

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

WORKERS' SOLIDARITY AGAINST PUTIN



Cartoon by George Newman, @gewman

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Workers' solidarity against Putin



The major Russian military offensive in Eastern Ukraine continues, as do Russian advances there, despite Ukrainian counterattacks and stubborn resistance. The grinding horror of this war may rumble on for many months or even years as Russian President Vladimir Putin pursues his war aim of subordinating Ukraine to Russian political power.

Putin aims to overrun Eastern Ukraine. If he wins in the East Putin will then have the option of continuing to take territory in Ukraine's south, perhaps looking to annex the whole coast. Or Russia might again attempt to conquer Ukraine's capital, Kyiv.

Many Ukrainian towns have been ruined, many thousands of civilians are dead. Mariupol's mayor estimates 10,000 have been killed during the Russian siege of his city. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy believes that 2,500-3,000 Ukrainian troops are dead. British officials state that 15,000 Russian troops have been killed.

The shape of the Russian occupation is becoming clearer. In occupied Kherson, on 25 April, Russian soldiers seized the City Council building. The next day the Russian military commander replaced the Ukrainian administration. Medical supplies, basic foodstuffs and Ukrainian currency are now in short supply; a curfew has been imposed; Ukrainian television channels are blocked.

The Russians seem to be preparing a "referendum" to be held in May to give legitimacy to a puppet-regime in the area. In the villages around Kherson there is a regime of terror and the city's mayor, Igor Kolykhaiev, states that 200 Ukrainians have been abducted in the immediate area in an attempt to crush resistance.

In March daily mass protests against the occupation took place in Kherson's main square. They now take place every Wednesday and on 27 April the demonstration was dispersed with stun grenades and tear gas. Nearly 100,000 people, or one third of the population, have fled Kherson.

If Russia does intend to hold the south of Ukraine it will face mass resistance and a partisan movement. On Wednesday the Kherson television tower was blown up, temporarily taking Russian channels off air. There are reports that Ukrainian special forces are ambushing Russian units in the occupied area around Melitopol.

6.5 million people are now internally displaced inside Ukraine and 5.3mn have left the country from a total pop-



ulation of around 43mn. Three million refugees are now in Poland; Britain's miserable, xenophobic Tory government has issued only 80,000 visas to Ukrainians, and only about 27,000 have got here (partly because many families have visas for some members but not others).

The World Bank is predicting that Ukraine's economy will contract by half this year. Export routes through Odesa and Mariupol have been cut off by the Russian military action. Mariupol has been destroyed and Odesa is blocked.

The West should cancel Ukraine's debt and the British government should open its doors to those attempting to escape from the war.

The World Bank also expects Russia's GDP to contract by 11% in 2022, with 2.6mn more Russians falling below the poverty line. Economies in the Caucasus and central Asia are expected to contract by 4%.

Across the world countries like Egypt, which imports 80% of its wheat from Russia and Ukraine, will see food prices rise and tourist revenues fall. Ukraine banned the export of wheat, corn, and sunflower oil in March in order to feed its own people.

Internationally prices are rising driven by energy price increases. Last week Russia ramped up the exchange of sanctions by cutting off gas exports to Poland and Bulgaria.

Meanwhile some of the British left continue to view the war through their own weird, Stalinoid, ideological spectacles. *Socialist Worker* thinks this is a proxy war being fought between the West and Russia. Which bizarrely makes Russia its own proxy.

And presumably this also makes Ukraine the proxy of the US. That must be news to Ukrainians who thought they were fighting off a Russian invasion in the name of Ukrainian liberty and freedom, to save their families and their homes (rather than at the behest of the cunning US, apparently hell-bent

on expanding NATO, while simultaneously denying Ukraine membership). And news also to the Ukrainian government which would be glad of much more Western help (on debt, weapons and aid), currently being denied.

Socialist Worker echoes the Putin



Action on Covid-19

Covid case rates are falling, but remain high. Precautions like mask-wearing and self-isolating when sick have faded. 13,000 people are in hospital with (if not necessarily because of) Covid, more than at the end of December. We will probably have a new wave soon (though probably a mild one) with the arrival of BA.4 and BA.5 subvariants of Omicron. Whole new variants are certain in due course, and may well be fiercer than Omicron. The Tories have chopped Covid-surveillance projects, are scaling down the UK Health Security Agency, and have repealed 2020's sick-pay boosts. Sainsbury's and Tesco have cut the provision for extra paid sick days they conceded in 2020.

We seek to make the labour movement fight for the social measures necessary to underpin curbing Covid:

- a sustained public-health system of testing and surveillance
- good sick pay for all
- restore NHS funding and repeal privatisation
- requisition private hospitals to augment NHS resources
- bringing social care into the public sector with NHS-level pay and conditions for staff
- workers' control of workplace safety (especially ventilation)
- requisition Big Pharma, especially its patents and technical know-how, to speed vaccine production and delivery world-wide. □

administration. Russia's Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Maria Zakharova, this week accused Zelensky of "being used" as a proxy by the US. Putin presents the war as a confrontation between Russia and the West, with Russia the victim of Western meddling in its affairs.

Socialist Worker claims, "NATO is driving relentlessly to wider war, threatening escalation to the use of nuclear weapons." SW's editors seem incapable of registering even basic facts about the actual war unfolding in front of us which contradict the war they want to see. The threat of a broader, even nuclear war came from Putin in his first announcement at the start of the invasion, and then from his officials against Finland. Russia threatens a "nuclear Baltic".

NATO is not "driving relentlessly to wider war". If they were, it would have happened by now; a wider war would be easy to orchestrate. On the contrary, the US and UK pulled their few troops out of Ukraine as the Russians invaded and have refused a No Fly Zone over Ukraine. The West's politicians have set limits on their support for Ukraine specifically to prevent a wider war which they calculate would be a disaster for all the European powers, and not just Russia.

Finland and Sweden are applying for NATO membership, but only from fear of Russia. Big opinion swings towards NATO membership have taken place in Sweden and Finland in the last three months. That has nothing to do with US pressure. It is simply a reaction to Putin's imperialist aggression against Ukraine.

Similarly, in Germany, massive increases in military spending have been agreed, with a big majority in the population backing the rises. The US has argued for decades that Germany should increase spending on its armed forces to 2% of GDP. It was only after Putin's army invaded Ukraine that the increase was announced.

Fortunately, and in contrast to *Socialist Worker*, labour movements across the world are rallying to back Ukraine and its fight against Russia. A large International Labour Network (ILNSS) of trade union centres and organisations recently held a fourth meeting in Dijon, France, attended by 200 delegates. The Network is working to provide workers' aid to the unions and working class in Ukraine. The Network unambiguously stands for a Ukrainian victory and international workers' solidarity.

Workers' Liberty backs Ukraine's fight to determine its own future and end the terror of Russian imperialist occupation.

We are working to build a rational, critical-thinking revolutionary socialist movement in the UK. Join us, help us. □

Russians use May Day to protest

By Michael Baker

May Day presented both the Russian government and the Russian anti-war movement with an interesting conundrum. For many decades, the slogan associated with the day in Russia has been "Peace, Labour, May".

With the first of those words now banned in any public context, official pro-government marches opted for different slogans entirely, while a common goal among anti-war protestors was to get away with just promoting the original slogan for the holiday.

For this year's festivities, Feminist Antiwar Resistance announced an unorthodox style of march. Instead of protesting openly, people were to take to the streets and feed pigeons, striking up conversations about the war and feminist responses to the invasion with passers-by as they went. At least 15 major cities reported back, although participation appears to have been relatively low.

More traditional demonstrations took place in a number of cities with a relatively small attendance – OVD-Info reported a handful of arrests, mostly activists with "peace" placards or people making public performances of some kind.

Yulia Karpukhina, the organiser of the long-standing Russian feminist group "Eve's Ribs" (Rebra Evy), was arrested in St. Petersburg and taken to a pre-trial detention centre. The details of her case and what she's been arrested for are still unclear.

Groups in the independent trade union movement such as the "Teacher"

union and the Confederation of Labour are supporting the "Courier" trade union's calls for the release of their leader, Kirill Ukraintsev (see below).

The Russian Socialist Movement reports that in Novosibirsk, 200 workers in an aggregate processing plant are being threatened with losing their jobs. On "idle time" since mid-February, the current lack of pay and promise of two months' wages upon resignation is being used to tempt workers into resigning voluntarily, forfeiting their redundancy packages in exchange for a brief reprieve from mortgage payments.

A college director has refused government instructions to punish his students for taking part in anti-war protests. In his statement, Sergey Chernishev, director of the Novosibirsk State Open College, said: "when forthright and intelligent young people go out into the streets with humanitarian slogans, and in response those who should in theory be protecting them from criminals instead put them in a riot



24 pages this week

We have 24 pages this week rather than our usual 16, and an unusually big "More Online" section, to enable us to reduce the queue of articles waiting for space. Pages 9-16 are designed to be available to be pulled out and kept longer than the usual weekly coverage. □



A pigeon-feeder sporting the Russian May Day slogan "Mir, Trud, Mai" – "Peace, Labour, May" – with the first word censored.

van – you can try to teach them 'patriotism' as much as you want. But the guys in black uniforms have already done it all for us." The college has stated that it refuses to take any action against arrested students.

Students at the Federal University of the Urals staged a mass walkout from a lecture titled "On the Danger of Ukraine and NATO", following a suggestion from the list of protest ideas created by group Students Against War (see coverage in [Solidarity 629](#)). A video of the walkout was uploaded to the [DOXA telegram channel](#). □

Free couriers' leader Kirill Ukraintsev

By the Courier trade union

Kirill Ukraintsev, leader of the Courier trade union, has been put in pre-trial detention until 25 June with a charge of "calling or participating in an unauthorised gathering on more than two occasions in the space of 180 days". He faces a sentence of up to five years – all this because he is the head of the only trade union organising delivery drivers across Russia, at a time when the majority migrant workforce is being squeezed tighter than ever by the bosses. We publish below a translation of the union's May Day demands on his employer Delivery Club and the Russian government. An online petition in English with the union's demands is at bit.ly/f-ku. The

Russian petition has over 7,000 signatures as of 1 May.

May Day greetings, friends! The meaning of the phrase "class struggle" is now very clear to all of us.

Kirill Ukraintsev is in a pre-trial detention centre only because he has stood up for the rights of delivery workers. The corporate bosses are trying to resolve the rising level of conflict between business and couriers by repressing the leader of an independent trade union.

Kirill is at risk of a real prison sentence. And the companies are not thinking about any improvements to the working conditions and rates of pay of their workers.

The persecution of the leader of the only trade union which defends them

means just one thing: The labour of a courier will be further devalued.

We have not received any clear explanation concerning the new pay system and the fact that the arrest of Kirill Ukraintsev occurred during a period of spontaneous protests by couriers in Moscow working for the VK and Sberbank companies, which own Delivery Club.

[The message calls on readers in Russia to uninstall the Delivery Club app and send videos and photos with placards supporting Kirill and the couriers; and on couriers to strike]

Quite apart from the fact that spring is a time when a fall in demand results in seasonal reductions in courier numbers, Delivery Club has

significantly cut rates of pay. Only collective absences from shifts can force them to take us into account. Big companies engage in talks only when this impacts on their profits.

The reinstatement of those dismissed, the withdrawal of fines, and assistance with getting wages paid – this was far from being all that Kirill was involved in as trade union president. He helped very many people, and now it is very important to help him! A strike will result in information about the fabricated case against Kirill being disseminated.

Couriers are not slaves! Solidarity is our weapon! Free Kirill Ukraintsev! □

• More: bit.ly/ku-more

No Wimbledon Russia ban!

By Sacha Ismail

Andrey Rublev protested against Putin's war – but is now barred from Wimbledon because he is Russian

The pro-Ukraine left must vocally criticise the decision of the All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club, which runs the Wimbledon tennis tournament, to exclude Russian (and Belarusian) players.

There can be blurred lines between measures which target a state and those which target its people. Banning sportspeople because of their nationality – particularly individual sportspeople, not part of a national side – seems to us to fall clearly on the wrong side of the line.

As we put it in [Solidarity 629](#), opposing an academic boycott of Russia:

"To signal general hostility to Russians harms solidarity. To limit communication to those already bold enough to speak out against Putin (knowing that in Russia that is likely to mean jail or the loss of jobs) also harms solidarity."

Before the Wimbledon ban was imposed, there was apparently discussion of allowing Russians who have condemned Putin's war to play. As well as being practically problematic – because it sets up players, many of whom will have family and friends in Russia, to be targeted by the regime – this is more generally objectionable. We want all Russians – all people – to condemn Russia's war in Ukraine. This should not be a condition for playing tennis, or working in a university, etc, etc, etc; and particularly not when this condition is only applied to people of one or two nationalities.

Having said that, note that the ban now imposed will bar Andrey Rublev (the world number eight), who at the start of the war publicly protested against it.

In the case of Belarus, the ban is being imposed on players from a people who not long ago launched a general uprising against their much-despised government.

"In the circumstances of such unjustified and unprecedented military aggression", says the Wimbledon club, "it would be unacceptable for the Russian regime to derive any benefits from the involvement of Russian or Belarusian players with the Championships."

Unprecedented? Really? In terms of the world now, Chinese and American (and indeed British, and many other) players can play, despite the crimes of their respective home states – but not Russians? This is not solidarity, it is chauvinism.

As we campaign in solidarity with Ukraine, we should do our best to stop such things spreading and becoming the norm. □

Stalinists, whataboutery, Ukraine, and the unions



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

After much prevarication, ambiguity and double-speak, the official “line” of the Communist Party of Britain (and therefore also the *Morning Star*) on Ukraine has gradually emerged. The main report delivered to the party’s political committee last week (published in edited form in the *Morning Star* of 20 April), states that:

- “fascism is embedded in the Ukrainian state.”
- “US and British politicians continue to spout the myth of a winnable war...”
- “What is needed is... a ceasefire and negotiations for a peaceful settlement that respects Ukraine’s sovereignty, allows autonomy to Donbass provinces and halts any further expansion of Nato.”
- “Nato’s culpability in provoking [the war] and the call for an immediate ceasefire and meaningful peace talks must continue to be articulated, not least within the trade union movement.”

So there we have it: while the CPB formally condemns the invasion, the blame for it lies with Nato; Ukraine cannot win and the best thing that could happen would be “an immediate ceasefire” to its disadvantage. It is particularly important to promote this “argument for peace” within the trade union movement.

Strange, then, that the *Morning Star*’s coverage of the debates and positions taken on the war by British unions has been so patchy. In early March, the paper praised statements put out by the leaderships of the FBU and NEU, both formally opposing the invasion but blaming “Nato expansion” and (in the case of the NEU) calling for Ukraine to negotiate on the basis of Minsk 2 – a deal that favoured Russia, forced upon Ukraine in 2015 by France and Germany.

Strangely, the MS failed to report that the NEU leadership

almost immediately withdrew its statement due to an angry backlash from members who considered it half-hearted its opposition to the invasion.

Similarly, the paper carried no report at all on the debate that occurred at the NEU conference in April, when a Stop the War Coalition motion of the type approved by the *Morning Star* and CPB (i.e.: blaming Nato, failing to back Ukraine’s right to defend itself and calling for “peace” negotiations) was rejected, leaving the union with no policy on Ukraine – an outcome that NEU delegates evidently preferred to the whataboutery and Putin-apologetics of the “Stop the War” motion.

Meanwhile, a resolution from Unite’s executive council that “unreservedly” condemned the invasion and acknowledged “the right of Ukraine to defend its citizens and territory” with no mention of Nato was also completely ignored by the paper that receives extensive funding from that particular union (Britain’s second biggest).

On 25-27 April the Scottish TUC Congress met in Aberdeen. A General Council statement on Ukraine saluted “the heroism of the Ukrainian forces resisting the Russian forces, including those besieged in Mariupol”, described Putin as “the aggressor who bears complete responsibility for the invasion,” and emphasised that “our overriding priority is solidarity with the Ukrainian people”.

An emergency motion submitted by South Lanarkshire Trades Union Council and backed by the General Council – the only motion on Ukraine on the agenda – stated: “Ukraine is perfectly entitled and justified to defend itself and seek support both politically and materially. ... It needs to be recognised that in this particular instance NATO cannot be classed as the aggressor.”

Both the statement and the emergency motion were passed with no formal opposition in what has traditionally been a bastion of Stalinism

within the British labour movement (see report at bit.ly/stuc-u).

The *Morning Star* – self-pro-

claimed paper of the British left and trade union movement, didn’t even mention what happened at the Scottish

TUC: so much for ensuring that their position is “articulated, not least within the trade union movement.” □

Better paths to union renewal



Letter

Having read none of the three books Gregor Gall reviews in his article in *Solidarity* 632 (“Unions: potential for resurgence”), I cannot comment on whether his critique of them is fair.

Gregor is surely right that abstract exhortations to greater militancy, and acting as though merely holding up the examples of previous strikes will be sufficient inspiration for other workers to take action, are not sound strategies for rebuilding union power. And yes, a conception of “the rank and file” as a stage army that simply needs the right sort of socialists at the head of it to command it to victory has indeed been a core weakness of much recent socialist theorising about class struggle and workplace organisation, at least in this country.

However, Gregor clearly does not believe organised labour’s current conditions of weakness and marginalisation are immutable. So if Eve Livingston and Jane Hardy’s proposed strategies (and Jane Holgate’s, although she is criticised less) for renewal are deficient, readers of Gregor’s review would, I think, have benefited from more extensive suggestions for alternatives.

Reflexively blaming “the bureaucracy” for all ills of conservatism and inertia within the labour movement can become a form of conspiracy-theorist thinking, as if union officials are continually plotting to hold back workers’ natural inclination to militancy. Nevertheless, the significant distance – whether structural, cultural, or both – between workers in workplaces and the power to lever union structures into action is a real factor. And there are surely alternative ways to address that apart from the shallow, stage-army conception of rank-and-fileism for which Gregor critiques Hardy.

In most unions, the elements of union structure that workers can most immediately access – their branches – do not have the power to declare disputes and organise ballots. In some unions, like RMT, the layers of bureaucracy standing between a group of workers wanting to have a fight over a workplace issue and actually having it are, on paper at least, relatively slight. In others, like Unison, they are significant and imposing. But within all unions, independent rank-and-file organisation that takes up struggles for democratic reform within unions in a way that ties those struggles to battles

in the workplace is surely both necessary and possible.

The successes and partial successes of reform caucuses in the US labour movement, such as Teamsters for a Democratic Union in the IBT, the Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators in the Chicago Teachers’ Union, and United Auto Workers for Democracy in the UAW are worthy of investigation and study, and, I would suggest, provide a better starting point than the heavily electoralist “broad left” approach much of the UK labour movement left remains wedded to.

Gregor critiques Hardy’s emphasis on what he calls “voluntarism”. Certainly, the industrial strategies of the SWP, of which Hardy is a member, have sometimes suggested a sub-anarchist, “propaganda of the deed”, constructed more for show than with any intention of being carried out. Their “all out, stay out” slogan for the 2011 public sector pensions strike, implying workers should simply refuse to go back to work after the official 24-hour strike ended, is a classic example. But union resurgence surely does require an element of something that, if not exactly “voluntarism”, involves certain acts of will. The IWGB and UVW’s successes, for example, have in large part been products of simply being willing to have a go, to seek opportunities to light fires and see struggles through. Socialists should advocate spreading that spirit through the wider labour movement.

Gregor criticises Livingston’s focus on the IWGB, saying: “Examining the outriders does not help understand how their practices can be mainstreamed or scaled up.” Unfortunately, he doesn’t give his own views on how this could be achieved; to my mind, the collaborations between PCS and UVW in the Ministry of Justice and Royal Parks show possibilities for using the resources and institutional weight of the established “mainstream” unions to amplify the “voluntarist” spirit of the radical unions. That may only be viable in a limited number of areas, but is nevertheless a tactic worth pursuing where possible, and one that socialists active in unions could play some significant role in bringing about.

Ultimately, of course, there is no monocausal explanation for the weakness of organised labour, and no single, easily-trodden path towards renewal and resurgence. But if Gregor is right that the perspectives on offer from Livingston, Hardy, and Holgate are inadequate, that is only a case for offering better ones, even if only as thumbnail sketches. □

Ollie Moore,
London

A film about puberty? Good. But not well done



Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

Turning Red is about a 13-year-old Chinese Canadian named Mei Lee. She gets good grades, does all the extra-curricular activities and helps out at the local temple, and when puberty arrives she discovers that the women in her family turn into giant Red Panda monsters when they experience strong emotions.

Producer Lindsey Collins explained the body horror for kids:

"Everybody on the crew was un-

apologetic in support of having these real conversations about periods and about these moments in girls' lives."

It is great to see periods and puberty addressed in a Pixar film. Accusations that Pixar have abandoned universal themes, as if the middle aged man in Soul is an adequate audience cypher but a teenage Asian girl cannot be, are patently sexist. But this film is bad and in particular bad on gender.

Turning Red is inconsistent and doesn't appear to have centrally understood its own theme. If the red panda is menstruation, what on earth are we being told when she manages to monetise it to pay for concert tickets?

And if the panda monster is generalised out to puberty, do we have a kids' film where it's implied she's turning

tricks at middle school? The film throws in every cliché on womanhood you can imagine. For Mei, becoming a woman involves becoming smelly, emotionally uncontrollable, and worse at maths. The girls in the film are adorable and supportive. The men in the film are empathetic and put upon.

The women are literally and metaphorically monsters, though they can't help it; as Mai Lee explains, "It's just some inconvenient genetic thingy I got from my mom".

The paint by numbers anime style is very pretty if a little trite for a film about an Asian teenager. It's certainly not all bad. The soundscape is fantastic, from the Cantonese chanting to the eerily accurate fake boyband. Mai turning the dopey, not particularly good-look-

ing, shop assistant into a merman erotic fantasy through teenage lust was genuinely funny. This makes the kiddie body horror all the more disappointing, because it could have been a better film.

Pixar is a studio famed for its obsessive tinkering and crafting to make almost perfect children's films. Up started life as a film about alien princes living in a floating city; *A Bug's Life* was completely rewritten nine months before its release. First feature director Domee Shi was clearly not put through that process, and it shows. It really needed someone at some point to step back and say "wait, are we making a film about why women are awful?" We need films for kids that foreground puberty, bodies and emerging sexuality, but this does it wrong. □

Musk plans an "anti-woke" Twitter

By Matt Cooper

The tech entrepreneur Elon Musk is, on some measures, the richest person in the world. His fortune of \$218 billion is equivalent to the GDP of Portugal. This self-styled "free speech absolutist" has bought Twitter for \$44 billion.

Musk tends towards an anarcho-capitalism where states run police and migration controls and little else. This is not a progressive wing of capitalism, but a rapacious form of it. It seeks to free individual capitalists from even limited social regulation by capitalist states.

In the past few years, Twit-

ter has taken the largely commercial decision to ban some on the far right such as Infowars' Alex Jones. Jones was banned in 2018 for right-wing conspiracy theories, particularly that the Sandy Hook school massacre was staged. Twitter banned Trump in January 2021 for using the platform to incite violence with the storming of the Capitol, and subsequently launched a major purge of alt-right conspiracy theorists such as QAnon. Musk's aim is to re-open Twitter to those on the far-right, from everyday racists to alt-right conspiracy mongers.

The most worrying thing

about Musk's project is that it is political. He has stated that this move is not to make money, but to restore his vision of free speech to social media.

Subscription

He wants to turn Twitter towards a user subscription model, thus removing the power of advertisers to object to content. Central here is a weaponised advocacy of free speech, not as a good-in-itself but as a drive against the spread of "woke" ideology and "cancel culture". While he states that there will be open rules, he has not given any hint of what these might be. He has

also suggested "time-outs" will be used for those breaking the rules rather than outright bans. These are likely to become more a badge of honour than a way of policing content.

If Twitter is a "town square" of political debate, as Musk has put it, it will be one where the far right will organise and propagate their ideas. Unlike a real town square, it is difficult to mobilise against such an online presence. While there is a possibility that the current Twitter workforce will slow this remaking of Twitter, it is unlikely they can do more.

Musk may not pursue his vision for Twitter – even for him, \$44 billion is not a trivial sum. If he does, it is likely to bring Twitter into conflict with state regulators, most likely in Europe. Moving to a subscription model will make its use more an active choice and shrink its user base to those who actively seek the content that free-speech absolutism will encourage. Perhaps the best outcome is that Musk will be left with a right-wing gutter Twitter that even he will see little point sustaining. □



Activist Agenda

The Labour Campaign for Free Movement joined the 14 April demonstration at the Home Office to denounce the government's asylum offshoring plans, and is preparing for an AGM in the coming months.

The Uyghur Solidarity Campaign plans a strong presence at the Tienanmen Square anniversary protest on 4 June, and will be back outside the Chinese Embassy on 5 July. Russians Against War have their next protest on Sunday 8 May 4pm at Parliament Square, after a protest at the Russian Embassy on 30 April for which the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign and Workers' Liberty mobilised. □

• Links, info, suggestions for labour movement motions: workersliberty.org/agenda

Police Act: defy, demand repeal!

The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act became law on 28 April, after the House of Lords accepted the government's insistence on reinstating authoritarian measures the Lords previously ameliorated.

The resistance of the Lords, which did sink attempts to make the law even worse, came after a late wave of lively – though not particularly big – protests. Bigger protests, and mobilisation by the labour movement, could have pushed the Tories back much more. As it is the Act is very similar to what was first proposed in March last year.

The first thing is to argue and organise in the labour movement and campaigns for defiance of the Act, and to refuse to let it damp down protest further. With society convulsed by multiple crises, we need much more protest, not less.

We need to put repealing the Act – in its entirety – firmly on the political agenda. A [model motion](#) for Labour conference includes that demand, and others to strengthen the right to protest and subject the police to accountability. □



Second hand books

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



“Not exactly surprisin



Interview

By Yuliya Yurchenko

Yuliya Yurchenko, an activist in the Ukrainian socialist organisation *Sotsialniy Rukh* (Social Movement) and the *Ukraine Solidarity Campaign*, spoke from Vinnytsia (in Ukraine) with Sacha Ismail and Michael Baker, in mid-April. Yuliya is author of *Ukraine and the Empire of Capital: from Marketisation to Armed Conflict*.

We may not know Putin's exact plans for Ukraine, but we know that he and his supporters reject any notion of self-determination or even really autonomy for the country. They reject the idea that Ukraine should be a separate nation in its own right. The message is not even about liberating Donbas [in eastern Ukraine] from a "junta" in Kiev. They're saying the whole country is corrupted by Nazism and needs "denazifying". The reason Russian forces are mainly restricted to certain areas of the country is because they have suffered military setbacks and the war has dragged on longer than they were planning.

I think they expected the West to do a deal and auction off Ukraine, which it would have done if the Ukrainian army and people hadn't fought tooth and nail.

Was this degree of resistance surprising to you?

Not exactly surprising but awe-inspiring. I thought Ukrainians would resist and I thought the Russian leaders' calculation would be self-deluding, but the degree of both has perhaps surprised me.

I think Zelenskyy's instinct pre-invasion would have been to go for a deal with Russia to preserve civilian lives, perhaps partition of the country, and he is no doubt under pressure from the Western powers whose funding we are so dependent on. In the context of the great popular mobilisation though, the territorial battalions, all the different volunteers, Ukrainian society as a whole, this is not such an easy option. Every time there are negotiations and rumours of a deal, you see a clear popular reaction, on social media and in communities. That popular pressure is surely an important factor in why the war has gone on so long.

That in turn put pressure on Western governments to give support and send us more, if still insufficient, weapons.

All the recent atrocities, in Mariupol, around Kyiv, at Kramatorsk railway station, have reinforced that dynamic. We now see the German government, long the most defensive of Russia, seriously distancing themselves.

Also don't discount the stand taken in Europe by trade unions, by civil society, the demonstrations and mass pressure.

The situation is grim but more favourable than I would have imagined. I can even imagine Russia being forced out of Donbas.

I think everyday people who are expressing solidarity are largely absolutely genuine. There are plenty of organisations, labour movement and civil society organisations, that have expressed solidarity all the way through. There are those who have just taken these things up now, but they are still motivated by solidarity to various degrees.

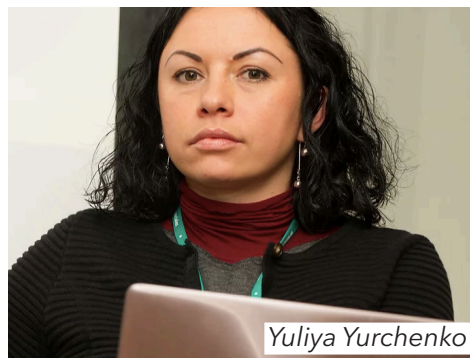
In the case of many politicians, however, I seriously doubt that is the case to the same extent. There were German politicians, for instance, who didn't want to help us even a few weeks ago and have now shifted for obviously self-interested reasons.

In terms of Donbas, from a socialist and democratic point of view, what kind of settlement should we advocate?

There are clearly important social groups who want greater self-governance, and that is of course fine. You could have devolved autonomy within Ukraine, for instance similar to what used to exist in the Crimea. This needs to be debated and decided in a proper democratic way, without Russian troops, mercenaries and functionaries, with proper international observation. All the people who have been forced to leave since 2014 must have the right to go back and take part in the process. At the same time there is a need for serious investment and economic cooperation to address the large-scale social and economic problems in the region, problems that have been horrendously exacerbated by the de-industrialisation, de-development, and ecological degradation of the last eight years, which is not limited to Russia-controlled territories.

Tell us about Sotsialniy Rukh.

Sotsialniy Rukh came together in 2015, a mix of established left-wing activists, involved in different political groupings, and young activists who were looking to create a meaningfully socialist organisation in Ukraine, as opposed to one that just has "socialist" or



Yuliya Yurchenko

"communist" in its name. Those young comrades had been going on demonstrations and engaging in grassroots activism, but decided it was time to form a political organisation – because protests and strikes will not by themselves overturn the oligarchic regime.

A big focus of work since then has been working with independent trade unions. The trade union movement in Ukraine has a divide between bureaucratic unions that came out of the Soviet era, and a new, independent union movement. There are new unions being organised in a range of sectors – in the health for instance, and in small and medium enterprises.

Sotsialniy Rukh is active in helping to form and develop unions – for instance one of our comrades was involved in this in the construction sector, where he worked – and in helping organise demonstrations and strikes. We've been working with trade unions and workers to run a legal advice service for those whose rights are being violated. We also try to raise workers' consciousness, for instance through reading clubs and summer schools.

Since the war started we've been engaged in the volunteer movement, helping source medicine, food, clothes and protective gear for the territorial defence. By the way, there is also a left-

wing battalion, organised by anarchists and socialists who are fighting in the territorial defence.

Essentially I think in the established battalions there is a risk of being associated with the wrong kind of people; and people therefore want to organise together with like-minded others. Many of those involved have known each other for a while, for instance through organising protests outside illegal construction sites in defence of workers' rights.

But since February most of the stuff we've been doing is raising awareness about social problems caused by the war, deprivation, the problems facing internally displaced people, for instance the problems caused by profiteering in the housing market. In Lviv [in the far west of Ukraine] there are so many refugees that the housing market is completely screwed up. The work advising people on their labour rights is now even more important than before and there is also a major legal assault on workers' rights. Now we are also spearheading and coordinating the campaign for cancellation of Ukraine's foreign debt.

This is something that Sotsialniy Rukh and its members have raised through different channels for some time, for instance through *Spilne* [the left-wing Commons journal]. Obviously it has now become much more pressing.

Ukraine's expenses have exploded because of humanitarian, medical and military needs, and meanwhile the preliminary assessment shows that we have already suffered losses amounting to one trillion US dollars! Even prior to the war Ukraine was the second largest debtor in terms of outstanding debt with the IMF, and it also has a lot



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g, but awe-inspiring”

of private debt. Now it is wracking this up by issuing war bonds and so forth. It is grotesque that the poorest country in Europe, fighting a war for the rest of Europe to contain Russia, has to prioritise its debt repayments over meeting the exploding needs of its population. So we have ramped up campaigning, demanding the debt is written off.

The Polish party Razem has been an amazing ally; they have been helping build an international network to lobby for our case.

Even in Britain it's quite hard to argue for socialism; it must be even harder in Ukraine where Stalinism has discredited the idea so much?

I'm not the best person to speak to about this because I'm normally in the UK, but my observation is that a lot depends on the language. If you start with Lenin, you may well get a knee-jerk reaction. But if you start with people's position in society, and social inequality, and ask them what we should do about the oligarchs, you will get a better conversation. The same if you ask shouldn't the state provide decent pensions, healthcare, education and so on?

Since 2014 in particular there has been a right-wing campaign around "decommunisation", linked to rejecting things connected to Russia and all things USSR. Obviously this is absurd; you have to unpick the argument. What about the enterprises accumulated and built up during the USSR, which account for a huge chunk of the Ukrainian economy? Should they all be shut down? Should they be burnt down as an act of defiance? Secondly, who are people angry at? The Soviet Union had been gone 25 years by then, and now over 30. Who is responsible for the situation now? Then if you talk to people about how the economy could be restructured and the need for decent social provision you can get them on board, and you can explain that capitalism runs against these things.

That makes sense, but isn't what you're describing more social democracy than socialism?

Well, you can then raise further questions about who owns services and industries and how they are managed. For instance, in terms of healthcare, ok, you can have a universal service, but who will pay for it and who will own it?



Will it just be insurance for private hospitals? There is no doubt that these are more difficult conversations than in Britain, where there is a strong labour movement history that was not interrupted in the same way.

We're restarting in a way. The other thing that doesn't help us is that we have parties that have "socialist" in their names or their propaganda but have essentially been mechanisms for different fractions of the oligarchic class to carve up state property into their private property. There is a widespread hostility to the power of oligarchs, which was reflected in both the Euromaidan movement [in 2013-14] and then later in Zelensky's election or rather how it was perceived. When people were in the squares for the Maidan, they were booing oligarchs who were trying to barter a deal with Yanukovich. It was in many respects a reactionary or reactive movement, but there was a common thread of being pissed off at police brutality, lawlessness, corruption and the oligarchs remaining in power whoever was voted in. If Russia had not started the war in the east [in 2014], it is conceivable we would have seen more of a social or class-struggle movement developing by now.

We had [Petro] Poroshenko [president 2014-19], whose pitch was that he was the best commander-in-chief for war, and then he was rejected in favour of the populist Zelenskyy. It was a kind of Maidan in the voting booths, though in reality Zelenskyy is not anti-oligarch. There is a crisis of representation that the left could tap into, though how soon a substantial political force will emerge I don't know.

What about the far right in Ukraine?
Since it was founded, Sotsialniy Rukh has had conflict with these right-wing groups and in some cases our members have been physically attacked. There are websites where they create lists of levaki, "lefties", for their people to target. Then they have wider activities like harassing gay rights or women's rights parades and trying to start fights. They have a relationship with the police, who regard these groups as doing a useful job for them. A cop may lose their job if they beat up a protester, so they can let the fascist do it for them. Even when they carry out arrests of the far right it does not usually

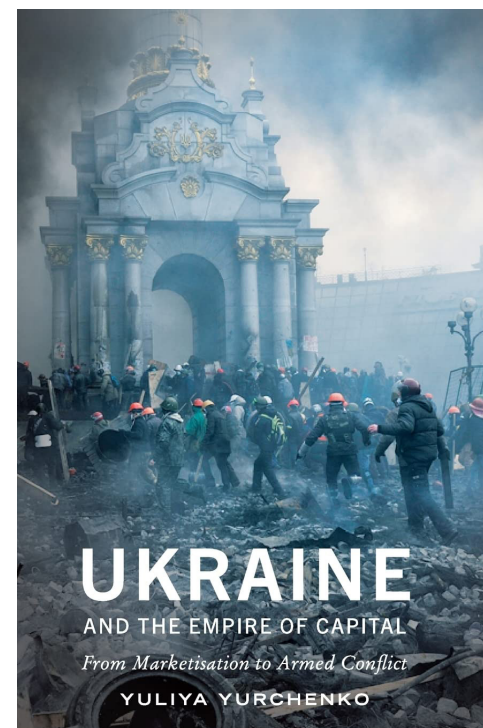
lead to any serious consequences. Of course such a situation exists in many countries. It doesn't necessarily mean that these groups have widespread social support.

In terms of the war and the army, you know about Azov. They were significantly more radical before 2014, and since then have mellowed a bit, though of course they are still vicious nationalists and some are actual Nazis. Now it seems some join them because of right-wing ideology and some because the battalion is famous and well organised and of course is part of the army itself. That makes them subject to all kinds of restrictions on their activities, but is also a serious problem in itself.

It's not clear how much the war has boosted them. Certainly in the siege of Mariupol they have appeared to many as heroic defenders. I'm not convinced it will lead to wider support, because unlike in 2014 they are submerged in a much wider mobilisation of Ukrainians. A bigger problem is broader hostility to Russians, which of course is understandable but totally wrong, rather than the far right specifically.

Even though this is a just war on Ukraine's side, there is a real risk it will cement neoliberalism and militarisation further. We already see countries ramping up their military spending.

On a range of issues, from the rights of refugees to the question of international debt, the left needs to use this opportunity to draw out wider lessons, to talk about deprived nations whose rights have been overlooked, and to



make arguments about the inadequacy of international institutions that at best have done nothing to prevent all the horrors of war, indebtedness and social destruction. These institutions have brought disaster to what "naturally" should be some of the richest countries in the world, in Africa and Latin America for instance.

So there is a lot to grab hold of. For instance with the debt campaign we are linking up with the International Committee for the Abolition of Illegitimate Debt, the Debt Jubilee Campaign and other groups, to revive a dialogue about what should happen if a country finds itself in a state of war or natural disaster, about an automatic mechanism for suspending debt payments and replacing them with aid. This will not bring a revolution but it could help win more ground.

We should argue for the UN to be democratised, with the permanent section of the Security Council disbanded.

Leaders and activists in Africa, among others, are frustrated about Ukraine getting more attention or consideration than other countries facing emergencies and what this says about international institutional racism. The answer is not competition over who gets a little bit more of the pie, but working together on the basis of recognising that many countries are being fucked by international capitalism. It's one country today, tomorrow it will be another; we need to fight to address systemic problems. I think there could be a bit more space for international solidarity opening up, and the demand for debt cancellation is one mechanism for that. □

• Abridged. More: bit.ly/yuliya-y



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Our drum sounds for Ukraine, too

By Vicki Morris

Jon Rogers, a long-time left activist in the public services union Unison, recently wrote a [blogpost](#) arguing socialists shouldn't have supported the trade union demonstration in support of Ukraine on 9 April. His title was "Marching to the beat of a different drum". For Jon, the only war that it is worth UK trade unionists getting worked up about is "the class war".

"The priority for trade unions in the United Kingdom should be fighting to defend the living standards of our members."

The article faces different ways. Jon says he supported all the demands of the demon-

stration but also fundamentally thinks the media are exaggerating the problem and that we are being hoodwinked. He suggests the left has to resist being moved to passion like, well, most working-class people are being moved to support Ukraine by what they see on the TV.

Of course, we know that the truth can be manipulated. See the media in Putin's Russia for a good example. But surely Jon believes – knows – that Russia has invaded Ukraine, putting millions of its population to flight, killed at least thousands, probably tens of thousands, of Ukrainian civilians, laid waste to Ukrainian cities, and caused most of the male and some of

the female population – ordinary, working-class Ukrainians like us – to take up arms to repel the invader. Jon knows that, and he thinks it's wrong.

But what then does he say the UK left should do? Keep out of it, says Jon, it's none of our business. All the while "our" government are siding with Ukraine, in their own way. And if "our" government, like Hungary's government, say, were not siding with Ukraine? Probably still none of our business, according to Jon. Get back to the cost of living crisis.

Jon's is not the worst position you will see on the left on Ukraine but it is bad, like a faint impression of the worst positions. It's Stop The War lite.

Jon says he has been marching against "war" for years. But then why not march against Putin's war, while supporting the Ukrainians defending themselves against aggression? On Ukraine's side this is not a war of conquest or annexation. Ukrainians have the right to fight in self-defence. The Ukrainian left and labour movement have the right to the support and solidarity of the UK left and labour movement, not hand-wringing and a lecture on "anti-imperialism" which tells them they should not resist Russian imperialism.

It is one thing to invoke the anti-war sentiment of socialists against the Great War in 1914 – "Wars are fought be-

tween capitalist nations over resources" – but Russia vs Ukraine in 2022 does not fit the template of World War One.

The left is internationalist or we are lost. Where is the sense in letting Boris Johnson appear as a saviour to working-class Ukrainians while we turn our back? We prosecute the class struggle at home and abroad. We don't just leave international politics to the ruling classes.

War will end when the working class – the international working class – takes power. Supporting Ukrainian workers against Putin is now a vital part of that struggle. □



Hospital security guards rally support

By David Santos

The Great Ormond St Hospital (GOSH) security guards in London held a rally on Friday 29 April, their 50th day of strike action.

Supporters from across the labour movement came together to celebrate their brave and undeterred action, despite the draconian injunction that remains in place. The rally was held in a small park near the workplace due to the court order criminalising any amplified music, shouting, or "vigorous dancing" outside the hospital. Half a dozen cops watched; there is no attempt to hide that these workers are up against the state as well as their employer.

The attempts to quell the action have proved entirely unsuccessful. The mood is still buoyant, celebrated by the repeated chant "We're gonna fight, we're gonna win!". Supporters have also written songs especially for the GOSH workers' picket line.

Speakers came from UCL UCU branch; East London Momentum;

Camden Trades Council; and Bell Ribeiro-Addy, MP in South London, amongst others. Martin Ralph from Liverpool TUC reported back from the international trade-union network conference in Dijon on 23-24 April, where the GOSH strike was heralded.

Reports came in from a number of strikes around London in health and public services: the GOSH struggle is seen as crucial, joining as it does numerous issues of outsourcing, racism, and the NHS.

The workers themselves spoke powerfully once again. One reminded the crowd of the Second World War, when Afrikans were drafted in to fight on front lines, before being sent back and met with violence when demanding independence. The pattern is repeated to this group of workers who worked on the front line through the pandemic, and are now criminalised for demanding something as basic as sick pay. The workers are reballoting and vow to continue the strike until victory. □

France: prime minister vs president?

By Martin Thomas

France votes in parliamentary elections on 12 and 19 June. Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the former Socialist Party minister who was the leading leftish candidate in the presidential poll on 10 April, is campaigning with posters for "Mélenchon prime minister".

Mélenchon failed to make it to the 24 April run-off, where Emmanuel Macron defeated Marine Le Pen 58.5%-41.5%. His slogan is unlikely. But not absurd.

The 1958 French constitution gave most power to the president, and implicitly assumed that the National Assembly voting would be close enough to presidential voting for an Assembly majority for whatever prime minister the president chose.

But more recently the presidential field has been dominated by individuals with loose or scant party bases, while the party organisations reassert themselves in legislative (and municipal) elections. In 2017 Marine Le Pen won only 8 Assembly seats out of 577, Mélenchon's La France Insoumise (LFI) 17. The Socialist Party (SP) with allies won 45, the Communist Party (CP) 10, the mainstream right 136.

In Assembly elections, any candidate with 12.5% of the vote can go into the run-off. For a long time, it was simple: in each seat the SP or CP would withdraw on the second round in favour of the better-placed in the first round, the parties of the right would also withdraw in favour of their best-placed, and there would be a left vs right run-off.

Now a seat with 40-odd% of left voters in the first round could fail to give any one of the left candidates 12.5%.

Mélenchon is driving not just for an agreement on second-round withdrawals, but for a common slate with a common (limited) platform which can top 12.5% almost everywhere.

As of 3 May he has agreements for his Union Populaire nailed down with the Greens (EELV) and with the CP, and possible with the SP. The revolutionary-left NPA wants to be in the Union Populaire, but not if the SP is in. Lutte Ouvrière is standing its own candidates.

There was "cohabitation" between politically-opposed presidents and prime ministers in 1986-8, 1993-5, and 1997-2002, because then the presidential terms of seven years did not coincide with the Assembly's five years (they've been brought into line now); or in 1997 because right-wing president Jacques Chirac miscalculated by dissolving the Assembly and having the Socialist Party win the ensuing election.

The chief result of that "cohabitation" was to discredit all the major parties in the eyes of their supporters.

Theoretically, Mélenchon could use an Assembly majority to impeach the president (it's never been tried), or as a springboard for mobilisations against Macron. However, he pitches the campaign for him as prime minister as an alternative to combatting Macron on picket lines and on the streets; and in any case the electoral calculus looks poor.

Backing Mélenchon's programme (maybe in the hope of getting one of their people elected somewhere) must be a poor alternative for the NPA to standing their own candidates on their own politics. □

The Dublin Labour War, 1913-14

Introduction



Connolly politically unexpurgated

By Sean Matgamna

The Dublin Labour War of 1913-14 is one of the great epics of working class struggle and endeavour. Officially, it lasted from August 1913 to mid-January 1914, but some of the lockouts dragged on beyond that date.

It is well known throughout the world because Vladimir Lenin wrote about it. That was in the first week, and therefore, many of his judgements were not true for the strike-lockout as a whole. Nor were the locked-out workers innocents picked upon by the 400 Dublin employers who banded together to fight them. The Dublin workers who were members of Jim Larkin's union, the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union really had provoked the employers. They really had banded together so that no small workplace was isolated in its struggles, and every group could appeal to workers indirectly involved in their trade to back them.

Seafarers could depend on Dublin dockers to strike until the seafarers were allowed to join their Union. Union members would act on behalf of or in alliance with other embattled workers.

Many rural workers came to Dublin for employment, thus pushing wages down. The union and solidarity action exerted pressure in the opposite direction. Slowly, the wages of general labourers were pushed up.

Then the lockout and strike. Led by an elderly Dublin millionaire reprobate, William

Martin Murphy, the employers hit back.

The British labour movement backed Dublin heroically, sending money. Ships full of food sent by the labour movement to support the strikers and locked-out workers steamed into Dublin repeatedly. The power of the bosses to compel workers by starving their children was severely limited. Much of Dublin was tied up.

Magnificent as British labour movement help in goods and money was, it was not enough. Only strikes in solidarity with Dublin could have inflicted the necessary damage on the Dublin employers. A class struggle like that of Dublin has a logic of its own. The logic of the strike-lockout in Dublin, and of British labour movement help to the Dublin workers, was a general strike in the UK. Militants in Britain took up the call for a General Strike. The idea was seriously discussed for the first time since Chartist times (there had been a General Strike in 1842 in the North of England, the so named Plug Riots).

But the union officials fought it off. They drew the line at Strikes in support of Dublin. The long, unequal struggle dragged on.

In January the Irish leaders called on Dublin workers to go back on the best terms they could get. The bosses hadn't won completely. The union survived. But the workers hadn't won either. The power of the workers had been curtailed, for a while. □

• This feature is part of a series on "Connolly: politically unexpurgated". See our website: workersliberty.org/connolly

Glorious Dublin!

By James Connolly

To the readers of *Forward* possibly some sort of apology is due for the non-appearance of my notes for the past few weeks, but I am sure that they quite well understand that I was, so to speak, otherwise engaged. On the day I generally write my little screed, I was engaged on the 31st of August in learning how to walk around in a ring with about 40 other unfortunates kept six paces apart, and yet slip in a word or two to the poor devil in front of or behind me without being noticed by the watchful prison warders.

The first question I asked was generally "say, what are you in for?" Then the rest of the conversation ran thus:

"For throwing stones at the police."

"Well, I hope you did throw them and hit."

"No, by God, that's the worst of it. I was pulled coming out of my own house."

"Pulled" is the Dublin word for arrested. It was somewhat mortifying to me to know that I was the only person apparently in prison who had really committed the crime for which I was arrested. It gave me a sort of feeling that I was lowering the moral tone of the prison by coming amongst such a crowd of blameless citizens.

But the concluding part of our colloquy was a little more encouraging. It usually finished in this way:

"Are you in the Transport Union?"

"Of course I am."

"Good. Well if they filled all the prisons in Ireland they can't beat us, my boy."

"No, thank God, they can't; we'll fight all the better when we get out."

And there you have the true spirit. Baton charges, prison cells, untimely death and acute starvation – all were faced without a murmur, and in face of them all, the brave Dublin workers never lost faith in their ultimate triumph, never doubted but that their organisation would emerge victorious from the struggle. This is the great fact that many of our critics amongst the English Labour leaders seem to lose sight of. The Dublin fight is more than a trade union fight; it is a great class struggle, and recognised as such by all sides. We in Ireland feel that to doubt our victory would be to lose faith in the destiny of our class.

I heard of one case where a labourer was asked to sign the agreement forswearing the



"Hired Thugs of the Boss Class", 13 Sep. 1913

Transport Union, and he told his employer, a small capitalist builder, that he refused to sign. The employer, knowing the man's circumstances, reminded him that he had a wife and six children who would be starving within a week. The reply of this humble labourer rose to the heights of sublimity. "It is true, sir," he said, "they will starve; but I would rather see them go out one by one in their coffins than that I should disgrace them by signing that."

And with head erect he walked out to share hunger and privation with his loved ones. Hunger and privation – and honour.

Defeat, bah! How can such a people be defeated? His case is typical of thousands more. Take the case of the United Builders Labourers' Trade Union, for instance. This was a rival union to the Irish Transport Workers' Union. Many sharp passages had occurred between them, and the employers counted confidently upon their cooperation in the struggle; Mr. William Martin Murphy especially praising them and exulting in their supposed acquiescence in his plans.

Remember also that they were a dividing

continued on page 10 →

→ from page 9

society, dividing their funds at the end of each year, and therefore without any strike funds. When the members of their union were asked to sign the agreement, promising never to join or help the Transport Union, not one man consented – but all over Dublin their 2,500 members marched out “to help the Transport boys.” Long ere these lines are written, they have experienced all the horrors of starvation, but with grim resolve they have tightened their belts and presented an unyielding front to the enemy.

It is a pleasure to me to recall that I was a member of their Union before I went to America, and that they twice ran me as their candidate for Dublin City Council before the Transport Union was dreamed of, or before our friend Jim Larkin brought the aid of his wonderful magnetism to the Labour movement in Ireland.

What is true of that union is also true of most of the skilled trades. All are showing wonderful loyalty to their class. Coachbuilders, sawyers, engineers, bricklayers, each trade that is served by general labourers, walks out along with the Transport boys; refuses to even promise to work with any one who signs the employers’ agreement, and, cheering, lines up along with their class.

Or think of the heroic women and girls. Did they care to evade the issue, they might have remained at work, for the first part of the agreement asks them to merely repudiate the Transport Workers, and as women they are members of the Irish Women Workers’ Union, not of the Transport. But the second part pledges them to refuse to “help” the Transport Union – and in every shop, factory and sweating hell-hole in Dublin, as the agreement is presented, they march out with pinched faces, threadbare clothes, and miserable footgear, but with high hopes, undaunted spirit, and glorious resolve shining out of their eyes. Happy the men who will secure such wives; thrice blessed the nation which has such girls as the future mothers of the race!

Ah, comrades, it is good to have lived

in Dublin in these days!

And then our friends write deprecatingly to the British press of the “dislocation of trade” involved in sympathetic strikes, of the “perpetual conflicts” in which they would involve great trade unions. To those arguments, if we can call them such, our answer is sufficient. It is this:

If the capitalist class knew that any outrages upon a worker, any attack upon labour, would result in a prompt dislocation of trade, perhaps national in its extent; that the unions were prepared to spend their last copper if necessary rather than permit a brother or sister to be injured, then the knowledge would not only ensure a long cessation from industrial skirmishing such as the unions are harassed by today, it would not only ensure peace to the unions, but what is of vastly more importance, it would ensure to the individual worker a peace from slave-driving and harassing at his work such as the largest unions are apparently unable to guarantee under present methods.

Mark, when I say “prepared to spend their last copper if necessary,” I am not employing merely a rhetorical flourish, I am using the words literally. As we believe that in the Socialist Society of the future the entire resources of the nation must stand behind every individual, guaranteeing him against want, so today our unions must be prepared to fight with all their resources to safeguard the rights of every individual member.

The adoption of such a principle, followed by a few years of fighting on such lines to convince the world of our earnestness, would not only transform the industrial arena, but would revolutionise politics. Each side would necessarily seek to grasp the power of the state to reinforce its position, and politics would thus become what they ought to be, a reflex of the industrial battle, and lose the power to masquerade as a neutral power detached from economic passions or motives.

At present I regret to say Labour politicians seem to be losing all reality as effective aids to our struggles on the industrial battlefield, are becoming more and more absorbed in questions of administration, or taxation, and only occasionally, as in the Miners’ National Strike, really rise to a realisation of their true role of Parliamentary outposts of the industrial army.

The Parliamentary tail in Britain still persist in wagging the British industrial dog. Once the dog really begins to assert his true position, we will be troubled no more by carping critics of labour politics, nor yet with Labour politicians’ confessions of their own impotence in such great crises as that of the railway strike or the Johannesburg massacres.



“When Labour takes a rest”, 27 Sep. ‘13

Nor yet would we see that awful spectacle we have seen lately of labour politicians writing to the capitalist press to denounce the methods of a union which, with 20,000 men and women locked out in one city, is facing an attempt of 400 employers to starve its members back into slavery.

And thou, Brutus, that you should play the enemy’s game at such a crisis! Every drop of ink you spilled in such an act stopped a loaf of bread on its way to some starving family. □

• *Forward*, 4 October 1913.

At the end of the *Forward* article Connolly added this: The following letter appeared in the *Dublin Irish Times* and is a gem that the readers of *Forward* should appreciate:

The Labour Crisis in Dublin: Sir – Proverbially akin, tragedy and comedy have apparently joined in their final embrace. Released last week from Mountjoy Jail for the same offence, the allied protagonists of Liberty Hall – James Larkin and James Connolly – have upset many important institutions and queered not a few pitches!

Yesterday, at the same moment, while the Rev. Father Condon, O.S.A., uttered the thunders of Rome to “the Grand Annual Office of the United Confraternities of Dublin in honour of the Blessed Virgin” against Larkin and his works, James Connolly was received in the streets of Belfast with volleys of stones, accompanied with cries of “No Pope!”

What under Heaven does it all really mean?

Who said a “sympathetic strike?”

Yours, etc. – A Disciple of the late W S Gilbert.

Dublin, 18th September, 1913. □

• In *Forward* (bit.ly/glory-d) Connolly also includes a section of another article of his, from *The Irish Review*, October 1913. That section, plus more, has already been published in this series in *Solidarity* 622. Cartoons here are from *Forward*.



“The Ring around the Standard”, 20 Sep. ‘13

Timeline

July: Murphy tells tram workers he will sack them unless they disavow ITGWU

August 26: Workers stop all trams, in protest and to seek pay rises

August 29-31: Police riot, attacking workers’ demonstrations

September 1: British TUC congress pledges support

September: Employers extend lockout

September 9: Connolly goes on a hunger strike in jail, which will win his release; Larkin goes to England for a fundraising tour

Mid-September: Unofficial action by railworkers and others, refusing to handle goods from Dublin

September 27: First of several ships organised by British trade unions arrives in Dublin with food aid for the Dublin workers

October 5: A Board of Trade inquiry recommends peace terms which the union accepts as a basis for negotiations, but the bosses flatly reject

October 6: Miners’ Federation conference in Britain calls for general strike in solidarity

October 18: Dora Montefiore and others begin to organise to have strikers’ children billeted with supporters’ families in England and Northern Ireland for duration of dispute. Denunciation and obstruction by Catholic priests

October 28: Connolly becomes acting general secretary of union while Larkin is jailed

November 1: Giant rally at Albert Hall in London in solidarity with strike, called by Daily Herald

Mid-November: Renewed rank and file solidarity action in Britain. Larkin does speaking tour in Britain

December 4: TUC leaders visit Dublin to seek new talks, which again fail because bosses refuse all compromise

December 9: TUC special conference votes down motion for comprehensive boycott of goods from lockout employers. Support from British unions starts to scale down

January: Irish Labour Party (formed by trade unions in 1912) makes its first election campaign, with candidates in Dublin municipal elections

January 15: Labour candidates narrowly fail to win more than one seat in Dublin municipal elections

January 19: Larkin advises strikers to go back to work on the best terms they can get. Over the following weeks the strike gradually ebbs. □

Karl Radek on China



Book review

By Paul Hampton

The Chinese revolution 1925-27 was one of the high points of working-class militancy in the twentieth century. By the mid-1920s a wave of strikes swept the country, with workers' organisations becoming major powers in the main cities, with ever-greater numbers of workers coming out, joining unions and taking control of the streets.

At the centre of working-class militancy was the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The party held its first congress in July 1921, when a dozen delegates represented only 50 members. Before 1925, it still had fewer than a thousand members, yet by early 1927 it had more than 57,000 militants, held the leadership of many unions and armed pickets and led peasant organisations.

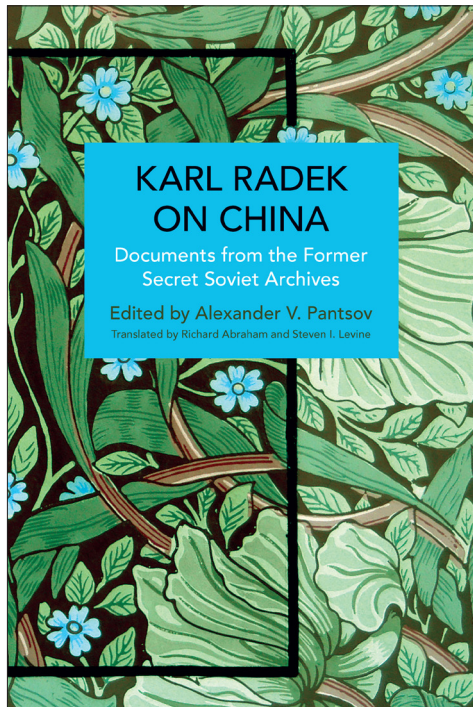
The Guomindang nationalist party also grew out of this ferment. Since the early 1920s it had been in government in Guangzhou and under Chiang Kai-shek built a powerful army that began to defeat the warlords who divided China. Since 1923, Communists had also been members of the Guomindang, running many strikes together, with both enjoying substantial support, financial and military, from the USSR.

In April 1927, Chiang Kai-shek ended the alliance by orchestrating the massacre of the CCP and other worker-militants. At least 2,000 Communists and militants were killed in Shanghai alone, and thousands more arrested or sacked from their jobs. Similar massacres were carried out months later in Wuhan and others places. The defeat of the Chinese revolution 1925-27 has been interrogated by historians ever since. The role of the Russian state, led by Stalin and the Communist International (Comintern) is a key part of any explanation. Historian Alexander Pantsov has utilised materials from Russian archives to shed new light on the defeat.

Pantsov's book *The Bolsheviks and the Chinese Revolution* (2000) clarified the extent of Stalin's mistakes, while providing a more nuanced account of Trotsky's Left Opposition efforts to challenge Comintern policy. Therefore Pantsov's book, *Karl Radek on China: Documents from the Former Secret Soviet Archives* (2021) is a welcome contribution to the real history of the Chinese revolution.

Radek in the Comintern

Karl Radek makes for an interesting prism through which to understand



the debates around the Chinese revolution. By the time of his engagement with Chinese affairs, he had already spent two decades as a revolutionary socialist intervening in the European labour movement. In 1920, Radek began working for the Comintern, where he was a member of the Presidium and secretary of its executive committee (ECCI). Over the same period, he was a member of the central committee of the Russian Communist Party. In 1923 he joined the Left Opposition, but lost his Comintern position after the failed October 1923 German uprising.

Radek made at least two significant contributions to Chinese politics during this time when the Comintern was a real general staff for working class revolution. First, in July 1922, Radek drafted the most important instruction to Hendricus Sneevliet (Maring), as guidelines for his work as Comintern representative in China. This instruction set the strategic and tactical orientation of the young communist party for the following five years. It stated:

"The ECCI regards the Guomindang as a revolutionary party that preserves the testaments of the Revolution of 1912 and seeks to build an independent Chinese Republic. In light of this, the tasks of Communists in China must be as follows: The education of ideologically independent elements which must in future form the embryo of the Communist Party... Communists are obligated to support the Guomindang and that wing of it that is based on workers and artisans... Communists must set up groups of supporters inside the Guomindang itself and in trade unions..."

Second, on 23 November 1922, Radek spoke on the "eastern ques-

tion" at the fourth Comintern congress, where he outlined the assessment of Chinese conditions and priorities. He said:

"The first task of the Chinese comrades is to focus on what the Chinese movement is capable of. Comrades, you must understand that in China neither the victory of socialism nor the establishment of a soviet republic is on the agenda. Unfortunately, even the question of national unity has not yet been historically placed on the agenda in China."

Given the conjuncture in China and globally at the time, Radek's judgement was realist and accepted with little dissent. It was the basis on which the CCP built itself, while advancing the legitimate nationalist movement against imperial intervention and domestic ruling classes.

Stalin's policy

However within Russian workers' state itself and the Comintern, the balance of forces was beginning to change. Workers' rule in Russia hung on the thread. The state bureaucracy had begun to strangle the organs of workers' democracy, the soviets, unions and the party itself. In autumn 1923, while Lenin lay paralysed by another stroke, Trotsky led the Left Opposition against the policies of Stalin, Zinoviev and Bukharin. Radek to his credit joined Trotsky's opposition. However the oppositionists were defeated and mostly lost their leading positions over the following years.

The Comintern line on China began to change within the sheath of the original policy, despite the growing working class struggle. At the fifth Comintern congress in June 1924, Dmitrii Manuilsky for the first time raised the idea of "workers' and peasants' parties". He was supported by Manabendra Nath Roy, who advanced the formula of a "people's party". Nothing immediately came of these formulations. The Congress did not debate them any further. Privately, Stalin told Manuilsky that "the creation of such hybrid parties in India and China would be harmful", but were a possibility in "very backward countries". However the conception of "workers' and peasants' parties" would soon be applied to the Guomindang.

Stalin elaborated his own views on China in a speech at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East (KUTY) on 18 May 1925. Stalin proposed that the Chinese communists could radically transform the nature of the Guomindang through seizing power within the party, allied to leftists within its ranks. In China, Stalin argued, the goal should not be a united national front but a revolutionary bloc,

and "that bloc can assume the form of a single party, a workers' and peasants' party, after the model of the Guomindang". He argued that communists could establish their hegemony inside such a bloc and that the CCP were on the brink of doing so.

This set the pattern for Comintern policy in China for the following years. At the sixth ECCI plenum February and March 1926, the Guomindang was characterised as a "people's revolutionary party". The Politburo voted to admit the Guomindang as a sympathiser party to the Comintern, with only Trotsky dissenting. In early 1927, this was carried out. Despite changed conditions in China, including growing working class militancy, the size of the CCP and the opposition of the Guomindang right-wing to the united front, Stalin insisted that Comintern support for the Guomindang continue.

Radek's orthodoxy

During 1924, Radek began to study, speak and write on Chinese history. From July 1924, his articles on China appeared in official publications. In autumn 1924, Radek gave his first public speech on China at the Bolshoi Theatre. In spring 1925, he joined a commission organising the Sun Yat-sen University of the Toilers of China (UTK), a special higher education institute for Guomindang and communist cadres in Moscow. In November 1925, Radek was appointed rector of this university.

Pantsov argues that until summer 1926, Radek fully supported Stalin's line on China. In October 1925, Radek described the nationalists as the "worker-peasant Guomindang" and the Guangzhou government as "the first worker-peasant government" of China. On 26 March 1926, Radek contended that nothing serious had happened the week before with Chiang Kai-shek's coup, despite the arrest of communists and circumscribing of their activities in Guangzhou. This was a serious turn, indicative of a breach in the united front and certainly a matter on which the Comintern should have reassessed. In April 1926, Trotsky proposed the CCP leave the "bloc within" the Guomindang and instead rally as an independent party. This was rejected by the Politburo, with Radek supporting Stalin.

Radek rethinks

Radek's rethinking can be traced through the essays and lectures in this volume, published by Pantsov in English for the first time. On 22 June 1926, he finished a polemic, *On the Fundamentals of Communist Policy in China*.

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He argued that in the current conjuncture:

"From that situation there are two possible outcomes. Either a renunciation by the Communists of their own independent policy, a complete subordination to the Guomindang... or it is necessary to move from the present form to a bloc with the Guomindang as an alliance of independent parties... Now the moment has arrived, when we must table the question of altering the form of the relations between the Guomindang and the CCP."

Radek sent his essay to Trotsky, who replied on 26 June offering broad endorsement. Trotsky added:

"The organisational cohabitation of the Guomindang and the Communist Party was correct and progressive for a specific epoch, which, however, has now come to an end. In the current epoch, this cohabitation has become more and more of an obstacle. The chronological moment is not put forward in the theses."

In August-September 1926, Radek presented his new views cautiously in letters to the Stalinist leadership of the Russian Communist Party. In October 1926, at the party's fifteenth conference, Radek was subjected to caustic criticism.

Radek responded by retreating into academic work. Between late 1926 and early 1927, he reworked a course on Chinese history. The 17 lectures compared China and the West over the past three millennia, then the evolution of China in the nineteenth-century under the influence of foreign capitalism, finishing with an assessment of class relations in China at the beginning of the twentieth century. Some 250-300 copies were published in the UTK Press at the time, but only now in English.

Although by mid-1926, Trotsky, Radek, Zinoviev, Kamenev and others formed the United Opposition to Stalin, they did not come to a common assessment or political conclusions on China. Trotsky maintained his position that the CCP should withdraw from the Guomindang, Zinoviev favoured the continued orientation of Chinese communists to work within the Guomindang and Radek vacillated.

Opposition to Stalinism

At the beginning of 1927, Radek retreated on the united front in China, no longer demanding the departure of the CCP from the Guomindang. Radek presented his views in the literary-political journal *Novyi Mir*, the newspaper *Izvestiia* and in a series of lectures. The stenographic texts of these lectures are published in this collection, notably *Driving Forces of the Chinese Revolution*, delivered on 13 March 1927 at the Communist Academy. The Stalinists were particularly incensed by Radek's *Izvestiia* article, which made the first public mention of Chiang Kai-shek's March 1926 coup against the CCP. On 6 April 1927, the Stalinists dismissed Radek from his post at UTK.



In early May 1927, Radek produced a long essay, intended for publication as a pamphlet, called *The "Betrayal" of the National Movement by the Chinese Upper Bourgeoisie*. Radek admitted his previous assessment that the Guomindang was some kind of workers' and peasants' party was wrong. However he defended the original united front tactic.

On 17 May 1927, Radek again publicly criticised the Comintern's China policy, speaking at the Institute of World Economy and International Politics during the debate on a report by the Stalinist Lev Geller. On 25 May 1927, at the eighth ECCI plenum, the oppositionists submitted the "Declaration of the Eighty-three". Trotsky, Zinoviev, Radek, and other old Bolsheviks criticising Stalin's China policy, which continued to uphold the united front with the "Left" Guomindang, despite Chiang's massacre a month before.

However it was not until 20 June 1927 that Radek (and Zinoviev) agreed with Trotsky's demand for an immediate end to the CCP's entrust policy in the Guomindang. On 2 July 1927, the oppositionists sent a long article to Pravda, demanding the CCP leave the Guomindang, the communist ministers withdraw from the Wuhan Guomindang government and the Guomindang be excluded from the Comintern. It was never published.

In December 1927, the fifteenth party congress expelled Trotsky, Radek and other oppositionists from the party. In January 1928, Radek was exiled until May 1929. He capitulated to Stalin, making a declaration that he was leaving the opposition. By 1930, he again began to speak on China, but now for orthodox Stalinist positions. This did not save him. He was arrested in 1936, tried for conspiracy and given a 10-year sentence. On 19 May 1939, he was stabbed to death by others prisoners in the Verkhneuralsk isolation prison.

Radek's politics on China lagged behind Trotsky, but he came to sharply criticise Stalin's line. Pantsov's book is a welcome addition to the literature on the real history of the Chinese revolution.

Chinese history

In addition, Karl Radek's historical work on China contained in the book also provide one of the first attempts to

apply Marxist analysis to centuries of Chinese history. In particular, his series of 17 lectures, *History of the Revolutionary Movement in China* (1926-27) and his unpublished essay, *Controversial Questions of Chinese History* (26 November 1926) repay close reading. While Radek's efforts were flawed in places, he also highlighted some significant matters that deserve credit.

Radek was very blunt about his own deficiencies. He told students during the lectures, "I do not want any of you to think that I claim to be a Sinologist. I do not know the language and I have not studied Chinese problems for long". He had no wish "to claim the title of an expert mandarin", but merely to lay out working hypotheses, "indicating what to look for, where to go, what questions arise before us". This was to guide young Chinese and other comrades studying the history. He was mindful that "the material is still very limited" and fully expected that "every scientific hypothesis in future... will be exposed as fallacious in many ways". Radek was clear that they were pioneering a Marxist investigation of Chinese history and much of what he had to say was tentative. This was the right approach. The tragedy is not that Radek made mistakes, but that Stalin cut short this open, exploratory research.

How the walls were broken down

The lasting and significant contribution made by Radek was his description of the way China was incorporated into the global capitalist economy, through a combination of global capital and foreign state violence.

Radek surveyed the period from the Opium Wars between Britain and China (1839-42 and 1856-60), when foreign capital first entered China, until the Chinese Revolution of 1911, the time when modern industrial capitalism began to take root in China. Although trade concessions were made to British and French imperialists, Radek argued that for much the nineteenth century, capitalist development was limited.

Radek thought the Sino-Japanese war (1894-95) and subsequent involvement of Japanese, Russian and German capital were the accelerant for capitalist development. Japan took control of Korea, Formosa (now Taiwan) and the Liaodong peninsula with Port Arthur, gaining effective control over North China. The Chinese government was obligated to pay an indemnity. Other big powers rushed in to gain more concessions, including Russia to extend the Trans-Siberian Railway into China.

Imperialist intervention triggered attempts to save China by means of reform from above, such as the Hundred Days of Reform. It also provoked the Boxer rebellion, which was drowned in blood by the imperial powers.

Radek dated the modern capitalist development of China to the building of railways. He wrote:

"The railroads which were built in the period from 1898 to the Revolution of

1911 were, consequently, in one part of the imperialist world a direct means of seizure; in another part a means of economic enslavement and primary mortgage which, in the event of international complications, naturally, would provide the stimulus for political seizure. Therefore, these railroads became one of the primary sources for the growth of Chinese national consciousness."

With the railways came heavy industry, mining and textile factories. Capitalist development also brought banking, debt and taxation.

"The collapse of the state resulted from the fact that foreign capital imposed enormous debts on China, and took half of China's revenues to secure these debts. On the other hand, the collapse of state power had larger consequences... a struggle commenced among various military cliques."

Radek went on to examine the break up of relations in the Chinese countryside. He argued:

"Peasants, ruined by an aggregation of disasters – oppression by militarism, competition from foreign goods, famine and other disasters brought about by the absence of concern on the part of the state regarding restoration of the timber industry and the regulation of rivers – are driven into penury, fall into the hands of merchant capital, and that this merchant capital is the primary factor in the destruction of the peasant economy, a parasite growing at the expense of the total pauperisation of the peasantry."

Imperialism

Radek used his lectures to reflect on the impact of imperialism on China. He argued:

"The role of imperialism was that of smashing the Chinese wall of social stagnation which separated China from the rest of the world. The railroads which forced their way into China brought it into contact with the world economy, and rendered possible the influence of the world economy. The investment of foreign capital helped to bring together surplus labour in the villages with the material elements existing in the country which, together, made up the capitalist economy, destroying the foundations of the old Chinese economy in the countryside..."

Although Radek recognised that "imperialism played an enormous progressive role in the development of China", he emphasised that his analysis was "not a defence of imperialism or capitalism". The "progressive factor" of imperialism in awakening China was the creation of Chinese bourgeoisie and the Chinese proletariat, classes that soon brought forth a broad nationalist movement. He also registered that imperialism "changed from a factor promoting development into a factor inhibiting the capitalist development of China".

Political conclusions

Radek drew some significant political

conclusions from his history. He argued that, although modern capitalism had taken over only the coastal regions of China, “feudalism” in China was largely past. Radek characterised the exploiting class in the China of his day, not as feudal (or semi-feudal) but as capitalist.

Second, Radek argued the Chinese bourgeoisie was too weak, too tied to foreign imperialism and too intertwined with the landlord class to be a revolutionary actor. He maintained: “The Chinese bourgeoisie cannot be the liberator of the peasantry.”

Third, the consequence of imperialist intervention and capitalist development was the creation of modern classes, securing the preconditions for revolution. Radek concluded that “the Chinese revolution will be, above all, a peasant war”, but that the working class would take part as well.

Politically this implied independent working class struggle within the national liberation movement against foreign imperialism – the stance that Trotsky had taken and juxtaposed to Stalin’s continued subordination of the CCP to the Guomindang.

Millennia of Chinese history

While Radek’s investigations of the recent history were extremely valuable for the political battles of the 1920s, his account of the previous millennia of Chinese history was largely speculative and erroneous.

According to Radek, feudal relations in China had dominated only until the third century BCE, the end of the Zhou dynasty. After that, a struggle for dominance by commercial capital began, with its eventual hegemony in the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries. Radek regarded both the Han dynasty (206 BC-AD 220) and Ming dynasty (AD 1368-1644) as beginning with peasants taking over the state and destroying feudalism, only for feudalism to recrystallise, and “peasant dynasties degenerated into feudal dynasties”. Then, commercial capital was weakened, with the disintegration of the Mongol empire and the corresponding loss of an enormous foreign market for Chinese goods. This was why, Radek believed, China subsequently lagging behind the West.

Radek seems almost entirely wrong, both on the grounds of Marxist theory and through subsequent historical studies. Nowhere did he define “feudalism”, but it seems perverse that the “feudal” period started earlier and was destroyed much earlier than elsewhere globally. Similarly, Radek asserted that “commercial capitalism” grew up very early in China, but with no adequate explanation. Although Radek followed the Russian Marxist historian Mikhail Pokrovskii, Marx himself was clear that the presence of merchants and markets was not sufficient to signify the capitalist mode of production was extant. Similarly, Trotsky had challenged Pokrovskii’s interpretation of Russian history.

Radek also asserted that the peas-

ants had at times ruled. He argued that “in China, unlike in European states, we see periods in which the peasants are victorious and establish their own governing power. In these periods, the bureaucracy is not a supra-class apparatus, but an apparatus representing the interests of the rural petty bourgeoisie, the peasantry”. Yet elsewhere he implied (rightly) that peasant rule was not possible. Radek failed to clarify the class character of Chinese society for more than two millennia.

Radek posed the question: if all the elements were present: commodity capital, artisans and a landless proletariat, why did a contemporary bourgeoisie not develop in China? He argued that capitalism had developed in Holland, England and Italy “thanks to capital accumulation through colonial policies”. By contrast, China had lost “massive opportunities” for colonial expansion after the fall of the Mongols, because “India established the rule of the Great Mughals, which was stronger” and “a revival which strengthened Persia”.

While of course colonial booty abetted the development of capitalism, it could not be the primary cause, or else Spain and Portugal would have been in the vanguard. Radek offered an exogenous explanation for capitalist development, rather than looking at the

internal social relations of production. In states like England where peasants lost their direct access to the means of subsistence, they were drawn into dependence on markets and lost control of their surplus to landlords and merchants in the cities. In light of the rich and varied Marxist debates on the transition from feudalism to capitalism, Radek’s work adds very little.

What sort of class society?

Worse, Radek was dismissive of the emerging Marxist debate on the “Asiatic mode of production”, which may have helped to clarify the type of class society in earlier periods of Chinese history.

It was well known that in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), Marx stated: “In broad outline, the Asiatic, ancient, feudal and modern bourgeois modes of production may be designated as epochs marking progress in the economic development of society.” In 1925, David Riazanov published some of Marx’s writing on China, and highlighted the “Asiatic mode of production”. In the same year, Eugene Varga wrote that China had seen “the formation of a ruling class of a very special type, unknown in the realm of European culture, namely, a class of literati”. In 1926, Anatolii Kantorovich

discussed the system of social relations in China in the pre-capitalist epoch in similar terms.

Radek’s response was to rubbish these analyses as “Confucian legends” and to dismiss European literature about the nature of landed property in China as “the result of ignorance, the result of reports by European tourists and superficial writers about China”. He asserted that the existence of private property in land, with the right to sell, buy, and mortgage it, was sufficient to undermine any conception of a tributary class society based on an exploited peasantry.

On a political level, Radek was understandably defensive. In the May Day 1927 edition of *Pravda*, the Stalinist hack John Pepper argued that there was no large-scale landowning or serfdom in China. Instead Pepper asserted that the “Asiatic mode of production” in China meant it was an even earlier form of class society, thereby seeking to justify Stalin’s subordination of the CCP to the Guomindang.

However Radek’s position was methodologically flawed. He simply assumed that “the scheme of the development of society, which Marxism provides on the basis of the existence of the history of European humanity, fully corresponds to Chinese history”. He asserted that “there were no significant differences between the social conditions of China in the middle of the past century and the social conditions of West European countries in the epoch prior to the development within them of modern industry”. This was not empirically true. Nor did he apply Marx’s focus on surplus extraction, the key to modes of exploitation and therefore to modes of production.

The tragedy was that the defeat of the Chinese revolution in 1925-27 triggered a vibrant discussion among Marxists in Russia about the class nature of Chinese society throughout its history – see Marian Sawyer, *Marxism and the Question of the Asiatic Mode of Production* (1977) and John Barber, *Soviet Historians in Crisis* (1981). More significantly, Chinese socialists also took up the Asiatic mode of production debate – see Arik Dirlik, *Revolution and History* (1978). Radek’s lectures were translated by Trotskyist Liu Renjing and published in four Chinese editions in the early 1930s. Other Chinese Trotskyists argued ancient Chinese history had taken a different path to Europe.

The debate flourished until Stalin shut it down, ultimately in his *Short Course* (1938), which omitted the “Asiatic” altogether from his (unilinear) list of modes of production. The label of “feudalism” was imposed on China, irrespective of the actual relations that may have existed over centuries of history. Radek’s work did not challenge that orthodoxy and therefore is not the best starting point for contemporary Marxist histories of pre-capitalist China. □

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Charlotte Despard, a rebel from age

By Jill Mountford

At her 89th birthday party, in 1933, Charlotte Despard made a speech urging her friends to fight fascism, and she quoted Lenin as she put the case for revolution.

Days earlier she was making a speech in Trafalgar Square, bent with old age and shaking her arthritic fist as she made the case for anti-fascist mobilisation just as she had made countless other speeches in the previous four decades in support of socialist, feminist, anti-imperialist and republican causes. Charlotte was also a vociferous advocate for vegetarianism, an anti-vivisectionist, a Roman Catholic, and a Theosophist. She would die in Belfast aged 95.

Charlotte Despard is a familiar name to anyone who has paid much attention to the magnificent struggle for votes for women. Less known than the publicity-seeking, autocratic leadership of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), Despard should spark curiosity, inspire and be much admired for her fight for democracy and against the dictatorial leadership in the WSPU of Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst. Despard, Theresa Billington-Greig and Edith How-Martyn organised a 70-strong split in the WSPU in 1907 at the height of the battle for votes for women.

For a couple of months both sides of the split feuded over who should keep the WSPU name. The group around Despard argued that they were the real WSPU because they upheld its constitution and therefore the name was theirs.

After a couple of months of that argument, Despard, Billington-Greig and How-Martyn, along with others, launched a new organisation, the Women's Freedom League (WFL). Their motto was "Dare to be Free", and they eventually produced a newspaper called *The Vote*.

With hindsight, it seems highly unlikely Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst would ever give up the name of the organisation they founded in 1903, and, just four years on, were running like a private army.

Both sides of the split were formidable. One side was relying heavily on loyalty and their personal charisma, and the other on rational argument about democracy and the kind of organisation the movement needed.

The WFL wasted no time in getting a caravan together to tour the country drumming up support for women's suffrage and recruiting members to the WFL. Like all women's suffrage meetings, the WFL's attracted opposition. At



11 May 1912: marching with working class women in Bermondsey under the banner of the National Federation of Women Workers, led by Mary Macarthur

open-air meetings angry youths would often throw things. Annie Barnes, an East End suffragette and close friend of Sylvia Pankhurst, recalled Sylvia and others being pelted with urine-soaked newspapers by youths in the East End.

On one such occasion in 1908 Charlotte was hit by a stone lobbed by youths. She battled on, her forehead bleeding, standing on a chair and continuing to addressing the crowd. The youths, undeterred, eventually forced Charlotte to retreat. Equally undeterred, the WFL returned to the same spot the next day to address a more engaged crowd.

The WFL debated tactics and what it was to be a militant organisation. The WFL recognised that if women relied on paid employment or had family responsibilities, that is, the vast majority of women, then the sort of militant direct action which Emmeline and Christabel focused on, almost certain to lead to arrest and imprisonment, was not an option.

Along with other women, the WFL began a campaign of tax resistance: no taxation without Representation. Despard helped found the Women's Tax Resistance League. Tax resistance was a creative tactic with a long history but limited in its scope as so few women earned sufficient income to pay tax. Over a five year period, 220 women got involved in tax resistance. A well known tax resister was Dora Montefiore, a member of the WFL and later a founding member of the CPGB, who had become politically active only when she was 40.

Charlotte was 64 when those stones were lobbed at her, and had been active in politics for less than twenty years herself.

She was in her 40s when she took up "good causes" as "something to do" after she was widowed at 46. That was what benevolent wealthy widows did.

And she had been left incredibly wealthy. In 1890 trusts and dividends made her annual

income the equivalent of a little under £500,000 in today's money, and she inherited three properties. She could have taken a very comfortable route for the rest of her long life, satisfied with charity work, being wealthy and very well connected.

Her brother, John French, was a high ranking British army officer, at one point Chief of the Imperialist General Staff (head of the British Army), and Lord Lieutenant of Ireland during the Irish War of Independence while Charlotte supported Sinn Fein.

But Charlotte took up work among a big poor Irish community in Lambeth, feeling an affinity with the Irish through ancestry and marriage. Within months she was living at number 2 Currie Street, Nine Elms, among some of the poorest migrant workers in London.

Her home doubled as a youth club for local boys, a nursery for small children, a welfare clinic and soup kitchen. It was open and active seven days a week. Sunday was set aside for a Bible class "run lightly". Taking on the cause of children was the fundamental fire burning inside her.

Poor Law

She became a Poor Law Guardian. This was an elected position in local government, open only to propertied women from 1869, and to all women from 1894. Being a Poor Law Guardian was an extension of the charity work of middle and upper class women. But Charlotte wanted to affect the law and how it was interpreted for the greater good of men, women and children living in poverty imposed on them. She set about exposing the corrupt and unjust nature of the poor law and those who administered it. After 1894 being a Poor Law Guardian was a common route by which many socialist-leaning women got involved in politics and the women's suffrage movement. For Despard, it was her "apprenticeship".

In 1895 Despard joined the Social Democratic Federation (SDF), Britain's first Marxist group. In five short years since her husband's death Despard had gone from being a rather bored wealthy Victorian woman writing romantic novels to being an active member of the SDF. She gave over the use of a prop-



In Trafalgar Square, days before her 89th birthday, calling for anti-fascist mobilisation

erty she owned in Wandsworth Road to become a meeting place, renamed The Social Hall, where meetings, political education and fund-raising concerts were held for the SDF.

She became close friends with Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling and fell out of love with the SDF in 1898 when Eleanor Marx killed herself after being betrayed by Aveling. Through her friendship with Margaret Bondfield Charlotte Despard joined the ILP and became active in getting workers to join trade unions.

In 1911 Despard and Marion Coates Hanson, a trade union activist in Middlesbrough, attended the Trades Union Congress, arguing that the labour movement needed to take women's equality more seriously and that there should be campaigns to get women to join trade unions. In 1912 Charlotte addressed strike meetings around London, including the London tailors', machinists' and dressers' strike, where she put the case for working women and the vote.

Over the years she was active in the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) Independent Labour Party (ILP), the Labour Party, and (in the 1930s) the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). In the early 1920s she was a member of Sinn Fein. She remained politically active beyond her 90th birthday.

Writer Gifford Lewis calculates that in 1916-17, when she was already 72, Despard held positions on more than ten committees including the National Campaign for Civil Liberties, the Home Rule for India Committee, the Women's Labour League and the Theosophical Society, alongside being president of the Women's Freedom League.

Was she catching up on lost time? or driven by knowing she was already "old" when life expectancy for women was 60?



By Dan Katz

Who knows? Her thirst for involvement, action, organising and inspiring others seemed unquenchable.

Whatever her shortcomings in political clarity, she lived by the idea that once injustice and inequality were identified, they had to be fought. They could not be ignored, dismissed or forgotten.

In 1918, as women over 30 who met a property qualification were granted the right to vote, and after decades of work in Lambeth, she was selected to stand as the Labour Party candidate in Battersea North. This was John Burns country. Once a Labour leader in Battersea, Burns defected to the Liberals to further his career. Of him, Despard wrote: "Just for a handful of silver he left. Just for a medal to hang on his chest". Her agent in 1918 was John Archer, who had been the first man of colour to be elected as a mayor in London, in 1913.

Despard did not win the seat. Out of the 17 women who stood in this significant election only one was elected, Constance Markievicz for Sinn Fein. (It was Sinn Fein policy not to take up a seat in the British Parliament, and Markievicz was in Holloway Prison at the time).

Many women who stood lost simply because they were women. Some, like Charlotte, had been consistent and vociferous anti-war activists throughout World War One, and that added to their unpopularity among some of the electorate. It has forever been acceptable to be an old man in politics just how acceptable was it, or is it, to be an old woman? The Liberal who won the seat got almost double Charlotte's vote, with 11,231.

In her election publicity Despard stood for equal rights for men and women; equal pay for equal work; the child as the most important factor in the state; children to have the first consideration in all food schemes; boys and girls should go to work at a later age; rigorous inspection of shops and factories where boys and girls work; adequate provision for disabled men and women; abolition of Defence of the Realm Act, especially 40D; free speech, free press and liberty of action; and for a League of Free Nations. Regardless of her years she campaigned vigorously and made many public speeches.

In the 1922 general election Shapurji Saklatvala stood in Battersea North and was elected as Labour's first black or minority-ethnic MP. Charlotte supported his campaign, but she had already begun a new phase of her life, living in Dublin and focusing her energies on the cause of Home Rule. A second article will cover the last two decades of Charlotte Despard's remarkable life. □

Saudi Arabia is looking for a way to end the disastrous, protracted war it has been fighting in Yemen for the last seven years. A surge in fighting has given way to an uneasy two-month truce (from 1 April) brokered by the United Nations.

The intervention of a Saudi-led coalition into Yemen's civil war has devastated a country which, even before the Saudi campaign started in 2015, was one of the world's poorest. Yemen's population is about 30 million, and 24mn, or 80%, now need humanitarian aid.

377,000 have died as a consequence of the war, the majority from hunger and disease.

The UN states that 10,200 children have been killed or wounded as a direct result of the conflict.

Yemen has also suffered from one of the largest cholera outbreaks ever recorded, with 2.5mn suspected cases and 4,000 deaths since 2016.

Much of the country's infrastructure has been damaged or destroyed; half the country's hospitals are not functioning.

A Saudi-led coalition, which includes the UAE, stepped into a civil war in Yemen to back up their preferred side, led by president Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi. Hadi's forces were being routed by the Houthi movement based in the north of Yemen. The Saudis expected to quickly overcome the Houthi fighters, who had taken over large areas including the capital, Sana'a. Instead, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, the dominant forces in the wider coalition, became trapped in a war that they could not win and were beginning to lose.

In 2015 Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman told CIA Director John Brennan that he expected to defeat the Houthis within a few weeks. Brennan comments in his memoirs that he wondered what bin Salman "was smoking". The CIA Director found the Saudi expectation that the Houthi regime would fold after a month or two of bombing to be fanciful.

Mohammed bin Salman subsequently became a notorious pariah for ordering the brutal killing of US-based Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in 2018.

The Houthis hold about 30% of Yemen, but these regions also contain most of the populated areas, with over 70% of the population. They run northern Yemen as a theocratic dictatorship. Their slogans are: "Allah is Greater, Death to America, Death to Israel, Curse the Jews, Victory to Islam".

The antisemitic Houthis seem to favour Russia in Ukraine, blaming the war on Ukraine's Jewish President, Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

The Houthis have been fighting around the key centre of Marib, which

is controlled by the official government and is Yemen's oil-producing centre. The Houthis have also recently launched successful drone and missile attacks on important Saudi and UAE targets. One result of the Houthi raids on UAE was to get the Emiratis to pull-out their effective, UAE-funded unit, the Giants Brigade, from fighting around Marib.

The Houthis have responded to repeated Saudi bombing raids on Yemen, many of which have killed civilians, by launching rockets at Saudi Arabia, including attacks on tankers and oil installations.

The Saudis have made 25,000 air strikes on Yemen in seven years, while the Houthis have launched 1,300 missiles in retaliation.

In the background, too, is a change in US policy on Yemen. President Joe Biden has pulled US backing for offensive military operations against the Houthis in Yemen.

The Houthi organisation is based on a large clan from the north west Saada province. The Houthis are Zaydi Shiite Muslims and are about 35% of Yemen's population. They refer to their movement as Ansarullah, or "Party of God."

The Saudis are worried about Houthi links with Iran. However, the Houthi are from a branch of Shiism which is different from the "Twelver" form of Shiism dominant in Iran. It seems the Saudi intervention has pushed the Houthis closer to Iran and its proxy, the Lebanese group, Hezbollah.

In order to facilitate a political deal the Saudis gathered the anti-Houthi parties in Riyadh at the start of April. Apparently the Saudis took the mobile phones from the various political leaders and put them in separate rooms. The Saudi puppet, Hadi, who spends his time in hotels in Riyadh, not in Yemen, was told to resign, which he duly did, to be replaced by an eight-member council made up of the various contending factions. The Yemeni political leaders were then allowed out of their rooms and told they were now the Saudi-backed governing council of Yemen.

The council includes parties with diametrically opposing views, including the Islamist Islah party and the UAE-backed southern separatist Southern Transitional Council. The council was sworn in on 17 April in front of members of Yemen's parliament, last elected in 2003.

Saudi Arabia and UAE have each pledged to hand over \$1bn to the Yemen central bank. The ceasefire also includes provisions which will ease the Saudi blockade of the port of Hodeidah. Hodeidah is an important entry-point through which fuel and food aid could be imported.

Prisoner exchanges have begun with the Saudis releasing 163 Houthis. The Houthis have also freed 14 foreigners they were holding in Sana'a.

Although this might be the beginning of the end of the Saudi war in Yemen, an end to Saudi bombing certainly will not solve the internal crisis. It is difficult to see how the various parties could agree a permanent, stable political settlement. Unless the Houthis win an outright victory across the whole country, or the state is partitioned, north-south, the battles inside Yemen are likely to continue (or erupt again after a pause).

Last year British companies sold £281mn of arms to Saudi and UAE. That is more than three times the annual aid Britain sent to Yemen. Shamefully, the UK has backed the Saudi war on Yemen.

The UK should end its political backing for the Saudi regime and stop arms sales. □



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Ukraine and fetishising the anti-NATO call

By Barry Finger

Opposition to NATO has historically been a hallmark of the third camp political approach to the Cold War. Julius Jacobson (*Socialism and Thermonuclear War*), for instance, argued that NATO was pointless as a means of defending Europe from Soviet nuclear aggression. Quite the contrary: "(I)t makes the European continent an immediate nuclear target in the event of war." That is, the NATO alliance was perceived as a tripwire to the expansion of otherwise containable conflicts and therefore existed "as a threat to the integrity of countries in and out of the Pact." This was an extension of the historical anti-militarist orientation of socialism applied to Cold War circumstances.

But the more specific and concrete purpose of socialist opposition to NATO was that it "provide(d) the Communists with an excellent propaganda target." For the dynamic forces that Stalinism harnessed were the then-popular appeals of anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism. Ringing the Soviet Union with American-dominated military could be seen as implying that "winning the Cold War" meant not simply the release of the peoples of Eastern Europe from Communist domination, but their resubjugation under American capitalist overlordship. The presence of US troops and bases provided Moscow with a ready-made political alibi that it was the persecuted underdog. And it and its supporters therefore constituted a "Peace Camp." This made it all the more difficult for independent oppositional forces to evolve within the Communist bloc. As long as NATO could be presented as a "threat," the Stalinists could cynically discredit independent democratic and socialist forces within Eastern Europe as being dupes or agents of Western imperialism.

Against the disheartening prospect of future American political subordination, the third camp believed that removing the threat of NATO raised the hope of a revolutionary alternative—of popular democratic control in opposition to bureaucratic class domination. Rather than giving the Soviet Union a freer hand, the removal of that NATO alibi might have telescoped workers revolts in Berlin, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland into a mass upsurge mitigating their vulnerability to being crushed in isolation. NATO, in any case, never came to the aid of any eastern European insurgency. Its policy was containment, not roll back and with it

the risk of mutual annihilation. It was, nevertheless, in the interest of both capitalism and Stalinism that the myth of Western military "rollback" in Europe was sustained.

Moreover, antagonism to NATO on the part of socialists was a crucial means to challenge and undermine the Stalinist grip over anti-war and peace politics, which, internationally, often trafficked in the same alibis. As long as NATO hovered as a purported threat, the Stalinist-inflected "peace movements" were provided with an apologia for Soviet intervention against democratic revolts. Remove the presence of NATO, Western Stalinists and Deutscherite apologists argued, and the Communist regimes would self-liberalise from above. Of course, there was little chance that this liberalisation, that Kremlin supporters claimed to expect, would satisfy the basic demands of democracy. Workers' revolts were always going to be met by bureaucratic repression even in the absence of NATO. But without NATO the anticipated upsurge in mass insurgencies would have sharpened and hastened the contest in the anti-war movement by initiating a political and educational feedback loop. Parts of the anti-war movement would certainly have been compelled to rethink their previous orientation, shed their illusions and be won over to a socialist perspective.

Opposition to NATO was, therefore, embraced in the Cold War era as a crucial act of democratic solidarity, a critical weapon in the arsenal of socialist political warfare.

What part of this analysis remains pertinent today?

Clearly, the more general anti-militarist perspective stands. NATO remains a danger to conflict inflation over the continent. But so too does Putin's Russia. NATO is a weapon for the containment, not of an anti-capi-

talist, anti-socialist social system (the Soviet Union), but of an expansionist ethno-chauvinist rentier nation (Russia). The post-Soviet era is no longer a contest between two social systems, but an inter-imperialist rivalry between two forms of capitalism: democratic and authoritarian.

Putin, like his Stalinist predecessors, is well aware that NATO has never been a force for rollback and his purported fear of NATO is more likely a fig leaf for a different fear, a fear of the contagion that the elemental exercise of basic democratic rights in Ukraine represents to his regime. Western capitalism has no such comparable fear.

The extension of NATO after the downfall of the Soviet Union may well have been a tragic mistake. But that extension was also a response to the popular desires of former satellite nations, who feared the heavy hand of Russia more than a Western alliance. And while Russia might seek to rid itself of NATO, it can hardly project the image of an embattled underdog. Its aggression is unprovoked. Ukraine is not a NATO member, is unlikely to become one and does not meaningfully constitute a military threat to Russia. If Putin's Russia succeeds in reabsorbing Ukraine, it will have removed a buffer and extended its borders to directly abut an additional number of NATO nations. So, in victory, Russia would, in effect, be ringing itself, setting the stage for further escalations.

Does any of this change our hostile orientation to NATO? Are we now obliged to defend democratic imperialism on a lesser evil basis? Are we, in other words, compelled to surrender our independent socialist program?

Of course not. But is it appropriate to simply repeat the old slogan, "Neither Washington nor Moscow; the main enemy is at home"? For, on the one hand, we cannot actually think that it

is Zelenskyy or even Biden, rather than Putin who is the main enemy of Ukrainian workers. And moreover, by prioritising our opposition to NATO in this conflict, when it is NATO armaments built in NATO factories that are supporting the Ukrainian resistance, we would, in effect – would we not? – be willing to accept the betrayal of Ukraine as a lesser evil to NATO?

The logic of third camp politics dictates otherwise. The defeat of Ukraine, made more probable by the withdrawal of NATO support, would be a setback for democracy worldwide and a defeat for dissident and socialist opposition within Russia. It would taint the

Western Left as complicit in Putin's victory and all the negative international consequences that flow from that victory.

A victory for Ukraine and defeat for Putin, on the other hand, would be a fillip for all the forces in Russia and beyond that uphold the democratic right of oppressed nations to self-determination, to resist military intervention and to uphold the right to popular self-government. Because such advances for democracy would embolden the resistance to authoritarianism everywhere, it would also be a step forward for the cause of socialism from below.

It might be objected that should Ukraine manage to prevail with NATO's assistance, Western imperialism will be able to tout NATO as the indispensable arsenal of democracy. Most assuredly so. This will be an unfortunate consequence of preventing the far more awful victory of autocratic aggression. But here's the thing: we need to recognise that if NATO is a bulwark of capitalist democracy, it is also a bulwark of democratic capitalist imperialism and exploitation and a reserve force for counterrevolution against socialism, workers' power and all the advances in democracy that revolutionary socialism entails.

And had Putin intervened in Ukraine to suppress an actual working class revolution that threatened to spill over to Russia, NATO would have certainly turned a blind eye subcontracting him, in effect, as their joint agent for repression. For faced with the prospect of revolution, both forms of capitalist imperialism can be expected to combine forces in pursuit of their unifying and overriding class interests. Then the only issue would be who would carry out that squalid assignment.

It is that understanding that conditions and shapes our core oppositional attitude towards NATO. □



Pic: bit.ly/u-nato

Sri Lanka's workers stand up

By Mohan Sen

Sri Lanka's working class has entered the fray against its right-wing nationalist government. Since 9 March the country has been swept by [pro-tests](#) sparked by a deep crisis of the economy and living standards, causing the resignation of the cabinet (bar the prime minister) on 3 April. On 28 April trade unions organised a general strike to demand the resignation of prime minister Mahinda Rajapaksa and president Gotabaya Rajapaksa, his brother.

From what I understand, there were already scattered strikes weeks ago as part of the protest movement. Now, however, the strength of the struggle has pulled the big labour movement organisations into taking action.

This is the first general strike in Sri Lanka since one was brutally repressed in 1980. And all the reports I've read suggest the 28 April strike was very strong.

Workers took part from both the public and private sectors, from the civil service and local government, from health, ports, the postal system, electricity, banking, oil production, and also from the country's "Free Trade Zones" and rural estates producing tea and other crops.

Many reports stress the multi-ethnic and religious nature of the strikes and protests. As one Muslim Sri Lanka journalist put it:

"It is the Rajapaksas' worst nightmare to see Muslims, Hindus, Christians and

Sinhalese Buddhists stand united on the streets calling for them to 'go home' but that is exactly what it is happening now in the country."

Another protest told Sri Lanka's *Sunday Times*: "Tamils, Muslims, Burghers [descended partly from Portuguese and Dutch colonists], Sinhalese, we are all here. They can't divide us by race anymore."

The Sri Lankan government is not only neoliberal and highly authoritarian, based around a militarised executive presidency, but also an ethnic and religious chauvinist regime that has crushed and mobilised hatred against minorities, particularly the Tamil people who make up about 15% of the population.

Brutality

Gotabaya was the defence minister who finally defeated the Tamil nationalist insurgency in the north of the country in 2009, with extreme brutality. Having easily won the presidential and parliamentary elections in 2019 and 2020, the Rajapaksas proceeded to further centralise and militarise the Sri Lankan state, rolling over opposition. Thus the present uprising and the possibility of their removal is all the more amazing.

A whole series of dangers faces this inspiring movement.

The first thing is that, despite the power of the uprising, the Rajapaksas are still in office and undoubtedly preparing to strike back. Already the army

has been mobilised and protesters killed.

If, as we should fervently hope, they are driven out, who and what will replace them? Sri Lanka's main opposition party Samagi Jana Balawegaya (United People's Power) seems to have moved in a more leftish and more cross-community (less Sinhala-dominated) direction since a split with the conservative United National Party (UNP) from which it grew. (It crushed the UNP in the 2020 election but lost heavily to the Rajapaksas' "Sri Lanka People's Freedom Alliance".) It is far from left-wing or a workers' party.

Sri Lanka once had a powerful socialist left, including one of the few mass Trotskyist parties in the world (the LSSP), the bulk of which disgraced and ultimately destroyed itself by adapting to Sinhalese chauvinism and joining a "left-wing" Sinhala nationalist government in the 1970s (the political ancestor of the Rajapaksa regime).

Meanwhile the Sri Lankan government has been seeking a bailout from the International Monetary Fund, and bridging loans from India and China. The IMF is demanding it increases taxes, cuts public spending and expands privatisation. This runs counter to the anti-poverty, pro-equality ethos of the protests – but it does not appear that the movement has a clear economic program to counterpose.

A mobilised workers' movement could shift the political environment in Sri Lanka, deepen cross-communal

unity and develop policies to tackle the economic crisis. The question is whether the wonderful 28 April strike was a one-off demonstration or the start of much wider workers' action.

Sri Lankan people in London have already held a substantial demonstration (on May Day). UK socialists and trade unionists should discuss how to make solidarity. □

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Johnson poses as BJP bulldozes Muslim homes

By Sacha Ismail

In the latest assault in the Hindu right's war on Muslims in India, Muslim people in many parts of the country are having their homes bulldozed.

International attention has focused on the demolition of Muslim areas in Delhi, but such destruction is becoming more and more common in swathes of northern India run by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). There are recent reports from Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Uttarakhand, states with a combined population of over three hundred million.

This is a yet another deepening of the symbiotic relationship between right-wing Hindu vigilantism and the Indian authorities, in the persecution of Indian Muslims, and in India's transformation away

from liberal democracy. Meanwhile Amnesty India tweeted:

"In the backdrop of Municipal Corporation of Delhi using JCB bulldozers to raze down shops of Muslims in north-west Delhi's Jahangirpuri yesterday, UK prime minister's inauguration of a JCB factory in Gujarat is not only ignorant but his silence on the incident is deafening."

(As explained in our recent [report](#) of the Delhi childcare workers' struggle, the Delhi regional state government is run by the supposedly "progressive" Aam Admi Party. The municipal corporation, however, is run for now by the BJP.)

Gujarat is Modi's home state, where he consolidated his power by standing aside to allow horrendous anti-Muslim [massacres](#) twenty years ago.

Nottingham East MP Nadia Whittome has spoken out in the House of Commons:

"... just days before [Johnson's photo] the BJP used JCB

diggers to bulldoze Muslim shops and homes and the gate of a mosque in New Delhi. Local governments in a number of other Indian states have

also carried out similar demolitions. So I ask again: did the Prime Minister raise this with Modi? If not, why not?

"Does the minister accept that the Prime Minister's visit to India has helped to legitimise the actions of Modi's far-right government?"

(The reply from the minister: "We condemn any instance of discrimination. Thank you.")

Although Johnson's action was typically crass ([see more online](#)), this is not an isolated incident. The Tories are very [close](#) to the BJP regime. And, shamefully, Modi and co. have their supporters in the [Labour Party](#) too.

Solidarity with India's Muslims, and with the left opposition to Modi and Hindu nationalism! □

Raising money for Indian unions

On 7 May two supporters of *Solidarity* and a friend will be walking from Lewes to Brighton – a combined mileage longer than the width of Delhi – to raise funds for workers in struggle in India. The money raised will go to the Delhi State Anganwadi Workers' and Helpers' Union (DSAWHU), leading a [struggle](#) of early years workers in the capital territory, and

Mazdoor Adhikar Sangathan (Workers' Rights Association, MAS), which organises among the precarious factory workers of neighbouring Haryana. One of MAS's leaders is [Nodeep Kaur](#), who was jailed during the Indian farmers' struggle and spoke at Workers' Liberty's "Building a new left" event last November. Donate (open till 14 May): bit.ly/child-c □

Climate change: how



Environment

By John Moloney

PCS Assistant General Secretary John Moloney spoke to Sacha Ismail.

Our union has recently been in discussion with others about the possibility of a trade union initiative on climate change. There's now a draft statement that has gone back to unions for amendment – a fairly general political statement.

PCS has submitted two amendments: firstly to propose a conference later this year, to bring together unions and union-oriented climate campaigns; and secondly for the creation of a standing union-based organisation that campaigns continually, outside of mobilisations around particular summits and the like.

If we can get local groups based on union branches, that would be great, but the fundamental thing is activity mobilising significant numbers of members – activity which is not just reacting to particular events or calls from other organisations, but driven by the unions themselves.

What was your assessment of the trade union mobilisation around COP26?

Certainly on the demonstration in London, and even more so in Glasgow, there were important union contingents, and many general secretaries spoke. There is a wider question, which goes beyond just climate struggles, about how far mobilisations go down. Certainly in PCS we consistently have contingents on demonstrations and at events but not necessarily in very impressive numbers.

I'm pretty confident large numbers of civil service workers and PCS members are interested and in some cases already active, but outside the civil service. They may be active outside work, but not see the workplace or the union as mechanisms for being active. What we've failed to do to any wide extent is identify these people and link up and organise them in the workplace. We have some great activists but we haven't developed a link with much wider layers of members.

We have a network of green reps, patchy, but several hundred strong, and growing. We are trying to get to a point where ever branch has at least one rep.

We have an annual Green Forum,

open to all members, which has just met. There's also a committee elected by the forum which meets regularly with the subcommittee of NEC members responsible for this work, to give a grassroots steer.

Part of the point is to share ideas and demands so that everyone can benefit from the best of everyone else's ideas and spread them across the civil service.

One thing we've been discussing is how we can make climate change a trade union issue rather than so to speak a specialised issue. We're pushing for all our committees to raise it as a bargaining issue with their employer. If we manage to do that properly, there's then a possibility that could be a channel to activate much larger numbers.

What sort of demands would that involve?

At the moment we have a few very good branches that regularly raise with their employer questions like the sources of their electricity, what light-bulbs buildings use, water consumption, possibilities for solar panels – but also whether terms and conditions can be improved in ways which encourage more climate-friendly behaviour, for instance in terms of transport. So we want to generalise this kind of approach to raise demands at a departmental level. We're arguing that every department if should have a carbon budget and that there should be plans to move to net zero well before 2050.

They will have to move on these things eventually – changes will have to happen – but they will do it too slowly and they will do it at workers' expense. So the union and the workforce need to both speed up and shape the process.

Given the nature of our industry it requires government action too – and of course that's a problem. The management of different departments go along with what ministers say, which in

practice means that they parrot about how important this is without proposing anything much – in that sense its similar to equalities issues.

Inside the Tory party now there's a widening discussion, perhaps about the validity of climate change, but even the zealots don't feel confident saying that, so instead we're now hearing that what we need is mitigations *instead* of actually dealing with carbon emissions. They cloak this in concern about living standards, which is remarkably incoherent and hypocritical – but that is the argument being used by the Tory right.

In fact at least one Labour MP, Graham Stringer, has also linked up with Farage on this kind of basis?

Yes, indeed. And generally I'm not saying the Labour Party's positions is unimpeachable – but clearly the Tory right is a much bigger problem. There is a growing right-wing pressure group that has benefited from Johnson's recent crises and is using the war in Ukraine as an opportunity.

I think Boris Johnson certainly is incompetent – I've never met anyone who's dealt with him that says he has any serious engagement with policies – but more important are the political arguments he's using. He's said that because of Ukraine, because of the impact on energy, tackling climate change is less of priority and the government should be given a "pass".

Their solution to the problems posed by the war is not a push on renewables, but fracking and Saudi oil. The idea seems to be that emissions may rise but will quickly go down again – a disastrous approach. I guess they hope some sort of market solution will come along.

To return to the civil service – no department has a plan. HMRC is the only department, I think, with a target – but no mechanism to meet it. So what PCS is saying is, look, the government has



a target, however inadequate, how are we going to contribute to meeting it? We have proposals which we want you to adopt or at least engage with. At the moment they're not. I don't even think that's anti-union hostility so much as lack of political will and a reflection of the government's stance.

We're really just starting discussions on how we can find ways to mobilise industrial action, or to start with significant workers' pressure through campaigning, to force management to shift.

A big problem for us, and not just on this, is that at the moment the big bulk of our members are working at home. We're hoping that in the middle of this year much more significant numbers will return to work at least part time, and that will make it easier to have organising and manifestations on various issues, including this.

We want to try to develop a series of basic demands – at the moment there are various ideas swirling around – and a series of things members can do, so we can go beyond patches of good activism to actually having national campaigns. Hopefully eventually that will involve physical protest. We might begin with e-actions, for instance getting members to write to their MPs to demand changes to push the civil service on this.

In your view is a legal industrial dispute about climate issues possible?

Under the anti-union laws it's not possible to have a legal strike over world climate policy. But a legal trade dispute can be any issue associated to your employment, so yes, it's possible. The issue is not legal ingenuity but political will from unions – and also how you get members to feel confident to take action on this when they often don't feel confident on much more basic issues of terms and conditions. I think a lot of people would find that a leap. The first thing is we need a lot more basic campaigning on climate issues. That can help shift consciousness.

If you look at the best historical examples, for instance the Builders Labour-



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unions can step up

ers Federation in Australia, it came on the back of a militant workforce who had won a whole series of economic gains. In PCS, and I think this is true of other unions, there are struggles here, there and everywhere but the overall background is fairly flat. That could change as there's more pressure over pay and living standards. In PCS we're working towards national action over that, and if momentum builds you could try to use it generate momentum on other issues.

In 2019, when the youth climate strikes were at their height, I remember some civil service workers trying to find ways to take action alongside them.

Yes, I think they tried to find ways around the edges of the anti-union laws, to get groups of workers out on the streets during work time.

The other thing unions can do of course is put strikes over economic issues on the days of climate strikes or other climate mobilisations. In PCS we agreed that in principle. I think in 2019 there was agreement for the BEIS [Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy] strikes by outsourced workers to take place on that day [in September], but then the dispute was settled, so they ended up sending a delegation rather than a bigger group of workers on strike.

Why do you think there hasn't been more of that? There must have been numerous missed opportunities.

General conservatism in the labour movement, and also I don't think a lot of union officers and officials see climate change as a union issue. Like international work, it's often treated as something sort of extra-curricular, not part and parcel of working-class struggle.

We need to assert the demand to scrap the anti-union laws. If you could take strike action for any reason, if unions could endorse and organise strikes for any demand – clearly that would make a huge difference to our ability to fight on these questions. You'd still need people to be willing to strike, of course – though if you no longer had ballot thresholds, but workers simply had the right to strike, you could get minorities taking action and acting as a catalyst, generating wider momentum. These laws have a highly



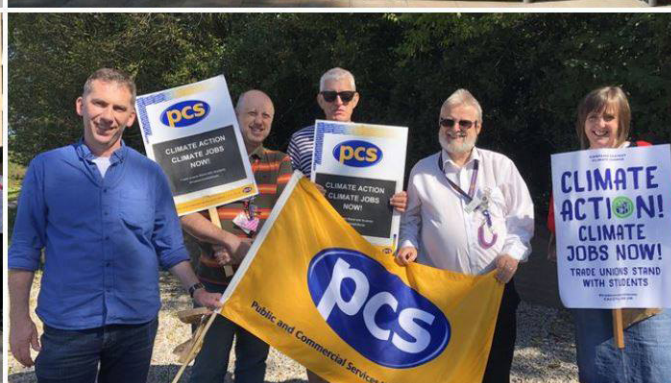
damaging effect on the functioning of unions but also by extension on the consciousness of workers; over years we have imbibed the idea we should only act within certain narrow channels.

There was some argument about climate change at TUC Congress last year.

One issue was nuclear power. PCS has got clear policy – we're not asking for nuclear power to be shut down, we're saying nuclear should not be replaced. It does provide baseline electricity supply, and if it was suddenly taken offline, there would be a gap. Instead this period should be used to develop alternatives, renewables, insulation, a smarter power grid and all the rest of it.

But the GMB motion you're criticising also argued for using gas, right? So isn't the nuclear position the least of your worries...

Yes, we criticised that too. I think this reflects wider differences about what "just transition" means. It's the idea that if you have members in a carbon intensive industry you just shift the way it's run a bit to make it slightly less intensive, maintaining essentially the same



jobs, and that's a just transition. PCS says there has to be a progressive move of the economy away from carbon intensive to low carbon production, that this has to be done on the basis of a plan, and that this means control by a democratic state.

If we don't fight for that, then we'll get some combination of markets failing to do the necessary fast enough, and markets making changes by throwing huge numbers of workers on the scrapheap and devastating swathes of the country, as happened 40 years ago with coal.

We need a much more concrete ideas about what a just transition means, how new jobs would be created, how exactly livelihoods would be protected. There is some useful academic work being done but what we need is campaigning policy.

Don't workers in high carbon industries have to be at the forefront of this? What we're discussing with the policies of GMB, Unite, Prospect and so on surely illustrates a major problem? It's ok for PCS and UCU and whoever to argue these things, but...

Well, it's not so black and white. For instance the steel union, Community, has called on the TUC to back a plan to move from high carbon to carbon neutral in their industry. So that's a good example of a union that can see what the future trends are and trying to get ahead of the curve. The problem they've got is that the steel industry is privately owned, driven by profit and there's not the incentive for those companies to do what is needed. In fact the risk seems to me to be that they'll asset-strip and run down those industries

and then walk away. So again the logic is to raise the question of ownership. In PCS we argue very strongly that energy must be socialised, and that this must be part of a wider extension of public ownership and part of a wider economic plan.

The only climate motion at the TUC was the GMB motion – that reflects a weakness, surely?

Yes, and if we get a union-led climate initiative we could use it to make sure policy is put forward. More widely it reflects a lack of coordination between unions, and not just on policy motions.

If a more progressive climate motion was put forward to the TUC, I'm sure it would be contentious, but better to have that contention in the open, in a positive form, rather than having it by the back door through responses to a more conservative policy.

The last two Labour conferences passed public ownership of energy but Starmer has dismissed the idea. How do we actually get it on the political agenda?

Well, the first thing is to actually articulate it, to make the arguments audibly; and then to find ways to mobilise members to campaign for them. I won't pretend PCS is brilliant at these things but we are making an effort to do better on both scores, so that policies we pass are actually put into effect.

On this and on many other issues, affiliated unions should be fighting in the Labour Party, at conference and at a CLP level. Non-affiliated unions can and should make demands on Labour too. But again if we have a grassroots campaigns mobilising significant numbers that will be much easier. One angle of a union-led climate campaign, by the way, could be organising union members who are in the Labour Party to push on what it is demanding and doing.

The FBU has raised the demand for democratic public ownership of the banks. Does PCS have policy on that?

I can't remember if we have policy. I think for sure if it went to PCS conference it would pass; it fits in with our arguments for democratic planning. As a socialist, I'm strongly in favour. □



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Tories say: “out” trans students

By Zack Muddle

The Tories are planning “guidance” to compel teachers to inform possibly hostile parents if students come out as trans at school.

At the education select committee on 20 April Tory MP Miriam Cates claimed that “children who don’t have a settled idea of gender or sexuality... are being told... that... they may be the opposite sex or they may be non-binary”. She complained that a minority of teachers who respect trans students’ confidentiality by not informing their parents are creating a “huge safeguarding fail”.

Education secretary Nadhim Zahawi, in response, said that parents must be “front and centre” of discussions about gender and sex: “You have to involve parents in this. You have a duty to safeguard those children. Parents are very much part of that.” He indicated that official guidance would be formulated on it.

This comes after Tory moves to li-

cense religious “conversion therapy” on trans people and a freewheeling transphobic interview by Boris Johnson.

Many people are trans or non-binary. Some children are, or will become, trans or non-binary. To hide this truth from children, in a society which often enforces strict gender norms on the basis of a coercively assigned gender, would be negligent. It is important to help children understand themselves and their feelings, and to signal that their identity and gender presentation will be accepted, whatever it is. Refusing to do this can be seriously emotionally damaging, as well as – where successful – reinforcing restrictive gender norms.

The MPs’ complaint seeks to resonate with the reactionary and utterly false conspiracy theory that children are being encouraged or “groomed” to be trans, as well as wider transphobic ideas that being trans or non-binary is worse than being cisgender, or even

that talking about LGBTIQ people is too “indecent” for children.

A child’s or young person’s decision to socially transition gender, or to experiment with doing so, should be theirs and theirs alone. It is entirely reversible. We support personal expression and self-determination, which is a sufficient basis to support gender self-identification. The evidence shows “that gender transition... improves the overall well-being of transgender individuals[;] that greater availability of medical and social support for gender transition contributes to better quality of life for those who identify as transgender.”

A decision to undergo medical treatment should also be the child or young person’s alone, subject to the discretion of supportive medical professionals.

It is best if children and young people can confide in and be supported by their parents in all such processes and decisions. Disclosure should however be their decision, and confidentiality

from trusted adults is important.

Why might a child disclose to a teacher, but not (yet) to a parent, their gender identity? Often because they have good reason to fear that their parents may not accept it. We know that many parents do not do so, at first at least. We know that many parents bully their children in an attempt to prevent transition or experimentation: the first real safeguarding issue here.

And we know that where children feel unable to disclose personal information to teachers or other trusted adults without bad consequences coming from it, such as being “outed” to hostile parents, wider abuse is more likely to go unreported and unprevented. This is the second real safeguarding issue.

The left and labour movement must go on the offensive for trans rights, and for the rights of children and young people, who deserve a trans-inclusive education and safeguarding from transphobic parents. □



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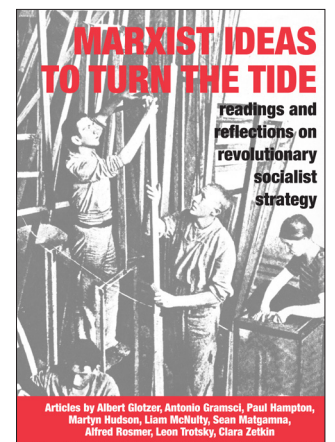
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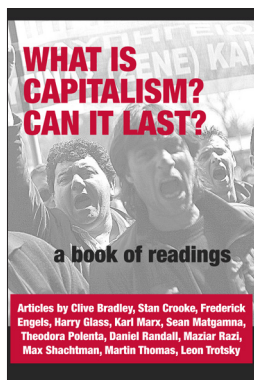
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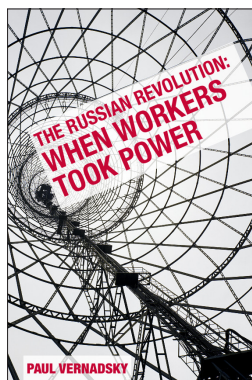
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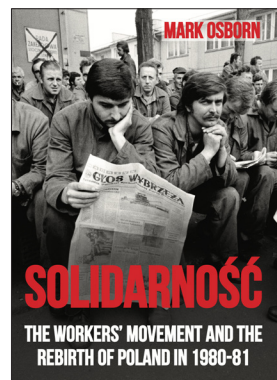
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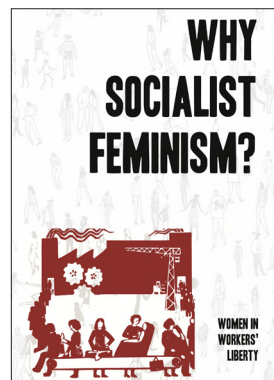
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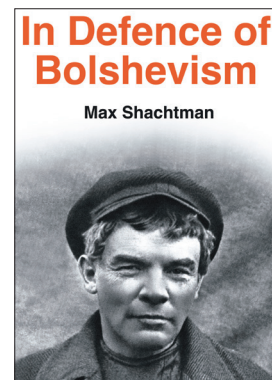
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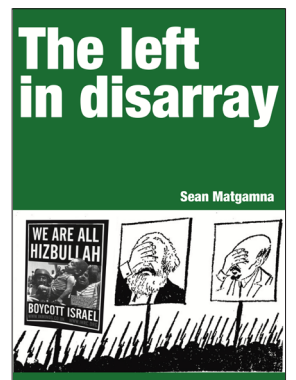
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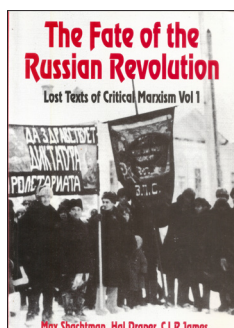
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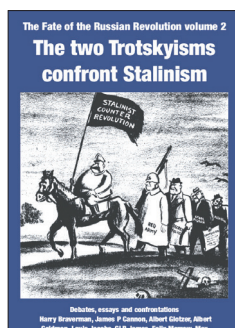
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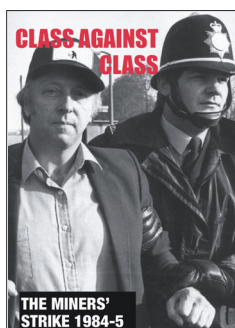
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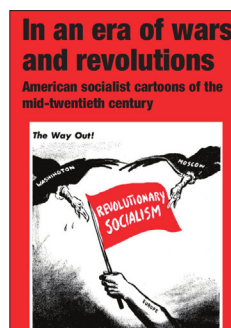
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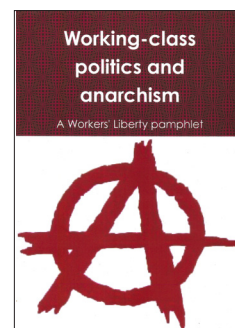
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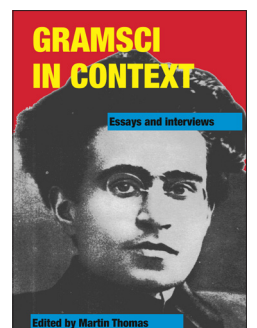
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Clampdown at Unison health conference



By Alice Hazel

The 25-27 April Unison Health conference last week should have been the opportunity for union representatives to review the failure of last year's pay campaign and relaunch a fight for this year. At the first in person conference since the start of Covid we should obviously, also, have seen collective discussion on the stark issues that have arisen during the pandemic.

However, delegates arrived at the conference already knowing that all the motions on these subjects had been

excluded from the agenda. The standing orders committee uses increasingly spurious reasons to exclude business from this conference.

This year virtually all the motions on issues sharply relevant in health workplaces – motions on sick pay in the private sector, last year's ballots, this year's pay campaign, safe staffing levels and the NHS crisis – were ruled out of order. Votes on these exclusions taken right at the beginning of conference, before there is time for any "winning of the floor", always go with the standing orders committee. The result is a very dull and "professionalised" conference, with dissent firmly silenced and the majority of motions written by national Unison officers.

The only debated issue was Unison's

approach to the Pay Review Body, the so called "independent" body which recommends pay rises for health workers, which is, in practice, firmly in the pocket of government. A motion submitted by Unison Northern Ireland called for Unison to take a firm position for collective bargaining including not submitting to the PRB in future (the submission has already gone in for 2022, so this would be relevant to next year's claim).

The Service Group Executive counterposed this with a call to consult on future mechanisms, a process which has already been completed. Despite a relatively lively debate, the SGE won around two-thirds of conference to their weak position.

On this year's pay campaign there

was a repeat of the "top table's" usual condemnation of the government, tales of health workers visiting food banks, and urging of delegates to go back and rally members, accompanied by zero strategy of how to do this or any discussion of how we should overcome the restrictions the anti-trade union laws place upon us. After 12 years of Tory pay cuts, a funding crisis that has our NHS on the brink of collapse and a global pandemic that has killed thousands of health workers there was no sign at this conference of a union in fighting mode.

The Service Group Executive elections (28 April to 25 May) are one opportunity to start turning this tide. Workers Liberty is supporting the [Time for Real Change](#) slate. □

CWU debates Ukraine and BT pay

By a CWU member

The biggest political debate at the Communication Workers' Union (CWU) conference (24-29 April) was on Ukraine. It was messy but ended with the union Executive being able to pursue Ukraine solidarity.

Some of us had an emergency motion along the lines of Ukraine solidarity. It was ruled out of order, we got it back on the agenda, and then the Standing Orders Committee composited it with a contradictory one along the lines of the Stop The War campaign.

We attempted to challenge the compositing, but the chair ruled that we couldn't. So we had to just oppose the composite. The Executive's line was remit.

CWU general secretary Dave Ward, who agrees with us on this, was off with Covid the first days of the conference. But he got back for that debate. Paul Garraway of the SWP moved the composite, there were some good speeches against, and then Dave Ward made an effective speech against, insisting that there's no justification for Putin's invasion. He made it very syndicalist – we don't have to do all this geopolitics, we just have to be in solidarity with the Ukrainian people – but it was effective.

The consensus in the CWU has long been on soft

"Stop The War" lines, but the composite was voted down heavily. That reflected the conference being convinced on the need to be unambiguous in supporting Ukraine, convinced that international policy has to be more than being anti-West and anti-Nato.

Our policy on the Labour Party was debated at a special conference in November. This conference was unanimous to condemn the government licensing conversion therapy as an attempt to have a go at trans people: that's the consensus with all the unions now.

Pay ballot

The other big issue was the vote for a pay action ballot in the BT Group (BT, EE, and Openreach). This is positive: an industrial action ballot will force the CWU to be more than just the BT company union it's been drifting towards for years.

But I have worries. The union has already hobbled itself by taking no action until a significant amount of the pay rise has already gone into pay packets, so the issue seems to be scrabbling over another few hundred quid.

The pay settlement date is 1 April. It's quite common for the negotiations to go on for another month or two and then we get an increase backdated a month or two.

This time BT announced

they were going to put a £1,500 flat-rate rise in the April pay. For a while the union did nothing, and now the branches have been told to go back and get their membership data in shape: there's no date for the ballot other than "as soon as is practical".

The other reason for worry is the Count Me In campaign in 2021. That was a consultative ballot, but it was clear that it was a consultative ballot that was going to lead to a ballot. It got a huge majority for action on a huge turnout. Then the union leadership didn't do anything. And after the negotiations, they never put that what they agreed in the negotiation to any sort of vote.

Just before the debate on the new pay ballot, we had a debate in which people were saying: you had better not let us down like with Count Me In.

There are also issues about grading on the current pay rates, which the union has done nothing about.

£1,500 for me is about 5%. But for people in higher grades, it's only about 3.5%, and inflation could be 10% soon.

There's lots of discontent, so if the union runs a good campaign and makes sure that all the discontent is drawn in, the ballot could be a big step forward, and we could win. □

Italian couriers strike on May Day

By Vicki Morris

Couriers in Turin, Italy held a one-day strike on 1 May for better pay and conditions of employment for

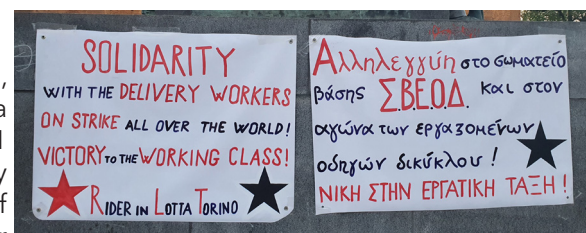
workers across a number of platforms, including Glovo, Just Eat, Uber Eats and Deliveroo.

Only Just Eat workers currently have anything like a decent permanent contract. The company recognises the CGIL union which organises five million workers. They are entitled to paid leave and sick pay. But the pay is still low: after tax they earn just 7.7 euros an hour.

Celeste, who has three different jobs, told me: "At Christmas I feel motivated to work more for Just Eat because the rate is higher than."

CGIL member Francesco told me about their fight to organise: "At the start of organising we held an assembly which was very bureaucratic, addressed by a union official who talked at a high level but not in any detail. People were getting angry. We had a word with him and the next meeting was better."

"In this field of work you have some big unions with lots of resources, e.g., CGIL, plus smaller unions, such as COBAS, closer to the grassroots but with fewer resources, plus you have the anarchists who don't join unions



for ideological reasons but who come to us for help when they are in trouble!" Previous strikes have been for three hours at peak times, Saturday evening, for example. Such strikes cost the striking worker just 20-odd euros, but cost the company very dear, losing them thousands of euros and maximising the impact.

The couriers are building a grassroots movement at the base, regardless of organisation or which platform workers use.

Reflecting on the couriers' long-term goals, Francesco said they need a national status for couriers with full rights for all.

"This could be a job that people might do for a few years if it were better paid, if people were treated with dignity."

"It's a dangerous job but it has its upsides: you are riding around your city out in the fresh air, not stuck in an office."

One of the couriers' mottos is: "We won't change jobs, we'll change the work." Regarding May Day itself they insist: "The first of May for us is not a holiday but a day for struggle." More: [bit.ly/d-p-0](#), [bit.ly/d-p-1](#) □

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Why we can't even get ambulances out of the station



Diary of a paramedic

By Robert Jordan

I turn up at my ambulance station for a nightshift to find a traffic jam. The station has enough parking bays for around 12 ambulances in the garage. Tonight there are over 20 vehicles crammed in.

The few dayshift crews who managed to escape a similar scene in the hospital ambulance bays are late off anyway, queuing desperately for a place to park their ambulance on station. All the bays are full and vehicles are parked down the centre of the bays blocking the others from exiting.

As I enter the garage and grab a vehicle to book onto, I'm greeted with the smell of fumes from all these ambulances manoeuvring in a tight space never designed for this capacity. I morbidly consider how much our risk of COPD, cancer, stroke and heart attack will increase over the next few decades

as we continue with this daily exposure to diesel exhaust.

I am allocated an emergency call for a category 1 (ineffective breathing). But I'm stuck. I radio dispatch and advise them to note my delay responding as I can't even get out of my bay due to the carnage in this garage.

How did we get here? Well, at one point in my city there were more ambulance stations, but they were sold years ago and not replaced due to underfunding in Tory austerity – the gift that keeps giving.

As demand steadily increased, more staff were employed and vehicles acquired to try and keep up, but these staff and vehicles were crammed onto stations that were already full to bursting. Besides, we still don't have enough staff, due to poor retention, and many of the ambulances are no longer fit for purpose. In fact, some are actually second-hand rejects from other ambulance trusts!

Over the years these issues have been raised many times, but whenever we ask for improvements to our stations, we are told that we are going

to get a huge central "hub". This might sound reasonable had we not been promised this new station for the last 10 years, with ground yet to be broken.

I reported the overcrowding, and that prompted management to arrange a meeting to discuss these issues. The intention is clearly to appease staff with superficial changes at best.

The more worrying thing is the answer I receive when I flag it up to the senior health and safety rep in my union to argue we are over capacity: "I don't think we should push that because they might redeploy staff".

I'm gobsmacked and saddened because this is the stance that I find endemic to our modern union with its "partnership-working": not wishing to rock the boat, accepting smaller token concessions handed out by management instead of pushing for real investment through industrial action, as have our comrades in healthcare abroad.

Where is the fight for better working conditions? Instead, we accept a death by a thousand cuts as things steadily getting worse becomes the new normal. □

Gangsterism as capitalism



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

It is the 50th anniversary of the release of *The Godfather*. However, if it is gangsterism as capitalism that you are thinking about, then there is a better film (in my opinion): Abraham Polonsky's *Force of Evil* from 1948.

John Garfield plays the part of Joe Morse, a crooked but smart lawyer who works for a crime syndicate. It is a ruthless world where the big fish swallow up the small fry. One of those small fry is Morse's older brother Leo. Morse tries but fails to save his brother.

Realising that he has destroyed his own brother and himself, Morse then turns on the head of the crime syndicate and kills him. He then confesses all to the District Attorney. The DA – the knight in shining armour (who we never see) – saves the day for capitalism. Polonsky wanted a much more pessimistic ending, focussing on Joe's moral disintegration.

Polonsky refused to testify at a 1951 House Un-American Activities Committee hearing and was blacklisted. He resigned from the Communist Party in the 1950s but never renounced Marxism, and at one time taught a philosophy course at USC School of Cinema-Television, "Consciousness and Content". He deserves to be better known. □



Section of the Mass Trespass

The Kinder Mass Trespass

By John Cunningham

One of the most successful acts of civil disobedience in Britain took place on 24 April 1932. The mass trespass on Kinder Scout on the moorlands of North Derbyshire was one of the major steps in eventually opening up the countryside for increased access to all and breaking the exclusive privilege of wealthy landowners and their grouse-shooting pals.

Three groups of ramblers, many of them members of the Young Communist League, approached Kinder to be met by violent attacks from gamekeepers. The trespassers defended themselves and there were five arrests. The five received prison sentences of between two to six months for unlawful assembly and breach of the peace. Estimates of the numbers involved vary –

the *Manchester Guardian* put the figure at 400.

The Trespass sparked off further acts of civil disobedience. A later rally in Winnats Pass in nearby Castleton attracted thousands. A momentum was created. One slogan was: "I may be a wage slave on a Monday but I am a free man on Sunday".

Three years later the Ramblers' Association was formed. In 1949 the National Parks came into existence, and in 1965 the Pennine Way was opened.

Among events being held to commemorate the Trespass is an exhibition in the North Derbyshire village of Edale. A commemorative volume, *The Battle for Kinder Scout*, includes *The 1932 Kinder Trespass* by Benny Rothman, one of the key organisers, and a foreword by Mike Harding. □

A full ballot on pay



**John Moloney,
PCS AGS (p.c.)**

The Annual Delegate Conference (ADC) of our union, PCS, takes place from 24 to 26 May in Brighton. The National Executive Committee (NEC) has submitted an emergency motion which, if accepted and passed, would commit the union to move to a statutory industrial action ballot over the cost-of-living crisis later this year.

I strongly support the proposal to commit to a statutory ballot, though I recognise that we need a democratic discussion as to who is in the ballot.

Group conferences for each of the areas in which PCS organises take place alongside the ADC. Our biggest group, the Department for Work and Pensions, has been teetering on the edge of ballots over workplace safety for some time. No doubt the group conference will discuss the next steps in that regard. If the DWP did move to industrial action then I think that would help win the national ballot on the cost of living.

The ADC will also discuss and determine the union's policy on Ukraine. There'll be a fringe meeting at the conference with the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign and Ukrainian trade unionists speaking remotely, which general secretary Mark Serwotka will also address. PCS supported the 9 April trade union march for Ukraine and we now need to discuss how to follow-up on that. The war could drag on for months, if not years, and trade unions that support Ukraine need to provide ongoing support and solidarity. I personally believe the unions that supported the 9 April march should call a trade union conference on Ukraine, linking up with Ukrainian trade unionists and independent trade unions in Russia, to discuss plans for solidarity.

I've continued to work on improving the union's organisation amongst outsourced workers. We're continuing to fight for civil service-wide union recognition with Mitie, one of the main outsourced contractors. We don't want recognition on a contract-by-contract basis, but a central recognition agreement that covers the whole civil service. We're already in dispute with them over recognition in one area and we have just asked for recognition in another area. We're continuing to recruit members, seeking to build an activist cadre, for in the end we need to win a super-majority of workers in the Mitie contracts to the union and to action. □

3,000 rail workers rally to win ballot



Off The Rails

Three thousand, three hundred rail workers took part in an online rally on 28 April to build the dispute on Network Rail and 15 Train Operating Companies (TOCs) against the pay freeze, job cuts, and attacks on conditions. The rally consisted of lead-offs from the general secretary and assistant general secretary, followed by a short Q&A based on queries that had been sent in advance.

Much of what was covered was already available, but it did no harm to hammer home the basics. We did learn that, if they do ballot, Unite and TSSA will do so on the same terms as RMT. TSSA Network Rail reps have already met and agreed unanimously to take action.

Our next job is to ensure that we reach the 50% turnout threshold in each company. The union announced a series of "ThruText" peer-to-peer text messaging training sessions where members can learn how to use the software to convince others to vote and vote yes.

It is good that the union is taking this pro-active approach to membership engagement, but it would have been better if there had been an option to voice call members as well. It's also important the ballot campaign isn't run in an entirely top-down way, with union officers treating reps and activists like passive foot soldiers who simply need to carry out orders.

Members at a meeting in Derby over two weeks ago raised the question of checking membership details, but the top table were then reluctant to reveal any details about the ballot, including the start date! Some reps are feeling a

bit frustrated now, like they are being left to play catch-up when ballot papers are already out. The union must respond to those frustrations by encouraging and empowering those reps, not by telling them to shut up and do as they're told.

One rep asked what will happen when different employers start to make offers on pay – will the unity across different TOCs and Network Rail continue? The reply was that we are going into dispute together, and we will stay together.

It's good our leaders have said this. It implies that the union isn't going to be bought off if one employer tries to settle quickly. We also need to make sure that the union doesn't allow itself make a choice between jobs, conditions, and pay in negotiations. We need to win on all these demands.

Rank-and-file

It's also good that the leadership said that any offers would be put to the members in a referendum. We need to deepen rank-and-file coordination and leadership as the dispute progresses. A yes/no vote in a referendum is a fairly shallow and passive form of democratic control; members across the industry should decide what terms are acceptable, rather than leaving that decision to union officials and only finding out about a potential settlement in a referendum. Rank-and-file disputes committees, linked to RMT branches (many of which span more than one company involved in the dispute) can help formulate strategy.

Maximum transparency in negotiations is also vital. Elected negotiating reps should give regular and comprehensive reports, and as offers and proposals from employers start to come in, these should be shared in full with members so they can be fully scruti-

nised and responded to. The bosses claim there's no money in the rail industry, and that any potential pay increase can only be funded by cutting jobs and reducing overheads.

Our jobs and pay should not depend on whether our employers are profitable. The rail industry should not be a profit making industry. It should be funded by the government as a public service. In fact, the bulk of the industry's funding is already from government, but the industry peddles the fiction that it is commercially driven and that its decisions depend on profitability.

While we are fighting the TOCs and Network Rail, this dispute is also about putting pressure on the government to fund the rail industry as a vital public service. We can't be in a situation where our pay and jobs are vulnerable to commercial success, profitability, and fluctuations in passenger numbers.

This is the biggest dispute most of us will ever have been involved in. It's not about us "supporting our union", or helping our union do something "for" us, it's about us using our union as a tool to organise collectively and fight back.

Ballot papers have already begun arriving (look out for a green envelope), and the deadline for their return is 5pm on 24 May. □

UCU outcomes unclear

The University and College Union (UCU) Special Higher Education Sector Conference (SHESC), held by Zoom on 20 April, voted to make an "assessment boycott... a core part of our UK-wide strategy for all branches in the Four Fights and pensions disputes", for "bouts of ten days of strike action commencing in late May to support the Action Short of Strike", and for "a ballot of members for all-out industrial action in the USS [pensions] and Four Fights disputes, in order that action should commence from the beginning of the academic year 2022/2023". But motions calling for immediate escalation were defeated, and so any drive to win the dispute in short order looks less likely, and activists worry about energy and organisation fading. Another

SHESC was held on 27 April. The voting for these conferences is done not at the conferences, but after them, online, so we don't know the outcome yet. □

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Want to be part of an organised long-haul collective effort to spread the socialist ideas you read in *Solidarity*, and to link together activities in diverse campaigns and conflicts around that consistent socialist thread? Then take some copies of *Solidarity* to sell each week, and contact us to discuss joining Workers' Liberty, the group that produces and sustains this paper. Check it out and contact us via [work-ersliberty.org/join-awl](https://workersliberty.org/join-awl) □

Couriers set new tactics

By Sam Myerson

The strike for pay against Just Eat and its contractor Stuart has been raging since December. This is an historic fight in a sector which had often been dismissed as unorganisable.

Action at the core of the dispute in Sheffield has for the time being moved away from daily pickets to larger weekly actions. The volume of Just Eat deliveries slows down over the spring and summer. The change in tactics is important to continue the dispute and to inflict maximum disruption to both Just Eat and their business partners, who may have adjusted to the previous mode.

In Darlington riders have recently taken two solid days of action, shutting down the app completely. Drivers and supporters continue to meet regularly to plan and co-ordinate action, and still need for socialists to get involved in supporting the dispute and helping to spread the strike. Couriers joined May Day rallies in Sheffield and Chesterfield, speaking about their fight and collecting donations to the strike fund.

The further pickets and direct action planned in Sheffield and Chesterfield, are only sustainable



Italian couriers, 26 March: see page 21

with the support of the wider labour movement. Students in Sheffield continue to play an important role in supporting the dispute, with continued solidarity from the local Trades Council.

We need unions and Labour Party branches to pass the model motion (bit.ly/mo-pe), and support the strike fund: tinyurl.com/StuartStrike

As we approach 150 days of the strike, couriers are being squeezed not only by the brutal pay cut, but also by the rising cost of living, especially squeezed on fuel and insurance. Both the model employed by Stuart, and the direct model via Just Eat are unsustainable. We have to escalate the action and bring more towns and cities on board.

To help spread the dispute to your area, contact us at awl@workersliberty.org □

Resist Labour's "capricious" exclusions!

By Colin Foster

As far as we know, four Labour Party members so far have had letters from head office threatening to expel them under the terms of the ban on Workers' Liberty and *Solidarity* adopted on 29 March 2022.

For one, the evidence is a contribution to debate from six years ago, arguing that socialists can draw from more than one tradition. For another, the letter claims only that head office has evidence from the web, without detailing it.

Judges in a court case in 2016 [declared](#) that Labour officials have no right to use the (often loosely-worded) rules "capriciously". Exclusions on such thin evidence are "capricious", as have been the exclusions of people like Pam Fitzpatrick and Alan Gibbons on grounds of supporting Socialist Appeal (banned in 2021), though everyone knows that Fitzpatrick and Gibbons do not in fact support Socialist Appeal.

A statement of protest against the ban and its undemocratic basis – and of commitment to continue debate with Workers' Liberty, explicitly licensed in the 29 March ban – is circulating among Labour MPs and others. It will be published soon and can hope to gain many more

signatories.

Also circulating are a model motion and model rule change (bit.ly/mo-pe) to challenge the ban, for when Labour Parties begin meeting against after the 5 May elections. □

Vote Labour on 5 May!

By Martin Thomas

This Tory government has set records for u-turns and for miring itself in scandals. Yet it can still do much harm.

It is pushing down real pay in the NHS, and delivering no emergency boost when the NHS is more overstretched even than in the Thatcher years.

It has pushed the Police Act and the Borders Act into law.

That is reason enough to vote Labour on 5 May, to replace Tories by candidates at least based and subject to accountability in the labour movement.

Vote Labour! At the same time, fire up working-class organisation and action in the workplaces and on the streets! □



Pic, 2019, USA: bit.ly/stop-ab

Push back abortion-rights threat!

By Gerry Bates

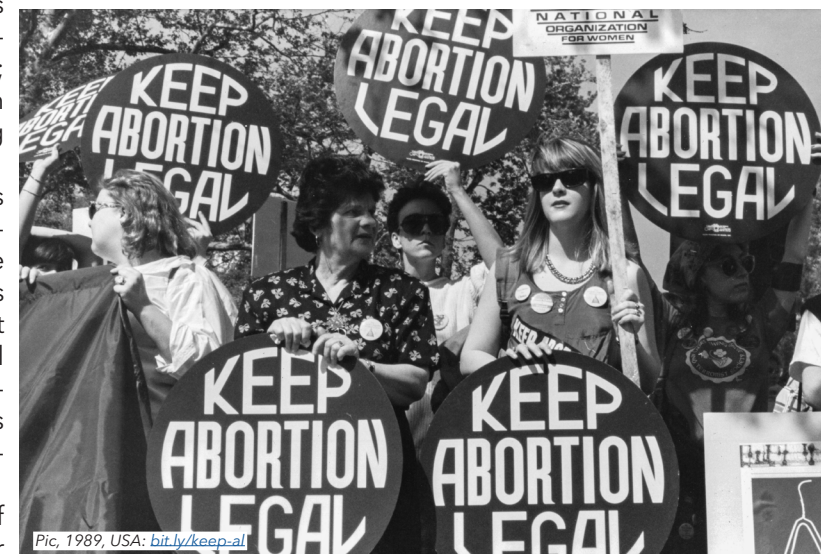
On 2 May a draft text was [leaked](#) from the Trump-shaped US Supreme Court indicating that the court will overturn US women's constitutional right to abortions in a decision due in June.

Support for a woman's right to choose, which Roe v Wade from 1972 bans US states from denying, has increased in the USA since 1972; but the Trumpist right has been on the offensive both in shaping courts and in the states.

Legal access to abortion has already been made near-impossible in some states. If Roe v Wade is overturned, many states are set to ban abortions except perhaps very early ones. This will especially hit women facing difficulties in travelling to the states which will still have abortion access.

The Democratic Socialists of America have called "on labour

unions, reproductive rights organisations, and progressive organisations to organize and join immediate protests around the country to culminate in a national day of action before the Supreme Court makes its undemocratic attack final", and for "federal legislation to protect abortion as a human right". □



Pic, 1989, USA: bit.ly/keep-al



Solidarity

For a workers' government

PUSHBACKS DEFEATED: NOW BEAT NEW ANTI- REFUGEE LAW

By Ben Tausz

The government has dropped plans to forcibly turn around small refugee boats in the Channel. The climbdown came days before a legal challenge by the PCS trade union and migrants' rights organisations was due to reach court.

Active involvement by PCS – the union representing many workers who would have been carrying out the policy – was very positive. Even more important was their threat to block pushbacks by industrial action.

This victory is a spark of hope in an otherwise dark situation. The government's anti-refugee Nationality and Borders Act became law on 28 April.

Refugees will now be categorised by arrival route. Those from irregular routes will be criminalised and their rights curtailed. Given the government's obstruction of legal routes for refugees from most countries, this likely means the majority.

Many of these will be denied any chance to claim asylum here. They will be deported to Rwanda under Priti Patel's recently-announced [scheme](#).

Those not deported to

Rwanda face second-class status. Even if the state recognises their claim to sanctuary, they will get only temporary status, with the threat of expulsion hanging over them for at least ten years. It will harshly limit their right to reunion with their families, and access to the social safety net, leaving them vulnerable to hyper-exploitative bosses and domestic abusers.

Multiple legal challenges are gearing up, again involving PCS. Responding to the passage of the Borders Bill alongside the authoritarian Police and Elections Bills, Kill The Bill vowed to make the new laws unenforceable.

That ambition is right, but will require a major leap forward in organisation. To break the anti-migrant legal regime, we will need to win more people to our side of the argument, and to draw many more of them into regular, real-world organisation and action.

In the Labour Party, we must turn over the leaders' wretched, cowardly pandering to anti-migrant sentiments, including pushing the Labour Campaign for Free Movement's [motion](#) to party conference. Local party



branches should link into direct action to defend against raids and deportations.

The movement must concertededly turn to persuasion and organisation among the workers tasked with enforcing the regime, from civil servants to aviation workers, to instead obstruct it. This is no small task. Worker activists will have to patiently, but uncompromisingly, confront some colleagues' reactionary views; challenge certain conservative union leaders; and build confidence. But it is possible. Worldwide, aviation workers have grounded many deportation flights.

The labour movement must link with existing migrant rights' groups, but stop outsourcing anti-racist responsibilities to external campaigns. We must organise as workers, to wield the unique power that workers have to frustrate the decrees of our bosses and rulers. Workers' Liberty activists in key unions and the migrants' rights movement are preparing for the fight – join us. □