

INDUSTRIAL

Good luck to resolute bin strikers

AND, so, the Birmingham bin strike continues. According to the report in the Morning Star (November 21) "Unite set to host event for Brum bin strikers" through involving the public. "Nine in 10 of more than 6,500 residents have agreed to display a bin sticker or poster in support of the bin workers" having "knock on the doors of more than 16,000

homes in the city".

Sharon Graham, Unite general secretary, says that "the support of the local community for bin workers is overwhelming."

The event will take place in the "Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood's constituency today."



Good luck to their continued strike as residents are now showing their support.

PETER SMITH
Braintree, Essex

1871

Stuck for a film this Saturday night?

I HAD a "I've found this dusty-old dvd in an old cupboard, and I didn't realise I still had it" moment.

"1871" tells the fascinating story of the Commune, and of the Communards in Paris, in what would be the first ever communist uprising in history; one that would be brutally suppressed by the bourgeois forces of order.

A fantastic rare film. It starts off in a Paris opera house, and an oafish Prince of England (played

brilliantly by Ian McNeice) takes a fancy to the beautiful singer on stage, passing a note of introduction to his royal flunkey to give to her.

The flunkey cannot hide the disgust on his face. "Sire, her majesty will simply not tolerate another scandal!"

They haven't changed in hundreds of years!

This is a great history of the Commune, if you can find a copy.

KEN KING
Hoddesdon, Hertfordshire

TRANSATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE

Britain's grubby empire was built on business of slavery

IN RESPONSE to the letter "Brits didn't benefit from slave trade" (M Star November 7 2025), colonial commerce, including the business of slavery, was one of the driving forces of the capitalist economy from its earliest manifestation, encouraging the expansion of a manufacturing economy.

Exports from Britain accounted for around half of all industrial production in the 18th century. Joseph Inikori tells us that, in 1770, the slave trade and the plantation economy furnished as much as 55 per cent of "gross fixed capital formation investment" in Great Britain.

The increased rate of industrial growth based on exports depended on purchasing power generated by the British West Indies. Demand stemming from Africa, the Caribbean and North America based on the sugar industry was responsible for more than half of the growth of English exports in the third-quarter of the 18th century. The business of slavery greatly contributed to increas-

ing investment in the empire, particularly the construction of the infrastructure that such trade required. Additionally the re-export of sugar to the Europe brought enormous profits. The textile industry depended on a particularly close connection between merchant capital, plantation owners and manufacturers. Cheap raw cotton from the southern states of the US was central to the growth of industrialisation in Britain which, in turn, encouraged the growth of US slavery.

It is one of the favourite national myths of the English bourgeoisie that the so-called Industrial Revolution was the result of the hard work of clever engineers. They do not tell you that James Watt, whose patents for improvement of the steam engine made it practical for widespread industrial use, was the son of a West India merchant and slave-trader who supported Watt in his career. Watt himself worked for his father as a mercantile agent in Glasgow during the 1750s. Car-

ibbean plantation owners who needed to process sugar cane were significant customers for Watt's steam engines. This mechanisation of sugar processing, far from making the lives of the enslaved labourers any easier, made their labours more relentless as the increased pace of the steam-powered machinery forced an increase in productivity by the workers; in this context, productivity increase meant even harder work, driven by the whip.

Atlantic slavery was inextricably interwoven with the markets, commodification, capital growth, credit and raw materials that were required for the expansion of capitalism in Europe and North America. West Indian merchants became the merchant bankers who were so important to the growth of the City of London. The modern insurance industry had its roots in the maritime insurance of the "Triangular Trade." Important infrastructure projects such as canals, docks and railways were

financed out of the profits of slavery and the compensation received after abolition.

Racism, which the profiteers of the slave trade used as a justification for enslavement, has left a legacy which continues to have a detrimental effect on British society. The institutional racism of the police, Stop and Search, the unemployment figures for young black people, the endless discrimination and petty humiliations of everyday life, the Windrush scandal: all these factors and more have their origins in the wealth and power that the British ruling class gained from the business of slavery.

Your headline on the day the original article by Claudia Webbe was published, "Racism 'baked into Metropolitan Police,'" describes a legacy of African enslavement.

STEVE CUSHION
Author of Slavery In The British Empire And Its Legacy In The Modern World" published by Monthly Review Press London E11

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ASYLUM-SEEKER POLICY

Where will this cruelty end?

SURELY the government has reached an all-time low in its draconian, cruel and dehumanising plans for people who have survived war, persecution and unimaginable loss who arrive in the UK with little or nothing, seeking only safety. Nothing to declare. But then they come up with this gem.

Confiscating the jewellery of refugees and asylum-seekers. Wedding rings too? Maybe/maybe not. If I reflect on my personal family history, the next logical step is presumably to remove people's fillings



before herding them off in the direction of the showers. HELEN MARTINS Sheerness

SHOCKING MOVES: Shabana Mahmood wants to 'confiscate' jewellery from asylum-seekers

ST GEORGE

There's no pride in waving a flag in order to intimidate people

IN RESPONSE to John Pateman's letter St George flag means pride (Letters November 20) - it is one thing to take pride in your country (or international football team where it seems obligatory for England fans to wear the flag of St George shirts) but it is entirely another for flags to festoon street lamps posts as happened this summer in some English towns to mark out territory and plainly intimidate people.

A Muslim friend told me recently: "I was born here, did all my training in the NHS and want to serve the community. But I am scared to go into some areas. Not only have we got whole streets where the lamp posts are flying St George flags I regularly see groups of men (and women) swaggering around and shouting abuse at anyone they see fit."

Like many, I found the

government's limp response to the wave this summer of street demonstrations (and outside asylum hotels) where the police appeared powerless - plus the wall-to-wall media coverage of Reform and other extremist groups of 'patriots' were them to feel free to organise these events in the name of "freedom of speech" totally astonishing.

TONY BURKE
Bedford