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NEWS



ISTANBUL PROTEST, 23 MARCH. PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

TURKEY

Radical democracy rocks Erdoğan

DRAGAN PLAVŠIĆ

Turkey's authoritarian ruler, President Erdoğan, is facing mass nationwide protests.

The protests were sparked by his decision to arrest Istanbul's mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu of the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) on trumped up charges. İmamoğlu is popular and has a real chance of defeating Erdoğan in the next presidential elections.

He was elected mayor of Istanbul in 2019 after 25 years of Erdoğan's rule, a victory he repeated last year as the CHP made gains in city elections across Turkey. A recent presidential poll put him on 54%

and Erdoğan on just 38%.

The trigger for İmamoğlu's arrest was his imminent announcement that he would run for president. But the wider context is key. Trump's election has given authoritarian leaders the added confidence to wield repressive powers. They know they won't be censured if they ensure their interests, viewed broadly, align with Washington's.

Despite opposing Israel over Gaza, Turkey is a Nato member that plays a key role in post-Assad Syria and counters Iran with which it shares a 500km border. Trump saw fit to praise Erdoğan as a 'good' leader. For these reasons too, the ever unprincipled Starmer has been conspicuously tight-lipped, refusing to condemn Erdoğan

despite pressing requests. As the embittered leader of İmamoğlu's CHP complained to the BBC: 'We feel abandoned. What kind of friendship is this? How can the UK, the cradle of democracy, and our brother party, the Labour Party, remain silent about this? We are truly offended.'

Domestically, İmamoğlu's arrest comes hard on the heels of Erdoğan's attempts to woo the Kurds. They are 20% of Turkey's population but lack national rights.

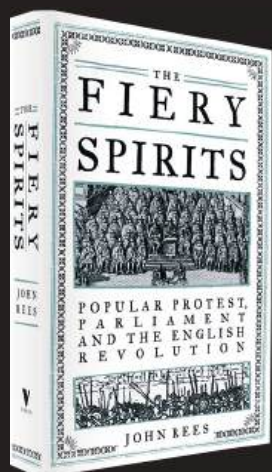
In February, following negotiations, the long-imprisoned leader of the Kurdish liberation struggle, Abdullah Öcalan, called on his Kurdistan Workers' Party to disarm and disband. What he got in return from Erdoğan is unclear. But if we recall

that Turkey is fighting Kurds in adjoining Syria, there's no reason to believe Erdoğan is doing anything but cynically manipulating the Kurdish question to divide the opposition and cling to power.

The future of democracy is at stake in Turkey. Erdoğan will not be removed by electoral means. His control of the state apparatus is too great, and he has no qualms about using it ruthlessly against his opponents.

The protestors are the only ones who can save democracy and our hopes must therefore lie with them. Their victory would be a blow to Turkish authoritarianism, its Western supporters, and to authoritarianism, actual and creeping, everywhere.

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by John Rees

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DIVESTMENT VICTORY AT GLASGOW UNI

GEORGIE
GLASGOW UNI STUDENT

Students at the University of Glasgow voted overwhelmingly for divestment from arms companies. The incredible victory comes after a mass, vibrant campaign.

Back in November 2024, the University of Glasgow's Court voted against divesting its £6.8 million in arms companies like BAE Systems and Leonardo, despite staff and students voting for it in a consultation.

Since then, a student activist coalition involving groups such as Glasgow Against Arms and Fossil Fuels, Glasgow University Justice for Palestine, the Stop the



DIMA AL-HAJ LIBERATED ZONE. PHOTO: @JADEECKHAUS / X

War Coalition led rallies, pickets and sit-ins on campus.

The campaign culminated in an encampment on Library Hill named the Dima Al-Haj Liberated Zone in memory of a former Glasgow student who died alongside her family in Gaza in November 2023.

The university met student protests with intensifying repression. The police presence peaked at the occupation of the Charles Wilson Building on 19 March,

with eighteen police officers blocking the entrance and access to food and water.

Students were camping out each night since 23 March, and six students are on hunger strike, to stress the urgency of the Palestinians' situation after more than 500 days of genocide. The students outlined their demands, which include severing all ties with arms companies, and urged a vote for divestment in the Student Representatives'

Council (SRC) referendum on whether the university should 'stop investing in companies that earn more than 10% of their revenue from the arms and defence industry'.

The encampment held discussions and rallies in the heart of the campus and engaged a wide layer of students and staff. They received lots of support with food and supplied and made a major impact on life on campus.

The SRC referendum result was a whopping 8,668 votes 'Yes' to divestment against 1,038 who voted 'No'. The pressure is now on the University of Glasgow leadership to listen to its students: will they?

TRUMP'S CLIMATE VANDALISM

JOHN CLARKE

With the return to power of Donald Trump, the pretences and tactical retreats on climate policy that marked the recent period have been largely put aside. At his inauguration ceremony in January Trump lost no time in nailing his pro-oil and gas credentials to the metaphorical White House mast.

Last month, BP announced that it was slashing more than \$5 billion in planned green energy investments. At the same time it said it was going to invest \$10 billion more in oil and gas. The company is now aiming to produce 2.4 million barrels per day of fossil fuels by 2030, which is a 60 percent jump from its 2020 target. That 900,000-barrel difference amounts to about 387,000 more metric tons of carbon dioxide each day — which is equivalent to around 90,000 gas-powered cars operating for a year.

BP is by no means untypical and a series of oil companies are proceeding in this fashion. The Trump administration has undoubtedly provided this basis for a renewed confidence and swagger among those who are literally fuelling the climate crisis.

Trump's Energy Secretary, Chris Wright, a former fracking executive, recently described himself as a 'climate realist' and said the 'Trump administration will treat climate change for what it is, a global physical phenomenon that is a side-effect of building the modern world. Everything in life involves trade-off.'

The harsh reality is that fossil fuels remain the lifeblood of capitalism, even if their continued consumption spells death and destruction for hundreds of millions of people. A vast portion of capitalist investment is in oil and gas and the interests involved will not allow any timely transition away from the use of such fuels.

Trump's open embrace of climate vandalism has emboldened the leading representatives and proponents of fossil-fuel capitalism and made them even more reckless and determined. Yet, the impacts of climate change are growing ever more severe and the fight to stop rampant carbon emissions and secure a just transition that can sustain life is even more urgent.

EDITORIAL



STOP THE CUTS TO JOBSSEEKER RALLY, AUSTRALIA. PHOTO: MATT HRKAC / CC BY 2.0

STEP UP THE RESISTANCE

COUNTERFIRE

The mask has fallen. The true face of Sir Keir Starmer's party, elected to end fourteen years of Tory rule, is now clear for all to see. It is the face of war, repression and austerity, indistinguishable from its Tory predecessor.

After slashing the international aid budget, Labour in government has now promised to deliver the biggest cuts to disability benefits in British history. An assessment for the government's Department for Work and Pensions admitted that 3.2 million families in England and Wales would be worse off as a result of changes to the Personal Independence Payments (PIP). The purpose of the cuts is to redirect billions more to arms spending, much of which will end up in the pocket of the US military industry.

The fear and anger in society is palpable. The Mirror denounced the spring statement as an act of 'balancing the books on the backs of the poor', while Alun Davies, a Labour Member of the Senedd, told the BBC that it 'scares the most vulnerable people in our society, and that's deeply distressing to see'. A study in the British Medical Journal warned of a further decline

in the health of the country.

No wonder that the government is intensifying its attacks on the right to free speech and protest. The arrest of six women by dozens of police officers at a publicly advertised meeting to discuss climate change and Gaza at Westminster Quaker Meeting House in London on 27 March was so outrageous that it made the front page of the quintessential establishment paper, the Sunday Times.

But it was not an isolated incident. It was just the latest instance of over-policing by the Met that proves that the violent arrest of Chris Nineham, the vice chair of Stop the War and chief steward on the national Palestine demonstration on 18 January, one of 77 arrests on the day, was no aberration. Neither was the subsequent police charging of PSC director Ben Jamal and other protestors, or the police interviews under caution of Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell, after the same demonstration.

These unprecedented attacks on the leadership of the largest and most sustained political movement in recent British history are part of a concerted effort by the government to criminalise resistance as it attempts to transform the welfare state into a warfare state. Such a trajectory mirrors

wider moves in Europe to rearm as the declining West under US leadership tries to meet the challenge of multipolarity and the rise of China.

It can be no wonder that under such circumstances Labour is tanking in the polls. Unfortunately, at the moment, it is the racist Reform UK that is benefiting most. But a swing to the right is not inevitable. There is a real desire in British society for a left-wing alternative. Over a thousand people joined the Budget Day protest outside Downing Street organised by Disabled People Against the Cuts and Stop the War, showing that there is a combative mood on the left.

Indeed, we have seen hundreds of thousands routinely march in solidarity with Palestine for a year and half, and five independents were elected to Westminster on the back of the mass movement. It is now imperative to unite anti-war activists, disability campaigners, trade unionists, anti-racists and others around the slogan of 'welfare not warfare' and to make the national anti-austerity demonstration on Saturday 7 June in London, called by the People's Assembly, as big as possible, and a point of focused, mass resistance from below.



WEEKLY BRIEFING

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



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RANK-AND-FILE ROUNDUP



STRIKING BIRMINGHAM BIN WORKERS. PHOTO: @UNITWESTMIDS / X

RUBBISHING THE PAY OFFENSIVE: BRUMMIE-STYLE

ROB HORSFIELD

Steeven Biset, a striking bin worker said, 'I think it's disgusting. People higher up, who have never done this job, are dictating how we work and for how much.'

Steeven has every right to be angry about Birmingham council sacking some 150 bin workers responsible for health and safety: he was recently knocked down by a car while doing his job.

The media is highlighting the rubbish piled in Birmingham's streets and the rats, cockroaches and seagulls that are swarming around them, but as Steeven says, 'It was the bosses who made this mess in the first place.'

Despite the council saying other jobs

will be made available, redeployed workers stand to lose around £8,000 a year. The cuts that Labour touts as 'tough decisions' are slicing into workers' pay and hurting their families.

Intimidation and solidarity

Birmingham council are trying every means to intimate the bin workers back to work. There is a sizeable police presence at the Atlas Bin Depot picket in Tyseley. And the council has tried to smear the strikers by making accusations of violence and intimidation concerning strikers who have been talking to workers taking out collection vehicles.

But the strike is having a real impact. The mood on the picket was, despite the

months on strike and the intimidation from the council, resilient and upbeat. The union PA played Charli XCX and people are taking the pickets food and drinks.

The most impressive aspect of the strike was the way the pickets walked in a circle outside the gates, effectively blockading it, and holding back bin lorries in the depot.

The solidarity that the pickets are getting comes from the understanding that the cuts are not about efficiency; they are an attack on the working class in the city. This fact is clearly visible, with piles of rubbish left to rot in the poorer areas of the city, while the well-to-do areas are clean.

Spread the action

The bin workers in Birmingham are on the sharp end of the cuts onslaught, but others are going to face the same attacks.

So far, union leaders have offered little more than gentle criticism of Starmer and Reeves, who have decided to make the weakest and most vulnerable people pay. Indeed, Sharon Graham has supported increased spending on weapons production, despite the cuts falling on Unite members like the bin workers in Birmingham.

The government's militarism and austerity go hand in hand and must be confronted head on. The creeping cowardice of trade union leaders seeking to compromise with Labour's agenda has to be challenged from within the unions.

We desperately need a national fight-back. The People's Assembly demonstration on 7 June needs to be as big as possible. Rank-and-file trade unionists have to give a lead. Pass resolutions to get coaches down to London and let this government know they have a fight on their hands.

JOBS APOCALYPSE: WHOSE SIDE IS LABOUR ON?

JOHN WESTMORELAND

Both critics and supporters of capitalism agree on one thing: it is a competitive system that grinds down labour costs to increase profits.

This fundamental feature of the capitalist system continually drives it into crisis, because declining wages inevitably lead to less consumption, the shrinking of markets, factory closures and mass unemployment.

We are at a moment of acute crisis in the system. Sections of capital, notably tech and finance, are happy to see a sharp turn towards authoritarianism to defend billionaires from demands for the redistribution of wealth.

The Institute for Public Policy Research predicts a 'jobs apocalypse' for up to eight million UK jobs at risk from AI. Entry level, part-time and back-office jobs (mostly women) will be hit hardest.

The threat to close the blast furnaces at Scunthorpe steelworks will put some 2,700 people out of work with a knock-on effect on the surrounding area that will put thousands more on benefits.

The UK car industry faces a bleak future too. China is leaping ahead of other countries in the manufacture of electric vehicles at a time when British car makers are just starting EV mass production. The signs are that capitalist competition will lead to skilled workers being thrown on the scrapheap.

The endlessly repeated neoliberal mantra recited by Reeves and Starmer that cuts, euphemistically called efficiencies, will lead to growth and save the day is increasingly exposed as the nonsense it has always been.

Slashing 15,000 civil-service jobs will affect frontline services. So dire is Labour's abstention from taking meaningful action to save jobs, that Reform is now attacking Labour from the left by promising to nationalise British steel using anti-Chinese and nationalist rhetoric.

Workers are fed up with having to access their lives through a rigged labour market, price inflation and debt. We need a response that will make a real difference.

The answer to the crisis lies in redistributing wealth and political power away from the billionaires and their casino economy. We want real, secure work in jobs that will make the world a better place for our kids to live in.

We need to divert investment from war and shareholder income into education, housing and health.

PICKET LINES THIS MONTH

BIRMINGHAM REFUSE WORKERS

Union: Unite
Dates: Continuous
Location: Sites across Birmingham

BRUNEL UNIVERSITY

Union: UCU
Dates: 1-4 April, 7-11 April
Location: Brunel University of London, UB8 3PH

BMW HAMS HALL, BIRMINGHAM

Union: Unite
Dates: 1,2,8,9,15,27 April
Location: BMW Group Plant Hams Hall, B46 1GB

HULL TRAINS

Union: Aslef
Dates: Continuous until 24 May
Location: Hull station, HU1 3QX

FUJITSU WORKERS AT HMRC

Union: PCS
Dates: Continuous until 23 April
Location: Telford, TF3 4NT

CAPITA LIFE AND PENSIONS

Union: Unite
Dates: Continuous until 22 April
Location: Manchester, M1 6EU; Glasgow, G3 8EP

JOHN CRANE

Union: Unite
Dates: 3, 10, 17, 22 April
Location: Buckingham Ave, Slough, SL1 4LU

INTERVIEW

‘The experiences of the Palestinians match, in some ways, my experiences in the Holocaust’



Michael Lavalette spoke to Stephen Kapos about his experiences as a child survivor of the Holocaust, during the 1956 Hungarian uprising and state repression against the Palestine movement in Britain

Could you tell us a little about your life during the Holocaust?

I was born in Budapest. My grandfather was a cantor at the Synagogue. But my father was not religious. We were brought up as secular Jews.

At the start of the Second World War, Hungary joined the Axis forces, but in 1944 the Germans implemented direct control and let the local Nazis (the Arrow Cross) loose. It was terrible.

In Hungary there was an agreement between the Nazis and a Zionist Rezső Kasztner. Kasztner made a deal with Eichmann: wealthy Jews, or those with particular skills, would be offered a place on a ‘Kasztner train’ that would take them to Switzerland, via Belsen. In return the Germans got trucks and money.

My father was a doctor. We were selected for one of the trains. But Hitler got wind of the ‘agreement’ and stopped it. My father was taken, but not to Switzerland, he got ‘stuck’ in Belsen.

I was taken in by Lutheran priests who were working to save some Jewish children. They took over some houses on the Buda side of the city and told the Germans that they were housing ‘Aryan’ refugees from the East.

The priests and the Swiss Red Cross looked after us, but the war was closing in. We were hungry and always on the move.

When Budapest was liberated

I didn’t know what would happen. But after a few weeks my mother found me! We went back to our old home, but it was gone and we were homeless.

We hadn’t heard anything from my father since he had been taken. But one day I was playing outside when I saw him walking towards us! He had survived and managed to come back to Budapest. We were reunited – but of course, so many of my friends and 15 members of my family were murdered in the Holocaust.

You stayed in Hungary until 1956. Can you tell us about the post-war period?

After liberation life was hard but we were together and we felt that things could be better. Most of our family joined the Communist Party. My father became a senior Public Health Officer. Gradually Budapest was rebuilt.

But there was no real freedom. After Stalin died, Khrushchev, in what is known as the ‘secret speech’, revealed the brutalities and harshness of the Stalin era. This prompted Communist reform movements. We didn’t want a return to capitalism, we wanted to keep the nationalised industries and a collective system. But we wanted greater freedom and a better standard of living.

This came to a head in 1956.

I was at Budapest University in my second year.

On 23 October I went into University to find classes



STEPHEN KAPOŠ
PHOTO: STEVE
EASON / CC BY-
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cancelled. We demanded the right to march and present our demands for change.

We made our way to Parliament. Others joined. A delegation went to the state radio station demanding they broadcast our demands. This was refused and confrontation developed. State Security fired on the crowd, killing and wounding several students. But they were overcome and the radio station was taken over.

The movement spread. In response, the Stalinists called in the Soviet forces. Gradually over the next period, workers councils and defence organisations were set up. Eventually the reformer Imre Nagy took over. He announced various reforms and eventually he said he’d disband the secret police and withdraw Hungary from the Warsaw Pact.

We thought our life would improve as a real Hungarian People’s Democracy.

But on 4 November Soviet troops re-entered Budapest and ruthlessly suppressed the Uprising.

You left and came to Britain. Can you tell us a little about your political life in Britain?

I was aware of what was going on in the world, of course, but in the 1960s and 1970s I was wary of going on demonstrations because my last demonstration had ended up with tanks on the streets!

But in the 1990s I joined the Labour Party. Over the next few years I held all sorts of positions at branch and constituency level.

When Corbyn stood for leader I was really enthusiastic. I joined Momentum and thought we had a chance to make a difference. I started to speak about my childhood and the Holocaust.

But something else happened. I started to see that the experiences of the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank matched, in

some ways, my earlier experiences in the Holocaust.

I’m not saying they were exactly the same, but there are echoes. On a visit to family members in Haifa I was shocked and appalled at the level of racism they had towards the Palestinians. They dehumanised Palestinians in a way that was similar to how we were dehumanised by the Nazis.

The German and Arrow Cross terror and the war-time siege of Budapest created conditions similar to the siege of Gaza. I looked at Palestinians whose houses were destroyed and thought I had been through that.

I started to speak out about these kinds of things and to argue that ‘Never Again’ only makes sense if it means ‘Never Again for anyone and everyone’.

But the Labour Party under Starmer didn’t like this! They tried to prevent me speaking about my experiences at Holocaust Memorial Day and said I would be investigated. At that point I left.

Why do you think the Met are clamping down on Palestinian solidarity?

When I was ‘invited in’ for interview I was so moved by the number of people who came and protested outside the police station and offered me such solidarity. I’d like to thank them!

But on the broader question, both Tory and Labour governments have tried to smear and criminalise our movement. The British state is a huge supporter of Israel, our solidarity movement challenges their international priorities.

The attacks on our rights must have been authorised by Starmer. But it’s important we resist. If they get away with it, it will have implications for all our protest movements.

Read the full interview on counterfire.org

Reform and the crisis of the political mainstream

Chris Bambery on the dangerous rise of Reform UK and how the left can fight back

Across Britain, we are seeing the far right achieve the kind of electoral success none of us have ever seen. The results being chalked up by Reform UK equal those of far-right parties in Germany, France and Italy.

The bookies will be looking at stopping taking bets on them winning the upcoming Runcorn and Helsby. Labour won that with a 15,000 majority last June. But as we have seen, the support they received to gain a landslide majority has melted away like an ice-cream cone in the summer sun.

It's not hard to see why. They have cut pensioner's winter fuel allowance and benefits plus introduced new austerity measures to pay for increased military spending and to keep a losing war going in Ukraine.

In Runcorn, two young residents expressed the growing verdict on Starmer and co, saying: 'Labour are supposed to be the ones who help us out, and we're worse off with Labour than we were with the Tories.' And: 'The people who are already rich are all right, but the working man is still getting stung. I'm from a Labour through-and-through family, but now Labour are in and there's no benefit.'

UK-wide opinion polls have shown Reform UK breathing down Labour's neck if a general election was called today. In Wales, Reform UK is running neck and neck with Labour and Plaid Cymru for top spot.

March saw a series of council by-elections in which Reform UK showed it could take votes from both Labour and the Tories. In Herne and Broomfield ward of Canterbury Council in Kent, Reform UK came second to the Tories with 34.6%, while



NIGEL FARAGE. PHOTO: GAGE SKIDMORE / CC BY-SA 2.0

on the same day, in the Vivary Bridge ward of Pendle Council in Lancashire, the Tories lost the seat to the Liberal Democrats, and came third behind Reform.

In Lincolnshire, the Tories just held Bracebridge Heath ward of North Kesteven with 33.3% (down 24.6% on 2023) with Reform UK coming a close second with 30.9%.

Scottish readers, don't fool yourself

that you are safe behind the border! In Scotland, Reform UK are now in third place in the polls ahead of next year's Scottish parliamentary elections, ahead of the Tories. They could win fourteen to seventeen seats. In March, Reform UK took 18.7% of the vote in the West Lothian ward of Broxburn, Uphall and Winchburgh. Labour lost to the SNP there. In Glasgow North East, the SNP won from Labour with

Reform UK coming third with 23.6%.

For those who think London is immune from the far-right threat, think again. In early March, Labour held the Brentford East ward in Hounslow, West London, with 430 votes (48%, down 15% on 2022) on an appalling turnout of 15%. The main challenge came from Reform, whose candidate polled 197 votes (22%), the party's best so far in a London by-election. Forty-three

percent of its inhabitants live in social housing.

Reform UK is a dangerous anti-migrant, anti-Muslim party. That's what motivates its members, but the bulk of its vote is coming from people fed up to the back teeth with both Labour and Tories. Poll after poll shows that's the reason they give for voting for Farage and crew, not 'send back the boats'.

Nigel Farage portrays himself as an 'honest joe', championing ordinary folk against a distant, globalised elite. As with Donald Trump, it's a nonsense. Farage went to a posh private school, worked in the City of London as a broker and joined the Tory Party in the days of Margaret Thatcher. She remains his hero.

Reform UK boasts a free-market agenda, which means they want to reduce public spending. At the last general election, it stood for 20% tax relief for private-healthcare providers and allowing these pirates greater access to the NHS; tax cuts for businesses; tax relief on school fees. In this parliament, it voted against an increase in trade-union rights and against paying compensation to Waspi women.

To people who believe Reform UK are somehow an alternative to the establishment parties, we need to explain this. In government, Farage's Thatcherite beliefs would quickly surface.

We also need to explain that migrants are not to blame for hospital waiting lists, lack of affordable housing and the cost-of-living crisis. Migrants built and sustain the NHS.

Some say, faced with the rise of Reform UK, we must rally behind Labour. But Starmer has reacted to their rise by trying to show he is just as tough on stopping migrant boats. Now he wants fresh austerity measures to fund extra military spending and to send more cash to Ukraine. He's even suggested we might need to bring back conscription.

In the upcoming local elections, we need to take to the streets and doorstep to argue against voting Reform UK. Rather than arguing for people to stick with this dreadful government, we should get behind independent candidates standing on a socialist platform. In last year's general election, we helped elect five socialist independents, including Jeremy Corbyn. Let's build on that success.



THE PRESTON INDEPENDENTS FACING DOWN THE FAR RIGHT

Preston Independents are standing 4 candidates in the Lancashire County Council elections on 1 May. Counterfire spoke with candidates Emma Mead and Almas Razakazi about their campaign.

Can you tell us why you decided to stand in the elections?

AR: We've both been involved with Preston Independents since it was set up to fight the General Election and we have both been heavily involved in the Palestine movement and various campaigns in Preston. I think it's important that we stand to give voters the opportunity to show their opposition to the main establishment parties.

I'm also horrified at what Labour are doing in Government: cuts to benefits, increasing poverty, slashing services and increasing inequality whilst increasing spending on arms!

EM: I think it's really important that we stand to offer a real left alternative. There is such disillusionment with the mainstream parties that Reform are trying to pose as the voice of ordinary people. But Farage, Trice and their like are far-right, establishment politicians who spout racism and Islamophobia to try and blame minority communities for the crisis. But the crisis we face is created by the rich, the powerful and by politicians – though it impacts worst on ordinary people.

I really think we need a to show that a left alternative is possible. The Preston Independents are standing on a 'welfare not warfare' platform – we want to invest in services, fight for communities and show that we are the real anti-establishment network.

AR: I do a lot of work in my community and the levels of disillusionment with Labour are huge. I never hear anyone with anything positive to say about Starmer, Reeves seems totally clueless, Cooper is nasty and authoritarian and Lammy, well he is just out of his depth!

What challenges do you think you will face?

EM: I think people are so disillusioned that many just won't vote. So it's really important that we manage to get on the door, speak to people and try to generate a sense of excitement and that winning is a possibility.

AR: There is real excitement amongst Preston Independents activists, but I agree with Emma that many people might not bother to vote, or vote for Reform out of despair.

Making it clear that we are the opposition in Preston – after all we were second at the General Election – and that we want to stand up for communities and put people before profit is the real anti-establishment message!

What can people outside Preston do to support you?

EM: We have three leaflets to get into every home and we need to try and canvass every house. We will be out every evening and each Saturday. If you can – why not come and join us?

We know Reform will do well in the local elections on 1 May, but if we can get 1, 2, 3 or even 4 candidates elected, then it will make us all feel better and all of us, right across the country, feel that it is possible to take on the mainstream parties and face down Reform by offering a left electoral alternative.

COUNTERFIRE PRESENTS

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THE CONDITION OF THE WORKING CLASS



The pandemic that changed our lives: 5 years on



by **Terina Hine**

Great calamities bring change. Epidemic diseases devastated Indigenous American populations, paving the way for colonisation, cholera epidemics in the nineteenth century and revolutionised sanitation. And Covid?

Over 230,000 people in the UK lost their lives to Covid. Those who survived were keen to forget. Five years on, with so much back to normal, it's sometimes hard to believe those momentous events happened at all. But they did, and normal is not quite what it was in 2019.

'Next slide please' was the daily soundtrack to empty apocalyptic streets, panic buying, lack of PPE, public figures losing jobs over illicit lockdown-breaking affairs, road trips to Durham and rose-garden humiliation, drunken Downing Street parties (although we didn't know about those until later), zoom calls, bubbles, online classrooms, solitary funerals, fear, boredom and loneliness.

Now the majority of school pupils have returned to the classroom but the level of persistent truancy has shot up. The gap in attainment between the poorest and the rest, which had narrowed pre-pandemic, has now risen. Lack of support during school closures was a major impediment and the poorest children will live with its legacy throughout their education.

Digital learning is here to stay, especially at university level where online lessons and exams remain commonplace. Good for some, less good for others.

Office work has changed fundamentally. Hybrid working has reset the work-life balance and reduced the time and cost of commuting. Employers may harp on about bringing back the five-day office

week, but this is met with such opposition, it's unlikely to happen. A recent survey showed that more than 80% of Fortune 500 companies have adopted a hybrid arrangement. The three-day office week appears to be the norm, with companies tempting employees back with coffee hubs, pool tables and free food.

This change has had a knock on effect in city centres, but the so-called 'hollowing out' of cities is as much to do with changing shopping habits (exacerbated by Covid) and the unaffordability of housing as it is the new working week.

Key workers (in health, education, logistics), as well as those in hospitality are unable to work from home. Some did not survive Covid: many died or became sick and long Covid hinders their return to work, others balk at returning to high pressured environments with limited financial reward. The toll of this on recruitment and retention is enormous. Thousands have taken early retirement.

The NHS has suffered, its waiting lists grow, its services are strained to breaking point. Rather than tackle the cycle of poverty and ill health (mental and physical), the government denies it exists and victim blames: its only solution to a collapsing NHS is privatisation.

But it's not just the NHS that's collapsing, trust in politics has gone the same way.

Partygate saw levels of trust in politicians plummet. In the autumn of 2019, Boris Johnson was the saviour of the Tories, by spring 2022, he was its nemesis. The issue of trust came to be of far greater significance for Johnson's fate than how he handled the pandemic itself.

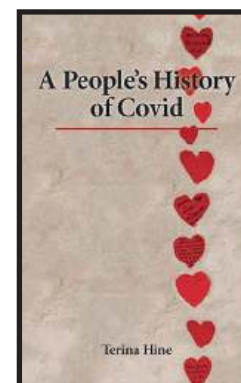
The scale of political dysfunction

exposed by partygate, on top of the PPE scandal, raised questions about the viability of democracy itself. A recent poll found one in five Generation Z and Millennial Britons preferred strong leaders without elections to democracy. The explosion of conspiracy theories is another symptom of the collapse in trust in the political elite and institutions of government.

Alongside the political upheaval, Covid exposed the fragility of our economic system. Just-in-time production, global trade and the free market were all found wanting. No longer is orthodox free-market economics the god of the global capitalist system. Production is shifting closer to home in both Europe and the US, and tariffs are undergoing a revival. The demise of our economic system, which began with the 2008 crash, has a large Covid shaped nail in its coffin.

Covid is over, but its impact is definitely still with us.

Terina Hine is the author of *A People's History of Covid*



It is on sale right now at counterfire.org/shop

MENTAL HEALTH, DISABILITY AND CAPITALISM

ELLY BADCOCK

Labour has launched a monumental attack on disabled people with Wes Streeting claiming there is an 'overdiagnosis' of mental-health issues, and Liz Kendall asserting that only the most severe 'cases' will be able to access disability benefits.

Talk of the most 'severe cases' plays into an age-old dichotomy between deserving and non-deserving disabled people, generally placing those with physical disabilities such as spinal fractures and lower-limb differences at the top, and those with mental-health conditions and poorly-researched conditions prevalent amongst women (e.g. fibromyalgia and Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome) at the bottom.

It also overlooks the key role that capitalism plays in causing mental-health issues and exacerbating the struggles neurodiverse people face. For example, 6/10 workers in leading global economies experience workplace stress, with 79% of British employees having experienced workplace stress; 50% of all neurodivergent people have missed work due to stress and lack of support.

A society free of the capitalist imperative feels extremely far away, whilst many disabled people are now wondering how they will feed, wash and clothe themselves with the current and continued onslaught on their benefits and lives. It is imperative to continue fighting the renewed drive to austerity in this and all forms, and central to this will be joining the People's Assembly demonstration against 'Austerity 2.0' on 7 June.

It is also vital to look beyond a society focused on profit and productive labour, to dream of a future where productivity is not the only hallmark of a life well-lived, and to make that society a reality through socialist politics.

[Read the full article on counterfire.org](https://counterfire.org)

THIS MONTH IN HISTORY

1759

27th: Mary Wollstonecraft born

1917

16th: Vladimir Lenin returns to Russia after spending most of his adult life in exile

1974

25th: Estado Novo government in Portugal overthrown in the Carnation Revolution

1975

30th: The fall of Saigon marks the end of the Vietnam War

1981

10th: Three-day uprising against the Metropolitan Police begins in Brixton, south London

MARXISM 101



PHOTO: WORKERS FOR A FREE PALESTINE

‘THE WORKING CLASS HAS NO COUNTRY’: WHAT DO MARXISTS MEAN BY THIS?



by **Alex Snowden**

Marxism is a worldview with class at its centre. History, as Marx and Engels wrote in the *Communist Manifesto*, has been a succession of class societies. Struggle between the main classes has been a constant feature and also a driving force of change.

Capitalism is a system that depends on a capitalist ruling class exploiting workers. Capitalists and workers are divided against each other – this division is the fundamental antagonism in capitalist society. It follows that, according to Marx, workers across borders are united by common interests.

The *Communist Manifesto* ends with a short chapter that offers a brief overview of the class struggles in several European countries and reiterates this internationalist outlook. It insists that communists ‘labour everywhere for the union and political agreement of the democratic parties of all countries.’ It ends by saying that working-class people everywhere have ‘a world

to win’ and urges: ‘Working men of all countries, unite!’

Marx’s vision of internationalism, then, is an internationalism from below: it is about linking up the struggles of working-class and oppressed people across different countries, not about elite cooperation. Nor is it a matter of a woolly ‘human brotherhood’: this is a matter of class solidarity in conflict with a ruling class that is utterly indifferent to the needs of working-class people.

During the 1860s, when Marx lived in London, a series of international causes galvanised popular support among working-class people in Britain. The revolutionary struggle for a unified and independent Italy drew significant support. It was viewed as a progressive struggle for liberation and its greatest leader, Garibaldi, was greeted as a hero by working-class crowds when he visited Britain in 1864.

In January 1863, an insurrection in Poland, seeking national independence from the autocratic and highly repressive Russian Empire, sparked a mood of solidarity among the more politically conscious British workers. Marx wrote a proclamation on Poland for the German Workers’ Educational Association in London, which was linked to efforts to collect funds for the Polish movement. There were rallies organised by working-class bodies.

The central issue generating workers’ support for the Polish struggle, as with the

mood of solidarity with Italy, was recognition that it was a democratic struggle. This dovetailed with the desire for greater democracy at home. These solidarity movements fuelled a resurgence of popular pro-suffrage protest.

Marx’s proclamation also refers to the most important international solidarity movement of the period:

‘The English working class has reaped everlasting historic honour by its enthusiastic mass meetings held to crush the repeated attempts of the ruling classes to intervene on the side of the American slave-holders.’

There was a nationwide movement of working-class solidarity with the struggle of the North to win the American Civil War. President Lincoln’s declaration of the abolition of slavery on New Year’s Day 1863 was the turning point.

After that, a movement of solidarity mushroomed, with overwhelmingly working-class mass meetings demanding that the British government should not intervene to support the South. There were close economic links between the British ruling class and the Southern slave-owners (which materially underpinned widespread racist attitudes).

A high point in the solidarity movement was in March 1863 when a mass meeting, organised by the London trades council, was packed out. With the British government seriously considering sending the

navy to attack Northern forces, this was a mass anti-war rally.

The resolution put before this mass meeting contained the line: ‘The cause of labour is the same all over the world.’ It was a distinctively working-class slogan and, in such a context, one that encompassed black American slaves and ex-slaves. This working-class internationalism undermined racism among British workers.

All of these currents fed into the launch, in September 1864, of the International Working Men’s Association. Marx was commissioned to write the association’s Inaugural Address, combining class politics with internationalism. Marx played a central role in the association, which became a crucial vehicle for developing links between labour movements across borders, as well as a step forward for independent working-class organisation in Britain.

International solidarity has a long tradition in the working class. This has been especially significant in Britain when we consider Britain’s historic imperial role and the centrality of nationalism and racism to ruling ideology.

Internationalist sentiments were often widespread among workers in Marx’s time and, with the aid of socialists, these were the basis for important solidarity movements that undercut nationalism and racism. This remains a crucial lesson for today.

WHAT WE STAND FOR

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

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

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

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

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

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

Join us and get involved today.

COUNTERFIRE & MOVEMENT EVENTS

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

See [counterfire.org/events](https://www.counterfire.org/events) for updates.

LONDON

Rally: Welfare not warfare: Stop Starmer's militarism, Defend the right to protest

Tuesday 1 April, 6:30pm
Brunei Gallery, SOAS University,
WC1H 0XG

GLASGOW

Understanding Trump's New World Order

Wednesday 2 April, 7pm
Queen Margaret Union, 22 University
Gardens, G12 8QN

MANCHESTER

Why increased military spending won't bring peace

Thursday 3 April, 7pm
Friends Meeting House, Main Hall,
6 Mount Street M2 5NS

CANTERBURY

Censorship, democracy and the right to protest

Friday 4 April, 7pm
Canterbury Baptist Church, St George's
Place, CT1 1UT

BRIGHTON & HOVE

Trump's New World (Dis)order

Saturday 5 April, 11:30am
Friends Meeting House, Ship Street,
BN1 1AF

BRISTOL

What is imperialism? A short history of conquest and plunder, 1900-2025

Wednesday 9 April, 6:45pm
Hamilton House, Mild West Room, 80
Stokes Croft, BS1 3QY

SHEFFIELD

Will Starmer and Trump bring peace?

Wednesday 9 April, 7pm
CURC, 60 Norflok Street, S1 2JB

BIRMINGHAM

New World Disorder: Trump and imperialism

Thursday 10 April, 7pm
Brig Warehouse Cafe, 54-57 Allison
Street, B5 5TH

NATIONWIDE

National day of demonstrations for Palestine

See stopwar.org.uk for details

NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE

Welfare not warfare: No to Starmer's military spending

Saturday 12 April, 1:30pm
Tyneside Irish Centre, Gallowgate
Lounge, 43 Gallowgate, NE1 4SG

HARINGEY & ENFIELD

Welfare not warfare: No to Starmer's military spending

Wednesday 16 April, 6:30pm
North London Community House, 22
Moorefield Road, N17 6PY

LONDON

Revolution! Confronting the New World Disorder

Saturday 3 - Sunday 4 May
SOAS University, WC1H 0XG
Details and tickets: bit.ly/revmayday

LONDON

Nakba 77 National Demonstration for Palestine

Saturday 17 May, 12pm
Central London
See stopwar.org.uk for updates

LONDON

No to Austerity 2.0: People's Assembly National Demonstration

Saturday 7 June, 12pm
Central London
See peoplesassembly.org.uk for updates

LOCAL GROUPS

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

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

NATIONAL OFFICE

info@counterfire.org
07807 123472

Branches:

BIRMINGHAM

BRIGHTON

BRISTOL

DEVON & CORNWALL

DONCASTER

ESSEX & SUFFOLK

GLASGOW

HASTINGS

KENT

LIVERPOOL

LONDON:

E LONDON

HARINGEY

NW LONDON

SE LONDON

SW LONDON

MANCHESTER

NEWCASTLE

PRESTON & CHORLEY

WALES

WEST YORKSHIRE



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

FIRST NAME: _____

LAST NAME: _____

EMAIL: _____

PHONE NO: _____

POSTCODE: _____



JOIN COUNTERFIRE TODAY

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

ART & CULTURE



SCENE FROM ADOLESCENCE

Why do men kill women? Unpacking *Adolescence*

LUCY NICHOLS

Adolescence, available to watch on Netflix, is a phenomenal piece of television. It has sparked debates on violence against women, concepts of masculinity, and the problems of the criminal justice system.

The programme is uniquely filmed: each hour-long episode is one long shot, filmed in real time. This ups the stakes in the already tense crime drama and makes for gripping, heart-wrenching viewing. We see long shots of characters as they must come to terms with the horror facing them.

This pure form of realism is brutal for the viewer: loose ends are deliberately left this way, scenes are slow and intense. Ultimately there is no hiding from the fact that Jamie is also a victim as he is led into a police cell by men twice his size in police uniforms.

There is a stellar cast including Stephen Graham, Ashley Walters, Erin Doherty and some fantastic child actors. The success of *Adolescence* should not only be put down to the difficult subject it tackles, but the quality of the programme in and of itself.

Adolescence has captured the cultural zeitgeist. It dives into the problem of male violence against women.

There are criticisms to be made. The programme arguably treats the police with too much sympathy, and clearly comes to the wrong conclusion about the root cause of violence against women.

On watching *Adolescence*, liberal commentators have been attempting to unpack it through the unhelpful framework of toxic masculinity, the idea that men are inherently chauvinistic and can only really interact with the world around them through a problematic and violent interpretation of masculinity. Even Keir Starmer has waded into the debate, telling the BBC he is worried about it (ironic given his propensity to

be photographed in military fatigues, next to tanks).

Smartphones are taking a lot of the blame for teenage violence. Campaigns such as Smartphone Free Childhood, arguing that giving children unlimited access to smartphones opens up the risks of bullying, grooming, addiction and harmful content.

It is true that in *Adolescence*, Jamie has been radicalised by online sexists who promote ideas that women are inherently inferior to men, that '80% of women are only attracted to 20% of men,' and that young men who aren't 'attractive' must use violence for sexual gratification. It is also true that children should be protected from seeing harmful content online, and vile ideas of the likes of Andrew Tate encourage backward views about the role of women. However, we must dig deeper.

Men have been murdering women for much longer than teenagers have had

smartphones, and longer too than Andrew Tate has been alive. One woman is killed by a man every three days in the UK.

This is a question not just of individuals being radicalised to extremism online, but also of the failure of the state to provide a fundamental level of safety from violence. Schools are often where early indicators of violence emerge, as with the case of Axel Rudakubana. However, the Prevent strategy – which public bodies are told to follow – is not designed to stop violence against women, but is a tool of state repression used to crack down on people (especially Muslims) for demonstrating solidarity with Palestine instead.

The criminal-justice system is deeply flawed, and in any case is stretched too thin to enact any kind of meaningful change when it comes to preventing violence, even if this were its aim. The percentage of alleged rapists ever being charged by

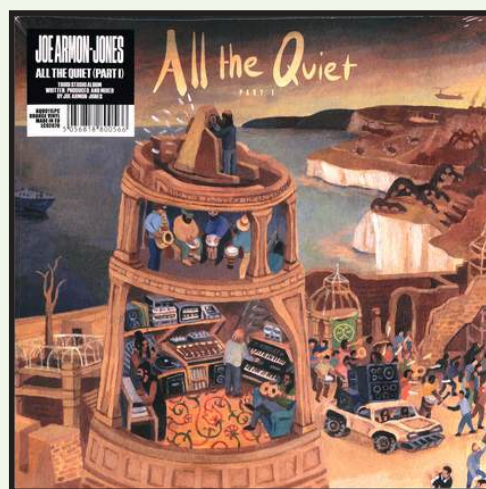
police – let alone brought to trial – is in the single digits. Aside from this, there are far too many cases of the police being the perpetrators to inspire much trust in the law.

The NHS is also in what feels like permanent crisis. Mental-health services are unable to deal with growing pressure. Social services are largely privatised and too over-stretched. A shocking number of children are living in poverty: 4.3 million or 30% of children, and 60% of these have at least one working parent. The government latest round of cuts will make the lives of thousands of children around the country even more difficult.

With circumstances like these, it is easy to understand why children may resort to desperate measures, or are more vulnerable to online grooming and radicalisation. If we want to learn from the fictional case of Jamie Miller in *Adolescence*, we need to understand that the state is responsible.

Revolution and exquisite tranquility: not-to-miss albums this spring

MAYER WAKEFIELD



JOE ARMON-JONES, ALL THE QUIET (PART I) ALBUM ART

Off the back of last year's *Ceasefire* and collecting Group of the Year 2025 at the Brit Awards with Ezra Collective, keys man Joe Armon-Jones returns with another genre-defying album, *All The Quiet (Part I)*. It is a voyage of a listen, travelling mainly through reggae and dub, but always underpinned by Armon-Jones' jazzy instincts.

On the lead single, accompanying poet Asheber sings 'more problems than solutions where I come from, so we plan for revolution where I come.' A lyric that resonates loudly with the times.

Another splendid return comes in the form of Anthony Joesph's *Rowing Up River To Get Our Names Back*. Joseph's latest collection of poetic dreamscapes

is as ever packed full of history and, on this occasion, underpinned by Dave Okumu's boundary-pushing production. Highlights include a tribute to Fela Kuti's drummer comrade Tony Allen (Tony) and the spellbinding *An Afro Futurist Poem*.

Elsewhere, Anoushka Shankar's latest offering, *Chapter III: We Return to Light*, provides some much needed escape with its nourishing tones. Sarathy Korwar and Alam Khan join forces with her here to create 26 minutes of exquisite tranquillity.

Lastly, Little Dragon's lead singer, Yukimi Nagano's first solo foray, *For You*, also has great soothing qualities and will not disappoint fans of the Swedish alchemists.

COUNTERFIRE
LONDON

STOP THE GENOCIDE NOW

FEYZI ISMAIL

Israel has been on a rampage since it broke the ceasefire on 18 March, killing over a thousand Palestinians, including hundreds of children, and displacing almost 150,000 people – with more evacuation orders for Rafah in the south and smaller cities in the north.

Nowhere is safe from the bombing – neither the shelters nor the hospitals. Israel is also preventing critical food and medical aid from entering Gaza, in a blockade that leaves hundreds of thousands facing hunger and malnutrition.

The depravity of the occupation includes the killing of 15 medical first responders, who were dumped in a mass grave along with their ambulances, clearly marked as belonging to the rescue workers, when they tried to attend to casualties from an airstrike.

This is what genocide looks like – in full view of the world. The way we refuse to normalise such atrocities is by speaking out, and remembering that the only way Israel is able to carry out such horror is with the military and political support of the US and UK.

This makes the Palestine and wider anti-war movement in Britain vital to stopping the genocide and ultimately destabilising the Starmer government, which only too happy

to imitate Trump's policies and defend Israel without condition.

Two things have become all too clear in Britain since the genocide began: this government wants war, and wants us to pay for it; and the right to protest against this state of affairs is under attack, whether it's genocide or austerity 2.0.

The way to defend Palestine and our right to a decent standard of living, then, is to defend our right to protest – over government complicity in genocide and over massive increases in defence spending.

All of this means ramping up our movement. The demonstration on 17 May commemorating Nakba Day is another opportunity to confront the government with our demand to end the genocide.

It also means linking Palestine and the drive to war with the attacks on welfare at home, making the focus of our resistance our own government. This is what solidarity looks like – in full view of the world.

NAKBA 77 - NATIONAL DEMONSTRATION
SATURDAY 17 MAY
CENTRAL LONDON
Follow @STWuk for updates

