventions and 'regime change' efforts in neighbouring Latin America, alongside giving a massive boost to the region's significant far-right forces.

One country that will be particularly wary of Trump is Venezuela. Between 2016 and 2020 the billionaire right-winger showed a relentless hostility towards Venezuela, managing to massively ramp up US intervention which has now taken place with the aim of illegal 'regime change' for over two decades.

Trump made his attitude very clear when campaigning this year in North Carolina, and also bluntly explained that what motivated his drive to unseat the Maduro-led Government in Venezuela was its resources saying, "When I left, Venezuela was ready to collapse. We would have taken it over, we would have gotten all that oil."

Direct sanctions were first applied against Venezuela in 2015, but Trump ramped up these illegal coercive sanctions into increasingly severe measures against the country as a whole, in a way akin to the criminal decades-long US blockade of Cuba.

The effect of attempting to strangle Venezuela's economy was severe, and came at great human cost, leading to 10,000s of deaths. Although Venezuela's economy is now making a recovery, at the time

the resulting loss of oil income was extremely damaging, impacting hardest on the poorest and most vulnerable as UN human rights rapporteurs reported. But economic sanctions were – and still are – only a part of the US 'regime change' offensive against Venezuela as it hopes to again control the future of the oil-rich country.

Military action under Trump – and his sidekick the incredibly hawkish Marco Rubio – can also not be ruled out. Indeed, in 2017 Trump said, "We have many options for Venezuela and by the way, I'm not going to rule out a military option."

Two years later he again said this was an option, around the time the US Center for Strategic and International Studies think tank hosted a top-level, off-the-record meeting to explore US military options against Venezuela.

While the geo-political landscape has changed since 2020, there is no evidence that the US's long-standing desire to destabilise the Venezuelan government and achieve "regime change" is off the table. And the same applies to other countries in the region too. Trump introduced illegal sanctions on Nicaragua in office - and made clear his absolute hostility to Cuba and wish to also force 'regime change' there.

Social and left movements in other countries in the region also have reason to be wary of Trump's return.

In countries such as Argentina and El Salvador, where the far-right currently governs at the cost of great economic and social misery, the ghastly regimes will feel they now have a friend in the White House.

Meanwhile in the economic powerhouse Brazil – where the far-right and top Trump buddy Bolsonaro lost the last Presidential Election to Lula – anti-democratic forces are already welcoming the Trump victory and seeking a renewed wave of organisation.

Bordering the US, Mexico will also beware of the waves of xenophobia he has enabled against that country and its people over many years. In Bolivia, activists will remember how the US enabled a military coup there against the elected Evo Morales-led Government in 2019.

And in Honduras where the progressive Government has sought to move away from US domination and neo-liberalism in recent years, there is already grave concern about US meddling and intervention in upcoming elections. From the left internationally our message must be clear – Trump, Hands off Latin America!

- **ONLINE EVENT: Trump - Hands off Latin America!** Thursday, December 12, 18.30. With US, Mexican, Argentinian, Brazilian & Bolivian speakers & a range of solidarity campaigners. Register at <https://bit.ly/TrumpHandsOffLatinAmerica>

Don't fund weapons industry

When we first submitted our request to address this evening's Council meeting, we hadn't envisaged that a speech by Chancellor Rachel Reeves a few nights before would spark a renewed and crucially important debate about the future of the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS).

While the proposals the Chancellor unveiled in her Mansion House speech lacked detail, the suggested creation of just eight LGPS "mega" funds across the UK poses critical questions about democratic control and oversight of investment decisions.

As retired UNISON members, many of whom have contributed thousands upon thousands of pounds in deferred wages towards our pensions, we believe there is already a democratic deficit in how the LGPS operates.

Especially given Camden's pension fund with a value of nearly £2 billion, there is a compelling case for greater accountability and transparency around the investments made with Scheme members' contributions.

An obvious remedy to this democratic deficit would be reserved places for elected trade union representatives with full voting rights (!) on relevant bodies. This just might also give real substance to what strikes us as often empty rhetoric about "environmental, social and governance" investment criteria.

According to the publication *Humanitarian Law & Policy* there are currently over 120 armed conflicts, involving more than 60 states and 120 non-state groups. Last year (2023) saw more wars including civil conflicts than any year since 1946.

The sorry reality is that Camden's pension fund currently invests in corporations that profit from the supply of weapons that fuel such wars.

George Binette, on behalf of Camden UNISON Retired Members Committee, spoke at November's Camden Council meeting on the need for divestment.

Sadly, but inevitably, this leads on to Israel's ongoing assault on Gaza now in its 14th month. Time does not permit comment on the escalating war in Lebanon or intensified settler violence on the West Bank, waged with the support of key figures in the current Israeli government.

The known death toll in Gaza is nearly 44,000, with thousands more unaccounted for. The vast majority of those killed – approximately 70% – were women and children, many of whom died as a result of bombs dropped by F-35 fighter jets.

The lead manufacturer is the US-based corporation Lockheed-Martin with Northrop Grumman as a principal partner, while UK-based BAE Systems supplies some 15% of component parts.

Camden's portfolio appears to include investments in all three as well as holdings valued at nearly £700,000 in the US corporation, which is the primary manufacturer of so-called "bunker buster" bombs such as the 900 kilograms/2,000-pound GBU-27 Paveway 3 used by Israel's air force on Gaza.

War in general also impacts on the climate crisis and by this summer credible estimates, published on the *Euronews*, suggest that the assault on Gaza had generated the equivalent of 60 million tonnes of CO2 and any eventual process of reconstruction could double that figure.

And while the exposure to fossil fuel holdings in Camden's portfolio has certainly diminished substantially, it still includes significant investments in Chevron, Exxon-Mobil and Valero

Energy, quite probably totalling more than £5 million.

In conclusion, while our interests may sometimes diverge, we should have a shared interest and indeed a collective responsibility to ensure that the pension fund's investments work to promote just transitions away from the manufacture of ever more lethal weapons and industries that threaten the long-term survival of our planet.

In ensuring decent pensions for today's beneficiaries, we must also take real account of the world we bequeath to children, grandchildren and generations further into the future.

Local authority policies on divestment

Positive statements have recently been made around divestment from arms manufacturers and corporations profiting from complicity with the occupation of Palestinian territories by **Waltham Forest** and **Islington**.

The latter is also in the process of terminating its banking arrangements with Barclays, which has been a principal target for the PSC's national campaigning.

In addition, both **Leeds City Council** and **Kirklees Metropolitan Borough Council** voted recently to take initial steps that could ultimately lead to substantial divestment.

There are active campaigns in many other local authorities.

Happy New Year?

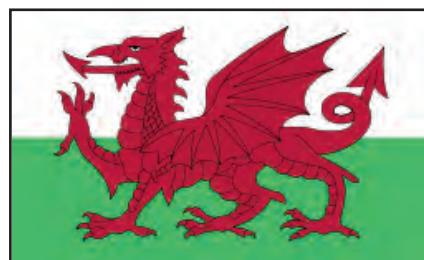
The coming year presents the real risk of the emergence of a significant Welsh Far Right. This may lead to their making gains in the Senedd elections of 2028. The election of Kemi Badenoch as Tory Leader and her promise to 'reprogramme' the UK and its institutions is an implied threat to devolution. Her comment that, 'not all cultures are equally valid' adds to the concerns. The Welsh Tories and their hapless leader Andrew R T Davies are flirting with the suggestion that devolution could be reversed or even abolished.

The 20mph speed limit is paying dividends already. The death rate and serious or minor road injuries are falling. It's quite clear that massive savings have been made in terms of health and several insurance companies have revealed a fall in the price of cover. Unfortunately we are still hearing that many anti-20mph campaigners are lining up with Reform, the Tories and the small reactionary element of the Welsh National movement. We must understand that self-identification under three headings as Welsh, British or English is a kaleidoscope with many strange forms.

The appearance of the Reform Party in July 2024, the reforming of the racist far right in groups such as Voice of Wales and No Cymru, the remnants of UKIP and the import of former BNP organisers, the EDL and individuals like Katie Hopkins have made an amorphous soup of hate and prejudice. This 'fascist soup' combines elements of climate crisis denial, paedophile entrapment, feeding of the homeless veterans with pork or bacon or obvious reasons, anti LGBTIQA propaganda, making claims that the Welsh Government's moral and spiritual education is sexualised and its usual racism whilst campaigning against vaccination and for creating

Ystradgynlais Labour councillor Martyn Shrewsbury wonders what 2025 has in store for Wales.

parent groups that see home education as a means to fight 'state intervention' with groups such as Parents for Child Protection which has spectacularly lost several major legal cases. I have heard such groups use terms like 'pure bloods' to describe those who go unvaccinated and outside the reach of



health and social services. Naomi Klein in her book 'Doppelganger' coins the term 'diagonalism' to describe a curious mixture of both New Age and Far Right ideology. One could almost say that they are far out and far right.

The post-industrial fate of the Welsh Valleys, though not unique, nevertheless has distinct features that are culturally and politically different from the North of England and even the rustbelt of the USA. The far right Welsh bloggers like Jac o' the North calling the army of the Confederacy brave men, opposing the removal of statues of slavers and posting, retweeting and sharing films made by Steve Bannon and Viktor Orban illustrate this perfectly. First class work is being done by the anti-racist group 'Far Right Watch Wales' and I thoroughly recommend reading its detailed research on the loathsome characters it has exposed.

A conversation I had with the late Nick Gais, the Welsh Socialist Republican, some years ago led us to speculate on

the existential threat to Welsh Labour. Labour gave devolution to Wales yet the party has still not devolved itself and Starmer shows no sign of allowing it. The activists are leaving, the number of members falling and I doubt that someone like me will be reselected. I feel that Eluned Morgan will be the last Labour First Minister for a generation.

Plaid have historically surged when Labour rules in London, but Labour is now far weaker than it was under Blair or Brown. The most recent opinion poll showed Plaid a mere one percentage point behind Labour. I think Rhun Ap Iorwerth had a good election in July. Starmerite imposition of London based candidates on Cardiff West and Swansea West made it clear that London Labour sees Wales as a sub branch of itself. In the general election I saw too many Labour posters adorned with the Butcher's Apron. The sub text was clear and the message chill.

And yet the left in Wales is organising and reflecting on what must be done. Leanne Wood, the former Leader of Plaid and a self-described Welsh Republican socialist, organised a meeting in Merthyr recently. Numerous Facebook groups and Whatsapp groups are emerging. Welsh Labour are at risk and the nascent beginnings of a Welsh Collective party like that of Andrew Feinstein may appear. In Wales, we too have our 'Galloways' who are economically left and socially conservative. Wales awaits 2025 with hope and trepidation. I feel the pessimism of the intellect and the optimism of the will. It is both the best of times and the worst of times.

Baby steps

Unlike the *Daily Telegraph*, who wrote gushingly of the Truss/Kwarteng Budget, “This was the best Budget I have ever heard a British Chancellor deliver, by an enormous margin...”, we did not think that this was a bad Budget let alone, as they wrote (incredibly), “the worst Budget I have ever heard a British Chancellor deliver, by an enormous margin...”

Our analysis suggests that the first Reeves Budget is a significant and welcome step in the right direction, but that its impact on national renewal will depend on how well it is implemented. The UK badly needed a radical Budget for renewal after a succession of damaging Budgets over the last 14 years. This Budget is a significant step towards renewal, and if it succeeds will make a tangible difference to the lives of UK citizens and provide a foundation for further renewal in the future.

Before the election, voters’ top two issues were the cost-of-living crisis and the state of the NHS. Our household finances are in almost unprecedentedly poor shape: real (adjusted for inflation) wages are lower today than they were 17 years ago – you would have to go back to the 1920s to find a comparably bad period. As a result, almost one in three children in the UK are living in poverty, and the median British household is set to be poorer than the median Slovenian household. That kind of wage slump has not happened for a century.

Our public services have been badly hit by austerity. Even the supposedly ‘protected’ NHS is close to breaking point. As Lord Darzi’s recent report said, “The 2010s were the most austere decade since the NHS was founded... Until 2018, spending grew at around 1 per cent a year in real terms, against a long-term average of 3.4 per cent. ... In 2018, for the service’s 70th

Mark E Thomas, of the 99% organisation, says the first Labour Budget in 14 years is a good start, but needs to be properly implemented.

birthday, a more realistic promise was made of a 3.4 per cent a year real terms increase for five years in revenue spending. ... The 2018 funding promise was broken. ... The NHS has been starved of capital and the capital budget was repeatedly raided to plug holes in day-to-day spending.”

Although the Conservatives constantly claimed – and still claim – that the economy was exceptionally strong under their watch, the data show otherwise, particularly since Brexit. On the environment, the news is no better: the last government supported fossil fuels at the expense of renewable sources of energy. And they allowed water regulation to become so toothless that many of our rivers and coastal waters now flow with sewage.

A government deficit equals stimulus to the economy (spending more money into it than we take out in tax), a deficit is not something to be eliminated. Public services are a critical part of being civilised, not a profligate indulgence. The private sector needs risk-free ways to save (eg for pensions etc), and this is provided by government borrowing. And there is really no risk of our government debt becoming unsustainable.

The Office for Budget Responsibility says that the increase in deficit – which is equal to the increase in Economic Stimulus – compared with the Spring Budget’s forecasts is £40 billion in 2024-25 and then declines. That is an additional stimulus of around 1.4% of GDP. In his Spring Budget, Hunt planned to cut spending this year by a further 0.5%, further weakening public



services; Reeves has replaced this plan with an increase in spending of 4.3% worth around £54 billion. Much of that will go into rebuilding the NHS, with significant amounts to schools and smaller amounts to other departments.

To keep the additional stimulus to £40 billion, Reeves has had to raise taxes by around £10 billion. The Treasury has said, “Real household disposable income (RHDI) per capita, a measure of living standards, is forecast to grow by 1.4% in 2024-25 and 1.1% in 2025-26 and is no longer set to decline in the near term.” Our analysis of Hunt’s last Budget suggested that there is far greater scope for raising revenue, and therefore spending, which the Budget could have exploited – and it is to be hoped that the government will address these opportunities in future Budgets.

Truss’s Budget had little to recommend it – but the reason that the catastrophe became evident so quickly was that Truss failed utterly to consider the institutional response to her Budget. The OBR was set up under Osborne with a remit and an analytical framework designed to make austerity and the regress it caused seem responsible. Both its remit and its analytical framework should now be adjusted to make progress the natural order once more.

Unspeakable in pursuit

It was a seemingly momentous victory when Scotland banned hunting with dogs. One year on, its legislation is failing wildlife. The Labour government has promised to properly ban hunting too - but it needs to learn from its neighbour's mistakes.

Campaigners described it as a "landmark moment" when, late in the evening on 24 January 2023, the Scottish parliament voted to pass the Hunting With Dogs (Scotland) Bill after a seven hour debate. The Bill became law on 7 March 2023, making it illegal to flush out a wild animal with more than two dogs. But it wasn't until 3 October 2023 that the law could actually be enforced. The reason? NatureScot was finalising a licensing scheme to "allow farmers and other land managers to use more than two dogs, in limited circumstances, for appropriate and humane wildlife control."

This licensing scheme has proved to be controversial. It is, wildlife campaigners argue, just another loophole in legislation to allow hunters to get away with murder. Back in August of this year, the *Daily Record* reported that NatureScot had issued more than 40 licences between November 2023 and April 2024. In 31 of these licences, the use of more than 20 dogs was permitted. Meanwhile, Glen Black, author of our report *A Case for a Proper Ban on Hunting*, said, "Protect the Wild has identified one issued licence that appears to have been used by the Jed Forest Hunt at least four times. Sabs attending the meets described hunting activity identical to that before the most recent ban, suggesting the licensing system is readily exploitable."

The Scottish Greens are attempting to hold Holyrood to account. The party's Ariane Burgess told the *Daily Record*, "The Scottish Government is showing

Campaign group Protect the Wild say Labour must learn from Scotland's mistakes on the hunting ban.



staggering complacency if this is how they envisaged the system working. The number of licences that have been issued makes clear that this is being treated as a loophole and exploited."

On 2 October, the Greens submitted a question during Portfolio Questions at the Scottish Parliament regarding this new loophole. But instead of recognising that the new legislation is failing wildlife, ministers defended the new law. Agriculture and Connectivity Minister Jim Fairlie argued that licences are needed for farmers to carry out "predator control" and to protect "livestock". He said, "The licensing scheme in the 2023 Act is not a loophole... Fox hunting is absolutely against the principles of the people of Scotland, but predator control is not."

The Countryside Alliance (CA), a lobby group which tries to overturn the ban on foxhunting, celebrated Fairlie's words, calling them "pleasing". This alone is a red flag - a sure sign that legislation is being exploited to favour fox hunting. The CA said, "This question from the Scottish Greens suggesting a loophole in the licensing system that they supported is not wholly unsurprising. They were more than happy to claim victory when the new law was passed last year yet are now unhappy that the licence scheme is doing what it

should be doing – enabling the use of more than two dogs to flush foxes to guns under very strict and rigorous licensing conditions for the protection of livestock and for environmental benefit purposes where there is no effective alternative."

Meanwhile, in England and Wales, campaigners such as Chris Packham, and, of course, hunt saboteurs and monitors, continue to do vital work, reminding Keir Starmer and Labour of its manifesto promise: to strengthen the Hunting Act, closing the trail hunting loophole. While we stand with our fellow wildlife defenders, Protect the Wild argues that the government actually needs to go a huge step further, completely replacing the current law.

Protect the Wild's Glen Black said, "If Labour decides to follow through on its manifesto pledge to crackdown on hunting in England and Wales, the Scottish example must serve as a lesson. It's not enough to simply ban trail hunting or to introduce a licensing system. Any new law must make it impossible for mounted hunts and foot packs to operate at all."

That's why we have commissioned Advocates for Animals to draft the Hunting of Mammals Bill. Our new Bill is far more than just an update of the Hunting Act. If it became an Act in law, it would stop hunting in its tracks, and finally give wildlife much-needed protection from illegal hunting.

The loopholes and exemptions that hunts use need to be removed entirely, not argued about for years to come.

UPHILL STRUGGLE

Kevin Flack

Revolting countryside

With threats to blockade ports and hold back food supplies, farmers are protesting strongly against having to pay a fair rate of what many people accept is part of contributing to society – inheritance tax.

Planning major protests, The National farmers' Union has stated, "It's hard to see anything which would destroy the new government's relationship with farmers more completely, or do more damage to family farm businesses, be they the owners of farms or the tenants who farm them for the landlord."

So what are the new plans? From 2026, the Government website tells us, "the full 100% relief from inheritance tax will be restricted to the first £1 million of combined agricultural and business property.

"Above this amount, landowners will pay inheritance tax at a reduced rate of 20%, rather than the standard 40%. This tax can be paid in instalments over 10 years interest free, rather than immediately, as with other types of inheritance tax.

"This is on top of all the other spousal exemptions and nil-rate bands that people can access for inheritance tax too. This means that two people with farmland, depending on their circumstances, can pass on up to £3 million without paying any inheritance tax."



Jeremy Clarkson has asked to speak at the forthcoming farmers' rally, which we would like to point out has nothing to do with promoting the new series of his lucrative TV franchise, 'Clarkson's Farm.' Diddly squat to do with it, in fact.

Of course, farmers do have genuine cause for complaint – fuel costs, supermarkets pushing down prices and the insecurity of tenant farmers. There is also no recognition that plans for more onshore wind and solar farms will provide a lucrative diversity for farmers' least productive fields. Whether the Chancellor holds firm on this remains to be seen.

History lesson

In determining rural action, the Labour Government could do worse than consulting its 1979 'New Life in the Country' plans:

- Improve and increase public sector housing in rural areas;
- Introduce mobile all-purpose community offices to provide services such as Citizens Advice Bureaux, job centres and social security offices;
- Arrange for more visiting chiropractors, opticians and dentists;
- Encourage free installation of telephones for elderly and disabled people.

Swap telephones for broadband and you've got a decent package there – along with the 1979 commitments to rural jobs, new forms of agriculture and better bus services.



National mistrust

Members of the National Trust may be aware of the Restore Trust pressure group, which is like a Reform Party for historic buildings and landscapes. However, it has highlighted a major lack of democracy in the National Trust – as it points out, "we saw the Quick Vote at work again at the National Trust AGM. The single tick-box casting automatic votes for all the management's choices meant that only the preferences of the Trustees and Nominations Committee were voted in and the views of the members made no difference at all.

"Turnout in the Council elections has slumped by 55% ... fewer than half as many members turned out to vote this year as did last year. So much for the claim that the Quick Vote is good for member engagement."

This takes me back to the campaign to ban hunting on National Trust land that took far too long – not because the members opposed it, but because those at the top of the Trust did. The rare exception being the Open Spaces Society's representative on the Trust's committee, formidable campaigner Rodney Legg who did much to open up hidden Trust property and land.

Kevin Flack has left the hustle and bustle of the Kent hop fields to report from the New Forest. Future articles may disproportionately mention broadband connectivity.

Striking back against

There are countless stories of astounding heroism in the international annals of the miners and our communities but few so heroic and noble as in 1941 when a strike by over 100,000 miners raged across the Nazi-occupied coalfields of northern France.

Action by the miners had been on the cards since even before the German invasion as the coal bosses took the impending Nazi assault on France as the green light to launch their own brutal offensive against the miners.

The northern coalfields were pivotal to the French economy and, later, to the Nazi invaders, producing 60% of France's coal and employing 143,000 men, large numbers of whom were refugees from fascist Italy while Poles accounted for 29% of the workforce. Following the German invasion, the coalfield region of Nord-Pas-de-Calais, which Hitler regarded, together with Belgium, as "Germanic", was sealed off and declared a "Forbidden Zone" under direct German military command.

Strikes and unions were banned. The employers loved the Nazi occupiers. As one put it: "I would rather see my country occupied by the Germans than my factory occupied by the workers."



By kind permission of the Durham Miners' Gala, we reprint Graeme Atkinson's harrowing account of the French miners' resistance to the Nazis.

Utilising the protection of the Nazi armies, the SS and the bloodstained terror machine of the feared and hated Gestapo secret police, the French boss class quickly set about rearranging labour conditions at will, tearing up all previous negotiated agreements, slashing wages and imposing new and adverse working conditions.

August to October 1940 saw a series of strikes and other protests at the lengthening of the working day by half an hour, many miners collectively turning up 30 minutes late to be wound underground in the face of ever louder German threats to take hostages and military occupation of the pits. The growing confidence and daring of the miners and their families was shown by a strike at No.7 Pit in Dourges to force the release of Michel Brûlé, a young pitman, who had been sacked and arrested by the Germans.

November 1940 saw the eruption of a strike that brought 35% of the miners out, followed, between January and April 1941, by riots against food and soap shortages. On May Day 1941, in another gesture of ant-fascist defiance, stunned French and German officials awoke to discover red flags and tricolours flying on electric pylons, telegraph poles and pit-head winding gear throughout the region. The stage was now set for the Great Strike.

As the former official social-democratic leaders of the miners' union had fled to save their own skins, Michel Brûlé, Auguste Lecoeur and Julien



Michel Brûlé, an antifascist hero of the mining community, was a young miner at No. 7 Pit – Dahomey Colliery – in Dourges, where he played a key role in initiating the 1941 strike and leading it from the front.

Hunted by the Nazi Gestapo secret police, he became a fighter in the armed resistance struggle and, with fellow miners, committed numerous acts of sabotage against the Nazi war machine.

He was betrayed, arrested and shot, aged just 28, on 14 April 1942 in the fortress of Wambrecies.

Hapiot – all fearless ant-fascist activists under thirty, all members of the French Communist Party (PCF) and the latter two former fighters of the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War – became the effective leaders of the miners.

Quickly, they drew up demands to counter the imposition of a new wages system, called for the former wages to be restored and for improved supplies of butter, meat and soap. Again, the action kicked off at the militant No.7 Pit

fascism

in Dourges when men 2,355 feet below ground stopped work, came to the surface and the next shift refused to ride the cage.

Flying pickets spread the strike across the whole coalfield with 100,000 eventually out, threatening Paris' energy supplies and kicking Berlin's insistence on a 25% hike in production into the long grass. Other workers in the ceramics and engineering plants and in railway workshops and textile factories followed the miners.

The entire pit community was mobilised, with the women of the pit villages, led by Émilienne Mopty among others, shaming and humiliating scabs and forming mass pickets in front of Nazi tanks at neighbouring collieries.

These actions caused German troops to disperse them with live ammunition, subject them to a brutally enforced curfew and make them stand in fields for hours under the summer sun without food or water. As the loyalty of French police fractured and local government wobbled, the nervous Nazis started mass arrests and deportations to concentration camps and took steps to restrict food rations.

In addition, the German air force flew high speed intimidatory swoops over already occupied pit villages while the Nazi army below imposed the closure of pubs, cafés and restaurants and banned the sale of alcohol and tobacco.

Hunger and terror took its toll as the miners and their families, denied provisions, went hungry while the collaborationist Vichy government compensated the coal bosses. A mass return to work took place on 9 June. On 16 and 17 June, having lost a half million tons of coal production, the Nazi authorities



Emilienne Mopty demonstrating with mining villagers against the occupying Nazis

photo: Sudinfo

Émilienne Mopty was a French working class heroine of WWII. She was born 1907 in Harnes, and beheaded in Cologne by the Nazi army in 1943. Her martyrdom made her a legend of the Nord-Pas-de-Calais coalfield. A mother of three, a miner's daughter and a miner's wife, she had already distinguished herself as a Communist and anti-fascist militant.

During the war, she took the lead in demonstrations during the great miners' strike of 1941, organising roadblocks, protests and transporting weapons and explosives. She led 2,000 women of the mining community in demonstrations against coal bosses in Billy-Montigny.

At the end of September 1942, she went to the Arras fortress to attack a Nazi firing squad but was betrayed and arrested by the Gestapo. Hideously tortured, she was brought before the military court of the Nazi Feldkommandantur d'Arras and sentenced to death. Transported to Germany, she was decapitated, aged 35, on 18 January 1943 at 7:30 pm.

At her execution, she murmured "my children", then put her head on the block and began to sing *The Internationale*, interrupted by the executioner's axe.

and Vichy collaborators, terrified of another – but this time armed - miners'

uprising, ordered distribution of increased rations and a pay increase. A price was paid for this. At least 450 arrests were made, of whom 270 people were taken to Nazi concentration and death camps. 130 never came back.

Communist pitmen were taken as hostages and just shot. Émilienne Mopty, Julien Hapiot and Michel Brûlé were all subsequently arrested and executed but not before Brûlé went into hiding and, with fellow miners, launched an astonishing campaign of train derailments and raids on arms depots.

When Émilienne's body was returned to France for reburial in 1948, her two sons – both pitmen – were, disgustingly, barred from attending as they were in jail for their militant activities in the 1947 miners' strike.

The 1941 strike showed the mettle of the miners and their families and their courage provided an inspiring, moving and ongoing example of living struggle for the French resistance – including further big pit strikes – against the Nazis, their French racist admirers and collaborators and their murderous apparatus of reprisal and repression.

The author, who is the son of a Durham miner, wishes to give full acknowledgement to the work of Matthew Cobb and Steve Cushion

Not so glad it's Friday

Last month, TGI Friday's closed 35 of their UK restaurants leaving over 1000 workers out of a job with just an hour's notice! Unite Hospitality and their members have already won £££s in unpaid wages, holiday pay and tips.

But they are still owed notice pay, redundancy, compensation and access to their possessions that are still locked up at work. To win, they need the public to pile the pressure on TGI Friday's, the Administrators and the Government, and Unite are organising a petition.

To recap: on Monday October 7th, over 1000 hard-working and loyal TGI Friday's workers were terminated with less than an hour's notice. 35 sites across the company were padlocked and workers locked out of their workplaces.

Staff were terminated without notice or consultation. They were owed thousands in wages, holiday, tips, notice pay and redundancy. They were given 57 minutes notice of a call many could not attend to be told

Bryan Simpson, Unite Hospitality branch, is calling for support for TGI Friday's workers.

by CEO Julie McEwan that their jobs were gone. One month on, and the workers are still fighting for their basic rights!

With support from their trade union, Unite Hospitality, the workers have now recovered wages, holiday pay and tips that they were told days previously would not be paid by the company. But the fight is not over.

Significant numbers of ex-TGI Friday's staff have been short-changed on their payments. And despite assurances from administrators Teneo, the workers continue to be locked out of sites and can't retrieve their belongings.

The workers deserve better than this. We're calling on TGI Friday's to pay up what is fair to workers who have lost their jobs. Senior management at

TGI Friday's knew the company was in difficulty for some time, but chose not to carry out meaningful redundancy consultations in good faith. They chose to let the company sink and let the government insolvency service pick up the tab for £millions in severance packages.

We know that big chains like TGI Fridays' are motivated by the profit generated from customers. We need to make a big noise to show the CEO, the Administrator, and the Government that the public aren't happy with what's gone down.

Can you sign our petition on the Unite website demanding that TGI Friday's CEO, Julie McEwan, gives our sacked members what they're owed! Thank you for standing up for low paid hospitality workers.

Labour Campaign for Council Housing

Our AGM will be taking place by zoom on Sunday December 1st at 2 p.m.

We are keen to hear from supporters their view on the impact of the budget on housing policy, and any ideas for campaigning.

We'll send out the link the weekend before.

For more details, contact labourcouncilhousingcampaign@gmail.com

The time is now

We have a critical year coming up. 2025 will not only see Unison's NEC re-elected, but we will also have a General Secretary election. Much hard work is underway behind the scenes right now to ensure an effective challenge in 2025 to the UNISON bureaucracy's candidates.

We will be in a position to make some exciting public announcements shortly, but meanwhile please take action in preparation:

1. Follow Time For Real Change on social media:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/TimeForRealChangeUNISON/>
X / Twitter: https://twitter.com/tfrc_unison
Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/tfrc_unison/

We ask that not only do you follow all three platforms (if you have accounts) but also that you invite your friends who are active UNISON members to follow TFRC. And don't forget to share our content!

2. Our next national meeting: **Wednesday 4th December, 6.00-7.00pm**

Sign up for the Zoom invite to attend our meetings on our website if you're not already receiving Zoom links for national meetings but want to attend.

If you've already registered for our meetings there is no need to do so again, you are on the list. These meetings take on additional importance as we enter

Unison members' group Time For Real Change are gearing up for important elections in 2025.



election periods, so to find out what's going on and what you can do, put this date in your diary.

3. Join your regional Time For Real Change group

Our regional groups are doing lots of important work and most of them meet monthly. Regional groups are the real engine rooms of our regional campaigns and to re-elect a Left NEC.

If you're not in a regional Time For Real Change WhatsApp group or receiving invites to meetings of Time For Real Change in your region, send us your name and region and we will put you in touch.

4. NEC election 2025: how to nominate guide

With the window for branch nominations opening in January, now is the time to refa

miliarize yourself with the process, to get your nominations through and accepted.

5. Make a donation

Both NJC local government and NHS pay awards with backpay have been made or are due imminently, so if you can afford to make a donation to our election campaigns this month, now would be a great time.

Please visit:
<https://www.gofundme.com/f/time-for-real-change-in-unison-nec-elections-25>

6. Report of last NEC meeting

Read a report of the latest NEC meeting, held on 16th October, on our website.

The greed game

You know by now that I spend quite a lot of time in Portugal, so I am currently taking a keen interest in the move of Ruben Amorin from top Portuguese club Sporting Lisbon to Manchester United. Amorin is just the latest in a long line of managers trying to recapture the glory years of Alex Ferguson. I think he's the ninth, they've had three Dutch managers, a German, a Norwegian, Scottish, Welsh, oh, and an earlier Portuguese who turned out not to be 'the special one'. Maybe Amorin is the right man, he's highly rated, so we shall see.

I want to talk about Globalisation – cultural, economic, political. About the (sometimes) beautiful game under late capitalism. I remember when there were almost no foreign managers, almost no foreign players, no black players in the English football league. There's so much money sloshing around these days. Absurd, obscene wages, and transfer fees. Some well dodgy foreign owners, viewing football as an investment more than having any passion or genuine interest in the sport.

Saudi, Chinese, increasingly American owners. Yernited (as they shall be known) are said to be valued at \$6.5 bn and are just about the biggest club in the world. They are still majority owned by the American Glazer family, but 'controversial' British businessman Jim 'INEOS' Radcliffe now has a 25% share and is starting to call the shots. Contrast this with Sporting Lisbon, valued at \$0.2bn, roughly 3% of the United valuation. Sporting is a majority fan owned club, with 150,000 members. Other highly valued fan-owned clubs include Real Madrid with 360,000 members, Barca with 145,000, Benfica with 300,000. Democratically run mutuals, a structure with which we socialists are very familiar.

Activist and footie fan Steve Price demands that football is given back to the working class fans who set up the clubs worldwide.



Ruben Amorin

Football is a national obsession over here, just as it is in the UK. It's embedded in the culture. Back in the deeply nationalist days under Salazar it was said his fascist rule relied on the three Fs: family, faith and football! But these days, for better or worse, football has gone global, and it is big, big business. The Premier League (The Greed League) is a genuine phenomenon, completely outstripping La Liga, Serie A and the Bundesliga in its global reach. Yes, the world, it's everywhere.

Where I stay in lovely Leiria, there's almost always a Prem game screened in the lounge. The Portuguese League is good to watch, the quality of play is very fine, but it's not a competitive league. It reminds me of the Rangers - Celtic two-horserace up in Scotland. Here, it's mostly three sided between Benfica, Sporting and Porto.

I love football, and the Premier League is sensational. But structurally it's classic predatory capitalism, where the big fish feed off the smaller fish, who in turn feed off the tiddlers. Portugal produces some of the best footballers in the world, and some brilliant managers. I remember the impact when Christiano Ronaldo went over to United, when Jose Mourinho went to Chelsea. These days there are a lot of Portuguese (and other nationalities) in

all the UK leagues. Portugal has a ten million population, therefore a smaller league, where even in the top league, some clubs only have ground capacities of around 5,000 fans.

The Portuguese clubs have adapted. They have got very good at identifying and developing young talent – from within Portugal, from within its former colony Brazil – and it's developed that as a business model. It is estimated that over £1 billion has gone into the big three clubs in transfer fees over recent years, money that is fed back into the game over here.

Keith Starver- who famously gets his tickets free - aims to establish a football regulator 'to oversee better financial distribution around the sport, to check on ownership and to increase the powers for fans.' Agree with all of that but he'll have a job. He's already being told he will run into problems from UEFA, with implied threats to England's participation in major tournaments! The direction of travel is the European super league, the next logical stage in capitalist exploitation.

The Bundesliga is often held up as the ideal type of league. There's much to admire. They have a 50%+ member ownership rule for all clubs, and German teams have been very competitive, and very successful. But now clubs like Beyer Leverkusen, Wolfsburg and Leipzig are blatantly bending the rules undermining the whole league. At the end of the day, it's capitalism innit. The money machine appropriates, manipulates, controls, deforms, corrupts, consumes, and ultimately destroys everything.

Nightmare in Washington

The election of Donald Trump to the office of President of the United States for a second non-consecutive term should come as a surprise to no one. From the lack of cohesive policy platform to deliver change to the American people, to their arrogant refusal to budge from their unconditional support of Israel's genocide in Gaza, the Democrats sealed Donald Trump's victory before a single vote was even cast.

The Democrats have once again proven themselves incapable of learning the lessons of previous defeats. As was the case in 2016, where Hillary Clinton lost to Trump, the Democrats chose to focus on their candidate's personal differences to Trump rather than build a progressive set of policies to meet the concerns of the American working class. This soap opera style of election only benefits characters like Trump and his now Vice President-elect JD Vance, who are set to take office in January 2025.

The decision to install Vice President Kamala Harris as the Democrat candidate following Joe Biden's late withdrawal from running for a second term was a failure in itself. The lack of democratic process in implementing Harris meant that her obvious weaknesses to a wider electorate only bubbled

under the surface and therefore avoided the mainstream examination that would have showed clearly that her major involvement in the Biden administration caused irreparable damage to her credibility as an instigator of the change demanded by millions of American citizens.

With only a modest economic recovery for very few under Biden, along with his unwavering and unapologetic support for Israel's genocide in Gaza, Kamala Harris' campaign failed to promise any sort of break away from the status quo. Trump on the other hand, whilst completely vague and light on policy, once again focused his campaign on this message - and that is what sealed his victory.

Make no mistake though, Trump is no friend to the working class or the people suffering under Israeli ethnic cleaning. In the hours following his victory, the 10 world's richest people, including Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos and Bill Gates, added around \$64bn to their wealth.

The defeat of Harris, an establishment centrist politician in the US, is some-

thing that must also be taken seriously by the Labour government in Britain too. 14 years of Conservative austerity and cuts to our communities gifted Keir Starmer victory in July. However, Labour must engage with the reality that wages in the UK have stagnated and public services such as the NHS are crumbling whilst the rich have never been richer. Any failure to address these issues with a significant national wage increase and huge investment in public services, paid for by a wealth tax on billionaires and corporations, puts Britain at risk of the election of another Conservative government.

This US presidential election result is a grave concern for the planet, marginalised communities, refugees and Palestinians trying to survive Israel's genocide. Trump's abhorrent rhetoric must be resisted at every opportunity and our movement must succeed where the arrogant Democratic establishment failed. We must organise globally, stand in solidarity with those targeted by the awful politics of fear and division and build an alternative of hope and unity.

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- Andy Burnham on Democracy
- Dr John Puntis on Darzi & NHS
- Karen Constantine on Domestic Violence
- Sabia Kamali on Hate Crime
- Don Flynn on Immigration
- Chris Ford & Hann Ostapenko on Ukraine
- Plus book/film reviews; Rowson cartoon

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Time to unite Kurdistan

The election held on 20th October in the four governorates of Iraqi Kurdistan is being seen as a great success. According to Iraq's Independent High Electoral Commission, over 72 per cent of eligible voters took part in this election, up from 58 per cent in 2018. The election was peaceful.

The two dominant parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) have both increased their share of the vote. Because of the very questionable decision of Iraq's Supreme Court to reduce the number of seats in the Kurdistan Parliament from 111 to 100 and the allocation of only 5 seats to minorities, which was criticised by the KDP and other smaller Christian and Turcoman parties, and the allocation of two seats (one for Christians and one for Turcomans) in Suleimania where almost none exist, the election was held in a charged but colourful atmosphere.

The antics and accusation and promises and rallies helped to increase the turn out. Parties would hold competing rallies of their supporters on the same day, in the same city and not far from each other. The great thing was that it all went on peacefully and without violence.

The KDP used Iraq's Supreme Court decision as an attack on Kurdistan and a direct interference in the election to weaken their support base. This has helped the KDP to galvanise their supporters. The two energetic and charismatic leaders of the KDP, Nechirvan Barzani and Masrour Barzani have managed to increase the KDP's share of the vote to

Ihsan Qadir, Secretary of the League of Kurdistan Regions, reports on the elections in Iraqi Kurdistan.



809,172 votes, up nearly 200,000, securing 39 seats.

The PUK, on the other hand, led by Bafil Talabani campaigned on a platform to smash the old hierarchy in Kurdistan. Hilariously getting carried away by the atmosphere of electioneering, Bafil actually smashed many microphones! He managed to increase the PUK's seats from 21 to 23. This election has helped him to establish his authority within his party.

The democratic tradition of choosing your government by ballot is now getting a firmer ground in Kurdistan. The New Generation Movement led by Shaswar Abdulwahid has become the third largest party by winning 15 seats, up from 8 in 2018.

In this election the Goran (Change) movement has managed to secure only one seat, down from 12 seats. Of the two Islamist parties, Yekgirtu won 7 seats, while Komel managed to win only 3, down from 7 seats in 2018.

The election result means that a coalition government will have to be formed which will have to include the two main parties, namely the KDP and the PUK.

It is important that KDP and the PUK should form a new government swiftly and create a unified Peshmerga force, a non-partisan civil service, but most importantly, an independent judiciary. Kurdistan has come a long way, and Kurdish leaders are rising to the challenges facing them.

They will need the continued support of their international allies. The Labour Party in government can help Kurdistan to develop further stronger social organisations and a wider civil society.

BACK FOR GOOD

Keith Veness

It's usual at this time of the year for me to write a seasonal theme for my column, debunking all the various bits of religious guff and also all the nonsense about the very large elf in Coca Cola red with the relativistic reindeer (i.e. they travel faster than the speed of light!).

This year however I want to refer to the exact opposite: Despite all the doom and gloom locally, nationally and internationally, we now live in a better, more secular society with major shifts in the population's perceptions of so many issues.



Let's deal with religion first as I mentioned it above. Successive polls have shown that the U.K. is now a majority secular / atheist / humanist state. People have freedom to worship in any way they want to but not to inflict those practices on people who find them deplorable.

You are free to believe the earth is flat and created by an old man with a long white beard in 4004 b.c.e. but you can't implement these beliefs if you are teaching geology or trying to run a space exploration programme.

We still have a country in thrall to various outdated superstitions. The presence of 26 bishops in the House of Lords hav-

ing a say on legislation affecting both other religious communities and us secularists alike is frankly outrageous and when the Labour Government removes the hereditary peers it should remove the Lords Spiritual as well.

Richard Dawkins argued a very strong case that compulsory religious education in schools is a form of child abuse. It is certainly a form of brain washing.

If youngsters were spared all this nonsense and were free to adopt any belief system at the age of 16 or 18, organised religion would swiftly die out. Tax relief for various superstitions is another intolerable imposition in this day and age. When I was half way through writing this, the Archbishop of Canterbury resigned after covering up for a paedophile - I rest my case.

Another related piece of hokum is having an hereditary head of



state with a whole tribe of hangers on enjoying use of properties and getting money from investments and / or the Civil List. These people are neither particularly skilled or have any real qualifications.

They constitute a caste of over-privileged relatives who really should be found something useful to do. It has now come to light that the Monarchy charges the Royal National Lifeboats Institution each time they launch a boat to save lives across a stretch of sand owned by the Crown Estate.

This is utterly disgraceful but typical of these spoilt parasites. I am a strong supporter of the RNLI but every time someone sends in a donation or buys raffle ticket, they are donating a small part of their cash to a thoroughly undeserving cause.

Seasons greetings and a happy Hogmanay to all our readers!



photo: iStock, Photobos

Steaming ahead

Repeater Books are a brave attempt to launch a 21st century equivalent of the Left Book Club. They make it clear that abstention is not an option and it is vital for the left to win the battle of ideas. Tariq Ali was one of the group helping to establish this venture. I got one of their early efforts and it is extremely good indeed.

Gareth Dennis is a committed socialist and a one-time active trades unionist with a lifelong involvement in supporting and riding on railways. However this is not another book by or about Jeremy Corbyn!

The author lives in York and admits to pushing his way into any gathering, no matter how important or local, that discusses railways and their operation. He states bluntly that many socialists, environmental campaigners and climate activists talk about switching to rail transport but haven't a clue what or how this could come about.

He does look at various European countries and how they compare. It is clear that the two outright winners are Switzerland and Austria. The Swiss simply ban freight from much of their road network. Not being a member of the EU, they can force goods going from Italy to Germany or

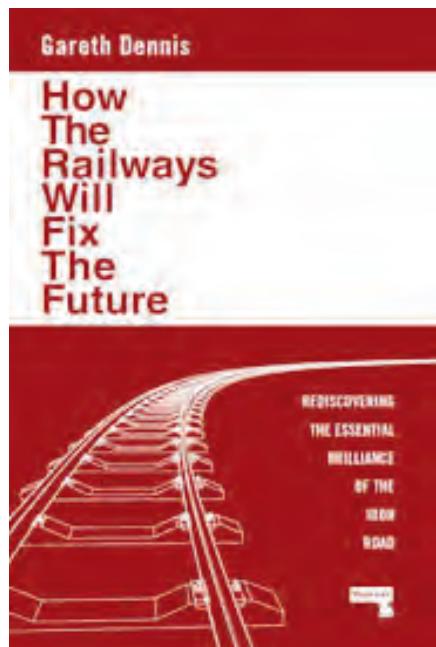
Keith Veness reviews *How the Railways Will Fix the Future* by Gareth Dennis, Repeater Books, £10.99

vice versa to be carried from one border to the next on the excellent Swiss railway network. No problems here about the wrong sort of snow. Their clearance trains cope with ten foot snow drifts and the system runs 365 days every year.

Austria has a rail network covering what is a very mountainous terrain but like the Swiss, they have an astonishingly clean and well run country and cause very little pollution or greenhouse gases. They have largely replaced any diesel units and electric trains are the norm.

He goes on to look at the two rail networks that are by far the biggest in the world - India and China. It is clear from the outset that the two most populous countries in the world could not function at all without the great network of railways. China has copied Japan in producing "bullet trains" linking most of their major population centres. India has modernised the old lines of the British Raj and expanded the network greatly.

Dennis has separate chapters on Metro and tram systems and makes



it clear that only the London Underground (of which he is a big favourite) and the Teesside system are truly metros in the real meaning of the word. The hybrid tram and train systems have many drawbacks that he outlines.

This is a densely packed book that is impossible to adequately cover in a one page review but I would strongly urge *Briefing* readers to get this and keep it as a handbook for future reference. If we really are going to stop runaway climate change, end the slavish dependence on petrol-driven cars and stop the incidents of smog, asthma outbreaks and other nasties, we need good cheap electric rail transport that connects everyone.

This book is an antidote to a lot of utopian stuff and shows a realistic way forward for the future.

The Party's over

This is the very unsavoury story of Gerry Healy and the WRP - and its eventual self destruction in 1985. Many of our readers - even the very left wing ones - who have never been in the farthest fringes of ultra-left sects will find some of this hard to credit and others will shudder and turn away, but the number of people in Labour and / or left wing politics who got sucked into this outfit is a lot more than most people imagine.

First, confession time - as a sixteen year old I joined what was then the Socialist Labour League [SLL] in 1964 just after they had walked out of the Labour Party and taken the majority of the Young Socialists national committee with them. To a sixteen year old all the red banners, loud denunciations of Harold Wilson and the talk of Marxism seemed very attractive.

In reality it was a cult - a sort of left wing moonies or followers of the Bhagwan - and we never got to directly confront the right wing we so happily denounced. Instead we had to sell unfeasibly large amounts of a newspaper with the very unrevolutionary name of the *Newsletter*. These had to be sold on any picket lines or outside engineering factories - of which we had plenty of the latter where I lived in West Middlesex.

However none of the toiling masses seemed all that keen on purchasing a paper with some very strange stuff in it - particularly at 8am in the morning. Instead we had to sell them on pub sales on Friday and Saturday evenings. We had one sale on Saturday night that started on Ealing Broadway and finished five miles away in Southall High Street. However we were also given one of the London region's sales routes that started in Earls Court and finished at Turnham Green - covering the main Australian pubs in the former and a swathe of Irish ones in the latter. Dangerous in that a lot of the drinkers were tanked up and violent. Also, the landlords didn't want their customers

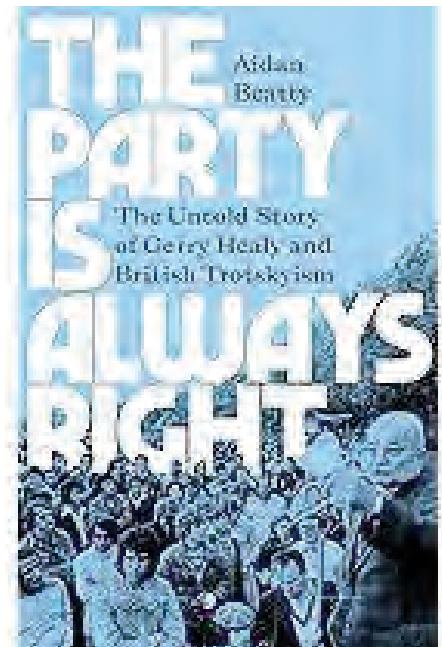
Keith Veness reviews *The Party is Always Right* by Adrian Beatty, published by Pluto Press, £10.99

bothered by paper sellers. Promotion came early in this outfit. After 12 months membership I became an 'alternate member of the Central Committee' - not as august as it sounds because the SLL had a membership of about 500 and the Central Committee had 30+ members. In that capacity I got into Party H.Q. at 186a Clapham High Street and met the great leader himself.

GLC member Iltyd Harrington met him when he was accompanying Ken Livingstone. He described Healy as a fearsome creature "with the outsized head of a psychopath". Healy was Irish but as the book says, he had a peculiar accent that was part cockney and part West Coast Irish. He could never pronounce my name properly and always called me "Keet". I left it in 1966 after a violent interlude I won't go into here but I always regretted not caving Healy's head in when I had the chance.

The SLL became increasingly irrelevant in the late 1960s as other groups related to growing anti-Vietnam war campaigns, to the new wave of feminism and to the black power movements - all of which were denounced by Healy as petty bourgeois or even as Police agents. Literally tens of thousands of good socialists were chewed up in the sausage machine that was this sect. Some went on to play leading roles like Ken Coates, Audrey Wise and Alan Milburn but thousands of others became nervous wrecks and left politics altogether.

The book charts the history of the group morphing into the Workers Revolutionary Party and the paper into firstly the *Workers Press* and then the *Newsline*. How this tiny clique managed to produce an all colour daily paper was a mystery, but then the truth gradually emerged that various Arab dictatorships funded this strange outfit. The biggest



donor was the mercurial Colonel Gaddafi but large funds were also taken from Saddam Hussein, the Gulf States and others.

I was always aware of Gerry Healy's drinking habits - usually involving bottles of Irish Whiskey. However it was only when the organisation finally imploded in 1985 that I, and most other people, learnt about his abuse of women members, including girls under the age of consent.

One of the heroes of this story was the member who bugged Healy's office to prove his depravity. The moral of this story was that the democratic centralism evolved by the Bolsheviks in Czarist Russia is grossly unsuitable in the states of modern day Western Europe and invariably leads to petty dictators and undemocratic set-ups. This book doesn't cover the area well documented in Andy Hosken's book *Ken* and if you wanted a fuller view, read this book alongside Hosken's tome.



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***Labour Briefing:
don't be left without it!***

All in a day's work

I recently visited the always excellent Wellcome Collection to have a first look at their latest temporary exhibition. It's just over the road from Euston Station in London.

The blurb reads that the intention is to: 'Explore the profound impact of physical work on health and the body, delve into the stories of underrepresented workers and their rights within precarious and unsafe labour environments. From protests to healing practices, the exhibition unveils hidden histories of resistance and collective action.'

'Through a collection of over 150 items, including historical objects, contemporary artworks, films and new commissions, we invite you to witness the interconnectedness of working practices across the globe and the enduring fight for workers' rights.'

Sounded promising! It referenced the debate stimulated by the Covid crisis as to constitutes an 'essential worker?' The focus here is on the health and the safety of oppressed, isolated, marginalised, exploited and stigma-



Treadmill at Pentonville Prison, 1895

tised workers. Workers who may all be considered to be 'essential.'

The first section looks at the plantation system that started in the 16th century and was widely employed by European settlers in the colonisation of the Americas and the Global South. Overworking enslaved people to max

Culture Vulture Steve Price visited the *Hard Graft: Work, Health and Rights* exhibition at the Wellcome Collection.



imise profit. An early capitalist system of exploitation. Unhealthy conditions, overcrowded, where malnutrition, injuries and infectious disease were rife. Collective strategies to survive and escape persisted. Holistic mind and body awareness, ancestral herbal medicine and food knowledge were lost in this inhuman system.

There follows an interesting discussion on post-plantation 'environmental racism' which I don't have space to do justice to here. The investigative group Forensic Architecture have done interesting work on this, which I can commend to you.

There's a section on prisons, showing how the US prison system was influenced by the plantation economy. And how many of those incarcerated were disproportionately African American men. (they still are!). The British system was in turn built on the American one. These days, prisons are being privately run for profit, again utilizing more or less 'free' labour. All of which has very severe effects on inmates' physical and mental health.

There's a feature on 'Street Workers,' which covers a range of marginalised work done by sanitation workers, waste pickers, street cleaners, street vendors and sex workers. The streets can be precarious and unsafe places to work, part of the unregulated economy. Workers typically marginalised and stigmatised. Some of these workers are the invisibles, unregulated and unprotected. Sanitation workers, for instance, are often exposed to pollution and toxic material. There's a good section on sex workers and decriminalisation campaigns.



Tennessee, 1968

Finally, there's a section on The Home. Housework, childcare and adult care – as unpaid domestic work.

There's something on the 70's 'Wages for Housework' campaigns. In many cases, physically and psychologically draining work. Migrant workers all over the world often take on cleaning and other domestic work, often undocumented and unregulated. Again, these workers are frequently exploited. What's inspiring here are the examples of resistance by the disempowered and dispossessed, coming together to force change through collective action. Whether or not all of this exactly coheres as an exhibition is perhaps for you to judge. But it is constantly interesting and stimulating. It runs until 27th April 2025



Letters

Dear Labour Briefing,

I'd like to share with you some thoughts about the disastrous election here in the US, and a plea to the Labour leadership. Please do not allow Foreign Secretary David Lammy to fall into the trap of appeasement regarding the re-emergence of the Trump-Vance fascism, especially after its recent popular vote capture of the White House. It is evident that Mr. Lammy has been overly compliant with the most troubling aspects of American foreign policy, rendering him unwelcome in pro-Palestinian Arab countries. His failure to support local radical leadership, particularly with regard to Tottenham MP Bernie Grant's widow, suggests a troubling trend toward careerism over genuine solidarity.

Reports have indicated that Lammy has boasted of his friendship with Vice-President Vance and the potential U.S. Secretary of Defense, Mike Pompeo. Rumors also maintain that financiers like Elon Musk are promising substantial contracts to the UK, contingent upon adopting a Blair-style submission to the whims of the American military-industrial complex. Authentic Labour sentiment is aligned with the Democratic Party in the U.S., encompassing not just the socialist wing but also feminist factions aligned with leaders like Kamala Harris. This was evidenced by the over one hundred Labour volunteers who supported her campaign.

Contrasting Lammy's appeasement—away from authentic socialist views—Tony Benn warned about the "appeal of fascism" to sections of the white working class, who have justifiably felt alienated by their declining standard of living since the 1980s. Benn emphasized that economic discontent does not necessarily lead to leftist politics; instead, it could foster a dangerous

shift toward fascism. His insights resonate, especially when we consider the historical electoral successes of the Nazis in Germany during the early 1930s, where many disillusioned workers gravitated toward extremist ideologies.

The decline in status among these workers is a significant factor contributing to Trump's popularity, illustrated further by the success of his British ally, Nigel Farage, and his fascist Reform Party, which garnered more votes than the traditional Liberal Democrats. A second factor is the pervasive influence of media conglomerates, with many local stations effectively controlled by figures who propagate "anti-woke" and "anti-Muslim" narratives, thus shaping public perception and conscience.

Currently, it appears that both German and Canadian left-wing governments continue to resist this rising fascist tide; however, the situation remains precarious. As pressure mounts from anti-immigrant sentiment—especially against Latino immigrants—there is an urgent need for a strategic response to counteract the influence of figures like Trump and Farage, especially as the European far-right now comprises a significant bloc in the European Parliament.

To address this challenge, I propose five proactive measures:

1. Learning from History: We should revisit the period of the 1945-1951 Labour governments, which, fuelled by journalist MPs like Michael Foot and Barbara Castle, launched an investigative royal inquiry commission into the press. Although the results didn't fulfil all expectations, it sparked discussions about media ownership and responsibility. Today, Labour MPs should collectively push for a similar inquiry into

the ownership of media moguls like Musk and Murdoch—advocating for a media landscape that serves the public interest.

2. Anti-Capitalist Economic Policies: As we shed the shadows of Blairism, it's time to re-embrace anti-capitalist democratic socialism. By implementing government-administered land taxes, we could address squalor in the housing market, supporting young working-class families. This initiative could serve as a cornerstone for economic regeneration, reminiscent of the policies from the post-war Labour governments.

3. Encouraging Fresh Thinking: It is crucial for Labour to cultivate new talent and perspectives from grassroots communities. Governments benefit from openness to fresh ideas, as exemplified by Harold Wilson's encouragement of his ministers. Labour MPs need to think independently and resist pressures from the Whips, especially in an unreformed electoral system susceptible to shifts toward extremist parties.

4. Promoting Self-Determination: Labour councillors and MPs must advocate for accountability in the Foreign Office, ensuring it aligns itself with democratic values and combats the rise of right-wing ideologies.

5. Mobilizing for Action: It's imperative that Labour and allied parties mobilize actively to counteract the threats posed by Trumpism and its associates. The urgency of the moment cannot be overstated; we must act decisively to uphold democratic principles.

Let us not wait until it's too late; the time for democratic action is now.

Lawrence Iles
USA

In pursuit of the uneatable
It has been almost two years since Warwickshire Police issued the Warwickshire Hunt with a Community Protection Notice (CPN) for causing road chaos.

Controversially, in August 2023 the force suddenly dropped the CPN, saying it had come to a private agreement with the hunt. MP Matt Western called it a "super scandal". And now he has found himself at loggerheads with hunting lobbyists the Countryside Alliance (CA).

Admirably, Western has refused to let the issue of the CPN go, working tirelessly to find out why it was dropped; who was involved in negotiations with the hunt; and what exactly was in the secret protocol that replaced the CPN.

He has relentlessly tried to get answers from the police and from Philip Seccombe, Warwickshire's pro-hunting Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), but has received none. Anti-hunt campaigners have long been suspicious that Seccombe had something to do with the decision to drop the CPN.,

So, well done that man. One might almost congratulate him on having the persistence of a terrier. Erm, maybe not.



Cough up, your majesty
In what may be the shortest honeymoon period for any Head of State anywhere (elected or most definitely not)

the current leader of the House of Windsor has found himself under a bit of a cloud of bad publicity.

Not only does the Monarchy charge the RNLI everytime a lifeboat crosses a patch of sand, as set out by our esteemed EB member and columnist Keith Veness on page 21, but it has transpired that they also charge the NHS for parking ambulances on land that, apparently, they also own.

So that's the filthy rich King making money from a life-saving charity *and* our cash starved, life-saving NHS. No doubt, that's how he got so filthy rich in the first place.

But who knew that all this land was owned by the monarch in the first place? Certainly not *Labour Briefing*. And what else could they be making money from? Are we going to get charged for walking on certain stretches of pavement??



Not so long arm

With the issuing of arrest warrants for Netanyahu and cronies, you'd expect an authoritarian Labour government which just loves using anti-terror legislation against peace and climate activists to relish the chance to pursue the chance to arrest someone who actually, well, deserves it.

Wouldn't you? Especially one headed by someone who sets great store by having been a human rights lawyer? What's that you say - Israel's a long way away and we can't exact-

ly expect Keith to get on a plane with the handcuffs in his briefcase?

That's probably true. But what about an *acknowledgement* of the warrants? At least a statement that there may actually have been a crime committed? No? We'll have to live in hope then that some other advocate of the 'International Rules-Based Order' steps up.



The never ending story

Just when you thought that the Starmeroids would have better things to do with their time than keep persecuting socialists (what with running the country and all) we get news that campaigning and well respected Kent County councillor Barry Lewis has been barred from standing again in next year's elections.

This puts the Margate seat in grave danger of being lost, but as we know, the right would rather have Tories in power than a socialist. When the County Council elections turn out to be a disaster for Labour, maybe Starmer will remember the wise old saying: if it ain't broke, don't fix it.



You mean he meant it?

Apparently, even some of the People's Wes' advisors are getting edgy about the relentless pace of privatisation and 'reform' of the NHS. It seems that some of them think he's going too far, too fast. Didn't they read the Manifesto?



BEHAVING BADLY

Christine Shawcroft

When I was a small child, words which are commonplace now were considered to be Very Bad Swear Words. Nowadays, events organisers talk about 'getting bums on seats'. If I'd said 'bum' in the old days, I would have got a good clip round the ear'ole.

This presented a problem when one was very angry and wanted to show it. I was troubled by a lack of vocabulary which has not, luckily, bothered me since. It was also very disappointing when the object of my ire, when faced with a red faced and shaking little girl who managed to hiss 'You - you - *bloody bugger!!!*' completely failed to burst into flames.

I think I was secretly hoping that I'd discovered the secret of the Deplorable Word, used by Jadis, Queen of Charn (aka Narnia's White Witch) which left her the only person alive on her world. (What do you mean, you haven't read *The Magician's Nephew*? Get down to the library right now and get a copy. The children's library.)

One of the pleasures of being grown up is that now I know lots of Bad Words. To critics who say I swear too much I can only point out that actually, I swear exactly the right amount. And there are people who know a much worse word than I ever use. It must be one of the worst words in the whole Universe, even worse than the Deplorable Word.

Hissed at one by enraged antagonists through clenched teeth, we are all

familiar with this terrible epithet. The word, of course, is 'Labour'.

This has become a Very Bad Swear Word, according to those who use it, because of the dreadful things that 'Labour' is doing. Apparently, 'Labour' is supporting war crimes and genocide, 'Labour' is carrying on with Tory cuts, 'Labour' is privatising the NHS. Anyone who is a member of the hated Party is also actively doing all those terrible things.

Accordingly, when I wasn't getting the door slammed in my face during the General Election campaign, I was told I was a baby killer. I used to run a day nursery, so I think if I was in the habit of killing babies, Ofsted would have had something to say about it. I also used to ask my accusers if, like me, they were members of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign. Strangely enough, none of them were.

The people who shout at Labour members on anti-war demos are well aware that 'Labour' isn't doing all the things they accuse us of. They know that, in actual fact, it is Prime Minister Sir Kid Starver who is doing them. His own Deputy doesn't support him, and is merely building up her profile amongst Party members and waiting for the opportunity to elbow him out of the way and take over herself.

His Front Bench is extremely nervous, and wrote a letter asking that the recent Budget wouldn't make too many cuts (OK, Rachel Reeves didn't sign it, I suppose we have to put her down as a Starmeroid) lest the new

government slid even further down the opinion polls than it already had. Secret surveys show that large numbers of Labour MPs wanted to abolish the two-child cap, and keep the Winter Fuel Allowance, but are too frightened to say so openly. It's only a matter of time before they become more afraid of facing the electorate than they are of the Labour leadership.

And of course, many of the rest of the Labour members are very unhappy with the direction taken by the Leadership. In a triumph of hope over experience, they thought they were voting for someone to carry on the policies of Jeremy Corbyn, and really liked the ten pledges bandied about during the leadership campaign.

Almost immediately, the pledges were ditched and the Starmeroids now openly joke about how they pulled the wool over the eyes of the Corbynistas. Members have been expelled, and many more have just left, but for those of us grimly hanging on for better days, it is particularly galling to be told we must be in support of everything Keith does, or we wouldn't stay.

Like the man said, if you fight you might lose, but if you don't fight you've already lost.

I've been told off for not having many jokes in my column. I'm not finding a lot to laugh about at the moment, but how about this: *what do you call two thieves? A pair of knickers.* Courtesy of an 8 year old I know.