

COUNTERFIRE

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After the victory in Tower Hamlets...

THIS IS HOW WE DEFEAT FASCISTS



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NEWS



NO KINGS PROTEST, MINNEAPOLIS, 18 OCTOBER. PHOTO: CHAD DAVIS / CC BY-SA 4.0

No Kings: escalating opposition to Trump

JOHN CLARKE

The No Kings protests against Trump last month unleashed a massive social mobilisation that expressed deep-seated anger and a determination to defeat the authoritarian agenda that the administration is imposing with terrifying speed.

Organisers estimated 7 million people protested across the country. Huge crowds were reported in New York, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, Chicago and Boston. Protests were seen in deep Republican states – in Birmingham, Alabama and Billings, Montana. Some experts have speculated that the demonstrations could be the largest in modern US history.

The objective of the movement is to ‘defend democratic norms and reject authoritarianism.’ This formulation however, carries with it an implication of defending a status quo that is to the liking of Democratic Party backers of the protests but which fails to meet the needs of the millions who took to the streets.

Trump was clearly rattled by the vast expression of hostility to his administration. Though he hardly seemed amused, he insisted, the protests were ‘a joke,’ while preposterously asserting that they were ‘very small, very ineffective.’

House Speaker Mike Johnson slammed the protests as a ‘hate America rally,’ and other Republicans have derided them as ‘anti-American’.

Prior to the protests, every effort was made to create a climate of fear and an expectation of the threat of violence.

The mobilisation of such a vast expression of opposition to Trump across the US

is a development of enormous significance and one that raises great possibilities.

The fear and loathing with which Trump and a number of his key supporters responded to the protests were also heartening. However, no realistic balance sheet of the No Kings initiative can fail to take note of its considerable weaknesses and limitations.

Hilary Clinton, along with other senior Democrats who have played a major role in this initiative, seek to set the boundaries for any resistance movement. They present Trump as a discordant note, an exceptional figure, who is pursuing dictatorial ambitions that threaten an otherwise admirable US system of democracy. If this threat is overcome, all will be well.

Though there is certainly an acute need to defend basic democratic freedoms in the face of Trump’s authoritarianism, the status quo that the Democrats want to preserve isn’t an option for millions of working-class people.

Trump’s brutal agenda and the ruthlessness with which it is being implemented flow from the instability facing the US and the complete failure of the discredited Biden interlude. Those responsible for this failed Democrat effort can’t provide anything but a false trail when it comes to defeating Trump and the dangers his administration poses.

An effective movement must advance demands that go beyond those of the Democratic Party. The authoritarian threat that Trump represents is very serious, but the US working class is confronting an agenda of union busting, austerity, an assault on migrants, environmental

degradation, militarism and global domination that the Democratic Party advances in a more ‘moderate’ form than Trump.

As Trump demonises protests and tries to generate an ‘enemy within’ to justify the use of emergency powers to suppress dissent, it is clear that he won’t back down without a challenge that does more than register its opposition. Huge protests are vitally important, but blocking Trump’s agenda will require a serious level of disruptive defiance that must include an escalating use of mass strikes.

There is a huge and vibrant opposition that is rooted in workplaces and communities across the US. The scale of the No Kings protest proves this. But those presently leading the movement against Trump have no intention to take the struggle against him to the levels that are needed.

The fight to overcome these limitations must emerge from within unions, social movements and communities under attack. Without such a reorientation Trump will not be stopped.



Trade unions must take on Starmer’s racist witch-hunt

PETE WEBSTER

In July this year, the government amended the Immigration Act to significantly increase minimum salary requirements. Many who become disqualified will face arrest, detention and deportation. The impact, like all immigration-related legislation, is deeply racist with the overwhelming number of people being affected coming from a non-white background.

Starmer’s government used a statutory instrument to make the amendment: meaning no debate nor any consultation with unions or others. Alongside the visa hikes, there are also changes to families applying to join an employed partner here with more stringent English-language tests effectively keeping families divided.

The adult social care, hospitality and logistic sectors also face sweeping changes.

More than 200 RMT members are at threat. At a protest last month, RMT General Secretary Eddie Dempsey said this was no way to treat the workers that are keeping the railways going. Martin Cavanagh, PCS President, said that there are two thousand DWP staff who will be impacted upon by the changes, with many thousands more across all other departments.

Richard Burgon MP said that the reason Starmer has introduced this racist policy is in order to chase the tail of Nigel Farage and Reform. John McDonnell said that the changes would result in Border and Immigration Force officers carrying out Trumpian ICE-style raids on individuals at home and in the workplace as people are hunted down and snatched from family, workmates and friends.

We need coordinated, organised resistance against these attacks including walk-outs when workmates are under threat.

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The Spycop lies coming to light

JAMES SIMPSON

The Undercover Policing Inquiry (UCPI) is back, more than 10 years after it was first set up. This phase will investigate the infiltration of the lives of anti-racist organisers, animal rights activists and family justice campaigns by the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS)'s Special Demonstration Squad (SDS) from 1993 until 2008.

The UCPI was called under the weight of continuous scandal. Since the 2010 unmasking of Mark Kennedy, undercover police spies had, one by one, been exposed. A shocked public learnt how officers had lived the lives of left-wing activists for years at a time. How they had deceived women into sexual relationships, with some even having had children. Whilst collecting an MPS wage.

The straw that broke the camel's back were the revelations from whistleblower, SDS officer Peter Francis, that he had been asked to infiltrate and find information that could smear the Stephen Lawrence family justice campaign.

The investigation into the murder has been heavily criticised by two public inquiries – the Macpherson Report, accused the MPS of institutional racism. The Ellison Review in 2014 revealed that an SDS officer and manager had colluded in secret meetings with a senior MPS officer, feeding information from the Commissioner's office of Lord Paul Condon.

Tranche 3 Phase 1 will see evidence given from Francis, and Baroness Doreen Lawrence, mother of Stephen, as well as family members of Ricky Reel, Michael Menson and Roger Sylvester – all spied on by the SDS under their loose remit of public order policing. All whilst trying to find justice for murdered loved ones.

Further evidence will be heard by SDS officers Mark Jenner and James Thomson, and from people their spying affected. Both deceived women into long-term sexual relationships. Jenner lived with 'Alison' for years whilst spying on her. He was also an active member of UCATT whose activists found their names on the blacklists. This meant long-term unemployment for many. SDS reports fed into the lists.

Please follow and support the work of activists and researchers, at Police Spies Out of Lives, Campaign Opposing Police Surveillance and the Undercover Research Group, in their tireless efforts to push for further investigation and less state obfuscation.

EDITORIAL



UKIP'S DEFEATED DEMO IN KNIGHTSBRIDGE. PHOTO: STEVE EASON / CC BY-NC 2.0

THE NEXT MOVE IN FIGHTING THE FASCISTS

COUNTERFIRE

The fight against resurgent fascism and the far right in the UK hangs in the balance.

On the one hand, the forces of reaction have never been stronger. There has never in post-war Britain been a fascist mobilisation on the scale of Tommy Robinson's 'Unite the Kingdom' demonstration in September. Nor has any such demonstration succeeded in kettling an anti-fascist mobilisation called to counter it.

All this took place against the unique circumstance of Nigel Farage's populist right Reform UK threatening to win the next general election.

This is grim reading, and an even grimmer experience. Yet the right have by no means had things all their own way.

The Whitechapel mobilisation against a planned UKIP march forced the police to ban the fascists. The victory demonstration was a powerful show of defiance.

The debacle of the government-inspired push to let Maccabi Tel Aviv fans maraud through Birmingham has ended in utter humiliation as the true thug nature of the Zionist fans became clear. And in the Caerphilly Welsh Senedd by-election, Reform got convincingly denied the

victory it had counted on by Plaid Cymru.

There can be no complacency however. Robinson will come again, one by-election failure for a Welsh Senedd seat will not stop Farage, and Starmer will continue to pave the way for the right even though he's been shown the red card at Aston Villa.

Before any of that happens, the anti-fascist movement needs to reconfigure itself in significant ways, and learn from the lessons of the past. Stand Up to Racism is currently rethinking its strategy.

There is a well-known model available. The Anti-Nazi League defeated the National Front in the 1970s and the British National Party in the 1990s. That experience cannot be repeated, but the fundamentals of its approach can be learnt from.

The ANL won because it was a specific campaign against fascism, not a campaign against racism in general. By narrowing its focus it was able to unite the largest possible numbers against its particular target.

It did not demand that its supporters agreed on any other question but stopping the fascists.

Other forces on the left tried to combine fighting fascism with wider and more general anti-racist campaigning. This was the approach of the Ken Livingstone-led Anti-Racist Alliance (ARA).

But in so doing, ARA diluted a specifically anti-fascist message and so failed to effectively mobilise against the nazis.

The ANL both physically confronted the fascists and sought to mobilise large numbers for demos, like the two ANL Carnivals in 1978, that were not physical counterprotests.

In fact, the ANL was specifically launched with this second task in mind. After the battle of Lewisham in 1977, even though that confrontation was a decisive victory for the anti-fascists, it became clear to many, especially the then leadership of the SWP, that the anti-fascists were in danger of being witch-hunted into isolation from the broader labour movement.

The ANL was launched to reconnect the anti-fascist vanguard with the wider mass of working people by insisting on anti-fascism as its key focus and by mobilising hundreds of thousands who hated the Nazis but who might not necessarily be immediately drawn into physical confrontation with them.

It aimed, in short, to become politically hegemonic. And it succeeded. It drove the Nazis back to the margins and in the process struck a blow against racism in general. We should draw on that model for a new anti-fascist league.



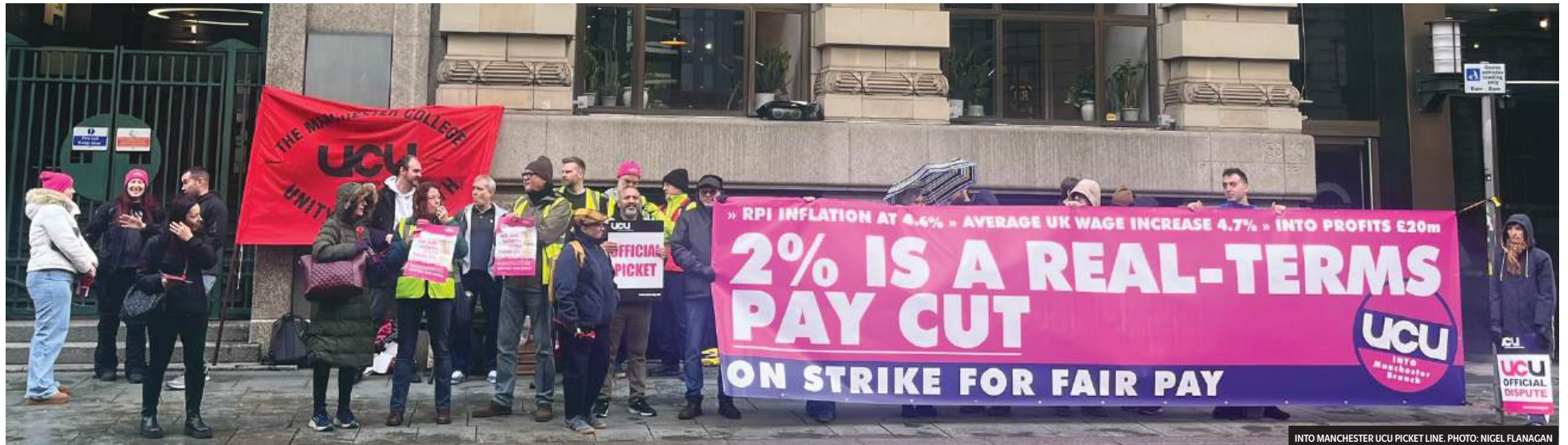
WEEKLY BRIEFING

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TINYURL.COM/LINDSEYBRIEFING

RANK-AND-FILE ROUNDUP



INTO MANCHESTER UCU PICKET LINE. PHOTO: NIGEL FLANAGAN

HE strike ballot: joint action can shift the dial

COUNTERFIRE UCU MEMBERS

Unions representing higher-education workers, including UCU, Unite, EIS and Unison, are balloting their members against the employers' paltry pay offer of 1.4%. With RPI at 4.5%, this is yet another real-terms pay cut.

It's a grim time for staff working in higher education. For years, universities spent tuition-fee income on enormous salaries for vice-chancellors, shiny new buildings and over-ambitious expansion projects but never on staff themselves who regularly received below-inflation pay offers.

Those golden years (at least for the employers) are now a distant memory for most institutions. Declining numbers of overseas students, who contribute a disproportionate amount of income, together with falling revenue from a frozen UK tuition fee and increased competition have produced a perfect storm for the university sector.

In the most recent financial year, 43% of institutions are expected to be in deficit while the average surplus has fallen from 6.1% in 2018-19 to just 0.5% in 2023-24. A fifth of universities had less than thirty days of liquidity – cash to pay staff and run their operations – while seventeen institutions reported zero liquidity days.

This precarious financial situation has led the employers to slash jobs with some 12,000 job cuts in the last year alone. The higher-education regulator is even preparing for some universities to go bankrupt in what it disgracefully calls 'market exit'.

Instead of dipping into reserves (or slashing senior staff pay), universities have reacted to this uncertainty by doing what they always do: making staff pay for a

crisis that they didn't cause.

University staff haven't taken any of this lying down. Dozens of institutions have taken industrial action over the last few years in response to management attacks on pay and conditions.

UCU members at Newcastle University took 44 days of strike action in the spring against the threat of 300 redundancies and won a guarantee of no compulsory job cuts this academic year. Members of the EIS at the University of the West of Scotland have just won a similar guarantee after eight days of strike action.

Meanwhile, workers at a number of

universities including Dundee, Leicester and Nottingham are all currently involved in disputes over redundancies that demonstrate a resilience not to back down in the face of management attacks.

However, while there is potential for organised opposition to cuts at a local level, the appetite for national action appears to be less certain. Members are understandably concerned about the broader economic situation and are feeling vulnerable in the face of aggressive management actions. There is also a residual lack of confidence in the ability of the respective union leaderships to fight consistently and with

accountability to defend jobs and working conditions.

It is going to take a major effort both to reach the 50% threshold in the ballot and to secure a majority to take meaningful industrial action. But this is our only option, as even successful local disputes won't address the more fundamental fault lines in higher-education funding that are behind the sustained attack on pay and conditions.

The crisis in higher education won't go away by itself; only concerted action across campuses and across unions can defend jobs and secure a higher-education system accessible to all.

PICKET LINES THIS MONTH

BIRMINGHAM REFUSE WORKERS

Union: Unite
Dates: Continuous
Location: Sites across Birmingham

PHLEBOTOMISTS AT GLOUCESTERSHIRE HOSPITALS

Union: Unison
Dates: Continuous
Location: Cheltenham General Hospital, GL53 7AN; Gloucestershire Royal Hospital, GL1 3NN

LEONARDO WORKERS

Union: Unite
Dates and locations: 5,6 November (all), 12,13 November (Yeovil, Luton and Basildon), 10-18 November (Edinburgh and Newcastle)

FIRST CYMRU BUS DRIVERS

Union: Unite
Dates: 1,2, 5-8 November
Location: Bus depots in South and West Wales

BRITISH LIBRARY

Union: PCS
Dates: 1-9 November
Location: London, NW1 2DB

CATHEDRAL SCHOOLS TRUST, BRISTOL

Union: Unison
Dates: 5-6 November
Location: Bristol and North Somerset

DWP LINCOLN

Union: PCS
Dates: 4-17 November
Location: Lincoln, LN1 1XX

SEAH WIND LTD, MIDDLESBROUGH

Union: GMB
Dates: 5, 12 and 19 November
Location: Middlesbrough

SHEFFIELD REFUSE WORKERS

Union: Unite
Dates: 10-16, 24-30 November
Location: Sites across Sheffield

UNIVERSITY OF THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS

Union: UCU
Dates: 5, 7, 18 November
Location: Inverness, IV2 3JH

IMPERIAL COLLEGE LONDON

Union: UCU
Dates: 13, 14, 25-28 November
Location: South Kensington campus, SW7 2AZ; White City campus, W12 7TA

LONDON BUS WORKERS PROTEST

Union: Unite
Dates: 5 November
Location: Assemble 11am, Islington Green, N1 0NY, march to TfL HQ

RESIDENT DOCTORS

Union: BMA
Dates: 14-19 November
Location: Hospitals across England

INTERVIEW

Racist flags, take them down!



Could you tell us a little bit about your political background?

I was born and brought up in Birmingham. I grew up in the 1970s and 1980s and we regularly faced racism at school and across the city. I grew up as a community activist: working in campaigns against racism, the wars in the Middle East and, of course, the campaign for Palestinian rights.

Recently you decided to go around your area taking down Union Jack flags, why?

Look, I'm not against flags, to be honest I don't care about them. No one cares that the Union Jack or the St George's flag fly during football tournaments, or fly from the council or government buildings.

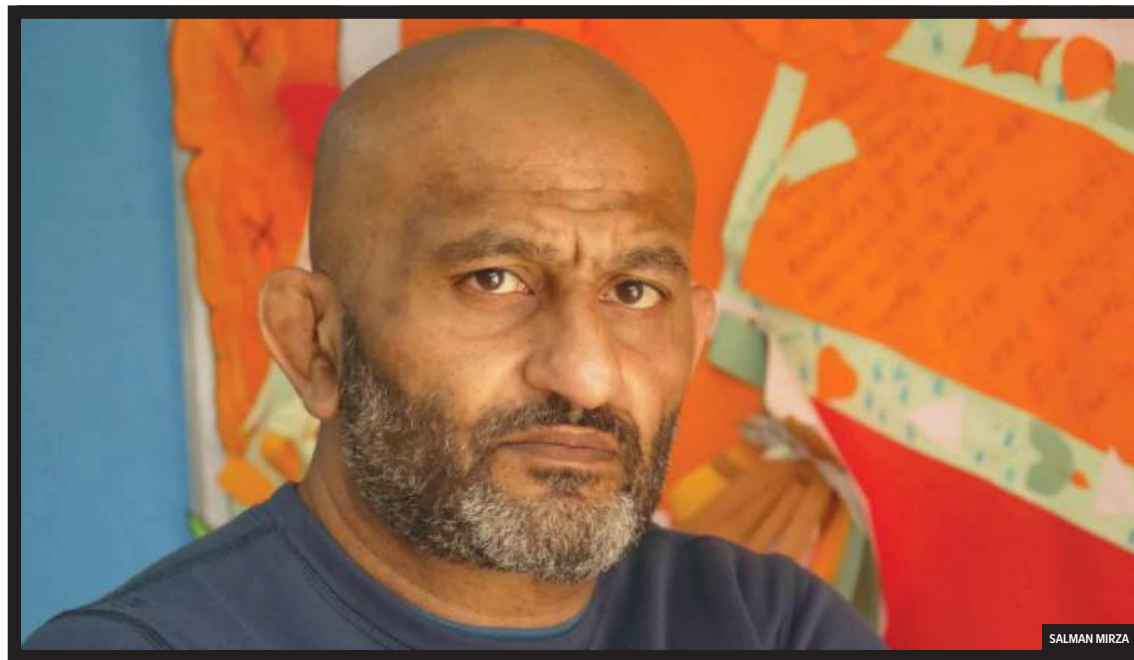
During football tournaments, or whatever, many friends and family members fly the flag from their cars for example. The idea that 'you're not allowed to fly these flags' is fanciful.

But there is nothing positive in the present campaign. This is not about making people feel welcome or sharing 'common values'.

Putting up these flags won't help people make ends meet, or mean we no longer have to have food banks, or that rents will come down or schools and hospitals suddenly have appropriate and adequate funding.

The flag campaign ignores these real needs that ordinary people have. Instead they are being put up in a context that says 'migrants and refugees are the cause of your problems', and

Michael Lavalette spoke to long-time Birmingham activist Salman Mirza who has gained national prominence recently for taking down flags from lampposts



that is demonstrably not true.

The flags campaign is about sowing division. It is about asserting that some people are 'not really British' and 'not really welcome'. And of course, the people who 'aren't really British' are black and brown people and, at present, particularly Muslims. This is about stoking racism.

And we have seen an increase in racism and racist violence in recent months. Young Muslim men have been beaten up, two young women were raped, a Mosque has been set ablaze and a young refugee from Syria was murdered.

To be honest, when they first went up, I thought they would be there for a few days and then people would get bored.

But in one of the WhatsApp groups I was in, a young woman said they made her feel scared and she said she felt like she was being driven away. At that point I thought, 'that's it, I'm taking them down'.

So the flags are an obvious example of a campaign of fear and intimidation. And for that reason, they need to come down.

I was accused of being a

hypocrite because I'm not taking down Palestinian flags! But this is completely different. The Union Jacks are going up to sow division and stoke racism; Palestinian flags are going up to show solidarity with people facing a genocide carried out by Israel with the support of the Western powers.

At present, the Union Jack flags are about 'punching down' and targeting minorities, the Palestinian flags are about identifying with the oppressed against a violent oppressor, they are about 'punching up' and targeting the establishment and the Western powers.

You mentioned the importance of setting the appropriate context within which the 'flag raising' is taking place, would you like to tell us a little more about this?

You have to put the recent campaign to 'fly the flag' in its appropriate context.

Nigel Farage is never off the television and he has been allowed to set the political agenda on the migration issue. The media

commentators really need to have a good look at themselves and what they have enabled.

Instead of confronting this, Keir Starmer and Labour have chased after Farage. They have mirrored Reform's talk of 'patriotism' and 'nationalism'. Every time he is on television, Starmer stands in front of a Union Jack!

Labour has tried to outflank them on the right, playing to Farage's tune. Labour and the Tories have chased each other to show who can be harsher and more brutal on migrants, who can promise to be even tougher on refugees.

But this hasn't stopped Reform, it's fed them and bolstered them and, even more worryingly, it has fuelled the growth of the street-fighting movement around Tommy Robinson.

It's a perfect storm: a Labour government failing to meet people's needs, cutting services, and increasingly distant from working-class communities and a racist right blaming migrants and minority communities for all our problems (and Labour legitimising these nonsense claims).

What we are missing is a

really large, broad national campaign against the right, and we also, alongside this, need to think about real political representation for the working class.

So what do we need to do?

Well I think there are things we can do locally and nationally.

If the flags go up, they are there to sow division. So we need to take them down. If mini-roundabouts are painted, we need to paint them over. Small, locally organised actions like this are important for building our side and pushing the far right back.

We need to assert that we remain the vast majority. We need a really broad campaign involving people from all communities, faiths, trade unions and local campaign groups. And here we need to concentrate on the common ground we have. We also need to think dynamically, we need to make anti-fascism something that is embedded in the cultural life of all our communities.

We need try to drive a wedge between the hardcore fascists and the softer elements who may be attracted to bits of their message because their lives are so awful.

And that means we also need to get to work in our communities, get onto the abandoned estates and work with local activists. We need to show unity in action against poverty, cuts, austerity and racism.

The question of political representation is an interesting one. Starmer and Labour are really hopeless and offer nothing in the way of hope for the future.

I chaired a Birmingham Your Party meeting, but I'm watching this carefully! There is potential, but it needs to move more quickly, be more dynamic and throw itself into the various campaigns that we need and not just get reduced to an electoral project.

The party we need

John Westmoreland looks at the hope Your Party has inspired, what we should be demanding of it and the dangers to avoid

A party that fights for working-class demands. A party that is rooted in working-class communities and trade unions. A party that is a political weapon we can wield against the capitalist dictatorship that threatens to overwhelm us, and that champions the democracy we need.

Your Party, as it is called for now, can become the party the working class needs. But to do that it has to become insurgent, a mass party that is inspired and active, disrupting the dominance of mainstream politics.

The mainstream parties are little more than sock puppets for the billionaires who are sucking up wealth from us at the rate of £35 million a day, and using that wealth to further corrupt a political system that was already in their pocket.

What passes for political debate in Britain is at times beyond parody. The spectacle of Keir Starmer and Tommy Robinson uniting to overturn the police's public-safety concerns over Maccabi Tel Aviv fans at Aston Villa leaves us wondering whether to laugh or cry.

Alongside a blood-soaked foreign policy, Starmer is locked into continuing austerity, the anti-working-class and pro-billionaire diktat that the unelected bankers and CEOs demand.

There's lovely!

The Caerphilly election that saw Plaid Cymru turn over the hopes of Reform and humiliate Labour shows that the working class has not fallen victim to their racist scare tactics. Caerphilly has been Labour for a hundred years, and the right-wing media were rubbing their hands at the expected win for Reform. But the planned Reform celebration party had to be cancelled, and the humiliation was tangible as their candidate walked out after the results were announced.

The victory for Plaid offers hope. If we build a genuine socialist alternative, we can challenge the mainstream parties and change the political conversation: take it out of the Westminster echo chamber and engage with real people that want a democratic politics that they can be part of.

Caerphilly should be the start of a process of breaking Reform's hopes and replacing a worn-out Labour Party. However, we can and must go well beyond what Plaid can offer.

The cart and the horse

Since the launch of Your Party, an amazing 900,000 plus people have shown interest,



JEREMY CORBYN, ZARAH SULTANA. PHOTOS: HOUSE OF COMMONS / CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

but the party has run into problems from rival visions within the leadership and the coterie of appointed organisers. Internal democracy is a matter of concern. The regional assemblies and the founding conference are showing the signs of top-down management that trade-union and Labour bureaucrats favour.

Labourism has always sanctified political leadership being in the hands of Labour MPs rather than trade-union members. This has rightly been mocked as the political cart leading the working-class horse. That model has failed.

We aim to turn the dominant political narrative on its head. We want to put human need in front of private greed. Something that Labourism has failed to do. We have to start by rejecting the Labour Party/TUC model.

We need working-class leadership that can hold the elected leadership to account.

Policy-making and campaigning priorities have to come from the struggles working-class people are fighting, such as those concerning working poverty, the housing crisis and the state of the NHS.

Working-class leaders

Media stereotypes of working-class people reflect the prejudices of our rulers: a working class that is overwhelmingly white Christian and patriotic. They think feeding us racism will keep us inside. Hence Starmer talking up 'working-class concerns about immigration'.

Working-class demands for social and economic justice, on the other hand, are condemned as unrealistic. Starmer is happy to play up anger about immigrants and smother anger about injustice. Let's turn that around.

A party of the working class should not

allow itself to be intimidated by right-wing economic forecasts. The job of Your Party is to tell the establishment that we want socialism, and they are going to pay for it with the wealth they have screwed out of us. 'Tax the rich' is a vote winner, especially when it's linked to better pay and conditions.

The policies of the party have to come from the working class and be won by the working class.

If we are against taking money from welfare to fund spending on armaments, we have to convince workers in the arms industry that they must be part of the struggle to move away from warfare. That means bringing together workers in the NHS and those from the arms industry and develop a policy born from a debate within our ranks.

Recruitment to Your Party can't be left to clever media presentation either. Our

party needs to strike roots into every working-class community; every trade union, tenants' association, food bank and soup kitchen.

Activists in Your Party at local level need to be campaigners over real working-class issues: poverty, housing, transport, education, welfare. This will help activists generate the policies we need, recruit community leaders and establish a genuine working-class party.

All socialists who want to help build this project must be included, and if they are, branches can develop a variety of campaigns and interventions that will help us to learn from each other.

These are exciting times. But we have to be clear. The enemy we face won't be defeated by winning electoral battles alone. When our policies, generated from the working class, are fought for by the working class, a new day will dawn.



LEHMAN BROTHERS INVESTMENT BANK BEFORE IT COLLAPSED IN 2008. PHOTO: DAVID SHANKBONE / CC BY-SA 3.0

IT'S BEGINNING TO LOOK A LOT LIKE 2008

DOMINIC ALEXANDER

There is now a chorus of eminent voices, from the IMF, the governor of the Bank of England, and any number of economists, warning that the world economy is on the verge of another financial meltdown on a par with 2008.

Their fears are well founded with many agreeing that the valuation of leading tech companies and their investments in AI are far out of line with any profits that might someday come out of the new technology, if it, in fact, proves to be profitable at all.

That issue is, however, only one aspect of the looming storm. Another is the huge explosion in the 'non-bank financial institutions', which include insurance companies, pension and investment funds and other institutions.

In the aftermath of the 2008 crisis, and its devastating bank failures, governments tightened the regulations around lenders, so that they would have to have sufficient reserves to withstand unexpected losses, and that they did not lend too recklessly. This was meant to stop another such crisis from happening.

However, just this October, two heavily indebted US firms have collapsed, and two regional banks, again in the US, revealed worrying, large exposures to other bad loans. These failures are signs that the financial sector in general may be

hiding dangerous levels of liabilities. This could lead to a cascading series of failures and panic in stock markets that would rapidly become another global crisis.

Why is this threatening to happen again? The reason is partly capitalism's unsatisfiable thirst for ever larger profits. The capital that couldn't be lent through banks because of the new regulations simply found other avenues, the 'non-bank financial institutions', through which to pursue risky, and lucrative, lending.

This has happened at such a large scale because capitalism has never recovered properly from the 2008 crash and recession. Indeed, we have been living in a period of low growth and low profit rates that has been appropriately described as a 'long depression'. Reckless lending is a strategy to chase profits in a low-profit economic climate.

You may object that surely many corporations, in the energy or tech sectors, for example, are swimming in obscene levels of profit. That is true, but it is a matter of a very few monopoly-scale companies able to use their power to concentrate vast returns, while many lesser concerns are mired in debt to the extent of being 'zombie companies'.

This situation means there are few opportunities for profitable investment, and a lot of capital competing to find it, which is a recipe for reckless capital behaviour. Thus we are seeing the opaque

'slicing and dicing and tranching of loan structures', and other 'exotic' behaviours in the financial world that is very reminiscent of the period just before 2008.

While this has all been happening since the 2010s, the rest of us have been suffering through a period of unprecedented stagnation in wages, and austerity for public services of all kinds, because of the measures governments across the West took to rescue the financial sector from its own disaster.

If you are wondering why so many of us are so poor in the sixth-richest country in the world, it is largely because of the debt governments have piled up through supporting the financial system for the last fifteen years and more. In enforcing austerity on the majority, meanwhile, governments have shielded the wealthy. The fifty richest families in the UK now hold more wealth than half of the country combined. Also, since the 1990s, £200bn has been paid out in dividends to shareholders of privatised utilities.

It's not the disabled, the unemployed or migrants who are draining resources from the country, it's the financial system and the wealthy that are the problem. We need to tax wealth properly, renationalise privatised industries, bring the finance system under democratic control, and have an economic plan for the country which does not prioritise profit, but social utility and social need.

THE CONDITION OF THE WORKING CLASS



RACHEL REEVES / HOUSE OF COMMONS / CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

A nation of shirkers?



by **Terina Hine**

The warnings are stark. The economy isn't working and neither, apparently, are millions of us. Brace yourself for welfare cuts and tax rises in the November budget.

'I can't leave welfare untouched,' said Chancellor Rachel Reeves in a recent Channel 4 interview, 'If more and more of our money ... is spent on welfare, you've got less for the NHS, you've got less on schools and you have to put more on people's taxes.'

Welfare benefits are out of control according to Reeves, a position almost never challenged by journalists happy to rewrite government statements as news.

Are we a nation of shirkers? Are welfare costs spiralling? Not according to the Office for Budget Responsibility who record welfare spending as being stable as a proportion of GDP, and lower than it was in 2015-16.

Yet this is not the government line. In a press release dated June 2025, the Labour government made its position clear. Welfare costs are 'spiralling', some benefits have 'doubled' since the pandemic, disability and incapacity-benefit costs are expected to reach 'a staggering' £70 billion a year by the end of this parliament. All of which, we are encouraged to believe, is completely unsustainable.

The government is desperate to paint welfare spending as placing excessive strain on our overburdened economy. A view unsurprisingly shared by the traditional nasty party.

Kemi Badenoch closed her party conference in October expressing outrage at the 6.5 million working-age adults claiming benefits: 'You heard me right, six and a half million. That is the entire population of Cardiff, Belfast, Glasgow, and Manchester. Combined. Being paid to sit at home all

day.' In reality, today's projected total welfare payments, which includes pension payments, are around 11% of national income a year. This is lower than when David Cameron was prime minister, even though we now have more pensioners.

Working-age benefits, including all out-of-work and health-related benefits, are well below the levels recorded in the 2010s. The FT's economics commentator, Chris Giles, reported in October that 'total non-pensioner benefits have hovered between 4 and 5 per cent of GDP for over 40 years,' and are currently at the lower end of the scale.

What about the 'shocking' number of people 'being paid to sit at home all day'? According to the Department for Work and Pensions there's been a rise of 80% in out-of-work benefits since 2018.

Yes, there are 6.5 million adults claiming out-of-work benefits. And yes there has been a rise in the number of claimants since 2018, but this is a long way shy of the 80% being reported. According to Professor Ben Geiger of King's College London, this claim, which has been amplified by politicians and journalists, is 'wildly misleading'.

It's not the number of claimants that has resulted in this rise, but how we count them. For example, sometimes a couple was counted as one claimant but is now always counted as two. Universal Credit has led to recipients being classed as out-of-work when in the past they weren't: people just claiming Child Tax Credits and/or Housing Benefit were not counted as 'out-of-work' under the old system even when they were not working. And of course, the state pension age has risen, so we now have a lot more people of working age.

Increasing the pension age has added

to the number of sickness and out-of-work benefit claimants, but it has saved considerable sums.

It's cheaper to pay 0.5m people benefits than to pay them the state pension yet, ironically, the result is presented as welfare running out of control.

If counted consistently over time, out-of-work rates today are similar to 2014-15 levels, and noticeably lower than 2013. The proportion of 16-64 year olds not working is lower than achieved under Thatcher, Major or Blair, and is close to record lows even with the 22% rise since 2018.

The misleading and inaccurate reporting of welfare statistics is being used to scapegoat the poor and disabled to cover for the failure of successive governments' economic policies. Welfare spending is not out of control.

THIS MONTH IN HISTORY

MORGAN DANIELS

1820

28th: Friedrich Engels born

1910

10th: Black Friday. Police violently assault a suffragette deputation outside the House of Commons

1963

4th: Five months of school protests against de facto segregation begin in Chester, Pennsylvania

1990

28th: Margaret Thatcher resigns as prime minister

2002

6th: The first European Social Forum begins in Florence



CONTRE LA GUERRE CONFERENCE. PHOTO: SHABIR LAKHA

Paris conference unites anti-war movements internationally

LUCY NICHOLS

The Paris Peace conference held on 4-5 October attracted 4,000 people and delegates from nineteen different countries. It marked a breakthrough for the international movement against the rearmament of Europe and the genocide in Gaza.

The conference highlighted opposition to renewed arms spending and the consequent attack on workers' living standards that is taking place across Europe.

The meeting demanded 'not a penny, not a weapon, not a human life for war'. The slogan of 'welfare not warfare' was taken up by a number of representatives of unions and campaigns. The meeting committed to setting up a body to help coordinate actions across the continent and beyond.

In the face of a darkening international situation and the growth of the far right, it is urgent that we broaden and deepen international links between trade unionists, anti-war movements, and progressive forces. This is why a second European conference is planned for Central Hall Westminster, London, on 20 June 2026.

The London conference will be held under the banner of 'The People of Europe demand Peace'.

The considerable involvement of the French trade unions in mobilising for and assisting in financing the Paris conference and the presence of trade-union representatives from across Europe sets an example for us here in the UK.

That the aims of the conference align with the positions taken at the TUC earlier this year in favour of 'wages not weapons' and support for the Palestine movement shows that the trade-union movement can be moved to act against militarism.

Across the movement, we must do all we can to build for the London conference next June. We ask all trade unionists to put motions to branches to encourage involvement, bring delegations and provide financial support.

The storm clouds of war are rumbling ever louder across the continent. Starmer promises more and more support for the military and pledges ever more of our taxes to build a war economy. It is urgent that anti-war activists and trade unionists come together.

As John Rees said in Paris, war is not the policy of the working class, so come to London in June 2026.

MARXISM 101



BRITISH TROOPS. PHOTO: NATO / CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

IMPERIALISM AND WAR



by **Alex Snowden**

In August 1914, Europe went to war. Over the next few years, millions of working-class people were killed. It was a massive clash between the great imperialist powers.

August 1914 shocked Marxists who opposed the war. It was not the outbreak of war that shook them. They had warned of that happening. They had traced the long-term factors leading up to it.

The shock came from supposedly socialist parties across Europe capitulating to their own ruling classes. These parties had previously passed resolutions pledging internationalism, working-class solidarity and opposition to war. Now they backed the ‘national war effort’.

This created a massive crisis on the left. It also prompted some marxists, most notably Lenin, to analyse modern imperialism as the latest stage in capitalism’s development. Marxists traced the economic roots of the war and worked through the implications for socialists.

Lenin wrote that by 1914 capitalism had become ‘the financial strangulation of the overwhelming majority of the people of the world by a handful of ‘advanced’ countries.’ This dominance by the European ‘great powers’, rooted in their advanced economic development, was imperialism.

Karl Marx had analysed the development of capitalism as a competitive system. From the 1870s onwards, capitalism developed in ways that would reach their climax in world war. This involved the growth of monopoly capitalism.

Marx observed that competition between rival capitalists pushed them to increase exploitation of workers in order to sell goods more cheaply than their rivals. He noted, however, a paradox. Competition, over time, produced what might seem to be its opposite – a monopoly. Successful capitalists would take over their failing competitors and increasingly dominate their field.

These bigger and bigger companies wanted new markets to sell in. They sought fresh raw materials (and fresh human materials) to exploit. They pushed, more and more, beyond national frontiers.

This was a deeply competitive system between the major capitalist states. Each national ruling class protected the interests of its biggest industrial and financial firms. An age of inter-imperialist rivalry began.

Monopoly capitalism created a genuinely global economy for the first time

in history. Capitalist firms, based in the advanced capitalist countries, spanned national borders in the workers they exploited, the natural resources they relied upon and the markets where they sold their goods.

The Scramble for Africa and the expansion of European empires saw the great powers carve up the world. It was plunder for profit.

Along with it went the brutal subjugation of people in what we today call the Global South. Capitalism had, wrote Lenin, ‘grown into a world system of colonial oppression’.

All parts of the world were dragged into the inter-imperialist conflict. The economic and social development of subjugated nations was conditioned by what happened in the wider system. Lenin understood that national liberation struggles were shaped by the global context of competition between imperialists.

The First World War was an expression of the competition between the largest imperialist states. The growth of a global economy dominated by these powerful states meant that the war would, unlike any previous conflict, be truly global.

The same would be true, on an even greater scale, in the Second World War. Since 1945, the old formal empires have collapsed, but the system of imperialism has continued because its economic roots have remained.

Lenin’s anti-war internationalism involved opposing war on the basis that it expressed the material interests of national ruling classes, while it was working-class people across all nations that would suffer. He also viewed the First World War as reflecting, and aiming to reinforce, the colonial domination of large parts of the world by western Europe.

Lenin identified that there was an alliance of interests between working-class people in the advanced capitalist countries and the oppressed people of subordinated nations. Lenin and the Bolsheviks supported national liberation for those who were subordinated to the imperialist powers.

A great deal of ruling-class ideology was geared towards obscuring these common material interests, with workers encouraged to identify with the ‘national interest’ while viewing those in the colonised countries as inferior. Nationalism and racism remain powerful barriers to working-class unity today.

Eighty years after the end of World War Two, we live in a world still characterised by the economic and military competition documented by Lenin.

The US is the globally dominant power, but one that has experienced long-term economic decline and is vulnerable to challenges, in particular from the growth of China’s economic weight. Ours is an unstable and violent 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

The party we need - Your Party supporters
 Tuesday 4 November, 6:30pm
 Friends House, Euston Road, NW1 2BJ

EAST LONDON

Trump, imperialism & the new world disorder
 Thursday 6 November, 6:30pm
 Mulberry Hall, St Margaret's House, 15 Old Ford Road, E2 9PL

NEWCASTLE

Trump, imperialism and the new world disorder
 Thursday 13 November, 7pm
 Divercity Hub, 120-126 Buckingham Street, NE4 5QR

GLASGOW

How protest changed the world
 Thursday 13 November, 7pm
 Renfield Centre, 260 Bath Street, G2 4JP

LUTON

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

DEVON & CORNWALL (ONLINE)

Gaza: After the ceasefire
 Tuesday 18 November, 2pm
 Register on Zoom: bit.ly/3LbbzEX

BIRMINGHAM

Police, protest & ID cards: Stopping Starmer's authoritarianism
 Wednesday 19 November, 7:30pm
 Friends of the Earth, 54-57 Allison Street, B5 5TH

LONDON

Revolution! Confronting a world of crisis and war
 Sunday 23 November, 12 - 5:30pm
 SOAS, Thornhaugh Street, WC1H 0XG

MANCHESTER

How protest changed the world
 Tuesday 25 November, 7pm
 Friends House, Mount Street, M2 5NS

NORTH WEST LONDON

Fascism and Farage: How do we stop the far right?
 Tuesday 25 November, 6:30pm
 Chalkhill Community Centre, HA9 9FX

LONDON

Eve of budget protest
 Tuesday 25 November, 6pm
 Downing Street, SW1A 2AA

IPSWICH

The ceasefire: Trump, imperialism and freedom for Palestine
 Wednesday 26 November, 7pm
 Friends Meeting House, IP1 3JH

LONDON

International Day For Palestine National Demo
 Saturday 29 November, 12pm
 Central London - follow @stwuuk for updates

NHS IN CRISIS: MIGRANTS NOT TO BLAME

Zarah Sultana MP	Your Party
Zack Polanski	Green Party
Dr Andrew Meyerson	A&E Doctor and campaigner
Obi Amadi	Unite the Union, health sector equalities lead
Adekunle Akinola	UNISON, Overseas Nurses Network
Margaret Mash	Care Worker, Pan African Workers Association
Dr Tony O'Sullivan	KONP Co-Chair +MORE SPEAKERS TBA

BLAME THE GOVERNMENT, NOT MIGRANTS, FOR THE CRISIS IN OUR NHS & SOCIAL CARE
 BOOK VIA [BIT.LY/MigrantsNotToBlame](https://bit.ly/MigrantsNotToBlame) **KEEP OUR NHS PUBLIC**

6:30PM 20.11.2025 ST ANNE'S SOHO, 55 DEAN ST, W1D 6AF

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:

BATH

BIRMINGHAM

BOURNEMOUTH

BRIGHTON

BRISTOL

CREWE

DEVON & CORNWALL

EAST KENT

DONCASTER

EDINBURGH

GLASGOW

HASTINGS

IPSWICH

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

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ART & CULTURE



GUILLERMO DEL TORO'S FRANKENSTEIN Only monsters play god

MARK DEE SMITH

Mary Shelley's epistolary novel *Frankenstein* is a cornerstone in the development of the contemporary imagination and arguably the birthplace of the 'science fiction' genre. It begins:

'The event on which this fiction is founded has been supposed, by Dr. Darwin, and some of the physiological writers of Germany, as not of impossible occurrence... I have not considered myself as merely weaving a series of supernatural terrors.'

A generation before HG Wells and Jules Verne, this was the first fantastic fiction that sought to stay within the realm of the possible. Mary Shelley was the daughter of proto-feminist and philosopher Mary Wollstonecraft and lover of Romantic poet and political radical Percy Bysshe Shelley. But these firebrand credentials are dwarfed by the global and historic impact of her 1818 novel.

A collision between notions of self-development rooted in the German *bildungsroman* and the deep anxieties rendered by scientific and urban growth, it's a crash course in modernity and its discontents presented as a fable providing a literary corollary to the Luddite revolts that marked the period.

Frankenstein and its tropes can be found in every aspect of mass culture and the book itself has been in print for over two centuries. Whenever we talk about monstrosity, we are alluding to Mary Shelley.

Guillermo del Toro is one of those rare filmmakers who manages to please cinephiles and still keep the Hollywood studios onside. This is no small feat, now or ever. More distinctively, the Oscar-winning del Toro is committed to non-realist genres – horror, fantasy, superheroes – but always seeks the inclusion of radical and socio-critical themes in his work.

This is seen most vividly in his Spanish Civil War allegory *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006), but also prevalent in his recent adaptation of *Pinocchio* (2022). Here del Toro invites close comparison with the English writer Angela Carter.

So what to do with a tale and characters as familiar in parodic form as in the original? This is a del Toro film which means

it's captured by an astonishing visual sumptuousness, maintaining the flow (not to mention, budget-access) established by his partnership with Netflix. The child-like fairytale gaze is sustained too with monster's arc from laboratory to arctic wasteland seen from the twin perspectives of creator and creation.

The high gothic style – Tim Burton on steroids – is contrasted with mute classicism of a stellar cast including Oscar Isaac as Victor Frankenstein and Jacob Elordi as the much-vaunted 'hot' monster. Mia Goth doubles as Elizabeth Lavenza and Baroness Frankenstein, and it's her role that heightens the film's philosophical aspects

Similarly satisfying for *Counterfire* readers is the pronounced but unsenten-

tious anti-imperialist theme that undercuts the more typical "science is bad" reading.

Del Toro has successfully completed the high-wire act of respecting the tradition's tropes while bringing enough of a fresh sensibility to captivate a general audience; this isn't just for geeks.

Galvanised by del Toro's astonishing passion, this lavish spectacle stands confidently beside the finest cinematic expressions of Mary Shelley's dark parable: James Whale's *Frankenstein*, *The Spirit of the Beehive* and the magisterial *Bride of Frankenstein*. Go see.

***Frankenstein* is out now on selected release and will be available on Netflix from 7 November.**

Dave's new album picks up where he left off

SHABBIR LAKHA

UK rapper Dave's new album, *The Boy Who Played the Harp*, further cements his status as one of the best lyricists on the scene.

Having dropped out of making music following his joint EP with Central Cee two years ago, fans are over the moon at his return. And the album doesn't disappoint.

It feels like it's picked up where the last album left off with his incredibly engaging storytelling, of self-reflecting and pulling the listener into trying to make sense of the world with him.

The album is more low-key and sombre than his previous projects, reflective perhaps of his own state of mind. He alludes to some of the internal debates and crises he's



DAVE, THE BOY WHO PLAYED THE HARP ALBUM ART

been battling with. There are conversations and appeals to god and a discussion on

reconciling a lifestyle of fame with knowledge of what's happening in the world, from Palestine to Congo.

One of the tracks, *Fairchild* with Nicole Blakk, is a haunting commentary on the epidemic of violence against women and girls and its roots in a structurally sexist society.

In the title and final track, Dave questions his own integrity, and by extension other artists in his position, 'afraid to speak 'cause I don't wanna risk it, my occupation / we got kids under occupation'. In questioning how principled he is, he references the Battle of Karbala, 'would I stand on my honour like Hussein did?'

This is a politically astute, lyrically and musically well-crafted and highly engaging listen.

