

How London liberals fuel the far right



Stefan Rousseau/Alamy; Hollie Adams/Reuters

Knights of the realm Blair and Starmer cloak their service to City bankers in “enlightened” liberal values, fuelling far right.

Once again, another summer where “Broken Britain” blows up in everyone’s face. In 2015, we had Corbyn-takes-over-Labour summer. Then it was Brexit summer (that lasted a few rounds). Then lockdown summer (a few of these, too) followed by cost-of-living-crisis summer. Now, while it was bad enough that Sir Keir Starmer got into No 10, we had hordes-of-racists-torching-asylum-centres-and-mosques summer.

The week of racist riots was a sinister warning of what lies ahead (see our call for trade union defence on page 11). In the end, mass anti-racist demonstrations coupled with a massive campaign of repression by the Labour government proved sufficient to quell the riots. But while some leftists are giving themselves high fives for having “won”, most know that nothing has been resolved and wonder how it got so bad and, crucially, what to do about it. And it is pretty obvious that a few liberal demonstrations will not solve the problem of the growth of the far right. So, to go forward, socialists must understand how the far right became such a powerful political force and draw lessons.

What have the liberals been saying? For some, the riots were a “mask off” moment. Maya Goodfellow, an academic, penned a piece in the *Guardian* titled “We keep hearing about ‘legitimate concerns’ over immigration. The truth is, there are none” (13 August). Rivkah Brown, a commentator at Novara Media, wrote a piece titled “We don’t need to ‘talk about immigration’” (14 August), arguing that concerns over it are fabricated and that, instead, we should talk about poverty and violence against women

and a range of other serious issues.

The standard explanation in these milieus is that racist ideas are spread by fascists like Tommy Robinson or racist populists like Nigel Farage, then echoed by politicians, Tories or Labour, as well as the media, particularly the tabloid press. They argue that, together with poverty, this creates a climate where it is “ok” to hate foreigners, leading to the recent explosion. The solutions include pushing more people into politics and media who celebrate immigration, fact-based evidence, tackling poverty and emphasising working-class solidarity. Variations of this narrative are found from the *Guardian* all the way to *Socialist Worker*.

It is certainly true that politicians and the media have done their fair share of spreading racist poison. And yes, poverty has everything to do with the riots. But none of this explains why, as the left has been banging its head denouncing poverty, those at the receiving end of it are turning not to the left... but to the right. Left liberals should also reflect upon the fact that branding anyone concerned about immigration as “racist” hasn’t quite worked out. And at bottom, the view that the riots are centrally caused by Farage and the Murdoch press is not much more profound than those who blame disinformation on social media. In truth, the liberals cannot understand nor attack the root cause of these riots.

What they cannot comprehend is that decades of austerity and attacks on working people have been carried out not in the name of “rivers of blood” but in the name of liberal ideas. “Freedom of movement”, “democracy”, “inclusiveness”, “saving the

planet”, and even “anti-racism” have been the war cries of the British ruling class, best embodied by Blairism and the European Union. Rather than opposing this, the forces supposed to fight for the working class and socialism embraced liberalism, sometimes even becoming its best defenders. This is how the far right emerged as the only political force challenging the globalised and liberal order, albeit from the right. The riots are but one manifestation of this process, which is unfolding throughout the Western world.

So long as the socialist movement remains in an alliance with liberalism, the far right is guaranteed steady growth. This is most obvious on the question of immigration, where the socialist movement is thoroughly imbued with liberal ideas. To understand this better, we must look more closely at the structure of the British economy.

Immigration and a rotting economy

Thatcher first presided over the reorganisation of the economy around the City of London. From then on, the British ruling class pursued a conscious policy of offshoring, first to destroy trade unions (like the NUM) and then simply because modernising old British industry costs more than buying cheap products from abroad. Impelled by the US victory in the Cold War and the beginning of globalisation, Tony Blair perfected this profound shift while giving it a social liberal veneer.

Back when the economy relied on industrial production, the capitalist class had some interest in maintaining a transport network and providing basic health care and educa-

tion for the workforce. Now, most of these have withered away, with catastrophic consequences for all aspects of life, resulting in a rotting economy.

Since the 2008 crisis, the UK has had mediocre growth and stagnating productivity. Wages (once adjusted for inflation) are at roughly the same level as they were in 2007, a decade and a half which is costing the average worker some £11,000 yearly. One-fifth of the population (roughly 14 million people) lives in poverty, 30 per cent of UK children grow up in misery, and these numbers are rapidly increasing. Spending per school student is the same as it was 14 years ago, and there are over seven million cases on the NHS waiting list. All this and more can be traced to an economy organised around a giant Ponzi scheme.

However, high immigration is an inseparable part of this economic model. During the 1990s, the net migration figures (those who arrived minus those who left every year) went from tens of thousands to over 100,000 in 1998. They rapidly increased throughout the Blair era and during the Tory years, reaching unprecedented levels. The last two years have seen a massive spike: 1.2 million people arrived in 2022 and roughly the same in 2023 (net figures are 764,000 and 685,000, with “illegal” immigrants being a tiny fraction).

The relationship between the rotting state of the economy and high immigration is most obvious when looking at the housing question. Property speculation—the housing bubble—is one of the critical drivers of the economy and how asset management firms make money. Gigantic sums are sunk

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PARTISAN DEFENCE COMMITTEE

AN INJURY TO ONE IS AN INJURY TO ALL!



Sinister Starmer

Many people have celebrated Starmer's swift crackdown on the racist rioters rampaging across the country this August. While we shed no tears for these anti-immigrant thugs, the way the state went after them is a sinister warning to the left

because the methods used against the rioters will be deployed against the left and pro-Palestine activists.

In the days after the riots, over 1000 people were arrested and nearly 600 charged. Judges responded to the immense social pres-

sure to clamp down on the unrest by imposing stiff penalties. When the mass arrests began, the state secured fast convictions as arrestees were coerced into pleading guilty in exchange for significant time off their sentence. It should be clear that when a wave of hysteria sweeps the country, the social pressure to plead guilty can get you railroaded into prison, often based on flimsy evidence.

The last time Britain saw mass arrests on this scale was in 2011 after the police shot Mark Duggan, leading to huge protests against racist police killings. Sir Keir Starmer was the country's top prosecutor and he kept courts open for 24 hours a day, encouraging magistrates to hand down longer and tougher sentences. In France, when mass protests erupted in the *banlieues* of Paris against the police killing of Nahel Merzouk last year,

they were met with similar repression.

In an escalation of repressive measures, several people involved in the riots were arrested based only on social media posts. Now, the government is threatening to increase online censorship, curtailing the right to free speech. Don't be fooled that this only applies to racist social media posts! Pro-Palestinian journalists Richard Medhurst and Sarah Wilkinson were recently subjected to terrifying arrests by anti-terrorism cops for their online reporting, including on social media.

In August, the state was cracking down on reactionary mobilisations. But the same methods are used against struggle that is in the interest of the working class. Socialists must be clear that such ramped-up mobilisation of the capitalist state machinery is ultimately aimed at suppressing working-class struggle.

Stop bloody crackdown on Nigeria protests!

The following is a reprint of a 6 August supplement from AmaBolsheviki Amnyama, published by Spartacist South Africa.

Over the past six days, hundreds of thousands of youth and unemployed have taken to the streets across Nigeria to protest the imperialist-dictated shock therapy which has led to economic catastrophe including widespread starvation. In response the government of Bola Tinubu is unleashing a bloody crackdown. Police repeatedly open fire with live ammunition, already killing anywhere between 13 and 50 protesters and injuring many more. State agents are hunting down protest organisers and journalists. It is urgently necessary for workers here and everywhere to demand an end to the murderous repression. **Free all protesters and journalists, now!**

What can stay the government's bloody hand, and turn the tide against neoliberal austerity, is the social power of the organised working class—including crucially workers in the imperialist centres. Revolutionaries and workers in Nigeria must fight for the Nigeria Labour Congress and Trade Union Congress federations to place themselves at the head of the protests. This is the best way to push forward the demands of the youth and unemployed, and it is in the direct interest of every NLC and TUC member. Similarly, the workers movement of South Africa has a vital stake in the victory of the protests. Every blow the Nigerian masses are able to inflict against the Tinubu regime and the imperialist masters, will strengthen our ability to fight the same imperialists here. Everyone knows the neoliberal onslaught is only going to increase under the new right-wing ANC-DA coalition. A struggle here in support of the Nigerian protests is also the best way to cut through the Randlords' divide-and-rule pitting black South Africans against immigrants from Nigeria and the rest of the continent (the poisonous campaign against Miss SA candidate Chiddima Adetshina being just the latest example).

The Kenyan youth struck the first blow by successfully forcing the William Ruto government to repeal its IMF-dictated tax laws. To really turn the tide and build a movement to defeat the imperialist stranglehold of the African continent, what's needed is a fight for revolutionary working-class leadership. The struggles for democracy, national liberation and socio-economic development are constantly undermined and sabotaged as long as they remain under the leadership of the nationalist elites.

From Lagos to Nairobi, from Cairo to the Cape, we must fight, now:

- Down with the crackdown against the #DaysofRage protests!
- Re-instate the fuel subsidy! Down with austerity!
- Repudiate the debt to the imperialist bloodsuckers!
- Nationalise the oil fields, refineries, mines and all imperialist assets!
- For communist leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle!

Pröbsting appeal denied

The 6-month suspended sentence for Michael Pröbsting, leader of the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency, was upheld by the court in Vienna at a 21 August appeal hearing. This means that at any time he can be thrown in prison at the state's whim. Michael's conviction in May for the RCIT's staunch defence of the Palestinian people sets a sinister precedent for increasing repression of pro-Palestinian activists throughout Western Europe. It is urgently necessary to unite in defence of the RCIT and all opponents of the genocide in Gaza facing similar prosecution.

Free Just Stop Oil Five!

The PDC demands the immediate release of the Just Stop Oil (JSO) activists Daniel Shaw, Lucia Whittaker De Abreu, Louise Lancaster and Cressida Gethin who were recently given four-year prison sentences, as well as Roger Hallam who got five years, because they attended a November 2022 Zoom meeting to discuss peaceful civil disobedience to protest the expansion of fossil fuel licences.

The JSO5 were convicted in July of conspiracy to cause public nuisance at a trial that severely restricted their ability to put forward an effective defence, making a conviction virtually a foregone conclusion. This followed many months of draconian bail restrictions. And these five activists are just a few in a very long list of JSO supporters who have been arrested and put on trial for taking action to bring attention to the climate crisis.

The sinister campaign of repression by the British state against JSO to criminalise not only civil disobedience but even just talking about it, is very bad news for the workers movement and the left. It is an attack on the rights of us all to protest against the ravages of capitalism. The powers used against JSO are also wielded against protesters for Palestinian liberation, opponents of the government's anti-Muslim "extremism" campaign and militants standing up for workers' rights on the picket line. That is why, despite our many disagreements with the aims and methods of Just Stop Oil, the PDC is fighting to build a united-front campaign to take action in defence of the JSO5 and the many others arrested and languishing in jail. Join us in this struggle!

Draconian charges against Palestine Action

As Israel continues its unrelenting genocidal war in Gaza and the West Bank, Palestine Action's co-founder Richard Barnard is facing charges of "supporting a proscribed organisation" under the sinister Terrorism Act for a speech he gave last year. He also faces charges of encouraging "criminal activity", namely against arms manufacturers like Elbit. This is an outrageous attack on militant opponents of Britain selling arms to Israel.

Earlier, five other PA activists were jailed on charges of damaging a Glasgow armaments plant owned by Thales UK, an Elbit partner, in June 2022. Their prosecution underlines the state's determination, passing seamlessly from the Tories to Labour, to smash any opposition to Israel's Zionist rulers. See PA's website for information on others threatened with jail. **Hands off all of Palestine's defenders!**

While PA's intent is laudable, its strategy, based on the daring actions of a few, cannot stop the flow of military goods to Israel. The power to do that lies with the trade unions, which could shut down arms production and transport in a flash. But that requires determined struggle against the Labourite trade union leadership, which helped usher in a Starmer government committed to austerity and support to the Zionist butchers. The workers movement can start fighting back by mobilising to defend Palestine Action and all others targeted by the prosecutor-in-chief in No 10.

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LUCY LETBY: SCAPEGOAT FOR FAILING NHS

19 August 2023

The Spartacist League is known for its defense of freedom against reaction and struggle against the whole of evil if necessary. Although I am but a humble sympathizer and will speak anonymously, I ask that you consider my words.

Yesterday I was looking at BBC News

LETTER

when I suddenly found an article that said that a nurse by the name of Lucy Letby has been found guilty of intentionally killing many babies and that she is expected to spend life in prison. I previously knew next to nothing about her.

Immediately, I suffered for these poor babies and felt sickened and also rage against her (regarding the rage part, I should not have rushed to judgment). But the more I read the article, the more something felt like it was wrong. All the arguments given against Letby seemed to have some flaw, and the case seemed to rest on weak evidence.

For the following hours, I continued my research and consulted a broad range of sources. Although I am not sure of Letby's innocence, it seems that a fair trial may not have been practiced (I am not sure of whether it was or not—I tend to only say I am sure of things if I have 100% certainty). I again and again found that the evidence against her seemed weak on many points and that there were all kinds of attempts in the reactionary media to appeal to hateful arguments against her. The whole case seemed to reek of anti-woman and anti-working class biases. The motives for which she supposedly carried out these

killings do not add up.

The prosecution was trying to make her nervous in the trial, saying things like: “So why did you kill them?”, “Are you sad you didn't succeed killing them all?” The bourgeois media posted photos of her personal life, with captions like: “She smiled as she was killing”. The media in some instances said that she's evil because in some cases she didn't call the parents to psychologically assist them, while in other instances they're saying she's evil because she did call....

I did not finish researching, but so far I found no strong evidence against her. A note was found in her apartment where she supposedly wrote something like: “I am evil I killed them”. But it seems that rather than a confession, this was a personal paper where Letby dumped her anxieties and accusations she was receiving to vent her emotional frustrations. That was consistent with the other things written in the paper. In other personal papers which were instead associated with her more serious writing, things were written like: “I didn't kill them”, “I know I did nothing wrong”, etc.

Meanwhile, it seems that the hospital where she worked was notorious for its poor safety practices which may have led to many dead babies. Perhaps the government engineered a witch-hunt against Letby in order to deactivate the population's frustrations over the massive spike in deaths linked to poor healthcare recently?

Later, I found a paper written by a seem-



Nurse Lucy Letby, railroaded by NHS bosses and police.

ingly independent scientist, where many arguments and evidence (which I did not finish reviewing nor have the medical expertise to fully understand, but seemed strong) were given for Letby's innocence. The scientist had previously worked on the freeing of a notorious case of another nurse who was imprisoned for similar things, but then freed after the trial was revealed to be flawed. Apparently, the court did not allow this paper to be shown, it banned much evidence speaking in Letby's favor, and this scientist now seems to be under some form of police harassment from the little I've heard?

The scientist also said that the defense basically surrendered the case and refused to bring up the best evidence. Seems typical of a bourgeois frame up, reminds me of Mumia.

Please find information about that paper by looking up: “Richard Gill Lucy Letby” as well as the website: “Rex v. Lucy Letby 2023”.

A table accused Letby of correlations between baby deaths and the shifts she was present. The data seemed to be hand-picked. Someone wrote somewhere that they had performed a better statistical analysis and Letby's shifts were not actually associated with an increase in death rate.

I then looked at the websites of the fake socialists. I found no article questioning the Letby case. I then looked at websites of known reactionaries. I found many reactionaries saying things like: “hang her now”. And they were saying all kinds of things against this woman which were clearly linked with their reactionary beliefs. And they were taking advantage of the widespread hate against her in order to push broader anti-working class views.

So, it seems like many people are out to hunt Letby, while barely anyone is raising even the smallest complaint about any trial irregularities. I see virtually zero dissent beyond that one scientist and maybe one in a million people randomly writing on Twitter: “maybe she was innocent?” Given that this could pave the road for further attacks against the working class and may be part of a nasty bigger plot, could the Spartacist League research this case? Again, I am not sure of her innocence or guilt, but I do desire to protect rights, freedoms and fair trials.

If I am right, what better way for the Spartacist League to again demarcate itself from the fake socialists and once again become hated by the whole of bourgeois society and prove its loyalty to the working class, as will become apparent to its vanguard, and those who are loyal to democracy and freedom in general?

Workers Hammer replies:

28 August 2024

Workers Hammer never responded to your letter and request because we dismissed them from the get-go and simply bought into the accounts of the press and the court about Lucy Letby's conviction. We were obviously wrong. In recent months, multiple accounts have come out raising serious questions about Letby's case, repeating many of the same points you laid out.

The leadership of the SL/B and Workers Hammer wish to make clear to you that it was an absolute failure on our part to dismiss your letter. That was a capitulation to bourgeois public opinion. Simply put, we failed to look at this case with the heavy dose of suspicion that any trade unionist—not to speak of communist—should have when confronted with such a story. Guilty or not, the conviction of a worker on flimsy evidence is a threat to the entire working class. The conviction of Letby has created a dangerous precedent for all NHS workers, and publishing the details you sent us a year ago could have helped her case.

We cannot go back in time. But we are taking this episode as a warning and want to rectify our failure by urging the workers movement to defend Letby. This is a key part of the struggle to save the NHS and defend its workforce against management scapegoating of staff for the system's failings.

Comradely,
Vincent David,
editor of Workers Hammer

NHS UNIONS: DEFEND LUCY LETBY!

On 13 May, the *New Yorker* magazine published an article that blew the lid off the 2023 frame-up trial that convicted neonatal nurse Lucy Letby of killing seven babies in the Countess of Chester hospital. Since then, dozens of articles have been published showing that her conviction was based on false and misleading evidence. The *Guardian*, *Times*, *Telegraph*, *Daily Mail* and BBC, who previously howled against her as a serial killer, are now awash with articles exposing many flaws in the evidence presented to this monstrous show trial.

The turnaround in opinion is a pivotal moment: the NHS unions must act *now* to overturn the wrongful conviction of Lucy Letby. Every nurse and junior doctor knows that what happened to her can happen to them. Their fears of being scapegoated are stated bluntly in an open letter by nurses saying that they are “terrified to continue working in the NHS as we believe that next time it could be one of us who is blamed for a failing system” (Open Letter Regarding the Conviction of Lucy Letby).

The signatories to this letter are putting their necks on the line against the bullying NHS bosses. The RCN, Unison, BMA and all health unions must act now: launch a campaign to *defend Lucy Letby!* This is in the interest of all their members, who face horrendous working conditions and pitiful pay levels to prop up the decrepit and increasingly privatised NHS. Organise a mass union demonstration outside the public inquiry planned for 10 September to demand: *Freedom now for Lucy! Give her £5 million and her job back, if she wants it!*

Workers Hammer no 249,
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Election result: bad for workers

Time to draw lessons

The article below was issued as a July 2024 Workers Hammer supplement.

The election of Starmer's Labour government is bad news for us all. The hated Tories were annihilated, and good riddance to them, but the Starmer government that replaced them is no less the enemy of the working class and oppressed. The country is now run by the most right-wing Labour government ever, led by a technocrat who spent the last four years purging the left. His government supports the genocide in Gaza and its economic programme will mean attacking the trade unions and public services.

What was needed was to build a united, pro-working-class opposition to Starmer. But although millions of people oppose his support for the genocide of the Palestinians and his Thatcherite austerity policies, the left made no effort to unite the working class. They were weak and divided and played **no role** in the election. Now, the overriding priority remains to unite the workers movement to resist the Starmer government. But to do that, we must draw the right political lessons.

For us, the starting point in the election was: Starmer has drawn a line against the working class, therefore the workers movement must say **no vote to Starmer's Labour**. We made no exceptions for left Labour candidates like Zarah Sultana, John McDonnell and Diane Abbott, who have been vocal in support of Palestine but helped put Starmer into office. As for the left, some shamelessly called to vote Labour (the CP, AWL) while others couldn't bring themselves to oppose a vote for Starmer (the SWP, Socialist Alternative). Moreover, the union bureaucrats that the left idolises—Mick Lynch, Daniel Kebede and Sharon Graham—all supported Starmer. These sell-outs who sabotaged strikes under the Tories will be even more treacherous when faced with the Labour government that they helped install. In the next round of pay talks, when the unions are pitted against Starmer, workers



Mark Davidson/Alamy

Going from bad to worse...

will have to fight tooth and nail **against** these class traitors.

Under the slogan "vote working class", we called for support to the Workers Party, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) and any independent candidates who stood against Starmer on a pro-working-class platform (which excluded the Greens). The main left challenge to Labour came from George Galloway's Workers Party, which ran numerous candidates on an openly anti-Starmer and pro-Palestine, pro-socialist basis. But the Workers Party failed to make the breakthrough it expected. Galloway himself narrowly missed getting re-elected in Rochdale, to the delight of the Starmer camp and of the rabidly right-wing *Telegraph*, which crowed that Galloway's defeat was "a triumph for Israel".

The inability of the left to build any viable alternative to Starmer left the field clear for Nigel Farage's Reform UK to posture as the only challenger to the establishment parties. His outfit made significant gains by tapping into anger in run-down working-class areas and channelling it into anti-immigrant bigotry. The rise of this far-right movement poses more sharply than ever the need to overcome the divisions within the working class.

In today's climate of right-wing reaction, it is important to reassert that struggle by the working class is the only way to change society in a progressive direction, and the only political perspective that can unite the working class for this purpose is opposition to the capitalist rulers. The way forward for socialists is to fight for a political **rupture** from Labour, which ties the working class to the British rulers. This is the lesson for the anti-Starmer left, which remains tied in various ways to the politics of Labour, whether it be through the Labour and trade union lefts, Corbyn, the local independent campaigns or Galloway's old Labour model. Their political ties to Labour are the chief obstacle to uniting the working class.

Corbyn revivalists

Instead of drawing the lessons of past



Aaron Chown/Alamy

failures, much of the left is placing its hopes on Corbyn, yet again. Of course, it's a good thing that Corbyn got re-elected as an independent, thrashing Starmer's stooge candidate. But for Owen Jones and Novara Media as well as Socialist Alternative, the Socialist Party and the SWP, Corbyn's victory has rekindled hope in the impotent Pope of the left, whose acceptance speech promising "peace not war" and "kinder, gentler" politics could easily have come from the Archbishop of Canterbury. Corbyn's revivalists hold up his 2019 election manifesto as their blueprint for changing society. That document supports the imperialist EU, while promising a list of good things—funding for the NHS, council housing, etc—which Corbyn could never deliver.

Corbyn's pacifist and Labourite politics are a repudiation of the class struggle. That's why, when he found himself in a position of power, he capitulated on every question that the ruling class regards as a red line issue. When Corbyn was leader, right-wing Labour MPs demanded an assurance that he would support any military action Israel undertakes. Corbyn refused, but he also betrayed the Palestinian cause by his refusal to fight the "anti-Semitism" witch hunt. He is hated by workers in deindustrialised areas for his support to the EU, which they rightly see as a sell-out to middle-class London liberals who despise the working class. Corbyn's liberal-Labour politics are a proven dead end.

Greens—Starmerites on bikes

The Corbyn cheerleaders are also excited about the rise in support for the Greens, but this is not a cause for the left to celebrate. The pro-NATO, pro-EU Greens are popular among the liberal middle classes, but are despised within the working class, not least for anti-working-class measures like the ULEZ tax. The Greens will prove spineless as an opposition to Starmer. No one should be taken in by their election material promising all kinds of good things—from a clean environment to defending the NHS. There's

no way they can achieve such demands. As a capitalist party, the Greens are on the other side in the class struggle. When they controlled Brighton council and bin workers were forced to go on strike against their proposed cuts, the strikers found themselves pitted against the council's "Tories on bikes".

What now for independents?

A record number of independent candidates stood for election, which shows the breadth and depth of anger against Labour over Gaza. We supported Andrew Feinstein, who ran an effective pro-Palestine, independent campaign in Starmer's constituency that slashed his majority. In addition to Corbyn, four independent candidates of Muslim background were elected. A fifth independent, Leanne Mohammad, came close to unseating the arch-Starmerite Wes Streeting in Ilford.

Since the election, activists who worked on independent campaigns have been discussing how to continue with grassroots activism. Both Corbyn and Feinstein have promised to build local movements in their respective boroughs of Islington and Camden. But efforts that are narrowly focused on local issues are not the way forward. Local problems such as the housing crisis, crumbling schools, etc are symptoms of the larger decline of the country that cannot be fixed by cash-starved local councils or by tinkering at the local level. Instead, it's necessary to build a strong national movement that is prepared to wage the class struggle in opposition to the whole system that has driven the country to ruin.

Where was TUSC?

We supported TUSC, whose stated aim was to unite other organisations on a pro-working-class basis. While they rejected our application to run our own campaign under their banner (so much for their "united" front), we offered to canvass for some of their candidates, including Nancy Taaffe and Roger Banister. But their campaigning efforts



Pro-Zionist *Telegraph* rejoices over defeat of Galloway.

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were minimal and reeked of demoralisation. TUSC's refusal to break from the Labour lefts and union bureaucrats (notably the probation officers' "union") undercut its aim of building a working-class opposition to Starmer. In fact Nancy Taaffe's election leaflet assured voters that they could support TUSC without doing any damage to Starmer's Labour. So, few people saw any point in voting for TUSC and they received a very poor result.

The Workers Party— under what flag?

In contrast to TUSC, the Workers Party did stand candidates against left MPs, rightly insisting that any vote for a Labour candidate is a vote for genocide. We welcomed the opportunity to canvass for Workers Party candidate Rizwana Karim, who stood against left Labour MP John McDonnell. She defiantly fought the obstacles placed in her way by McDonnell, who has deep ties to the mosques and played up the fact that he attends the Palestine demonstrations, in an effort to retain the Muslim vote. For that matter, many trade union leaders marched for Palestine and, like McDonnell, supported the election of Starmer. These ties to Labour explain why the Palestine movement has so far been incapable of achieving any real gains.

While we actively supported the Workers Party against Labour, we warned that Galloway's eclectic mix of old Labour-style social conservatism and British flag-waving makes it incapable of uniting the working class. Galloway's views on trans people put him on the side of Wes Streeting, who is spearheading a major assault on trans youth by banning puberty blockers. Anti-trans bigotry is repellent to many young activists, whether it comes from the Workers Party or from Labour.

Galloway appeals to the Muslim community based on a mix of pro-Palestine sentiment and his own retrograde views on the LGBTQ and abortion questions. But he did not invent the idea of playing to conservative views in minority communities. For decades the Labour Party has secured the Muslim vote by a system of patronage organised through community religious leaders.

We oppose Galloway's social conservatism because it accepts bourgeois moral codes which are manipulated by the capitalists to reinforce divisions within the working class. As opposed to keeping oppressed groups alienated and divided against each other, the way forward is to show that workers have a common interest in taking up the cause of women, gays, trans people, as well as Muslims and other oppressed communities, in a fight against Starmer's government—the common enemy of all.

Labour alienates Muslims

Labour's support for the aims of British imperialism in Gaza has driven Muslims out of the Labour Party in huge numbers. This raises an important question. If the Muslim community were to join in a new pro-working-class, anti-imperialist initiative, it would be a progressive step. However, there is a danger that, out of legitimate opposition to Zionism and despair at Labour turning its back on them, many Muslims will abandon the labour movement in the direction of ethnic and religious politics. This would be a reactionary development, separating Muslims from the broader working class and reinforcing the existing divisions. The fact that the Workers Party, which seeks to put forward somewhat of a pro-working-class platform, lost out to an independent

Muslim ex-councillor in Blackburn is not a good sign. The way forward for Muslim working people must be with the broader workers movement.

The Workers Party tried to compete with Farage for the white working-class vote by draping itself in the Union Jack. Previous generations of immigrants dreaded this flag under which British fascists carried out violent attacks on dark-skinned people. Today, many of their descendants embrace the Union Jack to show that they are as British as everyone else, to counter the racist trope that this country is not their home. But this is misguided. The labour movement's traditional emblem is the red flag, although it faded under Labour's pro-imperialist politics. As the satirical song says, "the workers flag is deepest pink, it's not as red as you might think". Nevertheless, replacing it with the Union Jack as the party's emblem was intended to underline Labour's loyalty to the establishment.

The Workers Party's embrace of the Union Jack drives away many layers of the population who rightfully belong in a workers party. In Northern Ireland, the Union Jack is routinely flown by Loyalists alongside the Israeli flag to show support for the oppression of the Irish Catholics. It signifies the oppression of the Scots nation (underlined by Starmer's refusal to grant a second independence referendum). The Union Jack also repels many English workers who grew up knowing that this is *not* the flag of their class. The Workers Party reinforces patriotic views among workers, rather than challenging them, which can only benefit Farage. After all, why vote for the Workers Party when they can choose the real thing—Reform UK. Often while we were canvassing for the Workers Party, their red-white-and-blue colours meant we had to explain that we were not Reform UK.

Workers Party candidate Rizwana Karim (centre) proudly stood against left Labourite John McDonnell. Spartacist League's Eibhlin McColgan (right) campaigning for Karim.



The Workers Party also echoes Reform UK's racist hysteria against migrants, offering its own "migration policy that reflects the anxiety felt among the working class about an influx of migrants". This is deadly for the working class. The exploiting class will always take advantage of immigrant labour to undercut the wages of all workers. And many white workers are conned into blaming migrants because no party organises the struggle of working people against those who are actually responsible for Broken Britain: the British rulers. The real criminals arrive in yachts, not small boats. Rather than proposing reactionary migration policies, the task of socialists is to fight for citizenship for migrants. The workers movement must oppose such divide-and-rule ploys by organising migrant workers into the unions and fighting for decent pay and conditions for everyone.

Farage's rise cannot be stopped by liberals (echoed by the SWP) scolding Reform voters for being racist. A chunk of Reform's

working-class base must be broken from this reactionary movement, not by liberal ideology but by showing that the class struggle that's necessary to turn this country around requires taking up the cause of migrants. A first step towards that is to replace the pro-Labour union bureaucrats with a new leadership.

The need to sever the ties that bind the left to Labour is the beginning of wisdom for overcoming the sorry state the left is in today. During the election, instead of a united, pro-working-class challenge to Starmer, the left was disunited and practically non-existent. Often we saw the absurd spectacle of the anti-Starmer left running against each other, as happened in Stratford. Faced with the tough battles against the Starmer government that lie ahead, this situation simply will not do. The bottom line is that the working class can be united. But only in opposition to the British imperialist ruling class. And that means in opposition to all variants of Labour politics. ■

Vote Communist Party?

Not so fast...we have a condition

On 1 July, we issued the statement below, declaring that we would support Communist Party (CP) candidates in the national election if they stood in clear opposition to Starmer's Labour. Alas, Morning Star (4 July) made clear they had no such intention. Far from advocating votes for the CP, it urged readers to "vote with the Communist Party" (our emphasis)...which was pushing votes for Labour! The CP's own candidates, as usual, simply provided a bit of window dressing for their party's betrayal of the workers.

The Communist Party of Britain is contesting 14 seats under the slogan "Vote communist on 4 July". Surely, Communists should deserve a vote against Starmer's Labour? Not so fast.... The CP's line is "vote Communist wherever you can" and vote Labour virtually everywhere else, with their overall line favouring a Labour government.

Voting for Starmer's Labour is completely against the interests of the working class. As we have explained (see our article "To hell with Sunak and Starmer! Vote working class!", *Workers Hammer* no 253), Starmer has made clear that his government will serve the rich and powerful, support Israel's genocide against

the Palestinians and attack public services and trade unions. The CP's call to vote for Labour amounts to supporting just that and is a total betrayal of the interests of the working class. To justify this with the argument that Labour is the historic party of the working class is a complete capitulation (see our polemic with the CPGB on this question, "Debating with Labourites", 27 May 2024).

If the CP wants a Labour government, why bother running candidates? The CP has been doing this for decades: they run a few symbolic candidates while supporting a Labour government. This enables them to maintain a "left" facade of opposition to Labour among some of their members while at the same time doing no damage at all to Labour and staying in the good graces of the trade union bureaucrats, who all support Starmer.

In the recent local elections, the CP also ran candidates, with glossy leaflets calling to vote Communist—"the party the rich can't buy". Then, a day before the vote, Robert Griffiths, general secretary of the party, penned an editorial in the *Morning Star* titled: "The overwhelming defeat of the Tories must be our top priority at the local elections" (1 May). In other words, we might run

candidates, but we don't want them to do well or else it will hurt Labour. Turns out the CP can be bought pretty easily....

So, should socialist opponents of Starmer's Labour vote for the CP on 4 July? Given all the above, our initial impulse was to say "no". However, some CP members are convinced these candidacies represent real opposition to Starmer's Labour. OK. We are ready to give them the benefit of the doubt. We are putting the following challenge to the CP and *Morning Star*:

If the Morning Star unambiguously calls on working people to vote for their candidates against the Labour Party, the Spartacist League will be happy to call for a vote for them. If, on the other hand, the Morning Star maintains that the "top priority" is to vote Labour (or strikes back on the eve of polling day with a similar editorial as during the local election), then no one should bother supporting a completely symbolic campaign designed to deceive people.

The Spartacist League rejects any vote for Labour and calls to vote for the Workers Party, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, pro-socialist independents and...maybe the CP. We will eagerly monitor the Morning Star.

Popular Front paves way for far right

The surprise defeat of the far-right Rassemblement National (RN) of Le Pen/Bardella and the victory of the New Popular Front (NFP) in the second round of the French legislative elections on 7 July were greeted with jubilation on the left in France and abroad. In truth, this was a pyrrhic victory. The result confirms the explosive rise of the RN against most other parties in France that claim to represent a “republican front” against the far right.

The NFP, named in honour of the 1936 Popular Front government, is an unholy alliance that includes the Socialist Party (PS) of former president François Hollande, the French Communist Party (PCF), the Greens and the left-populist La France Insoumise (France Unbowed—LFI) of Jean-Luc Mélenchon. Even the Trotskyist-derived Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste-L'Anticapitaliste (NPA-A) ran a candidate on the NFP ticket.

The attitude towards such trans-class alliances is a decisive test for Trotskyists. As Trotsky insisted again and again in the 1930s, supporting the popular front is not a tactic but a crime that paralyses the working class by tying it to the bourgeoisie. However, except for our small section, the Ligue trotskyste de France (LTF), the entire far left failed this decisive test and supported the NFP in one way or another.

We print below an abridged translation of the presentation given by our comrade Alexis Henri at a public meeting of the LTF on 11 July. The full text is published in *Le Bolchévique* no 236 (August 2024).

* * *

This meeting is taking place at a crucial moment in this country's history. We stand before a pile of ruins, with the far right taking another giant step towards power. Yet in its 8 July editorial, the NPA-R (NPA-Revolutionaries) proclaimed “a little moment of happiness”. On Sunday night, Révolution Permanente (RP, affiliated with the Trotskyist Fraction) rushed to declare that “we can only rejoice at the heavy setback for the party of Le Pen and Bardella”. Rejoice at a “heavy setback”, really? RP thus confirms that it was hoping for a popular front victory. In reality, the second round confirms the trend of previous elections, even if superficially the trajectory has been slightly slowed



Left: Jean-Luc Mélenchon, leader of France Unbowed (LFI), flanked by Manuel Bompard and Rima Hassan of New Popular Front which paves way for Marine Le Pen (right) to enter Élysée Palace.



Sarah Meyssonier/Reuters

by the republican front. The racist reactionaries of the RN have increased their number of deputies by over 60 per cent in the space of two years: they went from eight deputies in 2017 to 89 in 2022 and 143 today. Funny kind of setback, well, not funny at all.

And if we look at the number of votes cast, the RN's success is even clearer. In the second round, it received ten million votes, ie three million more than either the popular front or the Macronists. *It won 37 per cent of the votes cast, which is more than in the European elections and more than on the first round*, compared to 26 per cent for the popular front and the same for the Macronists. The fact that the far-right bloc came third in terms of seats instead of first is due solely to the undemocratic nature of the French electoral system based on obtaining a majority over two rounds.

In the very short term, the republican front will just strengthen the RN's claim to be the only real opposition to Macron; the only supposedly truly anti-system party, with all the others allied against it; the only party that hasn't been tried yet and won't betray you. If the workers movement doesn't get its act together, fight to unite workers against the anti-Muslim campaign, confront the bourgeoisie and force it to retreat, there's a growing risk that power will fall into the hands of the RN very soon, perhaps as early as next year. It is the fact that the far left has refused to oppose the republican front, with the one and only exception being ourselves, that constitutes a “heavy setback”—but for the working class, which will end up chained to false hopes that the popular front will implement at least some of its promises.

The only way to confound this catastrophic prediction is for the nominally Marxist left to conduct an urgent and uncompromising assessment of its complete failure in these elections. By supporting the popular front,

even partially, it has not contributed to building a new leadership but rather hindered this task and helped to paralyse the working class, demoralise it, and ultimately push some of it into the arms of the RN.

Thanks to the republican front, the electoral results mask the political collapse of the liberal centre represented by Macron.[...] As this morning's editorial in *L'Humanité* put it, “the mobilisation around the New Popular Front (NFP) has saved the Macronists from the shipwreck that their leaders' inconsistency promised.[...] it is once again the left which has preserved honour and saved the Republic.” Macronism was a caricature of the liberal triumphalism of the US-dominated post-Soviet order. In a country like France, the decline of the US order has led to an even steeper decline as the Americans increasingly squeeze their imperialist allies, notably through sanctions against Russia and the imposition of American shale gas. This is the material context, of which the collapse of Macronist liberalism is but a pale reflection in the parliamentary sphere.

By all appearances, we're heading towards an explicit or implicit coalition (in the form of a “technocratic government”) between the Macronists and the popular front, excluding all or part of the Mélenchonists. We had warned against this in our leaflet calling for abstention in the second round, including by

raising the Italian experience where a national unity government was the immediate antechamber to Meloni's far-right government. The mobilisation of the left and, criminally, the far left, for the republican front will only end up prolonging the agony of the Macronist liberal order while dealing a huge blow to the morale of workers and the oppressed, making the job of RN leaders Le Pen and Bardella much easier when they come to power.

That said, even if the popular front had won an absolute majority, it would have made no difference to the country's downward spiral. To implement even its minimal reforms, the popular front would have had to launch a merciless confrontation with the French bourgeoisie, which is impelled by its own decline to plunge the masses into increasing misery. It's obvious that such a confrontation would have been rejected not only by Hollande and Marine Tondelier, leader of the Greens, but also by the PCF and LFI. This didn't stop the NPA-R and RP from calling for a vote for them, even as the PCF's Fabien Roussel was announcing on TV that he was ready to govern with the Macronists in the name of republican unity against the RN.

A section of leading members on the right wing of his own party have started to desert the republican Mélenchon (Ruffin had already left in the middle of the election campaign, Clémentine Autain followed him on election night), and he finds himself isolated from the bulk of the popular front, which has already started working behind the scenes to seek a lash-up with the Macronists. But Mélenchon himself remains completely torn between his allegiance to the French republican creed, his own calls for a republican front that extends to the conservative Les Républicains (LR) party, and the sympathy



George Galloway
@georgegalloway

Mr Corbyn must be our #Melanchon He is the best leader to unite all forces behind him in a Popular Front. We in the @WorkersPartyGB and our 210,000 voters will follow him. @jeremycorbyn

Been there and done that. It was called Corbyn running the Labour Party.

How they betrayed their own fine words

Before the first round...

“The electoral alliance of the New Popular Front (NFP) claims to be the antidote to the RN. This ignores the fact that, for the past 40 years, the rise of the far right has been fuelled by the betrayals of the left while in power.”

— *Lutte Ouvrière*, 21 June

“What is important for us is to show that we are opposed to the popular front, because its politics totally conflict with our own. The important thing is to affirm the existence of a communist, revolutionary and internationalist current.”

— *Letter to LO*, 12 June

“In this context, it seems essential to us that the far left not appear completely diluted and divided in this election, and that it express a form of unity that has nothing in common with that of the ‘popular front’ of the institutional left. An electoral front based on class independence....”

— *Letter to LO and the NPA-R*, 11 June



...and afterwards

“Those who voted for Lutte ouvrière may want to vote for a candidate of the New Popular Front against the RN. If so, they can do this without shame.”

— *Workplace newsletter*, 1 July

“However, in places where an LFI or PCF candidate runs against the RN, or exceptionally where the candidacy of another left party warrants it, we will call for a vote to these candidates.”

— *Press communiqué*, 1 July

“The Greens and especially the PS are bourgeois organisations.... For the other organisations which make up the NFP, local conditions and the context of the second round may justify a critical vote for their candidates.”

— *Révolution Permanente*, 3 July

he has actively generated through a few kind words in the *quartiers* (immigrant and minority neighbourhoods) and in the pro-Palestinian movement. That's why even the election of a large number of committed Mélenchonists with stronger backbones than opportunists like Ruffin or Clémentine Autain would have changed nothing.

The task of the far left was not to act as a crutch for this left wing of the popular front, as it did, but to begin building an anti-RN working-class pole that is clearly *counterposed* to the popular front, and in particular to lead workers in breaking from its Mélenchonist left-wing component. This is what we put forward throughout the campaign, addressing the far left in particular.[...]

Now it is the working class and minorities who will pay dearly, not only for the far left's refusal to take up our calls, but for its open betrayal. Who's going to believe these people who approached the first round of the elections pretending to be an alternative to the popular front, then called for a vote for it? Or, in the case of LO, said people shouldn't be ashamed of doing so, and who, once the damage was done, went on to make bombastic proclamations of anti-popular-front radicalism?

We take no pleasure in the discrediting of these organisations, because their capitulation to the republican front has made it more difficult to crystallise a working-class opposition to the popular front. All they have achieved so far is to strengthen the LFI's hegemony over the workers movement. This will only increase as the popular front fractures between the LFI's Mélenchonists, who are being excluded from the republican arc, and the others who have rallied to the Macronists.

We may be isolated at present, but we're confident that the correctness of our programme will soon start to become apparent to growing layers of the vanguard. Left-wing organisations will be shaken by crises because some of their members will demand an accounting from their leaders for the disastrous line they took. These crises must be used to advance a process of splits and fusions around a revolutionary programme, with the perspective of re-forging the Fourth International.

Election results

One lesson of the elections that has been ignored by the left is that growing sectors of the bourgeoisie are coming to terms with the idea of placing the RN in power. Hence the crisis in the LR, even if its number of seats has not changed because the left saved the day with its republican front. LR president Eric Ciotti's move to ally with the RN is not just a personal anecdote; it reflects the shift to the right of conservative sections of the bourgeoisie.[...]

Le Monde can make all the hypocritical, politically correct speeches it wants, but the bourgeoisie and affluent petty bourgeoisie, as well as pensioners (in other words, the mass base of Macron voters) are reassured that Le Pen's demagoguery a few years ago about the European Union, or again last year over pensions, was just another form of the lies spewed by the bourgeoisie to advance its own class interests against workers and minorities.

Through constant propaganda from the government and the capitalist press that immigrants are criminals and that “we no longer feel at home”, relayed on the left through national unity against terrorism and defence of republican secularism against Muslims, the Macronists worked for years to adopt and legitimise the central themes of

the RN's propaganda in order to divide the working class. They crossed a new threshold by demonising Mélenchon while integrating the RN into the “republican arc” over Gaza, under the pretext of the so-called “fight against anti-Semitism”; and all this with the barely embarrassed assent of the PS and PCF. It is all these liberal, “progressive” governments à la Macron or Hollande that have paved the way for Le Pen.

The Meloni experience has been reassuring for the French bourgeoisie, and also in another respect: Meloni continues to open the borders to the extent that the bourgeoisie needs immigrant workers; they simply have even fewer rights than before and are therefore even more exploitable and at the mercy of the bosses, which further divides and weakens the working class. It's only a matter of time before the French bourgeoisie puts the RN in power.[...]

Why voting for the NFP will not stop the RN

Sooner or later the next republican front government, regardless of its exact composition, will fall, and the RN, as the only party that won't have been compromised, will emerge considerably stronger. Depending on the type of election, it will then win either the prime ministership with an absolute majority or the presidency directly. Either way, the NFP, with its republican front, will have paved the way for the RN, exactly as we warned.[...]

It is true that without a republican front, the RN might well have won an absolute majority, and in fact might have done so had the front that was formed not been sufficiently solid. So what would workers have gained if the workers movement had refused to support the republican front? For workers to break with their leadership, it's necessary for a politically credible alternative to come forward, showing concretely that there is a road outside of the popular front. If this had been the case, a certain proportion of workers would not have felt tied to the traitors who are going to govern us today, and this would have laid the objective foundations for building an anti-RN working-class pole opposed to the popular front.

The working class would have been in a much better position to defend itself than it is today, when workers' own leaders, for whom they voted (when they didn't vote for

the openly anti-working-class and racist far right), are preparing to bring to power the very government that is going to carry out attacks against them. The unions, which one might have imagined would stand up and mobilise workers in the event of an RN government, will instead now plead for moderation among their rank and file, arguing that it's necessary to prevent the republican front from falling for fear of the RN coming to power. For the past two years, the LFI as a whole has refused to vote for censure motions against previous governments, arguing that it should not mix its votes with those of the RN.

In the new context, they're hardly going to take it upon themselves to bring down the government of Gabriel Attal or his next clone as prime minister. Either the reformist workers leaders will bring down the government and speed up the RN's rise to power, or they will keep it on life support by swallowing every bitter pill Macron dishes out. In other words, they will have to accept attacks that will hugely demoralise the working class, which again will accelerate the RN's rise to power, as the

defeat over pensions has shown. Either the RN wins, or the workers lose: this is the deadly alternative the Mélenchonists and other propagandists for the popular front are trapping us with in the absence of an anti-RN working-class pole.

Since there won't be a stable government coming out of this election, the six months or a year, or at most three years, that have been “won” will serve only to further disorganise and demoralise the workers vanguard by chaining it to the bourgeoisie through this government it helped install. The longer this government holds out, the worse the damage will be. Just look at what five years of the Hollande government did to the workers movement in this country.

All that the vote for the popular front, and particularly for the LFI, has achieved is to serve as a stepping stone for some of the leaders of these formations to go to the Macronist governmental or parliamentary feeding trough. The bureaucrats and the LFI politicians who broke with Mélenchon will thus compromise themselves even further, while the illusions in the Mélenchonists who

continued on page 8



France...

(continued from page 7)

have been excluded from this obscene circus will grow stronger. The shift of some Mélenchonists into the camp of the PS and Macron is not a sad, unexpected and unnatural epilogue. Workers need to understand that this is what a populist bourgeois formation like LFI is for: to provide the bourgeoisie with a liberal parliamentary way out, even when such an outcome seems impossible. On the other hand, workers will have more illusions in the LFI rebels who remain with Mélenchon, which will once again paralyse working-class struggle.

On all sides, the working class will be further weakened, and the inevitable coming victory of the RN will take place under far worse conditions for workers and minorities. So the time supposedly gained until the RN's total victory is time that will ultimately work against us. Let's face it: we can't prevent Le Pen from coming to power by parliamentary means. What we need to do is build a *working-class opposition* to the popular front that is paving the way for her.

A programme against the RN

To stem the rise of the RN, we need a programme of demands and a leadership capable of leading workers in the struggle to wrest them from the bourgeoisie. We devoted a good part of our last leaflet, for the second round of elections, to outlining the main points that such a programme might contain (see "France: Popular Front Paves the Way for Le Pen", *Spartacist* [English edition] no 69, August 2024). We sought to show that at every stage, the Mélenchonists will act as a brake on the struggle for these demands, as they did in the fight for pensions, in the defence of *quartiers* youth after the uprising a year ago, and in the movement for the national liberation of the Palestinians. We can also add to the list the struggle for the national and socialist liberation of the Kanak people, where the Mélenchonists are seeking to save the Matignon and Nouméa colonial agreements so that French imperialism can retain a foothold in the Pacific.[...]

So now RP and the NPA-R are making grand proclamations about the need to struggle. RP introduces its first article commenting on the second round by stating that in the face of the far right, "only the struggles of workers, young people and the *quartiers* will enable us to win our demands and push back the far right for the long term". Unfortunately, far from drawing the necessary conclusions in terms of leadership, RP is content with pushing to the left the existing union leadership, which has just



Striking French rail workers rally against pension "reform", December 2019. Defeat of pension struggles strengthened reaction.

spent four weeks campaigning for the popular front. RP concluded its article by stating that "the leaderships of the workers movement, starting with the CGT, must take the lead in this work and stop subordinating themselves to the institutional left". All of a sudden, the likes of Céline Verzeletti (CGT union leader who formerly led a "union" of prison guards) should see the light? Come off it. Especially since RP endorsed the idea that you could vote for the Mélenchonists and the PCF. By doing so, they prevented left-wing union activists from breaking with the popular front and starting to fight seriously for workers' demands.

The bankruptcy of the far left in these elections

So again I return to the far left's capitulation in the second round. Its duty was to explain the need to oppose the popular front before the first round and throughout the week of the election campaign leading up to the second round. Instead, LO and RP ran token campaigns in the first round, with the former explicitly renouncing the idea that its slates could be a factor in the reorganisation of the left, and RP publicly announcing that it was not campaigning against the popular front.

Certainly the NPA-R seems to have been much more consistent in trying to forge an anti-RN working-class bloc that would oppose the popular front. But this only makes their call before the second round to vote LFI-PCF or even, on a case-by-case basis, for other left-wing candidates, more disastrous. For NPA-R activists, it's a school of cynicism to preach for three weeks that in the words of the NPA-R's 12 June letter to LO, "What is important for us is to show that we are opposed to the popular front",

and then, when the pressure of the popular front rises, to say essentially that what's important for the NPA-R is to show that it is *not* opposed to the popular front, and even that it is calling for a vote to some of its components. The NPA-R even raised the possibility of voting for parties other than the LFI and PCF, in other words Hollande-Faure's SP and the Greens, on a case-by-case basis.

The same goes for Révolution Permanente. Between the two rounds, it renounced any kind of independence from the left-wing bureaucracies by calling to vote for the LFI and the PCF, thus *obstructing* the building of a revolutionary *opposition* to these traitors. We had publicly suspected in our 1 July leaflet that RP would do this, given that its campaign was not oppositional to the popular front. And indeed RP finally stated on 3 July: "local conditions and the context of the second round may justify a critical vote for their candidates", ie those of the LFI and PCF.

It was easy to refuse to vote for Hollande and his Socialist Party, given the disgust that this party still generates in view of its crimes against the working class when it was in government, such as the El Khomri law, the year-and-a-half state of emergency, the bill stripping French nationality, etc, etc. The real question was opposing the LFI, the left wing of the popular front. That's where the people's illusions lie, and it's these illusions that made the popular front's relative success possible. Genuine opposition to the popular front requires fighting against Mélenchon's influence precisely on the issues that have won him political authority among the workers, the very issues that upset the bourgeoisie: his platonic defence of the *quartiers* and of Palestine. It was necessary to show that this authority had been *usurped* since the Mélenchonists, because of their republicanism, can do and in fact have done nothing concrete that would violate the bourgeoisie's red lines. The far left's refusal to wage this struggle against Mélenchonism can only lead to demoralisation on the one hand, given the absence of an alternative, and to strengthening of the hold of Mélenchonist bourgeois populism on the other.[...]

LO positioned itself a few millimetres to the left of the NPA-R and RP. Unlike RP, they did not state that it would be "justified" to vote for the LFI and PCF but nonetheless said there was no shame in doing so. I quote: "Those who voted for Lutte ouvrière may want to vote for a candidate of the New Popular Front against the RN. If so, they can do this without shame."

In other words, since you voted LO against the popular front in the first round,

it doesn't matter if you support it in the second. You voted for the workers' camp in the first round, well, the workers' camp was dismantled when the polls closed on 30 June, after which you can go ahead and vote for the camp of the bourgeoisie. Because this is precisely how LO explained the nature of the popular front during the campaign, and rightly so. LO knows perfectly well that voting for the NFP means chaining oneself to the bourgeoisie through its political caste. As they said themselves, this means delivering the workers to the bourgeoisie while saying "we warned you".[...]

This is the exact opposite of the role of a vanguard party, which is to swim against the stream when there is a frenzied campaign to chain workers to the republican front, and therefore to the bourgeoisie, by brandishing the scarecrow of the RN. Here, LO has sunk body and soul into the stinking swamp of the popular front. For LO, this is a really deeply ingrained attitude; they boast of how close they are to the pulse of the workers and how it's necessary to adapt to their consciousness. Yes, oppressed workers, kept in ignorance and betrayed a hundred times over by their leaders, vote for the reactionaries of the RN or the hypocritical so-called progressives of the popular front. But LO uses this as a pretext to capitulate to the popular front itself. This is an attitude full of cowardice, and also—let's be blunt—of petty-bourgeois contempt for the working class. LO's argument amounts to saying that the advanced elements of the class, those who vote LO, were not capable of understanding and following revolutionary directives, or even just clear directives to maintain class independence in the elections.

This is all the more regrettable given that LO voters, although they did not number in the millions, nevertheless numbered over 350,000. It is in particular from these voters that the first cadres of the revolutionary mass workers party that both LO and we ourselves call for, will be drawn. But to achieve this, we must start by calling on precisely these voters to resist above all the sirens of the popular front. Instead of raising their level, LO hid behind the least advanced part of its electorate, leaving them to vote for the popular front if they felt like it.

The coming period can only be seen as a respite if the Marxist left renounces its disastrous policies during this election campaign and starts right away to fight for a working-class pole opposed to the popular front. If it does not do so as a matter of urgency and without further delay, every second of this new popular front will contribute to further defeats and an even greater demoralisation of the working class—in other words, it will speed the RN's advance towards the presidency. We have little reason to be optimistic about the far left, but we're not going to remain passive spectators who simply comment from the sidelines on the need for socialist revolution one fine day, as LO is doing. Nor are we going to raise empty slogans such as "Urgent Revolution", as the NPA-R is doing. The time has come to take stock of the defeats that have taken place since the pensions struggle, the *quartiers* revolt, the pro-Palestine movement and now this new advance by the RN. The time has come to break with the popular front as a precondition for the working class to fight for its own immediate class interests and advance towards revolution. This is the perspective we propose. Thank you. ■

SPARTACIST LEAGUE PUBLIC MEETING

How London liberals fuel the far right

Saturday, 5 October, 2:30pm

Resource for London, 356 Holloway Road, London N7 6PA

✕@WorkersHammer ♦ workershammer@btconnect.com

Liberals...

(continued from page 1)

in the property market with no productive outcome. Growth relies on increasing house prices, which requires keeping the housing stock lower than the demand. In this context, high immigration is useful to keep demand high and find new buyers. Last year, with net migration at nearly 700,000, only 231,100 houses were built. Meanwhile, in England and Wales, at least 250,000 residential properties are registered to people overseas, often in tax havens like Jersey, the Isle of Man, etc.

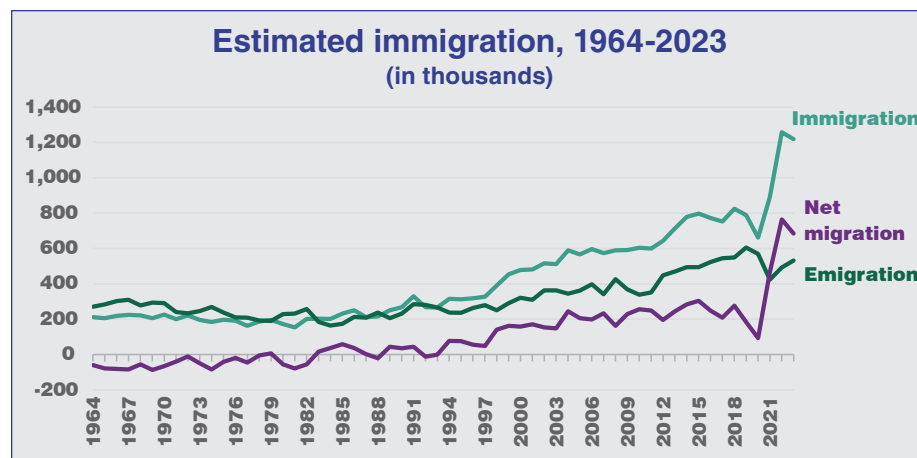
Property speculation is also one of the central reasons why productivity is so low. A society that grows in number but stagnates in productivity can only become poorer in every aspect, from wages to infrastructure and public revenues. The main way to increase productivity is through investment, such as building new facilities, buying modern machinery or improving training. For years, however, investment in the UK has remained low mainly because labour costs are so high. Not because workers are paid too much (far from it) but largely because of housing costs. Land is expensive, and the salary employers must pay their workers for them to have a roof over their heads is so high that investing abroad or parking your money in property is more profitable.

Thus, relying on a constant flow of migrant labour, often skilled and ready to work cheaply, becomes a substitute for actual investment. From Polish construction workers to Filipino nurses, having immigrant skilled workers trained abroad means you do not need to invest in training. Since migrant workers are most likely to accept worse conditions, this also drives down the need to modernise facilities and production processes. And their visas are often tied to their employers, with the threat of deportation hanging over their heads if they stir up trouble and engage in trade union action.

Crucially, this impacts wages. Liberals love to quote studies which supposedly prove that immigration has little impact on wages. Indeed, if you look at broad wage averages alongside immigration numbers, wages have not gone down (and in high-paid jobs, they have gone up). However, these same studies cannot avoid the fact that wages have stagnated, which means everyone is getting poorer. Second, an ever-increasing labour pool necessarily means lower wages. Just consider this: of almost 350,000 work visas issued last year, three-quarters went to health and care workers, who can be paid as little as £23,200 a year or £11.90 an hour. This impacts wages in those sectors and explains why they remain so low despite massive numbers resigning out of exhaustion. And this is also why the managers of the NHS and care homes “love” immigrants.

But the starkest expression of an economy organised around financial speculation is deindustrialisation. From the standpoint of City bankers, there is no use for large layers of the population and entire regions are left to rot. The economy is littered with armies of managers, solicitors, consultants, and countless parasitic agencies and “middlemen” who take a cut of whatever they can. A lot of what has been called “growth” consists of consortiums taking over state-owned sectors, racking up a profit, and handing them back to the state hollowed out and in debt (eg Thames Water, rail companies, etc. See also the letter on the right).

For millions, Blair’s “New Britain” meant minimum-wage jobs in warehouses and Tesco, with “flexible labour markets”



ONS

meaning zero-hour contracts and agency jobs. What best symbolised this transformation was the European Union, with privatisation, union-busting and “flexible” workforce schemes being EU-mandated. Crucially, the 2004 EU extension to Eastern Europe led to an increase in migrant workers who could compete for back-breaking, low-wage jobs at an even cheaper rate—thus the stereotype of the Polish plumber.

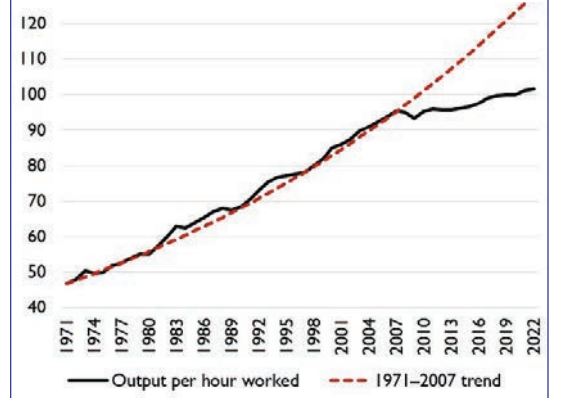
These transformations have given immigration a different character. While before, the rulers used it to drive down the wages of factory workers, now it has become a major subcontracting effort to stave off the collapse of public services, artificially maintain UK universities and shore up the public deficit. Indeed, a large proportion of migrants are foreign students, with universities completely dependent on the exorbitant tuition fees they have to pay. Pumping out degrees of often dubious quality has become one of the UK’s main exports, maintaining a vast and parasitic university network. Furthermore, immigrants have to pay massive application fees; they use few public services and benefits while paying a lot of tax. This is a cash cow for the state, with the OBR estimating in March that higher-than-expected

net migration would cut net borrowing by £7.4 billion in four years.

Anti-immigrant demagogues who say immigration is the cause of Britain’s problems are wrong. Parasitic finance capital is. But bringing ever-larger numbers of migrants into an economy which is rotting has nothing “progressive” about it. It only increases existing problems while creating fertile ground for anti-immigrant sentiment and pogrom violence. The central reason why the racist hysteria against refugees gets so much traction is because, banned from working, they are housed for free in devastated communities where millions can barely eat three meals a day or heat their flats. Those liberals who only celebrate immigration and label as “racist” any concern about it are only defending the status quo and pushing millions into the arms of racist demagogues.

In turn, those racist pundits who blame immigrants and claim they will drastically cut numbers have no answer to the problem. In the current economic structure, cutting immigration risks sinking the entire economy. Not only are immigrants vital for whole sectors, but a substantial cut in immigration would slash GDP growth and inevitably burst the housing bubble, provoking a flight of capital

Labour productivity flatlining



House of Lords Library

and, thus, the collapse of the entire pyramid scheme. This is why successive governments, despite promises, will not cut numbers and, instead, prefer to go after “illegal” migrants.

There is no solution to the immigration question, no “right numbers”, so long as the economy is organised around the giant parasite that is the City. The only progressive way forward lies in rooting out this cancer and reorganising the economy around a rational plan for *reindustrialisation*. Only the workers movement can carry this project forward. But for this, it must rid itself of all the liberals and Labourites who are the architects of the status quo.

The political function of liberals

What do we mean by liberals? This broad term encompasses the defenders of the post-Soviet, US-led order built on the EU, NATO and the UN, who defend liberal democracy, ideas of “human rights”, “international rule-based order”, the freedom of movement and capital, etc. Think of James O’Brien, almost any columnist in the *Guardian*, Blair and all Blairites, the Green Party, Lib Dems and even a wing of the Tories (eg Cameron).

(continued on page 10)

LETTER: WHAT THE CITY DOES TO BUSES

I am a mechanic repairing London buses, and having seen the leaflet you reprinted from the Committee for a Fighting Transport Union, I thought I would share some of what it is like working on the buses.

The first thing you realise is how old things are. Some of the garages were built over 100 years ago. I have co-workers who joke that this was the last time Britain



Workers Hammer

Bus stopped.

knew how to build anything. Many buildings didn’t start as garages, and they have only been minimally converted. Instead of installing vehicle lifts, they dug pits, and you do most of your work there. No such thing as fluid hoses, you get oil and coolant etc by hand pumping it from barrels into cans and carrying it to the bus. If a bus won’t move on its own, five or six mechanics push it round the garage, because a tug would cost money. The walls are filled with asbestos with a bit of sealing paint to keep you “safe”. The roofs leak, heating systems are left to rot and the plumbing and electrics are patched together. I’ve heard recently that one of the few garages that was actually purpose built is being closed because the land is more valuable for high-rise flats!

Not surprising, they have a hard time hiring people and getting young people into the trade. Those youth they do get have to complete a 3-4 year apprenticeship that starts at like five quid an hour and then moves up to the minimum wage. The reward when they are done is dirty work in crappy facilities for pay that barely covers the rent in London. Overtime is the norm for all mechanics (and drivers), seen as the only way to keep your head above water.

To plug the holes, the companies have an army of subcontractors that do even cheaper work and they bring in skilled labour from abroad. The latest scheme I’ve seen was to offer visas for workers from Africa and try to get people to put them up on the cheap in their spare bedrooms. Even with the lure of a visa they only got ten or 20 workers, not nearly how many they need. After seeing what the cost of living is, many of these immigrant workers are already questioning coming here. Some British workers live like immigrants: they rent a cheap room for themselves in London and try to send money to their family living out of town.

The companies have no reason to invest, they are here to squeeze whatever they can out of the workforce, and then sell on to the next group of investors in a few years’ time. UNITE will bargain for a pay rise once a year, this year telling us that the company is losing money too! The union tells the drivers they can refuse a bus on a very hot or very cold day, if air conditioning or heaters don’t work (AC rarely does). But otherwise, conditions are mostly left alone, because demanding improvements would mean challenging the entire way capitalism is run in this country—sell everything off and beat down workers to attract investment. And the whole country looks like a 100-year-old garage barely getting buses out every day.

—S. Burns

Liberals...

(continued from page 9)

For this country's elite—the *rentier* capitalists, landowners and aristocrats, big bankers and hedge fund owners who plunder large swaths of the planet—liberalism has always been the preferred ideology to justify their entire social and economic model. After the Cold War, anti-communism ceded the way to an “enlightened” neo-liberalism based on European institutions and globalisation, which found many defenders among the middle classes.

The particular function of liberals is to give the workings of finance capital a “progressive” tinge and to present the status quo in a brighter light. The strength of liberalism lies in its capacity to absorb and neutralise the workers movement. Think of all the left-wing protest movements of the last three decades. While clashing with the status quo, all were based on liberal platitudes and led by spineless Labourites, thus explaining their impotence.

Now that the US-dominated liberal order is on the decline, there has been an increasing right-wing backlash against liberalism. Many far-right pundits, echoed by growing sections of the ruling class, see in liberal ideas and institutions a hindrance to austerity, continued support to Israel or the need for military rearmament. In turn, this provokes a heightened hysteria from liberal defenders, a dynamic at the source of the “culture wars”.

As for left-wing liberals, which is basically what most of the far left has become, they can denounce capitalism and finance capital and even speak of socialism. But what they are incapable of denouncing is how the ruling class has used multiculturalism, anti-racism and all sorts of liberal and “progressive” ideas to further the interests of finance capital. A good example of this trend would be the group around Novara Media or most of the Trotskyist left.

Faced with a growing right wing and in the name of “progressive” ideas, they end up in a political alliance with liberals and union bureaucrats and, in this way, with the ruling class itself. This is what has enabled the rise of the far right. Millions of working people are finding the left to be arrogant liberals lawyering for policies which have devastated their livelihood, and a socialist left that clings to these people, guilty by association. Thus, they are turning to right-wing demagogues who are the only politicians opposing the liberal order and seemingly willing to put up a fight against it. But let's be concrete and look at recent history.

The left and the rise of the far right

As we described earlier, Tony Blair and “New Labour” best embodied the triumphant days of post-Soviet liberalism in Britain. Propelled by the 1990s boom, Blair pursued the economic model of Thatcherism with a social liberal twist. Privatisations, factory closures, European integration, increased immigration, and the bombing of Iraq were done side by side with legal advances for gays, so-called anti-racist policies and gender parity. Blair did not crush the trade unions but convinced its upper layers of the need to “modernise” (ie submit). Thus, despite the occasional spat (like over Iraq), the Blair/Brown government carried out catastrophic attacks with the tacit support of the leaders of the workers movement and with the left weak and disoriented.

David Cameron's coalition with the Lib Dems did not represent a rupture with the



Mark Kerrison/Alamy

Liberals and left mobilised behind imperialist EU, ceding the field to racist demagogues.

Blair model but rather a continuity. European integration, coupled with high immigration numbers, went hand in hand with devastating austerity attacks. Once again, the leaders of the working class, tied to the Blairite tops, proved impotent to mount a real challenge to the government and basically sat on their hands while workers were being bled.

But nothing better embodies the treacherous alliance of the leaders of the working class and the left with the City of London than the issue of Brexit. For millions of working people, nothing symbolised the liberal era, the devastation it brought and the contempt of liberals for the destruction of working-class Britain like the EU, supported by practically the whole political establishment. Also, high immigration numbers in an impoverished economy were directly linked to the EU—and not just in the mouths of demagogues. Nigel Farage rapidly discovered a great potential in exploiting anger at the EU and the London elites, all couched in anti-immigrant and patriotic rhetoric. In this way, the EU and immigration became political footballs dominating British politics, forcing the Tories to react.

Meanwhile, Corbyn won the leadership of the Labour Party in a political earthquake, marking a break from the Blairite years. Propelled by huge discontent and facing a constant Blairite insurgency, Corbyn's priority became keeping party unity. That meant campaigning for the EU despite his lifelong opposition to it. Thus, almost the entire left aligned itself behind Corbyn and, necessarily, behind “remain”. Even those left trade union leaders who did support Brexit were, at the same time, backing the leader of Labour's “remain” campaign. The result was a terrible polarisation.

On the one hand, the bulk of the British ruling class, the London establishment, the Lib Dems, Labour and most of the Tory leadership—that is, almost anyone with any power—united behind the EU. The liberals launched a blackmail campaign, predicting the apocalypse if “leave” won and, with the help of the Labour left, mobilising immigrants and anti-racists to present the fight for the EU as the “progressive” and “pro-immigrant” option against the “racist” Brexiteers.

On the other hand, the Brexit camp tapped into the deep resentment of working-class communities with the ultra-effective slogan “Take back control”, which spoke to their frustrations while channelling them against immigration. As working-class communities faced a united front of almost the entire political and economic elite, many said “sod off”. And rightly so. For millions of working people, the Oxbridge opportunists of the “leave” campaign were closer to them

than the Labour Party brass.

It was a huge betrayal that Corbyn and most of the left with him ended up supporting the “remain” camp. It sealed the alliance of the workers movement with finance capital and gave the right wing a monopoly over opposition to the EU. This further divided the white working class from its non-white component, as many black and brown workers and anti-racists, who were not full of love for the EU, felt compelled to support “remain” mainly due to the sheer racism of the “leave” campaign.

The liberals showed their true colours by whipping up hysteria against those areas which had voted “leave”. Suddenly, many “progressive” and “respectable” pro-EU figures were pouring out their hatred of “ignorant”, “bigoted”, and downright “stupid” working people who failed to listen.

In the end, Corbyn, refusing to draw any hard line against the Blairites, paralysed by his politics of conciliation, ended up running the 2019 election campaign as the candidate for a second referendum. (For more on Corbyn's demise, see “Why is the left so weak and divided?”, *WH* no 252, Spring 2024.) It did not matter that Corbyn's 2019 Manifesto promised the world and more. Millions of working-class voters saw in Johnson's “Get Brexit done” what they had voted for and what was constantly denied to them by London liberals.

The Covid pandemic soon eclipsed Britain's exit from the EU. And once again, the alliance of the left with liberals and the ruling class was on full display. The lockdowns, in Britain as elsewhere, proved disastrous for working people, with consequences still felt. A recent study by the Centre for Social Justice found that lockdowns “had a catastrophic effect on the nation's social fabric” to the point that “the UK is in danger of sliding back into the ‘Two Nations’ of the Victorian era”, with an underclass of millions unable to get out of total deprivation. If you are looking for an underlying cause behind the racist riots, this is it.

But the most virulent defenders of Johnson's lockdowns were found not on the right but among the left and liberals, who, in the name of “science” and “saving lives”, hysterically supported the locking up of the entire population. The whole leadership of the working class, rather than fighting the government and defending workers' health and livelihoods, cancelled strikes and became transmission belts for government mandates. Again, the far right was left with a monopoly of opposition to the government. Mass demonstrations were organised in London, attracting not just tinfoil-hat conspiracy theorists but tens of thousands of ordinary working people sick



Peter Macdiarmid/Shutterstock

of the economic and social consequences of lockdowns. At many of them, we were the only socialist group, with the entire left, from liberals to socialists, spitting on protesters as “fascists” who needed to be crushed.

Fast forward to the 2022-23 strike wave, which represented a tremendous opportunity to turn the tide and bring back the workers movement as a real force. Instead, the strike wave was dragged to defeat by the leaders of the trade unions. It is not a coincidence that “Enough is enough”, the slogan of the left campaign launched by Mick Lynch, Dave Ward and left Labour MPs in 2022, and then sabotaged by them as soon as it got enthusiastic support, became a rallying cry in the recent anti-immigrant protests and riots. The defeat of the strike wave weakened the workers movement while contributing to shifting society further to the right.

And now, these same trade union leaders, together with most liberals, have just put in office Sir Keir Starmer, a technocrat and anti-working-class North London barrister who will solve none of the problems of this country and only fuel the growth of reaction.

From the Blair era to Brexit, all the way to the pandemic and the sabotage of the strike wave, at every step of the great political events of the last two decades, the left and leaders of the working class pursued alliances with liberals and Blairites against the working class. The result has been an unprecedented weakening of the working-class movement, a total impotence of the socialist left, and a far right which enjoys the support of masses of impoverished and angry working-class people—leading to the racist outpouring of this summer.

The task of socialists: a split with liberals

The immediate threat of racist mobs targeting mosques, asylum centres and black or brown people needed to be met by mass united-front defence centred around the trade unions. The united front, even with liberals, is essential for the defence of minorities and to strengthen the unity of the working class and the oppressed.

That said, the broader struggle against the far right must be pursued in complete and irreconcilable political opposition to the London liberals and anyone in the labour movement who conciliates these people. The workers movement cannot win over working-class people attracted to Reform UK if it maintains unity with liberals. While fascism must be defeated on the street, Reform must be defeated *politically* by offering a working-class response to “Broken Britain” against the far right *and* the liberals. This is the problem with the

Bangladesh...

(continued from page 12)

country, or the situation will descend into reaction. To go forward, revolutionaries in Bangladesh must apply the lessons of the Russian Revolution, which are essential to advancing the struggle.

The first and most important lesson is to effect a *complete political break* with the interim government and all forces that conciliate it. The Yunus government is an agency of the ruling class and support to it can only *strangle* the revolution. In periods of revolutionary upheaval, as in Bangladesh today, the ruling classes stand to lose everything. Thus, given the opportunity, they *will* regain the initiative and crack down on the masses that dared challenge their rule. The interim government is precisely the kind of opportunity the ruling class needs to stabilise, clean its house and summon the forces of counterrevolution in order to secure its position. Unless there is a *decisive break* with this government and *all* wings of the movement that conciliate it, the aspirations of the masses *will* be betrayed.

Left lackeys of Yunus

However, most of the left is doing the opposite. The Left Democratic Alliance (LDA), an electoral coalition of half a dozen socialist and communist parties, presents itself as an alternative to bourgeois parties. Putting aside the fact that it is completely irrelevant, it places complete trust in the Yunus government, calling on it “to lead the country with the spirit of the popular uprising” (*Dhaka Tribune*, 11 August). As we have explained, any trust in the interim government can only strangle the revolu-

tion. These spent leftists sully the banner of communists by routing revolutionary sentiments *back* towards the road of capitalist stability. There is nothing communist about placing faith in the interim government.

Dangers of left unity

There are those that oppose the interim government. One example is the Revolutionary Student-Youth Movement (RS-YM), a Maoist organisation. They explain that the Yunus government is backed by the imperialists and that “[t]his revolution cannot succeed without the leadership of the working class, and without it, the emancipation of the masses—especially workers and peasants—is impossible” (yenidemokrasi34.net, 22 August). This is correct.

However, they undermine their opposition by proposing a “Provisional People’s Government” of anti-fascist and anti-Awami forces and representatives of *all* classes, professions and communities. In other words, they would like a government that includes the “progressive” wing of the bourgeoisie. But as we have explained, the entire crisis in Bangladesh today is a result of the rule of this class *as a whole*. It is not about the sentimental ideas in the heads of individual capitalists, but their social role in society. The Bangladeshi bourgeoisie is materially rooted in and benefits from the current economic structure of the country and its subjugation to imperialism; it cannot solve the basic problems that brought the masses out into the streets.

It is not enough to oppose the Yunus government alone, but to oppose *all conciliation* to the bourgeois order. To go forward, the revolution must make a *decisive rupture* with this class. The RS-YM, proceeding from the correct position of opposing the

Yunus government, ends up conciliating it by painting the bourgeoisie in bright colours, looking for its progressive wing. This is akin to opposing Miliukov in favour of Kerensky in the Russian Revolution.

Of note is the Revolutionary Communist International (RCI). They have made a substantial intervention in the West regarding the events in Bangladesh. They write much that is correct: opposition to the Yunus government, the importance of the working class, to place no trust in the bourgeois state which will “rob the people of victory”, that the masses “must trust only in their own power” and continue “until power is transferred to the students and working masses” and that the entire Hasina system must go. We agree with all of this.

Yet it is necessary to draw critical attention to the RCI because on the left, they come closest to the tasks of the revolution, only to duck from the main problem when it stares back at them. The entire question boils down to the immediate and practical tasks of revolutionaries regarding Bangladesh: to fight for a *political split* within the movement along the line of class independence. Concretely, *right now*, this is posed in terms of the attitude to the interim government, which stands as the main obstacle to the advancement of the revolution. And on this question forces on the ground are divided, with a majority supporting it in one way or another.

The most urgent task is to convince those that subjectively want to fight for a fundamental change in Bangladesh that such a change cannot come through trusting in Yunus. In short, the task of revolutionaries today is to wage the same fight as Lenin in April 1917 to rearm the Bolshevik party through a complete split with

the Provisional Government and its conciliators in the entire labour movement.

And this is precisely where the RCI fails. Their programme for Bangladesh, while formally correct, is not used to split the left on class lines. While they point out that the students were wrong to support the Yunus government, their polemics on this question directed at the rest of the left are non-existent. This is because the only perspective they offer for building a revolutionary party is to join the RCI; not to split and regroup the left on a revolutionary programme—which is the only way to build a real working-class party that can finish the revolution.

The question of a *political split* in the movement along the lines of no conciliation to the bourgeoisie *is the decisive question* on which the revolution will either go forward or break its neck. Unity of the left based on conciliating the Yunus government is the greatest danger facing Bangladesh today.

Onward to the second liberation of Bangladesh!

The Bangla masses have opened the door to the second liberation of their nation, but success is by no means certain. The movement faces all sorts of perils, all of which can be reduced to the subordination of the working masses to the bourgeoisie. We say to revolutionaries in Bangladesh and the diaspora: look to Lenin! Amidst all the upheaval in Russia, he was not afraid to be a minority of one and even split with the Bolsheviks on this question. What is crucial today is that such a Leninist pole exists and be willing to make this fight. *This* is the central lesson of the October Revolution for Bangladesh today.

Ebarer shongram poorno shadhinotar shongram! This fight is the fight for complete liberation! ■

tactic of Stand Up to Racism (SUTR) and the SWP, who go to Farage’s meetings to yell insults and disrupt them. Most working-class people think this is ridiculous (it is), and it only reinforces Farage’s appeal.

The socialist movement has no interest in supporting immigration quotas—as Galloway’s Workers Party does. This only further divides the working class between British and foreign-born. However, the socialist movement also has *no interest in supporting the current high immigration policy*. Workers concerned about immigration cannot be dismissed but, instead, must be brought to realise how the entire rotting economy is the result of the City of London. Those liberals who celebrate immigration, who defend the EU and the ECHR while hysterically calling any opponents of this “racist”, must be sharply exposed as stooges for the status quo.

And this is the broader political problem with SUTR and the SWP. Its slogans and politics are all geared towards those very liberals and act as a repellent for workers. Take its central slogan, “Refugees are welcome here”. This slogan appears to many working people as a straight-up defence of the status quo, as a liberal appeal and as an attack on them rather than on the ruling class.

Of course, the workers movement must defend refugees and oppose deportation. However, it matters how refugees are welcomed and for what purpose. Refugees must be welcomed in a way which strengthens working-class unity against the ruling class—whose entire economic system generates masses of refugees. Rather than doing this, “Refugees are welcome here” is mainly directed at the legitimate frustration

felt by millions in devastated communities into which Whitehall bureaucrats send asylum seekers. At the same time, this call is perfectly acceptable to London liberals and even big capitalists—particularly when it means refugees from Ukraine or Hong Kong. The same goes for slogans like “open borders”. This literally amounts to demanding a more extreme version of the current immigration policies and is designed not to strengthen working-class unity against the

rulers but to antagonise workers concerned about immigration.

What’s needed is a campaign demanding the mass unionisation of foreign workers (largely abandoned by the trade unions), together with the expropriation of the City and the reindustrialisation of Britain. A struggle to house refugees *and* workers on the monarchy’s land and properties registered in tax havens would do more to unite immigrants and white working-class communities

than the liberal appeals of SUTR. However, this would surely alienate the liberals and trade union bureaucrats bankrolling SUTR.

Others, like the Socialist Party or Socialist Alternative, call to oppose racism and raise demands like “jobs, homes and services for all”, somewhat conscious that racist reaction is fuelled by poverty. They have called on the trade unions to organise a mass demonstration against racism. It would not be a bad thing for the trade union leaders to actually do something, for once. But, again, none of what they do seeks to break the movement from the liberals. They have simply been tailing them, as seen with their staunch support for Corbyn, the union bureaucracy or lockdowns.

And crucially, their agency is always the trade union bureaucracy and left Labourites, from Mick Lynch to Jeremy Corbyn, who are literally responsible for the disasters of the last years. Rather than putting demands on those people to *expose* them as *obstacles* in the struggle against the far right and *dispel* illusions in this lot, their entire perspective is always based on desperate hopes that these crusty Labourites could play a progressive role.

The question of the coming years is who will channel the immense anger bubbling at the bottom of “Broken Britain”? Will it be the far right targeting immigrants and Muslims? Or will it be the multiracial working class against the rulers and the establishment? The race is already on, and the left is losing it because it is indistinguishable from the liberals. The socialist movement must stand on its own two feet, which requires breaking with all shades of liberals and refusing unity with anyone who conciliates them. The clock is ticking. ■

Racist riots

Organise mass trade union defence!

The SL/B issued the following leaflet on 6 August.

The fascist rampage against mosques and asylum centres can and must be stopped. The question is how.

Not by looking to the Starmer government, which came into office on the back of supporting Zionist genocide against the Palestinians and promising swift deportation of migrants. It’s suicidal to rely on the cops to defend the mosques or asylum centres; the power of the state will come down ten times harder on pro-Palestinian protesters and minorities than against the fascists.

Not by impotent liberal protests chanting “refugees are welcome here” as asylum centres are being set on fire.

The only force we can look to is the trade union movement. What’s needed is for union branches to reach out to local mosques, asylum centres and minority neighbourhoods and organise members to assist in their defence. Union leaders have mouthed fine words about the need for solidarity with mosques and refugee centres but Starmer’s lackeys are not going to make this real. It’s up to the union members to take action! Talk to co-workers and act now in preparation for further provocations by the fascists.

Bangladesh Tasks and dangers

The student-led revolutionary uprising in Bangladesh ousted the abhorred Hasina and her party, the Awami League (AL), and paralysed the state apparatus, sending cops fleeing and forcing the army brass to the table. This was a tremendous victory that unleashed the built-up anger of the masses at decades of corrupt rule and a worsening economy.

However, the student leaders of the movement have put their faith in (and some have joined) the interim capitalist government of micro-financier Muhammad Yunus. This is *not* the way forward; it cannot address the problems confronting Bangladesh. Its purpose is to provide a democratic facade, restore order and change nothing of the underlying economic and social structure responsible for today's situation.

The tasks of the revolution

Let us be crystal clear: the aspirations of the masses cry out for a fundamental change of the Hasina *system*. This means fighting against the way the entire country is run: women toiling in garment sweatshops and under horrible conditions, only to make superprofits for the imperialists and domestic capitalists; not enough quality and well-paying jobs for students; the masses working themselves to the bone to pay rising foreign debt to the IMF.

These are the burning questions that brought millions to the streets, and *none* of these will be addressed through policy changes or installing a more “democratic” face like Yunus to clean up Hasina's mess, which in reality is the mess of administering capitalism in a poor country. Addressing each one raises the problem of *how to develop the country*.

Combating corruption

The corruption and nepotism for which Hasina was hated are hardly unique to her rule; they are a defining mark of regimes of oppressed countries. The wretched neocolonial bourgeoisies serve as middlemen for the plunder of their countries. In Bangladesh the domestic rulers crush the masses to maintain the country as a sweatshop for the West. Corruption simply comes with the job. Look at India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Myanmar; or at South Africa, or Nigeria, or any other government in the Third World. All these governments are corrupt to the core. So long as Bangladesh is run on this model, it is impossible to end corruption.



Zabed Hasnain Chowdhury/Getty

Dhaka, 4 August. Mass uprising brought down hated Hasina regime. Now working-class power is posed.

Quotas or merit: fighting over a small pie

The question of quotas that galvanised the student masses confronts the same problem: underdevelopment. The fight over jobs gets played out over quotas and merit. This is the case in all of South Asia. But this debate doesn't address the central problem. Quotas exist because there aren't enough jobs to go around, and the good jobs go to those from the dominant or more powerful groups: upper- and middle-class people.

The quotas for descendants of the War of Liberation were certainly nepotistic and an affront to the struggle of millions. Yet even without the 30 per cent quota, will the jobs crisis be addressed? Can the students who so heroically took to the streets to oust Hasina say that a merit-based system will provide them *all* with decent and well-paid jobs? *No*.

The truth is that countries oppressed by imperialism cannot develop to meet the needs of the broad masses. The need for quotas will exist so long as there are insufficient jobs; the solution for the masses is not to fight over a small pie that cannot possibly feed all mouths, but to grow the size of the pie. But this pie can only grow when the productive forces of society—land, factories, banks—are no longer under the control of the ruling classes whose entire function is to sell the country off to foreign financial interests.

Defence of minorities key to revolution

A crucial question is the defence of the

Hindu minority. It is to the credit of the student movement that when reports of violence against Hindus broke out, it organised the defence of Hindu homes and neighbourhoods. The attacks against some leaders of the AL that happen to be Hindu have put wind in the sails of Indian- and Western-backed media, who are using this to discredit the movement. This undermines the prospect of winning the Hindu masses across the border in India to the fight for the second liberation of Bangladesh.

Communal reaction spreads like wildfire in South Asia. It is therefore paramount that the danger of communalism not be downplayed as a “distraction” from the “real” questions, but addressed head-on and the defence of the Hindu minority integrated as a key aspect in the fight for working-class power. Only by championing the defence of Hindus can the Muslim masses win the support of Hindus in Bangladesh away from the “secularism” of the AL and turn them into fighters *against* the Hasina system, building Hindu-Muslim unity. Such a development has the potential to cut through the deadly communal polarisations throughout the *entire* subcontinent.

Bangladesh is rightly wary of Indian expansionism. Today, as Hasina is sheltered by the Modi government, there are real fears that this duo will try their utmost to undermine the development of the struggle. The Hindu-nationalist propaganda machine is busy labelling the July events as anti-India. The truth is that a Bangladesh where the oppressed overthrow an

iron-fisted leader is bad news for Modi. A victory of the revolution in Bangladesh will galvanise the masses in India who are also suffering under the dictatorial Modi regime.

Reject economic blackmail

The liberals and bourgeoisie are clamouring about the rapid decline of the economy, using this as a cudgel against the masses. Yes, the economy is in dire straits. But the masses must understand that it is precisely the bourgeoisie that is responsible for the state of the economy. The bosses want to get back to business as usual as quickly as possible in order to open up the valves of profit. *Enough!* Instead of returning to the factories and the status quo, workers must defy this economic blackmail. As Lenin explained regarding the economic situation following the February Revolution in Russia: “The more imminent the debacle, the more essential is it that the bourgeoisie be removed.” Only the working class taking power can bring order to the economic chaos.

Workers must control order

The priority of the interim government is to restore order and stability. This means the restoration of the cops and other forces of the state to keep the “peace” in the streets—ie, crack down on future protests that threaten to get out of their control. The events of July showed whose side these forces are really on. It would be a gross injustice to the memory of martyrs to have these thugs back on the streets.

The masses have shown tremendous revolutionary initiative, maintaining social order and providing flood relief through their own means. They have now experienced and seen that *another way* of running the country is possible. They must build upon their initiatives, relying *only* on their own strength. *Replace the police and army with working-class militias!*

No support to the interim government!

Bangladesh today faces *the* question that confronts all revolutions: *which class will run society?* Workers, backed by the poor peasants and revolutionary students, OR the interim government, followed by combinations of reactionary bourgeois parties who finally see their shot at political power after 15 years of Awami rule? In order to fulfil the aspirations of the masses, the revolution must put the working class in charge of the

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