

COUNTERFIRE

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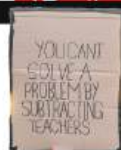
NO FARAGE NO STARMER FIGHT FOR SOCIALISM!



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NEWS



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

GORTON AND DENTON BY-ELECTION

Another nail in Labour's coffin

STEPH PIKE

Before nominations had even closed, the Gorton and Denton by-election was a political theatre of high drama with the King of the North, Andy Burnham, blocked from standing as a candidate by the middle-manager of the South, Keir Starmer.

The decision to block Burnham from standing angered unions, Labour Party members and Labour MPs, with fifty writing to Starmer to protest. Although Starmer's excuse for blocking Burnham was that he didn't want the expense of running a mayoral election so soon after a by-election, the fact that No.10 has been briefing against Burnham since then exposes the real reason; that Starmer is scared of Burnham being in a position to challenge his leadership.

And with good cause; Starmer's popularity is at an all-time low and recent polls have put Burnham's popularity ratings way above other potential challengers such as Angela Rayner and Wes Streeting.

The real story of the by-election is the collapse of Labour and the haemorrhaging of its support since the 2024 general election. There is a crisis at the centre of British politics with the Tories arguably irrelevant and Starmer deeply unpopular.

Gorton and Denton is one of Labour's safest seats and one of only seventy seats that Labour holds with an absolute majority.

However, in the current political climate, no Labour seat is safe.

The landslide majority that Labour secured in 2024 masked the reality of a party already in decline, heavily criticised for its stance on the Gaza genocide and its timid policies. Starmer's own majority was reduced by over 9,000, a bleeding of votes that characterised the elections.

Labour's victory was an unpopular one built on quicksand and reflected a collapse of support for the Tories rather than a positive endorsement of a Labour government. Rather than reflecting on this and using his large majority to improve the lives of ordinary people who had already suffered fourteen years of devastating cuts and austerity by the Tories, Starmer blundered on as prime minister trying to out-Tory the Tories and out-Reform Reform, dropping all pretence of being a party of and for the working class.

One of his first acts as prime minister was to cut the winter fuel payment for pensioners and to refuse to abolish the two-child limit, increasing poverty rather than trying to eradicate it.

His litany of authoritarian, right-wing and outright racist policies, including a war on refugees, an attack on our fundamental right to protest, further privatisation of the NHS, complicity with the genocide in Gaza and a fawning, sycophantic relationship with Donald Trump, spending on arms and warmongering at the expense of

public services, have led him to become universally hated; a position from which it is inconceivable he can recover.

In the 2024 general election, Labour won Gorton and Denton with a majority of 13,000. However, given Labour's national unpopularity and the fact that Reform overturned a 14,000 Labour majority in Runcorn and Helsby last May, this could be a disaster for Labour; and a disaster of their own making.

It is now a three-horse race between the Greens, Labour and Reform. This is a battle that is raging well beyond the North West

and beyond the electoral sphere. Stopping Farage and Starmer at the ballot box IS important, but it is worth remembering that the pro-Palestine independent MPs who were elected in 2024 were successful because of the mass Palestine movement.

It is not election leaflets that change people's minds; it is not the elections that can defeat Reform and the far right. To do this, the left must continue to build mass movements; over Palestine, against war, against austerity, and against fascism. If the parties of the left are not active in and committed to these movements, they will fail.

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EDITORIAL

THE STAKES ARE ONLY GETTING HIGHER

COUNTERFIRE

Every electoral win for Reform UK is a boost for the ‘Stop the Boats’ brigade, Tommy Robinson and his fascist friends.

Farage and his allies make racism respectable. They also pull British politics to the right, forcing Labour and the Tories to attempt to compete as to who is hardest on migrants. That’s a contest Farage will always win.

Most of those fleeing disastrous wars and occupations launched by the USA and backed by the UK are fleeing Islamic countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. That allows the racists to attack them as not just being migrants but Muslims, boosting further Islamophobia.

The rise of Reform UK to become the biggest party in the opinion polls is a threat to us all. It has received a major shot in the arm with the abysmal performance of Starmer and crew in government. Rich-kid Farage, like his pal Trump, can somehow present himself as the champion of the common folk standing up to a cosmopolitan elite out of touch with the needs of the British people. Starmer fits that bill perfectly.

In the Manchester Gorton and Denton by-election, it is vital that Reform UK are beaten. But the crucial battle will not be at the polls. There needs to be a fighting alternative to austerity and the failed policies of neoliberalism championed by Labour, the Tories and Reform UK.

That means continuing the mobilisations over Gaza and against Trump’s war drive. That means building the Together Alliance demonstration in London on 28 March against the racists and fascists.

In every community, workplace, college and school, we need to be countering Reform UK by pointing to the simple fact that while they claim to be anti-establishment, they stand for Thatcherite policies such as cutting welfare spending. That’s a message that needs to be spread from door to door.

The stakes are high here. As discontent with the woeful Starmer government grows, it can either be channelled to the right or to the left. If it goes rightwards, history warns us what the outcome will be.

Racist division weakens the working class and boosts the forces of reaction. If Farage, Tommy Robinson and crew carry the day, we will pay a high price.

We have to do everything we can to stop this happening.



MINNEAPOLIS GENERAL STRIKE, 23 JAN 2026. PHOTO: LORIE SHAULL / CC BY 4.0

Minnesota versus MAGA

KEVIN CRANE

There had not been a city-wide general strike in America for eight decades until 23 January, when the city of Minneapolis was brought to a dead halt by ordinary people demanding an end to Donald Trump’s violent occupation of their state and justice for its victims.

The scale of community and workplace occupation by working-class Americans is quite unlike anything that has been seen in the USA since the 1960s, and it has given the far-right federal government a genuine shock.

The strike had been provoked by the murder of Renée Good, a woman who had been quite legally filming the activities of federal agents. Trump’s government then defended that killing as justified ‘self-defence’ against a ‘domestic terrorist’.

The effect that the strike has had can be seen from the fact that when agents carried out another murder of an activist, that of Alex Pretti the following day, their bravado and willingness to just come up with lies and slander had significantly reduced, with Trump withdrawing the

‘commander-at-large’ of the operation and government officials releasing panicked statements to try to shift the blame away from themselves.

There has also been a sudden hard turn in public opinion in America, with views about racism, immigration and law enforcement shifting in ways that are normally considered impossible.

The background to this struggle has been the extreme polarisation of American politics and institutions, as well as the turn of Trump’s Republican Party towards ever more extreme racism and authoritarianism.

Trump was re-elected in 2024 on a programme that promised its supporters ultranationalist policies, which included tariffs and trade wars, but also the violent deportation of millions of foreign-born people. To make it look like he is delivering on this, he has massively expanded the role of the already-infamous federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency, deploying them like a paramilitary political police force.

He is sending them into states where he and his MAGA (‘Make America Great

Again’) movement aren’t popular to perform raids where they literally just grab non-white people off the streets and out of workplaces, explicitly based on racial profiling rather than evidence. The cruelty of it is the function: Trump wants to be able show his supporters news footage of South American, Asian and African people being brutalised.

The racism and injustice weren’t popular where it was being inflicted, though. While the US’s official opposition, the Democratic Party, offers no real resistance to ICE, ordinary Americans have organised themselves to confront the problem, using social networks, observation and reporting, and good old-fashioned protest to try to frustrate ICE operations.

When ICE came to Minnesota, many thousands of people in the state started using these tactics, having learned what worked from people in California. The effectiveness of this is what lead ICE agents to murder Good and Pretti: what the people were doing was working. The strike was the sign that they would not give up, and points to the potential for even more effective resistance.



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



VICTORY FOR ATLP STRIKERS

COUNTERFIRE

Hundreds of NEU members in the Arthur Terry Learning Partnership, a large multi-academy trust in the West Midlands, comprehensively won their demands after striking for nine days.

The victory has removed the threat of a hundred compulsory redundancies, halted attacks on conditions like regrading staff and removing payments for additional responsibilities, and protected funding for SEND pupils.

The dispute drew attention to the increasingly common issue of top slicing, where an academy trust sucks money into its own central operations – including the pay packets of senior managers.

It rocked the leadership of ATLP, forcing the resignations of the Chief Executive and Finance Officers.

The strike has brought a massive increase in NEU membership in the schools and a formidable network of new reps.

It also focused attention on the wider crisis of school funding and helps build confidence in the run up to the NEU's national pay and funding ballot, launching on 28 February.

'We don't want to pay for their wars'

Rank-and-file support is building for the International Peace conference in June, writes Cici Washburn

Following on from a 4,000-strong international peace conference in Paris last October, the 20 June conference is building momentum at the base of the labour movement. Workers are raising the model motion in support of the conference in branches and trades councils up and down the country.

Many trade unionists see the conference as the next concrete step following the massive wages-not-weapons vote at the TUC last year. This was the case at the Luton trades-council meeting and in other places. Given Trump's drive to war and the European leaders' rush to rearmament, they are clear that we will pay for these wars in welfare budgets. In a Unite meeting where the motion was passed, half of those in the meeting were ex-forces but they were clear that they don't want welfare budgets cut to pay for 'their' wars.

As Mark Dee Smith, Bedfordshire University Unison said, 'Organised workers have always been at the forefront of resisting militarism. The International Peace Conference has clearly caught the mood and demonstrates that the Mediterranean workers opposing the Israeli war machine are part of a tradition as well as a current.'

The FNEC FP-FO teachers' union in France is fully committed to preparing for the conference and the National Executive of



the NEU is also supporting the conference. As a teacher in East London said, 'Teachers always aim to emulate "best practice" in the classroom. The International Peace Conference is partly about learning from the successes of trade unionists and other activists abroad so that we can strengthen our anti-war movement here. But it's also about drawing links between our national movements to ultimately build on an international scale. You can't confront nationalist aggression without an internationalist alternative.'

Nathan Street, a Unison HE worker, said, 'Workers in Higher Education are motivated by issues that go beyond the bread and butter union issues of pay and conditions. Our institutions have been some of the most prominent in terms of workplace days of action for Palestine. Many of us are driven by internationalist, anti-imperialist and anti-colonial values, which can manifest in syllabus and research. But it needs to be put into practice not just theory.'

'If that wasn't enough, it's also in our material interests as the current funding model is reliant on retaining peace and the

international recruitment of students. It's vital unions and their members do all they can to support, build and attend the Peace Conference in London for the whole world to see.'

Given the scale and depth across society of the austerity measures that will take place following further increase in arms spending, we also need to build the conference in wider areas of local communities. Lambeth pensioners' action group (Lampag) has passed the motion which is an example of how we can build bigger and broader. The Progressive Lancashire opposition group, the group of Green and Palestine independent councillors opposed to Reform on Lancashire County Council is supporting the conference.

At a Unite retired members' meeting where the motion was passed, after the branch agreed a donation towards the conference, individuals made additional personal donations as they feel so strongly that the conference is necessary and should be supported.

Simon Midgley, a Unison health worker in West Yorkshire, reiterated, 'Our world is becoming more dangerous year on year. We have to promote an alternative vision to the dominant narrative. A vision which demands that our government increases spending on education, health, housing and social care rather than military expenditure.'

The PCS, NEU and RMT are officially supporting the conference. We need every branch across the country to be supporting this conference and sending rank-and-file delegations; this is what will strengthen the British anti-war and trade-union movement for the battles ahead and will create a powerful international movement against war which couldn't be more crucial.

Download the model motion from stopwar.org.uk/resources

PICKET LINES THIS MONTH

GREAT ORMOND STREET HOSPITAL SCHOOL, LONDON

Union: NEU
Dates: 2-5 February
Location: Great Ormond Street Hospital, Guildford Street entrance

UNIVERSITY HOSPITALS NHS TRUST STRIKE, BARKING, HAVERING & REDBRIDGE

Union: Unite
Dates: 3-6 February
Location: Various sites across Barking, Havering and Redbridge. Email Ryan at ryan.fletcher@unitetheunion.org for further details.

LONDON BUS STRIKE, LEA INTERCHANGE BUS DEPOT

Union: Unite
Dates: 6-7 & 20-21 February
Location: Lea interchange bus depot

ESSEX UNIVERSITY, SOUTHEND & COLCHESTER

Union: UCU, Unison & Unite
Dates: Rally 12pm 5 February, strike 12-19 February
Location: Southend-on-Sea, Essex, SS1 1NS and Colchester, Essex, CO4 3SQ

COLUMBUS SCHOOL & COLLEGE, BASILDON & CLACTON

Union: Unison
Dates: 5-13 February
Location: Columbus School & College in Chelmsford Pioneer in Basildon and The Key in Clacton

WINDRUSH LINE TRAIN STRIKE, LONDON

Union: RMT
Dates: 26 Feb, 26 March, 23 April
Location: Windrush line depots see RMT website for more info

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



INTERVIEW



RED CRESCENT WORKERS INSPECT BOMBED AMBULANCE, JANUARY 2024. PHOTO: UNRWA / CC BY-SA 3.0

EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT

'The complete destruction of Gazan society'



Michael Lavalette spoke to a doctor (**Doctor X**) who has recently returned from Gaza where he has worked on deployment as a neurosurgeon. Here, he remains anonymous so he can re-enter emergency zones in the future.

Dr X has deployed to Gaza on several occasions since 2018. His most recent secondment occurred just as the latest 'ceasefire' was announced. He recently discussed some of the issues facing Gazans and medical support teams in the beleaguered Gaza Strip.

What was Gaza like before October 2023?

Even before the current genocide started, conditions in Gaza were not easy. The Israelis put lots of conditions on doctors entering Gaza. We were restricted in what we could and couldn't take in. We were escorted in and out and, once in our accommodation, we were only allowed to go back and forth between our accommodation and the hospital.

We worked with the hospitals and supported them to carry out operations on those who were the victims of Israel's regular attacks and incursions. So it was difficult, but, in a sense, manageable.

Though things were difficult, Gaza was a functioning place. I was in Khan Yunis and it was beautiful. The buildings and architecture, the setting, the beach. When Trump says he wants to turn Gaza into a luxurious resort, you can see why he might think that: it's so beautiful, with so much potential. But, of course, Gaza isn't an empty piece

of real estate! It's home to over two million people.

Once the genocide began, things changed dramatically and our work increased exponentially.

I'm sure it is difficult to discuss all aspects of the medical disaster in Gaza, but could you give us details of some aspects of the 'medicide'?

The first thing to say is that the complete destruction of Gazan society creates the conditions for ill health to spread and for recovery to be much more difficult.

For example, the bombing, as we all know, has destroyed homes, so people live in overcrowded conditions, in tents, destroyed buildings or they sleep outside. Fresh drinking water is difficult to get. Soap and shampoo are luxuries, so keeping clean is immensely difficult. Sewage systems are destroyed. Functioning toilets are a significant walk away from where people and families are located.

As the siege conditions tightened, hunger grew to become the norm, then it progressed to starvation. Food inflation rocketed

so, for example, a kilo of flour, an egg, or a small piece of chicken would cost hundreds of dollars. It's hard to describe in words the huge barriers people face just trying to get the basics of life in place every day.

Against this backdrop, we had to undertake medical intervention to deal with the most horrendous level of injury that people have suffered. Let me give you some examples of the issues we face:

1. As people will know, the Israelis have attacked, bombed and destroyed hospitals and medical facilities across Gaza. Leaving aside the breaches of international law, this has direct consequences in so far as (a) medical staff are targeted, injured and killed, (b) medical machinery and equipment are destroyed, either in the initial attacks or when they occupy the hospitals and just fire into machinery to make it unworkable, (c) patients have to be moved under the most difficult of circumstances, often without enough ambulances, and (d) all this has a huge impact on the remaining hospitals who are immediately overcrowded and working way beyond capacity.

2. The siege has meant that 'use once' equipment (for example drill bits) are having to be used and reused because we cannot get supplies in. I'm a neurosurgeon, I have had to use hand drills because electric drills don't work, and often the bits are so blunt, it takes a very long time to get through the skull to allow me to start working. But we have also run out of medicines and anaesthetic; I have found myself operating on people, to save their lives, but without anaesthetic. All I can do is apologise as they're screaming in agony and try to get the work done as soon as I possibly can.

3. At the food dispersal zones, we soon realised that the Israelis were 'playing games'. One day people would come in with knee wounds, the next it would be head wounds, the next chest wounds, the following day ankle wounds. We realised this could only be a pattern, the soldiers were 'playing target practice' with civilians and children.

4. I deal with a lot of head wounds. As you will know, wounds swell, so you are confronted by brain matter seeping

out of bullet wounds, the matter is degrading and gives off an odour. But one thing I'd never experienced before was that this mingled with the smell of hair that hasn't been properly washed for months. I didn't expect this, nor have I ever experienced it, the smell was something beyond description.

5. Another thing I hadn't seen before was that, under conditions of starvation, old wounds started to degrade. So operations that people had had years ago started to re-open, allowing infection to take hold.

6. The wounds that people receive are so bad and so debilitating that most Palestinians speak openly about wishing to be hit by a bomb directly, rather than be hit by the shrapnel and its effects.

This is just a small selection of the issues we have faced. But I want to add something else. What is remarkable is the sense of togetherness, of 'samoud' (steadfastness), of looking after each other that I witness every time I go to Gaza and which remained central to life in the Gaza Strip during the genocide.

— YOUR PARTY CEC ELECTION — VOTE LAVALETTE

JAMAL ELAHEBOCUS

Michael Lavalette, a Lancashire county councillor in Preston, is standing for one of the four public office holder roles on Your Party's central executive committee (CEC).

During the nominations process, Michael received just under 3,000 endorsements, vastly exceeding the 150 required and making him the independent candidate with the most endorsements from the public office holder section.

Several prominent figures on the Left have endorsed Michael's candidacy, including Ken Loach, Tariq Ali, Andrew Feinstein, Stephen Kapos and Lindsey German.

Here are a few reasons why you should vote for Michael Lavalette for the Your Party CEC:

▶ Michael is standing as an independent candidate and is not part of any slate. He will be a crucial voice that can unite the party, oppose factionalism and build the broadest party possible. Key to his campaign is increasing grassroots democracy; Michael will advocate for strong branches rooted in community activism to be built in every area of the country.

▶ If elected, Michael will work to unite Your Party around clear political demands, including ending the cost-of-living crisis, welfare not warfare, Palestinian liberation and defending civil liberties. The momentum of Your Party has been slowed by a focus on internal processes but Michael's focus on the key issues facing ordinary people will help move the party forward.

▶ It is crucial that Your Party is rooted in struggle and amplifies the social movements against war, the far right and for Palestine solidarity. Michael will argue for this, having helped organise the local anti-war movement and protests against care-home closures in Preston.

▶ Michael has stood against the



mainstream political parties and won. He has won four out of the five local elections he has stood in, representing Respect, the Socialist Alliance and now as one of three Preston Independents. In the 2024 general election, he came second with 22% of the vote.

▶ As part of the Progressive Lancashire coalition, Michael is part of the official opposition to the

Reform council and has been fighting and winning locally. He played an important part in the campaign by staff and service users which has forced Reform to scrap their plans to close care homes in Preston.

▶ Palestine solidarity is central to Michael's campaign. He has visited Palestine over twenty times and has received honorary membership of the

General Union of Palestinian Writers in 2022. Since the genocide began, Michael has organised local protests and coaches to national demonstrations, helping galvanise the movement.

▶ Michael has played an important role in helping to launch Your Party, having spoken at meetings across the country alongside Jeremy Corbyn, Zarah Sultana and many others. From

the start, he has sought to build a broad and fighting Your Party which can mobilise as many people as possible, and he would continue to do so on the CEC.

You can vote for Michael from your YP member portal with voting opening on 9 February and running until 5pm on 23 February. We urge you to give one of your four votes to Michael Lavalette.



The movement we need to stop the far right

JOHN WESTMORELAND

The rise of far right and fascist parties is deeply dangerous. Trump's second term has parallels with fascist regimes in the 1930s, and is giving confidence to fascists here. The Together Alliance gives us an important chance of turning back the fascist threat. We need to make this alliance work by insisting that our sole purpose is to attack the far right and fascists on every front.

In the USA, masked ICE militias are terrorising communities with abductions, beatings and murders similar to Nazi storm troopers. Fascism serves capitalism by smashing working-class organisation in order to militarise the economy and society.

Mussolini and Hitler were put in place by militant capitalists and their institutions. From dictatorship, the fascists moved to imperial conquest. Lenin said that imperialism is the highest stage of capitalism. Perhaps, from today's perspective, we should qualify his analysis to specify 'fascist imperialism' as the highest stage.

Trump's gangster diplomacy echoes Hitler's. He wants vassal states dominated by far-right parties doing his bidding. He has the same contempt for democracy and law as Hitler had. Terrifyingly, the US military and digital-industrial complex dwarfs the German war machine of 1939.

The threat of international fascism is greater than ever. Tommy Robinson's Unite the Kingdom March last September was the biggest ever fascist-led demo in Britain.

Together against the far-right and fascists

The Together Alliance of trade unions, MPs, and campaigning organisations looks like the united mass movement we need. Let's make it work.

There are differences between far-right politicians like Nigel Farage and fascists such as Robinson, but they are connected. There is overlap between the two. Both are patronised by the likes of Elon Musk. Both Farage and Robinson supported the attacks on asylum hotels.

Even so, Reform voters are not the same as Robinson's street thugs. Reform has been able to harness working-class anger over the decay of our communities and turn it against migrants. Reform voters are not welded to Farage though. Reform's failures in local government, and Farage's support for Trump's gangster diplomacy may have weakened him.

Farage is incapable of delivering reforms to improve the lives of working-class people, and we have to expose that at every turn.

However, we have to attack fascism as the priority, and drive a wedge between

Farage's supporters and Robinson. Our focus should be overwhelmingly on fascism and the supporters and funders of fascism.

We need to outnumber them and destroy their attempts to gain a working-class base.

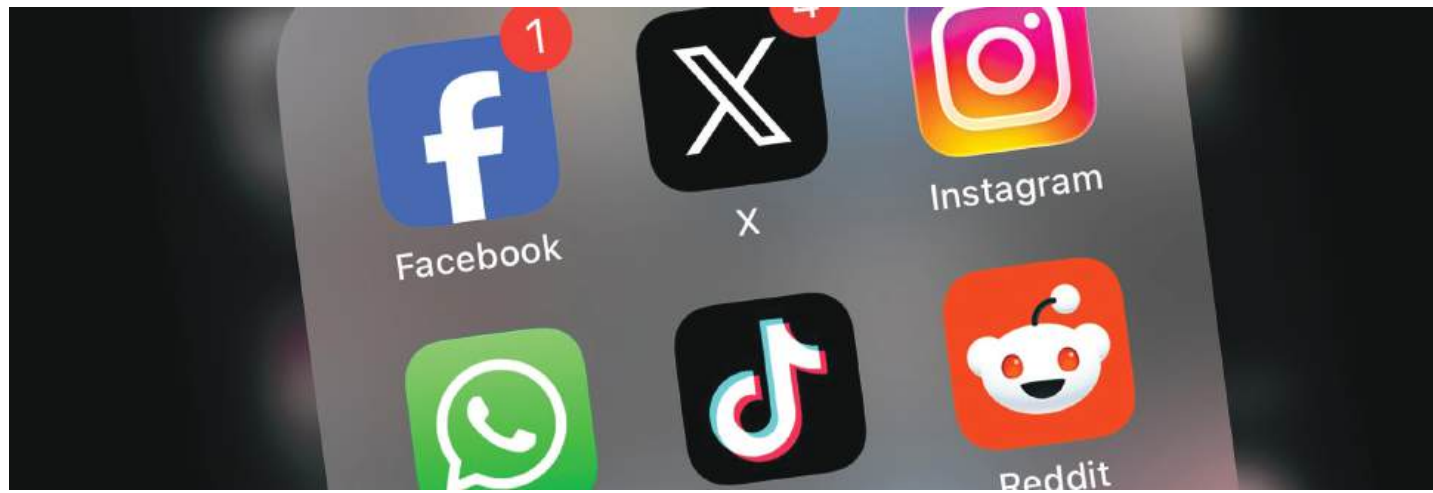
Fascists threaten our communities with violence and hate. They spread misinformation and magical thinking. Their aim is to build a mass movement that they can use to dominate the streets. They threaten every value we hold dear, from democracy and human rights, to peace and welfare.

We have to stop them. Every success here will be heard from Gaza to Minneapolis. Let's inspire the oppressed and terrify their oppressors.

Join the national demonstration on 28 March, more details at togetheralliance.org.uk



THE CONDITION OF THE WORKING CLASS



Social media should give everyone a voice, even under-16s



by **Terina Hine**

We are told increasing numbers of young people are suffering from mental and physical health issues. But are these issues the result of spending time on social media and will banning under-sixteens from platforms, as recently happened in Australia and is being discussed here, solve this health crisis?

Bullying, addictive algorithms, harmful and abusive content, some of which encourages suicide or sexual abuse, are serious problems. Yes, it is difficult to stop scrolling, especially when bored, made more so by the deliberately addictive nature of algorithms. Yes, bullying and abuse are serious issues which follow victims into what should be the sanctity of their home. Yes, there is plenty of harmful content.

But are our teenagers really depressed and inactive because of social media, or are they using social media because they are miserable and have nowhere to go? And could strong regulation and an effective regulator clean up the social-media platforms?

Ian Russell, whose daughter Molly killed herself just before her fifteenth birthday, after watching endless streams of images of self-harm and suicide on Instagram, is not in favour of a ban. He believes the Online Safety Act (an Act he played a part in shaping and pushing through parliament) should be given time to work before government considers an all-out ban. He fears the 'quick fix' of a ban will achieve little good and may be harmful.

Along with the NSPCC, Russell thinks a ban may push young people towards darker and less regulated platforms, that many children will circumvent the ban, the rest will face a 'cliff edge' at sixteen as they are thrown into the world of social media, plus a ban would prevent LGBTQ+ and neurodiverse children from making

connections and accessing support.

The Online Safety Act requires social-media platforms to conduct robust age verification and prevent children accessing harmful content. It forces big tech to take responsibility for content and empowers government and Ofcom to fine or remove platforms which fail to comply.

Russell cites the example of Musk's U-turn over Grok's sexual AI tool as an example of the Act working. When Ofcom initiated a formal investigation into the tool, the government became involved, X was threatened with a UK-wide block, and the software was removed. Russell believes if X was unavailable to minors, Ofcom and the government's response may not have been as robust.

Yet the proposed social-media ban for under-sixteens is popular among parents and the general public. According to a Mumsnet survey, 80% of their users support a ban, but just because something is popular that doesn't make it good policy.

As a parent myself I know how hard it is to impose restrictions on teenagers, especially when 'all my friends are allowed'. No parent wants to isolate their children socially. The argument is that a government-imposed ban would help reduce arguments between parents and teenagers, and provide a seemingly easy solution. But would it?

Let's face it, arguments with teens over social-media use would soon be replaced with other arguments, and all their friends would still be permitted to do whatever it is you prohibit.

People like easy answers to difficult problems and to have someone or something to blame for society's ills. Remember how Facebook supposedly lost Clinton the election and won Trump his first victory, rather than Clinton's neoliberal policies, her association with political elites, her

warmongering or 'deplorable' comments about voters.

Remember too how Remainers blamed Facebook for Brexit, rather than years of austerity, a wish for change or desire to give Westminster a bloody nose.

Well, now, social media is responsible for the poor state of our children's mental and physical health, regardless that, according to the *New Scientist*, 'the best available scientific evidence' shows that 'the impact of social media on teenagers' mental health is minimal.'

So let's have a ban for the under-sixteens, not worry about regulation for the rest of us and forget about the real causes of poor health in our children: the lack of investment in children's mental-health services, the sale of school playing fields, the lack of music in schools, the absence of funding for youth clubs and the obscene and growing rates of child poverty.

THIS MONTH IN HISTORY

MORGAN DANIELS

1805

1st: Louis-Auguste Blanqui born in Puget-Théniers in southeastern France

1848

21st: *The Communist Manifesto* published

1919

8th: Hands Off Russia holds a mass meeting at the Royal Albert Hall

1927

10th: The League Against Imperialism and Colonial Oppression formed in the Egmont Palace, Brussels

1988

2nd: Four lesbian activists abseil into the House of Lords during a debate on Section 28

NO WAR ON IRAN!

ZAHID RAHMAN

It is clear that Trump is seeking regime change in Iran using military aggression and economic coercion. However, an Iran-US war would have catastrophic consequences way beyond Iran's borders, risking setting the entire region on fire.

A week after Trump's military adventure in Venezuela and in the midst of anti-government protests in Iran, the US President claimed 'help is on the way' for Iranian demonstrators. At that point, US military options were limited. Any attack on Iran would have required the consent of (reluctant) regional allies for territorial access. However, using Iran's brutal crackdown on anti-government demonstrations as a casus belli, a US 'armada' has now been deployed to the region.

With its network of allies across the region, including militias in Iraq, a weakened but active Hezbollah in Lebanon and Ansarallah (commonly known as the Houthis) in Yemen, any war has the potential to expand massively.

Iran could target US bases in Iraq and the Gulf states, drawing those countries into any conflict. It could mine the Straits of Hormuz or target oil refineries, leading to significant global economic consequences.

Iran is a big country; larger than Germany, France, the UK and Spain put together. It has a population of ninety million; that's a lot of potential refugees. The best-case scenario predicts, in the face of war, 10% of the population would leave. That's twice as many refugees as during the crisis of 2015.

A US attack would also likely provoke Iranian nationalism, while any collapse of central authority could set in motion the balkanisation of Iran. Iran is a heterogeneous country. In the south-east, the decades-long Baluch insurgency could escalate. In the west, militant Kurdish groups with links to other groups in Iraq and Syria could drive further instability; Turkey could be drawn in. In the north-west, there's a sizable Azeri population with significant currents in favour of unification with Azerbaijan. These are several of the ethnic faultlines that could result from US regime change, leading to years of localised conflicts.

Any war with Iran would be neither limited nor controllable. As in Libya and Iraq, American intervention would be merely the opening chapter of a prolonged crisis.

Far from bringing peace and security to Iranians, intervention by outside powers would plunge the region into chaos.

If the US or other Western powers truly cared for the Iranian people, they would end the devastating sanctions that are causing so much suffering, and leave Iranians to decide their own future.

MARXISM 101



CAPITALISM: DRIVEN BY EXPLOITATION



by Alex Snowdon

Class is, for Marxists, the fundamental division in capitalist society. It is a divide that generates conflict and struggle. Class is an antagonistic social relationship because at its core there is exploitation.

The exploitation of workers by the capitalist class is a central feature of capitalism. The system depends on workers' labour, which (together with nature) is the ultimate source of value. Without labour, capitalism is nothing.

This basic recognition of social reality immediately clashes with two popular modern ideas. One is the notion of capitalists as 'wealth creators'. In fact it is workers, not capitalists, who create wealth.

The other is the idea that exploitation is an aberration. There may be 'bad bosses' who are exploitative, but they are the outlier: the exception to the norm. Karl Marx identified, however, that exploitation is endemic in capitalism. It is the norm.

Marx and Engels identified the emergence of the modern working class, or proletariat, in the British industrial revolution of the second half of the eighteenth century, and subsequently the wider European industrialisation of the nineteenth century.

Technological advances like the steam engine drove capitalism to new heights. These advances fuelled the growth of the

factory system and increasing power for the big industrial capitalists, who formed the core of the ruling class, or bourgeoisie.

The working class consisted of those, in Engels' words, 'who are obliged to sell their labour to the bourgeoisie in order to get in exchange the means of subsistence necessary for their support'. Capitalists depend on workers for the value (and therefore profits) they create; workers depend on capitalists for the opportunity to work and therefore avoid destitution.

Marx located the dynamism of capitalism in the realm of production. The *Communist Manifesto* heralds, even celebrates, the dynamism of capitalism: 'The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society'.

Labour is at the centre of Marx's view of history in general and of capitalism in particular. Human beings transform their world through labour. They act on the natural world, develop tools and technologies, and use these to produce what is needed to satisfy needs and wants.

This understanding of how labour interacts with nature is also the starting point for Marx's radical ecology, grasping

that capitalism generates environmental destruction through its naked pursuit of further accumulation.

History can be understood in terms of how work is organised, who does the work, who organises it, and so on. Successive types of class society have been defined by the relations of production that arise from how these questions are answered.

Capitalism turns labour into a commodity, just as it turns everything else into a commodity. Workers' capacity for labour, referred to in the Marxist tradition as labour power, is bought and sold by the capitalists. This is known as the labour market.

Capitalists pay workers less than the value they actually produce. This is the essence of exploitation. The additional value generated by work, from which the capitalist benefits, is surplus value. The capitalist class makes its profits from systematically organising work in this way.

Capitalists are in competition with each other. There is consequently a very strong impetus to keep costs, in particular labour costs, down. A race to the bottom in workers' pay, benefits and conditions remains a familiar feature of capitalism.

Workers also compete with each other. The labour market provides a supply of workers: selling their labour power to

capitalists, workers are driven to work by the need to survive. It has been said before that many workers are merely two months' pay cheques away from living on the streets. This compulsion to work by those, the vast majority, who do not own their own capital is necessary for capitalism.

Unemployment has often served as a disciplining mechanism on workers: the threat of the dole queue has helped hold down the pay of those who can find work. The 'reserve army of labour', argued Marx, was an effective tool for capitalists to ratchet up the level of exploitation. Racism directed at migrant workers has often been cynically utilised by the capitalist class to encourage workers to see those who are lower paid as the problem.

More optimistically, it is the shared experience of exploitation at work that can facilitate collective struggle by workers, and very often has. Where the chains of capitalism are forged, wrote the Polish Marxist Rosa Luxemburg, there they are broken.



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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 for updates.

NATIONAL (ONLINE)

[Counterfire Students] **Resisting war and militarism**
Wednesday 4 February, 6pm
Register on Zoom:
bit.ly/4FebStudent

GLASGOW

[Counterfire] **The rupture: Understanding the new world disorder**
Tuesday 10 February, 7pm
GMAC, 103 Trongate,
G1 5HD

TOWER HAMLETS

[Stop the War] **Islamophobia, war and the far right**
Wednesday 11 February,
6:30pm
Brady Centre, 192-196
Hanbury Street, E1 5HU

NATIONWIDE

[Palestine coalition] **Workplace day of action for Palestine**
Thursday 12 February

LONDON

[Palestine coalition] **Drop the charges, defend the right to protest public meeting**
Thursday 12 February, 7pm
SOAS University, Thornhaugh
Street, WC1H 0XG

BATH

[Counterfire] **Trump and the new imperial order: Venezuela, Greenland and the Middle East**
Thursday 12 February, 7pm
Pocock Room, The Grapes
Pub, 14 Westgate Street, BA1
1EQ

BRISTOL

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

NEWCASTLE

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

EAST LONDON

[Counterfire] **Policing protest and the drive to authoritarianism**
Tuesday 17 February, 6:30pm
Mulberry Hall, St Margaret's
House, 15 Old Ford Road, E2
9PL

NEWCASTLE

[Counterfire] **Trump and the new imperial order: Venezuela, Greenland and the Middle East**
Tuesday 17 February, 7pm
Tyneside Irish Centre, 43
Gallowgate, NE1 4SG

DEVON & CORNWALL (ONLINE)

[Counterfire] **Trump and the new imperial order: Venezuela, Greenland and the Middle East**
Tuesday 17 February, 7pm
Register on Zoom:

CREWE

[StW] **Stop Trump's wars**
Wednesday 18 February, 7pm
Big Mugs Cafe, 251 Edleston
Road, CW2 7EA

LONDON

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

GREENWICH & WOOLWICH

[Counterfire] **Policing protest and the drive to authoritarianism**
Tuesday 24 February, 7pm
Stage 19 Property, Macbean
Street, London, SE18 6LW

KING'S LYNN

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

MOLD, WALES

[Stop the War] **Stop the War Cymru Conference: Stop the drive to global war**
Saturday 28 February, 11am
Community Hall, Bethesda
Chapel, New Street, CH7 1UL

LONDON

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

DEVON & CORNWALL (ONLINE)

[Counterfire] **Is a crash coming? The AI con and bubble economics**
Tuesday 17 March, 7pm
Register on Zoom:
bit.ly/4rk6sBW

LONDON

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

LONDON

[Counterfire] **Revolution! weekender: Resisting Trump's new world disorder**
Saturday 11 - Sunday 12 April
SOAS University, Thornhaugh
Street, WC1H 0XG

LONDON

[Stop the War] **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
07807 123472

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EAST

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ART & CULTURE



The Voice of Hind Rajab: Unimaginable terror

KATHERINE HAJIYANNI

The Voice of Hind Rajab reconstructs the harrowing events of 29 January 2024, from the moment emergency call centre staff at the Palestinian Red Crescent's Ramallah office first answer the call from five-year-old Hind Rajab Hamada.

Hind and six of her family members had attempted to flee Gaza City before coming under fire from an Israeli tank. Only Hind survived the initial attack. Alone and trapped in the car with the dead bodies of her family, she pleads with the team to save her life. It is from their perspective that this story is told.

For three unabated hours, Omar Alqam (Moaz Malhees), Rana Hassan Faqih (Saga Kilani), and Nisreen Jeries Qawas (Clara Khouri) try to find the words to comfort Hind through unimaginable terror, as IDF gunfire is heard in the background, a tormenting reminder to them and us that Hind is running out of time. Simultaneously, centre leader Mahdi Aljamal battles to coordinate an approved safe route for an ambulance, stationed only eight minutes away, to come to her rescue.

In the endless space between exasperating calls between the Ramallah centre, the International Red Cross, and the Israeli military, he is forced to wait, and to push back against the increasingly desperate team promising Hind they won't abandon her. To send an ambulance without agreement from the IDF would likely be a death sentence.

The slow drag of Mahdi's narrative, juxtaposed against the urgency in Hind's petrified voice and the team's rising desperation, mirrors the sadistic reality of Israel's military occupation and systems

of apartheid. Such administrative strangulation is part of a broader, sustained and calculated strategy of systemic violence disguised as bureaucracy, which is designed to eradicate Palestinian life in Gaza, and which has existed long before 7 October 2023. Since then, this same system has obstructed aid convoys, engineered a famine, and decimated Gaza's healthcare infrastructure.

The cruel truth of the film is that we, the audience, know how it ends. After hours of painstaking back and forth and waiting for answers while Hind begs them to come to her rescue, a route is finally approved by the IDF for an ambulance to make the eight-minute journey. We watch as the emergency team rejoice, but we know how this ends. With 335 bullets. 335 bullets fired at one terrified little girl and her family, because they were Palestinian.

As Mahdi points out, the IDF know a child is in the car. They have advanced infrared surveillance technology. They can probably hear her, the same frightened little girl's voice we hear. The ambulance, though granted safe passage, is bombed on arrival. Paramedics Youssef Zeino and Ahmed Madhoun are killed instantly. And

Hind is alone again with her murderers. Soon after, her voice falls silent. Her body, the bodies of her family, and the remains of the paramedics were recovered 12 days later.

The heart of the film is the voice of Hind Rajab. The real audio recordings of Hind's calls to the Red Crescent are used. Fragile, terrified, innocent. None of the actors listened to the recordings until the moment of shooting the scenes. They are responding to her, the emotion in their performances is real.

The choice to tell the story through Hind's voice, rather than through dramatised scenes of war, demands our full attention. Undistracted by the spectacle of violence we are forced to be fully present with Hind and her deeply committed but ultimately helpless rescue team. To bear witness to their trauma in a way that is devastating but essential. It reminds us that for the endless footage we've seen of bombing and indiscriminate gunfire, within those videos were people, terrified, fighting for life, fighting to protect each other, begging to be saved.

One of the film's most heartbreaking moments comes when Hind's mother is put

on the line over speakerphone. We know she is speaking to her daughter for the last time. Wissam Hamada has not been able to listen to the recordings of her daughter's voice since her murder. Nor can she watch this film.

We know this is a true story, and moreover that it isn't unique. Hind is one of at least 20,000 children Israel has murdered in Gaza since October 2023. That figure is likely much higher, as numerous bodies of Palestinians still lie under the wreckage, and babies have been born and killed before their lives were ever recorded.

In one brief moment of calm, Nisreen, the team psychologist, leads Hind through a meditative breathing exercise. She tells Hind to imagine that she is swimming in the sea. Hind tells her she's afraid of the dark. "There's still some light left. We still have some time".

This film is a magnificent tribute to Hind, and it is a call to action. When Director Kaouther Ben Hania first heard Hind's voice pleading for her life, she asked herself what she could do. Her answer was to make this film. We must all keep asking ourselves that question, for Hind and all Gaza's children.

HELP KEEP THIS FREESHEET FREE

Counterfire produces the left's only free newspaper. We distribute thousands of copies across the country every month, helping to popularise socialist arguments and build protests and picket lines. But that costs money.

Please donate today and help us to keep producing and distributing our popular newspaper.



STOP THE STATE CLAMP DOWN

STOP THE STATE CLAMP DOWN



PHOTO: CHRIS NINEHAM'S ARREST, 10 JAN 2025

CHRIS NINEHAM

We face one of the most authoritarian governments in our history.

Austerity has led to a slide towards a stronger state and increasing aggression abroad is sharpening repression at home.

Thousands of Palestine supporters have been arrested, the Filton 24 are being held without trial, marches have been banned from whole areas of London and myself, Ben Jamal, Sophie Bolt and Alex Kenny face trials for organising peaceful protest.

Meanwhile, the government is cutting jury trials, introducing new laws to make protesting even harder and detaining and dehumanising refugees.

All this is having a chilling effect on society. Immigration raids are creating fear in communities. In many institutions, people are too anxious to even talk about Palestine, as criticism of Israel is conflated with anti-Semitism to silence dissent. Students

and staff have been suspended for supporting Palestine in at least 27 universities, staff have been disciplined in hospitals, the civil service and in the media.

The issue of Palestine and the attacks on immigrants are the frontlines, but we should be clear that this is a general assault on protest and free speech in the interests of the status quo.

When members of minority groups are randomly stopped and searched in the streets, when 'disrupting the business community' or offending or upsetting people is criminalised, arbitrary and authoritarian rule is being made normal. With Reform in the wings and a growing fascist movement on our streets, everyone who values the right to protest needs to recognise that the stakes are high.

What the government doesn't understand however is that the moment a regime switches from consent to coercion is a dangerous one for them as well as for us. Open repression can lead to resistance. In the US,

ICE's flagrant violence has sparked a massive popular backlash. Something approaching an uprising in Minneapolis has forced Trump to retreat.

Our job is to build the same kind of opposition to authoritarianism and the far right here. We shouldn't forget that the vast majority stand with us. Freedom of speech and freedom of assembly have always been held dear in this country. But our rights, including the right to vote, were never handed down to us from above, they have been won by waves of mass struggle from the Levellers to Peterloo, from the Chartists to the suffragettes and beyond.

Events across the Atlantic should be a warning as well as an inspiration. We need to stand up against attempts to repress and silence us. We need to strengthen and broaden the movements for Palestine, against war and austerity and against the far right in every corner of the country so that we too are in a position to organise coordinated popular resistance.

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