

COUNTERFIRE

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Two years of genocide...

BLOOD ON STARMER'S HANDS



STOP ARMING ISRAEL • FREE PALESTINE

NEWS



KEIR STARMER. PHOTO: SIMON DAWSON / NO 10 DOWNING STREET / CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

The state has no business controlling your identity

LINDSEY GERMAN

Latest polling from Ipsos shows that Keir Starmer is the most unpopular prime minister ever in the history of their polling.

His favourability rating is -66%. Just when you thought this couldn't get any worse, he has decided to unite pretty much everyone against him by announcing the introduction of ID cards for the whole population in Britain.

This is presented as yet another piece of persecution of asylum seekers and supposedly 'illegal' immigrants. But in reality it is an authoritarian move which will give far greater powers to the state and will be used in the already considerable curtailment of civil liberties that we are experiencing in Britain.

The alleged rationale is that it will stop illegal employment of those who are not entitled to work. But it will not stop people who are desperate and employers who are happy to pay below minimum wages off the books. The scheme would be in any case an extremely large sledgehammer to crack a tiny nut.

But it won't be mainly about that; despite denials that it won't be used to stop people in the street and ask for ID, that is very likely to happen. It will be much more likely to happen to those who are black or brown, but it will be a threat to everyone that the police might want to harass.

Behind it are two connected elements. One is the continuing grotesque persecution of refugees and asylum seekers, now extended by Nigel Farage to proposed deportations of hundreds of thousands of those with leave to remain – a policy that even Starmer has managed to denounce as racist. But typically tailing Farage,

Shabana Mahmood unveiled Labour's own plans to make life harder for immigrants.

The second is the growing use of random surveillance, not just in the huge amount of CCTV, but in areas such as facial recognition – again used disproportionately against ethnic minorities. These developments are both highly dangerous and reactionary.

It must be added to the general atmosphere of repression instanced by a range of issues including the failed prosecution of

Kneecap's Mo Chara, the proscription of Palestine Action and the arrest of hundreds of those who have protested, the charging of four leaders of the Palestine coalition, the constant petty and unjustified restrictions on the Palestine marches.

The real two-tier policing was also evident on 13 September when Tommy Robinson's fascist-organised march was treated with the utmost cooperation, including no prosecution for the calls for violence from Elon Musk that came from

the stage, and only a handful of arrests.

Over 2.5 million people signed a petition against ID cards within a few days, suggesting the scale of opposition. Not all of this comes from the left – both Reform and Tommy Robinson oppose their introduction. Here, as in so many areas, the trade union movement needs to step up much more than it has done on fighting the racism of the far right and Labour's attacks. This is an issue for the whole left and we can't let the right gain the initiative.

MACRON'S REGIME IN CRISIS AS FRENCH WORKERS TAKE TO THE STREETS

FRENCH CORRESPONDENT

In France, prime minister after prime minister have attempted to implement the same old neoliberal economic policies, each time they have been met with mass opposition. Now the country faces a regime crisis.

Following weeks of political turmoil, the fall of Prime Minister Bayrou and widespread street protests, there is no sign that the anti-austerity demonstrations and strike action will end any time soon.

The latest prime minister to be appointed by President Macron, Sébastien Lecornu is as unpopular as the last and almost as unpopular as the President. As the former defence minister, his agenda to date has been pushing for



PARIS DEMONSTRATION, SEPTEMBER 2025. PHOTO: @FRANCEINSOUMISE / X

arms spending at the expense of public services: austerity for arms. Currently, without the support of the far-right Le Pen party, the government would fall.

Under the slogan 'Block Everything', a spontaneous grassroots movement

emerged which has mobilised thousands and thousands and forced the trade unions into action. According to left-wing La France Insoumise MP Danièle Obono, 200,000 were on the streets on 10 September, and up to a million on 17 September. A further

day of strikes and protests is taking place on 2 October.

Young and old want the proposed budget cuts scrapped. Teachers, train drivers, pharmacists and hospital staff all joined the recent strikes, while teenagers blocked high schools. Protesters have called for increased spending on public services, higher taxes for the wealthy and a reversal to the increases in pension age.

Many were flying Palestine flags, despite police and judicial repression against supporting the Palestinian struggle.

La France Insoumise is mobilising on the streets and at the same time at the National Assembly where they have submitted an impeachment motion. It is clear that the only way the crisis will be resolved is if Macron goes.

Trump and NATO's cynical Ukraine policy

CHRIS BAMBERY

Ukraine 'is in a position to fight and WIN all of Ukraine back in its original form.' So claims Donald Trump on his Truth Social feed, adding that a Ukrainian victory depends on 'time, patience, and the financial support of Europe and, in particular, NATO.'

What Trump doesn't say is what the USA is going to do to help this victory, beyond selling arms to Europe to pass on to Kyiv. It's hard to know whether Trump is fooling himself or he is simply regurgitating what he's been told by his own deep state.

The reality on the ground is that Russia continues remorselessly to advance westwards in the Donetsk and Dnipropetrovsk regions; Russian drone attacks are destroying much of Ukraine's infrastructure; Ukraine has run out of troops, its economy is tanking and there is deep infighting in the government.

Despite this, our politicians and media keep churning out the line that Ukraine is winning. Now supposed Russian air incursions into Poland and Estonia see Starmer and co. making empty threats against Moscow.

However, one reading of Trump's message is that he's telling his own generals, the CIA and European leaders that if Ukraine is winning and Russia is on the edge of collapse, why does the USA need to get more involved?

Sure, the US will sell NATO all the weapons it wants, if America can make them, but Europe will have to pay for them. In other words, Trump is willing to fight to the last Ukrainian and until the last Euro and pound has been spent. It's a cynical policy. The obvious solution is for him to pursue the peace talks begun when he visited President Putin in Anchorage, Alaska. But it appears he is backing away under pressure from inside Washington.

With their fragile economies, Britain, France and Germany can bankrupt themselves giving those weapons to Ukraine and bankroll the US. Good business for Washington. The European governments are already facing widespread unrest over austerity and the cost-of-living crisis, particularly in France. But that unrest also benefits the far right, as we saw here with the Unite the Kingdom march.

The TUC passed a motion rejecting increased military spending. Given the UK's parlous finances, militarisation can only come at the expense of our welfare. The TUC resolution needs to be acted upon. Welfare not warfare should be our slogan.

EDITORIAL



PALESTINE NATIONAL DEMONSTRATION. PHOTO: STEVE EASON / CC BY-NC 2.0

THE ENDURING FIGHT FOR PALESTINE

COUNTERFIRE

What's in a word? Genocide. The worst of crimes and most depraved perversions rolled into one. It is a deliberate act that cannot be excused by mitigating circumstances, a crime enabled by the hatred of an entire people.

To plan the mass killing of children, as Israel has done, induce population-wide starvation and deny medical aid is almost unimaginable. But there it is, in plain sight, flaunted by Israel. And it has been going on for two years.

When Netanyahu spoke to the UN Assembly in New York, it was with defiance and pride. He promised to finish the job as if it's his historic duty. A murderer announced he would commit more murders and is still roaming free!

He was, of course, being hosted by the world's most fearsome imperialist state; one soaked in the blood of innocents.

The war on Palestine, and the attempt to erase it from the map, is part of a Western imperial project that has been developing for a century. Netanyahu is not a rogue actor. He operates with the backing and might of the US's industrial-military complex and Uncle Sam's British and European lackeys. Suggestions that war-criminal

Tony Blair should be the colonial administrator of Gaza fit perfectly.

For two years, the Palestine movement has fought back. The solidarity movements in countries backing Israel have taken their inspiration from the Palestinian people who have refused to give in, despite the hell that they have been plunged into.

We have become an international force of sisters and brothers against Zionism and imperialism.

Unmasking imperialism

The demand for Palestinian liberation has had a profound effect on politics. Protesters across the US, Britain and Europe have been criminalised and faced arrest and prosecution. This has educated a new layer of people about the nature of the capitalist state: its defence of genocide and its attacks on democracy.

Starmer's authoritarian stance has intensified repression and undermined our rights. It has provoked outrage, and considerable satire.

The sight of police in riot gear arresting old ladies with placards will go down in history as one of Starmer's greatest gaffes. Even Labour's own conference voted to acknowledge the genocide and call on the government to act to prevent it.

There is increasing understanding that the law is not neutral, that imperialism is not about spreading democracy or defending human rights, and that the institutions of capitalist rule are not on our side.

The courts, police and the media are increasingly revealed as tools and props to excuse imperialist carnage. Criminality and victimhood have been inverted. Those committing genocide are defended and shielded from public outrage.

But where the fight for Palestinian liberation has helped to enlighten millions on the one hand, state power in support of Zionism has also emboldened fascists.

The Israeli flag flies proudly on every fascist demonstration, demanding more cruelty towards Muslims, immigrants and their left-wing defenders. Where Starmer tries to maintain a semblance of respect for international law, the right wants to shred it. Labour has enabled Zionist murder and offers no defence against the racists and fascists who have taken inspiration from it.

Out of the fight for Palestine has come the new left party led by Jeremy Corbyn and Zarah Sultana, currently called Your Party. It is overdue, and had a difficult birth, but is welcome nevertheless. Socialist politics going forward must have Gaza and the liberation of Palestine at its heart.



WEEKLY BRIEFING

Cut through the media bias with Lindsey German's analysis on the latest political developments straight in your inbox every Monday morning



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RANK-AND-FILE ROUNDUP



TUC makes a stand against militarisation

KEVIN CRANE

Delegates at this year's Trade Union Congress have made a historic stand against Keir Starmer's push to militarise the British economy.

This is a significant turnaround from three years ago, when the Congress voted to campaign for increased arms spending by the state, at the same time as the the Tory government was enforcing harsh austerity measures.

Last year's Congress saw no challenge to this position even as Starmer pledged to drastically increase military spending at the same time as cuts to the winter fuel allowance and maintaining the two-child benefit cap.

The backdrop to this ratcheting up of military spending is a European-wide mass

rearmament programme greater than anything we've seen since the Second World War and which Starmer has been the head cheerleader for.

Increasing militarisation is part and parcel of prolonging the war in Ukraine and Israel's ongoing genocide in Gaza which continues to rely on F-35 fighter jet parts produced in the UK, spy flights from RAF Akrotiri and the training of IDF soldiers on RAF bases – all of which the increased public expenditure on so-called 'defence' contributes to.

Starmer's support for increased arms purchases has been sold, including by some within the trade union movement, as a way to increase employment and benefit local economies in Britain. The reality is that weaponry is one of the most inefficient ways any government can spend money to

create employment.

To make matters worse, Donald Trump is pressuring Britain and all the other NATO governments to buy more of their weapons from the US, while he is also imposing trade tariffs on goods from those countries: ensuring that public money will flow to the United States in a totally unjust and exploitative way.

Speaking in support of the 'Wages not Weapons' resolution on behalf of the RMT, Alex Gordon called the ramping up of military spending a "smash and grab" on public-sector jobs and wages: "As Donald Trump has made abundantly clear, the jobs and profits from military spending in the UK will flow across the Atlantic [to buy American arms]."

Labour, and all the establishment parties, currently support increasing militarisation as a way to help multinational corporations continue to make profits from public expenditure. When combined with continued cuts to public services and dire underinvestment in the productive economy, this amounts to making working-class people in Britain freeze and starve to support the war machine.

The weapons trade is also disastrous from a climate change point of view: neither the working class nor the planet can afford continued militarisation.

The TUC's adoption of the 'wages not weapons' motion, which explicitly denotes Palestine solidarity, opens the path for union members and anti-war activists to organise more effective trade union support for the Palestine and wider anti-war movements.

As workers are grinding Europe to a halt over continued complicity with Israel's genocide, as with the Italian general strike, this victory in the TUC is an important stepping stone to kicking the British labour movement into gear to stand with Palestine and campaign for welfare not warfare.

ITALIAN WORKERS STRIKE FOR PALESTINE

PENNY HICKS



A general strike across Italy in September created an explosion of protest. Four trade unions representing dock workers, rail and bus workers, teachers and students took to the streets supported by many more.

Around eighty major cities and towns had mass demonstrations, many leading to mass direct actions. The dockers at Genoa again blocked Israeli goods leaving the port, now supported by dockers at other ports. The strike demanded support for the safe passage of the global flotilla, stopping arms to Israel and for an end to the genocide.

The main A1 motorway at Florence was blocked, demonstrators marched symbolically down empty main rail tracks and stations were stormed. Iconic statues in Rome and Florence were adorned with flags, and traffic signs with the word 'Stop' had 'genocide' stickers added.

Footage of delayed drivers in one town showed them getting out of their cars to support demonstrators waving Palestine flags. Workers in hospitals not on strike wore Palestine badges.

The Italian government subsequently sent a navy ship to escort the Global Sumud flotilla through international waters after Israel attacked the boats with drones.

Now that's a workplace day of action!

Join the next UK national workplace day of action for Palestine on Thursday 9 October
See stopwar.org.uk for details



PICKET LINES THIS MONTH

BIRMINGHAM REFUSE WORKERS

Union: Unite
Dates: Continuous
Location: Sites across Birmingham

UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM

Union: UCU
Dates: 1-3, 13-17, 20-24 October
Location: Nottingham, NG7 2RD

UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER

Union: UCU
Dates: Every weekday until 17 October
Location: University Road, LE1 7RH

BOURNEMOUTH AIRPORT

Union: Unite
Dates: 1, 16, 17 October
Location: Bournemouth, BH23 6SE

NORTHERN RAIL CONTRACTORS

Union: RMT
Dates: 7, 8 October
Location: Carlisle Station, CA1 1QZ

BEE NETWORK

Union: Unite
Dates: 1, 2, 10, 11, 13, 18, 23, 24 October
Location: Depots in Ardwick, Wythenshawe, Stalybridge, Stockport, Oldham and Chadderton

FIRST WEST BUS DRIVERS, BRISTOL

Union: Unite
Dates: 1-14 October
Location: Lawrence Hill depot, BS5 0BT; Hengrove depot, BS4 1UL

INTERVIEW

How we fight and how we win



Michael Lavalette spoke to **Ian Hodson**, President of the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union about political trade unionism, countering the far right and the potential for Your Party

Can you tell us a little about your background?

I started off working in a food factory in Blackpool. I joined The Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union (BFAWU) and soon became a shop steward. I gradually became an elected branch officer and then moved to work full-time for the union. In 2012, I stood to be President of the union and won. It's a five-year term and I've stood four times.

Trades Unions are facing a decline in members and an aging membership. How do you think we can grow the union movement?

Workers have to see, in practice, that unions can improve their working conditions and wages. That's primarily what unions are for. In BFAWU, we have taken a very proactive attitude to recruitment: we believe that we have to (and can) go out and recruit workers, even in the most difficult circumstances.

We have been centrally involved in working with workers at McDonalds and at Hovis, campaigning with them, supporting their strike actions and organising against zero-hour contracts and for better pay rates.

At McDonalds, for example, a lot of people, a lot of good union people, thought it would be impossible to organise in the fast-food sector. But we put organisers in, built a relationship with the workforce and then supported the workers during the 'McStrikes'. Because of the work we had put in, we had a 100% vote for strike action amongst our members at



IAN HODSON. PHOTO: STEVE EASON / CC BY-NC 2.0

McDonalds! We then moved to our 'McBurn' campaign where we built up a campaign for legal intervention against the regular burns our members suffer from in the fast-food industry.

This is how, in my opinion, we win people to the union: being active and visible over the struggle for improvements in health and safety, clear and guaranteed working hours and better pay.

But your union doesn't just take up 'bread and butter' issues (as important as these are), you are also vocal over a range of political and social issues.

Of course! Look, I heard a Reform politician saying that London is full of people who don't speak English. And I thought 'of course there are lots of people speaking other languages in central London ... it's one of the most popular tourist spots in the world!'

But of course, they were trying to insinuate something else, but we have to be clear. Our class, the working class, is made up of old and young, men and women, gay and straight, black and white, people of various faiths and none. The bosses try to divide us.

They tell us that migrants are here to take jobs or force down

wages, but that's simply not true. The reason we have poor pay is because of the bosses and their wish to keep more of their vast profits for themselves. The reason for unemployment, poor housing, poor services is not because of refugees, it's the political choices of the establishment.

And, of course, as a union, we need to campaign against division, decline of services, and lack of housing, because these are things that directly affect our members.

The Employment Rights Bill is going through parliament, are you confident Labour will

implement it in full, as promised before their election?

Labour made all kinds of promises whilst in opposition. The Employment Rights Bill was going to stop zero-hours contracts, would improve pay and conditions and represent, they claimed, a fundamental improvement in worker rights. But it's taking too long to implement, and we can see, in the small print, they are suggesting all manner of delays.

Well, workers can't wait! We need better pay and conditions now, not in two or three years' time.

You are heavily involved in the discussions and debates around 'Your Party'. What are your hopes for the new party and its relationship with the union movement?

My union was heavily involved in the formation of the Labour Party at the start of the last century. We were affiliated to Labour for over 100 years. But in 2021, we took the decision to disaffiliate from Labour, frankly because we were so dissatisfied with Starmer.

But we do believe that workers and trade unions need political representation. So we have encouraged all our branches to engage with the debates around political representation.

For me, the potential for Your Party – with close to 800,000 sign-ups - is huge, though some of the machinations at the top really need to stop. Your Party needs to be a party of the grassroots, an insurgent party of ordinary people sick of the political establishment and the appeasement of the bosses.

We need to have a party that will fight for redistribution, greater equality, better services and a pay rise for all of us.

Trade unions vs Reform

John Westmoreland looks at the rise of the far right and the role of trade unions in turning the tide

It is looking increasingly likely that Nigel Farage will dominate parliament after the next general election with either an outright win for Reform, or in a coalition with the Tories.

Reform is dedicated to cementing the evolving capitalist dictatorship that is emerging from over a decade of austerity and the impoverishment of a swathe of the working class. Either way, one thing we can predict with certainty is that there is going to be a war on trade unions and a vicious fight over education.

Educators against Reform

Teachers unions, and especially the NEU, have enraged right-wing commentators with their demands for pay justice after years of pay erosion. The Tory press has expressed the outrage of their billionaire backers, with an unending attack on 'lefty teachers' and 'bullshit degrees' and the Labour government has echoed that prejudice.

Teacher unions have defended real education valiantly in the face of the manageocracy that leads the education sector. Every child in the UK is told that education is about becoming employable. 'Work hard and get a good job' is ingrained in the fibre of our schools, colleges and universities.

Real education that makes students think, at a time when the gap between rich and poor has never been wider, threatens the ruling class with aspirations beyond what the market can deliver. And, judging from demonstrations for Palestine and climate justice, young people are still infuriatingly idealistic, and resistant to dull business exhortations to buckle down.

We had better take heed of what's in store. A recent poll shows that an election now would give Farage between 200 and 250 seats in parliament. A Reform government would not mean business as usual. Anti-trade-union rhetoric will turn into outright repression as enthusiastic enforcers are put in place across the civil service and local and national administration.

War on the education unions is certain, and the NEU, a bit like the NUM under Thatcher, is seen as a bastion of the left in education and the wider trade-union movement.

Manufactured rage

When a Reform election rally in Doncaster was interrupted by student protesters last year, Farage exploded in anger: 'That's what you get, when teaching unions in this country are poisoning the minds of young



TRADE UNION BANNERS ON MARCH AGAINST TOMMY ROBINSON, JULY 2024. PHOTO: STEVE EASON / CC BY-NC 2.0

people, not just against Reform, but against everything this country has ever stood for. I'll make it clear, when we're in a position of power, we will go to war with these left-wing teaching unions and make sure our kids are taught properly.'

The hecklers had no connection to teaching unions. It was an opportunity to manufacture anger against the teaching unions and Farage took the opportunity with both hands. Farage is feeding on the wave of Republican hatred towards progressive education and educators in the US.

The assassination of Charlie Kirk saw Farage write an op-ed in the Daily Mail where he accused left-wing teachers and lecturers of creating the 'febrile atmosphere' that led to Kirk getting shot. 'My friend Charlie', claims Farage, 'was shot dead doing what he has always done, going to college campuses and courageously taking on the Left, trans activists and anybody

opposed to his national conservative views.'

Not only have teachers suffered victimisation and dismissal, but right-wing agitators have encouraged students to slap teachers who enforced mask wearing during the Covid pandemic, and right-wing bullies have invaded school board meetings with the intention of overthrowing them.

Woven into the manufactured rage of the right and their incitement are accusations of child abuse (sex education) and anti-Christian bigotry (social science) and teaching fake science (vaccines, and climate change).

The seriousness of the situation should not be underestimated. Books are being taken out of school libraries, health professionals are being sacked and the most absurd anti-intellectual figures are replacing them: witness RFK Junior's promotion

of anti-vax crackpots in the Department of Health.

Farage has every intention of turning our classrooms into a culture-war battleground, and we have to sound the alarm now, both to minimise Reform's electoral hopes and prepare for the fight to come if he succeeds.

Management bullies will rush to Farage

We can expect little from the corporate clowns that sit atop the management hierarchies in our educational institutions. The austerity years have conditioned a layer of overpaid managers, academy-chain bosses and university vice chancellors to make 'tough decisions' involving pay cuts for staff, pay rises for them and cuts to courses.

We could be forgiven for thinking that these education overlords are more

interested in business outcomes than raising educational standards. And don't think for one minute they will have any professional objections to an attack on progressive education and teachers. Reform membership will rocket in that demographic.

What's more, there is already a repressive apparatus of monitoring and shaming in place and that will fall into Farage's hands. Ofsted will become Ofstapo before you can say Tommy Robinson.

Your Party, the unions and the working class

Education is a class issue. It is a right. It is, and always has been, about developing the potential of children in their quest for adulthood. Progressive education is subversive. Unless the coming generation goes beyond the limitations of the current one, humanity regresses. Farage wants to contain free

thought, free speech and demolish the professional concerns of our educators.

The mass membership of Your Party tells us that we have a chance to start matching the right-wing on the need to fight over education now. We can dent Farage's voter base and expose the danger he poses to our kids.

We can hold rallies involving every sector of education and draw in students and parents too. If we are correct in saying that our educators and their unions are the line of defence between the depredations of rabid Reformers and our kids, then we can start to build across the trade-union movement as a whole.

If Thatcher had said, in 1978, that her intention was to destroy the trade unions and especially the NUM, there would have been class-wide anger and organisation to meet the challenge and history would be different.

Farage has laid his cards on the table. Let's use the defence of education as a wedge issue between him and his working-class supporters. We can weaken his vote and get teachers and trade unionists ready for the battles to come.

Threat of Reform

On the eve of Labour's annual conference a *Sunday Times* MRP poll reported if an election was called Reform would win a 96-seat majority.

A similar poll for YouGov the previous week had Reform a few seats shy of a majority.

Collapse of Labour

The MRP *Sunday Times* poll put Labour on just 90 seats.

The Labour leader is even more unpopular than the party. An IPSOS poll reported Starmer to be the least popular prime minister ever, below even Liz Truss, with just 13% of voters satisfied with his leadership, 79% dissatisfied.

Survation (for Labour List) suggest that the majority of labour members - 53% - want a new leader before the next election.



WOMEN AGAINST THE FAR RIGHT. PHOTO: STEVE EASON / CC BY-NC 2.0

THE FAR RIGHT DON'T CARE ABOUT VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

CLEMENTINE RUSSELL

The idea that immigration is a threat to British women and girls is racist rhetoric that has been a key part of the recent rise in fascist protests in the UK.

This propaganda, designed to villainise immigrants and refugees, has little in the way of truth behind it, and the weaponisation of women's safety concerns only makes battling sexual violence harder.

Prominent right-wing politicians such as Nigel Farage and Robert Jenrick have pushed the harmful rhetoric that immigration undermines female safety. In a press conference in July, Farage stated that:

'There is an alarming parallel between the extraordinary increase in the number of reported rapes and the wholly irresponsible immigration and asylum policies pursued by first Labour and then by Conservative Governments.'

Farage's viewpoint is particularly disreputable considering his consistent support of men who have been accused of committing sexual violence, such as Andrew Tate. Robert Jenrick has spouted similar views, stating his fears for his daughters over immigrants with 'medieval attitudes' to women and girls.

The idea that immigrants and refugees are primitive in their beliefs and behaviour is rooted in racism and xenophobia, 'othering' them.

The idea that women are unsafe around immigrants reflects racist and bigoted rhetoric that dates back to slavery, where white women were seen as pure

goddesses and black men as a threat to them.

In reality, the biggest threats to women's safety are the men in their lives. The majority of sexual violence is committed by men known to the victims, and is often seen in domestically abusive relationships. Women and children who are victims of sexual violence receive little to no support from those in power.

The issue of violence against women and girls often goes unspoken about, despite the massive numbers of women who have experienced harassment and abuse. Scapegoating immigrants for a very real issue both creates an unsafe environment for those seeking asylum in the UK and buries the real causes behind the epidemic of sexual violence.

The far right's perversion of our issues also subjects female refugees to further violence and persecution. While many Tommy Robinson supporters were seen wearing shirts urging 'protect our women', their behaviour was quite the opposite.

In one video from 13 September, the protesters chant 'Get your tits out for the lads' to a woman recording them. Another video shows a brown woman being chased. This hypocrisy highlights how women's safety is simply a thin veil that fascists such as Tommy Robinson use to hide their true bigotry.

Sexual violence against women and girls in the UK is a serious issue, and the far right's perversion of this should not be tolerated. Mobilising against fascists to show that immigrants are welcome in the UK is of the utmost importance right now.

THE CONDITION OF THE WORKING CLASS

The rot at the heart of Westminster



by **Terina Hine**

The 2018 hardback edition of *Why We Get the Wrong Politicians* by Isabel Hardman, assistant editor of the *Spectator*, was given a glowing endorsement on its title page by Peter Mandelson. The endorsement was not meant to be ironic.

Such is the cosy relationship between Westminster politicians and journalists. At the time, Mandelson had twice been sacked from ministerial roles for corruption, had a known close relationship with a convicted paedophile, yet was in the midst of being rehabilitated by the Labour right in order to attack Corbyn.

Since the beginnings of New Labour, the political class has become increasingly distant and professionalised: more and more PPE or law graduates who cut their teeth in student politics, fewer and fewer with experience of ordinary working life. Far too many move seamlessly from parliament to senior posts in the media and corporate world, or vice versa. The MP departing the Commons for a lucrative career in the boardroom, greased by deals, corporate ‘gifts’ and ‘relationships’ gained whilst supposedly serving their constituents, has become commonplace.

In Hardman’s book, she refers to a parliamentary culture that enables and encourages MPs to feel superior and entitled, such that even those who entered politics to do good, or those few from a working-class background, such as Angela Rayner, find it almost impossible not to become arrogant or to be tainted by a sense of impunity.

That Mandelson was appointed as an ambassador beggars belief. That he was appointed as UK ambassador to the US because of, and not despite his history,

speaks volumes. Starmer twice defended Mandelson. Fully aware of the case and utterly deaf to public opinion, Starmer said, ‘the ambassador has expressed his deep regret and is now playing an important part in the US/UK relationship.’ As I write, Mandelson still remains a Labour peer in the Lords. Impunity is clearly alive and well.

When Paul Ovensden, ‘top Starmer aide’, resigned over his vile WhatsApp ‘shag, marry, kill’ messages about Diane Abbott, one senior government source said sorrowfully, ‘Keir has relied on him heavily every day since [the election]. His loss to the project is monumental.’ Respected media commentators lamented Ovensden’s departing the political scene for an ‘indiscretion’ committed seven years ago, as if that’s a legitimate excuse. Most believe he will be back.

These scandals are just the latest examples of the rot at the heart of this government. Of course, it’s not just this government that’s rotten.

There was cash for questions in 1994, the expenses scandal in 2004, more recently we had Cameron’s lobbying and billions of pounds worth of Covid-related scandals. The leaks in the ‘Boris Files’ suggest Johnson used his prime-ministerial contacts for personal profit to a far greater extent than previously thought. One stand-out file relates to Johnson’s lucrative, commercial relationships with the Gulf States, a leaf no doubt taken from the Blair playbook.

People are not stupid and the rot is plain to see. The revolving door between politics, the media and the corporate world has resulted in a debasement of our political system that seems beyond repair and has resulted in a huge dissonance between the political class and general public.

This dissonance doesn’t just lead to an ever-continuing cycle of corruption, but also produces massively unpopular policies and disengagement from the political process. Lack of housing reform, support for Israel’s genocide, the two-child benefit

cap, disability-benefit cuts, the winter-fuel allowance cuts; these examples show that ignoring public opinion lost the government considerable political support and credibility regardless of its parliamentary majority.

The dysfunction surrounding the launch of Your Party revealed how important it is for even the best of our MPs not to become divorced from the masses and movements that lend them support. If we want an end to the rot in politics, political power must become rooted in mass membership and the trade-union and social movements, and the media disentangled from the political elites and corporate world.

Without this, the Westminster stage will remain inhabited by the wrong politicians: an unrepresentative, tone-deaf Labour government and ragbag Tory opposition with Reform eagerly waiting in the wings.

THIS MONTH IN HISTORY

MORGAN DANIELS

1649

24th: Leveller John Lilburne goes on trial for treason at Guildhall in London

1887

22nd: John Reed, journalist and author of *Ten Days That Shook the World*, born in Portland, Oregon

1903

10th: Women’s Social and Political Union formed in Manchester

1968

5th: Civil-rights movement born in Northern Ireland following police attacks on a march called by the Derry Housing Action Committee

2011

15th: Occupy London begins with an attempted encampment at the London Stock Exchange



Migrants make our NHS

TOM GRIFFITHS

Anti-migrant rhetoric is on the rise.

Saturday 13 September saw the biggest far-right demonstration in British history. Many who attended believe migrants are the root of Britain’s problems. Reform, leading in the polls, is calling for an end to Indefinite Leave to Remain. At the UN, Donald Trump told European leaders to end ‘open borders policies’ or risk ‘going to hell’. Racist scapegoating of society’s ills is nothing new, but it’s reaching a fever pitch.

The reason this has any traction at all is because there’s a lot to be angry about. A cost-of-living crisis, lack of jobs, crumbling services and war and genocide abroad.

Once beloved, the UK’s National Health Service is now struggling, waiting lists are growing, appointments lacking, and thousands of avoidable deaths are occurring each year due to long waits for emergency care and low staffing levels.

The truth is that Labour, in part voted into office to stop the NHS’s decline, has failed to offer a solution to the crisis.

Instead they will axe around 100,000 NHS jobs despite an urgent need for more staff and over 100,000 vacancies. They also plan to continue cutting trust budgets and allowing more services to be bought by private companies. At the same time, Keir Starmer has doubled down on the anti-migrant rhetoric that threatens only to deepen the NHS crisis.

The truth is, the NHS would collapse completely if migration was halted or even significantly slowed. About one in five NHS staff in England is from abroad. When it comes to clinical roles (doctors, nurses etc), about one in three doctors and one in four nurses is either born or trained abroad, meaning migrants are essential to patient care and patient safety.

It is impossible to replace migrant NHS staff with UK-born and UK-trained health workers overnight and it would take investment on a scale that this government is refusing to do.

Even the idea that migrants are a burden on the NHS is simply not borne out by the facts. Only 0.3% of total NHS budgets go on providing care for non-UK residents. The NHS, in fact, is the clearest example we have of how our society is benefited and enriched by migrants.

The current spike in racist rhetoric is a smokescreen meant to divide and distract us from what’s really causing misery in society and undermining our NHS. The root cause is politicians and their friends in vast corporations who are privatising our public services. It’s not people in small boats, it’s the people at the top.

MARXISM 101



POLICE AT DEFEND OUR JURIES PROTEST, 6 SEPTEMBER. PHOTO: INDIGO NOLAN / CC BY 2.0

THE POWER OF THE STATE



by **Alex Snowden**

The state is generally seen as a neutral set of institutions. It is ‘above politics’. It is impartial. Yet this appearance, argued Karl Marx, is a mask for it being a collection of instruments for class rule and exploitation.

What constitutes ‘the state’ is far from simple. After the Second World War, the term became increasingly associated with nationally coordinated services and provision that benefited working-class people: the ‘welfare state’ of nationalised health care, social security, and so on.

It was an apparently benevolent force. This view was associated primarily with Labour governments, but it had a cross-party consensus underpinned by the long post-war economic boom. This boom allowed scope for lifting working-class standards, partly via state measures from pensions and unemployment benefits to the NHS and social housing.

After Margaret Thatcher’s election

victory in 1979, and the pioneering of neo-liberalism, it became fashionable to view ‘the state’ as restrictive. We were (so it was argued) over-regulated, over-taxed and over-spending. And the poor were over-dependent upon the state. The state had to be trimmed to liberate market forces and force people to stand on their own two feet.

This was always more rhetoric than reality. Although the state was in some ways re-fashioned, it was very much needed by neoliberal capitalism. The state facilitated the needs of business. There was less emphasis on its benevolent role.

There is, however, an older and rather different conception of ‘the state’ that pre-dates the rise of national welfare systems designed to both alleviate poverty and maintain the labour force necessary for capitalism. This is the notion of a set of institutions required to maintain a modern capitalist nation state.

This includes the administrative functions. The British civil service grew enormously in the nineteenth century to carry out the business of an increasingly centralised state. This was true at the domestic level, but also in the massive expansion of the diplomatic corps needed to run the British Empire.

This might seem politically neutral work, but the reality is different. The most

senior civil servants are part of the ruling class and oversee a strictly hierarchical apparatus geared towards preserving the status quo. The 1980s sitcoms *Yes, Minister* and *Yes, Prime Minister* wittily satirised the ways in which top civil servants would undermine any efforts by elected politicians to change or reform anything.

There were also the repressive, coercive functions of the state. A properly organised police force developed in the aftermath of the Peterloo massacre in 1819 and the protest movements of that period.

Shrewder elements of the ruling class realised that sending in the yeomanry, hired from the ranks of the middle class, to crush demonstrations was deeply unpopular. A supposedly neutral force with more legitimacy was urgently needed.

The police therefore emerged as a response to working-class protest, not primarily as a vehicle for law and order. The armed forces grew into their modern form as part of British imperialism’s expansion, becoming a vital means for the ruling class to pursue its aims in war and military dominance. We could also add the security and intelligence services, the judiciary and the prison system as part of the coercive state.

All of this, of course, was presented as neutral and in service of ‘the national interest’. The administrative and coercive

layers were prettified and dignified by the third branch of the state: the ceremonial pomp of monarchy, Lords and Church.

These bodies had little real power. However, they possessed ideological force. They were all re-made for an age of universal suffrage, designed to legitimise the wealth and power of those accustomed to having large amounts of both those things.

Marx argued that the state served the interests of the ruling class. It was therefore an integral part of the system of exploitation of the working class by the ruling class. Yet it had, in order to be seen as legitimate, to be framed as ‘above politics’ and, in a sense, ‘above society’.

In today’s Britain, the links between state institutions and the capitalists are actually more obvious than ever before. There is a revolving door between corporate boardrooms and the upper echelons of the civil service. Privatisation and outsourcing have led to more direct business interference in traditional state functions.

The state is as coercive as ever too. The new authoritarianism is eroding the right to protest. Huge hikes in military spending, boosting the armed forces, are the order of the day.

Challenging the power of the state is essential to socialist politics and activism in today’s world.



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WHAT WE STAND FOR

Counterfire is a revolutionary socialist organisation that has been central to the Palestine, anti-war and anti-austerity movements over the last two decades. We are committed to transforming our society from one based on the profit motive to one built on the needs of working people.

Real change can only be achieved by working-class people organising themselves to challenge their bosses and the government that stands behind the bosses. It depends on mass movements, popular protests, and on workers taking action. We believe that this kind of popular opposition requires a dynamic extra-parliamentary left, rooted in workplaces, communities, and colleges.

We also believe that all the struggles against oppression are connected. Racism, sexism, and every other form of oppression and discrimination are a product of a society based on the exploitation of working people by a tiny minority of capitalists. War, climate change, and inequality are all symptoms of a chaotic system based on market competition.

In the process of helping to build every kind of resistance to capitalism, we bring to bear the lessons of the past and a Marxist analysis of the present. Counterfire puts the case for a revolutionary socialism that ultimately seeks popular control of society and genuine liberation for all.

Our members are actively involved in the protest movements and workers' struggles around the country, organising and supporting protests and picket lines. We have Counterfire branches across the country helping to build solidarity with struggles locally and nationally, and popularise socialist ideas and analysis.

As well as putting on a wide range of debates, public meetings and other events around the country, we run one of the best-read websites on the left which has scores of contributors and tens of thousands of readers every month and we distribute thousands of copies of the left's first free paper – which has now expanded to 12 pages.

Join us and get involved today.

COUNTERFIRE & MOVEMENT EVENTS

Counterfire branches around the country organise regular in-person or online public meetings discussing key topics of the moment. We also organise national and regional events like Revolution! and Marxism in a Day periodically. Our events are open to all, and listed below along with key movement dates for your diary.

See counterfire.org/events for updates.

LONDON

Women against the far right
Wednesday 1 October, 9:30am
Downing Street, London, SW1A 2AA

BRIGHTON

Stopping the genocide: Israel, the West and the Palestine solidarity movement
Thursday 2 October, 7pm
Friends Meeting House, Ship Street, Brighton, BN1 1AF

LONDON

Lift the ban
Saturday 4 October, 1pm
Parliament Square, London, SW1P 3JX

PARIS

International meeting against the war
Sunday 5 October, 1:30pm
Dôme de Paris, 37 Boulevard Victor, Paris, France

EAST LONDON (ONLINE)

Branch meeting (open to all)
Wednesday 8 October, 6:30pm
Register on Zoom: bit.ly/3ILRWSP

NATIONAL

Workplace day of action for Palestine
Thursday 9 October
Nationwide

LIVERPOOL

Your Party rally
Thursday 9 October, 6:30pm
St George's Hall, St George's Place, Liverpool, L1 1JJ

NEWCASTLE

Flags, fascists and Farage: how do we stop the far right?
Thursday 9 October, 7:30pm
Bar Loco, 22 Leazes Park Road, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 4PG

LONDON

National demonstration for Palestine
Saturday 11 October, 12pm
Central London - @stwuik for updates

BRIXTON

Flags, fascism and Farage: how do we stop the far right?
Wednesday 15 October, 7pm
The Platform Cafe, 2 Ridgeway Road, London, SW9 7AH

BRISTOL

Marxism, the state and imperialism
Friday 17 October, 7pm
Hamilton House, 80 Stokes Croft, Bristol, BS1 3QY

DEVON & CORNWALL (ONLINE)

Flags, fascists and Farage: how do we stop the far right?
Tuesday 21 October, 7pm
Register on Zoom: bit.ly/4gNcRBH

IPSWICH

Flags, fascists and Farage: how do we stop the far right?
Wednesday 22 October, 7pm
Friends Meeting House, 39 Fonnereau Road, Ipswich IP1 3JH

WHITECHAPEL

Counter-demonstration against UKIP
Sunday 25 October, 12pm
Whitechapel Station, E1 1BY

EDINBURGH

Flags, fascism and Farage: how do we stop the far right?
Tuesday 28 October, 7pm
Southside Community Centre, 117 Nicolson Street, Edinburgh, EH8 9ER

LUTON

Your Party rally
Sunday 16 November, 2pm
Grand Park Hall, Park Street, LU1 3HG

LOCAL GROUPS

Counterfire has local branches across the country building the movements of resistance and popularising socialist ideas by organising public meetings, local activity and distributing our free newspaper.

To find out more about a branch near you or to help set one up where you are, please contact the national office.

NATIONAL OFFICE

info@counterfire.org
07807 123472

Branches:

BOURNEMOUTH

BIRMINGHAM

BRIGHTON

BRISTOL

CREWE

DEVON & CORNWALL

EAST KENT

DONCASTER

EDINBURGH

GLASGOW

HASTINGS

IPSWICH

LIVERPOOL

LONDON:

EAST

HARINGEY

NORTH WEST

SOUTH EAST

SOUTH WEST

SOUTH (CENTRAL)

MANCHESTER

NEWCASTLE

PRESTON & CHORLEY



You can join by scanning the QR code on the right and completing the form on our website or alternatively fill out your details here and hand it in at one of our stalls or post to Counterfire, UN1.30, United House, North Road, London, N7 9DP

FIRST NAME: _____

LAST NAME: _____

EMAIL: _____

PHONE NO: _____

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JOIN COUNTERFIRE TODAY

Scan the QR code or go to www.counterfire.org/join

ART & CULTURE



HOUSE OF GUINNESS

Class, imperialism and the Irish national struggle take centre-stage

LUCY NICHOLS

Though on the surface, *House of Guinness* is merely another *Succession*-like family drama that chronicles the history of the world's most popular stout, there are some serious politics hiding in this eight-episode series. The soundtrack is also fantastic, with Kneecap and Fontaines D.C. featuring heavily.

The *Netflix* drama is set in Dublin during Britain's colonial rule of Ireland. We are also only two decades on from the Great Famine, for which British policy bears heavy responsibility. The famine left a million dead and created another million refugees. Both great injustices feature heavily in *House of Guinness*.

The phenomenally wealthy and Protestant Guinness family was unaffected by the famine and relies on the British Empire to sell its beer. After the death of the patriarch, the four remaining Guinness children jostle for power and money.

The male heirs to the Guinness fortune settle on expanding the business, by whatever means necessary. Meanwhile, the female members of the house of Guinness focus on expanding the company's charitable ventures, including by building housing near the St James' Gate brewery. All the staples of a *Netflix* drama follow: sex, violence, secrets, and betrayal.

The series is slightly predictable. There is nothing particularly groundbreaking when it comes to plot, direction, or cinematography. However, it does what it says on the tin, and is in this way a satisfying and enjoyable watch.

What is arguably ground-breaking is how it portrays Irish history, for an inter-

national audience. This programme follows the hugely popular *Peaky Blinders*, both written by Steven Knight, and is the subject of a serious advertising campaign from *Netflix*.

It will probably be one of the bigger programmes this year, broadcast all over the world. This will include Britain, where the dark history of the British Empire in Ireland is not exactly mainstream knowledge, and where the Irish 'potato famine' is often the butt of right-wing jokes.

One of the key storylines in *House of Guinness* revolves around the Irish Republican Brotherhood, who are treated as a genuine movement for Irish liberation and not stereotyped as terrorists.

Class is an overarching theme in the programme, although the Guinness family

is, rather annoyingly, portrayed as paternalistic and benevolent. The stark differences between Protestant high society and the poverty of the Irish working-class and peasant Catholics are made clear, and the Guinness family members often come up against this poverty.

One of the series' more poignant scenes is born out of this theme, as Ann Guinness, the younger daughter of the dead patriarch, travels to survey the family's vast estate in County Mayo. She passes through the village of Cloonboo (Cluain Bú in Irish) and, by accident, visits one of the mass graves from the famine.

The Guinness family owned Cloonboo at the time and did nothing as hundreds starved to death. A village matriarch explains the suffering endured throughout

the famine, that they were too weak to even dig individual graves for their loved ones.

At a time of increasing nationalism, where history is bent and shaped by those in power for political gain, it is refreshing to see a portrayal of Irish history and British colonialism like the *House of Guinness*. Indeed, it is refreshing to see any portrayal of Irish history at all, particularly one with such a strong emphasis on class, and political and national struggle.

It is not perfect, and becomes unrealistic at times, particularly as it portrays rich capitalists as paternalistic philanthropists. It is also the first *Netflix* programme to offer viewers the chance to watch with Irish subtitles, part of the resurgence of a language that British colonialism tried so hard to wipe out.

KNEECAP'S MO CHARA IS A FREE MAN

SHABBIR LAKHA

Trumped-up charges of terrorism against Kneecap rapper Liam Óg, stage name Mo Chara, were last month thrown out of court.

It is a huge victory for Palestine solidarity and free speech and an embarrassment for the police and Starmer's government.

In a statement following the trial, Mo Chara said,

'This entire process was never about me, never about any threat to the public and never about "terrorism", a word used by your government to discredit people you oppress.

It was always about Gaza. About what happens if you dare to speak up. If anyone on this planet is guilty of terrorism, it is the British state. Free Palestine!



KNEECAP OUTSIDE WOOLWICH CROWN COURT. PHOTO: @KNEECAPCEOL/X

Despite the concerted efforts to silence the Irish hip-hop trio, including the cancelling

of their visas to the US and Canada, Kneecap has remained steadfast in their support for the Palestinian people and calls to end the genocide in Gaza.

Starmer personally intervened earlier in the year to try to get them cancelled at Glastonbury.

At their recent packed-out performance in Wembley Arena, the rappers led the crowd in chanting 'Free Palestine' and 'Fuck Keir Starmer' throughout the night.

The British state's attempt at repression has seriously backfired and the band's popularity has increased dramatically. Hundreds have turned out to protest at every one of their court appearances and their shows sell out faster than they can announce them.

COUNTERFIRE



Photos: Steve Estlin / CC BY-NC 2.0

GETTING THE PARTY STARTED

John Rees

Your Party, the Jeremy Corbyn-Zarah Sultana electoral project, is stuttering into life.

In a rancorous and botched launch, the two figureheads have not, as Jeremy Corbyn admitted, ‘covered themselves in glory’.

Many on the left are despairing that it will ever become an effective organisation, many more are waiting to see if it can rise above its birth-pangs. Despair, rarely a useful political stance, may be premature.

Even on a worst-case scenario, come next May’s electoral test, the disaster of the Labour government, impacting directly on millions of working people’s lives, will be a political fact of far greater weight than the tribulations at the top of Your Party.

Palestine solidarity is, astoundingly, a motivating factor even greater than it was at the last general election, when four Gaza independents, plus Jeremy Corbyn, were elected.

So even if Your Party remains a loose coalition of like-minded activists, it will have made a modest step forward in organisation and co-ordination from the largely separate and atomised Gaza independents that fought the general election.

But Your Party has the potential to be so much more than this. It could express the boiling discontent felt with the political establishment in every section of a disenfranchised working class, some parts of which are drawn to Reform on precisely this basis.

For that to happen, it needs to develop quickly a simple, clear bullet-point election pitch that addresses the most pressing issues facing working-class communities. Everyone knows what these are: decent jobs and wages, housing and healthcare and education, peace not war, anti-racism not division and chauvinism.

In other words, a crystal clear call to stand with the exploited and oppressed against the new age of corporate greed and political corruption.

That will mean not allowing the populist

right to define the left through its own culture-war categories.

Your Party must speak a language that some of the existing left finds hard to master: plain, unequivocal, jargon-free common sense as it is understood by millions of progressively inclined working-class people.

And to do that the internal regime of the party must be democratic in the ordinary sense of the word as it is understood in trade-union branches, tenants’ organisations, and social movements.

It must be free of the controlling instincts that come naturally to trade-union and Labour Party bureaucrats and political advisors. It should not mimic the pollsters’ focus groups, or the fake ‘consultations’ so beloved of social-democratic politicians.

It must empower self-activity and support social movements rather than have an instrumental attitude to them.

It must embody the idea of socialism as the self-activity of working people, not as a gift handed to them by elected MPs. That is a failed model, a model that Your Party must replace.