

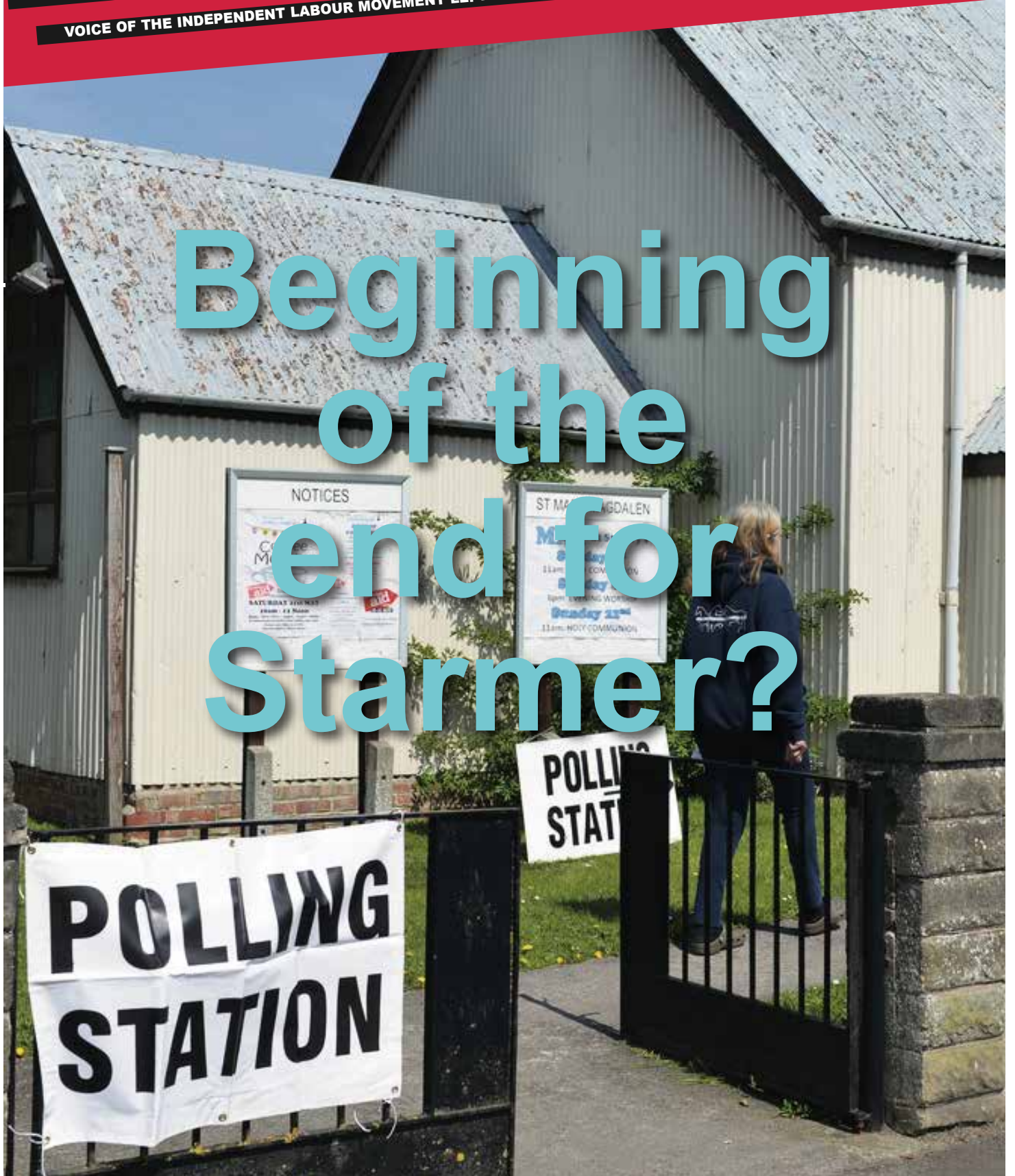
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Beginning of the end for Starmmer?





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Things can only get worse

Readers will be able to recall that the 1997 Labour campaign was conducted to the incessant playing of D:Ream's hit popsong, *Things Can Only Get Better*. Even when canvassing was finished for the evening, it seemed to echo round and round in one's head. The German's call that an 'earworm', and it certainly started to get rather wearing. It might be considered surprising that a bunch of hip young musicians would want to be associated with Tony Blair, but those were the early days of Cool Britannia, Blair was massively popular in the polls and all the bright young things beat a path to Downing Street.

It didn't last. The honeymoon was eventually over. The populace fell out of love with Blair. Fast forward to 2024. No one was in love with Ramsay MacStarmer in the first place. With a low turnout and an extremely low share of the vote, he was swept into Downing Street on a wave of 'let's get the Tories out, whatever the cost'. Almost immediately, Labour started dropping in the polls. The refusal to axe the two child benefit cap and the axing of the Winter Fuel Allowance left many people regretting their choice of party at the General election.

And that was just the beginning. With every announcement of further benefit cuts, attacks on the disabled, at the same time as huge increases in military spending, Labour's poll

ratings fell further and further. With rumours of panic breaking out in Number 10, Starmer cancelled swathes of the County Council elections due to have taken place this May. After the all too predictable heavy losses in the elections which did go ahead, Starmer has responded in the only way he seems to know how - by dragging his government even further to the right.

Starmer's disgraceful speech on the immigration White Paper, where he spoke of 'taking back control', of how white Britons are in danger of living on an 'island of strangers' and the 'incalculable damage' that migrants have supposedly done to the British economy has positioned a Labour government on the far right of the political spectrum. When all the polls show that a clear majority of British people want public ownership of utilities and an end to privatisation in the NHS, Starmer ignores them. Even most Reform voters seem to be progressive on economic policy. Starmer doesn't care. 61% of people who own assets over £10million support a Wealth Tax. Starmer is only interested in representing the small minority who oppose it.

If this is how the government responds to a (relatively mild) drubbing in the mostly Tory Counties, how will they react to a wipeout in urban elections next year? We suspect that things can only get worse.

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No place like home

The cost-of-living crisis is really a description of growing poverty. One of its key drivers is the cost of housing, resulting from the acute shortage of council housing and private rents outpacing earnings. Yet the government has refused to take any action on rent controls for the private sector. The insecurity of tenure in the private sector is a great disruptor of people's lives and a constant source of anxiety. The poor quality of much of this housing can ruin people's health as well.

Although council and housing association rent is lower than the private sector, increases are none the less impacting on 'social tenants'. The government is continuing with Tory policy - at least five years of above inflation rent increases. Above inflation rent increases won't resolve the council housing financial crisis. Council rent arrears have doubled since 2015 to nearly £400 million. Above inflation rent increases will drive them up further.

The latest Temporary Accommodation statistics show a further increase, with 127,890 households in it, including 165,510 children. 21% of social workers surveyed report children being removed from their families because of poor housing conditions. Councils are being ripped off by private providers for Temporary Accommodation, charging 60% above market rents.

London Councils have warned of a deficit of £330 million for placing people in Temporary Accommodation. More than 150 organisations have signed a letter to the government warning them of the danger of the loss of 70,000 supported housing units.

The Chancellor has maintained the freeze of Local Housing Allowance which gives councils only 90% of the 2011 rate for tenants in private rental. It is hardly surprising that dozens of

Martin Wicks from the Labour Campaign for Council Housing says the housing crisis drives people into poverty - and bankrupts Councils.

Councils fear bankruptcy. The government has continued with the Tories' "Exceptional Financial Support". 30 councils have been granted ESF, which offers no support but allows them to take on more debt and make more cuts. Collapsing councils will not be focusing on building council housing.

Starmer is keeping the Tories' hated bedroom tax, which still impacts on more than 100,000 households. Those who want to move to a property with fewer bedrooms are prevented by the shortage of available properties. The government has kept the Tory definition of "affordable housing", which includes unaffordable "affordable rent" (up to 80% of market rents), designed to make tenants pay more to facilitate a 60% cut in social housing grant. Grant for "affordable private rent" is also at 80% of market rent.

£2 billion has been announced for the first year of the new Affordable Homes Programme starting in 2026/27. This is said to fund 18,000 homes. The new chair of Homes England has said that 60% of the £800 million top-ups to the existing Tory AHP is funding social rent homes.

If the same was applied to the £2 billion that would mean 10,800 social rent homes. With Right to Buy still in place that 10,800 would be reduced. With 1.3 million households on the housing waiting lists and 127,000 in temporary accommodation this scale is completely insufficient. We have campaigned for 100,000 social rent council homes. The average grant for those 18,000 works



out at £111,111. We think that would be inadequate, but if that grant level was maintained you would need £11.11 billion to fund 100,000 social rent homes a year.

Despite all the talk of "social and affordable housing" the government's policy is one of reliance on the market to resolve the housing crisis. They believe that by making it easier for developers to push through planning permissions this will produce a big increase in house building. But there are already an estimated 1.4 million plots of land with planning permission which have yet to be built on.

The housing market is dominated by an oligopoly of large volume builders who build at a pace and scale to maximise their profits and the dividends of their shareholders. They are not going to build on a scale which will lower prices and profits. In any case the households in temporary accommodation and on the waiting lists are not going to be liberated by speculative builders building homes they cannot afford to buy. Only a large scale council house building/acquisitions programme will provide them with secure and affordable housing.

Binworkers fight back

At the time of writing, the Birmingham Binworkers' Dispute - all out strike action by 300 Unite members - is entering its 10th week. It's a very important dispute.

Birmingham Council - backed all the way by Keith, Rachel from Accounts and Angela Rayner - are taking on the most organised, most militant group of workers, employed by the largest local authority in Europe.

If they can defeat these guys then expect them to go for the street workers, cleaners, and the care workers next. Welcome to Labour Austerity, Labour attacking essential workers wages.

I joined an unofficial 'mass picket' on Friday 9th May, at one of the three refuse depots. Probably 500/600 activists came, from all over the country. And not just Unite members, activists and officers.

I saw Unison, GMB, RMT, and FBU activists. Management initially tried to open up and get lorries out, but quickly



Local Unite picket, joined by Steve Price (second from right in photo)

Unite activist Steve Price reports on the Birmingham dispute and the solidarity picket.

retreated, making haste to close the gates. The mobilisation was organised by Strike Map.

This action was 'illegal' in its size, and in its scope, involving as it did 'secondary action' by the other unions. The police didn't intervene, choosing to class the gathering as 'a demonstration.' It was an impressive, rather joyous celebration of workers' solidarity.

It is difficult to see how this strike will end. Both sides are dug in for a long battle. There is a huge backlog of recycling waste that's hardly been collected all year.

Management are also looking to downgrade the drivers' jobs from Grade 4 to Grade 3, another provocation, another big pay cut.

This could bring more workers out. My concern is that these members are isolated. There's been talk of other refuse collectors coming out, but it's not happened yet. Meanwhile the



Solidarity from other regions and other unions

council is continuing the austerity drive, axing staff and cutting pay and allowances.

This is largely unchallenged, apart from the workers on the sharp end. It is justified by a highly dubious claim of bankruptcy, based on figures which vary wildly from week to week. How depressing. And from a Labour Council, backed by a Labour Government (as Kinnock wouldn't have said. Brum is run by right wingers.)

Victory to the Binworkers!



Wildlife before profits

The announcement of the Planning and Infrastructure (PI) Bill has been a wake-up call. The legislation, if passed, will allow developers to destroy natural habitats as long as they pay a 'nature restoration levy'. These measures will strip away more of the UK's already sparse environmental protections and give a green light to big corporations who want to make a fast buck by literally steamrolling through ecologically damaging infrastructure projects.

Importantly, the money paid to offset infrastructure projects will not have to go towards restoring the sites damaged in those projects, instead it further commodifies the UK's natural sites, allowing corporations to destroy ancient woodland, and then plant some trees somewhere else!

The Bill also seeks to make it easier for the government to compulsorily purchase property and land in order for 'nationally important infrastructure projects' to go ahead. This will make it harder to oppose projects like airport expansion, new road building and the building of more prisons.

Chancellor Rachel Reeves said, "We are reducing the environmental requirements placed on developers when they pay into a nature restoration fund that we have created, so they can focus on getting things built and stop worrying about the bats and the newts." She cited the delays faced by the huge HS2 railway infrastructure project due to the need for Environmental Impact Assessments. In fact, HS2 has caused massive environmental devastation and destroyed irreplaceable natural sites like the Calvert Jubilee Nature reserve.

Protect the Wild's Founder Rob Pownall explained how the new plans will be devastating for British wildlife. He argued: "This new system will

Protect the Wild report that a new Bill will have devastating impacts on British wildlife.

weaken local environmental protections. Developers will be allowed to damage vital habitats with the vague promise of restoring nature elsewhere. It risks turning nature protection into a pay-to-destroy scheme.

Labour argues this will streamline infrastructure projects, but what it actually does is short-circuit environmental safeguards. Rushing through development without strict specific protections will undoubtedly lead to permanent biodiversity loss."

These plans are based on the flawed idea that one area of woodland or wetland, for example, is interchangeable with another. This is quite simply not the case, ecological systems are unique, precious and irreplaceable. Pownall explains: "Wildlife is highly location dependent. A protected wetland, ancient woodland or rare grassland can't just be ripped apart and then recreated elsewhere. Many species rely on specific local conditions, and transplanting those conditions is obviously not straightforward or even guaranteed to succeed."

Biodiversity is already in crisis in the UK. In fact, one in seven species is already at risk of extinction, and 41% of all species are in decline. We need to protect the natural world, not private profit. Chris Packham says, "This obsession with growth is insane. We live on a planet with only a finite amount of resources. Lady Bird book



photo: iStock, Nathanx1

of growth, page one is you can't keep growing. If we want growth in this country, let's invest in industries that are sustainable, the renewables. Let's invest in that renewable sector. Let's speed up the rapid transition away from fossil fuels, because we know we've got to do it."

After seven months of Labour rule, things certainly do not look any better for those of us who care about British wildlife. This Bill will be disastrous, and the government is pushing through the environmentally devastating Heathrow third runway. No action has been taken yet on fox hunting (although a consultation on a ban on trail hunting has been promised) and Labour has stated that it will allow the badger cull to continue until 2029, despite their pre-election pledge to end it. The government recently stated their support for the bird shooting industry.

Labour's new Planning and Infrastructure Bill represents a serious attack on nature and an attempt to protect corporations and private profit at the expense of British wildlife.

Far right on the march

You may remember that Reform recently held a very large rally in my home city of Birmingham. A mobilisation of 10,000, I filed a report in our last issue. I predicted a victory in the upcoming Parliamentary by election, and big gains in the council elections. I pointed out that they were then polling neck and neck with Labour...

Well, they duly won Runcorn, a couple of mayoralities, and pretty well swept the board in the councils. They now control Durham (!), Kent, Nottingham, Derby...They're no longer polling level with Labour, the latest polls have Reform 10-12% ahead. Just a few short years ago, all of this would have been unimaginable.

Steve Price reports that the Overton window - what is considered mainstream - is being dragged further and further to the right.

Some on the left have sought to downplay the significance of all this. Wrong my comrades, very wrong. Reform are part of a massive far right surge across Europe. A surge personified globally by the likes of Giorgia Meloni, Narendra, Modi, Jair Bolsonaro and, of course, The Donald. And they are reshaping our world.

Some people are saying that Reform will be found out once they actually have to run things, have to make decisions affecting people's lives. Wrong again I'm afraid. Anger, frustration,

distrust, and deep cynicism already exists in relation to the established parties. Reform are hardly likely to suffer by comparison. Not in the current climate.

The problem the left faces is a familiar one. Going back to Thatcher and Reagan. How do we respond to right wing populism? What has been happening for too many years is parties we may have once described as 'centre left' must now accurately be described as 'centre right.'

Yay, the mythical centre ground has shifted way to the right. Post War Keynesianism gave way to neo liberalism, and globalisation ruled for decades. But now we have rampant nationalism, authoritarianism, militarisation and, dare I say, fascism.

On Monday 12th May, in the morning, I watched Keith Starmer announce Labour's plans to cut migration. Shameful! Zarah Sultana captured it nicely when she asked 'Did Nigel Farage write this speech.' He is now being called Enoch Starmer!

The left have to resist. Organise and resist. We have to challenge the narrative. At the moment we don't seem to have the language to do this effectively. This is our most urgent task.



Organise and fight back

Matt Willgress



Recent developments have further confirmed not only the genocidal nature of Israel's war on Gaza, but also the utter complicity of the British Government in it. Just a few weeks have illustrated how a humanitarian catastrophe continues to unfold, with Palestine's Prime Minister, Dr. Mohammad Mustafa, declaring Gaza a "famine zone."

Since March 2, Israeli authorities have deliberately blocked supplies, bringing to a near-standstill humanitarian efforts. In response, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Tom Fletcher, said, "Blocking aid starves civilians. It leaves them without basic medical support... It inflicts a cruel collective punishment."

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, said "aid is being weaponized through its denial... it has to stop." In terms of what this blockade means, UNICEF warned children face a growing risk of starvation, illness and death, as a third of UN-supported community kitchens shut down in 10 days, leading to a 25-per-cent reduction in daily meal production.

Additionally, over three quarters of households reported a decline in water access over the last month, amid a drastically worsening sanitation situation, with over 90% experiencing "water insecurity." Gaza's medical system is also at breaking point. Ambulance services are shrinking due to damage and lack of access to fuel.

The statistics are stark. Prior to March 18, 149 ambulances were operational, of which only 48 are now functional. The number of public trauma hospitals has gone from seven to five. The proportion of trauma and emergency care missions denied by Israeli authorities went from 25 to 40 per cent between 18 March and 5 May.



At the same time as the deliberate starvation of Gaza through the aid blockade, since March 18, Israeli forces have escalated bombardment from the air, land and sea, alongside expanded ground attacks. This means hundreds of casualties, destruction of infrastructure, and the large-scale displacement of people.

According to Gaza's Ministry of Health, between 30 April and 7 May, 230 Palestinians were killed and 883 injured. Between 7 October 2023 and 7 May 2025, at least 52,653 were killed and 118,897 injured, including 2,545 killed and 6,856 injured since the escalation of Israel's attacks on 18 March. 278 children have been killed since October 2023.

In this context, on 7 May, UN Human Rights Chief, Volker Türk, responded to Israel's reported plans to forcibly transfer Gaza's population to a small area in the south of the strip, and threats by Israeli officials to deport Palestinians outside of Gaza, by arguing they "further aggravate concerns that Israel's actions are aimed at inflicting on Palestinians conditions of life increasingly incompatible with their continued existence in Gaza as a group."

What is the response of the British Government as this genocide continues to play out in real time in front of the world's eyes? A groundbreaking new report has shown the answer.

Not only does it reveal the extraordinary scale of arms exports to Israel using new data from the Israel Tax Authority, but it also shows how "it appears that Foreign Secretary David Lammy has misled Parliament and the public about arms shipments to Israel". (In Parliamentary jargon, the latter is a "resigning matter" – in other words, Lammy should go.)

Could there be a clearer illustration of the reactionary nature of Starmer and Lammy's Foreign Policy than arming this genocide? We must not only campaign against every single arms sale to Israel, but also build the global Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement. And crucially, we must never stop speaking up for Palestine.

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

Guiding light for democracy

In a darkening political landscape, one of the few beacons of light is the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy (CLPD). The principal objective of the CLPD is to fight for more power for Labour's members and affiliates. This has involved campaigning for greater party democracy, including mandatory reselection of MPs, reforms in policy making and internal elections and giving women and black members greater representation.

CLPD believes that Annual Conference must be the sovereign policy making body. At least 50% of conference time should be reserved for delegates' contributions to policy debates, and criteria for motions should be flexible and fair. Conference should be choosing and discussing policies fit for solving the challenges of the 21st century, not rubberstamping policies designed to maintain the status quo. Conference decisions and papers must be available online to party members.

The CLPD has consistently advocated that the main route for increasing grassroots democracy is through amending the Labour Party Rule Book, which gives rules for governance and management of the Party at all levels. Reforms are achieved through Annual Conference voting on rule change motions submitted by CLPs, after being voted on at CLP meetings.

This year, the CLPD is advocating three important reforms; guaranteeing rules covering Party administration and discipline are managed equitably and fairly by establishing an ombudsperson; allowing hybrid meetings to encourage greater involvement and engagement at CLP meetings; and changing the voting system to help ensure elected CLP members to the National Policy Forum (NPF) reflect the full diversity of views and opinions in the Party.

Barry Rodin, Orpington CLP, describes the changes which CLPD is campaigning for, to benefit members.

CLPD proposes that an ombudsperson is elected by Annual Conference for a renewable five-year term. The ombudsperson deals independently and impartially with complaints from Party members who consider there has been an instance of maladministration by the Party, for example on disciplinary matters. Decisions by the ombudsperson will be final.

Party members currently have no formal means to complain about maladministration. An ombudsperson would give ordinary members a route to submit complaints where the Party has not acted within the rules or has acted unfairly. An arbiter, independent of the administration of the Party, would give confidence and reassurance in relation to the management of the Party's rules and procedures.

A CLP's key responsibility should be to seek to ensure, as far as possible, that CLP general committee and branch meetings can be attended by all those entitled to attend. To fulfill this duty, the motion calls for hybrid meetings to be organized, in accordance with guidelines laid down by the NEC.

Currently the national Party only allows a small number of CLPs to organize hybrid meetings. They allow for greater participation than only in-person meetings. Accessibility for disabled members can therefore be significantly improved. Also, in areas where transport arrangements to an in-person meeting presents difficulties for some members, hybrid meetings can help circumvent these. The technology now exists to organize hybrid meetings, including voting.

I get regular feedback from members of our local CLP disability group based on the outskirts of London that such a reform would greatly help their participation at meetings, especially during the dark winter evenings.

The election of five candidates, including the young Labour representative, from each of the English regions and Scotland and Wales must in future be on the basis of the Single Transferable Vote method, instead of 'first past the post'. Of the four non-young Labour places, 2 must be reserved for women.

This would help make the NPF more representative of members' views in the CLP Section of the NPF. It is vital to fully use the wide range of experience amongst Party members through their contribution to the policy discussion. It will greatly increase the chances of putting forward policies that will both work in government and improve people's livelihood and well-being.

Since the 2024 General Election, key policies being implemented by our government have created significant problems, including those among our natural supporters. As evidenced in the recent local elections, a growing number of Labour voters and members are becoming less convinced that our government's policies will tackle the problems we said we would solve. Increasing accountability of a Labour Government to its members and supporters is a primary goal.

For more information on CLPD motions and internal elections:
<https://www.clpd.org.uk/2025/05/02/preparations-for-labour-party-conference-and-womens-conference/>

Into the abyss

The most recent opinion poll for the Senedd election of 2026 shows Welsh Labour staggering into the abyss. Plaid has reached the psychologically significant level of 30%. Reform is second on 25% whilst Welsh Labour has dropped to 18%. The Tories are down to 13% with the Greens and the Lib Dems at 7 % each.

In the last few days, at a safe Labour Council by-election in Pyle near Bridgend Reform captured the seat with Labour's vote collapsing from 60% to 30%. The pattern is continuing from earlier losses both to Reform and with additional losses to the Liberal Democrats in the Swansea Valley in the last few weeks.

It's quite clear reading the subtext and the implied criticism of Starmer's Labour government by the Welsh First Minister Eluned Morgan that Welsh Labour is in serious trouble. It's growing clearer daily that Starmer, Reeves et al have no serious understanding of the effects of Winter Fuel Payment changes, 'reforms' of benefits and the perception that Port Talbot steel works were not taken into public ownership whilst Scunthorpe's were.

The perception is that Wales is being ignored and that devolution is not understood or respected. Plaid's vote reaching 30% is highly significant. The activists have left Labour or been driven out. Many are joining Plaid, the Greens or actively meeting in Merthyr to seek a clear left alternative within Cymru.

Labour created devolution for Wales but have not granted it to the party. As it is, to those of us who support independence it's quite clear that the argument for progressive federalism is no longer viable. You cannot have federalism between Wales, England and Scotland because of the dominance of

Martyn Shrewsbury, Brecon, Radnor and Cwm Tawe CLP, is horrified by the collapse in Labour support in Wales.

England through size, economic power and cultural hegemony. Progressive federalism would only be possible if England itself was devolved into regional parliaments. And so the impetuous for independence and socialism is growing amongst the left and the Greens of Cymru.



Wales feels different. The Mark Drakeford administration demonstrated clearly that Wales dealt with Covid differently from England and the unintended consequences show that Wales is not England and that a different and unique path was possible. The drive to a Republican, socialist Wales is growing within Wales and stretches over at least three political parties here.

Of course the reactionary right in the shape of Reform and the Tories reveal another strata in the politics and culture of Wales. May 2026 is likely to see Labour in third place and the Tories supplanted by Reform. The culture wars are being fought vigorously here yet somewhat ironically Reform looks as if it may seek the abolition of the Senedd. It has refused to identify a Welsh Leadership role and is heavily playing on the myth of Farage seeking to reform Wales.

The Reform flag debacle has made no mention of which flags it would allow

flown in Wales. The use of the Union Flag has been widespread on Labour leaflets in Wales, and in last July's general election the only Labour posters available had the Union Flag upon them, giving local members no choice but to use them if they wanted posters up. Labour looks presently to be condemned to become the junior partner in a Plaid Labour administration. A historical shift is about to occur in Wales that has not happened since 1922 when Labour replaced the old Liberal Party.

The divergence in Wales from England has now reached the same stage as it has in Scotland and in the North of Ireland. Reform represents the last desperate but still potent last stage of Unionism or English Nationalism. The desire for self-determination within Wales is an attempt for a Green, Republican socialist Wales to emerge.

It's supported across a range of parties and is a desperate attempt at this moment of crisis both for Labour and the British state. The road ahead is unclear but the opinion polling reveals the fact that the contest for Wales is now between Plaid and Reform.

It may be that the Greens will elect their first representative in the Senedd next May. Perhaps we'll also see the emergence of independent socialist challenges both culturally and politically. Last year I cheekily said *apres Drakeford le deluge*. Comrades, I feel like Cassandra in the works of Homer. No one is listening to me...although I can prophesy the future. I think there may be a wooden horse in it.

Disaster for Starmer

It's notoriously difficult to make national projections of vote share from local elections. Like isn't being compared with like, you have to factor in who was standing where, how many seats were being contested, what kind of base each Party is starting from, and so on. The May 2025 elections are particularly difficult because several counties or large parts of counties had their elections cancelled, because Starmer was afraid to face the electorate - oh, sorry, no, it was because he wants to prepare for the next stage of devolution, which involves creating huge unitary authorities as remote from local people as possible.

However, as well as the election results, there has been extensive opinion polling carried out since the elections, which does not bode well for Labour. Although the pollsters don't always get it right, just ask Ed Miliband. Going back to the local elections for a moment, Labour managed to 'build' on their General Election victory less than a year previously by losing the only County Council they controlled and lost 187 councillors, winning only 98. They also lost the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough mayoralty, to the *Tories*, for goodness sake.

Speaking of, the *Tories* lost all 16 County Councils they controlled that were up for elections, and 674 councillors, winning only 319. Reform came from nowhere to win 10 County Councils and 677 councillors (having had two!). The Lib Dems won three County Councils and 370 councillors, a gain of 163. The Greens won 79 councillors, a gain of 44. 10 Councils are No Overall Control.

Clearly, the voters are trying to tell us something. Many political pundits are of the view that the Labour and Tory votes are heading for meltdown, with Reform hoovering up both sets of pre-

Christine Shawcroft, Poplar and Limehouse CLP, says the May election results prove that Starmer's policies are vote losers.

vious supporters. Given that Labour polling has been in freefall ever since the General Election, I'm surprised that we managed to win the Doncaster, North Tyneside and West of England mayoralties, not to mention coming so close in Runcorn and Helsby, where Reform beat Labour by only six votes.

But polling since the elections suggests that Labour has dropped from



14% to 12%, and is on course to lose 363 seats at a General Election, holding only 48! Reform are projected to be the largest Party, with 411 seats, a gain of 406. In fact, even without the support of 25 *Tories* and 80 Lib Dems, they would have a comfortable majority of 203 over all the other parties.

What is to be done about this terrible prospect? Starmer's view is that Reform are taking votes from Labour, and to get them back we have to be as much like Reform as possible. but is that actually true? Recent studies show that people who voted Labour in 2024 are much more likely to consider voting Lib Dem or Green than to vote for Reform.

The Tory vote is also collapsing, and their ex-voters are much more likely to turn to Reform. In fact the odious Rees-Mogg said on election night that

it was actually a great win for conservatism! Turnout is also key. It was low in the County Council elections, which is unfortunately not unusual these days, so it is more than possible that many disillusioned Labour and Tory voters stayed at home. It is also my view that Reform, with their mendacious "We're new! We're different! We're anti-establishment!" schtick connected with a different kind of voter, the ones who can't usually be arsed.

You know those ones on the doorstep who say, "I'm not voting for any of you. You're all the same." The professional non voters, the 30%ish who never turn out - they voted this time, for Reform. I don't have the statistics to prove it, but I've been on a lot of doorsteps. Now admittedly, those Reform voters are very socially conservative. But polling shows that they support more progressive economic policies. They want the utilities and railways taken back into public ownership. They're sick of profiteering by the energy companies. They don't want their rivers to be full of poo, and beaches to be so filthy they can't let their kids (or grandkids) play on them. They love the NHS, and want a complete stop to all the privatisation.

Given all of that, wouldn't you think that a Labour leader would aim for that open goal, and win all those voters for us? No chance. Starmer is happier banging on about terrible immigrants. He's using the Brexiteers' 'Take Back Control', but not their '£350 million a week to the NHS' (although that was a total lie, of course). As he said on immigration controls, 'I'm not doing this to attract voters, I really believe it.' And you can be sure that he does.

Economical with truth

Campaigners have been calling for the British to stop sending arms to Israel since before the last General Election. If anyone thought that a change in government would mean a change in policy, they were sadly mistaken.

Starmer and Lammy have both been very keen to tell us how 'steadfast' they intend being towards 'one of our closest allies.' And I understand that countries feel that they have to be part of various alliances, although I do think that they should choose their allies a little more carefully. But since when has it been compulsory to support your allies, right or wrong?

In 1967, Lyndon Johnson, then President of our ally the United States of America, asked Harold Wilson, then the Prime Minister of Britain, to commit British troops to the American war in Vietnam. To Johnson's considerable annoyance, Wilson refused. He knew that British public opinion was very much opposed to the war, and in those days Prime Ministers took notice of those things. I know, quaint wasn't it?

Going further back, the US opposed the ill-thought out Franco-British-Israeli attack on Egypt to try and prevent the nationalisation of the Suez Canal by Nasser. Even though the three countries were allies of the US, it led the opposition to the invasion and sponsored resolutions condemning it at

Christine Shawcroft, Poplar and Limehouse CLP, says the government have been less than truthful about arms sales to Israel.

the United Nations. The troops had no option but to withdraw, and it has to be said that it was a really stupid plan to start with. But there are clear precedents for *not* supporting your allies.

In September last year Starmer and Lammy made a great fanfare about how they were suspending some export licences to Israel, although they had to admit they were exempting the export of parts for the murderous F35 bomber jets. Starmer insisted that they didn't make much difference, as our parts are only about 15% of what was needed. Like a jet can undertake bombing missions with 15% of its components missing.

Regardless, in October, Lammy told Parliament that most UK military exports to Israel were for 'defensive' purposes, or for re-export to other countries (so that's all right then). He said that, "the licensing regime is about controlled equipment, which is not always guns." In September 2024 he had said, "I do not think anyone would suggest that we should not sell a helmet or goggles to one of our

closest allies." His pants were clearly on fire at the time.

A joint report by the Palestinian Youth Movement, Progressive International and Workers for a Free Palestine contains data from the Israel Tax Authority. It shows a shipment of 150,000 bullets. Since September 2024 there have been 8,000 individual shipments of munitions to Israel. The data also shows that tanks and other fighting vehicles, rocket launchers, flame throwers and grenade launchers have been exported. These are obviously being used by the IDF (is that why the government claims they are for defensive purposes?).

Whilst Lammy was going on about helmets and goggles, he must have known about the munitions. So he's deliberately lied to Parliament. In the days when there was integrity in our political system, that was considered a resigning matter. But don't hold your breath.



UPHILL STRUGGLE

Kevin Flack



Rural wipeout for Labour

As Labour seats fell across the country on May Day, it became clear that there would have been utter devastation if other council elections had not been cancelled by the government.

Thurrock, for instance, could have returned a clean sweep of Reform councillors based on the one by-election that took place.

Former mining villages in the **North East** were lost as was the now-Labour-MP's seat in the **Forest of Dean**. With the well-known local councillor retiring the rural ward of Calstock in **Cornwall** fell to Reform. The Labour vote that had been built up in rural **Devon** disappeared (indeed, the party was wiped out in its electoral stronghold of Exeter, leaving no representation on the county council.) Not completely rural, but Chipping Norton in **Oxfordshire** was held which will hopefully annoy Jeremy Clarkson.

The one rural seat that stands out nationally as a Labour hold, which brings much credit to its sitting councillor Kate Ewart, was the Rame Peninsula in **Cornwall** with 47% of the vote, 500 ahead of second-placed Reform. Apologies to any others, but I have been unable to identify them.

The outside left

As always, I also report on the achievements or otherwise of those standing to the left of Labour. This time there were some real successes for independent socialists. Former MP Ruth George, a sitting county councillor banned by Starmer's Labour from re-standing under the party name, topped the poll in her Whaley Bridge seat in **Derbyshire**

with 57% of the vote – humiliating Labour on 4%. Reform took 42 seats off the Conservatives and Labour but not this one.

In **Lancashire**, veteran Preston socialist candidate Michael Lavalette won easily, 900 votes ahead of Labour. At least three others that for shorthand can be described as 'Gaza Independents' gained seats but include one who believes Muslim men and women should be segregated more so you can judge individually how progressive they are. The main point is Gaza is still an electoral issue that is damaging Labour.

In **Nottinghamshire**, the Broxtowe Alliance, formed from a mass defection of Labour Councillors and members earlier this year, won a seat and came close in two more. Elsewhere there were creditable results for our own Barry Lewis in **Kent**, ex-Labour District Councillor Russell Whiting in **Nottinghamshire** and others in **Cherwell**, **Leicestershire**, **Lincolnshire** and **Northumberland**, some of whom finished ahead of the Labour candidates.

However, as usual, those standing under the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition (and the rather bizarre Independent Trade Union and Socialist Coalition) banner did very poorly bar a candidate with over 16% of the vote in a Doncaster seat, and 11% in Nuneaton. No other left party really registered with the electorate. With seats being won on as low a percentage as 18.9, it should have been possible for the left to do better. As always, the TUSC website has full details.

Another hunt bites the dust

Glasgow Hunt Saboteurs report that another Scottish fox hunt has folded. The Dumfriesshire & Stewartry Hunt is the latest to give up following the introduction of the Hunting with Dogs (Scotland) Act 2023, a more powerful deterrent than the equivalent in England and Wales. The sabs state, "this means that almost half of Scotland's registered fox hunts have now gone! The news comes after a disastrous end to the season for the hunt, following the arrest of a hunt member for assaulting a hunt saboteur — in what was possibly their last ever meet."

The Labour Government are committed to bringing in a ban on 'trail hunting' south of the border.

Brexit safety bonus

It has long been thought that Brexit could bring benefits to British farming and animal welfare, if managed correctly.

One result is that the government have been able to ban passengers bringing meat and dairy into the Great Britain from European Union countries, which before Brexit is likely to have been impossible. This has followed outbreaks of foot and mouth disease in Germany, Hungary and Slovakia. The disease has wreaked havoc with livestock farming in the UK in the past, costing, at today's prices, an estimated £15 billion according to the *i* newspaper.

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.

Another obstacle to

Whatever else it does, a Labour Government should aim to reduce poverty. However, the change to Personal Independence Payments (PIP) that Rachel Reeves is proposing will make things worse for thousands of people with disabilities. Paul Kissack, Chief Executive of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation said: "The Chancellor said today that she would not do anything to put household finances in danger, yet the government's own assessment shows that their cuts to health-related benefits risk pushing 250,000 people into poverty"

The Disability Rights UK website reported that "Benefits and Work [an independent campaigning group] has highlighted a freedom of information (FOI) request showing that the Government's proposed new Personal Independence Payment (PIP) '4-point rule' will lead to almost nine out of 10 current 'standard' PIP daily living awards failing when they come up for renewal. The change is planned to be introduced in November 2026, but not for existing awards. Reviews after November 2026 will be under the new system. Some of the most upset / disappointed / angry clients I have met are people who have had a review and their PIP has been removed under the current system. Thousands more will be affected under the Government's proposals.

As Benefits and Work say, the Government 'are hiding the virtual abolition of the standard rate behind a seemingly small change to the scoring system'. The Pathways to Work Green Paper proposes to remove the PIP daily living component from claimants who do not score four points or higher for at least daily living one activity, when their PIP award is reviewed from November 2026. The DWP has now revealed the proportion of current claimants who would lose out under

A benefits adviser reports that the government's proposed change to PIP will make life harder for thousands of people with disabilities.

this rule: out of 1,283,000 'standard' daily living awards, 87% (1,116,000) get fewer than four points in at least one of all activities; out of 1,608,000 'enhanced' daily living awards, 13% (209,000) get fewer than four points in at least one of all activities. The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) has suggested that the number of claimants who will lose their awards will be more like 800,000, not the 1,325,250 suggested. They argue that this is because people will fight harder to be awarded a four-point descriptor, including by challenging decisions. However, Benefits and Work says: 'We think that the OBR are being much too optimistic in arguing that over half a million claimants will be able to increase their scores, because: there are very limited opportunities to get four-point descriptors for claimants, especially with some conditions; the standard of assessments is very poor in many cases and there is a lack of understanding of many conditions; the mandatory revisions and appeals process is very drawn out and demanding.



There is very little support available for claimants whose health conditions may limit their ability to pursue an appeal.' It concludes: 'Whatever the final number might be, there will be vastly fewer 'standard' rate daily living



awards by the time all current awards have been reviewed. And very few new claims from November 2026 will lead to an award of the 'standard' rate daily living component.' In a separate FOI request, Benefits and Work has obtained details of the conditions which have the highest number of awards with no four-point or higher descriptors. Nearly eight out of ten awards where back pain is the primary disabling condition are at risk under the proposed four-point or higher rule. This is closely followed by arthritis, where more than threequarters of awards are threatened. The conditions least likely to lose out are learning disabilities, where only 3% are at risk and autistic spectrum disorders at 6%. However, only 52% of those with anxiety and depression and 74% with 'other' psychiatric disorders scored four points or more."

The government want more people who have been long-term unemployed to return to work. This change will make it more difficult for people to work. PIP was introduced in 2013. People in England and Wales can apply if they are between the ages of 16 and the individual's state pension age. Rather than be based on particular medical conditions, it is based on what daily activities people need support to do, or cannot do at all. The categories are: Preparing food; Eating

overcome

and drinking; Managing treatments; Washing and bathing; Using the toilet and managing incontinence; Dressing and undressing; Talking, listening and understanding; Reading; Mixing with other people and Making decisions about money. Separately assessed, there is a payment for mobility, based on Going out and Moving around.

From April 2025, the rates are: Daily Living 'standard': £73.90; 'enhanced' £110.40; Mobility 'standard': £29.20; 'enhanced': £77.05. To qualify, the applicant needs to score at least eight points. This can be two points each from four of the activities listed above for daily living. To add in the extra hurdle of scoring at least four points in one category will immediately disqualify many people. If someone scores 12 points or more, they receive the 'enhanced' rate. With only two categories in the mobility section, even achieving eight points can be difficult. In my experience there are two other immediate problems with the current system: it does not accept that applicants' conditions can vary from day-to-day and it does not work well for mental health conditions.

PIP has been plagued by problems since it started. One is that the assessments are subjective and inconsistent. This has meant many applicants having to go through the 'Mandatory Reconsideration' appeal process. In 2023-24, 49% of these appeals were accepted by the DWP, meaning that the original assessment was wrong. Some applicants drop out of the system, but of those who go to a Social Security Appeal Tribunal, in 2023-24, 32,222 out of 46,803 appeals were successful. That means that overall, over 80% of appeals were successful.

These figures do not show the stress that applicants undergo, both waiting for the appeal and then going to a

hearing, which I always recommend. Also, their PIP funding is stopped or reduced, depending on the decision, until the decision is reversed. In 2023, there was a backlog of 720,000 cases of people waiting for their new claim or review to be processed. Then there is the cost of all this. A report by the Administrative Justice Council found that the cost to the DWP of dealing with cases that were overturned on appeal in 2019-20 was £23 to £29 million. Add onto that the costs of the Social Security Appeal hearings – all the work to set the cases up, then paying for a judge and two expert panel members to hear the cases. There is also the cost of GPs and other health professionals providing evidence; along with some applicants becoming homeless because of their changed benefits when their PIP stops. None of these costs will have gone down. Some GPs are charging for writing letters on behalf of applicants.

The Coalition Government (remember them?) said they were making changes because "the current system is too complex". A report by Turn2us, a national charity helping people financially, in 2024 said: "Despite efforts to improve the system, the administration and impact of the process continues to face significant criticism. Our partners highlighted the complexity of the application process, inaccurate assessments, frequent reassessments for lifelong conditions, and the stress of appealing decisions. Many partners felt that the system does not fully understand or accommodate the full range of disabilities, particularly mental health conditions."

There clearly has to be a system for assessing need for benefits for people with disabilities. There are many long-



photo: iStock, monkeybusinessimages

standing issues with PIP and Turn2us believe that it can be improved if the government: "Include disabled people in the design of PIP. Disabled people's insights are essential to making sure that this support meets their needs; recognises that disability is complex. The social security system should support those who need it with compassion and trust, addressing challenges rather than punishing people.

"This means improving assessments and focusing on the social model of disability, recognising the barrier disabled people face, as well as retaining cash payments to allow disabled people to live with dignity; introduce protected minimum amount of social security through an Essentials Guarantee, so that the basic rate of social security always covers life's essentials, and ensure support is never pulled below that level and that PIP is not used to subsidise household budgets. PIP cash payments should help disabled people with the extra cost of disability as it was designed to do."

I would also include consultation and monitoring by organisations run by people with disabilities, and to move into the public sector all assessment work. Private companies should not be making profits out of assessing disability.

This article does not aim to explain how to claim PIP. For information visit www.gov.uk and the Disability Rights UK website, <https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/> which has an excellent guide.

End outsourcing on railways

Rail union RMT recently launched its campaign to end outsourcing on the railways, branding the practice as a vehicle for systemic racism, low pay, and poor service standards across the network. A new RMT report, *How Outsourcing Embeds Systemic Racism on the Railway*, exposes how thousands of rail workers—predominantly from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities—are trapped in outsourced roles with no pensions, no training, and no pathway to progression.

Key findings reveal that 58% of outsourced cleaners and caterers are from Black or Minority Ethnic (BME) background, despite making up only 25% of directly employed train operator staff. In London and the South East, the racial divide is even sharper: up to 80% of outsourced cleaners are BME, compared with 40% of train and station staff.

82% of outsourced workers want to build a career in Great British Railways, yet 77% have never had a discussion about promotion, and 68% have had no meaningful training in the last three years. 83% are regularly performing unpaid duties like

The RMT outline the key findings in their new report on discrimination and outsourcing.



customer service and fault reporting, tasks expected of directly employed staff.

83% of outsourced rail workers believe that passengers would benefit more if their service was taken in-house and run directly by Great British Railways. The report also shows how private firms use outsourcing to create a two-tier workforce—stripping staff of sick pay, pension rights, and job security, all while extracting shareholder profit.

RMT is calling on the Labour government to fulfil its manifesto commitment to undertake the biggest wave of insourcing and end this exploita-

tive practice once and for all. RMT General Secretary Eddie Dempsey said: "Outsourcing is one of the most exploitative practices, enshrining dreadful employment conditions and low pay for workers.

"Black and ethnic minority workers bear the major brunt of this super exploitation and are effectively trapped in second-class employment, unable to progress in a train company or Network Rail. Outsourcing is inefficient and wastes public money while company bosses and shareholders make obscene amounts of money, much of it leaving the country all together.

"RMT will fight tooth and nail to see these workers brought in-house, so they can enjoy the benefits our other members have being directly employed. Labour has promised the biggest wave of insourcing for a generation. We intend to hold them to their promises and build on what they have started with GBR."

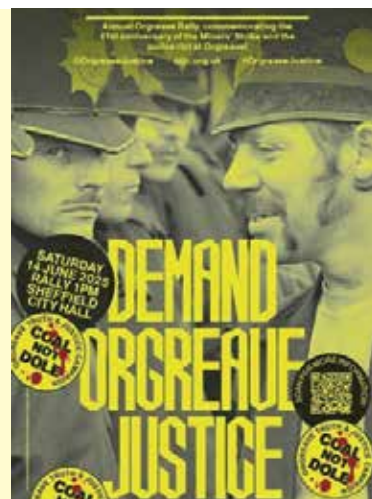
ORGREAVE ANNIVERSARY MARCH AND RALLY

Saturday 14th of June 2025

Assemble 1pm City Hall, Barkers Pool, Sheffield, S1 2JA

Support the Annual Orgreave Rally organised by the Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign, commemorating the 41st anniversary of the police riot at Orgreave and celebrating the great Miners' Strike of 1984/5. Please bring your banners, placards, drums, whistles, family, comrades and friends. Led by the Unite Brass Band, come and march with us through Sheffield and support our call for an inquiry for truth and justice for striking miners brutalised by the state at Orgreave on 18 June 1984.

Speakers: Watty Watson - Arrested and youngest sacked Scottish Miner *Lois Austin* - Campaign Opposing Police Surveillance Michael Mansfield KC - Lawyer for Orgreave miners *Maria Vasquez-Aguilar* - Chile Solidarity Network Chris Skidmore - Yorkshire Area NUM Chair and Orgreave Veteran *Kate Flannery* - Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign Dave Smith - Blacklist Support Group.



Defend public services

Reform's success in the 1 May 2025 council elections, including in the East Midlands, is an alarm call to our union and we must respond quickly. This statement says what we, campaigners in UNISON, think our union should do now. We are standing on the Time For Real Change (TFRC) slate in the National Executive Council elections but this is a plan that we hope the whole union will discuss and rally around.

Many voters who were fed-up with the Tories and who were either core Labour voters or simply prepared to give Labour a chance in the 2024 general election have quickly been disappointed. So far the Labour Government has delivered no change and no discernible improvements in people's lives, including importantly in public services; worse, it has made demoralising attacks on working-class people, cutting disability benefits and the Winter Fuel Payment.

Meanwhile the Government's goal of growing the economy is receding into the distance. With Labour offering no real political alternative, it is small wonder that many voters, including working-class voters and trade union members, have been won to Reform's glib "solutions": scapegoating migrants and "wokery", and blaming Westminster elites, while letting big business off the hook.

Reform are threatening to copy Elon Musk's US Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) inside the councils they now run, cutting expenditure they consider unnecessary. Speaking on 2 May, Reform leader Nigel Farage warned: "I would advise anybody who's working for Durham County Council on climate change initiatives or Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, or thinks they can go on working from home...you all better really be seeking alternative

East Midlands Time for Real Change candidates for UNISON's NEC have released this statement about the threat posed by Reform.

careers very, very quickly." This will be Reform's attitude in all of the 10 councils they now control.

UNISON General Secretary Christina

McAnea responded correctly that public services are already cut to the bone and that Reform councillors will struggle to find any savings. But this begs the question: what is UNISON, the union representing more council workers than any other, doing to campaign for public services to be rebuilt?

McAnea was correct also to tell workers not already in unions to join one fast to get protection against abuse. But that is not enough! We can't fight Reform solely through individual workers asserting their individual rights. McAnea's response is very passive – UNISON must say and do much more.

We propose that the whole union, and particularly the regions where Reform is now strong, discuss a plan to respond to the challenge that Reform now poses directly through its control of councils, but also indirectly through shifting the whole political narrative to the right. UNISON must support any branch or member threatened by Reform actions in local councils. We must refute the answers Reform gives for the malaise in public services, and undercut their growing popularity by campaigning for our own positive alternative.

We should resist Reform's racism; make the case for the benefits of migration to our public services and wider society, stand up for EDI princi-



**TimeFor
RealChange**

ples and defend our trans colleagues and service users in the face of the recent Supreme Court ruling.

We should use the Labour Link to pressure the Labour Government to rebuild public services, raising the necessary funds by taxing the rich; and to repeal all the anti-union laws that stop our members defending themselves. We should protest to demand more money for public services and build strikes to resist job cuts in the public services.

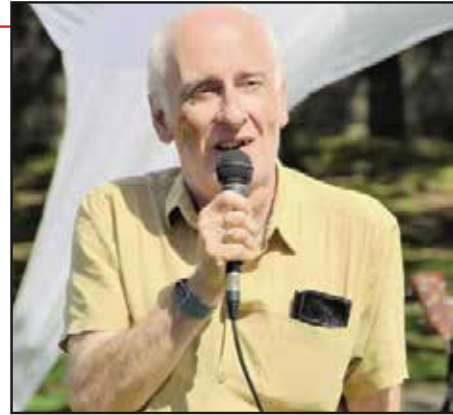
Let's be positive and go onto the front foot! UNISON has 1.3m members and counting. We have enormous potential to defend our members and also to mobilise them in a positive campaign for the public services that we all need, as workers and as citizens. UNISON must meet the UK's Trump wannabes head-on with clear statements on what we think and what we will do. We must resist Reform and campaign for our positive alternative: Tax the rich! Rebuild public services!

Signed - East Midlands TFRC UNISON NEC candidates:

Tom Barker (Leicester City UNISON); Natasha Bednall (Leicester City UNISON); Audrey Dinnall (East Midlands Probation branch); Sara Evans (Nottinghamshire County UNISON); Vicki Morris (University of Nottingham UNISON); Anjona Roy (North Northamptonshire LG UNISON)

Philosophers cornered

Martyn Shrewsbury



Tony Benn once observed that when people are afraid they turn to the right and that when people reflect upon their experience of life they move to the left. For many comrades Freud and psychoanalysis is an unknown country that bears little relationship or role in the establishment of a Socialist society.

A few weeks ago someone argued on a social media post that Freudian ideas could not be scientifically proven in anyway and that it was merely 'bollocks'. Later that week, at a course on Marxist theory I was told that Marxist Leninism was a science. The problem that many of us face on the left is how can we prove, apply or indeed show that critical theory is valid and scientific?

We cannot prove evolution or climate change in the laboratory yet we do not call these theories 'bollocks'. Psychoanalysis fits so easily into Marx's theory of the 'superstructure' where unconsciously we are conditioned to accept ideas, ways of thinking, patterns and more as acceptable in certain historical periods. When Marx observes that 'all that was solid melts into air' he is talking effectively about ways of thinking breaking down and giving way to new tools of theoretical analysis.

In the 1930s the Frankfurt school argued that capitalism replicates itself both consciously and unconsciously when they fused both Marxism and psychoanalysis. Think of the use of terms like 'maxing out the country's credit card' and Thatcher's equation

of the country's political economy with the family budget. With subtlety, a text is created linking our own fears of debt to the image of the family and then the country at large.

The link is often used by the political right, linking demands for wage increases to selfishness which in turns implies that we are letting down the 'family' that the nation is supposed to be. It activates individual guilt, memories of poverty and an appeal to be all in it together. It works both consciously and unconsciously.

Freud was of the opinion that society only worked because of control and the need for repression. Freud's nephew Bernays was instrumental in creating the ideas of consumerism, desire for goods and social control in the USA as a means to control the working class and prevent revolution. The documentary *Century of Self* is essential to appreciate the use of control in thwarting socialism. Bernays lived to be over 100 years of age and was feted and celebrated by the corporate lobby of his time.

As socialists we have a positive view of the human condition. Create a just society through equality, respect and access to knowledge and the fear fades. The political right from Farage, Trump and Le Pen have a low opinion of human nature. They play on the fears of the other, the unknown and the lack of resources. It's illustrated perfectly in the story of the refugee, the banker and the 'hard working person' sitting around the table with a plate of twenty biscuits upon it. The

banker takes 19 of the biscuits and then shouts out "that migrant is after your biscuit!"

Freud's ideas give us a rich insight into the unconscious beliefs about capitalism and its methods. The American myth that everyone can become a millionaire has its roots here, yet it is merely 'bollocks' to quote the critic of Freudian ideas that I mentioned earlier. Otto Gross and Wilhelm Reich went further. Reich traced fascism to the unconscious and its physical appearance in the character armour of the authoritarian personality. His book *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* tells us much about Farage and Reform. The grey, soulless mantras of Starmer's cabinet and its 'hard decisions' cannot stand against these crypto Fascist and hard right ideas.

Benn's solution of experience rather than fear is the only antidote. Corbyn gave hope in 2017 with his positive policies of social justice. Freud's ideas are as valid now as they were nearly 100 years ago. We must recognise the fear and do socialism anyway. Good old Rosa Luxembourg realised it was socialism or barbarism and the solution lays in the unconscious and the analysis of how capitalism works to control us all, Matrix-like. We must choose the Red pill.

If you are interested I will be running an online course on critical theory regularly on Thursdays between 11 and 1 from early April. Ring me on 07592 330467 or email martyn-jshrewsbury@gmail.com.

Peru at a turning point

Peru is a country of contrasts. Its ancient civilizations left behind breathtaking monuments like Machu Picchu and sophisticated systems of agriculture and astronomy. Yet today, many Peruvians still face inequality, political instability, and economic uncertainty. Nestled along the Pacific coast of South America, Peru has a population of over 34 million people and a diverse geography that includes mountains, jungles, deserts, and coastlines. Its cultural richness is matched by a long and complex history, from the rise of the Inca Empire to Spanish colonization in the 16th century, and eventually to independence in 1821.

But independence did not guarantee fairness or stability. Like many countries in Latin America, Peru has struggled with uneven development, social division, and corruption throughout its modern history. Today, it stands at a critical crossroads. Peru's political system has been marred by corruption and instability for decades. In the past eight years alone, the country has cycled through six different presidents. Many of them left office facing legal charges or political scandal. For ordinary Peruvians, this constant turnover has created widespread distrust in political institutions.

This political volatility affects everything: laws change quickly, long-term projects stall, and national priorities shift with each new administration. As a result, social services, public infrastructure, and economic policies often lack continuity and effectiveness. Moreover, many citizens feel that government officials are out of touch with the real needs of the population—especially in rural areas, where poverty remains high and access to public services is limited.

While Peru has made economic progress in recent decades, it hasn't reached everyone equally. The capital

Our Peruvian correspondent Elena Bill says that Peru is a nation balancing history, struggle and change.

city, Lima, has grown rapidly and developed into a modern urban center. But vast regions of the Andes and Amazon remain underdeveloped, with limited roads, hospitals, and schools. According to the National Institute of Statistics and Informatics (INEI), nearly 30% of Peruvians live in poverty, and rates are much higher in rural areas. Many people still work in the informal economy, meaning they have no job security, benefits, or legal protections.

The COVID-19 pandemic only deepened these challenges. Peru had one of the highest death rates in the world during the crisis and saw a sharp increase in poverty and unemployment. For many families, years of progress were wiped out almost overnight. One of Peru's most urgent needs is a stronger public education system. While primary school enrollment is high, the quality of education varies greatly by region. Rural schools often lack qualified teachers, textbooks, and even basic infrastructure like electricity or running water. High dropout rates are common in remote communities.

Healthcare, too, is uneven and often inaccessible. Urban hospitals are frequently overcrowded, and rural clinics are under-equipped. In many cases, people must travel hours or even days to receive medical attention. The pandemic exposed and worsened these weaknesses, highlighting the need for deep reform. To create lasting change, reforms must focus on strengthening institutions and reducing inequality.

1. Build Public Trust: Restoring faith in the government is essential. This starts with enforcing anti-corruption laws, promoting transparency, and ensuring

that leaders are accountable to the people. Trust cannot be rebuilt overnight, but consistent, honest leadership is a step in the right direction.

2. Invest in Rural Areas: Bridging the gap between urban and rural Peru means improving roads, electricity, internet access, and public services in underserved regions. These investments would open opportunities for education, health, and economic participation for millions of Peruvians.

3. Support Quality Education: Long-term national success depends on educating the next generation. Peru needs well-trained teachers, culturally relevant curricula (especially in Indigenous areas), and strong public schools. Education reforms should focus on critical thinking, civic engagement, and skills for a changing world.

4. Strengthen the Healthcare System: A more equitable and resilient health system is essential. That means better funding, expanded access in remote regions, and stronger emergency preparedness. It also includes ensuring that healthcare workers are fairly paid.

5. Promote Economic Inclusion: Formalizing the informal economy would provide protections for millions of workers and small businesses. This could include access to credit, and labor protections for domestic workers, farmers, and artisans who form the backbone of the Peruvian economy.

Peru is a nation with enormous potential. Its people are resilient, resourceful, and proud of their cultural heritage. But without major reforms, the country risks falling into a cycle of stagnation and division.

Cuba's scientific breakthrough

Cuba Solidarity Campaign is delighted that the 2025 AGM will be followed by the UK premiere of a new documentary by Belly of the Beast. This year's AGM takes place on Saturday 14 June from 10am-1pm at the NEU headquarters at Mabledon Place, London. Cuban Ambassador Ismara Vargas Walter and special guests will address the meeting, which is open to all to attend.

With the election of Donald Trump and appointment of pro-blockade hardliner Marco Rubio, the AGM provides members and affiliates with an opportunity to discuss how to confront the new challenges and threats to Cuban sovereignty. As well as a review of the last twelve months' work and an update on the Cuba Vive appeal, we will vote on motions on renewed attacks on Cuba's medical brigades and marking the centenary of Fidel Castro's birth in 2026, to agree future campaign priorities. A new executive committee will also be elected.

The AGM is open to all, but only CSC members and affiliates may propose amendments or motions, vote, and elect the 34 members of the National Executive Committee. Full details on how to propose motions or nominate candidates for the committee have been sent to all members with their *CubaSí* magazine in April. If you are a member of CSC and have not received your AGM papers, or would like to join the Campaign and take part in the

The Cuba Solidarity Campaign announces their 2025 AGM and a groundbreaking new film they will be showing.

AGM, please contact the office on 020 7490 5715 or email office@cuba-solidarity.org.uk.

Following the AGM there will be a premiere of the latest film from Belly of the Beast, the award winning media collective of journalists from US and Cuba, which looks at Cuba's scientific breakthrough in treating Alzheimer's Disease and the drugs currently going through clinical trials

The documentary will be followed by a discussion and Q&A with the director and producer Daniel Montero. Daniel is a journalist, producer and director with Belly of the Beast, where he was co-winner of a One World Media Award and a Telly Award for his work on the acclaimed documentary series

The War on Cuba. He graduated from the University of Havana's Communication School in 2020 with a degree in Journalism.

Dr Lauren Collin's has an article in our latest magazine on Cuba's Alzheimer's treatment and the film which looks at the difficulties Cuba has bringing this potentially life-changing drug to the world.

Saturday 14 June: 10am-1pm, Annual General Meeting; 2.30-4pm, Film premiere: *Teresita's Dream: Cuba's Battle against Alzheimer's*. Public events, all welcome.

If you would like to join the Campaign and take part in the AGM, please contact the office on 020 7490 5715 or email office@cuba-solidarity.org.uk.

The 18th RMT Garden Party for Cuba!



Featuring the legendary salsa beats of Omar Puente and Raices Cubanas (6 piece salsa band)

with
■ Eddie Dempsey, RMT General Secretary
■ Ismara Mercedes Vargas Walter, Cuban ambassador to UK
■ Bell Ribeiro-Addy MP
■ John McDonnell MP
plus special guest speakers tba



Wednesday 11 June, 6.30-10.30pm

Maritime House, Clapham Old Town, London, SW4 0JW

TICKETS £20

Includes food and two free drinks per person. Raising funds to help end the US blockade of Cuba and for the Cuba Vive medical aid appeal. [Buy tickets bit.ly/RMTCuba25](https://bit.ly/RMTCuba25)

BACK FOR GOOD

Keith Veness



We're just recovering from the mega disaster down here in the form of the Kent County Council elections. Most of the southern coastal counties avoided elections this year with the major changeover to unitary authorities looming. West Sussex, East Sussex, Brighton & Hove, Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk all got "time off for good behaviour" but the Tory leadership in Kent was so shambolic that the Government gave up and told the County Council elections to go ahead.

In the current dictatorship that passes for Labour Party processes, none of our four branches in Thanet were allowed to hold selection meetings, and members were simply presented with candidates nominated and imposed by the Regional Office. No wonder they ended up with hardly any canvassers or party workers. The general uselessness of the Tories ensured they got wiped out as well. In the last issue of *Briefing*, I said it was looking likely we wouldn't win any seats in Thanet. This is one of those times that you hate to say I told you so, but I told you so!

Of course, some of us have had a few chuckles about the calibre of some of the Reform zombies elected to various local authorities. Up in County

Durham two newly elected councillors were disconcerted to discover they couldn't be councillors if they worked for the same council! The Chief Executive / Returning Officer immediately voided their election and told them they may be facing disciplinary action.

In Newark, a newly elected Reform councillor resigned within a week of the election, citing 'personal issues'. These only became apparent after the election, presumably. However, Warwickshire went one better when one Reform candidate was actually in the Armed Services and breached what is now the Kings Regulations and could be facing a Courts Martial.

Down here we have a local politician called Trevor Shonk. He got elected firstly as a Conservative but changed parties when it looked like UKIP was on the up and got elected as a county councillor for Ramsgate. As UKIP fell apart, he rejoined the Tories.

The local paper noted his failure to hold surgeries or take up local issues and carried the notable headline advice to motorists to "honk if you see the Shonk". As the tectonic plates of politics moved again, he joined the local Thanet Independents Party and got elected to Ramsgate Town

Council, the lowest level of local government. However, with the rise of Reform, our Trevor jumped ship again and got re-elected for Ramsgate on the Kent County Council.

He thus represented five different parties for the same electoral area. Is this a record? He has had blue, purple, white, pale green and turquoise rosettes in his bottom drawer!

I wrote before about the issues surrounding unitary authorities and we await with bated breath what Whitehall will come up with for Kent. It's looking likely that the existing Medway Unitary Authority that covers Chatham, Gillingham and Rochester will be expanded a bit and three other quite large councils will be created covering West, North and East Kent. Presumably there will be fresh elections for these but it's not clear on what boundaries.

How long Starmer survives as Leader is a moot point, but I wouldn't mind betting that he will be sped on his way by the time Kent holds its next local government votes. Lastly, how low will Party membership fall by that time? Down here we have three quarters of our members, but I am pretty certain other *Briefing* readers can top that in their local constituencies!

Stop the deportations

A group of 238 Venezuelans deported by the US to a prison in El Salvador have been denied access to legal representation. Lawyers hired by the Nicolás Maduro government told reporters that they have not been allowed to communicate with the Venezuelan detainees in the Central American country's notorious CECOT prison. "We have requested that the Human Rights Office follow up on these cases," lead attorney Jaime Ortega said in an interview on Thursday. "We asked the penal center authority for a communication channel with our clients. We have received no reply." Ortega's law firm was tasked with defending 30 migrants that the Donald Trump administration forcibly sent to El Salvador in mid-March, using the 1798 Alien Enemies Act. The legal team filed a habeas corpus appeal before the Salvadoran Supreme Court and argued that it would extend to all 238 Venezuelans. The appeal remains unanswered.

Ortega stressed that the lawyers have not been able to verify their clients' incarceration conditions, but stressed that they "had not committed any crime" on Salvadoran soil and thus should not be treated under a maximum security regime. "Beyond the habeas corpus, we are also weighing a challenge to the US-El Salvador treaty on constitutional grounds," Ortega said. He added that another option was requesting asylum from a third country embassy in order to secure the Venezuelans' return home. The Trump administration struck a deal with the Nayib Bukele government to transfer deported migrants to El Salvador for a reported fee of US \$20,000 per detainee per year. In parallel to the legal efforts in El Salvador, lawyers representing Edicson Quintero, a Venezuelan among the 238 sent to CECOT, introduced a habeas corpus petition before a US

Ricardo Vaz, *Venezuelanalysis*, reports on the legal challenges to Trump's deportations.

federal court. The lawsuit demands Quintero's release from the maximum security prison on the grounds of violating his right to due process.

The attorneys argued that the Venezuelan migrant's incarceration "amounts to an effective life sentence" and that Quintero had committed no crime in the US. He had spent one year in detention after crossing the border and turning himself in to immigration authorities. The US government alleged he belonged to the Tren de Aragua gang before sending him to CECOT. Investigations have revealed that the vast majority of the Venezuelan detainees in El Salvador had no criminal record in the US, while gang allegations relied on profiling indicators such as tattoos and social media posts. In its second term, the Trump administration has prioritized cracking down on migration, particularly Venezuelan. In March, it invoked the Alien Enemies Act over an alleged "invasion" by Tren de Aragua to fast-track deportations.

Following a meeting with Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele at the White House on April 14, Trump told reporters that his administration would continue with mass deportations and mentioned the possibility of sending US citizens deemed "homegrown criminals" to El Salvador. Additionally, Trump stated that the US would assist Bukele in opening more detention centers. However, the White House's efforts have also faced legal setbacks.

Federal Judge James Boasberg initially put a temporary block on the use of the 18th-century law, but the Trump administration moved forward with the

flights to El Salvador. Recently, Boasberg ruled that there is "probable cause" to hold the executive branch in criminal contempt of the court orders. The judge will now seek sworn testimonies from officials, which may eventually lead to prosecutions. Boasberg's initial ruling was upheld by an appeals court before being overturned by the US Supreme Court. The maximum judicial authority backed the administration's use of the Alien Enemies Act but demanded that migrants be allowed to plead their cases in court.

In early May, the Supreme Court voted 7-2 to temporarily block new deportations under the 18th-century wartime legislation following an emergency appeal as a group of 50 Venezuelans reportedly faced imminent expulsion. The order followed similar prohibitions from lower courts in Nevada, Colorado, New York and Texas. Alongside mass deportations, the Trump administration has also moved to shut down programs allowing migrants to stay in the US legally.

Massachusetts District Judge Indira Talwani has issued a temporary stay ruling halting the termination of the so-called "parole" initiative granting legal status and work permits to migrants from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela (CHNV). Talwani concluded that the Department of Homeland Security could not withdraw parole and employment status without a "case-by-case review." The White House has vowed to appeal the stay order. The administration is likewise challenging a block to its attempt to end Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for some 600,000 Venezuelan migrants

Give peace a chance

Nuclear weapons have been used twice, on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Modern nuclear weapons generally have much greater explosive power than those first two bombs, and would greatly increase the scale of the devastation. If a nuclear bomb was detonated, the heart of the nuclear explosion would reach a temperature of several million degrees centigrade. The resulting heat flash would literally vaporise all human tissue over a wide area. At Hiroshima, within a radius of half a mile, the only remains of most of the people caught in the open were their shadows burnt into stone.

People inside buildings would be killed by the blast and heat effects as buildings collapse and all inflammable material bursts into flame. The immediate death rate would be over 90%. Individual fires will combine to produce a fire storm as all the oxygen is consumed. This would result in lethal, hurricane-force winds, and the fire would be perpetuated as the fresh oxygen is burnt. People in underground shelters who survive the initial heat flash would die as all the oxygen is sucked out of the atmosphere.

Outside the area of total destruction there would be a gradually increasing percentage of immediate survivors. Most of these would suffer fatal burns, would be blinded, would be bleeding from glass splinters, and would have suffered massive internal injuries. Many would be trapped in collapsed and burning buildings. The death rate would be higher than in a normal disaster since most emergency services would be incapable of responding due to their equipment being destroyed and staff killed.

The sheer scale of the casualties would overwhelm any country's medical resources. There is currently no international plan in place to deliver

CND says that international tensions risk nuclear war, endangering the entire planet.

humanitarian assistance to survivors in the case of a nuclear attack. Most casualties would receive at best minimal, palliative treatment. The best they could hope for would be to die in as little pain as possible.

Survivors would be affected within a matter of days by radioactive fall-out. The extent of the fall-out would vary according to whether the nuclear bomb detonates in the air (as at Hiroshima) or upon impact on the ground. While the former would entail more blast impact, the latter would throw up much larger quantities of radioactive debris into the atmosphere. The area covered by the fall-out would be determined by wind speed and direction.

The heavier particles of radioactive material would fall in the immediate or close vicinity. Finer particles would be blown over longer distances before they descend. In the aftermath of the Chernobyl nuclear power explosion and fire in Ukraine in 1986, radioactive rain fell over the next few days in a wide arc across Northern Europe – from Scandinavia to Scotland, Cumbria and Wales, a distance of over 1,700 miles from Chernobyl.

The effects of exposure to high levels of radioactive fall-out include hair loss, bleeding from the mouth and gums, internal bleeding and haemorrhagic diarrhoea, gangrenous ulcers, vomiting, fever, delirium and terminal coma. There is no effective treatment, and death follows in a matter of days. At lower levels of exposure, while there is an increased chance of at least short-term survival, the death rate remains high. Pregnant women would be likely to miscarry or give birth to babies with

a range of disabilities. Healing from injuries would likely be slow, leaving distinctive scar tissue. Radiation-induced cancers would affect many, often over twenty years later. Accurate estimates of long-term fatalities at Hiroshima and Nagasaki are not possible given the large-scale destruction of records, population movements and a general censorship on nuclear effects by the US. But at least 75,000 died in the first hours after the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, with around 140,000 dead by December 1945. The death toll reached around 200,000 by the end of 1950. 70,000 people died in Nagasaki as a result of the bomb by the end of 1945, and around 140,000 by the end of 1950.

But the generally used estimates of casualties are 140,000 in Hiroshima and 75,000 in Nagasaki. This would be far, far higher if a nuclear bomb was used today due to the higher destructive power of today's bombs. Research by the International Red Cross shows the effect of a 'limited' nuclear war involving 100 Hiroshima-sized bombs (i.e. less than half a per cent of the world's stockpile).

The five million tonnes of soot produced by the ensuing fires would cause global temperature to fall by an average of 1.3C. The disrupted global climate would have an overwhelming impact on food production. It is estimated that a billion people around the world could face starvation as a result of nuclear war.

The possibility of nuclear war is currently the greatest for many decades, and the effects outlined above must be avoided at all costs.

Malcolm X and Smethwick

The other day I decided to visit the area where I grew up. Smethwick, strictly part of the Black Country, tho' bordering Birmingham. A sometime famous, sometime infamous town. I went back to the inter-war council estate where I was born, a short walk to the old council house, walked the length of the High Street. The street I grew up in was all white, my secondary mod was mostly white. There was just one Asian lad, Permit, in my final year.

The street is more mixed now, tho' predominantly white working class. My old school has gone, it became majority Asian by the time it was closed down. Smethwick High Street was trashed by a dual carriageway in the 70s, the shops are now mostly Sikh, excepting the bookies. Even the pubs are run by Sikhs. Both now Desi pubs. Brilliant! I was heading for Marshall Street. I wanted to see a recently painted mural of Malcolm X, commemorating his visit on 12th February 1965 just a few days before his assassination. The mural is reproduced here but looks better when seen in situ on the Ivy Bush pub.

So why did the by then very famous Malcom Little/ El-Halo Malik Shabazz/ Malcolm X come to Marshall Street? There was an issue that gained international coverage. A proposal to offer some of the housing to 'whites only.' I could show you a painful four minute vox video where locals explain their hostility to the incomers. So Malcolm came over to see for himself and to talk to people. Later, he went for a curry at a Bengali restaurant in Selly Oak. He is photographed with academics from Birmingham University. Later, Stuart Hall would found the influential Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies.

But let's talk about Smethwick. It's actually mentioned in the Doomsday Book but its story really began with the industrial revolution. The Boulton and

Steve Price draws lessons on fighting racism from the history of his home town, visited by Malcolm X in the sixties.

Watt's Soho Works of 1796 was the first purpose built steam engine factory in the world. Smethwick became a centre for heavy industry. My dad was a labourer at a company that supplied the car factories. My first job, aged 15, was for a perforated metal company, second job a company providing and servicing roller shutters. Yay - manufacturing industry in the UK! Who remembers that?

In the post war boom, waves of migrants were employed in these factories. From India, the Caribbean, and later Pakistan and beyond. But capitalism fell into one of its perpetual crises from the mid 70s on. Thatcher was elected in '79 and the rest, as they say, is history. British industry was decimated, Smethwick was decimated. Me dad's factory went in '81 with 1500 jobs gone. Smethwick always bounces back, but economically it's struggling still. There was a further wave of migration, Poles, Ukrainian, Romanian, but also Kashmiri, Bengali, Kurds, Afghani, Iranian etc.

It's now very diverse. From my lived experience, people get along fine. There's integration, but also pride in cultural differences. It's an economically poor area, but there are no 'community tensions' that I'm aware of. Most people speak English, tho' will naturally revert to Punjabi, Urdu or Polish etc from time to time. I'm not saying there isn't racism, because of course there always is, but it's changed over the years. I can still remember the racist jokes I was told, with no self consciousness whatsoever, growing up. It was normalised. That would not be okay in



2025. Smethwick's infamy comes from its political history. Not just Malcolm X's intervention. The MP from 1926-1931 was none other than Oswald Moseley. Elected as a Labour MP, but then forming an openly fascist party. Am I seeing a pattern here? The MP elected in 1964 came after one of the ugliest campaigns in recent history, Peter Griffith, had a campaign slogan of 'If you want a n***** for a neighbour vote Labour.' By way of dramatic contrast, the MP elected in 2024 was a Sikh, Gurinder Singh Josan.

I'm writing this in the context of a surging Reform party, and in reaction to Keir Starmer's frankly racist speech. In principle I'm an open borders guy, but I'm not naive. Migration is an issue *everywhere* right now. Even in warm friendly tolerant Portugal, where I spend much of my time. 'Too many Brazilians coming over here,' I hear some complain. Probably too many English like me. 'Learn our language' I've had said to me a few times.

Dark days these, but we have to stand up to the racists and bigots. Stand up for multiculturalism, for diversity in all its beauty and creativity. As I've said elsewhere, we do have a big problem. We need to find the right language to challenge the increasingly dominant, profoundly reactionary narrative.

Fight the good fight

A brilliant book that all socialists should try to read. It is 275 pages plus the index and appendices but is well worth the effort. In much of Europe the last few years has seen the dreary scenario of right wing 'centrists' and liberals being attacked and outclassed by fascist, neo-Nazi and far right groups. Italy, Germany, Austria, Netherlands and many other states have played out these sad events.

The one outstanding exception is France, where the media promoting Le Pen and telling voters they had to support the dreadful Macron were decisively rebuffed by the efforts of the veteran Melanchon and his leadership of the Nouvelle Union Populaire Ecologique et Sociale (NUPES), which polled the biggest votes and scored a success for the United Left by strong campaigning and tactical know-how.

Lots of the media over here describes Melanchon as a "French Tony Benn" but that is way off the mark. Benn radicalized and moved leftwards as he got older. Jean-Luc actually started his major political campaigning as a member of the Trotskyist Organisation Communist Internationaliste (OCI) - the grouping led by Pierre Lambert and the sister party of Gerry Healy's Workers Revolutionary Party, though they later had a very bitter falling out.

The French left had become a total mess. The once mighty Communist Party had gradually lost much of its appeal and

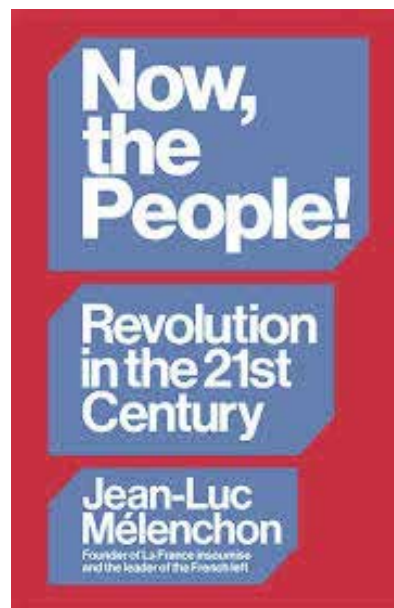
Keith Veness reviews *Now, the People* by Jean-Luc Melanchon, Verso Books, £22.

influence. From being the mass party of the working class it had shrunk to a Stalinist sect but maintained considerable influence still in the CGT, the largest trades union confederation. The Socialist Party under Francois Mitterrand had attempted to replace it but Hollande's spell as President had nearly finished it off. A Gallic version of Keir Starmer!

There were a great many ultra left and ostensible "Trotskyist" grouplets, including Lutte Ouvriere, the nearest equivalent of our SWP, but none of them ever got more than tiny percentages of votes in various elections. Melanchon had helped create a grouping called France Insoumise, that would approximate to something like the Peace and Justice organisation, Momentum, CLPD and the Campaign Group!

Under his leadership it had established a strong presence and helped to get together a united front of working class parties to stop Le Pen's push for office. The miserable liberal bleatings about supporting Macron as a "lesser evil" were swiftly answered by saying we should not support evil at all.

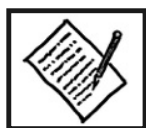
Getting the Insoumise, the CP, the SP and the other groups to agree joint candidates did not work everywhere and in a few places the old sectarianism reasserted itself but mostly it



was an amazing success. The left bloc using the title of NUPES was by far the biggest winners. Under the election rules Macron should have invited Melanchon to be Prime Minister - but he didn't and invited instead the utterly useless Barnier, the clown who performed the double act with Boris Johnson in the Brexit negotiations.

Melanchon's book uses this success to argue for a very different future for socialists and covers environmental issues, globalisation and much else. A short book review like this one cannot do justice to all the issues covered but do try to read it - we have much to learn from this approach!





Letters

Dear Labour Briefing,

After a successful mobilisation of supporters to help blockade RAF Lakenheath in April, the next stop on CND's nuclear bases tour of Britain takes place at the Devonport dockyard in Plymouth, on Saturday 7 June.

The base is the sole repair and refuelling facility for Britain's nuclear submarines and is owned and operated by arms company Babcock International.

Babcock has profited massively from the costly mid-life refitting of the current nuclear-armed fleet, with the cost of refitting HMS Vanguard jumping from an initial estimate of £200 million to over £500 million.

A second contract to refit HMS Victorious has been valued at £560 million, and that's before the work begins. Meanwhile,

at the nearby South Yard Freeport, Babcock and other arms companies based there are given generous tax incentives and other benefits.

Despite all this money flowing through Devonport into the arms industry, the area remains one of the most socially deprived areas of England.

Like the BAE Systems dockyard in Barrow, the nuclear weapons industry holds back other potential investments in Plymouth.

Green energy is a critical, rapidly expanding industry and the dockyard could be a major centre for wind and wave turbine construction.

Please join the demonstration on 7 June. Join CND in calling out the billions being wasted on nuclear weapons - money that could be redirected into creating highly skilled, well



Lakenheath demo. Photo: CND

paid jobs that don't threaten people and planet.

Saturday, 7 June, 12 noon: Assemble on Guildhall Square, Armada Way in Plymouth city centre.

1pm: An open top bus will take everyone on a tour of Plymouth and its nuclear links

2:15pm: Assembly at the gates of the Trident nuclear dockyard, Camel's Head, Devonport

More details can be found on our event page on our website, www.cnduk.org.

**Campaign for Nuclear
Disarmament,
London**

Pining for the fjords

In early May, the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO) which represents almost one million workers out of a population of five million, voted to push for immediate boycott, divestment and embargo on all companies doing business with the Israeli occupation of Palestine. They are now pushing for the divestment of Norway's Sovereign Wealth Fund from any company 'complicit in the Israeli occupation'. Starmer and Lammy, take note.

Good riddance

Speaking of our Viking cousins, Norway has also brought in a Wealth Tax, despite howls of protest from the country's fat cats that they would leave if it went through. In the event, the number of said cats who did actually pack up and go was absolutely tiny. We hear that the rest of the Norwegians were glad to see the back of them.

Somebody loves him

Our own dear Prime Minister may be a little upset by his dire opinion poll ratings and the terrible results from the May local elections, but he may be taking a crumb of comfort from the fact that he does still have two fans.

Yes, step forward Viktor Orban and Zoltán Kovács. The Hungarian PM's regime is racist and authoritarian - it's been described as 'Far-Right' but even that doesn't seem to quite cover it. Orban has expressed approval of Starmer's recent anti-migrant speech.

Not to be outdone, Orbán's State Secretary Kovács has made it quite clear: 'We see Sir Keir Starmer saying the exact sentences and words actually we've been talking about for the past ten years'.

That'll be more recently than Enoch Powell used them, then.

Nation's Shame

A new report for the NEU's No Child Left Behind campaign has found that more than a third of teachers see children coming to school hungry. 78% of them consider this a 'significant' worry. 49% feel that there are more children going hungry now than last year. Many teachers said that they bought food for pupils with their own money.

The NEU are campaigning for free school meals for all, and increased funding for breakfast clubs. Starmer is so far dragging his feet and talking about lack of resources and 'difficult decisions'.

The UK is the fifth richest country in the world.

Scraping the barrel

Many concerns have been expressed about Labour's 'due diligence' checks on candidates, some of whom seem to have got up to all sorts but been endorsed as long as they support Starmer.

However, Reform's candidate selection 'processes' must make Labour's look like a model of transparency. Several newly elected Reform councillors resigned within a few days of being elected,

supposedly for personal reasons (otherwise known as fear of being found out).

As Keith Veness reveals in his column, two were elected to the Council for which they work and are now facing disciplinary proceedings, and one was a serving member of the Armed Forces! Many of them have overtly racist and sexist social media posts, or denying climate change as a leftie conspiracy theory, 'joking' about domestic abuse and opposing the building of mosques because they 'divide communities'.

Most damning of all, 60 of them had previously been elected representatives of the *Tories*, now shoehorned into winnable seats ... oh, no, sorry, that's not a Reform thing, is it? Labour does that as well.

Stitch-Up Watch

The CLPs in east London's Newham were suspended in March 2021 due to 'membership irregularities'. Over four years later, with membership numbers having dropped through the floor, the CLPs are still suspended with no sign of any reprieve.

Meanwhile, Poplar and Limehouse CLP is NOT suspended but the officers have been refusing to call meetings for 19 months.

Send info about stitch ups in your CLP to originalbriefing-mag@gmail.com



BEHAVING BADLY

Christine Shawcroft

We all understand that image is important in politics, especially in the TV age. Hillary Clinton used to complain bitterly that commentary in the media on her hairstyle and clothes took precedence over her politics. I'm sure readers my age remember how Michael Foot was crucified in the press for wearing a not-terribly-smart jacket to the Cenotaph. They said it was a donkey jacket, which it wasn't, but the damage was done.

So I perfectly understand that members of the Labour Front Bench have to look smart and professional in order to get any kind of hearing at all. You would think, however, that with the money they're on they could afford to buy their own clothes. It's not like they need a different suit for every day of the week.

And the clothes all look the same anyway. Free Gear Gate has done immense damage to the Leadership which even wearing a donkey jacket (do they still make them?) might not have done. And trying to pass off the freebies as 'office support' really didn't help.

But what I want to know is, given they've been showered with free designer gear, why do they all look so dreadful? Staid. Dull. Boring. All those kind of words. Is it me? Have I fallen for the advertising, for the hype? Have I been conned into thinking that if something has a designer label, and costs a shedload of money,

that makes it better? Possibly I have. How embarrassing.

Maybe there's a special designer line of nondescript uniforms for politicians. Perhaps Dior brings out a Safe but Deadly Dull collection every autumn? Could it be that Chanel bring out their Horribly Boring Suits That No Self-respecting Woman Would Be Seen Dead In line each year? I don't remember seeing them in the September issue of *Vogue*, but that could be because I don't read *Vogue*.

Another mystery is why on earth designers would want to be associated with Labour politicians. When you're writing about them, the words 'young and trendy' don't exactly spring to mind. Recently, I saw a TV advert for a reality show about the Rees-Mogg family. Goodness knows why they would make such a show about people like that, or why anyone would watch it. Rest assured that I didn't.

But the really funny thing about the trailer was that it featured Mrs Rees-Mogg (Marina? I can't remember and I don't want to Google it, the algorithm would start sending me ads for Oka tat and Osborne and Little wallpaper) complaining that Johnnie Boden had sent her an email saying, 'Stop wearing my clothes, you horrible Tory Brexiteers'. So *he* doesn't want to be linked with them, which raised my opinion of him no end,

not that I had a low one to start with. I thought about getting some of the clothes, but I'm not really into that 'just off to milk the cows' country look. I'm more into the 'can't really be bothered' city girl look.

As well as providing smart but forgettable clothes, the designers are conforming to on-message colours dreamed up by a bunch of marketing consultants. I bet that wasn't free. So Rachel from Accounts is usually seen in Opportunity Purple, which is quite different from ordinary purple, hence the price tag. Lucky she doesn't have to pay. Oddly enough, there doesn't seem to be a Socialist Red on the chart.

Taking yet another leaf out of Margaret Thatcher's book, our leader has also had voice coaching lessons. But where hers did at least turn her rather shrill delivery into something a bit more mellifluous, the PM sounds even more dull than usual. Who would have thought that was possible?

In addition to the (yawn) speech and the (bigger yawn) suits, Ramsay MacStارmer has taken to wearing designer glasses most of the time. Which were free. He obviously thinks that these make him look sincere and intelligent, although mine (non designer) just make me look like I can't read small print. In fact, his make him look like a great big fraud. Should have gone to Specsavers.