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Trump's plan for Gaza?



Stop the
land grab!

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To the very last drop

Are there no limits to the bellicosity of Keir Starmer? He's beginning to give 'liberal interventionist' Tony Blair a run for his money. Perhaps he's afraid that, as he is shaping up to be a one-term Premier, he needs to squeeze all the death and destruction into one Parliament.

Many commentators have deplored his slavish adherence to US foreign policy. But now comes a twist - Trump's spokesman has announced a change. The President is not interested in the defence of Europe and if the sponging European governments don't shape up and fund their own defence, they deserve to get invaded by Russian troops with snow on their boots. We paraphrase, but that's about the gist of it.

Trump is now only interested in carrying out a trade war with China, and if that turns into an actual war, all well and good. To this end, he is brokering a peace deal in Ukraine with Putin, who has been demoted to Enemy Number Two. Never mind that a peace deal was agreed between Putin and Zelensky in April 2022, only to be scuppered by Biden and Boris Johnson, both very happy to fight to the last drop of Ukrainian blood.

After many thousands of preventable deaths, both of civilians and armed forces, the deal is likely to be quite similar to the original one,

except that Russia is now in a stronger position territorially and will no doubt seek to hang on to its gains. But is Starmer happy that peace may be breaking out? Or is he intent on carrying out US policy - but without the US?

Having pledged support to Ukraine for the next hundred years, as if such a commitment were achievable, and earmarked £3bn a year in military support (so much for the supposed 'black hole' in government finances), Starmer seems uneasy with the prospect of the end of the war. He's meeting other European leaders to get them to vastly increase their 'defence' spending, as he intends doing. He has committed troops to Ukraine - supposedly as peace keepers. And he's insisting that Ukraine should join NATO, just as the US say that that is no longer on the agenda.

All this seems to be because he fears that Russia is the main enemy, even though Trump doesn't. In terms of Russian domination of Europe, it has to be said that their track record isn't good. But what happened after World War Two is hardly going to happen now. Russian imperialism laid waste to their economy and led to the break up of the Soviet Union. Their economy now is about the size of Spain's. Does Starmer really think Putin is about to invade Europe, or is he setting up a straw bogeyman?

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United Utilities gives in

In a monumental victory for Save Windermere, United Utilities (UU) has withdrawn their appeals to the First-Tier Tribunal, where they argued that the Information Commissioner (ICO) was wrong in their decision telling them to release environmental information to the campaign. They have also subsequently released the environmental data they had been fighting to withhold from the public.

Save Windermere, as a second respondent in this case, worked tirelessly alongside esteemed barristers Nicholas Ostrowski and Samual Glanville, who provided pro-bono work for the campaign.

Together, we presented compelling evidence demonstrating why this information should be made public under existing legislation as well as providing evidence to the ICO for their initial decision on this case.

This decision marks a significant milestone, achieved through the relentless efforts of Save Windermere over the past few years to hold United Utilities accountable for their lack of transparency. Using established legislation, the campaign has dismantled numerous arguments presented by UU to justify the withholding of data.

We have been told that our requests were manifestly unreasonable, that the data did not qualify as environmental information, our requests are too broad, the data sets were incomplete and that its release would perturb the course of justice; the list of excuses went on and on.

The announcement demonstrates that UU has yielded to the ICO's decision to prioritise the overwhelming public interest in this matter over UU's claims of discretion regarding internal communications. This was one of the few excus-

Local campaigning group Save Windermere have scored a victory in their fight to get information from United Utilities.

es they had left. Since the decision, United Utilities has communicated readily with the campaign.

In addition to releasing the appeal information, they have also provided a significant amount of additional data we had previously requested. We commend this new approach by UU and the leadership decisions that led to this increased transparency about how their activities impact England's largest lake.

While we are encouraged by this outcome, we cannot ignore that it took years of persistent campaigning to achieve it, including countless complaints to the ICO, national media coverage and even the imposition of a special enforcement measure on United Utilities by the ICO – the foundations for which were laid by Save Windermere – making them the first water company in the UK to receive one.

We hope United Utilities will continue this newfound commitment to transparency and make strides in collecting more comprehensive data to fully assess their impact on Windermere. Should the need arise, Save Windermere will not hesitate to fight for transparency again.

After celebrating this momentous victory, we're continuing to share yet more evidence of the Environment Agency's



failings in their duty to protect Windermere.

This time, we're focusing yet again on the Agency's inadequate response to the Cunsey Beck fish kill. After completely failing to conduct a thorough investigation of the incident, their sole action was to install real-time monitors to assess the impact of the Near Sawrey Wastewater Treatment Works (WwTW) on the Cunsey.

Save Windermere had to intervene twice to have these monitors relocated from unsuitable positions. And now, in their final placement, we've discovered yet another flaw meaning the systems are still failing to provide an accurate picture of the sewage works' impact on Cunsey Beck.

We owe this discovery to retired Detective Superintendent Ashley Smith of Windrush Against Sewage Pollution, who used his investigative expertise to uncover these shortcomings.

Corruption or incompetence? We'll let you decide.

Can't pay, won't pay

Support for the government's proposal for five years of above inflation rent increases for council and housing association tenants is almost universal with housing associations and even supported by some councils that have signed the document "Securing the Future of Council Housing". London Councils are calling for 10 years of CPI+1%. Clearly councils are short of the funding they need to maintain and improve their homes. Yet above inflation increases are, in our view, counter-productive. It will further impoverish already poor tenants who do not have their rent covered by housing benefit.

Evidence of the impact on council tenants of higher rents is to be found in government statistics on rent arrears. For England as a whole, in 2023/4 current tenant arrears reached £397,006,149. That is nearly double the £203 million in 2015-16. Outstanding arrears of former tenants rose from £126 million to £200 million. This is despite the fact that for four of those eight years there was a 1% rent cut. Arrears still rose in each of those four years. There will inevitably be a further increase in arrears in the current financial year 2024/25, since the maximum increase was 7.7%, marking a two-year maximum increase of 14.7%.

In London, where rents are much higher than the rest of the country, the statistics are extraordinary. Over the same timescale arrears more than doubled from £75 million to £179 million. Former tenant arrears rose from £46 million to £88 million. Whilst outside of London there are 10 councils where the arrears are more than 10% of the rent roll (the income that councils would receive if all the rent was paid) in London there are 13 councils with more than 10%. The worst ones

Martin Wicks for the Labour Campaign for Council Housing warns that tenants are being forced to make up for cuts in government funding.

are Newham with 15%, Croydon with 17% and Haringey with 25%.

What will be the consequence of five or ten more years of above inflation increases other than increasing arrears, putting more financial stress on more tenants? They are being penalised for the under-funding of Housing Revenue Accounts which results from central government policy. The Chartered Institute of Housing warned "In theory it would be possible to change rent policy to allow rents to increase faster and to a higher level – but there would be extra costs in terms of increased benefits payments and risks in terms of social rents beginning to approach or exceed market rents."

"Securing the Future of Council Housing", supported by 109 councils, has warned that HRA finances are unsustainable. The extra 1% a year only provides around £74 million extra income which will have little impact on the financial crisis. What sense does it make to drive rents up to a level where more tenants won't be able to afford them and councils will collect less and less of their rent? If a tenant cannot afford a council rent, what can they afford? Private sector rents are way beyond their reach.

Whilst most council rents are way below Housing Benefit level, rents will be driven up to the point where it does not cover the rent. This is already the case with some "affordable rent" levels. Since April of last year new Consumer Standards were introduced. To check whether councils are adher-

ing to them, the Regulator of Social Housing has begun to carry out inspections of Housing Revenue Accounts. The inspections show some serious problems with the condition of existing stock.

Out of 27 councils, 15 of them have been graded C3, indicating "serious failures", 2 C4, "very serious failings". Whilst the problems include poor management, the fact is that HRAs were underfunded from the outset of the "self-financing" system introduced in 2012. One of the demands of "Securing the Future of Council Housing" is for reopening the 2012 'debt settlement' – calling for some debt write-off. (More than a billion pounds a year goes on debt service charges.)

Rather than proposing to increase the financial pressure on tenants with above inflation rent increases, councils should be seeking the support of tenants in a campaign for the government to fund HRAs sufficiently to maintain and improve existing homes. Even the New Labour government, which had a terrible housing policy (it opposed councils building council homes and prevented them from even applying for social housing grant until the Great Crash of 2007/8) provided funding through the Major Repairs Allowance which modernised homes with double glazing and central heating. With more demands on councils, with an upgraded Decent Homes Standard due, and decarbonising housing urgently needed, this government needs to provide its equivalent of the MRA.

Stop import of 'game' birds

Pheasants and red-legged partridges are traditional 'game' birds used in the shooting industry. Both of these non-native species are released into the environment in huge numbers each year, on UK 'game' bird shooting estates. Many of the tens of millions of birds released on UK shooting estates are bought from intensive farming systems in European countries. Over 5 million pheasants and over 2.1 million partridges were imported live into the UK between 1st May 2018 and 30th April 2019. 54,000 hatching pheasant eggs and 5,250 live birds were imported from the USA during the same period of time. These young birds can spend 20 hours or more crammed inside a crate stacked in the back of a lorry.

A report commissioned by the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust admitted that 47 million pheasants were released into the environment in 2016 – an increase of 588% over 50 years – with a maximum of 18 million of these being recorded as shot. Up to 10 million red-legged partridges were released, and up to an estimated 5.9 million of the birds were recorded as shot. Industry figures show that these numbers have continued to increase, rising to 61.2 million non-native 'game' birds released in 2018.

'Game' birds are not raised as wild birds, they are instead mass farmed in the same way as intensively reared farm animals, yet they are not protected by humane slaughter laws and many won't be eaten as food. The Government admitted that over 25 million pheasants and pheasant eggs were imported into the UK between 1st May 2018 and the 30th April 2019. These birds are farmed and shot in the name of 'sport', with many wounded and left to suffer. According to Defra (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs), virtually all the red-

The League Against Cruel Sports reports on the mistreatment of 'game' birds.

legged partridges released on UK 'game' bird shooting estates come from breeding birds confined in barren wire-mesh cages with less space per bird than an A4 piece of paper, often for most of their life.

In the UK minimum standards exist for the protection of animals bred or kept for farming. However, it does not apply to 'animals intended for use in ... sporting events or activities.' This denies birds farmed for 'game' bird shooting industry even the basic welfare protection given to birds farmed for food. Since January 2012, barren cages for egg-laying hens have been illegal in the EU. Enrichment including nest boxes, litter, perch space and claw-shortening devices must now be provided, along with slightly more room per bird. However, no minimum space or enrichment requirements have been implemented for caged 'game' birds.

Shooting estates buy young birds from breeding farms and rear them in crowded sheds and pens, releasing them just a few weeks before shooting season begins. According to the 'game' bird shooting industry, less than half of the birds released each year are killed by shooters. Millions of 'game' birds die on the roads surrounding shooting estates, causing damage to vehicles and distress to motorists. Others die from disease or exposure to the British weather, as both species are adapted to warmer climates.

In order to minimise predation of 'game' birds by native predators and to maximise profit, gamekeepers will set snares and traps to target animals



photo: Shutterstock, Karl Weller

such as foxes, stoats and crows. However, due to the indiscriminate nature of these devices, many non-target protected and endangered species such as badgers and hares get caught in these traps. The Government has also now prioritised safeguarding the profits of the 'game' bird shooting industry, over the protection of native British species. Natural England has issued licences in recent years to kill buzzards in order to 'protect' pheasant poult from their predation. This Government policy has been strongly criticised by the League, RSPB and conservation experts.

Pheasants and partridges which have been farmed, fed and 'protected' from predators are released onto shooting estates to be then driven towards paying shooters, by employees called beaters. With so many guns shooting quickly at so many birds, wounding is common. According to a 2015 shooting industry survey, 76% of shooters were unable to accurately gauge distance, with 10% thinking the target was twice as far away. This inability to judge distances results in up to 40% of birds being wounded, rather than killed outright, according to a former training officer at the British Association for Shooting and Conservation. Some may be left to die slowly where they fall.

Turning despair into hope

The sense that Labour's support at the General Election was shallow and fragile is now very apparent. Its average voting share since last July has plunged by 9 percentage points to only 26% in early February. Reform is the main beneficiary, rising in support to 24%. Ominously, hard-right parties (including the Tories) are collectively polling at 47 per cent, with Labour regularly losing seats to Reform in council by-elections.

The Chancellor's recent speech confirms Labour's faith in a failing neo-liberal orthodoxy, and has contributed to the slump in popularity. Recent history has shown that 'trickle-down' economics will not remedy stagnating living standards and social and regional inequality. The populist Right with its divide and rule policies, including scapegoating immigrants, will ruthlessly exploit growing despair.

Labour's messaging and actions are out of touch with people's expectations after 14 years of austerity, pandemic and cost-of-living crises. People are tired of hearing there are 'challenging times ahead', 'difficult decisions to make' and 'black holes' in the government finances. These words are an unpleasant reminder of the Tories' 2010 budget mantra that 'we are all in this together'. Austerity created one of the most unequal countries in the developed world.

Scraping winter fuel payments for an estimated 2.5 million pensioners on already low incomes is not only politically damaging (pensioners participate in elections more than any other age group) but also adds to financial hardship. It is estimated that over four-fifths of older people with a long-term health condition or disability are no longer eligible for the payment. Continuing the Tory policies of the two-child benefit cap and freezing personal tax

allowances until 2028 prolongs financial austerity, and with the betrayal of Waspi women gives the damning message that Labour is no different from the discredited Tories. This also gives political oxygen to Reform and their media allies.

A pensioner with a combined basic state and small private fixed pension amounting to no more than £12570 (the personal tax allowance) would have paid no tax in 2021. During the cost-of-living crises the state pension was increased by 20% between 2021 and 2024 using the triple-lock process. However, much of this increase was offset by freezing personal allowances resulting in the pensioner facing a tax bill of £374 during 2024.

Another counterproductive measure was raising employers' national insurance contributions. Labour is striving to encourage economic growth, which it believes partly depends on getting more people back to work. However, this increase is hardly encouraging employers to take on new staff, especially among smaller companies. To improve public finances, why not raise corporation tax on increased profits after growth has been created or introduce a wealth tax or increase direct taxation on high income earners?

Labour's Back to Work plan includes encouraging non-working disabled people and those suffering from mental illness or debilitating post viral conditions such as long covid to seek employment. However, so far there are few government initiatives to help employers support employees with disabilities or with chronic conditions.

Also, the challenges of daily commuting for disabled and vulnerable people must be practically addressed.

The employment rights bill and increasing economic growth through measures such as improving productivity and physical infrastructure using new green and digital technology are steps in the right direction. However, Labour must withstand pressure to water down these policies; from employers, climate change deniers and the actions of the American president, including US tariffs making the UK economically vulnerable.

The government's stated overriding aim of increased growth must be for the benefit of the many not the few, with human needs balanced with safeguarding the environment. Key priorities include improving social, as well as physical infrastructure, public services, increasing social housing and reducing inequality, which according the OECD will stimulate economic growth. Given chronic staff shortages in health and child care services there is a continuing urgent need to encourage recruitment to this sector by improving pay and working conditions for health and social care staff.

Moreover, it is imperative that not only progressive policies fit for the twenty-first century are developed by a united Left but there is also an effective narrative which gives hope, inspiration and a clear way forward. Otherwise, political alienation and disengagement will continue. The main beneficiaries are the hard-right and those with extreme wealth and power, as witnessed from Asia to the Americas.

Organise and fight back

Matt Willgress



Just weeks into Trump's return to the Presidency, we are seeing a new phase of the US Empire's war against the majority of humanity, which will deepen the global economic, military and climate crises we see unfolding each day on our TV and smart screens.

This is also reflected internally in the US by a deeply reactionary agenda, spearheaded by billionaires and polluters. As part of this, we have seen an unrelenting barrage of hate against black and migrant communities, women, disabled and LGBTQ+ people.

On the economic front, there are radical moves to make it easier to sack workers. He has also signed an executive order to prepare a massive detention facility at Guantánamo Bay he says could hold 30,000 immigrants. Internationally, the latter announcement is part of moves towards economic warfare against - and mass deportations with devastating consequences to - nearby countries such as Mexico and Honduras.

And in particular he has made it crystal clear to all how he will not shift from the US' backing of Israel, doubling down on suggestions that Palestinians should leave Gaza for Egypt and Jordan, rather than live in their homeland. This fits in clearly with Israel's far-right's plan for a Gaza without Palestinians and will encourage ethnic cleansing.

Then there is the talk of sanctions

on China; blockading Venezuela (or if the *New York Times* gets its way a military adventure;) Cuba put back on the 'State Sponsors of Terrorism' list; and pushing for 'regime change' in Iran as part of drives to dominate the Middle East.

These are not the actions of the world's mightiest power in its prime. They are those of an increasingly desperate Empire seeking unsuccessfully to reverse its (relative) economic decline and hold off the emerging new global economic reality, not least the rise of China.

Whilst the US remains the biggest power – and bully – in the world, its percentage of the world's GDP is now down to 26.3%, from 34.6% in 1985. And when we look at just how dangerous Trump can be, we need to remember that the US spends more on military spending than the next ten biggest countries combined.

Additionally, Trump will again seek to force other NATO members – including Britain – to up their military spending, as the Starmer-led Government compliantly will. These massive levels of military spending are not just for show. They are to seek to continue to dominate large parts of the world by any means necessary. When looking at just how reactionary Trump's agenda is we must also look at all the measures already enabling a massive increase in fossil fuel extraction in the US - alongside withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement - show

the new US regime will literally wage war on the planet itself. Just days after the California wildfires, Trump announced in his inaugural address "We will drill, baby, drill.". All this as new data shows 2024 was the hottest on Earth since records began - the year when average global temperatures temporarily breached the 1.5C warming, the threshold set by the Paris Agreement to keep us safe.

The abrupt new records set in 2023 and 2024 join other evidence that recent global warming appears to be moving faster than expected. And evidence that other earth tipping points have been reached or are perilously close confronting humanity with likely devastating domino effects including crop failure, water shortage, mass displacement, political crises and financial collapse.

In this context Trump and co. are nothing but climate vandals. And on this, and all the aforementioned fronts, Trumpism is barbarism. It must be resisted on all fronts.

- *Matt Willgress is the National Organiser of 'Arise - a Festival of Left Ideas.'*
- *He will be speaking at the Socialism or Barbarism in-person day-school in London on Saturday March 29, alongside MPs Richard Burgon, Ian Byrne and John McDonnell, campaigner Jess Barnard, socialist economist Grace Blakeley and campaigns such as PSC, CND and Stand up to Racism.*

The Wild, Wild East

It started with lots of silly, little things. The CLP Chair (let's call him Voldemort) started 'ruling', as GC attendance fell, that the quorum was 5%. When I read out the Rule Book which states that 5% is the quorum for all-member meetings; for delegate meetings it is 25%, he replied that the delegates were all members!

To challenge a chair's ruling you need a two thirds majority (he's fine with that Rule) so there was nothing doing. When we had Zoom GCs, he ejected someone from the meeting. Again, I read out the Rule (my Rule Book is very well thumbed) saying that to eject someone there needs to be a motion with a two thirds majority. He 'ruled' that this *really* means that there is a vote for a second expulsion, because it isn't clear what the word 'such' refers to in English.

Us Lefties, unable to win a vote challenging his 'rulings', moaned about the dreadful Chairing. We had no idea what was coming down the track. Voldemort and his sidekick, the Vice Chair (Membership), who I am going to call Peter Pettigrew, spent an entire year disputing that the Co-op Party is entitled to an EC delegate.

They didn't like the person elected. They justified this by saying that at the previous CLP AGM, there had been a secret change in the Standing Orders, without an amendment on the Agenda or any kind of vote, still less a two thirds majority, and without the knowledge of the then CLP Chair who was running the AGM.

When we pointed out that this was ridiculous, they swore that they had an email from the Regional Organiser confirming it. I asked to see the email. I was told it was confidential. I kept on at every meeting and eventually I was shown it - but it didn't say anything of the sort. By this time, the next Co-op AGM was upon us, and Voldemort ('V') and Peter Pettigrew ('PP') got delegates more to their liking, and a more 'suitable' EC delegate. She

Christine Shawcroft reports that in her CLP the Rules are routinely ignored and the officers have closed everything down. Welcome to Poplar and Limehouse.

was welcomed. Nothing whatsoever was said about the secret change in Standing Orders, even when I said how nice it was to have a Co-op delegate to the EC again. They didn't even blush. So they knew it was cobblers all the time.

In May 2022, Apsana Begum MP was up for the trigger process. The first branch to have a meeting was mine, Lansbury and Poplar. Contrary to the Rules, prospective candidates had been openly campaigning. They were outside the meeting handing out slips showing members how to vote for a trigger. When told this was against the Rules, they brazenly carried on. But as we can see, there are no effective Rules in Poplar and Limehouse. It's like the Wild West.

There was a great deal of aggressive behaviour from members in the meeting. Suddenly, V. appeared even though he wasn't the LCF observer. People started demanding to know why they weren't on the membership list with which I had been provided only on the *afternoon of the meeting* (so hadn't had chance to check it properly).

V. said he had an up-to-date list on his phone, and let four people who weren't on the official list into the meeting. I demanded to know what his list was, and why I didn't have it, but he wouldn't show me and short of wrestling him to the ground and taking his phone off him there wasn't much I could do.

Later I was tipped off, when PP ignored my emails asking if members had been misallocated to another branch, that something dodgy had gone on. I discovered that at least one member who V. let in had lapsed, three weeks before the meeting. As the result had been a draw, Apsana had really won the branch and

therefore had won the trigger. For proof, I have 82 witnesses, an official list showing 82 people ticked off but 86 voters, and a screenshot of the lapsed member's details.

And there's more. In September 2023, V. announced that the CLP was being closed down because of the Boundary Commission changes, that the Regional Office had appointed himself, the CLP Secretary and the CLP Treasurer as Interim Officers, and that they would organise an AGM. As this had happened in several neighbouring CLPs, I thought nothing of it.

When I tried to set up my October branch meeting, I found I was blocked from Organise and Member Centre. The CLP secretary told me that branches had also been closed down. I asked where it said that in the Rules, and was ignored. When the promised AGM didn't happen I checked the Rules. As the CLP didn't import any members, we were not 'substantially changed' and should have carried on as usual. I asked to be shown the email appointing them as Interim Officers. They ignored me. We haven't had ECs and GCs for 17 months.

Multiple emails and complaints have gone to the Party and been ignored. A few weeks ago V. called an AGM for part of my branch without consulting myself or the Chair. As a branch covering only part of the area doesn't exist, it was cancelled. I offered to convene one properly, and help them with other branch AGMs. My kind offer has been spurned. There are no branch AGMs in the pipeline.

Rank and file members have been effectively expelled from the Party and lost their democratic rights. You couldn't make this stuff up.

Springtime in Wales

The death of Dafydd Elis-Thomas, former Leader of Plaid Cymru and former Presiding Officer of the Senedd marks the passing of a controversial figure both fascinating and fractious in his legacy. In the February 1974 election Elis-Thomas captured the parliamentary seat of Merioneth from Labour and went on to hold this constituency with minor boundary changes till 1992.

His victory was essentially a victory for the Welsh Republican Socialist tradition over the older Unionist tradition of Welsh Labour. Plaid, for much of that time, could be considered to have experienced a tension between this tradition and the more socially conservative one of his fellow MP Dafydd Wigley, elected that year for the constituency of Caernarfon. This current of stress still flows through Plaid Cymru and the Welsh National movement.

Dafydd Elis-Thomas and Dafydd Wigley both served in the House of Lords and in later years, like Peter Hain, quickly forgot their one-time resistance to the frothy charms of the English ruling class. It was ironic that as a Senedd member Elis-Thomas had major issues with another Welsh Republican socialist leader of Plaid Cymru, Leanne Wood, causing him to sit as an independent before becoming Presiding Officer of the Senedd.

Some of us become more reactionary as we age and others move in an opposite arc. There is no doubt that Dafydd E-T provided a major contribution to the Senedd and to devolution in general. His legacy is major and his role, with that of Dafydd Wigley, made possible the devolution settlement of Blair's first government and the Devolution Referendum in September 1997. I met him a couple of times in the early 2000s and found him amiable, immaculately dressed and clear-

Martyn Shrewsbury, Brecon, Radnor and Cwm Tawe CLP, shows that the Far Right are opposed to saving lives on the roads.

ly aware of his significance and political knowledge.

As Wales comes within just over a year from the Senedd elections

of 2026 at least four sitting Senedd members from the Labour group have announced that they will not seek election next year. With Nigel Farage announcing that there will be no Welsh Leader for Reform this clearly shows the threat to the course of Welsh devolution and to the fate of Welsh Labour.

I still stick to my prediction that Plaid will be the largest party in the Senedd with Labour being third behind Reform. It may well be that Labour serves as the junior party in a Plaid government. Starmer's government offers little hope of further devolution for Wales and for genuine devolution of the Welsh Labour Party.

The Senedd election occurs as the mid-term deepens into crisis and Welsh Labour, despite the clear Welsh identity of Eluned Morgan, appears once more to be English or indeed London Labour. It's quite clear that in elections for Senedd and the Scottish Parliament the SNP will hold Scotland and Plaid will be the largest party in Wales. Blair's hope that devolution would kill off both Plaid and the SNP is revealed as false. It may be that Welsh Labour has found its political undertaker.

The 20mph limits in Wales continue to grow in popularity as statistics clearly demonstrate over 100 fewer deaths

Road casualties in Wales by speed limit October - September

Speed limit	Severity	Oct-22 - Sep-23		Oct-23 - Sep-24		Change	Change (%)
		Oct-22	Sep-23	Oct-23	Sep-24		
20 / 30 mph	All	2,402	3,724	-678	-28%		
	Killed	34	24	-10	-29%		
	Seriously injured	469	373	-96	-20%		
40 - 70 mph	Slightly injured	1,899	1,327	-572	-30%		
	All	2,164	2,213	49	2%		
	Killed	58	61	3	5%		
	Seriously injured	533	585	52	10%		
	Slightly injured	1,573	1,587	-6	0%		

and serious injuries in Wales. In addition real evidence suggests a possible £80 million saving in NHS costs and a fall in insurance premiums for most car owners.

Reform will probably use the issue of the 20mph limit on some roads as a centre piece of their Senedd campaign. It's important to remember that the limit is not a blanket imposition across Wales. Over the last weekend a small, obsessive and determined group have invaded the local Facebook group with the most appalling ignorance, inability to grasp statistics and prejudice on this matter.

The claim that 470,000 people in Wales oppose the limits is untrue. At the petition's launch the most searched for issue on Google was 'what are some Welsh postcodes? It's clear that there is an overlap with anti-ULEZ campaigners from England, climate crisis deniers and sections of the Far Right. One of the trolls stated 'some politicians favour the environment over people and democracy'. What can you do when such staggering ignorance is unleashed?

Now, Labour have lost the Torfaen council by election with its vote falling by 49%. Reform won the seat with 44% of the vote. This is in the Labour heartland of South Wales.

Cutting Brum to the bone

I'll start with a quick recap. I think this is my third *Briefing* article on the financial crisis at Birmingham City Council. No apologies for doing so because Brum is the largest local authority in Europe and problems here are replicated across the country. Cuts cuts cuts, austerity revisited. And the implications for our class are severe. It is also a ripping yarn, you really couldn't make this stuff up!

My first article was titled 'Brum is Bust'. In my subsequent update, I asserted that 'we should all understand that the fundamental problems in Birmingham are rooted in the systematic, politically biased, and very deliberate underfunding of Local Government going back to Thatcher's days'.

You will recall that she set out to end 'municipal socialism,' end 'art on the rates,' and 'lefty lesbian run community projects'... just as determinedly as she set out to smash the unions. Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, for all their talk of modernising and rejuvenating local government, did little to address their underlying financial weakness.

This time, the Tories sent the commissioners into the city to look at the books, a team led by Max Caller. Yay, 'Max the Axe' strikes again. The government named the eight commissioners who are to run Birmingham City Council until 2028, after it effectively went bankrupt declaring a Section 114. They will each be paid £1,100 a day - £1,200 for the lead commissioner - for up to 150 days a year. Frankly this is obscene.

One of the problems here is that nobody seems to know how much this 'debt' actually is. The 'in year 23/24 debt' was said to be £87 million. Given the size of the budget, that's chicken feed. Savings of £300 million were to be made in year to year ending April

Activist Steve Price reports on the financial quagmire which is the Birmingham City Council Budget crisis.

2024, largely justified by an unknown (guesstimate) figure relating to an equal pay settlement.

They have outlined plans to cut £148 million from its budget this year. Over half of the savings, £43m, have been found in cuts to adult social care, and £39m in children and families services. Then there's cuts in housing by £18.2m, and City Operations by £20m.

More significant cuts to arts funding, aiming to eliminate all grants to regularly funded arts organizations by 2026, with a 50% reduction already imposed in 2024/25. Council tax goes up by another 7.5% That's over 17% over 2 years. During a massive cost of living crisis. Disgraceful.

Cuts are being made on fantasy figures, contested figures. Why isn't Rachel from Accounts helping out a right wing Labour Council because some of the damage that is being done will be irreparable. The 'equal pay' settlement is important and necessary but estimates vary wildly from £300 million to £760 million. This is ridiculous.

A new development – it is now being pointed out that the Council have been substantially overpaying into the West Midlands Pension Scheme over recent years. Former Council Leader John Clancy and Professor David Bailey claim that, as of March 2024, BCC has overpaid some £416m in employer contributions and are urging Angela Rayner to intervene.

Cuts to 'City Operations' includes waste disposal and aside from a proposal to move to two weekly collec



tions – have these councillors not seen how much fly tipping there is already? – cuts have now led to another bin workers strike which is starting to bite. The demoralisation of, and loss of goodwill by the Council's 5,000 direct employees is incalculable.

And all this from a Labour Council – A *LABOUR COUNCIL* (credit Neil Kinnock, 1987). And the current Labour councillors can consider themselves very lucky. Having voted themselves all in at the four yearly elections in 2022 they have managed to dodge the voters till next year.

Nigel Farage is planning a huge rally in Birmingham in a few weeks time, and I can see the Labour Party getting absolutely smashed by Reform in those 2026 elections.

Don't mimic Reform

More than a thousand MPs, Labour members, trade unionists and campaigners have put their names to a statement urging the Labour leadership to pull back from its attacks on migrants' rights. The statement (full text below), which was coordinated by the Labour Campaign for Free Movement and Momentum, argues that Labour should instead focus on improving people's lives.

"Anti-migrant politics will not build a single house, staff a single hospital or raise anyone's wages," it argues. "Instead, by echoing its rhetoric, the government is simply fuelling the rise of Reform. We urge Labour's leaders to recognise that Labour's only route to victory is to deliver for the vast majority of people. We need to reverse austerity, address the climate crisis, take on the water and energy companies ripping us off, and foster a politics of working class solidarity."

Last week, the government began to release videos of deportations. It also doubled-down on the criminalisation of irregular arrivals, and took steps to ban those arriving irregularly from ever becoming British citizens. Separately, the government last week said a judge was wrong to give a Gazan family asylum because the scheme under which asylum was granted was meant only for Ukrainians.

Keir Starmer, who was elected as Labour leader promising to "defend freedom of movement", u-turned on that policy in 2022. The government is now opposed even to a youth mobility scheme and has opposed the introduction of safe routes. A campaigner with the Labour Campaign for Free Movement, said: "The Tories left the UK with an immigration system that was the envy of the far right across Europe. So far, Labour has ditched the Rwanda scheme but retained the rest.

Campaigners say Labour should oppose Reform on immigration, not mimic them.

This performative cruelty will be an electoral disaster - all the leadership is doing is giving the appearance of a consensus behind Reform's main narratives. If you want to know where that road leads, just look at Olaf Scholz."

Sasha Das Gupta, Momentum co-Chair, said: "The government's latest anti-migrant measures cross a line. On the ground, members and activists right across the party are expressing their disgust that the party leadership appears to be trying to out-do the Tories and Reform on anti-migrant cruelty.

"Migrants are not to blame for falling wages, declining public services or the housing crisis. We need real solutions to these problems - Labour must have the courage to take on big business interests, tax the super-rich and invest in communities."

Kirsty Jones, a Labour councillor in Nottingham, said: "The Tories were never interested in stopping the small boats for humanitarian reasons. They were interested in weaponising hatred against refugees to win elections. If Labour plays this game, it will lose - and it will jeopardise lives and violate human rights in the process.

No one risks their life crossing the channel or the Mediterranean unless they have no other option. Talk of smashing the gangs by force is a fan



photo: Shutterstock, Sean Aidan Calderbank

tasy - we need safe and legal routes to destroy the demand for dangerous crossings."

The full statement is as follows: "This week, the government has published videos of deportations, restated its intention to criminalise people arriving irregularly, and banned them from ever becoming British citizens. These measures mimic the performative cruelty of the failed Tory governments rejected by voters last July. They also breach Britain's international obligations to respect the right to claim asylum and guarantee safe routes.

"Far from being a drain on this country, migrants from all over the world enrich our society in every sense. Anti-migrant politics will not build a single house, staff a single hospital or raise anyone's wages. Instead, by echoing its rhetoric, the government is simply fuelling the rise of Reform. We urge Labour's leaders to recognise that Labour's only route to victory is to deliver for the vast majority of people. We need to reverse austerity, address the climate crisis, take on the water and energy companies ripping us off, and foster a politics of working class solidarity."

UPHILL STRUGGLE

Kevin Flack

Rural poverty exposed

The National Innovation Centre on Rural Enterprise has produced a definitive report on rural poverty, commenting that, "rural poverty is often ignored because poverty tends to be viewed as an urban problem."

Rural Poverty Today points to why – "much rural employment is insecure and poorly paid, leading to volatile and irregular incomes. The cost of living is higher and it is increasingly difficult to find affordable rural housing."

The report points out that our welfare system is not primarily designed for rural dwellers, while "services are increasingly centralised and digitised."

The issue is also damaging students' ability to fulfil their potential, states a separate report by Assistant Headteacher Debbie Tremble for SecEd challenging the assumption that rural students perform better than their urban contemporaries and stating that "rural areas face challenges such as geographic isolation, limited access to cultural enrichment and inadequate connectivity."

Chalk streams still under threat

Many Labour candidates at the last election, standing for constituencies that included polluted rivers, campaigned with Feargal Sharkey to improve and protect chalk streams of which the majority in the world are in the south of England. Indeed,

promises go back to the Tory Government's planned action on the recovery and restoration plan in the Chalk Streams Protection Pack.

Whilst the Labour Government promises action on water pollution in general, rather than implement the ready-made chalk river plan it continues to "explore" the issue as part of its reforms for the water sector. This has led to the Hampshire Wildlife Trust commenting it is "very disappointed" in the lack of action.

Blaming the Treasury for the failure to properly protect rivers across the country, the Nene Rivers Trust has rightly pointed out, "the environmental sector has always struggled for funding. It's always the first thing that gets cut during any period of austerity."

Subsidising shooters

The Daily Telegraph is up in arms (I thank you) over government plans for either a new tax raid on rural communities or ending the taxpayer subsidy of administering gun owners' licence applications.

Proposals are part of the new police funding settlement, with the cost of granting first shotgun certificates increasing from £79.50 to £194 and renewals from £49 to £126.

Unbelievably, there is no minimum age for obtaining a shotgun certificate although you cannot use one without adult (over-21) supervision until you are 15.



Part of current legal thinking comes from a case in 1994, where the ruling stated, "we do not consider that the appellant's age is either directly or indirectly something likely to give rise to the safety of the public or to the peace."

General firearms certificates are also to increase in cost. Perhaps it is time for a rural referendum – more bobbies on the beat or subsidising farmers and the bloodsports' fraternity?

Finally

As I write, news comes through that Labour Party membership is down significantly yet again – from 348,000 at the General Election to 309,000 – losing a member every ten minutes. Youth membership has collapsed from a high under Jeremy Corbyn of 100,000 to around 30,000.

Meanwhile Reform UK party membership continues to climb – having overtaken the Tories, they have now set their sights on Labour, expecting to overtake them within the year. Be prepared for even more anti-immigrant rhetoric from the Labour leadership.

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.



NHS on life support

The founding principles of our NHS are that it is free at the point of use, funded through general taxation and available to all. If you get ill, have an accident, need an operation, or have a baby – the NHS is there for you. We all owe the NHS so much for looking after us during the COVID-19 pandemic - and NHS staff have made incredible sacrifices in order to save lives and reduce the spread of the virus.

The NHS was founded in 1948 and has been proven to be one of the best and most efficient healthcare systems in the world – and unlike many others, it remains free at the point of delivery. The NHS was ranked the best healthcare system in the world according to a 2014 Commonwealth Fund study, and the second cheapest of those analysed. But recent governments have threatened the healthcare we all have access to, with cuts and privatisation.

In 1990, the “purchaser-provider” split was introduced as well as an internal market within the NHS. This



Campaign group We Own It details the sorry history of cuts and privatisation which have led to a healthcare crisis.

separated the job of providing care from that of commissioning care. Initially, NHS Trusts were created to serve as the main providers, but more recent legislation would open the door wider to private companies being used to provide NHS services. The 2012 Health and Social Care Act opened the door to rampant privatisation by requiring a competitive tendering process, involving for-profit private companies, for all NHS contracts over a certain value.

The 2022 Health and Care Act recognised the failure of that model. Part of the 2012 Act responsible for exploding outsourcing (Section 75) was revoked. However, the 2022 Act still opened the door to private companies having seats on NHS decision-making bodies and being given NHS contracts without public scrutiny. The vast majority of the NHS is still publicly owned and run. However, since the passage of the 2012 Health and Social Care Act, it is clear that there has been a trend in the direction of private healthcare companies running more NHS services.

Now, almost 10% of the NHS's budget, by Labour's estimate over £100 billion in the decade to 2021, is spent with for-profit private companies. Within this figure, NHS trusts and foundation trusts' spending with Independent Sector Providers, including private for-profit (albeit not them exclusively), exploded by 559% in the decade to 2020 - 2021,



according to the BMA. We are also increasingly seeing the rise of private healthcare companies taking over NHS GP surgeries. Centene, a multi-national US health insurance corporation, took over 49 GP surgeries in London in 2021. Added to the 21 NHS GP surgeries they previously owned, Centene is now the largest single provider of primary care in England.

NHS Trusts continue to pay for historic debts accrued because of Private Finance Initiatives (PFI). PFI was a policy of contracting private companies to build NHS hospitals at their own expense, with the NHS paying those companies back at rates much higher than they spent building the hospitals (plus interest) in yearly instalments. NHS Trusts paid out almost half a billion pounds in PFI debts in 2021 and are said to still owe around £50 billion in total.

In August 2023, the government announced the creation of 13 new Community Diagnostic Centres to reduce the NHS backlog, with over half of those (8) to be owned and run

pport

by private healthcare companies. This shows the government is intent on continuing to expand the role of the private sector in the NHS, instead of investing to build up the NHS's own capacity. NHS waiting lists currently stand at over 7 million people. The Labour government still supports a policy of sending NHS patients to private hospitals for surgeries.

We Own It published an open letter to the health leads of all parliamentary parties, signed by 15 public figures, including Stephen Fry, Dame Emma Thompson, and Siobhan McSweeney, making it clear that politicians have a choice to make — invest in our NHS for the long term OR divert that money to the private sector.

Private hospitals will not solve the crisis, because only the NHS takes care of patients at A&E — the private sector doesn't have A&E; trains our doctors and nurses — the private sector relies on NHS-trained staff; looks after all patients — the private sector cherry picks.

The real solution is to invest directly in the NHS to build up its capacity so that it can treat all patients. 78% of us believe the NHS should be in public ownership, including 77% of 2019 Conservative voters and 85% each of 2019 Labour and Liberal Democrat voters.

According to a briefing paper published by The Centre for Health and the Public Interest, it costs around £0.5m to train a doctor to the level of a consultant, and that there are an estimated 17,500 NHS consultants working privately in the UK.

This means overseas investors are given access free of charge to a highly trained, expert workforce worth £8.5 billion - at our expense. Despite many calls for the private sector to contribute to these costs, these have so far been ignored.

A recent Oxford University study published in *Lancet Public Health* has linked NHS privatisation to the preventable deaths of 557 people. A number of peer-reviewed academic studies have found that hospitals cleaned by outsourced companies are dirtier and therefore cause more hospital-acquired infections.

In just six years (2011-2017) private healthcare companies took out £831m in profits from our NHS just through one form of NHS outsourcing (PFI contracts and hospitals maintenance and support services).

NHS privatisation leads to corruption. For example, companies were 10 times more likely to get Covid contracts if they knew a government minister, an MP or a government official. According to a 2021 analysis, more hip and knee replacement operations are now done by the private sector by Circle Health Group, Nuffield Health, HCA Healthcare and Spire Healthcare, than by the NHS.

18% of those operations were for the NHS through outsourcing contracts, and the remaining patients paid out of pocket or used private health insurance. Our NHS has seen real terms funding cuts in 2022 of



Underfunding hits emergency services

between £4 and £9.3 billion, according to NHS Confederation. Underfunding of the NHS (the UK spends £40 billion less a year than comparable European countries) means waiting lists are longer than they should be and some people pay to go private if they can afford it.

As a result of privatisation and underfunding, there are now 7.6 million people on NHS waiting lists, with hundreds of thousands now forced to pay for care out of pocket in the private sector or pay for private health insurance.

This creates a two-tier system that undermines the universal support that our NHS enjoys and which prevents politicians from undermining it even more blatantly.

We Own It works closely with several organisations whose work you can also get involved in: *Keep our NHS Public*, *Toothless in England*, the *SOS NHS Coalition*, *99% Org*, *Just Treatment*, *NHS Workers Say NO!* and more.

UNISON: winds of change

On Friday 14 February at 5.00pm the branch nomination phase of the UNISON NEC 2025-27 elections ended.

It's very clear now to everyone, not least our opponents on the right wing of UNISON, that Time For Real Change is on the up! Nearly all our candidates are reporting significantly increased numbers of branch nominations than in the previous NEC election, despite all the resistance and mudslinging we have faced over the last two years!

So, we want to start this report by sincerely thanking all branches and branch activists who worked so hard to secure nominations for our amazing Time For Real Change NEC candidates. We really appreciate it. We know the processes are clunky and hard to navigate.

We also know these elections are over-policed by those who want to keep our union as the gravy-train they have gotten used to and as a cheerleader for the dead-end politics of Keir Starmer and the Labour right. But you did it and delivered a resounding vote of confidence in the current NEC, which speaks to the optimism of what we can continue to achieve together, and with the critical General Secretary election also later this year.

So what next? The actual member vote is not until 21 April. And before then we want Time For Real Change-supporting branches to publicise their nomination decisions to their members. We will be in touch separately about that, in the next two weeks. Right now though, the priority is to make sure that all the branches

Time for Real Change in UNISON report on positive results in branch nominations for their NEC candidates. The member vote is in April.

that nominated have their nominations accepted as valid. We expect a significant push-back from the bureaucracy, with complaints going in to try and invalidate the nominations you made.

We have heard a large number of worrying reports from branches, about regional staff wrongly demanding to attend branch meetings for nominations to be valid, wrongly interpreting the Rulebook and given false instructions to branches, and wrongly insisting that their 'pro forma' has to be completed to their satisfaction for a nomination to be valid!

All this is false, so if there are efforts now to rule out our nominations we have to fight to keep them. Between today and 6 March there is a period where complaints will be made about nominations in an effort to rule them out. Civica, contracted by UNISON to run these elections, will consider those complaints made, without telling those complained of.

The first you will hear about a complaint is if you are advised by Civica that one or more of your nominations is invalid. Civica must advise branches of this before 6 March. Branches then have until 5.00pm on Friday 14 March to submit an appeal, that is, to challenge the evidence Civica pro



vides the branch. It is worth appealing! In our experience, most of these anti-democratic challenges are trivial and can be and are overturned on appeal. We need vigilance from branches over the next few weeks, and a commitment to use the appeal processes in place.

Appeals should give full details of the reasons for the appeal and supply any documents or other evidence that supports the appeal. Appeals have to be submitted to: unison@cesvotes.com

As ever, Time For Real Change will endeavour to ensure that branches who want it are supported with advice and other material support to navigate these bureaucratic procedures and hostile challenges. If you want to discuss a branch appeal or draft you have written, do not hesitate to contact us at: tfrc.unison@gmail.com

We have made an astounding start in the NEC elections. So we must be prepared for the pushback. Reach out for help as you need it, so we can stay on course.

No to insecure work

Britain isn't working. The world of work is rigged in favour of bad bosses and against ordinary working people. More than four million people are in precarious employment. Over one million are employed on zero hours contracts. Millions don't have access to proper sick pay schemes.

Rogue employers like P&O Ferries sacked hundreds of staff on the spot without facing any consequences. Amazon used every dirty trick in the book to stop its workers from organising in a trade union. And wage growth during the Conservative-led government was worse than for any other period since the 1920s.

A decade of inaction on insecure work has left a legacy of over a million workers on zero-hours contracts. That's why it's so important to improve security at work and stop these exploitative working practices. The Employment Rights Bill will rightly ban them. Unions have been campaigning for years to push the government to deliver higher pay and stronger workers' rights. And we're closer than ever to delivering transformative change for working people. Working people need and want change

TUC analysis suggested there is a 13.1 percent pay gap for all employees between men and women. Another way of thinking about this is - that means that the average woman effectively works for free for nearly seven weeks compared to the average man, such that Monday 17 February is the first paid day of

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

work for a working woman. The overall gender pay gap is calculated using all median hourly pay, excluding overtime, for all male and female employees using the latest Office for National Statistics Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings data.

Causes of the gender pay gap include the facts that women are more likely to be employed in sectors where average pay is lower, such as care and health-care, and are more likely to work part-time as they deal with caring responsibilities.

Number 10 Downing Street and Cabinet Office cleaning and catering staff are to begin a month-long strike over pay.

The strike is scheduled to last from 24 February to 25 March in No 10 and the Cabinet Office. It is an extension of a wider dispute that has already taken place in a series of government departments.

The strike will include staff at the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, the Department for Education, the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, and the Department for Business and Trade.

PCS is seeking a pay rise and improvements to conditions in areas such as holiday entitlement and, more widely, is trying



to persuade the government to bring staff employed by an outsourcing company into official roles. Workers employed by the facility services firms, such as ISS and G4S, work permanently in government departments but are employed on inferior pay and terms and conditions.

Improvements to pay and terms and conditions is a matter for negotiation between PCS and the outsourcing company, but the government has a role as an active client, and for it to be in accordance with the wider objectives of its procurement strategy and its commitment to make all work pay.

Insourcing is a decision for the government. The contracts are held by the Government Property Agency, an arm of the Cabinet Office that manages office buildings, rather than by specific departments. PCS says the current contracts with ISS, G4S and OCS have expiry dates and that talks about bringing people onto civil service contracts should commence soon.

Philosophers cornered

Martyn Shrewsbury

Marx stated that whilst philosophers have interpreted the world the real point was to change it. In this column I want to stand up for philosophy and show how it can be used as a weapon of resistance and a critique of late capitalism and indeed of centrist policies beloved of the Labour right and centre.

It's often the case that when I write about philosophy a well-meaning comrade will imaginatively respond with the 'scientific' response "bollocks". I love the Left in all its fervour but sadly at these moments I want to scream. Marxism originates from a fusion of the political economy of the first industrial nation, the historical processes of the German states and of socialism from France. The roots of Marxism run back to the pre-Socratic world of Heraclitus, who first grasped the dialectical processes when he stated that you can't step into the same river twice, all the way through to Hegel whose idealistic claims were inverted by Marx into a materialistic one.

Hegel claimed that it was ideas that allowed material changes to happen. His original formula was that the struggle between one idea [the thesis] and its opposite [the antithesis] leads to another [the synthesis]. It's a classically 'Liberal' approach and it was Marx who inverts this process by arguing that the clash was between contradictory and clashing material conditions.

It is the clash between the material thesis and the material antithesis that produces new social conditions and economic relationships. This is why

Marx describes history as a clash or struggle between classes.

Marxist analysis, and indeed all philosophical analysis, should therefore avoid the simplistic answer that certain philosophers before and after Marx should be dismissed because of their personality, behaviours or the claims of many who have never read them or were told they caused the road to the death camps.

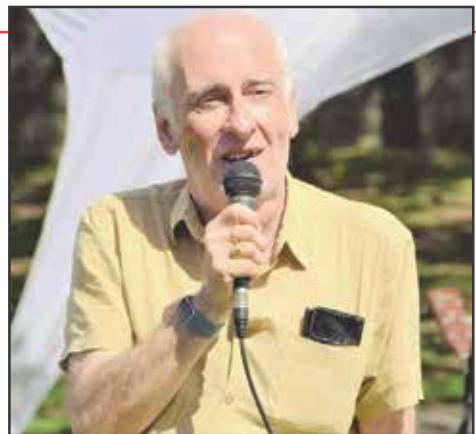
We should examine how the analyses of Marx, Freud and Nietzsche influenced one another through cross fertilisation of language as well as speculation on the historical forms of the future. Nietzsche anticipated Freud and could be considered to anticipate repression by the state through propaganda and the unconscious. Nietzsche condemned the Musks and Trumps of his time as vulgar and repressive. Freud laid the foundations for the Frankfurt school asking the questions on why socialism had not triumphed and concluded that the superstructure of the capitalist state controlled us not only consciously but unconsciously as well.

Nietzsche stormed out of one of Wagner's operas because of its crude nationalism and proto fascism. He criticised the Conservative right saying, "a word in the Conservative's ear - what we did not know before, what we know today, could know today ~ a regression, an about turn of any kind or to any extent is just not possible. At least we philosophers know this. But these Priests, these moralists have believed it. They wanted to bring humanity back like a crab to an earlier point." He was effectively cursed in

1914 when the *Daily Mail* claimed that every Imperial German soldier carried his work 'Beyond Good and Evil' in their kit bags. Nietzsche's fascist brother in law selectively edited his work to make it appear fascist and leading to the death camps.

It was not until the Kaufman translation of 1970 that we in the English-speaking world see Nietzsche in his proper context full of his potential for the left and socialism. The term "superman" is not an Aryan member of the SS or indeed male. When Nietzsche says "suppose truth is a woman" he is not being sexist, he is stating that truth is subjective and constantly changing. The term 'woman' is a reference to the feminine form of the verb or so Kaufman claims.

Finally, Nietzsche in his work 'Letzter Mensch' describes a point in the future where a passive nihilist society is suppressed by large corporations and an authoritarian state reminiscent of late capitalism. This analysis echoes the feudal technocracy of Google, Amazon and Tesla. Nietzsche said he would be a posthumous philosopher. His work should be seen by the left as valuable, useful and significant. I hope I can make many reconsider post modernism and philosophers as far more than just "bollocks", crypto fascist or nothing to do with the political battles of the Left in 2025. We can learn to spot the trajectory of historical materialism over the last ten thousand years. All political activists need to know philosophical analysis, its approach and its main characters as weapons in the struggle to build a socialist society.



Starmer waives the Rules

According to Keir Starmer his government is looking at "every conceivable way" to prevent me and at least 300 other people from receiving compensation for wrongful arrest and imprisonment in the 1970s. This issue arises from the decision by the British Supreme Court in May 2020 that the Interim Custody Order (ICO) or internment order issued against me was unlawful.

Internment was imposed by the British on 9 August 1971. It had been used in every decade since partition in 1920. Thousands of armed troops smashed their way into nationalist homes to arrest 342 men and boys. Dragged from their beds, many were beaten. 14 – the Hooded Men - were subjected to days of sustained torture.

25 people were killed in the following four days. In west Belfast 11 people, including a priest and a mother of eight, were killed by the Paras in the Ballymurphy Massacre. Five months later the Paras attacked an anti-internment march in Derry and killed 14 people. Bloody Sunday was another of many dark days. In July 1972 another five citizens, including another priest and a 13 year old girl, were killed in Springhill by the British Army.

I was interned in 1972, released and re-interned in July 1973. On Christmas Eve 1973 four of us made a failed attempt to escape. The following July I tried again. For these two escape attempts I was sentenced by a Diplock non-jury court to five years for attempting to escape from 'lawful custody'. Fast forward 32 years to 2009 and a researcher working for the Pat Finucane Centre in Derry found a memorandum, dated 8 July 1974, from the Director of Public

Gerry Adams, president of Sinn Fein from 1983 to 2011, details the unlawful internment orders in the 1970s and the problems with the Legacy Act.

Prosecutions to the British Attorney General. The DPP warned the Attorney General that before they decided to go ahead with the escape charges it was possible that "many ... detainees held under the Orders which have not been signed by the Secretary of State himself may be unlawfully detained." Eventually the British Supreme Court in 2020 ruled that I had been unlawfully detained.

The Supreme Court quashed my two convictions. But the Department of Justice in the North decided in 2021 that I was ineligible for compensation. In April 2023 Justice Colton concluded that it was "beyond reasonable doubt that there has been a miscarriage of justice, that is, the applicant is innocent of the crime for which he was convicted." He added that: "I am satisfied that the applicant meets the test for compensation under the Criminal Justice Act 1988."

Conservative politicians and unionists condemned the decision. Several Tory Lords brought in a rushed legal amendment that would deny compensation to any internee whose interim custody order had not been personally considered by the Secretary of State. They were persuaded to drop this in favour of a formal British government amendment which is now part of the Legacy Act.

The Act states that no one can take a civil action or continue with one if the person bringing the action claims that their imprisonment occurred because an interim custody order was unlawfully signed. Many correctly saw it as an effort by the British government to

protect its forces and agents and politicians. In Opposition the Labour Party committed to getting rid of the Legacy Act. It is obvious now they will not do this. Secretary of State Hilary Benn's treatment of the family of the GAA's Seán Brown is an example of that. Mr Brown was killed by loyalists who included many British government agents.

Mr Benn is blocking the Brown family from getting the public inquiry they are entitled to. His father, the late Tony Benn used to say, 'Never wrestle with a chimney sweep. You will get very dirty.' A wise piece of advice which his son should emulate. Mr Starmer clearly doesn't mind getting dirty. His arrogance is in keeping with the imperial mindset that survives in the heart of the British establishment. Britannia used to rule the waves. His remarks are another example of Britannia waiving the rules.

Mr Starmer's stated intention to subvert the laws he is supposed to uphold will come as no surprise to those in Ireland and in countless other states around the world. Frank Kitson described it well in his 1971 manual, *Low-Intensity Operations: Subversion, Insurgency & Peacekeeping*: "The law should be used as just another weapon in the Government's arsenal, and in this case it becomes little more than a propaganda cover for the disposal of unwanted members of the public."

So I will continue to pursue this case. I have no personal interest in compensation for myself. If any comes to me, I will donate it to good causes.

Stop grovelling!

If we are to prevent World War III, one hoped that a lesson from World War II would have been learnt about how to deal with Fascism. You simply do not appease it in any way but instead fight it uncompromisingly as it takes any concession as a weakness. On the macro level, Deputy PM Clement Attlee, and Labour National Executive member Barbara Gould refused any compromise with Hitler and his allies. After the war, both tried to maintain social democratic values amidst the rise of the American Far Right.

In pursuit of such stances, Attlee flew to DC to stop Truman from giving in to the Republican Party's demand that the US invade the infant Communist China. Gould published lead letters in both the *Guardian* and *Daily Worker* as well as the US *New Republic*, protesting the way in which a new American empire was being built by giving them British naval bases worldwide.

On a micro level, my own Londoner parents demonstrated their values democratically, with my Dad in the Home Guard fighting incendiary bombs before joining the RAF, just like Labour's future ministerial heroes Tony Benn and Peter Shore. Alas, such defiance seems lost, judging by what I saw in a January visit to the UK.

On January 16, on Question Time, Education Minister Chris Bryant agreed that the Far Right had "stimulated" actions against sex-grooming. However, a day later, Lisa Nandy said emphatically "No," asserting that action had been sought long before. Spinelessness proved contagious. Darren Jones, Financial Secretary to the Treasury, stated on TV that the Labour Government respected the fact that "Donald Trump and the US Republican Party" had won a "huge victory" last November. He also claimed that the values of the US and

Our American correspondent Larry Iles reports from the US on the dangers of fascism, and how to fight it.

UK were still the same. Lucy Powell, Leader of the House of Commons, said it was not her place to comment on US politics, even when it turned sexist, citing Trump's "large victory." Chancellor Reeves told the press that Trump was a model of US growth and profitability disregarding the victims of his fraudulent degree programs and unpaid debts.

Let's revive the spirit of Attlee and Gould by considering the facts. Trump did not win a huge majority last November. He won with less than fifty percent of the popular vote, in a reduced poll caused by apathy and intimidation. The Republican Party experienced a net loss of seats in the House, and the Democrats and their independent allies held onto well over forty Senate seats, limiting Trump's power to change treaties. Canadians, Mexicans, Palestinians, and Ukrainians may no longer feel secure, but the UK and Australia should feel supported by at least half of the US voting population defying Trump.

What worried us most was the broader British society bowing to the Trump/Musk and Farage propaganda machines. A YouGov poll showed over forty percent of younger UK voters no longer felt it essential to vote for "constitutional democratic political parties." An *Evening Standard* poll placed Reform ahead of the Starmer Government. Farage plans to hold a giant Trump-style rally in Birmingham before the spring local elections. This is buttressed by the ex-Labour House of Commons Speaker giving Reform MPs more airtime than the Green Party MPs and openly referring to "Nigel".



photo: iStock,
Maverick_Lee

One might suggest that Starmer should declare support for joining a new Social Europe and stand up against Trump and Farage, inspired by Danish Premier Mette Frederiksen, who has increased defence spending around Greenland. Additionally, it is critical to recognize the importance of fostering a political climate that actively discourages fascist ideologies. This includes promoting education on the dangers of fascism and authoritarianism, encouraging civic engagement, and supporting grassroots movements that champion democratic values.

Democracy relies on active participation and vigilance against forces that seek to undermine it. The grovelling to Trump and Farage only emboldens them and risks eroding the values we hold dear. It is time for the UK to stand firm, honour its democratic principles, and ensure that the lessons of history are not forgotten.

BACK FOR GOOD

Keith Veness

Valerie Veness's article in our last edition charting the history of the campaigns for the Guildford Four and the Birmingham Six caused a lot of enquiries, reminiscing and folk making contact who we hadn't heard from for years. I thought it would be good to use this month's column to remind our more senior readers and enlighten our younger ones of the whole slew of miscarriages of justice that came to light from the late 1970s through to the present day.

As we go to print the case of the nurse Lucy Letby has developed into arguments about whether she was guilty or indeed whether any actual crimes were committed at all. I don't know enough of these events to form a definite view but it does have features that are eerily reminiscent of past miscarriages.

Of course the Irish in Britain were not the only ethnic minority to be repressed and victimised. The black, mainly Afro-Caribbean, communities in many London boroughs, in Birmingham and other parts of the West Midlands, Bristol and other conurbations were subject to Police raids, immigration regulations and employment checks.

The first generation from the Windrush onwards tended to 'suffer in silence' but their children and grandchildren born here did not see why they should be second class citizens and the target for racism and state violence.

One area in North London with a large black population was Tottenham in the borough of Haringey. In October 1985 an immigration raid on a flat in the very large Broadwater Farm Estate resulted in the death of a black mother following

her being restrained. The area went up and rioting and protests erupted. Police units called in had little idea of how to defuse such situations and many Police officers were injured. A local beat officer, PC Keith Blakelock, was killed after a clash with a gang of youths.

The media went into a frenzy demanding arrests and retribution. Three people from the area were arrested and charged but the case against them always seemed weak. However, the media had whipped things up sufficiently to ensure convictions. The persons convicted were two black men, Winston Silcott and Mark Braithwaite, and a Turkish Cypriot Engin Raghip.

Their cases were taken up by the local MP Bernie Grant - who was himself subjected to insults and threats. The prisoners became known as the "Tottenham Three". After massive campaigns their convictions were quashed. Silcott was actually miles away on the night of the riot. All these three later paid tribute to the help and assistance they received from some of the Birmingham Six whilst they were incarcerated.

Another case of a victimised minority were the five young Tamils wrongly arrested for an arson attack that resulted in the deaths of young men. Three of those were acquitted but the two found guilty, Prem Sivalingham and Sam Koolasingham, became known as the East Ham Two.

Sam went on a hunger strike and was near death. He only abandoned it after Jeremy Corbyn and other campaigners visited and gave him certain pledges. I



got my union branch to adopt Prem and we sent him a variety of monthly magazines. Valerie visited them many times in Wormwood Scrubs prison.

They served seven years before the High Court ruled that their convictions were "unsafe and unsatisfactory" and they were both released. All of us in the public gallery gave the judge a round of applause and he said thank you to the audience. Something none of us had ever seen before!

We later attended Prem's wedding where the bride's family were a bit surprised to see lots of white people including actors and politicians sitting on Prem's side of the church!

There were many other miscarriages of justice over these two decades including:

- * Judy Ward, wrongly convicted over the M62 coach bombing.
- * The Bridgewater Four, accused of murdering the newspaper delivery boy during a robbery.
- * Nick Mullen, unlawfully abducted from Zimbabwe and accused of being an IRA bomber.
- * Sam Hallam, a young white bloke from Hoxton sentenced for a gang murder but cleared five years later when Thames Valley Police did an independent enquiry and found the Met police had his phone in an evidence bag that showed him a mile away on the night in question.

And there were many others which could be mentioned. All the cases were won after years of devoted campaigns by activists, politicians and legal supporters. We should never forget this!

Mexico resists Trump

Mexico's first female president, Claudia Sheinbaum, is facing a tough challenge from President Trump who recently announced the imposition of tariffs of up to 25% on Mexican exports to the US. About 80% of Mexico's exports currently flow to the US, while exports as a whole make up 40% of Mexico's GDP.

Trump's tariffs violate the terms of the 2018 US-Mexico-Canada trade agreement (USMCA), which Trump himself negotiated, as well as Article 20 of the Charter of the Organization of American States. But as with the illegal sanctions against Latin American countries such as Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua, legality does not rank as a bar to the exercise of US power.

President Sheinbaum's response has been steadfast, saying: "when we negotiate with other nations, when we talk with other nations, we always do so with our heads held high, never with our heads down." She has also categorically rejected Trump's allegation that Mexican drug traffickers had an "intolerable alliance with the government of Mexico."

In practice the Mexican drug cartels are armed with weapons flowing across the border from the US, while catering for the almost insatiable demand by US residents for illegal drugs, yet Trump blames Mexico. Trump is also implementing mass deportations of undocumented immigrants, including Mexicans. Countering this, Sheinbaum already has in place a humanitarian-focused programme to support all deported Mexican citizens.

Sheinbaum can count on support from the public, with crowds cheering "¡No estás sola, no estás sola!" (You do not stand alone!) and from Congress where her MORENA party and its

Tim Young, Labour Friends of Progressive Latin America, reports on the rolling back of neoliberalism in Mexico.

allies hold about 73% of seats in the lower house of Congress and just shy of a two-thirds Senate majority. Sheinbaum is the MORENA party's successor to President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO), elected last June when the right wing in Mexico suffered a historic defeat. She won by a margin of over 32 points, becoming the first woman and first person of Jewish descent to be elected president.

During AMLO's time in office, Mexico made real progress in fields such as social welfare, education, health, women's rights and equality for Indigenous people and Afro-Mexicans. The government also recovered control over key resources such as petroleum, gas, electric power, water supplies and now lithium. It played a leading role as part of the new progressive tide across Latin America. AMLO's foreign policy emphasised Latin American integration while denouncing US interventionism. This included condemning the coups in Bolivia and Peru, the blockade of Cuba and the US's ongoing illegal regime change efforts in Venezuela and opposing Israel's war on the people of Gaza.

President Sheinbaum has continued with AMLO's agenda of rolling back neoliberalism and reasserting national sovereignty. The overarching goal is "4T" – the fourth transformation of the country through a democratic renewal to end corruption and impunity. Key to this is prioritising social programmes, moving towards a more universal approach to welfare and social security. State payments now reach 65% more people than under previous governments. Crucially, welfare pro-

grammes are now enshrined in the constitution as entitlements rather than handouts.

Other new social programmes have included scholarships to students alongside vocational training opportunities; support for reconstruction efforts after natural disasters; and economic support to farmers through the Sembrando Vida (Sowing Life) programme to promote sustainable rural development. This project has so far assisted 440,000 families and reforested 1.2 million hectares in Mexico.

Sheinbaum is committed to continue AMLO's drive to regain energy sovereignty by ending the handing of Mexico's natural resources to multinational corporations and oligarchs. This has involved reining in the power of foreign mining companies through a new hydrocarbons law. This reclaiming of national wealth has helped fund vital investment and infrastructure projects.

Government functions previously outsourced to private and semi-private firms have been brought back in-house and the subcontracting of public services abolished. Workers' rights have also improved. The formal rights of domestic workers are now recognised for the first time, and precarious hiring practices have been eliminated, including through the banning of "fire-and-rehire" practices. Mexico's experience show another world is possible.

The Mexico Solidarity Forum can be found at e-voice.org.uk/mexicosolidarity-2 and contacted via info@mexicosolidarity.org.uk
Labour Friends of Progressive Latin America are at www.labourfriendspla.wordpress.com

Devil hunt or witch hunt?

History has a way of repeating itself, especially when tyrants attempt to suppress the will of the people under the guise of law and order. In 1971, the Pakistani Army launched Operation Searchlight, a brutal crackdown aimed at silencing the legitimate demands of the Bengali people. The operation led to mass atrocities, igniting a national resistance that culminated in the birth of Bangladesh. Today, under the illegitimate rule of Dr. Yunus, we see the eerie echoes of history in what is cynically termed "Operation Devil Hunt" a so-called security operation that is, in reality, a grand cover-up to shield criminals while vilifying their victims.

What sparked this so-called operation? The extremist Islamist group known as Student Shomonnayok comprising radical elements from internationally banned terrorist organisation like ISIS, Hizb ut-Tahrir, Islami Chhatra Shibir, and their parent organization, Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami brazenly orchestrated a violent attack on the home of an Awami League leader and Minister in Gazipur.

This was not a hidden plot; it was declared publicly before execution. Any responsible government would have moved swiftly to protect its citizens and their properties. Instead, the unconstitutional administration of Dr. Yunus turned a blind eye to this terrorist attack and instead chose to launch a crackdown on those who dared to defend themselves.

Dr. Yunus's regime, rather than bringing these violent extremists to justice, has embarked on a mission to persecute the very people who have suffered at their hands. Thousands of homes have been attacked and vandalized since the unlawful takeover of power on August 5, 2024. Thousands of Awami League members and supporters have been murdered in cold

Sayed Abedin is a barrister, reporting on the lawlessness currently being inflicted on Bangladesh.

blood. Hundreds of police officers have been brutally killed, with over 450 police stations torched to the ground. More than 2,000 attacks have been recorded against minorities, while Bangabandhu Museum, a symbol of the nation's identity, was desecrated in broad daylight, an act witnessed by the entire world. And yet, where was Dr. Yunus's government? Nowhere to be found.

By choosing to launch this so-called "Operation Devil Hunt," the illegitimate regime has only exposed its true allegiance. Its silence in the face of mass atrocities over the past six months stands in stark contrast to its sudden urgency to suppress those who protest against tyranny. It is as if they have given Student Shomonnayok, and their extremist allies a free pass to commit crimes with impunity. In fact, it is worse than that, Dr. Yunus's government has officially granted them indemnity for all crimes committed until August 8, 2024, effectively licensing them to kill, burn, and destroy without fear of prosecution.

The hypocrisy of this operation is staggering. Those who once chanted slogans of equality and justice in July 2024 have now revealed their true colors, showing themselves to be nothing more than the pawns of extremist forces. Many students who were misled into supporting Student Shomonnayok now realize they have been deceived.

Meanwhile, the Yunus administration treats the people as fools, believing they will not see through the deception. But the people of Bangladesh are not blind. They now understand who the real devils are.

The silence of the armed forces in the face of these atrocities raises troubling questions. Hundreds



Sayed Abedin

of police officers have been slain, and the morale of the force is shattered, yet the government denies these events even took place. What justification does the army have for standing idly by while the country plunges into chaos? Their inaction in the face of such widespread carnage could lead international human rights organizations and global powers to intervene. The world is watching, and history will judge those who enable tyranny through their silence.

If Dr. Yunus and his allies believe they can subdue the people of Bangladesh indefinitely, they are gravely mistaken. The people fought back in 1971, and they will fight back again. Oppression breeds resistance, and the path this government has chosen will inevitably lead to a reckoning.

Bangladeshis now face a critical choice: to submit to dictatorship and radical Islamist rule or to rise, as they did before, to reclaim the values of democracy, secularism, nationalism and justice for which three million martyrs sacrificed their lives. The writing is on the wall—Operation Devil Hunt is nothing more than an Operation Witch Hunt, and the people will not stand for it much longer.

Unite and fight

For anyone interested in the fight against racism, and the campaigns for civil rights in the United Kingdom for the Black and Asian ('Brown' according to the author – I follow her style in this review) communities, this is an important and ground-breaking book.

Ms Dhillon mainly covers the post-war period and outlines 10 movements, campaigns or issues that were important struggles for the Black and Brown communities. What is important for me is how she links them together and common themes emerge. Too often, for example, the Grunwick strike of 1976 to 1978 is seen in isolation, or looked at solely in a trade union context. Here, the role of Brown women in the struggle is recognised.

This is then linked to the campaigns by the predominantly Bangladeshi community in Tower Hamlets over the racist murder of Altab Ali and the battle to drive the National Front out of Brick Lane. Another important campaign that is often overlooked, was by the Black Education Movement, which challenged many black children being put into Special Educational Needs schools where their academic potential was stifled.

After an introduction to the development of pre- and post-war ethnic minority communities in British cities, the author covers: The Indian Workers' Association; the Bristol Bus Boycott; Black Power and the Mangrove Nine; The Fasimbas, the Oval Four and the

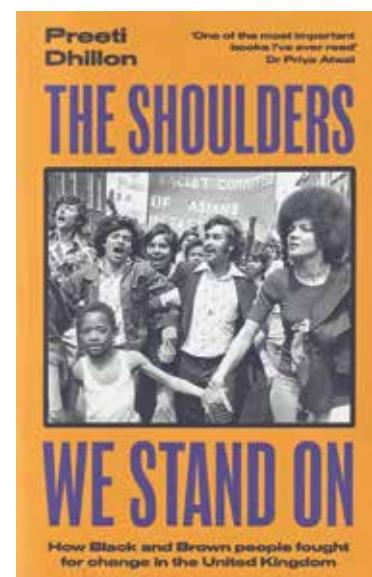
Peter Lush reviews *The Shoulders We Stand On - How Black and Brown people fought for change in the United Kingdom* by Preeti Dhillon, Dialogue Books, £10.99.

Black Liberation Front; the Black Education Movement; Brixton Black Women's Group and OWAAD [Organisation of Women of Africa and African Descent]; the Grunwick Strike; Altab Ali and the Battle of Brick Lane; Asian Youth Movements and the Bradford 12 and 1981. What is also interesting is how in some cases existing structures could be used to fight on issues, but more often how new – maybe more flexible – organisations appeared. An advantage of her approach is that common issues are developed in context.

There has been a huge growth in written history of the Black and Brown communities in the UK in recent years, along with television coverage such as the Small Axe series. Ms Dhillon has a very readable style. This makes the book accessible to everyone, not just academics, although 49 pages of footnotes shows the thoroughness of the research. It still manages to record people's experiences in different campaigns and struggles. An index would have been helpful though.

Inevitably, not everything is included. I would have liked to have seen more on Notting Hill in the mid to late-1950s. The racist murder of Kelso Cochrane is mentioned, along with the presence of the fascist Union Movement. The

founding of the Notting Hill Carnival and the work of Claudia Jones are also briefly covered.



However, the strength of this book outweighs any questions about why a bit more detail was not included in some areas. The last year covered, 1981, was also very significant. The New Cross fire, when 13 black young people died, and 30 were injured, with a very poor response by the police, was followed by a 20,000 strong protest march by black people in central London on a weekday. The 'uprisings' (the author prefers this term to 'riots') which followed in 1981.

This again highlights the hostility of the police at that time to the Black and Brown communities which is an ongoing theme throughout. Of course, much has happened since 1981. Stephen Lawrence, Black Lives Matter, the pandemic and more. The author acknowledges this, "I stopped this book in 1981 as it was a defining moment in the UK's history of race and racism". Hopefully the response to this book will encourage her to take to her laptop again, and bring the story up to date.



Evidence of occupation

Watching this film the other night, I was taken back to 2016 and a film showing at the Abbey Labour Party Branch Film Club. Back in Peak Corbyn, days of hope. It was our second film I think, *Five Broken Cameras*, a remarkable citizen journalist documentary about colonialist settler violence in the West Bank.

It was shown at the local library, and even before the antisemitism scam really took off, it nearly didn't happen due to 'sensitivities' and potential malicious complaints from local LFI activists. The film attracted a good crowd and we had a local Palestinian resident Marwan Darweish, and a book signing, 'Popular Protest in Palestine.'

Well, *Five Broken Cameras* was nominated, but won nothing at that year's Oscars. I see that *No Other Land* is also nominated. Got nowt at the recent BAFTAs, perhaps again because of 'sensitivities' This is a great film, essential viewing. If you haven't yet seen it, then you must. Though it's not being widely shown! It's still seeking distribution in the USA. Surprise, surprise. Currently, you can find it online.

A brief summary: Basel Adra began filming the Israeli occupation of his village in Masafer Yatta at the age of 15, recording he says in the name of 'evidence.' Naturalistically, he records daily life for the agrarian communities in Masafer Yatta, a collection of 20 Palestinian villages in the mountainous southern edge of the West Bank.

At some unspecified point he is joined by Israeli journalist and sympathiser Yuval Abraham. As in *Five Broken Cameras*, the filming equipment is at constant risk of being confiscated or smashed, as the Israeli soldiers clearly do not enjoy being filmed.

Steve Price reviews the documentary film *No Other Land*, produced by amateur film makers and ignored at an awards ceremony.

These people are brave, recording under constant duress. As an aside, it's interesting to see the kids, who all seem to have mobile phones! We see the great war criminal Blair at one point and it's explained that he (allegedly) intervened to stop settler violence around 2016.

We see soldiers turning up in numbers, intimidating military vehicles, targeted arrests including Adra's activist father. We see a man being shot, and subsequently dying through lack of medical care.

Things are coming to a head when the Army get a contested court ruling that whole villages are to be demolished to make way for 'closed off' military training. We see bulldozers crushing houses, and a school, filling in the well and cutting off that water supply. We get a real feeling for what it's like to live under occupation.

Children crying. A mother cries in despair "We have no other land, that's why we suffer for it," after her home is destroyed. You see the new, modern Israeli settlements very nearby. Depressingly, what you also take from the film is that it's a generational struggle.

The original demolition plan goes back to 1980, resurrected in 2022, and what we're not told in the film is that there's

Children face tanks in No Other Land



to be no 'military training,' more lies, it will just be more settler building.

Politics aside, judged as a film I found it vivid, naturalistic, authentic, heart-breaking. And a real insight into life in these villages. Of course, we have to view this film in the context of the ongoing Gaza Genocide and the rise in settler violence in the West Bank.

Al Jazeera claims that as of Christmas Day 2024 217 journalists and media workers had been killed, 75% of these were Palestinian. Not sure how many of these were like these guys, citizen journalists, or if those are even counted.

And then you have David Lammy stating that 'there are no journalists in Gaza' (tempting to say that's cos your Zionist mates killed them all, but maybe that's a tasteless crack). I hope you can get to see this film, as young Adra says, 'it's evidence.'



Letters

Dear Labour Briefing,

Nearly 100 people packed into a London church hall on 15 January 2025 for the kick-off of Andrea Egan's campaign to become general secretary of UNISON, Britain's largest union.

The meeting, chaired by former shadow Chancellor and currently suspended Labour MP John McDonnell, featured three women on the platform alongside Egan herself.

Ms Egan is the secretary of the union's Bolton local government branch and sits on its national executive council. She also served as UNISON's president for 2022-23, backed by the union's left umbrella group, Time for Real Change.

A qualified social worker, Egan pledged that, if elected, she would accept no more than her social worker's salary. The remainder of the general secretary's £166,000 annual pay would go back to UNISON's welfare and industrial action funds.

A long-standing Labour Party member, who was expelled over social media posts, Egan stressed that she would "put UNISON [members] first and Labour second," warning that the constant talk of "difficult decisions" from Labour's front bench was code for "robbing the working class."

Her wide-ranging speech was sharply critical both of



Labour's leadership and the union's own for enabling the party's rightward march, while also condemning Israeli war crimes and pledging support to the Palestinian people and workers in struggle internationally.

Egan also promised to strengthen the role of the union's lay activists and to pour more of its resources into branch-level activity as part of UNISON's "Organising to Win" strategy, which saw a substantial upturn in the union's membership between autumn 2023 and '24 with a net gain of more than 40,000.

By law, an election for the general secretary's role must take place this year, though the union has yet to confirm a timetable for the campaign. Andrea looks set to emerge as the sole left-wing challenger, while there is uncertainty whether the pro-Starmer incumbent will stand again.

Meanwhile, the biennial process of electing a national executive council is underway with nominations for some 70 seats open until Friday 14 February with the Time for Real Change battling to enhance its current slim majority.

George Binette
London

Arise Dayschool

Socialism or Barbarism

In person in central London

Saturday 29th March

Invited speakers include MPs, trade unionists, campaign organisations.

Sauce for the gander

Over 300 thousand people in Denmark have signed a petition calling for their country to buy California from Donald Trump. They've heard that the climate is much better there than the Danish one, and as real estate deals seem to be so much in vogue, why not?

And it would all be legit, signed and sealed without the threat of force, unlike the posturings of D. Trump. However, rumours that if impeached, Donald would seek asylum in Denmark are likely to be greatly exaggerated.

Unhappy houmous

Chris Dindar of Hastings was due to face charges of crimes against houmous at Brighton Magistrates Court in March. His dastardly alleged crime took place at a pro-Palestine demonstration at a local supermarket, where he drew attention to the fact that it was stocking Israeli houmous.

No doubt this very much hurt the houmous's feelings, but in any case charges have now been dropped, probably when the CPS realised that they would suffer reputational damage if the case went ahead (even worse than the damage done by the directorship of Keir Starmer).

We can now expect an amendment to the list of protected characteristics to include 'being mostly made from chick peas'.

Filthy rich

Not only are the super-rich getting super-richer by the minute, as governments all

over the world scramble to give them tax breaks and other preferential treatment (just so they won't leave the country, you understand) they are also destroying the planet.

Apparently, the carbon dioxide emissions from 155 million of the world's poorest people are completely dwarfed by those from just 50 billionaires. And there are a lot more billionaires where that 50 came from.

On average the super-rich create more carbon dioxide through their investments, private jets and superyachts in under three hours than the average Briton does in their whole lifetime. Maybe they think that, as the oceans rise and flood our coastal cities, they'll be safe out of the water's reach in their penthouses.

Up the pole

A recent YouGov poll of people who voted Labour last year but don't intend to do so again showed several reasons for the voters' change of heart (they could choose more than one reason). Amongst other

things, 35% had been put off by the Winter Fuel Allowance debacle, 33% were disappointed by the failure to cut the cost of living, 26% disliked the failure to improve public services, 25% felt that Starmer had broken too many promises and 23% were angry about the failure to challenge the rich and powerful.

Oddly enough, no one seemed to think that not enough desperate refugees had drowned. Government advisers just can't understand it.

No such thing as a free operation

It's hard work being a government Minister, you need all the help you can get. Accordingly, Wes Streeting has appointed Tom Kibasi, who spent many years working at McKinsey. They published a 2010 paper that said that ending the principle of the NHS as 'free at the point of delivery' probably 'need[s] to be considered'.

They've got lots of helpful ideas about charging us though, all to increase profits, er, we mean 'efficiency'.





BEHAVING BADLY

Christine Shawcroft

One of the perils of producing a monthly (more or less) magazine, as opposed to a weekly newsletter or even a daily paper, is that you are constantly being overtaken by events. In the gap between going to the printers and delivery to subscribers, all manner of circumstances can conspire against you, making you look out of date before the ink is even dry.

And when you are going to write about Donald Trump, the perils multiply by a large factor. What is he going to say or do next? What foreign policy bombshells is he going to drop (did you see what I did there)? Can you even call it a foreign policy, when it's just one crazy statement after another?

Apparently, the United States will never be safe and secure until it controls Canada, Greenland, Panama, Mexico and goodness knows where else. Now, I understand that countries have to keep a watchful eye on their neighbours, and look out for adverse geopolitical events right around the world. The US, in particular, seems convinced it is surrounded by a planet full of enemies, and wants to get its retaliation in first. But has it ever stopped

to wonder why so many countries actively dislike it?

It all reminds me of the so-called InCel movement. This is a bunch of sados on the internet who are 'Involuntary Celibates' because nobody wants to sleep with them. Their group is forever posting diatribes about what bitches women are, because apparently it's all our fault that they can't get laid. It's not at all their own look out for being so nasty, you understand.

But I've often wondered why, if the InCel brethren are so sexually frustrated, they don't stop the insults and the threats of violence and try being nice to us? I'm told that if you're a (straight) man and you want to sleep with a (straight) woman, you have to give her presents, take her out to nice places, compliment her dress and her hair-do. Jumping out of a helicopter at night and leaving a box of chocolates on her pillow also creates a good impression. And if that doesn't work with the first woman, try another one, we're pretty interchangeable.

But the InCel boys won't hear of anything like that. They seem to prefer venting their rage all over the Internet to

actually taking the chance of being happy. Maybe they're scared of helicopters.

Someone who isn't scared of helicopters is Donald Trump. He loves sending them to places and getting them to fire on the restive natives down below. And this is where the InCel connection comes in. If he wants other countries to like the US, why doesn't he try being nice to them?

Chocolates aren't so much use in that endeavour, but you can always buy their political parties, they come pretty cheap. He's already bought ours, and those of many other countries. He could try working for world peace, instead of World War Three, I'm sure that would go down well. Not that it's easily done, but those areas that he considers to be his enemies would appreciate the effort, I'm sure.

To really make his country safe and secure, Mr T needs to work on the international equivalent of helping round the house, putting the sweater round sometimes, making the bed or washing the pots. Failing that, maybe we could talk him into jumping out of a helicopter?