

House Passes Bill to Deport Unauthorized Immigrants Charged With Minor Crimes

Karoun Demirjian , Jan. 7, 2025, New York Times

The House passed a bill on Tuesday that would target undocumented immigrants charged with nonviolent crimes for deportation, an opening salvo from a Republican majority that has vowed to deliver on President-elect Donald J. Trump's promised crackdown at the border.

The measure, which drew the support of 48 Democrats as well as all Republicans, appears to be on a path to enactment, having garnered bipartisan backing in the Senate, which plans to take it up on Friday. It is named after Laken Riley, a 22-year-old nursing student who was killed last year in Georgia by a migrant who had crossed into the United States illegally and was arrested and charged with shoplifting, but was not detained.

The quick action reflected how Republicans in Congress, emboldened by the governing trifecta they will hold when Mr. Trump takes office on Jan. 20, are using their power to revive and pass a raft of border security measures that died during the last Congress in the Democratic-controlled Senate. Those include bills to increase deportations, hold asylum applicants outside of the United States and strip federal funding from cities that limit their cooperation with federal immigration enforcement authorities.

"This bill is more than just a piece of legislation; it's a return to common-sense American values," Representative Tom Emmer of Minnesota, the No. 3 Republican, told reporters on Tuesday. "And under President Trump's leadership, there will be a lot more where that came from."

The bipartisan vote, 264 to 159, illustrated how some Democrats, stung by their party's electoral losses in November, are reassessing their stances on issues like immigration even as they brace for a far more severe approach under Mr. Trump. "I support giving authorities the tools to prevent tragedies like this one while we work on comprehensive solutions to our broken system," Senator John Fetterman, Democrat of Pennsylvania, said on Tuesday in a statement endorsing the legislation.

Republicans, who control 53 Senate seats, would need seven Democrats to support taking up the legislation to allow it to receive a vote. Democratic Senators Ruben Gallego of Arizona and Elissa Slotkin of Michigan, who were elected in November, voted for the legislation as House members last year.

The bill would require federal authorities to detain undocumented immigrants charged with burglary, theft, larceny or shoplifting, broadening the list of charges that would subject them to being held and potentially deported. It aims to target people like Jose Antonio Ibarra, the Venezuelan man who received a life sentence in November for killing Ms. Riley.

"Right now, ICE is unable to detain and deport the illegal criminals who commit these minor-level crimes," Representative Mike Collins, Republican of Georgia and the author of the bill, said on the floor, referring to Immigration and Customs Enforcement. "We need to get these people off the street. These criminals are getting bolder and bolder while our communities become more unsafe."

Many Democrats have argued that the new category is too broad, and could result in innocent people being thrown into detention. (...)

Britain's House of Lords purges itself

The Economist, December 12, 2024.

They knew they must fall. But they stood anyway. If there is one thing at which the English aristocracy excels it is the brave stand in the face of overwhelming odds. They charged in the Light Brigade. They went over the top in the Somme. And on December 11th Britain's remaining hereditary peers walked into the House of Lords to face their own end.

On one side of the debate was the fate of several dozen hereditary peers and 700-odd years of history; on the other, the "House of Lords (Hereditary Peers) Bill" and a commanding government majority. The outcome of the debate was not in doubt. England's queen, it was once said, "must sign her own death-warrant" if Parliament sent it to her. And so when, on a chill Wednesday, the Lords was sent a bill demanding the "Exclusion of remaining hereditary peers"—a Labour manifesto commitment—they too, like turkeys voting for Christmas, would have to approve it. But not being turkeys, and certainly not chicken, the noble lords and ladies rose to fight it first.

The arguments against hereditary peers are not hard to make. The House of Lords is an affront to democracy, vocabulary and hosiery. It enables people to win power because 500 years ago their ancestor was chums with Henry VIII. As David Lloyd George, a former prime minister, said, it long enabled "500 men, ordinary men, chosen accidentally from among the unemployed", to wield power in Britain. It requires the government to publish guides on how to address an earl over email ("Dear Lord") and a baron in the flesh (grovellingly). It obliges far too many men to wear tights in public each year.

The House of Lords is one of the oldest assemblies in the world. It is also one of the oddest. Its 827 members make it the world's largest second chamber: France's has 348 members; Germany's a slender 69. It is the only legislature in the world to be larger than its lower house and is second in size only to China's National People's Congress. The only other country to have hereditary members in its second chamber is Lesotho, which has its tribal chiefs. (...)

Having hereditary peers, regardless of their quality, "brings our Parliament into a degree of disrepute and ridicule", says Meg Russell, a professor of British politics at University College London. The cure for admiring the House of Lords is, the Victorian journalist (and editor of this newspaper) Walter Bagehot once observed, "to go and look at it".

However, as few know better than Sir Tony, it is easier to criticise the Lords than to reform it. The current bill is a piece of unfinished Blair business. In 1999 Labour tried to abolish all hereditary peers. More than 600 were booted out. But 92 (who were, in a fudge for the ages, to be elected by their fellow hereditary peers) were kept as an interim compromise. And 25 years later they are still there. A quarter of a century is brisk by House of Lords standards. The first bill to attempt to limit its size was put forward in 1719; three centuries on, nothing has happened about that, either. (...)

Inheriting is becoming nearly as important as working

The Economist, 1 Mar 2025

Work hard, children are told, and you will succeed. In recent decades this advice served the talented and the diligent well. Many have made their own fortunes and live comfortably, regardless of how much money they inherited. Now, however, the importance of hereditary wealth is rising around the rich world, and that is a problem.

People in advanced economies stand to inherit around \$6trn this year—about 10% of GDP, up from around 5% on average in a selection of rich countries during the middle of the 20th century. As a share of output, annual inheritance flows have doubled in France since the 1960s, and nearly trebled in Germany since the 1970s. Whether a young person can afford to buy a house and live in relative comfort is determined by inherited wealth nearly as much as it is by their own success at work. This shift has alarming economic and social consequences, because it imperils not just the meritocratic ideal, but capitalism itself.

In part, the inheritance boom is a reflection of a wealthier and ageing society. As economies have become richer, they have accumulated capital per worker—capital that someone has to own. But because the pace of economic growth has slackened and housing markets have boomed, the scale of this wealth relative to incomes has ballooned. Nowhere is this combination of towering wealth and enduring sclerosis more evident than in Europe, where productivity growth has been dismal.

More wealth means more inheritance for baby-boomers to pass on. And because wealth is far more unequally distributed than income, a new inheritocracy is being born. (...)

For supporters of free markets, the rise of the new inheritocracy should be deeply disturbing. For a start, it creates a rentier* class that faces a series of bad incentives. A loophole-ridden tax system means that the wealthy spend a lot of time gaming the rules; it would be better used to direct their capital to more productive uses instead. To protect their assets, homeowners become NIMBYs, blocking building and making housing unaffordable for those without inherited wealth. Knowing they can rely on their inheritance, moreover, the new rentiers may face little incentive to work or innovate.

More worrying still is how an underclass of non-beneficiaries is becoming increasingly left behind—and increasingly disaffected. If property becomes ever harder to buy, and a comfortable life harder to achieve, the incentive of young, aspirational workers to strive will be blunted. And when they believe that the system is stacked against them, their support for mainstream political parties withers.

That is why fixing the problem is urgent. It would be mad to wish that inflation and war destroy fortunes, as they did in the 20th century. This newspaper has long argued that inheritance taxes are the fairest tool to deal with inheritocracy. Yet the taxes are so unpopular that, instead of enforcing them, governments have introduced loophole after loophole, raised the threshold at which they apply, or dismantled them altogether. (...)

*Rentier = a person living on income from property or investments

American women go to Mexico for abortions.

October 10 2024. The Economist.

Mexico has long been a popular destination for Americans seeking nose jobs or dental work. But since 2022, when the United States' Supreme Court overturned *Roe v Wade*, thereby removing the constitutional right to abortion, American women have started heading south to terminate unwanted pregnancies. That they can do so is testament to a recent expansion of the right to an abortion in Mexico, a trend that is mirrored across Latin America.

The number of Latinas who are able to obtain an abortion legally has grown dramatically in recent years. In December 2020 Argentina, the region's fourth-most populous country, made abortion legal. In 2023, after several Mexican states had removed their prohibitions, the country's Supreme Court ordered the rest to follow suit. (Mexico City, the trailblazer, has allowed abortion since 2007.) In 2022 Colombia's constitutional court made abortion legal up to the 24th week of pregnancy, just as it is in Britain.

But the trend is not universal. Latin America still has notably strict rules. The Centre for Reproductive Rights, an NGO in New York, notes that two of the four countries in the world that have rolled back abortion rights recently are in Latin America: Nicaragua and El Salvador (Poland and the United States are the other two). Both of those Central American countries impose harsh penalties on women who get abortions and the doctors who assist them.

In Brazil, the right-wing opposition is proposing a law that would equate abortion—which is already allowed only with very heavy restrictions—to murder. Argentine women could see their newfound freedoms removed too. Their firebrand president, Javier Milei, has said that he would hold a referendum on the right to abortion.

Where abortion is allowed, it is often permitted only in extremely limited circumstances. Some countries restrict it to the first trimester, or to those pregnancies which are the result of rape. Nor does mere legality necessarily mean abortion is available in practice. For example, many Mexican states have yet to reform their state constitutions or to ensure that services are available.

Criminalising abortion makes no sense: it still happens, but in more dangerous conditions. What's more, legalising abortion doesn't necessarily increase its use. As access to abortion in Latin America has expanded over the past 30 years, the share of women who get an abortion in a given year has declined from 35 per 1,000 to 32, according to estimates by the Guttmacher Institute, a research outfit in New York. (Central America is an exception; there it has risen despite harsh prohibitions.) One reason is that Latin America has done well at reducing unplanned pregnancies. They fell by 27% over the same period. Better reproductive services are a win-win proposition.

Artists imagine a new utopia for Kenya's capital

Ismael Einashe, November 2024, BBC news

Kenya's capital, Nairobi, has long been known as "the green city in the sun" because of its mix of forest and grasslands among the urban sprawl, but it all depends on where you are viewing it from. Seen from one of the city's comfortable apartment blocks or homes, then yes, perhaps – from one of its densely packed slums, then no. There, life can be characterised by poverty and ecological disaster, such as flooding and deadly landslides.

But an art collective - Kairos Futura – has been trying to take what might seem like some of the city's more dystopian elements and create a vision of a utopia, or at least how that might be achieved. Their exhibition *Hakuna Utopia* features the works of seven artists exploring themes of apocalypse and resilience – some in quite abstract ways - as they respond to the daily challenges endured by Nairobi's six million residents.

One of the collective, Stoneface Bombaa, grew up in Mathare, the capital's second-largest informal settlement. He has overcome great odds to become an artist and wants to use his work to address the way that people in Mathare live – often lacking jobs, housing and education. Bombaa says they endure a "hand-to-mouth economy", never sure where their next meal will come from. "People are really angry," he says, but through art, he feels he can "channel" his community's anger into something positive as "art unites".

Bombaa set out to create from the exhibitions "micro-utopia" sites dotted around the city. He called it the "jungle room" and hoped to get people to connect with nature from within Mathare itself, in an attempt to bridge the ecological divide.

Ironically, the building he had identified as a possible site was demolished by the authorities to make way for a road. Undeterred, he has been taking children from his community, often stuck living in unimaginable urban squalor, to experience Nairobi's verdant parks and expose them to green spaces.

"There are no trees or green spaces in Mathare," Bombaa says. But by contemplating the idea of utopia, he believes that he can imagine what it would be like if people in his community actually had unrestricted access to the city's green spaces. In this way, people in his community can claim a right to access nature that is denied to them simply because they are poor. (...)

The Kairos Futura team are also drawing inspiration from nature to use their imagination in how to address urgent environmental issues. For example, Coltrane McDowell has applied this to architecture. In his work *Invisible Cities*, he was inspired by termite mounds to reimagine what architecture might look like in the future.

Another artist in the show, Abdul Rop, known for his mesmerising woodcut prints and paintings, says that in order to "achieve utopia", Nairobians need to work together. "That's why the young people are agitating right now for change," he says, suggesting they are frustrated by a corrupt political system that hems in their potential. (...)

Rop argues that by thinking about utopia through the lens of art, young people may find creative ways to fight for their future. Rather than being far-fetched, he thinks that it can help imagine a bolder and more equal future for his city.

"The moment to act for the future is now," he says.

Kate Middleton wants public to focus on her work instead of outfits as she returns as frontline royal

Bryony Gooch, Monday 3 February 2025, The Independent

The Princess of Wales wants the world to focus on her campaign work and not her wardrobe as she gradually returns as a frontline royal.

In a move signalling her wish to be less about her fashion choices and more about her campaigning, Kensington Palace will no longer release details of her outfit during events.

A palace source said that change came with an “absolute feeling” that the public work was not about what the princess was wearing. They said: “She wants the focus to be on the really important issues, the people and the causes she is spotlighting.”

While they acknowledged “there will always be an appreciation of what the princess is wearing”, the palace insisted its new attitude to Kate’s duties with the statement: “The style is there but it’s about the substance.”

While the move is hailed in some corners as a sign of serious intent, up-and-coming fashion designers may lament the shift having benefitted from the princess’s patronage in recent years. Kate, 43, has topped numerous “best dressed” lists over the years and her influence on the British fashion industry has been dubbed “the Kate Effect”, with items worn by the royal often selling out quickly.

When she wore a floor-sweeping polka dot dress from Alessandra Rich for the official portrait of then-Prince Charles’s 70th birthday, it sold out in minutes. The princess has long championed young designers and British brands, such as Alexander McQueen, Jenny Packham and Catherine Walker.

This changing attitude to Kate’s fashion is part of a shifting approach as she returns to work following her cancer diagnosis. She revealed in September that she had completed her course of preventative chemotherapy. Speaking in a video message, she said her cancer journey had given her a “new perspective on everything” as she reflected on the “simple yet important things in life”.

She said: “Although I have finished chemotherapy, my path to healing and full recovery is long and I must continue to take each day as it comes. I am however looking forward to being back at work and undertaking a few more public engagements in the coming months when I can.”

Days later, she returned to the frontline with a private meeting at Windsor Castle for her continued patronage of the Royal Foundation Centre for Early Childhood. More recently, the Royal Foundation Centre launched a new initiative to focus on developing people’s social and emotional skills for better mental health, to counter addiction and abuse.

Kensington Palace announced last January that the Princess had undergone abdominal surgery at the London Clinic and William would temporarily step back from royal duties to care for his wife and their three children.(...) She confirmed she had been diagnosed with cancer in a video message and was undergoing preventative chemotherapy.

She said: “It has been an incredibly tough couple of months for our entire family, but I’ve had a fantastic medical team who have taken great care of me, for which I am so grateful”.

Cory Booker's 25-Hour Speech Was a Stunt. It Worked.

Nia-Malika Henderson, 2nd April 2025, Bloomberg.

Do something. This was former First Lady Michelle Obama's exhortation to Democrats last summer. It is now the collective demand of average Democrats despairing over the seeming inaction of their leaders. Into the breach jumped New Jersey Senator Cory Booker, once a young and up-and-coming phenom, and now a future senior statesman in a party that seems eager for new leadership. Over 25 hours, Booker broke the floor speech record long held by Senator Strom Thurmond, who belled for a day to block civil rights legislation in 1957. (...)

"I rise tonight with the intention of disrupting the normal business of the United States Senate for as long as I am physically able. I rise tonight because our nation is in crisis," Booker said in his opening remarks which began on Monday at about 7pm. "In just 71 days, the president has inflicted harm after harm on Americans' safety, financial stability, the foundations of our democracy, and any sense of common decency. These are not normal times in our nation. And they should not be treated as such in the United States Senate."

This was a message to Americans, but it was also plainly a message to his colleagues as they grapple with a base that desperately wants to see something different out of Washington, even as Democrats are firmly in the minority. The favorability ratings of Democrats are at record lows (29%) because of this discontent, with Minority Leader Senator Chuck Schumer's surrender on the government shutdown vote likely causing further erosion. Booker's speech must be seen in that context, as a corrective reset and kickoff for the road ahead as President Donald Trump seeks to push his agenda through a (narrowly) Republican-controlled Congress.

"I confess that I have been imperfect. I confess that I've been inadequate to the moment. I confess that the Democratic Party has made terrible mistakes that gave a lane to this demagogue," Booker said. "I confess we all must look in the mirror and say 'we will do better.'" (...)

As Booker held the floor, with the help of several colleagues, thousands of federal employees were being fired from their jobs at the Department of Health and Human Services, adding to the thousands already fired in a chaotic gutting of government workers and the services they provide. Booker's iron-man effort — spotlighting how the cuts in services and tariff-induced price hikes will land on average voters — set a new standard for how Democrats can fight and get attention. (...)

Democrats are now trying to spark a broad public rebuke of Trump. Booker encouraged his colleagues to do more on social media and increase the party's engagement online, particularly among younger voters. Booker's stunt, and yes, it was a stunt, worked on that score, earning 350 million likes on his TikTok livestream of the speech, according to Booker's office.

Booker spoke as voters cast their ballots in two Florida special elections and a state Supreme Court race in Wisconsin. The margins in Florida and victory in Wisconsin gave Democrats some hope that the political tide is turning against Trump and perhaps moderate Republican voters could be swayed to break ranks.

Eating from plastic takeout containers can increase heart failure risk – study

Tom Perkins, February 12th 2025, The Guardian.

Eating from plastic takeout containers may significantly increase the chance of congestive heart failure, a new study finds, and researchers suspect they have identified why: changes to gut biome cause inflammation that damages the circulatory system.

The novel two-part, peer-reviewed study from Chinese researchers adds to mounting evidence of the risks associated with eating from plastic, and builds on previous evidence linking plastic chemicals to heart disease.

The authors used a two-part approach, first looking into the frequency with which over 3,000 people in China ate from plastic takeout containers, and whether they had heart disease. They then exposed rats to plastic chemicals in water that was boiled and poured in carryout containers to extract chemicals. “The data revealed that high-frequency exposure to plastics is significantly associated with an increased risk of congestive heart failure,” the authors wrote.

Plastic can contain any of about 20,000 chemicals, and many of them, such as BPA, phthalates and Pfas, present health risks. The chemicals are often found in food and food packaging, and are linked to a range of problems from cancer to reproductive harm.

While researchers in the new paper didn’t check which specific chemicals were leaching from the plastic, they noted the link between common plastic compounds and heart disease, and a previous link between gut biome and heart disease.

They put boiling water in the containers for one, five or 15 minutes because plastic chemicals leach at much higher rates when hot contents are placed in containers – the study cited previous research that found as many as 4.2m microplastic particles per sq cm can leach from plastic containers that are microwaved.

The authors then gave rats the water contaminated with leachate to drink for several months, then analyzed the gut biome and metabolites in the feces. It found notable changes. “It indicated that ingestion of these leachates altered the intestinal microenvironment, affected gut microbiota composition, and modified gut microbiota metabolites, particularly those linked to inflammation and oxidative stress,” the authors wrote.

They then checked the rats’ heart muscle tissue and found it had been damaged. The study did not find a statistical difference in the changes and damage among rats that were exposed to water that had been in contact with plastic for one minute versus five or fifteen.

The study does not make recommendations on how consumers can protect themselves. But public health advocates say to avoid microwaving or adding hot food to plastic containers at home, or cooking anything in plastic. Replacing plastic utensils or packaging at home with glass, wood or stainless-steel alternatives is also helpful.

It is more difficult to avoid plastic when getting carryout. One can bring their own glass packaging or transfer food to glass packaging when one gets home.

Even households earning over \$150,000 a year are living paycheck to paycheck, Bank of America says

Jane Thier, October 28 2024, Fortune

It's no surprise that everything is more expensive these days. (Tickets to the World Series are the most expensive of all time.) But per a new Bank of America analysis, it's worse than you might think—even for those who supposedly count as rich.

Owing to ballooning basic expenses and, in many cases, the cost of maintaining an expensive home, one in five households earning at least \$150,000 a year are currently living paycheck to paycheck, the bank wrote in an October note, based on spending data and account information among U.S.-based customers. (Paycheck to paycheck, by B of A's definition, means spending over 95% of income on necessities like food, electric bills, childcare, and rent.)

To be expected, households earning below \$50,000 annually are by far the most represented in the paycheck-to-paycheck group, accounting for 35% (up from 32% in 2019). As households earn more and more, their proportion drops. Even those with six figures often find themselves digging around for extra money to keep above water. (A MarketWatch survey of high earnings from earlier this year echoed B of A's findings.) The problem is mostly due to the outsize impact of lifestyle creep in all its pernicious forms, the Bank of America report authors say.

"Households living paycheck to paycheck have either higher necessity spending, lower incomes, or a combination of both," they write, adding that their data suggests that "households living paycheck to paycheck have over 90% higher necessity spending than households who do not live paycheck to paycheck."

Another reason: When families hit a certain income threshold, all that "necessity spending" ends up relatively higher, often outpacing their salary. Namely, "higher-income households may have bought larger, more expensive homes and consequently have bigger mortgages," B of A writes. Big homes, they add, accompany bigger everything: insurance costs, property taxes, utilities, care, and maintenance.

Worse news: The share of paycheck-to-paycheck households mostly rises with age. More baby boomers, who are largely retired, live paycheck to paycheck than any other age group. Gen X, then, have the highest share of paycheck-to-paycheck households among those who are still getting most of their income via participation in the labor market.

The plight of Gen X, as B of A points out, echoes its earlier research finding that those individuals tend to have the highest share of necessity spending of anyone.

But across the board, there's been a rise in the share of paycheck-to-paycheck households since 2019, B of A finds. One in four households fit the bill. That's despite the fact that inflation has relatively cooled; it's still stubborn enough to create lasting sticker shock for working Americans.

And whether or not workers are actually in a precarious financial position, a large share feel as though they are. In B of A's *Market Landscape Insights Study*, nearly half of respondents said they agree with the statement "I am living paycheck to paycheck," a share that's steadily risen over the past two years. This, B of A wrote, "likely reflects the impact of higher consumer prices on people's perceptions and experiences of their finances."

Gender ruling offers clarity after years of ambiguity

Alison Holt, 17th April 2025, BBC News.

After years of argument and dispute about the meaning of gender, the watchword of Wednesday's Supreme Court ruling has to be clarity. Equality law has been made clear with the unambiguous statement that the term "woman" refers to a biological woman and does not include biological men who identify as women.

It is a "victory for common sense", according to the chairwoman of the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC). Baroness Falkner added: "If a male is allowed to use a women-only service, it isn't any longer a single-sex space." This is a world away from the carefully chosen language which has been used to navigate gender issues for much of the last decade.

The Equality Act, which protects people who have been through gender reassignment from harassment, discrimination and sex discrimination, is enforced by the EHRC. It is now updating its statutory code of conduct to take account of the judgment, saying that, with this new framework, it should be in a better position to enforce the law where it finds breaches.

It was directly involved in the Supreme Court case because it said inconsistencies over whether the term sex included or excluded transgender people with gender recognition certificates (GRC) was making equality law unworkable. The ruling removes any ambiguity. Now, a GRC will not change a person's legal sex for the purposes of the Equality Act.

Public bodies - from the NHS and prisons to sports clubs and businesses - will already be reviewing their policies. Women's toilets, changing rooms and other single sex spaces will be for biological women only. In theory, that means a transgender man or woman should use facilities that correspond to their biological sex. However, this is likely to present other difficulties as the person will be presenting as their gender identity to the outside world.

Baroness Falkner argues that transgender people should use "their power of advocacy" to persuade organisations to provide third spaces such as unisex toilets.

Following the ruling, transwomen cannot compete in women's sport, the EHRC says. Sport has been one of the most hotly contested areas in the debate about gender. In recent years, many sports have tightened rules around transgender athletics at elite levels. Athletics, cycling and aquatics, for example, have banned transgender women from taking part in women's events.

Other sports have put eligibility criteria in place. Earlier this month, the English Football Association introduced stricter rules - but still allowed transgender women to continue to compete in the women's game on the condition that their testosterone was kept below a certain level.

However, it will take time to consider the implications on eligibility in elite sport, so there will not be any immediate change. Governing bodies are not compelled to amend or reconsider their rules - but if their rules now break equality law, they could face enforcement action.

For some there will be concerns about what the ruling means for transgender people. The Supreme Court justices emphasised that transgender people already have protections against discrimination and harassment written into the Equality Act.

Inequality in flexible working dividing Britain into ‘two-tier workforce’

Joanna Partridge, 27 Jan 2025 The Guardian

Britain is dividing into a two-tier workforce as office staff benefit from flexible working but the conditions of frontline staff such as nurses and shop workers remain “frozen in time”, according to a report. Workers who were considered to be on the frontline during the pandemic have seen no change to their working hours or shift patterns in recent years, according to research by Timewise, a social enterprise that helps businesses with flexible working policies. This is despite the post-pandemic rise in hybrid working for office-based staff.

As a result, the world of work remains “frozen in time” for people in sectors such as retail, transport, health and social care and construction (..), representing 10.5 million people. Many of these roles involve shift work and are based at a set location, while some are on zero-hours contracts.

“For millions of site-based and shift-based workers in particular, it is impossible to meet essential needs like being able to take time out for a medical appointment, to plan ahead or to manage working hours around a health condition,” said Clare McNeil, a director at Timewise. “This is creating a two-tier workforce between office-based employees (...) and the frontline workers who keep our country moving,” she added.

Between 2019 and 2024, more than 1.3 million people in desk-based roles gained access to flexible hours, representing 14% of all office-based workers, according to official figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS). However, there was no change in the 6% of the UK’s 3.4 million shift workers who said they were able to vary their working hours, representing just 250,000 people.

(...). Increasing flexibility for shift-based workers could help companies to retain more staff or recruit new employees more easily, the report found, and could also aid the government in its goal of reducing “economic inactivity”, or managing labour shortages. (...) Companies often blame operational challenges and the costs of implementing new shift patterns as the reason for failing to introduce flexible working, the report found. “It is complex in terms of scheduling, in terms of rostering, and there are a number of other barriers we identified,” McNeil said. (...)

All UK employees currently have the right to request flexible working, yet many of the workers surveyed said they were not aware of this, while employers can refuse the request as long as they have a “good business reason” for doing so. Construction is one of the sectors where there has traditionally been little flexible working and many roles are based on building sites.

Property developer BAM, which employs 6,700 people in the UK, first piloted flexible working schemes in 2019, and has since expanded them. (...) Kim Sides, executive director for construction at BAM UK (...) believes that offering flexible working may help to attract younger workers to the industry. “We’ve got an age profile in the construction industry that we’re aware of, and the pool is not refreshing itself like it used to,” said Sides.

The report comes as work-life balance outranked pay as a top motivator for the first time in an international survey of thousands of workers, underscoring the permanent changes brought to the world of work after the pandemic.

Illinois governor bans Jan. 6 rioters pardoned by Trump from state jobs

Tobi Raji, Feb. 1 2025, The Washington Post.

Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker (D) has directed the state's hiring authority to block all those who participated in the deadly Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol from state employment. The order would apply to more than 50 people from Illinois who were given pardons or commutations by President Donald Trump in one of the earliest acts of his second term and marks the latest effort by the blue state governor to push back against Trump.

In a letter addressed to Raven A. DeVaughn, director of the Department of Central Management Services, which is responsible for hiring state personnel, Pritzker said people who participated in the attack should be disqualified from state employment. The governor called their behavior "infamous and disgraceful conduct that is antithetical to the mission of the State."

"One of my most important duties as Governor is protecting public safety in the State of Illinois," he said in the Thursday letter. "No one who attempts to overthrow a government should serve in government."

On his first day in office, Trump granted a "complete and unconditional pardon" to nearly all Jan. 6 defendants. He commuted the sentences of the remaining 14, who are members of the right-wing Oath Keepers and Proud Boys extremist groups. Oath Keepers' leader Stewart Rhodes and Proud Boys former chairman Henry 'Enrique' Tarrío are among the 14 rioters who had their sentences commuted. Trump also ordered his attorney general to dismiss all pending indictments.

According to the Chicago Sun-Times, 43 of the 53 defendants from Illinois had been convicted and sentenced by the time Trump took office on Jan. 20. They include former Chicago police officer Karol J. Chwiesiuk, whose lawyer called the Justice Department's four-year investigation into the attack "a witch hunt."

"It was a witch hunt," Nishay Sanan told the Chicago Sun-Times last month. "This was the Democrats' attempt to go after Trump and his supporters." According to court documents, Chwiesiuk said he was traveling to Washington "to save the nation." Chwiesiuk was convicted on four misdemeanor charges, including entering and remaining in a restricted building, disorderly or disruptive conduct in a restricted building, disorderly conduct in a Capitol building and parading, demonstrating or picketing in a Capitol building. He received three years of probation with 90 days of home detention.

Pritzker, an heir to the Hyatt Hotels fortune, was strongly considered for Kamala Harris's running mate over the summer and is viewed as a possible contender for the 2028 Democratic nomination. An outspoken critic of Trump going back to his first term, Pritzker has continued to take shots at the president as the administration began implementing its agenda.

On Saturday, he attacked Trump's plan to impose tariffs on Canada, Mexico and China, telling MSNBC that "the people of Illinois, the people of the United States are going to pay the price for what Donald Trump is doing." Pritzker has also slammed Trump's leadership and rejected the administration's sweeping deportation efforts, telling CNN that he's fine with deporting violent criminals, but he wouldn't order Illinois resources to help federal officials pursue "law-abiding" migrants "who may have been here for a decade."

Mark Zuckerberg says Apple hasn't innovated since the iPhone. He's forgetting about one major thing.

Michael Grothaus, January 18th 2025, Fast Company

Zuck's comment was baffling. But when you consider this one unique advantage that Apple has over Meta, it all becomes clear.

Last week, as part of his apparent ongoing campaign to rebrand himself as a more Musk-like figure, Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg sat down with Joe Rogan for a three-hour discussion about free speech, government "censorship," and how important it is that American companies win the AI race. But one of the other topics Zuck seemed intent to focus on was Apple.

The Facebook founder aired many of his beefs with the company, particularly his displeasure regarding the fees that some developers need to pay on Apple's App Store to distribute their wares on the platform (fees that Apple cut in half for small developers). Yet Zuck went even further, suggesting the Cupertino company isn't the innovative powerhouse it once was—and it hasn't been for decades. "It's like Steve Jobs invented the iPhone and now they're just kind of sitting on it 20 years later," Zuckerberg said (...)

Zuck's comments about Apple's supposed lack of innovation are baffling, especially coming from someone as knowledgeable about the tech industry and its progress over the past several decades as he is. But his comments are much easier to understand if you consider the degree to which Apple's most important innovation over the past ten years has harmed Meta's business practices.

Zuckerberg seems to believe that hardware advancements are the only ones that count as "innovation" at Apple. But I don't think it's fair to limit Apple to such a narrow scope. After all, the company isn't just a hardware company. It makes software and provides services, which all encompass an ecosystem that is unlike any other in the tech industry. It is an ecosystem that offers convenience, intuitiveness, and interoperability. And most importantly, it is an ecosystem that has revolutionized digital privacy.

Apple's greatest innovation over the last decade isn't something we can hold in our hands or show off to someone else. It's our power to keep more of our data away from the corporations and institutions seeking to harness our thoughts, locations, and connections for their own financial gain. Accessing and monetizing this information about us is Meta's bread and butter, and many of the privacy innovations Apple has introduced to its ecosystem in recent years have harmed Meta's ability to do this.

Take, for example, just one of Apple's recent privacy innovations in iOS 18—the ability for users to restrict app access to only the contacts they choose. Social media giants like Meta hate this feature, because it means they can no longer gain unrestricted access to everyone in your address book—to your friends, doctors, and religious leaders. This means that they lose control over knowing everyone you know and can't build a complete social graph for you.

Or take App Tracking Transparency (ATT), a privacy feature first introduced in iOS 14.5. ATT gave users control over whether an app would be allowed to track them across third-party apps and websites. This is a feature that faced strong opposition from companies, including Meta's Facebook, that had business models that relied on selling your information. But it's a feature that users have embraced overwhelmingly (...)

New Zealand opposition parties back Māori plea to King Charles

Eva Corlett, 12th December 2024, The Guardian.

New Zealand's opposition parties have thrown their support behind a letter appealing to King Charles III to intervene in New Zealand's politics amid tensions over the government's policies for Māori.

The Guardian on Wednesday revealed the National Iwi Chairs forum – a collective of more than 80 tribal leaders – had written a letter to the king, asking him “to ensure that the [New Zealand] government does not diminish the crown's honour” over what they consider ongoing breaches of the crown's promises made to Māori in the Treaty of Waitangi, New Zealand's founding document.

“It just shows you how serious the situation here is, because you have ... Māori under attack almost weekly from this government,” said Labour Party MP Willie Jackson, adding the letter was powerful even if King Charles does not respond. (...) Te Pāti Māori (the Māori party) co-leader Debbie Ngarewa-Packer said iwi (tribes) have long tried to be diplomatic but now the situation was “so serious it was compromising the integrity of the crown”. (...)

Since taking office last year, New Zealand's rightwing coalition government's policy direction has sparked the biggest ever protest over Māori rights, mass meetings of Māori leaders and condemnation from the Waitangi Tribunal, an institution that investigates breaches of the Treaty of Waitangi. The treaty is an agreement signed in 1840 between more than 500 Māori chiefs and the British crown and is instrumental in upholding Māori rights.

The rationale behind many of the government's proposals is to end “race-based” policies, tackle crime and reduce bureaucracy. The coalition has said it is committed to improving outcomes for Māori and all New Zealanders. But critics fear its policies, including rollbacks of the use of Māori language in public services, the dismantling of an institution designed to remedy inequities in health, and the introduction of a controversial bill that seeks to radically alter the way the treaty is interpreted undermine Māori rights, igniting anti-Māori rhetoric and eroding the Māori relationship with the crown.

Speaking to media on Thursday, the prime minister, Christopher Luxon, said the forum was free to write to King Charles III. “I'm sure many people write to King Charles and feel free to do so, but I acknowledge, as I've said before: the treaty principles bill, there are strong feelings on both sides.”

The bill does not have widespread support and is unlikely to become law. However, its introduction has prompted anger from many who believe it is creating division and undermining the treaty. New Zealand is a constitutional monarchy and Charles is the head of state, who – through his representative, the governor-general – acts on the advice of the government.

Buckingham Palace told the Guardian this was a matter for the New Zealand government but that the king is kept informed of all matters in the country.

Green party MP Teanau Tuiono said it was disheartening Kiwi were having to remind the crown of its commitments, made under the treaty. “We have a government that is dragging us backwards and disrupting the fabric of our society,” he said. “This letter is an entirely appropriate call for support from King Charles to do something about this institution.”

Sir Paul McCartney has warned artificial intelligence could “rip off” artists if a proposed overhaul of copyright law goes ahead.

25 January 2025, The Guardian

The use of copyrighted material to help train AI models is the subject of a newly launched government consultation. McCartney, one of the two surviving members of the Beatles, said: “You get young guys, girls, coming up, and they write a beautiful song, and they don’t own it, and they don’t have anything to do with it. And anyone who wants can just rip it off.” “The truth is, the money’s going somewhere ... Somebody’s getting paid, so why shouldn’t it be the guy who sat down and wrote Yesterday?”

A lack of clarity around whether it is right and fair that copyright material be used to train the models that are powering the latest wave of AI tools has led to debate around the world, with legal cases launched by companies and individuals in the creative industries over what they argue is unlicensed use of their material. In contrast, some publishing organisations and media outlets have signed licensing deals with AI companies to allow them to use their material to train such models.

It is not the first time McCartney has raised fears about the threat AI could pose to the arts. In December, he warned AI could “just take over” and joined the actors Julianne Moore, Stephen Fry and Hugh Bonneville in signing a petition, which states the “unlicensed use of creative works for training generative AI is a major, unjust threat to the livelihoods of the people behind those works, and must not be permitted”.

The novelist Kate Mosse has backed a parallel campaign for amendments to the data bill that would allow the enforcement of the UK’s existing copyright law, meaning creators could negotiate for fair payment when licensing their material.

The government said it would use the consultation, which runs until 25 February, to explore key points of the debate, including how to improve trust between the creative and AI sectors, and how creators can license and be remunerated for the use of their material.

McCartney appealed to the government to rethink the plans. “We’re the people, you’re the government. You’re supposed to protect us. That’s your job,” he said. “So you know, if you’re putting through a bill, make sure you protect the creative thinkers, the creative artists, or you’re not going to have them.”

In November 2023, McCartney and Sir Ringo Starr created the song Now And Then using AI technology to separate John Lennon’s vocals from a home demo recorded in 1977.

The culture secretary, Lisa Nandy, said last year: “This government firmly believes that our musicians, writers, artists and other creatives should have the ability to know and control how their content is used by AI firms and be able to seek licensing deals and fair payment. Achieving this, and ensuring legal certainty, will help our creative and AI sectors grow and innovate together in partnership.”

Union and bishops criticise small boat refugee citizenship ban

Lauren Turner, BBC News, 16 February 2025

A key union has joined faith leaders and charities in warning that a policy banning refugees arriving on small boats from gaining UK citizenship could "breed division and distrust".

Fresh guidance states anyone entering the UK illegally having made the dangerous English Channel crossing - on a small boat or hiding in a vehicle, for example - will be refused citizenship.

Christina McAnea, general secretary of Unison, and nine Church of England bishops are among 147 signatories of a letter, seen by the BBC, to the home secretary urging her to rethink the policy. They wrote that the government must instead focus on ensuring refugees "are welcomed and integrated into British life".

The Home Office says the government has merely strengthened rules that were already in place on who could obtain citizenship. The letter argues that citizenship is "not just a legal status" but "a tangible fulfilment of the promise of safety, dignity, and opportunity".

"When refugees become citizens, they feel a greater sense of belonging as full members of their communities with a stable future for themselves, their children and generations to come."

Referring to a riot at a Holiday Inn Express in Rotherham last August, it says that part of the response to that violence "should be on creating integrated communities".

It went on: "Labelling refugees, who through no fault of their own have had to put their lives at risk on flimsy vessels, or have had to hide in the backs of lorries to reach safety on our shores, as a type of second-class individual will simply breed division and distrust.

"It risks playing into a toxic politics that pits 'us vs them' and is then manipulated by the far right to bring hate and disorder to our streets."

As well as Ms. McAnea of Unison - Labour's most generous union backer in the 2024 general election campaign, donating £1.49m - other signatories include the bishops of Chelmsford, Leicester, Gloucester and Dover. The chief executives of the Refugee Council and Refugee Action have also signed it, alongside Islamic Relief UK and other faith leaders, including rabbis from the Conference of Liberal Rabbis and Cantors.

The government's new policy means anyone applying for citizenship from 10 February, having previously entered the UK illegally will be refused regardless of how long ago they arrived. Previously, refugees who arrived via irregular routes would have to wait 10 years before being considered for citizenship. It has also been criticised by Labour MP Stella Creasy.

A Home Office spokesperson said: "There are longstanding rules that can prevent those arriving illegally from gaining citizenship.

"The government is strengthening these measures to make it clear that anyone who enters the UK illegally, including small boat arrivals, faces having a British citizenship application refused."

Facebook and X must comply with UK law, says minister

Kate Whannel, January 12th 2024, MSN News.

Social media sites such as Facebook and X will still have to comply with UK law, Science Secretary Peter Kyle has said, following a decision by tech giant Meta to change rules on fact-checkers. Mark Zuckerberg, whose Meta company includes Facebook and Instagram, said earlier this week that the shift - which only applies in the US - would mean content moderators will "catch less bad stuff" but would also reduce the number of "innocent" posts being removed.

Kyle told the BBC's Sunday with Laura Kuennsberg show the announcement was "an American statement for American service users. If you come and operate in this country you abide by the law, and the law says illegal content must be taken down," he added.

On Saturday Ian Russell, the father of Molly Russell, who took her own life at 14 after seeing harmful content online, urged the prime minister to tighten internet safety rules, saying the UK was "going backwards" on the issue. He said Zuckerberg and X boss Elon Musk were moving away from safety towards a "laissez-faire, anything-goes model". He said the companies were moving "back towards the harmful content that Molly was exposed to".

A Meta spokesperson told the BBC there was "no change to how we treat content that encourages suicide, self-injury, and eating disorders" and said the company would "continue to use our automated systems to scan for that high-severity content". Internet safety campaigners complain that there are gaps in the UK's laws including a lack of specific rules covering live streaming or content that promotes suicide and self-harm.

Kyle said current laws on online safety were "very uneven" and "unsatisfactory". The Online Safety Act, passed in 2023 by the previous government, had originally included plans to compel social media companies to remove some "legal-but-harmful" content such as posts promoting eating disorders. However, the proposal triggered a backlash from critics concerned it could lead to censorship.

The plan was dropped for adult social media users and instead companies were required to give users more control to filter out content they did not want to see. The law still expects companies to protect children from legal-but-harmful content. Kyle expressed frustration over the change but did not say if he would be reintroducing the proposal.

He said the act contained some "very good powers" he was using to "assertively" tackle new safety concerns and that in the coming months ministers would get the powers to make sure online platforms were providing age-appropriate content.

Companies that did not comply with the law would face "very strident" sanctions, he said. He also said Parliament needed to get faster at updating the law to adapt to new technologies and that he was "very open-minded" about introducing new legislation.

Flies, rats and offers of hush money - the price of living next to a 'monster' incinerator

Esme Stallard, Matt McGrath, Patrick Clahane & Paul Lynch, 16 October 2024, BBC News.

"We have been inundated with flies, rats, smell, noise. It's just been horrendous," says Mandy Royle, who lives in the closest home to the UK's biggest waste incinerator at Runcorn in Cheshire.

The facility generates electricity from burning nearly a million tonnes of household rubbish every year - but much of that waste doesn't come from Ms Royle's local area.

BBC analysis suggests the burden of the UK's waste is disproportionately falling on deprived areas such as Runcorn, which are 10 times more likely to have an energy-from-waste incinerator in their midst than in the wealthiest areas.

Many families nearby shared a £1m settlement after 180 of them launched a legal action over the pollution and disturbances from the Runcorn incinerator, the BBC can reveal. But Ms Royle was one of a handful of people who did not sign the agreement, allowing her to speak out about life in the shadow of one of the UK's giant waste plants.

The others who took the cash, worth about £4,500 per family after legal costs, had to sign a strict non-disclosure agreement (NDA). (...)

Energy-from-waste incinerators have boomed over the past decade as local councils have faced higher charges to bury rubbish in landfill sites.

This shift, though, has come at a big cost to the environment. Yet it also comes at a cost to those who live near them. Our investigation found breaches of air quality controls increased both at Runcorn and across incinerators in England between 2019 and 2023. The number of these permit breaches has risen from an average of 3.4 in 2019 to 5.5 per incinerator in 2023. Last year 73% of facilities in England reported transgressions.

Runcorn's energy-from-waste site breached its permit 17 times in the past five years.

"The Runcorn Energy Recovery Facility (ERF) operates within a strict Environmental Permit and is heavily regulated by the Environment Agency, meaning it must comply with all the necessary regulations and permit conditions," Viridor said in a statement.

Household waste is also being sent hundreds of miles across the country to be burned, or even sent abroad, BBC analysis of UK council data showed.(...) even if the increased movement of waste by train and lorry is producing even more carbon emissions and worsening local air pollution.

However, the whole area along the River Tees has emerged as a UK hotspot for energy-from-waste. The region is now home to three active incinerators, with three more in various stages of planning.

"For my hometown, which has suffered a massive decline over the years, it's just another kick in the face. We're becoming the rubbish backyard of England," says an independent councillor in Redcar, Dr Tristan Learoyd. (...)

For Eddie Thompson MBE, who runs a busy food bank in Runcorn, the psychological impact of locating large-scale incinerators in poor areas is very important.

"Mentally, people feel as though, in some cases, they are worthless. They have no sense of a future that they can see ahead of them.

"I don't blame Viridor, but are we getting it right? Putting all the bad stuff in one place?"

Will AI make work burnout worse ?

MaryLou Costa, 23 October 2024, BBC News

When ChatGPT burst onto the scene in late 2022, PR agency founder Anurag Garg was eager for his team of 11 to quickly incorporate the technology in their workflow, so the business could keep up with its competitors.

Mr. Garg encouraged his employees to use the AI language tool for the agency's long list of daily tasks, but rather than increase the team's productivity, it created stress and tension.

Staff reported that tasks were in fact taking longer as they had to create a brief and prompts for ChatGPT, while also having to double check its output for inaccuracies, of which there were many. (...)

As a business leader, Mr. Garg also began to feel overwhelmed by the growing number of AI tools being launched, and feeling he had to keep pace with every new addition.

"The market is flooded with AI tools, so if I invest in a specific app today, there's a better one available next week. There's a constant learning curve to stay relevant, which I was finding hard to manage, leading to burnout," he says. Mr. Garg backtracked on the mandate that the team should use AI in all their work, and now they use it primarily for research purposes - and everyone is much happier.

The stress Mr. Garg and his team experienced using AI tools at work is reflected in recent research. In an Upwork's survey of 2,500 knowledge workers in the US, UK, Australia and Canada, 96% of top executives say they expect the use of AI tools to increase their company's overall productivity levels - with 81% acknowledging they've increased demands on workers over the past year.

Yet 77% of employees in the survey say AI tools have actually decreased their productivity and added to their workload. And 47% of employees using AI in the survey say they have no idea how to achieve the productivity gains their employers expect.

As a result, 61% of people believe that using AI at work will increase their chances of experiencing burnout - rising to 87% of people under 25, as revealed in a separate survey of 1,150 Americans, by CV writing company Resume Now.

Resume Now's survey also highlights how 43% of people feel AI will negatively impact work-life balance.

As Cassie Holmes, management professor at the University of California in Los Angeles, commented in the study: "Using multiple apps requires additional time to learn them and switch between them, and this lost time is painful because we are so sensitive to wasted time." (...)

Alicia Navarro is the founder and chief executive of Flown, an online platform and community which helps people focus on "deep work" - tasks that require sustained concentration. She agrees that there is an "avalanche" of AI tools, but says they need to be used correctly.

"There's such a huge amount of filtering and learning that has to take place before these tools can even start to become productive elements in our lives".

But she argues that for small firms, with limited resources, AI can be a big help.

"It's an incredibly empowering thing for start-ups to be able to do a lot more, or companies to be able to pay more dividends or pay their team more."

Acid Spill Creates Challenge for China in Zambia

James Palmer, March 18, 2025, Foreign Policy

As U.S. President Donald Trump threatens to make copper another battlefield in his trade wars, planning to introduce tariffs, China is dealing with a public-relations disaster at a copper mine in Africa. A massive acid spill at a Chinese-run mine in Zambia last month has contaminated the Kafue River, the country's most important waterway.

The damage from 50 million liters of acidic waste is visible far downstream, with devastating effects. Roughly 60 percent of Zambians depend on the Kafue; the water supply to 700,000 people in the city of Kitwe was cut off shortly after the spill—though it was later partially restored. Pollution may end up further downstream in the Zambezi River, Africa's fourth-longest.

Copper is a global boom industry, with prices at record highs—and U.S. demand is growing. China is the world's biggest copper importer, and Zambia is among the top 10 producers. (Copper makes up more than 70 percent of the country's exports.) Still, Zambia sits low on the value chain, producing relatively low-grade copper and lacking advanced facilities; China plays a dominant role in mining and refinement. (...)

Zambia's copper production has suffered from price plunges in the past—but the country is now looking to expand significantly, mostly with Chinese investment. Western firms are still competitive in Zambia, with the United States investing \$4 billion in the Lobito Corridor project last year to challenge China's influence. China responded to the project by promising \$5 billion in copper investment in Zambia by 2031.

China's investments in Zambia have made it both an ally to the country's leaders and a popular target for the opposition, with politicians often flip flopping once they take power. Early investments saw clashes with miners over unfair pay and conditions. In 2018, there were riots in Kitwe, Zambia, against Chinese businesses, reflecting growing anti-China sentiment.

Many Zambians blamed Chinese lending for contributing to the country's debt default during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, and anti-Chinese sentiment helped President Hakainde Hichilema win the 2021 election in a landslide. But Hichilema switched positions once in office, and China has kept up a strong patronage relationship with Zambia.

Hichilema wants to more than triple Zambia's copper production, and that would require more Chinese money. Though China's popularity in Zambia has fallen over the last decade, it remains broadly positive. The Kafue River disaster, however, is likely to become a new rallying point for anti-Chinese sentiment not only in Zambia, but also throughout Africa. In Zambia, an environmental bill that was being held up by mining interests is likely to move forward, and the Zambian government has begun to halt production elsewhere. But the need for Chinese funding, and thus the need to make nice with Beijing, hasn't gone away.

What may vanish is some of the Chinese demand for copper. Amid Chinese President Xi Jinping's manufacturing push, Chinese copper smelters are working overtime. Meanwhile, the country's real estate industry, which drives copper demand, hasn't bottomed out of its crisis. Both trends could cause copper prices to suddenly fall as they did in 2008—leaving Zambians and other producers economically stranded and environmentally devastated.

Greenways Are Reviving American Cities. Some Say They Could Be Improved

Micheline Maynard, 17 December 2024, Time Magazine

On a gray, blustery November afternoon in Detroit, John Kish watches vigilantly as his four-year-old grandson, also named John, frolics on a towering play slide. If the day was sunny, there might be a line to use it, but given the weather, they have it to themselves. “It’s a long climb, but it gives them something to do,” Kish says, laughing, as the youngster carefully crosses a bridge within the structure.

The playground sits at the West Warren Avenue stop on the Joe Louis Greenway, a network of bike paths, walking paths, playgrounds, and activity centers that’s planned to connect 23 Detroit neighborhoods. (...) Under construction since 2021, this greenway, named for the champion boxer, is part of a growing urban trend. From Atlanta and Boston to Dallas and Long Island, cities are reclaiming previously industrial or abandoned land and transforming it into recreational areas.

The best known is the High Line in New York City. Built atop a long-abandoned freight rail line, it opened in four stages from 2009 to 2019. It has become a popular attraction, with an estimated 8 million visitors a year, about one-third of them city residents. Along with walkers, cyclists, diners and concert-goers, the High Line has given birth to gardens and spurred economic development along its 1.45 mile path, with apartment buildings facing the pathway and the Hudson River.

That bucolic scene has yet to be replicated in Detroit, but it’s one city officials hope may occur. “This is our starting point,” says Crystal Perkins, director of City of Detroit General Services, gesturing to the plaza near West Warren Avenue. She expects the greenway will result in “health benefits, connectivity, and the ability to move safely and easily throughout the city.”

The Joe Louis greenway is being built in sections, with a total cost of around \$240 million over the next five to 10 years. It’s a major undertaking, involving the demolition of nearly three dozen abandoned houses, the removal of several crumbling commercial buildings and 23,000 tires. An estimated 40,000 residents will live within a five-minute walk of the project. (...)

Still, cities need to take more steps to make greenways user friendly, says Anne Lusk, a lecturer at Boston University who has studied greenways for decades. Many are lacking enough amenities like bathrooms, benches and playgrounds, like the one built in Detroit, that could make them more useful to residents and visitors, especially seniors. Lusk says she would also like to see cities build more protected bike lanes on their streets leading to greenways, turning them into seamless transportation systems.

“The greenway would then serve as the main interstate highway for people using the bike to get to work, the grocery store, the drug store, or take kids to school,” she says. Another concern, Lusk says, is the impact of climate change on the projects. Lusk would like to see greenways canopied with trees, which are scarce in the industrial corridors where projects are taking place.

Shifting our eating patterns away from animal products is smart for lots of reasons

Joanne Hunt , 3 February 2025, The Irish Times

How many times a week do you eat meat? (...) The climate and biodiversity crisis means we are going to have to think differently about how we eat. Our diet contributes to around a quarter of global greenhouse gas emissions and is responsible for almost 60 per cent of global biodiversity loss, according to the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). Farming animals for meat and dairy requires space and huge amounts of water and feed, says the WWF. Producing meat creates vastly more carbon dioxide than plants such as vegetables, and alternative sources of protein like grains or legumes such as lentils and beans. A “protein shift” from animal to vegetable is necessary, say policy makers in Europe. They are trying to reorientate our food system to make it more secure and sustainable.

The Flemish government has taken a lead. It has developed a protein strategy, launching what it calls the “green deal protein shift on our plate”. The objective is to change what a plate of food in this northern part of Belgium looks like. At the moment, the ratio of animal to vegetable proteins is about 60 to 40. In a healthy and environmentally responsible diet, more of our protein should come from vegetable sources. The goal of Flanders’ protein shift is to improve the ratio to 60 per cent vegetable protein by 2030. By doing so, Flemish people won’t be just doing their bit for the environment. It’s going to be better for their health too. Cutting down on meat and dairy products can also cut the cost of their food bills.

Getting behind the region’s protein shift are players from across the food system: farmers, food processors, supermarkets and the catering sector. It also includes research groups, NGOs, professional organisations and local government. Every one of them has a part to play in supporting people to improve their eating patterns.

Aldi Belgium, for example, has committed to expanding its range of vegan and vegetarian products, making them more attractive to customers and optimising their placement in store. Ikea Belgium has committed to making half of all main meals in its restaurants plant-based by this year, never pricing environmentally friendly meals higher, and nudging customers to eat more plant-based food.

The conversation in Flanders is not about eliminating animal proteins, but reducing them. However much you love meat and other animal products, most people will acknowledge that too much isn’t good for your health. Half of Belgians, aware of the health impact, no longer eat meat or fish every day anyway.

The campaign is about moving towards a diet with less animal protein, but not necessarily towards a world without meat, fish or dairy products.

Changing habits is hard. Who hasn’t gone around the supermarket, picking up items on autopilot? It can be pretty much the same trolley every week, the old reliables we know how to cook, and that we know will get eaten. It takes a concerted effort to shop and cook differently. But shifting our eating patterns away from animal products is smart for lots of reasons. A meal with less animal proteins is better for our health, for the environment and for our pockets too.

‘Brain rot’: Oxford word of the year 2024 reflects ‘trivial’ use of social media

Harry Taylor, 2 December 2024, The Guardian

“Brain rot” has been announced as the Oxford word of the year for 2024, amid concerns over endless social media scrolling and mind-numbing content. More than 37,000 people voted to help choose the winner from a shortlist of six words drawn up by Oxford University Press, the publisher of the Oxford English Dictionary. Its annual award, whose previous winners have included “rizz” and “climate emergency”, aims to reflect the moods and trends of the year.

Brain rot is defined as “the supposed deterioration of a person’s mental or intellectual state, especially viewed as the result of overconsumption of material (now particularly online content) considered to be trivial or unchallenging”. Oxford University Press said the term “gained new prominence in 2024 as a term used to capture concerns about the impact of consuming excessive amounts of low-quality online content, especially on social media”. Despite its recent rise to prominence, its first recorded use was in Henry David Thoreau’s book *Walden* in 1854.

Casper Grathwohl, Oxford Languages president, said: “Brain rot speaks to one of the perceived dangers of virtual life, and how we are using our free time. It feels like a rightful next chapter in the cultural conversation about humanity and technology. It’s not surprising that so many voters embraced the term, endorsing it as our choice this year. “I also find it fascinating that the word brain rot has been adopted by gen Z and gen Alpha, those communities largely responsible for the use and creation of the digital content the term refers to.”

The five unsuccessful shortlisted words included “demure”, which rose to prominence following a social media trend during the summer that refers to reserved or responsible behaviour; “dynamic pricing”, where the price of a product or service varies to reflect demand; “lore”, a body of facts and background information related to someone or something; “romantasy”, a fiction genre combining romance and fantasy; and “slop”, low-quality content online generated using artificial intelligence.

The shortlist was decided by a panel of four experts, chaired by lexicographer Susie Dent, best known for her appearances on Channel 4’s *Countdown*. Oxford University Press took the public vote into account as it chose the winner, as well as public commentary and other analysis before announcing it on Sunday evening.

Recent winners of the Oxford prize include “rizz”, an abbreviation of the word charisma, which took the title last year. “Goblin mode” took the crown in 2022 and the pandemic-era “vax” won in 2021.

Across the Oxbridge divide, Cambridge Dictionary’s word of the year was announced last month as “manifest”, which is a wellness trend to imagine achieving a goal in the hope it will make it more likely to happen. The word had been searched 130,000 times on the Cambridge Dictionary website.

Social media trends were also linked to “demure” being awarded as dictionary.com’s winner, linked to a TikTok movement during the summer advising people to be reserved and mindful in their behaviour. Another summer craze led Collins Dictionary to make “brat” its word of the year, after Charli xcx’s hit album of the same name released in June.

Homeless people to be given cash in first major UK trial to reduce poverty

James Tapper, 24 November 2025, The Guardian

Researchers are conducting the UK's first major scientific trials to establish whether giving homeless people cash is a more effective way of reducing poverty than traditional forms of help. Poverty campaigners have long believed that cash transfers are the most cost-effective way of helping people, but most studies have examined schemes in developing countries.

The new study, funded by the government and carried out by King's College London (KCL) and the homelessness charity Greater Change, will recruit 360 people in England and Wales. Half will continue to get help from frontline charities. The other half will get additional help from Greater Change, whose support workers will discuss their financial problems then pay for items such as rent deposits, outstanding debts, work equipment, white goods, furniture or new clothes. They do not make direct transfers to avoid benefits being stopped due to a cash influx.

Professor Michael Sanders, who runs KCL's experimental government unit, said: "What we're trying to understand is the boundary conditions for cash transfers. When does it work? For whom does it work? What are the amounts you need to give people in order to make it work?"

One of the first cash transfer schemes was in Mexico in 1997 and since then they have been used around the world. But most evidence is from low and middle-income countries, and there has been opposition from politicians and the public, who often believe people will spend the money unwisely. Last year researchers in Canada found that giving CA\$7,500 (£4,285) to 50 homeless people in Vancouver was more effective than spending money housing them in shelters, and saved around CA\$777 (£443) per person.

Small-scale studies have taken place in the UK, such as a scheme by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in 2012 which helped 12 rough sleepers, but Sanders said these are believed to be the first large-scale studies. As well as the trial with Greater Change, KCL researchers are working on four other similar studies. Greater Change has helped around 1,300 rough sleepers and other homeless people in London and Essex over the last six years. "On average, every person we help saves around £35,000 [in public spending]," Jonathan Tan, the charity's co-founder, said. About half of their clients have been involved in the criminal justice system.

Government figures show 13% of prisoners become homeless after release, putting them at greater risk of reoffending. Some have told the *Observer* they re-offended in order to return to prison – the reoffending rate in England and Wales was 33.2% in 2022 for offenders released from custody or starting a court order.

"We know that of our ex-offending cohort, who are prison leavers, fewer than 9% of them have reoffended 12 months on," Tan said. The charity says 86% of the people it helps out of homelessness are not homeless 12 months later. The KCL study is a way of establishing whether or not that success comes from dealing with easier cases. "We don't think it is because they probably send us the more entrenched cases," Tan said. "But we won't know till the randomised control trial finishes."

Trump administration struggles to rehire fired bird flu employees

Marcia Brown, 27 February 2025, Politico

The Trump administration touted a nearly \$1 billion plan Wednesday to combat the spread of avian flu and mitigate skyrocketing egg prices as the outbreak rips through poultry flocks across the United States. But the measures come as the Agriculture Department is struggling to rehire key employees working on the virus outbreak who were fired as part of the administration's sweeping purge of government workers. Roughly a quarter of employees in a critical office testing for the disease were cut, as well as scientists and inspectors.

The dismissals have already helped trigger a partial shutdown at one of the department's research facilities, according to two USDA employees, interrupting some workers' efforts to fight bird flu and help livestock recover from illness. Now, agency officials are running into logistical challenges in reinstating its bird flu staff — and convincing them to return to jobs while the president repeatedly attempts to squeeze government workers.

Bird flu is spreading beyond poultry and is infecting dairy herds across more than a dozen states, with no end in sight. That's made the staffing woes at USDA a key concern, with the past few weeks revealing how much easier it is to fire employees than it is to bring them back, even when their jobs are crucial for public health. "I don't know if people are going to want to come back," said one USDA employee granted anonymity to discuss the firings and attempted rehiring without fear of retribution. "Now there's this perception that federal jobs are not secure. I think they permanently damaged these services." (...)

The White House's and billionaire Elon Musk's effort to rapidly shrink the federal government — and inability to immediately rehire terminated employees — has also held up major research initiatives on combating bird flu, other animal diseases and helping livestock recover from illness. (...)

USDA's U.S. Dairy Forage Research Center, one of the most prominent agricultural research facilities in the country, lost more than a quarter of its staff under the initial firings, jeopardizing millions of dollars' worth of federally-funded research, according to two people familiar with the situation. They said USDA has since asked two employees who were working on bird flu and several scientists to come back to the center. Though some of those employees have returned to the office this week, they don't have their laptops, rendering them unable to adequately complete their work.

Like at NBAF, USDA declined to bring back people who support the research but are not lead scientists. But without those staff, Dairy Forage still isn't fully operational, two people said. Just this week, a technician's absence prompted chaos: A machine used for testing certain plant and soil samples and primarily managed by one of the fired technicians, caught on fire, forcing Dairy Forage employees to evacuate.

Many research projects were left unfinished, and it's not clear that the few who were rehired will be able to pick up where others left off. "If ... they have projects that are ongoing, all of that work has now essentially been thrown out, discarded and dead in the water," said Dr. Mary Beth Hall, a retired Dairy Forage researcher. "You've got God knows how many millions of dollars of research that's just been thrown away."

White South Africans Gather In Support of Trump and His Claims That They Are Victims of Racism

Alfonso Nqunjana and Gerald Imray, 16 February 2025, Time magazine.

Some white South Africans showed support for President Donald Trump on Saturday and gathered at the U.S. Embassy in Pretoria to claim they are victims of racism by their own government. Hundreds of protesters held placards that read “Thank God for President Trump” and displayed other messages criticizing what they see as racist laws instituted by the South African government that discriminate against the white minority.

Many were from the Afrikaner community that Trump focused on in an Executive Order a week ago that cut aid and assistance to the Black-led South African government. In the order, Trump said South Africa's Afrikaners, who are descendants of mainly Dutch colonial settlers, were being targeted by a new law that allows the government to expropriate private land.

The South African government has denied its new law is tied to race and says Trump's claims over the country and the law have been full of misinformation and distortions. Trump said land was being expropriated from Afrikaners — which the order referred to as "racially disfavored landowners" — when no land has been taken under the law. Trump also announced a plan to offer Afrikaners refugee status in the U.S. They are only one part of South Africa's white minority.

In a speech to Parliament this week, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa said the forced removal of any people from their land will never be allowed in South Africa again after millions of Blacks were dispossessed of property under the apartheid system of white minority rule and hundreds of years of colonialism before that.

“The people of this country know the pain of forced removals,” Ramaphosa said. He said the land law does not allow any arbitrary taking of land and only refers to land that can be redistributed for the public good.

The Trump administration's criticism and punishment of South Africa has elevated a long-standing dilemma in the country over moves to address the wrongs of centuries of white minority rule that oppressed the Black majority.

According to the government, the land law aims to fairly address the inequality that the majority of farmland in South Africa is owned by whites, even though they make up just 7% of the country's population.

White protesters on Saturday held banners referencing the expropriation law but also other affirmative action policies put in place by the government since the end of apartheid in 1994 to advance opportunities for Blacks. Those laws, known as Black Economic Empowerment, have been a source of frustration for some white people.

Influential Trump adviser Elon Musk — who was raised in South Africa — has also criticized South Africa's government and claimed it is anti-white for years, although some have questioned his motivations. He has recently failed to get a license for his Starlink satellite internet service in South Africa because it doesn't meet the country's affirmative action criteria.

While race has long framed South African politics, the country has been largely successful in reconciling its racially diverse people in the years after apartheid. The current government is made up of a coalition of 10 Black-led and white-led political parties that are working together.

Supermarkets 'putting profits above human rights', MP says

Mike Rudin, BBC Eye Investigations + Adam Durbin, BBC News, 4 December 2024.

Supermarkets in the UK that appear to be selling products linked to slave labour in China may be “complicit in putting profits above human rights”, a Labour MP has said. Sarah Champion’s comments come after a BBC Eye Investigation found that tomato puree sold in four leading UK supermarkets - Asda, Morrisons, Tesco and Waitrose - appeared to contain tomatoes produced using harsh and coercive forced labour in Xinjiang. Some of the products have “Italian” in their name others have “Italian” in their description.

All the supermarkets whose products were tested previously disputed the BBC's findings, while China also denies it uses forced labour in its westernmost province.

In an urgent question in the House of Commons on Tuesday, Champion described the UK’s product labelling as “weak and confusing”. The chairwoman of the International Development Select Committee also called for consumers to be given more information on which countries the product ingredients come from and stronger legislation to effectively ban the importing of products made with forced labour.

Champion said UK supply chains are “awash with Uyghur forced labour products” because human rights due diligence is “optional” for British companies.

“To supermarkets, I say, all of you are complicit in putting profits above human rights and I hope the British public do the right thing and make their mark with their pocket, in their wallet,” she said. BBC Eye’s Blood on the Shelves investigation found that a total of 17 products - most of them own-brands sold in UK and German retailers - are likely to contain Chinese tomatoes - testing commissioned by the BBC World Service shows.

Most Chinese tomatoes come from the Xinjiang region, where their production is linked to forced labour by Uyghur and other largely Muslim minorities. The UN accuses the Chinese state - which views these minorities as a security risk - of torture and abuse. China denies it forces people to work in the tomato industry and says workers’ rights are protected by law. It says the UN report is based on “disinformation and lies”.

Also commenting on the BBC Eye investigation was former Conservative party leader, Sir Iain Duncan Smith, who echoed Champion's call for an effective ban on such products backed by criminal sanctions.

Business and Trade Minister Douglas Alexander responded to the questions in the House of Commons by saying he was concerned, the government was reviewing the Modern Slavery Act and would “approach the company in question to try to establish more clearly the exact facts that underlie those deeply worrying reports”.

Alexander added “we need to send a clear and unequivocal signal that no company in the United Kingdom that operates under the existing statutory framework should have any forced labour whatsoever in its supply chain”.

Monday's calls for new legislation comes after the Parliament Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) Baroness Hayman of Ullock said Defra was “looking at labelling as a way to better inform consumers”.

Much of the damage from the LA fires could have been averted

January 15th 2025, The Economist.

(...) As of January 16th, the wildfires that struck the city (of LA) had killed at least 25 people and destroyed more than 12,000 buildings. Whole neighbourhoods look as if they have been firebombed. JPMorgan Chase, a bank, estimates that the bill for the damage will exceed \$50bn, making these fires the costliest in American history. Even before the flames are put out, many Angelenos are wondering: could some of the pain have been averted? Alas, the answer is yes.

Living in Los Angeles has always involved risk. Cradled uneasily between the mountains and the sea, America's second-largest city is susceptible to fires, floods and earthquakes. Climate change adds to the peril, by making fires more frequent and severe. Weather "whiplash" set the stage for the fires: the vegetation flourished after heavy rain, only to be parched to kindling by a long drought. Flames flew far and fast on strong Santa Ana winds.

Even if the world makes heroic efforts to curb emissions, favourable conditions for wildfires will grow more common in the decades to come. Vulnerable places everywhere will need to make themselves less vulnerable. This is where politics in LA, California and America has failed.

Strict regulations in LA require new homes to be fire-resistant, but most homes are not new. Environmental rules make it extraordinarily difficult to build, so much of the housing stock pre-dates the modern building code and is packed with flammable wood. Dense urban development would be reasonably fireproof, but most of LA is zoned for single-family homes, which sprawl out into the foothills, nestling against flammable undergrowth. Clearing or thinning that flammable vegetation is hard, since environmental objections can delay controlled burns for years.

A well-functioning insurance market would encourage sensible behaviour, by charging people more if they own fire-prone homes in fire-prone areas, and less if they make their homes safer or if they moved. But Californians voted in 1988 to give an elected insurance commissioner the power to stop insurance firms from raising prices. Insurers were forced to use historical data on wildfires, and could not adjust premiums to the added risks from a changing climate. Not only has a crucial incentive to make homes safer been lacking, but some insurers have been pulling out of the state because writing policies is unrewarding. A reform to allow them to use model-based estimates of risk came into effect only on January 2nd.

California's predilection for referendums also restricts the state's freedom to budget. A ballot initiative, passed in 1978, makes it hard to raise property taxes. Deprived of revenue from taxes, cities are more dependent on fees for services such as firefighting.

The toll of natural disasters, from floods and fires to hurricanes, keeps rising globally. National and local leaders should be working together to reduce the damage. Instead, Donald Trump stooped to partisan abuse by blaming California's governor, Gavin Newsom, for the disaster and calling him "Newscum". America urgently needs regulations and insurance markets that create the right incentives by promoting cost-effective ways to harden homes and encouraging people to live in safer places. LA will be rebuilt: Mr Newsom talks of a new "Marshall plan" for the city. People will always want to live in such a beautiful, vibrant place. But the city—and the world—should learn from its tragedy.

Two hundred UK companies sign up for permanent four-day working week

Kalyeena Makortoff, 27 Jan 2025, The Guardian

Two hundred UK companies have signed up for a permanent four-day working week for all their employees with no loss of pay, in the latest landmark in the campaign to reinvent Britain's working week. Together the companies employ more than 5,000 people, with charities, marketing and technology firms among the best-represented, according to the latest update from the 4 Day Week Foundation.

Proponents of the four-day week say that the five-day pattern is a hangover from an earlier economic age. Joe Ryle, the foundation's campaign director, said that the "9-5, five-day working week was invented 100 years ago and is no longer fit for purpose. We are long overdue an update." With "50% more free time, a four-day week gives people the freedom to live happier, more fulfilling lives", he continued. "As hundreds of British companies and one local council have already shown, a four-day week with no loss of pay can be a win-win for both workers and employers."

Marketing, advertising and press relations firms led the charge, with 30 adopting the policy. This was followed by 29 organisations in the charity, NGO and social care industry, and 24 in technology, IT and software. Another 22 companies in the business, consulting and management sector had also permanently offered four-day weeks to staff.

Overall, 200 companies have solidified their commitment to shorter weeks, which supporters say is a useful way of attracting and retaining employees and improving productivity by creating the same output over fewer hours. To date, London-based firms are the most enthusiastic, accounting for 59 of the total. However, it signals a growing gulf in culture wars over working patterns, which were upended during the Covid-19 pandemic. So far, many employees have been battling the right to continue working from home, let alone cut down their working days.

US-headquartered companies including JPMorgan Chase and Amazon have so far issued the strictest mandates, demanding staff attend work in person five days a week. Lloyds Banking Group is also considering whether senior staff are hitting their in-office targets when distributing annual bonuses. Some workers who still enjoy the flexibility of remote working have been pushing back against back-to-office mandates, including a group of staff at Starling Bank, who resigned after the chief executive demanded thousands of workers attend its offices more frequently.

Several senior politicians from the Labour party (...) have voiced support for a four-day week. However, the party has not embraced the policy since gaining power, with some speculating that they are fearful of giving political ammunition to the Conservative opposition.

Research by Spark Market Research suggests that younger workers are the most likely to rail against traditional working patterns. About 78% of 18-34-year-olds in the UK believe a four-day working week will become the norm in five years' time, while 65% said they do not want to see a return to full-time office working. Spark managing director Lynsey Carolan said that "18-34 [year olds], the core workforce of the next 50 years, are making their feelings known that they don't intend to go back to old-fashioned working patterns.

"This group also say that mental health and improving their overall wellbeing are their top priorities, so a four-day week is a really meaningful benefit and a key enabler of their overall quality of life."

‘Why not us?’: Welsh language trio on their forthcoming double album

By Steven Morris, January 1st 2025, The Guardian.

The idea of releasing a 23-track double album of pop and rock songs written entirely in *Cymraeg* – the Welsh language – might daunt some artists. But not Adwaith, a post-punk group from Carmarthenshire in south-west Wales. (...) Adwaith, are being hailed as the spearhead of a new breed of young bands and singers performing in *Cymraeg*.

Their previous two albums have been well-received and one of their songs, *Fel i Fod*, has been played more than a million times on Spotify. Their songs are being heard ever more frequently on UK-wide radio stations and their shows sell out not just in Wales but across the UK and in Europe.

The new album, which is called *Solas*, a Celtic word meaning enlightenment, may turn out to be another major leap forward for the band and Welsh-language pop and rock.

Gwenllian Anthony, who plays bass guitar and keyboards, said: (...) “This third album is us coming home and actually being confident in ourselves and being true to ourselves and not letting anxieties take over us. We’re sort of feeling enlightened.” *Solas* is, as far as anyone can establish, the first double album from a female Welsh-language band.

“There were a few people who said, it shouldn’t be a double album – people are not going to care, it’ll be too long,” Anthony said. “And we were just like, nope, it’s going to be a double album. The older we get, we just want to make stuff that we want to do and we want to release music without having to compromise.”

The album was recorded in places ranging from the Outer Hebrides in Scotland, Lisbon in Portugal and the renowned Sain studios in north Wales, co-founded in 1969 by the Welsh protest singer Dafydd Iwan, whose song *Yma o Hyd* (*We’re Still Here*) has become an anthem for Wales football fans.

One of the tracks on *Solas*, *Heddiw / Yfory* (*Today/Tomorrow*), was recorded in the barn of drummer Heledd Owen’s parents and honours the comforting familiarity for the band of Welsh landscapes. Owen said: “It’s about walking the same land I’ve been walking since I was a child, doing what I used to do as a child – very nostalgic.”

Influences on *Solas* range from the Cure to the nomadic blues of west Africa and Björk, but a vital element is *Cymraeg*. Hollie Singer said the language felt like an instrument in their work. “It’s such an integral part of what we do and who we are and what we create.” Anthony said: “The more you get people saying, well, wouldn’t you be more successful doing it in English, the more we want to do it in Welsh. We’re stubborn. We’re going to do a double album and it’s going to be in Welsh.

“We’ve had some people say that they’ve been learning the lyrics or have tried to learn Welsh from our songs, which is amazing. We couldn’t ask for much more than that. Making someone want to learn a language through music is amazing.” Adwaith – which means reaction – were inspired by artists who sing in Welsh such as Gwenno and Super Furry Animals. Anthony said: “It’s important for us to open more doors for other Welsh language bands. If we do that, then our job is done.”