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Following the Budget and Employment Rights betrayal...

RESIST LABOUR'S WAR ON WORKERS

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- WELFARE NOT WARFARE
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NEWS



DROP THE CHARGES PROTEST. PHOTO: STEVE EASON / CC BY-NC 2.0

The clampdown on dissent is spreading

CHRIS NINEHAM

We are facing the most authoritarian regime since the Second World War. Recent governments have used a raft of new legislation to crack down on both protest and dissent, creating the most draconian anti-protest powers in any supposedly democratic country. The result is that police now have the powers to stop any protest they don't like. And they are using them.

The longest sentence received by any of the Suffragettes early last century was three months. Climate campaigners have been in prison for five years for discussing a protest on a Zoom call. Many of the Filton 24 Palestine activists have already been in prison for more than a year waiting trial.

An incredible 2,300 activists face potential charges for defending Palestine Action. There are now at least forty political prisoners in this country. Meanwhile, four leaders of the Palestine movement are being taken to court for organising an entirely peaceful protest against genocide.

Many of the laws the police are using were brought in by the Tories. But Labour is adding to them with a clause slipped into the current Crime and Policing bill meaning the police can ban demonstrations close to a place of worship if they decide they could be intimidating to worshippers.

As almost every urban area contains a place of worship, the police will be getting more powers to stop any expression of dissent. And it is under the Labour government that the police have misused the 2000 Terrorism Act to round up thousands defending Palestine Action.

To make matters worse, Justice Secretary David Lammy is considering ending jury trials for all but the most serious offenses. This, even though his own review in 2017 showed juries improve fairness, particularly for the poor and ethnic minorities, not surprising given that most judges are white and upper class. Meanwhile, the authorities replaced the judge presiding over the Palestine Action judicial review just before it began, confirming a marked drift towards arbitrary intervention in the courts.

All this is part of an international trend. Ruling classes around the world are trying to marginalise and criminalise protest because they know they have a legitimacy problem, they know there is a growing distrust of establishment institutions.

In the case of the Palestine movement,

it is also a response to the fact that they are losing the argument in society. Latest polls show, for example, that 65% of British people believe Netanyahu should be charged with war crimes.

Given political and media hostility to the movement, this is a major achievement. It shows that mass campaigning can effectively challenge moves to shut down discussion and dissent. It shows too that authoritarian methods can backfire.

Nevertheless, the drive towards repression is real and worrying. Measures used against climate campaigners or Palestine activists today will be used to target strikers or anti-cuts protestors tomorrow.

The clampdown on dissent is spreading across society, with managements in universities, schools and other workplaces

restricting basic freedom of speech. Students or staff have been suspended over Palestine campaigning in at least 27 universities. Doctors, nurses, journalists and council workers have been sacked or disciplined for speaking out on the issue.

Freedom of speech and assembly are highly valued in this country, and the left needs to make the issue our own. Especially with Reform waiting in the wings, we cannot allow the persecution of protest and dissent to be normalised.

That means defending everyone who is attacked, joining the campaign against Labour's new legislation, taking the issue into every trade-union branch, social movement and political party and building the broadest possible campaign to defend the right to protest.

IS REEVES ON HER WAY OUT?

KEVIN CRANE

Did the Chancellor mislead the public and the cabinet before the budget?

According to the Tories absolutely, but then only a fool's fool would take Kemi Badenoch's word for it. So let's ask the BBC – who are known to bat for the government in most circumstances.

Chris Mason, the BBC's political editor says in no uncertain terms and 'after careful examination of the facts' he has to conclude 'we were misled'.

Perhaps if the budget had been well received this wouldn't matter, but that is far from the case. More than half the

population think the budget will leave the country worse off, half think they and their family will be worse off.

It's clearly bad news for Starmer that Liz Truss' ill-fated mini-budget was more popular than this.

Of course tax rises are rarely popular – and this is what the row is ultimately about. Reeves and Starmer led the public to believe they had no choice but to raise taxes. They used the OBR's data on tax revenue versus government expenditure to support that claim. The data however, said something else entirely.

And now a third of the population, according to a YouGov poll conducted

between 30 November and 1 December, believe the Chancellor misled or lied about the state of the economy in the run up to the budget.

Following the budget pollsters asked if Rachel Reeves was doing a good job, 63% said no. Still she did better than her boss. According to the polls when asked about Starmer that figure rises to 69%.

These are damning figures. Reeves is severely damaged. Starmer has doubled down in Reeves' defence and allied himself with her decisions. He clearly doesn't want to replace her. Some say if she goes then so does he. But how long can he resist the cries for her resignation?



Venezuela: another US war for regime change

JONATHAN MAUNDERS

Donald Trump's latest escalation against Venezuela has laid bare the truth about his government's "war on drugs." It's a cover for regime change.

The US has assembled its largest military force in the Caribbean since the 1989 invasion of Panama, including the USS Gerald R. Ford carrier group and around 12,700 troops off Venezuela's coast.

Under an anti-narcotics banner, US missiles have hit at least 22 small boats in the Caribbean and Pacific, killing more than 80 people in attacks that UN and rights groups say appear to be extrajudicial executions.

At the same time Trump has unilaterally declared Venezuelan airspace "closed" and pushed a radar installation with marines onto Trinidad and Tobago, stoking fears that the wider Caribbean will be dragged into an assault on Caracas.

This military build-up coincides with an American ultimatum demanding Nicolás Maduro's immediate resignation and the branding of the so-called "Cartel de los Soles" as a terrorist organisation, despite experts questioning whether such a cartel exists and US data showing that most cocaine enters via the Pacific, not Venezuela.

The drugs angle is further undermined by Trump's promise to pardon former Honduran president Juan Orlando Hernández, convicted in a US court of running a cocaine "superhighway" to the United States, even as he offers a \$50m bounty for Maduro.

The reality is clear. This is Trump's brazen spin on classic US regime change, staged in the shadow of events in Gaza and Ukraine. Maduro's regime is corrupt and authoritarian, but western imperialism is the main enemy here.

We must unconditionally oppose sanctions, blockades and the march to war. A genuinely socialist, democratic Venezuela can only be won by Venezuelans themselves, not delivered by Washington bullets.

EDITORIAL



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

A CRUEL BUDGET FROM A WEAK GOVERNMENT

COUNTERFIRE

The Chancellor's autumn budget is a complete surrender to the bond markets.

Labour's budget has left the wealthy and financial sector off the hook, passing the burden of meeting the Chancellor's self-imposed financial limits onto the working class.

Despite some welcome measures for the poorest, the freezing of income-tax thresholds means the working class is being asked to shoulder arbitrary financial rules in order to assuage the demands of the bond markets.

The budget has failed to address any of the structural problems facing the British economy.

Labour's policies remain reliant on private investment for everything. There is no national plan for building a sustainable energy infrastructure, or decent public transport, and precious little for our crisis-ridden public services. But of course there is plenty of money to 'invest' in weapons of war.

The economy is almost entirely dependent on the financial sector for 'growth', with the focus of this growth on profit

rather than raising the living standards for the vast majority.

The government hopes private investment, free from the burden of paying its fair share, will magically provide the jobs and services which will in turn bring in tax revenue. This is not going to happen. But, as we see with the AI bubble, capitalism as a system is now chasing speculative illusions, and fails to create the things society actually needs.

AI bubble and global recession

Even in its own terms the budget will likely fail. The prospect of a financial crisis caused by the tech bubble bursting or a global recession looks increasingly likely. We could be back to 2008-style bailouts for the financial sector. But this time around with a cost-of-living crisis and public services on the verge of collapse.

It didn't have to be this way. But this government is weak.

It has been weak in the face of pressure from the City and corporations. Their entire approach has been to demonstrate a complete commitment to the priorities of the ruling class while simultaneously

intensifying attacks on the left and social movements and much of its voting base.

The cruelty towards refugees, the victimisation of those who need social support and the attacks on the sick and disabled save only meagre amounts of money. They are as performative as Starmer's flag waving. In reality these are gestures to prove that the government would rather attack its own supporters than put the lightest of demands upon business or the wealthy.

Having alienated much working-class support, the government is unable to force capital to cough up its share to deal with the weaknesses of the economy.

So there are no real wealth taxes in the budget, because Starmer and Reeves are too weak to implement such a change of direction. There are no taxes on banks' profits because to introduce such taxes the government would have to face down the bond markets. Labour's lack of political support makes standing up to capital impossible.

This shallow imitation of a Labour government must be opposed. We must build a social and political force strong enough to confront not just Starmer and Reeves, but the power of capital.



WEEKLY BRIEFING

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



TINYURL.COM/LINDSEYBRIEFING

RANK-AND-FILE ROUNDUP



STRIKING RESIDENT DOCTORS. PHOTO: @BMARESIDENTS / X

Victory to the resident doctors!

GRAHAM KIRKWOOD

In November, Resident doctors took 5 days of strike action. Pay is an issue, with a real-terms reduction of around 20% since 2008, despite the pay rises won by the last wave of strikes.

Despite demonisation from the government and media, the picket lines across the country were lively and enjoyed public support.

I visited the picket line at the Royal Victoria Infirmary in Newcastle on the first day of strike. Numbers were rising throughout the morning as more and more colleagues joined the action. Lots of toots from cars going by cheered up the pickets. The strikers were joined by campaigners from Keep our NHS Public and Save South Tyneside Hospital Campaign who were well received.

Equally as important as pay is the issue of jobs. Pickets told Counterfire there were thirty applicants going for every specialty training post. There's a bottleneck in the system meaning severe shortages of doctors in the NHS are predicted for the future.

The public need to understand that it is taxpayers' money which is spent training the doctors we need, who then face no future in the UK and are forced to work abroad. If you can't get a GP appointment,

then why are there qualified GPs who can't get jobs because posts are not being funded?

The NHS is still in crisis and once again it is the young doctors who are showing the way.

Victory to the resident doctors. They

are the real future of our NHS, not Wes Streeting.

The resident doctors will be back out on strike from 7am on 17 December to 6:59am on 22 December. Check Strike Map for details of picket lines and get down to show your support.



TATE WORKERS ON STRIKE. PHOTO: PETE WEBSTER

TATE THAT!

PETE WEBSTER

PCS members across three gallery sites, Tate Britain, Liverpool and Modern, embarked on a scheduled one-week strike after being offered a below-inflation pay rise for the second year in a row. Actions short of a strike also took place at St Ives and Tate Stores.

Management's cavalier attitudes to staff in recent years, with redundancies, restructuring and arbitrary changes to terms and condition, have fuelled discontent that resulted in an impressive 98% vote for strike action.

No less impressive was the massive turnout on the picket lines. They were from all departments including gallery attendants, art handlers, curators and admin staff recognising that this fight requires maximum unity to win.

Tate's current offer of just 3% leaves employees facing a real-terms pay cut at a time when the cost-of-living crisis is sharply increasing. Tate directors, meanwhile, receive between £195,000 to £320,000 per annum, excluding 'bonuses'.

Tate Modern Branch Secretary, Carlos, explained the members' anger had been fuelled 'by micro-management of staff, the removal of subsidies in the staff canteens, replacing the Civil Service Pension Scheme with an inferior provider with weaker terms for new starters, changes to the sickness policy – everything has been stretched and reduced to the maximum.'

Use #TateOnStrike for messages of support and if you can, donate to the strike fund: www.pcs.org.uk/donate

PICKET LINES THIS MONTH

IMPERIAL COLLEGE LONDON

Union: UCU
Dates: 1-12 December
Location: South Kensington campus, SW7 2AZ; White City campus, W12 7TA

UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD

Union: UCU
Dates: 1,2,4,5, 9-12 December
Location: Sheffield, S10 2TN

SHEFFIELD HALLAM UNIVERSITY

Union: UCU
Dates: 1-5 December
Location: Sheffield, S1 1WB

BIRMINGHAM REFUSE WORKERS AND AGENCY WORKERS

Union: Unite
Dates: Continuous
Location: Sites across Birmingham; protest on 1 December, 8:30, at Smithfield depot (B5 6HX)

DWP LINCOLN

Union: PCS
Dates: 1 December – 2 January
Location: City Hall, LN1 1DD

TRANSPORT FOR GREATER MANCHESTER

Union: Unite
Dates: 5-7 December
Location: Warwick Road South (M16 0GZ) and Queens Road (M8 0RT) depots

PHLEBOTOMISTS AT GLOUCESTERSHIRE HOSPITALS

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

DILIGENTA

Union: Unite
Dates: 1, 8, 9 December (7am)
Location: Liverpool, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Stirling, Reading; details on Strike Map

WALTHAM FOREST REFUSE WORKERS

Union: GMB
Dates: 10-12, 17-19, 22, 23 December
Location: Waltham Forest depots

VILLAGE HOTEL

Union: Unite
Dates: Continuous until 2 January
Location: Glasgow, G51 1DB

RESIDENT DOCTORS

Union: BMA
Dates: 17-22 December
Location: Hospitals across England

INTERVIEW

'We concentrate on what unites us'



Could you tell us a little about your political history and background?

I was born in Burnley, and brought up in a small East Lancashire town called Brierfield.

I got involved in politics at a young age. I was at Nelson and Colne College and became the President of the Students Union. When I was there, we had a visit from then Tory Minister Kenneth Baker and I confronted him about the Youth Training Scheme.

YTS was a mask to cover youth unemployment, it undermined traditional skilled apprenticeships and the wages were really awful. So I got into an argument with him at the college over his support for the cheap labour scheme.

I then went on to the University of Central Lancashire and became the chair of Students 4 Palestine and got involved in Palestine solidarity work.

When I left university, I got elected onto Nelson Town Council. At that stage, I was an Independent, but soon joined the Labour Party and got elected onto Pendle District Council.

In the Labour Party, I got involved in various attempts to engage with the Muslim community, especially after the London Bombings of 7/7. This was structured by Labour as confronting extremism in all its forms, including far-right extremism, but I felt it was also was a way to argue for community development and investment.

In 2013, I first got elected to Lancashire County Council. I became the cabinet member for Health and Well Being when Labour ran the council. In

Azhar Ali is the group leader of the main opposition group on Lancashire County Council, 'Progressive Lancashire', consisting of 'pro-Palestine, welfare, not warfare' Independents and Greens. Michael Lavalette spoke to him about why he left Labour and how progressive councillors with different politics work together in Lancashire.

2017, when the Tories took over the council, I became Labour group leader and leader of the opposition.

And now I sit as leader of the main opposition group on Lancashire County Council, 'Progressive Lancashire'.

You left Labour in 2023. Can you tell us a little about this?

After 7 October 2023, I was speaking at Labour meetings across the country. I was speaking with (then) Shadow Government spokespeople asking that Labour should change their position (away from total support for Israel).

A number of councillors across the country came to me, raising concerns about Labour's position and concerned about the fact they were being 'gagged' from speaking out.

Whilst this was going on, I was selected to be the Labour candidate for the Rochdale by-election, which was eventually won by George Galloway. A couple of weeks into the campaign, I was suspended by Labour for 'antisemitism'. It was a nonsense charge.

Someone produced a recording, from a closed meeting, where I said that there was evidence, in the run up to 7 October, that both Egypt and the US notified Israel of increased Hamas activity. Instead of stepping up security, they relaxed their border security, thus encouraging the 7 October attacks. I suggested they knew it was going to happen, and that they then used the attack to mount their genocide.

I still believe this to be largely true. In fact, the Head of Israeli Security resigned because of what he claimed were 'security failings'. I think history will show this to be the case.

But for stating that I thought



things 'were not as they seemed', I was suspended and accused of antisemitism. Labour 'disowned' me from the by-election, but it was too late for my name to be removed from the ballot. So Labour didn't campaign for me, I was suspended and I didn't campaign, and Labour announced I wasn't their candidate even though I was on the ballot!

Whilst 'suspended', it became clear that Starmer and co weren't going to let me make my case. I'm not an antisemite. In fact, I 'turned myself in' to the local police and said this is what I'm being accused of. They simply said that this was a political matter and of no interest to them.

But in the hierarchy of the Labour machine, I now believe they wanted a high-profile Muslim politician as a 'sacrificial lamb'. I believe I was suspended so Starmer and co could show how 'hard' they were on pro-Palestine voices, to show they were strong allies of Israel. It became absolutely clear to me that I wouldn't be allowed to defend myself and to clear my name.

I resigned from Labour, sat as an Independent and won last May's election as a proud, 'pro-Palestine' Independent – though I want to make clear, we fought on a full range of local and national issues, we campaigned against poverty, inequality and

cuts, but our motivation to stand as Independents was because of the genocide in Gaza.

You are the leader of Progressive Lancashire. You bring people together from quite different traditions of the left. How have you found that? How does it work?

Reform won 53 of the 84 seats in the elections last May. Labour were expecting to win: they have four councillors. The Tories went from governing the council to having just eight councillors.

There were nine Independents elected, seven of us anti-austerity, pro-Palestine 'left' Independents. So the seven Progressive Independents have linked with the four Green councillors to form the official opposition, 'Progressive Lancashire'.

We have many differences, but we concentrate on what unites us. We are committed to opposing privatisation, austerity and inequality. We are all against the horror in Gaza and want to pursue ethical investment policies.

As a group, we have worked particularly well around Reform's attempt to close care homes and day centres for older people. We are outnumbered but we are doing a good job at holding them to account. And we try to do this with campaigns outside the council chamber: we have good links with Unison and the various community campaigns.

In many ways, I think we offer a model that others could look at! In practice, we are putting in place a way of people working together from across the left, from different left traditions. I think we need more of that given the horrors inflicted on working-class communities by the Starmer government, and Reform at Lancashire County Council.

Your Party: what next?

Lindsey German looks at the founding of the new left-wing party and the opportunities and challenges ahead

The Your Party founding conference on the last weekend of November was double edged: there were many impressive socialists and campaigners there, wanting to build a real alternative to the disastrous policies of the Starmer government and provide a focus for discontent which can otherwise go to Reform.

In the week following a budget which will make working-class people worse off, and a retreat on day-one rights for workers over unfair dismissal, there wasn't a better and more urgent time to meet.

The downside however was that the conference was beset with problems, many of them caused by the very limited levels of debate on important political issues, and a tendency to compress political differences into constitutional and other amendments which narrowed debates. It was a conference where those attending could only debate on specific amendments which were selected for us to discuss.

There was also a lot of discontent with the process of sortition which selected those who could attend the conference supposedly randomly, and with the lack of democracy in many of the local assemblies which marked what there was of pre-conference discussion.

But some of the problems were caused completely unnecessarily by sections of the leadership. The decision to expel a number of SWP members, refuse entry to several Counterfire members and to an adviser of Zarah Sultana the day before the conference was a spectacular own goal which rebounded on those responsible.

It was politically and personally indefensible (those accused found out as they were travelling to Liverpool for the conference). It also ensured that the vote which allowed parties and groups that were not electoral rivals to be members of YP was almost certainly bigger than it otherwise would have been.

The attempt to bar and witch-hunt



JEREMY CORBYN ADDRESSING YOUR PARTY CONFERENCE. PHOTO: JEREMY CORBYN / FACEBOOK

left-wing organisations is in the worst tradition of Labour's right and should not be used in YP. It is an attempt to use administrative methods to silence debate. It is also a denial of the role of the far left in British politics. This left has been at the centre of – and very often created – some of the most important campaigns in our history: the Anti-Nazi League, the poll tax campaign, the Stop the War Coalition, the Palestine campaign, anti-racism and anti-fascism more generally from Cable Street on.

Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling were involved in the founding of the Independent Labour Party, encouraged by Frederick Engels, and the Marxist SDF was in at the formation of the Labour Party.

The activities and organisation of the left have often been in the teeth of opposition from the Labour leadership. These left-wing organisations have always been in a minority but have often won their political ideas, because they are able to prove in practice that they are right.

The ban – effectively reversed by the vote on dual membership – contributed to the signs of deep division in the party and meant that it was not able to draw the line under months of conflict between Jeremy Corbyn and Zarah Sultana. This was clear from the decision – mistaken I think – by Sultana to boycott the first day of the conference in protest at the ban. It was also clear from the body language of both.

There are political differences for sure, but not ones that can't be accommodated in a potentially mass party like YP. However, there was clearly great frustration and some anger at the lack of involvement of the members, the avoidance of debate and the refusal by much of those organising the conference to accept any challenge to them.

So the left won decisively on most issues, and narrowly on the question of a collective rather than individual leadership. This should be a time when everyone agrees to move forward on the basis of democratic decisions. I'm not confident that is going to happen on either side – Sultana's speech was powerful and well-received but

It is also a sign that much of the membership wants a clearly left, working-class organisation with principled politics, not a Labour Party mark 2.

What now? The divisions are clearly there, epitomised by the failed attempt of some around Jeremy Corbyn to lobby to reject the constitution because it had been amended to provide for a collective, not individual, leadership. Had it succeeded, it would have blown up the whole project.

It is likely that there will be attempts to row back from or not implement certain decisions. That is unacceptable and members will have to fight to ensure their voices are heard.

The urgent task is for the local branches to be properly formed and to decide their priorities, to elect a new leadership and to start campaigning around issues, including the May elections. The factionalism at the top has to end and should not be imported into local organising.

My sense is that most members want to positively engage and work together. There is a widespread and correct feeling that we have only this chance, given the scale of attacks we are facing.

At the same time, the far left has a responsibility. I think it is still possible to build a mass Your Party, which reaches out to working-class people to win them towards left-wing ideas. That means we have to patiently explain, as Lenin once said, our politics, rather than denouncing anyone who disagrees with even 10% of them.

I'm particularly concerned here with the attitude of some towards the Muslim community, now dubbed as 'socially conservative' and written off. The rift needs to be healed quickly if we are not to squander the very good work between the left and the Muslim community which has been a mark of the anti-war and Palestine movements.

So the jury's still out. But the left is in there fighting, and we need to continue.



PARIS PEACE CONFERENCE. PHOTO: SHABIR LAKHA

NOT A PENNY, NOT A WEAPON, NOT A LIFE FOR WAR

Help build the international anti-war conference in London on 20 June 2026

In October, 4,000 people from 18 countries joined the international anti-war conference in Paris. It shared insights and inspiration in the struggles against war and genocide taking place across Europe and beyond.

A follow-up conference will be held in London on 20 June 2026 to continue the coordination of anti-war efforts internationally and confront the growing militarism in Europe.

Below is a model motion that can be taken to your trade union branch to support and build the conference. A downloadable version can be found on the Stop the War Coalition website.

This branch notes:

1. The success of the Paris Peace conference held on the 4/5 October 2025 which attracted 4,000 people and delegates from 18 different countries.

2. The considerable involvement of the French trade unions in mobilising for and assisting in the finance of the conference and the presence of trade union representatives from across Europe at the conference.

3. That the conference foregrounded opposition to renewed arms spending and the consequent attack on workers living standards that this requires across Europe.

4. That the conference provided amplified the voices of the Palestine solidarity movement.

5. The enthusiastic response of the conference to the speech of the General Secretary of the PCS and Stop the War officers.

6. That the aims of the conference are supportive of the positions taken at

this years TUC in favour of 'wages not weapons' and support for the Palestine movement.

7. That a second European conference announced in Paris is planned for Central Hall Westminster, London, on 20 June 2026.

This branch believes:

1. That this is an initiative wholly in line with the TUC resolution on 'wages not weapons'.

2. That in a darkening international situation and in the face of the growth of the far right across Europe it is necessary to broaden and deepen International links between trade unionists, anti-war movements, and progressive forces.

3. That the London conference held under the banner of 'The People of Europe demand Peace', and the slogans 'wages not weapons', and 'welfare not warfare' deserves the support of trade unions in the UK.

This branch resolves:

1. To encourage our members to attend the conference. To encourage branches and regions to send delegates to and make financial donations to assist in the building of the conference.

2. To offer leading union officers as speakers at the conference.

3. To make a donation of £... towards the conference costs.

4. To assist in the production and circulation of material advertising the conference.

5. To publicise and support the conference in the wider trade union movement.

THE CEASEFIRE IS A SHAM – WE CANNOT STOP FIGHTING FOR PALESTINE

CICI WASHBURN

The genocide hasn't stopped. There is no ceasefire in any meaningful sense.

Yes October 10 saw a ceasefire declared but since then Israel has violated it at least 500 times and more than 356 Palestinians have been killed, bringing the total dead in this Israeli war on Gaza to more than 70,000.

For months we were told the release

of the hostages both dead and alive would end the war. This has not happened.

On November 17 the UN endorsed Trump's Gaza plan, making a mockery of international law and showing what a pawn the UN is in the hands of the imperialists.

Meanwhile, aerial footage shows the yellow line, drawn as part of the ceasefire plan, has further encroached into Gaza. Clearly there is no intention of it being temporary. Gaza is being partitioned and

Israel becoming the permanent occupier, under the auspices of a technocratic board.

What this diplomatic sham of a ceasefire has achieved is to push the plight of the Palestinians from the headlines. It has resulted in a drastic reduction in donations to charities operating in Palestine as the public respond to requests for donations with 'but there's a ceasefire now'. It has resulted in Germany resuming its sale of arms to Israel.

Genocide is about more than just killing. It is about the deliberate eradication of a people. The inability of the Palestinians to rebuild their destroyed land, the continued attempts to maintain a blockade preventing lifesaving food, medicine and shelter entering the Gaza Strip are evidence, if more evidence is needed, that the genocide is ongoing. Trump's plan is a mirage of peace. The end goal remains unchanged: ethnic cleansing.

So now there is less pressure on Israel and absolutely no sign of the Israeli state being held to account. Neither is their any accountability for those who enabled the carnage - the US and its willing ally the UK.

But the millions of us who have taken to the streets in protest over the last two years have gone nowhere. The recent demonstration in London drew a crowd of 100,000 to the capital regardless of the rain

and the 'ceasefire'.

The dissonance between the government and the public on the issue of Palestine could hardly be greater. Gaza may have disappeared from the headlines, but as long as the genocide continues we can and must keep the issue alive.

Join the Stop the War Coalition and get involved in your local branch. If you're in a trade union, join the trade union network, and keep fighting for Palestine.

THE CONDITION OF THE WORKING CLASS



SHABANA MAHMOOD. PHOTO: ANDY TAYLOR / HOME OFFICE / CC BY 2.0

Labour ramps up the racist scapegoating



by **Terina Hine**

Labour's plans for cutting legal migration are not only cruel but will plunge key services into a staffing crisis on an unprecedented scale.

Net migration to the UK fell by two-thirds in the year to June. Yet still, as part of its pandering to Reform, the government demands it fall further and recently set out plans to transform the legal migration system.

In 1948, over a thousand, mostly Caribbean, migrants disembarked from HMS Windrush, the majority to fill posts in the NHS. Our health service was built on the back of migrants. Today there are more than 200 nationalities working in the service, and a quarter of the entire NHS workforce is from overseas.

But this fails to show the NHS's true reliance on foreign-born workers. Many thousands of NHS migrant workers have lived and worked in the UK long enough to gain British citizenship and are thus excluded from the 'overseas-workforce' figures.

But henceforth, the majority of migrant NHS and care workers will have to wait for fifteen to twenty years to obtain citizenship or settled status, that's if they are allowed into the UK in the first place. Forcing migrants to wait for up to ten years even to apply for settled status, rather than gaining it automatically after five, will cause chaos.

Research suggest that up to 50,000 nurses could quit. According to the Guardian, almost one in ten of all nursing staff in the UK could be affected by these changes. In the care sector, the Home Office estimates that 616,000 care workers and their dependents, who arrived between 2022 and 2024, will be impacted by the new arrangements.

The fifteen to twenty year rule will also likely change the immigration status for hundreds of thousands of Skilled Worker visa holders who arrived in the UK prior to 2024 in mid-level roles, for example as

chefs, welders, in tech, HR or marketing.

Similarly, our transport system will be severely impacted with as many as 300 TfL workers being affected by the rule changes. The minimum salary requirement for a visa is set to rise to £41,000 per annum, and with the removal of a number of roles from the Skilled Worker list, many current TfL employees are in limbo, unsure as to what their status will be going forward.

According to Maryam Eslandoust, General Secretary of the TSSA, her members have been 'betrayed', many have built lives in London and are now being told they no longer belong.

The raising of the skills threshold to degree level and the standard of English to A-level will make the filling of vacancies from overseas increasingly difficult across all industries. The consequences will be dire.

Unsurprisingly for a government so in hock to the corporate elites, these changes will not be applied equally. Some migrants will be fast-tracked and gain the ability to apply for settled status in just three years.

According to Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood, the 'brightest and best' will be offered more attractive terms. By 'brightest and best' she means those earning more than £125,150. For those on £50,270 or above the five-year path remains. It's just the lower paid, those charged with looking after you when sick, who may save your life or provide your care in old age, who are neither 'bright' nor the 'best' and so are made to suffer.

Back to the NHS: after the pandemic, the NHS looked to international recruitment to fill unprecedented numbers of vacancies, just as it had following the Second World War. Our health and care services would clearly never have made it through Covid without migrant workers. Of the 50,000 nurses recruited post-pandemic, 90% were migrants. Rather than financial reward or even gratitude, these

workers are being repaid with distress and insecurity.

This lack of security will do little to encourage inclusive relations between new and recent arrivals and the communities in which they live, neither will it lead to cohesion, but the exact opposite.

We currently have 150,000 vacancies in the NHS, and our birth rate is so low we will soon be dependent on inward migration just to keep the economy functioning. That's before we think about our ageing population and the growing pension bill. Cutting migration in the way Labour proposes is tantamount to committing economic suicide to appease Reform.

But it's not just for economic reasons we should oppose these plans. Basic humanity, something clearly absent from Labour's front benches, should put a stop to this abhorrent racist scapegoating and immigration-led race to the bottom.

THIS MONTH IN HISTORY

MORGAN DANIELS

1918

28th: Irish revolutionary Constance Markiewicz becomes the first woman elected to the House of Commons

1949

21st: Thomas Sankara born in Upper Volta, then part of French West Africa

1964

3rd: In a debate at the Oxford Union, Malcolm X asserts his belief in the fight for equality and justice 'by any means necessary'

1984

10th: 'Pits and Perverts' concert held by Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners at the Electric Ballroom, Camden

1987

9th: The First Intifada begins in the Jabalia refugee camp, Gaza Strip



Yet another COP-out

ELAINE GRAHAM-LEIGH

André Corrêa do Lago, the leader of the 2025 COP30 international climate conference, said before it started that there was a 'reduction in enthusiasm' from the Global North for dealing with the climate crisis. That UK governments ever had much genuine enthusiasm for climate policies is doubtful.

What is true is that whereas it used to be necessary for politicians at least to appear to care about environmental issues, the mainstream parties now seem to be competing against each other over who can be the least green.

Earlier this year, Nigel Farage called the pursuit of net zero 'lunacy' that adds £100s to people's bills and costs people their jobs. Labour now seems to have adopted that basic assumption that renewable energy is both inevitably more expensive than fossil fuels and the cause of the cost-of-living crisis, as shown by the pre-Budget coverage of the cuts to various green levies on energy bills.

Farage argues that climate crisis is an issue where politicians are out of touch with the country. This is true, but not in the way that he means it. It's not that climate policies are being imposed on a climate-sceptic populace; rather, people want far more action than we're getting. Even 51% of Reform voters say they're worried about climate change.

The reality is that there's nothing inevitable about renewable energy meaning higher energy bills. This is the result of the way that the energy market is structured, in the same way that heating using electricity, like heat pumps, is way more expensive than it needs to be because electricity is so much more expensive than gas. This structure is a political decision; one we can fight to change.

Contrary to what politicians from Labour to Reform would have us believe, green policies can mean real improvements in people's lives, quite aside from the climate benefits, whether that's jobs in green infrastructure, more rural buses, faster, more reliable trains, or ways of heating and cooling our homes that don't cook the planet.

To get them, we have to take on the logic of the market that has got us into this mess. That means full nationalisation of our energy system, running public transport for people's needs rather than profit or cost reduction, and making good, green jobs a reality. These aren't woke or elite concerns, they're demands that are in all our interests to win.

MARXISM 101



UKIP MARCH, 25 OCTOBER. PHOTO: STEVE EASON / CC BY-NC 2.0

WHY DOES RACISM PERSIST?



by Alex Snowden

For socialists and anti-racists, it is abhorrent that racism is still very much with us. Indeed there are, in important ways, growing problems with racism in British politics, from Reform’s polling success to far-right street protests.

It is important to understand both the origins of racism and why it persists. This is essential if we are to combat it effectively.

There are a number of ways in which racism is often understood. It is frequently seen as a matter of personal attitudes. Often these ideas or prejudices are regarded as a hangover from an earlier era. The remedy is education or awareness raising in order to enlighten people.

Racism is also frequently framed as an expression of privilege. White people possess privilege when compared to other racial groups. This blinds them to prejudicial attitudes or discriminatory behaviours. A key part of the solution is, again, to become more aware.

These ways of framing racism focus largely on individuals and their ideas. Remedies are on the level of changing attitudes. There is little sense that racism may have a material basis (aside from a vague sense of ‘privilege’) or have structural roots. There is consequently little focus on a collective response to racism.

Racism is also generally seen as both timeless and universal. It is assumed to be a regrettable part of human nature.

The Marxist tradition provides an alternative to all this. Marx developed an historical-materialist method that roots people’s ideas in material reality. He understood that these ideas can change enormously over time, shaped by economic and social changes.

Class societies have been divided and unequal societies. This broader context can provide fertile soil for racism. Any deeply unequal society will, inevitably, develop an ideology that justifies some having massively more than others, and some lives being valued more than others.

Racism fits this context very well. It can intersect with attitudes of superiority and contempt rooted in economic inequality.

The growth of capitalism was inextricably bound up with the emergence of forms of racism. European capitalism depended upon the slave trade economically, while the slave trade required biological racism – the crude notion that some people are

innately inferior to others – to justify it. The material reality of slavery in the US, meanwhile, was profoundly influential on American racism long after its abolition, though it was also sustained by ongoing economic problems.

A similar sort of biological racism accompanied the ‘Scramble for Africa’ in the last third of the nineteenth century. The massive expansion of European empires, subjugating and colonising entire populations in Africa and Asia, fuelled the notion that some racial groups were lesser (even sub-human), uncivilised and associated with backwardness. Economic exploitation was, again, the driving force for racism.

Antisemitism was re-fashioned in the same period for modern industrial capitalism. Often wrongly viewed as a legacy of earlier medieval prejudices, modern antisemitism was in fact shaped by a very modern capitalist society. Stereotypes about Jews were part of the same package as characterising black Africans as ‘backward’.

European ruling classes also discovered that Jews could prove convenient scapegoats for economic distress. The Nazis took this to the ultimate extreme, especially in the Holocaust, but antisemitic scapegoating – with a mix of ‘Jewish bankers’ and ‘Jewish Bolsheviks’ to blame for people’s woes – was widespread among European political elites.

While the Holocaust was humanity’s darkest episode, genocide was far from the preserve of the Nazis. It had been practised by all the ‘Great Powers’ on non-European populations during the period of imperialist expansion.

Similarly, genocide has been a characteristic of settler-colonial regimes from the extermination of indigenous peoples in the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand through to Israel’s ongoing ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians. Such genocides have been linked to economic factors like control of land and resources and have been deeply racist in character.

There have been many examples of ethnic or national groups being scapegoated by the ruling class to displace economic grievances onto those who do not deserve it. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels observed the phenomenon with Irish migrant workers demonised by the British establishment.

This could resonate with many working-class people, in particular at times of rising unemployment and economic insecurity, but there were also examples of British and Irish-heritage workers finding common cause in struggle.

These are recurring themes to this day: racism as a tool of division and class exploitation, but also anti-racism on the basis of class unity rooted in shared material interests.



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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.

BIRMINGHAM

Brum bin strike united - mass rally
Monday 1 December, 8:30am
Smithfield Depot, Sherlock Street, B5 6HX

HASTINGS

Confronting the cost of living crisis: wealth and power in Britain today
Tuesday 2 December, 7pm
Isabel Blackman Centre, Winding Street, Hastings, TN34 3AT

SOUTH EAST LONDON

Mamdani, Your Party and how the left can win
Tuesday 2 December, 7:30pm
Stage 19 Property, Macbean Street, Woolwich, SE18 6LW

PRESTON

Mamdani, Your Party and how the left can win
Thursday 4 December, 6:30pm
Preston Town Hall (Board Room), Lancaster Road, Preston, PR1 2RL

MANCHESTER

Fighting fascism: lessons from history
Tuesday 9 December, 7pm
Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester, M2 5NS

CREWE

Flags, fascism and the far right: how should we respond?
Thursday 11 December, 7pm
Community Room Hopes and Beams, Broad Street, Crewe, CW1 3UD

WHO WE ARE AND WHY YOU SHOULD JOIN US

Counterfire members have played an important role in trying to ensure Your Party is as broad, inclusive and insurgent as possible.

We have also played a significant part in building the unprecedented Palestine movement, nationally and locally.

Counterfire is a revolutionary socialist organisation committed to transforming our society from one based on the profit motive to one built on the needs of working people.

A new electoral alternative is a huge step forward for the left. But we believe it needs to be firmly linked to mass movements.

Change can only be achieved by working-class people organising themselves to challenge their bosses and the government that stands behind the bosses.

We believe that this kind of popular opposition also requires a dynamic extra-parliamentary left, rooted in workplaces, communities, and colleges.



We also insist that 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.


Counterfire puts the case for a revolutionary socialism that ultimately seeks popular control of society and genuine liberation for all.

What we do

We have more and more local branches around the country to help build the movements, solidarity with struggles 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 tens of thousands of readers every month. And we distribute thousands of copies of the left's first free paper.

Counterfire is growing fast. Please join us and help make change happen.



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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EMAIL: _____

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JOIN COUNTERFIRE TODAY

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

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

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HASTINGS

IPSWICH

LONDON:

EAST

GREENWICH &

WOOLWICH

HARINGEY

NORTH WEST

SOUTH WEST

SOUTH (CENTRAL)

MANCHESTER

NEWCASTLE

PRESTON & CHORLEY

ART & CULTURE

WICKED: FOR GOOD

Resistance with sparkles

LUCY NICHOLS

The state scapegoats a minority for the problems that it is responsible for, and the majority believes it. A dictator, propped up by lies, leads a witch-hunt (pun intended) against the resistance. Here is a powerful meditation on state propaganda, resistance, xenophobia, and the nature of good vs evil. It is a musical with an abundance of sparkle and a fantastically catchy soundtrack.

Here is *Wicked: For Good*, starring Cynthia Erivo (Elphaba), Ariana Grande (Glinda), Jeff Goldblum (The Wizard), Michelle Yeoh and Jonathon Bailey.

There are many ways to interpret *Wicked: For Good*. For some, it will be about the power of female friendship. For others, it will be about romantic love. For yet others, it will be a good example of how to turn a stage musical into a film. For some, it may even reflect Marx's famous assertion that 'being determines consciousness,' or John Locke's idea that 'absolute power corrupts absolutely'.

It is certainly being marketed as a frilly children's film with little substance other than ridiculous pink dresses and magic wands. This is a little disappointing: it is rather political, and this is presented in very interesting ways. Themes such as racism, fascism, power, and terror are explored using anthropomorphism, magic, physical transformations, and music.

The main character, Elphaba (the so-called 'Wicked Witch') has Green-coloured skin, and for this is an outcast from society. This is a major theme in the first film, and the decision to cast a Black woman as Elphaba cannot be an accident. This is less important in the second film, Elphaba having already come to terms with looking different to everyone else.

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz has already been exposed as a fraud. This ostensibly all-powerful wizard is not as



benevolent as he appears. He scapegoats a minority in the magical land of Oz to consolidate his own power, with the talking-animal residents of Oz forced out of their jobs and homes and either taken away to 'Oz knows where' or driven into exile. The first film ends with Elphaba refusing to help the wizard in his xenophobic goals and setting off on a journey to topple him and his supporters from power.

In the sequel, we follow Elphaba as she attempts to take down this semi-fascist dictatorship, fighting against a powerful

propaganda machine. There is obvious aesthetic inspiration from McCarthyite propaganda posters present in the film, where citizens are reminded to 'beware the Green menace'.

Any attempts to humanise Elphaba are blocked by the powerful of Oz, who insist on labelling her 'the Wicked Witch' rather than by her name. Meanwhile, Glinda (Ariana Grande) is the 'Good' witch. These two words; 'wicked' and 'good' are used to encourage the citizens of Oz into a binary mode of thinking, where you are either for

goodness or wickedness. This works to undermine Elphaba in her attempts to liberate the oppressed animal minority, as the ordinary citizens are simply too afraid of her to listen to what she is saying, and do not want to be seen as siding against the goodness of Oz.

Propaganda appears in other ways, too. In one musical number, distantly reminiscent of Walter Benjamin's *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, the Wizard sings,

'Where I'm from, we believe all sorts of things that aren't true / We call it history / A man's called a traitor / Or liberator /... / Is one an invader / or noble crusader / It's all in which label is able to persist.'

The theme of terrorism is also touched on, with the state manipulating events to paint Elphaba as a terrorist and thus sow even more fear. This fear is riled into frenzy and the closing act of the film displays how this can play out.

After watching this film, I had to do some research. There is no way that these ideas can appear in one of Hollywood's biggest films of 2025 by accident. It turns out, Gregory Macguire wrote the novel *Wicked* which the stage musical and now films are based on in the early 1990s as a response to US propaganda about Saddam Hussain in the lead-up to the First Gulf War. Though some of this is lost in the adaptations, the subversive undercurrent remains in the film.

If you have an evening off this Christmas or want to take children to see a film that you will also enjoy, *Wicked: For Good* is well worth a watch. Given the rampant Islamophobia, crackdown on resistance, the misuse of terrorism law and rising fascism in Britain, it is possible it might feel a bit on the nose. The only other risk is that you will walk out of the cinema with the lovely harmonies of Ariana Grande and Cynthia Erivo stuck in your head.

Olusoga's *Empire*: an antidote to nationalism

JOHN WESTMORELAND

David Olusoga's three-part series, *Empire*, is a must watch for anyone who finds themselves dismayed and disgusted by the anti-immigrant hate speech, culture wars and specious claims about 'national identity' that are spouted by flag-draped politicians angling for votes.

Empire is an Open University project, produced with the BBC, and David Olusoga is the ideal person to present it. His family roots include a Scottish soldier who fought in the wars of the British Empire, as well as a Nigerian branch that experienced imperial violence. He therefore represents the ethnic and cultural mixing, transporting and importing that defines Britain today.

As Olusoga puts it, 'Empire is a history of Britain that links together the people of Britain and also the 2.4 billion people who are part of the Commonwealth, the former empire'. And, the series certainly has great success in its

purpose of making sense of a world transformed by empire. It is, to quote Olusoga again, 'a shared story for a colossal number of people'.

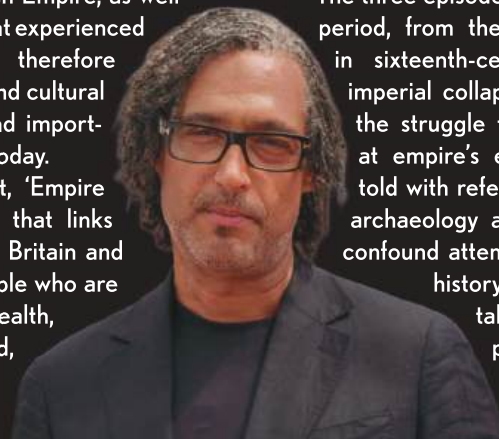
The three episodes cover the entire period, from the empire's origins in sixteenth-century piracy, to imperial collapse in the face of the struggle for independence at empire's end. The story is told with reference to archives, archaeology and artefacts that confound attempts to glorify the history. It is a story of brutality and the suppression of morality in the interests of imperial plun-

der; from the slave ports off west Africa to the genocide inflicted on the Aboriginal people in Tasmania.

At a time when the right-wing parties are demanding that the history of the British Empire should be taught in schools, to instil patriotism (as defined by them), *Empire* is an excellent corrective to that project. The history is too complex for any simplistic nationalist narrative. Every school could use the film as a rich historical and cultural source. It is a film our young people need to watch.

It looks very likely that the tide of historical scholarship is flowing very strongly against attempts to glorify the British Empire, and David Olusoga has made a very powerful contribution to that current.

Empire is available to watch on BBC iPlayer



INTERNATIONAL
WOMEN

WAGES ~~NOT~~ WEAPONS



JOHN REES

‘Your kids will die,’ says army chief as France reintroduces military service.

The new head of France’s army has caused outrage by telling a conference of mayors that the country has to be willing to ‘lose its children’ in a war.

General Fabien Mandon’s bloodcurdling speed was made as teenagers across Europe are being swept into the armed forces. The Europe-wide rearmament programme is already spending unprecedented amounts of taxpayers’ money on the armed forces.

But now politicians across the continent are determined to snatch teenagers from their families and put them in harm’s way in the military.

France has now followed Germany in reintroducing national service. Some 50,000

young people will be drafted by the next decade, on top of the already 200,000-strong armed forces that France already possesses.

Germany has made a similar move, so have the Netherlands and Belgium.

Militarists in Britain are licking their lips at the prospect of herding young people into the army.

The Daily Telegraph enthused that, ‘Military service is just what our lazy, selfish youth need’. Right-wing motormouth Rod Liddle said much the same in the *Times*.

The Tories had the return of parade-ground bashing in their election manifesto in 2024.

It’s all part of a massive rearmament propaganda push to spend more on rearmament while welfare spending and wages are slashed.

The TUC passed an important ‘wages

not warfare’ resolution at its last conference. There needs to be a labour movement-wide campaign to make that policy a live campaign.

We cannot wait until our spending has been raided to feed the profits of the arms industry and our children are dragged into a pre-war, army-recruitment drive.

Every union needs to join the campaign to build the international peace conference coming up in London next June. The predecessor conference in Paris last October mobilised thousands of trade unionists and activists across Europe. The June conference can be even bigger and more rooted in the trade-union movement.

But we need to act now before a xenophobic war drive gets going. Everyone knows where this led the last time: to the carnage of the trenches in the 1914-18 catastrophe.

20 June 2026: International conference against war

Central Hall Westminster, London, SW1H 9NH. Follow @stwuuk for updates.

Model motion for trade union branches on Page 7.