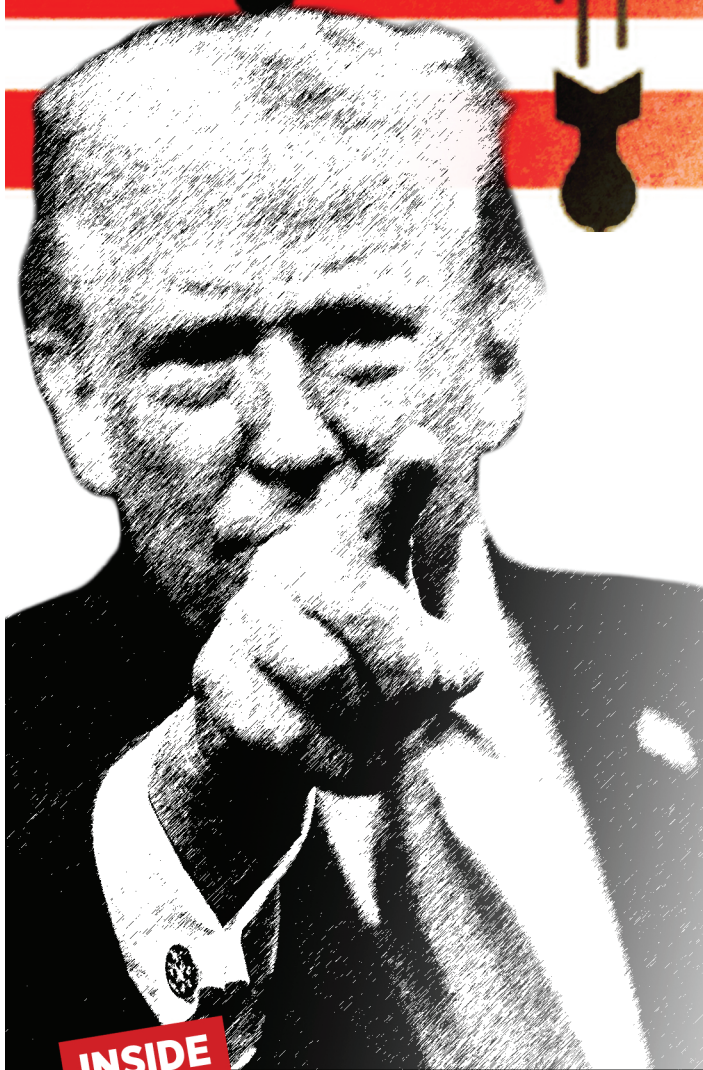


# COUNTERFIRE

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# STOP TRUMP'S WAR DRIVE



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## NEWS



ANTI-FAR RIGHT PROTEST, LONDON, DECEMBER 2025. PHOTO: STEVE EASON / CC BY-NC 2.0

# Why we need a new movement against the far right

CICI WASHBURN

Across the country, people were shocked and horrified at the scale of Tommy Robinson's Unite the Kingdom rally on 13 September last year, the largest far-right mobilisation in British history.

With flags displayed up and down the country, visible on every train in London and many knowing someone who attended the rally, it's become increasingly clear we need an urgent mass mobilisation bringing together broad layers on the streets.

In December, the Together Alliance was launched with its first initiative, a march together against the far right on 28 March, an essential action as the far right and fascists continue to organise.

The left was sizeably outnumbered on the counter-protest on 13 September and kettled for hours. However, since then, there have been several counter-protests in a number of places where we have outnumbered them.

The far right are still emboldened and more vocally anti-left than in recent years; in Falkirk and Bournemouth the far right have picketed trades-council and Your Party meetings. In October, fascist UKIP leader Nick Tenconi planned an anti-migrant march to Whitechapel. Socialists, the Muslim community, Palestine and anti-war activists mobilised a massive show of opposition and when the police realised the counter-protest numbers would be huge, it

banned the UKIP march – an example of how we make the far right unwelcome on our streets.

In the summer of 2024, when riots took place outside hotels housing asylum seekers, there were huge mobilisations against the right from Walthamstow to Liverpool, Brighton and Newcastle.

Counter-protests are absolutely necessary to help demoralise the far right. Additionally, we need to organise and mobilise on our own terms; 28 March is a timely chance for us to bring together a coalition that broadens and deepens the movement against fascism and the far right ahead of Tommy Robinson's next march on 16 May and ahead of the local elections in May.

Islamophobia is being whipped up not only by Tommy Robinson but also by Farage and Reform, the Labour government, Shabana Mahmood in particular, and the mainstream media's obsession with small boats and curbing immigration. This has resulted in a significant increase in hate crimes against the Muslim community.

The May local elections last year saw Reform massively increase its council seats at a scale that wasn't quite expected and in places with traditionally strong working-class organisation, such as Durham and other Labour strongholds. It's clear that the decline in working-class living standards, the cost of living and Labour's continuation of Tory attacks on working-class people,

such as the two-child benefit cap and the axing of pensioners' winter fuel allowance, is leaving a vacuum for Reform.

Your Party is important in filling this vacuum but even if its trajectory improves, which we are working on and hope it will, a street-led extra-parliamentary mass mobilisation is essential in any case.

For some time, we have needed a strong movement whose sole purpose is to unite masses of people against the far right and the fascists. As socialists, we need to organise a broad, determined and welcoming movement that makes hard class arguments to win people and peel away the softer layers from the fascists and far right.

We need a coalition of trade unionists,

socialists, community groups and campaigns, the Palestine movement and many more over this issue. The Together Alliance gives us an important chance of achieving this that we cannot waste. An impressive number of celebrities, musicians, trade unions, the TUC, Labour MPs, The Green Party, campaign organisations, charities, NGOs and many more have signed up to the alliance.

An opposition is needed with tens of thousands on the streets. We need urgently to get every trade-union branch and workplace supporting 28 March, coaches from every area in the country and to mobilise as widely as possible in our localities, the task is urgent and the stakes are high.

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# Resist Trump's ICE terror

CLEMENTINE RUSSELL

Earlier this month, a US ICE agent shot and killed an unarmed woman in her car. The woman, Renee Nicole Good, was described by Democratic Minnesota congresswoman, Ilhan Omar, as a legal observer.

She was shot in the head three times while attempting to drive away from the ICE agents. Reports from the scene say that an onlooking doctor attempted to give Good medical attention but was prevented by ICE officers who reportedly said, "No, shut up. We don't care." When an ambulance arrived, it was blocked by ICE vehicles and paramedics had to walk to Good.

Following the shooting, President Trump baselessly claimed that Good "violently, wilfully, and viciously ran over the ICE officer, who seems to have shot her in self defence." To anyone who has seen the video of the event, this is nothing more than a bold-faced lie.

What many already knew was made very clear to the whole country: ICE does not protect anyone. It is an unlawful paramilitary organisation used to carry out a fascistic government's wishes, emboldened by the fact that they can get away with murder and know the president will lie on their behalf.

If this is what they feel safe enough to do on the streets, whilst being recorded, to a white, American-born woman, what are they doing to the migrants they've snatched off the streets, their homes and workplaces and detained behind the scenes?

Since the shooting, mass protests have erupted across Minneapolis and the rest of the country, calling for an end to ICE's reign of terror. Videos of these protests show dystopian images, protesters holding up 'ICE OUT' signs facing officers decked in military gear and face coverings.

The protests have drawn in even liberal elements of the Democrat party. In a number of places the slogans have generalised to a widespread opposition to Trump's authoritarianism as well as his drive to more war.

## EDITORIAL



# THE DRUMS OF WAR ARE BEATING

COUNTERFIRE

**Trump's announcement that he is increasing American arm spending from 1 trillion dollars to 1.5 trillion dollars, a 50 percent increase, is a declaration of a new period of preparation for war, and increased actual military conflict.**

The European leaders are actually following Trump's lead. NATO arms budgets are ballooning, and conscription plans have already been introduced in Germany, France, the Netherlands, and Belgium.

Keir Starmer has already announced a pre-conscription scheme in Britain. And nobody can be in any doubt that, as media pundits are already predicting, there will be a full conscription scheme to follow.

The conflict with Venezuela quickly became a direct conflict with Russia after the US navy boarded a Russian-flagged tanker in the Atlantic, threatening a naval stand-off between Moscow and Washington. But it's not just among the US's traditional rivals that Trump's new imperial drive is causing disquiet. The

US President followed the military action in Venezuela with renewed demands that Greenland should come under his control. He threatened that military action could be on the agenda if his demand is not met.

Greenland is a quasi-independent territory that is part of Denmark. And Denmark is a member of NATO. So Trump is now directly threatening the use of force against a NATO ally. This was too much even for those European leaders who have been quiescent in the face of the attack on Venezuela.

From one end of Europe to the other, leaders have been echoing Keir Starmer's very rare contradiction of Trump when he insisted that Greenland and Denmark alone should decide their future. And in another consequence of Trump's new imperial design, US forces are flooding into military bases in the UK.

Starmer is also happy for the UK to enhance its traditional role as the US's aircraft carrier. US warplanes and an elite strike force recently arrived at RAF Fairford in Gloucestershire and RAF Mildenhall in

Suffolk. The deployment includes ten C-17 Globemaster transport aircraft and a pair of AC-130J Ghost Rider gunships.

This follows evidence that US nuclear weapons, specifically B61-12 gravity bombs, have likely returned to RAF Lakenheath in Suffolk, for the first time since 2008, following infrastructure upgrades and transport flights, marking a shift in NATO's nuclear posture amidst rising tensions, though official confirmation is withheld by both US and UK governments.

In response to this, European anti-war activists gathered in Paris recently to organise for the forthcoming International Peace Conference in London planned for 20 June. This will be a major labour-movement mobilisation in line with the TUC's wages-not-warfare policy adopted at its last Congress.

A model motion that can be taken to your trade union branch to build support for the conference can be found on page 8.

The direction of travel is clear and we urgently need a mass, organised anti-war movement.



## 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 SOCIAL CARE WORKERS. PHOTO: @NORTHWESTUNISON / X

# Lancashire workers gear up for a fight with Reform council

**EMMA MEAD**

Workers across Lancashire Adult Social Services are gearing up for a significant fight with the Reform council over their plans to cut and privatise services and their failure to pay workers appropriately for the jobs they do.

Social-work assistants across the county have been in dispute with the council for months over a regrading claim. The council has expanded the role of social-work assistants, expecting them to do

initial assessments of older people's (often complex) needs. Traditionally, this task has been done by social workers, but the council has increasingly allocated this to assistants on lower pay grades.

Some of the workers want appropriate regrading, whilst others only want to do work appropriate to their role. But the council is refusing any meaningful discussion over the workers' concerns.

So far, the workforce has undertaken sixty days of strike action to force a resolution. Now the workers have begun all-out

continuous strike action until the council relents.

At the same time, workers in care homes and day centres across Lancashire are demanding a ballot for strike action over the council's plans to close and privatise facilities.

There has been a significant increase in union membership across the homes and centres (from around 20% to over 55% of the workforce) with workers upping their campaign for strike action to resist Reform's plans.



## BRENT TEACHING ASSISTANTS ESCALATE STRIKE

**PETE WEBSTER**

A chilly start to the term saw the dispute at Woodfield School in Brent which provides complex and specialist care for SEND pupils escalate as management had brought in around forty-odd scab workers in an attempt to break the strike by using a loophole in the regulations.

These were provided by a number of teaching agencies on a 'play scheme', although these normally take place during the school holidays. In fact, they are being used to cover the work that the teaching assistants (TAs) carry out: a practice that is considered illegal.

This also has an impact on the pupils as the agency workers do not have the same degree of professionalism and dedication of the TAs and, as temporary workers, cannot provide the same degree of commitment to the pupils who benefit from having regular and consistent contact with individual TAs over the course of the year.

At the core of the dispute is management's attempt to cut pay and hours for TAs that would result in their pay being cut by around £4,000 per year.

They claim there is a need to make financial savings, yet can find the money to pay the recruitment agencies who cream off a nice profit as these 'play-scheme' workers will be on the bare minimum.

Nonetheless, striking staff were in good spirits and are determined to continue their struggle that started last year. The strike is continuing and a majority of strikers want to extend the action to eight days over two weeks if management remain intransigent.

It is critical that the strikers maintain their resolve to show the bosses that they are not going to be pushed around.

Daily pickets are from 7:30-9am. Send messages of solidarity to [jennifer.cooper@neu.org.uk](mailto:jennifer.cooper@neu.org.uk) and/or [lucy.cox@neu.org.uk](mailto:lucy.cox@neu.org.uk)

## PICKET LINES THIS MONTH

### ST ENOCH'S VUE, GLASGOW

Union: Unite  
Dates: 8 January – 6 February  
Location: G1 4BW

### FURTHER EDUCATION COLLEGES

Union: UCU  
Dates: 14, 15, 16 January  
Location: Nationwide, see UCU website for details

### UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER

Union: UCU  
Dates: 22, 23, 26 January  
Location: LE1 7RH

### ARTHUR TERRY LEARNING PARTNERSHIP SCHOOLS

Union: NEU  
Dates: 14, 15, 20-22, 26-29 January  
Location: Schools across West Midlands, see Strike Map for details

### BIRMINGHAM REFUSE WORKERS

Union: Unite  
Date: Continuous, Megapicket on 30 January  
Location: Sites across Birmingham, RSVP for Megapicket on on Strike Map

### DWP LINCOLN

Union: PCS  
Dates: 5-16 January  
Location: City Hall Lincoln, LN1 1DD

### VEOLIA ENERGY RECOVERY FACILITY, NEWHAVEN

Union: Unite  
Dates: 12-16 January  
Location: BN9 OAB

### AIREDALE HOSPITAL WORKERS

Union: GMB  
Dates: 20-26 January  
Location: Steeton, BD20 6TD

### CAMBRIDGE STAGECOACH BUSES

Union: Unite  
Dates: 5, 10, 19, 24 January  
Location: CB4 ODN

**WORKPLACE DAY OF ACTION FOR PALESTINE**  
THURSDAY 12 FEBRUARY  
**STOP ARMING ISRAEL**  
**END THE GENOCIDE**



INTERVIEW



NATIONAL WOMEN'S COMMITTEE JOIN BIRMINGHAM BIN WORKERS PICKET LINE. PHOTO: @UNITEWESTMIDS/X

# 'We are determined to fight until we win'



**Can you give us the background to the dispute?**

The dispute has its roots in the failings of Birmingham City Council. In 2023, the council effectively declared that they were bankrupt. They had installed a new IT system which original estimates suggested would cost £20m, but it ended up costing £140m. And there was the cost to the council of their long-standing failure to meet pay equality claims, resulting in a potential pay liability, they claimed, of £760m.

Michael Gove sent in commissioners to run the council, or at least, to have oversight of council decision making. The commissioners demanded the reorganisation of the council with a view to making savings in all council budget areas and all service directorates.

In mid-2024, we, as a union, were given a '108 notice' which informed us that the refuse-collector job was going to be 'removed'. This is a crucially important job. It's the person who works at the back of the truck and has, what a High Court Judge in 2017 determined, a 'critical safety role', making sure other workers are safe from traffic and that traffic is passing the trucks

**Michael Lavalette spoke with Matthew Reid, Unite Convenor at Birmingham City Council whose members in refuse collection have been on strike for just over twelve months.**

safely. Now the council were saying this job would go and we were facing redundancies via a voluntary redundancy scheme. Anyone who didn't lose their job would be downgraded to a 'loader' and that meant a pay cut of £8,000 per year.

So, effectively, we were facing three issues: redundancies, regrading/wage cuts and increased workload for those who stayed in job.

The council launched their 45-day 'consultation'. But it was a complete sham. We put multiple options forward that would have avoided the need for redundancies and stopped them removing the key, 'safety-critical' role. But they simply didn't listen to us. They'd made their mind up from the start that they were going to force through redundancies and wage cuts.

In December 2024, we balloted for strike action. I think the council thought we wouldn't reach the legal threshold to instigate strike action and they could just do what they wanted. But we got the threshold and we had our first strike on 6 January 2024.

The day of the first strike, the council suddenly approached us to negotiate!

We then spent six months in discussions with them, via ACAS. We eventually got to a place, we thought, where we had more or less agreed a compensation package and were close to a settlement.

The council told us they were taking this away to the commissioners and we thought we had an agreement.

But the commissioners responded by rejecting the proposals and basically said all negotiations over the previous six months were unacceptable! What a waste of time!

But even worse, they then said that the drivers were now going to be regraded and they would also lose £8,000 a year! In others words, they came back and upped the ante.

**Clearly the on-going dispute is on the council! How have you tried to build support in the local community?**

The council has used anti-trade-union legislation against us and we have had the police using public-order legislation against us. We have had to think about how we conduct our campaign. We have had rallies, meetings and a couple of mega-pickets, all of which have been fantastic. But we have also had to think about how we take this into the community.

The council has responded by cutting garden waste and recycling services and focus on household waste. Ironically, this has created a space for us to engage with the community and explain our case.

Unite organisers have been in the community, knocking on

doors and getting a very positive response. We estimate that close to nine out of ten people we speak to are supportive.

When people know that workers are facing job losses and £8,000 pay cuts because of the failings of the council, they are really supportive. Most people are appalled that the council want to take a quarter of people's salary when it's clearly not their fault or doing. It's Birmingham council mismanagement that's at the heart of the issue and they want hard-working, low-paid bin workers to pay the price: most people in the community recognise that and are very supportive.

**What solidarity have you received from the wider movement?**

It's been brilliant!

We have had messages of support from across the movement. We have had donations to the strike fund from across the country. The meetings, marches and mega-pickets have been well-supported and amazing events.

There are support groups who regularly turn up to offer support in various ways.

Jeremy Corbyn and Zarah Sultana have been to our picket lines, but unfortunately they have been the only MPs who have joined us. None of the Labour MPs in Birmingham have bothered to come along.

In fact, early on in the strike, Angela Rayner, when she was still Deputy PM, came to Birmingham and I thought, 'great', she's coming to support us. But I couldn't have been more wrong. She actually went out to meet and greet the scabs and tell them what a great job they were doing!

**What needs to happen to bring this to a positive end?**

The workers are on £70 a day strike pay, and that is less than their wage, obviously. But we have been able to say: 'if we don't fight, if we don't win ... that will be our wage from now on! So let's have a hard, solid fight now to ensure proper pay going forward.'

As the strike has gone on, the more determined people have become. We are absolutely determined to fight until we win; the workers' resilience has been amazing.

We need as much support as we can get. Messages of support, financial support, come and join our marches and rallies. But we also need to increase the political pressure on the council to demand that they get back round the table and sort this out.

**Donations to the strike fund to: Unite West Midlands region 1% fund Account number: 20174000 Sort code: 60-83-01 (Please include reference BCC)**



DONALD TRUMP AT PRESS CONFERENCE FOLLOWING KIDNAPPING OF VENEZUELAN PRESIDENT MADURO. PHOTO: WHITE HOUSE

**Chris Bambery analyses the latest phase of US imperialism and what it means for global geopolitics**

The United States is now operating in a nakedly imperialist way. The attack on Venezuela, the kidnapping of President Maduro, putting him and his wife on trial in New York City on charges of supposed drug running, and the seizure of Russian-flagged oil tankers on the high seas plus the renewed military threats against Greenland, Cuba and Iran all represent a ratcheting up of US military aggression.

All of this flies in the face of international law, much of it written by Americans post-1945. There is no attempt to justify this, as they did with the invasion of Iraq in 2003, as a necessity to topple a totalitarian dictator intent on using weapons of mass destruction against the West and replacing him with parliamentary democracy.

Once, long ago, Washington tried to present US military action as being about defending the 'free world' against totalitarian Stalinism. That was never true, but Trump has ditched all that pretence.

Trump did not present the attack on Venezuela and the kidnapping of Maduro as being about toppling socialism; he did so in much cruder terms, that it was about gaining control of the country's oil.

The US is now operating like British imperialism at its height in the nineteenth century when it simply sent in a gunboat, invaded sovereign countries and sacked capitals such as Beijing. Like Britain then, the US under Trump does not wish for

# NAKED IMPERIALISM

allies. It wants subservient states who jump when ordered, just like Starmer did over the seizure of a Russian tanker in the North Atlantic, providing an air base, refuelling and intelligence.

Nor is Trump interested in regime change in the way of his predecessors. He insultingly dismissed the right-wing opposition leader in Venezuela, María Corina Machado, saying she did not have enough 'respect' within the country.

Trump instead recognised Maduro's vice-president, Delcy Rodríguez, as interim president, warning she would pay 'a very high price' if she did not toe the US line and 'do what's right' by opening Venezuela's vast oil reserves to American companies.

Rodríguez seems desperate to placate Trump and possibly lead an authoritarian administration subservient to Washington

and its oil transnationals, as was the model in Syria.

Trump says that over Venezuela and Greenland, he is enforcing the Monroe Doctrine. This was a warning issued by an American president in the early nineteenth century to keep Europe out of the Americas: Washington would dominate there with no heed to anyone else.

It has intervened with force scores of times: in Mexico, Haiti, Cuba, Nicaragua and other Latin American states and supported fully vicious dictatorships such as that of Augusto Pinochet following the 9/11, 1973 coup, plotted by Washington at every stage.

Many see the invocation of the Monroe Doctrine as the US retreating from its global commitments into simply controlling its own backyard. I think they are wrong.

Firstly, the attack on Venezuela and the seizure of Maduro also involved seizing oil tankers bound for China and Russia. That's dangerous enough but clearly Trump wants to stop them getting Venezuelan oil.

Neither Beijing or Moscow would have lifted a finger to save Maduro: they accept the Monroe Doctrine, and would like Trump to do the same over Taiwan and Ukraine. But, while they can access oil elsewhere, Trump's actions will prove to them, once again, that he cannot be trusted.

Secondly, in the Middle East, Benjamin Netanyahu rushed to applaud Trump's actions in Venezuela. Just days before, he was in Florida urging Trump to join Israel in a fresh attack on Iran. Such an attack would set the region on fire, but that won't stop Trump joining in.

Thirdly, the military build-up involving the US and its allies, including Britain, in

the South China Sea and around Taiwan continues. China claims Taiwan as part of its sovereign territory. Trump sees this as his priority because China is the US's principal enemy economically and militarily.

Add into all this, the US bombings in Nigeria and Syria.

Over the war in Ukraine, Trump has pulled much of the US support for Kiev, dumping that on the European states, who in response have hiked military spending, are re-introducing conscription, and have poured massive gifts of cash into the bottomless pockets of Ukraine's elite.

Vladimir Putin once hoped Trump would broker peace on Russia's terms. Now, having criminally launched this war, he will look to military victory. Neither he, nor President Xi in China, will trust Trump after his attacks on their allies, Iran and Venezuela.

Regarding Europe, it's clear to anyone who has ears and eyes that Trump could not give a fig for Nato and the US's 'allies'. His threats to take over Greenland and his behaviour over Ukraine are proof of that.

The White House openly stated that 'weak' Britain should have celebrated Maduro's capture. Keir Starmer's response was not to tell them to get stuffed. Instead, like the poodle he is, he gave every help America requested in an act of international piracy, the seizure of the Russian-flagged oil tanker. Nigel Farage and Kemi Badenoch would have done the very same.

In this situation, hope rests with the anti-war movement. The unity built in solidarity with Gaza and Palestine will now be required to prevent further US acts of aggression, and British complicity in them. Hope rests in the streets, not in the corridors of power.

## A history of US intervention in Latin America

ORLANDO HILL

The US has a long history of intervention in Latin America and the Caribbean, marked by coups, blockades, military operations, some covert and some not so covert. Here is a list of them.

**1831** The US Navy invaded the Argentine settlement on the Malvinas/Falkland Islands, took the Argentine authorities away as prisoners and destroyed Puerto Soledad.

**1833** The US assisted the British Navy in ousting the new Argentine authorities from the archipelago, claiming them for the British crown. In supporting a European power in the takeover of the islands, the US disregarded the Monroe doctrine of 1821.

**1846** The US invaded Mexico and annexed Texas.

**1847** The US occupied Mexico City.

**1848** The US imposed the Guadalupe-Hidalgo Treaty by which Mexico handed over half of its territory: Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California.

**1860** US forces landed in Panama, then a part of Colombia, to protect US interests in the midst of an insurrection. From the perspective of Colombians, the US was intervening in their sovereignty, while the Colombians were legitimately defending their nation from insurrection by enemy combatants.

**1895-8** US troops intervened in Cuba during the latter's war of independence, known to the Cubans as the Necessary War (Guerra Necesaria). In 1898, the United States and Spain signed the Treaty of Paris, which demanded the formal recognition of Cuban independence on the part of Spain. The US prevented Cuba from participating in the Paris peace talks and the signing of the treaty. The treaty did not set a designated time limit for US occupation, and the Isle of Pines was excluded from Cuba. The treaty

officially granted Cuban independence, but Cuban rebel forces were not allowed to participate in the surrender ceremonies in Santiago de Cuba.

**1898** US naval forces bombarded San Juan in Puerto Rico initiating military operations on the island.

**1903** Through the Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty, the US occupied 8km on either side of where the Panama Canal was to be built. In Cuba, they occupied part of the territory in Guantanamo where a military base was established.

**1905** US assumed responsibilities over the customs revenue of the Dominican Republic.

**1909** Nicaragua was invaded. President Jose Zelaya was forced to abandon the country.

**1911-14** The Dominican Republic was occupied by US military forces.

**1912** Cuba and Honduras suffered US intervention.

**1914-24** US marines invaded and occupied Nicaragua.

**1915-34** The US invaded and occupied Haiti.

**1917-19** Cuba was occupied by US forces.

**1922** The US intervened once again in Cuba.

**1924-6** The US invaded Honduras three times.

**1947** Allied with native military officers, the US overthrew President Romulo Gallegos of Venezuela. The excuse was that Venezuela had increased the price of its oil.

**1954** With the aid of aerial bombardment and mercenaries, the US was complicit in the overthrow of the democratically elected president of Guatemala, Jacob Arbenz.

**1961** The US masterminded the failed

AMERICAN MARINE POSES WITH DEAD HAITIANS KILLED BY US MACHINE-GUN FIRE, 1915



invasion of Playa Giron (Bay of Pigs) in Cuba. For the first time, US-backed forces were militarily defeated in Latin America.

**1964** In Panama, US soldiers fatally shot twenty students protesting against US occupation of the canal. In Brazil, the CIA took part in the overthrow of democratically elected president Joao Goulart.

**1965** The US occupied the Dominican Republic to free the country from the threat of communism and prevent the democratically elected president, Jaun Bosch, from taking office.

**1973** In Chile, the CIA masterminded a plan to overthrow the democratically elected president, Salvador Allende.

**1982-90** The US financed and trained mercenaries in the war of aggression against Nicaragua. They also enforced an economic blockade against the country.

**1983** Troops from the 82nd Airborne Division invaded Grenada and assassinated president Maurice Bishop.

**1984** As a reinforcement to the counter-revolution in Nicaragua, eleven thousand US soldiers spread throughout Honduras.

**1988-9** US pilots and the National Guard of Kentucky bombed the civilian population in the interior of Guatemala under the pretext of combating guerrilla groups. In El Salvador, the US sent military advisors to aid the government in their murderous war against the FMLN.

**1989** 25,000 US troops invaded Panama and kidnapped President Noriega. More than a thousand Panamanians were killed in that operation.

**2002** The US embassy in Venezuela monitored the failed attempt to overthrow President Hugo Chavez.

**2009** The US successfully sponsored the coup in Honduras that overthrew President Manuel Zelaya.

As Brazilian writer Frei Betto said,

*'Wherever they went, the invading troops of the USA left only misery, inequality, corruption, and death. But they did well to place the Statue of Liberty at the main gate of the USA. Thus, we are all aware that it delimits the sphere of freedom. For all of us, who are not US Americans, we are left with the freedom to never contradict their freedom to restrict or suppress ours.'*

## THE CONDITION OF THE WORKING CLASS



SCHOOL STRIKE AGAINST CONSCRIPTION IN KASSEL, GERMANY, DECEMBER 2025. PHOTO: DEZENTRALE KASSEL / CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

# Conscription: Europe's war frenzy



by **Terina Hine**

Europe is in the grip of a military frenzy. Countries across the continent are spending billions on boosting supplies of weapons and attempting to integrate disconnected military infrastructure. But it's not just about guns and tanks. In order to have an effective fighting force, we are told Europe must plug large gaps in its military personnel.

During the Cold War, NATO had large conscripted armies to rely on. Since then, not so much, but things look set to change as the introduction of compulsory and voluntary military service is becoming a fashion followed by increasing numbers of European countries. A fashion that is rapidly heading this way.

Starmer's agreement to send British 'peacekeeping' troops to Ukraine, with permission to shoot Russians as necessary, has been met with cries of despair by the right wing and armed forces. What boots, they ask, have we to put on Ukrainian ground?

Just last year, in a bid to deal with the crisis of recruitment and retention in the armed forces, the government promised £1.3bn of additional funding; apparently that's not enough. The youth of today are just too interested in scrolling on social media to become cannon fodder. As it seems are their European counterparts.

The solution? Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden have all introduced compulsory conscription in the last decade, most in the last few years. Croatia will be joining their ranks in 2026 with mandatory military service for all men aged between eighteen and thirty.

Elsewhere, governments have looked to voluntary schemes to boost recruitment. In December last year, the Belgium government wrote to all seventeen-year olds inviting them to volunteer for the army and earn €2,000 per month. A similar scheme was introduced in the Netherlands in 2023.

Poland has plans to introduce universal military training for every adult male and

expand its voluntary forces. Bulgaria has a voluntary scheme for citizens up to the age of forty and Romania has plans to adopt a similar scheme this year.

France is introducing voluntary 'national service' for eighteen to nineteen-year olds this year. The young recruits will be paid €800 per month to participate in a ten-month military-training programme.

Germany is also moving towards a voluntary scheme, with an option to make it compulsory if national security demands it, or if there are not enough reservist volunteers. From July 2027, it will be mandatory for all German men aged eighteen to complete a survey on their suitability for service and undergo a medical examination. The initiative will enable the military to call on those needed as and when required. In December, German youth took to the streets to protest the plans and schools went on strike in ninety German cities: 63% of 18-29 year olds oppose the scheme.

Here in the UK, after Rishi Sunk caused a national outcry in 2023 by proposing mandatory military service for young people, the government has been a little more circumspect. However, in the run-up to Christmas, they announced plans to boost armed-forces recruitment by introducing a 'gap-year' programme for school leavers. The plan is to give 'gappies' the chance to spend a year in the armed forces, as if it were equivalent to travelling the world with your mates or working at a beach-bar in Australia.

Recruiting to the armed forces in the 2020s is no easy task. Consequently, there are real concerns voluntary conscription models are part of a slippery slope towards mandatory military service.

Traditional solutions in the UK have been to recruit children from the most deprived areas of the country. The UK has the only professional army in NATO which recruits children. According to the latest MoD figures, a third of new recruits are

aged eighteen or under, 10% of those who signed up between September 2024 and March 2025 were only sixteen.

Research conducted by the Child Rights International Network (CRIN) show a direct correlation between economic deprivation and the rate of childhood recruitment: the more deprived an area, the younger the recruits. In the most deprived areas, the recruitment of sixteen and seventeen-year olds was found to be 57% higher than in the least deprived.

If Britain does send troops to fight the Russians in Ukraine, it appears many will be child soldiers, and most will be from our poorest communities. Unless of course, Britain joins the expanding European compulsory conscription club. Both must be resisted.

The International Peace Conference in London on 20 June could not be at a more important time. Do what you can to build it and attend.

[More details at stopwar.org.uk/events](https://stopwar.org.uk/events)

### THIS MONTH IN HISTORY

**MORGAN DANIELS**

**1649**

30th: Charles I executed outside the Banqueting Hall on Whitehall

**1804**

1st: Jean-Jacques Dessalines declares Haiti's independence from the French Empire

**1855**

16th: Eleanor Marx born in Soho

**1890**

11th: First installment of *News from Nowhere* by William Morris published in the *Commonweal*

**1893**

13th: Independent Labour Party founded in Bradford

## MODEL MOTION FOR 20 JUNE PEACE CONFERENCE

Take this model motion to your trade union branch to support the International Peace Conference on 20 June at Central Hall Westminster. A downloadable version can be found at [counterfire.org](https://counterfire.org)

### 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.

MARXISM 101



AMAZON WORKERS FIGHTING FOR UNION RIGHTS, USA. PHOTO: JOE PIETTE / CC BY-SA 2.0

# WHY CLASS MATTERS



by Alex Snowden

Class, we are often told, is no longer relevant. It is an archaic concept. If class does still exist, it is now terribly complicated – with maybe seven different classes determined by complex criteria.

Alternatively, there's the idea that most people are middle class now. Sometimes the size of the working class is squeezed from the opposite direction, by emphasizing the supposed growth of an 'underclass'. Either way, the concept of a 'disappearing working class' is always with us.

Where the relevance of class is conceded, it is nonetheless just one of a range of demographic factors alongside sex, ethnicity, sexual orientation and so on. Class is often reduced from an objective matter to a question merely of identity – 'working class' as one of a range of possible identities.

As for what defines class, it can frequently be framed as a matter of lifestyle choices. Anything from someone's accent

to how somebody dresses or their cultural tastes can be a marker of class. There is little sense that class is rooted in material conditions. This 'identity' or 'lifestyle' approach also tends to treat class as an individual affair, rather than identifying what binds people together or what they have in common.

For Marxists, there are three fundamental points to grasp about class.

First, class is a material fact. It is objective reality, not subjective identity. Class is determined by people's relationship to the means of production.

Class societies stretch back around 10,000 years to when some communities began to produce a surplus – more than they required in order to live. This allowed a small elite, or ruling class, to develop, based on concentrating control of that surplus wealth in its own hands.

In a capitalist society the fundamental division is between capitalist and worker, based on who owns and controls production (the capitalists) and who is obliged to sell their labour power in order to survive (the working class).

Second, class is a social relationship. This is not unique to capitalism, which is a few hundred years old. In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels took a longer view when they wrote:

'Freeman and slave, patrician and

plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another...'

They are referring here to a series of class relationships throughout history – from ancient slave societies through to the emergence of early capitalism, via the Roman world and feudal societies. In each of these forms of society, class was a social relationship. It was an inevitably antagonistic one, too, as it rested upon economic exploitation.

In each type of society, the ruling class depended upon those who produced the wealth. In modern capitalism, a tiny ruling class – with the owners of capital at the core – exploits a working class, which forms the majority of society.

Third, the division of society into classes – with opposing material interests – inevitably generates class struggle. The quotation above from the *Communist Manifesto* continues:

'...an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of contending classes.'

This draws attention to how struggle between the main classes is a constant

feature of any class society, even if much of the time there appears to be little class conflict. It also implies that there have generally been two main 'contending' classes, though there may be other (less historically significant) classes.

In capitalism, it is the bourgeoisie (the capitalists) and the proletariat (the workers) that constitute the two main antagonists. This does not exclude the possibility of other class formations, such as a middle class including small business owners and those with managerial roles.

Nor does it stop us from analysing particular tendencies within a class – Marx did this often in his writings. It simply means grasping the main division in society and the way that provides the foundations for class struggle.

Marx and Engels were also highlighting the decisive role of class struggle in shaping the course of history. For example, the transition from feudalism to capitalism was rooted in technological and economic changes, but it also required a struggle – economically, politically, ideologically – by the emerging capitalist class to advance its interests.

It follows that further historical progress is possible. It requires working-class struggle to end capitalist exploitation. To quote the end of the *Communist Manifesto*: 'The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win'.

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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 organises regular national and local public meetings discussing key topics of the moment. Our events are open to all, and listed below along with key movement dates for your diary. See [counterfire.org/events](http://counterfire.org/events) for updates.

### NORWICH

**No war on Venezuela**  
Tuesday 13 January, 5:30pm  
Quaker Meeting House, Upper Goat Lane, NR2 1EW

### BRISTOL

**Policing protest and the drive to authoritarianism**  
Wednesday 14 January, 6:30pm  
Kit Form, 37 Jamaica Street, BS2 8JP

### EAST LONDON

**Venezuela, the Middle East, Greenland: Trump and the new imperial order**  
Wednesday 14 January, 6:30pm  
Mulberry Hall, St Margarets House, Old Ford Road, E2 9PL

### PRESTON

**Save Lancashire' care homes and day centres march and rally**  
Saturday 17 January, 12pm  
Preston Flag Market, Cheapside, PR1 2AP

### DEVON & CORNWALL (ONLINE)

**Police, protest bans & ID cards: Stopping Starmer's authoritarianism**  
Tuesday 20 January, 7pm  
Register on Zoom: [bit.ly/3KntBDT](https://bit.ly/3KntBDT)

### NEWCASTLE

**Resisting the new authoritarianism**  
Tuesday 20 January, 7pm  
Tyneside Irish Centre, 43 Gallowgate, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, NE1 4SG

### BRISTOL

**Hands off Venezuela: Stop Trump's wars, free Maduro!**  
Wednesday 21 January, 7pm  
Hamilton House, 80 Stokes Croft, BS1 3QY

### PRESTON

**Starmer, authoritarianism and Labour's crackdown on protest movements**  
Thursday 22 January, 6:30pm  
Preston Town Hall, Lancaster Road, PR1 2RL

### GLASGOW

**From Venezuela to Gaza: how to fight US imperialism**  
Thursday 22 January, 7pm  
GMAC Film, 103 Trongate, G1 5HD

### MANCHESTER

**Resisting the new authoritarianism**  
Tuesday 27 January, 7pm  
Friends' Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, M2 5NS

### HARINGEY

**Trump and the new imperial order: Venezuela, Greenland & the Middle East**  
Tuesday 27 January, 6:30pm  
All Good Bookshop, 35 Turnpike Lane, N8 0EP

### IPSWICH

**People, power and protest: how to fight Starmer's authoritarian state**  
Thursday 29 January, 7pm  
Quakers Meeting House, 39 Fonnereau Road, IP1 3JH

### BIRMINGHAM AND COVENTRY

**Megapicket: Support the bin strikers**  
Friday 30 January, 6am  
5 sites, follow @strike\_map for details

### LONDON

**National March for Palestine**  
Saturday 31 January, 12pm  
Location tbc, follow @stwuik for updates

### NATIONWIDE

**Workplace day of action for Palestine**  
Thursday 12 February

### NEWCASTLE

**Together against the far right rally**  
Saturday 14 February, 12pm  
Grey's Monument, NE1 5AF

### BRISTOL

**Bristol Together: United against racism rally**  
Saturday 14 February, 12pm  
College Green

### LONDON

**Defend Ben Jamal and Chris Nineham protest**  
Monday 23 February, 9am  
Westminster Magistrates Court, 181 Marylebone Road, NW1 5BR

### KING'S LYNN

**Stop British Nuke Jets – National Demonstration**  
Saturday 28 February, 12pm  
RAF Marham, Upper Marham, PE33 9NP

### LONDON

**Time to stop militarism, war and Islamophobia: Stop the War conference**  
Saturday 14 March, 11am  
Mander Hall, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, WC1H 9BD

### LONDON

**Together against the far right national demonstration**  
Saturday 28 March, 12pm  
Central London, follow @UKTogetherAll for updates

### LONDON

**Revolution! weekender**  
Saturday 11 - Sunday 12 April  
SOAS University, Thornhaugh Street, WC1H 0XG

### LONDON

**International conference against war**  
Saturday 20 June  
Central Hall Westminster, Storey's Gate, SW1H 9NH

## 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](mailto:info@counterfire.org)  
07807 123472

Branches:

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**LONDON:**

**EAST**

**GREENWICH &**

**WOOLWICH**

**HARINGEY**

**NORTH WEST**


**SOUTH WEST**

**SOUTH (CENTRAL)**

**MANCHESTER**

**NEWCASTLE**

**PRESTON & CHORLEY**



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## ART &amp; CULTURE

# Awards season: escape from the real

LUCY NICHOLS

It's that time of year again. While the rest of us trudge back to work after the holiday period and gear up to freeze on cold, winter demonstrations and picket lines, the faraway land of Hollywood decks itself in glitz and glam. It is preparing for 'awards season'. Here, the whole world is invited to watch as people with more wealth than we will likely ever see in our lives pat themselves on the back for creating the best (or highest grossing) art.

As US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) wage war on ordinary Americans, and Trump threatens to overthrow the already shaky world order, the stars of film, TV, and music prepare humble acceptance speeches and magnanimous losing faces.

There is no doubt that many awards shows will be peppered with anti-ICE, anti-Trump and maybe even pro-Palestine sentiment. But with the Golden Globes offering guests goodie bags worth \$1 million, it is hard to find the heart to care about awards season in the face of all of that is going on around us.

However, understanding the dominant culture is arguably rather important. We can make some, somewhat cautious, conclusions from the films that are expected to do best this year.

*Marty Supreme* has already begun winning awards, with lead actor Timothée Chalamet taking home a Critic's Choice Award (usually a good predictor for the Oscars). *Marty Supreme*, from Josh Safdie, is a fast-paced whirlwind about the working-class Jewish experience in New York (and table tennis). The main characters are all working-class Jews coming to terms with a new world after the Holocaust: a particularly poignant scene with a Hungarian Holocaust survivor comes to mind. The film depicts an instability faced by Jewish, immigrant, and black working-class Americans in post-war America.

*Sinners*, from Ryan Coogler, is also tipped to win big this year. More than just a musical about vampires, this film starring Michael B. Jordan is about African American in 1930s Mississippi, the height of the Great Depression and Jim Crow. It

is a horror film, arguably ripe for political analysis.

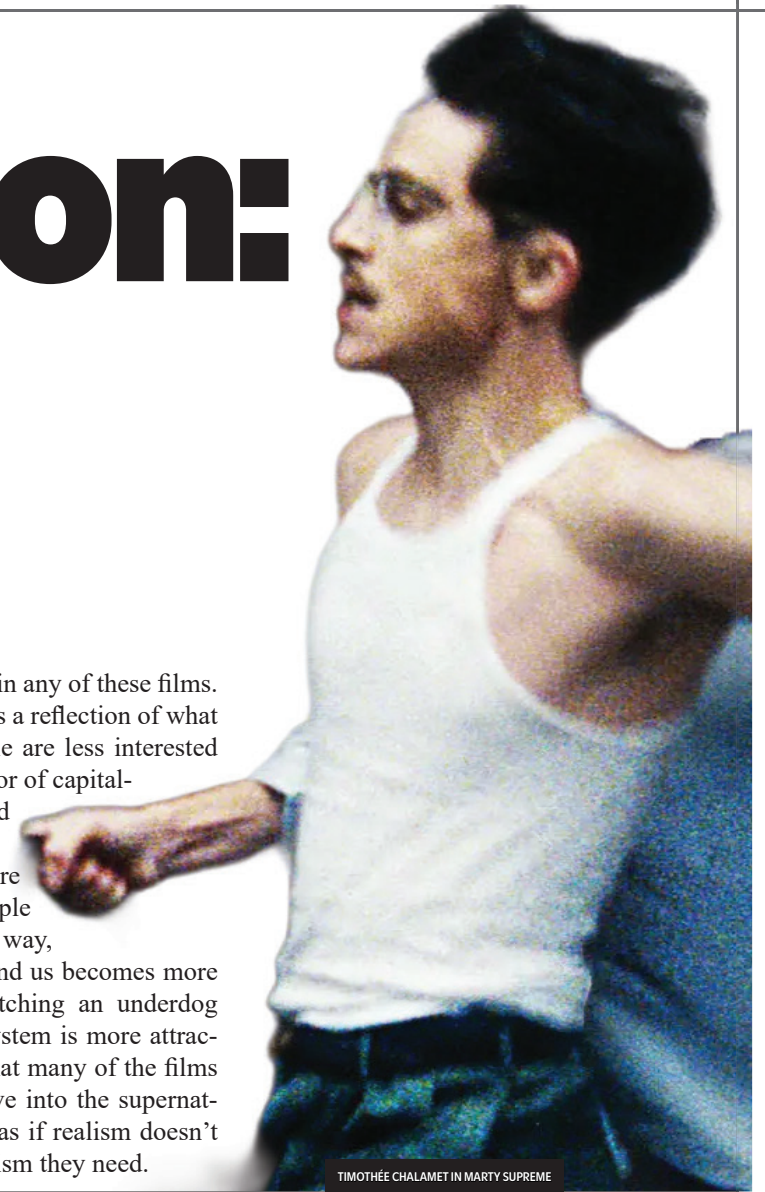
Paul Thomas Anderson's *One Battle After Another*, starring Leonardo DiCaprio, is another contender. This film is about Bob, a revolutionary, and his comrades. They form an armed activist cell seeking to take on border patrols in an increasingly right-wing America.

Other films expected to do well include *Frankenstein*, *Wicked: For Good*, *Bugonia* and *Hamnet*. Every one of these films subverts traditional storytelling and favours the underdog, the underclass, the subaltern.

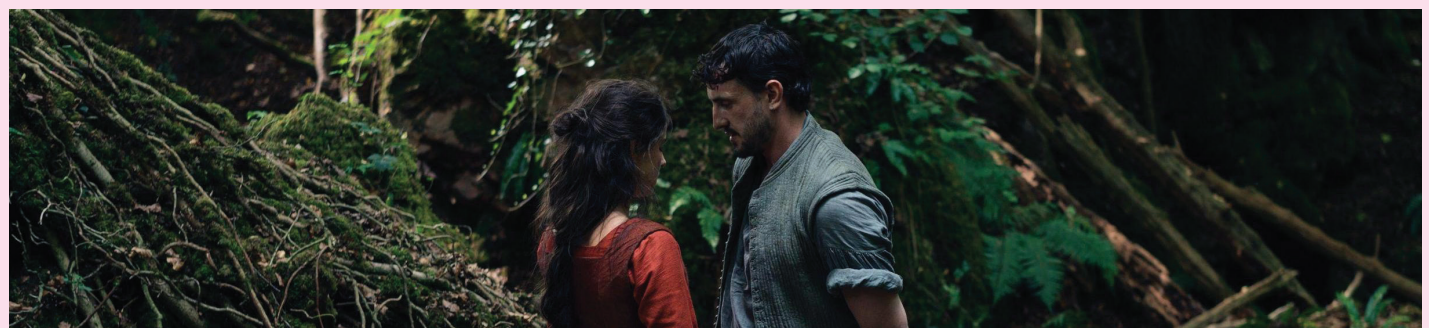
This isn't to say Hollywood has taken a turn left, or that there is any serious resist-

ance to the status quo in any of these films. Yet they can be seen as a reflection of what is popular now. People are less interested in the story of a hero, or of capitalistic rises to wealth and power.

The popular films are ones that ordinary people can relate to in some way, and as the world around us becomes more unstable, perhaps watching an underdog taking on a corrupt system is more attractive. Also to note is that many of the films tipped to do well delve into the supernatural and the obscure, as if realism doesn't offer people the escapism they need.



TIMOTHÉE CHALAMET IN MARTY SUPREME



## HAMNET

## A DEVASTATING EXPLORATION OF GRIEF

EILIDH STEWART

Based on the best-selling book by Maggie O'Farrell, *Hamnet* centres Agnes (commonly referred to as Anne) Hathaway, Shakespeare's wife, and depicts the couple's journey of loss, grief and heartbreak after the death of their son, Hamnet.

The movie, starring Jessie Buckley and Paul Mescal, begins with an explanation that the names Hamnet and Hamlet were used interchangeably at the time, foreshadowing the movie's main premise: that the death of Shakespeare's son inspired his famous tragedy.

Historically, many elements of Shakespeare's life are unknown, particularly his family who are often only briefly discussed. While Agnes and their three children, Susanna, Judith and Hamnet, are all real, O'Farrell and director Zhao attempt to fill in the gaps, illustrating their

fun-loving family dynamic, the impact of Shakespeare's frequent residencies in London and the aftermath of a great loss.

Agnes has a deep relationship with nature throughout the film, likely a reference to the symbolic use of forests in many of Shakespeare's works. Just as *As You Like It's* 'Forest of Arden' is depicted as a place to find love and freedom, so too are woodlands considered a place of sanctuary in *Hamnet*: first as the site of Mescal and Buckley's meeting, then as a site of play for their children.

The impending doom of *Macbeth's* Birnam Wood is present in the film too. Hamnet finds himself stuck in an imaginary wooded area, a state between life and death, whilst on his deathbed. The movie is sprinkled with clever references to Shakespeare's works which demonstrate great attention to detail.

However, *Hamnet* does have its weak

points. Despite being painstakingly slow, the film's character development is rushed. In saying this, the amount of sadness squeezed into two hours was impressive.

This, however, is the film's intention. It purposefully encapsulates the horrific realities of the time. There were at least five major outbreaks of The Bubonic Plague throughout Shakespeare's 52 years. Buckley and Mescal's raw acting captures the parental grief and heartbreak, common at the time due to the high child mortality rate.

The film ends on a (slightly) more uplifting note with Agnes going to see Hamlet and realising her husband has immortalised their son through the production. The idea that Hamnet lives on appears to be a comfort to Agnes, who hadn't forgiven Shakespeare for missing their son's death. She reaches out and can feel her son again.

DEFEND  
THE  
RIGHT  
TO  
PROTEST



PHOTO: INDIGO NOLAN / CC BY 2.0

# DEFEND THE RIGHT TO PROTEST

**SHABBIR LAKHA**

Western leaders have suddenly discovered that they support the right to protest – as long as it’s in Iran. Donald Trump, whose ICE agency recently killed an unarmed protester in Minneapolis, cares so much about Iranian lives, he’s preparing to bomb them.

Yvette Cooper, the former Home Secretary, ‘urged the Iranian authorities to respect the fundamental rights of their people to take part in peaceful protests’. That she and her government are taking a wrecking ball to our fundamental right to protest in the UK doesn’t seem to matter.

For over a decade, Tory governments were systematically undermining our basic civil liberties. From enhanced digital surveillance to legalising murder, torture and rape committed by undercover state agents, to creating a two-tier citizenship based on race.

Since coming to power, Labour has accelerated this process. In under 18 months, they have introduced new legislation and expanded police powers to quash protest, are preparing to scrap jury trials for all but the most serious of offences, and plan to introduce digital ID.

The central target of Starmer’s authoritarian streak has been the Palestine solidarity

movement which has proved to be one of the largest, most sustained protest movements in British history.

Increased police powers over ‘public order’, and increased political will to use those they already have in the most cynical ways, has meant every Palestine demonstration has been limited by arbitrary restrictions on its route, its slogans, its duration, sometimes even the permissibility of using a megaphone.

The marked turn of this draconian campaign was the 18 January 2025 national demonstration which saw the violent arrest of chief steward Chris Nineham, and subsequent charging of him and Palestine Solidarity Campaign Director Ben Jamal.

Since then, the government has proscribed the direct action group Palestine Action, and arrested some 2,000 people for supporting it. It has taken the extraordinarily cruel step of holding the Filton24 protesters in pre-trial detention for well over a year. Currently, four of them are on hunger strike – one for over 70 days and on the brink of death – while the government refuse to even meet with them.

Dozens of activists and journalists have been subject to dawn raids, the seizing of their electronic equipment and arrest, sometimes

for as little as a comment on social media. Most recently, the Metropolitan and Greater Manchester Police forces have banned the use of the word ‘intifada’.

That the government can pledge support for Iranian protesters with a record like this is not just rank hypocrisy, but a demonstration of how inseparable foreign and domestic policy are. The other side of imperialism abroad is crushing democratic rights at home.

The new authoritarianism will not be limited to the Palestine movement. Already, these new draconian powers have been used against striking workers, climate protesters, and even firework spectators in London on New Year’s Eve.

The task of defending our right to protest and turning the tide on the nosedive into authoritarianism is an urgent one for the whole labour movement and wider social movements.

That means continuing to protest and strengthening the movement. It means supporting the hunger strikers. And it means the biggest possible mobilisation in defence of Chris Nineham and Ben Jamal on 23 February to insist the charges are dropped. The case of Julian Assange showed that the court of public opinion and our ability to mobilise can be a decisive factor.

**23 February: Defend Ben Jamal and Chris Nineham protest**  
9am, Westminster Magistrates Court, 181 Marylebone Road, London, NW1 5BR