

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

FOR UKRAINE!

London, March 13



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“Stop the War”? Yes, but with victory for Ukraine!



The carnage and human suffering caused by Russia's predatory war against Ukraine is immense.

Towns in Eastern Ukraine – Kharkiv, Sumy, Mariupol – have been partially destroyed. Hospitals, public buildings, housing estates have been hit by missiles and Russian artillery fire. The battle for Kyiv will take place soon.

549 Ukrainian civilians, including 26 children, have been killed according to the United Nations estimates (as of 10 March), although the actual numbers will certainly be considerably higher. Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky says his armed forces have had 1,300 troops killed since the invasion. The US estimates that five to six thousand Russian troops have died.

2.5 million refugees have fled Ukraine and nearly two million are internally displaced.

In a small taste of what can be expected under Russian occupation the mayor of Russian-occupied Melitopol, Ivan Fedorov, has been abducted and replaced by a Russian stooge, Galina Danilchenko. 2,000 Ukrainians demonstrated in Melitopol for Fedrov's re-

lease. Danilchenko then warned the town's population against “provoking a reaction” and has said she intends to set up a “People's Choice Committee” to administer the area, replacing the elected council.

A second mayor, Yevhen Matveyev, head of the city of Dniprorudne, also appears to have been arrested by Russian soldiers.

The resistance of Ukraine against a superior armed force is inspiring. The Ukrainian people have motivation to fight. They are defending their homes, families and the existence of their country. They know very well that Vladimir Putin does not accept Ukraine has the right to exist as an independent entity.

Ukrainians also understand what Russian occupation will look like because they know all about the regimes in the areas seized by Russia from Ukraine in 2014. The so-called People's Republics of Luhansk and Donetsk are run by gangsters who act under Kremlin orders. These mini totalitarian states use terror and torture against dissenters.

In this war the UK labour movement and left must rally in support of the Ukrainians' right to self-determination. We support Ukraine's fight and demand weapons from Western powers to help Ukraine win, forcing Russia to withdraw.

In the Spanish civil war, when Republican Spain fought Franco's fascist coup, no one on the left, shrugging, even-handedly, demanded “peace” and to “Stop the War”. No, the left said: defend democracy and the workers' movement; support the Republican war. We helped the Republican side.

Franco was not going to stop fighting. The fascist war was relentless. A bland demand for “peace” and to end the fighting could only have meant the Republic giving up.

Likewise, in a strike, we side with the workers and try to help them win. If the workers on strike choose to negotiate with their bosses, that's their right, but it is not the job of socialists to agitate for negotiations as the soft-option way out. No, we fight for solidarity and to help the strikers win.

Sign away

And we certainly do not campaign to “Stop the Strike” and for the workers to negotiate a crappy deal with their bosses.

And yet when the left evades clear support for Ukraine, and instead demands negotiations and diplomacy to end the war, they are doing something very similar. Last week the Executive of the National Education demanded negotiations around the Minsk 2 “agree-

ment”. Leaving aside the fact that Minsk 2 is obsolete and demanding negotiations around it leads us to believe the people who wrote the NEU motion don't know what they are talking about, the intention of the NEU Exec is clear. They think Ukraine should stop fighting and sign a deal with Russia which would sign away their right to determine their own future.

In a strike that would be the behaviour of a bureaucrat, or even a scab.

On the British left, *Socialist Worker* and many of the left groups do not support Ukraine. They organise to “Stop the War” and hold meetings without a single Ukrainian speaking. They have to do that because, so far, they can not find a single “reliable” Ukrainian who will back their policy.

The Ukrainian communities in the UK know very well that something important is at stake in this war: Ukrainian freedom. They understand Ukrainian freedom is valuable, and worth fighting for.

Workers' Liberty has taken sides, and we back the Ukrainian war of self-defence. That follows from supporting the democratic rights of the Ukrainians to self-determination, a right which is being trampled on by Russian imperialism.

Support Ukraine! §

Why we look to workers' “sanctions”

By Martin Thomas

We distrust NATO because we know the big capitalist powers will always give their own interests priority over the rights of less powerful nations. The NATO powers want to push back Putin, but only to restore stable investment and trade conditions, and stall new disruptions.

They pushed Ukraine into signing a pro-Putin deal in 2015 (the now-defunct Minsk 2: see centre pages) and they would do the same again.

The US wanted to bring some (compliant) form of democracy to Iraq by their sanctions and then war there, but the outcome was chaos and deaths.

We have no cause to de-

nounce the trade and financial measures against Putin and his associated oligarchs; but we should not rely on them, nor put ourselves in the hopeless position of (un-listened-to) advisers the NATO states on how to calibrate and target their big-power measures.

Broadly, as the historian Nicholas Mulder [says](#), sanctions “fail more often than not”.

Official sanctions, by definition, are a weapon only for big-power states, and inevitably calibrated by the ruling circles. In some instances the interests of oppressed nations or democratic revolts coincide provisionally, against throw-back imperialists like Putin, with those of the big powers, as when Marx and Engels [wrote](#) in the 1850s about the

prospect of Russia seizing Constantinople (Istanbul): “In this instance the interests of the revolutionary Democracy and of England go hand in hand...”

In those “instances” we do not ask the big powers to stop their action against Putin or his similar; but we recall that reality is more than the instance, we do not trust that action, we do not endorse it. We look instead to workers' solidarity with the people of Ukraine and with the opposition inside Russia, the “[sixth power](#)” as Marx and Engels called it.

Italy

Economic and financial sanctions were “invented” as an alternative to military action after World War One. Their

first big use was against Italy in 1935-6, when it went to conquer Ethiopia. They have been used more since 1945, and especially since 1990.

The revolutionary socialists of 1935 opposed the sanctions, and counterposed “sanctions of the international working class: demonstrations, boycotts, and embargoes” (*New Militant* 5 and 12 Oct 1935). No-one on the left now would uniformly call for the scrapping of all government sanctions or aid. Rather, the problem is the inverse of an argument Lenin had with his comrades in 1918 about accepting aid which might be given to Bolshevik Russia by Britain and France for their own reasons (to counter Germany): much of the left rou-

tinely demands sanctions as “our” answer. *Socialist Worker* [denounces](#) British sanctions against Putin, but not because it is against government sanctions in general; rather, because these sanctions allegedly do not “start from the demands of oppressed people”, i.e. it does not recognise the Ukrainian people as oppressed. “Workers' sanctions”, as our comrades called them in 1935, sanctions with their aims designed and calibrated by the working class rather than big-power governments, have a proud history. They are of great moral and political value, even if their immediate economic effect is slight. §

• Much abridged. More: bit.ly/w-sanc

Open the doors to refugees!

By Mohan Sen

Clare Moseley, founder of the Care4Calais charity, explained the thrust of the Tory government's approach to Ukrainian refugees:

"Ukrainians who spoke to the media, even when they weren't eligible for a visa, immediately received one. Otherwise the Home Office was doing all it could to stop Ukrainians talking to the press."

So determined is the UK government to say one thing (to appear pro-Ukrainian) and do another (keeping out refugees) that Priti Patel and Home Office

officials have repeatedly told straight-forward lies, for instance about the establishment of (non-existent) application centres in France.

As millions of Ukrainians flee, flights to the UK from Ukraine are leaving with empty seats because the vast majority who want to come here cannot get permission.

Of the 2.7 million who've already left Ukraine – with 150,000 fleeing daily – the right-wing Polish government has accepted well over a million. The much richer UK has issued 1,000 visas.

Many governments have treated Ukrainian refugees more generously than they've treated refugees from war in Syria or from other places outside Europe, but the Tories have not even done that. They've adopted different rhetoric – but not a different policy.

Michael Gove has even suggested expropriating the mansions of Russian oligarchs in London to house refugees. The gap between rhetoric and reality is yawning.

Gimmicks like payments to people

who put up a Ukrainian in their home are also intended to mask the reality. And to cover the Tories' continuing drive against all refugees and most migrants, with the [Nationality and Borders Bill](#).

In the midst of the crisis, the Tories remain not only determinedly anti-refugee but pro-capitalist. They have awarded the Home Office's visa contract (and billions of other business) to a private firm, TLScontact, which has laced appalling incompetence and indifference into the framework of the government's hard-faced policies.

The labour movement must take up the call from Ukraine Solidarity and others for refugees from Ukraine and all conflicts to be admitted freely; for the Nationality and Borders Bill to be scrapped; and for restrictions on asylum-seekers and other migrants working and accessing services and benefits to be removed.

The government is on the back foot – despite the lack of counter-argument and pressure from Keir Starmer's La-




bour Party. We must push it into retreat.

The Ukrainian authorities, or elements of them, have also disgraced themselves by their treatment of black and brown people attempting to flee Ukraine. From the start of the Russian invasion well-documented stories emerged of people being blocked or hindered from leaving, and facing brutality, indifference and threats, with black people faring worst of all.

African, South Asian and Middle Eastern people who have made it to Poland have been attacked and hounded by far-right Polish nationalists.

Bring down the borders! Support the rights of everyone fleeing conflict! §



Corrections

The *Solidarity* 626 report on the GDST dispute should have said "Sydenham High" where it said "Sydenham Girls". *Solidarity* 627 was slightly wrong on amendments to the Borders Bill: see bit.ly/cr-bb §

Putin is not a victim of NATO

By Matt Cooper

NATO is a military alliance of big capitalist powers. We oppose it. But to present Putin's invasion of Ukraine as triggered by NATO, rather than by Putin's own imperialism, is a whitewash, as in an article by Nick Clark in [Socialist Worker](#) of 26 February.

NATO was formed in 1949. The first shot it fired in anger was 1994 (over Bosnia). Russia has not been under threat of attack from NATO.

Clark claims "thanks to NATO, the US practically funded the whole colonial war" of France in Indochina (1946-54). In fact US funding to France started in 1950 (along with the non-NATO Korean war) and was less than France wanted. With NATO, the US was trying to

push West European states to put more into defending Europe (as Stalin clamped down in Eastern Europe) rather than into colonial wars.

"Every NATO member must submit to the project of US dominance", writes Clark, but NATO offered no support for the US war in Vietnam. Nor did most of NATO's members. France called for a negotiated peace. In 2003, NATO gave no support to the US-led invasion of Iraq.

Clark claims that NATO's action in Bosnia (1992-1995) "wasn't because the Serb governments were any worse than other groups. The US had decided backing the Serbs' opponents was the best way to extend its influence". The NATO powers had their own

(various) interests in and tactics for containing Serbia, but what triggered NATO action was a genocidal war by Serbian forces against Bosnia Muslims. NATO pushed that back (but didn't make Bosnia a prize perch for US capital).

Clark refers to "NATO's invasion of Afghanistan in 2001". NATO did not invade Afghanistan. The US and UK did. NATO's first involvement was in 2003 when it led the UN-mandated ISAF force, a somewhat different proposition.

Clark claims that "NATO's expansion into eastern Europe... has led to the war in Ukraine today... its clash with Russia is one of two powers competing for markets and political control in eastern Europe."

There is of course a general

sense in which Russia's actions can be understood in the context of Russia as a subaltern power seeking to recreate its sphere of influence, but markets and political influence in Eastern Europe are held by states and corporations, not NATO as a bloc.

The impetus for the expansion came not from the USA, but from the states that had been occupied by the USSR in World War Two. Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia signed the Visegrad Declaration in 1991 seeking "full involvement in the European ... system of security".

Russia at that time was engaged with NATO structures. NATO's Partnership for Peace was established in 1994 to bring in Russia and ex-USSR

republics. In 1997 the NATO-Russia Founding Act was signed, which included a promise by NATO not to station permanent troops or nuclear missiles in the new NATO states.

Since Russia invaded Ukraine in 2014, NATO has responded by moving troops into the new member states (technically complying with the Founding Act by making these non-permanent rotating forces: nuclear weapons have not been moved closer to NATO's eastern border).

But that was NATO responding to aggression from Putin – the exact opposite of what Clark argues – and after it had let similar aggression in Chechnya and Georgia pass without reacting. §

Wrong to cancel vaccines

By Sacha Ismail

Lithuania has [cancelled](#) a donation of 440,000 Covid vaccines to Bangladesh because of the Bangladeshi government's abstention in the UN General Assembly vote on Russia's war in Ukraine. Those who decided on Bangladesh's stance at the UN will not

be hurt by this decision. Those who will be hurt are people with mostly little influence over government policy – the working class and the poor. Only 76% of Bangladesh's population have had one vaccination; 53% have had two; and 2.7% are boosted.

The UK government has just [an-](#)

[nounced](#) the donation of a million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine to Bangladesh. But Bangladesh has 165 million people.

The US has long been highly critical of the country's authoritarian Awami League government and sympathetic to the right-wing, Islamist-linked and

historically pro-American opposition it has suppressed. Russia on the other hand is friendly to the Awami League. (In 1971, the US aggressively opposed Bangladeshi self-determination and supported Pakistan's blood-soaked war; the USSR leant towards the Bengalis.) More: bit.ly/lt-bdesh §

Why has the Morning Star ignored Unite on Ukraine?



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

Last Thursday the executive council of the big union Unite met and passed a resolution on the war in Ukraine.

The resolution “unreservedly condemns Putin’s invasion of Ukraine and stands in full solidarity with the millions of victims of the attack. Unite calls for an immediate cease-fire and a withdrawal of all Russian forces from Ukraine.”

It congratulates union members “such as those at the Stanlow refinery – who refuse to unload Russian oil from any ship regardless of the nationality of the vessel that delivers it, and Unite repeats the call on the UK government to close the loophole that is still making these deliveries possible.” The resolution calls for a “comprehensive programme of support for UK workers, their families and companies impacted by [sanctions against Russia] including wage protection and company support

while alternate supply chains are established.”

The resolution goes on to demand support for “all refugees from Ukraine and elsewhere”, to express solidarity with the Russian peace movement and to note “the numerous reports of links between Vladimir Putin and Far Right parties across Europe, the presence of Russian oligarchs in the UK and huge amounts of Russian money flowing through the city of London, as well as the allegations of Russian financial support for some political parties in the UK.”

Perhaps most importantly, “Unite acknowledges the right of Ukraine to defend its citizens and territory within internationally recognised borders.”

The resolution was immediately released as a statement and can be read in full [on the Unite website](#).

One publication that might have been expected to give prominent coverage to the statement is the *Morning Star*. After all, that paper receives substantial financial support from Unite and has traditionally acted as a mouthpiece for successive leaders of the union.

Its relationship with Len McCluskey was nothing short of obsequious and while things are not quite such a full-on love-in with his successor Sharon Graham, the *MS* has bent over backwards to establish friendly relations and make up for not having supported her to replace McCluskey.

But neither Friday’s paper nor Saturday’s even mentioned the Unite resolution/statement. This despite the fact that Saturday’s editorial is headed “The link between the labour and peace movements is crucial” and praises two unions, the FBU and the National Education Union, “in releasing clear statements of solidarity, opposing Russia’s invasion but also calling for an end to Nato expansion and support for the anti-war movement” (by “the anti-war movement” they mean the Stop the War Coalition).

The FBU statement contains the bizarre line that the war is “a proxy conflict between Russia and NATO prompted by NATO expansion into central and Eastern Europe”, apparently oblivious to the fact NATO is not fighting in Ukraine and has never had

any intention of doing so. The NEU statement also suggested NATO is to blame for the war and, additionally, called for Ukraine to negotiate on the basis of Minsk 2 – a deal which France and Germany pushed Ukraine into accepting in 2015.

Of course, these statements fit in nicely with the line now being peddled by the *Morning Star* and the Stop the War coalition: formal condemnation of Russia’s invasion but with the main emphasis on blaming NATO and calling for Ukraine to negotiate on the basis of Minsk 2.

Unite doesn’t mention NATO or Minsk 2, but clearly and straightforwardly supports “the right of Ukraine to defend its citizens and territory”. The only possible conclusion to be drawn from the *Morning Star*’s failure to even mention the Unite statement is that it’s an embarrassment that runs against the de facto pro Russia apologism of the paper.

Perhaps Unite should start seriously considering whether it wants to continue subsidising this wretched Stalinist rag. §

DSA needs to learn the lessons of SDS



Eric Lee

By Eric Lee

Sixty years ago, the United States was still in the grip of the McCarthy era. The Attorney General would regularly update his list of “subversive” organisations. Communists and other leftists were denied platforms in many places, including universities. Racial segregation remained in place in the Southern states. And young people were largely depoliticised, attending university in record numbers but showing little interest in changing the world.

And then at a conference held in Port Huron, Michigan, the moribund League for Industrial Democracy decided to relaunch its student arm under a new name: Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Few could have expected what happened next.

SDS exploded in growth.

The rapid rise of the civil rights movement, including its more militant wing, combined with the Vietnam War, completely transformed the country – and especially the campuses. Millions of people were in the streets protesting. Every group on the left, including long-dormant groups like the Young People’s Socialist League (YPSL) began to grow. The mainstream Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party played a prominent role in the anti-war movement. But no one experienced anything on the scale of what happened to SDS.

By the end of the decade, it had a presence across hundreds of campuses in practically every state. It claimed a membership of 100,000. Nothing like it had ever been seen before in the long history of the American Left. And then, suddenly, in a puff of smoke it was gone.

SDS had increasingly fallen under the control of extremist groups – some Maoist, some anarchist. At its final convention, it was taken over by a

tiny Stalinist sect known as the Progressive Labor Party. The minority wing went on to form the terrorist Weather Underground. Within a few months, all the competing factions had largely disappeared.

A number of the saner veterans of SDS found themselves in something called the New American Movement (NAM) which together with Michael Harrington’s Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (DSOC) formed Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) in the early 1980s.

Sanders

DSA struggled for decades to grow, and while it had successes here and there, it never really took off. And then, in 2015, the independent Senator from Vermont, Bernie Sanders, decided to run for president. Sanders was a democratic socialist, but not a DSA member.

His campaign reinvigorated DSA and the American Left more broadly. Tens of thousands of new members, mostly

young people with little experience on the Left, joined DSA. The group expanded to reach 100,000 members. In addition to recruiting thousands of political neophytes, DSA also attracted some far Leftists who came into the organisation with their own agendas.

After a short while, very little was left of the organisational cultures and values that had sustained DSA for four decades. And nowhere is this clearer than in a statement adopted by the organisation’s International Committee when Russia invaded Ukraine. Following a denunciation of the Russian aggression, the statement went on to say that “DSA reaffirms our call for the US to withdraw from NATO and to end the imperialist expansionism that set the stage for this conflict”. In other words, America was somehow at fault.

For many members of the organisation, especially those who had been in DSA for a long time, this was the final straw. As one long-standing DSA activist wrote this week,

“I don’t intend to renew my membership as I feel the NPC statement on Russia’s invasion of Ukraine was an utter disgrace. This is not time to blame NATO or the West as this fascist bastard, Putin, dismantles a country and slaughters its innocent civilians... It is with deep sadness that I see what the national organization has become with the leadership in the hands of sectarian purists.”

Those resignations are not yet on the scale of what brought down SDS a half century ago. But the pattern is clear. For the second time in my lifetime we are seeing the hopes of a new American Left, one with mass support among the young, being dashed by ultra-leftism.

Does DSA need to share SDS’s fate? That depends on the organisation’s members, on their willingness to stand and fight for the values that the group once stood for. §

• Eric Lee is the founder editor of Labourstart, writing here in a personal capacity.

Croatia 1991, Bosnia 1992, Kosova 1999, Ukraine 2022

By Sacha Ismail

In Croatia's war of independence (1991-5), about 14,000 civilians died; in the [Bosnian war](#) (1992-5), about 40,000; in the Kosovan war (1998-9), about 12,000. We distrust and dislike NATO; but NATO intervened only very late (a short bombing campaign in Bosnia in September 1995, another against Serbian forces over Kosova in March-June 1999), and accounted for some hundreds among the tens of thousands of civilian casualties.

The lesson for Ukraine is, to be sure, distrust of NATO – but first of all, support for peoples resisting conquest or dispersal (Croats, Bosniacs, Kosovars), and rejection of the excuse used by Serbian imperialism then and Russian imperialism now that they make war only against threats from “the West”.

At the root of the 1990s Balkan wars was a drive by Serbia to dominate other peoples of former Yugoslavia, using the former Yugoslav federal army, of which it had gained control. As in almost all wars, nationalists on all sides committed crimes – but not symmetrically or to the same extent.

The 1999 NATO intervention ended a bloody military drive by Serbia against the oppressed Kosovar Albanians. In Bosnia, NATO and the UN did little to protect the Bosnian Muslim victims of Serbia and Serb nationalists, and indeed hindered their self-defence.

Yet the Stalinist “left” claimed the wars were really all about NATO or the EU or “the West” oppressing Serbia; and non-Stalinists like the Socialist Workers' Party also moved towards that view. (Lindsey German, now of Counterfire and Stop the War, was the central SWP figure then.)

After the fall of Stalinism in Eastern Europe and the USSR, long-stifled nationalities demanded freedom. The federal state of Yugoslavia broke up. The government of Serbia, which had dominated the federation, strove to prevent self-assertion by the other nationalities. It pulled back after only ten days of war in Slovenia, and did not even attempt war to retain North Macedonia; but waged big wars to retain control in Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosova.

It was imperative for socialists and labour movement activists in Croatia and Bosnia to oppose their “own” nationalists and to uphold the rights of minorities such as Serbs in Croatia. But in Slovenia and Croatia, whose secession launched the breakup of Yugoslavia, 94% and 93% respectively, on high turnouts, voted for independence.

“Left-wing” apologists for Slobodan Milošević's regime in Serbia and its

role – [typified](#) by Labour left leader Tony Benn – presented Western powers as pushing to break up Yugoslavia. In fact the big powers generally sought to minimise separation and, for as long as it seemed half-plausible, to press the weaker nationalities to be patient and continue under Serbian domination.

Far from intervening aggressively against Serbia, the big powers imposed an arms embargo – with little effect on the Serbia-run “Yugoslav National Army” with its stock of armaments and equipment and the Bosnian Serb forces allied to it, but a crippling effect on the Bosnian government in the early period of the war.

In 1995 NATO bombed Bosnian Serb forces and imposed the Dayton Agreement, a mess but ending the war and on paper maintaining Bosnia intact.

In 1991-9, the SWP declared a plague on all nationalists, emphasising the right-wing nature of the Croatian government and the fact that the Bosnian government was dominated by a conservative Muslim party with a Muslim-chauvinist wing. In fact there was no symmetry – Croatia and Bosnia were fighting for self-determination and Serbia for domination and conquest.

Spur

The spur for the NATO bombing was Bosnian Serb shelling of a marketplace in the Bosnian capital Sarajevo, killings dozens of civilians. And shortly before that Serb forces committed the worst atrocity of the war, the July 1995 Srebrenica massacre, a week in which 8,000 Bosnian Muslim civilian men were murdered and tens of thousands of women, children and old people expelled.

Overall more than 30,000 Bosnian soldiers and 20,000 Serb soldiers were killed; but the figures for civilians were 31,000 and 4,000. The great majority of rapes were of Bosnian Muslim women by Bosnian Serb men. In Serb nationalist-controlled areas mosques were systematically destroyed; in Bosnian-controlled areas Orthodox churches remained standing. The Serb nationalists were virulently Islamophobic – one reason the far right across Europe rallied to them.

Although Bosnia's government did drift in a Muslim-communist direction, during the war it was a multi-ethnic regime to a far greater extent than the other side.

The SWP were not the worst. The Communist Party and wide sections of the Labour left, including a raft of MPs, formed a “Committee for Peace in the Balkans” with Tory right-winger Sir Alfred Sherman. Sherman has in-

vited Jean-Marie Le Pen to Britain, said the US was turning Europe into “Islamistan”, and declared at the committee's founding meeting that he had “nothing against Muslims” but they were not “civilised” or “democratic”.

The NATO powers intervened much more decisively over Kosova in 1999 – for their own reasons and after years of advising the Kosovars to submit, but the net result of the bombing was to save lives and allow independence to Kosova.

Kosova is the Kosovar Albanian name, Kosovo the Serbian. Unlike the other components of the two Yugoslav states, 1918-41 and 1945-90, Kosova had only ever been integrated by conquest.

It was granted some autonomy in the last years of the Tito regime. In the 1990s the Serb nationalist “Yugoslav” regime of Milošević cancelled that autonomy and, using Serbian settlers, created a kind of apartheid state there. By 1998 Amnesty International estimated that the driving out of Kosovars from government-linked jobs had brought about a 70% unemployment rate in the community. In 1996 the regime settled many thousands of Serb refugees from Bosnia and Croatia in Kosova, in many cases against their will, to shift the demographic balance.

Armed conflict developed between the government and the Kosova Liberation Army (KLA). By the end of 1998 thousands of Albanians had been killed and a quarter of a million out of a population of less than two million displaced. In early 1999 the NATO tried to get Kosovar autonomy restored and subject to NATO guarantee (the Rambouillet accord); Serbia refused.

11 weeks

In response NATO bombed Serbia resulting in (according to Human Rights Watch) about five hundred civilian deaths. The “Yugoslav” army accelerated its campaign of ethnic cleansing, with thousands more killed and 90% of the Kosovar population displaced and a majority expelled from Kosova. After eleven weeks of NATO bombing Milošević gave in and Kosova became effectively independent. (It formally declared independence in 2008.) In 2000 a democratic uprising in Serbia overthrew Milošević.

The KLA murdered and drove out Kosovan Serbs, Romani and critical Albanians. Socialists condemned that. Yet the Kosovars were fighting a struggle for national liberation and perhaps survival. While advocating no trust in NATO, we [backed the Kosovars](#) and [advocated Kosovan independence](#).

The [SWP](#) shifted towards a more

strongly pro-Serbia stance, denouncing NATO's intervention as the main problem and actively opposing Kosovan independence. It formed a Stop the War Coalition with forces including [Stalinists and Serb nationalists](#) to pursue this line.

For two decades now the SWP has attacked left-wing criticism of extreme-right political Islam and Islamic reaction more generally as Islamophobic. Yet in the 1990s it not only failed to defend the Muslim Bosniacs and Kosovars against viciously Islamophobic assault, but falsely depicted the KLA as Islamists and denounced them as such.

Now, since the 9/11 attack and the “war on terror”, for the SWP Islamism has come to be deemed anti-imperialist because in conflict with Western governments.

Serbia's wars in ex-Yugoslavia and Russia's in Ukraine and elsewhere have features in common, including the attempt to delegitimise and demonise other nationalities, presentation of victims as oppressors and the attempt to use Serbian or Russian communities beyond their borders as an excuse and mechanism for warfare. (Also the bravery of internationalists in both countries opposing their governments.)

Today Serbia and Serb nationalists in Bosnia are, Belarus aside, Putin's strongest allies in Europe. Although a desire to join the EU has restrained it somewhat, the Serbian government has opposed effective action against Russia, for instance providing the only remaining avenue for Russian flights into Europe.

Those on the left who saw the main problem in the Balkan wars as NATO intervention are naturally disposed to see NATO intervention as the main problem in Ukraine – even when Western governments are *not* intervening directly and the aggressor is not the localised imperialism of Serbia but the strong imperialist state of Putin's Russia, fresh from its wars in Chechnya, Georgia, and Syria.

Socialists do not advocate Ukrainian nationalism any more than Croat, Bosnian Muslim or Kosovar nationalism. But we advocate national rights. We do not write oppressed nations out of the picture by seeing the conflicts in Croatia, Bosnia, Kosova, or Ukraine in terms of siding with whomever opposes NATO, or the UN, or the USA, and thus redefining Serbian or Russian imperialism as a sort of anti-imperialism. The positive compass of democracy and working-class interests mandates support for Ukraine on the same basis as for Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosova. §

Tax the rich to shift from fossil fuels!



Environment

By Stuart Jordan

In *The Housing Question* Engels mocks the French millionaires of his day for pouring their money into Germany, thus financing a hostile military power. The actions of the French capitalists were rational as an investment decision. But their unrestrained profit-seeking undermined France's imperialist interests.

A similar dynamic has played out between Europe and the Putin war machine. Europe gets 40% of its gas, 27% of its oil and 46% of its coal from Russia. Over many decades, trillions of dollars of European money has flowed into Russia's state-owned fossil giants. The European capitalist class's commitment to private profit-making has prevented the essential transition to renewables, locking us into dependency on ecological fossil fuels and the good graces of an imperialist butcher.

Attempts to impose sanctions and

European panic about energy security has revealed the extent of this dependency. Despite bold statements on fossil fuel sanctions, the UK will spend £2 billion on Russian Liquid Natural Gas before the end of 2022. Last year it was estimated that Europe spent \$1 billion a day on Russian coal, oil and gas. The EU's plan to reduce dependency on Russian gas by two thirds by the end of 2022 will still mean billions pouring into Putin's war chest.

The neoliberal commitment to privatisation has had further perverse effects on energy security. 25% of Germany's strategic gas reserve is owned by a subsidiary of Gazprom; according to the German government these storage facilities have been "systematically emptied" in the run up to Putin's invasion. As part of the EU's plan to free itself from dependency on Russian gas, there is a rush to fill this underused storage with piped gas from Azerbaijan and LNG from Qatar, Egypt and elsewhere.

The EU's energy transition plan involves a shift to carbon intensive coal and biofuels and boosting North Sea gas and oil extraction. The bogus idea of gas as a "bridging fuel" to renew-

ables will be dropped with a plan to stick with coal and speed up the transition. On renewables, Germany has announced 30bn euros for a clean energy transition. The Tories have signalled that they want to increase on-shore and off-shore wind farms. But with greater state intervention and resourcing much faster transition is possible.

These dramatic policy shifts and the (deliberately delayed) sanctions on Russian oligarchs are the belated efforts to tame the havoc caused by decades of neoliberal policy. They raise a question about how far governments might be pushed towards bolder measures. George Monbiot has [advocated](#) some in the *Guardian*.

More: Britain's 29 million homes produce 15% of all emissions. According to government figures, retrofitting the average home to make it net-zero would cost £26,000 per house (or £676 billion in total). Current government plans involve spending just £60 million on retrofitting the least energy efficient social housing with a further £150 million available in Home Upgrade Grants. 2.5 million households are due to join the UK's four million "fuel poor" house-

holds when the energy price cap is raised in April. The current approach will leave millions facing a very cold winter whilst delaying the necessary action on climate change.

As the capitalist class panic about energy security, the labour movement should to take up growing calls for a "war mobilisation" to transition to renewables and nuclear. During WW2, governments abandoned the free market and shifted to centralised economic planning. They imposed progressive taxation and the top rate of income tax peaked at 99.25%. Today, the UK's billionaires have a collective wealth of over £597 billion and pocketed over £106 billion in 2020-2021 alone. Much of this wealth is not taxed at all. WW2-style taxes would still leave them with unimaginable riches. Even modest measures, such as a 5% wealth tax or nationalising the energy firms, would release billions for a just transition.

The IPCC warn that "any further delay in concerted global action will miss a brief and rapidly closing window to secure a liveable future". The labour movement should take this seriously and act accordingly. §

Anti-feminist backlash in South Korea



Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

Yoon Suk-yeol, a right wing former prosecutor, has won the South Korean presidential elections. The self-described anti-feminist promised to abolish the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family during his campaign, alleging that it was discriminatory to men and that women no longer experience sexism. He also stated that the penalty for falsely reporting sex crimes would be increased.

The election saw a high turnout, with roughly 77% of the eligible population voting. Sim Sang-jung, a women's and labour activist and the only woman presidential candidate, commented: "Sexism clearly exists in South Korean society... Yoon's stated objectives risk fanning dangerous misogynistic sentiment and will, ultimately, damage South Korean democracy. We already know the historical consequences of election campaign strategies that encourage hate".

The People's Power Party has made scrapping the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family a core campaign pledge. The ministry provides family-based services, education, assistance to victims of gendered and sexual violence and social welfare for children and spends about 0.2 percent of the country's annual budget.

The anti-feminist movement in South Korea grew virtually simultaneously with the country's #MeToo movement. This misogynist movement claimed South Korea was suffering from "reverse sexism" as a result of mandatory military duty for males. A suicide prevention portal dedicated to young women, whose suicide rates increased by more than 40 percent during the pandemic, was temporarily taken down due to hacking attacks accusing it of disregarding men's lives.

South Korea's Constitutional Court ordered the National Assembly to revise abortion regulations that are punitive and damaging to women and girls by the end of 2020, including decriminalisation. The South Korean government announced new draft

laws on 7 October 2020, that would allow abortions up to 14 weeks and, in rare cases, up to 24 weeks, but would still make abortion illegal outside of these exceptions.

A recent study into attitudes on sexism showed 58.6% of Korean men in their 20s stated they strongly opposed feminism, with 25.9% rating their opposition as a 12 on a scale of 0 to 12. Women are now joining the workforce at higher rates (nearly 70% of Korean women between the ages of 25 and 34 work), but South Korea has the greatest gender pay gap of any OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) nation with a pay disparity of 35%.

In March 2020, Korean authorities cracked down on a network of Telegram chat rooms where users were viewing, sharing, and trading non-consensual images of large numbers of women and girls, including images of acts of sexual violence, acquired through coercion and blackmail, and prosecuted multiple chat room operators. Within a month, 2.7 million individuals signed a petition demanding that the chat room owners'

and all members' identities be made public.

The Korean labour movement has taken up sexism in recent industrial disputes. The Chanel Korea Workers Union, a member of UNI affiliate KFSU, announced on 21 December 2021 that they have successfully won wage increases and inked a new collective agreement with Chanel Korea management. The strike

involved 390 union members out of 480 workers, and it saw 60 stores out of 85 Chanel-operated stores having to stop operations.

The union had previously struggled to negotiate over working conditions during the pandemic, unsatisfactory handling of serious allegations of sexual harassment cases in the workplace, and wages. §



Upcoming meetings

Workers' Liberty meetings are open to all, held online over zoom (unless otherwise stated).

Wednesday 16 March, 4.30pm: Students – Fighting antisemitism on the left – Brunei Gallery, SOAS, London

Tuesday 22 March, 6pm: Students – Organising couriers, gig workers – The Pack Horse Pub, Leeds, LS2 9DX

Wednesday 23 March, 2pm: Students – Trans rights, struggle and backlash – Brunei Gallery, SOAS, London

Friday 1 – Sunday 3 July: Ideas for Freedom 2022, Camden School for Girls – book now!

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

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Support childcare workers in India

By Mohan Sen

On 10 March the Lieutenant Governor of Delhi, the nationally-appointed official who oversees the territory of the Indian capital, invoked the Essential Services Maintenance Act (ESMA) to ban a strike by thousands of childcare workers.

This relatively little-used Act applies to government workers. As Shivani Kaul, president of the workers' union [DSAWHU](#) (Delhi State Anganwadi Workers and Helpers Union), points out, the workers do not have the status of public employees: they are treated as volunteers who receive honorariums. This is in fact one of their main grievances. So which is it?

The union has suspended the strike and is challenging the use of ESMA in court. The ban is supposed to last six months. But Kaul says that if they do "not get justice from the judiciary, we will violate ESMA through civil disobedience and resume the strike".

The Lieutenant Governor was appointed by India's president, a member of the far-right, Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People's Party, BJP). But invocation of ESMA is essentially at the discretion of the state government. Delhi's government is run not by the BJP but by a supposedly "progressive" anti-BJP party. More on that below.

The DSAWHU says 117 workers have had their employment terminated for participation in the strike. 90 of those were on 13-14 March. The union is challenging that in court as well.

The Delhi "anganwadi" workers, numbering 22,000, overwhelmingly women, had been on strike since the start of February. Probably more than

that in the neighbouring state of Haryana have been out even longer.

Anganwadi is Hindi for "courtyard shelter". It is the name of a type of childcare centre started in 1970s as part of government programs to combat child hunger and malnutrition. Indira Gandhi's government expanded welfare services under the slogan "Remove poverty" (while also defending capitalism and progressively turning to more and more authoritarian forms of rule). The All India Federation of Anganwadi Workers and Helpers says Narendra Modi's BJP government is trying to "dismantle" this system of "Integrated Child Development Services".

Anganwadi centres often provide a range of services – childcare, preschool education and activities, nutrition education and supplementation, contraceptive counselling and supply, health education and some basic healthcare, plus connections and referral to other public services. Their workers have played a central role during India's terrible trials in the pandemic.

£96 a month

The Delhi workers' grievances are numerous, including:

- Pay. The anganwadi workers get 9,678 rupees a month (about £96) and helpers 4,839 rupees. The Delhi governments said this would go up to 12,720 and 6,810 from March but the union says this has not been implemented. In any case they are demanding 25,000 and 20,000.

- Employment status. The workers are demanding to be recognised as public employees, bringing benefits like pensions, medical services, paid leave and travel allowances. (This is a demand they say has been won in the

territory of Puducherry.) They also want the government to provide support for any worker who tests positive for Covid.

- An end to "forced labour" where they are pushed around and constantly threatened with termination by officials.

- If I've understood rightly there are also issues about the closure of local centres, threatening to undermine the nature of the service the workers provide.

The workers' struggle has, as you might expect, highlighted what their dire situation means for the children they care for (and their children) and for society, as well as them.

As part of its attempts to pose as a champion of women's rights, mainly focused on [bashing Muslims](#), the Modi government has also raised the slogan *Beti bachao, beti padhao* ("Save the girl child, educate the girl child"). The strikers have emphasised the hollowness and hypocrisy of this.

The Haryana government is run by the BJP, but the Delhi government is run by the Aam Admi ("Common Man") Party. A vaguely leftish party founded out of anti-corruption protests in 2011, the AAP has been in office in Delhi since 2013 and dominated the city's politics since 2015. It has just swept elections in Punjab, where last year's [farmers' battle](#) began, for the first time. A thoroughly middle-class party, it did at least oppose the BJP's Hindu chauvinism, champion secularism and expand some services. More recently, however, it seems to have developed a personality cult around its leader Arvind Kejriwal and turned to subtle pandering to Hindu nationalism to win wider support.

During Hindu [pogroms](#) and [mass protests](#) against Hindu chauvinism and the BJP's anti-Muslim changes to citizenship laws in 2019-20, the AAP government of Delhi essentially sat events out, using the fact it does not control the police as an excuse to say and do little. Farmer activists also said it refused to aid their protest camps on the borders of Delhi during the 2020-21 struggle.

Yet, while collaborating with the national BJP government against the anganwadi strikers, the AAP has accused the strike of being a front for the BJP!

The DSAWHU says that it has denied a platform to representatives of both the BJP and Congress (the liberal, neoliberal party which previously dominated Indian politics and is still the main national opposition). Moreover it points out:

"Rajendra Pal Gautam [the Delhi child welfare minister, who has just resigned] and his Aam Aadmi Party themselves have proved that it is BJP's 'B team' on issues of conversion, CAA-NRC, Kashmir issues, temple politics etc [various issues of Hindu nationalist agitation].



Aam Aadmi Party is continuously doing soft saffron [Hindu chauvinist] politics. He openly played the same card even during the election campaign in Punjab. When such double faced... people accuse others of being with BJP, even a child can understand the reality of their allegations...

"Anyone who knows the history of our [union] which was formed in 2015 knows our truth. Our union has been against the communal fascist politics of BJP and RSS [the fascist militia-type organisation linked to it] since the beginning. Its chairman Shivani has been a leading leader of the anti-CAA-NRC [citizenship law changes] movement in Delhi... Even during the communal riots spread in Delhi, the peace brotherhood campaign was run under the leadership of Shivani and the riots were calmed down by taking to the streets."

The Delhi government has apparently attempted to use another union, part of the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) run by the Stalinist/social democratic Communist Part of India (Marxist), to marginalise the DSAWHU.

The DSAWHU says: "We won't be scared by your threats, we will take what we came for". And: "Kejriwal government beware!"

This strike is important on many levels – workers' rights, social provision, children's rights, women's rights, the shape of society after the pandemic... It also seems to underline the truth that only the working class can seriously challenge Hindu nationalism and fascism in India.

It comes in the aftermath of the [farmers' victory](#) (in November), the first serious defeat for the Hindu right since Modi came to power in 2014.

Haryana was, along with Punjab, the epicentre of the farmers' protests. And now farmer activists have joined the anganwadi strikers on their protests. Youth and student activists have also rallied in support in both Delhi and Haryana. Let's find ways to make solidarity here. §

Indian election results

In February-March over a hundred million voted in elections in five Indian states – the first since the farmers' victory over the BJP government in November. Along with hundreds of millions in India, we hoped that BJP had been pushed back. In some respects it has been; but not that much.

In the giant state of *Uttar Pradesh*, the BJP lost dozens of seats – but not enough to lose its majority. Its percentage of the vote increased very slightly from the 2017 state elections – though it was down substantially from the 2019 national general election vote in the state (40% 2017; 50% 2019; 41% 2022). Once again the BJP has benefited majorly from first past the post, but its support does seem to have held and rallied.

In *Punjab*, the launchpad of the

2020-21 farmers' struggle, the BJP did about as badly as last time, winning only two seats. The slate linked to sections of the farmers' movement failed to win any. In a political earthquake, India's once dominant Congress party, which had controlled the state, lost most of its seats; the conservative Sikh party Shiromani Akali Dal also lost out. The supposedly progressive Aam Admi Party, previously in power only in Delhi and third in support in Punjab last time, swept the election.

In the relatively small state of *Uttarakhand*, next to Uttar Pradesh, the BJP lost seats but held on comfortably. In the small state of *Manipur*, the BJP actually gained ground. In the small state of *Goa*, ditto. §

Why the “Minsk deal

By Dale Street

On the day Russia invaded Ukraine a statement issued by the Stop the War Coalition (STW) called on the British government to “encourage a return to the Minsk 2 agreement, already signed by both sides, by all parties as a basis for ending the crisis in relations between Ukraine and Russia.”

A post-invasion statement issued by the GMB trade union – far better in all other respects than the STW statement – likewise called for “a non-violent solution to this conflict, with a return to the Minsk agreements providing a framework.”

And a statement issued in the name of the National Education Union – so wretched that it had to be speedily withdrawn – also called on “all parties to honour their obligations under the Minsk 2 agreement and under international law.”

The Minsk Protocol (Minsk 1) dates from September of 2014. It was forced upon Ukraine under the combined impact of Russian military advances in the east of the country and the pressure of European states.

In the summer of 2014 Ukrainian military forces were making slow but steady progress in the conflict with the breakaway Donetsk and Lugansk “People’s Republics”, which had been organised, financed and armed by Russia.

With the separatist forces facing defeat, Russia now intervened directly, sending troops and heavy artillery into Ukraine, as well as bombarding Ukrainian border areas from artillery stationed in Russia.

In late August some 400 Ukrainian soldiers were killed in a single day as they attempted to retreat from Russian troops stationed around Ilovaisk. It served as a warning of the carnage which the joint separatist-Russian forces could and would wreak in the event of further fighting.

At the same time, west European

states were ready to lean on Ukraine to sign up to some kind of peace deal, restabilising their relations with Putin’s Russia and containing the conflict in eastern Ukraine.

The result was Minsk 1, signed off by representatives of Ukraine, Russia and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). By and large, Minsk 1 gave Russia what it wanted.

It maintained the fiction that Russia was not directly involved in the conflict but merely a “mediator”. It committed Ukraine to passing a “law on special status” under which power in the “People’s Republics” would remain in the hands of gangster warlords – who were also to be granted immunity from prosecution.

Clause ten of the agreement required the withdrawal of “illegal armed groups, fighters and mercenaries from the territory of Ukraine.” But, in reality, this meant nothing.

It made no mention of withdrawal of Russian troops (whose presence was denied by Russia anyway). And the “People’s Republics” likewise denied that there was anything illegal about their military forces: They supposedly consisted entirely of local “anti-fascist” volunteers.

Worst of all, Minsk 1 allowed the “People’s Republics” to be party to “an inclusive nationwide dialogue”. In practice, this meant that Russia, as the patron of the “People’s Republics”, would have a direct say within Ukraine’s politics.

Clause one of Minsk 1 provided for an immediate ceasefire to be monitored by the OSCE. But the fighting continued – and quickly escalated.

In January of 2015 Donetsk “People’s Republic” leader Zakharchenko stated that his puppet state would “not make any attempts at ceasefire talks any more” and would “attack right up to the borders of the Donetsk region.”

Backed up by Russian troops, separatist forces seized control of Donetsk Airport after prolonged and bloody fighting in early 2015 and advanced to take control of Debaltseve, a crucial transport hub linking Lugansk and Donetsk.

While the fighting escalated, Russia took steps to create functioning state structures in the “People’s Republics”. New leaderships were imposed, their army and police forces were restructured, fake “elections” were held to provide a veneer of democratic legitimacy, and a Russian inter-ministerial commission took responsibility for their economies.

Ukraine was again forced back to

negotiate under pressure of Russian-backed military advances and European states wanting a quick deal.

As Oleksiy Danilov (secretary of Ukraine’s National Security and Defence Council) later put it: “They (Minsk 2) were signed under the Russian gun barrel – and the German and the French watched.”

According to Ukraine’s Ambassador to Britain, speaking more recently: “These agreements were imposed on us by force by Russia. The most hated word right now in Ukraine is ‘progress’ when it is pronounced in a French or German accent, when we understand that something has to be done at our expense.”

Duncan Allan’s widely quoted [analysis](#) of the Minsk agreements says:

“The German and French leaders seem to have been so keen for a ceasefire that they assented to political provisions at odds with Ukraine’s existence as a sovereign entity and, probably, its EU integration. This explains why the Kremlin used military power so demonstrably as talks were in session: to intimidate Western interlocutors who, it judged, lacked the stomach for confrontation – and who might be induced to get Ukraine to the fold.”

The academic Samuel Charap [adds](#): “Minsk 2 was a victor’s peace, essentially imposed by Russia on Ukraine at the barrel of a gun. Ukraine’s forces had just been routed, and Germany and France were pushing for an end to the bloodshed.”

Coercing

But Charap’s answer is for the US to take over the role of coercing Ukraine: “Where the US does have significant leverage is with Ukraine. Rather than focusing on coercing Russia, Biden should also push Kiev to take steps towards implementing its obligations under Minsk 2... Biden may also have to push Ukraine to take some painful steps toward compromise in order to save it from calamity.”

Vladislav Surkov, Putin’s aide for Ukraine at the time of Minsk 2, later described the agreement as “the first open geo-political counter-attack by Russia (against the west).” It was part of a “reconquest” of Ukraine and “legitimised the first division of Ukraine.”

Looking to the future, Denis Bilous, a member of the Ukrainian socialist organisation Social Movement, has highlighted the circumstances under which Minsk 2 was agreed:

“One of the results of the current (January 2022) standoff will likely be growing pressure on the part of Germany and France to make Zelensky

implement the political part of the Minsk agreements – just as they made the previous Ukrainian president, Petro Poroshenko, sign these agreements in 2015.”

Minsk 2 was not an alternative to Minsk 1. It was a continuation of its predecessor – in the wrong direction.

It maintained the fiction that Russia was not party to the conflict and failed to require the withdrawal of their troops. Leaders of the breakaway republics were again guaranteed immunity from prosecution.

The armed conflicts which they had initiated as part of the Kremlin’s strategy to undermine Ukrainian sovereignty were simply referred to as “events”. And the creation of a demilitarised buffer zone (specified by clause four of Minsk 1) no longer figured on the agenda.

Ukraine was to adopt a new constitution by the end of 2015. The “law on special status” – a temporary measure under Minsk 1 – was to be incorporated into law and into the new constitution. Far-reaching powers were to be devolved to the “People’s Republics”.

These included the powers to appoint the heads of prosecutors’ offices and courts, to create “people’s militia units”, to promote “cross-border co-operation” between the “People’s Republics” and Russia, and to keep in office local council deputies who had been elected in (sham) “snap elections”.

Minsk 2 benefited Russia in other ways as well. Above all, it failed to specify the sequence in which different clauses should be implemented. From the outset, this allowed Russia to denounce Ukraine for its supposed failure to implement Minsk 2 (i.e. the Russian version of how it should be implemented).

Russia has claimed that the first stages of implementation should be granting the “People’s Republics” political autonomy and the holding of local elections. In practice, that would mean ‘elections’ under conditions of Russian occupation, with those “elected” effectively having the right of veto over decisions by the Ukrainian parliament, including on whether to join NATO and/or the EU.

Successive Ukrainian government, by contrast, have argued that the first stages of the agreement’s implementation should be the withdrawal of “all foreign armed forces” and restoration of Ukraine’s control over its eastern border with Russia. Only then would free and fair elections be possible.

Like its predecessor, Minsk 2 opened with a clause providing for a ceasefire.

More online

Unite to defend Ukraine: bit.ly/u-l-u

Listen to Ukrainian and Russian

socialists: bit.ly/u-r-s

Putin’s lies: bit.ly/p-n-u

Misuse of “main enemy is at home”:

bit.ly/kl-h-f

Ukraine’s history: bit.ly/u-cen

Russian troops out of Ukraine:

bit.ly/t-o-u

Putin vs Lenin: bit.ly/vp-vl

Socialist Appeal and Socialist Worker:

bit.ly/sa-sw

als” are no answer

But Putin had other priorities than an immediate end to the fighting.

The ceasefire was due to start on 15 February 2015, three days after the agreement had been signed off. The reason for the delay was so that the separatist/Russian forces could complete their seizure of Debaltseve, which they had now encircled.

As Putin put it: “Those in the kettle will certainly try to get out; those who have boiled that kettle will try to collect the foam.” Separatist leaders stated that they had “a moral duty” to capture Debaltseve, and that Minsk 2 “did not apply” to Debaltseve.

But Debaltseve had still not been captured by 15 February. The fighting continued, with the town falling on 18 February. The contempt which the Russian/separatist forces displayed in ignoring the requirement for a ceasefire as of 15 February set the pattern for future years.

Both Ukrainian and Russian/separatist forces have repeatedly breached the ceasefire since then. From 2015 until Russia’s launch of a full-scale war on Ukraine in February 2022, there has been a simmering low-level of military conflict, punctuated by a total of 20 ceasefires

Russia did nothing to implement the clause in Minsk 2 requiring the withdrawal of “all foreign armed forces” – unsurprisingly, given its plans for an eventual full-scale invasion.

It consistently hindered the work of the OSCE in attempting to monitor implementation of the (nominal) ceasefire and the (nominal) withdrawal of heavy weapons by the “People’s Republics” required by clause two of Minsk 2.

After some limited releases of prisoners in the years immediately following Minsk 2 (and a token gesture in April 2020), it has done nothing to implement clause six of Minsk 2: “the release and exchange of hostages and illegally detained persons based on the principle of ‘all for all’.”

Driven

It has driven through changes in the “People’s Republics” – the supposed leaders in Donetsk and Lugansk are no more than Moscow’s glove puppets – which amount to a process of creeping integration into Russia.

In breach of Minsk 2, elections were held in the “People’s Republics” just two months after the agreement had been signed off. The results, as Bilous has put it, “were not even falsified but simply invented.”

The “People’s Republics” also formally adopted constitutions which claimed sovereignty over areas under

Kiev’s control. Again, in breach of Minsk 2.

Over 800,000 inhabitants of the “People’s Republics” have been issued with Russian passports, i.e. Russian citizenship. Higher education institutions have adopted the curricula used in Russia. The Ukrainian language has been banned in schools.

In addition to the replacement of Ukrainian television broadcasting by state-controlled Russian television channels, the Kremlin version of current affairs (and world history, in the form of the “Russian world”) is promoted by outlets of the Russian Centre organisation (Russian-state-funded) and the Russia-Donbass Integration Committee (also Russian-state-funded).

Russian political parties are now active in the “People’s Republics” and contest elections there, especially the Just Russia Party, the Russian Communist Party, and Putin’s United Russia Party. Those inhabitants of the “People’s Republics” who have Russian citizenship also take part in Russian elections.

Minsk 1 and Minsk 2 are dead. The former died when Minsk 2 was signed. Minsk 2 itself arguably died the moment it was agreed, because it was never intended by Russia, the force which dictated its terms, to be implemented as a way to resolve the post-Maidan conflicts (for which Russia itself bore responsibility).

Or maybe the date when it was due to be implemented, when Russian/separatist forces blatantly ignored its ceasefire provisions by continuing with their offensive Debaltseve?

Or two months after it had been signed off, when sham elections were held in the “People’s Republics” in breach of the provisions of Minsk 2?

Or some time between February 2015 and February 2022, as the accumulated result of the succession of measures taken by Russia to integrate the “People’s Republics” into Russia?

Or on 21 February this year, when Putin declared Russian recognition of the “People’s Republics” and announced that Minsk 2 was dead: “The Minsk agreements are non-existent now. Why should they be implemented if we recognise the independence of these republics?”

Maintaining his record of the previous seven years, in the same speech Putin blamed Ukraine for the collapse of Minsk 2:

“They (Ukraine) are not going to implement (Minsk 2). And the top officials have already said it in public. What is to be expected then? Shall we wait for the continuation of sufferings of these

people, this genocide of nearly four million people who are living on these territories?”

Putin again blamed Ukraine in another speech the following day: “The Minsk agreements were killed long before yesterday’s recognition of the Donbass republics. And not by us, not by these republics, but by Kiev’s current authorities.”

Even if Minsk 2 had not already been dead before Putin’s recognition of the “People’s Republics” as independent states, that declaration killed it off definitively, and with no prospect of revival.

As the Kharkov Human Rights Protection Group put it in a statement issued two days after Putin’s act of recognition, on the eve of the invasion:

“By ‘recognising’ its proxy republics in the Donbass and openly invading Ukrainian territory [by declaring that it would send troops into the “People’s Republics”], Russia has unilaterally withdrawn from the Minsk Agreement. Since Russia has long used this flawed agreement as a lever of pressure on Ukraine, this is not necessarily a bad thing.”

Even if there had been any space for some faint hope that Putin’s act of recognition did not mark the end for Minsk 2 – although there was no such space – Russia’s invasion three days later further underlined the demise of what was really an already long-dead Minsk 2.

Minsk 2 had required the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Ukraine. But as of 24 February Russia did the opposite. It poured another 150,000 troops into Ukraine.

Minsk 2 was forced on Ukraine by Russian force of arms, with Germany and France acting as Russia’s willing accomplices.

Its carefully crafted ambiguities and lack of clarity provided Russia with a pretext to mount a prolonged propaganda war against Ukraine for its failure to implement the agreement in line with Russia’s interpretation of it.

Russia ignored its provisions as soon it was signed, and continued to do so for the following seven years.

Then, having decided to escalate a long simmering war against Ukraine into full-scale invasion and conquest, Putin dropped any pretence of commitment to implementation of Minsk 2 – while simultaneously blaming Ukraine.

And yet the Stop the War Coalition and its fellow-travellers and camp-followers advocate a “return to Minsk 2, already signed by both sides.”

Not even the reference to the agreement having been “already signed by



both sides” is particularly accurate: Russia signed Minsk 2 on the claim that it was not one of the sides in the conflict but a mediator, a sort of ACAS with nuclear weapons.

In calling for a return to Minsk 2 the Stop the War Coalition continues to live in a parallel political universe in which NATO is trying to seize Ukraine and the west bears primary responsibility for the Russian invasion.

Its “solution” for ending the war is for Ukraine to return to the victor’s peace of seven years ago, one which institutionalised the fiction of Russian non-involvement in the conflict, gave Russia everything it wanted (at that time – now it wants far more), and gave Ukraine nothing.

In his article criticising the position on the war taken by the Democracy in Europe Movement 25 Denis Sultangaliyev writes of how “the Western left continues to shock with their ignorance and disregard (of Ukraine’s rights).” §

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Connolly as Home Rule

Introduction: the phases of James Connolly



**Unexpurgated
Connolly**

By Sean Matgamna

In the course of his political activity James Connolly went through a number of phases, and sub-phases as well. First, in the 1890s, there was the Social Democratic Federation and more or less conventional Social Democracy of the era. The SDF advocated "Legislative Independence for Ireland", not a republic. This is what Marx himself had argued for – the 1782 affair, only democratised. There is no evidence that Connolly disagreed. Later, from 1898, he would call his newspaper in Dublin *Workers' Republic*.

From the turn of the century Connolly was an adherent of Daniel De Leon's variant of Social Democracy, which emphasised the inadequacies of the big Social Democracy of Europe. Positively, the De Leonites came to advocate the industrial One Big Union that would eventually take over industry. They advocated the simultaneous building of a tight and narrow revolutionary party. In practice this came to be only a vehicle for De Leon's views. There was little or no democracy. After DeLeon's death in 1914 the group became a dead sect devoted to his memory.

Connolly fought the De Leonites on three issues, and then a fourth. On one issue, Connolly was certainly right – whether or not trade union action could raise real wages. Connolly said yes, it could.

On the issue of religion and socialists' attitude to marriage and sex, Connolly was out of step with the Marxists of his own time and of ours. Besides, all the evidence says

that Connolly himself was a Catholic, sometimes perhaps a lapsed Catholic.

The fourth issue was that of the tight revolutionary party. Over-reacting against De Leon, Connolly plunged into the looser Socialist Party of Eugene Debs, which was certainly the living strand of US socialism. He also plunged into the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), which at about the same time had broken with De Leon in the direction of anti-politics.

It is sometimes hard to know which of Connolly's attitudes of one period persisted into the next. On industrial unionism there is no such problem: Connolly remained an advocate of it for the rest of his life.

Loose

In his last phase in the USA, from 1908, Connolly worked for the IWW and Debs's Socialist Party (there was an overlap). He came back to Ireland to be organiser of the Socialist Party of Ireland, which remained small, loose, and ramshackle. From 1911 he worked for Jim Larkin's Transport Workers' Union. In 1912 he helped found a loose, broad Irish Labour Party.

From late 1910, when the Liberal Government became dependent on the vote of the 80 odd Home Rule Irish MPs, a Third Home Rule Bill was unavoidable. The Liberals and the Irish MPs had a majority in the Commons; the Lords now lost their veto power over the Commons and from 1911 had only a two-year delaying power.

In Ireland everyone prepared for Home Rule government, the Labour Movement too. It looked like a Home Rule government in Dublin would stop the payment of MPs and other progressive measures the Liberals had recently introduced.

Yet the anti-labour-movement Home Rule MPs passed as pro-Labour in Britain. A number of Connolly's articles of that period try to explain that and to tell British socialists in the Labour Party what they should insist on in the Home Rule Bill. Labour MPs tended to argue that the Irish had elected Home Rule MPs to Westminster, and the proper democratic course on Irish issues was for them to back the elected MPs.

Connolly, Jim Larkin, and their comrades disagreed. Some things were more important than an abstract principle of "let the Irish decide". You can only make sense of Connolly's famous interaction with William Walker if you keep in mind that it was part of Connolly's preparation for securing a reforming Irish Labour Party presence in a Home Rule parliament.

Given that Connolly went through a series of phases, you cannot understand any phase without understanding what the phase was and what Connolly was thinking generally in that phase.

For instance, Connolly went through at least three phases between the outbreak of the Great War at the beginning of August 1914 and his death on the morning of 12 May 1916. He always had a hatred of Britain and the Empire. Immediately at the start of war, for about two weeks, Connolly was a revolutionary socialist, following the line of the Basle Manifesto of the Second, Socialist, International against all imperialist war.

He abandoned that later in August, and took sides actively with Germany in the war, adopting German war aims. The original plan of the rising involved German troops in Ireland. Roger Casement landed on the Kerry coast, off a German craft, on Good

Friday to stop the Rising, planned originally for Easter Sunday, because he knew for certain that the Germans were not coming.

And then there was Connolly's third phase, when they knew that that Dublin would have to rise alone.

Connolly after the first phase was not anti-war but pro-German. The original plan was that the rising would be in conjunction with German aid. It is much easier to explain away the Easter Rising of 1916 as a "blood sacrifice" than to see it as what it was originally planned as: an action in conjunction with Germany, an action in the Great War.

Ironies

Understanding the real Connolly, politically unexpurgated, falls victim if you ignore the phases and the shifts. For instance, it is impermissible to quote Connolly in his first anti-war phase, or his articles telling potential British recruits that war was horrible, to summarise his view on the war.

Laying all of Connolly out before you, so to speak, and picking and mixing is not permissible. That way you only reproduce a picture of your own politics.

Connolly was a living, thinking human being who learned, evolved. From the turn of the century he had a healthy De Leonite awareness that all was not well with the big Socialist Parties of the International, parties which collapsed in 1914. It is one of the ironies of Connolly's life that from late August 1914 he came to agree with the majority of the German party (the International's "model" party) that German imperialism had to be supported against the British empire. §

The United Irish

By James Connolly

One of the earliest of the pioneers of the modern Socialist movement in Scotland – poor Bob Hutchinson – whose death was recorded in *Forward* some months ago, was wont to say on Glasgow Green when interrupted by some of the rival gangs of Irish disputants – "The Irish question, do you say! Why, we are all Irish, only some of you came here nine months ago, and some nine hundred years ago".

This somewhat sweeping generalisation as to the component elements of the population of Scotland rises to my mind when writing these notes from Ireland. It, I hope, is sufficiently true to lend to these notes an interest which cannot be inspired by the writer, whose personality is unknown to the majority of the readers, and it is sufficiently untrue to permit of the possibility of writing of Ireland as of a country unknown to the readers and thus in enlisting his or her curiosity.

The present writer has spent great portion of his life alternating between interpreting Socialism to the Irish, and interpreting the Irish to the Socialists. Of the two tasks, I confess, that while I am convinced that the former has been attended with a considerable degree of success, the latter has not. At least as far as the Socialists of Great Britain are concerned, they always seem to me to exhibit towards the Irish working-class democracy of the Labour movement the same inability to understand their position as to share in their aspirations as the organised British nation as a whole has shown to the struggling Irish nation it has so long held in subjection.

No one, and least of all the present writer, would deny the sympathy of the leaders of the British Labour movement towards the Labour and Socialist movements of Ireland, but a sympathy not based upon

reformist, part three

Irish League, the Labour Party, and “the pleasant relations”

understanding is often more harmful than a direct antagonism. A case in point will serve to illustrate my meaning as well as to provide a guide and a warning for the future.

Upon the passing of the Local Government Act establishing household suffrage for the municipalities and local governing bodies of Ireland, in 1898, the Trades Councils, and other trades bodies all over this country proceeded to form independent Labour Electoral Associations for the purpose of running Labour candidates against the nominees of both the orthodox Irish political parties.

At once, as was natural, the Capitalist politicians took fright, and in press and on platform the Irish workers were denounced for daring to abandon their “natural leaders”.

But the Irish workers—who knew the Irish political cliques and their leaders at first hand, and appraised them accordingly at their just value, went on with the nomination of their candidates, practically every trades council in this country being actively engaged in the

work of fighting for Independent Labour Representation.

The small British Socialist press which then existed had given up till this a cordial approval of this hopeful development of the political side of the Irish Labour movement,

But so ominous did this movement appear to the interests which control the Home Rule Party that eventually the present leader of that Party took the field against it, and in a carefully reported speech, declared that “Labour and Nationality must march together”, meaning as all his hearers knew, as everybody in Ireland knew, that Labour must abandon its political adventure as a separate cause, and must be content to seek its fortunes as a subordinate issue in the Home Rule camp.

Labour in Ireland did not pay much attention to this pronouncement against it, but the responsible leaders of the Labour movement in Great Britain immediately seized upon this phrase and in press and on platform it was heralded in that country as a “magnificent pronouncement of the Irish Party in favour of Labour”.

A more ridiculous perversion of fact it would be hard to conceive, but all during these fiercely contested Local Government elections in Ireland; where Irish MPs were brought down in shoals into the municipal wards to fight against the nominees of the Irish Trades, these same MPs had no better weapons in their armouries than the eulogies which in England were being lavished by responsible Labour men upon the Home Rule leaders — eulogies based upon and only made possible by a wresting of the language of a politician from all relation to the circumstances which inspired it.

If some one had said in England that “Labour and Liberalism must march together”, no one would have or could have construed it into a declaration of Liberalism in favour of the Labour movement, but all

would have recognised it as a declaration against that political independence of Labour which is the very essence of the movement. So it was with the former declaration in Ireland, but the British Socialists, accustomed to think of the Home Rule Party as a minority party, utterly misunderstood its attitude and language when speaking in Ireland as a majority party deprecating all political activities not under the control of its officials.

This is but one sample out of many that could be quoted of the difficulty of making the comrades in Great Britain understand the totally different conditions in Ireland, and also understand that these conditions naturally produce catchwords, phrases and rallying cries which bear no relation to the conditions which prevail in Great Britain.

The Labour Party in Parliament tries to surmount this difficulty by, so to speak, establishing Home Rule in its relation with Ireland. Thus if a trades body in Ireland writes to the Labour Party asking that a certain question be raised in Parliament, if that question pertains to a district represented by a member of the Home Rule Party, the answer sent to the trades body generally is that the question has been turned over to the Irish Party: and that should that party raise it in the House, the Labour Party will support it.

As the Irish Party desires to pose in Ireland as opposed to all class divisions and as a cold matter of fact is generally bossed locally by small sweating employers, slum landlords and publicans, the MP from the district never brings the question up, and the incident never is made public, but only serves to accentuate “the pleasant relations which exist in the House between the Irish Party and Labour”. Ahem!

As a result of these “pleasant relations”, there was no one in the House to fight for the inclusion of Ireland in the Meals for

Necessitous School Children Act, and thus while reformers in England are now fiercely fighting for the right to feed children during holidays, the school children of Ireland are yet denied the primary right of being fed during school hours.

A threat from the Labour Party to wreck the Insurance Bill unless Ireland was included in the Medical Benefits would have secured that, the best part of the Act, for Ireland, but that would have disturbed the pleasant relations also, and Ireland was left out, and a totally inadequate, unworkable Act without that provision foisted upon this country.

Ireland is to-day the battle-ground almost daily of fierce industrial disputes. In these disputes there are continual outrages by a police and constabulary over whom no popularly elected body in city or country exercise the smallest control, but in no case are these outrages upon Labour made the subject of Parliamentary questions by the Irish parties. Strikers arrested in industrial disputes are tried and sentenced by resident magistrates drawn entirely from the possessing classes, but although their findings and sentences are usually a travesty upon law and an outrage upon justice, the smug serenity of our lawmakers is never troubled by any question pertaining thereto.

Labour and Nationality now as in 1898 are marching together (in Parliament) and the fierce battles of the labourer in the towns of Ireland for bread must not disturb their pleasant relations.

O, yes, the Home Rulers are great democrats — in England; great friends of Labour — in England; heroic defenders of the common people — in England. But in Ireland. Ah! that is another matter.

During the lock-out of the girls in Carroll’s Tobacco Works at Dundalk at the beginning of last year, a girl picket was arrested for striving to in-

duce another girl not to black-leg. She was summarily tried and sentenced to prison on a charge of “indecent conduct in the streets”. No unclean language or action had been attributed to her, and the police evidence simply stated that she had persisted in picketing, yet the cold-blooded scoundrelism of the authorities framed a charge against her calculated to blast her character and ruin her whole life. If she had been a daughter of an Irish farmer fighting an Irish landlord in Land League days, the then Irish Party would have made the world ring with their denunciations of such character assassinations, but she was only an Irish working girl fighting an Irish employer, and none of the Irish heroes who on the platforms of the Liberal Party in England are fighting for the “Glory of God and the Honour of Erin” had time to waste on such as she.

Small wonder that we in Ireland are working to establish a Labour Party of our own. We have no fault to find with the Labour Party in Great Britain. We recognise that it has its own problems to face, and that it cannot well be expected to turn aside to grapple with ours. And, Heaven knows, these problems are serious enough to require the most earnest study and undivided attention of men on the spot. They require more study and attention than can be given by men absorbed in the urgent problems of the greater population across the water. §

• *Forward*, 3 May 1913: another, final, section is in the 1975 pamphlet [Ireland Upon the Dissecting Table](#). The full article is [on our website](#).

• **Page 12:** more Connolly, from “Notes from Ireland: bigotry and agitation”, in *Forward*, 10 May 1913, full text [on our website](#). The part of the article here, distinct in subject from the rest, was previously reproduced in the 1975 pamphlet [Ireland Upon the Dissecting Table](#).

Part of a series

- Connolly and the Catholic “Orange Order”, [Solidarity 613](#)
- On the yellow unions in Ireland, [Solidarity 614](#)
- The churches and the mobs in the battle for human freedom, [Solidarity 615](#)
- What is the sympathetic strike?, [Solidarity 622](#)
- Who was James Connolly?, [Solidarity 623](#)
- Connolly’s critique of De Leon’s Marxism, [Solidarity 624](#)
- Connolly as Home Rule reformist part 1, [Solidarity 625](#)
- Connolly as Home Rule reformist part 2, [Solidarity 626 §](#)

Many-headed opposition

By James Connolly

When this issue is in the hands of *Forward* readers, the delegates of the Irish Trades Union Congress will be gathering at Cork. There is no question of the first importance upon the agenda, such as has been in the past two Congresses, but it is felt nevertheless that a battle royal is pending.

That our readers might understand the position, it is as well to state that for some years back the main interest of the Congress has centred around the proposal to establish an Irish Labour Party. At last year's Congress at Clonmel this proposal was carried, much to the chagrin of the reactionary elements.

The opposition to the proposal came from most strangely assorted forces. The Hibernians opposed it, the Orangemen opposed it, the All-for-Irelanders (William O'Brien's followers) opposed, and the members of the Belfast Branch of the British ILP opposed it in the name (wonder of wonders!) of international solidarity. To this wonder-

ful combination of Orangemen, United Irish Leaguers, O'Brienites and Socialists (?) were opposed the Irish Trade Unionists who were sick of all the old parties, and had already fought them in municipal elections, and the Socialists, who adhered to the policy of the Socialist Party of Ireland. That policy was the policy of encouraging the working class of Ireland to work in harmony with the national aspirations of Ireland, but to go on with the formation of a definite class party to fight all the old parties upon the political field.

Although the Labour Party resolution, as it was called, was carried, circumstances have prevented it taking other than a municipal direction so far, and it is believed in some quarters that an effort will be made at Congress under some guise to have the question re-opened.

If it is re-opened, we may expect again to see Belfast Socialists who still retain their affiliation with the ILP of Great Britain, uniting with Orangemen and Hibernians to strangle the infant

movement of an Irish Labour Party. Already that element was the chief agent in securing by a majority of one the withdrawal of the Belfast Trades Council from the Irish Trades Congress. As the Orangeman says "We will not have Home Rule", so the Belfast dissenters from the position accepted by most Socialists in Ireland say "We will not have an Irish Labour Party". So he repeats in the Labour movement the same feelings of hatred and distrust of his Catholic brothers and sisters, as his exploiters have instilled into him for their own purposes from infancy.

The great majority of Socialists in Ireland have united under one banner and one name, that of the Independent Labour Party of Ireland, quite distinct from the Trade Union organisation, but also in harmony with it. But a small section of Belfast Socialists still holds aloof, unconsciously influenced by old prejudices against the rest of Ireland, and trying to fool itself into the belief that it is opposing the development of the political movement of the working

class in Ireland – in the interests of internationalism. The kind of internationalism that is most eloquently advocated by Sir Edward Carson and his followers under another and more genuine name.

It will be interesting to see this young infant of the political movement of Labour in Ireland grapple with this many-headed opposition at Cork. §

• In *Forward* of 24 May 1913 Connolly reported that the "many-headed opposition" had not in fact appeared. "As briefly indicated in my notes last week [in fact, two weeks before], the Irish Trades Union Congress at its Cork meeting had the usual heterogenous opposition to meet, but I was unable to anticipate that said opposition fell as flat as the proverbial pancake. The minds of the Irish toilers are turned too definitely towards the idea of independent political action as a class to be diverted from their purpose by any possible amalgamation of reactionaries and doctrinaires". §



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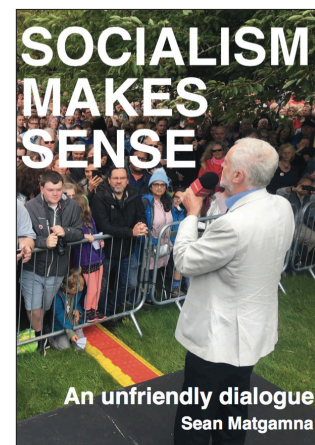
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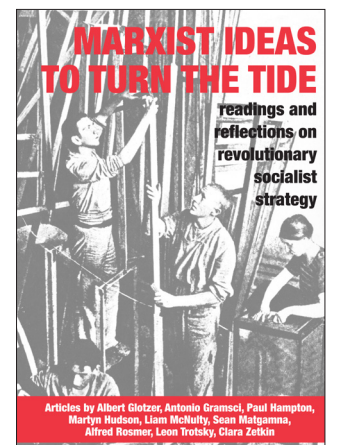
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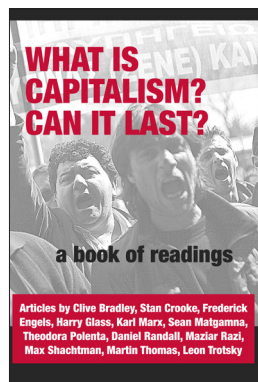
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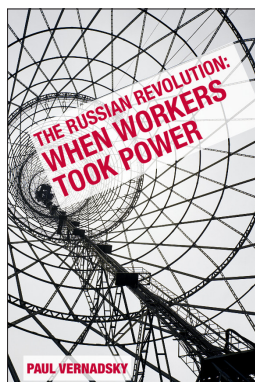
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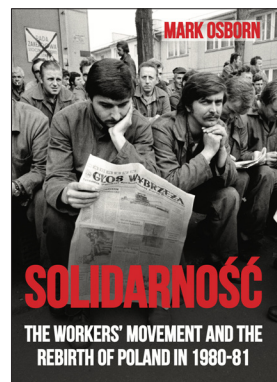
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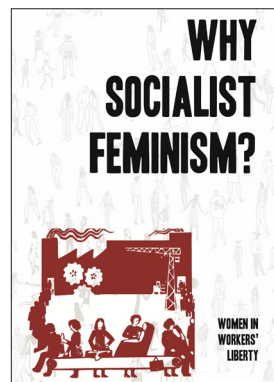
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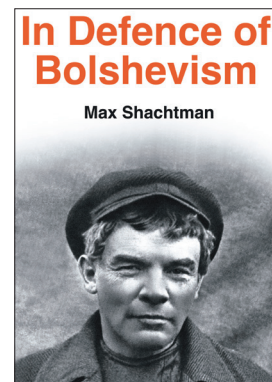
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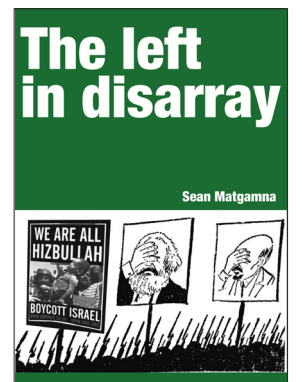
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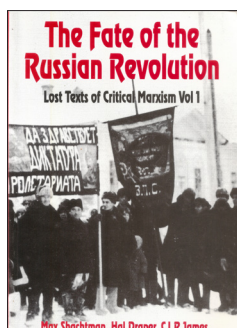
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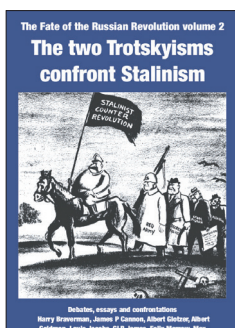
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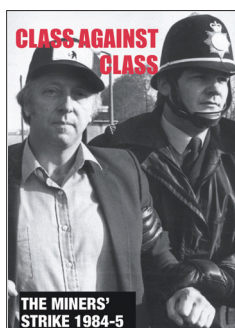
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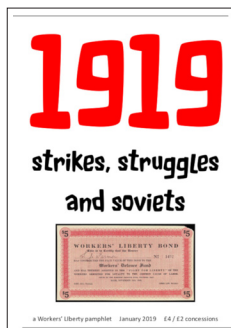
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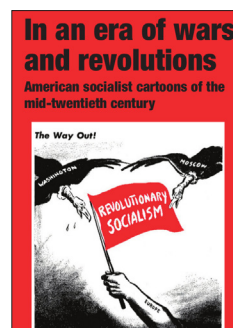
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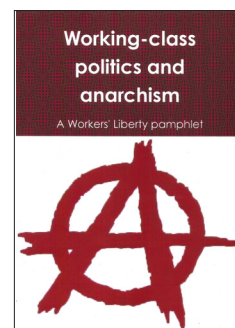
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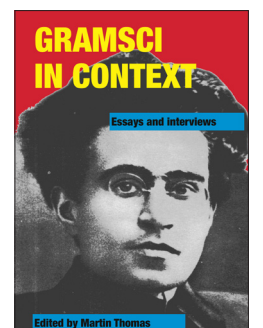
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Strike for equal pay claims



By Katy Dollar

Unison members in Glasgow City Council have voted to strike in their ongoing dispute over equal pay compensation payments.

Some 96% of Unison members voted in favour of the strike action, beating the anti-union laws threshold with a turnout of 52.5% among just under 9,000 workers.

Some days earlier GMB workers also voted for strike action, while Unite the

Union will be balloting its members on industrial action on 14 March.

The dispute has its roots in a £500 million settlement agreed with council staff in 2019, for which a new pay and grading system was required to account for the many workers – primarily women – subject to unfair pay. The settlement followed the largest equal pay strike in British history.

Despite pay claims up until March 2018 being settled by the 2019 deal, there are still new claims covering earlier periods, coupled with demands of interim payments for after 2018. Approximately 18,000 claimants are waiting on a settlement for post-2018

claims, and roughly 5,500 new claims for the pre-2018 period have been made.

The joint legal team for the claimants – comprised of Action4Equality, Unison, GMB and Unite – met with council lawyers last week.

This week, Unison announced that the council has changed its position and stated that the 2019 deal will now be applied to new claims. No progress on interim payments, which are now the main focus of the dispute.

Unison branch deputy chair Lyn Marie O'Hara said: "This is a huge vote for action and a clear message to the council to resolve the dispute. The Uni-



son branch will now request authorisation for strike action from our NEC (National Executive Committee) and be liaising with our sister trade unions on the next steps in the industrial dispute.

"The trade unions will also continue to receive regular updates from the claimants' joint legal team on the current negotiations with the council lawyers. The council should now listen." §

Starbucks union drive accelerates

By Angela Paton

Across the USA, the unionisation of Starbucks continues at lightning speed, with at least 129 locations currently in the process. It's had a knock on effect in other coffee chains, including independent chains in Detroit, Michigan and Wisconsin.

Starbucks has hit back with bullying, harassment, even sackings of union organizers. Seven employees involved in a union drive in Memphis, Tennessee, were fired five weeks ago, after launching their union campaign on Martin Luther King Jr Day.

"We were fired over mundane things. The things we were fired for are things that nobody has been fired over

in the past, and we believe that they fired us because we were too loud for Starbucks and they had to shut us down the only way they'll know how", say the original union organising committee at the Poplar and Highland store. (They remained in the store after closing time to do an interview with local media, say Starbucks management).

The Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco & Grain Millers union, whose three-month strike against Kellogg recently ended, has joined pickets outside the Memphis store. And "union yes" and "union strong" are being called out regularly in coffee shops as names people give for their orders.

The campaign is using social media heavily, with baristas

linking up quickly across the whole country. These workers are largely in their mid-20s, and the new organisers are also in their mid-20s, a lot still in higher education.

Women and non-binary workers are leading the push for union recognition are 70% of Starbucks workers are female. People of colour and women of colour are also at the forefront, challenging the current white middle-aged male composition of many union leaderships.

Safety

In the three Buffalo stores that have won union recognition, there has already been a strike: a union organiser was sacked, but the result was a successful renegotiation of contracts on

their terms. A change to health and safety policy won by workers in Buffalo has been applied across all Starbucks locations.

Previously, if a worker had been in contact with someone who tested positive for Covid, they were still made to work if they had been vaccinated. Now they are to stay off work for five days.

Union busting efforts made by Starbucks are making the union activists more determined to win. Starbucks Communications Director Reggie Borges quoted says "we don't believe a union is necessary at Starbucks, but we respect the right of our partners to organise", but top bosses have mandated their store managers to clamp down heavily on unionisation efforts.

The Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) have given support in the form of emergency organising committees across the country to provide practical support and education to workers who want to unionise.

This effort has been recognised by Starbucks Workers United as invaluable and has also opened up a new layer of workers to solidarity in class struggle.

The *Washington Post* reports that union approval is at its highest since 1965, with 68% approval, 77% among 18-34 year olds (Gallup poll).

We must support these workers however we can, helping them gain safer workplaces with union recognition. §

Avanti West Coast cleaners strike for pay

By Ollie Moore

Cleaners on Avanti West Coast (members of the RMT union) struck again from 10-12 March, demanding improved pay from their employer, the contractor Atalian Servest.

The cleaners are paid £9.68 per hour,

less than the Real Living Wage (£9.90 outside of London and £11.05 in London). Atalian Servest's latest pay offer represented an increase of just 6p an hour. Meanwhile, according to research conducted by the RMT, Atalian Servest's holding company paid a dividend to its French parent company of £10.8 million in 2021, a sum that would pay for more than 300 cleaners to get a pay rise to £11 an hour 12 times over and £15 an hour three times over.

The Avanti West Coast cleaners' strike overlaps with the next phase with Churchill cleaners, who are striking for 48 hours from 12 March on four Train Operating Companies. Churchill clean-

ers on Eurostar have suspended their participation in the strike, after Eurostar agreed to facilitate tripartite talks between themselves, the RMT, and Churchill to discuss improving conditions on the Eurostar contract.

Spread

The strategy RMT has adopted in these strikes, including focusing as much pressure as possible on the Train Operating Companies themselves, rather than solely focusing on the immediate employer, must be spread to every part of the industry where RMT organises outsourced workers.

The last Churchill cleaners' strike rally

heard a report of railway engineers at Stratford refusing to cross a cleaners' picket line. That kind of solidarity could also be vital to winning these disputes. Reps for directly-employed staff in all affected TOCs must convene joint committees with cleaners' reps to discuss how directly-employed workers can support the cleaners' disputes – including, wherever possible, refusing to cross picket lines.

Health and safety can be used to maximise the impact of the cleaners' action: if stations and trains haven't been adequately cleaned, are they safe to work on or put into operation? §

Online



Covid: a pause, but not the end
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“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.

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

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- Open borders
- Global solidarity against global capital – workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers
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We could see this coming



Diary of a trackworker

By Matt Shaw

Almost the only topic of conversation at work, apart from Ukraine, is the proposals for restructuring and redundancies which have finally been published. We knew it was going to be

bad, but nobody thought it would be this bad. Loss of a whole grade to be replaced by the use of trainees, lowering of wage rates to "average" levels, and a wholesale loss of terms and conditions for those that are left behind.

The general reaction is outrage and a level of willingness to take action that I've not seen on the railway for many years. Even supervisory levels are talking about being out on strike.

While all this is good, there is also an underlying current of worry about the

competency of our union leadership due to the way this period has been handled. Many of us have passed comment on the way that all the signs of what was to come we're obvious, but no decisive statements or plans to fight were coming out of the union, and now we're on the back foot.

While it's not too late to organise a fight, the impetus for it will need to come from us at the sharp end with a willingness to take on our own leadership when they are obviously wrong. §

Vote Independent Left in PCS!

By a PCS activist

Nominations for the National Executive Committee (NEC) and Group Executive Committee (GEC) elections in the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) closed on Thursday 10 March.

Workers' Liberty supporters in the PCS are part of Independent Left (IL). The other main groups in the union are Left Unity (LU), the dominant leadership faction, for many years run as an alliance between general secretary Mark Serwotka and the Socialist Party, and the Broad Left Network (BLN), the Socialist Party's new vehicle created after they fell out with Serwotka and split from LU. All three networks – IL, LU, and BLN – are running slates for the NEC elections, LU as part of a long-standing "Democracy Alliance" with the soft right.

IL will stand candidates for president, three vice-president positions, and 16 seats on the NEC, as well as a slate for the GEC elections in the Department for Work and Pensions, the largest department in the civil service and now the only one where PCS retains more than 50% membership density.

At the time of writing, the number of branch nominations for each slate had not been confirmed. It looks as if IL will maintain its level of nominations from

the 2021 elections. Although there is now a higher "anti-establishment" vote, that vote will be split between BLN and IL, both standing as oppositional. This stance is unconvincing in BLN's case, as it is made up of the same personnel who comprised a section of that leadership prior to the Socialist Party's squabble with Serwotka. Only IL offers a genuinely alternative vision.

The legacy of the Serwotka-Socialist Party leadership is a legacy of declining organisation and haemorrhaging membership. The last three national ballots have failed to hit thresholds. IL's vision seeks to address this.

IL emphasises rebuilding from the workplace up, empowering rank-and-file members to take ownership over union campaigns and pick fights with their employers. This vision includes proposals for democratic reform within the union, to give branches greater autonomy to launch disputes, and replacing an army of highly-paid, unelected bureaucrats with elected, accountable officials.

The elections open against the backdrop of PCS's consultative ballot for industrial action over pay and pensions. With a patchwork of pay differentials now in place across departments, the union is demanding an across-the-board 10% increase, on top of depart-

ment-specific rises to level up pay. The union is also demanding a return to civil-service-wide bargaining over pay and conditions.

While these approaches are an improvement on how previous campaigns' demands have been formulated, there has been little attempt to give members ownership over the demands or even to explain them properly. Much activity around the consultative ballot has been driven from above, with rank-and-file members in many areas passive and disengaged. If the consultative ballot achieves a sufficient result to trigger a statutory ballot, workplace organisation must be urgently strengthened to give that any chance of success.

More than ten union branches have now passed policies similar to those proposed by Workers' Liberty supporters, defending Ukraine's right to self-determination and self-defence.

There will be greater opportunities than last year to speak to members face-to-face about the NEC elections. And historically, although IL have fewer branch nominations than other slates, we invariably get a higher number of votes per nomination, as the branches that nominate IL candidates tend to be better organised and most active. More: bit.ly/il-s §

Two angles on the Light Brigade



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

The Crimean War has been mentioned recently in *Solidarity*: there are two very different films about that conflict.

The first, *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (1936) with Errol Flynn and Olivia de Havilland, shows the charge as a heroic affair. It's a typical "Empire" film and predictably gung-ho.

The other film of the same name is very different. Directed by Tony Richardson in 1968, it depicts the famous

cavalry charge at Balaclava against Russian gun-emplacements (25 Oct 1854) as a mess of misplaced or misunderstood orders, arrogance, petty rivalries, astounding stupidity on the part of the officer class and a callous disregard for human life.

Trevor Howard plays the bull-headed and incompetent Lord Cardigan, and the worst British actor of the 1960s, David Hemmings, takes on the role of Captain Nolan, who is killed in the action. One of the most expensive British films made at the time, its attention to the gory reality of the battle knocked the bottom out of its ridiculous glorification as embodied in the jingoistic poem by Alfred Tennyson. §

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Union backs Ukraine



John Moloney

Our union National Executive Committee has adopted a policy on Ukraine, which clearly opposes Russia's invasion and priorities practical solidarity with the Ukrainian labour movement and refugees. Our International Committee, which I'm part of, met subsequently, and discussed what enacting that policy looks like in practice. The committee will be writing to members with practical steps they can take to support Ukrainian trade unionists.

As part of this work, I've reached out to a contact in the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine, one of the two main trade union centres in the country. We've corresponded about what PCS can do to support Ukrainian workers and unions, and we'll meet via Zoom to continue that discussion.

On Tuesday 15 March, I'll attend a demonstration at the Home Office, called by the Labour Campaign for Free Movement, Ukraine Solidarity Campaign, and Another Europe is Possible, which calls for opening Britain's borders. We have to situate the demand to let in Ukrainian refugees within a wider politics of migrant solidarity. The discrimination against Black and Asian asylum seekers and migrants in Ukraine itself, and the glaring differences between how the British media discusses Ukrainian refugees and how it discusses refugees and migrants from other countries, especially Muslims and non-white people, show the racism inherent in any system of immigration controls.

PCS's consultative ballot for industrial action over pay and other cost-of-living demands closes on 21 March. Launching this ballot was a necessary step to give some practical focus to the anger and anxieties PCS members were feeling about the cost-of-living crisis, and obviously the hope is that it will be a prelude to a formal ballot and then to industrial action over those issues. But it is also an important learning process for the union, part of a process of mapping where our strengths and weaknesses are in terms of workplace organisation.

The majority of our members will face a "hybrid" situation for the foreseeable future, in terms of a mix of home-working and working in offices, so the ballot and the lessons we learn from it are part of the union adapting to that situation and attempting to renew and strengthen our organisation in that context. §

• John Moloney is assistant general secretary of the PCS, writing here in a personal capacity.

After March strikes: name more dates, build the political campaign



Tubeworker

Reps in the RMT unions will meet on Friday 18 March to discuss the next steps in the fight for jobs, pensions, and conditions, following our excellent strikes on 1/3 March. Tubeworker supporters in the meeting will argue for the following:

Name more dates now

We have the wind in our sails following one of the most impactful strikes in many, many years. Let's press our advantage by naming more dates now, and showing the company 1/3 March wasn't just a token protest or an exercise in letting off steam. The 31 March publication of the pensions review is a good date to target; we could name strikes immediately prior or following that date. A "wait-and-see" approach won't serve us well here; waiting until significantly after the publication of the review just gives management time to put plans in place to implement whatever reforms it recommends.

We have to convince our bosses, and the government, that it will be more costly to them to drive through planned cuts than to abandon them. We can't do that if we drag our feet. Delaying will also risk sending the signal that the 1/3 March strike was a one-off protest against cuts we secretly believe are inevitable. Let's send a different signal – that we are in this to win it – by naming more strikes now.

Escalate the action

We always knew 1/3 March was likely to be the opening salvo in an ongoing fight. Now we need to explore ways of stepping up. This could be a three-day strike, split over a Monday-Wednesday-Friday, to maximise the impact. Other forms of action should also be



discussed, including rolling and selective action.

Local hardship funds

As action escalates, workers will be sacrificing more. RMT branches should administer local hardship funds to ensure those who need it most are supported by the union, ensuring no-one feels forced to come into work due to financial hardship.

A public, political campaign

Our dispute won't live or die on the altar of public opinion, but an effective political campaign making the links between our industrial demands and the wider social question of accessible public transport will greatly strengthen our campaign. The Hands Off London Transport campaign from 2014-2016 provides a useable model for this, and should be revived.

Coordinate with other unions

Bus drivers in Unite on Arriva routes plan strikes on 21 March and 28-30 March. It's too late for us to coordinate with those dates, but we should liaise with Unite and join up future action if possible.

We should also call on Aslef to join us in the fight. They have a live strike ballot mandate and can name action at two

weeks' notice. We shouldn't be shackled to their pace, but striking together is always preferable to one union striking alone.

Continue regular mass meetings

It's vital rank-and-file workers feel a sense of direct investment in and ownership over this dispute. Mass members' meetings should take place on a regular schedule, with reps and activists formulating proposals to take to their branches and Regional Council. The Regional Council should consider doing as it has done in previous region-wide disputes and convening a permanent dispute committee to plan campaigning and propaganda, and help build for mass members' meetings. §

Cleaners brought in-house, security guards strike

By Ollie Moore

Security guards at London's Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH) are continuing their six-week-long strike to demand parity with NHS workers' terms and conditions. The United Voices of the World (UVW) union plans a further strike rally at 12pm on Friday 17 March, at

Queens Square, WC1N. GOSH cleaners, also UVW members, also planned a two-day strike from 11 March, after GOSH management appeared to stall on a prior commitment to bring them into direct employment. The cleaners' strike was called off after bosses guaranteed the cleaners would be

moved onto NHS contracts from 1 April.

The cleaners' victory means the security guards, who are employed by outsourcing giant Carlisle, will be the only group of GOSH workers who remain outsourced. The security guards say they are prepared to extend their strike if necessary. §

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Varied anti-war action in Russia

By Michael Baker

As the invasion of Ukraine enters its third week, the Russian anti-war movement is faced with a question: what will things look like going forward? The government still gives severe punishments for any public dissent, but as the student journal DOXA puts it, "war affects too large a number of people and causes too much pain to become something routine or normal". Many see no option but protest when faced with the horrific invasion, the financial and social impact of sanctions, and the mass repression of social media and the free press.

The immediate wave of protest is showing signs of waning. Sunday 13th still saw protests in over 30 cities across the country, but the total number arrested for the last week remains around 1,000, almost all of them on that day. Over 13,000 were arrested in the previous two weeks.

With no accurate measures of participants, there are a few possible conclusions here. The least likely is that protest numbers have stayed the same, while the rate of arrest has gone down – videos and anecdotal accounts suggest that if anything, the police are getting worse. Lots of the former protestors may be fatigued, and scared of long-lasting consequences. It's also possible that large amounts of the protesting population (including a disproportionate number of the activists willing to organise protests) have already been arrested.

The answer is most likely a combination of the last two factors, along with the usual decline in numbers that many major protest waves face at some point after their initial surge. The fact that thousands still attend regular unsanctioned protests is impressive in itself, and a testament to the steady growth of the Russian protest movement over the 2010s.

Now that so many protestors have been arrested, their treatment in custody and sentencing will become more of a focus. This week has seen many left wing activists treated with particular cruelty by the authorities, most notably [Alexei Dmitriev](#) of the Union of Marxists. Dmitriev was beaten by police and refused medical attention on the day of his trial, despite falling unconscious, with suspicions that he may have been drugged

or poisoned. Dmitriev has been imprisoned until 25 March.

There have been a couple of promising developments in workplace organising. Two groups in the education sector, Teachers Against War and Students Against War, have been agitating in their places of work and study while trying their best to evade the worst of the new laws against anti-war activism. Teachers Against War released an [open letter](#) on 24 February that openly opposed the invasion in no uncertain terms:

"For us, schoolteachers, violence goes against the very essence of our profession. Our pupils may die in the fires of war. War inevitably intensifies the social problems in our country. We support anti-war protests and demand an immediate ceasefire."

The text of the open letter was removed from the site on 4 March, but the signatures of over 5,000 teachers remained. Teachers and teaching unions from a number of other countries signed the letter, but the UK was not amongst those listed – this could be a useful avenue for British teachers and their unions to express solidarity with the Russian anti-war movement.

[Students Against War](#) have begun an "educational strike", where students try to manipulate their reading and learning materials to force as much war-related content into their classrooms and seminars as they can, "bringing the discussion of topical themes into the learning process". One example given was a student who convinced her course-mates to read Sigmund Freud's essay *Thoughts for the Times on War and Death*, instead of the scheduled reading of *The Interpretation of Dreams*.

This might seem small as a replacement for mass protest, but it also sows the seeds for a long-term movement, aiming to politicise and engage the population in places the government hasn't yet been able to censor. §



Courier strike needs funds and volunteers

By Michael Elms

As fuel prices skyrocket, sporadic strikes by JustEat delivery workers and food couriers on other platforms are spreading. These new outbreaks of strikes – in Ashford, Folkestone and Thanet in Kent; in Mansfield and Sutton in Nottinghamshire; and in Farnham and Aldershot in Hampshire – are all connected, directly or indirectly, to the IWGB union's pay dispute with Stuart.

The task for socialists and the labour movement is to help these newly-organising groups of hyper-exploited gig economy workers to link up with each other and with the IWGB, and develop a strategy to beat the big platforms.

The bulk of the strikes in the UK are directed at the delivery firm Stuart. Stuart is a same-day logistics firm based in France and it supplies delivery service for JustEat in many UK towns and cities. In 2021, they rolled out a new pay structure which reduced the per-delivery base rate of pay for drivers from £4.50 to £3.40.

The strike began in Sheffield on 6 December, when Stuart finally rolled out the pay cut to the last group of towns. The roll-out had been delayed in Sheffield because of the militancy and organisation of the drivers there. Since 2019, activists in Workers' Liberty have been helping delivery couriers to organise a union, which has won some fights on local issues. With 80 members at the start of the strike and more now, this is a stronghold of union power in the gig economy

in the UK. No other city has so far had such a powerful or established gig economy workers' union.

From Sheffield, the strikes spread to Stuart workers in Blackpool, Huddersfield, Sunderland, Middlesbrough, the West Riding of Yorkshire and Leicester. A strike fundraiser has raised over £30,000 with more coming in every week. The Stuart strike has mostly been run on the basis of putting pickets on high-volume restaurants in order to shut down deliveries from major Stuart clients.

This is a change from the "spontaneous" methods of strikes most often used by platform workers, which normally involve asking all workers to simply switch off their apps and stop taking deliveries from all restaurants, including the smallest ones. The targeted strike is easier to sustain and enforce.

The Sheffield workers' strike strategy was always about sustaining action long enough to bring more parts of the country into the pay strike campaign. After 77 days of strike action, the rapid spread of strikes shows that this is paying off. But to allow the movement to consolidate and spread further, there is an urgent need to raise more money for the strike fund, and to find socialists who can volunteer to reach out to groups of drivers in their towns.

For leaflets and briefings on how to help spread the couriers strike to your area, contact AWL with the subject line "couriers strike" at awl@workersliberty.org. Strike fund: tinyurl.com/StuartStrike – model motion: bit.ly/mo-pe §



Solidarity

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NEW PUSH NEEDED IN UCU BATTLE

By a UCU member

Reballoting in the University and College Union (UCU) disputes over pensions, pay and conditions opens on 16 March and closes 8 April. With the initial six-month mandate for action running out at the start of May, and no movement from the employers, beating the 50% turnout threshold is vital if the strikes and action short are to continue through exam and marking season. Further strike days have been called in the weeks beginning 21 and 28 March, with half the branches with mandates taking action in each week.

Staff have been fighting against cuts to USS pensions that will see those in the older universities lose around 35% of their guaranteed future retirement income. This comes on top of a decade of cuts already amounting to around £240k. The latest proposals have been pushed through on the casting vote of the supposedly independent chair of the pension scheme after employers refused to consider alternative options put forward by UCU.

Meanwhile across the sector the "Four Fights" dispute is focusing on the dramatic decline in real-terms pay over the past decade (down by 20%

since 2009), now a crucial issue with the cost-of-living crisis, alongside equality pay gaps, workload and casualisation. Employers have refused even to negotiate in this dispute, though some of them are well able to pay. The 24 institutions of the Russell Group are collectively sitting on a £2.2 billion surplus. The employers' organisation is using the financial problems of a small number of institutions (sometimes the consequence of local mismanagement, sometimes of government policy) to justify inaction.

Pay negotiations for 2022-23, however, are scheduled to begin on 30 March, with meetings running through until 5 May, so there will be a chance to push on a new settlement for summer 2022. A solid mandate in the reballot is vital to back up the negotiators: otherwise they will go into that last meeting without any threat of continued action.

However, the arrangements for the reballot proposed by the union leadership fall short of what is needed. The three-week ballot process falls over two weeks in which the branches with existing mandates have been called out on strike. Like the previous ballot, this strike



will be disaggregated, meaning that each branch needs to beat the 50% threshold to continue with action. This will undoubtedly put a strain on local union resources, already stretched, in striking branches.

In some contexts, strikes can be important as a mobilising tool, but many UCU members are questioning how well-chosen this five-day action is. It is less than we need to pressurise employers, but it represents a significant hit to pay. Some members in branches involved in both disputes have already taken 13 days of action, but the union has yet to extend access to the strike fund beyond the first 11 days. Branches are doing their best, but national leadership is also vital to ensure that the message of employers' intransigence gets across, and that members are convinced there is a strategy to win. §