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Briefing

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Bean counters can't count

From the moment Starmer and Reeves took office last summer, their mantra was that they were going to create growth. Their election pledges, such as they were, would be fulfilled later on, from the economic growth that their policies would ensue.

And how were they going to turbo-charge the economy and produce growth? Why, by making cuts, of course. The failure to axe the two-child benefit cap, the cuts to the Winter Fuel allowance and the refusal to properly fund either local authorities or the NHS, were all in the name of fixing the fictitious budget deficit and stimulating growth, in what we call a 'jam tomorrow' economic strategy.

One would really expect the so-called 'Party of work' to understand what the consequences of public sector cuts would be. Public services cannot make 'efficiencies' by finding a cheaper source of raw materials. They don't have any raw materials. They cannot streamline the production lines in their factories, nor expand into markets in other countries. Organisations which exist to teach children, care for the sick, sweep the streets and collect the dustbins can't do any of those things. The only way they can make savings is to shed staff. Cuts mean job losses.

Don't the geniuses in Downing Street have any idea how capitalism works? Even right

wing economists hold the laws of supply and demand sacred. And if you suck demand out of the economy, there will be no need for much supply. Even those still in work, for now, are too concerned with paying the rent and the energy bills to have much left over to stimulate the economy in the way that Starmer and Reeves fondly imagine is going to happen.

The evidence is right in front of us. The economy is flatlining. Reeves quelled the worries expressed by even the most Starmerite right wing MPs by assuring them that, with a bit of belt tightening over the winter, she would be able to allow a bit of spending in her Spring Statement. At the time of writing, it does not look like anything of the sort is about to happen.

Like all right wing PMs and Chancellors throughout modern history, the current incumbents are convinced that the answer to the problems caused by austerity is more austerity. This has never worked. It didn't work in the 1930s, it didn't work for the Tory governments of 2010-2024, and it still isn't working. But lest it would appear that we are being too harsh, in the name of balance we must concede that there is one growth area in the economy, stimulated by government policies. The weapons manufacturers and merchants of death are laughing all the way to the bank.

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Democracy

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Still fighting on

'Bolshy' Barry Lewis has scored a victory for children and families against Tory controlled Kent County Council.

There was a danger that the Tories would close the Millmead Family Hub in Margate and the Seashells Hub in Sheerness which would have had a devastating effect on much needed services in those areas.

In November the decision on ending commissioned services at both Family Hubs was postponed following representations from County Councillor Barry who put forward a recommendation to delay the decision until new government funding was finalised.

At a recent Council meeting, it was agreed to fund the centres for another year. The Cabinet member for integrated children's services said that she had now received confirmation from government of the strict spending controls for KCC's allocation of the Year 4 Family Hub Grant.

This meant she could explore options for directly funding core Family Hub services to be delivered by Millmead and Seashells for the next financial year. In typical Tory double-speak, she said, "All we are striving for is the best for our families and children."

The campaign to reverse the decision to axe KCC's £222,127 contract with Millmead and a £204,302 con

Kent County Councillor for Margate, 'Bolshy' Barry Lewis, is still campaigning, and winning, for the local people he represents.



tract with Seashells was strongly supported by local people and councillors.

Barry Lewis said, "I fought the original decision to close Millmead and now we are at this stage. It's not a knockout win but I think it is a win on points. It has been nine months of hard labour, especially for me. In 50 years of campaigning and eight years of being on the council this is my proudest moment."

He thanked those who helped with the campaign including fellow councillors Jackie Meade, Roz Binks, Paul Carter and district councillor Martin Boyd and all at Millmead Family Hub. It is only the second time in 25 years that a decision has been referred from scrutiny back to full council.

The management team of the Millmead Family Hub said they were "delighted" to be able to

continue providing services to the community.

In a statement, they said: "We are delighted to confirm that we are not closing our services. We will remain open as usual to deliver the full range of services

advertised on our social media platforms.

"We remain committed to our vision to promote and develop a thriving community where families and their children are empowered to seek a positive future in which they are healthy, safe and achieving their full potential.

"Thank you to all to those who are and have supported us through this difficult time and we can, together, continue to build a great future!"

Barry's reward for all his hard work and campaigning for local people is, of course, that the Labour Party wouldn't allow him to stand for re-selection as the Margate County Council candidate, knowing that he would win.

Born on Death Row

Camp Beagle is the longest running, permanent, grassroots animal rights protest camp in the UK, possibly the world. We are physically camped outside MBR Acres (Marshall BioResources) in Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire, a puppy breeding factory, supplying around two thousand beagles a year as a commodity to toxicology testing laboratories. Camp Beagle has been running 24/7 since July 2021, for nearly four years, and runs an exposure and pressure campaign to shut down MBR Acres and ban animal testing.

The MBR beagles live inside windowless industrial sheds. They never have access to the outside world, no natural light, no bedding, not even a bowl of water. The dogs are fed by automated dispensers, which tip their food on to the floor of their dirty cages and their water is via a metal tube, like a rabbit water bottle.

MBR Acres also has a Home Office licence to bleed the dogs to death, harvest their organs and sell them. Behind closed doors they suffer from the moment they are born and as young as 16 weeks, they are shipped out to laboratories.

The MBR beagles are used in cruel and unnecessary animal experiments. These experiments often involve injecting or force-feeding them via a tube all sorts of chemicals, sometimes for up to 128 days.

This causes them severe pain and yet more suffering. Then at the end of the experiment, the dogs are killed for autopsy reports. None of them see their first birthday. None of them ever leave the laboratories alive. There are superior non-animal methods based on human biology which the UK

Louise Jayne, animal rights campaigner from Camp Beagle, reveals the horror of 'puppy farming' for animal testing labs.



Government and the animal testing industry refuse to adopt. Organ on a chip, artificial intelligence (AI) and human organoids are just some of these methods offering more relevant and accurate results, at a fraction of the cost.

We launched our third parliamentary petition, but the first one to the current Labour government, on the 14th February 2025. It smashed the 100k threshold in five days and at the time of writing we have 219,255 signatures. Parliament considers all petitions that get more than 100,000 signatures for a debate and we are currently waiting for the date to be set.

The petition says, "As a first step to end animal testing, we want an immediate ban for dogs. They are commercially bred in what we see as bleak and inhumane factory-like conditions.

"We believe there is evidence suggesting that dogs are being left unattended for extended periods in a government-licensed establishment.

"In 2023, 2,456 dogs were used in 3,749 scientific procedures, 734 were classified as causing severe or moderate harm. There were 2,593 procedures for regulatory purposes even though there is no UK legislation that mandates animal testing.

"These procedures can include oral gavage, when a tube is inserted into the dog's throat, up to three times a day, to administer liquids to the stomach. There are studies questioning the reliability and human-relevant value of the outcomes of these tests."

How can you help? Sign the petition, <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/705384>, share with friends, colleagues, contacts. Write to your MP. MPs are duty bound to respond to their local constituents. Email us if you need support with technical briefings on non-animal methods.

Visit Camp Beagle: see and hear for yourself, the monstrous eight-acre puppy breeding site. Meet the very heart of our campaign. Follow us on social media and share our posts to highlight the plight of these beagles.

Visit www.thecampbeagle.com. Keep up to date with our campaign. Go cruelty free with the app <https://cruelty-cutter.org>. Learn more about "Non-Animal Methods."

So many of the British public are horrified that this cruel practice still goes on in the 21st century, many still believing that beagles stopped being used in animal experiments decades ago. It's time for change, please help us to pressure the UK Government. The animals who suffer do not have a voice - but we do.

Scan this code to sign the petition.



No Heathrow third runway

Heathrow, originally named London airport, is 16.8 miles out from London and was originally farmland surrounded by five villages. In the sixties it featured in a Ladybird book on "London Airport" as a good day out where children could watch the planes. The visitor centre has a picture of a farmer ploughing a field that is now the first runway!

Rachel Reeves backed the latest incarnation of the 3rd runway plan on 29th January this year. If passed, the plans would mean building a second Heathrow by the side of Heathrow! That part alone will be bigger than Birmingham airport.

Three villages will be destroyed, Longford (which is right in the path of a third runway) and two that were mentioned in the Domesday book: Sipson (where I used to go to the pub after work) and Harmondsworth with its ancient tithe barn and church, and of course the notorious immigration detention centre. There has been no mention of any new infrastructure for the North which needs it most.

To understand the sheer scale of this, take the U3 bus from Uxbridge straight into Heathrow Central Bus station for terminals 1, 2 and 3, which now has a free train link to T4 and T5. The route is 9.3 miles; an express bus from Uxbridge was introduced under the Freeflow Heathrow initiative, which only took twenty-five minutes. Perimeter travel round the airport and Bath Road, where a lot of the airport buildings and hotels are, is also now free and the Elizabeth line has already been built to serve the existing terminals and could no doubt be extended.

I worked on the campaign against privatising air traffic control in 97-98 with Chris Rodgers from the NTR campaign and other volunteers. Hillingdon coun-

Local campaigner Helen Smith outlines the case against the planned third runway at Heathrow.



cil came fully out against a third runway and had a big banner on the front of the Civic Centre, reminiscent of the GLC's famous "three million unemployed" banner. We lobbied John Randall the 'wet' Tory MP for Uxbridge and he also came out against it. He now sits as Baron Randall of Uxbridge so presumably can still be lobbied, but unfortunately the new Uxbridge MP Danny Baker is sitting on the fence with a strong tilt to backing the expansion.

The pro-Heathrow propaganda leaflets even reach as far as Marlow where you can see the planes turn for Heathrow. The story never meets the national media enough, as it always billed as a local issue. We must correct this so people know what is being planned and the consequences, such as increased traffic and traffic congestion.

3750 houses will be compulsory purchased, say the No Third Runway (Notrag) Campaign. That is surely a minimum as the plans also include going over or under the M25 at Junction 14-15, which is the busiest one. The latest plans also include a new Oxford to Cambridge road as those cities are apparently going to be a new European 'Silicon Valley'. None of this could actually be built during this

Parliament as it will take longer than that to go through planning, legal challenges and possible bids for judicial review.

Another problem is air pollution. Anyone who works at Heathrow will tell you of the

terrible smell of the fuel. I used to get off the bus and walk to the terminals with the travelator. The air pollution level is already fourteen times what it should be and has always been way over the European limits.

Noise pollution is also very bad. I was at my PCS rep's house in Twickenham when a plane came over. It's not just noise, it feels like the plane could crash through the house. It's so bad I think that some people try to arrange to be out when the airport is busiest.

Jobs will always be an argument. However, it is a two-tier workforce with short term or badly paid jobs. They will presumably have the usual core jobs, airport policing, HM Customs and Immigration but will contract out the support jobs for these, for example baggage handlers, catering, even X-ray security can be employed by the Spanish company which owns the airport, as at Gatwick.

The previous Airport Expansion Consultation was in 2019. It stated that a third runway WAS approved in summer 2025, a date in the future, and that it will take ten years allowing for legal challenges etc. The government's commitment to 'reform' planning laws sounds ominous.

Cold feet, not for radicalism

I'm standing outside Whitechapel Art Gallery in London's East End in mid-February. The people arriving are wrapped in thick coats and scarves. They keep them on, because for the next two hours we're staying outside, discovering the stories of radical political activists locally, the campaigns that motivated them, and the traces that remain of places important for them.

We all hope for a better future, but since 2007 I have been engaged in the fight for a better past, telling tales that conventional histories keep obscured. I lead radical history walks to put that past in conversation with the present. On this cold February day I am taking a random group on my first walk of 2025, "The Radical Jewish East End". It focuses on the late 19th and early 20th centuries in London's traditional immigrants' and refugees' quarter.

Most of the migrants and refugees arriving then were Eastern European Jews, adding to a local population swollen earlier by Irish immigrants. My grandparents, Polish and Ukrainian Jews, arrived there as children when the East End was alive with industrial and political struggles. Both of the East End's most numerous minorities, Jews and Irish, took part. In Angel Alley I point out Freedom (anarchist) Bookshop which has had premises here since the 1960s, initially on the top floor. A red and black sign juts out spelling "Freedom" in large letters, in smaller type: "established 1886". *Freedom*, an anarchist newspaper, edited by Cambridge-educated Charlotte Wilson, was first published in London.

I show my walkers an image of an earlier radical newspaper, *Justice*, published from 1884 by the "Social Democratic Federation" (SDF). You might think that "social democrat" means a *Guardian* reader who listens

David Rosenberg, Islington North CLP, has boots made for walking, in the footsteps of radical and socialist pioneers.

to Radio 4; in the 1880s it meant "Marxist" – and fairly dogmatic ones at that. I show an image of a third radical paper: larger type but harder to read. It is called *Arbayter Fraynd* (*Workers' Friend*) and is written in Yiddish using Hebrew characters. Started by socialists and anarchists, it was published from 1885.

We walk through the streets of Spitalfields. I stop at a former "speakers' corner", showing buildings that used to have sweatshops in the basement, and earlier had Huguenot weavers' looms in the attic. We stop at a building, once a Huguenot church, that was used for packed strike meetings. A plaque tells us that Eleanor Marx and Annie Besant spoke there. The international anarchist celebrity Emma Goldman also spoke there, in 1899, to lambast the concept of charity. Meanwhile the top floor of this building has been converted into luxury flats.

Back in 2007 I had one walk, I've now got 16. Half of them take place in the East End, the cradle of London's industrial and political struggles, especially between the 1880s and the 1930s. My third walk this year, one day after International Women's Day, focused on suffragette and anti-racist struggles in Westminster.

I have a separate walk about East London suffragettes which I combine with the Poplar Rates revolt, early 1920s. I reveal overlapping personalities and themes within those struggles. In the West End I have a walk that starts on the Strand describing how the Savoy Palace was burnt down in the 1381 Peasants' Revolt. Wat Tyler's



forces destroyed rather than looted its wealth. That walk continues through Fleet Street whose alleyways were once home to radical pamphleteers and booksellers and offices of left wing groups, while the main street housed bastions of the right-wing press.

South of the river I take in radical struggles in Battersea and Bermondsey, while other walks north of the river include radical histories of Bloomsbury, Clerkenwell and Hackney. I describe glorious moments and acknowledge courageous grassroots struggles for change but even those who did heroic deeds had their contradictions. I describe activists who quarrelled over strategies.

After my suffragettes walk an American visitor wrote, "Thank you for the wonderful tour... I live in the US, amid our unfolding catastrophe. The stories you told about resisters of fascism – and even the stories about former suffragettes who became fascists and why it appealed to them – reminded me that we're inheritors of a long lineage of complicated, brave, flawed fighters for freedom and justice."

To book a place, visit: <https://www.eastendwalks.com>, tours are £10 (£7 unwaged).

Organise and fight back

Matt Willgress



February 19 marked the anniversary of the commencement of bombing in Bush and Blair's bloody war on Iraq. The human effects of this war were catastrophic. According to a random survey of Iraqi adults conducted by ORB International - an independent London polling agency - this war, which was opposed by public opinion and governments all over the world, caused over 1.2 million deaths.

For Blair, and the Labour Party he led, it not only contributed to the loss of votes and Party members more than any other issue, but also the war - and lies which were used to justify it - led to a massive breakdown of trust in British politicians which has (rightly) never been restored.

This is the recent historical context - alongside the Afghan and Libyan disasters - to the recent announcements from Starmer that British military spending will dramatically rise at Trump's behest. The Government has raided the international development budget to pay for military spending to be raised from 2.3% to 2.5% of GDP and confirmed the "aspiration" of further increasing it to 3%.

In these announcements - amidst pieces in the 'Financial Times' actively calling for Britain to become a warfare state - we have seen the fruit borne of years of the ruling-class seeking to lock-in Britain's high and rising levels of military spending, whilst the Labour Party and broader labour movement has avoided any serious discussion on the issue since Starmer became Labour leader with his notorious "anti-war" pledge. This pledge - entitled "Promote peace and

human rights" - read in full, "No more illegal wars. Introduce a Prevention of Military Intervention Act and put human rights at the heart of foreign policy. Review all UK arms sales and make us a force for international peace and justice."

In opposition, this pledge was ditched even faster than others. Then in Government we have seen the continued arming of Israel's genocide, Starmer just this month denying Israel's war on Gaza is against international law, and now commitments to more nukes and arms as part of a dangerous, militarist agenda.

Also ignored in much of the discussion on this issue by the 'mainstream' media and establishment politicians is that military spending levels in Britain are incredibly high already, with figures for 2021 putting the total UK budget at £45bn a year, making it the fourth highest spending country globally, and highest in Western Europe.

More than ever then, military spending seems to be one area where the 'Magic Money Tree' is in full operation. Winter Fuel payments have to go as part of 'difficult choices.' We 'can't afford' to scrap the two-child benefit cap even though it would lift 100,000s out of poverty. And now, disabled peoples' benefit are to be cut in a way so draconian even George Osborne couldn't stomach it.

Yet the public, Labour members and MPs are expected to roll over and unquestionably accept insane levels of military spending. Renewing Trident nuclear weapons alone will

cost at least £205 billion according to CND, and that's before considering Ministry of Defence projects typically go well over budget.

To illustrate how extreme this spending level will be in terms of the 3% 'target,' this is a repeat of Liz Truss' 2022 Tory leadership campaign pledge to spend 3% by 2030. At that time, it was confirmed this would represent an incredible uplift in money terms of £158 billion, with independent experts calculating the increases Truss was talking about would mean income tax rises of 5 per cent, or equivalent spending reductions, so we are realistically talking about even worse than this now.

In speeches, Keir Starmer has previously cited Nye Bevan in arguing that "the 'language of priorities' is our religion." His priorities, quite frankly, stink. On the Left, we need to be clear what our priorities are. They are green technologies, not weapons of war. They are nurses, not nukes. They are books, not bombs. They are welfare, not warfare. They are people, not profit. They are socialism, not barbarism.

- *Matt Willgress is the National Organiser of 'Arise - a Festival of Left Ideas.'*

- *He will be speaking at the Socialism or Barbarism in-person day-school in London on Saturday March 29, alongside MPs Richard Burdon, Ian Byrne and John McDonnell, campaigner Jess Barnard, socialist economist Grace Blakeley and campaigners such as PSC, CND and Stand up to Racism.*

CLPD needed more than ever

The Campaign for Labour Party Democracy's role in the Labour Left has never been more important than now. At CLPD's 52nd AGM this was the overriding message from guest speakers Diane Abbott MP, Jess Barnard (NEC), Gemma Bolton (NEC) and Carol Mochan (MSP).

All stressed the need for a united Left at all levels of the Party to oppose continuing austerity by the Labour Government. Proposed welfare reforms and benefit reductions will hit the poor and vulnerable hardest. Moreover, alienating traditional supporters with unpopular policies gives political oxygen to opposition parties, including the hard right and Welsh and Scottish nationalist parties.

For instance, Carol Mochan expressed concern that recent electoral gains in Scotland are in danger of being reversed, especially if SNP policies are to the left of Labour and more attractive to traditional Labour supporters in Scotland.

The Labour Left has an opportunity to not only regroup and unite, but also reach out to the Labour centre by opposing increasingly unpopular government policies and developing progressive alternatives. The CLPD will therefore continue to campaign for more power for its members, including greater grassroots democracy, and accountability of MPs and the Leadership to its members. This includes monitoring and highlighting the extent to which Labour in government is not implementing its election pledges, especially with regard to reducing inequality and poverty.

CLPD has always striven to encourage left unity being a founder member of the long-standing Centre Left Grassroots Alliance, whose actions are focused on where consensus can be reached; for example, successfully selecting and campaigning for candidates in internal party elections. The CLPD AGM voted for a campaigning strategy for 2025, covering three key issues.

Barry Rodin, Orpington CLP, reports on CLPD's AGM and the struggles to come in the following year.

Change in economic direction: It was noted with regret that the government's economic policy gives no indication that it will deliver adequate solutions to the problems Labour promised to address before the general election.

Instead of continuing the Tories' austerity agenda, such as future plans to slash benefits for disabled people and cut public services, the government's economic policy needs to radically change in order to deliver growth, raise people's living standards and deliver quality public services. CLPD believes that the government's economic framework, including the austerity measures already announced, are significantly harming long term support for our Party.

Labour should be fighting the politics of the far right: CLPD voted to demand that the Government stops pandering to the far right agenda, including opposing their racist myths on immigration, asylum seekers and ethnic minorities. Such an approach is clearly helping right wing organisations such as Reform to achieve similar levels of support to both the Tories and Labour.

The leadership continues to mistakenly believe that a vote for Reform is one vote less for the Tories and continues to bend to the far right, such as agreeing to a series of 'enquiries' on sexual exploitation that will inevitably fan the racist myths that build support for the far right.

CLPD also demands that Labour must oppose the far right in every election and between elections, including rebutting racist propaganda. It also needs to change the orientation of its asylum and immigration policy. Labour must communicate the huge contribution made, including growing the economy, by those

who settle in Britain and also act with humanity towards those fleeing desperate poverty and war. It also needs to promote a positive rhetoric about migrants that reflects the real situation and challenges the racist mythology of the right wing.

Making Labour's equality structures work: Following the democracy review in 2018, there was huge progress in embedding new inclusive and democratic structures in the rulebook for women, BAME and disabled members, Young Labour and Labour Students.

However, the current leadership has totally failed to recognise the need to invest in these structures and recognise the potential benefits from an engaged membership and a wider pool of candidates for selection at elections. The AGM agreed that CLPD will prioritise promoting democratic equality structures, building broad alliances and working with other organisations.

To help fulfil our overall objectives CLPD will develop and promote rule changes and motions where appropriate, organise fringe meetings at Conferences and support centre left candidates at key internal elections. Working with other left groups to encourage the many thousands of progressive comrades who left since 2020 to rejoin the Party is also vital to create an engaged and active membership.

For more information on CLPD: <https://www.clpd.org.uk/>



The strange death of Labour Wales

In 1936 George Dangerfield wrote *The Strange Death of Liberal England*, 30 years after the Liberal landslide victory of 1906. Dangerfield argued that the Liberal Party was destroyed by its failure to deal with the challenges of Trade Unionism, women's suffrage and Ireland. Marx commented that history repeats itself first as tragedy then as farce and talked of how things once solid melted into air. With the emergence of Labour as a separate party the Liberals found themselves reduced from close on 400 seats to only 40 by 1924.

It's been 103 years since Labour emerged as the dominant party in Wales and some 28 years of dominance since the Devolution Referendum of 1997. Now a spectre of Reform and Farage is haunting the Valleys of South Wales and it's been 100 years since the founding of Plaid Cymru in 1925. Reform will prove ephemeral but dangerous in this short term whilst opening up the post-industrial Welsh Valleys for a darker brand of the far right not seen since the 1930s.

The inability of Starmer to tackle inequality, the implications of Palestine and of Trumpian ethnonationalism echoes the challenges for the Liberal Party over 100 years ago. The disastrous Liz Truss-like administration of Vaughan Gethin shattering a broad-based progressive understanding between Labour and Plaid has threatened the left-wing progressive dominance in Wales. This had additional support from the Wales Green Party and others upon the eco socialist left.

The recent Reform victory in the Torfaen Council by election reveals the threat to Welsh Labour and in the Council elections of 2027 the pattern threatens to be repeated. Labour's vote fell by two thirds and Reform

Martyn Shrewsbury, Brecon, Radnor and Cwm Tawe CLP, wonders if Starmer's failure to deal with current challenges will doom the Labour Party.

stormed to victory with 44%. Reform is recruiting for candidates for 2027 and the Senedd elections of 2026. Barely thirty years after devolution too many people have failed to appreciate the possibilities for building a community based and mass party for Socialism.

Recently at one of my philosophy groups I had several people argue for the abolition of the Senedd. Labour, the creator of devolution, has yet to devolve power to the Welsh party and a Starmerite Stalinist could suspend the First Minister of Wales without recourse to Welsh Labour.

Eluned Morgan herself is a significant development. She is the first First Minister to come from a background that would have made it possible for her to join either Labour or Plaid. Many comrades have serious concerns about her ambition or beliefs. Yet she broke ranks and called for a ceasefire in Gaza and has taken time to campaign for local activists in election campaigns whilst the worthies of the local Labour Party did not. Yet I still feel she will be the last Labour First Minister of Wales for a generation or so.

In May 2026 I suspect that Plaid will become the largest party with Labour third just behind Reform. Reform's membership in Wales will soon exceed Labour's and we can foresee a shifting of power to Plaid with Labour as a junior partner in an inversion of the One Wales Government of 2005. Plaid has its challenges too between the ecosocialists and the socially conservative farmers. Plaid stand on the edge of power and it is likely that

Wales and Scotland will see the return of the SNP in Holyrood and Plaid for the first time in Cardiff. Nearly a third of sitting Welsh Labour members are standing down at the coming election.

What can we say of the Left in Wales? It's clear that embers are glowing and growing. Groups like 'Celyn', the Welsh name for Holly are emerging promising to be red, green and prickly and to seek a left socialist and green current across the Labour Left, the ecosocialist wing of Plaid and of the Wales Green Party. It may be that the Leader of that party, who gained a respectable 15% in the July 24 election, will be elected in May 2026.

Devolution is in danger and the contradictions and the paradox of the situation originates in how an England without regional assemblies or Parliaments could ever create a 'progressive federalism' with Wales or Scotland. Starmer never mentions the Welsh parliament and refers merely to regional assemblies.

Too many on the 'Brit Left' confuse the Welsh National movement with English Nationalism. For Wales the Welsh national movement largely comes from the need to survive rather than that of Imperial dominance. Welsh Socialism can be made to burst into flame again. The Red Flag was first raised in Merthyr in the 1830s, another Keir in another time and place understood the value of home rule and social justice, socialism and more.



Rubbish in Birmingham

This sounds, and looks, a bit like back to the future, back indeed to 1979 and the Winter of Discontent. Images of black bags piled up on the streets, rats and 'super rats,' mass picketing, scab labour. Not seen many braziers yet, and Spring has come early. And, as in 79, this is under a 'Labour' Council.

But 2025 is not 1979, it's an isolated dispute, and generally the public are sympathetic to the striking binworkers. Although a neighbour of mine had a radical solution - they should all be shot! Charming!!

Unusually, the local media are pretty muted sensing the popular mood. 300 workers are taking action, and it's very solid. Truly 'essential workers' striking in support of colleagues faced with up to £8,000 a year pay cuts.

I should declare an interest on a couple of grounds. For one, my current UK base is in Brum, and where I'm living we have communal bins full to overflowing with only irregular collections. And this part of Birmingham has a rat problem.

And I should also state that the strikers are members of my union, Unite,

Local activist Steve Price reports on some consequences of the government's refusal to properly fund local government.

and the action has been fully supported by local and national leadership. I was on the picket line for the identical 2017 dispute. Over essentially the same issue, a strike that Unite famously won, the consequences of which resound to this day.

The fight is over the proposed removal of workers from the back of wagons, workers who the unions insist are health and safety critical. But it's also about pay and grading, because that 2017 victory is 'blamed' by some for triggering another wave of equal pay claims from other, mostly female workers.

There's also an inter union issue which is rarely discussed, with most of the appellants being represented by the right wing GMB, but we won't go there just yet.

So why has the dispute flared up again? Well, it is best understood within the context of Birmingham's ongoing financial crisis. A Section 114 notice was issued last year leading to



huge council tax rises, job losses, and drastic cuts to services.

And the largest local authority in Europe is effectively still run by Tory Commissioners, headed by the notorious 'Max the Axe' Caller. So the employer's negotiators are not acting with any autonomy.

I am told there were talks taking place from 20th March. ACAS have been involved, and the strike went all out indefinite from mid-March. If it ain't settled quickly, it's gonna get ugly.

The depots are being heavily picketed, and police are being deployed by the 'Labour' Council to try and ensure the scabs can get the wagons out to come collect our waste.

My view as ever is that if it ain't hurting, it ain't working. Solidarity with the strikers!



Bin workers' picket line

Long arm of the law

For over a year, Greenwich Council in south London has used anti-social behaviour powers under a sweeping Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) to restrict and disrupt protests by Palestine solidarity campaigners against genocide in Gaza.

The PSPO includes restrictions on the use of amplified sound and as one local organiser told Netpol, “the overall feeling from protestors in the borough is that we are silenced – literally”. PSPOs were introduced in 2014 and ban specific activities within a designated geographical area in England and Wales that are not criminal offences but are considered “anti-social behaviour”. This has ranged from bans on littering, spitting and street drinking to begging and the use of fireworks and barbecues.

In October 2023, Greenwich Council imposed a borough-wide PSPO that covers a wide range of conduct including “anti-social use of amplification”. This bans the use of sound equipment in any public place “except for events or activities for which prior permission has been obtained, or permitted by law”. In February 2024, campaigners gathered outside the Woolwich branch of McDonalds in response to the call by the Boycott, Disinvestment and Sanctions Movement for a global boycott of the company. There was a heavy police presence at the demonstration and officers told protestors that the use of loudhailers was prohibited by the PSPO.

A few days later, a rally was held outside Woolwich Town Hall to protest against the council’s refusal to hold a minute’s silence at its meeting for civilians massacred in Gaza – especially the horrifying murder of six-year-old Hind Rajah by the Israeli military. Hind was a relative of one of the local protestors. Demonstrators planned to

The Network for Police Monitoring (Netpol) has disturbing news of criminalisation of lawful protest in Greenwich.

use a speaker to play the sounds of bombardment over Gaza, but Greenwich Council community safety enforcement officers, supported by the police, cited the PSPO to threaten them with arrest and prosecution. The PA system was turned down to an inaudible level.

In May 2024, a march in response to a call for local action from the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and drawing support from the large local Muslim community was organised from Greenwich Islamic Centre in Plumstead. However, police informed local organisers that they could not use a PA system or loudspeakers during the march and rally, again citing the PSPO.

It took an intervention to senior officers at Scotland Yard by the national office of the Stop the War Coalition, pointing out the safety issues of this restriction, for the Metropolitan Police to back down and say amplified sound would now be permitted by the council. Organisers felt this was unprecedented in London and told Netpol that they had a feeling of “bewilderment at not being allowed to use a PA system for a march... it [felt] like a violation of the right to protest and freedom of expression”.

The most recent use of the PSPO against local people exercising their right to protest was in January 2025, outside a full council meeting at the Town Hall in Woolwich. A local Palestine solidarity group was urging the council to divest its pension fund from arms companies supplying Israel and a Palestinian resident was scheduled to ask questions at the meeting. Outside, however, Greenwich Council

community safety enforcement officers were again citing the PSPO to tell protestors they could not use loudhailers and threatening them with arrest.

Every one of these protests in Greenwich is also commonplace throughout London, were unquestionably “permitted by law” and were supposedly protected by the Human Rights Act, yet the council and the police in Greenwich have treated them as “anti-social behaviour” rather than a vital part of local democracy. Local people who have taken part in protests in neighbouring Lewisham and in central London have not experienced similar restrictions on protest rights.

A local organiser told Netpol: “It seems to be only in Greenwich where this is happening to protestors. We are expected to protest quietly and not to take up space on the borough’s streets. Our local rallies, marches and events have been stifled by these threats from the police and council. They make hosting protests of any kind additionally difficult as we never know if we will be prosecuted, arrested or have our equipment confiscated, simply for amplifying our voices and trying to connect with a wider public”.

Netpol is supporting campaigners in the borough who are calling on local councillors to end the anti-democratic misuse of PSPO enforcement powers and to explore whether to bring a legal challenge against Greenwich Council.

UPHILL STRUGGLE

Kevin Flack

Working for free

The current Government have found the ideal worker for their flood prevention and nature infrastructure schemes, the humble beaver. This Stakhanovite rodent has long been championed as a creator of clean wetlands that absorb water and so reduce the chance of flooding further downstream.

So finally we have a go-ahead for licensed release projects across England, with appropriate action for any who are adversely affected. This has been welcomed by Wildlife Trusts across the country, many of which have penned beavers waiting for the go-ahead.

Indeed, there has already been a beaver release in Dorset in the last month, relocating unwanted creatures from Scotland on the Isle of Purbeck where a number of beavers mysteriously appeared last year in the Little Sea.

If you want to find out more, check out Defra's policy paper, *Wild release and management of beavers in England*.

End to subsidy culture

In a welcome move, Labour Minister Daniel Zeichner has signalled the beginning of the end for subsidies for the agricultural industry from your taxes. Following public funding for such Common Agricultural Policy travesties as butter mountains, wine lakes, paying farmers to plant hedgerows they had been paid to plough up a few

years before and paying them to do absolutely nothing ("set aside"), 37,000 Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) subsidies have continued - along with other schemes - post-Brexit.

Now, in another confrontation with the National Farmers Union following proposals to at least partly end the anomalies around inheritance tax, Zeichner says that farmers are, "not going to be supported forever by the public purse. We know that."

The plan is to close the SFI scheme to new applicants, with a future cap introduced on existing recipients. It is believed that taxpayer-funded subsidies account for around 40% of farm incomes. Which must please the largest landowners, the Dukes of Buccleuch, Westminster, Atholl and Northumberland, all of them with over 120,000 acres of land.

Halls for all

As someone involved in running my local village hall, I was encouraged to read of a rare socialist among pioneers of the village hall movement. Agricultural workers had already established reading rooms in many villages, and miners were setting up their Welfare Halls.

Newly-published *Halls for All* reports the role farmworkers' union leader George Dallas played as Secretary of the Village Clubs Association. Following the First World War, the organisation gave much encouragement to building meeting places



where those outside the local gentry could meet up and where education could continue into adulthood. Some members of the Fabian Society also supported these endeavours.

Dallas's political background was in the Socialist League (described by some as 'revolutionary socialist', the League were a British representative to the Second International) and the Independent Labour Party before he eventually became a



Labour MP and later Chair of the National Executive Committee in 1937.

He would be pleased to know village halls still play a role not only as examples of grassroots collective activity but often the only place for political meetings in rural communities. I like to hope that one of the village halls he helped to create may have been a polling station during his election in 1929.

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.

Water privatisation

Margaret Thatcher privatised water in England and Wales in 1989 - she couldn't get away with it in Scotland so they have publicly-owned Scottish Water. Welsh Water is now a not for profit. England has a unique model of privatisation. We didn't just give private companies a right to operate, we sold off our assets and infrastructure wholesale.

Your private water company has a monopoly in your area and there is no market, you have no choice about the water company you use. Privatisation was supposed to mean lower bills and a better service but the opposite has happened. Privatisation is a legalised scam. Since the 1990s, investment from the privatised English water companies has gone down 15%, and they've built up a debt mountain of over £60 billion (paid for by us). Meanwhile, shareholders have received £78 billion over the last 35 years.

The privatised English water companies pour raw sewage into our rivers and seas, which kills fish and wildlife and makes people ill. A huge amount of water is leaked away every day. Instead of spending money on infrastructure to tackle sewage and leaks, the water companies prioritise their shareholders. We rely on Ofwat and the under-funded Environment Agency to slap their wrists when it goes wrong.

The English water companies are more than 90% owned by shareholders abroad, for example:

- Wessex Water is 100% owned by a



photo: Shutterstock, Lucas Hunt

Campaign group We Own It set out the case for taking English water companies back into public ownership. Can we afford *not* to do it?

Malaysian company, YTL

- Northumbrian Water is owned by Hong Kong businessman Li Ka Shing

- Thames Water is partly owned by investors from the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, China and Australia

Since privatisation, £72 billion has gone to shareholders - around £2 billion a year on average. The average pay for a water company CEO is £1.7 million a year. The biggest earner is Steve Mogford, CEO of United Utilities, on £2.9 million. Our bills have gone up by 40% in real terms since privatisation.

Water companies are leaking away 2.4 billion litres of water a day (up to a quarter of their supply). The Environment Agency has said that by 2050 some rivers will see 50-80% less water during the summer months - so water is a precious resource we need to conserve. Every day, the water companies discharge raw sewage into our rivers and seas more than 1000 times on average - over 9 million hours since 2016. Only 14 percent of English rivers are considered to have good ecological status.

Publicly owned Scottish Water has spent £72 more per household per year (35% more) than the English water companies. If England had invested at this rate, an extra £28 billion would have gone into the infra



photo: Shutterstock, Jory Mundy

structure to tackle problems like leaks and sewage. In France, a number of cities have brought water back into public ownership. They didn't sell off the assets like England did which means they can just wait until contracts come to an end. The publicly owned company L'Eau de Paris has built still and sparkling water fountains throughout the city! 82% of the British public want water back in public hands.

To sum up, we've been trying regulation for 34 years, since privatisation in 1989, and it has failed. That's why we're in this mess. Research looking at the role of regulation in water networks confirms "private equity investors have found innovative financial mechanisms for increasing investor returns that are unrelated to productive activity...The regulatory toolbox, governed by a narrative of competition, has consistently been biased towards investors...the regulator is caught in an impossible bind in meeting the contradictory and contested interests of investors, end users and the state". Not very encouraging. Privatised water companies are at no risk of ever losing their monopolies,

n stinks!

there is no competition. In fact as it stands, we have to give them an absurd 25 years notice if we want to take back our water. Ofwat, the regulator, is hopelessly captured - there's a revolving door between people working at the water companies and people working in Ofwat. This makes it very unlikely that it will do a good job of holding the water companies to account.

The Environment Agency is hopelessly underfunded. Its funding has been cut by 50% over the past decade so it's very difficult for it to hold water companies to account. Staff are not being allowed to do the job of protecting our environment. The fines water companies have to pay are too small to have any impact. Water companies see them as the cost of doing business and go ahead and pollute.

The water companies are set up to prioritise making a profit for their shareholders. This means they are incentivised to invest as little as possible in the infrastructure. They walk away with £1.5 billion in dividends for shareholders every year on average. Given that stopping sewage requires serious investment, why would we be pouring all this money down the drain?

The private companies don't bring investment, in fact they extract value. As research has highlighted "companies could have afforded to finance all their operations and investments without taking on any debt at all. Instead, evidence suggests their debt taking was driven by overly high dividends".



So every penny of the water companies' investment in water infrastructure has been covered by our bills.

A lot has changed over the past 30 years. Water companies improved their game because of EU law, not because of privatisation. They started out with a green dowry of £1.5 billion from the government. Scottish Water, in public hands, has cleaner rivers and seas.

Taking back our water means buying back the water companies so they can be publicly owned, like Scottish Water. This isn't a particularly radical thing to do - in the energy industry the Conservative government removed some duties from National Grid to create a publicly owned Future System Operator to plan for net zero. The new independent National Energy System Operator is set to launch in October 2024. Bringing the privatised English water companies into public ownership would involve a similar process.

Parliament can decide on an appropriate level of compensation for shareholders, depending what it thinks is in the public interest. This decision can take into account, for example, the outrageously bad track record of the water companies - how little they have contributed over the years and how much they've already extracted in profit.

If we gave the shareholders back what they put in (i.e. the equity value of the shares) it would cost just under £15 billion to buy back the water companies. We would save around £2.5 billion a year because we wouldn't have to pay out shareholder dividends and borrowing costs are lower in the public sector. Bringing water into public ownership pays for itself in around 6 years on that basis.



One option that wouldn't cost the public anything and that we could start right now would be to take shares not fines from water companies when they pollute. This would kick off the process of taking back our water, help clamp down on profiteering polluters, and give local communities more say.

Over 90% of the English water companies are owned by international investors, private equity funds, and banks. Only 8.5% of shareholders in the water sector are UK pension funds.

Pension managers minimise risk by spreading investment, and small fluctuations in value are normal. The impact on funds is tiny in relation to the investments of each fund as a whole. Even if investors in UK water and energy grids were, in total, notionally 'losing' £40 billion short of 'true market value', the 0.8% of that 'loss' that affects UK pension funds is minimal. As University of Greenwich research outlines, this represents less than 0.1% of the £2,200 billion investments by UK pension funds - much less than the average daily fluctuation in the price of investments. The impact would be invisible.

There are much better ways of supporting UK pensioners - for example, the water companies could reverse their policies of closing their own pension schemes and running big deficits in their pension funds. In general, bringing services into public hands and reducing bills would help pensioners.

No to fire and rehire

Devon threatens staff

Devon County Council has issued fire and rehire threats to almost 1,000 staff unless they capitulate submit to inferior terms and conditions.

The move comes after union members decisively rejected the councils' proposed changes to terms and conditions to the essential car users' allowance.

Rather than return to the negotiating table, the council has informed 834 staff of its plans, and told them to submit before 23 March, or face being given notice of termination of employment on 31 March - with dismissal and re engagement taking place by 1 July.

The controversial policy has also been used by P&O ferries who dismissed 800 staff without consultation and British Gas back in the winter of 2021[2].

GMB union has pledged to do 'whatever is necessary' to protect its members and urged the council to 'put its toys back in the pram' and return to the negotiating table

Jake McLean, GMB Regional Organiser said:

"By threatening our members, Devon County Council is not only undermining morale but also risking the quality of care and support that our community relies on.

"Our members have already rejected this offer; bosses need to understand that and treat our members with dignity and respect.

"It's time for Devon County Council to put their toys back in the pram, withdraw this threat and return to the negotiating table, so we can solve this issue.

Our man at the TUC has details of ongoing campaigns and disputes to improve workers' conditions.

"Our members should have no doubt, we won't stand for these bully boy tactics, and we will do whatever is necessary to ensure their voices are heard."

PCS pay campaign

We continue to campaign on improved pay and pensions for all our members across the civil service and related areas, including outsourced workers who are employed on contracts in government departments.

Our successful campaign of industrial action in 2022/23 won an increased pay remit, £1500 cost-of-living payment and guarantees on redundancy terms. View our timeline of strike action.

Carrying this momentum forward, PCS general secretary Fran Heathcote wrote to the Cabinet Office early in 2024 to set out the national pay claim for 2024/25. Our pay demands to the UK government included:

a cost-of-living rise, plus pay restoration for previous years
pay equality across departments on the best possible terms,
a living wage of £15 an hour,
London weighting provision of a minimum £5,000 a year,
35 days annual leave minimum,
a significant shortening of the working week with no loss of pay.

Between March and May 2024, members in 171 civil service and related areas (excluding the Scottish Government Sector where a two-year pay deal had been agreed last year) were balloted for strike action. We

achieved over 50% turnout (the percentage required by law for strike action) in several employers, including DVSA, HM Land Registry, DEFRA, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and Rural Payments Agency.

On 4 July 2024, Labour came to power following a landslide general election victory. Within a few weeks, the new government published the civil service pay remit guidance, allowing government departments to make average pay awards up to 5%.

PCS has since been involved in delegated pay talks with the various departments and ministries. We have formally rejected offers from many groups (including the Ministry of Defence, the Home Office, the DWP, Ministry of Justice, HMRC and the Department for Transport) as they fall short of our national campaign demands.

Key demands on which these offers fall short include a 10% pay rise and pay restoration, as well as a national living wage of £15 an hour. Despite being rejected by PCS, most departments are imposing their respective pay offers.

PCS negotiators will continue to update the national executive committee (NEC) on these pay offers as they come in. Once the NEC has received offers across all areas, it will consider the next steps in the pay campaign.

We took our case on pensions to the Court of Appeal in February 2024, which rejected our appeal.

Still waiting for equal pay

Tens of thousands of women Asda workers are on the cusp of equal pay justice. But thousands more face taking their case to appeal after a ruling by the Employment Tribunal.

The hearing found in favour of 12 out of 14 'lead claimant' Asda workers in the biggest private sector equal pay claim in history – paving the way for a potential £1.2 billion pound pay out.

The case, brought by GMB and Leigh Day, centres on the fact that the predominantly female retail workforce is paid up to £3.74 per hour less than the predominantly male warehouse workforce.

In its ruling, the Employment Tribunal said the following jobs are of equal value to the distribution centre jobs they are comparing themselves to:

Checkout operator, Shop Floor Assistant (Chilled, Bakery, Produce, Process, Home & Leisure, George, Counters, Service Host, Customer Service Desk and Warehouse) and Section Leader.

Two roles were not found to be of equal value - Personal Shopper and Shop Floor Assistant – Edible Grocery. GMB and lawyers are considering all available options including the possibility of an appeal.

The women, who first launched their claim in 2014, now face just one final hurdle; stage three of the claim, which requires Asda to provide a reason, not related to sex, for the difference

Women workers at Asda have fought for 10 years for equal pay, supported by the GMB. An ET brought with Leigh Day has secured only partial victory.



in pay between certain roles.

Nadine Houghton, GMB National Officer, said: "This is a historic step towards securing equal pay justice for tens of thousands of Asda workers, but it is tainted with bitter disappointment for those who now face an appeal.

"These women have been fighting for what they are owed for more than ten years and are close to ending the era of retailers systematically undervaluing women.

"It's telling that many of the roles judged to be of equal value are the traditional shop floor roles women have held in retail for so long.

"It's a crushing blow that some roles were not considered of equal value and we will be discussing next steps, including the possibility of an appeal.

"GMB now calls on Asda to stop wasting time and money dragging this case through the courts and get round the table with us to agree a settlement." Lauren Loughheed, Partner at

Leigh Day, said: "This is a significant step for the thousands of Asda store workers who have established equal value.

"Our clients have fought for over ten years to achieve recognition of the value of their work and I am so pleased for them.

"We hope that Asda will now focus on resolving their cases quickly, rather than prolonging the process.

"Today's ruling will of course be bitterly disappointing for our clients who work in the job roles that were not found to be of equal value.

"We believe that a strong case was put forward for these roles, and we will be discussing our next steps with those affected.

"Equal pay is a fundamental right, and this decision takes us one step closer to ensuring that the hardworking colleagues in Asda's stores are not undervalued and are paid what they are owed.

"Our clients' demand is clear: they want to be treated fairly. This means being paid the same as their colleagues in other parts of the business, who do work of equal value."

Philosophers cornered

Martyn Shrewsbury



Some 46 years ago I was studying for a Classics degree at Swansea University. It was a requirement to study another topic, and I chose a course run by Professor Sydney Anglo on the history of ideas. It was the genesis of a long fascination with philosophy and the start of my understanding that theory can be a weapon of resistance and rebellion. To understand any philosophy or philosopher you must always know the cultural and political context of the time and the individual concerned.

Syd introduced us to *The Prince* by Niccolo Machiavelli. This book is essential reading for all of us on the Left. It's about political strategy and tactics. The book sought to liberate Italy from the Imperial aims of France and Spain. Please do not be fooled by the negative press that Machiavelli has received for the last 500 years. The book is as important as the *Communist Manifesto* and is as vital a component in the development of political ideology and philosophy. Please do not let the term 'Prince' put you off, it's a necessary use for the times it exists in and is a central tool of critical theory of power relations.

The key terms to understand are two. The first is 'fortuna' and the second 'virtue'. Please don't jump to conclusions about either term. 'Fortuna' applies to an opportunity to seize the political moment to achieve your ends. 'Virtue' means the capacity to analyse the events you see for your aims. It's clear that Marx and Engels were well acquainted with this text. Of course, it's also important to understand how the work has been interpreted and misrepresented. It's

above all tactical and applies to the here and now. It's secular, it's ruthless and yet philosophically necessary for these times.

There was a certain irony that has remained with me for the last 50 years. Syd Anglo was debonair and perfectly turned out. He looked like a character from the Renaissance. His beard was beautifully waxed and superbly styled. Years later whilst watching the film 'Angelheart' I saw that he bore a perfect likeness to the De Niro Satanic character Lous Cypher.

Later that term Syd Anglo frightened the distinguished members of the History society by reading in Latin extracts from the Black Mass. I will always be grateful to Syd. He taught me about ideas, how they change through time, how they are created, adapted and applied. He helped me grasp both Hegel and Marx and I am glad to tell you that he is still with us in his early nineties.

By now some comrades may find my dwelling on the occult a little odd but I must beg your indulgence a little longer. Marx must be seen in his historical perspective and in the language and cultural influence of the Gothic. The *Communist Manifesto* talks of the Spectre or perhaps more accurately the hobgoblin that is haunting Europe.

The vampirism of capitalism is clearly outlined, and the fetishism of exchange value hypnotises us all with false consciousness alienating us from who we are and what we produce. We are possessed by the

demons of capitalism, but some are waking up. The spectre or hobgoblin cannot be denied and frightens the rulers. Beyond the economic analysis of trade, production and the market the ghosts of understanding cannot be exorcised. Marx must be understood using these gothic terms. The Gothic was a response to liberal rationalism and scientific truth. Spiritualism appears some four years prior to the Communist method and yet much of its imagery can be used as a resistance to the hypnosis of false consciousness. To understand philosophy and philosophers we must avoid failing to understand the cultural and political situations of our time. Marx grasped it as did Gramsci and many others.

I often feel like screaming when I get the naive dismissal by some on the left of the film *The Matrix* and of 'They live'. Science Fiction is the gothic imagery of our time and a weapon of resistance and rebellion. Thank you, Syd Anglo, Niccolo Machiavelli and Karl Marx. All that is solid is rapidly melting into air...its imagery is merely changing across space and time. You might even look at HG Wells' *The Time Machine*, 1899, as a fear of where capitalism was taking us and of its consequences for both the working class and the bourgeoisie ...but that's another story isn't it? Funny old buggers those philosophers....

If you are interested in these issues I will be running an online course on critical theory regularly on Thursdays between 11 and 1 from early April. If you are interested, ring me on 07592 330467 or email martynjshrewsbury@gmail.com.

Face the real enemy

Keir Starmer is very fond of taking our money, but not so keen on asking us what to do with it. No one (well, only Tories) objects to paying for schools, hospitals, social housing, pensions, etc. Yet those are the very things that Starmer is going to cut, in order to pay for more weapons! We are entitled to ask if the dosh is being put to good use.

When I was on holiday last year, there was a book on great military blunders lying around the rental. It was a very weighty tome, as you can imagine, but I flicked through it and then found myself reading the chapter on the fall of Singapore, then part of the British Empire, in the Second World War.

Singapore was considered safe on the landward side, because of the impenetrable jungle behind it. All the British defence experts and the powers-that-be were sure that the danger came from the sea.

So certain were they that they knew what was needed to defend the city, the authorities spent a fortune on huge gun emplacements all around the coast, pointing out to sea. It was an enormous expense, but apparently there are no limits when it comes to safety and security. The city was considered to be a fortress, safe from any attacker.

In February 1942, 35,000 Japanese troops slashed their way through the dense jungle and, making use of the element of surprise, defeated the 85,000 strong garrison. Not a shot was fired from the massive guns: they were in the wrong place and pointing the wrong way. On 15th February, Lt General Arthur Percival signed the surrender. Churchill said it was the 'worst disaster and largest

Christine Shawcroft, Poplar and Limehouse CLP, questions the need for increased military spending.

capitulation in British history'. Yet it certainly wasn't for lack of defence spending.

Fast forward to 2025. Donald Trump doesn't want to pay so much towards the defence of Europe, but he has no doubt that it needs defending. And apparently it needs defending from the Russians, who are said to be poised to invade their former vassal states in eastern Europe and once there will be well placed to move on the west. With the snow still on their boots, I expect.

Happily picking up the poisoned chalice, Keir Starmer is prepared to cut overseas development and slash public services to the bone, all to hugely increase military spending.

He is pledged to increase the number of 'our' nuclear weapons (we already have over 240, all of them eight times more powerful than the Hiroshima bomb) because apparently, being able to nuke every country in the world, some of them more than once, just isn't enough to keep us safe these days. As the saying goes, when you have a hammer, everything looks like a nail.

Starmer is repeating the mistakes of the rulers of Singapore, spending huge amounts of our money to counter the wrong threat. Russian imperialism in Europe destroyed their economy and led to the breakup of the Soviet Union. Their economy is



now roughly the size of Spain's. The Russian bear is NOT about to try and gobble up Europe. They can't afford it, never mind any other considerations.

Meanwhile the Far Right are capitalizing on working class discontent with the cost of living, huge NHS waiting lists and the lack of affordable housing. Sneaking up behind us is catastrophic climate breakdown which will flood every coastal city in the world – say 'bye bye' to London, Portsmouth, Southampton, Bristol, Liverpool, Hull and similar ports in Wales and Scotland.

The money being wasted on countering the wrong enemy could be spent on safeguarding democracy, investing in an economy geared to socially useful goods and services, providing insulation and renewable energy. Carrying on the way we are is leading to disaster. Like in Singapore, the guns are useless.

Portugal goes to polls, again

Here we go again! I've written in Briefing before about Portuguese elections. In 2022, and just 12 months ago in March 2024. And now there is to be another General Election on the 18th May.

Nobody wants this election. So maybe this already sounds like all the usual clichés about life under a proportional electoral system - tales of endless wheeling and dealing, compromise, political instability and very regular elections.

But I should say here that this is *not* typical of Portugal. Post-Revolution, there have been 50 years notable for lengthy periods of rule by either centre right, or centre left parties. Pre-1974 of course, there was lots of 'stability', 42 years of one party fascist/authoritarian rule. The Carnation Revolution of 1974, which magnificently overthrew Estado Novo, is still part of the collective memory, and will be widely celebrated once again on the 25th April.

I have a deep affection for Portugal. Part of my interest over here is a project I'm undertaking with the clunky sounding provisional title 'Uneven development under Late Capitalism, Portugal and the UK, a comparative study'. I'm looking at politics, economics and culture, each of which can be seen in play in the current crisis.

In 2022, the then PS (Socialist Party) leader Antonio Costa stood down



Our Portugal correspondent, Steve Price, reports on the coming general election and possible outcomes.

over 'the perception of corruption' related to an investigation into alleged irregularities in lithium mining and hydrogen projects. And now current Prime Minister Luís Montenegro, from the centre right AD (Democratic Alliance) party has lost a vote of confidence over his involvement in a data protection company. Suggestions are that he has personally benefited from the consultancy, whose clients include several companies that have contracts with the government.

Now compare this with the UK and the rampant, blatant industrial scale corruption under the Tories. Covid being the classic case. And let's be honest, possible corruption carried on by this Labour Government. Exposed by the press early on over the perks of the likes of Keith Starver, and Rachel from Accounts. More seriously, and not exposed by the media, is the funding Streetwork and others receive from private medical companies who are looking for a hefty slice of the NHS cake.

And let's not even talk about private pro-Israel funding, and the Genocide enablers. But do any of these chancers do the decent thing, the right thing, and stand aside...where there is even 'the perception of corruption'? Not bloody likely. Do they even apologise, when they get found out? A rhetorical question, of course.

My big concern when I heard there was to be another election was that



Pedro Nuno Santos fancies his chances in the elections.

the main beneficiaries would be Chega, a far right party led by a Trump mini-me, the dangerous populist clown, Andre Ventura. Chega caused a major shock last year, getting 18% of the vote and 48 Parliamentary seats.

Early polling suggests their appeal may have waned, but election day is still a couple of months ago. It is very possible that the socialists will emerge as the largest party. Personally, I am a paying member of Bloco Esquerdo (Left Bloc), a party with excellent Corbynite policies. They have MPs, and one MEP.

Unfortunately, their support has slipped. Back in 2022, they were actually in power, in coalition with the governing Socialists, together with the Communist Party! But, like much of the Left in Europe, they are struggling, and having to deal with internal divisions and distractions. I shall follow the election with great interest and report back in May.

BACK FOR GOOD

Keith Veness



Most of us on the left recognise now that global warming is happening and one of its main causes is humanity dumping vast quantities of extra carbon dioxide (CO₂) into the lower atmosphere, which in turn raises the global temperature as this colourless and odourless gas causes a marked "greenhouse" effect by trapping solar radiation and raising the overall heating of our planet.

Some on the left have the ultimistic position of saying "Capitalism caused this and until we overthrow it there is nothing we can do". This defeatist nonsense is an excuse for laziness and non-involvement. We can argue for more trains and less cars and planes, fewer motorway roads, more cycling and walking, and recycling waste rather than incinerating it. All of these contributions however require international cooperation and often joint work across the globe.

We also argue strongly for ending the burning of fossil fuels like coal, oil and gas. The alternatives are the so-called renewables - wind, solar, tidal and hydroelectric. I won't broach the whole issue of nuclear power stations and will have to discuss that another day. Down here in East Kent we have the Thanet Array of 300 wind turbines off the coast of Broadstairs where we live. These are being augmented by 34 new mega turbines. We also have the newer

London Array off Margate of 1000 turbines. Between these off-shore wind generators they supply well over 50% of the electricity needs of the two million population of Kent.

I have said all of this to emphasise my commitment to an electric future powered by renewables.



However, and there is always a however, we are facing an appalling dilemma here of some of this new technology destroying wildlife and wrecking the environment. The River Stour flows through Canterbury and discharges into the sea past Sandwich. It has a flood plain that is visible if you come here on the High Speed train between Canterbury and Ramsgate that supports a lot of bird life. In fact this area is called the Minster Marshes after the nearest Thanet village. It contains a surprising quantity of bird life, mammals, reptiles and invertebrates. Fallow deer, water voles, otters and badgers all can be found in numbers. Black headed gulls, not found anywhere else in Kent exist in abundance and winter visitors like turnstones and arctic terns can be spotted from November through to March. Many years

ago the Government designated the area a "Site of Special Scientific Interest" [SSSI] which we naively thought preserved it from development and despoilation.

Now we have been informed that the Central Electricity Generation intend to bring ashore a connector cable from Norfolk to Kent under the North Sea and the English Channel. This will be a two way connection that sends electric power between East Anglia and the Southern Home Counties. This may strike people as strange - we know about connectors between England and Belgium & between England and France but lots of us assumed that connections inside England would be land based, but apparently not. We will have huge pylons striding across what are agricultural fields or green fields and woods. The Labour Minister in charge of this area is our old friend Ed Miliband, who currently shows no sign of stirring himself to stop this disaster.

There is local campaign launched called "Save Minster Marshes". This has a long way to run but we already know of an incident where a large white swan flew into the first power cables being erected. A very upsetting picture has done the rounds. It must surely be possible to support renewable energy without wrecking the environment and causing species extinction?

Stop arming Israel

The 17-month long genocide in Gaza never ended. During the two-month ceasefire, Israel repeatedly violated the agreement, killing 150 Palestinians in Gaza by drone strikes and sniper fire, while simultaneously causing starvation by imposing a complete blockade. Now, it has torn the agreement to shreds – dismantling it in front of the eyes of the world.

Israel has unleashed a major assault across the Gaza Strip, killing over 400 Palestinians, including entire families. Israel has again issued forced evacuation orders for multiple neighbourhoods across Gaza, once again displacing many thousands, suggesting it plans to continue its bombardment. This follows 16 days of a complete blockade on the entry of all food, fuel and medical supplies.

On March 17th, David Lammy finally admitted in Parliament that Israel's blockade on Gaza was a "breach of international law". But weak words are not enough. For months we've asked: How many thousands of Palestinians have to be slaughtered before David Lammy and Keir Starmer finally stop sending weapons to Israel?

Yet Britain continues to export components for the F-16 and F-35 fighter jets used by Israel to conduct its bombing campaigns. We demand a full arms embargo on Israel now.

The Palestine Coalition also condemns the decision of the Metropolitan Police to issue letters ordering a range of activists, including Stephen Kapos, an 87-year-old Jewish Holocaust survivor, to attend formal interviews over their alleged roles in the Palestine solidarity protest on January 18th, 2025.

Letters have also been issued to prominent actor Khalid Abdalla, Stop the War Coalition officers Lindsey

The Palestine Solidarity Campaign report on breaches of international law, and flagrant disregard for domestic law at home.

German, Alex Kenny and Andrew Murray, CND General Secretary Sophie Bolt, Friends of Al-Aqsa Chair, Ismail Patel, and probably will be to others.

The police claim in the letters sent to these activists, that they breached conditions imposed by the police to limit the right to protest against the genocide in Gaza. These restrictions almost certainly came as a result of political pressure from supporters of Israel's pro-genocide policies.

The protest's chief steward Chris Nineham and Palestine Solidarity Campaign director Ben Jamal have already been charged with offences arising from the same protest, along with many others. Chris Nineham was violently arrested on the day.

MPs Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell have also been interviewed under caution by the police. This apparently co-ordinated attack against the Palestine solidarity movement is endeavouring to halt public protest on the issue, through harassment of those involved in the movement, and through increasingly draconian restrictions on demonstrations.

That a Holocaust survivor is called in by the police for the alleged offence of carrying a bunch of flowers into Trafalgar Square, underlines the unjustifiable extremes to which the Metropolitan Police are prepared to go, to restrict the right to public protest and silence the Palestine solidarity movement. What is claimed by the police as justification for this massive overreach of their powers is a complete misrepresentation of what took



photo: PSC

place, not just on the day but beforehand. Our cause is to mobilise support for the Palestinian people suffering a genocidal onslaught by the Israeli state, backed by the British government. To pursue this just cause, we must also defend the right to protest – alongside many others who face similar restrictions.

We will not be cowed by these attacks on our rights. We demand that the Metropolitan Police halt any prosecutions or proceedings against those involved in this entirely peaceful protest. We further insist that the Metropolitan Police respects the right to protest and that it ceases to take instruction from those who are determined to back Israel's genocidal actions, to maintain British state support for them, and to drive our movement off the streets.

Those who seek to do so will not succeed under any circumstances. We urge all those committed to preserving long-established freedoms to join us in protesting against this mounting campaign of state harassment.

Work in today's world

I finally got to see the film 'On Falling' the other evening. It's got a limited release over here in the UK, and although I spend a lot of time in Portugal I needed the English language version, as I still struggle to follow spoken Portuguese! It's a film directed by 31 year old Laura Carreira, and is a British-Portuguese co-production.

Laura is based in Edinburgh and the film was backed by Sixteen Films, co-founded by Ken Loach back in 2002. As you might expect *On Falling* is a socialist realist film. It's been compared in its intensity to the work of the Dardenne Brothers, which is high praise indeed.

Central character Aurora (Joana Santos), a young Portuguese woman living in Scotland, works as a 'picker' at a huge Amazon-style warehouse. She spends her days patrolling shelves with a bar-code scanner and picking out deliveries.

It is badly paid, precarious work. The other employees are a mix of fellow migrants and working-class Scots. They are friendly, but distant. Pressure of work and relentless targets rule out spontaneous interactions and keep the workers endlessly on the move.



Steve Price reviews British-Portuguese film *On Falling* and its critique of the modern world of work.

An opening scene, in which anonymous workers shuffle cattle-like through a turnstile, establishes processes of dehumanisation which will soon accumulate. Laura is an exploited worker in a 'fulfillment centre'.

It's a film about work under late capitalism. *On Falling* shows us a world of sadness and exhaustion, a kind of heavy cloud cover of depression that is both a symptom of the job and a way of getting through it: only by reducing yourself to zombie-like inattention to your own needs can you get through the day as a "picker".

Aurora has become like the automatons that presumably one day will take her job – numb, emotionless, lost. She tries to escape the workhouse prison by applying for work as a carer. Her feelings break through the surface in an unexpected rush of emotion during the job interview, this small fissure cracks open the whole façade.

It's only by finally allowing herself to fall, literally and figuratively, that Aurora can feel again. Perhaps in doing so can find a route back to the self she has lost...

Where I stay in Portugal I'm surrounded by young students and many are keen to leave Portugal in pursuit of better wages, better opportunities.



The UK is a less popular destination post-Brexshit, and with the ever spiralling cost of living crisis. Though there is deep affection for the UK that is somewhat at variance with the reality.

Ireland is an increasingly popular destination. Some will further their studies or progress their careers - a young woman I talk to wants to study law, and has an ambition to work in London.

But others will end up working in cafes, maybe 'fulfillment centres'. My Portuguese ex-partner worked in Scotland pre-Brexit, so the film had a certain resonance based on tales she told me. It's also very relevant to my own interests and project work.

Rewriting history

While not the first book to cover Starmer's 2024 election victory (that was Anoushka Asthana's *Taken As Red* reviewed previously) this book is interesting in its own right: if deeply dishonest. It is not a book Starmer himself would care for; though others in the piranha-infested swamp that is Labour High Command will. It starts with useful background on Morgan McSweeney, attempting to explain his political philosophy. There is description of how Starmer became leader, members of his original clique duly name-checked, and how McSweeney came on board. Next, Starmer's actions in relation to the Tories, Partygate, Israel/Palestine and so on, and finally the first 100 days of the new government.

These authors are higher up the media food chain than Asthana. Whereas she was grateful to be allowed access to the higher echelons (up to a point) Maguire & Pogrund (hereafter M/P) are actual players in the Westminster game. As such, every bit as dishonest (and complicit) as the rest of them. M/P claim that in 2018 on social media groups "in full view of the leadership of the Labour Party, the left spoke the conspiratorial hateful language of the far right. This was the army McSweeney would have to overcome." They only name one person, Ian Love (Portsmouth Momentum) but do reveal it was "McSweeney [who] ensured the most telling examples found their way to the *Sunday Times*".

They do not tell us Pogrund was lead author of this article, that Love resigned Momentum membership two weeks afterwards, nor that antisemitic posts amounted to precisely 0.05% of the 4 million trawled. Given such dishonesty, it is no surprise that at every turn M/P try to spin actions against supposed antisemitism as justified. The peremptory sacking of Rebecca

Larry O'Hara has selflessly read *Get In: The Inside Story of Labour Under Starmer* by Patrick Maguire & Gabriel Pogrund, Bodley Head, £25. So you don't have to.

Long-Bailey is described as that of a "lunatic" who had committed "suicide by cop". 39 pages are devoted to a highly partisan account of Jeremy Corbyn's suspension first from the party and later withdrawal of the whip. The March 2019 Survation poll that the general public thought 34% of Labour members had been accused of anti-semitism, when the real figure was 0.3% shows exaggeration by a factor of 300! M/P do not challenge this highly relevant figure.

There is a mealy-mouthed apologia for Starmer supporting the war crime of Israel starving Gaza of food, electricity and water and continual assertions that in McSweeney's words Labour was a "racist antisemitic party". Predictably, M/P describe the Jewish Labour Movement as having worked for "four years to expose Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party for what they believed it to be: antisemitic". In fact, as Asa Winstanley has proven in his *Weaponising Anti-Semitism* the JLM was a hollow shell given life by the Israeli Embassy to destroy Corbyn. Yet elsewhere they admit that investment broker Trevor Chinn was indeed motivated to fund McSweeney's Labour Together because of Palestine, such funding (illegally) kept secret, as indeed was his financing of Starmer's leadership campaign till voting had closed. Chinn's influence was so great Tom Watson is supposed to have promised him that if Labour had won a majority in 2019, he would have led a mass defection of MPs.

As befits the undisclosed but highly relevant fact that Pogrund used to work for the *Jewish Chronicle*, it is no surprise M/P repeat the Suella Braverman



lie about pro-Palestinian marches that "peaceful attendees were overshadowed by protesters glorifying Hamas". Nor that they minimise the vile racism of anti-Corbyn Labour staffers in the leaked submission to the EHRC, dismissing the evidence as a 'morality play' based on selective quotations buttressing a "baseless stab in the back myth". McSweeney was primarily motivated by atavistic hatred, and patently still is: "in his mind, Corbyn's politics were evil".

At the core of McSweeney's ideology is utter contempt for Labour members: M/P state "McSweeney came to believe that ... a party democracy that obliged elected representatives to put members before voters was the real elitism" They do not mention the November 2023 opinion poll conducted for Left Foot Forward showing public ownership is favoured for buses by 67%, water by 73%, railways by 70%, energy by 65%, postal services by 70%, schools by 78% and finally 81% want public sector involvement only in the NHS, a figure to confound not just McSweeney but Wes Streeting too.

continued on facing page 25

M/P let slip their belief that “since 2015 almost everyone in the Labour Party has tried to destroy Jeremy Corbyn”, not the members of course, but most MPs and the bureaucracy. As they say in a rare understatement “the dinner tables of private homes feature more frequently in these pages than the streets of individual constituencies”. Though one suspects even Lucrezia Borgia might balk at inviting McSweeney to dinner and rightly be loath to turn her back on him.

Concerning the failed leadership attempt to prevent Diane Abbott standing for election in 2024, M/P remark “statements deferring to the primacy of the NEC meant nothing: by then it was their politburo”. M/P chronicle the development of McSweeney’s secret ‘Project Ex’ WhatsApp group, which included Luke Akehurst, laughably described as a “moderate stalwart”, designed to alter the leadership election rules. The question arises, what were/are McSweeney’s political beliefs? Zionism certainly, anti-Leftism, and that he “wanted the Labour Party to be the establishment”. An initial aim of Labour Together was to “develop a political vision that is relevant to voters in a rapidly changing world”. However, this ‘vision thing’ never happened.

Less important than McSweeney in this saga is Keir Starmer. M/P do not interrogate his previous legal career at the Crown Prosecution Service. While Oliver Eagleton is mentioned as having picketed Starmer no attempt is made to refute Eagleton’s forensic critique of Starmer’s time at the CPS (and his subsequent wrecking role as Shadow Brexit Secretary). Starmer does not come across well in this book, for good reason. The overwhelming impression is he finds politics boring, dislikes it intensely, and politicians too.

At the outset of his bid to become leader, incubated while publicly professing loyalty to Corbyn, M/P remark “he did not say **why** he wished to lead the Labour Party, or **what** he wished to do with power, but preoccupied himself



with the tedious minutiae of the **how**”. The image that sticks in the mind is one from a McSweeney acolyte (or perhaps the man himself anonymously) “occasionally they spoke of the leader as if he were a useful idiot. Said one, referring to the driverless Docklands Light Railway in East London: ‘Keir’s not driving the train, he thinks he’s driving the train, but we’ve sat him at the front of the DLR’ ”.

Consider the fact that every single one of the ‘Ten Pledges’ Starmer made to win the leadership have been junked. M/P do not deny this but spin a revisionist account of how they were mistakenly adopted in the first place. Equally pathetic are attempts by M/P to pretend Starmer’s victimisation and purges of Leftists were not factional and that he wanted unity with the Left who spurned him. The German SPD’s Olaf Scholz, with his four ‘missions’ was Starmer’s inspiration. In view of what has happened in Germany, the SPD recently slung out of office alongside a record vote for the Far Right AFD, the fate of his fellow dullard is a portent.

Even Starmer eventually realised he needed to at least simulate vision, and called back to politics Blairite Peter Hyman, who articulated five ‘Missions’—the highest sustained growth in the G7, Britain becoming a clean energy super-power, reforming the NHS, making the streets safe and cutting down barriers to opportunity. Not delivered, unless you believe economic stasis, abandoning a Green New Deal, accelerating NHS privatisation and maintaining the two-child benefit cap count as delivery. The last section of this book is revealing: ‘Epilogue

100 Days’. Readers might expect some account of the new government’s first 100 days, as it says on the tin. Instead, it is almost entirely devoted to a largely unanswered *ad feminam* attack on Starmer’s now departed Downing Street Chief of Staff Sue Gray, replaced by McSweeney himself. She is blamed for everything: blocking appointments, denying access to Starmer, sidelining ministers—the list is endless. From the start of McSweeney’s malign interventions in Labour politics Pogrand has helped him out and this chapter looks like more of the same. I suspect even ostensibly negative stories about McSweeney that have appeared in the *Sunday Times*, including the Labour Together funding illegality (long after the fact) came from his circle, puffing up the image of this self-regarding low grade political thug.

Wes Streeting is merely chided for being ambitious (he is for the Labour Right Starmer’s successor-designate, and unlike him actually articulate). Yet the potential corruption implied by his private office being funded by private healthcare interests is even more reprehensible than Starmer’s freebies. There are also references to how friendly Deputy PM Angela Rayner is with Trevor Chinn, Lord Michael Levy and Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, and her promise to Chinn she was willing to expel 100,000 Labour members over antisemitism. Rayner was photographed in 2019 in Palestinian Dalloula Neder’s shop wearing a Keffiyah, claiming to support Palestine. The same Rayner sat impassively while Neder was dragged out of a Labour meeting in January 2024 for brandishing photographs of family murdered by the IDF. M/P evidently appreciate her turncoat politics and want to cultivate her as a possible future leader, like Streeting.

As long as you bear the author’s various agendas in mind, and have a strong stomach, an interesting book. *A fuller version of this review can be found on our website.*



Letters

Dear Labour Briefing,

The end of fox hunting is in sight—but it's up to us to make it happen. The coming months are absolutely critical in our final push to ensure this brutal pastime is outlawed for good.

We are working around the clock, pulling together every piece of evidence and taking it straight to MPs to demand action. Now is the moment to prove that parliamentary time must be used on this issue now—not later. From our annual hunting report—the most comprehensive ever produced—to a groundbreaking study on hound welfare, we are exposing the truth like never before.

And with our upcoming mini-website revealing the full scale of hunt havoc, we'll be ramping up pressure on hunts, the police, and those in power to act. But we're not stopping there. We continue to equip and support hunt saboteurs and monitors on the ground, we've launched a vital new mental health initiative, and our investigative journalism

and social media content is reaching millions each month—keeping the reality of hunting in the public eye and impossible to ignore.

If you believe in what we do, now is the time to stand with us. The opportunity to end fox hunting is right in front of us—but we need everyone pushing to make it happen.

Protect the Wild

Dear Labour Briefing,

During fourteen years of Tory failure too many people were written off. Millions of workers have been left without proper support to move into work or progress in their career, and too many people with disabilities or ill health have not had access to the support they need to enable them to work.

Action to boost access to quality employment programmes and ensure that Jobcentre work coaches can provide quality and meaningful support is welcome. So are proposals to strengthen contributory benefits.

In parallel investment in the NHS, including mental health services is critical. Better healthcare transforms lives and enables employability. The government's plan to Make All Work Pay is also crucial to driving up the quality of jobs in Britain and ensuring more people have access to decent work.

But change must be done in the right way, getting the sequencing right. The TUC has said that "as well as ensuring that those with the most severe disabilities are protected, we urge ministers to reconsider the scale of proposed cuts in disabled people's incomes. Disabled people who are unable to work must not be pushed further into hardship."

TUC, LESE

Dear Labour Briefing,

We're writing to ask your readers to take action to oppose Palantir, a US company producing technology that enables Israel's genocide. Palantir has been awarded a lucrative contract to develop and maintain a platform to store NHS patient data – known as the Federated Data Platform. Alongside health workers and patient groups, we're calling for the contract and roll-out of the platform to be stopped. Will you write to Wes Streeting today?

Palestine Solidarity Campaign



French lessons

A French centre-left (is there such a thing?) Euro Deputy has attacked the Trump administration for its Far Right views - and demanded the return of the Statue of Liberty to France.

"We gave it to you as a gift, but apparently you now despise it," says Raphael Glucksmann. He feels that the US no longer represents the values that led France to make a present of the statue (don't we all?).



The Deputy has also criticised Far Right leaders in France, accusing them of being a "fan club for Trump and Elon Musk".

We'll be sending him an invitation to take out a subscription to *Labour Briefing*, naturally.

School's out

Our spies in the NUSAWT have told us that several union branches have nominated Matt Wrack, until recently the General Secretary of the FBU, in the election for the General

Secretaryship of the NUSAWT, as an election is now pending.

Mr Wrack has admitted that his knowledge of schools and education is extremely limited. But, as he points out, he is very experienced in being a General Secretary, having run the Fire Brigades Union for 20 years.

Briefing thinks that the NUSAWT could do a lot worse.

Scroungers?

Our dear comrades Keir Starmer, Rachel Reeves and Liz Kendall, to name just a few, are very keen on fairness. Apparently, it isn't fair that some people have to work, whilst others get benefits.

Some of us think that it's hardly fair that normal people have to work all hours whilst Ministers pick up eye-watering salaries *and* claim expenses, but we don't run the country so it doesn't matter what we think.

Reeves and Kendall are especially keen to point out that the Labour Party is the party of work, not benefits, "the clue is in the name - *Labour*" they like to repeat to anyone who will listen.

What they haven't noticed, in their drive to save money, sorry we mean *fairness*, is that many of the benefits they intend to cut are actually in-work benefits. Particularly the Personal Independence Payment, which tends to go to people with disabilities in order to help them work. They

need it to pay for taxis to work if they can't physically manage public transport, for example.

So the sick joke is that cutting benefits to disabled people in an attempt to starve them into the workforce will actually force many of them *out* of the workforce, because they will have lost the support they need to get to work.

Cutting other in-work benefits, at the same time turning a blind eye to rampant profiteering from landlords, energy companies, water companies etc, hardly befits a party which is supposed to be on the side of working people.

And there's more. The Civil Service, after 14 years of Tory cuts, is incredibly so overstuffed and bloated that in order to afford huge increases in military spending, the cash-strapped crew in power have earmarked several government departments for cuts. In fact a couple of them stand to lose 50% of their staff, who will find themselves on the dole, being blamed for the unfairness of the benefit system.





BEHAVING BADLY

Christine Shawcroft

One of the things I'm often mocked for is my aversion to WhatsApp. Some of the others, since you ask, are my inability to stay awake past about 9.30pm, a consequence of still waking up at 6am after years of having to do so for work, and my childish palate which has never acquired a taste for alcohol, so I rarely drink any. Both of these things are hopelessly Uncool, apparently.

People love to boast about their booze consumption, like it's something clever, and try and persuade me to partake. I have, in the past, told people that I'm a recovering alcoholic (which I'm not) in a successful move to get them to shut up about it. I may be sober but at least I'm resourceful. Or maybe it's the reason I'm resourceful.

Then there's the 'staying up until 2am' thing which, I'm told, is what really Cool people do. Probably they're getting pissed at the same time. But studies show that disrupting your circadian rhythm in this way could be a cause of cancer. So that's all I'm going to say about that. (Not so funny now, is it?)

Anyway, let's get back to the WhatsApp business. People are always telling me that there's something wrong with my phone, because they WhatsApped me and it didn't work. I tell them I'm not on it, and it's like one of those 1920s Bateman cartoons of a crowd of people comically horrified by one of

their number - 'The Man Who Lit His Cigar Before the Royal Toast' or something.

But seriously, comrades, how on earth do you stand it? I've been on it twice, having given in to the pressure of people telling me that that's what normal people do, and within days I had to delete it. I found that, totally without my permission, I was being added to groups. I hadn't signed up for them, or whatever you do, but of course all the people who had been WhatsApping me found that my phone did work, after all.

There might be 25-30 people in just one of these groups, and I would find that, first thing in the morning, someone would post (is that the word?) 'Looks like a nice day today'. Then everyone would have to chime in: 'Yes, nicer than yesterday' or 'I hope so, I got soaked on Tuesday' or whatever, and my phone is going beep, beep and when I check it's rubbish like that.

Then, a bit later in the day, someone else might say, 'I'm thinking of going to Brighton this weekend' and they all start again. 'Yes, Brighton's lovely' 'Have you tried Whitstable?' 'Margate is really nice at this time of year' on and on and on. And that's just one group, I might have been added to a couple of dozen.

All the time, the phone is beeping and it's drivel like that. At this point, I'm reaching for the 'delete' button,

and I can't understand why everybody else doesn't as well. A while ago, David Mitchell said on *Would I Lie To You* that he wasn't on WhatsApp and tried to persuade the other panellists to delete it. So he shot up in my estimation, although I have to admit he was already my favourite anyway.

Consider this as the beginning of the *Briefing* campaign to stamp out WhatsApp. What do you think? Maybe you need to discuss it in your WhatsApp groups first.



As Western governments fall over themselves to chummy up to the new 'transitional' President of Syria, Ahmed al-Sharaa, they are at great pains to say the former jihadist has now 'changed'. And he has, he's changed into a suit. By such means, he has erased his past as Abu Mohammed al-Jolani, leader of Islamist fighters Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), linked to ISIS and al-Qaeda.

Meanwhile, Shamima Begum, who was groomed as a 15 year old schoolgirl into going to Syria and marrying an ISIS fighter, has become a stateless person, not allowed back into Britain because she's a 'terrorist'. Unlike the new President, she never took up arms and she never killed anybody. Yet she's the one being vilified and punished. Maybe she should start wearing a suit.