

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

NOT JUST BORIS

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Pic: @gewman

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Not just Boris Johnson

6699 Editorial

We'll be glad if we see the back of Boris Johnson. More so, we want to see the back of the Borders Bill, the Health and Care Bill, the Police Bill, and the government's squeezing of public services (NHS, social care, schools) and public sector pay.

The Health and Care, and Borders, Bills are in Committee stage in the House of Lords; the Police Bill finished in the Lords on 17 January (with some of the worst last-minute government amendments cropped), and now comes back to the Commons.

Ousting Johnson will not stop those Bills, or the cuts in real wages and services. The Tories' favoured replacements - Rishi Sunak, Liz Truss - may be more careful than Johnson about partying at work, or chancing it with obvious fibs, or even about sallies like Johnson's attempt to send Parliament home in August 2019. But they are stricter, more coherent right-wingers than Johnson himself.

The temper of the Tory base to which both Johnson and his rivals are playing is shown by Johnson's "Operation Red Meat" to regain ground. Sending the military against asylum-seekers in the Channel, and squeezing the BBC financially to limit its capacity for at least some width of critical content - such is what Tories think will "make up for"

Johnson's misdeeds.

The best thing, for us, about Johnson's stumbles is that they have made the Tories look more vulnerable.

The turnouts on the 15 January protests across the country against the Police Bill (and sometimes the Borders Bill too) were better than expected given that in most cities publicity was only by social media a couple of days before. Some thousands in London, some hundreds in many cities.

Those protests give us a boost - but also, like an expansion of sight gained by topping a foothill, bring into sharper view how far we have yet to climb.

There were some tens of thousands on the streets in London on one of the spring 2021 protests against the Police Bill (3 April). Nine months of campaigning since then, amendments from the government to worsen the Bill - and our numbers have shrunk (though surely they are bigger now than in the last Police Bill protest in London, on 8 December).

On the Borders Bill, the biggest protest so far has been only a thousand or so in London on 17 October - tiny compared to the breadth of opposition to the Bill. On the Health and Social Care Bill there have been no big demonstrations at all.

Labour

The labour movement (the unions and the Labour Party), which despite all its weaknesses is still by far the major week-to-week organisation of the working class and left-minded people, has opposed those Bills on paper, but has not mobilised.

We would scarcely expect the Starmer leadership of the Labour Party, in current mode, to call protests. But the union leaderships, many of them left-wing, have called no protests, nor campaigned to swell the protests called by others. Neither have the groups of the Labour left, like Momentum, which have networks wide enough for the task.

Solidarity will work to change that.

The spread of smartphones and social media since about 2008 has made it easier to call protests at short notice. There had been big short-notice protests long before then, at times of ultra-ferment; but outside those highs big protests depended on spreading discussions round workplaces and neighbourhoods and campuses, conveying leaflets to people's hands, organising union and Labour Party groups to distribute the message in their circles, and that required time, some weeks if not months.

That ability to call snap protests is a boon. It can "work" to get big turnouts



at high points. It can't develop a campaign over months such as we need on the Tory Bills, and on many other causes.

Somehow we have settled into depending too much on protest being called by ad hoc groups geared not to week-to-week campaigning and to organising in workplaces and neighbourhoods, but instead to the "last-minute social media" model. The blame lies not with the ad hoc groups, but with us, with the labour movement, for leaving it to them.

Street protests are important. Strikes are more so. And those almost always have to be built on weeks, months, or years of detailed previous organising, even if sometimes they may be triggered at short term.

We have a long way to go before strikes against the Police Bill, the Borders Bill, or the Health and Social Care Bill. The layers of Tory anti-union law make strikes difficult in many conditions, as local government workers and NHS workers facing real pay cuts have recently found in their battle with turnout thresholds.

But, as these things go under neoliberal capitalism and under the burden of anti-union laws, this is a good time for strikes. A government discredited and zig-zagging through u-turns; a government which has promised to level up but is squeezing real wages and public services; employers anxious to get output going again; less unemployment than we feared.

Solidarity works to mobilise the labour movement in support of strikes like the Sheffield couriers and the disputes on the Tube and in the universities.

For two years Keir Starmer has led by trying to reconfigure the Labour Party as flag-waving and business-friendly, and has won only contempt even from the small-c conservative-minded voters he has hoped to woo. The discredit of the Tories now has swung some voters back willy-nilly to Labour.

Unions and Labour members will to some extent (*Solidarity* works to make that a decisive extent) increase pressure on Labour's leadership to consolidate the opinion-poll upticks into

stable support by campaigning for policies decided at Labour conference - rather than shelving them and criticising the government only for "incompetence" and the like.

Maybe a first sign is Shadow Home Secretary Wes Streeting, among the most "Blairite" of the shadow front bench, proposing on 17 January a "ten point plan" to curb Covid.

In its calls to "fix" sick pay, continue free testing, "transform" the NHS and social care, improve ventilation in schools, and help vaccinate the world, it goes further than previous Labour statements on Covid. Those have usually called only on the government to have "a plan" (unspecified) or raised demands for the government to do things only when it has become clear the government would soon do them anyway.

Yet it is vague, weak, and poorly promoted even at the level of press releases. Streeting said nothing about moves by Next, Ikea, Morrisons, and Wessex Water to cut isolation pay for unjabbed workers. And what about Labour conference policy on decarbonising?

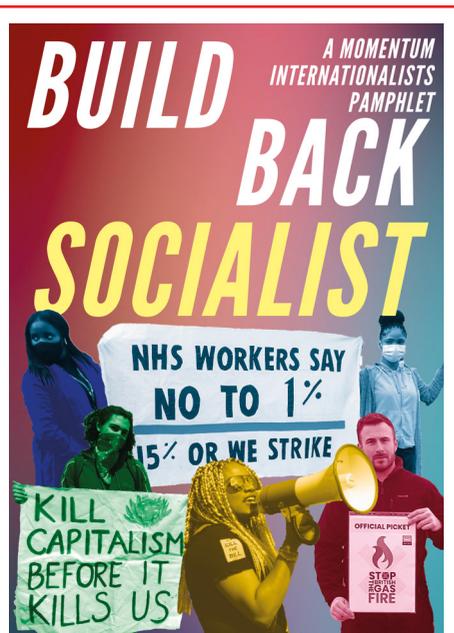
On workers' rights and anti-union laws?... Make the unions fight for their own left policies! Make Labour fight the Tories! □

24 pages

To ease a backlog of "held-over" articles, this issue of *Solidarity* is 24 pages rather than the usual 16. □

23-24 April

Workers' Liberty's annual conference, where we debate our policies, plan our actions, and elect our committees for the coming year, will be on 23-24 April 2022 in London. (We're working on the assumption that Covid rates will be relatively low by then, at least for a while). More info? Email awl@workersliberty.org □



Social inequality has deepened the Covid pandemic; the pandemic has deepened inequality. This new pamphlet, from Momentum Internationalists, offers ideas for the labour movement to regroup and fight back on socialist lines. □

momentuminternationalists.org

Ukrainian socialists call for solidarity

Talks between Russia and the US on Ukraine (9-13 Jan) ended with no movement, and a heightened risk of Russian invasion.

The left should oppose NATO expanding and indeed its existence. But NATO has not attacked Russia, and its existence does not justify the threat Russia poses to the Ukrainians' right to self-determination.

Since 2014 Russia has occupied and annexed Crimea and caused many thousands of deaths by sponsoring Russian-puppet "republics" in the east of the country.

The Ukrainian socialist organisation [Social Movement](#) has called for solidarity. Social Movement describes the situation in Donbas, and proposes steps to ensure peace. It declares:

The Kremlin has ordered the Russian army to the Ukrainian borders and is threatening to intervene if the US, NATO, and Ukraine do not fulfill its

demands. We, the Ukrainian socialists, call on the international left to condemn the imperialist policies of the Russian government and to show solidarity with people who have suffered from the war that has lasted almost eight years and who may suffer from a new one...

After the collapse of the USSR, only one superpower remained in the world – the United States. But nothing lasts forever and now its hegemony is declining. US interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq brought catastrophic wars to the peoples of these countries and ended in disgrace for the United States.

Unfortunately, the decline of American imperialism has been accompanied not by the emergence of a more democratic world order, but by the rise of other imperialist predators, fundamentalist and nationalist movements. Under these circumstances, the

international left, accustomed to fighting only against Western imperialism, should reconsider its strategy.

In recent decades, there has been a revival of Russian imperialism, which is now trying to get the US to redistribute spheres of influence in the world. The facts show that falling into the sphere of influence of Putin's Russia does not bring any good to the people. Right now, Russian troops are in Kazakhstan with the aim of forcefully suppressing the popular uprising. These actions confirm the reactionary nature of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), which was created not to protect countries from external aggression, but to strengthen the influence of the Kremlin and to protect unpopular regimes from revolutions.

Russia has played a similar role in the Belarusian protests. The Kremlin sent its propagandists to replace the striking media workers and announced

the formation of a reserve of security officials to be sent to Belarus. Just like in the 19th century, when the Russian Empire was the gendarme of Europe, the Putin regime is now becoming the roadblock of social and political changes in the post-Soviet space – any social movement in this territory is forced to think about how not to become an irritant for the Kremlin.

We express our gratitude and solidarity to the Russian left-wing activists who oppose the imperialist policies of the Kremlin and who are fighting for democratic and social transformations in their country. Only a revolution in Russia and the overthrow of the Putin regime can bring stability, peace and security to post-Soviet countries... □

• Ukraine Solidarity Campaign protest: Monday 31 January, from 5pm outside the Russia Today office, Millbank Tower, London SW1P 4QP.

Kazakhstan: fight for democracy and workers' rights

By Dan Katz

Protests against a fuel price hike at the beginning of January focussed widespread opposition to the kleptocratic and authoritarian regime of President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev.

Town square meetings took place across the country, especially in the oil producing west where workers have a recent record of strike action. Protests began to demand free elections.

On 5 January, however, a new force joined the protests. A faction of the ruling class around former president Nursultan Nazarbayev attempted to use the protests as cover to move against Tokayev. His supporters overran many public buildings, police stations and the airport in the commercial capital, Almaty.

The protests in Almaty became very violent.

Tokayev had fired Karim Massimov, the Nazarbayev loyalist who headed the KNB secret police, and has taken over the Security Council formerly headed by Nazarbayev.

Tokayev called on Vladimir Putin to help him stabilise his rule, both against the working-class demonstrators and against Nazarbayev's hired and organised thugs. Within hours Russian paratroopers were on the ground in Kazakhstan. The Russian presence ended Nazarbayev's move against Tokayev.

Tokayev has now spoken out against Nazarbayev, who was president until 2019 and picked Tokayev to as his successor. Tokayev has now removed members of Nazarbayev's family from control of the national oil transporter



KazTransOil and the national gas company QazaqGaz. Other family members have fled the country.

There now seem to be negotiations between the factions in the ruling class. The Nazarbayev clan's power has been seriously weakened but not yet destroyed. Tokayev's position has been strengthened.

Nazarbayev, now 81, has not been seen since the start of the crisis, although the latest reports suggest that he is alive and in the capital, Nur-Sultan, which he named after himself.

One former Western diplomat, quoted in the *Guardian*, suggests, "The power struggle continues. There is no guarantee things will end smoothly,"

From a working-class point of view there is little to choose between these ruling-class groupings. They are all staggeringly corrupt, brutal and hostile to democracy and the rule of law.

Government statements suggest over 12,000 people have been detained, 2,600 needed hospital treatment and over 225 have died. □

Christine Lee, Barry Gardiner, and Labour

By Mohan Sen

Lawyer Christine Lee, who gave £600,000 to the office of Labour MP Barry Gardiner, has been revealed as an operative of the Chinese government's "United Front Work Department". She is a Chinese government lobbyist (if not, as frantic right-wing newspapers put it, "a spy").

Much of the coverage tries to present Gardiner as a left-winger. In fact he is a skilfully opportunistic political chameleon, with a long record on the Labour right.

Gardiner has taken a generally pro-Beijing political line. He has been far more active supporting the far-right regime of [Narendra Modi](#) in India - a fact not mentioned in any of the mainstream coverage.

The left must fight the Chinese gov-

ernment's political influence, while also opposing and fighting anti-Chinese paranoia and any targeting of Chinese people for being Chinese.

Lee and other supporters of the Chinese government (including Lee) have extensive links with the Tories, not just Gardiner. British corporations, for instance HSBC, support repression in China and HK, and more because they calculate that support will benefit their profits than because of secret words in their ears.

The wider problem is politicians who share the interests of and work to support capitalists and the rich. The labour movement and left need to reassert working-class representation and working-class politics - against the Tories, the open Labour right, and chameleons like Gardiner. □

• More: bit.ly/cl-bg



Upcoming meetings

Workers' Liberty meetings are open to all, held online over zoom.

Saturday 16 January, 6:30pm: Workers' Liberty online forum: Repression in Hong Kong

Saturday 22 January 9:30am: The anti-vaccine movement, conspiracies, covid-19 and class struggle: Issues for socialists

Sunday 23 January, 2pm: London Socialist Feminist Reading Group

Monday 31 January, 5pm: Russia: Hands off Ukraine, RT office, Millbank Tower, 21-24 Millbank, London, SW1P 4QP

Sunday 13 February 11am: How to stop the next pandemic – Ecosocialist reading group

For our calendars of events, updated details, zoom links, more meetings and resources, [see workersliberty.org/events](https://workersliberty.org/events) or scan QR code □



Whatever Putin does in Ukraine, the Morning Star will support him



By Jim Denham

None of us knows whether Putin is going to invade Ukraine.

His demands upon NATO and the west prior to the talks with the US and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe were almost certainly drafted to be rejected, creating a pretext for a further invasion (following the 2014 “annexation” of Crimea). Or it may be that Putin will stop short of a full-scale invasion and seize enclaves or establish a land-bridge to Crimea.

Predicted

What can be predicted with certainty is that the Morning Star will support Putin. We know this because ever since a mass uprising ousted the pro-Russian government in February 2014, the paper’s coverage on Ukraine has been nothing more than Kremlin propaganda.

International editor Steve Sweeney was at it again on Saturday 15 Jan, claiming that the CIA is training Ukrainian special forces “at an undisclosed location in the Southern United States” as “part of preparations for a potential armed insurgency.” This claim may well be true, but what is noticeable is that while Sweeney says “Washington has ratcheted up tensions in the region”, he



A barricade during the “Maidan” protests

ignores the more than 100,000 Russian troops on Ukraine’s borders, and the fact that the US and NATO have explicitly ruled out a military response to any Russian attack.

The US military support for Ukraine so far amounts to Javelin anti-tank missile systems, small arms, and a group of training officers. It is dwarfed by the Russian mobilisation.

The most blatant declaration of advance support for a Russian attack, came in an article on 8 December last year, by John Wojcik (republished from the US Stalinist *People’s World*, of which Wojcik is editor). This piece is chemically-pure Putinesque propaganda, slavishly repeating every single trope, stock-phrase, half-truth and outright lie that the Kremlin has circulated about Ukraine since 2014:

- that the 2014 uprising (the “Maidan” protests), actively involving more than half a million people, was a

“fascist coup”. (In fact the politics of the “Maidan” protest were complex. Participants ranged from fascists, who played a key part in the violent confrontations with the old regime’s armed forces, to socialists and anarchists. But to use the word “coup” is simply ridiculous. It also ignores the fact that it is the security forces in Russia, not Ukraine, that have recently tortured and jailed a group of young anti-fascists).

- That the Ukrainian government murdered “hundreds of trade union activists”. No such murders have been recorded on the web sites of Ukraine’s two trade union federations. None have been mentioned in the detailed reports of the United Nations.

- The government “banned opposition political parties”, including the Communist Party. It didn’t. The electoral commission banned the Communist Party from participation in the 2019 presidential elections – something that

we would obviously oppose, but not the same as banning the party, which continues to operate legally.

- The government “banned the use of the Russian language”. It didn’t. A law making Ukrainian the state language was adopted in 2019 – after three decades of argument, shaped by aspirations to revive Ukrainian culture after centuries of Russian repression. Again, something that we would oppose, but it is not a “ban”. Russian is still widely used, and there is no legal obstacle to it in private or religious life.

- Ukraine is naturally part of Russia and “millions of Ukrainians and Russians ... are part of the same families.” Although he doesn’t acknowledge it, Wojcik is referring to Putin’s article *On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians* published in July 2021 and seen in Ukraine as preparing the ground for an invasion. Putin argues that Ukrainian nationhood was invented by the Poles and/or Austro-Hungarians and describes the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact of 1939, by which Poland and the Baltic states were divided between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, with the words “the USSR regained the lands earlier seized by Poland”.

So although we don’t know what Putin’s next move will be, we do know for sure that whatever it is, the *Morning Star* will support it. □

- In preparing this piece, JD has made extensive use of Simon Pirani’s post “Putin’s little helpers undermine solidarity” on the blog [“People and Nature”](#).

For scrupulous reviews



Letter

I’m grateful to Stuart Jordan for alerting comrades to the RS21 pamphlet on ecology ([Solidarity 619](#)). We certainly should evaluate what the rest of the revolutionary left says on these important matters.

I’ve not read the RS21 pamphlet, so I trust Stuart’s criticisms are warranted. However I think he is far too casual about Marx and Engels, the founders of our tradition and where our assessments often begin.

There is nothing “so-called” about Marxist metabolism. For two decades this term has been used as shorthand for Marx’s approach to ecological

questions in his mature political economy. This is a tremendous advance over those – including some on the left – who deny Marxists have much to say about ecology.

The virtual of the “metabolic” approach taken by Marx is that it puts labour at the centre of understanding ecological damage, recognises that capitalism (and other class societies) have damaged humanity’s relationships with the planet (the “rift”) and that only rationally planned political economy (= socialism) is sustainable.

Marx and Engels died before the modern hypothesis on climate change was even formulated – and long before the evidence of emissions and the consequent impacts were fully established. No Marxist can credibly read off current politics on climate change from nineteenth century works alone. How-

ever Marx’s method and comments on agriculture, deforestation, technology, science and principally on the political economy of capitalism are immensely valuable for grounding our thinking about today’s ecological questions.

There is no definitive Marxist political economy of climate change. However Marxists have much to say about the capitalist mode of production, the behaviour of capital and its states – and most of all, about workers as social agents capable of stopping the rot and transforming the situation before runaway climate change.

Our responsibility is to develop a distinctive, Marxist contribution to tackling ecology and climate change, as part of our fight for socialism. To do that, we need serious articles in *Solidarity*, which tackle the difficult questions, evaluate the efforts of other

Marxists (and bourgeois thinkers) and above all guide our intervention into the burgeoning climate struggles of our time.

We should follow Trotsky’s prescient advice: “*Reviewing is the most responsible kind of literature. A good review presupposes that the author has an acquaintance with the subject, an understanding of the place of the given book within a series of other books - and conscientiousness. We do not need two or three hasty thoughts thrown up ‘about’ the book, but a review that acquaints us with the book itself. It is sometimes better to give the detailed contents of the book and two or three quotes than a hasty, dilettante, and unconvincing evaluation.*” (“On Bibliography” (18 May 1924), *Problems of Everyday Life*). □

Paul Vernadsky, London

Cops aren't answer for women's safety



By Katy Dollar

A Metropolitan Police officer, PC David Carrick, accused of sex offences against four women, is facing nine additional charges relating to four other alleged victims. Carrick now faces charges relating to 29 alleged offences, including 13 counts of rape, against eight women between 2009 and 2020.

He is due to appear at the St Albans court on 28 January for a mention hearing relating to those charges, with a provisional trial date in April.

Since the torture and murder of Sarah Everard there has been increasing at-

tention to violence against women by police officers. Despite this the government is using outrage about violence against women and girls to argue for the expansion of police powers. Workers Liberty is supporting the following motion to Labour Party Women's Conference.

We note:

- The government is using public outrage about violence against women and girls to help its Police Bill – a law that will increase police powers, diminish collective freedoms and deepen inequality
- At least 15 serving or former police officers have killed women since 2009
- 2,000 police officers have been



accused of sexual misconduct, including rape, over the past four years

- One woman a week reports domestic abuse by a police officer.
- 53% of women

in prison report having experienced abuse as a child

Heavier policing and a more punitive criminal justice system are not solutions to society's problems. We must attack poverty and inequality and expand social provision – starting by comprehensively reversing cuts to services, including refuges and rape crisis centres.

We will campaign to:

- Stop the Police Bill and commit Labour to repeal it if passed
- Tackle police violence and abuse of power; replace the Independent Office for Police Conduct with a genuinely independent body with representation

from friends' and families' campaigns and the labour movement.

- Curb of police powers and role, including in terms of use of force, stop-and-search, and police presence in schools.
- Addressing drug-related problems through public-health policies instead of criminalisation

• Boost services so that mental-health crises are dealt with by mental health professionals

- Launch major prisoner release programme of those convicted for non-violent crimes, and reduce the use of prison sentences.
- Restore local government funding and expand VAWG services.

Labour Party women's conference is on 19-20 March 2022, online.

The deadline for motions and delegacies from constituencies is 11 February.

The limit for motions is 250 words, and the text above is 247. □



Letter

Before Arrhenius

In his review in *Solidarity 619*, Stuart Jordan remarks that Svante Arrhenius was the first to foresee the global warming effects of fossil fuel combustion. He predicted that doubling carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere would increase the average temperature by 5-6 deg Celsius. The modern consensus is around half that. He also predicted that it would take over 300 years for this to happen but already CO2 levels are up by about a third since 1950.

It is interesting to note that knowledge of the role of CO2 in regulating Earth's temperature considerably pre-dates Arrhenius's work. It had long been speculated by such as Fourier, the French mathematician and physicist, that the atmosphere played a role in keeping Earth's temperature within bounds hospitable to life. In 1859, the Irish physicist John Tyndall announced the results of experiments into the heat absorbed by different gases in the atmosphere, showing that water vapour, CO2 and ozone were the best absorbers.

However, he was pre-empted by the American scientist Eunice Foote, who in 1856 published work showing the absorption of heat by CO2 and water vapour and suggesting that this phenomenon could play a role in climate change.

Sadly, her work did not become widely known and was unlikely to have reached Tyndall's attention but she deserves recognition as a pioneer in the study of the role of CO2 in climate change. □

Les Hearn, London



Activist Agenda

On 5 February, the Uyghur Solidarity Campaign's regular 5th-of-the-month protest at the Chinese Embassy (Portland Place, London W1B 1JL) will coincide with the 25th anniversary of the Ghulja Massacre, a violent suppression of Uyghur protest in the city of Ghulja, in east Turkistan, in 1997.

And it will coincide (almost) with the Beijing government's showcase opening of the Winter Olympics, too.

The Uyghur Solidarity Campaign is also working closely with Labour Solidarity With Hong Kong, which is planning towards protests in March, when the trial of 47 HK oppositionists under the National Security Law is likely to start. □

- Links and info for these and other campaigns, suggestions for labour movement motions and petitions: workersliberty.org/agenda

Second hand books!

Workers' Liberty is selling hundreds of second hand books – politics, but also fiction, history and much more. Visit bit.ly/2h-books for the current stock and prices, and to order. □



The telescope: celebrating homophobia?



Letter

In writing (*Solidarity 619*) about the science of the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) I omitted the political dispute about its name.

James Webb was the NASA administrator (effectively, the Chief Executive Officer) from 1961 to 1968: the "Apollo Era", which saw the birth of human space-flight. During his tenure, Webb was keen to stress the dual purpose of NASA, as an agency not just for space flight and exploration, but also scientific discovery. He was right to do so.

For this reason Webb's eventual successor, the NASA administrator in 2002, Robert O'Keefe, named the telescope in his predecessor's honour. This was the first major telescope to be named after a bureaucrat rather than a scientist (perhaps O'Keefe wanted to set a precedent?).

"Lavender scare"

But in the same Webb era thousands of LGBTQ staff in US governmental workforces were being sacked for being "national security risks" and/or communist sympathisers via anti-LGBTQ "Lavender Scare" laws. Between 1949-1952, the Under-Secretary of State heavily involved in the implementation and drawing up of such State Department policies was one James Webb.

Whilst Webb was there hundreds of staff were either denied jobs or sacked for being gay. Shortly after

Webb's departure as Undersecretary (in 1953) a Presidential Executive Order was signed that was later used during Webb's tenure at NASA to sack others. Webb bears significant responsibility for the appalling, discriminatory treatment of LGBTQ workers. He should not have been honoured with the naming of the JWST.

Petition

A petition to rename the telescope was launched in March 2021 and amassed over 1700 signatories (stating the Harriet Tubman Space Telescope would have been more appropriate). After agreeing to investigate Webb's history, NASA concluded in October that there was "no evidence" to warrant a name change. This investigation was never published publicly.

With only the ability to call on the current administrator to "do the right thing", the views of those central to the project apparently count for nothing. Clearly there is more wrong than just the name of JWST; NASA has concentrated far too much power in the role of its administrator (accountable only to one person, the US President, who hand-picks them).

The science users of the telescope, the engineers who designed and built it, the operators scheduling its observations, and the public who will benefit from its discoveries should decide this. A more vigorous campaign to democratise how science is done is well overdue; winning the right to decide what we call our experiments must form a part of this. □

Josh Lovell, Cambridge

Gas is not green



Environment

By Stuart Jordan

Climate activists and some European climate ministers have slammed the EU's long awaited "taxonomy on sustainable activities" which includes gas and nuclear in its new "green investments guidebook". The guide is designed to channel billions of EU subsidies into projects that help the EU reach its target of zero carbon emissions by 2050. The inclusion of gas torpedos that effort. The issue is live in the British labour movement too, since the GMB union supports gas as "green".

The original taxonomy, agreed through a long process of scientific debate and negotiation in Brussels, excluded both gas and nuclear. This started to set a world standard. Even the Russian government investment bank followed the EU example and excluded gas from its own "Russian taxonomy". After pressure from France, Italy, and East European states, the final taxonomy (released on New Year's Eve in an attempt to bury the news) included both gas and nuclear.

EU politicians opposed to the measures are not confident they have the numbers to vote down this taxonomy, though Austrian climate minister Leonore Gewessler has said the plans "destroy the future for our children" and has threatened to sue if the plans go ahead.

In our view it is problematic to oppose nuclear as well as gas. These are fundamentally different technologies associated with different environmen-

tal problems. There are some CO2 emissions associated with nuclear energy, from construction, operation, fuel production, dismantling, and waste disposal. There is no scientific consensus about the size of these emissions. An authoritative review of the literature found estimates ranging from 3 to 200 gCO2/kWh; the IPCC gives a [median estimate](#) of 12. The processing of lower grade uranium ore significantly increases the carbon footprint.

However, all energy generation, including renewables, has some carbon footprint, because construction, maintenance, etc. rely on fossil-powered machines and industrial processes. The carbon footprints should reduce as broader industry is transformed. The UK Committee on Climate Change have said that by 2030 all electricity should be generated with less than 50 grams of carbon dioxide emitted for each kilowatt-hour (50 gCO2/kWh). For inclusion in the EU taxonomy, the target is less than 100 gCO2/kWh.

The opposition of prominent climate scientists like Michael Mann to nuclear is based on concerns about safety, the difficulties of waste disposal, and nuclear weapons proliferation, rather than on CO2 emissions. Mann also argues that nuclear is a distraction and the technology exists now for a transition to 100% renewables.

But, at the very least, that transition will take some time. For now, in Britain for example, the ongoing rundown of nuclear will mean *more fossil fuels* for "baseload" electricity generation (capacity to be used when winds and sun are low).

Nuclear could play an important role in a transition to 100% renewables, and each project should be judged on its



own merits. The UK government's particular plans for new nuclear power plants at Hinckley Point C and Sizewell C appear particularly foolhardy given the risk posed by sea level rise, but that does not mean opposition to all nuclear.

The carbon footprint of fossil gas – methane – is on average [450 gCO2/kWh or more](#). And its extraction, increasingly via fracking, involves some of the methane leaking into the atmosphere. Methane is over 80 times more potent as a greenhouse gas than CO2 (and then degrades into other greenhouse gases – CO2 and water – after a few decades). Since 2011 some scientists have argued that this leakage means that fossil gas is dirtier than coal.

That view is contested, but recent research suggests the alarming spike in atmospheric methane in the last decade is linked to the boom in fracking.

Carbon Capture and Storage technology can be added to gas-fired power stations to scrub CO2 out of emissions, but thus far the recovered CO2 has mostly been used in enhanced oil recovery rather than placed in long term storage. The fossil-fuel industry's claim that fossil gas can provide a "bridging fuel" in fact projects more like a bridge

to catastrophe.

The Labour Party retains a pro-gas policy, in part under pressure from the pro-gas GMB. Sectionalism and social partnership ideology means that in recent years the GMB bureaucracy has been a powerful conduit for climate change denial within the UK labour movement.

In his 2019 speech to Labour Party conference former general secretary Tim Roche spouted denialist scare-mongering worthy of Fox News. He claimed decarbonising the economy would lead to "confiscation of petrol cars", "state rationing of meat", and "limiting families to one flight for every five years". In September 2021 the Tories' extremely mild proposals to encourage the replacement of redundant gas boilers with low-carbon alternatives led to a wild-eyed GMB [press release](#): "Ripping out existing boilers across 24 million homes across the UK... will lead to heating chaos for millions".

Transforming the labour movement into a force that could win governmental power to implement a rational energy policy involves contesting the government's plans and setting out our own workers' vision for big infrastructure projects. □

Tories push on Elections Bill

By Sacha Ismail

On 17 January the House of Commons passed the [Elections Bill](#) – another front, alongside the Police Bill, Borders Bill and others, in the Tories' push to narrow democracy. It now goes to the House of Lords.

The Bill introduces a requirement for photo ID in order to vote, a change the Electoral Reform Society says could disenfranchise two million people; gives ministers more power over the Electoral Com-

mission; and in a more minor but unbelievably blatant attempt to gain a Tory advantage, abolishes preferential voting for elected mayors in favour of first-past-the-post.

In a specific attack on the labour movement, the Bill also introduces changes to expenditure rules which mean that pro-Labour trade union spending in elections will be counted jointly with the party, potentially massively reducing its funds.

There is a wealth of evidence

that the ID requirement will disproportionately hit people on low incomes and people of colour, among other socially disadvantaged groups.

The Tories are aping the [Republicans](#). They have also borrowed the spurious argument about "election fraud".

The Electoral Commission [says](#) unambiguously that voter fraud is barely a problem at all, in the UK. (There have been three convictions in the last seven years.) No wonder the Tories want to take it over. □



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How Democrats are paving way for Trump



Eric Lee

By Eric Lee

No one is working harder to get Donald Trump back into the White House than the leadership of the Democratic Party.

Preventing Trump from winning the 2024 elections would seem to be a top priority for progressives, trade unionists and others in the US. And yet at the moment, the “moderates” in the Democratic Party, the ones who opposed Bernie Sanders in 2016 and 2020, are working overtime to come up with crazy ideas that would guarantee Trump’s re-election.

Two news stories from last week illustrate this.

First, veteran *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman, who often writes about the Middle East, drew comparisons between Israeli politics and American politics. Friedman is convinced that only an alliance of the far Right and pretty much everyone else could have brought an end to the Netanyahu era. Anyone familiar with Israeli politics will understand how completely wrong this analysis is. But far worse was Friedman’s suggestion of how to prevent a return of Trump.

In his view, Joe Biden should run for re-election with Liz Cheney as his vice-president. That’s the same Liz Cheney who is, and always has been, a right-wing Republican. The same Liz Cheney who showed up with her father, the vile Dick Cheney, architect of the Iraq war, at a recent event in Congress.

The Democrats are fawning over the Cheneys because unlike pretty much every other Republican politician, they don’t get along with Trump. But their brand of Republican politics has almost no support in America these days.

Second, shortly after Friedman’s column appeared, the news media in the US was buzzing with reports that the Clintons were showing an interest in returning to national politics. Their supporters, including pollster Mark Penn, appeared on Fox News and elsewhere arguing that a “rematch” in 2024 between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump would be the best thing ever.

Apparently no one has informed these folks that Mrs. Clinton lost to Trump, just as she lost eight years earlier in the Democratic primary battle with Barack Obama.

The proponents of a “rematch” involving Hillary Clinton and those advocating the creation of a “Biden/Cheney” ticket are both responding to a dismal political landscape in the US today.

There is every reason to believe that the Democrats will lose control of both houses of Congress in the mid-term elections later this year. Trump will almost certainly be the Republican nominee and is likely to defeat Biden in 2024. The one part of the federal government still in Trumpian hands – the Supreme Court – is doing what it can to undermine Biden’s policies.

The “moderate” Joe Biden was supposed to be the great conciliator, the man who’d bridge the partisan divide in Washington and get things done. Things didn’t work out that way.

Meanwhile, the progressive wing of the Democratic Party seems to be



rudder-less. Bernie Sanders will be 83 years old on Election Day in 2024 and is unlikely to want to run again. The other democratic socialist with a national profile, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, will turn 35 just before the election, making her eligible under the Constitution – but she’s still seen as too young and inexperienced by many.

The unions, with a few notable exceptions, did not rally behind the Sanders campaigns. In some cases, usually without consulting their members, unions supported Clinton and other candidates of the Democratic right. Despite Biden’s failure to enact the one bit of legislation that unions desperately need – the PRO Act, which would make it much easier to organise workers – unions remain loyal to Biden, just as they were to Obama and Bill Clinton, though neither of them bothered with

workers’ rights issues either.

Despite an increase in the number of strikes, and some interesting organising wins at Starbucks and elsewhere, the kind of spectacular growth unions saw under Franklin D Roosevelt in the 1930s is not being repeated under Biden. Unions continue to decline in members and influence, including influence inside the Democratic Party.

Everyone knows that running Biden and Kamala Harris is a guarantee of defeat. The Democratic “moderates” are coming up with crazy ideas instead. The progressives and trade unionists seem to have little to say.

At the moment, it feels as if a second Trump term is increasingly inevitable... □

• Eric Lee is the founder editor of LabourStart, writing here in a personal opinion column.

Around the World in 80 Days



TV review

By Sacha Ismail

I read it a long time ago, but I remember finding Jules Verne’s *Around the World in Eighty Days* distinctly underwhelming. Did I miss something?

A new television adaptation, co-produced by French, Italian and German public broadcasters, currently showing on BBC1 and available on iPlayer, shares the 1872 novel’s basic premise. A rich Englishman, Phileas Fogg, circumnavigates

the world for a bet of £20,000 (over £2m in today’s money). The series is very enjoyable and politically surprising.

As far as I can tell, the series’ creator Ashley Pharoah (*Life on Mars*) is not known as a left-winger. But he or somebody involved clearly knows quite a bit about the politics, including radical politics, of the 1870s. Both the dramatically revamped plots – with settings including the aftermath of the Paris Commune and post-civil war Reconstruction in the US – and the dialogue are littered with radical references. Even the legalisation of unions in Britain is mentioned.

The context of the period was developments in technology, transport and communi-

cations which for the first time made such a journey possible at relative speed and for a rich enthusiast – the same context in which, at exactly this time, Marx and his comrades were helping develop a global working-class politics.

Fogg has something of 21st century capitalists buying their way into space. However *80 Days* is far from an uncritical adulation of what he represents.

Fogg’s valet Passepartout is still French, but now of black African background – and a political radical. The detective following them, Fix, has been replaced by a young female journalist of the same name. Race and gender come up throughout. Some in the right-

wing media have lost their shit about these changes, with the *Daily Mail*’s tirade seeming to suggest there were no black people in 19th century France.

Both Passepartout and Fix are better characters than Fogg. Both have a good line in mocking and challenging him (at least early on). Leonie Benesch, Ibrahim Koma and David Tennant are all excellent and do well together (by the way, Benesch is German and Koma French).

The other context which would have made a journey like Fogg’s possible was the consolidation of European and in particular British colonialism as a worldwide system. Here imperialism is a repeated target. One example: in the

novel Fogg rescues an Indian princess from being burned alive by her relatives (and then marries her - but don’t worry, she’s light-skinned). In this series the corresponding figure is an Indian soldier threatened with court martial, deportation and hard labour by the British authorities.

As often with leftish TV and films, the conclusion descends into mushy right-on liberalism. *Around the World in 80 Days* at least has the defence that it is not primarily a political programme. And still, as well as being a lot of fun, it provides entry points to many of the struggles of a fascinating and important time. □

From the Malayan Communist Party to Lee Kuan Yew



Book review

By Sara Lee (part 1 of a series)

In *The Open United Front: The Communist Struggle in Singapore 1954-1966*, Lee Ting Hui attempts to analyse communist activities in Singapore "within the framework of the united front." While the book fails to understand the ideological context of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), it tells of how the Communist Party led the labour and student movements into struggle against British domination in Singapore (then a colony alongside Malaya). Well-known anti-colonial figures from the time such as Lim Chin Siong are said to have been secret members of the MCP, a narrative upheld by the Singapore state that has been a matter of controversy.

In the 1920s, some of the Malayan branches of the Kuomintang (KMT) had communist members. When the KMT broke with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Malayan communists were advised by the Third International to form a regional "Nanyang Communist Party" (South Seas Communist Party), which later split into national parties such as the MCP.

From 1937 to 1941, the MCP continually shifted the focus of its propaganda to align with Soviet foreign policy. It attacked the Japanese in 1937, then attacked the British in 1939 (when the Nazi-Soviet Pact was signed) and went back to attacking the Japanese in 1941 (when Germany invaded Russia). Instead of understanding this in relation to changes in the Moscow party line, Lee Ting Hui puts this down to the united front policy, which he defines as "a question of alternating [between] principal and secondary enemies." The Comintern clearly had some influence over the MCP but the book is vague on this.

Lee Ting Hui suggests that from 1940 onwards, the MCP eschewed "Lenin's ideas" in favour of Mao's, because it perceived its situation as "closer to the Chinese revolution than the Russian Revolution." In addition to mangling Lenin's ideas, he neglects to mention the close historical relationship between Stalin and the CCP, and how Stalin's own advice on the Chinese revolution deviated from Lenin's ideas. Around 1940 the MCP's goal changed from a "Soviet republic of Malaya" to a "new democratic republic of Malaya." This seems consistent with Moscow's advice to Mao in 1937 to "switch from the soviet system to a system of people's revolutionary rule on democratic foundations."

It was around 1940 that the MCP adopted the strategy of popular frontism and the "bloc of four classes".

Mao's focus on the countryside resonated with the MCP experience of the Japanese occupation from 1942 to 1945, where MCP guerrilla fighters allegedly liberated more than half the rural villages in Malaya. But as Paul Hampton argued in *Solidarity 617*, the Maoist "rural strategy" has its roots in Stalin's thinking.

During the occupation, the British armed, trained and organised the MCP guerrillas to fight the Japanese. Upon the return of the British, the MCP engaged in peaceful struggle on the advice of their leader Loi Teck, who was revealed to be a British agent not long afterwards. In 1948, the MCP launched an armed rebellion against the British - the "Malayan Emergency." This time the MCP lost its guerrilla war, along with the mass support it had gained during the occupation.

The MCP reverted to peaceful struggle in 1954. Lee Ting Hui theorises that it wanted to operate legally in part because of the introduction of the Rendel Constitution in Singapore. The 1954 Rendel Constitution expanded local participation in government but in a severely limited way. Almost all the local political parties, except for the British-backed Progressive Party, criticised it as window dressing. Moreover, the constitution aimed to develop a national government capable of resisting communism when Singapore became independent. The MCP itself made scathing criticisms of the constitution.

Khrushchev

Perhaps more important was the pressure from Khrushchev into pursuing a legal, parliamentary route to revolution. This would explain the MCP's heavy emphasis on gaining legal recognition. It came to insist upon the legal route even during the 1955 bus worker strikes which culminated in street battles with police. The MCP blamed the subsequent government crackdown on the "left adventurism" of student and worker activists.

National Service was introduced in 1954 to suppress the communist threat. Students at Chinese middle schools refused to register. A thousand of them demonstrated in violation of Emergency Regulations on 13 May, clashing with police. There were three more mass assemblies over the next month, with one of them as large as 3,000 students. Despite not winning anything, the movement gave birth to important student leaders and student organisations such as the Singapore Chinese Middle School Students Union.

Several large industrial actions took place against the backdrop of the student movement. In July 1954, 9,000 city council workers went on strike, followed by 400 Malayan Textile Mill workers in September. A successful strike at Paya Lebar Bus Company in February 1955 was the dress rehearsal for the



historic Hock Lee bus strikes later that year. The number of "Communist-influenced" unions grew from three in August 1954 to 14 in April 1955. The ones that gave the government the most grief were the Singapore Factory and Shop Workers Union (SFSWU) and the Singapore Bus Workers Union (SBWU). The SFSWU and SBWU were led by Lim Chin Siong and Fong Swee Suan respectively. According to Lee Ting Hui, they were both MCP members who also had influence in the other unions.

Fabian

Lee Kuan Yew, often hailed as Singapore's "founding father," came onto the scene as a Fabian socialist lawyer helping to defend Chinese middle school students and members of the University of Malaya Socialist Club (UMSC) in court. The UMSC were non-communist socialist intellectuals. In the heat of the Chinese middle school student rebellion, Lee Kuan Yew, Lim Chin Siong and Fong Swee Suan founded the People's Action Party (PAP) which is today entering its seventh decade in power. Initially, there was a pro-communist faction and non-communist faction in the PAP. Lee Kuan Yew needed the communists to gain the support of the mostly Chinese-speaking, blue-collar sections of the labour movement. The PAP non-communists only really had support in the UMSC and in 11 trade unions that were made up of English-speaking, white-collar workers.

1955 saw a major strike wave. It was the year of what is known in popular memory as the "Hock Lee bus riots." Here Lee Ting Hui struggles to hide his sympathy for the police. On 25 April, striking workers at Hock Lee Bus Company formed a human chain at the depot to prevent members of the yellow union from taking out the buses. A crowd gathered, many of them Chinese middle school students. For ten days they held 'indignation meetings' on the picket line. At a Labour Day rally on 1 May, Fong Swee Suan told the 8,000 workers and 2,000 students in attendance that there is always bloodshed in a revolution.

On 12 May, the police turned a water hose on the human chain, sparking a street battle between the crowd and the police. Buses leaving the depot were damaged. Roadblocks were placed throughout Singapore in a failed attempt to stop the crowd of

sympathisers from growing. Fighting continued late into the night and the next day, and a Chinese schoolboy was fatally wounded.

Workers at 10 of the 11 other bus companies in Singapore joined the strike. Then-Chief Minister David Marshall, of the Labour Front party, came down on the side of the SBWU. The bosses at Hock Lee agreed to dissolve the company union and reinstate the strikers. The MCP hailed this as a victory but warned that future struggles should not be "too leftist." Lee Kuan Yew made statements in support of non-violent struggle for "an independent, democratic, non-communist Malaya."

The next month brought Singapore even closer to a mass strike. The SFSWU, SBWU and Federation of Coastal Workers all announced that they would strike in solidarity with the striking Singapore Harbour Board Staff Association - a white-collar, English-speaking union controlled by the non-communist faction in the PAP. Before the strikes could take place, Fong Swee Suan was arrested along with six other people, and the police raided the SFSWU office. At this time, Lee Kuan Yew was on a three-week holiday in mainland Malaya, where he could not be implicated in the June events.

Lee Ting Hui suggests that the MCP collaborated with Lee Kuan Yew to win over the few unions that were influenced by the non-communists in the PAP. If true, this must have been poor judgment on the part of the MCP, as it was a much stronger force in the labour movement than the PAP non-communists and would have had little difficulty displacing the latter's influence. According to Lee Ting Hui, for example, the Singapore Tractor Company Employees Union voted out their non-communist leaders in favour of the communists following the events of Hock Lee.

What is certain is that the founding of the PAP was part of the strategy of popular frontism - collaboration with the national bourgeoisie against imperialism. Internally the MCP acknowledged the "petty bourgeois" nature of the Lee Kuan Yew and his non-communist faction. As part of the 'united front', the communists agreed to hold no more than three places on the PAP's Central Executive Committee and never to hold office, one of many decisions that would later prove fatal. □

A welcome contribution to a necessary debate



Book review

By Daniel Randall

David Renton's book *Labour's Antisemitism Crisis: What the Left Got Wrong* is a welcome addition to a slowly but steadily expanding discourse that aims to develop a critique of left antisemitism that is explicitly from the left, and for the left.

Renton and I corresponded while I was writing my own book on left antisemitism, *Confronting Antisemitism on the Left: Arguments for Socialists*, a correspondence I found useful and which I feel helped improve my manuscript. We have also collaborated since on a dialogue on the issue for the US socialist website *Tempest*, and on a public panel hosted by Labour Party activists in Lewes. I hope we will repeat such collaborations in future. I find his work on the issue thoughtful and thought-provoking, and would recommend his book to anyone interested in getting to better grips with the issue of antisemitism on the British left. He and I also differ on a number of key issues; this review will gesture towards some of them, although for reasons of time in space it is not intended to be a point-by-point exposition of the things in *Labour's Antisemitism Crisis* I disagree with.

Renton's starting point is that "the left has tolerated antisemitism, or at least a mindset which comes close to antisemitism – an ignorance about what most British Jews think combined with an indifference to the thought of antagonising them." The organisational framework of Renton's study, as per the title, is the Labour Party. He treats "the left" broadly, looking at a number of prominent individuals and broadly left-wing opinion, as expressed in, for example, left-wing Facebook groups. There is far less focus on the organisations and institutions of the far left, either today or historically. That choice of focus has its advantages, as it can tell us things about antisemitism within broadly left-wing discourse we wouldn't necessarily learn just by diving into the archives of the far-left press. But it also has weaknesses, in that it misses out key historical context for how antisemitic ideas have been produced, reproduced, and circulated via sections of the far left as an organised movement.

Renton is a lawyer by profession, and brings an impressive forensic rigour to this work, effectively re-litigating a number of key episodes drawn from the scandals and furores that dogged Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party – including the Mear One mural, Jackie Walker's comments on Jews and the slave trade, and Ken Liv-

LABOUR'S ANTISEMITISM CRISIS

What the Left Got Wrong
and How to Learn From It

DAVID RENTON



ingstone's comments on Hitler and Zionism – and explains, in a lawyerly but nonetheless accessible fashion, exactly why they were antisemitic. That, for me, is the book's most valuable contribution. For readers who already feel instinctively that those episodes were problematic, Renton provides depth and detail. For readers less sure, but prepared to approach the text in good faith and with a relatively open mind, that forensic re-litigation ought to be able to cut through the emotion-ridden cacophony of social media "debate" to prove that allegations of antisemitism were not "smears".

A chapter considering antisemitism in the context of a global resurgence of far-right authoritarian nationalisms – Trump, Orban, and others – is an important reminder that left antisemitism is not the only, or even the main, form of antisemitism now vigorous in the world, and that allying with or promoting forces on the right because they pose as allies to the Jewish community against other forms of antisemitism, as some Jewish communal figures have done, would be politically catastrophic. A chapter on the limits of Corbynite "populism" – pushing vague concepts of "the many" versus "the few", or identifying "elites" who "rig the economy" as the source of social ills – rightly concludes that "the less 'populist' and more 'socialist' he became, the better Corbyn's politics were – not just more effective at winning voters, but better protected against anti-Jewish distortion." I would dissent, however, from the chapter's view that some degree of populist framing is necessary or even positively desirable for the left; populist frames always cut against class politics.

Reflecting on the impacts and effects of so much political discourse now being conducted on social media, Renton argues that Marxists need to be better at intervening in online discourse to

call out conspiracy theories expressed in left-wing online spaces. That would certainly be helpful, although I wonder whether the very form of social media discourse – which do not lead themselves to considered reflection and reassessment – cuts against such efforts. An "all-fronts" political-educational campaign, which attempts to reach people "in the real world" as well as online, with longer and more in-depth material than can be conveyed in a Facebook discussion, is needed. The challenges presented to that need by, for example, the ongoing pandemic are real, and not ones to which I claim to have easy solutions.

Inevitably, the book involves some assessment of the politics of the Israel/Palestine conflict. Renton's position is more maximally "anti-Zionist" than mine: he is for a single-state settlement and is strongly pro-BDS. Nevertheless, he criticises the wilder, conspiracy-theorist forms of anti-Zionism common in some sections of the left, and devotes a whole chapter to criticising the "hound-ing" of the (centre-right, and strongly Zionist) Labour MP Luciana Berger.

As far as I know, Renton does not consider himself to have reassessed or rejected the basic political framework on Israel/Palestine he held during his decades of membership of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). In my view, the SWP's perspective on Israel/Palestine has always been wholly "campist" – seeing Israel and its people, certainly those descended from European settlers/refugees, as an illegitimate colonial implantation in the region, part of the camp of imperialism, that will be defeated by what the SWP historically referred to as an anti-imperialist "Arab revolution". That campism has led the SWP into support for explicitly antisemitic forces such as Hamas and Hezbollah; to agitate, in the 1980s, for bans on campus Jewish Societies because of their "Zionism"; and, once, to uncritically publish a letter railing against "Zionist influence" at the BBC which turned out to be from a prominent National Front activist.

I see the campist programme itself as logically antisemitic, as it is premised on the inadmissibility of any expression of collective rights for the Israeli Jews as a national people, and implicitly designates the majority of the world's Jews who, for understandable historical reasons, maintain an affinity with Israel and the idea of Jewish nationhood – not only as political opponents but mortal enemies. Renton's book contains much detailed statistical description of the historical and contemporary mechanics of Israel's oppression of the Palestinians, but does not polemicise directly for a one-state/BDS programme. He rejects the idea that the left should treat "Zionism", as expressed in mainstream Jewish communal life in

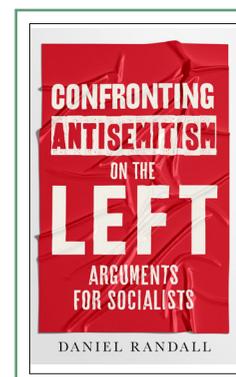
Britain, as equivalent to "racism" or "fascism" that should be no-platformed: he commends veteran Labour leftist and Momentum founder Jon Lansman for engaging with the *Jewish Chronicle* and attempting to reach out to "mainstream" Jewish opinion. It seems implausible to me, in the light of what he has written in *Labour's Antisemitism Crisis*, that Renton could reread the SWP's historic analysis on Israel/Palestine and Zionism, for example the 1986 pamphlet *Israel: The Hijack State*, or consider its campaigns against Jewish Societies in the 70s and 80s, and not feel some reassessment of the underlying perspectives is necessary.

In general in Renton's book, there is sometimes too much focus on how the left presents its arguments, and not enough on the roots of the ideas and assumptions that impel antisemitic speech or actions, meaning Renton sometimes comes across more as someone advising the left on how to better package its ideas or practise so as not to "antagonise" Jews rather than someone attempting to critique what might be antisemitic in the substance of those ideas or practise themselves.

Despite – or rather, in some ways, because of – these differences and disagreements, I hope Renton's book is widely read and discussed. Its rigorous re-litigation of the key flashpoints of the 2015-2020 period will help educate and persuade activists, and even where Renton advances arguments with which I disagree, I believe the book will help generate and contribute to a necessary debate.

Moishe Postone, perhaps the pre-eminent Marxist theorist of modern antisemitism, called antisemitism an "antihegemonic" ideology, offering its adherents "pseudo-emancipatory" narratives. As such it poses a particular threat to left-wing politics specifically; acknowledging that threat, and rejecting the notion that antisemitism is either solely a phenomenon of the far right, or a fabrication of supporters of Israel, is therefore a matter of ideological self-interest for the left. David Renton's contribution to the effort to acknowledge and confront that threat is welcome, and I look forward to continuing to discuss both our differences and common ground. □

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Corbynism failed on class focus



Book review

By Susan Jackson

Martin Thomas is to be thanked for his useful and objective account (*Corbynism: What Went Wrong?* workersliberty.org/corbynism) of the years 2015-2019 when Jeremy Corbyn was the leader of the Labour Party. The lack of equivalent critical analysis by other socialists of this recent period is in itself evidence of the problem of Corbynism.

The Corbyn times have been idealised by many on the left, and its strategic mistakes and inadequate class politics remain hidden behind a betrayal narrative.

During the Corbyn leadership his alleged exceptionalism as the only incorruptible politician, indeed as a saintly man, encouraged an unhealthy cultism. This had more in common with the anti political moralism found in all forms of populism than socialist tradition.

The essential flaws of Corbynism; its failure to argue and organise for class politics; its hypocrisy on Party democracy and equality (not just antisemitism, but also its bro-socialism, and tolerance of homophobia and transphobia), flow directly from a tendency to left populism.

Corbynism as a phenomenon was not a working-class movement, or even a Labourist one. Few of those involved in its activism during 2015-9 were class-struggle socialists, or indeed lay Union activists. Thomas is right to point out that many of the main movers of Corbynism were infected by the cul-

ture of the NGO and quango, a continuation from Blairism, but in a more "left wing" or "grassroots" form.

An honest assessment of the Manifestos of the Corbyn leadership in 2017 and 2019 shows there is little clear red water from that of Miliband in 2015. The radicalism on policy of the Corbyn leadership was exaggerated and mainly existed in soundbites. There was little consistent work done on how to articulate radical policies within Party structures, let alone how to organise for them in the country. There was little change offered in certain key social and economic policy areas including public ownership and humanising the social security system. In the House of Commons there was an acceptance of an economics of "keeping to fiscal rules" and supporting employee share ownership by the Shadow Chancellor. The Shadow Home Secretary proposed abstention on Tory plans to strengthen immigration controls.

Commitment

On wider issues Corbyn failed spectacularly to articulate or organise to deliver change for working people given his commitment to socialism. Thomas points out there was no surge in left lay activism in the trade unions affiliated to the Labour Party (or indeed those not affiliated) to match the Corbyn surge in the Labour party. Whilst Corbyn and McDonnell did what they had always done and attended picket lines, there was no concerted effort during 2015-9 to encourage working class action and to inspire and develop union activist in industrial struggles. Thomas also points out the lack of encouragement of street and community activism. And of course there was no engagement with the biggest street protests since the 2003 invasion of Iraq, i.e. those against Brexit.

Where was the democracy?

Thomas points out how the meagre culture of debate in the years 2015-19 affected the younger people attracted to Corbynism. But, contrary to the spin, Corbyn failed to inspire a youth-based movement. The real experience of Labour members in CLPs was a greater preponderance of older people joining the Labour Party under Corbyn. Mainly those had been politically formed in previous decades. They bought a lot of bad habits resulting from political fights of the past, now frozen in aspic. This is the root of much of the destructive and counter-productive factionalism of Corbynism.

Some of the most shocking actions of the Corbyn leadership were a result of leadership control worthy of Blairite times. The unchanged use of an over staffed personal office of the Leader of the Opposition and the appointment of well-aid advisers led to a top down

structure disposed to manipulation. There was the imposition of favoured Parliamentary candidates without consulting local Parties (more under Corbyn than any other leadership); the organisation of Party delegates to Annual Conference to break their mandates from the CLP because of loyalty to the leader (most obviously in the Brexit debates); and the use of the Party machine to defend the indefensible actions of members because they were in the Corbyn camp. There was also a distasteful nepotism in appointments to the Leader's Office and elsewhere in the Party.

Prize

The prize for democratic failure between 2015-9 however must go to the startling fact that a hard left leadership never set up a democratic organisation. Momentum remains more democratically unaccountable than other Labour factions and organisations to its right. Thomas rightly describes in detail how social movementism and the social media/data model stopped the development of a properly broad left in the Labour Party. The influence of the Communist Party on Corbynism is, as Thomas catalogues, also a major contributing factor.

The presence of members of the old Straight Left faction (Milne and Murray) in the Leader's Office stalled taking trans and non binary rights forward. The culture of many of the older Corbynites was often more socially conservative than the average CLP activist who reflected the progressive changes within the labour movement on women's rights and LGBT rights over the decades, when many older Corbynites had opted out of political activity.

Mistake

The big mistake of many who joined the Labour Party during or after the leadership campaign was their belief it was they who had delivered victory to the hard left in the Party. This is simply not true. Despite the Miliband rule changes to election of leader which

allowed the participation of registered supporters, Jeremy Corbyn got elected in 2015 on the votes of those who had already been Labour Party members.

The centre of gravity of Labour Party activists and members has always been to the left of the PLP. The potential of tapping into their discontent with previous accommodation with austerity economics was never properly followed through.

No attempt was made to form an alliance with those soft left MPs, who, unlike the Brownite and Blairites, were prepared to join the Shadow Cabinet and work with Corbyn as the elected leader of the Party on central Labourist issues of economic policy and social justice.

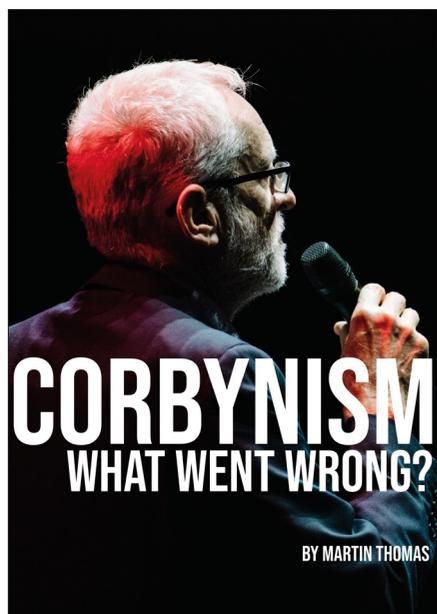
Dividing

The dividing lines between left and right in the Party became Brexit and antisemitism, and Thomas is right to point out this is where Corbynism ran aground. The "common stock" leftism on these issues was never challenged and there was little opportunity to hear a coherent case for internationalism or the need to remove the stain of antisemitism from the British left.

This has miseducated a new generation of Labour left activists, led by those in the Corbyn "wonkosphere" who saw the Brexit vote as an incoherent expression of working class aspiration to "take control" from the metropolitan elitist establishment.

Similarly antisemitism has become even more entrenched, with the common left wisdom that claims of antisemitism in the Labour party were exaggerated to discredit Jeremy and his associates. Corbyn supporters were expected to defend their leader rather than consider the issue itself.

The underlying reason that Brexit and antisemitism became fundamentally problematic during the four years of his leadership was the failure of the Corbyn project to focus on, indeed have any coherent strategy for, key issues for the British working class. □



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Covid: “the moon is not a hamster”

By Martin Thomas

As the Harvard University scientist Bill Hanage tweeted in early January: “Omicron is not endemic [settled into being a worrisome but manageable background factor] right now in much the same way that the moon is not a hamster”.

On 12 January Chicago teachers returned to in-person work, after a week in which they had insisted on a temporary online model in response to an Omicron surge, but the city had barred them from logging in.

With the USA’s tax rate lower than Europe’s, Covid death rates in Illinois in mid-January 2022 are [comparable](#) to the early 2020 peak and to all but the very worst of the peak in late 2020 and early 2021. (In Britain, though cases have rocketed, Covid deaths in the Omicron surge have kept under one-fifth of the early-2021 high).

The union had already won some measures back in February 2021, including safety committees with a union majority in all school buildings and weekly testing. New measures now won provide for improved masks (KN95), agreed criteria for temporary flip to online (30% of staff off sick or 40% of students self-isolating! the city wanted higher thresholds), and pay boosts for supply staff.

Schools will also be using saliva tests pioneered by the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, which are not as quick with results as lateral flow tests but are more easily administered.

The union vote to return to in-person work was quite close, and union leaders say they will continue to press for more. On 14 January, Chicago school students organised through the Chi-Rads network walked out of school midday to protest at the Chicago Public Schools office for more say for students in Covid-safety talks.

French teachers struck on 13 January over Covid safety, emphasising that their demand was for “safety measures

in schools and educational establishments so that they are open as much as possible”.

The unions reported turnout as 75% in primary schools, 62% in middle schools and general and technological high schools, and more than 50% in vocational high schools. In France, where strikes are often minority actions, that is high. Teachers will strike again on 27 January over pay.

The French unions’ demands include more and better masks, more testing, better ventilation, air purifiers.

Australia

In Australia, Covid rates were low by world standards until recently, but with Omicron cases have rocketed and death rates are currently ten times any previous peak, though still low by European standards. Australia’s unions are campaigning for provision of free Rapid Antigen (lateral-flow) tests, improved masks, fixing close contact definitions and restoring support for businesses and workers; and for new risk assessments in all workplaces, for Omicron, in consultation with workers’ reps.

A meat-processing firm in South Australia, Teys, has [demanded](#) that even workers who have tested Covid-positive return to the workplace. In many countries, meat-processing factories have been among the workplaces spreading the virus most widely.

World total case counts are about 3.5 times their previous peak in early 2021. Death rates are rising above their April 2020 peak, and about half the early-2021 high. (Case counts vary hugely according to testing policy as well as infection rates. Death rates are undercounted in many countries: *The Economist* magazine, working from excess-deaths data, [estimates](#) for example that the real Covid death count in China has been about 160 times the official figure). In Britain, probably the Omicron surge is ebbing. Case counts are clearly down, and a fall in hospital



admissions has followed, tentatively but quicker than I expected. Figures from South Africa, Zimbabwe, Botswana, the Netherlands, and Norway, all countries where Omicron hit early but there was high partial immunity (in Africa much more from previous infections than from vaccinations), suggest the ebb will continue.

Limited

Limited covid-distancing curbs, of the sort that can be sustained less damagingly and longer than full lockdown, still make sense to push the curve down quicker. And the longer-term, structural, social measures which help virus control (and which the Tories have avoided even when they have spent huge sums on business support and

mass testing, and even when they have locked down) remain urgent. Omicron will not be the last variant.

- Full isolation and sick pay for all
- Boost NHS pay; requisition private hospitals and staff to integrate them into the NHS; bring NHS logistics and supply back into the public sector
- Take social care into the public sector, with staff on NHS-level pay and conditions
- Workers’ control of workplace safety; upgrade ventilation
- A crash housing programme to reduce overcrowding
- Requisition Big Pharma, and in the first place its patents and technical know-how, to enable rapid worldwide production and distribution of vaccines for all. □

French left in hard times

By Chris Reynolds

On 23 January sign-ups close for the “Popular Primary” for left candidates for the French presidential election, for which the first round will be 10 April.

The aim of the primary (run by an NGO-type group) is to rally voters behind a single left candidate capable of a good showing on 10 April, but there is little chance that will work.

The background is setbacks for the French left. The Socialist Party used to be the biggest party in France, and won the presidency as recently as 2012, but its candidate Anne Hidalgo is polling just 3%. Yannick Jadot of the Greens is on 5%, Fabien Roussel of the Communist Party, 3%.

Jean-Luc Mélenchon is on 10%; but that compares badly with his 19.6% in the first round

in 2017. France was the first country to define politics as “left” and “right”, and political opinion there was long fairly evenly split between those poles. But now only 20%, in [opinion surveys](#), classify themselves as “left” (even in the broadest sense), and 37% as “right”. The remnants of the “yellow jackets” movement of 2018-9 are distinctly right-wing, and the political effect

of the movement, if any, seems to have been to reinforce the right.

Although French labour law imposes many fewer curbs on union action than Britain’s, and strikes and demonstrations remain more numerous, the political constituency built over many decades by the Socialist Party and the Communist Party has decayed without the revolutionary Marxist left yet being

able to capture the ground abandoned by them.

Philippe Poutou of the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste and Nathalie Arthaud of Lutte Ouvrière are standing as revolutionary class-struggle left candidates, but this time mostly to promote their parties and win recruits rather than in hope of a large vote. □

- Abridged. More: bit.ly/fl-ht

1971: Bangladesh'

By Sacha Ismail

"Kill three million and the rest will eat out of our hands". So Pakistani dictator Yahya Khan is said to have told his top brass in March 1971, as they prepared war against the people of East Bengal. By the time Bangladesh – "Bengal Nation" – gained its independence in December, Pakistan's army had murdered between 300,000 and three million civilians. These were among the worst atrocities of the 20th century, seeking to suppress one of the biggest anti-colonial struggles.

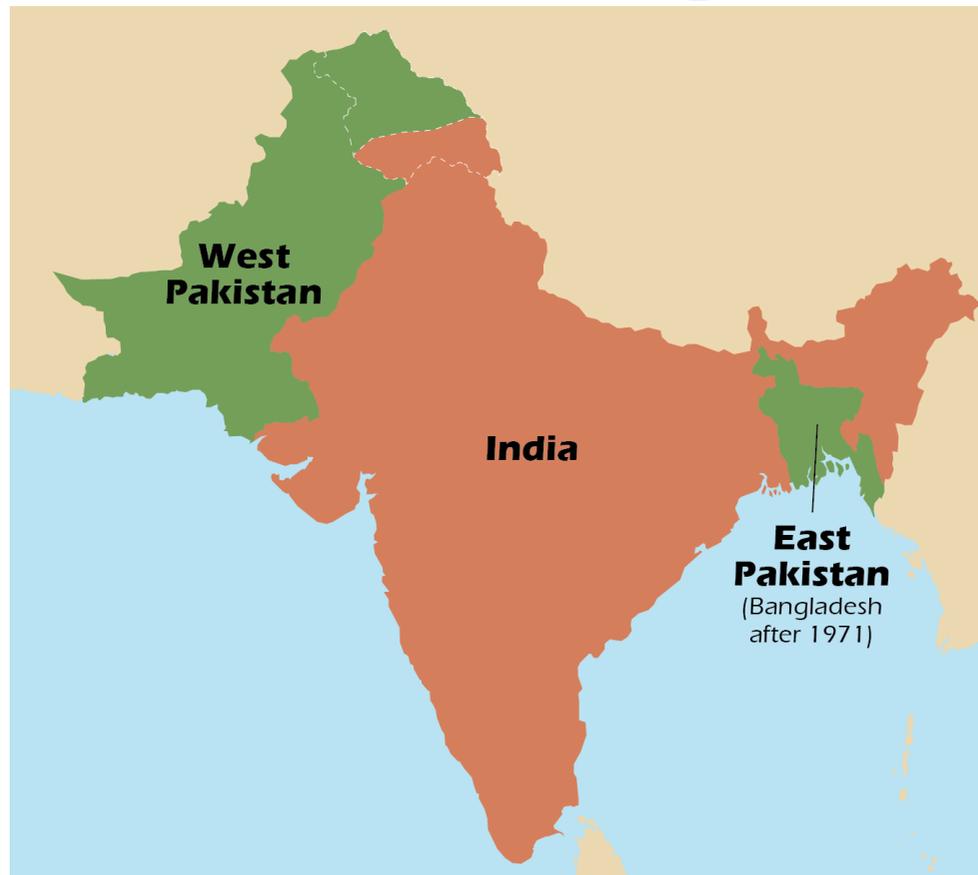
Conflict over the relationship between Pakistan's two wings – the East with the majority of the population, the West dominating the state and economic machinery – had simmered and periodically flared for over two decades, ever since independence from Britain. What began as a struggle for recognition of the Bengali language became more and more one for some form of self-determination. In the 1950s and 60s the energy of this rising mass movement flowed into a petty bourgeois-led Bengali nationalist party, the Awami League (AL).

In 1968-9 a vast uprising of students and workers in the West ousted military dictator Ayub Khan, in power since 1958. Yahya took over and held elections in December 1970. The openly right-wing and religious parties were routed. In the East the AL won over 70% of the vote and almost all the seats, enough for a majority across Pakistan. A majority of Western seats went to the Pakistan People's Party (PPP).

The PPP's channelling of the struggle was a tragedy for both East and West. On paper the PPP was more "socialist" than the AL, though by then the latter was talking socialism too. Many of West Pakistan's insurgent workers and students supported it. But it was run by Ayub's former foreign minister, Sindhi landlord Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Even more of an immediate issue than Bhutto's fake socialism was his false posturing as a democrat. Aggressively (West) Pakistani nationalist, he not only advocated greater militarism against India, but opposed even the AL's moderate proposals for federalism.

The West Pakistani movement against Ayub had originally included strong autonomy for the East (and for each of the four Western provinces) among its demands. But after Ayub's fall the movement receded sharply; Bhutto and his friends had the initiative.

Many thought Bhutto would reach an agreement with the AL to push the



military from power. They gave him too much credit. Instead he worked with the military to oppose the Bengali movement, sometimes pushing the generals for a harder stance. Without Bhutto they would not have been able to do what they did.

Since the AL would have a majority in the new national assembly, opposition to Bengali self-determination necessitated opposition to democracy at an all-Pakistan level.

The PPP leaders could dress it up all they wanted, but the fundamental character of this stance was made clear by a Pakistani general who within days of the 1970 election reassured his men: "We will not let these black bastards rule over us".

Bhutto declared the PPP would boycott the assembly in order to oppose the AL taking office and carrying out its federalist programme, threatening PPP members who wanted to take part. He participated in the decision of the military leaders to cancel the convening of the assembly, without rescheduling – announced on 1 March 1971. The people of the East responded with mass protests, mass civil disobedience and a general strike.

The admiral who was military governor of East Pakistan resigned in protest at the regime's refusal to seek compromise with the Bengalis; yet the "socialist" Bhutto affirmed to the junta that he would support repression.

Yahya and Bhutto took part in nego-

tiations in Dhaka, presenting a conciliatory face to the AL leaders. Meanwhile the preparations for a military assault on the East accelerated.

On 25 March the army launched "Operation Searchlight" to smash the Bengali movement. Returning to Karachi from a burning Dhaka on 26 March, Bhutto beamed as he told journalists: "Thank God, Pakistan has been saved".

Until the Western revolt of 1968, East Pakistan had been the part of the country where people had carved out most democratic space under the military regime. Now that regime was supposedly on the way out; but it drove to subjugate the people of the East with great brutality.

Foreign

All foreign journalists had been deported from East Pakistan – with good reason. Somehow figures for the number of killings don't seem to do justice to the sheer barbarity of Pakistan's war. Poor working-class areas of Dhaka were demolished, as thousands of towns and villages would be in the course of the war. The campaign of executions targeted political activists, students and "intellectuals". In the first day of Operation Searchlight the University of Dhaka was invaded and hundreds of teachers, campus workers and students murdered.

Jagannath Hall, a residency of mainly Hindu-background students, was destroyed, and about 600 of its residents killed. That set the scene for a core el-

ements of Pakistan's disgusting campaign, the targeting of East Bengal's Hindu population. Hindus made up 20% of East Pakistanis, but a big majority of the huge flood over the border into India.

Pakistan's rulers flaunted their anti-Hindu policy, saying they were promoting Islam against a decadent Hindu-influenced Bengali culture.

As well as virulently racist, Pakistan's war was virulently misogynistic. Hundreds of thousands of Bengali women were raped. A West Pakistani religious leader's edict declaring that "wealth and women" seized were legitimate "booty of war" was widely circulated. One army officer told an American in East Pakistan that after they won, "each of his soldiers would have a Bengali mistress and that neither dogs nor Bengalis would be allowed in the exclusive Chittagong Club". In fact women were kept as sex slaves inside the military cantonment in Dhaka.

Shamefully, after the war many of the rape victims faced humiliation and ostracism in independent Bangladesh.

Women served in the Bangladeshi resistance forces, including as fighters. In broad sweep Bengali nationalism was liberatory and progressive; but some Bengali fighters also killed and raped civilians, particularly from Urdu-speaking migrant communities from the Indian state of Bihar, which tended to sympathise with Pakistan. After the war hundreds of thousands of Biharis and others were denied citizenship and forced to live in refugee camps, with the courts reversing this for those born in Bangladesh only in 2008.

The basis for Pakistan's fascist-style assault on the Bengalis had been laid over many years of a right-wing and militaristic regime that justified an increasingly colonial relationship with the East by presenting its people as alien and inferior. That built on British imperial narratives contrasting the conspiratorial and untrustworthy Bengalis to the "martial races" of north-west India – including the Punjabis, who dominated Pakistan's officer caste.

Actual fascists, or a close equivalent, played an important part in Pakistan's war. The army helped establish and train Razakar (volunteer) militias – in particular Al-Badr, dominated by Islamist organisation Jamaat e-Islami, and Al-Shams, led by other Islamist groups and the conservative Muslim League. Islamists supported Pakistan as an Islamic project and hated the secularism of the Awami League and the left. Their militias, Pakistan's only active local

s “Liberation War”

support, took part in the spectrum of atrocities, but played a particular role in the killing of left-wing students and intellectuals.

In West Pakistan a government-orchestrated wave of anti-Bengali, anti-Indian and Islamist chauvinism swept the country. The most militant working-class and student leaders were imprisoned.

Though more and more of their supporters – particularly the radical students – had been demanding independence from Pakistan, the Awami League leaders did not call for it before the war began. Once Operation Searchlight was launched, AL president Sheikh Mujibur Rahman signed a declaration that “today Bangladesh is a sovereign and independent country”.

Mujib was arrested early on 26 March and taken to the West, but within two days the declaration made it onto the airwaves, in the voice of future Bangladeshi dictator Major Ziaur Rahman.

Probably believing their own anti-Bengali propaganda, the Pakistanis aimed to end the war within a month. In fact the Bangladeshi forces kept the conflict going over eight months before India intervened in December.

Although the early military resistance was chaotic, it drew strength from many sources, in the context of massive popular support for the independence struggle. Bengali soldiers and police defected in huge numbers. The East Bengal Regiment and the East Pakistan rifles went over en masse and became the core of the “regular” military element of the Mukti Bahini (Liberation Forces) as the Bangladeshi fighters came to be known. The Mukti Bahini also had a “people’s” wing of civilian volunteers, active mainly in guerrilla warfare. There was a proliferation of militias led by sections of the Awami League, student groups and various left organisations.

An AL-run provisional government for the “People’s Republic of Bangladesh” was set up in the west of the country, near the border with India.

As the war dragged on, the AL leadership was concerned about being outflanked on the left. Many of the party’s rank-and-file activists and supporters saw themselves as fighting for what they understood as socialism, and left-wing ideas did spread widely.

The left in East Bengal, completely dominated by Stalinism, found itself wrong-footed by events. By this time the Sino-Soviet split in the Stalinist left internationally was in full swing. In East Pakistan the pro-Russian wing, pursuing an approach of sharply separated historical stages, made itself hard to

distinguish from the AL leadership. The pro-Chinese wing, generally more “radical”, was in disarray in part because of long-running confusion on the question of self-determination.

The Soviet Union was allied with India, an alliance strengthened during this conflict. Mao’s China was allied with Pakistan, praising this closely US-linked regime as “anti-imperialist” and defending its “national unity” against the Bengali struggle. In the early 60s East Bengali Maoists and similar had been startlingly soft on the Pakistani dictatorship, with the encouragement of the Chinese bureaucracy. (By 1971 some pro-Chinese leftists had come round to supporting independence.)

China provided propagandistic and practical support to Pakistan during the war, but too little and too measuredly for the junta’s satisfaction. The US, Pakistan’s dominant ally since the early 50s, was less restrained. Richard Nixon’s regime went out of its way to funnel aid and weapons to the Pakistanis and protect them from restraining criticism and pressure. Nixon told Pakistani diplomats: “Yahya is a good friend. I understand the anguish of the decisions he has to make.”

Extreme

So extreme was the US’s stance that American diplomats in Pakistan, including the consul general, wrote in protest to denounce “the suppression of democracy”, “atrocities” and “bending over backwards to placate the West Pakistan-dominated government”.

The personal-psychological inclinations of Nixon and Henry Kissinger – the former described Indians as “slippery, treacherous... bastards” and the latter India’s prime minister Indira Gandhi as “a bitch” – seem to have played a role. More fundamentally, the US government feared a growth in the influence the Soviet Union and India in South Asia, and the possibilities for left-wing radicalisation in an independent Bangladesh. Nixon was in the process of attempting to establish relations with China, also opposed to the USSR and India.

From June 1971 Pakistan’s crimes in East Bengal became widely known, in the first instance due to the reports of a courageous West Pakistani journalist, Anthony Mascarenhas.

A global solidarity movement developed, reaching far beyond the East Pakistani diaspora and the left. Approached by West Bengali-American musician Ravi Shankar, former Beatle George Harrison produced what has been described as the world’s first charity single, *Bangla Desh*. He and



Awami League leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman during the 1970 election

Shankar organised benefits with a remarkable array of famous musicians.

The impact on world opinion was more important than the money. Pakistan was made to stink in the nostrils of many millions worldwide – even as some of the most powerful governments continued to support it, and others (including the UK) equivocated.

By far Bangladesh’s strongest supporter was India. That the Mukti Bahini maintained the resistance for so long is a tribute to their courage and popular support; but they also depended on Indian organisation, training and weapons. A mix of factors seems to have driven Indian support for the East Bengalis: public opinion; desire to batter a long-standing military adversary; concern for Hindus being persecuted; fear of the left gaining the upper hand in East Bengal and linking up with comrades over the border; perhaps even some element of democratic principle and humanitarianism...

India had a very immediate reason for intervening which was both humanitarian and self-interested. By the summer of 1971 something like ten million refugees had crossed into the eastern Indian states of West Bengal and Assam, creating a humanitarian and economic crisis and growing political pressure.

In August, as global outrage at the genocide mounted, India signed a co-operation treaty with the Soviet Union. Newly confident of safety from Chinese retaliation if her government intervened in East Bengal, in October Indira Gandhi toured the US and Europe to indict Pakistan. Battle intensified in the UN and other inter-state forums.

On 3 December the desperate Pakistani regime launched pre-emptive airstrikes on Indian air force bases – modelled on Israel’s surprise attack on Egypt during the 1967 Six-Day War. The Indian government had anticipated such action; it was ineffective, but gave India a final excuse for the intervention it wanted. Arguing that Pakistan had declared war, India defended itself in the west while launching an invasion of

East Bengal. At the UN Pakistan and its allies demanded a ceasefire; this was vetoed twice by the USSR.

The US detached a ten-ship task force from its fleet off South Vietnam and sent it to the Bay of Bengal; Russian ships from Vladivostok were sent after and trailed it into January 1972.

Outgunned and already demoralised, the Pakistani army surrendered within a fortnight, on 16 December. In addition to more than double India’s casualties before the surrender, Pakistan had 90,000 soldiers taken as prisoners of war.

A new country of 65 million people was born – one whose government said it was committed to secularism, democracy and socialism. □

- The first part of this series, *The origins of Bangladesh and Pakistan’s 1968*, bit.ly/ba-or, was in *Solidarity* 618, 15 December 2021.

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“Success” for China. And for China’s workers?

By Dan Katz

Click on to the [website](#) of the Socialist Action group and the banner at the top of the Home page tells you what to expect. There is no place here for Marx, Trotsky, or Lenin. But enough space for pictures of Malcolm X, Chavez, Castro and Guevara.

That certainly sets the scene nicely.

Socialist Action was one of the splinters that emerged in the mid-1980s from the break-up of International Marxist Group (from 1982 renamed Socialist League). Inside the IMG the faction that eventually became the current Socialist Action group had traditionally been led by John Ross.

Socialist Action was launched as the Socialist League’s newspaper when the organisation entered the Labour Party in the early 1980s. Later, after the Socialist League had split apart, SA was published as the magazine of the Ross group. Now, although the group still exists, all that is publicly visible is their website.

Buried, secretly, in the Labour Party and various campaigns, by the late 80s SA had become a small, ultra-factional sect which attempted to hitch itself to prominent leftists and soft-leftists in the UK labour movement. They gave praise and support to Stalinist and “anti-imperialist” movements and states in the wider world.

Ken Livingstone

Although still nominally Trotskyists, SA became well-known backroom workers for the fake-left Ken Livingstone. SA’s day-to-day labour movement practice would not distinguish them from most run-of-the-mill Labour MPs.

In the 1990s Ross lived in Russia, semi-detached from SA, and for the past decade or more he has been confusing himself in China.

When the Berlin Wall came down at the end of 1989 and popular bourgeois democratic revolutions swept the Stalinists from power across Eastern Europe we helped the anti-capitalist and anti-Stalinist left, and celebrated. SA, however, editorialised (issue 7): “The destruction of at least some of the workers’ states in Eastern Europe, and the imperialist reunification of Germany are both the greatest defeats suffered by the working class since World War 2.”

So, East Germany, where one in seven people were caught up as part of the Stasi’s secret police network, and Stalinist Hungary, where a workers’ revolution was crushed in 1956, were workers’ states, and without any qualification.

And this was not just any defeat, you understand, but bigger even than the imposition of apartheid in South Africa, the fascistic Chilean coup of 1973, and the coming to power of Khomeini in



Iran. That comment placed SA on the far, uncritical end of the very broadly-defined socialist left; they were less critical of Stalinist rule in Eastern Europe than most Communist Parties.

When the end came in the Soviet Union, with a feeble, rump Stalinist coup attempt in August 1991, SA’s cover (issue 12-13) had the headline: “1917, 1941, 1991 - the Russian Revolution fights for its life.” SA sided with those attempting the coup and attempting to preserve “nationalised property relations.”

Yes, in 1991 the Russian revolution still lived, apparently. Despite Stalin’s purges, the Ukrainian famine, Gulag prison camps, the creation of a totalitarian state within which the working class had no power, the emergence of the Soviet Union as a colonial-imperialist boss state – despite all this, the Russian workers’ revolution was still alive. And the Bolsheviks’ representatives on Earth were now a group of rusty old generals attempting a coup to save the Revolution!

Academic

Now Ross is an academic at a Chinese university, writing in enthusiastic praise (bit.ly/ross-c) of the glorious achievements of the Communist Party of China (CPC). Ross continues the SA tradition of sycophancy to those whose bandwagon they intend to hitch themselves. He certainly knows whose arse he needs to press his face into if he wants to keep his job at a Chinese university.

He states his “deepest appreciation” for “the leadership of the CPC.”

Ross’s English language blog is called Learning from China. And what exactly has Mr Ross learnt from China? (Apart from that being Beijing’s useful idiot pays well). Ross’s thesis is this: if the USSR’s leadership had followed the Chinese route the USSR would not have fallen. Instead, using the genius-strategy of Mao and Deng, the USSR would have been able to build a powerful socialism, just as the Chinese are now doing.

Ross’s 7,000-word article is also full of praise for himself. You must understand, you see, that John Ross is an important Marxist theoretician. Why?

Because he tells us so. Over and over again.

What you won’t find in all that text is any of these words: worker, working class, trade union, class struggle. Because for Ross socialism is something that does not depend on workers, or workers’ freedom and conscious, organised power. For Ross these little people can be ignored, concerned as he is with the battle between the Western free market capitalist system and the anti-imperialists led by China under the Communist Party.

Other words you will not find are: Uyghurs, Xinjiang, Tibet, Hong Kong, democracy movement, threats against Taiwan, military build-up in South China Sea. Ross ignores these issues which speak of a side of China that apparently does not concern him: the virulent Han-chauvinist, repressive, would-be-totalitarian, imperialist Chinese Communist Party.

Patriotism

Except that is not quite true. Occasionally Ross praises Chinese patriotism. That should not come as any surprise to those Ross-watchers who noticed, in the 1990s, Ross advocating a red-brown alliance (Stalinist Communists allying with far right nationalists) in Russia. In this article he again praises Russian patriots.

It is not necessary for Ross to advocate a red-brown alliance in China now, of course, because the CPC already exists as a unified “red-brown” party.

Ross’s long-winded, tiresome article amounts to this:

The “overall balance sheet of the USSR... is overwhelmingly positive.” Why? Because the USSR “defeated German Nazism saving Europe from fascism [and] its impact was decisive in the destruction of the colonial Empires.”

The USSR’s “disintegration” was a “geopolitical disaster”. Capitalist restoration led to misery in Russia. The Chinese avoided this disaster due to the magnificence of their CPC leadership. Why did China succeed when the USSR failed? In China not everything is nationalised; after 1978 they developed a “socialist market economy”

and China is open to the world market. “China after 1978 achieved literally unprecedented economic success.”

How was this possible? “Mao Zedong, with Lenin, [is] the greatest political thinker of the 20th century and “Mao Zedong Thought”, as it is known in China, [is] a fundamental contribution to Marxism.” And, as a consequence, “Deng Xiaoping ... who achieved this [economic miracle] ... saved world socialism.”

Ross argues that a fully nationalised, “collectivised” economy in Russia in the 1930s was a good thing because it allowed the USSR to beat the Nazis. Back in his Trotskyist past the fully nationalised Soviet economy of the 1930s was what had allowed him to call the USSR a “workers’ state”.

OK, but without a fully nationalised economy, why is China socialist? It is not clear from what Ross writes, but he seems to suggest that the Chinese Maoist revolution of 1949 would not have happened without the Russian Revolution. And since the USSR was socialist, ergo, so is China. Fill in the logical gaps yourself.

Besides, it says it is socialist and has a red flag – so, there you go.

Nationalisation

Ross manages to consider the creation of the nationalised economy in the USSR without mentioning how that economy was created: the abolition of trade unions, workers’ control and Party democracy, police state terror and the murder of Trotsky and the socialist opposition.

And, indeed, the USSR defeated the German Nazis, yes, but then imposed its own totalitarian rule in the areas it overran, presiding over its own colonial empire in Eastern Europe. The USSR sent troops into Czechoslovakia to crush a dissident Stalinist movement and fought a long and bloody colonial war in Afghanistan. The USSR was in opposition to US imperialism not because it was a socialist, internationalist state, but because it was an alternative, competing imperialism.

Of course the reintroduction of capitalism in the former USSR was a nightmare for many workers. Ross is right about that. Where he’s wrong is here: supporting democratic and workers’ rights in the USSR does not imply we favour the wild gangster capitalism of the Yeltsin years. Or any type of capitalism.

Ross suggests Chinese workers avoided suffering, because, apparently, they avoided capitalism. In the early 1960s, 30 million people died of starvation during the deranged Great Leap Forward campaign. Later, during the Cultural Revolution, hundreds of thousands more died as the Maoists struggled to

continued page 15 →

A childhood in Stalinist Albania



Book review

By Dan Katz

On a bookshelf in our front room there's a picture of my partner and me, half-empty glasses raised in the air. It is New Year's Eve, 1989, and we are drinking to celebrate the death of Stalinism across much of Eastern Europe. The Berlin Wall had just come down and the dictator, Nicolae Ceausescu, had just been put against a wall and shot, during a brief civil war as Romanian Stalinism crashed.

The bourgeois revolutions in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union were liberations, for sure. The new freedom meant elections, new political parties, the ability to form free trade unions and an end to secret-police terror and vast, ubiquitous state surveillance and repression.

Gulags

In her new book *Free*, Lea Ypi, a young child in the 1980s, describes puzzling, coded conversations as her parents and granny discussed the fates of relatives imprisoned in the Albanian system of gulags. To be at "university", was to be in jail; "graduation" was to get out; "dropping out of university" was committing suicide; a "strict teacher" was a torturer. Life for a child is often confusing enough without having every word your parents say measured and managed for fear of the state.

Ypi's book is not a text book, or history, but a memoir. It is highly personalised, human, nuanced and recommended. In the end it made me feel sad, but maybe that's just me.

The UK's right-wing press, which has reviewed Ypi's book extensively and enthusiastically, has concentrated almost entirely on her description of the weird and ultra-repressive Stalinist variant which she lived under in Albania. But Lea Ypi's book is in two parts, and the second half deals with what happened next, after Stalinism's fall. The freedoms that were won – real free-

doms – were also bourgeois freedoms. The framework was now being set by the capitalist class and institutions such as the World Bank. Capitalist "structural adjustments" meant mass unemployment in Albania, rising inequality, mass emigration, gangsterism and corruption and, in 1997, a mass uprising following the collapse of wildly popular Ponzi schemes.

Albania, a small, backward state on the Adriatic Sea (current population, 3 million), was occupied by Mussolini and then by the German Nazis, and fell to the Stalinist forces under Enver Hoxha in 1944. Hoxha broke with Tito's Yugoslavia (which had been attempting to swallow Albania) in 1948 and then with Khrushchev's USSR in 1961, siding with China in the Sino-Soviet split.

1967

Hoxha broke with China in the 1970s and China cut off all aid to Albania in 1978. That left Albania utterly isolated. The 1967 constitution had attempted to seal-off Albania by banning foreign travel as well as listening to foreign radio. Borders were sealed with electric fences and those who attempted to escape could be executed. Private ownership of cars and even bad language were prohibited.

The legal changes in 1967 also declared Albania "atheist," meaning all mosques and churches were closed and then reopened as community centres or libraries. Religious worship became a seriously punishable offence.

Beards and long hair were also banned, apparently as symbols of decadent Western culture. In 1970 Ajax football team were told they could not enter the country unless their players were clean-shaven and their hair was no longer than 4cm. Celtic's squad was banned from the country for having beards.

The Sigurimi secret police force brutally trampled on even mild criticism of the regime and ran an extensive, efficient network of informers. Many buildings were bugged. As an Albanian saying went, "There are 11 spies for every ten people."

Between 1945 and 1991, when the

Albanian Stalinist regime finally fell, at least 43,000 political prisoners had been jailed and 6,000 executed. Many prisoners were forced to dig for copper in the mine at Spac, in the country's north, the most notorious of 50 internment camps.

Fatos Lubonja was jailed for 17 years for criticising Hoxha in a private diary. Shtjefen Kurti, a Catholic priest, was executed for performing a baptism in 1971. Maks Velo, a painter, was told his paintings were anti-socialist and showed "modernist tendencies"; he was interrogated for six months, tortured, and sentenced to ten years hard labour. Hysen Haxhijaj joined a small book club with six other members and was jailed for 15 years for discussing "pro-Western" poetry.

Maks Velo

Like many who were persecuted, the painter Maks Velo was given a choice: go to a prison camp or become an informer. He chose prison. At the end of her book Lea Ypi makes the point that even in terrible conditions people can and do make choices. Maks Velo did the right thing. That is an easy thing to write from south London in 2021, but he was right nevertheless.

More recently, Velo discovered that up to 20 people informed on him, including a close relative and a good friend. The state destroyed Velo's paintings, and 4,000 politicals are still listed as missing.

Lea Ypi's family was at particular risk from persecution as they had come from well-off, educated backgrounds. Ypi's mother's family had property seized by the regime.

As a teenager Ypi lived through the first years of post-Stalinist rule in Albania. All the key features of her adolescent years formed opposite poles. Capitalist democracy and Stalinism. Her mum (a northerner, a Gheg, a founder then leader of the opposition Democratic party, who believed people are basically bad) and her dad (a southerner, a Tosk, who was a confused leftist who ran a port and faced laying its workforce off under World Bank-mandated reforms).

and even expropriate members of the private capitalist class.

China now is now aggressively constructing a network across the world, drawing in neighbouring states through Belt and Road. It is rapidly building up sophisticated modern armed forces.

Behind all this guff from John Ross is the question: how do we measure progress and socialism? Economic "success" achieved at the expense of the working class is not socialist success. Chinese state power used to repress the working class and protect the elite's privilege is not socialist power.

Then came the January 1997 collapse of the pyramid schemes in which many thousands of Albanians – perhaps two-thirds of the population – had invested life savings. The schemes were often fronts for money-launderers and mafia organisations and offered interest of 10-25% per month.

These scams were allowed to exist under rules set out by the IMF in 1994 which allowed the unfettered operation of private financial organisations.

A violent protest movement spread from the south where the Stalinists still retained some support. The rebellion became a generalised insurrection by March 1997 with the active participation of criminal gangs. Weapons were looted from army stores and mafias took over whole towns.

Diary

Ypi reprints her teenage diary from March 1997, including conversations with her father, who by then was a Democratic Party MP, and the story of her mother and brother escaping the violence by jumping on a ship bound for Italy. She ends, "I'm not taking Valium any more, I'm taking valerian; it is meant to be milder."

Perhaps 2000 people died and an international military intervention was required to restore order. Ypi describes the difference between 1990-1 and 1997: "In 1990 we had nothing but hope. In 1997 we lost that too."

Ypi, now lecturing on Marxism at the LSE, starts her course: "Socialism is above all a theory of human freedom, about how to think about progress in history, of how we adapt to circumstances, but also try to rise above them. Freedom is not sacrificed only when others tell us what to say, where to go, how to behave. A society that claims to enable people to realise their potential, but fails to change the structures that prevent everyone from flourishing, is also oppressive."

Which is not a bad place to start a conversation. The reviewers for the right wing press clearly did not note her criticism of capitalism. Or thought it not worth mentioning. Or maybe they didn't get that far through the book. □

from page 14 → keep power. 3,000 were killed in the Tiananmen protests of June 1989.

These were spectacular high points of very visible horror, coercion and terror. But day-to-day life is regimented and organised from above.

The CPC has caused enormous suffering, regulating in its own interests the press, the internet, the writing of the current news and past history and the curricula of educational institutions. Religious worship, national minorities are monitored and policed. Families are told how many children they can have and where they can and

cannot live. People are ruined, sacked, disappeared or jailed for stepping out of line. Unions are banned and strikes are repressed. Towns, suburbs and villages can be destroyed without consultation to make way for roads, new factories or vanity projects.

Everywhere there is bureaucratic abuse and corruption. And Chinese workers have certainly not avoided capitalist exploitation. The CPC has allowed vast capitalist expansion, while maintaining a strict monopoly of political power and an enormous, efficient, brutal surveillance-state which allows the CPC to corral, arrest, intimidate

The metric of socialism is workers' democracy and liberty. By that measure China fails.

Ross manages to write his nonsense without managing to understand he is doing some damage to his humanity. Presumably, somewhere, in the back of his head, he can remember becoming a Trotskyist. Maybe he can even recall why he did so: because the world urgently needs solidarity and working class struggle in the fight against repression and exploitation.

And now what is he? What have SA become? Boosters and mercenaries for Xi and the CPC. □

Permanent revolution and

Introduction

The articles reprinted here, from a dispute in the Irish Workers' Group (IWG) in 1967-8, are important for seeing how the term "permanent revolution" has been used in certain ways to rationalise a world-view on the radical left, and how the political trend represented today by *Solidarity* and Workers' Liberty dug our way out of those misuses.

The IWG was a regroupment to the left of the Communist Party, small and short-lived, but including many activists who figured in the 1968-9 political explosion in Northern Ireland. The original nucleus of our political trend were in the IWG, and the dispute was largely between them and the central IWG leadership. There, the chief figure was Gery Lawless (1936-2012).

He appears in his article here as proposing arguments of the "USFI", the mainstream of "orthodox Trotskyism" then led by Ernest Mandel (cited here with his pen-name Germain). In fact Lawless led a motley coalition. Dispute on Cuba might rally people because the Cuban regime then had a much more revolutionary aura

than today, and was enthusiastically supported by almost all the anti-Stalinist left as well as by Stalinists.

What was "permanent revolution"? In 1904-5 Leon Trotsky developed the idea that the working class - rather than capitalistic liberals or even radical middle-class democrats - could lead the overthrow of Tsarism in Russia. The workers could win the support of the peasantry - too scattered and economically stunted to become the leading force in its own right - and take power. That victory could spread to workers' victories in the more economically advanced countries, and with their help Russia could move towards socialism with no bourgeois "stage" intervening.

The Russian working class, though a minority in the country, was strong in modern factories in the big cities; the Russian bourgeoisie was disproportionately weak, tied to the landowners and to foreign capital; the urban middle class was also disproportionately weak.

Trotsky called this perspective "permanent revolution",

drawing the phrase from Marx. The Bolsheviks made it reality in October 1917. Or, at least, the initial steps of it. The working-class risings in Europe which followed October 1917 were defeated, and so Russia's workers' government could not build socialism, but instead was ousted by Stalin's bureaucratic counter-revolution.

In the decades that followed, "permanent revolution" perspectives, extended to other countries with fresh workers' movement, weak bourgeoisies, and rebellious but scattered peasantries under landlord, colonial, or autocratic rule, became one of the chief ideas of "Trotskyism". The Stalinists counterposed a "stages" strategy: in less-developed (and even in quite developed) countries, the workers should first aim for a bourgeois "democratic stage", or "advanced democracy"; only at the next "stage" would direct socialist politics become operational.

Lawless indicted our people, Sean Matgamna in particular, as sectarian hyper-critics of Cuba and (therefore, he claimed) "revising the the-

ory of permanent revolution". How? The argument worked via a scheme rather than from investigation of the realities of Cuba.

Trotsky had said that such measures as land reform, national independence (and, wrote Lawless, with Ireland in his mind, national unity) would not be won by the weak bourgeoisie in colonial and similar countries. Anything that went so far as to win them must be the socialist working-class revolution, in some form. Cuba had done land reform and defied the USA. Therefore it must be a victorious workers' state.

The conclusion for other countries (and it would be developed for Ireland too) was that sufficiently hot nationalist struggle against the big powers would *become* socialist struggle.

Our 1967-8 reply did not feel confident to reject the terminology ("deformed workers' state") which we had inherited from our "orthodox Trotskyist" tradition. It did, however, insist on realities.

Admit that in some (technical?) sense China could be called a "deformed workers'

state"? But you must then also register "an elite caste in full control", "oppression of the working class", and "monstrous terror". A "monstrosity". The working class had played no role, "none at all", in installing it.

The Cuban regime then had great popular support, was less repressive than China's, had a lighter bureaucracy. But it had "originated apart from the working class", it was a "form of Bonapartism" (the state standing above society), and "gross Stalinist degeneration" was likely.

The spirit of Trotsky's "permanent revolution" indicated identification with Cuba's workers, and with those workers ready to fight for workers' rule, not with the regime. To interpret permanent revolution as a scheme requiring Marxists to accept regimes like Cuba's as a full victory of socialist revolution would mean "fore-shortening it by a head" and making it into "a reactionary theory". □

Martin Thomas

Cuba: the nexus

By Gery Lawless

Elsewhere in this document I noted that Comrade Matgamna had avoided mentioning Cuba, and I asked him where he stood on this question,

I did this, not because I wish to score debating points, but because I believe that a lot of important things flow from the political stand that we take on Cuba. This is not my full statement on Cuba. I hope that before the next (recalled?) AGM at which all the points can be thrashed out, I will make a further contribution to the discussion on Cuba.

With the entry of the Red Army into Europe and the victory of the Chinese Revolution, the World Trotskyist movement was thrown into ideological tur-

moil, and we had the "second birth" of the state capitalist theory.

For our generation the victory of the Cuban Revolution seems destined to do the same. The reason for that is that Trotskyists believed that the building of the Fourth International as the World Party of Socialist Revolution, replacing the degenerate Communist movement, was an essential prerequisite of the victory of world revolution and the establishment of Workers' Republics. But, although the Fourth International continues to be built, nowhere, for certain objective and subjective reasons, have we constructed a mass party. Yet major social transformations have taken place. Despite the fact the Trotsky himself recognised this possibility,

the establishment of China, Cuba and Eastern Europe has split the Trotskyist movement. Four main tendencies developed:

Four

(i) The International Socialist Group, who surmounted the problem by defining the states in question as "State Capitalist".

(ii) The group around M. Pablo who, without ever spelling it out, decided that there was no need for a Fourth International.

(iii) The SLL, who recognised the need for the Bolshevik-Trotskyist Party, but nevertheless think Cuba is a petit-bourgeois, bonapartist state, that since the revolution was not led by a Bolshe-

vik Party it could not have established a Workers' State,

(iv) The vast majority of Trotskyists, who remembered that Trotsky had foreseen the possibility, and, not being blinkered theoreticians, recognised that. China, Eastern Europe and Cuba were Workers' States, albeit deformed: and from this recognised that "the weakness of the enemy in the backward countries has opened up the possibility of coming to power with a blunted instrument", while still insisting that these are exceptions, and we base our perspective on the rule, not the exceptions.

Therefore we still recognise the need to build the revolutionary party.

Comrade Matgamna has said that

and working-class politics

his only difference with Healy's SLL on Cuba is that, logically, Healy should extend this line to China. From this flows Sean Matgamna's semi-state-capitalist line, and his opposition to the Fourth International.

Revised

The state-capitalist/workers' state controversy has been gone over many times before. I do not need to go through it all again. But this attitude to Cuba, even if Comrade Matgamna remains formally a workers' statist, means that he has revised another basic Trotskyist position – the theory of the Permanent Revolution.

The Marxist analysis of the relationship of the bourgeois-democratic and socialist revolutions in the modern world was first suggested to Marx by the German revolution of 1848, and then in this century was fully developed by Trotsky.

This analysis is called "the theory of

the Permanent Revolution". (See editorial *Irish Militant*, December. 1966; Shane Mage, *An Solas* No.11). Basic to this theory was the belief that the class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie existed in embryo, even in the Cromwellian revolution; and played a significant part in the Great French Revolution. But this factor is, in modern times, so much more important that, for the bourgeoisie in the backward or semi-colonial countries, the basic political emotion is fear of the working class.

Economically

Moreover, economically, the bourgeoisie of a backward country is most intimately linked to the old land-owning class and the colonial power. For these reasons the bourgeoisie and its parties are incapable of carrying through the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution. Basically these tasks are agrarian reform, national unity and national

independence. Not only has the Cuban revolution carried out these tasks (with the exception of the Guantanamo base), but it has carried out many tasks of the socialist revolution.

Workers

The conclusion, therefore, is inescapable. Either one estimates Cuba as a workers' state and estimates its state power as the dictatorship of the proletariat (even if it is somewhat distorted); or one takes the position that, the bourgeois-democratic revolution in a backward country can be carried out, by class forces other than the proletariat. To maintain the latter is to revise the theory of Permanent Revolutions

I bring this out because, as I said before, I do not believe that it is accidental that Comrade Matgamna, in his wide and detailed document, missed out on Cuba altogether. It is not that he has no position on Cuba; I know he has. It is an honest position, although in my opin-

ion, a wrong one. What is dishonest is that he should keep silent on it for fear of antagonising some people he hopes to win to his side. (On the question of Cuba, ultra-leftism and party building etc., I would like to refer comrades to Ernest Germain's excellent [Marxism v Ultra-Leftism](#)). □

• *Despite the promise of a "further contribution", this is all I have, or anybody I know, has of Lawless on the issue. If anybody has more, send it and we will reunite it with the rest of Lawless. I suspect there is not a lot more. He deliberately repeated Mandel. His politics were an attempt to justify the Russian action in shooting down east Berlin workers in 1953; ours were siding with the workers and against the Russians, as emphatically as we could within the "orthodox Trotskyist" degenerated workers' state formula – SM.*

The politics of the anti-Trotskyist coalition



By Sean Matgamna

*"As I was going up the stair
I met a man who wasn't there
He wasn't there again today
Oh, how I wish he'd go away!"*

On p.12 of Internal Bulletin 4, Prosecutor Lawless points an accusing finger: "I notice, reading over Comrade Matgamna's articles, and those of his letters to me which I still have, that nowhere does he take a firm stand on Cuba. Where do you stand on Cuba, Comrade Matgamna? Why, in a polemic that ranged so widely, are you completely silent about Cuba?"

And on p22: "... I do not believe that it is accidental that Comrade Matgamna, in his wide and detailed document" ([Trotskyism or Chameleonism](#)) "missed out on Cuba altogether..." And why, Comrade Matgamna, did you evade the issue of Burma? And of the class character of the CP of Outer Mongolia? Why, in a document dealing with the internal structure of a Trotskyist Party, and the concrete reality, history and problems of the Irish Workers' Group, are you so evasively silent on these and other vital questions? What are you hiding?

A Trotskyist Faction circular in early January has already in anticipation answered the question on its merits. But Lawless, in his two pages of "gleanings" from Germain on Cuba, exists in his own right, and we will find his ideas here relevant to the other issues in dispute. His intention was to use some of the processed arguments against Healy of the USFI, against us. But he has in fact done more than he thinks.

His two pages on Cuba contain enough confusion to drown Lawless and give his allies a good wetting too, Taken together with his section on the revolutionary party, presumably his answer to [Trotskyism or Chameleonism](#), we get the most demonstrative proof of the deep political confusion of Lawless. His document is nothing less than a detailed political self-portrait. Let us examine it.

On p21, summarising the experience of the Cuban Revolution, Lawless spells out! his own full position. He thinks that though "Trotskyists believed (sic!) that the building of the Fourth International as the World Party of the Socialist Revolution, replacing the degenerate communist movement was (sic) an essential prerequisite of the victory of world revolution...", "major social transformations have taken place..." with "the establishment (?) of China, Cuba and Eastern Europe." Which has "split the 'Trotskyist movement.'" Amidst all the confusion, and the varied positions, the good guys, supported by Gery Lawless, reached a number of conclusions which he un-

derstands as follows:

"... not being blinkered theoreticians, (the USFI) recognised that China, Eastern Europe and Cuba were Workers' States, albeit deformed: and from this recognised that 'the weakness of the enemy in the backward countries has opened up the possibility of coming to power with a blunted instrument', while still insisting that these are exceptions, and we base our perspective on the rule, not the exceptions." Throughout these two articles the Stalinist bureaucracy is mentioned once, without issue, and the 'albeit deformed' is added as an afterthought, also without issue.

Lawless thinks that we don't need revolutionary parties in the deformed workers' states - a blunted instrument was enough. And is the process at an end? He doesn't say... he implies it is, that the establishment of deformed workers' states is a victory (without qualification? He doesn't qualify it) for the world revolution. As "exception" (rather frequent exception!) the blunted instrument can substitute for the Trotskyist Party. And is that all? The blunted instrument leads to power... and that's the end of the chapter. Presumably. Lawless repeats it often enough.

Thirties

Trotskyists in the thirties and afterwards held to the elementary Marxist view that the working class could only take power consciously (even if, having taken it, they could lose it, giving rise to the transitory regime of a bonapartist

workers' state). The instrument of the drive towards power could only be a Party of the kind Lenin built - a Trotskyist Party. Bitter experience of the treachery and ineptitude of Stalinism and Social Democracy reinforced this. But the Trotskyists were a small minority, and Stalinism, the most dangerous enemy, was buttressed by the Soviet state. It reinforced and perpetuated the conditions which had bred it by securing a succession of defeats which held back the proletariat.

After World War 2, the Stalinists sold out the revolution in western Europe, France and Italy particularly. But in East Europe and China (where, despite all Mao's efforts to form a coalition with Chiang Kai-shek, that stupid reactionary insisting on attacking and gave Mao the choice of victory or death), in peculiar conditions, under the pressure of imperialism and in face of the weakness of local capitalism, the Stalinists took the state power and began "major social transformations". What emerged at the end of these transformations were deformed workers' states analogous to Russia - bureaucratised, with an elite caste in full control, material privileges, sometimes vast, for the parasitic bureaucracy side by side with economic and political oppression of the working class - all maintained on the basis of a monstrous terror, since somewhat modified. These were nearer to the Orwellian nightmare than to any sort of socialism.

Yet because of the elimination of

the bourgeoisie and imperialism, and a serious overturning in the economy, they were no longer bourgeois states. Going beyond capitalism, they did not and have not yet reached the stage of direct workers' power. The world economic and social pressures itemised by Trotsky as the basis of the theory of Permanent Revolution unfolded in a somewhat different pattern, with the bureaucratic caste substituting for the working class in the initial stages: the reason for this was the defeats of the workers' movement brought on by Stalinism, the influence of the Stalinist bureaucratic ideology and practice, the terrible backwardness and poverty of the countries involved - and above all because of the lag in the proletarian revolution in the advanced countries, which would have qualitatively transformed the situation of backwardness and isolation.

Instead of a healthy development of the Permanent Revolution, with the working class as the leader and organiser, leading up to the classic style of the October Revolution, we get a twisted and deformed development leading to the formation, partly under the influence of the existing Russian model, of grossly deformed workers' states. If the Russian revolution degenerated in isolation, the new workers' states never reach the stage of direct workers' power but are warped during birth.

Trotskyists extended and adopted the analysis of Russia to interpret these states as deformed workers' states. This designation by the Trotskyist movement was adopted, not as some in the Lawless faction think, because they were somehow socialist. They were understood to be transitional regimes. Analyses such as state capitalism were rejected because of the impossibility of squaring the new realities of these states with modifications of the old categories such as state capitalism. And also, because to accept such analysis would mean a total change of historic perspective by the world Trotskyist movement, basing its strategic orientation on the conception that this is the imperialist era of wars and revolutions, the highest and last stage of capitalism. If the deformed workers' states are state capitalist, this would demand a total reappraisal right down the line, recognition that we were living in an era of vastly expanding capitalism (the Shachtmanite theory of bureaucratic collectivism had even worse implications, including the exploding of the whole Marxist appreciation of the necessary logic of historic development.) Recognising that only events could close the unended chapter which saw the birth of deformed workers' states, they opted for the most optimistic variant.

The Trotskyist movement, while rejecting the blanket repudiation of the social transformation in the deformed workers' states, which was typical of those who adopted state capitalism in that period (and who took this even to



the point of being "neutral" on Korea) did not stop at saying "the weakness of the enemy in the backward countries has opened up the possibility of coming to power with a blunted instrument." It said that these are partial steps in the proletarian revolution, half-way stepping stations which will have to be completed and supplemented by a future workers' revolution to achieve direct power by the working class and eliminate the privileges and control of the ruling bureaucrats. The Trotskyists insisted that the political revolution necessary in these states likewise demands the preparation of proletarian combat parties to lead them. Hungary, where the spontaneous rising of the workers was smashed is today generally taken as the most, concrete proof of the truth in that position.

Stress

Without this stress on the monstrous incompleteness, the extension of the degenerated/ deformed idea would have meant the collapse of Trotskyism at the feet of the Stalinist bureaucracy. (And this is the logic of the position Lawless expresses in his document). Those Trotskyist groups which neglected this aspect (and there has been a wave of such groups ever since, coming at each turning point) soon stopped being Trotskyist. Those who neglect it today are on the way to formally abandoning Trotskyism.

The superiority of the orthodox Trotskyist position was in avoiding both the Stalinist identification of the revolution with its bureaucratic deformities, losing sight of the workers, and the similar fault of the state capitalists and others who lost sight of the actual gains of the social transformation, The Trotskyists supported these gains critically. They supported absolutely the workers' revolution that was and is ripening against the bureaucracy, and declared that in any clash between the workers and the bureaucracy in the deformed workers' states, revolutionaries must be with the workers - unconditionally. Logically they understood that revolutionary working class parties had to be built within the Stalinist states to lead the political revolution.

It is a fact that, beginning with the Tito-Stalin break, the Trotskyist movement, formally adhering to this position (for the most part) has seen sections of itself interpreting the deformed workers' state theory in such a way as to blur the perspective of the political revolution. Such groups have inevitably become satellites of the actual ruling forces within these states. Many of these groups reason rather in the manner of Lawless in IB4 - the revolution has been made, not only without us ("For Comrade Matgamna's sake I will spell it out - these revolutions were not lead by Trotskyist Parties") but even without the working class. These become disorientated and fall to fellow-travelling with the bureaucracy, usually at first with one national grouping or other, maintaining the orthodox Trotskyist position for the others. Pabloism is the name given to this internalisation within the Trotskyist movement of what is properly called Deutscherism, expressive of a whole trend and a variety of intermediate positions. In 1953 the Fourth International split on this issue.

The Cuban Revolution, a similar development in many ways to the Chinese but without the horrors, occurred from '59 on. How to appreciate this new development naturally presented difficulties to the Trotskyist movement, The SLL and others, reacting against Pabloite-type capitulation to bureaucracy, but stupidly over-reacting, took up the most illogical position imaginable on Cuba, which essentially, considering their view that China is a workers' state, amounted to saying that only the Stalinists could create a deformed workers' state. The old ISFI and the SWP correctly classified Cuba as a workers' state: as an inversion of the SLL, though, they have taken a consistent position of being virtually uncritical of the Cuban leadership. Some of them sometimes even appear to think it is a healthy workers' state - which is nonsense. However encouraging the Cuban revolution compared with the Stalinist horrors of the past, it is still bonapartist and proletarian "democracy" is at a primitive, plebiscitary level at best.

The Cuban regime is an extremely popular form of Bonapartism originating apart from the working class, retaining a separate identity and not subject to direct popular democratic control. Given this sort of regime, the possibility, and in certain conditions the inevitability, of gross Stalinist degeneration exists. Amidst other indication, Trotskyists - albeit strange Trotskyists - have been jailed in Cuba for their politics. And the recent affair of the "micro-faction" of Escalante is hardly suggestive of a model socialist democracy (whatever we think of Escalante).

Without direct soviet-type democracy the Cuban revolution remains incomplete. Nor can there be a vacuum for much longer - and all the recent signs point to a rapid hardening of the hitherto rudimentary bureaucracy. The establishment of soviet democracy would be a political revolution, though it is still hard to estimate the degree of resistance the regime will put up against a workers' drive for a Leninist regime in the country. However unique has been the Cuban revolution so far in its low level of bureaucracy, there was never any guarantee against its growth and hardening. The only guarantee can be direct workers' power. Any "Castroite" illusions, though perhaps for a while less unattractive than, say, Maoist ones, can only be suicidal in the long run.

Therefore simply to say without qualification, without elaborating on the need for a political revolution, that a blunted instrument is enough (i.e. bureaucratized party, Russian army, or peasant armies) in backward countries, is to break with Trotskyism. Its only logic is capitulation to one or another of the ruling bureaucracies. Lawless in fact openly draws the most extreme "Pabloite" conclusions, and if these aren't his conclusions, why did he start his section by saying that a party wasn't always necessary, and why does he continually stress the "blunt instrument"? A blunt instrument will not suffice to gain the victory for the world social revolution, to consolidate healthy proletarian regimes within those states where capitalism has in fact been overthrown. As to why Lawless insists on this blunted

instrument, even to the extent (as we shall see) of reckless misquotation, and exactly what he has in mind, we will see in Part II.

On p22 Lawless does some more spelling for us, again using Germain's book as primer. With the bravery only possible to the stupid, Lawless accuses me, because of my alleged "state cap" line on Cuba, of revising the theory of the Permanent Revolution. We will have to see who revises what.

Guns

Children playing with guns are bound to hurt themselves. When Lawless, whose understanding of the proletarian revolution allows him to be satisfied with the deformed Stalinist monstrosities, raises the question of the permanent revolution, he is playing with dynamite. Of course he just lifts Germain's point that in view of what has actually happened in Cuba the Healyite contention that it is still a bourgeois state means that their appreciation of the progressive role of the bourgeoisie is very high indeed, and makes nonsense of the conception basic to the permanent revolution theory, that they are hopelessly feeble. Naturally Lawless adds his own gibberish, but frankly I haven't time or space to take it all up. But if we take his points, together with his blanket use of the "quotation" about blunted instruments, and his following exposition of the permanent revolution, the only one whose conception of the permanent revolution is called into question is Gery Lawless.

Trotsky understood the conception of the permanent revolution as a process nationally and internationally of world revolution that could last decades. According to the Trotskyist conception, the deformed workers' state is a transitional stage in the unfolding of this process in the backward countries. A deformed workers' state means precisely that it is not completed, the workers have not taken direct power in the sense of the permanent revolution, and bureaucratic forces have substituted for the activity of the working class in the early stages. There is an interregnum. The deformed workers' states, including Cuba, are still in the process of Permanent Revolution, a process which will end only with the establishment of proletarian democracy.

If, like the Healyites, one insists that essentially nothing has changed, then this does put some strains on the permanent revolution theory. If, on the other hand, like Lawless in his document one makes no mention of and

no provision for the completion of the process in the deformed workers' states (either in Cuba or elsewhere), if one says or implies that the permanent revolution has been "confirmed", one is also "revising" the permanent revolution, and in the most deadly way possible. The permanent revolution is a perspective of working class action; its real protagonist on a world scale, and whatever forces dominate at the initial stages, is the proletariat; its conclusion is full democratic world-wide workers' power.

This is Trotsky's Permanent Revolution. If, through a process of permanent revolution "power has been taken" without qualification or mention of political revolution, in the Stalinist countries, then one is foreshortening it by a head. One winds up in the absurd position that the permanent revolution has been confirmed in countries like China, yet still the working class is oppressed by a parasitic bureaucracy and a question mark or denial is placed over the future workers' political revolution. Who is revising the Permanent Revolution?

If continued belief in the permanent revolution demands recognition of its completion in even some of the deformed workers' states, this cuts off the perspective of the workers' political revolution, the revolutionary proletarian element of the deformed workers' states theory. This in turn would make the Permanent Revolution a reactionary theory, and continued adherence to its letter would mean a breach with everything Leon Trotsky founded the Fourth International to fight for.

The Trotskyist Faction and Workers' Fight are Trotskyist. We are hard-line defenders of what we understand as Bolshevism - and even if we sometimes in the middle of the night feel awareness of the incongruity, we can still see no other alternative open to us. We are Trotskyists because we are convinced that Trotskyism is necessary for the self-emancipating revolution of the proletariat. It is the best theoretical preparation for it. Lawless, on the other hand, in his "adherence" to a parody of the Permanent Revolution, seems unaware that his version amounts to a reliance on and identification with other forces, and leads to the anti-Trotskyist conclusion that the permanent revolution can be confirmed while a bureaucracy lives on the backs of the suppressed working class.

The absence of any mention of the orthodox Trotskyist conception of the future of the deformed and degenerated workers' states, and in relation to the Permanent Revolution, shows Lawless's "conception" of the Permanent Revolution as not Trotskyist in any sense: he saves his belief in the Permanent Revolution by ignoring the working class completely. The working class played a marginal role in Cuba, none at all in China - in fact they immediately felt the repression of the peasant Red Army. Yet Lawless presents this as the Permanent Revolution. This is all the



more a crime because of the people in the Lawless faction who understand the workers' state designation in an entirely Stalinist fashion; and also those whose preconceived revulsion from the Permanent Revolution theory will be reinforced by the conception of it put forward by Lawless.

If this is Trotskyism, if adherence to either the deformed workers' states theory or the permanent revolution means we stop with the statement which Lawless stops with, that "power can be taken with a blunted instrument" - without even asking who takes direct power - then we must repudiate Trotskyism in the name of the future proletarian revolution in these countries. Defending the Permanent Revolution against the "secret state caps", Lawless succeeds only in making a very powerful "case" for rejection of the Permanent Revolution by all revolutionary socialists,

Fortunately it is Lawless's conception of both the permanent revolution and degenerated workers' state theories that is wrong. For orthodox Trotskyists the permanent revolution is still a continuing process, the degenerated workers' state an intermediary stage; Bolshevik Trotskyist parties within these countries remain absolutely necessary, no less so that in the capitalist countries, to prepare for the taking of direct power by the working class.

Stalinist

If we take the ideas in IB4 seriously we must conclude that Lawless is not just a Pabloite, or a Deutscherite - but a straight Stalinist! At best a critical Stalinist. He equates, without qualification, the deformed monstrosities such as China and East Europe with the unfolding of a world revolution, removing the need for Leninist parties; and he sees, merely in passing, the deformities and bureaucracy as just blemishes.

Thus he shows that he understands neither the proletarian revolution, nor the permanent revolution, nor, since it is the instrument of the working class in these, the conception of the Party. Midas couldn't avoid turning everything he touched into gold: at the opposite point Gery Lawless cannot avoid turning every political question he touches into a complete and utter caricature. Naturally he must be a caricature "Pabloite" as well.

Throughout the above discussion I have taken without comment the quotation about blunted instruments which Lawless present as a passage from Cannon's *International Socialist Review* Sept '67 article. Lawless seized on my bringing in of Cannon as an easily accessible arbiter in the dispute about what kind of party we need, to try to make Cannon into a general infallible prophet on every question. I of course would not be willing to accept this, and if Cannon took the position that Gery Lawless takes I would attack him for it. Insofar as Cannon's article seems ambiguous towards those in the Trotskyist movement who have a too uncritical attitude to Cuba, I would disagree.

This said, it remains a fact that the passage from Cannon on which Lawless hinges his almost Stalinist line (that a blunted instrument has already led to the victory of the revolution in places like China) is a blatant misquotation. The "passage" from Cannon is in fact a quotation by Cannon from the Reunification Congress documents. As I read the article, Cannon quoted this in order to discuss its inadequacies.

"In its resolution adopted at the 1963 Reunification Congress... the Fourth International has taken into account this variant of political developments as follows: 'The weakness of the enemy in the backward countries has opened the possibility of coming to power with a blunted instrument'.

"However, this factual observation does not dispose of the entire question or even touch its most important aspects. The deformations of the regimes emanating from the revolutionary movements headed by the Stalinised parties, and the opportunism and sectarianism exhibited by their leaderships since assuming power, notably in Eastern Europe, Yugoslavia and China, demonstrate that the need for organising genuine Marxist parties is not ended with the overthrow of capitalist domination. The building of such political formations can become equally urgent as the result of the bureaucratic degeneration and deformation of post-capitalist states in an environment where imperialism remains predominant and backwardness prevails" - *International Socialist Review*, p.29, September-October 1967 □

More online

Ernest Mandel's argument on Cuba referred to by Lawless: bit.ly/em-cuba. More on permanent revolution: bit.ly/sm-prev and bit.ly/cb-prev. More on the Irish Workers' Group and related debates: bit.ly/irelandt □

Remembering Hrant Dink, fifteen years on

By Pete Boggs

On Wednesday 19 January, it will be fifteen years since Hrant Dink, the editor of the leftwing Turkish-Armenian newspaper *Agos*, was shot dead on the streets of Istanbul.

He was not only the enemy of the far rightists who killed him, but also of the Turkish state: at the time of his murder he was being prosecuted by the government for "denigrating Turkishness." In 1914 there were approximately 1.5 to 2.4 million Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire: most of these were murdered during the Armenian Genocide, and today about 50,000-70,000 Armenians live in Turkey.

Dink was painted by his detractors as a rabid Armenian nationalist who hated Turks, but in his writings he was very conciliatory, seeking dialogue between Turks and Armenians. In 2007 this was too much for the Turkish state to accommodate. The situation has not improved since then.

Over 100,000 people marched in

Dink's funeral procession, chanting "We are all Armenians" and "We are all Hrant Dink." However, these slogans were mirrored by the nationalist right - the far right leader Devlet Bahçeli (now Erdoğan's coalition partner in parliament) said "We are all Turks," and fans at football matches shouted "We are all Ogün Samast," in solidarity with Dink's killer. However, this gruesome slogan was echoed by Dink's friend, the author Orhan Pamuk: "In a sense, we are all responsible for his death."

Those who conspired to kill Dink were far from isolated pariahs. Immediately following Samast's arrest, two police officers took a picture with him holding a Turkish flag. The revolutionary socialist group Marksist Tutum (Marxist Attitude) has castigated the government for blaming the assassination on its various bogeymen over the years, first the "Ergenekon" organisation, and later the "Fetullahist Terrorist Organisation" (the government's name for the supposed conspiracy of Fetullah Gülen in Turkey,



a term used in a similar way to the "Trotskyite-Zinovievite Terrorist Centre").

A happier anniversary came last week, the 120th birthday of the Turkish communist poet Nâzım Hikmet. Whether or not they might be overly hopeful, these lines from his poem *The Evening Walk* capture the spirit of Hrant Dink's life's work:

*The grocer Karabet's lights are on
This Armenian citizen has not forgiven
his father's slaughter in the Kurdish mountains.
But he likes you,
because you also can't forgive
those who blackened the Turkish
people's name. □*

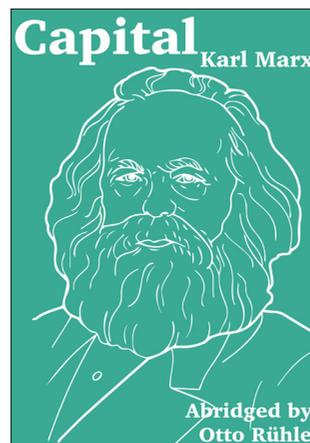
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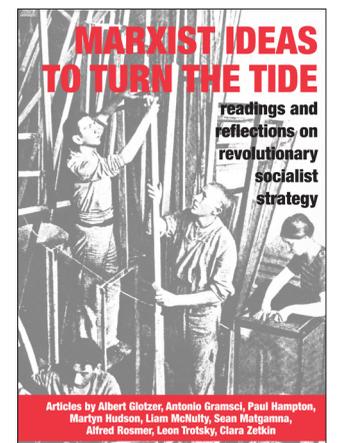
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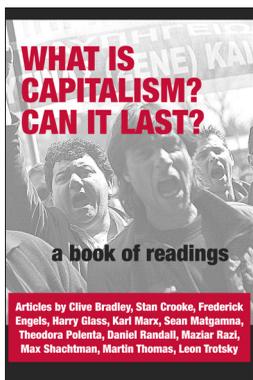
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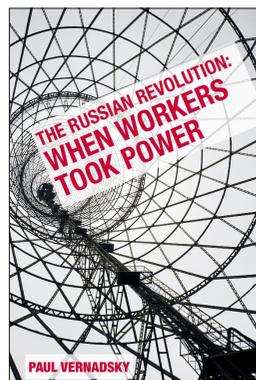
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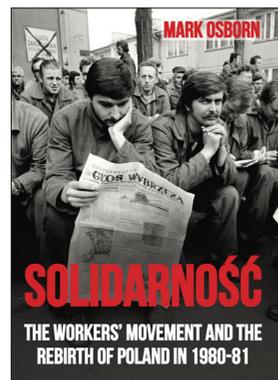
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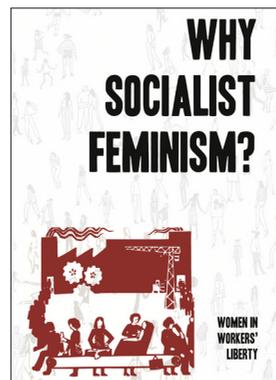
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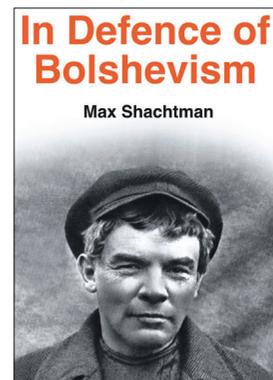
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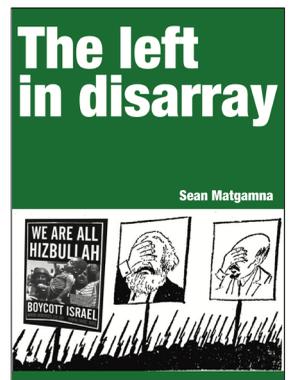
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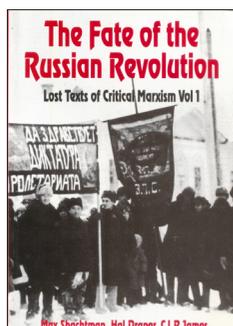
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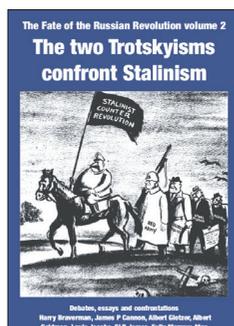
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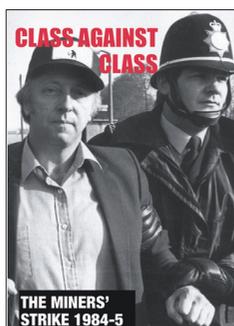
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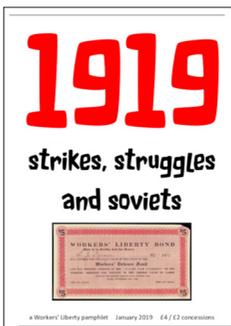
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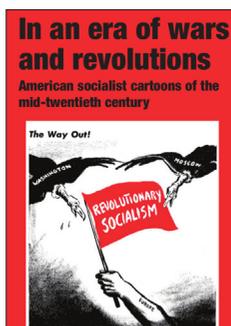
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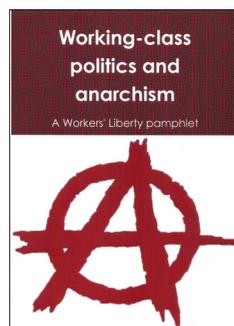
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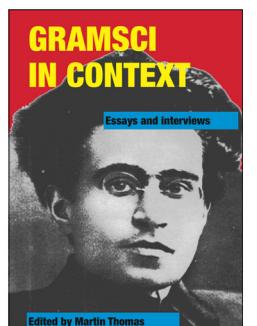
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Tube: act now to forestall cuts



Abridged from Tubeworker

Since the industrial action ballot on the Tube by rail union RMT returned a 95% majority in favour of taking action, discussion has been ongoing amongst workers about the next steps. This has taken place formally, in union branch meetings and region-wide reps' meeting, but also informally, in workplaces across London Underground (LU).

This discussion is an essential part of any campaign. Whatever action we eventually take will be much stronger and more effective if it has been decided upon via a process of genuine democratic deliberation, with an as-large-as-possible number of members feeling investment in and ownership over the strategy.

Tubeworker believes we need to take action as soon as possible. With Covid infections now falling, we can expect to see an uptick in passenger numbers. As footfall begins to rise, our leverage increases. With the latest round of bailout funding from the government expiring on 4 February, a subsequent bailout is likely to have further strings attached. Striking around the time of any new financial settlement could have a positive effect on its content, by showing both our own bosses and the Department for Transport know that further punitive conditions on funding will be met with ongoing resistance.

Some workmates argue for a more cautious strategy, perhaps waiting until after the current phase of the pensions review concludes on 31 March. Their argument is that, currently, all of LU's proposed cuts and attacks are just maybes and potentials; workers will be more prepared to strike when they know we are facing a concrete threat.

The problem with this is that, by the

time the threat becomes "concrete", it's usually too late. Waiting until that point will leave us playing catch up, striking to oppose something that is already on the point of implementation, or even something that has already happened. "Pre-emptive self-defence" is a perfectly legitimate strategy, and a necessary one in this instance.

It's also important to remember that, for many of us, the threats are already concrete. LU has already announced specific cuts on stations, overhauling the Special Requirement Team (SRT) and revenue frameworks to increase "flexibility", and announcing up to 600 jobs to go, across dozens of stations. The company has even announced the specific stations it plans to target for cuts.

But these cuts are not a "stations issue". If they are not stopped, they will spread. All RMT members on LU, wherever they work, have an interest in stopping them.

A second area of debate concerns what form of action we should take. Some argue for an all-out 24-hour strike as an opening salvo, followed by a wait-and-see period to gauge the company's response. Others, including Tubeworker, believe we need to announce an ongoing programme of action rather than a one-off strike. A 24-hour strike on its own will be a token gesture.

At the same time, we shouldn't pretend there are no challenges. We haven't had LU-wide strikes since 2016. There is a whole generation of workers on the job now who've never been on strike.

In that context, it would be naïve to imagine we could just announce a three or four-day strike (or more!) straight away. The confidence to take that kind of action needs to be built up.

Announcing an ongoing programme of action is a good way to do that. A programme of action over several months could include inbuilt escalation, with strikes lengthening from



month to month. It could also involve selective action, with different groups of workers striking at different times, as a way to maintain pressure between all-out strikes.

It's vital we don't approach this dispute passively, waiting for "the union", conceived of as some external body, to "tell us" what to do. We are the union, and it's up to us to decide what strategy we think will be most effective.

Neasden drivers vote for strikes

RMT drivers at Neasden depot have voted overwhelmingly for strikes following the imposition of a new timetable in September 2021.

With a lack of consultation on changes to walking time, an imbalance of turns, and an increase in poor work-life balance, drivers have voted to strike from 11:30 on Thursday 20th January to 11:29 on Friday 21 January and again from 11:30 on Thursday 10 February to 11:29 on Friday 11 February.

While RMT activists continue to discuss how to take the result of the pension and terms and conditions ballot forward, both the Neasden strikes and the ongoing Night Tube action on the Central and Victoria are important to

show management that existing agreements cannot just be ripped up.

Tubeworker urges supporters to join the pickets and calls on Aslef members to refuse to cross and support the dispute.

Night tube strikes continue

Management have again refused further talks with RMT regarding "grade consolidation", i.e. the abolition of the Night Tube driver's grade.

Strikes on the issue are set to continue every Friday and Saturday night through to June, on the Victoria and Central lines.

Continuing to strike over Night Tube hours makes sense, as it's those duties we're aiming to "de-consolidate". But to increase the pressure on management, we need to escalate beyond 24-hour strikes. Several strikes over Night Tube hours, plus two 24-hour strikes, haven't forced concessions from management, so we step up the action.

That could mean longer strikes, or more than one strike in a week. With the strikes involving drivers on only two lines, the strike fund is especially important, as Central and Victoria drivers will strike more often. Donate: bit.ly/nt-fund □

Hostel sit-in opposes closure

By Dale Street

Unite members in the Regina Coeli hostel in Belfast, backed by members of the local Unite Jim Larkin Community branch, are continuing with their work-in despite having been suspended by management.

The work-in began last week, as the latest stage in the campaign to save the hostel from

closure. Regina Coeli House is owned by the Legion of Mary, which has decided to sell the property. In early January staff were told that they were being made redundant and that residents would be transferred to other hostels.

The hostel is the only facility in Northern Ireland which provides women-only accommodation for female victims of domestic abuse and home-

lessness, and for women with mental health or addiction issues.

Residents who have been moved out of the hostel have been sent to mixed accommodation, despite their needs.

Camp

The work-in enjoys the active support of the Unite Jim Larkin Community branch, which provided food and fuel supplies

over the holiday break, to ensure that residents did not go short, and which has also set up a solidarity protest camp outside the hostel.

But at the end of last week management sent letters to staff telling them that they were suspended for supposed "serious breaches of the safety and security" of residents.

And the residents themselves were informed that

they must leave the hostel for places in new mixed accommodation, even though this may not be appropriate to their needs.

Unite is calling on the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, which already provides funding for the services provided by the hostel, to take over the property in order to ensure that services and jobs are not lost. □

669 What we stand for

Today one class, the working class, lives by selling its labour power to another, the capitalist class, which owns the means of production.

Capitalists' control over the economy and their relentless drive to increase their wealth causes poverty, unemployment, blighting of lives by overwork; imperialism, environmental destruction and much else.

The working class must unite to struggle against the accumulated wealth and power of the capitalists, in the workplace and wider society.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty wants socialist revolution: collective ownership of industry and services, workers' control, and a democracy much fuller than the present system, with elected representatives recallable at any time and an end to bureaucrats' and managers' privileges.

We fight for trade unions and the Labour Party to break with "social partnership" with the bosses, to militantly assert working-class interests.

In workplaces, trade unions, and Labour organisations; among students; in local campaigns; on the left and in wider political alliances we stand for:

- Independent working-class representation in politics
- A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement
- A workers' charter of trade union rights – to organise, strike, picket effectively, and take solidarity action
- Taxing the rich to fund good public services, homes, education and jobs for all
- Workers' control of major industries and finance for a rapid transition to a green society
- A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression
- Full equality for women, and social provision to free women from domestic labour. Reproductive freedoms and free abortion on demand.
- Full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people
- Black and white workers' unity against racism
- Open borders
- Global solidarity against global capital – workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers
- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation
- Equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small
- Maximum left unity in action, and full openness in debate

If you agree with us, take copies of *Solidarity* to sell – and join us! □

• workersliberty.org/join-awl

Take energy into public ownership

By Mohan Sen

In two months the number of UK households living in "fuel stress" – spending at least 10% of our budget on energy bills – is likely to treble. Yet Keir Starmer's Labour leadership insists the energy industry that created this mess should carry on as before.

The broadly right-wing Labour, but serious and thoughtful, Resolution Foundation think tank [says](#) that when the cap on bills rises in April the proportion of "stressed" households will leap to 27%. (That assumes an increase of around 50%, to something like £2,000 a year. Energy regulator Ofgem will announce the new cap on 7 February.)

Labour has focused heavily on temporarily removing VAT on bills – which would make a pretty small difference and benefit those with the biggest bills, likely to be better off, the most.

The Resolution Foundation is right that part of the answer must be increasing benefits, i.e. the opposite of what the Tories have been doing. It could

have added: and wages. The energy crisis should be a wake up call to the labour movement to start fighting seriously for decent pay rises for all.

But to prevent similar crises in future and transform the system, we need to change the whole way the energy industry works – and that means changing its ownership.

On 17 January Starmer [reiterated](#), on LBC radio, that he's "not in favour of nationalisation". He also said that in September, on the same day Labour conference voted overwhelmingly to [say](#) that the imperative of planning carbon-emission cuts demands "public ownership of energy including energy companies, creating an integrated, democratic system".

Energy companies have seen their profits fall. Some 30 operating in the UK have gone bust this year. But that comes after years of most companies making big profits – at the expense of people's household budgets and investment in urgent tasks like tackling carbon emissions.

Public ownership would allow surpluses to go into reducing bills and investing to improve the system – and publicly subsidise when and where necessary to prevent crises.

Labour says it wants investments in renewables (and nuclear) and measures like insulation. It wants a windfall tax on North Sea oil and gas producers, who are benefiting from high prices. That's fine, and more generally we need taxation of the rich and big business – something Labour avoids.

But as in social care, childcare and many other sectors, the discussion is about public handouts to profit-making private companies. In energy and elsewhere, we need to shift it towards public ownership, and democratic control.

The labour movement should fight for [Labour conference's policy](#) to be put into practice: for full public ownership of energy, alongside urgent measures to defend incomes and household budgets in this crisis. □

Setback in local government

By a Unison member

The ballot by the public services union Unison of its local government members for industrial action for an improvement on the real-wage-cut 1.75% offer on 2021 pay closed on 14 January in England and Wales.

Unison has not published the results yet, but they are widely available. 70.2% voted for strikes, 29.8% no, on a turnout of 14.5%, far short of the 50%

turnout required under the Tories' Trade Union Act 2016.

The GMB, another union with members in local government, is doing an indicative ballot. Unite is currently balloting members for industrial action, with closing dates from 17 February.

Unison activists had expected a low turnout, but not that low. A lot of things worked against the activists.

- The ballot ran over Christmas
- Postal disruptions due to Covid

(the ballot had to be postal, by law)

- Many members working from home

It also seems that work-from-home and lockdowns have damaged branch organisation in some areas.

There were also misjudgements by the left majority in the union's local government service group Executive. They balloted at the wrong time, failed to disaggregate, and campaigned with nowhere near enough vigour. □

Early Soviet film posters



Kino Eye

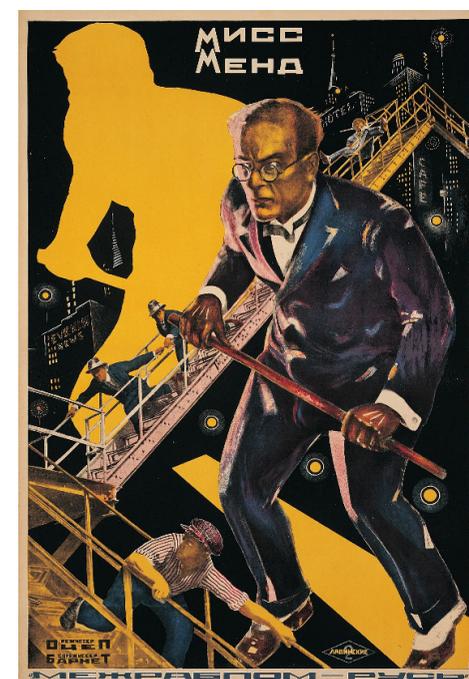
By John Cunningham

Something different this week. If you perused the *Guardian* website on 14 Jan, you may have noticed an [item](#) on Soviet film posters up to about the mid-twenties. It is well worth checking out.

These are among some of the finest examples of graphic art in the twentieth century. Inspired by Constructivism, incorporating elements of dynamism, montage and a striking use of colour, these posters are a stirring accompaniment to the films of the period, the famous like Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (not on the website) and others such as *Miss Mend*, directed

by Boris Barnet (1926). The artists of the posters are no longer anonymous: people such as Georgi and Vladimir Stenberg, Anton Levinsky (who did the *Miss Mend* poster), and Anatoli Belsky. If you want, you can buy excellent quality reproductions of all these posters, and many more, in the collection *Film Posters of the Russian Avant-Garde* by Susan Pack, published by Taschen, although it is very expensive.

You can also have a good laugh. For some reason, the poster for Eisenstein's film *October* (1927) is described as a rarity for that date because it depicts the face of Trotsky: in fact it shows Alexander Kerensky, head of the Provisional Government! □



The poster for *Miss Mend*

Opposing the Bills



**John Moloney, PCS
Asst Gen Sec (p.c.)**

On Saturday 15 January, I spoke at the “Kill the Bill” demonstration in London. The demo protested both the Policing Bill and the Nationalities and Borders Bill. We need an ongoing movement against both pieces of legislation, which represent a slide towards authoritarianism.

The government’s war on migrants has direct industrial implications for our union (PCS) members who work in the Border Force. The government wants our members to drag migrant boats back towards France. Given that these boats are frequently overcrowded and unseaworthy, such a policy greatly increases the danger to the migrants. Our union is pursuing legal action against that directive, and we will consider strike action as well.

Unions need to be at the head of a movement which not only opposes these bills, but fights for democratic transformation in Britain. Central to that is opposing anti-union laws, one of the main brakes on democratic action in this country. Demonstrations and rallies are important, but they need to be connected by week-to-week organising, especially in workplaces. Activists concerned to oppose these bills should also support picket lines, and organise in their own workplaces. In my speech at the demonstration, I specifically highlighted the security workers’ strike at Great Ormond Street Hospital, organised by the UUV, which is set to be the longest strike in NHS history.

We expect the Prime Minister will soon announce the scrapping of all “Plan B” Covid restrictions, partially in an attempt to distract from “partygate”, and partly to appease the elements in his own party who oppose any Covid restrictions whatsoever.

It’s not clear exactly what that would mean, but it will likely lead to a “back-to-the-workplace” push for workers who’ve been working from home. Covid safety in workplaces has been a key issue for us, and we’ve had significant industrial disputes over this issue, for example at the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Authority (DVLA) complex in Swansea. We must be prepared for further fights over this.

Our National Executive Committee meets on 19 and 20 January and we will discuss the planning around our consultative ballot for industrial action over the cost of living. To win we have to energise activists. A key discussion must be around how this can be done. □

67 universities now ready to strike

By a UCU activist

Three days of strikes in 58 universities across the UK were held in December 2021 by the University and College Union (UCU), following two ballots. One ballot was over cuts to the “USS” pensions scheme (which average 35% across the scheme’s membership). The other, on the “four fights” issues: to tackle low pay, inequality, rampant casualisation, and excessive workloads.

Over the Christmas period re-ballots were held in 42 UCU branches who just missed out on taking strike action in December having previously fallen short of the 50% turnout threshold set by anti-union laws. Some branches had live ballots on one of the two disputes, and so in some cases branches now have the legal right to strike on both.

In the USS ballot, 7 of the 22 re-balloted branches now have live ballots, of which 5 could not strike in December. Though many branches missed out by small margins, 82% favoured strike action, and 90% favoured action short of a strike, such as marking and assessment boycotts.

In the four fights ballot, 9 of 38 re-balloted are now able to take action (though here again there is some overlap with the USS dispute), making a total of 67 institutions striking out of 100 universities balloting across the two disputes.

Mixed

These results are mixed. Clearly more effort by the union to better resource re-ballot efforts could have resulted in far more branches with legal strike ballots which would have bolstered the dispute. More branches involved however allows for more on-the-ground organisation, and more vigorous action in the coming weeks and months.

UCU’s higher education committee (HEC) meets Wednesday 19th to decide the next steps in the dispute. This follows on from branch delegate meetings on Tuesday 18th, at which members of the UCU branches with live ballots have elected delegates. These delegate meetings formally however have no power in the union, and do not appear to even be running in line with the union’s own guidance. This is concerning for transparency and democracy.

Clearly now is the time to escalate the dispute. The December strikes were good for rallying support and building density, but it was always going to be the second and third academic terms in which these disputes would be settled.

What form of escalation do we need?



Increasing strike action throughout February, that builds towards indefinite action at the end of this university term. All out strikes might prove necessary to force the employers to budge, but indefinite action needs building towards with increased week-by-week mobilisation.

We should get this underway as early as possible in February. Many ballots run out in May, so we need to consider how and when these should be renewed for the final university term. May and June see the majority of courses undergo final examinations, a period when marking and assessment boycotts would be most hard-hitting. For those to be effective, the national union needs to properly resource branches with training and support over the coming months.

Critical

Critical in all of this is maintaining the link between both balloted disputes. The core reason we are fighting over this range of issues is the marketisation of universities. We should retain the fightback against these issues that are fundamentally linked. Fighting these in isolation would further weaken the solidarity built between members in recent years, in particular between permanent and casually employed staff. Right wing efforts in the union have been focused on ensuring the pensions issue takes priority from here on. Rank and file members of the UCU should fight to keep the disputes coupled, and hold our leadership to account for any attempts to decouple these.

A further consideration is when these national dispute strike dates should take place accounting for ongoing important local UCU strikes. One example is at Goldsmiths where 52 redundancies are still tabled for the end of March. Timing the national disputes could provide significant leverage to this dispute, which would add to the “Boycott Goldsmiths” campaign that was announced in mid-January. □

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Labour: why and how to stay and fight

By Simon Nelson

Speculation (probably concocted) in the *Telegraph* and the *Daily Mail* about a “Corbyn-exit” from the Labour Party has started a new round of debate between “quit” and “stay and fight”.

Solidarity backs “stay and fight”. Jeremy Gilbert’s *Why we shouldn’t leave the Labour Party* article for Momentum (bit.ly/jg-sf) has lots to recommend it. Momentum hosted him, with members of its National Coordinating Group, MPs, trade unionists, and others, for an extended Twitter discussion on 6 January.

Gilbert argues that while membership of the Labour party is individual, it is not about individual consumption of the politics of the leadership at any given time. The issue is not so much the Labour party promising various measures, as what people within the party do collectively.

If the labour movement is to be meaningfully different from liberalism then, as Gilbert rightly says, we should not be “working with a conception of politics which is basically the same as that of the elite professionals who staff our more progressive newspapers, the office of the Leader of the Opposition, and the PR departments of some of our more enlightened corporations”.

But he also gives this valuable focus on collective political action, as against individual disgust at or liking for this or that leader, a skewed electoralist focus, making it depend on the electoral system rather than the Labour Party’s links with the bedrock labour movement.

“You are making a fundamental philosophical mistake. You are thinking of the Labour Party like a football team that you support, but might stop supporting. But in an electoral system like ours, the Labour Party isn’t the team; it’s the very pitch upon which the game is played. To leave the party is not to make an effective point of principle: it is merely to concede the entire match to the opposition”.

“Ultimately, in a political system like ours, there are only two good reasons to be a member of the Labour Party: because you recognise that no other party apart from the Conservatives can form a government, and that a Labour government will always be preferable to a Tory one. As long as those two facts are true, it makes no sense to leave”.

And if Labour is to win an election: “The only way a party can hope to form a government under our system is by winning a plurality of votes in a majority of constituencies, which inevitably

requires such a party to span a wide spectrum of political opinion. Inevitably, this will result in internal conflicts, and a situation in which different political tendencies will have to fight it out for supremacy within parties”.

Gilbert is right that it was naive to believe that Corbyn could switch the party quickly into a unified “vehicle for socialism”. Some of the political confusion and demoralisation among the “returners” or new members of 2015-7 is down to false expectations of easy and quick success. As he says, five years was never going to be long enough to transform a party that had been in the control of the right since the late 1980s.

Five

He misses out, however, on the fact that five years was long enough at least to make sizeable democratic reforms, and the Corbyn leadership largely failed on that. Corbyn and McDonnell had for decades argued for conference sovereignty; but under their leadership, policy still largely came from the “Leader’s Office” and from “announcements” by ministers. Despite Labour conferences getting much bigger, conference decisions were still taken only as advice. As the Labour left re-groups, it needs to rediscover the battle for democracy and conference sovereignty.

That Gilbert has not “got that” is shown by his opening sentences, which say to people who quit because of the Labour leaders’ opposition to Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) against Israel that they are right to be shocked. The composite passed by Labour’s 2021 conference (and much lauded by most of the left, though not us) did not affirm BDS either; and the Corbyn leadership opposed BDS. Gilbert mentions neither fact, referring only to a majority for BDS in an opinion survey of party members. As if conference debates and decisions rank lower than random opinion surveys... (*Solidarity* campaigns vigorously in the labour movement and on the streets for Palestinian rights, but [opposes BDS](#)).

Gilbert is right that Starmer wants left wing members to quit, but our aim should not just be to replicate the hope of the 2017 election and turn it into 1997. Our aim should be to win a majority for socialist politics within Labour, and to use the fight to win that in order to win a majority in the working class and society.

Gilbert invokes the principle of solidarity against individual moralising, but his solidarity is focused on electing a left wing majority on Labour’s National Executive, not on workers’ strug-

gles and what can be done at grass-roots level.

Solidarity has called for “making Labour the party of strikes”: turning Labour Party resources to support strikes - as many in the Sheffield Labour Parties have backed the couriers’ dispute - and convincing militant rank and file trade unionists to join Labour and broaden their fight within the party. We also want Labour positively to help start fires of industrial action wherever workers are ready.

The Corbyn leadership gave some warm words, and some MPs made their way to pickets, but mostly not Corbyn himself; and Corbyn-Labour, too, never campaigned to back strikes. The leadership would tell us “join a union”, but never got round to engaging much with union struggles.

The shift has to be won at grass-roots level: it is not guaranteed by a left-wing top leader, nor doomed by a right-wing one. The more it is won, the more we can democratise the trade unions and their links with Labour party, and thus transform socialist prospects within the Labour party.

Gilbert demotes the link with the trade unions as a key reason for staying in the Labour party. They barely get a mention. For Gilbert, the driving force for being in the Labour party is to get something, anything, that can defeat the Tories and the nationalist right.

Coalition

For him, there is a coalition of people in the Lib Dems, the Greens, Plaid Cymru, and the SNP to be made for that purpose, but in the meantime we must stay with Labour to make formalising the coalition even possible. Gilbert is a long-time proponent of a “progressive alliance” in order to win proportional representation.

Gilbert’s section headlined “Stay and Sulk” recommends that sulking, rather than decrying it. “Direct engagement with local parties... since 2015 has often been fairly futile, especially in constituencies with a sitting right-wing Labour MP [who will surely defeat the left]”. Instead, Gilbert says, leftists should “have been building autonomous organisations for political education, occasional campaigning and general cadre-building, rather than dragging new members with us to dispiriting and tedious branch and constituency meetings”.

So the left in, say, Lewisham Deptford, or Streatham, or many others, should never have bothered? We should leave the CLPs to the right? “Cadres” are better “built” by talking among ourselves rather than getting in there and battling



the right wing? And that goes for right-dominated unions, too? Unison leftists should never have bothered campaigning to win their union’s National Executive?

Truth

The kernel of truth there is that the left could have built (and in fact can still build) genuine Young Labour groups on a constituency level, with their own life, distinct from the standard party routines (which are poor, but, it has to be said, by no means necessarily worse than some standard Momentum meetings). Sadly, for now, the national organisation of Young Labour, though still on the left, seems to exist largely on social media, with no real drive to build locally.

Gilbert makes staying and sulking a positive value: get on with political work in other spheres of your life, but keep your membership, so you can help the left in internal elections and help win the next general election. Momentum’s own presentation of “stay and fight” recommends tenant organising, trade union work, and other campaigns, but little sense of linking Labour activity with these campaigns.

In *Socialist Worker*, Nick Clark disputes Gilbert by saying again and again the real struggle lies outside parliament and that Labour was central to neither the Black Lives Matter demonstrations nor the climate strikes. What about the fact that, though the Black Lives Matter protests and the climate strikes were tremendous, little ongoing week-to-week organisation has come out of them?

No-one argues that street protesters should put all their eggs in the Labour basket. Neither should activists put all into the basket of turning up to one demonstration after another with pre-printed placards. (And in fact, the SWP did not even that with the BLM protests: they were scarcely seen). Week-to-week work to transform the labour movement has to be central. □



Solidarity

For a workers' government

SHEFFIELD COURIERS' STRIKE: "YES, YOU CAN"

JustEat striker Khalil Lange spoke at a Kill the Bill demo in Sheffield on 15 January.

"I am a JustEat driver and we have been striking in the city since 6 December. We worked throughout the pandemic; we were delivering prescriptions, food, Apple products to students who were still working from home; we were delivering an awful lot to people who were isolating – we showed up to their doors.

"We were happy to keep the country going. We figured when it was all done they were going to respect us. They did not. They cut our money by 24% on the base rate and raised their CEO's pay by 1,000%.

"We said: we have had enough. They said that people in our sector could not strike. That we could not organise together, because there is a certain competitiveness: we are always trying to get the next job and we know that there are so many other drivers out there who could just take that work off you. So they thought that we would just roll over and take it and that we wouldn't stand together. We said: 'no'. Since then, we have struck non-stop. We have managed to hold it consistently in this amazing city. Not only that,



but we have been out up and down the country to get many other cities taking strike action with ourselves against Stuart. And we have won some stuff! We have managed to win an issue that we have with our insurance, so that we can [update it] without being suspended for weeks at a time without being able to make money. We are now the only delivery company in the city that will pay drivers for waiting at the restaurant. But they didn't give us our pay back. So we will be continuing the strike. We have no intention of slowing down and no intention of stopping. We are going to strike until we get what we deserve. And after that: Uber's next! After that, Deliveroo! DPD, Hermes, everybody. Anybody working in the gig economy. Carers working for agencies, working from job to job. They think that these people can't strike. We are paving the way

forward to say: 'yes, you can.'"

At this demonstration a collection run by supporters of Workers' Liberty and our friends in the Labour Party, with help from comrades in Socialist Alternative, raised £415 cash.

The couriers' strike in Sheffield continues with overwhelming support from the public, McDonald's staff, and drivers. Now entering the fifth week of action, the strike is taking a toll on workers. Raising more money for the strike fund – by thousands and tens of thousands, not just by hundreds of pounds – is now crucial.

The renewed strike has been taken up by drivers in the North East: Sunderland Stuart workers will strike on Wednesday 19 and Thursday 20 January, stopping all deliveries on the app from 5pm-7pm on those days. □

• Donate to the strike: tinyurl.com/StuartStrike