

From resistance to revolution

The workers' movement needs a fighting strategy, not more talking shops

The Summit of Resistance is due to assemble in London on Saturday 29 March. The Socialist Workers Party, one of the main organisers, bills it as 'bringing together all those who believe' in fighting for 'an alternative to austerity, wars, climate denial and racism'.

It should be a forum to thrash out a strategy based on common action against the bosses and the right wing, from Kemi Badenoch to Nigel Farage and Tommy Robinson. It should also take on Labour in power under Keir Starmer and Rachel Reeves. But many activists will arrive sceptical that it will achieve any such thing.

The summit is based on a familiar model, essentially a rally where a few 'left' union leaders, MPs, journalists and celebrities give rousing speeches, with a smattering of strikers or floor contributions, and then everyone goes home.

What we need right now is a conference which debates motions and decides on action.

Counterfire and the SWP are past masters of organising the former and obstructing the latter. Their rank & file conference and workers' summit two years ago led to nothing. In 18 months of the mass Gaza solidarity movement, neither has attempted to bring the movement together in an inclusive national assembly.

Workers Power is approaching left groups and radical campaigns to join forces so that this time the national gathering really takes the movement forward on a democratic and fighting basis, with local organisations open to everyone who wants to fight the dangers that lie ahead.

Battles ahead

On that front there is much to discuss—the fact that despite the 2023 strike wave, real wages have not recovered from the losses of the 'savage austerity', the covid recession or the double digit inflation that spurred the strikes. And now Rachel Reeves, caught between the rock of raising taxes on the rich and the hard place of her self-imposed fiscal rule, faces her with a return to austerity, i.e. cuts in real terms.

Clearly public sector union members—in health, education, local and central government—need a strategy of combined action to resist the slashing of jobs and services. Council workers too need to act when the lo-



The trade union, antiwar and climate movements are marching on a long road to nowhere

cal authorities on the verge of bankruptcy do the same. The jobs-services nexus makes this into not simply an economic struggle but a political and social one too, requiring combined mobilisations to prevent sacking and closures and advancing the demand to make the rich pay.

Vitally connected to all these struggles is the issue of the Employment Rights Bill Labour has promised. This was slated to include repealing the anti-union legislation from 2016 and 2024 with the minefield of restrictions that prevent workers speedily reaching a simple majority decision to strike and the minimum service level rules that allowed bosses to order strikers to scab.

But worker militants need to demand all the Tories' anti-union laws, going back to Thatcher's Employment Act of 1980, are put in the bin. This will take a real mass campaign not just to demand their repeal, but to defy them.

If we want to truly build a force capable of seeing off the attacks aimed at weakening and disrupting all our struggles we have to fightback against the anti-immigrant and refugee hysteria formatted by the Tories and Reform and shamefully conceded to by Labour boasting of its mass deportations.

We have to show that housing shortages, the waiting lists in the NHS, low wages are not caused by immigrants but by repeated government cuts and the bosses' desperation for their profits. We have to defend refugees against deportation raids and win our fellow workers to opposing the poisonous racist propaganda of Farage and Badenoch, and resisting Yvette Cooper tacking behind them.

Closely linked to this is the international situation of mounting rivalry between the imperialist alliances. Trump is attempting to 'Make America Great Again' at the expense of allies and enemies alike, while encouraging Israel to ethnic cleanse Palestinians. Putin's Russia has devastated Ukraine and looks to colonise four of its provinces. China, America's main rival, is manoeuvring in the Pacific. And a weak and divided European Union is marching to the right, fearful of the racist demagogues the neoliberal 'centre' has created.

Starmer's Britain plainly does not wish to choose, holding out its invest-in-us begging bowl to Trump, Xi and the EU leaders, and offering to be an 'honest broker' between them. A man—and party—that ditched all their principles to attain office look

weak and pliable. Who would trust this former lawyer to stand up for truth and justice in the face of bullies?

The working class must, as Karl Marx said back in 1864, 'master themselves the mysteries of international politics; to watch the diplomatic acts of their respective governments; to counteract them, if necessary, by all means in their power'.

None of the imperialist states or alliances represent a 'camp' more peaceful or progressive than the others. Each and every one will, sooner or later, turn on those who put their trust in them, like the unfortunate Volodymyr Zelensky. If Trump weakens or even breaks up Nato, there is no reason to support calls for rearmament whether by Britain alone or by joining a European military alliance. We must revive the slogan, 'Not a penny nor a person for the defence of the system!'

Last but not least, we have to recognise that the climate movement is in a crisis. Mass school strikes and civil disobedience have given way to smaller splinter groups, which while radical have alienated many and now face heavy repression.

A new approach is needed, one that links the struggle to protect the planet with workers' action to control industrial production and take so-

cial ownership of energy generation, transport systems and infrastructure projects. With a climate denier in the White House and global temperatures soaring, this task is urgent.

All of these issues point to one conclusion: the working class and the oppressed needs to struggle not just for this or that major concession from our rulers and exploiters, but to replace their power with our power, the rule of the working class with its own armed power (state) and its own planned economy (socialism).

For that a fundamentally different party than Starmer's—or even Corbyn's Labour Party—is needed. The party we really need is one made up of thousands of rank and file militants in the unions, in the communities of the socially oppressed, in the multitude of campaigns. Along with this we need an International organisation of similar parties in every country, on every continent.

On 29 March Workers Power will be arguing on these issues and campaigning for a clear commitment from organisers and participants to take concrete actions for clear demands. We urge all workers, activists and socialists who want to go beyond merely talking a good fight to help us turn the summit of resistance into a real council of war.

Poll boost for anti-immigrant Reform UK

Labour's return to austerity will bolster racist claim that immigration is to blame for lack of housing and services

Recent polls showing Reform UK ahead of both the Labour government and the Conservative opposition have sent shockwaves through the political establishment.

In the general election campaign Reform took most of its votes from disillusioned Tories. But its voting base is now shifting, as it picks up support from disgruntled Labour voters.

Unable to respond to the multiple crises facing the UK, the Labour government has continued down the path of austerity. Despite vague assurances of change in last year's election, Labour has scrapped winter fuel payments for pensioners, kept millions of children in poverty by refusing to remove the two-child benefit cap, and has restricted public sector pay rises to below inflation. The Labour Party has garnered the same level of public hostility in six months as the Conservatives took over a decade to attain.

With their support plunging in the polls, Labour has resorted to bashing migrants in a blatant attempt to win back those tempted by Reform's racist message. It even adopted Reform's branding, with social media adverts boasting about the number of people the government has deported.

This approach was always doomed to failure. Studies across Europe, drawing on data going back to the 1970s, demonstrate that when centre-left parties move to the right, they end up alienating their own working-class support and embolden the far-right.

Frustration with successive Tory and Labour governments fixated on



Reform was built on splitting the Tory vote. Now it plans the same fate for Labour.

ruthless public spending cuts has led to a surge in support for Reform. As well as consistently topping the polls in February, the party has now surpassed 200,000 members and has organised rallies throughout the country. A recent study commissioned by Hope Not Hate indicated that Reform is attracting 10-15% of Labour voters in constituencies with large white working class populations.

Who are Reform?

Founded in 2021 as a relaunch of the Brexit Party, Reform has focused almost exclusively on immigration, portraying asylum seekers and Muslims as threats to the fabric of the nation. Nigel Farage dubbed the 2024 general election 'the immigration election'. The alarmism over the supposed 'invasion' of small boat crossings was amplified by the right wing

press and seized upon by a floundering Conservative Party.

Reform won 4.1 million votes (14.3%) and five MPs. The split of the right leaning vote was devastating for the Tory incumbents, with over a quarter of their voters in 2019 switching to Reform in 2024.

This strong performance has also placed the Tories in a strategic bind. Their new leader Kemi Badenoch has called for even more extreme measures on immigration, as well as stating that 'some cultures are better than others', but former Conservative voters are not in a forgiving mood after 14 years that have left the country feeling poorer.

The Tories' promotion of racist and Islamophobic policies over 14 years in government were primarily an attempt to deflect from the problems accruing from 40 years

of Thatcherite neoliberalism. In the end it helped to foster a fruitful climate for Reform. Incidentally Labour's record has been just as damning and had the same effect.

Farage has forged a long political career scapegoating migrants for the problems working-class people face. An admirer of Enoch Powell, who delivered the infamous 'rivers of blood' speech, Farage created his own moment of infamy with the 'Breaking Point' poster during the EU referendum. Set over an image of Syrian refugees fleeing war and persecution, Farage sought to link migrants and Muslims to violence and societal decline. Shortly before the 2024 general election, he repeated claims that British Muslims 'do not share British values' and that some towns had 'become virtually unrecognisable' as a result of immigration.

His shameless self-promotion as an anti-establishment figure obscures his true political identity. Behind this mask of a 'man of the people' hides a public-school educated former Conservative who followed his father into a lucrative career as a stockbroker. Even a casual glance at Reform's policies, by way of their 2024 manifesto, reveals their anti-working class character: support for a private insurance-based health service; tax relief on private school fees; and reducing corporation tax from 25% to 15%.

Reform has announced it will hold the 'largest ever rally in modern British political history' on 28 March in Birmingham, ahead of the local and mayoral elections in May. Ahead of this carnival of reaction, Zarah Sultana MP has been subjected to vile racist tweets for urging people to protest outside the rally. Anti-racist demonstrations are an important means of struggle—coordinated action pushed the far right off the streets in August—but the working class must go on the offensive too.

Labour's failure to tackle deepening poverty and widening inequality is fuelling the growth of Reform. The only way to successfully cut across far right ideas is for the workers' movement to fight for a socialist programme that is anti-racist to the core: one that unites workers against the bosses. In the coming period, we need to get organised in workplaces and communities to fight for better pay, housing, and public services. Only in this way can we build a workers movement which is capable of defeating the far right for good.

Dara O'Cogaidhin

Germany: major gains for the far right

The Left party made important gains but has no clear strategy

The Christian Democrat leader Friedrich Merz will almost certainly be the next Chancellor of Germany, probably in a 'grand coalition' with the Social Democrats (SPD).

With an 83% turnout, the CDU/CSU conservatives came top with 28.5% of the vote, up 4.2% since 2021, giving them 208 out of 630 MPs.

As expected though, the headline news of the 23 February election was the success of the far right Alternative for Germany (AfD) doubling its vote to 20.8% on a platform centred on 'remigration', i.e. expelling 3.5 million who have some form of legal status. With 152 seats in the new Bundestag, they will be difficult to ignore, especially if the CDU/CSU and the SPD clash over major issues.

Alarming, AfD performed well above average among people in poor economic circumstances (39%) and amongst workers (38%) and the unemployed (34%). It was also the second strongest party amongst 18 to 24-year-olds.

The SPD suffered a historic defeat, down to 16.4%, a loss of 9.3% and

with 120 seats the lowest score in a free election since the 19th Century. The party lost heavily among blue- and white-collar workers (12% and 15% respectively) and amongst the unemployed, too (13%). Its leader, Olaf Scholz, was the Chancellor in the unpopular 'traffic light coalition' (SPD, FDP, Greens).

The FDP, who pulled the plug on the coalition over the budget (not hard enough for this neoliberal party) suffered a well-deserved and shattering blow, falling by 7.1% to under the 5% threshold, meaning they do not retain a single seat in the new parliament.

The Greens, too, lost votes but significantly less than the SPD and FDP. This is because they have a social base among the salaried middle classes and the labour aristocracy. They also represent a 'liberal' minority faction of capital that shares their mixture of aggressive war policies, despite the Green New Deal and pseudo-democratic humanism. Interestingly, they lost 700,000 voters to the Left Party, which is mainly due to a movement of young voters away from the Greens.

So, Germany has clearly moved sharply to the right, confirming an international phenomenon, most starkly posed by the first weeks of Donald Trump's presidency, his vice president JD Vance and the world's richest man, Elon Musk, who openly endorsed the AfD before the vote.

The Left

The result for the Left Party (Die Linke) was the only bright spot. With 8.8% of the poll, up by 3.9%, and with 4,355,482 votes they have 64 parliamentary seats. It did exceptionally well amongst 18 to 24-year-olds, with 24% (up 17% compared to 2021). In particular 37% of young women voted for them. Obviously, this reflected their role in mobilising mass demonstrations against the AfD and the CDU/CSU collusion in parliament to pass a (non-binding) anti-migrant motion.

Also, Die Linke did set out a markedly contrasting programme to the other parties: calling for a fight against social inequality, taxing the rich, lowering rents and subsidising public transport. It has recruited 30,000 new members since 2023 and

the split with the right under Sahra Wagenknecht. Her party failed to beat the threshold.

Millions voted for Die Linke because it is perceived as the only opposition to neoliberal attacks, cuts, militarisation and racism. Its left-reformist programme, which promotes the welfare state, social redistribution, disarmament and pacifism, corresponds to the aspirations of these voters. In addition, it plays an active role in social movements and tries to present itself as an 'activist' party.

However, it has no strategy for pushing through its proposals against the resistance of the ruling class, except through what it calls 'rebellious' co-governance on a provincial level. But, where it co-governs, as in Bremen and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, it continues to tacitly accept deportations and go along with cuts.

Although its influence in the trade unions has increased, it stubbornly refuses to fight the social democratic-led bureaucracy politically or even to put pressure on it. Instead, it hopes to take over the apparatus itself in individual unions.

Die Linke focuses, albeit one-sidedly, on so-called 'social issues', such as the fight against extortionate rents, against price rises and for uplifts in social security. But, at the

same time, it tries to avoid other key issues. Although it presents itself as anti-racist and anti-fascist, it does not see the fight against racism and fascism, for equal rights for all migrants and refugees, as an integral part of a united struggle.

In this area, it pursues a policy of cross-class, popular front-like alliances (right up to the imaginary 'left' wing of the CDU) and rejects the fight for open borders, full citizens' rights and the establishment of self-defence structures against racist and fascist attacks.

Yet its tens of thousands of new members and over four million voters do represent a potential force for resisting the attacks of the bosses, the next government and the threat of the far right. Left Party members and their youth movement, Solid, can play a big role in standing up for migrants under attack.

Revolutionaries must work to get them moving in the workplaces, in the unions and on the streets. This will in turn make it possible to mobilise broader layers of the class, bring about a change of course in the unions, re-energise dissatisfied members and voters of the Social Democrats, the Greens and even non-voters, and bring them into active opposition to their parties.

Martin Suchanek
Workers Power Germany

Capitalism. It makes you sick

Labour threatens to force sick benefit recipients back to work

Liz Kendall says that young Universal Credit claimants are 'taking the mickey' by choosing not to work.

Never mind that Universal Credit pays a standard rate of only £393.45 a month, less than a person could make in a week on a full-time minimum wage job. Never mind that millions of jobs are so badly paid that 38% of UC claimants, 2.4 million people, are currently in work.

Liz Kendall's comments that 'we can't have a situation where doing a day's work is in itself seen as stressful', and that young people don't understand that work is 'just the nature of life and that isn't stress or pressure' are condescending. They will fuel anti-disability sentiment and encourage harmful stereotypes about mental health.

The implication that young people can't understand the difference between suffering from mental health challenges and hard work is patronising and untrue. Around 37% of all new claims are now mental health related. And is it any great surprise?

On 6 February Labour claimed



450,000 claimants will lose hundreds of pounds a month under new plans

that the 'broken' benefits system is 'letting down people with mental health conditions who want to work', suggesting that many who are classed as 'long term sick' are being prevented from re-entering the workforce. They say that changes to the benefits system will help those who are 'crying out for support' while 'people who can work, should work'. The underlying threat is that

there will be 'consequences for those who do not fulfil their obligations' to take any job on offer.

The consequences, it seems, will come in the form of huge cuts to the welfare budget targeted at the £80.8bn cost of Universal Credit and £39.1bn of disability benefits. Cuts were initially feared to be in the magnitude of £3bn but now look set to be much higher. Starmer's

self-described 'ruthless' cuts will devastate millions of people.

Poverty and discrimination

Many prominent disabled charities have spoken out against the cuts, fearing they will 'plunge more disabled people into poverty' by raising the threshold for accessing help, rather than focusing on 'invest[ing] in an equal future for disabled people'. Nadia Whittome, Labour MP for Nottingham East, said 'the changes that the government is proposing will do nothing to help people with mental illnesses. It will just make their lives harder.'

The truth is that poverty limits access to healthcare; hospitals and other health services in lower-income areas are typically oversubscribed and underfunded. Systematic racism and prejudice discourages people of colour from accessing medical help and sees them receive worse care.

Mental health claims are consistently dismissed and not taken seriously, leaving millions without support and allowing their illnesses to worsen. All this forces people onto the benefits system, for which they are demonised and left struggling.

Work may not be stressful for Liz Kendall, who earns £150,000 as a minister and whose banker

husband is on £600,000. They probably hire home helps (servants) to do their shopping and housework. For those at the other end of the scale, a bullying boss demanding you work faster for less each day is the final straw.

The real aim of these reforms is to force people into low-paid, part-time, flexible work. Our benefit system must instead provide a good standard of living for the disabled and unemployed, rather than poverty and harassment.

While many of those in receipt of benefits are not in employment, benefits are a trade union issue. The threat of poverty serves to keep workers afraid of unemployment and more willing to tolerate falling wages and worsening conditions. Our unions should demand that benefits are raised to match a living wage, paid for by taxing the rich.

It is clear where Labour's loyalties lie, and it's not with their working class voters. For the upcoming struggle against austerity, we need to unite the working class in resistance—employed and unemployed, able-bodied and disabled. To truly make inroads against capitalism and struggle for a society based on human need, we need a revolutionary party.

Rose Tedeschi

Labour turns on migrants

Ministers claim deportations deter people smugglers. But the truth is, it's right-wing voters who are the intended audience for performative racism

Fearing the electoral threat posed by Reform, Labour has launched a fresh assault on migrants.

Part of this campaign is a disturbing ad blitz, boasting of the highest deportation levels seen in five years. These advertisements are styled in Reform UK's distinctive turquoise, with Labour's branding conspicuously absent.

They have also launched a Facebook ad campaign targeting Labour defectors and those considering a switch to Reform. This campaign, which omits any mention of Labour, seeks to 'raise awareness' of the government's stringent measures against migrants.

This is not just hateful rhetoric. Since taking office six months ago, Labour has increased the frequency of deportation raids by 38% compared with the previous 12 months. These 'successes' have been widely publicised, with Home Secretary Yvette Cooper joining raids targeted at people with no 'right to work'. Dehumanising photos and footage depict handcuffed asylum seekers being herded onto planes.

New Bill

Labour is also attacking migrants with the new Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill, which has already cleared its first reading in parliament. The Bill 'creates a framework of new, enhanced powers and offences to improve UK border security and to strengthen the asylum and immigration system'. It will establish the vaunted 'Border Security Command', allow police to treat people smugglers



Local community prevents Border Agency raid in Glasgow, 2021

as terrorists, and give immigration enforcement teams the power to seize mobile phones.

By targeting so-called 'illegal working' and linking this to attacks on 'small boats', the government is propagating the myth that those arriving on small boats are economic migrants. However, the statistics don't bear this out. From 2018 to March 2024, 93% of those arriving in small boats claimed asylum, and over three-quarters were successful.

Labour's attacks are couched in the language of protecting vulnerable people from exploitation and the risks of the dangerous Channel crossing. However, they are no longer providing any alternative, with the old references to establishing 'safe routes' missing from both their rhetoric and their policy announcements.

Labour's cruel immigration policy not only escalates Tory attacks, it is also doomed to fail. It won't improve the economy, which relies on migrant labour, nor will it give Labour an electoral edge over Reform. Its only effect will be to legitimise the far right's hateful rhetoric. Indeed, Reform MP Richard

Tice took the government's policy as evidence that 'immigration is the number one issue because it's out of control.'

Labour has failed to present a credible plan to save the NHS or the economy. Further austerity will very likely be announced in June. This will fuel the fires of hate because the whole mainstream political spectrum, from Labour to Reform, is blaming migrants for our falling standards of living.

The trade unions hand over vast sums of money to the Labour Party and get nothing in return. The unions campaigned for Labour, so now we need them to step up and place demands on the government to tax the rich to fund the NHS, schools and council houses, rather than scapegoat migrants for their failure to do so.

Labour is governing on behalf of the bosses, not the workers who elected them. We need a real party of struggle rooted in the communities and committed to reversing the rising tide of reaction—a revolutionary party with a programme for overthrowing capitalism and establishing working class power.

George Banks

Airport expansion puts profits before planet

Labour thought they could get their betrayals in early on the environment. They ditched the £28 billion a year pledge for green investment and promised not to rescind any of the 100 new oil and gas licenses. They even abolished much of the Green Belt.

At the time Workers Power predicted that they would throw more green ballast overboard if the economy dipped and, lo and behold, they have.

Rosebank and Jackdaw oil and gas fields are set to open, nationalisation of the water companies has been ruled out, Starmer even attacked environmental activists as 'naysayers', abolishing their right to reject planning proposals. The erstwhile human rights lawyer has stood by as record prison sentences were handed out to climate protesters.

But most damning has been their U-turn on airport expansion. Labour has given the green light to expand Heathrow, Gatwick, City of London, Stansted, Luton, West Midlands and Doncaster airports. Chancellor Rachel Reeves defended the third runway at Heathrow with the words, 'Growth trumps everything.'

London Mayor Sadiq Khan has criticised the decision and for good reason. The expansion will destroy Harmondsworth Moor, a local wildlife park; parts of four rivers will be paved over, and a fifth will be diverted through a landfill site. The Airports Commission estimates a third runway would increase CO2 emissions by 4.4 million tonnes, 1.1% of Britain's total emissions.

Labour has justified the expansion by saying that, in the future, airplanes

will use Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF), comparable to jet fuel with a lower carbon footprint. SAF is made from agricultural residues, wastewater sludge and wood mill waste, as well as dedicated energy crops. Its proponents claim that it will provide 'economic opportunities to farming communities, improve the environment and even boost aircraft performance,' and SAF is compatible with most existing engines.

But while better than fossil fuels, SAF still burns and releases carbon at high altitude and is therefore extremely harmful. Indeed fixation on SAF distracts attention and funding from technologies that are truly sustainable.

Furthermore, the current level of supply lags behind demand, providing only 2% of all aircraft fuel. Costing 2-7 times more, you can see why the bosses are reluctant to switch. For them, profit trumps everything!

To protect the environment, Labour needs to restructure our energy and transport systems to massively reduce the use of fossil fuels. This means above all expropriating the big polluters and using their assets and infrastructure to plan our way out of spiralling climate change.

Instead of sacrificing environmental pledges at the altar of capitalist profit, we need a mass environmental movement, based on the industrial and social power of the working class, to force Labour into action and go on to struggle for a socialist society based on the needs of people and planet, not the greed of the boardrooms.

Alex Rutherford

Crisis of leadership in the rank and file

Without a conscious fight to transform the unions, the bureaucracy will always smother rank and file 'initiative'

The trade union movement in Britain saw something of a strike wave in 2022–23, in response to double-digit inflation and the cost-of-living crisis.

Yet in the following years the tide has definitely ebbed. In December 2022, 830,000 working days were lost due to strike action; by December 2024, they had dropped to 52,000.

Moreover the elements of this 'movement' remained isolated and limited to their own goals with no serious attempt to link the various struggles into a fight for a pay rise for all workers. At the same time national ballots of civil servants and local government workers failed to pass the legal threshold for strike action.

The one attempt to build a national movement, Enough is Enough, did not go beyond rallies in which strikers and left union leaders, notably the RMT's Mick Lynch, whipped up the crowds with class struggle rhetoric before going on to strike modest deals which took their members out of the firing line. The reasons for this failure lie with the role of the trade union leadership and the absence of a lasting organisation of union activists armed with a political perspective.

Bureaucracy

The trade union bureaucracy, both its left and right wings, owes its position to mediating between workers and capitalists. While it may be forced into more radical positions by its members demanding more, under the influence of rank and file activists, it has a vested interest in keeping this under control, so that its position is not challenged.

The left bureaucracy, traditionally



Health unions refused to coordinate action over pay or conditions

in the CWU, RMT and Unite, but also in education unions UCU and NEU, are usually willing to ballot for strikes and give fiery speeches—but their main aim is to bring the bosses 'to the negotiating table' avoiding the need for serious action.

Unite's Sharon Graham, elected in 2021, pledged to dump Len McCluskey's Corbyn era focus on the Labour Party and get 'back to the workplace'. Obviously building union presence in the workplaces and organising non-union firms was needed, and as a consequence Unite has won several significant victories, but this strategy has now revealed its limitations.

Unite's focus on key industries and limited gains guaranteed that the momentum of victories would not be generalised into a class-wide anti-government fight over the cost of living crisis. Joint action with other unions was avoided and even Unite's gains remained patchy, localised and sectional.

Not enough

Rail workers in the RMT, and postal workers in the CWU conducted solid national strikes in 2022–23. The RMT strikes in particular, buoyed by effective media appearances by the union's leaders, won widespread national support and had the potential to generate a real mass movement for automatic across the board wage rises to fully compensate for inflation.

The Enough is Enough campaign, led by the CWU with the support of the RMT and UCU, seemed like it could be the foundation for such a movement, uniting 'politics' with 'economics'.

But sensing the Tories' acute leadership crisis (three PMs in as many months) and their likely electoral meltdown in favour of Labour, these left leaders did not want to unleash a strike wave linked to a radical political movement that might upset Starmer's chances. A few rallies and it was literally 'enough'!

When the Labour government eventually arrived, union leaders were happy with a government they could 'do business with' and Starmer was careful not to pick a fight with them. Their passivity has been cheaply bought with concessions, providing they did not alarm the bosses, being courted with 'growth'.

Labour settled the train drivers' dispute in September 2024 with a concession of 15% over three years and the junior doctors' dispute with an 8% pay increase. It also pledged to repeal the draconian 2016 Trade Union Act (ballot thresholds) and 2024 Strikes Act (minimum service levels).

These plus concessions on fire-and-rehire and zero-hours contracts, combined with the pay deals, has led to a period of industrial passivity, with the partial exception of schools and some NHS grades.

Politics

Starmer is heading a deeply unpopular government, which will only become more detested. Reform has passed them in the polls. If there is no strong class alternative created, the hard right may become the main beneficiaries of economic stagnation and general discontent. Five years after Corbyn's defeat, the left remains disorganised and powerless.

The union leaders cannot be relied upon to provide the leadership required to change that. Even a shift towards more militant workplace activity will see them do everything in their power to limit it, as they did in 2022–23. The left cannot sit back and rest its hopes on a spontaneous outbreak of trade union militancy to drive the union leaders to the left.

What we need is a truly radical rank and file movement. But it is not

going to be built just by knitting together a handful of strikes over pay and conditions, nor by Broad Left candidates winning a few elections. Nor even by workplace reps while they remain hemmed in by the anti-union laws and bureaucratic procedures.

It will require a political leadership. But this is precisely what the British left is not offering.

Troublemakers, which aims to pull together union militants across industries, is the best initiative, the only initiative that goes some way towards organising the rank and file. But so far it has avoided setting itself up as a real network with local branches.

Strike Map provides a useful information exchange but has outsourced its educational wing to the left wing of the bureaucracy. Its reprints of syndicalist and Stalinist pamphlets from the 1920s and '30s offer history lessons rather than guides to action.

We Demand Change, a 'Summit of Resistance', animated by Counterfire and the Socialist Workers Party, has been called for 29 March in London. But these organisations have a long history of setting up 'coalitions' and one-off events, graced by a few left union leaders, which lead to no change in strategy or tactics on the ground and no politics.

For a genuine rank and file movement to be built, an openly radical, socialist political leadership must be formed within it, to link up and build upon struggles as they emerge, generalise their experiences and feed them into a national leadership. This is the task Workers Power sets itself and we encourage other revolutionary militants to join us and fight for it.

Tim Nailsea

Swedish dockers boycott Israel arms

On Tuesday 4 February, the dockers' union launched a six-day blockade of all types of weaponry for Israel.

This is exactly the kind of action that the workers' movement needs! It is perhaps somewhat surprising that the Labour Court has recognised the blockade, which is a form of strike, as lawful.

However, the employer Göteborg Roro Terminals (GRT) has taken the opportunity to dismiss the chairman of the Swedish Dockers' Union, Erik Helgeson. The reason given is an alleged violation of the Security Protection Act and disloyalty in connection with this regulation. However, GRT did not want to further substantiate its vague accusations. The company has also announced that it has reported Erik Helgeson to the police. Helgeson explains that he has not heard anything from the police and does not know what he is accused of.

In any case, it is clear that any accusation will only be a pretext. The company simply wants to get rid of a combative union chairman and test whether the pretext works. The



Erik Helgeson

entire trade union movement must recognise that this is an attack on the right of trade unions to elect their representatives themselves and give Erik Helgeson every support!

Spread the action

The action of the dockers' union is also a big and important step in the fight against the Israeli genocide. What is needed is a unionised total blockade of Israel, or at least a much more comprehensive one, which should last not only six days, but at least until all military action against Gaza is stopped and the people there are provided with the bare

necessities.

But of course, no one can blame the dockers' union for organizing a more limited boycott. A single and rather small union cannot do everything, and we must now hope that more unions will follow suit and use strikes as a political weapon, both against war crimes in other countries and for the interests of the working class at home.

So political strikes are still allowed to a certain extent, but we must assume the reactionary right wing government will try to change this. The trade union movement must vigorously defend itself against such attempts—but this is made more difficult by the fact that the Social Democratic and LO (Swedish TUC) leaderships have agreed to the recent restrictions on the right to strike.

- Support the Dockers' Union!
- Support Erik Helgeson!
- The workers' movement needs political strikes as a weapon against both war crimes and right-wing politics!

Arbetarmakt
Workers Power Sweden

Rayner's staff ballot

A ballot for industrial action has opened at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

Staff at Angela Rayner's department are fighting closures, mandated attendance and restricted promotion opportunities.

Birmingham, Newcastle, Truro, Exeter, Sheffield and Warrington offices will shut, with no guarantee that others are safe in the longer term.

Members of the PCS union in other bodies are already taking industrial action against arbitrary targets. A union rep told the BBC's Panorama, 'We've never been told by senior leaders at the ONS that there is a problem with productivity, there's a problem with quality, there's a problem with meeting deadlines.'

Rayner's Employment Rights Bill is facing fierce resistance from employers. That she is now aping Elon Musk shows how little faith we can have in her standing firm, without bringing to bear significant pressure of our own.

A PCS member

School strikes

The National Education Union is coordinating strikes across 10 schools in four London boroughs.

Teachers are on the picket lines on 27 February and 5, 11, 12 and 13 March, while some will strike on days in between as well.

The crisis facing schools has seamlessly transitioned from the Tory to the Labour government. At its heart is a funding crisis, which means that '76% of primary schools and 94% of secondary schools will face cuts next year' according to the NEU's Stop School Cuts campaign.

There is room for the coordination to grow, as school strikes are mushrooming across boroughs, academy chains and nationally.

We need all school unions to synchronise their strikes. Elected strike committees should coordinate the action from below and demand escalation up to and including all-out indefinite action.

- All out from 27 February!
- Tax the rich to fund schools!
- Workers' control of strikes!

Jeremy Dewar

Trump betrays Ukraine

A change of strategy will see the US and Russia attempt to partition Ukraine

Donald Trump's first hundred days in office have put the tech broli-garch motto 'move fast and break things' into action. A blitz of reactionary policies has dislodged longstanding pillars of the domestic and international US-based order.

At home, decades of the antiracist, environmental and anti-gender discrimination legislation, along with the democratic rights of American citizens, are under unprecedented attack from his dozens of executive orders. His billionaire henchman Elon Musk is tasked with the mass sacking of federal employees and huge spending cuts.

The assault doesn't stop at the US border, with Trump's campaign to deport millions of 'illegal' migrants, to tear up the environmental pledges agreed at the COP conferences, to end USAid, to threaten tariff wars with Canada and Mexico and to seize Greenland and the Panama Canal. The world was shocked by his demand to take ownership of Gaza and evict its two million people, breaking with three decades of the phony 'two state solution'.

Dumping Zelensky for Putin

Then Trump upstaged himself with his reversal of US support for NATO allies over the war in Ukraine which he promises to end... on the terms of the aggressor, imperialist Russia. Trump hasn't just abandoned Biden's policy of a carefully graduated supply of arms and funding for Ukraine's self-defence to keep the war going, he has endorsed most of Putin's justifications for his invasion. He even declared Zelensky a dictator and demanded Ukraine repays three years of aid by handing over \$500bn worth of his country's rare earth minerals.

These threats are aimed not just at Kyiv but at the UK and the European Union. Trump scarcely hides his contempt for the potentially rival bloc, which he labels an anti-American institution that has shaken down the US for decades in terms of trade and defence spending. The EU now has two enemies, in Moscow and Washington, with the latter by far the most threatening.

This turn in US policy, from unreliable and controlling ally to dangerous gangster, broke cover on 12 February with what Trump called a 'lengthy and highly productive' phone call with Vladimir Putin, a man he has long admired for his 'strength', i.e. brutality. In a report of the conversation, posted on the Truth Social media platform, Trump said,

'We both reflected on the Great History of our Nations, and the fact that we fought so successfully together in World War II. We agreed to work together, very closely, including visiting each other's Nations. We have also agreed to have our respective teams start negotiations immediately, and we will begin by calling President Zelenskyy, of Ukraine, to inform him of the conversation, something which I will be doing right now.'

When Zelensky objected to being



'It may be dangerous to be America's enemy, but being its friend is often fatal'

sidelined from the negotiations in Saudi Arabia and any deal over Ukraine's head, Trump replied by reversing reality, a well-worn right wing tactic: 'Today, I heard, "Oh, well, we weren't invited." Well, you've been there for three years. You should have ended it' and furthermore, 'you should have never started it'.

He went on to assert 'Zelensky has done a terrible job, his country is shattered, and millions have unnecessarily died', adding he 'better move fast or he is not going to have a country left'. To add insult to injury he claimed, 'Russia wants to do something, they want to stop the savage barbarism.' Trump is angling toward bringing Russia out of the diplomatic cold, ending sanctions and adding it to the G7, from which he says it should never have been excluded.

Meanwhile at the Munich Security Conference on 14-16 February, US vice-president JD Vance made it clear that Washington would intervene in European politics to ensure that forces akin to Trumpism could gain the upper hand in Europe. Elon Musk had already blazed this trail, appearing online at an election rally of Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) to urge them to shed any guilt complex about Germany's past, and attacking Keir Starmer for 'persecuting' fascist rabble rouser Tommy Robinson.

Vance declared there was a 'new sheriff in town' and the danger to Europe came not from Russia but 'from within' by social democratic and liberal leaders ignoring or suppressing their voters' justified fears of mass migration. He demanded that Germany should tear down its 'firewall' against the racist populist right's participation in government, plainly alluding to the AfD, though not naming it. Vance also snubbed SPD's Olaf Scholz, then still Germany's Chancellor, and met the far-right party's leader Alice Weidel

on the sidelines.

The alarmed European leaders, including Starmer, met on Emmanuel Macron's invitation in an emergency summit to discuss Trump's bi-lateral negotiations with Putin. But they failed to produce a united stance. Talk of creating a European defence system always meets with major obstacles: the lack of independence not only of Britain and France's nuclear deterrent but also of the command and coordination systems of the European armed services. Without the US such a system would take years to create and trillions to pay for.

Trump has only ripped off the covers from the fact that Nato is a protection racket, defending the interests of the major European imperialist states, but at the price of tying it to the geostrategic goals of the US giant. The fact that Macron, Merz and even Starmer are impotent means that they will be unable to halt any deal Trump strikes with Putin.

A reactionary peace

These developments certainly put semicolonial Ukraine in a dire situation. If the US pulls the plug on all its military assistance – financial, logistical, intelligence – it is unlikely the impoverished country can fight on successfully against its much larger imperialist invader without suffering further serious losses of territory and soldiers, and greater destruction of its cities and their civilian populations.

European Nato members and the EU would not be able to plug the gaps left by a complete US withdrawal, contra the pathetic claims of Starmer to 'turn the screws' on Putin with sanctions and Ukraine aid. If Zelensky signs on to Putin and Trump's deal, it will indeed be seen as similar to Munich 1938. However, even this analogy misses the mark: for Trump and most of the US bourgeoisie, looking to America's world

position, it is China not Russia that is the strategic threat.

If Trump and Putin succeed in clinching a deal and don't fall out over the spoils, Ukrainians may well be forced to accept an armistice. But Ukrainian workers and socialists should make it clear to the world that their country is being ripped apart by two gangs of armed imperialist robbers and by the sections of the Ukrainian capitalists who act as their agents. The EU states have already seized large parts of the country's agriculture; the US want to seize its mineral wealth; and Russia occupies one-fifth of its territory.

Socialists worldwide should denounce a reactionary imperialist peace based on annexations and continue to demand the complete withdrawal of all Russian forces from Ukraine. We must recognise Ukraine's right to continue to defend itself against Putin who still refuses to recognise the former Soviet republic and Tsarist colony as a sovereign and independent nation, making the chauvinist claim that the Ukrainian nation does not exist.

It should be for the Ukrainian people alone to decide if they want or are able to continue to wage their justified defensive war. If they do so, they have a right to take arms and other supplies from wherever they can get them. But Ukrainian workers should beware of the US and the EU reasons for doing so and organise a political struggle to expose and resist their plans to shackle their economy for decades to come.

On the left in Britain, Jeremy Corbyn, the Communist Party of Britain, the Stop the War Coalition and Counterfire have long demanded Ukraine make a 'negotiated peace' with its imperialist occupier. The *Morning Star* now writes 'peace talks are overdue and welcome' and 'nobody on the left should seek to prolong the fighting'. Trump's imposed peace has fully exposed the reactionary reality obscured by such

demands.

Despite criticising Trump and Putin, the British Stalinists and their fellow travellers on the question miss the mark. An imperialist-brokered peace deal always meant carving up Ukraine. It will not stop Putin's plans to rebuild the Russian Empire nor stop inevitable future wars—Trump wants to settle with Russia to hike tensions globally with China. The European working class must oppose Trump's demand for increased arms spending as well as calls for an independent European military, while opposing NATO rhetoric and indeed its existence.

America, Britain and the EU are of course on a global scale no better than Russia. But the tendency of the 'campists', nostalgic for the Stalinist USSR, to gloss over the fate awaiting Ukrainians in the four oblasts that Russia has laid claim to is astounding. Whatever territory Putin retains will only be rebuilt, if at all, as a highly militarised zone, where textbooks are rewritten to obliterate Ukraine as a nation and the Ukrainian language is extinguished completely. The struggle for democratic and workers' rights will be paramount in eastern and western Ukraine.

If there is an armistice or a peace deal, we should oppose attempts by the EU states to force the return of Ukrainian refugees. The Ukrainian workers, small farmers and poor should reject the economic policies subordinating to their land and labour to the EU and US economically, and demand both imperialist camps, the US-EU as well as Russia pay for this reconstruction and the clearing of unexploded ordinance and mines, so that the inhabitants can voluntarily return. The seceded eastern provinces and the Crimea must have their independence respected and the right to decide democratically which state to belong to or independence.

In Russia the task is to organise against Putin's FSB police tyranny, as the end of the war reveals the immense scale of the suffering, death and economic wastage, calling to account the criminals in the Kremlin and the capitalist oligarchs who supported it. For as long as Putin continues to rule, especially as long as he can pose as the winner, then in the states surrounding the Black Sea, in Caucasus and central Asia he will provoke new wars to 'Make Russia Great Again'.

But an armed Europe under its oldest colonialist and imperialist powers, Britain, France and Germany, forced to spending billions on rearmament, whilst slashing their welfare states to ribbons, will also lay the powder charges for the detonation of a European war if there is not a European revolution to stop it.

Indeed, only the European working class—providing it unites its forces across the continent and indeed with those of all the continents—can prevent further conflict and head off the horrific prospect of a Third Imperialist World War by a revolutionary struggle for power against their ruling classes.

Dave Stockton

Syria: women and workers organise

'Continued fighting will be what allows us to win'

The fall of the hated dictator Bashar al-Assad last year has left Syria devastated by fourteen years of war, prolonged and deepened by the rival regional powers, the US and Russia. As always it is women who bear the brunt.

Ninety per cent of Syrians now live below the poverty line. Three-quarters of the six million in dire need of food assistance women and girls. Over half the population – 12-15 million – are internally displaced or refugees, and 80% of those refugees are women and children. This social collapse has been borne by women in other ways too, from higher unemployment and gender violence to rising child marriage as a response to poverty.

Armed groups control much of the politically fragmented country. Syria's interim president Ahmed al-Sharaa, who took power with his Islamist militia Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), is busy consolidating his grip. Al-Sharaa insists he is committed to a democratic transition and rights for minorities and women. But many believe he is just buying time to convince Western powers to lift sanctions, key to refloating the economy.

While Joe Biden renewed sanctions on Syria for another five years in January, the US main ally among the Gulf states, Saudi Arabia, is emerging as a key financier for Syrian reconstruction. Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman is a renown human rights violator, especially when it comes to women—and Biden's successor, Donald Trump, is barely any better.

However, for the Syrian people the revolution has brought a welcome period of relative peace and legality, the first in decades, sparking an



Workers have protested across Syria against planned layoffs

outpouring of political discourse and organising. Workers, women, youth all have a stake in ensuring no return to war and the fullest democracy, so they can organise for their class demands and against new oppressive laws.

And that is a real danger. Al-Sharaa says it could be four years before elections are held, and a promised (but not yet convened) National Dialogue Conference will be consultative only.

The sole female minister, for women's affairs, supports Sharia law and threatens to exclude feminist groups that don't agree. A government spokesman, meanwhile, has stated that women are unsuited to be judges due to their 'biological and psychological composition' – 30% of judges are

currently women. Videos from 2015 have emerged showing justice minister Shadi al-Waisi overseeing the execution of two women for prostitution in his time as minister in Idlib for al-Nusra Front, forerunner to HTS.

To spread the regime's writ throughout Syria, HTS fighters and allies are violently imposing order, subduing rivals, remnants of the old regime and criminal gangs. Largescale intimidation, harassment and arrests, and summary executions have been reported. In the city of Homs 35 were killed in three days according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. Socialists report gay and transgender people being arrested in Damascus, Aleppo and other cities at gunpoint, while a peaceful protest

by democratic campaigners in Tartous on 9 February was attacked by a pro-HTS group.

'Syrian Workers Are One'

Meanwhile the provisional government is pushing through free market policies, promising to privatise state-owned oil refineries, cotton farms, furniture factories and ports. It is inviting private capital to rebuild infrastructure. One in four government workers face the sack, hitting unionised sectors that employ many women. The raising of the minimum wage by 400% still only covers one-eighth of the cost of living for a Syrian family, after years of hyperinflation.

The job cuts have sparked the first workers' protests against the regime. The sacking of 700 workers from the Daraa Health Directorate's hospitals and clinics saw hundreds join a sit-in protest. In the following weeks doctors at the Aleppo University Hospital and al-Nafis hospital in Damascus took strike action over the lack of protection from attacks.

In the past month, a Workers' Association for Democratic Change has been formed out of a network of oppositionist trade unionists formed in 2012 at the beginning of the Syrian revolution. They called their first co-ordinated action on 15 February with sit-ins outside the official trade union buildings in Damascus, Aleppo, Suwayda, Latakia and Homs. The WADC plans weekly action to follow.

They are organised in nine provincial coordination committees, each of which includes 'delegates' from sectors like electricity, health, the media, banks, and textile industries. A national coordinating committee sits in Damascus. Their list of demands

includes a minimum wage, permanent contracts, pensioner support and the reopening of state enterprises shuttered by the war.

Courageous grassroots activism has seen women tackling gender violence and deprivation brought on by war. Women have joined the protest movements in Suwayda and elsewhere since 2023. But many have been forced into exile, organising NGOs whose activity is restricted by international donors.

The Syrian Women's Political Movement held a conference in Damascus on 9 January, one of the biggest political gatherings since Assad's downfall. It announced the results of its consultation with the major sectors of the opposition. However, given the bourgeois nature of most of its participants, they could not even agree on rejecting sharia law!

Workers, women and the poor cannot afford such bourgeois blueprints for democracy, even if HTS were to listen. Syria's reconstruction costs are estimated at \$250-400bn. There is no way to refloat Syrian capitalism without making workers pay the price and women carry the heaviest load.

Assad's crony capitalists, Iran and the oil-rich Gulf States, USA and Russia should be forced to pay reparations. Al-Sharaa won't do this. Spreading the workers' committees and launching a working class women's movement, fighting against poverty and for full democratic rights, including the Kurds' right to self-determination, are the only way to contest this.

This means reigniting the Syrian revolution from below and refusing to accept a new dictatorship, which will only end up looking like the old one.

Andy Yorke

Congo bleeds in scramble for rare earths

In less than three weeks the Rwandan-backed M23 militia swept through the mineral-rich provinces of North and South Kivu, in eastern Congo, leaving a trail of destruction. A quarter of a million people have been forced to flee in terror, many not for the first time.

In late January, the M23 'rebels' surrounded Goma, capital of North Kivu and home to two million people. The DRC's army retreated to Goma airport, where they surrendered, while the M23, backed by around 7,000 Rwandan Defence Forces soldiers, looted the city's shops and ordered civilians to leave.

One of the worst atrocities took place after militiamen broke free male inmates at Munzenze prison, many of whom were M23 soldiers convicted of war crimes. According to the UN, the prisoners and M23 soldiers then proceeded to rape 167 women prisoners before burning them alive. As in other conflicts, rape is used as a weapon of war.

M23 then moved south to take the second largest city in Kivu region, Bukavu, on 15 February. Although Burundi had reinforced the DRC's crumbling army, they were no match for the battle-hardened Rwandan and M23 forces.

Thousands have been killed in the

fighting. An estimated 250,000 refugees have been forced from their homes to join the 7 million internally displaced Congolese people from 30 years of on-off warfare. With hospitals destroyed and food scarce, there is another humanitarian disaster in Africa.

Third Congo War

Rwanda's president Paul Kagame claims his troops are only in DRC to root out Hutu rebels, who fled there after the 1994 genocide of the Tutsis (the ending of which initially brought Kagame to power) and conduct raids over the border. This is the same excuse he used during the first two Congo Wars between 1997 and 2003, in which 5 million people were killed.

While there may be some truth in this and the origins of the M23 militia lie in a Tutsi mutiny inside the Congolese army, it is certainly not his reason for Rwanda and its ally Uganda starting what some are already calling the Third Congo War. Indeed, the M23 has declared its aim is to march to the capital Kigali and overthrow the government of Felix Tshisekedi.

The DRC and the Kivu region are particularly rich in the so-called rare earths, key to powering the digital revolution and green transition: cobalt (electric vehicles' lithium batteries), tantalum (mobile phones, medical

instruments) and germanium (semiconductors). The US wants to get round China's control of major global stocks. Congo has huge deposits of these as well as copper, gold, diamonds, and uranium, an estimated \$24 trillion of mineral wealth under its soil.

Proxy war looming?

Rwanda has developed relations with key powers big and small, from China (hosting the 2024 China-Africa Forum) to the US (its top aid donor), Israel, the UAE (biggest trading partner and buyer of metals) and most recently, a 2024 partnership with the EU to provide rare earths in exchange for €900 million investment in Rwanda's mineral supply chains and infrastructure. It provides other services too, e.g. a Tory 'safe haven' for Britain's unwanted refugees (and before that Israel's), but its strategic position at the heart of Africa and mineral wealth, including that of its unfortunate neighbour, are its USP.

So, after weeks of foot dragging, on the 21 February UN Security Council passed a French resolution calling on Rwanda to withdraw its troops, leading to the US to impose sanctions not on Rwanda but just on General James Kabarebe, the minister overseeing Rwanda's smuggling over the border of rare earths from Kivu! That's one more minister than the West has sanctioned



Rwanda has refused to accept Congolese refugees

over the Israeli genocide in Gaza but a weak gesture, and the Rwanda government has declared its solidarity with him. Going to press, the 'liberal' EU has yet to do the same.

Tshisekedi has enriched himself by signing off contracts for the same minerals with China. Now out of desperation, he has offered the US and Europe strategic access in return for security, potentially triggering a new scramble for Africa, which could be as bloody and tragic for the continent as the first one 150 years ago.

Socialist and trade unionists in the imperialist centres must stand firmly

against the pillaging of Africa's resources and propping up of the rotten regimes that facilitate it. The people of the DRC must control their own mineral wealth, rather than it be exploited for others' enrichment while they remain poor.

This must seem a tall order to the people of Goma and Bukavu today. But only by uniting the workers, the rural and urban poor across borders and fighting for a federation of socialist states across central Africa, can the endless taking and retaking of cities by bandits be ended.

Jeremy Dewar

Women and the rising tide of reaction

Defend rights for women and black workers against Trump's counter-revolutionary attack on civil rights

Trump's second term has brought into sharp focus the fact that progressive changes that seemed irreversible can be reversed, sometimes with the stroke of a Sharpie marker pen.

The accumulation of rights for women and other oppressed groups is always presented as a slow but steady march from the vote to equal pay, access to abortion and same-sex marriage, etc. When the gender pay gap is reported, it includes an estimate of how many more years it will take to fully close it.

But the global rise of right wing populism is turning back the clock and under the battle cry of 'anti-woke' threatening everything we have achieved since the 1970s in terms of equality and affirmative action for women, people of colour and LGBTQ+ people. If it succeeds millions could lose their jobs or be forced back into the closet.

Trump 2.0

Trump issued an Executive Order on his first day in office that set out to eradicate diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) from the government. Federal workers were ordered to report all DEI-related programmes, take down DEI-related government websites and social media accounts, and place all DEI office staffers on leave. Three million workers are employed by the federal government, and this initiative will not only affect those employed directly by DEI programmes but all those who benefit from them.

The same executive order also banned federal contractors from using 'discriminatory' DEI policies and initiatives. Companies found to be in breach could face hefty financial penalties. One in five American workers are employed by a federal contractor, and these workers, too, are finding safeguards against workplace discrimination removed.

Fatima Goss Graves, CEO and president of the National Women's Law Center, commented, 'In less than 48 hours in office, President Donald

Trump has eviscerated his promise to be a champion of workers, gutting basic workplace equal opportunity protections that have been in place for 60 years.'

A second executive order targeted access to abortion, removing federal funding from any organisation found to 'fund or promote elective abortion'. This measure affects charities across the world providing contraception, abortion and other healthcare. A 2022 study by The National Academy of Sciences estimated that Trump's anti-abortion restrictions on foreign aid led to 108,000 deaths of women and children in poor countries over the four years of his first administration.

Doubling down on this international attack on access to reproductive healthcare, the US resubscribed to the Geneva Consensus Declaration, an initiative from Trump's first term that protests the idea that women have a right to abortion.

The Executive Order also overturned Biden's decisions to categorise abortion as 'healthcare' and allow travel costs for elective abortions to be reimbursed by the Medicaid programme. These changes will make it even harder for women to travel to another state to access abortion.

The order itself celebrates Trump's role in the overturn of the historic abortion ruling *Roe v Wade* saying, 'For the first time in nearly fifty years, President Trump returned the issue of life to a vote of the people, from within the States.'

Since the Supreme Court overthrew *Roe v Wade* in 2022, 41 states have placed stricter restrictions on abortion; 12 prohibit abortion entirely.

Trump's anti-abortion supporters are pressing him to go further in restricting reproductive rights, with a federal abortion ban that would cover all 50 states and a crackdown on access to abortion pills prescribed via telehealth and mailed to patients, which are a lifeline to women in more conservative states.

Right-wing reaction

Trump's attacks on women, minorities and LGBTQ+ people mirror those of right wing populist governments across the world. For more than a decade, Hungary's Viktor Orban has used transphobia and homophobia to maintain his grip on power while promoting conservative family values. Alongside promoting a 'traditional' role for women, with tax breaks for those who give birth to four or more children, he has revoked legal recognition of transgender people and defunded gender studies in academia.

Argentina's Javier Milei cleared the path that Musk and Trump now walk, wielding a symbolic austerity chainsaw as he vowed to deliver economic 'shock treatment' by slashing public spending, closing whole departments, selling state-owned companies and eliminating the central bank. At a right wing rally in New York Milei handed over his chainsaw to Musk who brandished it delightedly.

Milei has cut funding to programmes supporting survivors of domestic violence, closed the Ministry of Women, Gender and Diversity and the National Institute against Discrimination, Xenophobia and Racism. He has banned gender-inclusive language in government documents.

The Argentine president declared last year that, 'The only thing this radical feminist agenda has achieved is greater state intervention to hinder economic process,' and has called abortion a 'completely murderous agenda,' prompting fears that his government will bring forward legislation to restrict women's reproductive rights.

With Reform polling at 24% in Britain, the nationalist AfD becoming Germany's second-largest party and National Rally already occupying that position in France, there is a rising wave of populist reaction.

These parties whip up racism, sexism and anti-LGBTQ+ hatred to justify or distract from neoliberal economic policies and increased

authoritarianism. They seek to convince heterosexual men that if they cannot get good jobs, this is because of discrimination against them by 'feminist laws', and likewise white men that equality legislation for Blacks and Asians is the reason they cannot get good jobs. Trump and Musk claim that inferior and incompetent candidates are promoted over the 'best'.

They represent sections of their national bourgeoisie which demand radical and potentially unpopular action to increase profitability and strengthen the national economy in the face of stagnant economic growth and turbulent global markets. Their solution is to cut public spending, reverse redistributive tax measures, and expand their share of global markets by economically dominating other countries with tariffs, threats or even military action.

When hospital waiting lists grow, inflation and unemployment rise, and the education system declines... they will blame migrants. And they will promote conservative family values in order to push responsibility for the social safety net from the state onto the nuclear family, the burden of which will fall on women.

Working class women

The nuclear family is central to capitalism because within it children are raised, those too elderly, sick or disabled to work are cared for. If the family did not perform this function then the state would be expected to. In wealthier countries, workers and women's liberation movements over the course of decades won reforms that transferred some of this responsibility to the state, for example childcare vouchers and adult social care.

Alongside this, attitudes towards women were challenged and changed, with sexist notions that the domestic sphere was a woman's 'natural' responsibility were sidelined, though never disappeared.

The decreased centrality of the nuclear family to economic life also opened up other opportunities to

challenge narrow, conservative concepts of gender and sexuality. LGBT people fought for and won the right to same-sex marriage, gender recognition and pushed back against homophobia and transphobia.

Against those seeking to turn back the clock, throw LGBTQ+ people back into the closet and women into the kitchen, we must organise to resist, bringing with us the collective strength of the labour and trade union movement.

The working class can only resist cuts to public services, rising unemployment and inflation if we resist the divisive ideology of the populists. And unlike the feminist movements of the past that so often stopped after winning rights for upper or middle class women, we need working class women's movements that fight not only to reinstate what we have already lost but to go further.

This means an anti-capitalist struggle against a system built on the exploitation of enormous numbers of women that work in production and services worldwide. Fighting the anti-woke, anti-DEI misogynistic ideology we have to take forward the struggle for women's liberation, a goal inseparable from socialism and workers' power.

Rebecca Anderson

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The femicide pandemic

In 2023, every 10 minutes, a woman or girl was intentionally killed by a partner or family member.

A report recently released from the UN showed that gender-related killings, or femicide as it is now commonly known, is on the rise around the world. While there has been some public outcry, this is certainly not enough.

Femicide is defined as an intentional killing with a gender-related motivation. It is different from homicide, where the motivation may not be gender related. It is driven by discrimination against women and girls, gender stereotypes or harmful moral or religious norms of what is 'natural'

or 'unnatural', long fostered by class society.

Femicide is the most extreme and prevalent manifestation of violence against women and girls, claiming just under 85,000 victims in 2023. More often than not these murders are not isolated incidents, but the continuation of the multiple forms of violence that women and girls daily experience at home, in workplaces, schools or public spaces. One in three women will experience physical or sexual violence from a partner or person known to them in their lifetime.

Even though the numbers presented in the report are alarmingly high, the true figure is likely to be much higher. An estimated four in

10 intentional murders of women and girls go uncategorised as femicide as there isn't enough information to identify them as such due to the variation in the way each country reports and investigates these crimes.

As a result, the two categories of crimes included in the report, and in general when reporting on these crimes, are murders committed by partners and/or family members. Although the data on many femicides is underreported and uncategorised, femicides committed by family members or partners are still the most prevalent form of gender related killings of women and girls.

Gender related killings of women

and girls represent a global crisis that affects every country. It is particularly prevalent in Africa, where an average of 56 women and girls lose their lives every day. Africa has recorded the largest number of killings with an estimated 21,700 victims in 2023.

There have been several particularly gruesome murders in Nairobi, Kenya's capital, where one victim was found dismembered in a park. These murders sparked outrage across the city with several demonstrations taking place last year, notably one in December 2024, where police resorted to using tear gas to disperse 'violent and aggressive' crowds made up of mostly women and children.

These murders are also connected to the increase of economic and social crises and the dislocation caused by war, where mass rapes

and femicides are used by military forces and militias, as is currently happening on a huge scale in Sudan and Congo.

There have also been demonstrations against femicide in France, Mexico, Colombia and Ireland in recent months, with thousands taking to the streets. However, the attempts at resistance have been fragmented and nationally focused. Many have even been spontaneous, with no organised leadership, and have lacked international solidarity and coordination.

To solve an issue of this magnitude will require a coordinated international movement of the working class to struggle not only against these crimes but against the patriarchal culture inseparable from capitalism and for women's liberation and socialism.

Millie Collins

Workers power

Workers of all countries, unite!

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY
**WOMEN
UNDER
ATTACK**
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No justice without a free Palestine

As we go to press, stage one of the Gaza ceasefire is due to end on 1 March. However, Netanyahu's war cabinet has repeatedly delayed negotiations on stage two, which should have started on 4 February.

The Israeli prime minister has also held back the release of Palestinian detainees, many held without trial, in an attempt to force humiliating concessions from Hamas and its allies. The Zionists hope this provocation will provide a pretext for resuming the genocide.

In fact Israel has continuously violated the terms of stage one, most egregiously with regard to the delivery of mobile housing units and building materials. Some of this material passed through the Egyptian side of the southern border crossing but was then held up on the Israeli side for 'security checks'. The Gaza Media Office has said that only six bulldozers had been let through, while there are estimated to be over 40 million tonnes of rubble.

When Hamas, in response, suspended the release of Israeli hostages unless Israel delivered the promised aid, Netanyahu threatened to resume bombing. Donald Trump backed him up, promising that 'hell will break loose', unless all the hostages were released immediately. Meanwhile Trump's shocking 'plan' to drive all Palestinians out of Gaza and turn it into an obscene holiday resort for the rich and powerful is merely a distraction.

This Theatre of Cruelty obscures the fact that Netanyahu is searching for a reason to delay or abort the ceasefire's second phase – which requires a total withdrawal of IDF forces, opening the Strip for full-scale reconstruction and allowing the delivery of food and medical aid, while finally opening negotiations to end the war.

This is bitterly opposed by the fascist parties led by Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben-Gvir, who have threatened to bring down Netanyahu's Likud-led coalition. It would also likely lead to a political reckoning for Netanyahu's failure to prevent the 7 October attack, and the IDF's inability to achieve his declared aim—the total destruction of Hamas. It could potentially also lead to Bibi's jailing for corruption.

A powerful factor delaying a full-scale return to genocide is that it would delay if not destroy Trump's larger agenda in the Middle East, for which normalisation of relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia is essential. However, only a fool would rely on Trump's rationality to make the fragile ceasefire stick.



Israeli raids in the West Bank have caused the biggest round of ethnic cleansing since 1967

War in the West Bank

Another major development ignored by the world's media, fixated on Trump's Gaza Riviera smoke and mirrors, is Israel's creeping 'Gazification' of the Occupied Territories on the West Bank, supposedly to wipe out the Palestinian resistance. The refugee camps of Jenin, Nur Shams and al-Far'a have from 2021 been the centre of Palestinian local resistance fighters, a united front of nationally bitter rival political groups (Fatah, PFLP, and Hamas) based on the courageous youth who have countered IDF incursions, inflicting casualties on the raiders.

In early 2022 the IDF launched Operation Break the Wave against these camps, in July of that year launching airstrikes, first on Jenin, then on other parts of the northern West Bank. Since 7 October the IDF has created hundreds of additional checkpoints across the West Bank and arrested up to 5,000 inhabitants, holding over 3,600 without charge or

trial. It escalated home demolitions and distributed firearms to settler militias who have forcibly displaced up to 20 Palestinian rural communities in the West Bank.

Meanwhile, IDF soldiers have kicked families out of their homes, separating men, women and children into different groups and marching them out of their neighbourhoods at gunpoint. UNRWA reports that this has led to the displacement of at least 40,000 Palestinians.

The current offensive, which started on the first day of the Gaza ceasefire and was renamed 'Operation Iron Wall', aims to 'change the security status quo' in the West Bank by definitively crushing the armed resistance.

On 24 February Defence Minister Israel Katz claimed another '40,000 Palestinians have evacuated from the refugee camps of Jenin, Tulkarem, and Nur Shams, which are now empty of residents', adding the IDF is preparing 'for a prolonged

presence in the cleared camps for the coming year and to prevent the return of residents'. For the first time in over 20 years Israeli tanks have been deployed in the West Bank.

In reality the plan is to ethnically cleanse enough Palestinians from their homes for full annexation, something Trump has indicated he will soon recognise, just as he did the incorporation of East Jerusalem in his first term. In May 2024, Israel reversed the Israeli Disengagement Law of 2005 and allowed settlers back into evacuated settlements in Jenin and Nablus.

Where next?

Despite the endurance and resistance of the Palestinians, this is far from being a victory that some supporters claim. The military-political strategy of Hamas not only gave the settler state the pretext it was looking for to move from apartheid to genocide. It also revealed Western imperialism's total support

for Zionism, enabling it to crush Hezbollah and silence Iran. In short the 'Axis of Resistance' is broken beyond repair.

The Gaza War proved too the complicity of Egypt's dictator Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and Saudi Arabia's crown prince Mohammad bin Salman, who never went beyond verbal condemnations. But these betrayals and setbacks only mean we must redouble our efforts to deliver solidarity to the Palestinians.

As long as Israel continues its bloodthirsty rampage, either in Gaza or the West Bank, the solidarity movement needs to take a full range of militant measures to aid Palestine, from mass demonstrations, to picketing arms firms like Elbit, to boycotting and divesting from Israeli trade and cultural exchanges. The Swedish dockers' blockade of arms supplies (see page 4) must be applauded and replicated.

We must also defend activists and writers, who are being hauled before the courts under bogus charges of antisemitism or terrorism, or being dismissed from their university positions for exposing Israel's genocide. Last but not least, we must protest any 'deal' involving the current or future displacement of Palestinians, placing no trust in any promises that such evictions would be temporary.

We must continue the fight to end the decades-long siege of Gaza, opening up full land, sea and air communications, including full access for journalists to report the scale of the crimes committed there. End the Zionist clearing and settlement of the West Bank and East Jerusalem! Dismantle the checkpoints and the armed settler hilltop fortresses, with the full withdrawal of all IDF forces! Convene free and independent elections by all Palestinians in Gaza, the West Bank and the refugee communities beyond—they should decide who governs them, no one else!

We revolutionary communists will continue to argue that the only just solution is a Palestinian state 'from the river to the sea'. Both Israelis and Palestinians must have equal political, economic, and social rights. This could itself only be fully realised if the workers of both nationalities unite to create a workers state, based on social ownership of the land, factories, and natural resources, and equitable distribution of labour and the necessities of life.

The formation of such a state must form a part of the revolutionary transformation of the region's states created by colonialism into a federation of socialist states across the Middle East.

Dave Stockton