

# The inauguration of Donald Trump: a warning to the world

## Oligarchs and world leaders scramble to pay tribute

Donald Trump's inaugural address, was full of his usual demagoguery, including the claim he had been 'saved by God to make America Great Again'.

Prominent among his host of reactionary policies was his declaration of a state of emergency on the southern border. Within 24 hours he sent troops to block the Mexican frontier, effectively halting legal asylum applications and leaving thousands stranded there indefinitely.

His boast that he will launch 'the largest deportation program in American history' received a standing ovation. A Seattle judge immediately struck down his executive order depriving children born in the US to 'illegals' of their 14th Amendment constitutional right to citizenship. However, will the Supreme Court, packed with pro-Trump appointees, do the same for this and other right wing measures?

Despite his populist appeal to our 'marvellous car workers', his inauguration speech was really directed to big business, which will be enriched by his policies. Symbolically the three richest US oligarchs, the tech elite, stood behind him on the platform: Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, and Mark Zuckerberg.

Trump has tasked Musk with leading a new Department of Government Efficiency to slash federal government spending, suggesting \$2tn of the \$6.8tn budget could go. He promised 'the largest deregulation campaign in history' to boost business and cut taxes for the rich.

As expected he has withdrawn from the Paris Accords on climate change. Trump is a climate change denier, whose central domestic policy is 'drill baby drill'. He aims to expand US oil and gas production, with huge global repercussions for humanity.

The avowed antivaxxer has also withdrawn the US from the World Health Organisation, leaving its funding in shreds and hundreds of millions at the mercy of curable, but uncured diseases.

### New World Order?

Wielding the threat of huge tariffs, Trump is trying to bully China and Mexico, as well as 'allies' Canada and the European Union, into agree-



Trumpism unleashed: The president's second term will pour oil on the flames

ments favourable to America. He demands the handover of the Panama Canal and Greenland, offering to buy the latter but refusing to rule out using force in either case.

This is the background to Trump's claim that he is a peacemaker who will 'stop wars not start them' in the Middle East and Ukraine—for which he demands the Nobel peace prize! At best, this *Pax Americana* will impose unstable and reactionary agreements. A rotten normalisation between the Gulf monarchies and Israel will enable its continued dispossession of the Palestinian people—until the inevitable next conflict breaks out.

### Fascist threat

When Trump promised to plant the Stars and Stripes on Mars, Musk jumped for joy. Musk later gave a Nazi salute at a rally, for which he has refused to apologise.

Though Trump is not a Nazi Führer, nor MAGA (yet) a fascist movement, Trump remains dangerous. His extreme rhetoric, claiming hordes of violent illegal immigrants have taken over 'hundreds' of cities, raping and killing 'thousands of Americans', provides fertile soil for the growth of the far right.

Any mass deportation operation would terrorise 11 million undocu-

mented migrants and asylum seekers, with mass detention camps and a pervasive atmosphere of suspicion and informers everywhere. This would have echoes of the early Nazi regime.

Trump can also mobilise the Maga movement on the streets if he comes up against legal obstacles or losses in mid-term elections. If inflation takes off or there is a recession, Trump can hike his demagogic attacks to try to hold his base together, mobilising it against 'internal enemies'—immigrants, Black Lives Matter, environmental and LGBT+ activists, striking trade unionists.

Teachers, among the most militant trade unionists, could be targeted in 'anti-woke' campaigns. Likewise he could withhold federal funds to 'sanctuary' cities and states which defy federal immigration orders. One of his first decrees was to end legal recognition of transgender people.

On the other hand he pardoned and released the more than 1,500 '6 hostages' convicted of insurrection and violence, including leaders of the fascist Oath Keepers and Proud Boys. Members of these white supremacist outfits paraded triumphantly in their fascist regalia outside the Capitol to pay thanks to 'their' president. They are part of the Maga movement and a potential fascist spearhead that

Trump is willing to play with in extreme circumstances.

### Resistance

With this dark turn in US society, there will be defiance. Learning the lesson of the 2016 movement against Trump, workers and the oppressed must build their own grassroots resistance and draw the unions into joining the revolt against him.

An immediate task is to defend migrants facing deportation, with anti-raids committees prepared to put their bodies on the line. Many of those threatened with forcible removal have been in the US for 20, 30 or 40 years.

Another clear threat lies at the door of workers facing government job cuts or deregulated working conditions. If rank and file trade unionists can link strike action to defend jobs and conditions to political campaigns to halt the deportation of their workmates, this could start to bind the strands of resistance together.

In the course of these struggles and others, US workers and minorities must break their organisations of struggle away from the discredited Democrats to form a new fighting party of all American workers and the oppressed.

Dave Stockton

## I IN BRIEF

### Ethnic cleansing in Gaza: the next step

With the ceasefire in Gaza barely a week old, Trump called for the ethnic cleansing of the territory.

He told reporters: 'You're talking about probably a million and a half people, and we just clean out that whole thing and say: "You know, it's over."'

Bezalel Smotrich, Israel's finance minister and far-right icon, called the proposals 'an excellent idea', while Hamas naturally rejected the suggestion. Jordan has also stated that it will not be part of such an operation.

Nevertheless, despite the diplomatic and practical obstacles to conducting the biggest ethnic cleansing campaign since WW2, Israel is pressing inexorably on with its objective, both in Gaza and the West Bank.

As well as killing tens, and possibly hundreds of thousands, of civilians, Israel's war in Gaza took the form of a systematic destruction of the means of existence of a people. Virtually educational, medical, and government facility has been levelled along with hundreds of thousands of housing units. The territory's water and sewage treatment, energy and transport infrastructure have been flattened.

With hundreds of thousands of civilians living without shelter, healthcare or sanitation, the occupation forces have instructed Unrwa to cease operations by 30 January. This is a certain death sentence for thousands, as no organisation has the capacity to deliver aid on the necessary scale.

Trump's intentions, in line with both Israeli and American policy for decades, is to ethnically cleanse Palestinian land and pave the way for a greater Israel.

In his first term, Trump formulated the 'deal of the century', which would have seen Palestinians removed from areas like the Jordan Valley, and the environs of the major Zionist West Bank settlements.

There is no question that Palestinians removed from Gaza would never be allowed to return. Palestinians, who were kicked out of their homes in 1948, 1967 and continuously since then, already constitute the largest refugee population in the world. The global solidarity movement must resist a new Nakba.

Marcel Rajeky

# Child sexual exploitation scandal

## Racist myth-making obscures real causes of violence against women and girls

The spectre of ‘Muslim grooming gangs’ is once again haunting the headlines of the tabloid press. The racist myth that Muslim men are disproportionately perpetrating these crimes has nothing to do with protecting children and everything to do with whipping up Islamophobia.

Tech billionaire Elon Musk reignited the controversy when he reposted a far-right account claiming that the Government had covered up the scandal in Rotherham ‘out of political correctness’. Musk commented ‘the government officials responsible, including those in the judiciary, need to be fired in shame over this’.

Musk also accused Keir Starmer of being ‘complicit in the RAPE OF BRITAIN when he was head of Crown Prosecution for 6 years’. He has demanded a new national inquiry and called for a ‘new election in Britain’. This goes along with calling for the release of the fascist leader Tommy Robinson, who faces an 18-month prison sentence for contempt of court after falsely accusing a 15-year-old boy of being a rapist in his so-called documentary ‘Silenced’. A judge ordered the self-publicist not to show the film again nor to repeat the slander. After many violations of this court order, he was jailed again.

### The facts

Child sexual assault in Britain is a multi-faceted problem, perpetrated by both individuals and groups, assisted by the failure of institutions to protect children or hold abusers to account.

In 2022 Professor Alexis Jay published the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse report after a seven-year national investigation. Its findings concern the extent to which state and non-state institutions failed in their duty of care to protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation.

Jay’s report was based on 76 investigations, inquiry reports and publications. She found that there has been a catastrophic failure by all institutions to perform their statutory duty to protect children from



Trade unionists have led opposition to drastic cuts to children's services

all forms of abuse.

Her report highlights how the institutions adopted a culture of buck-passing, victim blaming and turning a blind eye to abuse. The reputations of individuals and institutions were prioritised over children’s safety. Statutory agencies were not adequately informed, in many cases not at all. Perpetrators were ‘moved on’ and the allegations not investigated any further. Records about child sexual abuse allegations were not kept and often destroyed.

Some institutions had no child protection policies or procedures while volunteer organisations were found to not have any proper records. Where there were policies and procedures, they were often wholly inadequate or not complied with. Previous enquiries’ recommendations were frequently ignored or only sporadically implemented.

The inquiry also highlighted wider societal issues where child victims who came forward were met with disbelief, fear and embarrassment. Many victims were accused of lying, were blamed or silenced without receiving help or protection. Victims and survivors commonly said that the negative responses meant that they didn’t talk about their experiences again for many years, which led some onto a dark path of self-destruction, alcohol and drug abuse,

and self-harm.

The report repeatedly states that due to poor and inconsistent data collection across all state services, it is impossible to draw conclusions as to the ethnicity of perpetrators. At no point does the report say that the offences are committed by one singular ethnicity, nor is it just happening in corner shops and takeaways as the far right would have us believe.

The scapegoating of Asian men as the sole perpetrators of CSE only serves one purpose—racist dog whistles to the far right. Not only does this result in violence against immigrant communities, it also causes victims of other offenders to be ignored.

Politicising the issue of sexual violence fails to acknowledge its lifelong impact and hinders the implementation of the vital and urgent overhaul our systems require. Specifically referring to the call for another national inquiry Prof Jay said: ‘Our mission is not to call for new inquiries but to advocate for the full implementation of IICSA’s recommendations.’

### Government response

Jay recently told MPs that the Tory response ‘was inconsequential, insubstantial, committed to nothing’. She highlighted these urgent recommendations:

- Mandatory reporting for all individuals in certain professions.
  - A statutory requirement to report any signs of child exploitation to the relevant authorities.
  - National redress, providing financial compensation to the victims who have been let down by the system, enabling them to get the help they need.
  - The creation and implementation of a Child Protective Authority, responsible for inspecting all institutions who come into contact with children and overseeing existing inspectorial bodies.
- None of these have yet been implemented.

Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch has clashed several times with Starmer over this issue, calling for a full national inquiry: ‘2025 must be the year that the victims start to get justice’. Badenoch met with victims in Oldham, but only after admitting she hadn’t met with any when she called for the inquiry.

In one racist outburst Badenoch blamed ‘peasants’ from ‘sub-communities’ in other countries, claiming there is ‘a culture of “this is not our problem” coming from the state’. She fails to remember that her party was in government when the report was published, so any failure to act on its recommendations lies first and foremost with the Tories.

Due to mounting pressure, Labour’s Home Secretary Yvette Cooper announced a ‘Rapid Audit’ which would start imminently to address the ‘current scale and nature of gang-based exploitation across the country’. It will be a three-month review led by Baroness Louise Casey.

In full accordance with the right-wing narrative the focus of this audit will be to look at ‘ethnicity data and demographics of gangs’, completely ignoring the systemic failures of the state at the heart of the report conducted by Jay.

### Action

Instead of pandering to the racists, Cooper needs to make the necessary reforms. The one failing that the right has correctly identified is the ability of police and other interviewees to refuse to cooperate with local inquiries. Their compliance must be made mandatory, on pain of prosecution.

For this the powers of local authority designated officers (LADOs) need to be increased. In particular there needs to be independent liaison officers to work with victims, separate from the police who are often distrusted and have a poor record of carrying out their duty of care.

Labour needs to reverse the cuts to council budgets, which continue to fall disproportionately on children’s social care and youth services, which are not statutory services. Those fighting the cuts, including council workers’ unions, must highlight this demand.

But at the same time socialists must emphasise the fact that sexual abuse of children is not the product of one community’s ‘bad culture’ but endemic to all capitalist societies. It thrives in conditions of poverty, where the frustrations and anger at the system are inevitably taken out on children, given the patriarchal nature of capitalism.

Here the far right’s defence of both capitalist exploitation and the family comes into contradiction to their apparent disgust at child abuse. They must be opposed, beginning on 1 February by confronting the fascist march to demand Robinson’s release.

*Millie Collins*

## Defend the right to protest

### MPs and activists targeted in major attack on democratic rights

For 18 months Britain has been at the centre of international opposition to Israel’s genocide of the Palestinian population in Gaza—at least on the streets. In the cabinet offices of Tory and Labour governments, Israel has been able to rely on our rulers’ ‘unconditional support’.

Fortnightly national protests, which at times brought hundreds of thousands of people onto the streets of London, did have an effect. Eventually Labour was forced into a mealy-mouthed demand for a ceasefire—but point-blank refused to end all the lucrative weapons sales or

military cooperation with Israel and the US which enables the Zionist state to oppress the Palestinians and invade and menace its neighbours with impunity.

Although the Israeli government has been forced to agree to a fragile ceasefire in Gaza, it has simply shifted its focus from the devastated coastal enclave to the West Bank. Buoyed by the refusal of its allies to oppose a televised genocide, the IDF has laid siege to Jenin, a major town in the north of the occupied West Bank.

Protests against the genocide have not been limited to street marches. Direct action by groups

like Palestine Action targeting Israeli weapons manufacturer Elbit systems, Workers for a Free Palestine picketing British arms factories, and increasing public support for boycotts and divestment (BDS) are part of a growing ecosystem of resistance to British imperialism’s support for Israel.

On no other question is the government’s policy so out of step with the opinion of the majority of the people, never mind the majority of Labour voters. But that is about to change, not least because of the election of Donald Trump.

Keir Starmer and his sycophantic Foreign Secretary David Lammy

do not want to be vilified as the defenders of oppressed people, especially Muslims. That, plus Israel’s reluctant acceptance of a ceasefire, has led them to clamp down on the right to protest in solidarity with Palestine. This has now become a key battleground.

### Escalation

While anti-protest laws proliferated under a series of reactionary Tory home secretaries, Labour has pointedly refused to repeal them. In fact it is taking them further. The prosecution of Palestine solidarity activist Tony Greenstein under anti-terror legislation is an outrageous attack on freedom of speech. Direct actionists are regularly locked up for months without trial.

On 18 January there was a new escalation. The police, with the

encouragement of the government, banned Palestine solidarity campaigners from marching on the BBC. A static rally held in Whitehall was subject to a slew of petty restrictions and heavy handed policing.

By the end of the day, 77 protesters had been arrested, including chief steward Chris Nineham and PSC leader Ben Jamal. This brazen attempt to shut down Palestine protests is a signal of what faces other movements.

The entire labour and trade union movement must come together to demand all charges are dropped against all those arrested on Saturday, and all those detained on other charges related to protests: over Palestine, the environment or self-defence against Tommy Robinson’s fascist supporters.

*KD Tait*

# For a workers' plan to rescue health and social care

Trade unions must fight for a planned, universal system, free for all and funded by progressive taxation

**Health Secretary Wes Streeting has announced that 'the NHS is broken'—and Labour doesn't have a plan to change that anytime soon.**

Waiting lists are at an all-time high, and the 8am rush for GP appointments has become a feature of everyday life. Meanwhile, emergency departments are full and patients are being treated in corridors, a state of affairs which Streeting has been clear isn't going to change any time soon.

The NHS will not fund social care for any but those with the most complex needs. Most care is left to be paid for by councils, and more and more by patients themselves. Costs can be hundreds of thousands of pounds, forcing many to sell their homes. Staff shortages and low wages mean care is often substandard. The lack of care at home then prevents the NHS from discharging patients from hospitals, further adding to the overcrowding.

There is a serious staffing crisis across the NHS and social care. Staff turnover is high due to low wages and poor working conditions, which leads to increased pressure on remaining staff. Brexit caused an exodus of essential migrant labourers and the government's 'crack down' on immigration is only exacerbating the problem. Around 19% of all NHS and social care workers are migrants.

Labour claims that it simply inherited the situation from the Tories, but that isn't the whole story. While 13 years of Tory austerity certainly



Healthworkers led the 2023 pay strike campaign, but were let down by their leaders and other unions

had a disastrous impact, it is not the underlying cause of the decline. Privatisation was baked into the NHS from the start by allowing GPs to be run as private partnerships. The organisation of hospitals into Trusts continued this trend, with each being run like a small business preventing effective centralised control.

Glorification of competition led to the introduction of the internal market under Thatcher, and privatisation was accelerated under Labour, with Gordon Brown's Private Finance Initiatives (PFIs). These relieved pressures in the short term, but put dynamite in the foundations, diverting public funds into

private companies and letting them milk profits by providing NHS services on the cheap. This undermined the NHS, leaving it ill-equipped to cope with austerity. Outsourcing has made providing healthcare both less efficient and more expensive, as profitable services are carved out and sold to the highest bidder. Taken together, these measures amount to a deliberate sabotage of a system which millions of workers rely on.

Labour's so-called 'plan' consists of a commission led by Baroness Casey; the first stage to be completed by mid-2026, where critical issues will be identified and medium-term recommendations given. Why this delay is necessary considering that reports

that have taken place over the last few years which already highlight the critical issues and recommend improvements is unclear. Phase two of the plan will not even report until 2028—a year before the next election is due to take place.

## Fixing the crisis

The NHS is being transformed before our very eyes into a two-tier health service, with private insurance for some, and a second-rate service for everyone else. This is presented as the only option to save the service, but in fact it paves the way for further defunding and eventual dismantling, as wealthier voters go private and working class voters

can't access NHS services.

The scale of the challenges demands a new approach, renationalising the NHS, incentivising workers to choose careers in the health and social care services by offering improved conditions, subsidised training and better wages. But this would mean a showdown with powerful corporate interests which Labour is unwilling to countenance.

Health workers showed the way during the strike wave, when porters, paramedics, nurses and doctors of all grades took part in the greatest period of industrial action in NHS history. But these disputes were invariably sold short by the union tops, who recommended workers accept a paltry 5% deal, only a quarter of the original claim. Despite the best efforts of the rank-and-file group 'NHS Workers Say No!', which organised a successful campaign for nurses to reject the deal. When the Tories used the undemocratic anti-union laws to stop the strikes through the courts, the bureaucrats backed down.

This demonstrates the need for a rank-and-file organisation across the entire NHS which can take control of disputes and prevent future sell-outs. Workers need to organise collectively, across all disciplines and pay grades to fight for what's needed; a real pay rise linked to inflation, an end to privatisation, and a properly funded health and social care service paid for by taxing the rich.

*Rose Tedeschi  
and Alex Rutherford*

## Troublemakers AGM

Left refuse to name bureaucracy as the enemy

**The rank and file network Troublemakers At Work held its first AGM online at the end of January.**

It was organised in two parts: an open session, 'How do we invigorate and democratise our unions?'; and a one-hour AGM for members.

Speakers for the first session were Andrea Egan, left candidate for Unison general secretary, Luke Dukenfield, a housing and benefits caseworker who has just won a union recognition battle, and Lisa Xu from Labor Notes (US). A wide-ranging discussion followed.

One of the main subjects was how to wrest control of disputes from union officials. Mass meetings and elected strike committees were seen as essential. Others wanted to know about 'open bargaining' in the US, where members were more involved from the start and even invited into negotiations. But it was not clear who was in the driving seat and who was the passenger.

Another hot topic was bureaucratic blocking of members and reps. Even after winning control of the executive committees in Unison and UCU, for example, comrades said unelected officials and general secretaries would block left initiatives.

This made it all the more surprising that a Workers Power

amendment to TM's constitution, calling for ousting the bureaucracy and installing workers' democratic control of our unions, met with hostility and was voted down.

We explained that we had to put our end goal into the document to inspire activists to aim for unions without bureaucrats, though this does not mean we refuse to make alliances with officials when they are fighting the bosses. However, even 'lefts' will always betray eventually unless we break them from their caste mentality.

Against this, comrades from rs21, ACR and the AWL said it would put off new militants. For the same reason they did not want to open up affiliations to socialist organisations. But discussions about political strategy are essential for militants and activists to engage in, not something we should hide or shy away from. Troublemakers could provide a forum for these conversations and develop workers' fighting strategy and class consciousness in the process.

Our other amendment was to encourage local branches of TM and sectoral networks, so that we could intervene in struggles, share experience and recruit new troublemakers.

As an example, our members in Leeds made a leaflet advertising the AGM, which was warmly received at

a school picket line—but there had been no way to coordinate these efforts with other TM members in the city.

This too was voted down, though only narrowly. The main objection here was that TM did not have the capacity centrally to do this. This seems absurd since local and sectoral groups could run themselves, relieving pressure on the centre.

Worryingly this puts TM on a course to become a British version of Labor Notes. LN confines itself to a biennial 'conference' of workshops, educational programmes and backing 'left' candidates in union elections.

As Lisa Xu pointed out, LN backed Shawn Fain's campaign in the United Autoworkers, but were immediately let down when Fain used the *Washington Post* to announce his willingness to do a deal with Trump. Another example of a left bureaucrat using the rank and file to get elected, then dumping them.

Nevertheless Workers Power will work loyally to build TM in the coming months because it is the best, and perhaps the only space where rank and file militants from across the unions can come together and discuss how to 'invigorate and democratise our unions'.

*Jeremy Dewar*

## Unison elections

Left campaign needs democratic control

**Branch nominations have opened for the NEC elections in Unison, Britain's biggest union. Time For Real Change (TRFC), a coalition of socialists and Labour lefts, is putting up candidates to retain control of the Executive.**

It is important for branches to nominate the TRFC slate, so they can campaign for them during the Spring election period. TRFC has held a majority on the NEC for nearly four years.

Their most important reforms have been to overturn the previous 'servicing model' for the union and introduce an 'organising to win' model, which puts branch organisation and workplace reps at the heart of everything the union does. This has already resulted in a growth in membership for the first time in many years.

## Andrea4GS

One bureaucratic obstacle is the current general secretary, Christine McAnea. TRFC is putting up Bolton social worker Andrea Egan to replace McAnea in next year's election. This would give the left more authority to transform the union.

While Egan's programme is limited, we urge our readers to support her campaign. Her strongest policies



include: standing up to the Labour government and fighting against it when necessary; smoothing the path for branches wanting to take strike action; and taking only her social worker's wage, rather than the £225,000 McAnea receives after perks are added in.

As Egan said at her launch rally in London, 'Unison with 1.3 million members is the largest union in Britain, but our profile is terrible. Hardly anyone has heard of us. That must change.'

Indeed. Change must come. But for that change to be meaningful, TRFC must also change. It has only recently opened itself up to individual members joining. Now it needs to develop democratic structures, so the rank and file can decide its policies and hold its elected representatives, including the general secretary should Egan get elected, to account.

*A Unison member*

# A message from the markets

## Starmer and Reeves feel the hot breath of global finance

**Under Keir Starmer, Labour's economic strategy has been guided by his determination to prove that a Labour government would not be a threat to big business interests.**

That was why Rachel Reeves, his Chancellor of the Exchequer, guaranteed not to raise taxes and to stick to existing, Tory formulated spending limits.

Once in government, Reeves withdrew the Winter Fuel Tax Allowance from the great majority of pensioners, just to prove to the City that she could be relied on to cut government spending, no matter who it hurt.

Labour's fear of a market attack like the one which brought down Liz Truss is well founded. Because of its origins in the working class movement and its reliance on trade union support, the wealthy expect Labour to come under pressure to raise spending on public services. What they want instead is privatisation of those services so that profits can be made from them.

The first full week of trading after the New Year provided an opportunity to test Labour's resolve. The Tory owned media shrieked about a panic on the gilts market. Kemi Badenoch, still trying to prove she's up to the job of Leader of the Opposition, insisted Reeves should resign because she had flown to Beijing when the 'markets are in turmoil'. One week later, the panic



The grown ups arrive

was, apparently, all over and nothing much had changed. So, what was all that about?

Despite the press hysteria, this was not a solely British affair; interest rates on government bonds were rising in other countries, too. Many factors contributed to the uncertainties that drove up those rates; political instability in Germany and France, fears for the future of Ukraine and the ongoing war in Palestine, for example, but the principal factor was the impending inauguration of Donald Trump.

It is widely believed that his policies, high tariffs and forced expulsion of 'illegal' immigrants, will stoke inflation in the USA. That would

mean interest rates staying high after markets had expected as many as four rate cuts this year. High rates in the US will attract capital from elsewhere, forcing governments to raise their own interest rates to try to hold on to their domestic capital which, of course, is not at all patriotic.

In Britain, the interest rate on 10 year government bonds (gilts) was 3.75% in September, and rose to 4.93% at the height of the January panic—a 16 year high. That points to increased costs for the government across the board, thereby threatening its economic policy.

This is what prompted Reeves to insist that she would stick to her 'fiscal rules'. Those rules require that

current expenditure, including debt repayments, must only come from current revenue, that is, taxation. As a consequence, if those repayments go up, spending on everything else, for example, health, education and social care, will have to go down. That is the kind of promise that 'the markets' want to hear from Labour.

To listen to the media, you would think these markets are uncontrollable forces, a bit like the Santa Ana winds that fanned the flames in Los Angeles at about the same time. In reality, of course, they are just very rich people and corporations whose only aim is to maximise their profits and grow their capital.

Hargreaves Lansdown, a broker dealing in gilts, reported 6,100 transactions in the first two weeks of January, amounting to £225 million in total. On average, then, each transaction was worth some £36,885. So, 'the market' in this case was people who could fork out £36,885 as a bet on an investment—no doubt just one of many—and as a result destabilise the entire national economy.

Where were the headlines about greedy financiers holding the country to ransom? Nowhere to be seen—after all, these are 'the markets' which governments must obey! In fact, worse than that, when interest rates return to more normal levels, as they are already doing, the price of the bonds will go up. When the buyers sell them at this higher

price, they will not be taxed, because such profits are not subject to capital gains tax. In other words, the government's own financial rules encourage this irresponsible behaviour.

The uncertainties in the global situation, which are the background to the sudden increase in bond yields, are real enough, especially with regard to the likely effects of a Trump presidency. In the UK, however, the supposed 'market panic' was quite consciously exaggerated. A mere 0.1% drop in inflation was enough to turn the tide.

The press barons who whipped up this hysteria are instinctively hostile to any Labour government. They realise that it will come under pressure from its voters and the unions to make the rich pay for essential expenditure on public services. For them, the episode was a warning to Starmer and Reeves to keep their promises to the City of London, not those made to its members and supporters.

That Starmer and Reeves were so vehement in their insistence on sticking to their fiscal rules should be a warning to workers and their unions that more than argument and protest will be needed to force this government to put the interests of the working class before those of capital. Only by organising to take militant mass action, including strikes, can we begin to tip the scales in our favour.

Peter Main

## ...and Labour's reply

### Fiscal rules are rules

**Every year the global elite assemble for the World Economic Forum meeting in the Swiss resort town of Davos. Every year the meeting coincides with the annual Oxfam report showing that the rich are getting richer.**

This year's meeting takes place against a backdrop of Trump's re-election, which will accelerate the climate disaster, intensify imperialist rivalries and dampen world trade via tariffs and taxes.

But like the COP conferences on climate change, the WEF meeting isn't a forum for addressing systemic crises. Instead, it's a venue for the world's super rich to rub shoulders with the politicians and policy-makers who keep the profit system running.

The presence of a Labour chancellor used to be one of the main events. But despite the best efforts of Keir Starmer and Rachel Reeves to present the UK as a good place to do business, the money men (and occasional woman) remain unconvinced.

Labour's response to this is to double down on their promise to take the 'difficult decisions' that will lead to 'economic growth'. Addressing the business elite in Davos, Reeves put this in terms both workers and employers can understand: in exchange for investment a Labour government will roll back regulation, push

through privatisation and 'crack down' on welfare benefits.

### Take up thy bed and work

We are left with no doubt as to what this means in practice. While the chaos of social care can be postponed into yet another commission that will not report until 2028, airports are to be expanded and developers given free rein to throw up housing, solar farms and warehouses with no plan.

Labour's commitments to net zero are set to be abandoned as it plans to reform planning laws and override environmental protections. Climate activists were denounced by Keir Starmer as 'zealots', as he plans a major power grab by central government to override local objections.

As the government passes its six-month mark with a stagnant economy and little progress towards its promise of 1.5 million new homes, Reeves has placed all her hopes in allowing market forces to let rip.

Meanwhile the 'Iron' Chancellor intends to cut Universal Credit payments by £1.5bn and sickness benefits by £3bn as part of a plan to shave £8.6bn off the welfare bill. In an attempt to reduce the UC bill, Labour wants state access to individual bank accounts so it can claw back DWP overpayments, which ministers misleadingly label 'benefit fraud'.

They also aim to attack the 3.7

million long-term sick by overhauling the notoriously unfair Work Capacity Assessment, so it is made even harder to claim sickness benefits. Also on Reeves' radar are personal independence payments (PIPs). Labour wants to reduce the amount paid out with stiffer criteria or even replace them with humiliating vouchers for specific items, increasing the stigma of disability.

Rather than making work less stressful, for example by introducing a four-day week with no loss of pay, Labour wants to increase the number of exploited workers by making the sick take unsuitable jobs and slashing benefits.

### Far right threat

Waiting in the wings is Nigel Farage's Reform party, which hopes to capitalise on the rapid disaffection with Labour's lacklustre programme by posing as an anti-establishment opposition to the mainstream parties and the political consensus that commits governments to making progress towards net zero.

In fact, Reform is the party backed by a section of capital that is most clear about handing over the NHS to private health firms, clearing obstacles to profit by ripping up environmental and planning protections, and intensifying labour exploitation by weakening trade union and employment rights.

Donald Trump's return to the White House will give the most reactionary forces in British society a confidence boost, and Labour has shown no sign of a backbone in standing up



The human face of 'difficult choices'

to him and his outriders. With foreign secretary David Lammy leading the way, cabinet members have been frantically swallowing their words in a pathetic attempt to ingratiate themselves with the new president and the US tech barons who they hope will invest in Britain.

For Musk and co., support for Trump and the far right is about protecting their business interests from the threat of Chinese competition on one hand, and from pressure to regulate the tech and AI industries on the other. Making provocative interventions backing far right challengers is one way to put pressure on governments; a more effective way is to have the ear of a president who threatens to torpedo the economies of whole

countries if they don't fall into line.

The rich have always used the power that their vast wealth gives them to bend laws and politics to their whim. But not since the days of the robber barons has this wealth and associated power been so openly flaunted and exercised.

Labour came into office promising to tackle the problems caused by an economy rigged in favour of the rich; Davos shows that they never had any strategy for doing so. Only a revolutionary workers government, democratically accountable to a strong, organised labour movement, could take the measures necessary to defend our class against these capitalist cultures.

KD Tait

# The Trump ascendancy

## Continuity and contradictions in the second term

**After three days of speechifying, executive orders and appointments of the most reactionary cabinet in US history, including giving fat sinecures to many in his own family, Trump turned to address the World Economic Forum at Davos. His rambling speech re-pressed his programme to the assembled global elite.**

Towering over the sober audience on a giant video screen, Trump boasted about his plans for the US while justifying his tariffs and bullying of smaller countries: 'many, many things have been unfair for many years to the United States'.

This narrative of victimhood is the flipside of *Maga's* aggressive racism and chauvinism, as well as its justification. So in his inaugural address he promised that 'Instead of taxing our citizens to enrich other countries, we will tariff and tax foreign countries to enrich our citizens. It will be massive amounts of money pouring into our Treasury coming from foreign sources'. But there are massive obstacles to Trump's project of remaking America in *Maga's* image.

He is in a stronger position now than in 2016 with a firmly *Maga*-dominated Republican Party and a much better prepared government of hand-picked true believers. Republican majorities in the House and Senate and a Trump-packed Supreme Court give him control of all branches of government and wide latitude to impose his policies.

### Global ambitions

Internationally the Gaza War and Israel's weakening of Hamas, Hezbollah and Iran, with the bonus of the downfall of Russia's ally Assad, opens the way for a Middle East settlement favourable to the US. This could of course be upset by further aggression of its Zionist guard dog, the courageous resistance of the Palestinian people and a revival of the democratic aspirations of the Arab, Iranian, Kurdish and Turkish 'streets'.

In Ukraine Trump's offer of peace or escalated war hasn't been taken up by Putin yet, but would force this devastated semicolonial people to accept the partition of their country and a peace of ruins, poverty and Western exploitation. Both settlements, brokered through a mix of bribery and bullying, would enable Trump to concentrate on China, a new global imperialist power and the USA's main rival.

Despite the first Trump administration's trade war and record tariffs, retained by Biden, China saw its biggest export surplus yet at nearly £1 trillion in 2024. China has become a leader in many tech fields, such as electric vehicles and AI, while its global investments have made it the main trading partner to South America, what the US ruling class considers its 'backyard'.

The US is engaged in a grand strategy to recover its own economic dynamism and preserve its position as the most powerful imperialist state. China is their growing, primary obstacle on the world stage. For Trump, his policies kill two birds with one stone, rebuilding US domestic



**Elon Musk's Nazi salute places him in a long tradition of fascist capitalists, including his car manufacturing predecessor Henry Ford, a notorious antisemite and funder of Adolf Hitler. While Musk's open promotion of far right ideas is relatively unusual among the 'liberal' tech plutocracy, there is sound business sense behind their support for a US president committed to using US state power to protect American industry from its competitors, and promoting racism and national chauvinism in pursuit of defending the supremacy of US capitalism.**

industries and more jobs for his base.

The 'Trump bump' in the stock markets, sending them to record highs, shows that investors expect profits to leap from turbocharged Republican policies—he boasts unprecedented cuts to government, taxes and regulation. Though there are genuine fears of inflation and tariff wars, exemplified by the quiet rise in the 10-year US bond yield since September, pricing in higher risk.

But as the 'tech bro' billionaires' conversion to *Maga* show, significant sections of the US capitalist class have shifted behind Trump since 2016, leaving their veneer of liberal concerns and causes behind. As a disrupter willing to upend international relations and trade in pursuit of recovering US power, one with a mass populist movement able to cut the Gordian knot of winning elections with a radically pro-business programme, they are betting that Trump can do what Biden couldn't.

### 'Drill, baby, drill'

Trump praises autoworkers, miners, teamsters and farmers who built America (no mention of slave labour!) and casts himself as a friend of labor with his tariffs, 'Drill, baby, drill' energy policy and pulling out of the Paris Climate Accord:

'With my actions today, we will end the Green New Deal and we will revoke the electric vehicle mandate, saving our auto industry and keeping my sacred pledge to our great American autoworkers. In other words, you'll be able to buy the car of your choice. We will build automobiles in America again at a rate that nobody could have dreamt possible.'

One dramatic convert is Shawn Fain, supposedly 'left' leader of the United Autoworkers (UAW) who regularly appeared at Labor Notes conferences brandishing its 'Troublemakers Handbook', sporting a T-shirt with the logo Eat the Rich. He endorsed Harris and

condemned Trump as someone 'who stands against everything our union stands for'. Now he has written a *Washington Post* op-ed, 'I'm president of the UAW. We're ready to work with Trump.'

Along with Teamsters leader Sean O'Brien who spoke at the 2024 Republican National Convention, this shows that the 'left wing' of the trade union bureaucracy cannot be relied upon to lead any sort of fight against Trump. Indeed the American workers' movement will remain paralysed as long as it is led by such people, whether they tie it to the likes of Biden and Harris or play bit parts in Trump's carnival of reaction.

On 21 January, Trump declared war against all forms of 'woke', cutting federal funding for schools supposedly teaching 'critical race theory', ranting 'we have an education system that teaches our children to be ashamed of themselves, in many cases to hate our country.' He has declared a purge of diversity, equity, and inclusion requirements from federal and state institutions, extending the culture war.

This will put teachers, civil servants, local authority workers and their trade unions in the firing line. Trump's sweeping rollback of transgender rights is part of this, with a ban in the military, barring transgender women from competing in women's sports and restricting access to gender-affirming care, hitting the estimated 1.6 million transgender Americans.

### Plutocracy

These right wing populist measures are intended to intoxicate his plebeian followers and hide not just his pro-rich policies but the fact that his administration is a veritable plutocracy, including 13 billionaires with a net worth above \$380 billion—higher than the GDP of 179 countries combined. They are there to serve their class at the expense of the

world and the great majority of the US people. The scraps from the table are merely ballast to keep his base, and union leaders, on board.

His plans to 'make the United States a manufacturing superpower and the world capital of artificial intelligence and crypto' involve a private sector venture, Stargate, projected to invest \$500 billion to fund infrastructure for AI and creating more than 100,000 US jobs. Plans to 'pursue our manifest destiny into the stars' and 'plant the stars and stripes on the planet Mars' will launch another cold war style space race, an adjunct to the arms race, to gain a lead on China. State subsidies will no doubt help open these new fields to US capital and outpace China and other rivals.

Abroad Trump talks loudly while waving around a big stick: tariffs. He has threatened 25% tariffs on Canada and Mexico, America's largest trading partners, and a 60% tariff on Chinese imports, though recently this has been reduced to 10%. On The EU he said, 'We have a \$350bn [£283bn] deficit with the European Union. They treat us very, very badly, so they're going to be in for tariffs.'

Given the US surplus in services to the EU, this is actually a much smaller deficit. There will also be problems for US firms relying heavily on Chinese production; for instance one million Teslas are now made in Shanghai. And Trump's tariffs generally end up smaller than his rhetoric—his advisors and billionaire backers are well aware of the dangers of a tariff war leading to trade crash and recession.

Commentators noted that despite his claim of 'day one' tariffs his pile of executive orders did not include them. Trump will use them to pressure Canada and Mexico into quick concessions, particularly on cars (also an issue with Germany), and force the EU to make similar concessions, including importing more

US gas. He also demands allies hike military spending to 5% of GDP, an impossible figure without slashing welfare spending (even the US does not spend this much).

### Contradictions

This points to the larger contradictions in Trump's promises and policies, which are radical but seek to offset the chronic, global overaccumulation of capital by lowering costs for American business: state spending cuts, tax cuts, deregulation but particularly by shifting costs onto other countries, semicolonial subordinates as well as imperialist rivals.

There will be retaliation, possibly leading to trade wars, undermining the capitalist economy further. Trade and production may not be a zero-sum game between imperialist powers but in the post-2008 stagnant economy there is a strong trade-off. If any country could pull off this beggar-your-neighbours policy, it is the gigantic USA, which accounts for nearly a third of the global economy, but there are limits to this.

Trump is committed to slashing Federal spending, deficits and debt (\$35tn or 120% of GDP) as well as high spending on defence, big tax cuts and a costly deportation campaign. The relative openness of the American economy to immigration has been crucial to its relative dynamism, while economists argue there isn't much scope to expand domestic energy production.

Union leaders might think Trump's immigration and economic policies put a floor under low wages while creating more well-paying jobs. In reality tariffs will lead to retaliation, hitting US business and tendentially undermining growth and jobs. Any extra investment will certainly advantage the anti-union South and Republican-voting states with 'right to work' laws, while any serious success with budget-cutting or Musk's new Department of Government Efficiency (Doge) points to a lot of unemployed, this time of white collar workers.

Crucially, tariffs (and in truth mass deportations too) will hike prices for Trump's plebeian base. Federal Reserve central bankers will have to hike interest rates, further hitting growth, jobs, and homeowners.

Given how inflation hit Biden's vote, this is a real threat to Trump's popular support. If Trump's populism crashes, his only way out would be to push them further right, towards fascism. Democrats could hardly counter this with a Roosevelt-style New Deal, but this offers no advantage for big US capital today.

The real answer is militant class struggle and an internationalism that rejects blaming immigrants or workers in Mexico or China for low wages or closed factories. We cannot rely on union leaders or reformists, from Sanders to the DSA, who dare not break with the billionaire Democrats. We need to build a revolutionary working class party that can win its spurs in the future battles against Trump.

*Andy Yorke  
and Dave Stockton*

## The struggle in Syria today

**The rapid collapse of Bashar al-Assad's regime in December 2024 was nothing short of spectacular for anyone who has followed the Syrian revolution and civil war since it began in 2011.**

The various stages of the civil war indelibly marked regional and global politics over the past 13 years: Russia's intervention in 2015 provided decisive air power to Syrian and Iranian-backed ground troops, while Turkey launched an offensive against US-backed Kurdish militants. For millions of Syrians, the fall of Assad is a moment of relief and jubilation. Thousands thronged the streets of Damascus in massive rallies celebrating the overthrow of his regime.

While the situation in Syria is fluid and far from stable, it opens new possibilities for struggle.

There have been reports of meetings organised by socialists, feminists, liberal NGOs, and the families of those who were disappeared in Assad's brutal prison system. Syrian lawyers, for example, have called for free union elections after the new authorities appointed an unelected council to govern the bar association.

### Prospects

While Turkey is now the key regional actor in Syria, the caretaker HTS government is seeking to allay Western concerns. The Islamist militia remains listed as a terrorist organisation by the US and the UK, but speaking at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Syria's new foreign minister confirmed their neoliberal orientation by assuring the West they are open for business. HTS unveiled extensive plans to privatise state-owned ports and factories aimed at convincing the West to end the sanctions and to attract foreign direct investment.

In a country where 90% of the population is already living under the poverty line, further liberalisation of the economy is likely to exacerbate socio-economic inequalities. When Bashar al-Assad replaced his father as leader in 2000, Syria shifted from a state-led welfare model to a neoliberal economy, exposing domestic industries to global competition.

This exposed long-standing inefficiencies in the Syrian economy and subsequently eroded public services, concentrating wealth in the hands of the rich while widening social divides. This was one of the main factors behind the 2011 uprising. This deepening of neoliberalism under HTS will expose their counter-revolutionary colours and could prompt future struggles from below.

Despite the challenges, there is currently a space for the forces of the Syrian left and the labour movement to come together, organise, and grow. There is also the potential to rekindle the spirit of the 2011 Arab Spring and inspire movements in the region to topple their Arab rulers, who are working hand in glove with US imperialism and Israel.

*Dara O'Cogaidhin*



## Syria: revolution, civil war and the fall of Assad

**Syrian revolutionaries can use the democratic opening to organise against the emergence of a new dictatorship**

**Ahmed al-Sharaa announced the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad's regime on 8 December, only 11 days after Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) launched their offensive from Idlib in the northeast of Syria.**

Though it was a coalition of opposition forces that took Damascus, it was HTS, the largest and most effective fighting force, who initiated and co-ordinated the seizure of power, and quickly formed a provisional government.

### The ongoing revolution

Assad's defeat was facilitated by Israel's attacks on Hezbollah and Iran's militia, and by Russia's preoccupation with its war in Ukraine. It was not, however, the result of a US-Israeli-Turkish conspiracy to remove a stalwart of the Axis of Resistance against the Zionist state. His fall merely confirmed that his brutal dictatorship was almost entirely dependent on the support he received from Russia, Iran and Hezbollah.

In fact Assad's overthrow was a continuation of the revolution that erupted in March 2011. That uprising quickly spread to all parts of Syria, even the cruelly repressed Kurdish areas (Rojava) and the Alawite religious minority, up to then considered Assad's social base. Their grievances were both social, the oppression of women and the Kurds for example, and economic, mass unemployment and poverty wages inflicted on 85% of workers, etc. It was not restricted to students and the intelligentsia but mobilised the urban poor, many of whom came from rural areas where the Ba'athist regime had handed over the land to crony landlords.

The people quickly formed Local Coordinating Committees to plan actions and deliver immediate supplies and services in the liberated zones. As the regime withdrew, White Helmets took over the tasks of first response and civil order duties, while local councils were elected or appointed to run the administration. As the repression increased, conscripts and commanders of the Syrian Arab Army defected, forming brigades of the Free Syria Army, though they were only loosely coordinated.

This phase of the revolution was marked by a spirit of unity amongst the various religions and sects, under the popular slogan, 'One, one, one Syria'. The participation of women and solidarity with the Kurdish rebels were pronounced. Unsurprisingly, religion was not absent, seen in the popular slogan, 'Syria, Allah, Freedom', to which pro-regime forces countered with, 'Syria, Allah, Assad'. Religion, as Marx said, is 'the heart of a heartless world' and flourishes in conditions of extreme poverty and repression.

Nevertheless, political Islamist forces soon emerged, particularly as militias, pushed out of Iraq took root in Syria. The most important were those of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who broke with al-Qaeda and formed the Islamic State in Iraq and Levant (ISIL) in March 2013. Turkey and, to some extent, the Gulf monarchies supported these forces as a means of punishing Assad. As they became better armed, they began to displace the FSA, through assimilation or by force.

The exception was Rojava. Here, the dominant force was the Turkish-based Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK), known in Syria as the Democratic Union Party (PYD). Their ideology had shifted significantly away from Maoism towards the 'libertarian municipalism' of the US anarchist Murray Bookchin.

As the YPG militia liberated areas, they installed local councils that carried out various democratic reforms, particularly aimed at the liberation of women. However, other opposition forces in Rojava demonstrated against the PYD's authoritarian rule and the lack of free elections. The PYD's Kurdish nationalism led them to do deals with the regime against other revolutionary forces. Increasingly, they stood aside from a Syrian revolution and Assad left them alone.

### Hayat Tahrir al-Sham

The turning point came in August 2013, when Assad attacked the Ghouta suburb of Damascus with chemical weapons, killing over 1,000. Although Barack Obama had declared this a red line which, if crossed, would lead to direct US involvement, there was no US response. This signalled that their priority was defeating ISIL, not regime

change in Syria. The PYD took this opportunity to make a de facto alliance with the US, renaming its militia the Syrian Defence Forces to avoid sanctions.

Assad's use of chemical weapons against civilians heightened sectarian tensions, as this was viewed (correctly) as an attack on the Sunni population. Ahmed al-Sharaa (then calling himself Mohammad al-Jolani), the leader of Jabhat al-Nusra, which had broken from ISIL but was still affiliated to al-Qaeda, declared an 'eye for an eye' policy of massacring Alawites and other minorities. As a result, Christians, Druze and Shi'ites fled to areas where their communities were in the majority, increasing sectarian divisions, in direct contradiction to the revolutionary democrats' early aspirations.

Hezbollah, Iran and Russia increased their support for Assad, knowing that they would largely escape US reprisals. The regime and its allies now made steady progress, culminating in the fall of Aleppo at the end of 2016, pushing the opposition into the northwestern province of Idlib.

This defeat prompted al-Nusra to reassess and adapt its ideology and strategy. It had already broken from ISIL; now it shed its ties with al-Qaeda, renaming itself Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (Committee for the Liberation of Syria) in January 2017.

Its spiritual leader, Abu Jaber al-Shaykh, described HTS as an 'independent entity' aiming for the liberation of Syria. They adopted the flag of the Syrian revolutionaries, with its three stars, and set up a civilian Syrian Salvation Government (SSG). When Shaykh died in October 2017, Jolani took over and deepened this turn, nurturing a strong alliance with Turkey and Qatar.

Through splits, fusions and bloody battles, HTS became the dominant military force in Idlib by 2019, fusing the disparate Islamist militia into a disciplined force. The SSG extended its power across the province, rebuilt civil institutions, started reconstruction and collected taxes. Externally, it projected an image of Islamic rulers who tolerated and protected religious minorities and elevated the role of women in society.

However, it established its own religious police force and security service, which enforced Islamic codes of dress, requiring all female students to wear the niqab. There were numerous examples of religious persecution and destruction of holy sites. HTS was hostile to Kurdish independence or federalism within Syria. Most importantly, the SSG defended the right to private property and capitalist profit in its contracts for reconstruction.

### Where next?

Despite the leading role of HTS, the overthrow of Assad's dictatorship represents the re-emergence of forces that can revive the long Syrian revolution for democracy and social justice. The initial 2011 demand for the 'downfall of the regime' has been achieved and democratic spaces have emerged as a result. Now, the provisional government of Ahmed al-Sharaa is the main threat to the fulfilment of the revolution's democratic demands.

His vision is a Syria that is wedded to capitalism, has friendly or at least tolerant relations with Erdogan's Turkey, and is thus hostile to the Kurds' struggle for liberation. He is appealing to the wealthy absolute monarchies of the Arabian peninsula and the Egyptian military dictatorship for support while conciliating both US and Russian imperialism.

Such influences are a threat to democratic advance. The temptation will be to eliminate all opposition, prevent multiparty democratic elections to a Constituent Assembly, repress any re-born independent working class movement and even rival Islamists. The aim of all revolutionary forces in Syria must be to stop this counter-revolution in its tracks.

The local coordinating committees and White Helmets must re-emerge from their underground existence and take to the streets to demand:

- The election in every urban and rural district of councils of delegates to control distribution of food, the return of exiles, reconstruction
- Free trade unions and workplace committees fighting for a living wage and income for the unemployed, the elderly and those with long term illness and disability.
- Full equality for women, including their participation at all levels of public life
- As soon as is practicable, the holding of elections to a sovereign constituent assembly
- A democratic national emergency plan for reconstruction, under the control of workers and with social ownership
- Workers' management of all abandoned enterprises and the confiscation of capitalist property
- Equal rights for all religious and ethnic minorities
- A free press and broadcasting
- Self-determination for Rojava, including the right to secede from Syria
- Reparations, aid without strings, from all the interfering regional and imperialist powers that have used the Syrian revolution for their own narrow and reactionary aims.
- Full support and aid to the Palestinian people's struggle for liberation from the chains of the Zionist settler state.

Last, but not least, the Syrian revolution will not fulfil its democratic aspirations unless the working class rebuilds its trade unions and forges a revolutionary political party that can contend for power and pose the need for a socialist Syria as part of a Socialist Federation of the Middle East.

*By Jeremy Dewar*

# Tailing liberals and bureaucrats

*A Radical Guide to Anti-fascism* by Samara Ali and Lewis Nielsen, SWP, October 2024, 42 pages, £3

**This is a timely publication from the Socialist Workers Party. Not just a reprint of old material, it includes analysis of last August's riots, Reform UK and Tommy Robinson's latest iteration.**

Ali and Nielsen open the pamphlet with a note of urgency, which is welcome, suggesting that the fascist menace 'is at its greatest at any time since the 1930s'. This may be an exaggeration in the British context, as we do not yet face the type of violence meted out by the National Front. But internationally the danger is there and growing.

## What is fascism?

The first half of the pamphlet deals with the definition of fascism, its current configurations and how Hitler could have been stopped. The authors dismiss the tendency to call any reactionary figures like Putin or Trump, fascist. This is correct; such an apparently radical characterisation actually hides from workers and minorities the real fascist threat behind such figures.

Instead, they characterise fascism as having three elements: counter-revolutionary; a mass movement; and a fake revolutionary mask. While they back this up with quotes from Trotsky, they do not take up and develop his characterisation of fascism as 'a chemically pure distillation of the culture of imperialism'.

The distinctive feature of fascism is that its goal is to build an armed force that can control the streets and physically destroy capital's main opponent, the organised working class. To do that it mobilises all those driven to desperation by capitalism's inevitable crises around slogans based on existing reactionary prejudices. Having identified the scapegoats, fascist leaders predict the existing political parties will be 'too soft' on them and, therefore, 'we will have to deal with them ourselves'.

This is how they whip up the

desperate middle classes, the long term unemployed and workers in the most neglected regions. That is why they present themselves as opponents of the 'elite'. From the beginning, the purpose of their rallies and demos is not only to publicise their demands but to identify both the potential street-fighters and the potential backers of a fascist party. That is the connection between Trafalgar Square rallies and the Southport riots. That is why fascist groups and parties are qualitatively different from other reactionary currents.

This is important for developing anti-fascist strategy and tactics. Such a strategy has to start from the need to prevent the fascists mobilising and organising their forces. At the same time, it has also to fight for demands that really express the needs of the working class and the oppressed in a way that the fascists' supposedly radical slogans do not.

## Old problems

As a 'guide' to fighting fascism, the pamphlet suffers from all the deficiencies that have plagued the SWP ever since the foundation of the Anti-Nazi League in the late 1970s. Indeed, Ali and Nielsen are very selective in retelling the history of the ANL and its successors, Unite Against Fascism and Stand Up To Racism.

Most glaring is their revision of the meaning of 'no platform for fascists' and what they mean by 'physical confrontation'. They rail against 'small, conspiratorial groups [that] mask up and run around chasing Nazis'. This is a gross misrepresentation of the campaigns that stopped the National Front, within which many of their own comrades took a leading role.

'No Platform for Fascists' was a slogan derived directly from the analysis of fascism's strategy for growth. The early mobilisations against the National Front's marches were organised by the left groups but soon

attracted much wider support, culminating in the 'Battle of Lewisham'. The fascists took a pasting there because the earlier demos in Bradford and Wood Green alerted local youth who certainly were not going to let a bunch of racists parade through their streets.

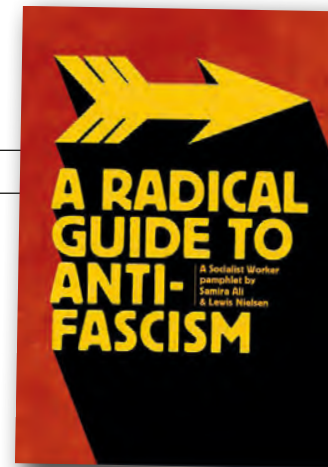
Immediately afterwards, the National Front announced a march through Tameside, in Manchester. The police, with the backing of the Labour government, banned any counter demonstration and that confronted the movement with a choice: accept the ban or mobilise to stop the fascists despite it.

What was necessary, as Workers Power argued at the time, was a campaign within the workplaces, the unions and the working class and immigrant communities for the biggest possible counter-demonstration and, within that, the organisation of self-defence groups against the fascist gangs.

The SWP thought otherwise. Together with Liberals like Peter Hain and some union leaders, they formed the ANL as an alternative movement and accepted the ban by organising a separate meeting some miles from Tameside. As Alex Callinicos wrote at the time, their view was that, while no platform was 'in the abstract, perfectly correct', for the ANL to adopt it would 'kill it stone dead'.

Instead, it prioritised Rock Against Racism carnivals, on several occasions ignoring NF marches through immigrant areas that were happening at the same time. SUTR continues this practice, often restricting mobilisations to passive protest, without trying to get near the fascists.

For example, when Tommy Robinson's English Defence League attempted to march through Tower Hamlets in 2013, SUTR held a rally a mile away in Altab Ali Park. Fortunately, hundreds of independent anti-fascists, including Workers Power, broke away



## Revolutionary strategy

The biggest failing of the pamphlet, however, is that it does not link the anti-fascist struggle to the fight for socialism. There is no mention of the need for a revolutionary party, nor even of the need to overthrow capitalism, the system that gives birth to fascism.

This is no accidental oversight. For the SWP the answer to fascism is anti-fascism, just as the answer to exploitation is militant trade unionism; the party is merely the organisation that binds different struggles together.

Trotsky was clear on this point. The answer to fascism is not anti-fascism, but socialism. The party of reactionary despair must be met by the party of revolutionary hope. How else are we to win workers away from the fake radicalism of Farage and Robinson? Certainly not by presenting ourselves as defenders of the Labour and union leaders.

We must do this, however, concretely, putting forward demands and forms of organisation that lead workers and youth towards the fight for socialism: black self-defence groups; taxing the rich and confiscating their property to pay for housing and social services for all; a rank and file movement to oust the bureaucracy and transform the unions into vehicles for socialism; and above all working class internationalism not only to welcome refugees and migrants but to overthrow global capitalism.

Some of these may appear distant goals, but if we don't start fighting for them now, in today's struggles, they will remain distant. Anti-fascism without anti-capitalism is a project doomed to endless repetition. Those at the sharp end of today's fascist advance, migrants, Muslims, LGBT+ people, cannot afford to put off the final reckoning with these murderous thugs.

**Jeremy Dewar and Peter Main**

letters@workerspower.uk

## Assisted dying

Dear comrades,

I'm writing to you with some thoughts about the recent vote in Parliament in favour of a bill to allow assisted dying for terminally ill people.

Much of the opposition to the bill was from disability activists, and people with strongly held religious beliefs. I also noticed when I went down to Westminster on the day of the vote that those outside Parliament supporting the bill were predominantly middle-aged and white, and that there were far more Bame people opposing it. Some of the arguments I heard against assisted dying were from people who believed only God has the right to decide when and how we die, or even that suffering is part of God's will and a 'test' of faith, as the Christian Church maintained in Medieval times.

It's clear that many people were concerned that the state of the NHS and its underfunding, lack of support for disabled people and the exorbitant cost of care-homes might lead more people to feel that assisted dying was a viable option. The answer to that is to fight for more support for the disabled and their carers, and more support for the NHS (not the window dressing with AI and no extra money proposed by Labour).

At some point we are all likely to become

disabled in one way or another e.g. loss of sight, deafness, difficulty walking, result of stroke, dementia and so on. People manage these conditions, often with insufficient state help. No-one wants to force disabled people to end their lives, rather the supporters of assisted dying want it as a choice. As in the case of abortion, people should have the right to choose. Having rights over your own body is hardly a revolutionary right in itself. People who are desperate and can afford it, can go to Switzerland for an assisted death, but that's hardly ideal.

As for the Left, for example Diane Abbott and Corbyn voted against the bill, citing worries about disabled people (many of whom actually support the bill). The left paper Counterfire quoted Abbott's statements and is against the bill.

We need to fight for more resources for the NHS and palliative care, a publicly owned, not for profit social care system run by well-paid and trained workers, and for an end to private medicine in our health care of whatever kind. The most worrying thing about this bill is not that people might decide the manner and timing of their own deaths, but that health minister Wes Streeting, who vehemently opposed it, might decide to outsource our assisted deaths to some private company. Capitalism already makes vast profits out of deaths without adding yet more.

**Janet Forsyth, by email**

## Alejandro Bodart

Dear comrades,

Below is a statement being circulated to highlight the case of Alejandro Bodart, a leader of the International Socialist League (LIS-ISL) who is facing charges related to activity in solidarity with the Palestinian liberation struggle. Sign the statement here: <https://tinyurl.com/freebodart>

The undersigned, as representatives or members of human rights organizations and social, labor, and political organizations of a very wide diversity, or in a personal and independent capacity, agree to address you in order to request the immediate acquittal of Alejandro Bodart in Case No. 127087/2022-3 that is being processed in your court.

While in the last 15 months the State of Israel has already committed more than 50,000 murders in Palestine and Lebanon - mostly women and children- sentencing Bodart for three tweets in solidarity with the Palestinian cause violates the human, democratic, and constitutional right to freedom of expression and is in fact functional to the impunity of such crimes. Reporting a genocide is not a crime.

*We welcome letters of up to 250 words. Send to info@workerspower.uk*

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# Workers power

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INSIDE  
**LABOUR  
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PAGE 4

## The Gaza ceasefire and prospects for Palestinian liberation

**Hundreds of thousands in Gaza and throughout Palestine have attended rallies celebrating the recent ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas.**

This agreement promises an end to a year and half of war and destruction, and the entry of aid including food, medicine, clean water, clothing and building materials. Furthermore, hundreds of Palestinians, including children, will be released from Israeli prisons.

Hamas claims this agreement as a victory. Indeed, Israel failed to achieve its goal of destroying Hamas' political and military infrastructure, much less expelling the Palestinians wholesale from Gaza. Israel had to recognise Hamas as a negotiating partner, even if only through the mediation of the USA, Qatar and Egypt.

By contrast, hardly anyone in Israel cheered the ceasefire. The relatives of the hostages have not forgotten that it was the Israeli government itself that repeatedly sabotaged prisoner exchange deals in order to continue its genocidal war. Ben Gvir's fascist Jewish Force party regards the agreement as a 'capitulation to Hamas', arguing to continue the genocide. The far right party, National Religious Party-Religious Zionism, led by Finance Minister Smotrich, remains in government, purportedly after Netanyahu promised a return to the bombing after the first phase of the ceasefire.

### Balance sheet

Whilst the Zionist state has failed in its maximum goals—eradicating Hamas and expelling the Palestinians—this victory has come at enormous cost. The Israeli army has left a destroyed, devastated country, with 50,000 people killed directly by the Israeli army while at least an equal number—and potentially many more—died from the 'indirect' consequences of the genocidal war.

The ceasefire agreement has three projected stages. In the first phase, lasting 42 days, 33 of the 98 hostages still alive are to be released in exchange for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners. The Israeli army will remain in Gaza, and negotiations are to take place on the details of its withdrawal, the exchange of further hostages and prisoners, and the 'self-government' of Gaza.

The reality is that a lasting agreement on the future of Gaza is virtually impossible as long as Israel insists that Hamas must be excluded



Jabalia in northern Gaza after its occupation by 'the most humanitarian army in the world'.

from any political participation.

The Israeli far right will campaign against the agreement. However, if Smotrich and his party leave and oppose the Likud government, opposition leader Yair Lapid and his party Yesh Atid have offered to support it and save Netanyahu for the entire duration of the ceasefire agreement.

Whatever the uncertain future of the ceasefire agreement it is a result of the pressure of newly elected US president Trump that forced the deal, against the resistance and reservations of the Israeli government. The pressure of mass protests in Western states and the political exposure of the character of Zionism in the eyes of millions may have contributed to the US and its Western allies enforcing the ceasefire, but it was not decisive.

Unfortunately, the causes are different. First, Israel, the US and wider West have achieved significant goals in the last year and a half. Most Arab states have not lifted a finger for the Palestinians. Their reactionary regimes have once again made it clear that their economic and geo-strategic interests are always more important to them than solidarity with the Palestinian people, to whom they grant only verbal and symbolic support. China and Russia also allowed the West and Israel to get on with it, limiting their criticism to UN resolutions and diplomatic jabs.

The so-called 'Axis of Resistance',

on which Hamas and the Palestinian left relied, has been massively weakened: Hezbollah defeated, the Syrian government overthrown and Iran attacked and isolated. Though unstable, Syria will not pose a threat to the Zionist state for the immediate future.

The Axis has been exposed as a paper tiger but more fundamentally, Hamas' assumption that their allies would be forced into the fight was also misguided. The leaderships of Hezbollah, Iran and Syria had no intention of doing so.

While Biden and his Western allies considered the total annihilation of Hamas and any other resistance organisation to be politically unrealistic because it would require the complete expulsion of Palestinians from Gaza. They were unwilling to force a ceasefire on Israel despite its genocide, which they hypocritically denied while shedding crocodile tears for 'the Gazan people'. Their only concern is that its continuation could strengthen the solidarity movement and see it extend into blockades and boycotts of military and economic links, or worse the Arab street, angered beyond patience with their rulers, begin to move. Above all, the US and its allies want to revive Israel's economic and political cooperation with the reactionary Arab regimes, particularly Saudi Arabia—and the ceasefire allows restarting the process

of 'normalisation' interrupted by 7 October.

### Where next?

The promises of a ceasefire and 'self-government' in Gaza and the West Bank are intended to pacify and appease the Palestinian masses. As with the Fatah movement and the PLO in the past, some imperialist powers would have nothing in principle against also openly or indirectly involving Hamas in government, ideally for them a 'government of national unity' with Fatah, but either way under Israeli supervision—i.e. one just as powerless, if not more so, than the current Palestinian Authority in the West Bank. Even this however is unacceptable to Zionist hardliners.

The ceasefire may lead to a lull in the violence, but it will not and cannot lead to a solution to the real problem, the systematic 76-year-long expulsion, disenfranchisement and oppression of the Palestinians. A 'peace agreement' negotiated by the imperialist powers and Israel with Hamas cannot bring genuine self-government, let alone liberation, to the Palestinians.

While Gaza would continue to languish in poverty, dependent on Western aid and under a regime of scarcity for years, the construction of settlements, land grabs and evictions in the West Bank would continue at the accelerated level the Netanyahu

government launched before 7 October. Such a solution would itself be a malicious caricature of the two-state solution, which has always been reactionary and utopian.

If the war and the experiences of recent years have shown anything, it is that there has not been, is not and will not be a just and lasting peace in the Middle East as long as the oppression by the Zionist state of Israel, which acts as a pro-imperialist gendarme, continues. Peace will only be possible if the oppressive Israeli state is replaced by a unified, secular, democratic and socialist Palestine in the context of a regional socialist revolution.

However, this also means that the Palestinian left and working class need a strategy and programme that goes beyond the orientation towards the 'Axis of Resistance'. Rather, the liberation struggle must be placed in the context of a revolution in the entire Middle East, in Arab states such as Syria and Egypt, but also in Iran and Turkey. But this also requires the fight to build new revolutionary workers' parties in Palestine as well as in the entire Middle East and a new International based on a programme of permanent revolution.

### The solidarity movement

In Western countries, we must continue the fight for the liberation of Palestine, which the ceasefire in itself will not deliver. In the period ahead, the task is to deepen our organisation and mobilise to provide aid and support for the Palestinian people. We must demand not only money and material aid, but also an end to all support for the Zionist state and the right of Palestinians to defend themselves against Israeli oppression and fight for liberation. Building a broad movement rooted in workplaces, schools and universities also requires fighting in the trade unions and reformist parties for a break with the pro-imperialist and pro-Zionist leadership.

- No weapons to Israel! Immediate cessation of all military, diplomatic and economic support for Israel

- Immediate withdrawal of the US army and all Nato troops from the Red Sea and the Middle East

- End the repression of the solidarity movement! No to the banning of Palestinian organisations and associations, their flags and symbols! Stop all prosecutions, surveillance and spying measures.

Martin Suchanek