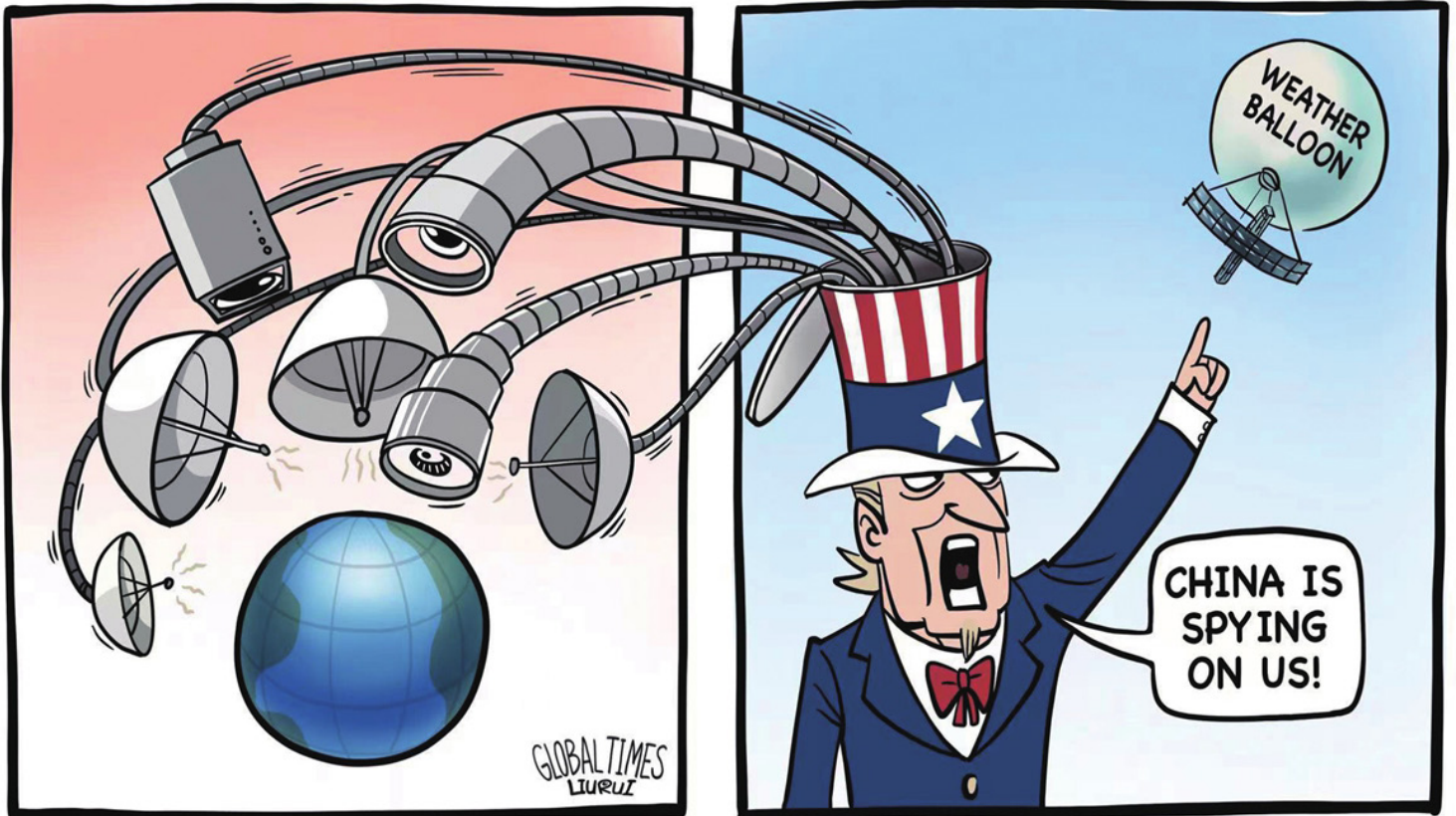


Proletarian



Workers must refuse to be intimidated by the barrage of lying propaganda that fills Britain's corporate media. It is the capitalists' job to try to stop us from taking power and building a socialist society; it is our job to do it anyway!



Hollywoodised news media a giant distraction machine

see page 8 ▶

Society



Support our teachers; save our schools!

It is not only their present ability to exist that Britain's teachers are fighting for, but our children's future.

The present teachers' strike is not just about fair pay. It is about the future of education in Britain. Essentially, it is a question of *class against class*. The capitalist crisis and the inflation crisis it has spawned are a vicious assault on working peoples' lives, and teachers are right to fight back. As the people tasked with helping children to open their wings and fly, teachers cannot tolerate being forced to crawl.

In today's conditions of crisis and war, when our ruling class prefers to spend millions on arms for Ukraine rather than on providing funds for pupils with special needs, and where our trade union and democratic rights to strike are coming under a sustained attack, workers need to stand together and demand the reconstruc-

tion of their unions on the basis of a truly class-conscious defence of pay and conditions.

We must oppose the forces of defeatism, capitulation and submission. We must prepare ourselves for a prolonged and multifaceted struggle. We must demand:

- The reversal of all privatisation and academisation in our schools and universities.
- The scrapping of Ofsted inspections and arbitrary measurements and hierarchies; let every school be facilitated in providing the best to its children!
- A meaningful increase in wages that not only compensates for rampant inflation but also reflects teachers' vital status in society.

- The scrapping of agency contracts and a return to secure employment for all teaching and support staff.

- The abolition of management structures aimed at coercing pupils and teachers alike into subservience to privatised business requirements.

- The restitution of trust and training so that teachers can once more be respected as the leaders of their classrooms.

- The provision of truly free education for all, away from any entanglement with the market, in service to needs of our children and our class.

We believe in an educational system that is centred on the deeply humanist teaching relationship between student and teacher.

We oppose capitalist undermining of education, of transforming our schools into business units, complete with a bureaucratic hierarchy of managers whose job is to implement government policy and to create a mechanism of surveillance and authoritarian control within each school, manipulating and bullying teachers and promoting a 'customer relations' attitude towards parents rather than treating them as respected collaborators in the care and development of society's most precious asset – the next generation.

We oppose all repressive measures against the our teachers' right to strike. We condemn those managers who are serving the ruling class by intimidating teachers out of joining a union, forcing them to keep schools open, and encouraging students to cross their teachers' picket lines.

Teachers have every right to protest against conformity and submission to the enforcement of business priorities in schools, which are trampling

on the interests of pupils, staff and society at large in the interests of profit-taking. We condemn those 'school leaders' who are taking the ruling class's bribes of executive bonuses and career 'success' in order to enforce this anti-child agenda.

Frontline teachers are in a very different situation from the administrative officers who receive CEO-level salaries in return for implementing the government's privatisation policies – policies that are adversely affecting not only the public and free character of education in Britain, but also pressing hard upon the working lives and conditions of our teachers.

Like so many other workers in Britain, our teachers have been subject to an incredibly rapid impoverishment over the last 15 years of austerity, which has drastically shrunk their incomes, and this is now being severely exacerbated by galloping inflation. But why are we being asked to pay this price? It is not the workers who are responsible for inflation, but the capitalists, who have been printing money to try to paper over the cracks of their economic crisis. In the process, they have become richer still, while the working class has been asked to pay the bill many times over.

As privatisation accelerates, the burden of teachers' workloads is becoming unbearable, while in the hierarchy of the contemporary capitalist school, classroom teachers now find themselves at the bottom. At the top are the financial director-managers, whose role is to extract profits by opening the school to business activities and the 'free' market.

These managers spend their time looking for sources of funding and ways to save money – and if that means keeping

Society

our classrooms without heating in order to balance their books, nobody seems to care!

Ofsted inspections enforce a parallel set of hierarchies, placing some schools at the top and others at the bottom. Schools with a majority of better-off students tend to achieve good school results, 'innovative practices' in finding resources, and success in attracting 'customers'.

Schools with a majority of poorer students and greater educational needs are left to their own devices to survive in the jungle of market competition, trying to get 'bums on seats' in order to secure funding. Educational priorities are everywhere overwhelmed by the priorities of business.

Schools in poor and immigrant areas are turned into cheap training warehouses for a future workforce of exploited proletarians. They focus purely on functional skills instead of on providing a rounded education; on narrow training rather than on developing general knowledge. The omnipresence of Microsoft and Google apps is killing the last vestiges of creative and fulfilling connection between teachers and their students.

As a result, teachers are leaving the profession in droves. Too many are succumbing to severe burnout, buckling under the intolerable pressures of endless bureaucracy and corporate-style meetings, of trying to do their jobs in a poisonous environment where their role and their dignity alike are undermined and undervalued.

It is not difficult to understand why so many teachers are so stressed and are losing all connection to the joy of teaching. Why instead of being enthusiastic, they feel physically and mentally drained. Like our overburdened health workers, they are daily picking up

the pieces of a broken system, staggering under the weight of the endless bombardment of extracurricular tasks, bureaucratic burdens and impossible responsibilities, which spread stress, uncertainty and anxiety.

Documents, instructions, circulars, ministerial decisions, new legislation and a daily downpour of new responsibilities are turning our teachers into unpaid computer scientists, nurses, doctors and psychologists, and driving them to the point of exhaustion.

As in our crisis-ridden NHS, we are witnessing an epidemic of 'quiet quitting' in the teaching profession, alongside an unprecedented wave of mental health issues, which cannot possibly be addressed by fatuous assemblies or 'wear yellow clothes' days. It is not a lack of colour that has brought about this avalanche of depression, but the weight of impossible expectations, lack of meaningful classroom support, abysmal salaries and drastically deteriorating working conditions.

We say:

- Another school is possible and we will fight for it.
- We will fight for the safeguarding of our children, which is at serious risk with every new staff redundancy in the name of saving costs.
- We will fight against every capitulation by trade union leaders
- The children of the working class deserve a militant and class-conscious educational movement that will link its efforts to those of all other striking workers. It is not only our present that we are fighting for, but their future!

These battles must be fought, because they are necessary!

The movement is here, the movement is us! Join us!

'No support, no training, no care for the kids'

Why are so many teachers so demoralised?

A young teacher explains why she left her first job within months of starting it.

When did you graduate from your teaching course?

July 2022.

How did you get your first job as a teacher?

Through an agency.

Why did you have to leave your first job as a teacher?

- As a newly qualified teacher I wasn't given the support and training that I was entitled to, despite asking management on multiple occasions.
- Management's lack of appreciation for the hard work that I put into teaching. I was a newly qualified teacher who had no early years' experience. However, I was told to teach a nursery class of 63 children, which included several children with special educational needs. Despite being thrown in at the deep end, I wasn't given sufficient support and training to guide me as a first-time teacher.
- My joy, love and passion for teaching was slowly eroding as a result of feeling so overwhelmed, under-supported and burnt out within the first few months of teaching.
- My nursery class deserved to be in a school where the management cared not only about their education but also about their wellbeing. The children were subject to an unjust learning environment. For months, the children had to learn in a freezing classroom

because of a broken boiler. For a week, the classroom had no running water, which meant that they had to walk to the main school building to go to the toilet, and that resulted in accidents. To watch the children endure such conditions saddened me every day, and I couldn't bear to be part of school that didn't care about or respect the children.

What did you learn from this experience about the state of education?

While studying for my degree, I completed teaching placement in several inner London schools, so I am aware of the never-ending funding issue. However, the lack of funding plus the combination of poor management results in the continuous downfall of children who are already labelled as 'deprived and disadvantaged' owing to their ethnic and cultural background.

These 'deprived and disadvantaged' children deserve to be respected enough to be given tailored, enriched and stimulating educational resources according to their attainment level, to be taught by competent and passionate teachers and support staff, and also to be taught in a rich learning environment that will enhance them.

Despite having such a challenge teaching experience as a newly qualified teacher, this experience has taught me how to be resilient and how to persevere within an unorthodox learning environment. It has also heightened my passion and love for teaching!

Society



Poor housing kills

The death of two-year-old Awaab Ishak has shone new light on a growing problem: the slum conditions being endured by too many in Britain today.

Within a fortnight of his second birthday, Awaab Ishak died.

Mr and Mrs Ishak had noticed mould in their rented home in 2017, and, after reporting it, had been told to paint over it, which they did. Life went on, and so did the mould, which, as per instructions, was again painted over when it reappeared.

A normal day to many, 13 December 2018 was a special day for Awaab's parents as they welcomed their son into the world: a "happy, smiley baby" taking his first breaths. He grew like magic, as little ones do, and ate and laughed and cried and played and, after all that, slept and, as any parent can attest, woke up a lot too.

The mould grew, too

In June 2020, Awaab's dad instructed solicitors about the recurring mould since, owing to 'policy', no repairs could be carried out without an agreement from the claimant's solicitors.

Since Awaab's parents were expecting another baby, a friend and sibling for their now 18-month-old boy, they were visited by a health visitor on 1 July. Awaab's mum and dad showed the health visitor the mould in their home and asked with help in getting moved. A week later, the health visitor wrote a letter "expressing her concerns about the mould in the house and the potential impact to the health of Awaab".

A 'disrepair manager' finally paid the family a visit on 14 July 2020 (three years after the first report) to verify the

accuracy of the family's claim. He inspected the property and confirmed that actions were needed: mould in the kitchen on the walls and ceiling required treatment; mould in the bathroom on the walls and ceiling required treatment; mould seen in the cupboard in the bedroom required treating using a three-part treatment. A plumber was asked to attend in order to confirm the same.

The health visitor re-sent her letter, four months later and at the urging of Abwab's father. On 20 November, a 'technical inspector' came to look at the house. His effort to aid this now desperate situation? He noted the mould "and also confirmed there was no effective ventilation in the bathroom as the fan worked but very poorly. The kitchen had no mechanical ventilation at all." He "recommended a survey to look at the ventilation issues and treatment of the mould".

Four professionals had by this point visited the house,

yet no action whatsoever had been taken. The coroner who investigated the death of little Awaab summed it up:

"I find as a matter of fact that no action was taken and from July 2020 until December 2020 Awaab continued to have chronic exposure to harmful mould." (Awaab Ishak death: the coroner's verdict in full by Jack Simpson, Inside Housing, 16 November 2022)

On 19 December 2020, Awaab's parents carried their now two-year-old boy, struggling to breathe, into Rochdale Urgent Care Centre. He was transferred to another urgent care centre, given treatment, diagnosed with suspected croup and, as he was showing signs of recovery, sent home. On arriving home, he deteriorated again and, though his parents took him back to the hospital, their son died.

He died, robbed of his chance to become part of the world before he even knew how to spell the word.

Slum housing

Within a fortnight of turning two, Awaab Ishak died as a direct result of black mould and fungus infesting his first and only home. That is one way of putting this event, an event that ought to be unimaginable in a 'rich, developed country'. We would put it a different way: he was killed.

Our view was first summed up by Friedrich Engels in his classic work on the conditions of life for workers in the cities of 1840s Britain:

"When one individual inflicts bodily injury upon another such that death results, we call the deed manslaughter; when the assailant knew in advance that the injury would be fatal, we call his deed murder.

"But when society places hundreds of proletarians in

Society

such a position that they inevitably meet a too early and an unnatural death, one which is quite as much a death by violence as that by the sword or bullet; when it deprives thousands of the necessities of life, places them under conditions in which they cannot live – forces them, through the strong arm of the law, to remain in such conditions until that death ensues which is the inevitable consequence – knows that these thousands of victims must perish, and yet permits these conditions to remain, its deed is murder just as surely as the deed of the single individual; disguised, malicious murder, murder against which none can defend himself, which does not seem what it is, because no man sees the murderer, because the death of the victim seems a natural one, since the offence is more one of omission than of commission.

“But murder it remains.” (Condition of the Working Class in England, 1845, Chapter 5)

Nearly half a million homes in England have serious problems with condensation and mould, leading England housing ombudsman Richard Blakeway to report that landlords need to make a more serious effort to tackle the “real risk of worsening damp and mould issues”, complaining that there is an “over-reliance being placed on the contribution of a tenant’s lifestyle” as the cause of the problem. (Housing Ombudsman Service: Spotlight on Damp and Mould. It’s not lifestyle, October 2021)

Landlords aren’t making sure that the homes they allow access to at a hefty fee (as much as 50 percent of a worker’s wages) are fit for human habitation, and are even trying to push the blame onto the victims of such a parasitic relationship for not keeping the heating on or not opening the

windows enough.

At this point, the reader may have conjured up an image of the landlord who ignored the pleas of Awaab’s parents. Perhaps you have imagined a lone landlord who owns a few houses but can’t afford or isn’t willing to do the repairs. Maybe you’re thinking of a big housing conglomerate that sees workers merely as ‘opportunities for rent extraction’. You may not have pictured Rochdale Boroughwide Housing (RBH), “the social housing provider to become a mutual organisation, co-owned by its tenants and employees”.

Basing analysis on statistics, which any enquiring worker should, we can see that conditions are worse in the private rental sector (PRS) than in social or ‘owner-occupied homes’. In fact, the private sector has the worst housing conditions. The English Housing Survey estimates that, in 2019, 23 percent of privately rented homes did not meet the decent home standard – around 1.1 million homes.

This compares with 18 percent of owner-occupied homes and 12 percent of socially-rented homes. Privately rented homes are more likely to have at least one Category 1 hazard under the housing health and safety rating system (HHSRS).

Notice the fact that across all categories of housing, regardless of the terms of occupancy, taken on average, *one in five do not meet the basic standard of providing a decent place to live*.

Whatever form the relationship of landlord and tenant takes, the same antagonistic motives are present: the tenants’ motive of needing cheap, good quality, secure homes is diametrically opposed to the landlords’ motive of extracting maximum profit from his investment, realised by spend-

ing the bare minimum on repairs and by adjusting rents or selling in accordance with the dictates of market conditions.

Those who are not yet able to identify the class interests behind all phenomena and relationships in capitalist society are apt to fall for the nonsense of “Buy your own home!” or “You are free to move if you don’t like it!” Alternatively, such innocents are to be found beseeching the government, long ago identified by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels as “a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie”, to step in and “do something”! (Manifesto of the Communist Party, 1848, Chapter 1)

Tenant ‘protections’

How do British MPs, many of them landlords with considerable wealth, ‘do’ this ‘something’? Well of course they serve their own interests alongside serving the interests of their masters in the monopoly capitalist class. They block or put off any and all efforts aimed at effecting meaningful change, while setting up toothless ‘regulators’, which they pretend are able to mediate this irreconcilable situation.

After many twists and turns, a bill aiming to legislate a landlord’s (council or private) obligation to ensure all rented homes are fit for human habitation landed in front of MPs in 2016. It may not come as a shock to our readers to hear that it was thrown out. With 312 voting against and only 205 in favour, our corrupt ‘representatives’ chose unequivocally (as ever) to prioritise the interests of their bosses, and of the system that guarantees their own wealth at the cost of the mass of workers.

Before the vote, the government asserted that the amendment would “result in unnecessary regulation and cost to

landlords, which will deter further investment and push up rents for tenants.

“Of course we believe that all homes should be of a decent standard, and that all tenants should have a safe place in which to live regardless of tenure, but local authorities already have strong and effective powers to deal with poor quality and unsafe accommodation, and we expect them to use them.”

A translation: “The current conditions are fine by us, and yes, people are getting sick and dying, but investors come first. The ineffective powers to sort this will remain ineffective.”

In a bid to explain their obvious anti-worker voting stance, it was claimed by those voting against the bill that there are already “*implied terms* in a tenancy agreement that require landlords to let properties which are ‘fit for human habitation’”. This was a reference to the Landlord and Tenant Act, 1985.

However, these rules only apply to people who have an annual rent of less than £52 (or £80 in London). The ridiculously low threshold was set in the 1920s and has never been updated. The House of Commons Library describes these ‘implied terms’ as “obsolete”.

So, as in matters of work, health, education and all other spheres of life that affect workers, capital works via a thousand threads to maintain and exacerbate our slavery.

Destruction of social housing

The loss of cheaper, state maintained housing has not only led to higher rent prices but also to poorer quality housing across the board, since private interests no longer have to compete with the ► **page 7**

Society

Police officer David Carrick's campaign of rape: a bad apple or a rotten barrel?

News that the Met will now reopen the cases of a thousand officer complaints would seem to answer the question.

An elite London Metropolitan (Met) police officer, David Carrick, has been unmasked as a serial rapist, leading to further revelations of predators hiding in plain sight within the police force.

When Carrick recently pled guilty to a series of charges at Southwark crown court, it brought the total to 49 charges covering 85 serious offences, while the voice of his victims had yet to be heard. (Elite Metropolitan police officer David Carrick revealed as serial rapist by Vikram Dodd and Emine Sinmaz, *The Guardian*, 16 January 2023)

With trust plummeting ever faster in the good old British bobby, the Met has announced its intention to re-examine investigations into a *thousand* of its officers who have previously been complained about, but who have all been left in place.

With the eye of the public upon them, police forces up and down the country have suddenly jerked into action. At least 39 officers will face misconduct hearings across England and Wales over the coming weeks, 23 of them from the Metropolitan police alone.

Some of the most unpleasant offenders reported are those who have been downloading images of victims in voyeurism

cases and indecent images of children. In one case, an officer is accused of tying up a woman and cutting her with a knife. In another, a sergeant stands accused of using his position to strike up a relationship with a domestic abuse victim.

Met commissioner Sir Mark Rowley has revealed that he expects to see "two or three officers going to court" for separate criminal cases every week for the next few months, with many facing accusations of serious sexual offences and domestic abuse.

"He admitted that Britain's largest force had more than 'just a few bad apples' and warned that 'more painful stories' would be unearthed as Scotland Yard intensifies efforts to find and sack unsuitable officers.

"In the latest case, a Safer Schools officer admitted a string of child sex offences including grooming teenage girls." (Police roll call of disgrace by Lizzie Dearden, *Independent*, 30 January 2023)

So with the Met admitting that more than one thousand officers and staff have been allowed to remain in the police force despite allegations of sexual misconduct and domestic abuse, how are we to understand this sickening and



David Carrick (L) and Wayne Couzens (R) are the two most high-profile Met police officers whose sadistic and criminal activities have recently been brought to light. The truth is that the corrupt, decadent and violent nature of many in the British police force is but a reflection of the decaying and senile system they serve.

bestial behaviour pervading the ranks of the constabulary?

The role of the police in capitalist society

In capitalist society, the police's main function is the protection of private property in the means of production and the enforcement of bourgeois rule.

Every other police activity, from helping old ladies across the road to 'engaging with the local community', is so much window-dressing to divert attention from this core role. And because the interests of capital are diametrically opposed to those of the working class, the police, however noble their original motives for entering the 'service', cannot but come to see the workers as their enemy.

So it is that a police officer, though often having come from a decent working-class home, can't help but have contempt for the mass of the working class, against whom they are trained to work.

The police force could not act the way it does without tacit complicity by the court system and without working in coordination with government. The

police brutally beat the miners in the 1984-85 miners' strike, thoroughly living up to the Marxist description of "special bodies of armed men" under the direction of the capitalist state.

Although it was clear to all within the state machinery that the South Yorkshire police had been responsible for the 1989 Hillsborough disaster, which led to the deaths of 96 innocent people, the Thatcher government covered it up as a 'thank you' for the police's role in suppressing the strike.

The corporate media (Murdoch's empire in particular) worked in lockstep with the government to falsely smear the football fans, claiming they had picked the pockets of the dead, urinated on police officers and beaten an officer who was in the middle of giving the kiss of life – a pack of shameless lies.

This periodic explosion of deceitfulness, brutality and violence by the police brings with it a risk that the general public will come to doubt the propagandised image of the 'friendly Bobby' on the street. Public confidence in the police has been rapidly declining over the last two years, in partic- ▶

Society

Poor housing kills

◀ **page 5** decent conditions that once prevailed in readily available and cheap council houses.

The short-lived 'joy' at buying your council house has been whittled away over the years. Every overproduction crisis leads to another tranche of workers (and small landlords) being forced to sell up at rock bottom prices, only for large investment funds swoop in and snap them up.

Thus in this, as in all other spheres where the market holds sway, Britain's housing stock is being steadily concentrated into fewer and fewer hands. Capitalism tends towards monopoly, and rent levels approach immiseration levels as the housing market is thus monopolised.

The destruction of huge numbers of perfectly adequate former council houses and blocks, and their replacement by fewer, poorly-built houses is also speeding up the process. Local workers try to push back, but find themselves unable to compete with extremely well-funded local authority campaigns in favour of demolition.

The result, unsurprisingly, is a steady growth in the number of working-class families suffering homelessness, overcrowding and deprivation.

Housing under workers' control and ownership

Ask any worker what house is to them, and they will answer something like: "a place to live", "where I rest", "where my babies were raised". Ask a landlord or a capitalist, and you'll get a very different response: "an investment opportunity", "a passive income", "a way to diversify your portfolio".

These answers also reveal the relationship the two classes have with houses. Where a worker sees a 'use value', a place in which to sleep, eat, love, raise kids, read, meet friends, etc, a capitalist sees 'exchange value' a commodity to be sold or rented so as to realise a profit.

In these opposing, antagonistic viewpoints is revealed the contradiction between housing as a human need and housing as a commodity. Commodities are not produced primarily to meet human needs, but in order to be exchanged

on the market. Housing is not produced according to what the members of a society need, but according to what the market will bear – *what can be sold*.

The way forward?

The law of production for profit, which is the motive force for all economic activity within the capitalist system, means that shaming, campaigning or explaining to the exploiting classes will have as much impact as the coat of paint on the mould that killed baby Awaab.

What *will* have an effect is changing the fundamental relationship between the forces of production and our relationship to those productive forces. Under capitalism, productive forces (factories, farms etc) are social in character; workers operate them together. No product is ever now created by one worker acting alone. By contrast (and this is the source of the conflict), the relations of production are this: the owner of the means of production owns, and consumes or distributes, the fruits of the labour of those working in his factory, on his land, etc.

When laid out like this, the solution becomes clear. Bring

both the forces of production and the relations of production onto accord; make them *both* social in nature!

If we apply this solution to housing, it becomes obvious that we would be quite capable of creating a social housing system worthy of the name, where the whole aim of the endeavour would be to house workers according to their needs, whether the right location (near to employment, schooling, childcare, nature spots, transport, hospital etc) or a building's suitability as a home (communal heating, cheap utilities, regular and high-level maintenance, improvement with advances in technology, beauty and quality in design).

We can achieve this only by *doing away with the present economic system*, which demands that everything be transformed into capital in order to produce profit, and cares not that the end result is workers paying ever more extortionate rents for ever poorer housing. We can achieve it through a social revolution and the replacement of production for profit with socialist planning and production for need.

◀ ular since the tragic case of Sarah Everard at the hands of another 'elite' Met officer.

When asked whether they trusted the police, 41 percent of people said they did not, with 23 percent distrusting officers "a little" and 18 percent "a lot".

Women are more likely to report a fall in trust than men, while 43 percent of those polled thought that women "should not have confidence in the police in the UK". (Public trust in police revealed amid wave of misogyny and sexual violence scandals by Lizzie

Dearden, Independent, 30 January 2023)

The National Police Chiefs' Council has been forced to admit that its leaders "recognise that confidence in policing, especially amongst women and girls, has been damaged".

"The public deserve to have trust in any officer they may deal with in their time of need," a spokesperson said. "Police chiefs are committed to rooting out those who betray our professional standards."

The body warned that as action is taken against unsuitable officers, more "uncomfort-

able and difficult" cases will be brought to light, but hopes that "action, and the public seeing the result of that action, will rebuild confidence".

The truth is, you cannot smash a square peg into a round hole. Under bourgeois rule, the police will continue to be periodically exposed by one horrendous scandal after another. It is simply in the nature of their role as a privileged body of armed men, placed above the general population for the purpose of keeping them down, and therefore given immunity from the very laws they are supposed to enforce.

No wonder many workers see the police as gangs in uniform. Only under socialism can the police truly 'serve the people', as the media tells us they are meant to (along with politicians, judges, journalists, civil servants, and a whole host of other functionaries of the capitalist state machine).

Until such a society is achieved, the antisocial behaviour of Britain's police officers will continue to mirror the moribund and degenerate imperialist society whose interests they serve.

Media



Look, balloons! The Hollywoodisation of imperialist 'news' media

Hyperbolic reportage of the 'spy balloons' story was a perfect example of how the 'infotainment' industry works to distract and confuse.

Imagine if our media outlets reported the truth and presented facts that explained the reality of our living experience. Where taxpayer-funded wars were described as scams that enabled multinational corporations to reap continual profits rather than being fictionalised as righteous battles for democracy and freedom.

American writer Walter Lipman once said that in times of war, what is said on the enemy's side is always propaganda, and what is said on our side is truth and righteousness. What we must ask ourselves is: which side is 'our' side?

Perhaps some of us still think

we are fortunate to live in a democratic country where free speech abounds, and truth and justice are assured and reflected in an open and honest media. Where news is presented as facts based on independent, qualitative journalism.

But if that were true, where are the news reports explaining how the contradictions of capitalism itself are the true cause of the 'cost of living' crisis? Where are the headlines in support of the striking workers who are demanding better conditions – not to thrive but just to survive? Where is the in-depth analysis explaining our rulers' drive to war in the context of their competing geopolitical interests, profits and

power?

If truth and reality were what we were presented with each day in the 'news', might we not expect to wake up to broadcasts that illustrated the reality of the gross inequalities of capitalism? To illustrate, after the publication of a recent Oxfam report, our front pages might convey the following:

A tsunami of inequality

In the last two years, a tsunami of inequality has resulted in the richest 1 percent of people acquiring almost as much new wealth as the rest of the world's population put together. For every \$1 of new global wealth earned by a person in the bottom 90 percent, each billionaire amassed around \$1.7m (£1.4m).

Whilst most people struggle to survive, 95 food and energy

corporations more than doubled their profits last year making \$306bn in windfall profits and paying out 84 percent of it (\$257bn) to rich shareholders. And whilst this small group of grossly rich elites bathe in their obscene wealth, you, the British worker, join your own select group of 1.7 billion workers worldwide battling to survive against conditions where inflation outpaces wages.

Imagine the response such reporting would elicit if given the same pervasive onslaught as the anti-strike, anti-Russian, anti-Chinese smorgasbord of propaganda that feeds our daily diet of 'news'.

The fact is that western media are owned and controlled by a handful of these powerful elites, whose interests align with and support imperialist ambitions. War with Russia. War with China. Ongoing exploitation of the world's natural resources. Maintenance of western imperialist hegemony by any means.

Our news media has become entirely subsumed into a huge machine of hyperbolic distraction and misdirection, bombarding us with puerile soundbites that seek to 'explain' the perilous conditions of our existence in terms of good versus evil and hero versus villain: the righteous Volodymyr Zelensky fighting the evil Vladimir Putin. Communist dictator Xi Jinping versus leader of the free world Joe Biden.

In the face of said propaganda, the aim is to shrivel our thinking with panic and to keep us diverted from the truth and distracted from its pursuit.

President Biden's national security strategy outlines how his administration wants to seize this decisive decade to advance the USA's vital interests and position the country to outmanoeuvre its geopolitical competitors. It says that

Media

China is the only competitor with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it.

So now we begin to understand who or what 'our' side is and who we are supposed to perceive as 'our' enemy. Our side, according to the newsfeeds, is western imperialism led by the USA, and our primary enemy is China, with Russia a close second.

Propaganda has been perfected to such a degree that the perverted reality we are fed infiltrates and undermines the truth of our actual living experience. Like children whose attention is drawn away from a sore knee by their parents' suggestion of balloons floating in the sky, western corporate media is immensely adept at the classic magician's sleight of hand that diverts our focus from where the unjust capitalists' cruel 'magic' is being performed.

Distraction from the detrimental impact to workers of the latest budget announcement, or the realities of political corruption, of the ensuing effect of ongoing inflationary rises, of the rape and pillage of our natural resources, of the preparations for new wars necessitating gross military spending funded by our taxes and in whose name all of this is done – western imperialists, led by the USA.

Hysterical coverage of 'spy balloons' takes over the news cycle

Diversionary balloons were literally the case this February, when a giant Chinese-owned weather balloon that supposedly 'threatened US sovereignty and security' was shot down to great fanfare by US fighter jets and western media reported the event as a shocking and

sinister act of Chinese aggression and provocation.

The saga dominated our media outlets for days and conveniently distracted workers' focus from two important concurrent stories: a train wreck in Ohio that was described by locals as "a mini-Chernobyl", spilling deadly chemicals and killing 45,000 animals; and an explosive report by Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative journalist Seymour Hersh, detailing how the United States had carried out the sabotage of the Nord Stream gas pipeline last year.

If our media was independent and determined to present facts and truth, rather than the Superman comic-book version of 'truth, justice and the American way', then surely the catastrophic impact of the derailment, and serious allegations of an act of state-sponsored terrorism by the USA should have dominated our headlines?

After all, demands for President Putin's arrest following allegations of war crimes from less than credible sources dominate the western 'news cycle' at the time of writing. Sources that are noticeably dead to either shame or irony, since they have chosen to renew their baseless allegations just as the world marks the 20-year anniversary of the illegal invasion of Iraq – the perpetrators of which heinous crime remain at large and largely rewarded.

And it's not just that the Hollywoodised news media deflect and reroute our scrutiny. Each time the imperialists captivate our attention with pseudo balloons up high, they take another opportunity to recondition us to perceive their adversaries, those who threaten their hegemony, as mortal threats to 'our' *democratic, free way of life*.

President Biden's comment at the signing of the Aukus deal in March summed it up: "Forging this new partnership, we're showing again how democracies can deliver our own security and prosperity ... not just for us but for the entire world."

Prosperity and security for whom? Certainly not for the Australian workers who are funding the \$381bn investment whilst facing a housing crisis. Workers who have not seen real wages go up in a decade, whilst interest rates have recently surged, and whose healthcare system is in a state of crisis. Sound familiar?

Responding to the twin threats to US global hegemony posed by Beijing and Moscow requires stepped-up defence and national security spending. The saturating media coverage of China and Russia as mortal enemies provide a useful diversionary story, concealing the real problems faced by workers in Britain and elsewhere, and obscuring the true cause of their misery.

Western media play a vital and blinding job in obfuscating the economic, environmental and existential consequences of imperialist war for the world's people. Their constant bombardment of emotive imagery and falsehoods aim to whip up a frenzy of indignation, fear, uncertainty and righteous superiority against any threat to US and western supremacy.

Their real aim is not to inform or educate, but to manufacture fear and soften us up for our ongoing exploitation; to persuade us that poverty, inequality, economic crisis and war are inevitable, and to make us believe that our rulers' enemies and interests are also ours.

The truth could not be more different.

Look, balloons!

Join the communists

Not only do we need to campaign against the bad conditions and lack of prospects for working-class people in Britain today, but we need to work for a completely different type of society – one where people's needs decide everything.

So many problems face this world: environmental catastrophe, poverty, disease, racism and war. They'll never be solved while capitalism remains, but they could all be sorted if society was set up for the benefit of the majority rather than the private gain of a few billionaires.

The Communists refuse to be intimidated by the barrage of lying propaganda that fills Britain's corporate media. It is the capitalists' job to try to stop us from building a socialist society; it is our job to do it anyway!

Our aim is to revive revolutionary Marxism and popularise it amongst the broadest possible sections of our class. Combining knowledge with disciplined organisation is the key to success in the fight against capitalism.

Our membership is youthful, while our leadership is experienced. We may be small, but we are growing. We welcome anyone who is serious and committed to working for a socialist future.

Become a supporter at thecommunists.org

British politics



The Labour left still lost in its labyrinth

Starmer's refusal to allow Corbyn to rejoin Labour has highlighted the true loyalties of the party's supposed 'left-wingers'.

In a recent article for the Times, prominent Conservative Lord Daniel Finkelstein argued that "Keir Starmer has challenged the left of Labour in a fundamental way", and cited three reasons for making his assertion.

First, he averred that Starmer's refusal to allow Jeremy Corbyn to be selected as a Labour candidate in the next general election calls into question the very basis of the Labour party's existence.

Second, he postulated that this stance of Starmer's highlighted the extreme unlikelihood that anyone from the 'left' of Labour would have the gumption to try to form a new party, despite crowd-pleasing avowals that Starmer is no different from a Tory.

And third, he quite correctly pointed out that, as a result of this failure to put their money where their mouth is, the po-

sition of 'left' MPs in the Labour party now stands clearly exposed. (The Labour left is facing its moment of truth, 21 February 2023)

On his first point, Finkelstein pointed to the words of the Fabian 'socialist' Ralph Miliband, who wrote in the 1970s that the Labour party needed to choose between being "a party of a modest social reform in a capitalistic system" or "one concerned with socialist change". Under Starmer, says Finkelstein, Labour has clearly and definitively opted for the former: it cannot possibly be seen as a vehicle for introducing socialism to Britain.

This is perfectly correct, of course. But Finkelstein 'forgot' to mention that becoming 'a party of a modest social reform' was not, in fact, a choice made by Starmer, or even by former prime minister Tony Blair, but has been the essen-

tial nature of the Labour party since its birth in 1900.

According even to Ralph Miliband himself: "The Labour party was never a party concerned with socialism ... Of political parties claiming socialism to be their aim, the Labour party has always been one of the most dogmatic – not about socialism, but about the parliamentary system ...

"The leaders of the Labour party have always rejected any kind of political action (such as industrial action for political purposes) which fell, or which appeared to them to fall, outside the framework and conventions of the parliamentary system." (Parliamentary Socialism, 1961)

Moreover, as our own comrade Harpal Brar has consistently pointed out: "Labour never has been, is not now, and will never in the future be, a party of the British proletariat.

"It was formed to defend the interest of the privileged upper stratum of the working class

... and from its inception was committed to the defence of the British empire and British imperialism alike ... it has always been a party of opportunism and social chauvinism, which is totally alien to the revolutionary proletariat." (Social Democracy – The Enemy Within, 1995)

In support of his second point, Finkelstein argued: "Labour-left MPs needs Starmer and he doesn't need them," adding: "the most solid objection to the creation of a new left party is that it might reduce the chances of Labour winning an election".

Of course, fear that starting a new left-wing party would damage Labour and hand victory to the Tories implies that 'left-Labour' MPs do in fact believe that Labour's policies are fundamentally different from those of the Tories, even under the leadership of so impeccable an establishment figure as Keir Starmer.

This is despite the endless proofs provided by history that both parties consistently support big capital, wage imperialist wars, and enthusiastically enact the programme of welfare and social service cuts that have been demanded by Britain's rulers since the 1970s.

On his final point, Finkelstein observed that the belief of Labour MPs in the value of retaining Labour no matter what is underlined by the fact that "Labour-left MPs [are] not quitting to join up with Corbyn. And not even being able to indicate support for him, because to do so would lead to their own expulsion ...

"I think they will find themselves still in Labour at the general election, having dithered and debated their way into total irrelevance ... because in the end, they are the few and not the many [*in the*

British politics

Labour party, that is – Ed]”.

With this last ironic reference to Corbyn’s famous slogan (which actually originated in the Blair era), Finkelstein satirised the deceptive propositions of the Corbyn project.

This project was based on continuing to beat the tired old drum that a party that had been founded for the defence of existing class relations, a bourgeois parliamentarist party that has steadfastly and consistently supported British imperialism and its wars, could somehow become a force for ‘change’ if only it had a ‘progressive’ person at its head.

This is despite the fact that no ‘progressive’ representative of Labour has ever done anything to change its trajectory. And even after all the party’s apparently progressive members have been either marginalised or expelled, groups from the Labour left continue to feed this narrative.

But this should not surprise us. As Finkelstein quite correctly made clear in his article: the motivation of those comprising the ‘left wing’ of the British Labour party is not the advance of the interests of the British working class, but the advance of their own careers. They are loyal to the Labour party, not to any particular politics.

They cleave to Labour not in the service of any great principle but because that is how they get paid. And the Labour party they serve is an integral part of the British establishment and unshakeably loyal to British imperialism.

Meanwhile, to imagine that anything ‘left’ could really be born from the imperialist-aligned morass of Labour parliamentarism is frankly delusional.

The real question that constantly eludes those who talk about this possibility is: *What*

type of party? As we pointed out in this newspaper back in 2019: “Any new workers’ party will have to be different. It will have to put the agenda of workers first. It will have to be economically radical. It will have to stand for a *change in the ownership of the means of production*, of the real sources of our modern material wealth, and make it clear to workers why this is necessary ...

“A new workers’ party will have to *oppose imperialist war*, not on pacifist or charitable grounds but on the basis that it is against the interests of workers at home and abroad ...

“It will have to educate, mobilise and weld workers into a determined force.” In short, it would have to represent a total break with bourgeois parliamentarism. (The Brexit election and the death of Project Corbyn, 12 December 2019)

Once again, we arrive back to the immortal words of VI Lenin: “Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement. This idea cannot be insisted upon too strongly at a time when the fashionable preaching of opportunism goes hand in hand with an infatuation for the narrowest forms of practical activity”. (What Is To

Contact the editors

We welcome your letters, articles and comments:

PO Box 78900,
London SW16 9PQ
editor@cpgb-ml.org

Subscribe: £12 yearly /
£30 international

Cheques to CPGB-ML
or pay via
shop.thecommunists.org



Lessons and legacy of the two-million strong Iraq antiwar protest

Demonstrations are dead-end get-togethers without the leadership of a vanguard revolutionary party.

Iraq, Occupy – where are you now?

The two-million-strong demonstration against the Iraq war 20 years ago was not a success of the antiwar movement, but a symptom of its rottenness and failure. That demonstration’s total impotence was a clear sign that a so-called ‘antiwar movement’ led by servants of the imperialist *Labour party* was *never going to be able to stop any wars* – it wouldn’t even be able to explain to workers what it takes to stop a war.

Two million people took to the streets of London on Saturday 15 February 2003. Stop the War likes to claim the credit for that mobilisation, although in fact it had very little to do with it. It was a section of the British ruling class, the Europe-aligned section, which did not want to remove President Saddam Hussain of Iraq via an invasion but through other methods (you know, the ones where they starve little children and tell everyone it’s ‘worth it’ to impose their will on irritatingly sovereign states).

The Daily Mirror campaigned

against the war consistently, and advertised the demonstration repeatedly. Having helped to mobilise a huge crowd, it ran its presses all night to make placards for the event.

Still, never mind how they got there. Imagine what could have been done with all that raw people power, if only it had been given proper leadership.

But what was done?

Were the people told that if they were prepared to occupy the centres of government (Parliament), of administration (Whitehall), of the transport system (rail terminals, tube junctions), of the justice system (Courts, Scotland Yard), of the business districts (the City) – to bring all the business of directing and managing the economic and political affairs of the state to a standstill – then they would be in a position to *demand* that the war machine be stopped in its tracks?

No. Instead the hopeful and angry millions were allowed to wander off home ► **page 15**

British politics



British delegate in Italy: Our rulers are working to overturn Brexit

Workers across Europe share the goal of defeating both the EU imperialist bloc and the US-led Nato war machine.

The following greeting was delivered by Comrade George Korkovelos on behalf of our party at the recent congress of the Communist Party (Italy) in Rome. The CP(I) is a member of the World Anti-imperialist Platform.

Comrades, I bring fraternal greetings from the Communists of Britain.

In our country today, the British establishment is hopeful that its long work to overturn the Brexit referendum is finally bearing fruit.

After years of chaos in the major imperialist parties, Boris Johnson and Jeremy Corbyn have both been routed and the ruling class has both Tory and Labour back under the leadership of solid establishment figures. Now prime minister Rishi Sunak has agreed a deal with the European Union on the status of northern Ireland that opens the door towards the gradual reintegration of Britain into the European economic area. This could well be followed by a formal application for the UK to rejoin the bloc in a few years' time.

The king, who is supposed to be 'above politics', was so delighted that he had tea with European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen after the deal was signed.

Millions of working-class people voted for Brexit, taking the opportunity to revolt against a ruling class that treats workers with open contempt. But the ruling class refused to accept a result that was so fundamentally against its interests and immediately set about working to undermine or reverse the decision, making full use of their control of the state bureaucracy, most of the media and of academia.

Our rulers may think that reversing Brexit will solve their problems, but they are mistaken. The fabled genie is out of the bottle, and it will not be put back in. The contradictions that generated the Brexit vote have not gone away, and its reversal will only add to the growing anger of the working class.

Before long, the British financiers may find that their problems over Brexit pale into insignificance compared with the ferocity of class struggles

to come.

Today, we are witnessing a strike wave unprecedented in forty years. More than 2.4 million working days were lost to strikes last year as desperate workers fought back against the intolerable pressure of rampant inflation on their living conditions.

The strike wave is not over yet, but there is a growing awareness that union leaders are looking for a way out – not concerned with achieving victory, but only with putting forward just enough of a deal to be able to tell their members that the sell-out of their interests is 'the best that can be achieved'.

The real desire and urgent need of workers to fight until victory is being systematically sold down the river by the very people who are paid to lead that struggle – 'leaders' who persist in pushing 'compromises' that leave their poorest members taking drastic real-terms pay cuts year on year. *This is class treachery pure and simple.*

Britain's professional union officials have no interest in seriously bargaining to raise the price of labour-power, but are concerned only to keep their jobs and to persuade their members to vote Labour at the next election. Even though Labour, like the Tories, serves only one master and follows only one agenda: *Save British imperialism, no matter what.*

Facing a spiralling global economic crisis and the rampant war drive of our rulers, there has never been a more urgent time to organise our forces for revolutionary change. As the shift to a multipolar world gains ever more momentum, there is no crime the imperialists will not commit in their desperation to prevent its arrival, which threatens to bring to an end the era of their dominion over

the world and its people.

The threat of depleted uranium munitions being sent to Ukraine by the British government is a vicious escalation against the people of the region and the world. What will happen to Ukraine's people if their food, water and animals are poisoned with these nuclear weapons (assuming the region's breadbasket will still produce crops)? What will happen to the world's people if poisoned food is exported from this region?

All this is mere collateral damage as far as the emperors of finance capital are concerned – a "price worth paying" in the pursuit of their profits and domination.

It is not Russia or China, but the US-led western imperialist bloc that has orchestrated wars all across the developing world, murdering and displacing millions and causing millions more to go hungry.

Comrades, we have a great battle before us, but we live at a time not only of crisis but of opportunity. As the crisis deepens and the war drive escalates, our rulers' are daily providing proof of their unfitness to remain, of their inability even to sustain the slaves in their slavery.

Let us work together to use the coming period to coordinate our efforts against our common enemy. To work together for the defeat of the neo-Nazi Nato warmongering alliance, the dissolution of the EU imperialist bloc, and the destruction of US-led imperialism.

And let us work together to bring the understanding to both our peoples that only through socialism can we find lasting peace and a decent and dignified future for ourselves and our children.

Industry



Pardeep Singh and Boohoo: sweatshop and semi-slavery conditions on the rise in Britain

An immigrant worker whose punishment beating was filmed by his employer serves as a stark reminder of the true face of capitalist exploitation

Conditions described as 'modern slavery' are increasingly common in sectors of the British economy such as clothes manufacture, warehouse fulfilment, construction, cleaning and agriculture.

Here we see the quest for maximum profit starkly revealed: either export your capital to where labour is cheapest, or import the pay and conditions applicable in developing countries, making maximum use of those members of the workforce, especially 'illegal' immigrants or foreign students, who are least able to defend themselves.

The case of Indian construction worker Pardeep Singh

At the close of 2022, film emerged on social media of a young man being berated and the punched about the face and head, in what appeared to be a faux-hostage scenario.

Certainly, the violence being meted out had ritualistic elements, with the victim made to kneel humiliatingly and receiving taunts from off-camera, whilst a man towering above him doled out punishment.

Yet the context was incongruous, with little else signalling a distant war zone. Popular slogans on sweatshirts, neat ceiling spotlights and magna-lia-painted walls indicated that this brutality was more likely to have been a civilian matter, perhaps a gang-related straightener.

After all, both men in the footage appeared to be Asian, so one might assume that some dispute, some transgression, was being resolved 'culturally' within 'the community'.

A disturbing watch, the young man horribly vulnerable during the onslaught from the grandstanding bully, but to an audience well-schooled in the

specious liberal arguments of identity politics surrounding race and culture, it presented a potential minefield and was therefore best avoided: scroll past.

A closer examination would have revealed, however, that the footage was posted by British workers outraged by the rampant exploitation, intimidation and physical assaults meted out to employees on a regular basis and seemingly with impunity by Baljit Singh, owner of Conform (UK) Plant UK Wolverhampton.

Pardeep Singh, an Indian citizen who has been studying in Britain for two years, was employed by Conform (UK) Plant Ltd from 5 April 2021 to 1 July 2022 – a total of 15 months, on pay between £8 and £9 per hour for a 40-hour week. Although he worked far longer hours, no overtime payment was ever made. He did not receive a pay slip, a P60 or a contract of employment.

On the evening of 15 October 2022, Baljit Singh visited Pardeep at his home along with 15 other men. For the crime of

having demanded his back-pay, they beat him so badly that he required hospitalisation, and he is currently being treated for mental distress.

The entire attack was recorded by one of the boss's companions and published on social media. Meanwhile, even as the British police were called and the crime report was registered, Pardeep's family in India was being visited by friends of Baljit and threatened.

The company, a subcontractor to the construction industry mainly specialising in concrete-laying for new buildings, car parks, shopping malls and warehouses, has been accused of routinely abusing its employees and withholding wages. Baljit Singh presently employs about 10 workers, although in the past he has had between 30 and 40 on the roll.

His workers are expected to present themselves at 5.00am or earlier and to work until 7.00pm, when they are transported back to the company site – a working week of 70-80 hours. They are only paid for up to 40 hours, ▶ **page 14**

Industry

Bohoo

◀ **page 13** however, with their remaining wages being paid as a lump sum at a later date.

National insurance and tax contributions are not deducted from the lump sum. The workers have neither payslips nor contracts of employment.

If Baljit Singh and his cronies thought that filming the abuse of Pardeep would act as a warning to other workers seeking fair pay and conditions then it backfired spectacularly. Pardeep and his friends organised a protest outside the company's premises in Wolverhampton, which was attended by 400 people and addressed by several of the company's workers.

Following the rally, a meeting was held to seek justice for Pardeep and to hold Baljit accountable for his crimes, initiating the Campaign to Seek Justice for Pardeep. Following this, one of Pardeep's coworkers was firebombed at his home in November, and it is widely believed that Baljit is aiming to frighten workers who are organising for justice and to expose his crimes.

The workers of Conform (UK) Plant Limited have not been alone in their struggle, receiving support from both the Indian Workers Association (IWA) and the Birmingham Trades Union Council (BTUC).

Superexploitation practices becoming the norm in several sectors

Such flagrant abuse of workers cannot be dismissed as an isolated incident. As we covered in July 2020, similar levels of superexploitation are no longer rare in Britain, particularly among vulnerable immigrant communities.

In Leicester's garment indus-

try, which supplies cheap clothing to high-profile fashion retailers such as Next, Very, Asos and Boohoo, workers were revealed as being routinely mistreated to such an extent that the term 'sweatshop' carried no hyperbole. (Leicester sweatshops keep their heads down despite Covid panic, 17 July 2020)

Housed in unsafe and unsanitary conditions for long hours while being paid the derisory sum of £3 to £5 an hour, and with few concessions made to the spread of Covid at the height of the pandemic, the stark images of Victorian exploitation of impoverished workers were horribly revived. Indeed, rather than implementing some adaptations to working practices for the sake of the health of employees, whether through compassion or the fear of legal redress, output from these businesses increased over the period.

Any questioning of employers was met with the confiscation of identity documents, rendering individual workers fearful and quiescent.

Those bodies tasked with preventing such abuses – the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), for example, or the Gangmaster and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA) – seemed incapable of effecting meaningful change. Inspections of unsatisfactory premises would merely lead to a plethora of new 'start-up' businesses happy to evade inspection, making, in the words of one GLAA official, "a mockery of regulation".

The image-conscious retailers promptly distanced themselves from disposable-fashion retailer Boohoo when it emerged that that company relied heavily on dubious sweatshop lines. But there was little evidence that this was anything more than a diversionary tactic to keep their own supply lines free from investigation.

Such duplicity is to be expected from profit-squeezing manufacturers and retailers. A

This contemptible empty gesture aims to knit a cloak of invisibility under which business as usual can continue for the powerful monopolists, protected as ever by complicit regulators and politicians.

GLAA official interviewed by the Financial Times in 2020 was fully aware that the prevailing attitude was "It will blow over", and, more worryingly, that the sweatshops were com-

mon knowledge to councillors and MPs in Leicester.

Treating workers as disposable, despite pandemic conditions that placed an extra duty of care onto employers, was simply business as usual.

In an industry sensitive to the whims of the public, the impact of window-dressing is appreciated. In what can only be viewed as a tawdry damage-limitation exercise Leicester's Fashion Technology Academy inaugurated a new qualification in 2022 aimed at educating workers in the garment industry regarding their rights as employees.

This 10-hour course is apparently designed to give workers an overview of their rights in the workplace, covering such areas as "how to apply for jobs safely, the national minimum wage, holiday pay and reading payslips". The syllabus also includes information on "how to identify the main signs of mod-

ern slavery and labour exploitation, and the ways you can report concerns to the GLAA and law enforcement".

The course has the full support of the GLAA, which claims on its website to be "passionate about ensuring that all workers are able to understand what they are entitled to and how things should work for them in the workplace".

There we have it. If only these employees had received their Level 1 certificate before or during the pandemic, perhaps they would never have been subject to such abuses. If only they had been more aware, more assertive, then their wages and conditions might have been improved. Their employers were just waiting patiently for the opening of that dialogue.

Where might they ascend to when they scale the dizzy heights of Level 2? Building worker solidarity, planning and taking effective strike action as a prelude to instituting worker-led democracy? One can only assume that Level 3 will be aimed at implementing legal proceedings against negligent and criminal employers.

This contemptible, empty gesture marks an attempt by an industry hyper-aware of image to mask blatant profiteering by foisting responsibility onto its beleaguered and exploited workers. It aims to knit a cloak of invisibility under which business as usual can continue for the powerful monopolists, protected as ever by complicit agencies, regulators and politicians.

Anyone assuming that such ruthless and often illegal practices are reserved only for illegal or fresh-off-the-boat immigrants and refugees, would do well to read the results of a recent investigation carried out by the Times. In this in-depth article, a picture is painted of

Industry

workers' conditions in Britain today that can only be described as dehumanising.

Having learnt nothing from the damage wrought to its brand, to say nothing of the plight of its garment workers, by the 2020 Leicester sweatshop expose, Boohoo continues to pursue practices that, according to its own employees, are akin to imprisonment and slavery.

The Times's undercover investigator spent a month as a 'picker' at Boohoo's largely windowless distribution warehouse during the summer season, reporting that temperatures as high as 32C were recorded even during a night shift, when the temperature outside was just 19C. The upper floors of the warehouse, an aircraft hangar-sized facility on the outskirts of Burnley, were entirely lacking in outside ventilation or air conditioning.

The picker's job involves rushing around the aisles collecting items for posting at the direction of a bulky black device that must be strapped to the wrist. Failure to meet the specified target of 130 items an hour results in a picker receiving 'feedback', and can ultimately end in dismissal.

Despite Boohoo's claim that pickers cover 7.5 miles per shift, the Times's reporter covered up to 13 miles during the 11 hours he spent on the warehouse floor.

The physical demands of the job, coupled with the pressure on staff to limit themselves to only one or two (timed) lavatory breaks on a 12-hour shift, has regularly led to workers collapsing in the aisles. Ambulances are called to the site on average once a month to attend workers complaining of chest pain, convulsions or blackouts. Up to three-quarters of the 59 ambulance call-outs over the period in question resulted in

hospitalisation.

In addition, workers are provided with shoddy and ill-fitting clothing, particularly shoes, causing blisters and muscle strain. In a further risk to their safety, they have to unload heavy boxes of jeans from a lorry without any training or support, leading many to incur shoulder and back injuries. Despite management reassurances regarding safeguarding, staff have even been refused requests to be allowed unpaid rest breaks.

In such conditions, it is hardly surprising that staff turnover is extremely high, with many workers leaving and others dismissed for failing to keep up with demand. Boohoo claims that the productivity output of its employees averages £83,700, up 13 percent on a year ago, but pickers are paid just £11 an hour. Understandable, then, that staff have scrawled the words "prison" and "slaves" around the warehouse floor.

If that wasn't already enough, workers have also reported further types of harassment and discrimination at the same Boohoo workhouse. Asian staff are routinely sent pick in the hottest part of the workhouse, and have been mocked when they complained against such overt prejudice.

A female worker who claimed to have been sexually assaulted was ignored when she reported the incident, then accused of lying, only for the assailant to admit the attack when later questioned and finally sacked. Reassurances that Boohoo had a 'zero-tolerance' attitude to racism and sexual harassment have done nothing to alleviate workers' fears. (Inside the Boohoo warehouse where workers call themselves slaves 22 November 2022)

As ever, management quote official policies and deny

wrongdoing. Local MPs occasionally highlight 'shocking revelations', but little to nothing changes. As in Leicester, everyone knows what is going on, but they prefer to turn a blind eye. Nothing to see here. Capitalism working as capitalism should: extorting maximum profits from the workers. Regulatory bodies and the law collude as they stand idly by.

Low-paid, immigrant and non-unionised workers fare worst under capitalism, and, as British imperialism sinks into yet another self-inflicted crisis, we can see the deterioration of pay and conditions accelerating, and sweatshop conditions spreading from industry to industry.

At such a time, it would be foolhardy for any worker to believe themselves secure against the ravaging tooth and claw of capitalism – an economic system which has at its core the mantra 'Profit before people'. If left alone to do so, it will devour us all.

It remains to be seen whether Pardeep Singh will receive justice in his case against bloodsucking and bullying employer Baljit Singh. Since Baljit has a long history of starting and closing companies in the Wolverhampton area, we can assume that evading responsibility for his employees is an integral part of his business strategy.

However, one of the marked contradictions in the capitalist system is that in the face of brutality and injustice there arises the opportunity for workers to stand together in solidarity and challenge such inhumanity. Such organised action provides invaluable lessons to oppressed workers about their own power, and sends a signal of hope to workers everywhere.

In this way, justice for Pardeep Singh is justice for all workers.

Iraq antiwar demo

◀ **page 11** again, or were herded into Hyde Park to be addressed by the great and the good of Liberal and not-so-left Labour worthies, all of whom had essentially the same message:

"Well done! Your demonstration is really big! We're breaking records! Write to your MP! See you next time!"

And in this way, a real mass movement was turned into a machine for the manufacture of cynicism and disillusionment.

No wonder Tony Blair felt confident to send his RAF bombers out to their bases in the Mediterranean and the middle east even as the demonstration was taking place. He knew it posed no threat. He knew that the 'leaders' of that movement could be counted on to misdirect and dissipate the energy of the potentially game-changing force at their command.

But history will have the last laugh.

For while many workers were turned off the idea of political action that day, and have not yet returned to the fray, it was Britain's role in the criminal Iraq war, and in particular the bare-faced lies told in order to galvanise support for that illegal aggression, which really began the long, slow process of undermining the faith of the British people in their politicians, their journalists, their state institutions and their democracy.

And the next time those same workers are moved to protest about the spiralling cost of living or the insane drive towards WW3, our rulers may find that they are far less susceptible to the idea that our government means well, or has anyone but the financiers' best interests at heart.

Africa



Street mural shows activist Kémi Séba, who burned a 5,000 CFA franc bill in protest in 2017. Since December 2021, activists have taken to the streets of Dakar, Senegal, with the slogan 'France, dégage!' (France, disappear!)

France is losing its dominance in west Africa

Chinese economic and Russian military assistance are enabling the region to finally break its neocolonial bonds.

After years of empty promises by various French presidents that neocolonial relations between France and west Africa would be brought to an end, Emmanuel Macron's eighteenth trip to Africa was a sharp reminder of the steady decline of French influence in the region.

Military decline

President Emmanuel Macron's African tour in early March was clearly a desperate attempt to counter the rising influence of Russia and China in the region, where the formerly dominant French imperialists have suffered a string of recent military and political defeats.

Burkina Faso is the latest country to have driven French troops from its territory and ended its 'military agreement' with Paris. A year ago, French forces were forced to leave the Sahel after Operation Barkhane failed to eradicate terrorism in the region. The Central African Republic, a his-

torical ally of France, has also distanced itself from its former coloniser.

With the French gone, these countries have been turning to Russia for military assistance, perceiving it as an ally and partner rather than an exploiter preying on the region's natural resources. Unsurprisingly, such a rapprochement between their former colonies and Russia is causing the French ruling class – and the western establishment in general – to break out into a cold sweat.

The BBC described the situation as follows: "Russia, hoping to rebuild the influence it had lost since the cold war decades, is offering security support to governments that feel under threat or isolated from the international mainstream: mercenaries from the Kremlin-linked military contractor Wagner are now operating in Mali and the Central African Republic, where they have been accused of human rights

abuses." (Emmanuel Macron's mission to counter Russia in Africa by Paul Melly, BBC News, 4 March 2023)

"The age of *Francafrrique* is well over," declared Macron while standing in Libreville, stronghold of the Bongos – rulers of Gabon and its oil-rich soil for 60 years, and one of the most loyal *Francafrrique* families.* No wonder the local people, tired of France's constant hypocrisy, are increasingly turning to Russia, whose help is real and comes without strings. (Macron says era of French interference in Africa is 'over', Al Jazeera, 2 March 2023)

Time for compromise

In the context of extreme domestic tension in France, where huge workers' demonstrations are taking place against pension reform (and against French involvement in Nato's war in Ukraine), Macron's trip to Africa might seem to be superfluous and ill-timed. But as a declining imperialist country, France cannot afford to lose one of its biggest sources of revenue – its ability to extract superprofits from its colonial spheres of influence.

However, growing civil society discontent against its military and economic presence in Africa is forcing the French ruling class to offer some decidedly unwilling concessions.

Reform of the CFA franc, a currency that was introduced during French colonial rule in Senegal, is one of the most pressing demands of the region's people, who have gone so far as to burn CFA franc bills during demonstrations.

The currency, shared by 14 African countries and anchored to the euro, is rightly seen as a tool of neocolonial domination. "There is controversy among African politicians and economists about the role

of the CFA franc in economic policy.

"The peg to the euro ensures an exceptionally stable currency. Compared to other African countries, government debt in CFA countries is significantly lower. And yet the CFA franc also creates disadvantages. In terms of economic policy, the peg to the euro limits industrialisation and hinders proactive state investments." (No alternatives? Why monetary sovereignty matters so much to countries of the CFA franc zone by Robin Frisch, Megatrends Afrika, 30 August 2022)

Announced with great fanfare by Macron, some at least of the long-demanded reforms seemed finally to have arrived in December 2019. France promised a rebranding of the CFA franc to the less colonial-sounding 'eco', the withdrawal of French members from the supervisory body of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA), and the removal of the condition that UEMOA states should deposit half their reserves in the French treasury.

Three and a half years later, none of the promised reforms has been put into effect. And, with China and Russia looking increasingly attractive as economic and military partners, able to give real assistance to countries seeking development and sovereignty, it seems unlikely that the patience of these long-suffering nations will extend indefinitely.

NOTE

* *Francafrrique* is a frequent target of anti-imperialists and pan-Africanists, who point out that after the wave of decolonisation in 1960, France propped up dictators in its former colonies in exchange for continued access to resources and military bases.

Europe

Strikes in France show benefits and limits of trade-union action

The wave of strikes paralysing France should be an inspiration to trade unions in Britain, demonstrating how powerful workers can be when they organise themselves in defence of their class interests.

On 7 February, France effectively ground to a halt. Three-quarters of national train services were shut down, roughly one in three air flights were cancelled, a quarter of civil servants went on strike and nearly two-thirds of primary school-teachers did the same.

That day of coordinated action followed a string of separate one-day strikes in January, and now it has been announced that public transport workers, truck drivers and nuclear power technicians are to turn up the pressure, rising from one-day strikes to indefinite rolling strikes.

The main focus of the strikes and demonstrations has been the latest attempt by President Emanuel Macron's government to extend the pension age from 62 to 64. This is Macron's second serious stab at pension 'reform'. His first attempt in 2019 met with such massive resistance that he was forced to abandon the plan, using the Covid emergency to spare his blushes.

He is now trying to speed up the draft law raising the pension age, rushing it through before the end of March. Macron no longer has a parliamentary majority, so cannot guarantee that the law will pass muster. However, a useful kink in the constitution theoretically enables the president to ignore the national assembly's decision and force the law onto the statute book – if he really wants to spark a political crisis.

Ever since the government of former president Jacques Mitterand reduced the pensionable age to 60 in 1982, successive governments have fought to push it back up. At present, it stands at 62.

In one sense, the vacillations and retreats of successive French governments on this issue bear witness to the doggedness with which France's unions have resisted the capitalist efforts to intensify the terms of workers' exploitation. The militancy of French unions like the CGT puts most British unions to shame, and is much to be admired.

In another sense, though, the sad fact that, 40 years after the Mitterand reform, French workers find themselves still fighting the same battles, confirming the ultimate futility of limiting the class war to the struggle to improve the terms of wage-slavery, and neglecting the historic task that confronts workers: the abolition of *wage-slavery itself*.

Until capitalism is overthrown, every temporary reform conceded to workers under pressure can be watered down or reversed when the dust has settled and the ruling class has had time to regroup its forces.

Whilst the pensions battle is currently the specific focus of proletarian revolt in France, and deservedly so, it clearly indicates a much wider dissatisfaction with the capitalist order in crisis, a dissatisfaction which can only be fully addressed by fighting for socialism and the end of wage-slavery.

French communists: Revolutionary crisis developing



The following joint statement was issued by French revolutionary communists from the National Association of Communists (ANC), the Pole of Communist Renaissance in France (PRCF), the Communist Assembly (RC) and the Youth for Communist Renaissance in France (JRCF).

If Emmanuel Macron imagined that he could put an end to the popular mobilisation by showing his contempt for the opponents of his counter-reform, he has totally failed.

When prime minister Elizabeth Borne activated article 49.3 [of the French constitution] to push through the pension reform without parliamentary approval, she showed that this government no longer even has a parliamentary majority, even after rallying supposedly 'republican' leaders to its side.

The democratic illegitimacy of the Macronist regime is now blatant, and shows that the current political crisis has the potential to lead to a crisis of the regime itself – or even to a deeper crisis, if we remember Lenin's words: "A revolutionary crisis arises when those above are unable to govern as before, while those below are no longer willing to be governed as before." (May Day action by the revolutionary workers, 1913)

In the popular demonstrations taking place today, we see striking similarities, not only to the events of December 1995 and May 1968, but also to the revolution of 1789 and the capture of the Bastille. Our country, which has experienced great revolts and moments of great social progress – such as in 1945, when the social security fund was created – needs a new recognition of history.

The present crisis needs to bring onto the agenda an authentic popular and socialist revolution that will at last put "the world of work at the centre of national life", as the National Council of the Resistance has already proposed.

Under these conditions, the ANC, the RC, the PRCF and the JRCF are together calling for the expansion of the demonstrations in all their forms – in particular by supporting in every way possible the strikes and courageous blockades being carried out by electricians, gas workers, dockers, refinery workers, railway workers, binmen, and by all those who are strongly committing themselves to the fight against the regime's denial of democracy.

We believe it really is possible to win the ongoing arm-wrestling by obtaining not only the withdrawal of the counter-reform, but by provoking a general coun- ► **page 26**

Europe



Oppose western pressure on Serbia to recognise the Kosovo province as a state

The imperialists are still pursuing their 30-year campaign to forcibly disintegrate and occupy the territories of the former Yugoslavia.

The following joint statement was initiated by the New Communist Party of Yugoslavia (NKJP) and has been signed by the CPGB-ML amongst others.

The signatories to this joint statement strongly condemn the latest pressure from the governments of the Quinte countries (the United States of America, Great Britain, France, Germany and Italy) on Belgrade to accept the so-called German-French ultimatum, which demands that Serbia should recognise the independence of the fake 'state of Kosovo'.

No one in Serbia has the legal or moral right to recognise the 'independence' of Kosovo, even should the authorities in Belgrade not wish to oppose the request of the puppet separatist authorities in Pristina for membership in the United Nations, as called for in the German-French ultimatum. A government in Serbia that was prepared to accept the 'inde-

pendence of Kosovo' in any form would be guilty of an act of high treason and would be rejected by the people.

There is no reasonable argument that could justify capitulation to the blind ultimatum of the imperialist governments in Washington, London, Berlin, Paris, Rome and Brussels for the official surrender of the occupied southern Serbian province into the hands of the separatist puppet pro-imperialist government in Pristina.

Since 9 June 1999, the southern Serbian province of Kosovo and Metohija has been under the occupation of the military wing of western imperialism, Nato, and the Serbs living in that area have become second-class citizens.

On that day, the so-called 'Kumanovo agreement' was signed, initiating the Nato occupation of Kosovo and Metohija that followed the aggressive war of the western imperialist countries against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (24 March-10 June). In

signing that agreement, the Yugoslav army was forced to leave the territory of Kosovo, and the Albanian terrorist pro-imperialist 'Kosovo Liberation Army' took power there, while Nato established Camp Bondsteel, the largest military base in the Balkans.

The aggression against the FR Yugoslavia, the occupation of Kosovo and Metohija, and the installation of the pro-imperialist separatist 'Kosovo Liberation Army' in power in Pristina were all carried out for the sake of the expansionist and plundering interests of western monopoly capital.

A large number of Serbs and other non-Albanians were forced to leave their homes and flee to Serbia, while the remaining Serb population in Kosovo was subjected to constant torture and harassment by the pro-imperialist authorities in Pristina.

Since 2013, under the auspices of the European Union, a series of meetings have been held in Brussels between the authorities in Belgrade and the separatist leadership in Pristina, at which the goal of the western imperialists has been

to force Belgrade to accept the 'independence' of Kosovo.

In the meantime, the Serb population has been exposed to constant pressure from the pro-imperialist separatist authorities in Pristina. It is completely hypocritical but also naive to expect that any negotiations on peace and prosperity will be conducted under the auspices of the imperialist power of the European Union, which, along with the United States and Nato, is criminally culpable for the occupation of Kosovo and Metohija and its separation from Serbia.

We demand:

- That Washington, London, Brussels and other imperialist centres of power immediately stop putting pressure on Serbia to recognise the 'independence' of Kosovo. Kosovo and Metohija is an integral and indivisible whole, which, as its province, belongs to Serbia. Any change of borders is unacceptable and contrary to the interests of peace and prosperity.
- That the puppet pro-imperialist government in Kosovo immediately stop all pressure on the Serb population living in that territory, and allows all refugees to return if they wish!
- That the Serbian and Albanian people in Kosovo and Metohija should be allowed to live in peace and unity in the tradition of fraternal relations between Albanians and Serbs, who, in the second world war, fought side by side against the Nazi-fascist occupier!
- That the occupying Nato troops must immediately leave the territory of Kosovo and Metohija, and that the southern Serbian province should return to the motherland.

Only in that way can Serbs and Albanians live in the territory in true peace and prosperity!

Ukraine war



The truth about the war in Ukraine – straight from the horse’s mouth

Retired German general lays out a few key facts for the hard of learning.

If you want to know what is really going on in Ukraine, don’t bother asking Stop the War, the Trotskyites, the revisionist left or any other ‘politically correct’ denizens of the Guardian-reading swamp. All they can do is trot out the same slavish nonsense: “Putin is a dictator, Russia is imperialist, support neither Washington nor Moscow, pray for peace.”

No, if you want to know what is going on, straight from the horse’s mouth as it were, then listen to the testimony of a witness with impeccable imperialist credentials. Before he retired, General Harald Kujat was head of the German army from 2000 to 2002, going on later to chair the Nato military committee. No peacenik he. But here is some of what he told a Swiss newspaper on 18 January.

How Boris Johnson sabotaged the Istanbul peace agreement

“The longer the war lasts, the more difficult it becomes to achieve a negotiated peace ... That is why I found it so regrettable that negotiations in Istanbul in March were broken off despite great progress and a thoroughly positive outcome

for Ukraine.

“In the Istanbul negotiations, Russia had apparently agreed to withdraw its forces to the line of 23 February, ie, before the attack on Ukraine began. Now complete withdrawal is repeatedly demanded as a prerequisite for negotiations ...

“Ukraine had pledged to renounce Nato membership and not allow the stationing of any foreign troops or military installations. In return it would receive security guarantees from any states of its choice.

“The future of the occupied territories was to be resolved diplomatically within 15 years, with the explicit renunciation of military force ...

“According to reliable information, then British prime minister Boris Johnson intervened in Kiev on 9 April and prevented a signing. His reasoning was that the west was not ready for an end to the war ...

“It is outrageous that the gullible citizen has no idea about what was being played here. The negotiations in Istanbul were well-known publicly, and that an agreement was on the verge of being signed; but from one day to the next, not another word was heard about it.”

How Russia is responding to Nato expansionism

“No, this war is not about our freedom. The core problems causing the war to begin and still to continue today, although it could have ended long ago, are quite different ...

“Russia wants to prevent its geopolitical rival, the USA, from gaining a strategic superiority that threatens Russia’s security. Be it through Ukraine’s membership in US-led Nato, be it through the stationing of American troops, the relocation of military infrastructure or joint Nato manoeuvres.

“The deployment of American systems of Nato’s ballistic missile defence system in Poland and Romania is also a thorn in Russia’s side, because Russia is convinced that the USA could eliminate Russian intercontinental strategic systems from these launch facilities and thus endanger the nuclear strategic balance.”

How new arms shipments needlessly prolong the war

“The longer the war lasts, the greater the risk of expansion or escalation ... Both warring parties are currently in a stalemate again [*Really?* – Ed] ... So now would be the right time to resume the broken negotiations.

“But the arms shipments mean the opposite: namely, that the war is senselessly prolonged, with even more deaths on both sides and the continuation of the destruction of the country. But also with the consequence that we are drawn even deeper into this war.

“Even the Nato secretary general recently warned against an escalation of the fighting into a war between Nato and Russia. And according to US joint chief of staff General Mark Milley, Ukraine

has achieved whatever it could militarily. More is not possible.

“That is why diplomatic efforts should be made now to achieve a negotiated peace. I share this view.”

Imperialist deceit over Minsk II agreement

“What Mrs Merkel said in an interview is clear. The Minsk II agreement was negotiated only to buy time for Ukraine. And Ukraine used the time to rearm militarily ...

“Russia understandably calls this fraud. And Merkel has confirmed that Russia was deliberately deceived. You can judge that any way you like, but it is a blatant breach of trust and a question of political reliability.

“It cannot be disputed that the refusal of the Ukrainian government – aware of this intended deception – to implement the peace agreement, just a few days before the start of the war, was one of the triggers for the war.

“It was ... a breach of international law, that is clear. The damage is immense. You have to imagine the situation today. The people who wanted to wage war from the beginning, and still want to do so, have taken the view that ‘You cannot negotiate with Putin. No matter what, he does not comply with agreements.’

“But now it turns out that we are the ones who do not comply with international agreements ...

“As far as I know, the Russians are keeping to their treaties ... I have had many negotiations with Russia ... They are tough negotiating partners, but if you come to a common position, then that stands and applies.” (Victor Grossman, *Monthly Review*, 5 Feb 2023)

Further comment would be superfluous.

Ukraine war



Scholz visits Biden as USA works to bury the truth about Nord Stream

Will Washington test the anti-Putin coalition to destruction?

Why was Olaf Scholz's visit to Washington such a low-key affair? Could it be connected to the later release of supposedly 'new intelligence' by US agencies seeking to blame rogue forces in Ukraine for the attack on the Nord Stream pipelines? How long will the German people put up with a leadership that goes along with such blatant falsehoods regarding this act of war against their country?

Frustrated in its efforts to win its undeclared war against Russia via its proxy Ukrainian cannon fodder, US imperialism is becoming yet more reckless. Failing to land the decisive blow against Russia for which they had prayed, the aggressors are raising the stakes by deploying ever more hi-tech weapons systems, threatening to draw Russia's neighbours into a widening war and using a mix of bribery and coercion to keep their 'allies' (tools) 'on side'.

The governments of western

Europe (primarily Germany and France) are caught between a rock and a hard place, trapped on one side by angry home populations living through the direct consequences of their leaders subscribing to a sanctions war, and on the other side by a US godfather who will stop at nothing to achieve European 'unity' against Russia – that is, unity on America's own economy-wrecking terms, an offer which the 'allies' cannot without peril refuse.

Scholz goes to Washington

It was against this backdrop that Germany's chancellor Olaf Scholz recently paid his odd visit to the US president in the White House. Scholz arrived without any of the fanfare that normally attends one head of state popping across the planet to visit his counterpart.

There was no press conference, no joint statement, no media circus. In truth, this one-hour encounter resembled more that of a junior employee presenting his report to his

boss and awaiting further instructions.

With protests against the war growing ever more vocal back in Europe, Chancellor Scholz had for a long time been resisting Washington's demand that Berlin send 18 Leopard tanks to Kiev, so fearful was he of the public outcry that would ensue. In the end, Scholz folded and agreed to ship the tanks, on the understanding that the USA would also send its own Abrams tanks.

US president Joe Biden took a long time to agree to this proviso, aware that by sending the Abrams the US was effectively admitting what the rest of the world had long since tumbled to: that this was fundamentally an American war against Russia.

Washington may congratulate Berlin for having allegedly made some progress on weaning German industry off Russian gas, but it is clear that any move in that direction simply dissolves a commercially successful partnership, replacing it with an industry shackled to a dependence on overpriced US LNG.

German antiwar rally unites workers from 'left' and 'right'

Getting a pat on the head from President Biden will not compensate workers facing unpayable fuel bills and factory lay-offs, let alone the prospect of being dragged ever deeper into war. This discontent is digging deeper into the working class, sweeping aside phony divisions between 'left' and 'right' affiliation.

"Police estimated there were 13,000 people at the Uprising for Peace, at the Brandenburg Gate, organised by Sahra Wagenknecht, a renegade member of the Left party, and veteran feminist campaigner Alice Schwarzer. The organisers claimed as many as 50,000 took part. Similar demonstrations took place in other German cities.

"Protesters carried banners reading: 'Helmets today, tanks tomorrow, the day after tomorrow your sons,' in reference to the manner in which the coalition government has increased its military support for Kiev, initially donating 5,000 helmets and more recently agreeing to send German-made Leopard II tanks.

"Other banners read: 'Diplomaten statt Grenaten (Diplomats instead of grenades)', 'Stop the killing' and 'Not my war, not my government'."

Foreign minister Annalena Baerbock was singled out at the demonstration as "the government member with the most responsibility for drawing Germany deeper into the conflict. Participants angrily shouted 'Baerbock raus' – or Baerbock out – during and at the end of Wagenknecht's address." (Thousands protest in Berlin against giving weapons to Ukraine by Kate Connolly, The Guardian, 25 February 2023)

Ukraine war

Yet Guardian readers may be surprised to learn that Baerbock, Germany's foreign minister, is a member of the Greens. This is not a fluke. In 1999, the Green foreign minister Joschka Fischer backed Nato's bombing of Belgrade. Nor is this just a German trait: in March this year, the Green party in England and Wales voted to drop its opposition to Nato.

The Uprising for Peace in Germany, in some ways similar to the Rage Against the War Machine in the USA, appears to be tapping into a wider reach socially than is achieved by the more 'politically correct' left-liberals. The Manifesto for Peace garnered 650,000 signatures in the first two weeks after its publication, sparking resentment in some quarters, which have sought to de-platform the organisers and get everyone to boycott Wagenknecht's initiative.

The reason? She suggested that "anyone whose heart beat for peace" would be welcome to the demonstration, after far-right groups expressed their desire to attend.

Would the Greens face similar calls for exclusion because one of their leading members happens to be the foreign minister of a warmongering government? And would the right-on thought police show the same enthusiasm for detecting and excluding fascists when it comes to the shower who have ruled Ukraine since the imperialist-backed coup in 2014?

No, they turn a blind eye to the torchlight parades, anti-semitism and swastikas of the Bandera worshippers, then suddenly develop X-ray vision when it's a case of some muddleheads in Germany whose incoherent rage against poverty and war, in the absence of communist leadership, makes them a prey to demagoguery.

The only solution to this problem is to be found in the building of a communist party that can lead workers out of the morass of both social democracy and its fascist twin.

The antiwar movement, like the revolution itself, will be made by the working class we have now, not by some fantasy proletariat shaped by prolonged exposure to the combined wisdom of the massed ranks of the liberal petty bourgeoisie, Greens and all.

Christian Lindner, the German finance minister, says that "those who don't stand at Ukraine's side are standing on the false side of history". He has this upside down: those who don't stand on the side of Russia's war of defence against Nato aggression, instead prettifying America's proxy war as a struggle for Ukraine's 'independence', will go down in history as tools of imperialism. *No pasarán*.

Nord Stream disinformation

Meanwhile, the revelations about who really bombed the Nord Stream gas pipeline from Russia to Germany are guaranteed to put a figurative bomb under Biden's efforts to whip Europe into shape. Speculation about who really blew up the pipeline last September is a story which cannot stay buried, and the Biden regime's attempts to bury the facts in a mountain of obfuscation – and German anger with it – may account for the low-key nature of Scholz's visit to the USA.

Back when the attack took place, there had been some ludicrous and rather half-hearted stabs at pinning the blame on Russia itself, but mostly the approach was to let Sweden and Denmark carry out their own 'investigations', excluding Russia from the process, and then rely on the goldfish memory of

the news cycle to quietly bury the questions.

But when veteran investigative journalist Seymour Hersh dropped his bombshell with his exposure that it was US imperialism itself that sabotaged the pipeline, on the explicit direction of Biden himself, the cat was well and truly set among the pigeons. The conspiracy of silence in the corporate media dragged on a while longer, but it was clear that the facts were circulating, anger was rising, and the story was not going to go away.

With the presidency itself now in the dock, it was time for the propaganda line to take a radical swerve. The previously taciturn intelligence suddenly grew voluble, offering a variety of 'explanations'. It wasn't Biden that did it, it was Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky. Or if not Zelensky, then some rogue Ukronazi outfit on a freelance adventure. Or anybody else except Biden.

On 7 March, the New York Times reported: "New intelligence reviewed by US officials suggests that a pro-Ukrainian group carried out the attack on the Nord Stream pipelines last year, a step toward determining responsibility for an act of sabotage that has confounded investigators on both sides of the Atlantic for months.

"US officials said that they had no evidence President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine or his top lieutenants were involved in the operation, or that the perpetrators were acting at the direction of any Ukrainian government officials." (Intelligence suggests pro-Ukrainian group sabotaged pipelines, US officials say by Adam Entous, Julian E Barnes and Adam Goldman, New York Times, 7 March 2023)

This version of events, along with various other options, has been reported at great length

across all the main imperialist media outlets, accompanied by dossiers of alleged 'evidence' and a supporting narrative, all in the breathless tone of an Agatha Christie whodunnit. Hersh's version, when included, is presented as the least likely option on a long list of possibilities, and readers are invited to believe this is the greatest mystery of the 21st century, on which the best brains in the west are conscientiously beaver away.

Thank goodness for the forces of law and order. Move along, nothing to see here.

Meanwhile in recent weeks, Kiev has been the scene of political carnage as a swathe of key political and military figures have faced summary dismissal in an 'anti-corruption' drive overseen by the CIA's William Burns. Whilst this has been dressed up as a run of the mill clean-up of corrupt officials, what it really amounts to is a purge conducted all the way to the top of the power structure.

Whether Washington is trying to protect its protege Zelensky, or is moving to isolate the actor-turned-president in preparation for setting him up as the fall guy responsible for all their failures, is as yet unclear.

Biden may be trying to save his own scalp by sacrificing his Ukrainian 'allies', but if it turns out to be the case that for Germany 'standing with Ukraine' means standing by whilst Ukrainian fascists blow up your main power supply, then don't be surprised to see thousands more Germans take to the streets as the truth about the war, and the roots of the war, sink in.

"We are like the slaves to war and the warmongers," said Norbert, a former soldier, who held a banner reading: "The real enemy sits in the City of London and New York."

Anti-Imperialist Platform



Comrade Joti in Caracas: 'We are facing the same enemy and must fight together'

The world's anti-imperialist forces are coming together in a way that has not been seen for 70 years.

The following contribution was delivered to the World Anti-imperialist Platform conference in Caracas on Saturday 4 March by Comrade Joti Brar on behalf of our party.

Comrades, this event takes place at a time of crucial importance for the world struggle against imperialism.

Our struggle is becoming more significant every day, as people everywhere are faced with the hard truth that they simply cannot obtain a secure supply of basic necessities under their present economic conditions – never mind being able to achieve for themselves the peaceful enjoyment of a useful and fulfilling life.

To the esteemed delegates in this hall, I bring greetings from Britain, one of the oldest imperial powers and at one time the most powerful. In my country, a tiny class of billionaire finance capitalists still profits enormously by using the wealth accumulated over generations to carry on plundering the resources and exploiting the labour-power of the globe.

Yet in this same country, the mass of poor workers are

suffering greatly from the effects of the global economic crisis – a crisis that has been exacerbated by our rulers' aggressive economic and military warfare, and by their refusal to put in place any measures to help those who are bearing the brunt of a crisis that was not of their making.

Of course, we know that the burden of this crisis is falling most heavily on the poorest around the world, just as it is falling most heavily onto the poorest workers within British society. Still, both inside Britain and across the world, the same message is making itself felt more plainly every day: this system does not care about you; it cannot help you; *something must be done*.

Standing in Caracas today, we are reminded of the long history of oppression – *and resistance* – of the peoples on your continent.

We remember the crimes of colonisers from Spain, Portugal and Holland, who were replaced in their turn by the equally criminal and even more ruthless modern imperialists – the finance capitalists of Britain and the USA.

In much of the world, the USA rose to the position of public enemy number one only after two world wars had fatally weakened the powers of old Europe. Even then, it was some time before many newly-liberated nations understood that the old empires had been replaced by a new one; before they detected the dagger behind the back of the gangster whose hand appeared to be stretched out in friendship.

In this part of the world, the story is a different one. Here, life long ago revealed the fascistic face that hides beneath the democracy-loving mask of Uncle Sam. Two centuries ago, US president James Monroe set out his famous doctrine for the Americas, claiming for his masters the sole right to loot and control the resources and politics of every part of the western hemisphere.

From that day to this, the history of Latin America and the Caribbean has been a story of the subversion of democracy and the denial of the people's will.

From assassinations to mysterious illnesses and plane crashes; from the buying or overturning of elections to the control of media, judicial and military institutions; from outright invasions and occupations to the funding of vicious mercenaries and proxies to

drown popular movements in blood; from the direct overthrow of popular governments to their slow strangulation by economic blockade, the USA has made it clear that for as long as it has the power to prevail, the masses of this continent will be allowed no peace but the peace of the grave.

And to what end was all this directed? Did some higher human purpose justify these relentless assaults, this seemingly endless trail of suffering? No. It was only to secure and boost the profits of US monopolies: of the United Fruit Company, of Texaco, of Chevron, of Monsanto, of Pfizer.

For such an end, there is no human cost the imperialists consider to be too great. *Understanding this simple truth is the key to understanding our own tasks*. We must give up on the idea of persuading or reforming our oppressors. It cannot be done.

Karl Marx long ago explained that in the present economic system, the capitalist becomes the *personification of his capital*, and acts relentlessly and solely in its interests. He cannot be appealed to on the basis of humane or rational logic.

And what is it that his capital desires? *Only to expand*. To be given an opportunity to exploit labour-power in order to make a profit and grow. Today, when the hoards of accumulated capital have become unimaginably vast, the need to keep finding new avenues for their reinvestment is driving the owners of those capital funds into a frenzy.

And all the while, the rulers of our world are getting richer at the expense of the rest of humanity. Their joy is built upon our misery, and they have created a huge machinery for the division and suppression of the people in order to maintain their privilege and power.

Anti-Imperialist Platform

Their economic system and their machinery of suppression must be destroyed.

As a British socialist, I represent that part of the British working class that is already striving for liberation and socialism; which has understood this message and is doing what it can to help the rest of our class understand it too.

And, as socialists living at the heart of the imperialist world, in the belly of the beast, we remember the words of the great Lenin, that master of revolutionary theory and practice, whose Bolshevik party was the first to show humanity that the workers could be organised into a truly independent force, that the imperialists could be defeated, and that a new world could be built.

Lenin taught us that, in the struggle against our imperialist rulers, *we must unite with the hundreds of millions of oppressed peoples around the world who are struggling against the same enemy.* He repeatedly stressed that no one who claims the title of socialist can fail in this duty. And the Russian revolution gave us the proof that our struggle *will be victorious* if we succeed in this aim, and *will be doomed to defeat* if we do not.

Friends, we do not support one another's struggles out of feelings of sympathy or charity. We do not strive to unite out of humanitarianism, although we feel our common humanity very deeply. We unite with one another because *we must*; because *we face the same enemy and must fight together if we are fighting to win* and not merely making heroic but futile gestures in order to salve our consciences.

Comrades, just as the October Revolution showed workers everywhere that another world is possible, the collapse of the Soviet Union set back

the cause of human liberation by 30 years and more.

Who can forget that the global capitalist economy was in dire trouble in the 1980s? And who can forget that the imperialists were saved from their troubles by the unprecedented orgy of looting that followed the collapse of the USSR and the European people's democracies? That they pillaged and grew fat on the wealth stolen from the proud peoples of the former socialist republics?

Who can forget the jubilation with which the USA declared itself to be the world's only superpower and set out on a mission to stamp out every last shred of sovereignty and independence in the globe?

To the extent that the newly-emboldened rulers of the USA were able to launch their project for a 'new American century', it was as a result of the terrible blow that had been inflicted on the forces of socialism and anti-imperialist liberation. With supreme arrogance, the imperialists embarked on a carnival of destruction, starting in Yugoslavia and spreading out across Asia and Africa.

The death toll for all humanity following the loss of the USSR has not been computed, but when we consider all the dire consequences, from liberation struggles crushed and countries destroyed to the catastrophic fall in life expectancies and birth rates, there is no doubt it has been immense. And to this must be added the destruction of hard-won infrastructure, industry and agriculture, of whole economies razed to the ground and whole countries poisoned by chemical and nuclear weapons.

The imperialist-engendered famines and the waves of refugees sent flooding from these conflicts bear eloquent witness to the destructive savagery of the USA and Nato's war ma-

chine.

To the extent that the imperialists failed in their mission to wipe out all centres of resistance to their domination, it was as a result of the legacy of October, which gave a signal to the peoples of the world that the time *when colonial overlords would be tolerated was over.* And the world has never been the same since.

Given that the USA and its allies could not beat the resistance in Afghanistan, where the technological level was so low and the poverty levels so high, it seems like insanity for the imperialists to be targeting Russia and China as they are currently doing – countries with the economic and technical strength to stand up for themselves and their allies. *But the desperate need to find some way out of their economic crisis impels the monopoly financiers to drive towards war all the same.*

Clearly, they hope that if they can set enough fires on the borders of Russia and China; can create enough proxy forces to drag them into endless conflict, they will be able to wear their opponents down before facing them openly; will be able to create unrest amongst the Russian and Chinese populations, and thus prepare the ground for regime change from within and without.

What is it ultimately that the imperialists want? They want free access to the wealth of the world, with no resistance from the peoples on or under whose lands this wealth resides. They want to destroy every government and movement that tries to defend its people against this piracy.

In particular, they want to destroy the sovereignty and independence of Russia and China, break them into pieces, loot their wealth and exploit their labour forces.

They want a repeat of the carnival they enjoyed after the fall of the USSR.

Such an outcome would once again set back the cause of socialism and liberation by 20, 30, 40 or even 50 years. Comrades, the world's impoverished masses cannot be asked to endure such another torment!

That is why we say that this struggle we face now has reached a critical stage, and that it concerns the entire world. We must all of us recognise that there is *one struggle and one enemy*; that our fight is your fight and that your fight is ours.

The members of my party take great hope from all the signs that the world's anti-imperialist forces are coming together in a way that has not been seen for 70 years. We take great hope from the initiative that has seen the forming of the World Anti-imperialist Platform, whose aim is to help forge that unity of purpose and action we so desperately need.

We welcome the role of the Platform in vigorously countering the imperialist war propaganda machine, which seeks to demonise the leadership of every country it targets, and to confuse and demoralise the working masses by turning our hatred of imperialism into a weapon against us. *The branding of Russia, China and even Brazil and Venezuela as 'imperialist' countries is a major part of the psychological and ideological warfare that our enemies are waging, and it must be exposed and opposed.*

If we can truly unite our activities around this central programme; if we can really come together to maximise our actions to disrupt and defeat the aggressive and criminal Nato imperialist bloc, then our victory is assured.

Americas



Working-class antiwar rage sends US woke mafia into a head fit

A broad coalition of those who really want to stop the US war machine faces silence from the media and insults from the 'left'.

The nineteenth of February witnessed a massive antiwar demonstration in Washington, right in the belly of the imperialist beast. Thousands gathered to “rage against the war machine”, sweeping aside labels of ‘left’ and ‘right’ to express their raw anger at a system which simultaneously conducts wars of oppression against the poor abroad and austerity at home.

Unlike other self-identifying (and self-neutering) antiwar movements (essentially middle-class ‘left’ rackets in hock to the Democratic party in the USA or the Labour party in Britain), the Rage movement might actually pose a real threat to the establishment.

So long as our protests conform to the tried and tested (and repeatedly failed) activist playbook, policed by the orthodox left and pitting ‘left’ versus ‘right’, there is nothing to really disturb the capitalists’ sleep. But when the seething masses, tortured by want and driven to fight in wars they do not understand and in which they have no stake, are pushed beyond toleration and can no longer be soothed by labels of ‘left’ or ‘right’, then the establishment becomes nervous – and instinctively turns for as-

sistance to the ‘left’ guardians of political correctness, hoping thereby to put a little lead in the pencil of the liberal bourgeoisie.

Media suppression

The first response to the Rage protests has been a near-total silence in the imperialist media. Just like the media blackout which has faced Seymour Hersh’s devastating exposure of the Biden administration’s direct responsibility for the criminal sabotage of the Nord Stream pipelines, the massing of an antiwar revolt in the heart of Washington was simply airbrushed out of the headlines.

This was commented on in a recent email circular from the Greenville Post, whose author remarked on the “near total wipe-out of all information – before, during and after – on the 19 February ‘Rage against the war machine’ rally in Washington DC, long programmed by a left-right coalition ranging from libertarians to real left (ie, People’s Party, independent Marxists, etc) at the Lincoln Memorial.”

The piece continued: “Instead, what we saw (those who tried to watch the rally on YouTube or TV) was a big nothing,

Coverage could not be found, or was suspiciously defective (no sound). It’s undeniable that the rally was clearly and meticulously sabotaged, rendered invisible, before, during, and after, by all types of dirty stratagems, obviously staged by the establishment’s legacy media and the social media platforms themselves.” (Email: Anti-imperialist tool Vol 18 from the Greenville Post, 21 February 2023)

But as it dawns on the bourgeoisie that such manifestations of popular revolt cannot simply be shrugged off as the crisis worsens, it turns for ideological aid to its woke friends, the self-appointed gatekeepers of the ‘left’.

Left policemen to the rescue

After all those years spent arguing about the need to build a ‘broad church’ that could mobilise the widest support for the antiwar message: years in which it was maintained that the exclusion of communist voices alone would avoid scaring off the Quakers and pacifists; years which to the contrary witnessed the serial erosion of its support base thanks to the political bankruptcy of the social-democratic leadership, there is now a new approach to building a ‘broad’ antiwar movement.

Instead of pretending to welcome all comers (bar communists) with open arms, the new woke management effectively requires any would-be peace activist to undergo a rigorous entrance exam up front, designed to winkle out and cancel any luckless soul who fails to pass the test.

Take as an example ‘journalist/activist’ Jacqueline Luqman. She urges the antiwar movement to grill anyone who might be suspected of contamination with reactionary

thoughts, forcing them to have “conversations about their racism and white supremacist tendencies, their patriarchy, their homophobia and transphobia, their ableism, their superior attitude as if they know All Things Organising, and their resistance to being led by non-white non-men”. (Protest movements in Israel and the United States: On the importance of context when choosing sides by Benay Blend, Palestine Chronicle, 15 February 2023)

Step forward grand inquisitor Melinda Butterfield. The Rage programme, she notes, “features racist, anti-trans, and anti-worker speakers like ‘Tea Party’ founder Ron Paul, a former member of Congress from Texas; anti-trans bigot Tulsi Gabbard, another former representative; former judge Andrew Napolitano, a past Fox News host who was considered by Trump for a supreme court seat; and representatives of the Libertarian party and Lyndon Larouche’s Schiller Institute.” (Ibid)

None of this should astonish and is to be expected, given that the event was openly billed as uniting left and right voices against the war with Russia. More worthy of note is the fact that, despite the failure of the orthodox left to mobilise significant opposition to the war itself, it still believes it has a God-given monopoly on posing as the anointed organiser of all antiwar protests.

This dog-in-the-manger logic is more concerned with detecting and outing backward heresies amongst the great unwashed than with leading a genuine mass fight to stop the war in Ukraine. But then, like every other self-identifying ‘left’ faction, its failure to recognise Nato as the aggressor and Russia as the target of aggression renders it incapable of understanding the first thing that is going on, let ▶ **page 26**

Americas



Lawfare in Latin America: the case of Argentina's Cristina Kirchner

Corruption of a nominally-independent country's justice system is a major tool in the arsenal of imperialist control.

Ten days after the murder attempt against Argentinean vice-president Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner (CFK), the Clarin newspaper, owned by the country's largest media conglomerate, wrote an article headlined: *'Cristina, entre la bala que no salió y el fallo que si saldrá'* (Cristina, between the bullet that did not fire and the court sentence that will fire).

This title openly expressed the firm desire of the upper classes and right-wing politicians to eliminate Ms Kirchner from the political scene, whether via a bullet or via the courts.

Lawfare, nothing new in Latin America

In 2001, US air force general Charles Dunlap defined the term 'lawfare' as the use of the courts to obtain certain results that would otherwise require the use of military force. Since then, the concept has expanded to include the use of legal systems and institutions to damage or delegitimise an opponent, or to weaken or destroy political adversaries.

To implement lawfare processes, the ruling classes have two main allies: the highly-concentrated mainstream mass media and that most conservative and ideologically dependable of bourgeois-democratic institutions – the judiciary.

In Latin America, lawfare has been used by the USA to justify political and economic sanctions against countries like Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela, by corrupted judges to prosecute political leaders and ban them from running in elections, as was the case of Rafael Correa (former president of Ecuador) barred in absentia from running for office for 25 years, Dilma Rouseff (former president of Brazil) deposed in 2016, Evo Morales (former president of Bolivia) who was barred from standing in 2020's Senate elections, and Lula da Silva (former president of Brazil).

The case of Ignacio 'Lula' da Silva is one of the most recent and glaring examples of this use of the courts to achieve political ends. The former Brazilian president was sentenced

by a corrupted court to 12 years in prison on trumped-up corruption charges in 2018, thus preventing him from standing in that year's presidential election.

Lula had spent 580 days in prison when Brazil's supreme court finally overturned his sentence as baseless and politically motivated, thus freeing him to run for office once more. He was duly elected president of Brazil for the third time in October 2022.

As defeated president Jair Bolsonaro's vice-president Hamilton Mourão remarked ruefully: "We have to stop crying. We lost the election. Our mistake was to have allowed Lula to turn the court case around."

Lawfare and the Kirchner case

Since leaving the presidency in 2015, Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner (known to locals as CFK) had been subjected to daily harassment by corrupt judges and corporate media in an attempt to silence her, while the new right-wing government of Mauricio Macri was busy reversing the major social policies that had been implemented during her presidency.

Several lawsuits were presented against Ms Kirchner. The most significant of these were charged her with: manipulation of future currency exchange prices against central bank reserves; concluding a memorandum of understanding with Iran regarding the investigation of a terrorist attack against a Jewish community centre that had occurred in 1994; tax evasion; corruption in the award of public infrastructure projects in the province of Santa Cruz.

In the last seven years, these cases have been dismissed one by one, either for lack of evidence or because Ms Kirchner

was acquitted before the case went to trial. But the media continued to report on the charges daily, doing everything possible (as was done in Brazil regarding Lula) to incite a mood of public condemnation.

Clearly, the all this harassment was aimed at achieving 'justice', but at destroying the hope that Cristina Kirchner represents to millions of poor Argentineans – hope for a life free from the grinding poverty inflicted as a result of the US plunder of their country.

As a new electoral year approached, the elite used the judges and courts under their control to have Cristina sentenced to six years in prison – and to issue her with a lifelong ban from holding public office.

The judges now have until 9 March 2023 to 'explain' their decision, at which point Ms Kirchner will be able to begin the lengthy (in all probability years long) appeal process. For the first time in Argentinian history, a vice-president has been convicted of a crime while in office (following the example of Dilma Rouseff in Brazil, who was deposed during her presidency following similar convictions).

Following Ms Kirchner's sentencing, a photograph has appeared which shows her judges playing football together at former president Mauricio Macri's ranch. Another shows several of them flying with media tycoons in a private jet to visit British business magnate Joe Lewis, a close friend of Macri, at his Patagonian ranch.

After years of corporate media campaigning against Ms Kirchner, public opinion is naturally polarised. But among the popular masses there is a strong belief that her sentence was politically motivated.

This was clearly expressed by Kirchner herself af- ▶ **page 26**

Americas

Argentina lawfare

◀ **page 25** ter the court hearing: “They sentence me because they are against a model of economic development and recognition of the rights of the people. But the sentence is not six years or jail. The real sentence they are issuing is the perpetual disqualification to exercise elective political office. All public posts I held were won by popular vote.” Despite her having declared that she will not seek election in 2023, public support for Cristina’s candidacy is on the rise.

Progressive leaders in Latin America – stone in the shoe of USA backyard policies

For US policy makers, Latin America is a basket full of rich resources that need to be managed in the interests of the USA. This attitude was summed up by US Southcom chief General Laura Richardson at a recent Atlantic Council event on ‘security in the Americas’.

During her interview, General Richardson catalogued and stressed the importance of Latin-American resources such as the vast oil reserves of Venezuela, huge recently-discovered deposits of copper, silver, gold and other minerals, and the ‘lithium triangle’ (Argentina, Bolivia and Chile), which accounts for most of Lat-

in America’s estimated 60 per cent of global lithium reserves.

General Richardson further highlighted the 21 countries of the region that have joined China’s Belt and Road Initiative, the Chinese multinational Huawei’s leading role in telecommunications and the provision of 5G networks, and Russia’s activities in Latin America as ‘threats to the US national security’.

In summary, defending US interests means ensuring the application of ‘US policies’ in the region. (A conversation with General Laura J Richardson on security across the Americas, 19 January 2023)

Progressive leaders in Latin America have always represented a major obstacle to the continued dominance of ‘US policies’ in the region.

As the recent victories of Gustavo Petro in Colombia and Lula in Brazil show, progressive leaders want to develop independent regional policies that address inequality, determine locally the best use of local resources, and end the isolation of Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua.

As the recent Celac (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States) summit demonstrated, there is a desperate need for the continent to create a forum at which its own voice can be heard, as distinct from the US-dominat-

ed Organisation of American States (OAS).

Progressive leaders at the summit called for the strengthening of institutions and of democracy in the face of a recalcitrant and fascist right, for an end the blockade of Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela, for the construction of a peaceful and multipolar world order.

President Nicolás Maduro of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela pointed out: “It is imperative that we raise a single voice, and Latin America and the Caribbean tell the United States of North America: no more coups, enough sanctions against free and sovereign countries. We must join forces and efforts to reject all kinds of interventionism by forces or powers out of our region.”

The recent rejection by Colombia, Brazil, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Cuba and Argentina of the USA’s request to send their stockpiles of Soviet/Russian weapons to Ukraine confirmed that progressive leaders are committed to building in Latin America and the Caribbean a ‘Zone of Peace’, as declared in the third Celac summit in 2014.

One thing is clear: the more that the oppressed nations stand together, the better they will be able to defend their sovereignty and achieve their independence.

French crisis

◀ **page 17** ter-offensive of workers, precarious workers and youth, fighting not only to bring the retirement age back down to 60, as is called for by many trade unions, but also to improve wages and employment, in order to freeze and dismantly many of the other counter-reforms, inspired via the Maastricht process (SNCF, EDF), the reconstruction of national education, the banning of industrial offshoring and the safeguarding of production in France, the maintenance of social housing, unemployment benefits, etc.

In this tug of war, it is the responsibility of our communist organisations to blame head-on not only Macron and the MEDEF, but also the European Union, which has been orchestrating social breakdown on a continental scale for decades, and the stifling austerity of the euro, not to mention Nato, which, in close alliance with the EU, and with Macron’s slavish support, is day by day preparing the conditions for a potentially destructive global conflagration with Russia, and even with the People’s China.

Now, more than ever, we call for:

**Money for wages,
not for war!**

**Money for our pensions,
not for the arms dealers**

**They break our gains,
block their profits!**

More than ever, in the face of devastating capitalism and its increasingly reactionary and fascist tendencies, the Communist Renaissance Pole in France, the Communist Assembly and the National Association of Communists together reaffirm that the future belongs to the revolutionaries and to a new generation of socialism-communism.

US antiwar rage

◀ **page 24** alone educating anyone else.

Ms Butterfield has warned that the “ultra-right is preying on the weakness and confusion that has plagued the antiwar movement since the outbreak of open conflict between Russia and Nato’s proxy regime in Ukraine last year.”

Yet who is responsible for that weakness and confusion if not those who blame Russia for the war and reserve their fiercest attacks for the politically incorrect?

She warned: “The far right is attempting to lead antiwar forces into a trap that would override the life-and-death concerns of oppressed communities for the false hope of

a ‘broad alliance’ against the warnings of World War 3.”

But the official antiwar movement is already in a trap, a social-democratic trap into which we are invited to enter.

Embellishing that trap with woke slogans will not advance the fight to stop the war by even one inch.

Industry



NHS pay offer exposes the limitations of trade unionism

Why are modern trade unions in Britain so incapable of advancing working-class aims?

From the Class Consciousness Project, with thanks.

The news on Thursday 16 March that the government and NHS trade unions had reached a ‘major breakthrough’ in their long-standing pay dispute by negotiating and recommending a pay deal which in no way constitutes a real-terms pay rise will surprise nobody who works in the NHS.

The offer, which consists of a one-off payment of 2 percent, a ‘Covid recovery bonus’ of 4 percent for the current financial year, a 3 percent pay rise for next year, and then a 1 percent pay rise in the next two years, means that NHS workers will receive a pay ‘rise’ that has already been outstripped by rampant inflation not seen in this country since 1990.

Although Unite has said that it is not good enough and has paused strike action whilst its members are consulted, Unison and the Royal College of Nursing (RCN), trade unions not known for their militancy who between them organise the vast majority of NHS unionised staff, have recommended acceptance of the offer.

RCN general secretary Pat Cullen has proclaimed the deal as a “vindication” of the “his-

toric pressure” that members put on the government to negotiate a settlement. However, taking an admittedly unscientific sample of responses from social media suggests that the rank-and-file members working in the NHS do not agree. In fact, they are extremely angry at what they believe is a derisory offer that has been dressed up as the ‘best deal that can be won in the circumstances’.

The government has indicated strongly that this ‘deal’ would be paid for from existing NHS budgets, while health secretary Steve Barclay has said that the additional money “would not come from areas of the budget that impact on patients”.

What is obvious is that, if frontline services will not be affected, an assertion that lacks credibility, then workers in back-office and admin roles will have to bear the brunt of the strip-back of budgets that will result from the reshuffle of already allocated funds from some departments to others.

The bureaucracies of NHS trade unions have been dragged kicking and screaming into this dispute by their membership, and have been fighting tooth and tail to get out of it as quickly and as painlessly for themselves as possible.

High-profile disputes like this cruelly expose the schism that exists between rank-and-file trade union members and the detached bureaucratic professionals who negotiate with employers and run their unions.

Democratic atrophy has been taking place within trade unions for decades. The turning point for the modern British trade union movement is arguably the period between 1984 and 1986, when the government of Margaret Thatcher went into open war with the working class during the miners’ strike, and their eventual defeat was followed by Rupert Murdoch’s (notably assisted by the foul and repellent trade union EETPU, led by the late and unlamented arch-reactionary class traitor Eric Hammond) crushing of the print unions in the ‘Fortress Wapping’ dispute.

Hamstrung by myriad anti-trade union laws and by the demoralisation of a string of defeats suffered in the mid-80s, the trade unions adopted the ‘service model’ of organisation, where members join a union for local workplace representation, legal assistance and a raft of discounts and other services. Workers ever since have been encouraged to join a trade union in much the same way as motorists are encouraged to join the AA.

This has created a purely transactional relationship between trade unions and its members – poor representation from the trade union is met with members simply leaving rather than challenging those poor representatives or, heaven forbid, standing for office against them.

Trade union bureaucracies have a vested interest in maintaining their ‘democratic structures’ in such a parlous state: they remain in their positions (some handsomely remuner-

ated) for as long as they want to be in them, while opportunities for politically-suitable new recruits to the bureaucracy exist only for those with the necessary contacts and networks.

The toxic relationship that the trade unions have with the Labour party is also a critical factor. There has been an osmotic relationship between the Labour party and trade union bureaucracies for decades – Labour MPs have often come from trade union bureaucratic backgrounds, while Labour party staffers can move seamlessly into paid trade union roles, often by dint of their employment with Labour alone.

The trade union bureaucracies of Labour-affiliated trade unions are essentially apprenticeship schemes for would-be Labour councillors and MPs, and fealty to the Labour party is a prime requisite for anyone hoping to make a foray into the higher levels of trade union organisations.

This toxic relationship permeates every action of the trade union bureaucracies. With Labour looking likely to win a majority of seats in the next general election and Sir Keir Starmer a strong candidate for Britain’s next prime minister, Labour-affiliated unions are anxious to avoid prolonged and bitter confrontation with employers, lest this hands the media the opportunity to implicate Labour in them.

For now, however, the matter at hand is that Unison and RCN have recommended an offer to their members in the NHS which leaves them, in real terms, with a lower wage in proportion to the cost of living than they had in 2021. It must be totally rejected by members, and those responsible for negotiating this wretched deal and, worse still, recommending it to their members, should resign.

Proletarian



After the strikes, what then?

As union leaders look for the exit, their members' anger is being directed towards yet another diversionary 'vote Labour' campaign.

The strike wave that began in June last year, as desperate workers supported industrial action to protest against efforts to make them bear the brunt of the inflationary cost of living crisis, has been impressive in its scope and duration.

The Office of National Statistics reported that days lost through strike action were the highest in 30 years, with over 2.4 million working days lost to strikes last year.

On 1 February, a day of action called by the TUC, over half a million workers went out on strike, including rail workers, bus drivers, civil servants and teachers. The RMT called its first national rail dispute since the privatisation of the railways and the Royal College of Nursing called the first strike in its existence.

For a time, it seemed as if the growing anger of workers as burden after burden was heaped on their backs would prove a powerful enough impetus to make them break free from the suffocating embrace

of the Labour party and hit back at the system which was systematically impoverishing them.

When the TUC proved unequal to the task of giving leadership to the struggle, the RMT's Mick Lynch stepped into the breach, offering his own brand of militant trade unionism in a way that resonated not only with his own members but even with sections of the general public, who relished the sight of Lynch running rings around the gormless Good Morning Britain crew.

On an institutional level, the trade union based Enough Is Enough campaign thrived for a while, drumming up support for a similar mix of militant trade unionism. But now the RMT has now suspended its strike so that members can mull over a slightly improved pay deal, while the RCN has called off the nurses' strikes on just a vague promise of "intensive talks".

The strike wave is not yet over – as this is written, the

junior doctors have just concluded a three-day strike – but there is already a strong sense that union leaders are making a coordinated bid for the exit and calculating the most opportune moment to bail out, concerned not to achieve victory but to get just enough of a deal to be able to feed their members the standard line that this sell-out is 'the best that could be achieved'.

This is a travesty of leadership and a blatant dereliction of duty. The real desire and urgent need of workers to fight is being systematically sold down the river by the very people who are paid to lead that struggle. And this despite the fact that many of the union members who are propelling the current actions are on headline salaries that simply won't allow them to keep body and soul together without a pay rise that at least keeps up with inflation.

These leaders' routine insistence on pushing a 'compromise' that leaves their poorest members taking drastic real-terms pay cuts year on year is class treachery pure and simple.

Meanwhile, reports suggest that 'Enough Is Enough' meet-

ings now attract a dwindling clientele, mostly composed of paid union officials whose real goal is neither smashing wage slavery, nor even seriously bargaining to raise the price of labour-power, but solely getting everyone to vote Labour at the next election. The Trot/revisionist lash-up of usual suspects behind the abject 'People's Assembly' is also pushing the 'evil Tories' mantra, calling on people to sign up and come along to local meetings in order to ... you guessed it: 'Bring down the Tories'.

No possible benefit can come to the working class from following this diversionary advice. Labour and Tory alike serve the same master and follow the same agenda: Save British imperialism, no matter what.

Our advice to workers is quite the reverse: Break the link with Labour, rebuild a real fighting trade union movement in Britain, resume a determined struggle for decent pay and conditions, and take up the struggle for socialism – the only real way out of the downward spiral of poverty, economic crisis and war.

Trade unionist politics, even if properly and militantly conducted, are not able to offer a lasting way out of the fix workers are in. Only when we raise our horizon from the demand that capitalism treats its slaves a little better (a fair day's work for a fair day's pay) and fix instead on the revolutionary demand for a complete end to our wage slavery – in short, that we demand socialism – will we be able to secure enduring progress.