

Editorial

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More people will vote in 2024 than in any year previously. Elections are taking place in more than 60 countries globally, including in India, Russia, the United States and the European Union. Mainstream commentators have framed these elections as a battle between democracy and ‘populism’.¹ They argue that the ‘centre must hold’ to prevent a slide into anarchy. But centrist politics have failed people for decades. Since the 1980s, neoliberalism has hollowed out wages and undermined the effectiveness of trade unions. It has created multiple financial crises, each of which has been loaded onto the shoulders of working families. The current cost of living crisis has come after decades of falling incomes and worsening conditions, the result of reforms that have funneled wealth and power to the top of society. Neoliberalism has failed to provide even the basics for millions of people, but it has done what it was meant to do, it has reinforced the power of capital and moved wealth to the ruling classes. This is why the neoliberals adopt Thatcher’s dictum that ‘there is no alternative’ (TINA). It is also why the language of populism is so important - it transforms politics into a binary choice between a ‘rational establishment’ and the ‘extremes’ of left and right; and it presents the ‘centre’ as democratic, moderate and stable and anything that deviates from this as dangerous and unpredictable.

The backdrop to this framing of the elections is the ominous rise of a new far right. Trump, Le Pen and Farage have all made gains by using the same racist playbook. They claim to be ‘outsiders’ who will unite the ‘people’ against the ‘elites’, but their real objective is to deflect anger away from the ruling classes onto minorities. They claim that by targeting asylum seekers, Muslims and the LGBTQI community they can ‘make their nations great again’. But their real ambition is to accumulate wealth and power for themselves by whipping up hatred and dividing working people. Trump is a millionaire property tycoon who gave enormous tax cuts to his billionaire friends when he was in office.

Farage presents himself as a ‘man of the people’, but he wants to cut taxes for corporations and reduce regulations in the City of London. As they have always done, the far right builds its base by talking about ‘the national people’ but they govern as part of the existing ruling classes. Indeed, this is even more true today than it was in the 1930s as the modern far right usually promotes an even more intense form of neoliberalism than those in the mainstream. By contrast, far left politicians like Corbyn and Melenchon seek to unite working people by opposing policies that benefit the elites. They stand up for migrants, oppose racism and criticise the conservatism inherent in traditional ‘family values’. They want to challenge the deep inequality that characterises modern capitalism and tackle the aggression of imperialism in the Middle East, which is why they are smeared as antisemites.²

Framing politics around the centre versus the extremes is an effective way to make the depredations of capitalism seem inevitable. It makes what Tariq Ally has defined as the ‘extreme centre’ seem natural and benign; but there is an even more important reason for this framing of politics – it disguises the fact that the elites relate to the far left and the extreme right in very different ways; that they have created the current wave of far right politics while they vehemently oppose the forces of the radical left.

This sponsorship of far right movements has occurred in two main ways. Firstly, decades of neoliberal restructuring have fostered a sense of despair and fatalism that provides the breeding ground for far right ideas.

Public services have been run-down at the same time as welfare states have been defunded, meaning competition for scarce resources increases. In the absence of major struggles to defend these services, some of those struggling to make ends meet ask whether they can get a house before a migrant family or a single parent. Since the 1970s, the ruling class has also threatened to move their capital rather than continuing their post-war partnership with trade unions. One result has been a steady decline in trade union power resulting from a failure by union leaders to shift away from their reliance on the state (corporatism) to militant insurgent action. This, in turn, has led to a decline in confidence in collective action across society. Neoliberalism has also encouraged an attitude that each man or woman is out for themselves – and so competition between working people has also increased.

Secondly, and this is crucial, the conventional right has both fostered and adapted to the agenda of the far right. They have recognised the potential for the right to deflect anger away from the elites and they have taken up far right themes and given them legitimacy. France provides a good example of this dynamic. The fascist party, National Rally, defines Muslims as a threat to French culture. But rather than challenging this poisonous racism, the French President, Emmanuel Macron, has legitimised it, by closing down Muslim centres, bringing in laws against Muslim ‘separatism’ and by using the code word of ‘secularism’ to attack Muslim women who wear the veil (or the burka). Even Amnesty

International says that Macron is “reinforcing pre-existing negative and harmful stereotypes that conflate Muslims and terrorism.”³ Far from undermining the far right and the fascists, this directly plays into their strategy of ‘detoxification’; of bringing their ideas beyond the *Cordon Sanitaire*. In response, the far right have also moved, softening their language for electoral purposes even as they build up squads of boot boys on the streets. The conventional right’s attempts to embrace elements of the far right agenda always get trumped. The far right simply has to say: if you want racism - vote for the real thing.

But why, despite this failure of strategy, does the conventional right engage in this game? Despite claiming to lie at the mid-point between the ‘extremes’, big business has always favoured the far right to the far left. They do not particularly like the plebian elements within the fascist movement. They distrust any interference with their own personal liberties. But in moments of crisis, they always turn to the fascists to put down the left. When a hammer is needed, they support the fascists over a radical left dedicated to stripping them of their economic privileges. The *Financial Times* explained this well during the recent French election. Under the headline, ‘French businesses court Marine Le Pen after taking fright at left’s policies’, they noted that “France’s corporate bosses are racing to build contacts with Marine Le Pen’s far right after recoiling from the radical tax-and-spend agenda of the rival leftwing alliance in the country’s snap parliamentary elections.”⁴As capitalism lurches from crisis

to crisis, the neoliberal right and the far right help to reinforce each other. From one side, the mainstream right legitimises the concerns of the fascists; from the other side, the far right takes up the logic of neoliberalism, arguing that tax cuts for corporations will help to rebuild the national economy.

The left response

How should the left respond to the growth of far right ideas? One mistaken approach comes from a Stalinist tradition that increasingly defines itself against what it defines as the ‘woke left’. George Galloway provides one extreme example of this tendency in Britain.

He says he is for ‘the workers not the wokers’ and that his party stands for ‘the working-class patriotic alternative to woke anti-British ‘Labour’. So enraged is Galloway by the left’s embrace of LGBT rights and Scottish Independence that he even claimed to vote Tory rather than Labour recently.⁵ A more sophisticated example comes from Sahra Wagenknecht in Germany. She recently split from Die Linke (The Left Party) to found the BSW - Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht- and won six seats in the recent European election. Wagenknecht is better than the soft left in opposing German intervention in the war in Ukraine, but she favours a more restrictive immigration poilicy that makes concessions to the hard right Alternative for Germany (AFD). Here is how she explains her position in a recent *New Left Review* interview,

Our capacity to give immigrants a chance of equal participation in our economy and society is not endless. We also think it is a lot better if people can find education and employment in their home countries, and we should feel obliged to help them in this.⁶

When its carefully crafted ambiguity is stripped aside, Sinn Féin (SF) has decided to take the same direction with its new immigration policy, *International Protection: A Fair System That Works*. One way the Irish government has sought to exclude people seeking asylum in the state is by stopping them arriving in the first place. Another way is to designate their country of origin ‘safe’, making it much less likely that they will be able to claim asylum here. Conservative governments across Europe are expanding their lists of ‘safe countries’ and this is now something that Sinn Féin also supports. Instead of calling for more resources and a recognition of the benefits that people coming to Ireland make, SF has called for an expansion of the ‘safe countries’ list and a speeding up of deportations.⁷ SF leaders have not said which other states should be added to the list, but their whole approach is now couched within the logic of immigration as a major problem facing workers. Even a cursory glance at the experience of Irish migrant workers during the ‘anti-Paddy’ and ‘anti-Mick’ riots in Britain during the 19th century shows that anti-immigrant sentiment is always constructed by those who seek to divide working people. Not once do Galloway, Wagenknecht or Sinn Féin

challenge the narrative that migrants are taking resources by pointing to the simple fact that resources are often created by migrant workers. How else do people think Irish hospitals or building sites run?

By siding with an argument that assumes immigration is a problem, the ‘anti-woke’ left plays into the hands of the far right who want to unite ‘the people’ around hostility to migrants rather than opposition to the inequalities of capitalism. It also plays into the hands of the neoliberals who are able to deflect the crises they are causing onto migrants and other vulnerable minorities. In taking this turn – often as cloaked in a rhetorical anti-racism – this type of left turns its back on Lenin’s dictum that socialists should act as ‘the tribune of the people’ and not just as ‘trade union secretaries’. He was suggesting that the only way to fight divisions which are fostered among working people is by standing with the oppressed and arguing that the real enemy is the capitalist elite.

Against the approach of the ‘anti-woke’ left, People Before Profit deploys a twofold strategy for challenging the far right. Firstly, unlike liberal anti-racists we do not simply preach about more education, while looking down our noses at working class anger. We start by insisting that people have every right to be angry. We do not moralistically dismiss those who are swayed by racist ideas. We understand that racism does not result primarily from individual ignorance or prejudice but is embedded in Western culture through the class relations of the capitalist system. Through a myriad of sophisticated mechanisms, the mass of people is taught to

believe that membership of a particular nation-state (particularly one close to the centres of imperialism and capital accumulation) confers unique privileges over others. Despite its own history of colonisation, Irish society is not immune to the dominant racist discourses of Western culture. Just as socialists must challenge all aspects of bourgeois ideology, it is necessary to engage with people who are swayed by racist ideas to break them away from the fascists. Sometimes this will involve conversations that start by identifying with the righteous anger that many feel and then seeking to re-direct it onto the government. But we must also challenge the far right when they seek to mobilise – remaining visible on the streets and making sure that socialists are at the centre of anti-racist united fronts that take on the far right wherever they emerge.

However, the best antidote to the pressure of racism is the emergence of working class struggle that shows in practice that unity rather than division is the way to make gains. In other words, countering racism ultimately demands a real fighting left. The successive betrayals of social democracy have left a vacuum which the far right has sought to fill. Even the new ‘radical left’ of Syriza, Podemos and Die Linke has failed the project of mobilising anger because of their desire to play by the rules and enter national and local governments. A hard principled left that offers a programme of simple demands to all workers – native and migrant- is what is needed. It should include demands such as a minimum wage of €15 an hour; a reduction in the pension age to 65; public housing on

public land and much more. Most importantly, it should show that it will not simply talk about policies but is prepared to mobilise and fight for them – even when they conflict with the limits of local capitalism or the European Union’s Fiscal Rules. The recent victory by the New Popular Front in France shows that when voters are offered a radical alternative to both the neoliberals and the fascists it can attract significant support. This was also true when Corbynism energised millions of British voters through its radical left manifesto in 2017. But without a further commitment to challenge the logic of the system through mass activity, the left will not be able to meet the test of the far right and their neoliberal enablers.

In this Issue

Nowhere is the extreme nature of the capitalist elites more evident than in Gaza. Every day since October 7, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) has butchered innocent Palestinians with weapons supplied to them by their western sponsors. These are the same western leaders who proclaim themselves ‘defenders of universal human rights’ and upholders of the ‘international rules based order’, but when the International Criminal Court (ICC) recently sought arrest warrants for Benjamin Netanyahu - for crimes against humanity - the US Congress sought sanctions against the ICC. A week after the IDF murdered 22 civilians in a refugee camp in Gaza City, a Joint Session of the US Congress gave Netanyahu a standing ovation as he came to justify genocide. Hundreds of millions of us

are repulsed by the barbarity of the Israeli army. But we must also seek to understand the roots of this brutality in the partnership of Zionism and Western Imperialism. Three articles in the current edition are dedicated to this understanding.

Our lead article is an interview with Richard Boyd Barrett T.D. who has spent more than thirty years in the struggle for Palestinian liberation. In this wide ranging interview, Boyd Barrett talks about his own radicalisation during the first Intifada, when he found himself working alongside Palestinians on a farm near Hebron. He speaks of his shock at the systemic racism he witnessed against his fellow workers and of the deep inspiration he took from the grassroots resistance he witnessed during the Intifada. Boyd Barrett is razor sharp on all the key political questions. He debunks the idea that the conflict is rooted in a powerful Jewish lobby in the US; he insists that the starting point for genuine solidarity must be defending the right of Palestinians to resist their occupiers, and he charts the only feasible resolution to the conflict in a state that tears down the apartheid Israeli regime and erects one that fosters genuine equality.

My own piece situates the current slaughter in the long and brutal history of Western Imperialism in the region. As the source of vast oil reserves and the site of major trade routes for global capitalism, the Middle East has been an essential zone for imperialist rivalry for more than a century. Controlling the Middle East is of vital strategic importance to the western ruling classes, but their relative remoteness from the region means that Israel is an essential partner in

their pursuit of global hegemony. These considerations go a long way to explaining why US lawmakers are willing to give standing ovations to men who are committing crimes against humanity.

The sheer brutality of the slaughter in Gaza means that one foundation of Zionism is coming under pressure. Since its foundation, the State of Israel has consciously fostered an identity between Zionism (a nationalist political project) and Judaism (a monotheistic religion). It has sought to justify Israeli terror by misappropriating the memory of the Holocaust and it has built a virtual monopoly in institutional Judaism through its control of schools and synagogues - and the nationalist myths that sustain them. Becca Bor explains the lies that sustained Zionism in her own Jewish community during the 1980's but her focus is on the growing number of Jews around the world who are consciously breaking from Zionism. She outlines the conscious efforts by progressive Jews to sever the links between Judaism and Zionism and to sever the link between antisemitism and anti-Zionism. These are vital developments that are essential to the wider movement for Palestinian liberation.

Paul Le Blanc writes about the great revolutionary V.I. Lenin, one hundred years after his death. His essay helps to reclaim Lenin from the conservative slander he has received ever since, but it also helps us to understand the nature of imperialism which is so vital to understanding the contemporary Middle East. Le Blanc shows how Lenin and his contemporaries (Hilferding, Bukharin, Luxemburg) set out to explain the horrors of

the First World War on the basis of interstate rivalries that defined the latest stage of capitalism. For these revolutionaries, imperialism was much more than one country aggressively seeking to control another state – it relied on huge conglomerates of finance and industrial capital wedded to the military apparatus of the state. Lenin opposed this drive to war with the revolutionary potential of the working classes. He insisted on the rights of oppressed people to fight for national liberation and on the maximum level of democracy in any society worth fighting for. These lessons are worth remembering today.

Assessing the recent restoration of the Stormont Assembly, Michael Jackson argues that the entire structure is built around failure. More than 25 years after the Good Friday Agreement, the devolved Assembly continues to lurch from crisis to crisis, all-the-while fostering the deep sectarianism it was meant to overcome. Tracing the latest crisis back to the DUP's support for Brexit, Jackson argues that the inherent sectarianism of the institutions means that they will eventually collapse altogether or continue to foster a 'two tribes' mentality that gives the elites the cover they need to move further into neoliberalism. Rather than supporting these failed institutions Jackson highlights the significance of the largest strike wave in the north for generations.

The final two essays in this edition relate to Marnie Holborow's excellent new book *Homes in Crisis Capitalism: Gender, Work and Revolution*.⁸ In her extended review, Sinéad Kennedy situates the book in the experiences of women during Covid 19.

Despite the fact that women were more likely to lose their jobs and far more likely to pick up the extra care and support work that Covid created, women were often invisible in national debates that centred on the needs of businesses to continuing making profits and the needs of the population to stay at home. As Kennedy points out, 'homes' under capitalism are meant to be a sanctuary, but they are invariably sites of unequal care work, and housework, and all too frequently the sites of violence, coercion and control. To explain these dynamics, Kennedy praises Holborow's book for "situating gender and home within their essential relationships to the capitalist mode of production".

Taking up this theme, Holborow insists that it is only a Marxist analysis – constantly updated and reflexively developing – that can fully understand the nature of homes under capitalism and of women's oppression within the home. Her starting point is the dialectic between the private realm of the bourgeois home and its public role in the capital accumulation process. Homes are presented as private spaces characterised by love and respect, but they are simultaneously sites for the production of the next generation of wage labourers and the site of the replenishment of the current labour force. These contradictory roles create oppressive demands on women under capitalism. The system needs women to care in the home, but it also needs to exploit them as cheap wage labourers in the economy.

To explore these dynamics, Holborow draws on Marx's insistence that family homes are part of a totality of relations of production and reproduction that are necessary for the

ongoing reproduction of capitalist class relations. She also insists that Engels has much to tell us about modern gender relations, despite the fact that he is often dismissed by radical feminists and by

Marxists alike. Her book deserves a wide readership.

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¹For one of many articles of this nature see John Kampfner, 2023. Right-wing populism is set to sweep the West in 2024. A Year of elections looms and it could be a disaster for liberal democracy. *Foreign Policy* @ <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/12/26/right-wing-populism-are-set-to-sweep-the-west-in-2024/>.

² See for example, David Averre. July 2024. Jean-Luc Melenchon is a friend of ex Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and has defended him from claims of anti-semitism. July 7 *Daily Mail* @ <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-13612187/The-French-hard-left-leaders-ties-Jeremy-Corbyn-Jean-Luc-Melenchon-friend-ex-Labour-leader-Israel-critic-defended-accusations-anti-Semitism.html>.

³ Amnesty International 2021. Amnesty International’s concerns regarding the Bill “To Strengthen Respect for the Principles of the Republic” @ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/EUR2139122021ENGLISH.pdf>.

⁴ Financial Times June 14 2024. @ <https://www.ft.com/content/e28f9753-1770-4c8c-91d8-e7bb7ed44feb>.

⁵ Isobel Knight. For the workers not the wokers: the rise of the anti pc-left. *The Left Berlin* @ <https://www.theleftberlin.com/for-the-workers-not-the-wokers/>.

⁶ Sahra Wagenknecht. 2024. Condition of Germany. *New Left Review*. 146 March April 2024 @ <https://newleftreview.org/issues/ii146/articles/sahra-wagenknecht-condition-of-germany>.

⁷Sinn Féin. International Protection: A Fair System That Works @ <https://vote.sinnfein.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/International-Protection-A-fair-system-that-works.pdf>.

⁸ Marnie Holborow. 2024. *Homes in Crisis Capitalism. Gender, Work and Revolution*. London Bloomsbury Press.