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NEWS

Down comes the Labour sandcastle

KEVIN CRANE

As was predicted two years ago, when Starmer got elected with a huge parliamentary majority, it was built on nothing and it is coming down.

Scotland got a two-decade head start when the nationalists took over the devolved government in Holyrood in the late 2000s, and that's the underlying reason why the Scottish election results were pretty boring. While the SNP is also looking like a bit of a spent force these days, it has been able to rely on widespread antipathy to UK governments from south of the border to keep it in office, and that just played out yet again.

In stark contrast, Wales' election was absolutely spectacular. The difference there is that the devolved government had been kept in Labour's hands for a very long time by an unusually popular and competent First Minister, Mark Drakeford, who combined a version of the SNP's 'hey, at least it's not London' schtick with just enough economic radicalism to look more progressive next to successive Tory governments. His retirement, coinciding with Starmer's catastrophe of a UK government, caused this once-sturdy output to be destroyed from both inside and out, as his initial successor immediately got embroiled in



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

a messy corruption scandal. The loss of Wales to Labour is a particularly symbolic blow, as the country played an outsize role in the development of the British working-class movement historically.

England continued its pattern of long-in-the-tooth council administrations suddenly falling apart from last year. The added dimension, of course, is that this year's round includes all the London councils and large cities like Birmingham and Manchester, which were also absolutely

core hubs for Labour's internal infrastructure. Technically, Labour's London result is not the worst it's ever had – that was the near total wipeout of 1968 – but the statistics mask a serious structural crisis that is hitting the party much harder than that event did.

Labour could dust itself off from a nasty shock like the '68 defeat because even with the loss of council seats, the infrastructure of the party rested on solid foundations of social democracy. The trade

unions, the strong local party structures, the loyal support of working-class communities were all still there. London Labour actually renewed itself very successfully after that defeat and a new generation of leaders, such as Ken Livingstone, emerged to revitalise the party with ideas brought in from the New Left of the 1960s.

Scotland has already shown us that Labour cannot do this now. Scottish Labour has never once come out of a Scottish Parliament election with more members in Holyrood than they went in with, and that trend has not been bucked. The party's internal machinery was shattered well over ten years ago, and we can see that it is not reassembling.

Labour's Scottish problem is now going to spread to Wales, and also to major English cities. There isn't a mass popular base invested in keeping Labour going in any of these places anymore, so once the local politicians lose their seats and the facilities and opportunities that go with them, there's really nothing much left to keep ambitious and career-minded people in place.

Labour will hollow-out, and struggle to maintain consistent organisation in increasingly wide areas of Britain. The era of the Labour Party as the dominant vehicle for left-of-centre votes is at an end.

TRUMP'S GANGSTER IMPERIALISM IS A DANGER TO US ALL

LAUREN SIMMONDS

The latest US Department of War operation, ironically named 'Project Freedom', designed to escort merchant vessels out of the Strait of Hormuz, was cut abruptly short when the Gulf States, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, denied support for the plan and suspended US military access to their airspace and bases.

Still reeling from earlier Iranian strikes across the Gulf, targeting the numerous US bases situated within their territories, the cost to the Gulf States' economies, from tourism to industry, has been significant.

Announcing that he was halting 'Project Freedom' in a bid to reach a deal with Iran to end the war, Trump – in characteristic style – has vacillated between the possibility of a peace deal and a resumption of the bombing.

With the US failing to achieve any of

its stated war objectives and Iran standing firm with their original 'Ten Point Plan', a tense period of negotiations is set to ensue. Whilst the Strait of Hormuz remains closed to US allies, the global economic crisis will continue for the foreseeable future, with the already irreversible consequences still to be felt by most. One thing is for certain, Trump's demand for Iran's total 'surrender', won't achieve a genuine resolution anytime soon.

And if recent CIA reports on Iran's missile stockpiles, and capacity to withstand severe economic hardship, are to be believed, then we could all be in for a prolonged period of warfare, both economic and military.

It's quite the contrast to claims from Trump and his top advisors that Iran's economy has been entirely decimated and their military capabilities, including nuclear, have been all but destroyed. It remains to be seen how much longer that

creative narrative will wash with the US public, including Trump's MAGA base who believed they were championing an 'anti-war' president.

It's not only the Gulf States which are becoming increasingly frustrated with Trump's hubris. Germany has engaged in a public spat with the US over the war in Iran resulting in Washington withdrawing 5,000 US troops from German soil after the German Chancellor Friedrich Merz said that the US was being 'humiliated' by Iran's leadership in Tehran. The German Defence Minister, Boris Pistorius, later stated that 'Europeans must take responsibility for our own security.' It would appear that NATO alliances are on increasingly shaky ground.

A stumbling block to any potential peace deal between the US and Iran is Israel's complete disdain for the term 'ceasefire' as it relentlessly continues its bombing and aggressive attacks in both

Lebanon and Gaza, with civilian casualties mounting daily and no end to the violence in sight. Cessation of the bombing in Lebanon is a term of Iran's 'Ten Point Plan' and will remain a bone of contention in any negotiation talks.

Trump's new era of gangster imperialism is creating a much more dangerous and volatile world. International law has been completely absent and Europe's response has been to increase military spending to record levels and introduce conscription in several countries, with more likely to follow suit. The race towards rearmament and militarism is in full swing.

The need to build international opposition and unity against war has never been more urgent. The International Anti-War conference in London on 20 June is the perfect springboard to achieving this. Spread the word far and wide. Everyone has a stake in this. See you there!

EDITORIAL



Conscription: we say no!

MARTHA LYNN

On 11 May, the Stop the war student network set up an initial meeting to discuss the launch of a campaign against conscription. Labour's military gap year scheme, due to begin later this year, is the road to conscription by stealth.

The guest speaker at the meeting was Felix Kreklow Rojas, a school student in Germany who has been one of the organisers of the impressive school strikes against conscription. He shared some of his stories from Germany about the repressive policing, rising militarism and impending conscription.

Currently in Germany, every male born from 2008 has received a questionnaire regarding physical abilities from the armed forces. If the questionnaire is refused, individuals can receive up to a €1,000 fine. Additionally, every man between the ages of seventeen and forty nine cannot leave the country for more than three months without permission from the military.

It's clear that conscription is accelerating with immense force in Germany, and the government seems to be moving toward compulsory services. According to Felix, the ministry of defence has provided no information to the public about how these rules will progress. This undemocratic lunge towards full militarisation is not far from the UK, and it remains essential that activists engage in combatting the governments drive towards conscription for young people.

The International Anti-War conference on 20 June in London is a prime opportunity for students and young people to come together in the wider and international anti-war movement to organise against conscription, militarism and our government's continuing support for Israel's war crimes.

With 50% of young people saying they would not fight for Britain in a war under any circumstances, it's clear that there is a huge anti-war constituency to build upon.

If you're a student and want to get involved in the campaign, please email office@stopwar.org.uk.

HOW WE TURN THE TIDE

COUNTERFIRE

The attack on the Palestine movement has reached new and disturbing levels.

The whole establishment has united behind the lie that the movement is antisemitic and calls for the banning of marches are growing.

It's important to understand this is an attack on the whole of the left and the labour movement. If the police and the government can get away with this over Palestine, they will undoubtedly come for other campaigns.

This state-led attack will be boosted by Reform's election surge and by Tommy Robinson's street mobilisations.

It is taking place in the context of a growing drive to war as governments across Europe and beyond rearm, introduce conscription and obsess about what they call security.

That is why this year's Nakba Day mobilisation has had added significance. It is important that the movement has united to respond to this situation. In the weeks and months ahead, we need to continue to build the broadest and deepest possible movements of resistance.

In doing this, we need to keep in mind that Labour's vote in the recent elections broke to the left as well as the right. The Greens in fact won more votes from Labour than Reform. It is an avoidable tragedy that Your Party was in no shape to intervene in the elections. If it had been, it would undoubtedly have polled very well.

The Green Party is no socialist organisation. But their own surge shows there is a huge constituency looking for a challenge to the mainstream political consensus. Millions of people are desperate for an alternative to cutbacks, increased defence spending, attacks on civil liberties and refugees, continued support for Israel and the special relationship with the US.

Socialists' first priority must be to draw this constituency into action against the government and against the far right.

As well as defending and broadening the Palestine movement, building a movement against militarisation and for welfare not warfare must be a key element of this. Trump and the US have suffered a big reverse over Iran, but he is likely to lash out again.

The fact that the government, most of the main parties and the far right continue to support the special relationship with Trump's US is a source of major weakness for all of them. Polls show that 75% of the population here disapprove of Trump and that over 60% opposed the attack on Iran.

Growing calls for welfare cuts and increases in defence spending are deeply unpopular too. We should be making sure that there is strong Stop the War organisation in every area.

We also need to mobilise for the International Anti-war Conference in Central Hall, Westminster on 20 June. Bringing thousands of activists from across Europe and beyond can lay the basis for mass coordinated action against the core policies of the European ruling classes.

This can help turn the tide against the warmongers and their far-right supporters.

The campaign against the attacks on immigrants and the growth of the far right also needs to be strengthened and deepened. Last month's Together demonstration showed what was possible on this front and we need to build on its success.

Organising resistance on this kind of scale requires much stronger socialist organisation at the heart of the movement. We urge all our supporters to join us in this effort.

See page 10 or go to counterfire.org/join



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



NEU STRIKE BALLOT: 'A FIGHT FOR OUR LIVES'

MOLLY MAGUIRE

The national executive committee of the NEU have announced a formal ballot for strike action of over 300,000 teachers and support staff in England's state schools.

It follows a promising indicative ballot which showed overwhelming support for strike action (90.5%). The chief demand

is a fully-funded, above-inflation pay rise, which the government has not signalled it will grant. The School Teachers' Review Body is currently recommending a 6.5% rise over three years. But inflation due to the Iran war – which might increase dramatically over the summer – could, as NEU General-Secretary declared, wipe out any gains 'in one Tomahawk cruise missile'.

Crucially, the Chancellor and Education

Secretary have suggested they will not fund school budgets to pay for any rise in salaries, meaning already cash-strapped schools will need to cut programmes and services to students, delay desperately-needed building repairs and make other staff redundant.

In addition, the government has stated they would like to eliminate a long-standing cap on working hours for staff (1,265 per year), further increasing workload and exacerbating a national teacher recruitment and retention crisis.

School staff have been forced into a fight for our lives, and the union must throw everything it has into it.

The formal ballot will open on 3 October and close 15 December, with a view to initiating strike action at the start of 2027. The timeline is a long one, partly due to the school summer break, partly due to regressive trade-union laws which require ballots to be handled through the post and for 50% of ballots be returned. The indicative ballot was electronic, and just shy of half voted, so turnout will need to be organised.

We don't want to lose the momentum that the indicative ballot has built, nor do we have time to waste in winning new layers of staff to smash through the voting threshold. Starting now, schools and district branches need to build the confidence and organisation we need to win the ballot, and win our strike.

This will involve raising awareness

of what's at stake among colleagues, parents and pupils and building alliances with other unions and community groups through workplace campaign meetings and committees, local demonstrations, public forums and school-gate leafletting. Our 'Save Education' campaign should be talked about at dinner tables across the country.

In short, the NEU must re-mobilise in the style of spring 2023, when, after eight days of strike action for pay, it found itself on the precipice of a full-scale shutdown of the school system. Other education unions, NASUWT, NAHT and ASCL had begun balloting in tow, and teachers were marching with other public-sector strikers like doctors and lecturers. That fight forced a very intransigent Rishi Sunak to find extra money for a better pay rise (4%-6.5%). But the 2023 deal was still below inflation, and we cannot afford that again. This time, we must go further.

One way to do this is to link up with broader movements against war and austerity, which is certain to gain more momentum as the economic impact of war really starts to set in over the coming months. The NEU has been an important presence on pro-Palestine and marches against the far right, and NEU branches around the country have backed the International 'Against War' conference in London, 20 June. Let's make our pay campaign central to all of that. Wages not Weapons! Books not Bombs!

PICKET LINES THIS MONTH

For latest updates see counterfire.org/events

DHL LOGISTICS AT JAGUAR LAND ROVER

Union: Unite
Dates: Continuous from 12 May
Location: Solihull, B92 8NW; Wolverhampton, WV9 5GA; Birmingham, B76 9EH; Widnes, WA8 0PG

ARRIVA BUS ENGINEERS

Union: Unite
Dates: 11-15, 25-29 May
Location: Luton, LU4 8DS

SOUTH CHINGFORD FOUNDATION SCHOOL

Union: NEU
Dates: 5-22 May, 7am
Location: Chingford, E4 8ES

CENTRAL HILL DAY CENTRE

Union: Unison
Dates: 14 May, 8am
Location: Lambeth, SE19 1AA

EAST LONDON BUS DRIVERS

Union: Unite
Dates: 15, 16 May
Location: Bow, E3 2QP

CWM TAF MORGANNWG HEALTH VISITORS

Union: Unite
Dates: 15 May – 17 July
Location: Llantrisant, CF72 8XR

LONDON UNDERGROUND

Union: RMT
Dates: 19-20, 21-22 May (12pm to 11:59am)
Location: Depots across London

AQA EXAM BOARD

Union: Unison
Dates: 11 May
Location: Manchester, M15 6EX; Milton Keynes, MK8 8DF; Guildford, GU2 7XJ

INTERVIEW

'We must resist the attempts to criminalise our movement'

Michael Lavalette interviews Stop the War Chair **Alex Kenny** about the continuing attempts by the state to attack the Palestine movement



Could you start by telling readers about yourself?

I'm a retired teacher. I was active in my union (both the NUT and then NEU) throughout my career. I was a branch secretary in Tower Hamlets for thirty years and served on the executive of both unions between 2006 and 2023.

My first-ever demonstration was an Anti-Nazi League march in 1978. I'm a member of CND, Stand Up To Racism and Palestine Solidarity.

I joined Stop the War when it was first formed in 2001. We set up StW to confront Bush and Blair's 'war on terror'.

We set out to confront three interlinked aspects of the 'war on terror': the 'hot wars', the imperialist interventions into the Middle East, the linked rise in Islamophobia and the growing threats to our civil liberties. Twenty-five years on, these three features remain central to our work.

I represented the NUT/NEU on the StW Steering Committee, and, about ten years ago, joined the Officers group. Three years ago I became national Chair.

You have been StW chair throughout the genocide, organising national demos, stewarding marches etc. In the aftermath of the demonstration on 18 Jan 2025, you were one of the people charged with public-order offences. Where is your trial up to?

The past three years I have been involved in coordinating our national and London-based demonstrations in response to the genocide. I've been part of the lead stewarding team (alongside others from the Palestine coalition).

Chris Nineham, Ben Jamal,



ALEX KENNY OUTSIDE WESTMINSTER MAGISTRATES COURT. PHOTO: STEVE EASON / CC BY-NC 2.0

Sophie Bolt and myself were all charged with public-order offences relating to our demonstration on 18 January 2025.

Chris and Ben have been found guilty and are rightly appealing that decision. Sophie and myself were back in court in late April and now have a trial date of February 2027: over two years after the demonstration! Whether our case goes ahead will, I think, depend on the outcome of Chris's and Ben's appeal.

I believe the charges against Chris and Ben were outrageous and the outcome a travesty.

In Jan 2025, the police were trying to strangle the Palestine movement, putting increasing restrictions on us. We had faced ridiculous accusations that these were 'hate marches' from the press and politicians and now the police were trying to restrict our rights.

They originally said we could gather outside the BBC (we wanted to gather there because of

their biased reporting). They then changed their mind, suggesting we reverse the route and gather at Whitehall to march to the BBC. But then they rescinded permission for that too!

There was heavy lobbying to stop us marching and taking our preferred routes. This was on the specious grounds that we were marching close to synagogues.

The cops admit there have been minimal arrests (tiny given the huge numbers) on our marches and very few of any arrests were linked to antisemitism.

One senior officer asked me 'why do you keep marching?' We have heard this again recently.

The polite answer is: 'we keep marching because the Israelis keep killing, and our government keeps supporting Israel's atrocities in Gaza, in the West Bank, in Lebanon and Iran!'

We need to assert that we have the right to assemble and march until Palestine is free of Israel's brutal occupation.

Our marches are incredibly peaceful events. People from all walks of life join us, marching together in solidarity, including large numbers of Jews, Muslims and people of no faith.

We reflect majority opinion in the country regarding the genocide, and the need to isolate apartheid Israel.

The assault on our movement has ramped up again, with the Met chief Mark Rowley making a series of outrageous claims and politicians lining up to argue our 'hate marches' are responsible for an increase in 'violent antisemitic attacks'. What do you think is going on?

The attack on the Palestine movement has become very significant. They are looking for reasons to stop us marching and are trying to marginalise us.

I think the Stop the War response has been very good. We

got a statement out condemning the antisemitic attack in Golders Green. As more details have emerged, it's obviously not as straight forward as the press and police are trying to make out.

But the weaponisation of the knife attack has been shameful. Rowley claims we want to march past synagogues which is simply untrue. We have published a rebuttal under the name of the full Palestine Coalition and have sent a legal response to the Mayor's Office for Police and Crime, demanding retraction and a full apology.

As I've said, the marches are not 'hate marches', but expressions of solidarity with the people of Palestine in the face of the most dreadful violence and oppression.

The claims that slogans such as 'globalise the intifada' or 'from the river to the sea' are antisemitic are simply wrong.

It's ironic that there are so many, non-Arabic speaking people, telling Palestinians and Arabs what 'intifada' means! Intifada means 'shaking off' and, in context, it means 'resistance'. But to be honest with you, I don't actually hear 'globalise the intifada' very much on our marches.

'From the river to the sea' is a call for freedom and equality for all (for people of all religions and none) between the river Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea.

There is something dangerous about people who don't know the meaning of words, or slogans demanding that they be banned.

The Palestine movement has been remarkable. For almost three years, we have sustained a high-level campaign that has put the establishment on the back-foot. It is important that we resist the latest attempts to criminalise us, and assert our right to march and protest for Palestinian freedom. Together we can push back against the Met and the political establishment and make it clear that we will march, protest and demonstrate until, Gaza, the West Bank and Palestine are free.

The 1926 General Strike: lessons for today

JOHN WESTMORELAND

The British Labour movement loves its myths, and the General Strike is one of them. The TUC's website celebrates millions of workers standing together and takes the credit for calling the strike in support of the miners, but goes all shy when it comes to saying why they called it off.

The Labour Party's leadership, then as now, was quick to condemn the strike for confronting the government and thereby the constitution, and used the defeat to urge workers to forget about the lost cause of fighting back, and vote for change through Labour.

For liberal commentators and academics, the narrative is that emotion, stirred up by hotheads, overtook reason and put trade unionists into a fight that they could never win.

But millions of striking workers had every chance of winning for the simple reason that capitalism runs on labour. We stop and the system stops. We have collective strength.

Doomed from the off?

It is often claimed that the miners' demands were unrealistic in a period of post-war economic difficulty. But were the demands of the miners unrealistic?

During the war, the government of Lloyd George thought that as coal was essential for industry, it should be taken out of the hands of the mine owners. In order to bring miners behind the war effort, the anomalies in pay for the million-plus miners were replaced by a basic wage.

When the mines were returned to their owners, they set about attacking national pay and refused to invest in the modernisation that was an obvious necessity.

'Not a penny off the pay, not a minute on the day', was the slogan adopted by the millions who went on strike. It was coined by miners' leader AJ Cook,

and taken up by workers across the country. The miners' fight was everyone's fight. The demand was that the government should either subsidise coal or else nationalise the pits again.

The miners faced appalling working conditions, low pay and were being squeezed for more. The government provoked the strike by supporting the mine owners, whom they privately saw as 'the stupidest men in England'.

The miners were not, therefore, trying to wreck the economy, nor overthrow the government. They wanted a secure future, an end to paid poverty and a safe working environment. The demand for nationalisation was a winner because it made economic sense. The proof of this is that the miners' demands were realised after the Second World War.

Therefore, the party holding back modernisation was the government and their paranoid defence of private property and the free market.

The establishment go to war

The government's attempt to criminalise and crush the striking workers was supported by every facet of the establishment, from the top down.

The king smelled revolution and put his self-interest first. He demanded that strikers be arrested and that more troops should be set against them.

The generals and admirals happily deployed their forces against the strikers, especially in the docks. When East London power workers switched off the power to the docks, Royal Navy submarines and cruisers were on hand to generate power, and help unload ships.

Naval vessels were stationed off the Clyde, Tyne, Humber and Mersey.

Emergency Powers were used to arrest strike leaders and especially members of the Communist Party. This included the MP for North Battersea, Shapurji Saklatvala, who told a Hyde Park rally that young men in the armed

forces should lay down their arms, and served two months in prison.

The scabbing and propaganda operation launched by the government drew in media barons, retired army officers, 'varsity types' from Oxford and Cambridge, John Reith at the BBC, and, although they weren't allowed to wear their fascist regalia, members of the British Union of Fascists.

BUT IT FAILED! There were more workers on strike after nine days than at the start.

Defeat snatched from the jaws of victory

The TUC didn't call off the General Strike because it was losing. Exactly the opposite. They called it off because it was winning. In Newcastle, the government's District Commissioner all but admitted defeat when he asked the local strike committee if they could organise the transport of essential supplies.

Fresh waves of workers were joining the strike and even unorganised workers were responding to the call. For example, women who picketed bus stops and boarded trains, demanding that the passengers boycott scab transport, were getting results.

The TUC knew that ending the strike would lead to a wave of victimisations and reprisals by the bosses who had felt the meaning of working-class power, but they hated being connected to the increased radicalism of the strikers who were challenging the state and constitution.

Had the left been able to organise a leadership among the strikers that was prepared to take things beyond the limits of the trade-union bureaucracy, the outcome could have been very different.

The failure of the General Strike to peg back the employers' offensive fed into the horrors of the 1930s: mass unemployment, the hated Means Test that enforced poverty and the rise of fascism and war.



SCHOOL STRIKE AGAINST CONSCRIPTION, BERLIN, MARCH 2026. PHOTO: MATTHIAS BERG / CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

PALESTINE NATIONAL DEMONSTRATION, LONDON, OCTOBER 2025. PHOTO: STEVE EASON / CC BY-NC 2.0

PROTEST IN SAINT-NAZAIRE AGAINST NEW FRANCE LIBRE AIRCRAFT CARRIER, 8 MAY. PHOTO: @INF00VRIERES / X

INTERNATIONAL RESISTANCE TO WAR COMES TO LONDON

Militarism is ramping up across Europe, but so is the resistance and it's converging in London on 20 June, reports Cici Washburn

Thousands of workers, trade unionists, students and activists from across Britain and Europe will be coming together at Central Hall, Westminster for the International Conference Against War on 20 June. This will be the biggest meeting of trade unionists not organised by the TUC in many years. Get your ticket now, before it's too late and spread the word amongst fellow activists, friends, workers, campaign groups and so forth.

Over 1,100 signatures from 23 countries have backed the conference. In Britain, at the time of writing, ten national unions (including UCU, RMT, Aslef, NEU, PCS), 95 union branches and trades councils, dozens of peace organisations, solidarity campaigns and other organisations are supporting the conference. Struggles against rearmament, war and austerity have been taking place across Europe and hundreds of activists will be heading to London for 20 June.

In Germany, a Volkswagen factory has been turned into an arms factory; Germany is set to double arms spending over the next five years. Conscription is coming in full

force there with men aged between 17 and 45 having to apply to the military if they want to leave the country for more than three months. Huge student protests with tens of thousands have taken place across Germany in 130 towns and cities, and German student protesters will be speaking at the conference.

An organiser of the protests, Felix Kreklow Rojas said at a recent Stop the War mobilising meeting that the reason people should attend the conference is because 'what we are experiencing in Germany is not an isolated development, similar trends can be seen across Europe; rising military budgets, growing tensions and a political climate that normalises war. This is why we need to build lasting connections across borders and exchange strategies, support each other in moments of pressure and coordinate actions.'

Klaus Zwickel, former president of IG Metall and of the European Automotive Workers' Association said, 'As a trade unionist, as a metalworker, as a former chairman of the European Motor Workers' Union, I support the International

Conference Against War in London, which grew out of the anti-war conference in Paris ... It is necessary and of the utmost urgency that trade unions in every country, across Europe, and indeed internationally, unite against rearmament, militarisation, and preparations for war.'

In France, military stock levels are set to rise by 400%, conscription is being introduced and teachers have been protesting against the military coming to schools and giving children unloaded weapons. The French teachers union FNEC FP-FO is backing the conference and many teachers from France will be attending.

A teaching assistant in France who is attending the conference said, 'A new "Voluntary military service" is being introduced and pushed onto students who don't get the courses they have chosen.' There have been a series of mobilising meetings for the conference across France and young people organised successful gigs in Nantes to raise money so people can get to London.

Conscription is also on the agenda in Britain, with the announcement in

December of a military gap year. School and university students say they are increasingly seeing a military presence at their places of study and some talk about how defence jobs are strongly encouraged as a way forward in the context of AI replacing jobs and rising youth unemployment.

And inflation is set to soar; even if war in the Middle East ended now, we would still have, at the very minimum, more than half a year of a serious spike in inflation. This comes as most workers are yet again getting below-inflation pay rises and more than a quarter of children in Britain are living in poverty. Generals and government ministers regularly tell us on the radio that we will pay for war, it will come from welfare budgets, as they say it has to come from somewhere, and they mean our public services too.

Europe's and the US's drive to war will affect the livelihoods of every worker and every student in this country. Defence spending has seen a 50% increase in the last six years, with the government determined to make further increases which we will pay for.

The International Conference is a crucial next step to the passing of the 'Wages not Weapons' motion at the TUC last year. Trade-union branches are sending delegations from up and down the country. Tickets are selling fast, book yours now and get more branches, campaigns and Palestine solidarity and community groups on board.

Four thousand people attended the first international conference in October last year in Paris, thousands of us will be in London on 20 June and another conference has been called in Madrid. It is crucial we have a strong, coordinated international anti-war movement for the battles ahead. Be there on 20 June.

Tickets: bit.ly/againstwar2026



Model motion: bit.ly/j20motion
Crowdfunder: bit.ly/j20appeal

THE CONDITION OF THE WORKING CLASS



A cost of war crisis



by **Terina Hine**

The Iran war may be thousands of miles away, and a ceasefire is currently in place, but the impact of this US-Israeli-led conflict is being felt by families up and down the UK, and it's only going to get worse.

The war has caused the most severe disruption to oil and gas markets in history and the damaged infrastructure, including oil refineries and gas plants, will take years to fix. The resultant surge in energy prices and the supply-chain disruption caused by the closure of the Strait of Hormuz is being

felt the world over.

We have all experienced the price hikes at the petrol pump. At the local garage back in January, it cost about £1.30 per litre for petrol and £1.60 for diesel; it's now £1.60 and £1.93 respectively. This not only impacts the daily commute, but also the delivery cost of goods and services. Whether it's by car, plane or ship, moving stuff requires fuel.

And it's not just transportation costs that have risen. Energy prices are projected to rise by 24% this year and commodity prices by 16%. The sharp rises in the price of plastics and fertiliser are beginning to have severe ramifications.

As much as 99% of nitrogen fertiliser is made from natural gas with large quantities of the world's fertilisers exported from the Gulf via the Strait of Hormuz. Some of the biggest importers of Gulf fertilisers – India, Brazil and China – are, not surprisingly, among the world's biggest food producers.

The price of urea, the world's most popular nitrogen fertiliser, has doubled since the start of the war. Fertiliser shortages and increasing costs are leading to farmers across Asia cutting back on planting rice and other crops. The reduction in fertiliser use will reduce yield on crops planted, while the spiralling cost of available fertiliser will be passed on to consumers.

The threat to global food security is significant, and with the added transportation costs, potentially disastrous both for farmers and for those, like us, in import-dependent countries.

According to the latest research, UK food prices, which have been rising for the last five years, are set to be on average 50% higher than they were in 2021. This rate of rise is equal to the price rise over the preceding twenty years. That's two decades worth of price rises compressed into a five-year period.

Since the beginning of the cost-of-living crisis in 2021, the price of beef has risen by

64%, while family staples such as pasta and frozen veg have risen by 50%. Although, of course, these price increases are not solely attributable to Trump's war, the conflict in Iran is making a bad situation much, much worse. The Bank of England has estimated that between now and November we will suffer 7% food inflation.

The impact of such rapid price rises is devastating for those on lower incomes. People will have no choice but to skip meals and more and more children will go to school hungry.

And there's more. Plastics are oil-based products. A cursory glance around your kitchen/bathroom/bedroom will give an idea of how much plastic we use daily. Another inflationary nightmare is being baked into food packaging and containers. Then there's the petrochemical industry, also set to take a hit – impacting the production costs of products including toothpaste, disposable nappies, tampons and laundry detergents. Since March, the cost of petrochemicals has risen 50%-60%, and most of this has yet to filter through to our shopping baskets.

As inflation pushes up interest rates, the cost of borrowing rises, so prepare for mortgage rates to go up later in the year. Some commentators suggest the base rate will be 5.5% by early 2027, with more than 50% of UK mortgage holders seeing their repayments rise.

Add this to the surge in heating and energy costs, and having somewhere warm to sleep as well as something to eat will become increasingly difficult. For low-income groups, savings are a luxury, there is no fund for rainy days, or cold days or the days when hunger bites.

Food, fuel and a roof above one's head are basic essentials. This war-induced cost-of-living crisis will hit us all, and those with the least, without savings and who spend a greater portion of their income on basic essentials, will be hit the hardest.

IS THE MET POLICE THE BEST JUDGE OF RACISM?

SHABBIR LAKHA

Following the violent attack against Jewish people in Golders Green, the Met Police launched into a concerted campaign to criminalise the Palestine movement.

Met Commissioner Mark Rowley made the outrageous claim that the organisers of the national Palestine marches over two and a half years had intentionally and repeatedly sought to march near synagogues. This is a bare-faced lie that is easily disproven.

That hasn't stopped the Met Police however from continuing to make unsubstantiated links between the Palestine movement and violent attacks on Jewish people. Nor has it stopped them from demanding more powers from the government (and more money) to restrict the right of people – including thousands of Jewish people – from protesting against our government's support for Israel's genocide.

But as well as their disregard for the right to protest, it is clear that the Met police cannot be considered an authority on what is and isn't racism.

Their decision to hand over central London to fascists on 16 May, knowing the Palestine movement would be marching on the same day, and knowing from Tommy Robinson's last demonstration how openly Islamophobic and violent he and his supporters are, is case in point.

The disparity between the treatment of antisemitism and Islamophobia was underlined by two recent incidents. In early May two people were arrested for antisemitic hate crimes after they verbally abused a Jewish man. In February, when a far-right preacher travelled to Whitechapel to shout abuse at Muslims, those complaining were told "in this country, we have freedom of speech".

It comes as no surprise that the Met Police aren't impartial nor a credible authority on racism. The Macpherson report in 1999 found the Met to be institutionally racist. This has been re-confirmed by eight further inquiries, reviews and investigations between 2010 and 2024.

It was recently exposed that the Met Police had Tommy Robinson supporters within its ranks, and in 2023 the Met identified over 1,000 serving officers with allegations of sexual misconduct and domestic abuse.

This is not an institution with any sort of moral authority.

THIS MONTH IN HISTORY

MORGAN DANIELS

1787

22nd: The Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade founded in George Yard in the City of London

1798

24th: The Irish Rebellion against the British Crown begins with clashes in County Kildare

1818

5th: Karl Marx born

1929

30th: First UK general election held with universal suffrage for adults over the age of 21

1934

9th: Longshoremen across every West Coast port in the US walk out, marking the beginning of an 83-day-long strike

MARXISM 101



'MR MONOPOLY'

IS HUMAN NATURE A BARRIER TO SOCIALISM?



by **Alex Snowden**

The idea that 'human nature' is a barrier to socialism is one of the oldest and most widespread arguments against socialist politics. This line of argument tends to focus on a number of supposedly universal aspects of human life to suggest that they are natural and inevitable, making any alternative impossible. Socialism is therefore ridiculed as utopian and unrealistic.

The focus is often on three central aspects of the capitalist society we are accustomed to. These features, we are told, are timeless parts of the human condition – and this is due to them being rooted in our essential 'human nature'.

The first aspect is competition. The assumption that humans are naturally competitive is the basis for suggesting that a competitive market economy is an expression of our nature.

This overlooks the numerous ways in which people cooperate with each other – in personal life, at work, in society – to meet their needs. It conveniently ignores the historical record that for many thousands of years humans cooperated with each other in egalitarian communities, prior to the emergence of the first class societies.

The second aspect is conflict. War, we

are told, is as old as humanity. It is hopelessly naive to imagine a world without war. Yet again, this ignores the historical record of pre-class societies. It also, however, fails to recognise the extent to which modern-day wars are very clearly rooted in a particular set of social conditions. It is the system of imperialist competition, which grows out of capitalist relations, that underpins military conflict today.

The third aspect is inequality. It follows from us being naturally competitive that there will be inequality in what wealth people have. This is supposedly a reflection of natural differences between people's abilities – an idea that very easily flows into racism, sexism etc – or maybe their dispositions (for example, whether someone is 'entrepreneurial' or has the right 'mindset').

Today's inequality is so extreme that this aspect of capitalist ideology is under great strain, with large numbers of people unhappy with levels of inequality.

Marx disputed the idea that any of these features of capitalist society are universal features of the human condition. He had a historical materialist method. This involved examining the material economic and social conditions in any given context. He recognised that these conditions can change – and indeed have changed – enormously.

If the economic and social conditions can change, so can the ideas, values and behaviours that people have. Particular conditions give rise to the attitudes and behaviours that go with them. For example, in a capitalist market economy it is

hardly surprising if people develop a competitive mindset.

Marx also noted, though, that we often see contradictions. Work in a capitalist society involves cooperation – day in, day out – between workers in order to produce goods or provide services. This experience of cooperation is in tension with the capitalist ethos of competition and allows us to glimpse a better, more cooperative, way of living.

War may be presented as a normal and unavoidable feature of life, but it also horrifies most people. The destructive realities of war turn many people against it and fuel the desire for peace and diplomacy, rather than military competition and conflict. Some people will go further and question what kind of society gives rise to wars in the first place.

Inequality may be presented as inevitable, but the visible unfairness and injustice of a tiny minority acquiring great wealth while others struggle to make ends meet can turn people against the system. An instinct for equality is in fact extremely

widespread. A formal commitment to equality is therefore an established part of modern capitalist societies, even if they are economically deeply unequal.

We can see, then, that what is passed off as 'human nature' is historically conditioned and often in tension with other, completely different, values and behaviours. Things can be otherwise. We can live differently.

This does not mean there is no 'human nature' at all. Marx argued that human beings must cooperate, as social animals, in working together on nature to satisfy our needs. Our capacity for cooperative labour is key. In the process of such work, we can transform our environment, what we create, and ourselves.

This is, though, a radically different conception of human nature. It combines a grasp of what makes us essentially human (including our biological and environmental limits) with recognition of how we can transform our world. It is materially grounded while allowing scope for human agency, flexibility and creativity.

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We face a fast-unfolding series of interlocking crises that pose both a great challenge and a significant opportunity for the Left.

The Marxist Review is Counterfire's attempt to respond to the big questions posed by contemporary capitalism and will seek to develop a strand of Marxist thought that remains rooted in working-class struggle.



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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)
[Stop the War] Students
Against War open organising
meeting against conscription
Monday 11 May, 6:30pm
Zoom link: bit.ly/stwstudents

CREWE
[Stop the War] Iran, Trump
and European rearmament
Monday 11 May, 6:30pm
Big Mugs, 251 Edleston Road,
CW2 7EA

YORKSHIRE (ONLINE)
[Counterfire] The left and
elections: How radical are
the Greens?
Wednesday 13 May, 6:30pm
Zoom link: bit.ly/42r4e9r

BRISTOL
[Counterfire] War, fascism,
economic crisis: Why you
should be a socialist
Wednesday 13 May, 6:30pm
Kit Form, 37 Jamaica Street,
BS2 8JP

SCOTLAND (ONLINE)
[Stop the War] Why we need
an international anti-war
movement
Wednesday 13 May, 7pm
Zoom link: bit.ly/4nnbWLD

NATIONAL
[Palestine coalition]
Workplace Day of Action for
Palestine
Thursday 14 May
Workplaces nationally

PRESTON
[Counterfire] War, fascism,
economic crisis: Why you
should be a socialist
Thursday 14 May, 6:30pm
Preston Town Hall, Lancaster
Road, PR1 2RL

BATH
[Counterfire] War, fascism,
economic crisis: Why you
should be a socialist
Thursday 14 May, 7pm

The Grapes Pub, 14 Westgate
Street, BA1 1EQ

GLASGOW
[Counterfire] Can the SNP
deliver independence?
Thursday 14 May, 7pm
Renfield Centre, 260 Bath
Street, G2 4JP

LONDON
[Palestine coalition] Nakba
Day national demonstration
for Palestine and against
Tommy Robinson
Saturday 16 May, 12pm
Exhibition Road, SW7 2DB

NEWCASTLE
[Counterfire] War, fascism,
economic crisis: Why you
should be a socialist
Tuesday 19 May, 7pm
Tyneside Irish Centre,
43 Gallowgate, NE1 4SG

**DEVON AND
CORNWALL (ONLINE)**
[Counterfire] Sex, class and
women's oppression
Tuesday 19 May, 7pm
Zoom link: bit.ly/4mORi6D

GREENWICH
[Stop the War] Stop Trump's
wars
Tuesday 19 May, 7pm
Stage 19 (opposite Lidl),
Macbean Street, SE18 6LW

EAST LONDON
[Counterfire] Why is the
Palestine movement under
attack?
Tuesday 19 May, 6:30pm
Lab 7, Idea Store Whitechapel,
321 Whitechapel Road, E1
1BU

SHEFFIELD
[Stop the War] Welfare not
warfare: Oppose Trump's
wars
Thursday 21 May, 7pm
Showroom 5, Workstation, 15
Paternoster Row, S1 2BX

DUNFERMLINE
[Counterfire] War on Iran:
why has the west set fire to
the Middle East?
Tuesday 26 May, 7pm
Del Farquharson Centre,
Nethertown Broad Street,
KY12 7DS

HARINGEY
[Counterfire] Why is the
Palestine movement under
attack?
Tuesday 26 May, 6:30pm
All Good Bookshop,
35 Turnpike Lane, N8 0EP

PRESTON
[Counterfire] Sex, class and
women's oppression
Thursday 28 May, 6:30pm
Preston Town Hall, Lancaster
Road, PR1 2RL

FAVERSHAM
Swing Riots and Bossenden
Rising Festival
Sunday 31 May, 1-7:30pm
Mount Ephraim Gardens,
Staple Street, ME13 9TX

TOWER HAMLETS
[Stop the War] Why we need
an international anti-war
movement
Thursday 4 June, 6:30pm
Mulberry Hall, St Margaret's
House, 21 Old Ford Road,
London, E2 9PL

LONDON
[Stop the War] International
conference against war
Saturday 20 June
Central Hall Westminster,
Storey's Gate, SW1H 9NH

LONDON
[Book launch] Capitalism
and the media
Monday 22 June, 7:30pm
Golden Lane Estate
Community Centre, off Fann
Street, EC1Y 0SA

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.

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07807 123472

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ART & CULTURE



DJ PRÓVAÍ POSES WITH KNEECAP'S BILLBOARD QUOTING KEIR STARMER'S COMMENTS ABOUT THE BAND. PHOTO: KNEECAP / X

FENIAN

A rebellious slam on the British establishment

LUCY NICHOLS

Following a turbulent couple of years for Kneecap, their second album is a rebellious slam on the British establishment, not only for its attempts to silence the band, but also for its involvement in the genocide in Gaza, and abuses of the Irish people, historic and modern.

Made up of West Belfast natives Móglaí Bap, DJ Próvaí and Mo Chara, the rap trio spent seven weeks making *Fenian*. During these seven weeks, Mo Chara appeared before Westminster Magistrates Court and Kneecap headlined Wembley arena, both experiences forming inspiration for the anger and resistance woven through the album. Chants of 'free Mo Chara' from the protest outside the trial are sampled in 'Carnival', an early song detailing the farce: 'investigate the people joining armies far away / instead of the people opposing genocide.'

The album cover features DJ Próvaí, wearing his signature tricolour bandana and a blindfold with 'Fenian' (a slur often levelled at Irish Catholics but originally used by Irish revolutionaries who derived it from Irish mythology) scribbled across it. The name of the album is, according to an interview the band gave *NME*, part of attempts to reclaim the word from its colonial uses. Mo Chara explained that slurs had been similarly used against resistance fighters in Palestine, India and Kenya.

From the very outset, Kneecap's belief

in the power of language has been obvious. As a result of the band's success, the Irish language (Gaeilge) is surging in Ireland, and more children are taking up learning it, hundreds of years after early attempts to ban Irish people from speaking Irish.

Much of the album is in Gaeilge, though this is certainly no barrier to understanding it for a non-Irish-speaking listener. Lyrics include 'Fuck Keir Starmer ... genocide armer', or 'Tiofaidh ár lá'; sentiments that are easy enough to understand for most.

Throughout, rappers Mo Chara and Móglaí Bap weave Irish and English together, with Arabic also making an appearance on the song 'Palestine', featuring Palestinian rapper Fawzi.

Fenian is perhaps Kneecap's most political work yet, taking aim at the government and Israel's genocide in Gaza: 'It might be the Fenian in me, but I think it's quite clear to see / The Brits are at it again / Repeatin' history' (from 'Carnival'). The

single 'Liar's Tale', referring to the British government, is another example of this, the video featuring a clip of Margaret Thatcher as a zombie.

This album is also more mature than previous work. Softer than their previous album *Fine Art*, *Fenian* is more accessible to a mainstream listenership, though remains loyal to Kneecap's roots. The album's producer, Dan Carey, has worked previously with bands like Fontaines D.C., Wet Leg and Foals, which you can hear at points throughout, like in the opening bars to 'Cocaine Hill'.

More traditional hip-hop elements appear in *Fenian*, but so do the raunchy drum-and-base beats that make Kneecap. The first half of the album, featuring bigger hits 'Fenian', 'Smugglers & Scholars', 'Liars Tale' is loud, passionate and defiant.

This transitions into a more introspective, reflective mood, featuring history and Gaeilge lessons. 'Occupied 6' is about

the British army's crimes in the Northern Ireland: 'In the Occupied Six / Wasn't all about teenage kicks / International laws they were abusing / MI5 death squads collusion'. 'Gael Phonics' is Kneecap's very own English/Irish lesson. The album closes with 'Irish Goodbye', featuring veteran wordsmith Kae Tempest, an emotional goodbye to Móglaí Bap's late mother.

Having already reached No. 1 in the Irish Charts and No. 2 in Britain, *Fenian* fully deserves its popularity. Kneecap have announced that they are donating all royalties from the album to two Irish language organisations and the Palestine Solidarity Campaign.

That an album so unapologetically pro-Palestine and anti-establishment can do so well is likely a reflection of the power of the Palestine movement over the last few years, but also demonstrates how crucial it is that we have culture that stands up against injustice.

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