

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

Graphic based on bit.ly/cc-pixs



UKRAINE: DROP THE DEBT!

» **Russian troops out!**

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Beyond the windfall tax



Why is mainstream discussion of the “cost-of-living crisis” so shallow, when, for example, an energy company boss says that 40% of households may soon be in “fuel poverty”? The labour movement’s failure to argue loudly for alternative policies, and push the Labour Party to, is a big factor.

This is the flipside of the shortage, so far, of strikes to push up wages – despite favourable conditions to make gains, with low unemployment, more workers back in the workplace, and a discredited government. The left needs to tackle both problems.

The labour movement needs an emergency plan of proposals to defend living standards and confront and reduce inequality.

Labour’s campaign for a windfall tax on the profits of fossil fuel giants, to subsidise household energy bills, doesn’t involve street-activity or demonstrations, let alone strikes. But it’s at least a hint at how to actually argue for something. There aren’t demonstrations, street stalls, workplace leaflets, speaker tours, door-to-door canvassing... but Labour’s leaders, its MPs, its representatives, spokespeople and social media are vocally and continuously hammering the demand. It’s a start.

Too often labour movement organisations agree a policy and then never mention it!

The windfall tax is virtually all Labour is proposing. The profits of BP, Shell, and the rest are outrageous, and emergency money to mitigate energy bills is necessary. But subsidising energy bills will only cushion the squeeze on living standards to a limited extent, and public subsidy of energy providers’ profits is not a good longer-term solution.

The labour movement should be exploiting this situation to win public

ownership of energy, so we can have a planned push to bring down bills, transform the industry – including to help tackle climate change – and avoid and prepare for future upheavals. And in fact that’s the policy passed at the last two Labour conferences (2019 and 2021: bit.ly/lpgnd21).

Starmer and co. are able to ignore conference policy because the Labour left is poorly organised and woolly, and because trade unions mostly put the party under little pressure – even for their own policies. The fight for agreed labour movement policies to be carried out is a fight for working-class interests, and also for labour movement democracy.

The TUC and unions’ demands bit.ly/18junemarch for the “We demand better” march in London on 18 June are better than Labour’s – a real pay rise for every worker, a real Living Wage for all, end “zero hours”, increased Universal Credit, and more – but precise demands the TUC and other unions have promoted since 2020, for instance on sick pay and benefits, are not mentioned.

Union

Union mobilisation for the protest is slow so far, and the Labour Party hardly seems to be promoting it at all. Starmer’s Labour leadership refuses to support strikes, and isn’t arguing for workers to unionise even on the level that Joe Biden does in the USA.

Starmer is not even proposing to restore the £20 a week the Tories cut off Universal Credit in October. That £20, plus uprating all benefits at least in line with inflation, is essential to prevent the worst impacts on society’s poorest. Benefits should be significantly increased, to at least regain the real value they’ve lost over forty years; and punitive conditions and sanctions scrapped.

Another Labour conference policy ignored by the leadership and even the left is a £15 minimum wage. Labour

argues, not very vocally, for £10, but it has had that demand since 2017 – and the actual minimum wage is now £9.50. With prices soaring, real campaigning for a higher minimum – and for all workers, not excluding young ones – is much needed.

The same Labour conference demanded sick pay at a living wage level for all. With the squeeze on living standards, a fight to boost the UK’s shameful statutory sick pay is more urgent than ever.

So is a fight for controls on rents.

Cuts

After a real-terms pay cut last year, after a decade of real-terms cuts, millions of public sector workers need a big rise this year. The unions are not fighting seriously for this; and Labour is certainly not advocating it. We need to raise our ambitions.

The bulk of the working class in the private sector will only get adequate pay rises if trade union action leads the way, including by strikes. But emergency state measures, as well as helping many private sector workers in other ways, will also create better social conditions for them to fight.

Then there are many wider measures necessary to rebuild society on a better basis after the lockdowns – from restoring gutted local government funding and building council houses to reversing privatisation, establishing public social care and childcare systems, and creating green public-sector jobs. Winning serious measures on living standards now makes it more likely we can push forward in these other battles.

Where does the money come from? Another way in which public debate about all this is so impoverished is that, fuel companies aside, it largely ignores the huge wealth being piled up by employers and the rich. There’s no shortage of wealth in society, but it is concentrated in the hands of a few. The total Rishi Sunak allocated as “household support” for poor households during the pandemic was £500 million. He and his wife alone have £730 million!

Workers’ Liberty advocates taking the banks and big financial institutions into public ownership and democratic control, to unlock wealth to tackle the social and ecological emergencies and begin transforming the economy in a socialist direction. In fact that policy has been passed twice at TUC Congress, most recently in 2019.

Even short of that, however, the labour movement should be shouting to tax the rich – through income tax, corporation tax, a wealth tax (ongoing,

not one-off) and as many other means as possible. That’s urgent to cut down inequality and diminish the power of the rich, as well as providing funds for alternative policies. Taxes that lower workers’ incomes should be cut back.

Last but not least, there is one crucial policy to redistribute wealth that wouldn’t require any public spending. We should urgently demand the repeal of all anti-union and anti-strike laws, so that workers can fight to drive up living standards freed from the current web of legal restrictions and bureaucratic harassment. □



Action on Covid-19

Covid deaths and cases are falling almost everywhere besides China and North Korea. It may be sensible now to ease even light Covid curbs, like masks, except for those working directly with more vulnerable people, so that as many as possible have some immunity from previous mild infection as well as from vaccination before winter and before the next variant comes. But Covid is (as the WHO officially recognises) still a pandemic. That new variant will come, and it may be fiercer than Omicron. We push for:

- a sustained public-health testing-and-surveillance system
- 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. □

An emergency plan

The labour movement should campaign, and demand Labour campaigns, for:

- Reversing the £20 UC cut; benefit increases with inflation and above
- A major real-terms rise for public sector workers, as part of winning rises for all workers
- Scrap all anti-union laws to help push up wages
- A major increase in the minimum

wage, to £15, for all

- Sick pay at least at the minimum wage level, for all
- Rent controls
- Taking the energy companies into public ownership (a windfall tax to subsidise energy bills is necessary – but no solution)
- Taxing the rich – all of them, as much as possible □

No.637 on 8 June

Solidarity 637 will be out on 8 June. We’re skipping a week on 1 June because it would be difficult to distribute the paper properly over the 2-5 June public holiday. To make up, this issue has 24 pages rather than the usual 16. □

Couriers organise for a long haul

By Michael Elms

Food couriers across the UK are continuing their six-month campaign of fighting for fair pay. Couriers employed by Stuart Delivery, a French firm (a subsidiary of DPD and the nationalised French postal service) which performs deliveries for JustEat and other companies.

The strikes started in Sheffield, where couriers have been building an organisation for several years with the help of the local branch of Workers' Liberty. From there, they spread across the UK and in particular the north of England following a pay cut which Stuart rolled out in late 2021.

With daily strike action and regular meetings and protests spreading across the country for over five months, Stuart came under immense pressure but stonewalled the union. Now that summer has arrived, and the volume of

work available on delivery platform has fallen, the workers are concentrating on building up their organisation to prepare a renewed offensive in the winter when business picks up; while keeping the pressure on Stuart with regular days of action and political campaigning.

On the most recent day of action on 17 May, strikes shut down all delivery platforms in Hartlepool and Darlington, while a busy McDonald's in Sheffield was closed down, and riders elsewhere in the country held meetings and discussed future action. Supporters of the couriers staged protests outside the premises of two smaller clients of Stuart Delivery, Lush and Brewdog, whose management has made it clear that they feel under pressure regarding their supplier's labour practices.

Meanwhile, dozens of supporters staged a demonstration outside the JustEat UK head office, and a leading



courier attended the Greggs shareholders' AGM, where the presence of a striker caused great alarm among senior Greggs executives, which was noticed by their big investors.

Following a national strike supporters' zoom rally, addressed by John McDonnell and leaders of the UCU and PCS unions, there will be continued organisation of members of the public who back the dispute, throughout the

summer. In Sheffield, Hartlepool and Darlington, Stuart riders were joined by riders from other platforms, who have been inspired by the JustEat struggle. In Sheffield, efforts are underway to create a formal organisation of UberEats drivers.

Sheffield UberEats drivers have decided to embark upon a local campaign around parking issues and treatment in a local branch of KFC. □

Anti-war feeling may be rising in Russia

By Michael Baker

Phone polls run by the Public Opinion Foundation in Russia suggest that, while support for the government remains roughly stable, in the last two weeks the number of those willing to take part in protests has risen from 15% to 19%. 24% of people believe that "a considerable number" would take part in protests in their region, up from 17% the week before.

In the words of the Russian Socialist Movement, "it's no great surprise that people are being radicalised. Quality of life is falling rapidly, the regime is destroying any opportunity to legally express your discontent, and the prisons are filling up with dissidents. Meanwhile,

the systemic 'opposition' parties, who should, purely for the sake of electoral rating, be expressing and defending the interests of their public, have bowed their heads to the regime, and in some cases have even outpaced them in their anti-popular messaging and initiatives."

While true figures about the size of the Russian population's discontent are impossible to find, there are growing signs that the number of those against the war is far bigger than the first cautious estimates.

An anonymous student at the Ural Federal University used a university event with Maria Zakharova, spokeswoman for the Russian Foreign Ministry, to publicly challenge the gov-

ernment's lies and action over Ukraine. Although Zakharova used the interruption as an opportunity for a 30-minute tirade at the audience, the student was still able to give a defiant public expression of dissent to a leading government figure.

Self-determination

"The Russian government has proudly talked of sovereignty for decades, of the self-determination of peoples, and then at some point decided to turn a blind eye to Ukraine's independence, to its sovereignty, and decided for some reason to determine the fate of a nation without the participation of the nation itself. If my memory serves me correctly, no official has asked Russia to

free them from the neo-Nazis, asked them to denazify them, asked them to do anything like that... so how has this happened?"

The Russian Public Prosecutor's office will be investigating the Independent Trade Union of Journalists and Media Workers. The investigation will demand full access to all financial records of the union, all of its founding documents, and recordings of the union's representatives speaking to the press, to ascertain whether it has been "complying with laws regarding public associations, trade unions, and information". While not yet an actual act of repression against the union, this is clearly an attempt to scare the Russian labour movement in the wake of the

war in Ukraine and its financial fallout, rising workplace discontent across the country, and the ongoing case against Kirill Ukraintsev, leader of the Courier Trade Union.

Artist Sasha Skochilenko, in pre-trial detention until at least the end of May, has put out an open letter available online [in English](#). In her letter, she calls her imprisonment a "performance" that she doesn't regret in the slightest. "The freedom of speech, freedom of expression, and peace, to my mind, are invaluable, and I'm not afraid to pay for them with some ten years in prison. Even ten years will be a small price for the chance to express my opinion peacefully and without arms." □

Inflation 10.2% for rich, 8.7% for poor

Inflation is at its highest rate for forty years. Consumer Price Index inflation (CPI) was 9% (measured April to April), the highest since 1982. The monthly jump from March to April was the biggest since 1980. Food inflation was at 6.7%; durable goods at 8.5%; the biggest drivers were energy costs. The energy price cap is due to go up again in less than five months.

And inflation is not the same

for everyone, but worst for the worst off. The highest-income tenth of society are experiencing inflation of 8.7%, while for the poorest tenth it's 10.2%.

Meanwhile real wages are falling, at the fastest rate for a decade – but not as fast as the value of most benefits. (Figures from the [Resolution Foundation](#)).

The situation should inject urgency and clarity into socialist agitation – for strikes to

drive wage increases upwards towards and past inflation; for clear, solid government policies to redistribute wealth, raise living standards and attack inequality; and against the capitalist government and system responsible for this mayhem. □

- TUC "We Demand Better" demonstration, Saturday 18 June, assemble 10:30, Portland Place, London W1A 1AA.

Upcoming meetings

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

Sunday 5 June, 6.30pm: Online AWL meeting: Who was James Connolly?

Sunday 12 June, 11am: Ecosocialist reading group: Mass extinction. Held over Zoom

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

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



Murray's way forward for Labour



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

The Communist Party of Britain (CPB) is all over the place on what to do and say about the Labour Party at the moment – and this is reflected in the pages of its mouthpiece the *Morning Star*.

The CPB's little Englander ignoramus of a general secretary, Robert Griffiths, told a recent CPB executive committee (reported in the MS of 11 May) that what he described as Labour's "failure" in the recent local elections was down to "two key factors": that "millions of former... supporters... have not forgotten nor forgiven Labour's attempts to dismiss the democratic vote to leave the EU", and that "Starmer's purge of the left... sabotaged the party's campaigning capacity."

Neither of these "explanations" stands up. In 2017, Labour's commitment to "respect" the referendum was completely opportunist and dishonest. In reality, everyone knew the "respect" position was a cover, and if Labour stuck to its "six tests" (remember them?) then it could support no Brexit deal. Millions

of Liberal, Green, Plaid and other Remain voters – especially youth – rallied to Labour.

The point at which Labour's standing in the polls collapsed was in early 2019, when Corbyn (urged on by Stalinist advisers close to the CPB and *Morning Star*) abandoned the position of the vast majority of the membership – clear opposition to Brexit and support for a second referendum – and attempted to impose his pro-Brexit position. Campaigning was down in some areas this spring, but it held up in some areas where Labour did poorly, and it wasn't all that good in 2018.

A more serious and thoughtful attempt to analyse the present situation in Labour was presented by Andrew Murray, the unelected Unite bureaucrat (under Len McCluskey) who officially left his leading role in the CPB in order to join Corbyn's inner sanctum in 2017. In an article on 18 May ("The Starmer era: a study in failure"), Murray outlines three options: "a liberal alliance with the Greens and Lib Dems, a leadership challenge that may well not go to the left – or gathering together the remaining socialist forces in the party to fight for radical policies."

Stalinist though he is, Murray at least seems to be trying to think things through. He denounces the idea of a



Andrew Murray and Jeremy Corbyn

"formal or informal" pact with the Lib Dems and the Greens (rightly so, even if his reasons are bizarre – it's a plan put forward by "erstwhile Remainiacs", apparently). He then suggests a leadership challenge to Starmer as a focus, but back-tracks: "there is no certainty... that a new leader would be an improvement."

So Murray falls back upon his final proposal: "If defeating Starmer seems too challenging right now, then at least form a common campaigning front of MPs, unions and members to promote Corbyn-era radical policies and defend Labour's beleaguered democracy."

Corbyn's incoherent left-reformist

platform, including (presumably) his rejection of the members' view on Brexit (so much for "defend Labour's democracy") cannot be revived as the basis of a left-wing fight back; but there are plenty of policies current in 2015-19 (restoring the NHS, reversing cuts, taxing the rich, abolishing student fees, scrapping anti-union laws...) around which unity could start.

Murray's despairing tone suggests even he doesn't believe his plan will fly: but at least he's giving the issues serious thought and not just whingeing about Starmer – unlike most people around the CPB and *Morning Star*. □

A new terminology for Israel-Palestine

By Martin Thomas

Socialist Worker has adopted new terminology for Israel-Palestine. In [SW of 18 May](#), Haifa is no longer Haifa. It is "the occupied city of Haifa".

Israel is not Israel. It is "48 Palestine", or just "48". Israeli Jews are not people who live there because they were born there, mostly in families which arrived there as refugees. They are "Israeli settlers": the article refers to "sustained moves by Israeli settlers to marginalise Arabs in 48 Palestine", making it clear that it is referring to Israelis in Israel, not to the settlers and the military in the West Bank.

Socialist Worker used to propose a "democratic secular state" covering all British-Mandate Palestine. That term disappeared from its everyday agitation years ago – it hardly fits with SW's support for the anti-secular Hamas – but was not replaced.

The new terminology comes

with no spelled-out new policy, but the implications are clear. The Israeli Jews are "settlers", and should be driven out or marginalised. Although Haifa had a Jewish majority before 1948, the Jews there are analogous to the Israeli settlers planted in the West Bank since 1967.

Socialist Worker says "it was all Palestine before Israel's creation in 1948", "it" presumably being Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza.

In fact, *Socialist Worker* doesn't want a return to before 1948. SW does not want a return of the British rule (1918-48) which defined a specific territory for "Palestine" (previously a loose term covering a wider area); or of Ottoman rule (for centuries before that).

It wants an independent Palestinian state. Rightly so: over the 20th century a distinct Palestinian nation has developed and been denied rights.

Workers' Liberty shares the view of many (perhaps most)

secular Palestinian nationalists, and of most Israeli democrats, that, since the Israel-Jewish nation has been consolidated, Palestinian self-determination will emerge as the creation of an independent Palestinian state, alongside and with the same rights as Israel, in a territory formed where Palestinians are the majority: West Bank, Gaza, East Jerusalem (with provision to make it contiguous).

Indication

SW's terminology points a different way: an independent Palestinian state to be all British-Mandate Palestine, with "Israeli settlers" pushed out or marginalised. The 18 May article refers to the (real, and encouraging) increase of Palestinian mobilisation within Israel; but is pointedly silent about the part of that which is a rise of joint Jewish-Arab mobilisation, through groups like Standing Together, the 2018 protests against the Na-

tion-State Law, or the protests against evictions in Sheikh Jarrah.

Palestinian resistance, in alliance with democratic-minded Israeli Jews and with international solidarity, can force Israel to withdraw from the West Bank and concede an independent Palestinian state. The horrible shift of both Israeli Jewish politics and Palestinian politics to the right in recent decades means only that the necessary shift of politics to the left to win progress is a harder and longer job.

Palestinian self-assertion can force Israel to concede substantive civic equality to its Palestinian citizens.

But overrunning Israel? Re-running the 1948 war with an opposite outcome? That could be done only by a very unlikely firm alliance of the Arab states (or by a nuclear-armed Iran). Possibly not even then. In any case the attempt would be bloody and ruinous; and "victory" would

bring no good outcome among the ruins to the Palestinians, who have been treated even worse by the Arab states to which many fled in the 1947-8 war than by Israel.

Socialist Worker supporters, if pushed, usually square the circles by saying that their answers depend on a socialist revolution throughout the Middle East. But that socialist revolution presupposes at least some working-class unity embracing the best-organised working class of the region, in Israel, and so a programme capable of uniting workers across national divisions and of inspiring battles for democratic redress now without waiting for full revolution.

And anyway there is little of that "revolution throughout the region" talk in SW's recent coverage. The new terminology suggests a further turn down the political blind alley in which SW has trapped itself since 1967 and especially since 1986-7. □

Israel-Arab détente leaves Palestinians sidelined

By Sacha Ismail

Benjamin Netanyahu, when Israeli prime minister from 2009 to 2021, managed to combine a brutal policy towards the Palestinians with an extension of Israel's connections to Arab governments. The precarious coalition government of his successor Naftali Bennett ([Solidarity 635](#)) is trying the same.

In August 2020 Netanyahu signed the "Abraham Accords" normalising relations with the United Arab Emirates, followed quickly by Bahrain, and over the next year by measures of normalisation and cooperation with Sudan, Morocco, and Oman. One result was Netanyahu suspending the plan he had agreed with Trump to formally annex swathes of the West Bank (though the slower de facto annexation continues as for decades).

In March 2022 Bennett's Israel held a summit in Israel's Negev desert with the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco and Egypt (and the US) to discuss cooperation – the very first such regional meeting.

One of Israel's main concerns is create a united front against Iran. As foreign minister and, if the coalition survives till next year, future prime minister Yair Lapid put it: "This new architecture, the shared capabilities we are building, intimidates and deters our common enemies – first and foremost Iran and its proxies – they certainly have something to fear..."

The Arab participants are less fearful of Iran than they were. Unlike Israel, they do not oppose Biden's attempts to revive the Iran nuclear deal which Trump cancelled. UAE is a major trading partner with Iran, and has pursued improved relations with it.

Since last year, however, Emirati forces have been in [Yemen](#) fighting the Iran-backed Houthi Shia Islamists, and in January the Houthis carried out missile attacks on UAE's capital Abu Dhabi (an Iraqi Shia militia also sent drones). One took place while Israeli president Isaac Herzog was visiting the city. The Houthis' official slogans include "Death to Israel" and "Cursed be the Jews". Saudi Arabia and UAE responded with a bombing campaign that killed dozens of Yemeni civilians.

Iran called the summit a "conference of evil", with supreme leader Ali Khamenei denouncing the "pitiful states [that] have normalized relations with the Zionist regime. These states are not effective. The Islamic nation will never

forget, nor will it capitulate on the issue of Palestine." But the days of a united "no, no, no" attitude to Israel by Arab states are long gone. That was inspired by the thought that they could re-run the 1948, 1967 or 1973 wars and win. No Arab state has really been much concerned for Palestinian rights, now or in the "no, no, no" days: back in 1949 Jordan and Egypt annexed most of what the UN had designated as an independent Palestinian state.

Emirati, Sudanese, Moroccan and Omani governments are relatively straightforward about their fear of Hamas (with its links to Iran) and their lack of interest in the Palestinians (despite the presence of some 200,000 Palestinians in the UAE, many of them workers in highly-qualified jobs). The Jordanian government, with a Palestinian majority in its population, is more cautious, but their diplomatic and trade relations with Israel are of long standing. Jordan signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1994, had extensive under-the-counter dealings with Israeli governments before that, and has accelerated links since.

Egypt signed its peace treaty with Israel in 1979, and has long cooperated with Israel in blockading Gaza.

Relations

Turkey has recognised Israel since 1949, with relations since then sometimes warm, sometimes cool (Turkey also wants to woo Islamist movements across the Arab world). Recently they have warmed.

Jordan declined to participate in the Negev summit; during it King Abdullah II visited Ramallah to see Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas. When Israeli police invaded the al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem in April, threatening to spark a fresh round of the 2021 military clashes with Hamas, even the UAE took Israel to task. But those are only hiccups in the trend.

Qatar, too, has long-standing trade and under-the-counter diplomatic links with Israel, and plays a balancing act, supplying funds to Gaza to avert full social collapse by agreement with Israel.

Khamenei speaks in the voice of antisemitic "anti-Zionist" chauvinism. Internationalists should support normal relations between Israel and other states. But, as an [article](#) for the Arab Centre Washington DC put it:

"Middle Eastern leaders show... little interest in leveraging their emerging regional entente in ways that might in-

duce Palestinian and Israeli leaders to come to the negotiating table, [so] the biggest losers will be those Israelis and Palestinians who support a just and fair end to their endless conflict."

Israel wants strong and reactionary Arab governments that will do business with it and tacitly accept Israel's treatment of the Palestinians. Thus its strong support for the post-October 2021 coup regime in Sudan.

Partnerships

The Arab governments see Israel as an "accomplished fact" with which it will be advantageous to do deals, and the Palestinian leaderships, Hamas and the PA in the West Bank, as unreliable losers. Israel is now a major exporter of high-tech military equipment, and in 2021 the UAE and Bahrain took 7% of that flow. An Israeli government official commented: "Partnerships such as the Abraham Accords create high demand for Israel's cutting-edge technological systems".

The Arab-ally governments have also been supplied with the Pegasus spyware now known to have been very widely used to infect the phones and devices of politicians, activists and journalists around the world. Pegasus was created in 2011 by three cyber-engineers who previously worked for a unit of the Israeli Defence Forces.

So aggressive and globally disruptive have the activities of their NSO Group become that in December the US government put it on a blacklist.

The list of Pegasus victims is remarkable: this month Spain's prime minister announced that he and his defence minister have been hacked. Arab states in détente with Israel look to have made extensive use of the technology against dissidents; in fact its ability to infect phones first became public when an Emirati human rights activist, Ahmed Mansoor, was targeted in 2016. Last year it emerged that Pegasus was used in operations preceding the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi by the Saudi regime in Istanbul in 2018.

In addition to Mexican drug cartels, Pegasus has also been used by other authoritarian regimes Netanyahu cultivated – including Modi's India, Orbán's Hungary, Kgame's Rwanda and Aliyev's Azerbaijan.

Another repressive regime with which both Netanyahu and Bennett have cultivated friendly relations is Russia.

Although Israel voted for the UN general assembly resolution opposing the

invasion of Ukraine (in 2014 it refused to condemn the annexation of Crimea), its wider stance has been strikingly equivocal. It refused the US's request to co-sponsor a Security Council resolution. On 5 March Bennett became the first foreign premier to meet Putin during the war. His government has rejected Ukraine's requests for military aid (including access to Pegasus!) Israel has offered to mediate, and several Israeli ministers have publicly downplayed Russia's responsibility for and crimes in the war. All this despite Zeleny's friendly attitude to Israel.

Russia

Defence minister Benny Gantz has cited Israel's "border" with Russia due to Russian air power over Syria and Lebanon as a reason not to cross Putin. Bennett's minister of finance is Avigdor Lieberman, leader of a right-wing but secular party heavily based among Russian Jews whose families migrated to Israel in the 1990s: many of those Russians, even though they fled, still feel ties with Russia. Netanyahu and friends have attacked the government as insufficiently pro-Putin.

Da'am, the left Stalinist group that runs the significant Israeli trade union WAC-MAAN, argues (in an [article](#) full of the peculiarities of Da'am, but worth reading):

"It is no coincidence that Israel and its Arab partners refused to condemn the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Saudi Arabia, for example, is openly working to thwart sanctions against Putin by refusing to increase oil production... Like Putin, both Saudi Arabia and Israel hope Trump will return to power in 2024... Israel and the Gulf states are attempting to convince the world that Putin is their friend and ally, while Iran is the true existential danger. The fact that Putin invaded a neighbouring country without provocation, and is preparing the ground for using weapons of mass destruction there, is not discussed in Israel..."

"Israel's complete disregard for the Palestinians living under occupation, as well as for the murderous nature of its allied Arab regimes, explain its neutral stance in the current war on European soil between democracy and tyranny... every leader, even if he is a dictator and a murderer, becomes a desirable ally, from Donald Trump to Putin, from Mohammed bin Salman to Abd al-Fattah el-Sisi, provided he is willing to ignore crimes against the Palestinians." □

Threat to women's sports



Letter

I was pleased to see the excellent [articles in Solidarity 635](#) in response to the [items in 634](#) that I can only describe as transphobic.

I wanted to draw out the fact that the arguments that Ally and Jack put against trans people are also to the detriment of all women.

By arguing against Gillick competency, you certainly do work against the rights of children. Crucially you also work with the right wing to undermine the reproductive rights of teenage women. Gillick competency came

about specifically to allow teenage girls to gain access to the morning-after pill without having to have parental consent.

And the negative focus on trans women is a threat to women's sports in general. Whatever means authorities might use to screen out trans women will be invasions of privacy that cis women will also have to endure. Besides being trans there are other medical conditions that can make aspects such as testosterone level, chromosomes, or genitalia appear to be outside the parameters of what is considered "normal" for a woman.

Female athletes too often have to contend with the accusation that they are not "real women". We should not

have to endure such scrutiny. Men are not subjected to such treatment.

Oppressed group

The question of whether an oppressed group has an "unfair advantage" has a long and ignoble history – as black men and women have long been accused of winning due to an inherent advantage rather than being allowed to celebrate their achievements.

Jack and Ally might like to remember this is a socialist organisation. We are in favour of the liberation of all humanity, and seek to minimise the divisions in our class. We have a duty to fight for the oppressed, not to find ways of further excluding, humiliating and marginalising them.

Once again, attacking trans women on this issue is damaging to women's sport generally. It is a pattern – whenever you seek to put the needs of one oppressed group against another, you will find they are both worse off. To the benefit of the right wing. The Tory bigots are stoking up culture wars to divide our class and strengthen the far right. The arguments you are putting aid them.

I'd like to remind the writers that Workers' Liberty have standing policy that we are proud of, we recognise that trans women are women, and their right to live as women in our society. □

Angela Driver,
south London

The age of consent, again



Letter

Wilson Gibbons' reply ([Solidarity 635](#)) to my reply ([634](#)) to an article by Zack Muddle ([633](#)) contains so many misrepresentations and/or misunderstandings that it is difficult to know where to start – especially as a letter like this is necessarily constrained by space.

My main concern is with kids under the age of 16, not young people between 16 and 18 – a matter that has become confused because in the "Bell case" the claimants argued that no-one under 18 could ever consent to taking puberty blockers. That is not my position, which is that the age of 16 is an appropriate age of consent for most matters (not just sexual relations) and that the much-touted "Gillick competence" criteria are unlikely to be met by children under 16 when it comes to irreversible medical transition interventions.

Let me explain: Wilson states (and I agree) that "Gillick" applies to young people's and children's "right to get contraceptives, abortions, vaccinations, blood transfusions or medically necessary surgery free from parental interfer-

ence." The crucial words here are "medically necessary" and even then that right is conditional upon (in the words of Lord Scarman in the Gillick case: "a child seeking advice has sufficient understanding of what is involved to give consent valid in law." In the situations cited by Wilson (contraceptives, abortions, vaccinations, etc.) the issues at stake are relatively straightforward and likely to be sufficiently understood by a child for valid consent to be given. The issues are far more complex and unlikely for a child to understand when it comes to gender transition interventions. I would also add that the examples given by Wilson all involve the prevention of life-changing events – pregnancy, serious illness, death itself – whereas medical transition interventions are life changing measures: I am aware that puberty blocking treatment is said to be "reversible" and for the sake of argument will accept that assessment here. But Zack Muddle, in his article, went further and stated that as well as "reversible" treatments a 'decision to undergo medical treatment should also be the child or young person's alone, subject to the discretion of supportive medical professionals.'

Leaving aside the question

of what exactly Zack means by 'supportive medical professionals', it seems to me that the comments of the judges in the "Bell case" were sensible and fair, not only with regard to puberty blockers (which may or may not be "reversible") but all the more so with regard to "irreversible" interventions: "It is highly unlikely that a child aged 13 or under would be competent to give consent to the administration of puberty blockers [...] It is doubtful that a child aged 14

or 15 could understand and weigh the long-term risks and consequences of the administration of puberty blockers."

Legal

It is worth noting, as well, that the Appeal Court overruled this decision not because it felt the declaration of the judges in the Bell case was necessarily wrong (it took no view on that), but because the court had exceeded its authority in issuing such an opinion and that such findings were not the proper purpose of a judicial review (the means by which Bell had brought her case). In other words, this was a narrowly legalistic decision and not one that need be decisive for socialists when reaching a political (or ethical) view of the issues at stake. Socialists take account of what the law says and the courts decide, but we are not bound by it.

Space does not allow me to take up all the issues raised by Wilson, but one, in particular, cannot be allowed to pass unanswered. I am accused of "evoking the trope that autism wrongly causes people to transition" and that this is "offensive and discriminatory against autistic people." Of course, in pointing out the well documented fact of a measurable overlap between autism and gender dyspho-

ria (or [diversity](#)) I was merely stating that possible autism is a factor that should be taken into account by medical people supporting and advising children experiencing gender dysphoria (does Wilson think it should be ignored?): but it is Wilson – not me – who uses the expression "mentally ill" in this context.

As for Wilson's claim that I am more reactionary than "mainstream" Tory politics on this issue: I would remind Wilson that Stop the War supporters make exactly that charge against the AWL on Ukraine: Trotsky, in his brilliant polemic "Learn to Think" deals with this kind of argument very effectively.

Finally, Wilson accuses me of "screeching 'won't someone please think of the children?': well, the AWL many years ago *did* "think of the children" and recognised that under-16s need special protections and lack the ability to make certain decisions that adults make. The AWL – rightly in my opinion – supported an age of consent at 16, not just for sexual relations but for other "life changing" decisions as well. Wilson seems to disagree with this. For myself, I'll keep "screeching". □

Jack McDonagh,
Birmingham



Corrections

Gillick competence applies to under-16 year olds, not under-18 year olds, as "Court upholds Gillick competence", [Solidarity 634](#) had it. The article is correct that Bell was under 18 but not under 16, and the Bell vs Tavistock initial court judgement targeted all under-18 year olds: undermining Gillick but also more. 16 and 17 year olds have generally been deemed able to consent without the need for Gillick competence to be assessed. It has been corrected online. □

Green hydrogen? Yes, but...



Environment

By Stuart Jordan

Australia's newly elected Labor government is planning the world's largest green hydrogen plant and a hydrogen power station. Many other countries, including the UK, are also stepping up the development of hydrogen technology as an alternative to Russian oil and gas.

There are bold claims for hydrogen technology. What role can it actually play in solving the climate crisis?

Hydrogen is an extremely powerful fuel in that contains more energy per unit weight than fossil fuels. It has been used as a fuel for over two centuries, and powered the Apollo lunar modules.

Hydrogen is similar to fossil fuels in that it is a compact, transportable store of energy. With little modification it can be pumped through gas pipelines or burnt in combustion engines. The waste product from burning hydrogen is water and so it can help improve air quality (particulate matter from fossil fuel combustion kills 8.7 million a year globally). Depending on how it is produced it might also play a role in reducing carbon emissions.

Before hydrogen can be burnt to produce energy, it must first be produced by splitting water molecules with electricity or by splitting methane (fossil gas) using heat energy. About three times more energy is required to produce hydrogen than is released

by the resulting fuel. At best hydrogen is a useful but inefficient way to store energy harnessed by solar technology. At its worst it is the world's dirtiest fuel, with three times more CO₂ per kWh released through its production cycle than in direct use of fossil fuels.

Hydrogen is assigned a colour depending on how it is produced. Green hydrogen is produced using electricity from wind turbines or solar panels. Blue hydrogen is produced by reforming methane with steam and then using carbon capture and storage to reduce emissions. Grey or black hydrogen uses fossil fuels to produce the energy. Other colours, which are very much in development stages, involve different primary energy sources (nuclear, pyrolysis).

According to the IEA, 76% of hydrogen currently is from gas (grey) and 23% of hydrogen is from coal (black). Blue and green hydrogen make up less than 0.7%. State intervention and falling prices of solar technology may change this.

Hydrogen adds nothing to the total energy mix, and so it cannot solve the big problem of replacing fossil fuels with non-carbon based primary energy sources. But if we can harness an abundance of solar energy, green hydrogen may be a way of decarbonising industrial sectors like steel or aviation that are difficult to electrify.

In Australia the plan is to convert excess solar energy to green hydrogen which will provide baseload power during the night and for hydrogen export. Countries like Australia want to use green hydrogen technology to "export sunlight".

Currently the main use of grey/black hydrogen is in the production of fertilisers. The energy inputs of the Haber-Bosch process rearrange chemical elements into forms that can be metabolised into the bodies of plants and microorganisms. These in turn are metabolised into human bodies. In this way, fossilised solar energy provided some of the calories for 20th century population growth. Greening hydrogen production is essential for reducing CO₂ emissions associated with fertilisers, whose production currently contributes 2.4% of global emissions.

Modelling from BloombergNEF suggests that an energy mix including 24% green hydrogen by 2050 would be compatible with Paris climate goals. But to produce this quantity of hydrogen would require 38% more electricity than currently exists in the world. The scenario depends on building enough photovoltaics and other "renewable" energy technology to harness 4.5 times current global energy use.

Herein lies the difficulty of any energy transition. Capitalism has a tendency to exhaust all the energy made available to it. Capital accumulation in the physical-geographical realm is the accelerating movement of matter in production, distribution, and consumption. So long as economic life is run for profit, the tendency is always towards accelerating and expanding this movement and exhausting all available energy supplies.

There are no techno fixes to this social problem. The solution can only come from measures to reduce total energy consumption and minimise waste through better design. Workers

have an interest in greening hydrogen production. We have a much greater interest in organising a slowdown of energy consumption. □



Activist Agenda

As Labour Party meetings re-start after 5 May, activists are submitting motions and rule changes opposing the Labour Party's new ban on Workers' Liberty: see bit.ly/mo-pe. The suggested wording is chosen carefully so as not to be subject to being ruled out of order on grounds used against debate on previous bans, or via the "three-year rule", or via recent changes to Labour's rule book to give the National Executive "absolute discretion" on some disciplinary points. In at least one CLP the wording has been ruled out of order "because the NEC has already made a decision", but we should resist making this a precedent: there is as yet no rule which says that once the NEC has decided something, members can't even discuss whether to criticise it! CLP meetings in the next weeks will also be electing delegates to Labour annual conference (deadline 17 June) and making nominations for the NEC, NPF, and NCC elections: *Solidarity* advocates backing the standard left slate. □

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

Huge gender care waiting lists are danger



Letter

Jack's letter ([Solidarity 634](#)) begins with thoroughly missing the point, and just gets worse. Zack's article ([633](#)) may well contain "highly debatable" points for some – but for us, it's not particularly controversial. Workers' Liberty's support for trans and non-binary rights has been established through numerous debates, educationals and [votes](#).

As Wilson's contribution ([635](#)) to this debate deftly illustrates, Jack's gamete-based "biological" defence is entirely irrelevant. Non-binary people

are non-binary because we do not fit within society's man-woman paradigm, but we rather exist between, outside, or irrespective of it. Trans people exist because they transition from their gender-assigned-at-birth to another gender.

Jack also slips back into his bizarre comparison between healthcare for young trans and non-binary people and the age of consent, which has been taken down, in Wilson's response, and before by Angela [609](#). He also says that "possible issues like homophobic bullying, sexual abuse, or autism" should be considered. This is a very weird and disrespectful argument to

use, not in the least because it feeds into some nasty narratives of the trans community as groomers, but also because it's ableist towards autistic people, and disrespectful to victims of sexual trauma, and suggests such people can't know our own minds. Finally, it's bizarre to assume someone would choose to escape bullying or abuse by joining one of the most pilloried and attacked groups in our society.

Jack may want us to believe in this scary universe where kids wander haplessly into the Tavistock, and come out with bags full of hormones and a surgery booked next week. The reality is waiting lists for NHS gender care are

pretty much on a geological timescale, so much so that they are the subject of a [High Court case](#). The waiting time is meant to be 18 weeks for first appointment, but is often between three and five years.

On top of this, no under-16s can currently pursue gender care [beyond](#) psychological support and sometimes (reversible) puberty blockers on the National Health. Practically, even someone getting into the gender clinic on their 16th or 17th birthday will be lucky to get hormones by their 18th, and surgery by their early 20s.

Workers' Liberty thinks these waiting times are inexcusable, and the NHS drastically needs more funding to provide bet-

ter gender care (and all other forms of healthcare). I'd go so far as to agree that it is illegal, discriminatory, and a danger to the lives of trans and non-binary people. People have died by their own hands on these waiting lists, and many more have suffered needlessly by being forced to deal with a body they don't want, and yet Jack compares this to a mere aesthetic choice like a tattoo – as far as I know, not getting a tattoo never killed anyone.

To argue these reactionary, borderline-Trumpian points is to support making it harder for people to access gender-affirming healthcare. □

Satya Pine,
Birmingham

Twilight of the oligarchs

By Tom Harrison

Whilst the barbarous rabble of Vladimir Putin's invading army continue to murder, rape and pillage in Ukraine, another round of "unexplained deaths" of prominent oligarchs has had scant mention in an otherwise crowded news agenda. At least six high profile wealthy Russians have died in mysterious circumstances since the invasion began and three have been particularly disturbing cases of alleged murder-suicides.

Sergey Protosenya, a former top manager of energy giant Novatek, was found hanging in the garden of his luxury holiday home in Lloret del Mar. Spanish police found his wife and 18-year old daughter inside the house hacked to death. No suicide note. No fingerprints on the axe and knife found therein. No bloodstains on Protosenya's body.

Vladislav Avaev, ex-vice president of Gazprombank, who had previously worked in Putin's presidential office, was found dead the previous day in his multi-million dollar luxury Moscow apartment after also apparently deciding to slaughter his wife and daughter.

Moscow police "found" a pistol in his hands and the Tass state news agency dutifully reported it a case of murder-suicide, not daring to suggest the whole thing was staged.

Three other oligarchs with associations to the oil industry were also apparent suicides. Alexander Tyulyakov and Leonid Shulmam, both executives of Gazprom, and the improbably named Mikhail Watford, whose death is currently being investigated by Surrey police.

Deaths

All of these deaths might indeed be suicides – a reflection of the mental torment these individuals had been under as a consequence of their various associations with the Putin regime. Sceptics, however, would point to the track record of that regime in eliminating its opponents over the last decade or so.

It has been claimed that the FSB drew up a list for Putin of executives in the energy industry in a belief that some of them were leaking information about the invasion of Ukraine and Putin OKed the liquidation of everyone on the list without even looking at it! Given the gas sector is the most corrupt part of the

regime and Putin is so highly dependent on it financially, the claim has some degree of credibility.

Here one is reminded of Joseph Stalin, burning the midnight oil in the Kremlin, pouring over death warrants to sign whilst smoking his pipe. In Stalin's case, he was at least bothered to look at the names for elimination! Staged suicides were commonly used by Stalin's secret police the NKVD in the 1930s to eliminate political opponents. The heirs of that organisation today are to be found in Unit 29155 of the Russian military intelligence agency GRU.

Putin's KGB background has equipped him with all the "skills" and behaviour of the Stalinist police state and his desire to reestablish a Great Russian empire has led him to strip away all vestiges of democratic rights and freedoms in Russia. Terror and repression now rule the day.

The military failings of his military forces are reminiscent of those of the war against Finland in 1939 and the collapse of the Red Army between June and November 1941. As a consequence of the latter, Stalin had a nervous breakdown in October 1942 and

retreated to his dacha. When members of the central committee went to visit him there, he thought the game was up and they were coming to depose him. Yet he had reduced the ruling elite to such an abjectly craven state that they begged him to return to Moscow and resume his leadership.

Palace coup

Is it the same with Putin? Or is a "palace coup" likely? In addition to the "suicides" of oligarchs, we have arrests and purges in the military and intelligence services. They fouled up, not the boss. Again reminiscent of the Stalin era. The employment of conscripts as cannon fodder is another, although it's not been reported any of them have been shot down for retreating yet.

Socialists of course place no trust in palace coups where one dictator is replaced by another. We support instead the developing anti war movement in Russia itself. As the war drags on and the Russian economy nose dives, this movement will only get stronger, strong enough to sweep away the gangster capitalist regime and the remaining oligarchs. □

Sylvia Pankhurst and "the first of its kind"

A new pamphlet from Workers' Liberty, Sylvia, can be bought online at workersliberty.org/sylvia (£3 single copies, five copies for £11). It tells the story of the political journey of Sylvia Pankhurst, the member of the suffragette Pankhurst family who moved to working-class organising and revolutionary socialism while her sister Christabel and mother Emmeline moved to support for World War One and for Toryism. Sylvia's Workers' Suffrage Federation were the sharpest and boldest supporters in the British left of the workers' revolution in Russia in October 1917. Their paper Workers' Dreadnought of 17 November 1917 editorialised:

"Anarchy in Russia" say the newsagents' placards. The capitalist newspapers denounce the latest Russian Revolution in unmeasured terms, and even the working men and women in the street too often echo their angry denunciations. Yet the latest revolt of the Russia Revolution, the

revolt with which the name of Lenin has been associated, has been brought about in order that the workers of Russia may no longer be disinherited and oppressed. This revolt is the happening which definitely makes the Russian Revolution of the twentieth century the first of its kind.

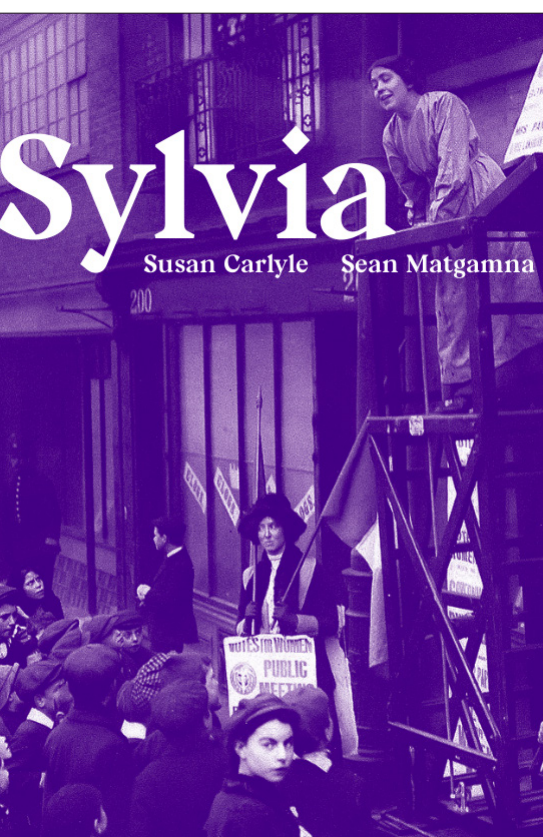
The Bolsheviks, or Maximalists, whose best known leaders are Lenin and Trotsky, but who do not depend for their policy on any group of leaders, were the driving force which made possible the Revolution last March, when the Czar was deposed. In the present upheaval they are but striving to complete their work...

The Council of Workers' and Soldiers Deputies created by the soldiers was the power, that made the Revolution, and... it is, as Mr. Arthur Ransome, the Daily News special correspondent, says, "the broadest-based elected body in Russia"...

The Bolsheviks (whose title merely signifies that they are out for the maximum Social-

ist programme instead of the minimum programme like the Mensheviks) at first formed the minority on the Workers' and Soldiers' Council, and the majority, who thought it safest to have a Coalition Government, carried the day... But... the advice of the Bolsheviks to withdraw from the capitalist War and to press on towards Socialism has gained steadily in favour, both in the country and on the Workers' and Soldiers' Council, till at the last All-Russian Congress of the Councils the Bolshevik delegates numbered 335 out of a total of 475.

Their opponents strive to make it appear that Lenin and his party are a handful of people which has imposed its domination upon the unwilling Russian people; but it is the Workers' and Soldiers' Council which has now deposed Kerensky and the Provisional Government, and itself becoming the Government has chosen Lenin to



be its Prime Minister...

The things set forth in this manifesto [of the Soviet Congress] are the things which the Russian Revolution originally set out to attain – a dem-

ocratic peace; land for the peasants, promised again and again by Minister after Minister since the Revolution in March: democratisation of the Army, partially accomplished months ago, then snatched away; control of the workers over industry; Socialism – Socialism is not expressly mentioned in these provisions, but we hope, and believe, that its speedy realisation is intended; freedom of nationalities... though the successive Coalition

Governments set up in Russia since the Revolution have not been willing to grant freedom to the nationalities within the Russian Empire... □

Drop the debt! A Workers' Plan for Ukraine!

By Katy Dollar

The Russian invasion has led to thousands of deaths and displaced millions of people; 7.1 million internally, 4.6m abroad. It has also destroyed homes, roads, hospitals, bridges and ports.

Ukraine will need a reconstruction programme. Leading economists and capitalist politicians are beginning the discussion of the Marshall Plan for Ukraine.

The World Bank predicts Ukraine's economy will shrink by 45% in 2022. Between the outbreak of the war in Donbas in 2014 and the 2022 invasion, the World Bank has lent US\$8.4bn, the IMF has loaned US\$17bn, and the European Commission has advanced at least €13bn to the country. In the latest reports, Ukrainian National Government Debt reached US\$86.3bn in March 2022.

Through wage cuts, job losses, attacks on employment rights and cuts in public services, the bosses are already passing the costs of the war onto the working class and poor. It is not enough to call for reconstruction, the Ukrainian left and unions must propose independent working-class organisation and a workers' plan to rebuild Ukraine. A plan for workers, not oligarchs or western lenders.

Due to the legacy of Stalinism, socialist politics is faced with suspicion in post-Soviet states. Ukrainian workers can be convinced through common



struggle, not just abstract argument.

Workers are facing basic defensive struggles: rents have been pushed up, whilst they are facing wage cuts and redundancies. There is a link between these fights and the fight for working-class power. Only by fighting for reforms can the working class transform itself and its movement into a force capable of remaking society.

Ukraine's debt should be cancelled. We want the workers' movement to make itself an autonomous force in the war and during its aftermath, and to our mind that means discussing and organising for demands like the following:

- Organise the unorganised! There are a huge number of precarious or unofficially employed workers in Ukraine. Like in the UK there is a new gig economy of food delivery and taxi drivers working without employment rights for tech platforms. Across the private sector it is a serious issue in older sectors too: for example, most construction workers are not officially employed.

- Scrap the anti-union laws passed under martial law and fight for a positive charter of workers' rights. Support workers protesting and striking in defiance of the law.

- Reverse cuts and privatisation car-

ried out during the austerity period; tax the rich to rebuild the health and education sectors. Implement a massive investment in infrastructure.

- No evictions. Rents capped to pre-war levels. A big programme of public sector home building, with quality housing for all.

- Fight for women's liberation: demand levelling up of pay; expanded abortion rights; free, universal child-

care, and other measures for gender equality.

- Open the books of the companies and oligarchs. Close tax loopholes. Fight for workers' control at every level of the economy.

- Investment in renewable energy. Move away from fossil fuels. Break up the energy oligopolies and invest in a green transition. □

FOR WORKERS' CLIMATE ACTION

CLIMATE CHANGE, CAPITALISM AND WORKING-CLASS STRUGGLE



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The language question in Ukraine

By Tom Harris

For years, Russia has justified its brutal imperialist policy in Ukraine by claiming to act in defence of ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers living in the country. Putin has claimed that Russian-speakers in the east are suffering persecution and even “genocide” at the hands of the Ukrainian state. At the same time, he has made explicit that he does not consider Ukrainians to be a distinct nation separate from Russians. Our recent solidarity delegation to Ukraine gave us an opportunity to talk to Ukrainian leftists about how Russians and Russian-speakers are viewed, and to dig into some of the background history.

A 2012 poll found that 50% of Ukrainians consider Ukrainian their native language, 29% Russian and 20% considered Ukrainian and Russian to be their “joint” native language. In practice, the vast majority of Ukrainians understand Russian and many use improvised combinations of both languages known generically as Surzhyk.

It would be wrong to make a mechanical assumption that just because someone speaks a particular language, that defines how they identify nationally or ethnically. A large-scale 2013 study by Polish academics Maria Lewicka and Bartłomiej Iwańczak found that a big majority of people in the predominantly Russian-speaking south and east identified themselves as Ukrainian. Even in Donbas, 70% or more of respondents considered themselves Ukrainian.

Of course, none of that is to say that there is a blanket, homogenous national identity in Ukraine. Nor is it to say that the cultural and political outlooks of different linguistic communities haven’t been shaped in different ways. But the idea that “Russian-speaking = Russian = sympathetic to Putin’s policy” is clearly nonsense.

Dry statistics are all well and good, but we were interested to hear from Ukrainian leftists and trade unionists on the question. At the solidarity conference in Lviv, Yurii Samoilov spoke via Zoom on behalf of the Union of Independent Mineworkers of Kryvyi Rih. Samoilov is a Russian-speaker of Bulgarian ethnicity, and Kryvi Rih is a mainly Russian-speaking city. When asked about whether workers there felt oppressed on the basis of their language or nationality, he said he found the question bizarre. He also drew a sharp contrast between the way in which people might feel culturally part of “the Russian-speaking world”, and actually identifying with the Russian state or its invasion.

Many of the trade unionists we met were most comfortable speaking in Russian. This makes sense, as for historical reasons the industrial centres of the country have tended to be Russophone. Countless activists pointed out to us that the very cities that have put up the most dogged and bloody resistance to the invasion were those that the Kremlin and Putin-sympathetic ele-



Signs in Mariupol in Ukrainian and English being removed

ments of the Western left would have you believe were pro-Russia all along.

In the past decade, the Ukrainian state has introduced various legislative measures aimed at promoting the Ukrainian language. Laws now guarantee that a certain portion of music played on the radio must be Ukrainian, as well as requiring the use of Ukrainian in schools. In 2012, a law allowed for Russian to become an official “regional language” in certain areas where it was popularly spoken. This law was overturned by the constitutional court, a legal ruling criticised by the Council of Europe for disrespecting minority language rights.

I asked Vladyslav Starodubtsev, a member of left-wing Sotsialniy Rukh and a native Russian-speaker himself, what he made of “Ukrainianisation” laws. He said that while he disagreed with some policy details, he was supportive of the general aim of protecting and promoting Ukrainian. Centuries of Russian imperialism had stigmatised and persecuted the use of Ukrainian,

he said, and measures to protect and promote the language now should be understood as decolonisation. I asked if there was a risk that Russian-speakers might be persecuted? He replied that Russian was still very much a prestige language, prominent in the media and business: “If you only speak Russian you will get along fine in this society; if you only speak Ukrainian you will run into problems”.

And how do Ukrainians feel about people from Russia itself? Understandably given the horrors of the invasion, the mood we got from the Ukrainian conference attendees felt hostile to them. We asked one feminist speaker whether she had any links with the women’s movement in Russia. No, she said, and she didn’t want any. Anarchist speakers were asked about the possibility of working with deserters from the Russian army. They replied that, after the massacres of civilians in Bucha and Irpin, that fraternal mood was at an extremely low ebb.

Socialist activists from Sotsialniy Rukh said that they had connections with leftist activists in Russia and continued to maintain contact.

I suspect for many Ukrainians, the searing pain of what Russia has inflicted on them will make it difficult for them to find common cause with ordinary Russian citizens for some time. But building links between the Russian anti-war left and the Ukrainian resistance is important. □

Women and Roma in the war

By Tom Harris

The European Network for Solidarity with Ukraine delegation which visited Lviv on 3-7 May heard from feminist activists and campaigns for women’s rights. The war has had a profound effect on women’s lives. Sexual violence has been used as a weapon of war by the invading Russian forces, creating enormous suffering and trauma.

The ability for women to access abortion is far from guaranteed. Though abortion is legal in Ukraine, those trying to get one can face social stigma and religious prejudice. Shamefully, many traumatised Ukrainian women who succeed in escaping to Poland discover that they are now in a country where abortion is effectively banned.

According to Yana Wolf, an activist from the feminist group Bilkis, the militarisation of society has also emboldened some men to abuse women. “When men join the army, they don’t just get a uniform”, she explained. “They get a sense of power, including over women”. She explained that women and children often face the fallout when traumatised soldiers get back from the front. “That trauma turns to rage when they return”, she explained, “and violence provokes more violence”.

The Ukrainian women’s movement has achieved much in recent decades, but the infrastructure it has built has been imperilled by war. Marta Chumalo of the group Women’s Perspectives described how some women’s refugees had to close in the face of the

invasion. The conditions of many refugee women, including those who have fled to Lviv, are a perfect breeding ground for domestic violence. Marta’s organisation had been helping women, one of whom who’d been living 17-to-a-basement, with scant ability to feed and provide for themselves or their children and little recourse to escape violent partners.

Fight back

But while women face grave challenges, they have also fought back, both against the invasion and against the oppression of men on their “own” side. Many women have volunteered to fight the Russians, and the percentage of women in the armed forces has shot up to over 15%.

A lot of women have demanded they be allowed to

take the fight to the enemy, resisting the army’s attempts to allocate them to roles far from combat. Meanwhile, the exodus of refugees to the safer towns of Ukraine’s west has allowed previously disparate campaigners to forge new connections, with Lviv becoming an impromptu centre for feminist and LGBT activism. In Kyiv, a feminist collective fighting for LGBT rights votes each month on which military unit they want to donate to.

Ethnic minorities, too, have been drawn into a common struggle against the occupiers. We heard from human rights activist Yulian Kondur about the high numbers of Roma people volunteering in the armed forces. The participation of so many Roma soldiers in the war is a big source of pride for the community,

he said. And yet the Roma are one of the most marginalised and oppressed groups in Ukrainian society, a systematic disadvantage that has by no means disappeared during war. The collective struggle of the war, Kondur said, has presented new opportunities to combat prejudice, but the difficulties are harsh. Roma continue to find it harder to migrate, including internally, and often struggle to access social provision designed to help the victims of war.

Roma have also been the victims of vigilante justice amid the chaos of the conflict, and the speaker drew our attention to a particularly horrible incident in Lviv where Roma girls from Eastern Ukraine were tied up, painted and humiliated for the alleged crime of petty theft. □

The history behind the war

By Rohini Hensman

Abridged with thanks from "The Historical Background to Putin's Invasion of Ukraine", on [the New Politics website](#).

While human habitation in Ukraine dates back tens of thousands of years, the first stable state was Kievan Rus, established by the Scandinavian Varangians who settled in Kiev in the late ninth century AD. The height of its prosperity occurred under Volodymyr the Great (980-1015 AD), who converted to Byzantine Christianity, and his son Iaroslav the Wise; but Kievan Rus was destroyed by the invasion of Genghis Khan's Golden Hordes in the thirteenth century, and was subsequently fought over, divided and dominated by Lithuania, Poland, Austria, and Russia, until most of it was colonized by Russia (then called Muscovy) in 1654.

Nonetheless there was a revival of Ukrainian culture in the nineteenth century, in the latter part of which both nationalist and socialist parties grew as Ukraine was integrated more closely into the Tsarist empire as a provider of wheat and raw materials such as coal and iron, and as a market for Russian manufactured goods.

This was a typical colonial relationship; as Lenin observed in 1914 at a talk in Zurich:

"What Ireland was for England, Ukraine has become for Russia: exploited in the extreme, and getting nothing in return. Thus the interests of the world proletariat in general and the Russian proletariat in particular require that the Ukraine regains its state independence, since only this will permit the development of the cultural level that the proletariat needs".

Crimean Tatars were the most numerous indigenous ethnic group in Crimea when it was annexed by the Russian empire in 1783 during the reign of Catherine the Great, who proceeded to settle it with Russian colonizers and, according to Raphael Lemkin, who coined the term "genocide", to drown 10,000 Crimean Tatars.

Ukraine's origins as a state predate the founding of the Grand Principality of Moscow (predecessor of the Tsarist Empire) in 1263. It is therefore entirely understandable that it would have a national liberation movement, which succeeded briefly in establishing Ukraine as an independent Soviet Socialist republic from 1920 to 1922. The Crimean Tatars were also granted special status under Lenin.

All that changed when Ukraine was recolonised by Stalin in a process described as "the classic example of Soviet genocide" by Lemkin, who outlined the process in chilling detail. First the intelligentsia was destroyed by deport-

ing, jailing or killing teachers, writers, artists, thinkers and political leaders; at the same time, the Ukrainian churches were destroyed with hundreds of priests and lay-people killed and thousands sent off to forced labor camps, deliberately separating families and sending children to Russian homes to be "educated."

Finally, in 1932-1933, as Stalin escalated his repression in Russia itself, around five million Ukrainian peasants – men, women and children – were starved to death. Lemkin shows that this was not the result of forced collectivisation, which had left ample crops to feed the people and livestock, but the outcome of a deliberate policy to engineer a famine.

The dead and deported Ukrainians were replaced by non-Ukrainians, altering the ethnic composition of the country and comprising the fourth step in the systematic destruction of the Ukrainian nation. In 1944 the Crimean Tatars, who were also described by Lemkin as being subjected to genocide, were deported en masse by Stalin, a crime against humanity in which almost half of the population perished.

Russia was not the only country to occupy Ukraine in the 20th century; the Nazis, with their own genocidal agenda, also did so.

Nazi policies

Timothy Snyder argues that Nazi policies, which referred to Ukrainians as *Afrikaner* or as *Neger* – including the Hunger Plan to starve millions of people in the winter of 1941, the Generalplan Ost to forcibly transport or kill millions more thereafter, and the "final solution" to exterminate the Jews – were centred on Ukraine; consequently some 3.5 million civilian inhabitants of Ukraine – of which an estimated 1.5 million were Jews – were killed by the Nazis, in addition to roughly another 3 million inhabitants of Ukraine who died as soldiers fighting against the Nazis or indirectly as a consequence of the war.

Russian historians have calculated that more inhabitants of Soviet Ukraine died in World War 2 than inhabitants of Soviet Russia; more Ukrainians died fighting against the Nazis than French, British and Americans put together. At the end of the war, Ukrainians were subjected once more to Stalin's rule.

Almost miraculously, the Ukrainian sense of national identity survived this horrendous history, and in the referendum of 1991, 84% of the population participated and more than 92% voted for independence from the Soviet Union. When the votes are disaggregated by region, it is notable that every region had a majority in favour; the lowest majority (54%) was in Crimea, but in

each of the majority-Russian-speaking Oblasts of Donetsk and Luhansk, over 83% voted in favor.

This was partly because citizenship was defined not ethnically but inclusively, and although the constitution adopted in 1996 proclaimed that the state language would be Ukrainian, it also promised that "the free development, use and protection of Russian, and other languages of national minorities of Ukraine, is guaranteed"; again, that "The State promotes the consolidation and development of the Ukrainian nation, its historical consciousness, traditions and culture, and also the development of the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of all indigenous peoples and national minorities of Ukraine."

The positive outcome of the referendum cannot be attributed to interference by the United States, because President George H.W. Bush was strongly opposed to independence for Ukraine.

This history puts Soviet-controlled Ukraine firmly in the category of colonies, and in fact one which has suffered more than many others. Most of us refer to colonies and former colonies of Western imperial powers in Asia, Africa, and Latin America as the "Third World" or "Global South," sharply distinguished from the imperial powers that exploited and oppressed them, yet we are guilty of lumping together the imperial power with its colonies and former colonies in the Soviet Union.

From this perspective, the disintegration of the Soviet Union can be seen as an ongoing process of decolonization, and Ukraine's struggle for independence as being necessary, as Lenin said, to permit the development of the cultural level that the proletariat needs.

The Grand Principality of Moscow gradually absorbed other principalities, including the Kievan one, until in 1503 Ivan III took on the title of tsar and declared himself "Ruler of all Rus." The Tsarist Empire was an absolute monarchy, which was overthrown in 1917 by the Russian Revolution. Among the enormous challenges facing the revolution was the question of what to do with the colonies of Tsarist Russia.

There was a debate on this issue between V.I. Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg, with Lenin upholding the right of all colonial peoples to self-determination but conceding Luxemburg's point that this should not result in handing over power to regressive, authoritarian regimes. Lenin did not come to this position alone, but by listening to comrades from the colonies. During 1920 and 1921, Ukraine, Georgia, Byelorussia, Azerbaijan and Armenia were treated as independent republics.

In one of the articles that came to be called "Lenin's Last Testament," Lenin expressed anguish that one of Stalin's close associates had hit a Georgian Communist who disagreed with his plans to terminate Georgia's independent status, and continued:

"It is quite natural that in such circumstances the 'freedom to secede from the union' by which we justify ourselves [against Western imperialist powers] will be a mere scrap of paper, unable to defend the non-Russians from the onslaught of that really Russian man, the Great-Russian chauvinist, in substance a rascal and a tyrant..."

"I think that Stalin's haste and his infatuation with pure administration, together with his spite against the notorious 'nationalist-socialism', played a fatal role here. In politics spite generally plays the basest of roles..."

"Here we have an important question of principle: how is internationalism to be understood?"

"In my writings on the national question I have already said that an abstract presentation of the question of nationalism in general is of no use at all. A distinction must necessarily be made between the nationalism of an oppressor nation and that of an oppressed nation, the nationalism of a big nation and that of a small nation. In respect of the second kind of nationalism we, nationals of a big nation, have nearly always been guilty, in historic practice, of an infinite number of cases of violence; furthermore, we commit violence and insult an infinite number of times without noticing it". [He goes on to quote the racist epithets by which Ukrainians, Georgians and non-Russians in general are insulted.] ...

Lenin made mistakes in theory and practice that we can debate, but his anti-racism, anti-imperialism, and identification of Great-Russian chauvinism as the Russian version of White supremacy set an example for all socialist internationalists to follow. However, he died soon after making these remarks, and Stalin went ahead with reducing the Tsarist ex-colonies back to the status of colonies.

In Russia itself, his counter-revolution erased all the gains of the revolution except for the transition to state capitalism. Stalin exterminated communists as ruthlessly as Hitler, and converted the Communist International into an arm of the Russian state capitalist empire. His totalitarian state ruling Russia and its colonies was distinguished not only by its extreme brutality but also by a systematic war on the truth, analogous to the Nazi use of the big lie repeated over and over again. His propaganda machine was responsible

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for literally rewriting history to propagate falsehoods, and for cropping and airbrushing photographs to eliminate his victims from them as they themselves were liquidated.

"These fabricated stories and images were then internationalized by means of the vast propaganda apparatus of the Comintern. Vicious censorship made it impossible to find alternative accounts or challenge the falsification without risking death. Stalin's collaboration with Hitler from August 23, 1939, to June 22, 1941 (the archetypal red-brown alliance) was possible only because the politics of the two men were so similar.

Gorbachev

When Mikhail Gorbachev became General Secretary of the Communist Party in 1985, a movement of disgust against the prevailing culture of corruption, lies, and assaults on the dignity of the individual was already underway, and he plugged into this.

Gorbachev's plans for a new treaty that would create a truly voluntary federation – a vision close to what Lenin was working towards – were thwarted by a coup against him by Stalinist hardliners in August 1991; the coup was met with public outrage and defeated, but Gorbachev was sidelined and Ukraine, among other Soviet Republics, voted for independence, leading to the disintegration of the USSR. While the economic plunder and corruption which followed were disastrous, it should not be forgotten that in his own way, Gorbachev initiated a democratic anti-imperialist revolution.

This is what Vladimir Putin, from the time he first came to power in 2000, has been trying to reverse ever since. His agenda has two main goals: (1) to crush all expressions of democracy in Russia and inaugurate or support authoritarian regimes in the rest of the world; and (2) to rebuild the Russian empire.

Investigators of the Moscow apartment bombings of September 1999 (which unleashed an Islamophobic "war on terror" against Chechnya and swept Putin to power), journalists, human rights defenders and whistle-blowers against corruption were murdered. In 2011-2013, huge protests against the rigged elections that had brought Putin and his United Russia party to power, and demanding free and fair elections and freedom for political prisoners, were met not only with arrests and police violence but also with mobilization of far-right counter-protests.

Opposition leader Alexei Navalny (who more recently narrowly survived being poisoned and was subsequently imprisoned) was jailed. Opposition leader Boris Nemtsov was shot dead yards from the Kremlin after writing an op-ed about the Russian incursion into Ukraine, published in September 2014 in Russian and Ukrainian.

Historian and opposition politician Vladimir Ryzhkov outlines the anti-Mus-



A 2016 commemoration event in Kyiv for the 1944 deportation of the Crimean Tatars. On 18-20 May 1944 around 200,000 Crimean Tatars were forcibly deported to the Central Asian republics of the USSR. Nearly 8,000 of them died during the deportation and tens of thousands perished subsequently due to the harsh exile conditions.

lim racism that accompanied Russian annexation of Crimea, an issue that has been widely ignored:

"The Crimean Tatars are the ancient, native inhabitants of Crimea... In 1944, Stalin ordered that all 191,000 of them, all 47,000 families, be exiled to Central Asia. In 1954, Khrushchev transferred Crimea from the Russian to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, but in March of this year Putin returned Crimea to Russia...

"Along with Crimea came the Tatars, who were surprised to find that they were part of Russia (once more). They had begun to return to their homeland in droves under Gorbachev in the late 1980s, and by 2001 the Ukrainian census recorded 245,000 Crimean Tatars living on the peninsula. They now number some 300,000 and make up around 13% of Crimea's population...

"The hostility of most Crimean Tatars towards the idea of union with Russia caused a serious conflict with the pro-Moscow authorities..."

The important point being made by Nemtsov and Ryzhkov is that the 2014 annexation of Crimea and war on Eastern Ukraine was an assault on democracy. And Putin has extended this assault well beyond Russia by sponsoring extreme right-wing authoritarian groups and parties around the world, and in turn being admired by them.

Such parties from Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Serbia, and Spain have a symbiotic relationship with his regime, and neo-Nazis from

Germany, Greece, Britain, and Norway have praised him. White supremacists from the US have close ties with their counterparts in Russia, and former KKK Grand Wizard David Duke has travelled to Russia several times to promote his antisemitic book, *Jewish Supremacy*. The Russian paramilitary Wagner Group, whose brutal neo-Nazi Rusich unit was active in Donbas, has fought for Bashar al-Assad in Syria and Khalifa Hiftar in Libya, both guilty of crimes against humanity, and has been associated with mass murder and military coups in the Central African Republic, Mali, and Burkina Faso.

Democracy

With this assault on democracy has come an assault on the truth, magnified since Stalin's time by new technology and social media. This was on full display in Putin's speech on February 21, 2022, in which he claimed that the Ukrainian state had been created by Lenin and the Bolsheviks "by separating, severing, what is historically Russian land." He fully supported Stalin's counter-revolution, deploring only his failure to delete the reference to "self-determination" from the constitution. According to him, there was a coup by radical nationalists supported by Washington in 2014; there was a policy to root out the Russian language and culture; Donbas communities daily come under military attack as Ukraine continues "its transition towards the Neanderthal and aggressive national-

ism and neo-Nazism which have been elevated in Ukraine to the rank of national policy"; the eastward expansion of NATO is a threat to Russia's security; and NATO should undertake not to induct any more countries in the east and in fact roll back its borders to where they were in 1997, failing which Russia would act to ensure its security.

It is true that Ukraine has a history of antisemitism and collaboration with the Nazis, as have most countries in Europe, including Russia. It is also true that during the Euromaidan movement the neo-Nazi Azov brigade played a disproportionately large role in responding to the violent crackdown by the Yanukovich regime. Undoubtedly these facts are a cause for concern.

But they have to be considered along with other facts: that far-right parties in Ukraine have consistently polled pathetically small numbers of votes, that Volodymyr Zelensky, a Russian-speaking Jew, won the last presidential elections with a landslide majority, and that the neo-Nazi and antisemitic forces on the Russian and separatist side, which engage in antisemitic smears against Zelensky, are incomparably stronger.

In fact, Putin himself has made it very clear that NATO's eastward expansion and Russian security are simply red herrings to distract from his real goal. At a press conference he quoted Soviet-era punk-rock lyrics about rape and necrophilia to demonstrate what Russia wants from Ukraine.... "Whether you like it or don't like it, bear with it, my

beauty," Putin said.

Russia experts noted that Putin appeared to be quoting from "Sleeping Beauty in a Coffin" by the Soviet-era punk rock group Red Mold. "Sleeping beauty in a coffin, I crept up and fucked her. Like it, or dislike it, sleep my beauty," the English translation of the Russian lyrics reads.

Jason Stanley explains that Putin's grotesque claim to be "de-Nazifying" Ukraine by toppling a Jewish president whose family fought against the Nazis rests on the Holocaust-denying neo-fascist myth that the "real" victims of the Nazis were not the Jews but Russian Christians.

Putin is a living embodiment of the Stalin-Hitler Pact: the ex-KGB agent who has absorbed the fascist nostalgia for absolute power, imperial glory, and blood-and-soil nationalism. Lenin's words from a century ago about the "vulgar Great-Russian bully" who "carelessly flings about accusations of 'nationalist-socialism' [today's neo-Nazism] whereas he himself is a real and true 'nationalist-socialist'" sound weirdly apposite today.

In general, Western imperialist attacks on democracy in the name of democracy have helped to spread skepticism about democratic values. Most recently, the 2001 war on Afghanistan and 2003 war on Iraq violated and undermined international law. Perhaps as damagingly, given that the Taliban had virtually nothing to do with 9/11 and Saddam Hussein had no weapons of mass destruction, they destroyed the credibility of Western media, creating

an environment in which even well-researched and reliable reports could be dismissed as "fake".

Coming to the more specific failures connected to this war, I mentioned earlier that George H.W. Bush had opposed Ukrainian independence in 1991. One anxiety, among others, was that the new nation became the world's third-largest nuclear power after the United States and Russia.

Negotiations to persuade Ukraine to give up its nuclear weapons, while also giving it security assurances that it would not suffer attacks if it did so, resulted in Ukraine signing the Non-Proliferation Treaty as a non-nuclear power while on 5 December 1994 the USA, the Russian Federation and the UK signed the Memorandum on Security Assurances in connection with Ukraine's accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons aka the Budapest Memorandum. Among other things, the signatories undertook to "respect the Independence and Sovereignty and the existing borders of Ukraine" and to "refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of Ukraine."

This agreement was torn up by Putin when he annexed Crimea and made incursions into the Donbas in 2014, but have the other signatories made real efforts to hold him to it?

Instead of holding Putin to the Budapest Memorandum, there were the two Minsk Agreements signed by Russia, Ukraine, France and Germany. Hastily drafted in order to establish a cease-

fire while Russian forces were ranged against a much weaker Ukrainian military, the Minsk Agreements of September 2014 and February 2015, which sought to end Russia's war in eastern Ukraine, rest on two irreconcilable interpretations of Ukraine's sovereignty.

The pretext given by Putin for the 2014 invasion of Ukraine was exactly the same as the pretext given by Hitler for the annexation of Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia – protecting speakers of Russian and German respectively and uniting them with their homeland – and it is interesting that some of the same arguments, like the "right to self-determination" of these enclaves, were used in both cases. Instead of opposing this blatant aggression, British Premier Neville Chamberlain and French Premier Édouard Daladier negotiated with Hitler, and on September 30, 1938, signed the Munich Agreement – drafted by the Nazis and presented by Italian dictator Benito Mussolini – in the hope of avoiding war. As we know, the outcome was World War Two. Since then, the Munich Agreement has become a byword for the futility of appeasing expansionist totalitarian regimes.

The Minsk Agreements were not quite so bad, because at least the victims of aggression were allowed to participate in the negotiations and there were weak sanctions against the aggressor, which probably prevented Putin from launching an all-out war until he thought he had sanction-proofed Russia; and then, even as the Western powers were talking about the Minsk Agreement, he tore it up by recogniz-

ing Donetsk and Luhansk as independent states. But while Putin prepared for war, it was business as usual for the Western imperialist powers.

Just a few examples illustrate this criminal negligence. On September 30, 2015, Putin started bombing Syria in support of his genocidal protégé Bashar al-Assad, targeting hospitals, schools, markets, residential neighborhoods, and mosques, with massive civilian casualties including small children. Yet the Obama administration negotiated with Putin and on September 10, 2016, signed a ceasefire deal that was unanimously condemned by secular, democratic Syrian activists, treating the perpetrator of crimes against humanity as a partner in the "war on terror."

It is not surprising that the Syrian Civil Defence or White Helmets – who had experience of the Russians using helpless Syrian children, women, and men to test their fearsome new weapons – were among the earliest to offer solidarity with the beleaguered Ukrainians.

Then, it is almost beyond belief that instead of diversifying their sources of energy, the EU allowed construction of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline to go ahead despite it being so clear that its purpose was to starve the Ukrainians into submission. Thirdly, investigations have established that Russia provided at least social media support and probably also money to the Brexit campaign in the belief that it would weaken the EU, demonstrating the cosy relationship between Putin and this section of UK politics. □

To resist is not anti-feminist!

By Kelly Rogers

In March "Feminists Against War", an international coalition originating in Spain, [published a manifesto](#) against the war in Ukraine. It has been signed by many leading feminist activists and academics from around the world, as well as thousands of others.

The statement adopts a disappointing line. It states:

"We reject the positions... that deepen the warmongering spiral. We reject the decisions that involved adding more weapons to the conflict and increasing war budgets..."

"We must remember that NATO is co-responsible for the situation created by its global expansionism and militaristic security narrative. Weapons perpetuate war, perpetuate barbarism, and perpetuate suffering. There is no greater security than peace..."

"War is irreconcilable with

the essential values and goals of the feminist movement. We stand for peace, coexistence of people and democratic solutions to conflicts."

The manifesto ignores the facts on the ground in Ukraine – failing to distinguish between aggressive war and legitimate resistance, falling instead to generic pacifism. Calls for peace sound nice, but opposing the provision of arms to Ukraine means, in practice, supporting Ukraine losing the war, and the Ukrainian people submitting to Putin.

Feminists Against War and their fellow signatories view the situation as a war between two imperialisms, between East and West. Ukraine – and the Ukrainians fighting – are merely pawns in that conflict. This is a narrative often heard on the British left that has been dissected before in *Solidarity*; one that robs Ukrainians of their agency and denies their

experience of war. It is the Russian military invading Ukraine, and committing war crimes along the way.

Confusion

When it was published, the manifesto caused some confusion, calling as it does on people to join "the Feminist Resistance Against War", which many took to mean the anti-war feminist collective organising in Russia, Feminist Anti-War Resistance. This group has since published their own response, where they express their full support for the provision of arms to Ukraine – the only means by which Ukraine can realistically defend itself. They [write](#):

"We understand the consequences of growing militarisation, but we also know the Russian state from the inside and we have no illusions about any possibility to negotiate with those who are in

power here, who practise and understand only the language of force."

The manifesto argues that there is something inherently pacifistic in feminist politics. There is certainly some history of feminism and pacifism being linked. Feminists Against War point to Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp, for instance, which protested nuclear armament.

But the implication – that war is against the "nature" of women, or that women should never support the taking up of arms – is false, essentialising and, frankly, offensive when one considers the history of women in armed struggle.

In *The Military Programme of the Proletarian Revolution*, Lenin gives an example:

"Today the imperialist bourgeoisie militarises the youth as well as the adults; tomorrow, it may begin militarising the women... [But] how can

Social-Democrats give way to fear of the militarisation of the youth, etc., if they have not forgotten the example of the Paris Commune?

"Women and teenage children fought in the Paris Commune side by side with the men. It will be no different in the coming battles for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie. Proletarian women will not look on passively as poorly armed and unarmed workers are shot down by the well-armed forces of the bourgeoisie. They will take to arms, as they did in 1871..."

We must offer our full support to the women of Ukraine, whether they are fleeing the country and the war to protect themselves and their families, as millions have done, or those who have stayed in Ukraine to support the resistance, both armed and unarmed. We are for victory to the Ukrainian resistance in Putin's war. □

Socialist Worker condemns “war of conquest”... by Ukraine!

By Sacha Ismail

“Three months since Russia invaded Ukraine”, claims *Socialist Worker* of 18 May, “the war has entered a new and even more dangerous phase”. Specifically: “there can be no more doubt this is now an inter-imperialist war”.

In fact, this was also SW’s previous line; but they are doubling down on it, but with some new twists.

They now claim, without any substantial justification, that “today any element of a war of liberation against Russian imperialism is wholly subsumed by, and subordinated to, Nato’s war on Russia.”

Note – despite the talk of “inter-imperialist war”, SW says not even “war with Russia” but “war on Russia”. So it seems Ukraine is in some respects at least the aggressor. And in fact SW goes even further, accusing of Ukraine of engaging in a “war of conquest” (see below).

“Gone are hopes of swift victory on either side. Instead both prepare for further carnage... Now the war has settled into a horrific drawn-out confrontation, with generals and politicians anticipating this will be a long conflict.”

As if anyone serious predicted swift victory for Ukraine! Or thought that a quick end to the war was likely except through Russian victory... In fact, though the war may indeed continue for a long time, the Ukrainians have done better than widely expected. In other cases of such “resistance”, the SWP would hail it. But because of support from NATO, the Ukrainians have disqualified themselves as anti-imperialists.

“The West... imagined there could be a regime change in Moscow... Instead, for now at least, sanctions have rallied large sections of the population behind Putin, and the regime is trading at record levels with countries outside the immediate influence of the US and NATO.” SW’s claim to have a good picture of Russian public opinion is highly dubious. The fact that many governments are supportive of, or not willing to jeopardise their relationship with, Russia has no possible bearing on the justice of Ukraine’s cause.

Again, SW is outraged by Western governments providing Ukraine with weapons. It’s not totally clear if the SWP objects specifically to getting weapons from NATO governments, or to it fighting with weapons at all. Elsewhere what it has counterposed to armed struggle is unarmed demonstrations against the Russian occupation – an argument it has unsurprisingly not repeated too much.

Pointing out that a new package of US



Russia is the aggressor

military aid to Ukraine is more than various aspects of US spending on public services, attempting to counterpose the two, is a cheap, populist, almost US nationalist argument. There is vast wealth in US society – and much larger amounts of it are sent overseas for military purposes which, unlike Ukrainian self-defence, are highly objectionable.

“The people of Ukraine, and the Russian conscripts”, says *Socialist Worker*, “will be the cannon fodder in this contest.” True, of course, as in most wars. But does that make the two sides symmetrical or determine socialists’ attitude to the war? Isn’t there a crucially important difference in what the two sides are fighting for, and how this connects to the working people of the two countries?

Radical left

SW never considers, as far as I can see, why the radical left in Ukraine supports Ukraine’s military struggle while the radical left in Russia supports Ukraine. Of course, comrades can be wrong. But it seems to us this fact is highly telling about the nature of the war.

Because NATO governments provide weapons and intelligence, SW says that “the Ukrainian military as an extension of the US and NATO”. This is a ridiculous leap. Was the Vietnamese resistance to US conquest “an extension of the USSR” (and so on – you could cite

many other cases)? “With every day the war goes on, Ukraine becomes more a vassal of the West and less independent”.

This is a wildly exaggerated claim; and it makes no sense to suggest that the provision of weapons during this war is the fundamental thing tying Ukraine to Western governments. But in any case, this ignores the much greater immediate threat of enslavement by Russia.

Serfdom

As Gilbert Achcar puts it:

“If Ukraine were to succeed in rejecting the Russian yoke, it is more than likely that it would be vassalised to Western powers. But the point is that, if it fails to do so, it will be enserfed to Russia. And you don’t have to be a qualified medievalist to know that the condition of a vassal is incomparably preferable to that of a serf!”

As noted above, however, SW has a more radical argument – it actually accuses Ukraine of being the aggressor:

“Now, emboldened by Western arms [it is considering] an offensive to take back the whole of the Donbas and possibly Crimea. Either would require a murderous war against Russia on what it regards as its own territory.”

Ukraine taking military control of Crimea seems very unlikely. The idea that it doesn’t have every right to take

back Donbas is wrong itself. But the description of such a drive as a “murderous war against Russia” is worse – and the citing of the fact that Russia “regard [Donbas] as its own territory” worse still. This criterion would rule out supporting a huge swathe of the wars of national liberation that have taken place in the last hundred years, since imperialist powers have frequently regarded colonised territory as their legitimate possessions.

SW is suddenly very upset about the expansion of NATO influence and membership in Europe, most of which actually took place around 20 years ago. We oppose NATO.

But SW presents the NATO expansion almost exclusively as a matter of the USA and others seeking military territory – downplaying the rather central fact what has driven the expansion of NATO is East European nations’ experience of the Stalinist, and sometimes Tsarist empires, and their observation of Putin’s wars in Chechnya, Georgia, and Ukraine.

At length, SW tries to once again equate the conflict in Ukraine to the actual inter-imperialist conflict of the First World War. It’s certainly imaginable that such a development could unfold. But it is very clearly not unfolding at present, and SW doesn’t really even try to justify the equivalence. □

Lutte Ouvrière and Ukraine's right to self-determination

By Dale Street

Once upon a time, in a faraway land called the Soviet Union, Ukrainians and Russians lived happily together. But then some wicked bureaucrats destroyed their country.

This gave NATO generals, who were just as black-hearted as the bureaucrats, the chance to seize new lands. So Vladimir Putin invaded Ukraine.

This sums up the analysis of the war in Ukraine provided by the French socialist newspaper *Lutte Ouvrière* (LO, Workers' Struggle).

According to LO, "the Ukrainian and Russian peoples are linked by a long shared history and culture. ... For 70 years they lived within the Soviet Union, this vast territory forged after the revolution of 1917." (Issue 2794).

This idyllic life of "solidarity between Russians and Ukrainians, who often speak the same language and who long lived in the same country and were not really separated by anything" (2797) was not ruptured by the Stalinist counter-revolution:

"Despite the ferocious Stalinist dictatorship which destroyed most of the achievements of the Bolshevik Revolution, this shared development continued until 1991... In spite of the dictatorship of Stalin and his successors, the peoples of the Soviet Union lived together until 1991." (2795/96)

But in December of that year the Soviet Union was formally dissolved:

"It was not the peoples of the Soviet Union who wanted to separate from one another. It was the bureaucrats of Moscow, Minsk and Kiev who proclaimed the independence of their republics." (2795 and, in virtually identical words, 2796).

Holodomor

Other articles acknowledge, albeit only in passing and in general terms, the oppressive nature of Stalin's nationality politics. But there is no mention of the Holodomor, the mass famine of the early 1930s when nearly four million Ukrainians died.

Nor the murderous purges of the Ukrainian intelligentsia throughout the 1930s, replete with show trials and concocted allegations about a non-existent Union for the Liberation of Ukraine.

Nor the brutal crushing of post-war anti-USSR uprisings, when relatives of insurgents were arrested and sent to forced labour camps, and hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians were deported.



Nor the relentless Russification of Ukraine pursued by Moscow from the 1940s through to 1980s, while Ukrainians who spoke out against such policies were arrested and imprisoned, or exiled.

Unsurprisingly, given their experience of decades of brutal repression, the people of Ukraine – not just "the bureaucrats of Kiev" – opted for independence as the Soviet Union went into decline and then collapse.

Ukraine adopted a declaration of independence after the failed Stalinist hardliner coup of August 1991. A subsequent referendum saw a turnout of 84%, and a 90% majority in favour of independence. There was a majority for independence in all parts of the country.

The collapse of the Soviet Union was followed by NATO expansion. That is certainly true as a statement of fact. But LO puts its own particular spin on it. It reduces NATO expansion to a drive by American imperialism to encircle Russia:

"For 30 years they (the USA) have surrounded Russia with NATO bases, this military organisation built during the Cold War to isolate the Soviet Union." (2795)

In fact the driver was popular support for NATO membership in Eastern European countries, based on the "common sense" notion that the risk of aggression by a historical oppressor was best met by NATO membership.

More recent applications for NATO membership by Finland and Sweden underline this dynamic: nothing to do with the two countries being inveigled into NATO by US imperialism, but everything to do with Russia's invasion

of Ukraine.

But for LO that invasion was a response to NATO expansion and aggression.

On the eve of the Russian invasion LO asked the question: "Today American bases surround Russia, and Putin wants to prevent Ukraine from joining NATO. So, who is the aggressor?" (2794)

After Russia recognised the Donetsk and Luhansk "People's Republics" as independent states and despatched troops there, LO portrayed this as a defensive measure: "It is to loosen this noose [i.e. encirclement of Russia by US bases] that Putin has deployed his troops." (2795)

Putin's ambition in invading Ukraine, LO declared, was to "respond to the growing encirclement of the country by NATO" (2799). It was "this same policy of encirclement carried out by NATO which led Putin to invade Ukraine." (2807)

LO condemned the invasion. But for LO the blame for the invasion lay not with Putin but primarily with NATO:

"It is the policies of the major western powers which have transformed Ukraine into the scene of their arm-wrestling with Russia. The western rulers present Putin as sole aggressor in order to disguise their overwhelming responsibility in the evolution which led to the war." (2796)

The invasion was the result "of an escalation in which the imperialist powers have been participants" (2797). "For at least ten years" the policies of the western rulers "had consisted of provoking Putin through Ukraine." (2798)

LO even suggested that the invasion might be a progressive leftover from the glory days of the Soviet Union:

A state apart

"In spite of its billionaires, Russia remains a state apart for imperialism ('un état à part pour l'impérialisme'). It is a regime which – an inheritance from a very distant revolutionary past – might not have the means to achieve its ambitions but has at least the inclinations not to unconditionally bow down before the capitalist powers." (2804)

LO's representation of the invasion as "a response to the growing encirclement of Russia by NATO" makes no sense.

The expansion in NATO's Eastern European membership took place 23 years ago (1999, three new members) and 18 years ago (2004, seven new members), and in a period of NATO-Russia rapprochement. In re-

cent years only Montenegro (2017) and North Macedonia (2020), neither of which border Russia, have joined NATO.

There was no real prospect of imminent Ukrainian membership of NATO, or even of membership at all. Virtually no progress had been made since possible membership was first raised in 2008. Some member-states are overtly hostile to Ukrainian membership.

The character of the war in Ukraine is straightforward: An attack by Russian imperialism on Ukraine's right to exist as a state and as a nation, a linear continuation of the Tsarist and Stalinist oppression of Ukraine.

Since 2008, and much more frequently in more recent years, Putin has explicitly denied the character of Ukraine as a nation and its right to national self-determination. According to Putin, Russians and Ukrainians are really one people, or at least members of the same family.

His declared war aim is to "denazify" Ukraine. This is not about a few members of the Azov Battalion.

It is about the tens of millions of Ukrainians who self-identify as Ukrainians and refuse to accept Putin's rewriting of history. For Putin, Ukrainians have no right to be Ukrainian. His invasion is designed to stop them from exercising that right.

LO does not challenge Putin's historical fictions and expose his war aims. With its nostalgic invocations of "a long shared history and culture" and tropes of "NATO encirclement", it provides an echo chamber for him.

Slogans such as "Solidarity with Ukraine!", "Russian Troops Out!", and "Arms for Ukraine!" are absent from the pages of LO. Instead, declares LO, solidarity is not about sending arms to Ukraine but "struggling against a system which engenders only crises and wars." (2796)

LO concedes that "the workers and population of Ukraine need to be armed" – but "armed first of all with policies opposed to their own regime as much as to Putin." (2797) And the only way to end this and similar wars is to "overthrow the irrational economic system which dominates the world". (2797)

Leaving aside the vast screeds of whataboutery which repeatedly overwhelm LO's articles on Ukraine, what LO offers its readers is a cross between a fairy tale and a medieval morality play. □

Refugees need a real welcome

By Katy Dollar

Setúbal, a municipality ruled by the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) is facing fines of up to €10 million over its reception of Ukrainian refugees. The Portuguese police have accused two pro-Russian activists of illegally collecting and sharing the personal data of Ukrainian refugees in the country.

The Ukrainian ambassador to Portugal, Inna Ohnivets, has said that the personal information recorded would be "of interest to Russian intelligence".

Police raided buildings linked to the Edinstvo – an association for eastern European migrants.

Portuguese media reports the couple, who had no written contract with the council, copied refugees' personal documents and questioned them about the whereabouts of any family members still in Ukraine.

The alleged links between the two suspects and Moscow have led to calls for the Communist mayor of Setúbal, André Martins, to resign. The city council has denied knowing about any "suspicious acts or conduct" linked to the refugee association. There is also growing backlash against the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) for its refusal to oppose Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Portugal has so far welcomed nearly

36,000 Ukrainian refugees since the war began on 24 February.

Authorities in Lisbon have previously been after officials handed over the personal data of organisers of an anti-Kremlin demonstration to the Russian embassy in Lisbon.

Meanwhile in Algarve the summer tourist season is seeing newly arrived refugees forced from their homes. Property owners can make more money renting to tourists than those fleeing war.

The UK, with a population almost seven times as big as Portugal's, has admitted only 53,800 refugees so far (as of 16 May). □



More online on Ukraine

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

Listen to Ukrainian and Russian socialists: bit.ly/u-r-s

Putin's lies: bit.ly/p-n-u

Putin vs Lenin: bit.ly/vp-vl

Misuse of "main enemy is at home": bit.ly/kl-h-f

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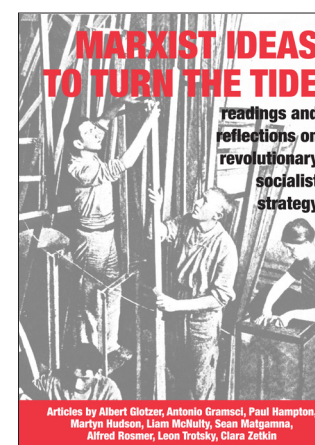
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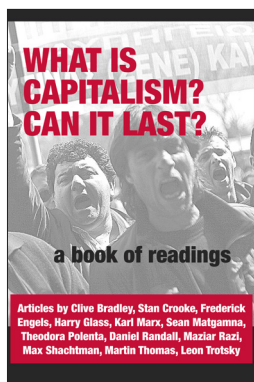
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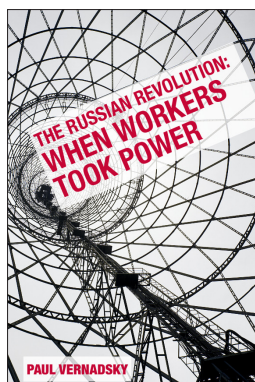
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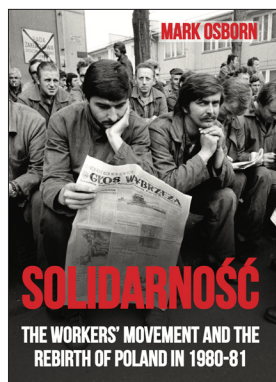
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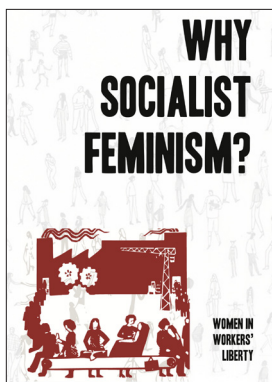
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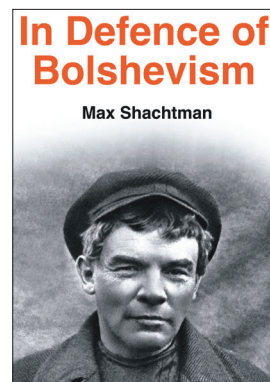
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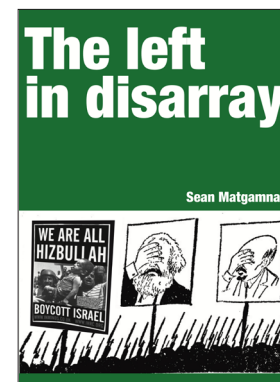
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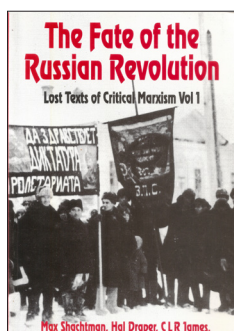
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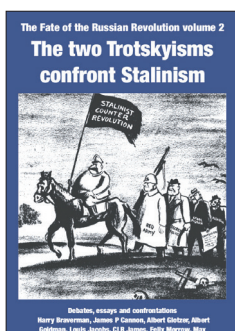
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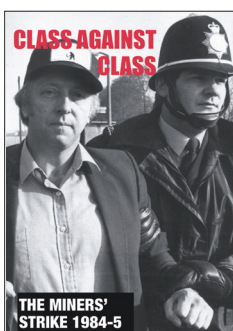
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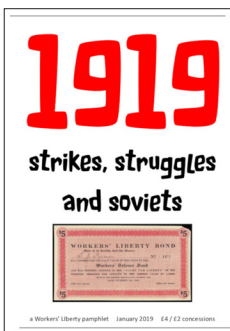
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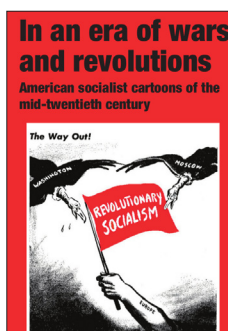
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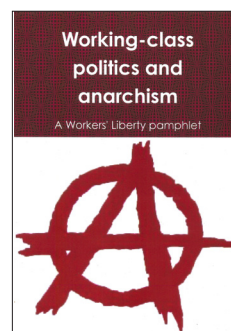
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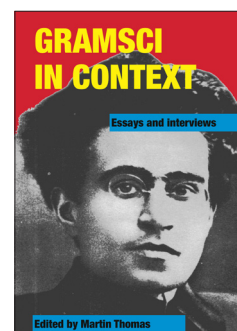
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USA: A House Divided yet again

By Tom Harrison

Another far right terrorist gun rampage, this time in Buffalo, New York (14 May). Perpetrators of racist attacks don't need burning crosses to advertise their deeds nowadays. They livestream the whole thing on the internet instead, with a white-supremacist "manifesto" thrown in as if to serve as "justification" for the cold blooded murder of working class people going about their daily business.

The teenager who carried out the atrocity was from small town America – Conklin in New York State, population 5,000, 98% of which is white. His social interaction with non white Americans very probably limited or non-existent. Yet it's often the case that "white fear" of "the other" is strongest in places like Conklin, irrationality stoked up by the considerable presence of online hate-mongers ranging from Alex Jones to various neo-Nazis.

Unsurprisingly the key belief promoted in the killer's "manifesto" was that of "great replacement". We shouldn't dignify the term a "theory". Essentially it is antisemitic conspiracy nonsense that there is a "Jewish plot" to replace the "white race" with non-white people through mass immigration.

This racist myth has been taken up by numerous figures on the far right including the recent French presidential candidate Eric Zemmour, who received two and a half million votes. In the USA, its most notable proponent has been Fox TV host and Putin fan Tucker Carlson.

The Great Replacement myth is worryingly believed by one in three Amer-



Trump supporting Republicans are likely to gain a majority in both houses

icans, unsurprisingly most of whom are Republican voters. The constant harking about immigration by Trump and others reinforces the idea that "white privilege" is under threat and what they rather dubiously term "native Americans" are in imminent danger of becoming an oppressed minority.

What gets overlooked in Republican opposition to abortion rights is the racial dimension. Limiting or outlawing abortion is also about "keeping the numbers up" in the white population. Too many white women are, for them, getting abortions, whilst there are too few amongst non whites. Just as it's a case of socialism for the rich and capitalism for the poor, the Republican position on abortion, if they were honest about it, would be to favour it for non white women.

Threat

The threat to abortion rights posed by the Supreme Court as it seeks to overturn the Roe v Wade judgement, has divided American states pretty much along the lines slavery once did. Its implications are also distinctly reminiscent of what transpired in the civil war era, the difference being it's not slaves who are now escaping from the South but women seeking abortions.

A Texas abortion law offers \$10,000 to those who sue people helping women to obtain an abortion after the six-week term. This includes not only medical staff, but also, for example, some driving a woman wanting the procedure to a clinic. States intent on protecting abortion rights have been enacting legislation which provides

refuge to women from places like Texas and protects abortion providers from out-of-state legal actions.

GOP "bounty laws" bring to mind the days when bounty hunters went after escaped slaves. The Underground Railway ended up in Canada and just to complete the historical parallel the Canadian government has reaffirmed it will welcome Americans seeking abortion services.

Abortion

At least 26 states are reckoned to ban abortion outright should Roe v Wade be overturned. In no way does this reflect majority American opinion of course. It serves to underline yet again the constitutional straitjacket placed on American society, where largely rural states with small populations dictate the behaviour of the rest of the nation. That dictation is further enforced by large doses of voter suppression and gerrymandering.

Whether or not moves to ban abortion energise voters enough to prevent the Republicans taking control of both Houses of Congress in the coming mid terms is a moot point. Expectations are that the party of Trump will be in charge of the entire legislature come November, with most of its Congress men and women propagating the lie that Trump won the Presidency in 2020.

Of particular importance here is the fate of the House select committee investigation into the 6 January insurrection which attempted to overturn that election result. Public hearings are expected to start in the summer, hoping among other things to expose clear

links between Trump's inner circle, elements in the Republican leadership and far right groups such as the Oath Keepers.

The investigation has unsurprisingly been denounced as "not legitimate" by those the committee wants to testify but are refusing to attend, including Republican minority leader Kevin McCarthy. These characters, like Trump himself, are adept at resorting to legal shenanigans aimed at delaying proceedings until they regain control of the House and close the whole investigation down.

Protests

Whatever happens in Congress, big protests are certain to erupt if the Supreme Court eventually comes out with a ruling overturning Roe v Wade and US socialists will be strongly committed to this struggle. In addition, they will have been heartened by the victory of New York workers who've won trade union recognition rights against the tech giant Amazon.

Moves are afoot in America to reverse the decline in trade union membership. Americans are more pro-union and anti-big-business than they've been for decades. Despite Trump's fake populism, the Republican Party stance is virulently hostile to organised labour and some of "bounty law" measures in various Republican controlled states will be used to attack workers seeking to unionise. Worker self-organisation must be the way forward that will eventually break the duopoly of the capitalist parties which dominate American politics. □

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A good start, but there's more

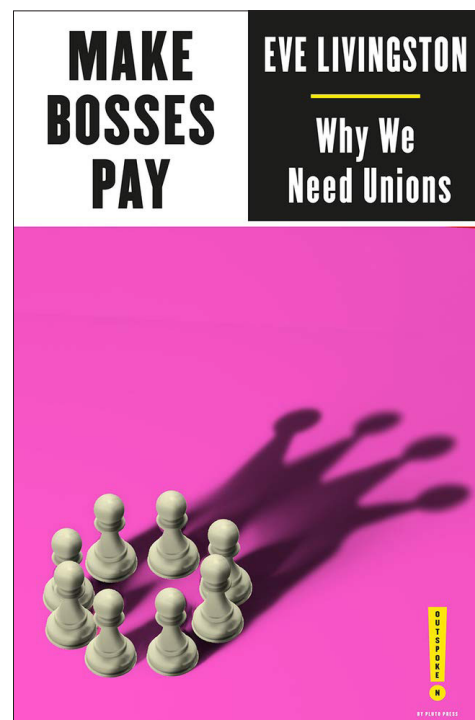


Book review

By Caroline Jeffries

On the first glance Eve Livingston's book *Make Bosses Pay* is a good basis for any young wide-eyed lefty wanting to understand the trade union movement. The book gives an easy-to-understand overview of British trade unionism while also focusing on issues young people face in the movement.

The book gives a historical basis for where we are today, in part touching on the anti-union laws that shackle collective power. Livingston addresses the demoralisation many activists feel when they join unions and find they are met with the apathy of bureaucracy and inaction, telling the reader, "your union isn't disempowered, it's rubbish". I particularly liked the analogy of a trade unionist as a patient gardener, "sowing the seeds, cultivating the sprouts, and laying the groundwork for unionism to bloom". One chapter lays out the case for more inclusive unions that move away from the "white male breadwinner model" and towards issues that accurately reflect our diverse workforce



that now makes up 15 million women. The reader is correctly warned that HR isn't your friend and we are asked to think about widening our organising efforts to other areas of society, like renters' unions.

Livingston makes an effort to encourage young people to reimagine trade union democracy. She writes "the trade union movement and its parliamentary

counterpart have both evolved drastically since their respective formation, with the result being a confused and often fraught relationship. But the relationship is there". A true analysis and one that should make trade unionists want to stay and fight in Labour.

As I read I could see my younger self in the pages of this book. I knew there were issues with the union movement. It's pale, male and stale and prohibited by its own inaction. I was inspired by smaller unions like the IWGB having a "just do it" attitude to action and precarious workers taking action. Like my younger self, the book seems to have this rose-eyed view of trade unionism, particularly in the ninth chapter, "Organising hospitality: A toolkit for the future". In this chapter, bits of union press releases – or articles that are essentially a copy and paste of the press release – are taken and given as examples of hospitality workers organising. I have written [previously](#) about my experiences with the McStrike.

While I can't speak on the aspects of every case study in the chapter, some of the precarious workers' campaigns have been a genuine effort by unions to organise young people in low-paid work. But these have been fraught with all the common issues of a union-bureaucracy-driven campaign: a

top-down approach and a focus on outward perception more than actual workers' empowerment. Perhaps she really believes the union press releases. Perhaps Livingston is aware of this, but wants to empower the reader to think anything is possible, something with which I sympathise. Pulling back the veil on those campaigns left me disempowered.

There are other ways the book can improve. The book needs to take on the issue of trade union bureaucracy with more teeth. When mentioning the anti-union laws Livingston doesn't mention how the labour movement seems unwilling to take on the fight to repeal all the restrictions. She focuses on a seat-at-the-table approach to diversify union leadership. While representation is important, a woman bureaucrat in an inactive union is still a bureaucrat. She doesn't take on the bloated salaries that union bosses give themselves. Livingston paints unions being inactive and disempowering as an accident of history, rather than the innate role of union bureaucracy.

The book is a good place to start conversations with young people about trade unionism. I hope *Make the Bosses Pay* empowers young people to get jobs and fight the bosses in their workplace and their union. □

Democracy vs sexism in the unions



Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

Reel News uploaded a video detailing serious allegations against senior officers in the transport union TSSA by former organiser Claire Laycock. The TSSA responded by trying to force a court injunction against Reel News and Laycock. The injunction against the news site was thrown out, but an injunction against Laycock for breaking her Non Disclosure Agreement (NDA) is still in place.

Reel News reports they have been contacted by other staff who allege sexual harassment and have been silenced by gagging orders.

"From Saturday night, people started getting in contact with us having watched the video. We heard allegations

of at least six women (all former staff of the union) who had been sexually harassed by TSSA General Secretary, Manuel Cortes, but were also restricted by a Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA) from saying anything. We heard from people from outside the TSSA who alleged that they'd witnessed, or experienced, misogyny and sexism from TSSA senior officials. But we also heard allegations of sexual harassment and sexual assaults in other unions. And then with mounting horror we started hearing allegations of rape."

Reel News claim to have seen evidence that Frances O'Grady, the General Secretary of the TUC, was asked to take action over allegations against Cortes. O'Grady disputes this. A statement released from the TUC says:

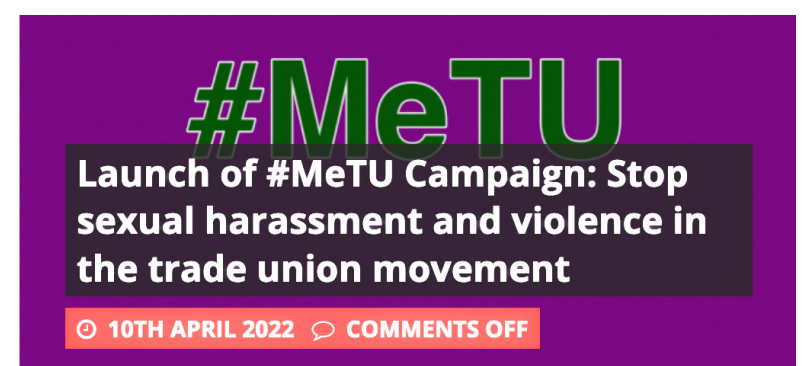
"Frances O'Grady became aware of the specific allegations against the General Secretary of TSSA when the Reel

News video was posted on social media on 7 May 2022. She had not been aware of them previously. It is inaccurate to imply otherwise... When specific allegations are raised, we help unions commission independent investigations and implement the report's findings, as we are now doing with TSSA. We continue to work so that every workplace is free of sexual harassment and every woman is safe at work."

Obviously we can't judge the allegations in TSSA. But in 2020 an independent report commissioned by the GMB after allegations against General Secretary Tim Roache found a culture of bullying, misogyny, cronyism and sexual harassment.

Barrister Karon Monaghan QC found a culture "of heavy drinking and late night socialising, salacious gossip and a lack of professionalism".

The newly formed #MeTU campaign made up of union



staffers and ex-staffers says a similar culture is common across the union movement.

We must confront sexism in our class and class organisations. Workers' power can only be built by universalising class politics, wearing away divisions between workers and breaking chains of oppression. We need to build a culture of honestly confronting sexism and educating and supporting each other.

We need to democratise our unions and build women's self-organisation. Allega-

tions have concerned male gatekeepers at the top of our unions, with concentrated personal power. Officers on workers' wages, elected officials and decisions taken by committees and conferences rather than individuals would help prevent this. Unions should be prevented from using NDAs in cases regarding harassment or discrimination because they prevent detection of patterns of behaviour and prevent us organising collectively to confront oppression. □

“I have always believed in discontent”

By Jill Mountford

Part 3 of a series on Charlotte Despard, a feminist and socialist who became active in London in 1890, at the age of 46, and remained active until her death in 1939 at age 95. Previous articles have covered her activity in London to 1921 ([Solidarity 633](#)), and in Dublin 1921-26 ([634](#)).

After her dismay at the Civil War and the lack of social radicalism from Irish Republicans, in 1926 Charlotte Despard had perked up. Her optimism refuelled, she wrote “Communism is growing extraordinarily; we mean to try and start a group here; so far as Society is concerned, that is the only hope for this tortured world”.

She worked hard to marry her Communism and Christianity. Her annual dividends that year (from shares left to her by late husband) were given over to Roddy Connolly (James Connolly’s son) to set up the Irish Workers’ Party (IWP). She purchased the machinery needed for the party to produce its own paper, *The Workers’ Republic*. The IWP stood for the nationalisation of the banks, appropriating landlords, and abolishing pawnbrokers.

The IWP was a short-lived project, and Despard’s previous disenchantment turned into depression. She wrote: “In the Labour world it is all hideous chaos – splits, suspicions, mutual recrimination everywhere”.

Given her age and lack of direct history in Ireland, Despard was now never in the thick of struggles as she had been previously in the women’s suffrage movement.

Stalinist

In 1930, at the age of 86, in an effort to combat low spirits, she joined Hanna Sheehy Skeffington in a delegation from the Friends of the Soviet Union, on a trip to Leningrad and Moscow.

Her reports of the trip seem romantic and idealistic, reflecting a desperation to believe Stalinist Russia had turned her “dreams into reality”. She wrote of her trip: “Free, happy and rejoicing – I thought of Shelley and his Revolt of Islam, and breathed within myself a fervent wish that this grand nation... may not have her progress retarded by capitalists and imperialists who are bent on her destruction”.

In 1933 Charlotte was inspired by the Stalinist Revolutionary Workers Groups (set up in 1930 as a preparatory step for an Irish Communist Party) when they declared that “the reorganisation

of Irish life demands the public ownership of the means of production, distribution and control”. She rented, then bought, a big house in Eccles Street, Dublin for the headquarters of Friends of Soviet Russia (FOSR) and a college for working class members of the IRA.

That Easter the Cardinal-Primate wrote that Communists were “the enemy of God... that there was no room for them or their blasphemies among the children of St Patrick”. This translated into Catholic youth attacking left-wing speakers and their meetings.

The RWG meeting house was attacked by a mob, made up in part of Blueshirts (a right-wing grouping with some fascist traits) and the St Patrick’s Anti-Communist League. They set fire to the house. Not long after, a similar mob attacked the FOSR HQ and workers’ college Despard had set up.

Belfast

This remarkable 89 year old woman was trapped inside for several hours as the property was bombarded. Her response was to write a poem:

...those who sow and reap and weave,
Who delve and dig and mine,
Who make this earth, our dwelling place,
Productive, rich and fine,
Shall reap the harvest, call the tune,
Shall live as free men ought,
Enjoying the abundance
They themselves have wrought...
Can these indeed be Communists?
By all that’s just is true.
Wild people cease from cursing,
We build the world for you.

Charlotte’s Catholic Communism made her increasingly isolated in the circles she mixed. She contemplated coming back to England, and even considered Spain. She eventually settled on Belfast, having been persuaded by Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, of prospects for unity between Protestant and Catholic workers after the Outdoor Relief riots of October 1932.

Once more she gave away a couple of properties. Roebuck House, in Dublin, she gave to Maud Gonne, and her other property to the Friends of Soviet Russia. She moved to Belfast to spread the word about Communism, as she saw it.

Despite her declining health and increasing years she, at 91, had Roland Kidd staying with her, while he was carrying out an investigation around the abuses of the Special Powers Act for the National Council of Civil Liberties. Her safety was compromised as work-

FOR TWO GENERATIONS SHE WAS A REBEL

TRIBUTE FROM A VETERAN FIGHTER

TOM MANN, veteran leader of the British working-class, in a message to the Daily Worker pays the following tribute to Mrs. Despard.
“Our dearly-loved comrade, Charlotte Despard, has left us after a long life of great usefulness. I have known her for many years, and our dear friend, now gone, has ever been a fine example of courage and steadfastness.
“In all the vicissitudes of life she was ever courageous and militant, actively engaged in combating the causes of hindrance to progress, and imbued with a firm resolve to encourage others by setting a fine example.
“Lovingly we take our leave, but ever to cherish and imitate the example she set.”—TOM MANN.

SHELTERS ARE ONLY ON PAPER

PAPER schemes for the provision of air-raid shelters for the workers, with the date of their operation

MRS. CHARLOTTE DESPARD, known to two generations of working-class and progressive opinion in Britain, died yesterday morning at her home at Antrim at the age of 95.

She came of a well-known Anglo-Irish family; her brother was the late Lord French.

At 20 years of age Mrs. Despard was strongly influenced by the works of Shelley. In after years she declared she became a rebel after reading Shelley’s “Revolt of Islam.”

She married Colonel Despard, who also took a prominent part in the reform movements with which she was associated in those early years. Her husband died in 1890.

Mrs. Despard had travelled extensively in Germany and France, but her first actual public appearance was at Kingston-on-Thames, where she became a member of the Poor Law Guardians and served for 12 months in that capacity.

For 11 years subsequently she was a guardian for Lambeth and later for Wandsworth, being responsible for many reforms.

In the early days of this century she became one of the leaders of the women’s suffrage movement, and despite an apparently frail physique was by pen and on the platform one of its most active exponents.



Report of Charlotte Despard’s death in the Daily Worker 11 November 1939

ers’ unity broke down and more riots ensued.

She moved outside Belfast, and had a small property built. The foundations were searched for weapons being buried during construction.

There is some concern that Charlotte’s generosity was taken advantage of in old age, and that some on her side actually stole from her. She was made bankrupt in her 90s and died alone. There has even been concern about the nature of her death at 95 after she fell downstairs having only six weeks earlier made a will to her two young left-wing companions.

Whatever the speculation, Charlotte had agency in her old age.

Charlotte, alongside Esther Roper and Eva Gore-Booth, Dr Kathleen Lynn, Madeleine French-Mullen, and many others from the first-wave women’s movement, are celebrated in queer history. Charlotte had a long standing relationship with suffragette Kate Harvey. They shared a house and several projects.

When Charlotte was in her early 70s she commented that she was “younger

now than when I was 20”. At 86, as we’ve seen, she went on a trip to Russia to refuel her optimism. At 89 she addressed a crowd in Trafalgar Square urging anti-fascist action.

She was an eclectic, maybe a little eccentric (hardly anyone who writes about Despard misses the opportunity to make wry comment about her appearance and style of dress), she was a Catholic and a theosophic mystic, an idealist, a romantic. All that and more sat alongside her socialism, but central to all of those drives was a burning desire for equality and justice, for a better world.

Charlotte did not do not give up or walk away from these ideas and drives, regardless of her age or health, and that’s her best legacy! The motto of the Women’s Freedom League was “Dare to be Free”. The motto of Charlotte Despard’s life was “Dare to Fight On”. The last words must go to her and must inspire us all:

“I have always believed in discontent – not grumbling, which is usually selfish and individual – but a disinclination to sit idly, knowing things are wrong.” □

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- Tubeworker/Off The Rails, videos by the producers of the bulletins □

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Mixed verdict from Texas Supreme Court

By Zack Muddle

In February, the corrupt hard-right Trumpist Attorney General of Texas, Ken Paxton, issued a nonbinding legal opinion equating all gender-affirming medical care – puberty blockers, hormones, or surgery – for transgender under-18s with child abuse. Texan Governor Greg Abbott, of similar ilk, then directed the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) to investigate any facilities offering this care, and parents of recipients.

DFPS stated that it would follow this – nonbinding – directive, opening at least nine investigations into parents of trans under-18s. In March, a district judge granted an injunction against all such investigations, which was upheld in a Third Court of Appeals.

The Texas Supreme Court has now reopened a door to investigations, although allowing injunctions to protect specific families.

Its ruling also makes clear that DFPS is not bound to make such investigations

or heed Abbott or Paxton. Medically supporting young trans people is not child abuse; refusing to do so – with its emotional consequences – often is abusive neglect.

These attacks are one (currently) extreme example in a much wider wave of anti-trans legislative activism sweeping the USA; in turn part of a hard-right culture war against LGBT people, reproductive rights, migrants, ethnic minorities, the environment, science, truth, and more. □

Another clampdown by Starmer

By Simon Nelson

Wakefield Constituency Labour Party's selection of Simon Lightwood as the prospective parliamentary candidate in the upcoming by-election showed us another power grab by Starmer and the leadership. The resignation of the previous Tory MP, who has now been jailed should mean Labour are in a good position to regain a seat they had previously held for 87 years.

But their actions in excluding two popular local candidates from the long list, both Wakefield councillors, caused the entire Wakefield CLP executive to resign.

Their statement says:

"Over the past year the Wakefield Labour Party has repeatedly put two requests to party headquarters:

1. To do an early selection to avoid a rushed job and get a candidate in place early

2. We wanted a local candidate

The rules say a shortlist should be drawn up by a five-person panel, three chosen by the local Labour Party, plus one each from the NEC and the Yorkshire Region. The NEC simply reversed this, with three from the NEC itself plus one for region and one local (which had to be female).

The rules say there should be a week between publication of shortlist and the vote, so members can find out about the candidates and a chance to think about their choice. The NEC have given two clear days.

We asked for local candidates, but there are none. Three prominent council and local Labour candidates, including the deputy council Leader, didn't even make it onto the 'longlist'.

A shortlist of four was requested by our representative on the panel to give members some choice but the NEC members insisted on just two.

Representations to party officials at the highest level have got absolutely nowhere, with some queries not even answered."

Labour appears to have ignored Party rules to rush the selection and exclude at least one candidate on the left of the party. Labour and union activists should push for selections to be run according to the rules, and pressure National Executive reps from both CLPs and unions to ensure pro-leadership candidates are not just parachuted in at the expense of a fair contest. □

Aslef and FBU vote down disaffiliation

By an Aslef member

The Annual Assembly of Delegates (AAD, annual decision-making conference) of the train drivers' union Aslef voted overwhelmingly, by 74-9, on 16 May to retain the union's affiliation to the Labour Party.

Activists organising to reject disaffiliation motions had been expecting it to be much closer than that. We welcome this vote, which came less than a week after the Fire Brigades Union conference voted down a disaffiliation motion 75-25.

Aslef's Executive Committee remains split on this issue, and this is unlikely to be the last time disaffiliation comes up at conference. It is

important to guard against complacency on this issue. However, this is a very encouraging indication of where the union is at the moment.

Especially given the make-up of Aslef and the significant degree of dislocation between the activist layer and the wider membership, a vote to disaffiliate would be a serious retrograde step. It would not mean the end of political discord in the union – in fact it would likely cause severe fracturing and disorientation, as various factions fought it out between trying to make the union apolitical or right wing, trying to hitch it to the bandwagons of Sta-

minist charlatans like George Galloway or Chris Williamson, or trying to re-affiliate or at least remain very close to Labour.

Post-Corbyn we have seen renewed pushes within the affiliated unions to disaffiliate, citing the behaviour of the Starmer leadership. In reality, the political alternatives for the trade unions after the Corbyn era are roughly the same as before it came along – a series of undemocratic and/or politically toxic dead-ends, vehicles for individual personalities or fronts that have no internal life of their own, or "business unionism" with no political outlet beyond lobbying.

Although trade unionists

and socialists are right to be disgusted with the conduct of the Starmer leadership – lurching rightwards on most issues, and utterly failing to advance even a moderate alternative over the cost-of-living crisis – the best way to fight that leadership is by using the union link to Labour to assert pro-working-class policies and democratic reforms within the party.

A better organised, more coordinated intervention on the part of affiliated unions, left networks like Momentum, and left-wing MPs will challenge Starmer far more seriously than disaffiliations and doomed electoral challenges. □

Tories' adviser airbrushes far right

By Sacha Ismail

Last year 22% of referrals to the government's "Prevent" strategy for countering "extremism" concerned Islamist radicalisation; 25% concerned the white nationalist far right. (Larger numbers for "mixed, unstable or unclear ideology"; only a very few referrals for far left ideas). Seven years ago the Islamist figure was about five times higher than the far right one (and five times higher than it is now).

Of "Channel" cases concerning "radicalisation of vulnerable individuals", 46% concerned far-right ideas and 22% Islamist ones.

Some more radical Islamists engage

in violence; but there have been many white nationalist attacks in Europe and the US. The shift in "Prevent" referrals is unlikely to reflect the authorities being too harsh against that danger. Yet leaked draft extracts of the official review of Prevent argue for more focus on Islamism and less on the far right.

We have been critical of Prevent generally, but this is something else again.

The final report will need some serious dissection. But its author William Shawcross, former head of the Charity Commission, is a radical right-winger who, as director of the neo-conservative Henry Jackson Society, said: "Europe and Islam is one of the greatest,

most terrifying problems of our future. I think all European countries have vastly, very quickly growing Islamic populations."

It is true that successive governments and swathes of conservatives, liberals and the left have been in denial about the reactionary and dangerous nature of less violent Islamists (while simultaneously perpetuating broader social discriminations which disadvantage Muslims generally).

That is an issue for the left, labour movement and anti-racist movements to take up – not a government that airbrushes and encourages the racist far right. □

UCU needs a new strategy

By a UCU member

The University and College Union (UCU) disputes over USS pensions and the “Four Fights” (pay, equality, workloads and casualisation) are in danger of collapsing after multiple branches were pulled out of an assessment boycott following a shambolic “consultation”. The move leaves twenty (perhaps fewer) branches refusing to mark in the Four Fights dispute, and just fourteen over USS. Forty-three branches in total had mandates.

Since rebalot results were announced on 11 April, there has been delay after delay in implementing the action members voted for. UCU could have given swift notification to employers after that result, allowing action to start promptly on return from the Easter break if the special sector conferences endorsed it, and withdrawing the no-

tification if they did not. But it was 6 May before action was announced – to begin on 23 May, too late for many institutions. It is hard to see this as anything other than a deliberate strategy to run down the disputes, a disgrace when the employers’ national offer on pay for 2022 is just 3%, while inflation runs at three times that. Dundee UCU have proposed a motion of censure in the General Secretary, which will be heard at Congress (1-3 June).

There is now a real risk that the dispute will play out with serious damage to the national pay bargaining system. At Durham University the UCU branch pulled out of the action after management offered a local settlement including a £1,000 bonus. There is a growing incentive for well-organised branches in richer institutions to go around the national structures. We should defend the principle that workers doing the

same job should be paid the same money (plus if necessary a local cost-of-living weighting) wherever in the sector they are working.

Elsewhere, as the union leadership has dithered, employers have been emboldened in their attacks. In those branches still planning assessment boycotts, they are threatening deductions of 75 to 100% of wages for “partial performance”. Three universities that did not make the threshold are facing sweeping cuts to jobs and programmes. Recruitment to 146 courses, primarily in arts and social science, has been suspended at Wolverhampton. At Roehampton 226 people – half of the academic staff – have been told their jobs are at risk. De Montfort management are threatening 58 compulsory redundancies. These are in addition to the long-running fight at Goldsmiths against compulsory redundancies.



All these institutions have been hit by the government’s marketisation strategy allowing some universities to expand at the expense of others, by ministers’ hints that they might pull funding from courses that don’t lead to well-paid jobs, and by changes to the student loans scheme that mean higher total repayments for lower earners.

It is now more urgent than ever for branches to get organised and come up with a strategy for action in the autumn that can put meaningful pressure on employers. □

Post workers prepare to ballot

By Ollie Moore

The Communication Workers Union (CWU) is holding “gate meetings” at Royal Mail workplaces as it prepares for a potential ballot of its Royal Mail membership over pay and conditions.

The last pay settlement included 2020 and 2021. A resolution at the CWU’s conference in April committed the union to moving towards an industrial action ballot to win a pay increase if no acceptable offer was forthcoming in negotia-

tions for the 2022 settlement.

Royal Mail’s offer is for a 2% payrise, backdated to April 2022, with a further 1.5% increase, not back-dated, conditional on accepting a series of changes to conditions, including compulsory Sunday working, increased flexibility, a reduction in sick leave, and a separate set of conditions for new starters, effectively creating a two-tier workforce. CWU says the offer itself breaches the terms of the previous “Pathway to Change” agreement, which stipulated that

company proposals to change working practices must be negotiated with the union separately, and not linked to pay.

Royal Mail paid out £400 million to shareholders off the back of pre-tax profit of £311 million in the six months to 26 September 2021. Revenue has risen to £6.1 billion, a year-on-year increase of 7%.

Around 115,000 workers could be balloted. Royal Mail workers previously balloted over pay and conditions in 2019, smashing the anti-union thresholds and winning a 97%

majority for action. A High Court injunction obtained by the company, torpedoing the ballot on a spurious technicality, prevented action. A re-ballot in March 2020 produced a 94.5% majority for action, but with the pandemic breaking, CWU leaders rushed to guarantee the union would not call any industrial action, and instead demanded the government designate the post an “emergency service”.

The CWU also has recent form for building up big campaigns to prepare for ballots

that continually put off launching the formal ballot itself, with ballots sometimes never launched at all. With inflation running at nearly 10%, Royal Mail’s offer amounts to a significant pay cut; whilst preparatory groundwork needs to be done before any ballot, an effective fightback means moving quickly.

The 2019 and 2020 ballot results show the union can clear the thresholds. The union must announce the timetable for the formal ballot as soon as possible. □

New Labour purge in Wirral

By Jayne Evans

Local Labour Party members have this week been notified that the Wirral Labour Local Government Committee (a committee of delegates dealing with local government affairs across the council area) has been suspended and all planned meetings have been cancelled. The reason given is no breach of rule, but just that “the LGC has not been fully focused on ensuring our campaign organisation is as effective as it should be”.

The email states that the North West regional office will take over the interviewing and selection of candidates;

selected candidates must sign a candidates’ contract which will be monitored; and all councillors will be interviewed. The region will set up a campaign committee which will determine targets and target seats across the Wirral until the 2023 elections. It will retain oversight of the situation in the Wirral with a view of restoring the LGC in May 2024.

This attack on local democracy is the latest in a long line of attacks in the Labour Party in the north west: the suspension of CLPs, selected mayoral candidates not being allowed to stand, suspension of councillors.

The impact on the membership is to further increase the numbers of

people leaving the party. One of the most recent is Paul Davies, a long time member of the Labour Party, chair of Wallasey CLP and chair of Wirral Local Government Committee.

Authoritarianism

He says that the authoritarianism, lack of respect for democracy, unfair disciplinary procedures, proscriptions and bans, expulsions with no appeal, and the broken pledges of Starmer, have led him to resign. He has said he will now join the Green Party.

The Labour right are currently in the ascendancy and socialists in the Labour Party are under sustained attack. How-

ever, leaving to join the Green Party is not the answer.

Much of the Labour right understand the Labour party better than those on the left. When the movement around Corbyn was at its strongest, people like Luke Akehurst argued that the right needed to stay in the party. They understood that the battle within the labour movement is part of the class struggle and that political struggle isn’t helped if you walk away. It just makes the job of your enemy easier.

Despite the attacks, socialists should convince others to stay in the Labour Party. The political battle in the Labour Party is not yet over. □

“What we stand for

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

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

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

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

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

• workersliberty.org/join-awl

Facilities for extra staff



Diary of a trackworker

By Matt Shaw

With the pay, terms and conditions, and job security ballot taking place over recent weeks, some of the more routine things have gotten lost, and especially with Covid restrictions in place over those weeks. Network Rail management has now formally withdrawn all the Covid restrictions, and so the basic items now resurface.

Our depot had a problem with parking which we thought had been solved

with the use of some waste land and better markings in the car park. However, during Covid curbs some staff who were normally based elsewhere have been allowed to use portacabins so as to not be travelling or working in crowded offices. Those portacabins were originally used for briefings, in-house technical training or testing, and the hundred and one things that crop up.

The effect has been to increase the number of people parking so that we have lost the earlier gains.

We don't want to appear inhospitable, but the extra staff, who in theory should now be travelling to their as-

signed depots, seem to have settled in for the duration. The portacabins have recently been replaced with better buildings, but with no proper facilities attached – toilets, water supply, drainage.

That has led to more pressure on the facilities in the main building, which was designed for many fewer staff, and has recently suffered from a failure of the toilets.

It will be up to us to ensure that if the extra staff are to be permanent, then our management should spend the extra to allow us to do our work in a dignified manner and not be overcrowded. □

Two tiers on Crossrail



Diary of a Crossrail worker

By Steve Allan

With days to go until the Elizabeth Line [Crossrail] opens to the public, it's all hands on deck to get things ready. Matters to be resolved range from a leaky tap in the mess room to whether the company has enough staff to safely operate.

It's my second week on the job and first time out on the stations. B gives

me the tour and tries to put me at ease ahead of my impending assessment. I'm supposed to be receiving two tours, but it turns out only one can be conducted as a station can't spare the staff to take me round. It doesn't fill me with confidence.

Later on I see the union Whatsapp group is full of messages. Members tell of being under-staffed to perform security checks and shifts extended at short notice. Things seem to be simmering up even before the first passenger boards.

Managers are scrambling around for agency staff and for people to take

overtime. The final roster should be confirmed a week in advance, so it's pretty shocking that not all shifts are filled! Furthermore, there is confusion amongst "in-house" staff as it is unclear how work will be divided. With agency staff being given more responsibilities, some seem to view this as infringing on territory.

This creation of a two-tier workforce may suit management fine but causes division within the workforce. Agency staff are on worse terms and conditions and receive less training. It is on us to raise everybody's level, not to beat down. □

Silkwood and work safety



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

Solidarity 635 carried an [article](#) on "unsafe workplaces" demonstrating the high price workers often pay for a lack of safety at work. Those who become whistle-blowers are particularly vulnerable. In *Silkwood* (1983, directed by Mike Nichols) the eponymous character (played by Meryl Streep) works at a plutonium plant making fuel rods for the nuclear industry. She is a member of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers' Union and becomes increasingly concerned about safety at the plant, going to Washington to testify before the Atomic Energy Commission.

Back at work she activates an alarm and it is discovered she is dangerously over the permitted radiation limit. After going through a lengthy decontamination procedure, Silkwood returns to



the plant. She continues to gather evidence of management misdemeanours, unearthing x-rays showing that vital welding joints are faulty.

After she contacts the New York Times a reporter arranges to meet her, but she never makes the rendezvous. Her car crashes in mysterious circumstances.

The film is based on the book *Who Killed Karen Silkwood?* by Howard Kohn. Kerr McGee, the company concerned, eventually settled for \$1.38m in compensation to her family but have never admitted liability and even claimed, at one time, that Silkwood deliberately contaminated herself. □

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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 workersliberty.org/join-awl □

PCS meets in conference



John Moloney

As I write, our union, PCS, is holding its group conferences and national conference (23-26 May). The main debates at the national conference will be around our plan for a national industrial action ballot over cost-of-living issues. Two contested issues are when the ballot should take place, and whether it should be a single aggregated ballot, or disaggregated by department.

On the former issue, the two proposals are to begin in July, or to begin in September. I favour the latter position, which is also the National Executive Committee (NEC) majority position, simply because I don't think we lose anything by taking those extra two months to prepare. On the aggregation question, I see a role for disaggregation in certain contexts. But here, which is essentially a national dispute over pay and conditions affecting the whole civil service, I would favour aggregation.

Meanwhile, we're learning more details of the government's plan to cut 91,000 civil service jobs.

We haven't been told of any plans to reduce the functions of the civil service, so there'll be no decrease in workload. That means the existing workload will have to be covered by 91,000 fewer staff. We've also been told that, if larger departments like DWP or HMRC simply can't cover their workload with a reduced staffing complement, their "share" of the cuts will have to be redistributed elsewhere, effectively meaning some departments could be hit twice.

The government's current position is that they want to achieve cuts via "natural wastage". That would mean a recruitment freeze for three years. That's simply not viable.

They will very likely offer voluntary severance packages to tempt people into leaving. They're also saying that any work which can be outsourced will be deemed to contribute to the cuts, as that work will not longer be done by directly-employed civil servants.

This shows the clearly politically-motivated nature of this plan. This is not a case of a new technology being available that allows the employers to automate work and cut jobs. It's about the Tories being able to say "we shrank the state, we reduced the civil service." □

• John Moloney is assistant general secretary of the civil service union PCS, writing in a personal capacity

Rail workers vote to strike



Off The Rails

Tens of thousands of rail workers will take industrial action in support of jobs, pay and conditions, after voting by a large majority in RMT's ballots.

Union members in Network Rail and in thirteen Train Operating Companies (TOCs) voted for strikes and action short of strikes. Each one of these fourteen separate ballots achieved a Yes vote and exceeded the turnout and support thresholds laid down in the 2016 (Anti) Trade Union Act. Unfortunately, the results in two further ballots – on GTR Southern and Island Line – did not reach the thresholds. RMT's Executive will now deliberate on what action to take.

Network Rail and TOC staff have not had a pay rise for two years. With inflation soaring, their real wages are plummeting.

Tory rail minister Chris Heaton-Harris insists that there is no money for increased subsidies to pay for wage rises, calling it 'unfair on taxpayers'. He doesn't seem to think it is unfair on taxpayers for government subsidies to go into the profit accounts of private rail owners though.

Meanwhile, Network Rail plans to cut 2,500 jobs to help achieve £2 billion in cuts. The TOCs have refused to rule out compulsory redundancies, with many making their own cuts, including closing ticket offices.

Rail workers had a choice between, on the one hand, financial hardship and job insecurity, and on the other, fighting back. It was a stark choice, and workers have voted to fight.

The employers and government are clearly very rattled by the prospect of a summer of railway stoppages, trotting

out anti-union clichés and promising new anti-union laws. They have very good reason to worry. RMT now has a mandate which will enable it to cause serious disruption and force the employers to concede.

Smaller rail unions TSSA, ASLEF and Unite have some catching up to join in this fightback, but it is important that they do, in order to maximise the impact of co-ordinated action. If RMT strikes before they win ballot mandates, their members can nonetheless strike as part of the RMT action.

Workers' Liberty rail workers are arguing for the maximum possible rank-and-file control in RMT's national dispute. We want to see national strikes, with workers in different companies striking together. There may be times during the dispute that scheduling 'selective' action (different action at different times by different grades and/or on different companies) would have a strong impact. However, the fight will be most effective if it begins with, and is centrally based on, united national strikes.

RMT also has live disputes on several cleaning contracts and on London Underground, and is balloting Scotrail members over pay. This gives it significant power if it calls synchronised action.

Workers' Liberty publishes Off The Rails, a blog (workersliberty.org/blogs/rails) and printed bulletin written by rail workers, including many activists central to building this dispute across the companies involved. Our blog has a specific section on this dispute – bit.ly/OTR-national-rail-dispute – and welcomes pieces from all rail workers.

This promises to be a large-scale conflict between organised workers on one side and profiteering bosses and their government servants on the other side. A win for rail workers will boost every

other worker's prospects of protecting themselves from the rising cost of living and making the employers pay for the crisis instead.

We encourage socialists and activists across the labour movement to actively support the rail strike – invite speakers to your meetings, take part in demonstrations of support, visit picket lines, raise money for the strike fund.

Merseyrail

In a separate dispute, guards on Merseyrail have voted in RMT's referendum to reject a company proposal to resolve their long-running dispute over their safety-critical role by imposing a two-tier arrangement, with new starters on significantly worse terms than existing guards.

The logical follow-up to the No vote is a return to industrial action. Guards' strikes have the power to force the employer to stop undermining their role, especially as on Merseyrail, Aslef has a laudable record of refusing to cross picket lines or to discuss the drivers' role in door control until the company and RMT reach an agreement. □

• More: bit.ly/OTR-Merseyrail

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Station staff: all out on 6 June



Tubeworker

RMT has called a strike of London Underground (LU) station staff on Monday 6 June.

It's part of the union's overarching, company wide dispute to stop pension cuts, job cuts, and detrimental changes to terms and conditions. The stations strike will emphasise two of those three demands in particular, as stations are currently on the frontline in terms of job

cuts and the imposition of new frameworks.

600 jobs are due to be cut on stations, with stations like King's Cross and Victoria, where the detail of the planned cuts has already been announced, due to lose around 1/3 of their Customer Service Assistant (CSA) workforce. The company says that, because no-one is directly losing their job as a result of the cuts, they don't matter, but we know from previous restructures that headcount reductions mean an increased workload for everyone else. Crucially, they will also im-

pact the quality and accessibility of the service. LU says it can manage with fewer staff as passengers footfall has yet to return to pre-pandemic levels, but what about when it does? And what about when an incident takes place? As usual, LU's plans might work as long as nothing ever happens... as long as there's never a medical incident, as long as there's never anyone requiring particular assistance, as long as there are never any disabled passengers requiring help, as long as we never have to evacuate a station... We know from our Jan-

uary 2017 strike that stations-only action can have a major impact on the service. We must build back up to all-grades, network-wide action, but selective, function-by-function strikes can help maintain pressure and momentum between those all-out strikes.

The expiry of TfL's latest financial bailout from the government, on 24 June, should be a target for our next all-out strike, by which time we may be able to coordinate with RMT action on Network Rail and mainline Train Operating Companies. □





Drive out the Tories! Drive out their policies!

By Sacha Ismail

A few days before *Solidarity* went to press, Tory MPs and the Tory press were declaring that critics of Boris Johnson over the “Partygate” scandals should shut up. “What a farcical waste of time and £460,000” shouted the front page of *Daily Mail*.

Then on Monday 23 May new photos of Johnson, apparently showing him making a speech making a speech at a packed party, drink in hand, reopened the affair.

Johnson and co. are a disgrace. But even the Partygate misdemeanours are a relatively minor part of that.

They didn’t just ignore lockdown rules they insisted on for others, but oversaw policies that drove a soaring pandemic death toll and ensured the pandemic fuelled a further growth of inequality.

Johnson should go – but replacing him with another, at least equally right-wing, less discredited and possibly more competent Tory leader would not be a great victory.

The labour movement should agitate for a general election to oust the Tories entirely. Most importantly it should start seriously fighting them, on the streets and in workplaces, and fighting for serious policies to undo the damage they have done. □

Up the Republic!

By Gerry Bates

Forty five years ago in 1977, during the Queen’s 25th jubilee, many thousands attended a republican People’s Jubilee organised in North London (by the Communist Party). This year, for the 70th jubilee, republican events will sadly be low-key.

That isn’t because support for the monarchy is stronger today. In fact, despite the aggressive attempts to insist on unanimous enthusiasm for the jubilee, there are signs of the monarchy’s support approaching a serious crisis.

The difference with the 70s is that the socialist left and the labour movement more broadly are weaker and less politically confident.

There is a large constituency of people opposed to or at least sceptical about celebrating the monarchy, particularly when the pageantry comes in the midst of collapsing living standards and public services – but it lacks a voice at present. The socialist left should help it speak up. □

• More: “After the jubilee: be bold for a republic!”, bit.ly/boldforrep

Patel facilitates racist harassment

By Alexander Herman

Following up fast on the passing of the [Police Act](#), and the announcement of yet more repressive legislation to come, Home Secretary Priti Patel is expanding police powers to harass people in the street through “stop and search”.

She has announced changes to use of Section 60 of the 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act. Now instead of a senior officer being able to declare they believe serious violence will take place in a given area, thus allowing searches without reasonable grounds, it will be a matter of declaring that violence “may” occur. The length of time the powers can be in force will go up from 15 to 24 hours, with extensions up to 48 instead of 39.

Johnson and Patel’s is a seriously right-wing and repressive regime. Even Theresa May’s government curbed the use of stop and search a bit.

There is a mountain of evidence that such pow-



ers do little to reduce violent crime, but a lot to boost racism. 99% of Section 60 searches do not find weapons. For searches in 1919-20, the arrest rate was 4%. In the same period people from all ethnic minorities were around four times more likely to be searched than white people, and black people around nine times more likely.

We need many more protests against the Tories’ authoritarian drive. We need a labour movement campaign for measures to [curb](#) the police and to scrap the Police Act, the Public Order Act and similar legislation. □

How to defeat “minimum service” threat

By Mohan Sen

The Tories have revived the plan, included in their 2019 election manifesto, to effectively ban all-out strikes in transport through a law requiring a “minimum service level”.

They are obviously trying to intimidate transport workers in the run up to what could be huge national rail strikes in the summer (though in fact a minimum service law could scarcely be got in place for a long time to come).

Despite the manifesto pledge, transport secretary Grant Shapps has said only that they are considering such a law, if things “got to that point”, despite the manifesto commitment.

Even if a minimum service law is passed, it is entirely possible that determined trade-union tactics can render it fairly ineffective. Such laws in France, for instance, have generally been ineffective. Both blocking this attack and rendering it

ineffective if that fails require workers’ resistance.

Non-complicity

The 2021 conference of rail and transport union RMT [pledged](#) both “non-complicity” with any minimum service requirement and a serious campaign to prevent one, including a national demonstration.

It’s early days, but the danger is that, as they did with the 2016 Trade Union Act, unions will talk a good fight but do little.

RMT’s initial statement sounds militant but doesn’t advocate its conference policy – or much of anything really.

Let’s organise across the labour movement to help RMT members put it into action. And let’s stop leaving the initiative to the Tories, and launch a serious drive to demand repeal of *all* anti-union laws. □

IDEAS FOR FREEDOM

WEEKEND OF SOCIALIST DEBATE AND DISCUSSION

The world's political life is dominated by governments pledged to keep the **wealthy comfortable** and the **working class** in its place. For many, life is often **difficult** and **miserable**. And **unnecessarily** so.

Workers' Liberty fights for a world based on solidarity and democratic working-class control over economics and politics. We organise **Ideas for Freedom** each year to **discuss, debate**, think and listen to ideas to transform the world. **Join us!**



Early Bird weekend **tickets** until 3 June are £38 waged, £22 low waged and HE student and £9 non-waged/school student, from bit.ly/ideas-22

Thursday 30 June – Radical Clerkenwell **Walking Tour**

Friday – Film, *The Young Marx*

SATURDAY 2 JULY

11:30 – The punk rock politics of **Joe Strummer**, with Gregor Gall • The legacy of **George Orwell**, with Dorian Lynskey • A socialist history of **race and racism**, with Camilla Bassi • Renewing our **unions**, with John Moloney (PCS AGS, pc) and John Leach (Organiser, RMT London Transport, pc), and more • The struggle for **reproductive rights** worldwide

2pm – Workers' solidarity with **Ukraine**, with speakers from the Ukrainian left and labour movement.

3:55 – The **Covid-19** pandemic, with Professor George Davey-Smith • The **history of Ukraine**, with Chris Ford and Marko Bojcun (Ukraine Solidarity Campaign) • **Couriers** vs gig economy bosses, with speakers from the JustEat couriers' strike • Why the **working class**? • Defending the **right to protest and strike**, with Rhian Keyse (UCU NEC), and Janine Booth (RMT Disabled MA Committee)

5:35 – Capitalism, **disability**, and socialism, with Janine Booth, author Ellen Clifford, and Richard Rieser (World of Inclusion) • The legacy of **James Connolly**, with Paul Richards • The **left in disarray on Ukraine** • What is a **revolutionary party** and why do we need one?

7:15 – Informal **social** at a nearby **pub**

SUNDAY 3 JULY

10am – The ideas **Starmer** wants to ban: Historic and current **Labour Party** leaderships' attacks on the revolutionary left. • **Class struggle in India**, with Sacha Ismail, and more. • The significance of the **Russian revolution** • Is a united **Ireland** in prospect? • **Monarchy, republicanism**, and socialism

12:40 – Should socialists back a "**progressive alliance**"? Debate with Michael Chessum • **Climate change** as class war, with author Matt Huber • The Cammell Laird **shipyard occupation** and the fight for justice, with Eddie Marnell, Cammell Laird occupier, and more • **Sheffield's** early socialists, with E.M. Johns • The history of **Hong Kong**, with HK socialist Chen Ying • Soviet composer Dimitriy **Shostakovich** and Stalinism • Class struggle in **China**, with Chinese socialist Chris • What is **imperialism**? • The climate movement in **Australia**, with Janet Burstall

4:05 – Closing plenary



2-3 July • Camden School for Girls, London • Tickets: bit.ly/ideas-22