

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

UKRAINE: BEAT BACK PUTIN



» **Arms to Ukraine**

» **Solidarity with Ukrainian workers and left**

» **Defeat Russian imperialism**

Cartoon: @gewman

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Ukraine: beat back Putin

6699 Editorial

As the first anniversary of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 approaches it is worth taking a balance sheet of the war, its human costs, political consequences and the left's response.

Ukraine was a poor country before the war began, but its GDP slumped by 45% in 2022. Well over 100,000 residential buildings have been damaged or destroyed. 8 million Ukrainian refugees are now registered across Europe, from a pre-invasion population of 44mn; a further 5mn, at least, are internally displaced.

In October 2022 Ukrainian Prime Minister Denis Schmyhal estimated the cost of re-building Ukraine at \$750bn.

The OHCHR records 18,000 Ukrainian civilian casualties, including 7,000 deaths. In areas occupied by Russia elected authorities have been replaced and Russia has ruled through terror. Murder, torture, disappearances, sexual assaults and widespread looting has been routine. Ukraine has opened over 50,000 case files on alleged war crimes.

Putin's year of war has – so far – been a spectacular strategic failure.

Western sanctions have not stopped the war, but they have damaged Russia's economy, which was already in poor shape before the invasion.



Putin's apparent belief that Ukraine would quickly collapse as Russia invaded from Belarus in February 2022 was quickly disabused. The Russian state expected to take the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv, within days, and even believed Russian forces be welcomed. In fact Russian troops faced strong resistance, were defeated and withdrew, re-deploying in eastern Ukraine where a second phase of the war began.

The *Economist* quotes a study from summer 2021 which recorded 41% of Ukrainians agreeing with the idea that "Ukraine and Russia are one people". The figure is now 8%. The war has pushed the peoples further apart.

Russia began a drive in Luhansk which culminated in Ukrainian withdrawals from the towns of Sievierodonetsk and Lysychansk in June-July. However, these towns were destroyed in the process.

The US provided new weapon systems to Ukraine and from September

Ukraine won spectacular victories, first in Kharkiv, and later retaking Kherson city.

The US's army leadership believes Russia has suffered "significantly over" 100,000 casualties in Ukraine. It has lost at least 1,500 tanks, either destroyed or captured by Ukraine.

Putin's aim of keeping NATO away from Russia's borders has backfired. Finland and Sweden, acting from justified fear of Putin's Russia, have applied for NATO membership. Germany set aside €100bn to modernise and expand its armed forces, and Poland has increased arms spending to a massive 4% of GDP.

However, the unwillingness of the West to provide aircraft, long-range missile systems, tanks, and adequate amounts of the weapons it does give to Ukraine, has handed the initiative back to Russia. Russia has mobilised and trained many tens of thousands of new troops which it is now deploying.

A new fourth phase of the war has begun with what appears to be increasingly violent assaults across much of the Donbas frontline, around Vuhledar, and south of Zaporizhzhia. Putin shows no sign of ending his attacks on Ukraine and his relentless war continues.

Workers' Liberty believes Ukraine is right to fight to defend its self-determination from Russian imperialism and has the right to demand arms and aid from wherever it can get it. The Ukrainian left and trade unions, while still criticising Zelenskyy and opposing his measures which restrict trade-union

rights, unanimously support Ukraine's war, knowing that a Russian victory will also mean the destruction of Ukraine's labour movement.

Some of the British left disagree.

The *Morning Star*, *Socialist Worker* and others argue that this war is, in fact, a war between Russia and NATO, with Ukraine acting as America's proxy. The West's war aim, apparently, is to defeat and seriously damage Russia. These radically disoriented left groups mangle reality to fit their political prejudices. They are Putin's useful idiots.

This "anti-war" left demands an end to Western arms to Ukraine. They must know what this means: Ukrainian surrender and a Russian victory.

If the US and European states really were acting to beat Russia down, it is inexplicable why they repeatedly stall and deny Ukraine the weapons in needs to defeat and force Russia out.

The West did not want this war and is arming Ukraine to stop it losing, not to allow it to win.

Part of it is that the West is scared of Putin's response if Ukraine does get the upper hand. They fear Putin might resort to chemical or nuclear weapons as a last resort, to protect himself from a loss in Ukraine which would be a political disaster for his rule inside Russia.

The US and European powers are alarmed by this war and most of all want it to end. Eventually they may well force Ukraine into a lousy deal with Putin in order to stop the war. Their problem is that Putin does not want to stop, as his newly launched offensive proves.

Defend Ukraine! Back Ukraine's workers' movement! □

Emancipation, class struggle, and "classism"

 Socialism vs capitalism

By Martin Thomas

Capitalist society generates and regenerates a class division between capitalists and workers (with at least one large intermediate class, the "petty bourgeoisie", and many grey areas). Like many other societies, its course is shaped by class struggle.

Victory by the working class in that class struggle will bring not a rearrangement, but the withering-away, of class divisions. Not complete and uniform equality of everyone in

every respect (hard to imagine what that would even look like), but removal of the class exploitation, domination, and oppression that has blighted life under capitalism and for aeons before capitalism.

So Marxists argue, anyway. No-one much denies the existence of class divisions. But many accuse Marxists of "class reductionism", or define the problem not as classes but "classism" (prejudice against people of working-class background).

Marxists do not "reduce" all social issues to class. Never have done. The Marxist movement, sometimes the socialist movement before Marx, has supported autonomous efforts, with appropriate al-

liances, for women's rights, LGBT+ rights (not then called that), national rights, anti-racism, broad civil liberties.

On those issues, as indeed on more narrowly "class" issues, Marxists have often been inconsistent, wooden, or even wrong, but only caricature can "reduce" the history of Marxism to "class reductionism".

Working-class

The priority of working-class struggle for Marxists is not a question of moral valuation, or of thinking other forms of oppression negligible, but of the levers for change.

Except under totalitarian regimes where all openings are blocked, the working class constantly generates perma-

nent ongoing organisation and struggles – labour movements – as no previous oppressed class or group has.

Since the "Eurocommunism" of the 1970s and 80s, some hold up "social movements" as a more modern alternative to labour movements, but none of those cross-class "social movements" has had the breadth, durability, and power of the labour movement.

For the working class to augment its power, it needs to unite itself, and to draw its worst-off sections into battle. Thus the logic of class struggle, above a certain intensity, is to generate and augment challenges to all oppressions.

Socialism, as an all-round alternative, is possible only

if the working class mobilise ourselves enough to become, in Marx's words, "a class with radical chains... a sphere which has a universal character by its universal suffering and claims no particular right because no particular wrong, but wrong generally, is perpetuated against it; which... cannot emancipate itself without... thereby emancipating all other spheres of society".

Remedies to "classism" by seeking good regulations or enlightened administration so as to seek equal access to ruling-class or better-off positions for people coming from working-class backgrounds (as sought for women, LGBT+ people, ethnic minorities, etc.), are something much less. □

Turning it round for 15-16 March

By Ollie Moore

Coordinated strikes on 15-16 March, which coincides with Budget Day, can help galvanise and intensify the ongoing strike wave. Teachers in the National Education Union (NEU) will strike on both days; civil servants in PCS will strike on 15 March.

It is likely that RMT members on London Underground will strike on 15 March, and on another day in the same week. Following RMT's rejection of the latest offers from employers in disputes on the national rail, workers at Network Rail and mainline Train Operating Companies may join them.

The University and College Union's programme of strikes in universities currently includes 16 but not 15 March; but many activists are pushing for the union to name further action. The Communication Workers Union is likely to renew its industrial action mandate in Royal Mail, and can take action from 2 March onwards, enabling them to join a mass strike on 15-16 March.

Coordinated

NHS unions involved in the strike wave have, thus far, been cooler about the prospect of coordination. The Royal College of Nursing (RCN), which has historically identified and functioned more as a professional association than a trade union, is cautious about identification with the wider labour movement and the possible "politicisation" of its dispute. But the RCN now looks likely to call a 48-hour strike on 1-3 March, with a reduction of derogations in A&E, intensive care, and cancer units. There is surely potential to push for the RCN, and other NHS unions, to join coordinated strike days around 15-16 March.

There is no critical number of strikers which, when reached, tips a mass coordinated strike over into being a "gen-

eral strike". The form of the 1 February strike, hopefully expanded on 15-16 March, is likely the closest thing to a general strike we will see in Britain any time soon. A general strike called as a special action by a single body would be mass defiance of anti-strike laws, a long way off for now. Pushing for unions with live strike mandates all to join action on the 15-16 March is a better way of generalising and uniting the strikes than formulaic calls on the TUC or such to "call a general strike".

Stepping stone

Even the best mass coordinated strike on 15-16 March, however, can only be a stepping stone in an ongoing and escalating struggle, not a culmination. Each union must develop strategies for winning its own dispute, designed to maximise pressure on their particular employer. Given that government finances and funding stand behind those employers in most current disputes, either directly or indirectly, maximising coordination and seeking to unite the strikes into a class-wide fight-back against the Tories will be to the benefit of all disputes.

Unions must also seek ways to inten-

sify the impact of their strikes. When disputes become entrenched and deadlocked, unions can either give up and accept defeat, or find ways to increase pressure on employers. Continuing to repeat the same actions – striking sporadically for 24 or 48 hours at a time – will only lead to a dribbling away of morale.

Strikers should be wary of union leaders dressing up such tactics as necessary for "long haul" disputes. Drawn-out disputes suit bosses, who can mostly live with low-impact levels of sporadic strikes for prolonged periods, much more than workers, for whom they become a source of demoralisation that imparts the lesson that striking doesn't work. Rather, we should seek to end our disputes quickly, on our terms, by a level of action that can secure concessions.

Concentrated

It took the Liverpool dockers five weeks' concentrated action (about 30 days) to win; the Abellio bus workers, 20 days to win a partial victory. Nothing less concentrated is likely to win in other sectors.

Both RCN and NEU have recently called off strikes by their members in Wales after employers made offers which, although an improvement relative to previous ones, were still significantly below inflation. The RCN's formal demand is for a 19% pay rise; suspending strikes for offers representing less than half that when the dispute is still gearing up only signals weakness.

The Executive Committee of the Fire Brigades Union is also recommending its members accept a below-inflation offer (albeit one that significantly improves on the previous offer of 2%): see page 14. Strikes stand the great-

est chance of victory if they are based on escalating action, building towards indefinite action where possible, supported by levies to bolster strike funds and hardship payments. Coordination on 15-16 March must be a staging post on that path. □

Strikes

14-16, 21-23 Feb, 27 Feb-2 Mar, 16-17, 20-22 Mar: Higher Education workers at 150 universities (UCU) strike. Unison HE members at 12 universities will strike on various days in Feb

13-19 Feb: British Museum workers (PCS) strike

15-16 Feb: Teachers on the Isle of Man (NASUWT) strike

20 Feb: Ambulance workers (GMB) strike

20 Feb: Drax power station workers (Unite) strike

22-24 Feb: Teachers in four areas of Scotland strike (EIS)

27 Feb: Drax power station workers (Unite) strike

28 Feb-1 Mar: Teachers strike across Scotland (EIS)

28 Feb: Teachers in the Northern, North West, and Yorkshire and Humber regions (NEU) strike

1 Mar: Teachers in the East Midlands, West Midlands, and Eastern regions (NEU) strike

1-3 Mar: 48-hour strike by nurses (RCN)

2 Mar: Teachers in London, South East, and South West regions (NEU) strike

Until 3 Mar: Selective strikes in civil service departments (PCS)

Various dates to 3 Mar: Petrofac offshore workers (Unite) strike

6 Mar: Ambulance workers (GMB) strike

6, 13, 20, and 27 Mar: Drax power station workers (Unite) strike

7-9 Mar: Targeted strikes in four areas by teachers in Scotland (EIS)

13 Mar-21 Apr: 20 further days of rolling strikes by teachers in Scotland (EIS)

15 Mar: Civil servants (PCS) strike

15-16 Mar: Teachers in England and Wales (NEU) strike

20 Mar: Ambulance workers (GMB) strike

Mar, date TBC: 72-hour strike by junior doctors (BMA), pending outcome of ballot

Until 3 Apr: Discontinuous strikes by workers at drinks manufacturer Diageo's plant in Leven, Scotland (Unite)

4, 10, and 17 Apr: Drax power station workers (Unite) strike □



Activist Agenda

The Bakerloo line branch of the RMT rail union has passed a resolution calling for their union to call a Saturday demonstration against the threat of new anti-strike laws. Text of the motion and more at freeourunions.org. □

- Texts for motions on many issues, and details of other campaigns, at workersliberty.org/agenda



Upcoming meetings

Workers' Liberty meetings are open to all. Unless otherwise stated those listed are online. We have many local (in-person) meetings, [see online](#).

Wednesdays 15 February, 1 March, 15 March 7.45pm: Workers' unions fighting back – strike waves in British history, New Cross Learning, 285-287 New Cross Road, London, SE14 6AS

Thursday 16 February 3-5pm: Tubeworker monthly meeting – Earthquake relief and international workers' solidarity. With UID-DER (Uluslararası İşçi Dayanışması Derneği, Association of International Workers Solidarity).

Saturday 18 February 11am: Southampton AWL – The strike wave, how can it win?, The Art House, 178 Above Bar Street, Southampton, SO14 7DW

Mondays until 27 Feb, 7pm: Communist Manifesto study group continues

Wednesday 22 February, 7pm: James Connolly – Socialist, Nationalist and Internationalist, Marchmont Centre, London, WC1N 1AB

Friday-Sunday, 14-16 July: Ideas for Freedom 2023, London, a weekend of socialist debate and discussion. Watch this space!

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



Ballots

Until 16 Feb: Royal Mail postal workers (CWU) re-ballot for action over pay and conditions

Until 20 Feb: Junior doctors (BMA) ballot for action over pay

Until 21 Feb: Workers centrally employed by Transport for London (RMT) ballot for action over pay and conditions

Until 27 Feb: Civil servants in HMRC; VOA; Companies House; Care Quality Commission; Welsh Government (PCS) re-ballot for action over pay and conditions

Until 2 Mar: Tube drivers on London Underground's Bakerloo, Central, District, Hammersmith and City, and Jubilee lines (RMT) ballot for strikes to defend manual detrainment

Until 7 Mar: UK Power Networks workers in London, the South East & East (Unite) ballot for action over pay □

Osborne and the Trojan Horse affair



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

A previous column about the right wing journalist Peter Osborne (*Solidarity* 661) described how this one-time “conventional conservative” had been transformed by the Iraq war into someone feted by sections of the left. I described his politics as “right wing isolationism”

That column described Osborne’s largely uncritical admiration for Islam and Islamic regimes, including some ultra-reactionary Islamists.

I will now go on to examine Osborne’s long-standing interest in the Birmingham Trojan Horse affair – an alleged plot or campaign by some conservative Muslims to take over Birmingham secular state schools and turn them into de facto Islamic schools.

Osborne was actively involved in the campaign to defend the schools and school leaders that had come under scrutiny.

He continues to describe the entire affair as a “hoax” and in his latest book

(*The Fate of Abraham – Why the West is Wrong About Islam*) claims “The case for the Trojan Horse plot now lies in ruins.”

It was accepted by almost everyone, from the outset in 2014, that the Trojan Horse letter was a “hoax” in the sense that it was not what it purported to be (advice from a Birmingham Muslim fundamentalist to a co-thinker in Bradford on how to take over schools), but a ruse to draw attention to what the creator of the letter believed was going on in certain Birmingham schools. That does not mean that claims of an Islamist campaign (or “plot” – call it what you will) were false.

There is eye witness evidence that at one school (Park View), pupils were taught creationism and that a woman cannot refuse her husband sex. At the same school, speakers with extreme Islamist and anti-Israel views were invited to address assemblies. Another school (Oldknow Academy in Small Heath) was found by Education Funding Authority inspectors to have been “taking on the practices of an Islamic faith school” and had excluded non-Muslim staff and pupils from an annual trip – paid for with public money – to Saudi Arabia.

Some of the truth finally emerged

when one of the school leaders dismissed for alleged misconduct, Razwan Faraz, brought a claim to an Employment Tribunal in 2018 (ET cases and decisions are in the public domain).

Faraz was one of five people who had the cases against them dropped by the NCTL (National College for Teaching and Leadership) disciplinary panel in 2017.

Supporters of the five, including Islamist organisations, the SWP, the *Guardian’s* education editor Richard Adams and Osborne, hailed the collapse of the cases as a vindication of their stance that the entire affair was a witch-hunt based upon a “forged” document and fuelled by Islamophobia.

In fact, the collapse of the cases proved nothing of the sort: it was necessitated by legal technicality (important, but a technicality nonetheless) resulting from the incompetence of the NCTL’s lawyers, who had failed to disclose evidence used as part of its prosecution. What the collapse didn’t show was that the evidence against the five was untrue.

So Razwan Faraz would have been well advised, at that point, to have quit while he was ahead. But Mr Faraz insisted upon bringing a claim of

religious discrimination and unfair dismissal against Birmingham Core Education Trust (who’d dismissed him from his job as Deputy Head of Nansen Primary School in 2015) at an Employment Tribunal.

The Tribunal published its decision and its reasoning. It found that Mr Faraz was fairly dismissed because of comments he made on a Whatsapp group called “Park View Brotherhood” in which he described gay people as “animals”. He’d written: “These animals are going out in full force. As teachers we must be aware and counter their satanic ways of influencing young people.”

Other comments posted on the Whatsapp group were viciously misogynistic and antisemitic.

The Employment Judge, Richard Henderson, called Faraz’s comments “demonstrably homophobic” and described him as “evasive” and “not a credible witness”.

This alone is sufficient to show that Osborne’s dismissal of Trojan Horse as a “fake media narrative” that now “lies in ruins” is – quite simply – wrong.

I will discuss Osborne on the Labour Party, antisemitism and Jeremy Corbyn in a future column. □

Arming Ukraine: lessons from history



Eric Lee

By Eric Lee

Everyone knows that the only way to end the war in Ukraine – to really end it – is to ensure a Ukrainian military victory over the Russian aggressor. A decisive victory by the Ukrainians would almost certainly lead to the toppling of the Putin regime. The result would be a de-fanged Russia, one that poses far less of a threat to its neighbours.

Everyone also knows that Ukraine needs the latest tanks and aircraft to achieve that goal. The Russians have been hurling their best weaponry at Ukrainian cities. Ukraine has been fighting back with what they have on hand, mostly Soviet-era tanks and planes.

Everyone knows that – and yet NATO has been slow to arm Ukraine properly. For months, Germany has refused even to allow third countries

such as Poland to re-export their Leopard tanks. Now, finally there has been some movement on this.

But as President Zelensky pointed out in his recent whirlwind tour of European capitals, what Ukraine really needs now is fighter jets. And that, for most NATO countries, is a bridge too far.

Poland’s President, Andrzej Duda, speaking to the BBC’s Laura Kuenssberg, said sending F-16 fighter jets would be a “very serious decision” that was “not easy to take”. In other words, he stepped back from the brink. And Poland was perhaps Ukraine’s strongest ally in NATO.

Why the reluctance? The Poles and others are worried that every time NATO supplies Ukraine with more weapons, they run the risk of Russia considering these to be an act of war. The Russians have already threatened to bomb NATO countries that provide Ukraine with advanced weaponry. So far, that has been a bluff. It may not remain a bluff forever.

There is a history to this

which Ukrainian leaders ignore at their peril.

During the Spanish Civil War, Franco’s forces were aided by Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, who used the opportunity to test their latest weapons. The major Western democracies, including Britain, supported a ban on providing weapons to the Spanish Republic. The result was inevitable: the Republic was crushed, and Spain suffered four decades under Franco’s dictatorship.

In 1956, during the first major uprising against Soviet rule in an Eastern European country, the Hungarians overthrew the Stalinist regime that had been imposed upon them. The Soviet response was to invade the country. As Western powers, including the United States, had been encouraging the Hungarians to rebel against the Soviets, many Hungarians naively expected NATO to come to their rescue. There are stories of Hungarians standing on roof-tops in Budapest, scanning the skies for signs of American aircraft. Those planes never came.

Thousands of brave Hungarians died and many more fled the country.

The Ukrainians have been cheered on by NATO and most of the world for an entire year now. Everywhere Zelensky goes, both in the real world and online, he is greeted as a hero. But as Ukraine faces an imminent and long-expected Russian counter-offensive, his biggest ask has been answered with a deafening silence. No one wants to rile the Russian bear, to provoke an increasingly deranged Putin to do something mad. So no one, not even the Poles, are in any hurry to give Ukraine the tools it needs to finish the job.

Everyone knows that for the war to end, Ukraine must get the latest equipment, the best weapons that NATO can offer, including fighter jets. Without those, the Russians might turn their fortunes around. But NATO is hesitating.

A year ago, the blue and yellow Ukrainian colours could be seen all over the Western world, including in the UK. Public support for Ukraine is



Hungarian anti-Stalinist rebels, 1956

undiminished. But now that support has to be transformed into mass campaigns involving thousands and demanding that governments do more than applaud Zelensky and the undoubted bravery of his people. Ukraine must not suffer the fate of Spain or Hungary.

Socialists and trade unionists should march in the streets in the run-up to the anniversary of the Russian invasion and on their banners and placards should be the clearest possible message: Arm Ukraine! □

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

After TSSA, all unions need checking



Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

An Inquiry has found a culture of sexism, harassment and bullying in the Transport Salaried Staffs Association (TSSA).

Helena Kennedy KC reported: "It gave me no pleasure to uncover a series of appalling incidents, alongside leadership and management failings in the TSSA. These incidents included inappropriate and sexual touching, sexual assault, coercive and manipulative behaviour, violent and disrespectful language, humiliation and denigration of members of staff, reps and members of the Executive Committee."

Included in the recommendation is that none of the current senior staff she calls the "internal leadership" should remain in the organisation.

The TSSA commissioned the Inquiry after *Reel News* published a video in which ex TSSA full-timer Claire Laycock made allegations against Manuel Cortes (the then General Secretary of the TSSA), Luke Chester (a member of TSSA staff) and Tim Roache (then General Secretary of the GMB). *Reel News* had to defend against an injunction by the TSSA attempting to kill the story after the TSSA enforced a Non-Disclosure Agreement to stop Claire Laycock repeating her sexual harassment allegation.

This comes after the 2020 report by Karon Monaghan QC into sexual har-

assment within the GMB concluded the union was "institutionally sexist", with bullying, misogyny, cronyism and sexual harassment endemic. Though details of the assaults were different in the different unions, findings on the sexist, undemocratic cultures of covering up for senior officials were markedly similar. Every union should be investigating its internal culture,

A damning inquiry by Bruce Carr KC into the Royal College of Nursing, a non-TUC union, has exposed bullying, misogyny and a sexual culture where women are at risk of "alcohol and power-related exploitation". The report said RCN's senior leadership had been "riddled with division, dysfunction and distrust" and condemns the male-dominated governing body, known as Council, as "not fit for purpose".

Responding to the report on TSSA, TUC General Secretary Paul Nowak said:

"Today's report reveals a shameful and unacceptable culture of bullying and sexual harassment at the TSSA. Sexual harassment and bullying have no place in the trade union movement or any workplace. The TUC believes the women who came forward to share their experiences. I'm pleased the TSSA has committed to act on Helena Kennedy's recommendations and have asked the TSSA to meet with me and the TUC President to discuss next steps. This report must lead to genuine culture change. The union movement must be a place where women feel safe and supported."

The TUC has made no comment on allegations that complaints about

Cortes had been repeatedly ignored by then TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady.

Changes

It is very unlikely that these unions subject to independent inquiries are alone in their faults. The entire labour movement must face up to these findings. Activists should fight for democratic reforms and changes in culture.

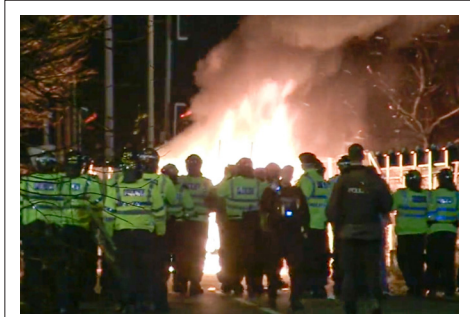
Recurring themes in the reports include:

- The failure or inability of lay executives to oversee staff at the top of the union.
- Cultures of cronyism, offering a route to higher paid jobs through loyalty.
- Alcohol and banter in social scenes which staff had to be part of to hold influence.
- Sexist tropes, beliefs, and behaviours common and tolerated.
- Low level of rank-and-file involvement and power.

Our unions cannot be allowed to be controlled by gangs of high-paid staff operating a system of patronage and cover-up.

When allegations against GMB General Secretary Tim Roache emerged many trade union leaders pointed to the need to address a wider cultural problem (at times, it seemed, to distract from specific allegations). Three years on, more examples of that poor culture are being unearthed.

The current strike wave has brought in many new activists into our unions. PCS and NEU picket lines were visibly full of young women. In addition, many



On 10 February, a far-right crowd of 400 fought with police outside a hotel housing asylum seekers in Knowsley, near Liverpool. A similar far-right protest, notably involving Patriotic Alternative, is scheduled in Rotherham on 18 Feb. Labour-movement-based united-front mobilisation is needed against this new far-right surge. More on asylum-seekers: page 6.

longstanding activists have been reinvigorated by the struggle, throwing off demoralisation from years of defeat and inactivity. These activists can be the base of a new movement for the democratic reforging of our unions.

Those groups which face specific discrimination – women; black, and migrant workers, LGBTQ+ workers; disabled workers – need real self-organisation within unions from branch to national level. Those structures must be more than "advisory" – to have adequate resources and power to ensure their issues are taken up.

Bigotry, prejudice and oppression divide workers and make us weaker. The measures we need to make our unions safer for women and more able to defeat our bosses are the same. □

Ukrainian socialists visit UK in March

By Dan Katz

Olenka Gulenok and Kateryna (Brie) Kostrova, two activists from the Ukrainian socialist organisation Sotsialnyi Rukh (Social Movement, SR), are visiting Britain in March. Their visit is hosted by Workers' Liberty.

The comrades will meet activists, trade unionists, socialists and feminists as they briefly tour the country, speaking at conferences and public meetings.

No-one on the British left should understate the significance of what they have to say or misunderstand the urgency of their message.

The comrades of SR have been active in countless campaigns against the Ukrainian capitalist class. And now they

have the added burden of having to fight the new Russian invasion and occupation. The comrades of SR represent a clear and authentic voice on the Ukrainian left, where no-one has any sympathy at all for the mealy-mouthed Stop the War-style "stop fighting" position which offers back-handed support to Putin.

The Ukrainian unions and left back the war against Russia and for Ukrainian self-determination while simultaneously defending the living standards and rights of the Ukrainian working class. In particular, the comrades of SR know that a Russian victory would mean the destruction of Ukrainian democracy, the labour movement and socialist organisations. Meetings include:

Sunday 5 March. Reception from 5pm, Bread and Roses, Clapham Manor Street, London. Tuesday 7 March: AWL

International Women's Day meeting, Marchmont Centre, Marchmont Street, central London. Thursday 9 March: Public

meeting, Nottingham. Friday 10 March: Public meeting, Sheffield. Saturday 11 March: Public meeting, Liverpool. □

Akehurst and the ban

Labour Party National Executive right-winger Luke Akehurst has posted on Twitter (bit.ly/la-sm) to recommend an [article](#) by *Solidarity* contributor Sean Matgamna on left antisemitism. "Quite a read", he says.

True enough. But how does Akehurst reconcile his support for purging people from the Labour Party just for social-media "likes", "shares", or "retweets" of Workers' Liberty output with his own tweet?

The ban on Workers' Liberty passed by the National Executive in spring 2022 had a "dispensation" saying it was all right for people to attend Workers' Liberty meetings if they were "debating", and that exemption seemed to have been motivated by the fact that in 2016 Akehurst spoke (in debate) at the Workers' Liberty summer school.

So another "dispensation" should be added now?

We know of one comrade

sent a notice of "termination" from Labour on grounds of "liking" Workers' Liberty tweets who has been "acquitted".

Another sent a notice on similar lines a while back had his "termination" stalled for almost a year, and it has been reopened only now they've been nominated for an influential union position.

The purges are undemocratic and arbitrary. □

Rights for under-18 asylum-seekers!

By Wilson Gibbons and David Santos

Since 2021, the UK government has contracted hotels to house Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) in lieu of moving them into Local Authority care.

A recent investigation by the Observer found that dozens of under-18s had gone missing from a Brighton hotel with reports that they were being picked up from outside the hotel by traffickers, sparking outrage and protests. Fundamentally, this child protection failure is the result of decades of dehumanising anti-migrant sentiment and policy.

Months before that investigation, another report counted over 200 children missing from hotels on the south coast, with less than half being found. Internal memos show that the government was aware that it had been running “illegal children’s homes” but then acted against advice to end the policy. That decision has put Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children in danger.

Moving across borders creates precarity, and as borders are raised ever higher people who move become ever more precarious either on their journey or at their destination. By leaving young people in hotels without status of any sort, the government is opening further opportunities for this exploitation to happen.

Socialists should not take lightly the risks that going missing can pose to the

young people. The possibility of these young people being trafficked internally is clear – the difficulty entering the UK often leaves people indebted to those who bought them here or involved in other criminalised activities which pose a risk to them.

Several children who went missing from one hotel in Brighton were found in a cannabis farm. Others have been found in cars with known gang members, or found hundreds of miles away involved in county lines.

One source suggested to the Observer that people are being “recruited” by traffickers who tell them they’ll be sent to Rwanda if they stay in the hotel. In these scenarios the young people are likely making a choice they view as beneficial. It highlights further how government policy is creating the opportunity to exploit these young people and the need to support migrants with equal rights and better options when they reach the UK.

Currently, the most important way to do this for UASC is to pressure the Home Office to end its hotel policy, and instead bring children directly into Local Authority care. (Older asylum-seekers should also have proper accommodation, not hotels). State welfare policies are inadequate and subject to change, but can provide some security and stability to UASC.

The young asylum-seekers are entitled to go to school and have the same provision as other children looked

after by Local Authorities. That can help them put down roots and reduce the risks of exploitation that come with moving. We should advocate for the expansion of these systems to provide additional universal support, including to those over 18.

UASC also gain additional support making their asylum claim and appealing Home Office decisions. Some radical social workers even suggest “quadruple planning” with young people – planning around the three possible Home Office outcomes but also informing young people of how to stay in the country with no status as safely as possible.

Children do still go missing from local authority care, but the risks posed to them are more managed, rather than left as an unknown.

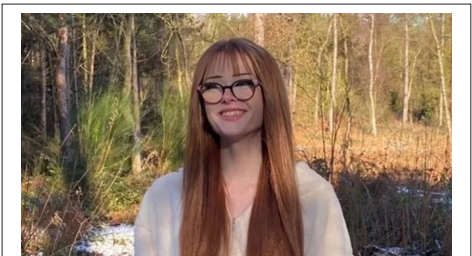
Some young people may leave Home Office hotels to seek family or friends who may be undocumented and need to remain safe. Those who are missing deserve safeguarding, but as socialists we should not be relaxed about the risks that large police investigations pose to other undocumented migrants.

UASC are not treated as absconding from immigration services when they go missing, but the people they may be seeking out might well be. And as soon as they turn 18 the likelihood of a UASC being treated as an illegal immigrant and detained or deported increases exponentially.

Current police missing investigations

are inadequate *because* policing is not about protection. It would be difficult to imagine as many citizen children going missing without being found because of the relation of policing to the Hostile Environment and an institutional bias against migrants. Calling for the state to find these young people risks empowering police further surveillance over all migrants. Socialists should advocate for investigations into missing under-18s by a civilian safeguarding body rather than the police.

Socialists must continue to fight for free movement and safe legal routes to enter the UK. We must organise community resistance to detention and deportations, and safe, autonomous spaces for undocumented people. We should advocate for asylum seekers to have the right to work and against the expansion of the Hostile Environment in our workplaces and communities. □



Over 30 vigils are planned across the UK in memory of Brianna Ghey, a 16 year old trans woman who was murdered on 11 February. See bit.ly/b-ghey □

When the lakes run dry



Environment

By Stuart Jordan

Without immediate emergency measures, one of the Western Hemisphere’s keystone ecosystems is at risk of collapse. The Great Salt Lake in Utah, USA, has lost 73% of its water since 1860 and scientists have warned “without a dramatic increase in water flow to the lake in 2023 and 2024, its disappearance could cause immense damage to Utah’s public health, environment, and economy.”

The saline lake provides habitat for ten million migratory birds and is the only significant body of water in North America’s most arid region. It is running dry mostly due to local farmers extracting water from tributaries upstream to irrigate water-intensive crops, mostly for cattle feed.

This winter 800 square miles of lakebed was exposed, sending brown clouds of toxic dust over two million

residents of Salt Lake City and beyond. The retreating water leaves a salty dust laced with heavy metals. If the lake runs dry, these sediments will create a permanent Toxic Dustbowl.

The Great Salt Lake is one of a number of inland seas that have run dry in recent years. Benjamin Abbott, one of the scientists who wrote the report notes “No one has succeeded in restoring these saline lakes systems when they start to decline.”

Take Lake Chad. In 1979, a state-owned rice company built the Maga Dam to divert the Logone River, which flows out of the Congo rainforest into new paddy fields. It cut the flow into Lake Chad by 55%, reducing the floodplain from 3,000 square miles to less than 160 square miles. With similar dam building and irrigation works in all the tributaries, the lake has diminished by 90% since the 1960s.

Elephants and lions have fled one of their last refuges in the Waza National Park. Thirteen million farmers, fishers, and herders, including the most numerous nomadic people on Earth, the Fulani, are suffering water shortages,

crop failure, collapsed fisheries, soil erosion, deforestation, and destitution. The ecologically degraded region has given birth to Islamist insurgency Boko Haram, adding further misery. 2.9 million are now internally displaced and 5.6 million are food insecure.

In Central Asia, the Aral Sea was once the fourth largest inland sea in the world. It is now a toxic desert, as a result of Promethean fantasies of Stalinist rulers, then the gangster capitalists who took control after the collapse of the USSR. Under Stalin, the goal of self-sufficiency meant the arid plains of Central Asia were transformed into cotton plantations. Cotton is a thirsty crop, so in the early 1960s, an 800 mile irrigation canal was built to drain the Amudarya river into the deserts of Turkmenistan. The Karkakum canal remains the longest irrigation canal in the world, and has turned a desert state into the most profligate per capita water user on Earth. By 1980 over 120 billion cubic metres of water was being extracted from the Aral Sea basin to irrigate 20 million acres of cotton fields.

The people of the region have slaved

for generations in these cotton fields and, despite partial successes from international union campaigns, forced labour persists.

The people who live on the banks of the Aral sea are now destitute, as the tourist and fishing industries they depended on collapsed with the retreating waters. Hundreds of thousands of working-age people are leaving. Those who are left behind are being killed by the salty dust of the seabed, which is dense with pesticide residues and heavy metals. 95% of women have anaemia. One in twenty babies are born with birth defects. The region has some of the highest rates of cancer in the world. Average life expectancy is just 51 years.

Scientists and environmentalists are calling on the Utah State Legislature to act to save the Great Salt Lake by imposing strict limits on agricultural water extraction. The suffering of the people of the Aral Sea and Lake Chad provide a stark warning of what happens if we let farmers drain our rivers and lakes dry. □

• Thanks to Fred Pearce’s book *When the Rivers Run Dry*

Israel: equivalent of 1.6 million on streets

By Ollie Moore

The last round of demonstrations in Israel in opposition to the new far-right government mobilised nearly 250,000 people, according to journalist Noga Toparnopolsky. An equivalent mobilisation in a population the size of the UK's would see around 1.6 million people on the streets.

At the time of writing, a "general strike" is planned for Monday 13 February. Some professional associations, such as the Israeli Attorneys' Organisation, are supporting the strike and have declared that their members will participate. 2,000 physicians have also signed a petition supporting the call for the strike. Arnon Bar-David, the leader of Histadrut, Israel's main trade union centre, has said Histadrut is not participating in the strike. Rather grandiosely, Bar-David has said that "only the head of the Histadrut has the authority to shut down the economy."

Nevertheless, it is likely the day will see many workers walk off the job – possibly, in many places, with the tacit or explicit support of their employers. A recent protest action by workers from Israel's tech sector was backed by several major firms, worried about the international economic implications of the new government's policy. Students are also likely to join the strike; at least one university, Haifa, where 40% of the students are Palestinian, has said it will allow students to retake any exams missed due to participation in the walk-out.

The demonstrations have mainly focused on the government's domestic agenda, especially its plans to reform the judiciary. Israel's independent judiciary is seen as a check on governmental power; one of the new government's first bills is a reform package that would limit the ability of the High Court to rule against Knesset legislation, and would

increase governmental influence over the appointment of judges. Israelis rightly fear a slide into outright authoritarianism.

Peace Now, [Standing Together](#), and other anti-occupation and left-wing groups, have intervened in the demonstrations to emphasise the need for the opposition movement to take up the question of the occupation and Israel's treatment of the Palestinians. In response to the opposition movement's self-conception as a movement in defence of democracy, some have used slogans such as "no democracy with occupation".

In a recent interview, the veteran Palestinian journalist Atallah Mansour stressed the need to intervene in the opposition movement (sections of which are nationalist and conservative, though anti-Netanyahu) with a policy of joint struggle: "If I as an Arab want to be a partner and express solidarity and join in the struggle, and they tell me no, what do they expect me to do? Arab protesters want to express their pain and not just the Jews' pain. It's impossible to protest without mentioning the Palestinian issue. It has to be a joint Jewish and Arab struggle because we have to arrive at a solution and political settlement with the Palestinians."

Meanwhile, the Israeli military has stepped up a programme of raids across Palestinian towns and cities. At least 40 Palestinians have been killed so far in 2023. The military actions represent a significant escalation, with raids now being conducted in daylight in urban centres in the occupied West Bank. Palestinians have also carried out attacks against Israelis, including a car ramming on 10 February and a shooting at a synagogue on 28 January.



obstruct settlement construction. But a guerilla campaign in the form of sallies from the cooped-up and separated Palestinian-autonomy islands within the West Bank ("Area A"), unlinked with civil mobilisation including of Palestinian and other pro-democracy Israeli citizens, has no prospect of forcing Israeli withdrawal and acknowledgement of Palestinian sovereignty. In the case of Hamas, its military operations, which seek to strike civilian targets, are inseparable from its wider political and social project, which is thoroughly reactionary.

An uprising in the West Bank can only succeed in making gains for democracy and equality if it is able to link with social upheaval inside Israel itself – amongst Israel's Palestinian minority and within the Jewish population too.

Only co-resistance based on the principle that both national peoples, Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian-Arab, must have equal rights, including an equal right to national self-determination and statehood ("two nations, two states"), can hope to force the occupation to roll back. The struggles of anti-occupation forces within Israel's opposition movement are, therefore, vital. □

Although the new government has so far held back from launching a full-scale war against Gaza, it did conduct air raids on 2 February in response to rocket fire from Hamas, and a renewed assault remains a distinct possibility. Israeli attacks on Gaza have a devastating effect due to the cramped living conditions and social deprivation stemming in large part from years of siege and blockade.

Settlements

On Tuesday 7 February, Belazel Smotrich, a government minister from the Religious Zionist party, responded to US pressure to halt settlement construction and house demolition by insisting there would be "no construction freeze in Judea and Samaria, period". ("Judea and Samaria" is a term used by Israeli-Jewish nationalists to stress sole Jewish ownership and sovereignty over the occupied West Bank.)

The Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* reports a recent analysis by the director of the CIA which suggests conditions are ripe for another intifada – an armed uprising by Palestinians. *Ha'aretz* also reports Palestinian journalist Nasser Laham's analysis that the increase in Palestinian militancy is not necessarily being driven by traditional Palestinian nationalist and Islamist paramilitary groups, but by looser, grassroots networks of younger people with "no leadership, no head, no commander leading it and no one who's controlling the money." Israeli journalist Anshel Pfeffer identifies a risk of "civil war" within Israeli society itself, as Jewish-Israeli society fractures along political and religious lines.

The situation is bleak. Palestinians have a right to defend themselves against Israeli military raids, and to



The World Health Organization [says](#) that Covid is at a "transition point" – probably moving into being a "background" disease, always there, with occasional flare-ups (and a continuing large burden of "post-Covid" conditions). We're ending this special column, for now anyway, because the measures needed on the Covid danger now tend to merge into public-health measures for infectious disease more generally. They are still urgent:

- 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
- bring social care into the public sector with NHS-level pay and conditions for staff
- specialist public clinics for post-Covid conditions, more research, and recognition of the conditions as a "disability"
- 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. □

150 at Modi film showing

By Sacha Ismail

Over 150 people attended a showing of "India: The Modi Question" at SOAS university in London on 7 February, organised by the India Labour Solidarity Campaign (ILS).

The BBC [documentary](#) – about Narendra Modi's role in the 2002 [massacres](#) of Muslims in Gujarat – has been banned in India, and students in particular have suffered [repression](#) for trying to watch it.

The SOAS event was an opportunity to watch the programme (its first hour-long instalment) together and discuss the issues, while demonstrating solidarity with comrades in India.

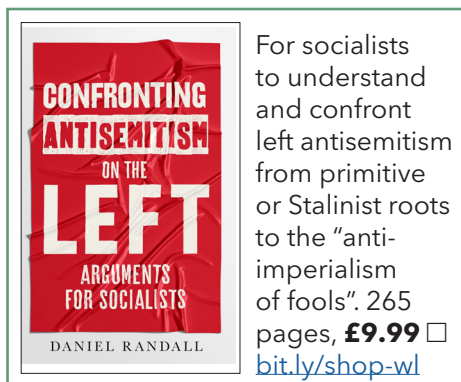
As well as ILS, the meeting heard

from Aakash Bhatt, whose father, Gujarat police officer Sanjiv Bhatt, was jailed after trying to expose Modi's role in 2002; and [Kashmiri](#) human rights campaigner Mirza Saaib Beg.

There was some important discussion about to what extent Modi's rule represents a sharp break from the situation in India in the 20th century, and to what extent it has sharpened existing repressive and right-wing trends.

SOAS activists are planning to show the second half of the documentary in early March. There have also been showings at Oxford University and LSE. It would be well worth organising one in your university or elsewhere. □

- Get an ILS speaker: indialaboursolidarity@gmail.com



For socialists to understand and confront left antisemitism from primitive or Stalinist roots to the "anti-imperialism of fools". 265 pages, £9.99 □ bit.ly/shop-wl

Holodomor: the Ukrainian

By Vincent Présemy

"Collectivisation" in the USSR began at the end of 1929: it caused some damage but the Holodomor was not its immediate consequence. Rather, the famine was the result of decisions that were taken in the autumn of 1932. In the framework of the law on "socialist property" of 7 August 1932, which aimed to repress any act driven by peasant hunger, a whole series of terrible decisions were made, all of them going back to Stalin personally, intentionally targeting Ukrainians, who were identified with unruly peasants whose "nationalism" was supposedly manipulated by "Polish spies".

On 8 November, the morrow of the anniversary of October 1917 and of the suicide of Stalin's young wife, Nadezhda Alliluyeva, the Politburo decided to cut off supplies to kolkhozes [collective farms], sovkhoses [state-run farms] or individual farmers in Ukraine who would not meet their quotas; 1,623 kolkhoz directors were arrested. The purge targeted the base of the apparatus, the small bosses who were suspected of being too close to and generous with their peasants.

On 18 November, against the advice of the Ukrainian CP, an order was given to return surplus grain from the previous sowing! On the 20th, a fine was introduced in for those who failed to deliver the required grain, which was to be paid in meat: a monstrously cruel measure which amounted to killing what little remained of the collectivised livestock. On the 27th the Politburo set

Stalinist agents take food from peasants, Novo-Krasne, Ukraine, November 1932



the deliveries due from Ukraine at one third of those required from the whole of the USSR. On the 28th the collective farms that did not deliver their "due", which had already been blacklisted, were condemned to give up fifteen times the amount demanded. This meant that they would be stormed and looted by armed units.

This turn was clearly directed against the "Ukrainian nationalism" that was supposed to have infected the party. The policy of "Ukrainisation", a kind of linguistic and cultural liberalism (described by pro-independence communists as paternalistic), which had been pursued from 1920-23, was officially ended. And it was ended in the worst way: at a congress of folk singers, known as kobzaris, held in Kharkiv, the artists were rounded up and deported to Karelia, where most were shot in 1937. The use of the Ukrainian language in education and administration was suppressed outside the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, first and foremost in Kuban [to the east of the Azov sea], where it was probably still the majority language at that time. The aim was to build a "new party", making Ukraine the "fortress of the USSR", a "model SSR". On 5 December the famine was officially declared by the head of security in Ukraine, Balitsky, following a meeting with Stalin, to be the result of a Ukrainian nationalist plot in collaboration with Poland. On 14 December, a party purge in Ukraine was launched, affecting one third of its members. Policemen and apparatchiks knew that if they showed mercy to the hungry or asked for help, they would be sent down for "nationalism".

On 21 December it was announced that the annual grain quota required for 1933 would have to be reached by the end of January! Such a decision was taken in full knowledge of the facts: it condemned 3 million human beings to death. On 14 January, the borders of

the Ukrainian SSR and city limits were closed off. The whole system of internal passports, instituted on 27 December 1932, was deployed from then on: armed columns shot at fugitives, labelled as counter-revolutionaries who were pretending to be hungry in order to sabotage the realisation of socialism.

Deaths

Then, the final blow: in February-March 1933 the last seeds were collected – 38,000 people were arrested in the course of this collection. After that, Ukraine became a silent graveyard.

Excess mortality due to famine in Ukraine saw about 250,000 deaths in 1932 and 3,250,000 in 1933, with another 150,000 in 1934. 300,000 victims were city dwellers, not all of them Ukrainians, the rest were rural people, almost all of them Ukrainians. Outside Ukraine, in 1932-1933, famine killed about 700,000 people in provincial Russia, but also in the Bashkir, Udmurt and Mordvin regions of the Black Earth Region and the Volga. 500,000 people died in the plains of the northern Caucasus, including almost all the Ukrainians in the Kuban, which was then de-facto "de-ukrainised".

Famines played a structural role in establishing that overall relationship of domination which was the stuff of the Stalinist regime. Under the name of "construction of socialism", this regime undertook an unbridled accumulation of fixed capital: it was the real antithesis of the hopes of the October revolution, and particularly of the peasants' socialisation of the land, which abolished as the land was put under state ownership, and serfdom reintroduced under the name of "collectivisation".

The famine of 1933 and its denial – we are starving but we have to admit that we live much better! – locked the new regime into place. It was preceded by the Kazakh famines (1932: 1.3 million dead and 2 million refugees out of 4 million inhabitants), which is referred

to as Jasandy Acharchylyk by present-day Kazakh dissidents, or Aqtaban Subryndy by some historians, and also the famines of Outer Mongolia and Tuva. The causes of these famines involved no meteorological factors: only social reasons related to the so-called collectivisation.

But at what point should famines cross a line into being considered genocides? At the end of 1932 and beginning of 1933 the Soviet authorities took decisions aimed at killing millions of Ukrainians. The facts also establish radical, qualitative differences between this famine and that of 1921: between the Stalinist "great leap forward" of 1929-1933 and the "war communism" of 1918-1921 (and there can be no question of prettifying the latter, but that is another question).

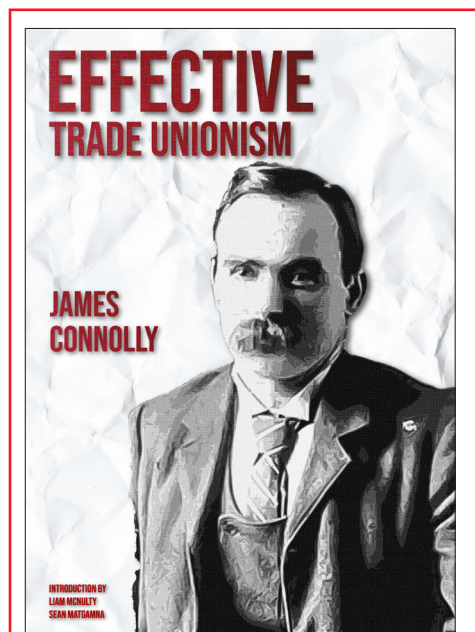
The death by hunger of nearly four million Ukrainians in the USSR in 1933, making up between two-thirds and three-quarters of the deaths from hunger at that time in the USSR, was deliberately amplified. This was the necessary founding act to seal the definitive transition to Stalinist society: a specific social formation based on exploitation and oppression. Stalin did not need a racial extermination ideology to do this, going beyond his derzimorda contempt for these hick Ukrainians, his irritation at their national feeling, and his sure, sharp paranoia.

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Aiming to replace capitalism with socialism, James Connolly's organising and ideas evolved considerably. One idea he clung to from the turn of the century to his death in 1916 was industrial unionism, workers' solidarity across grades and trades, and sympathetic strikes. That is how he saw his work in the Irish Transport Union. £5. □

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Ukrainian famine of 1932-3



We can – and should – speak of genocide, as it played a role as a touchstone for the whole USSR, having targeted the main non-Russian nationality of the whole entity.

The Holodomor paved the way for measures of ethnic cleansing. The first de facto “ethnic cleansing” dates from 1933: it was that of the Ukrainians of Kuban. Then, very quickly, in the second half of the 1930s, there were the mass deportations of Koreans, Poles, and other peoples. Then the “punished peoples” of the Second World War: Chechens or Crimean Tatars. Not forgetting, above all, the mass deportations and expulsions targeting Germans, Hungarians, etc., associated with mass rapes in Central Europe in 1944-1945, which the Nazi crimes in no way excuse. This ethno-nationalist dimension is found in the Chinese, North Korean and Vietnamese regimes. So, while a racial or ethno-nationalist intention may not be present as a causal factor in the Holodomor, the Holodomor nevertheless opened the floodgates to what must be called the racist or ethnicist dimension of Stalinism (and Mao-Stalinism), which are still present today in various forms, and often structurally associated with antisemitism.

Trotsky

The blackout of the facts of the Holodomor at the time was very powerful and misled even the Ukrainian émigré community to some extent. A rather interesting aspect is the evolution of the position of the main political opponent of the USSR, Leon Trotsky. He had very little information about the Ukrainian famine in 1932-33: he knew that there was a famine, but he spoke of harm to the peasantry in general, but not specifically of any particular nationality. It was at the end of the thirties that the fight for a Ukraine that was both Soviet in the true sense of the word, and therefore democratic, unified and independent, took a central place in his writings. Although he did not pose this explicitly, he was calling into question the very existence of the USSR, a bureaucratic state that was an exploiter and a prison of the people. This growing importance of the Ukrainian question for Trotsky parallels, not coincidentally, the growing importance taken on by the Jewish question, the Jews being in his view threatened with annihilation



Agnieszka Holland's film *Mr Jones* (2019, pictured) was an important step towards raising awareness of the Holodomor outside Ukraine. This British-Polish-Ukrainian production is centred on a real character, the Welsh freelance journalist Gareth Jones, sent to Moscow on the strength of his reputation of having been the first journalist to interview Hitler once he came to power. He arrives in the USSR with a slightly favourable view of the regime, but soon becomes convinced that it is vital that he go and see what is happening in Ukraine. He manages to go there and “escape” into the snowy countryside, where he encounters the Great Famine. The rest of the film sees him trying to get himself expelled from the USSR.

in the very next period, barring proletarian revolution. The march towards the second world war, which accelerated from the Munich agreements when the Hitler-Stalin rapprochement clearly took shape, from the beginning of 1939, and which was no “surprise”, reinforced both the gravity, the high stakes, and the revolutionary potential, of the question of the Russian-Stalinist oppression in Ukraine and the question of anti-Semitism.

However, the Trotskyists, or at least the “orthodox” ones who remained attached to the theory of the “bureaucratically degenerated workers’ state” come what may, did not follow this evolution in Trotsky’s thought: their “defence of the USSR” often remained linked with a visceral mistrust towards many national questions, and the Ukrainian national question in particular.

Today, it is hardly surprising that the central source of Holodomor denial is Putin’s regime in Russia. The “politics of history” is becoming increasingly important in Putin’s politics in general, and the constitutional amendments which were recently approved in a dubious referendum to enshrine an interpretation of history within the constitution. This is a state reaction against the efforts of several generations of “dissidents”, represented by the struggle of the Memorial association, which was born under perestroika and is now being repressed again.

Vladimir Putin’s officially right-wing, traditionalist and conservative government is in line with an increasingly openly-avowed continuity with the regimes of Brezhnev and Stalin. Thus, the

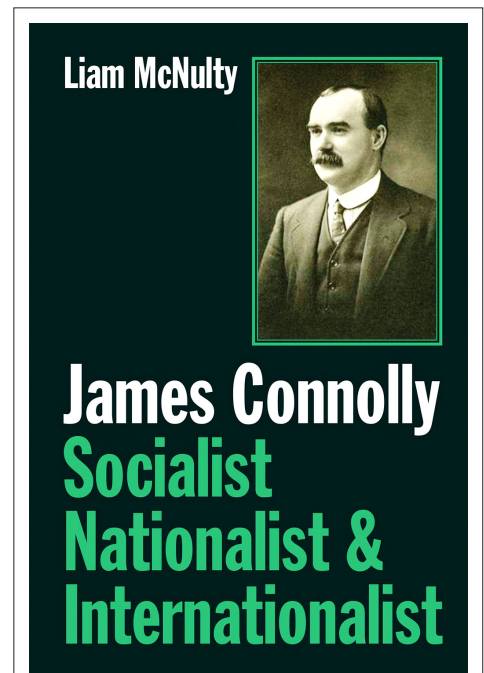
story of the Holodomor is contrasted with the “shared tragedy of the Soviet peoples”: the great misfortune of the famine, it is claimed, should bring Ukrainians closer to the Russian fold instead of pushing them away. Before his death, Alexander Solzhenitsyn gave his full support to this idea, calling the term Holodomor “an insinuation of Bolshevik agitprop” aimed at “confusing brotherly peoples”. The red-white summary of history, as attempted by Putin and his advisors such as Dugin or Surkov, intends to adopt all the military and domineering acts of the past, both tsarist and Stalinist, and only demonises, or brackets off, the October 1917 revolution (and, of course, the figure of Trotsky). In his speech of 17 April 2014, following Russia’s intervention in Crimea and Donbass, Putin, taking up Catherine II’s concept of Novorossia, denounced the creation of Ukraine’s eastern borders, encompassing Donbass, as a Bolshevik crime.

Holodomor denial is now part of the Kremlin’s official discourse on the origins of the Second World War, developed at length by Putin for the American neo-conservative magazine *The National Interest* on 18 June 2020, a laborious undertaking to deny or, better still, justify the Hitler-Stalin alliance. Poland plays the role of scapegoat here, becoming almost the main culprit of the Second World War, based on the annexation of Teschen (Zaolzie for the Poles) during the carving up of Czechoslovakia at the end of 1938 and the Polish-German non-aggression treaty of 1934.

If we look at the history of the 20th

century, from which we inherit our mental and political chains, the Holodomor and Hitler’s rise to power in Germany are twin events, deeply linked. Both establish a before and after. Neither would have happened without Stalinism. One of the two – Hitler – makes a terrible noise that drowns out the few voices reporting that people in Ukraine are dying of hunger on orders from above. But the other, the Holodomor, is no less important by the very fact that it is hushed up, censored, obscured. Had the Holodomor been more widely known about, it would probably have been interrupted and would have led to the undermining of the social regime which was founded and reinforced by its perpetration and subsequent denial of the famine. The nightmarish aspects of our modern world spring from these two distinct but combined sources: Hitler and Stalin. In order to wage a struggle to change the world and win a future, we must be aware of these foundations of the present order. To deny these foundations is an attack against our struggle, because it has no other function than to take away our weapons, those of struggle and organisation, those of consciousness.

• Translated by Edward Maltby. Abridged here, full text online: bit.ly/hol-vp-en, bit.ly/hol-vp



This book discusses Connolly not just as an Irish hero, but traces how he was shaped by and responded to the international socialist and labour movement of his time.

It traces his influences and influence through a transnational network of working-class activists, socialist agitators, and revolutionary nationalists. □

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After the earthquake: solidarity and accountability!

From Marksist Tutum

Scores of provinces in south-eastern Turkey woke up on 6 February to the biggest earthquake in the history of the republic. A 7.7 magnitude earthquake occurred at about 4 in the morning centred around Pazarcık in the Maraş province.

Ten minutes later there was a 6.6 magnitude earthquake centred around Nurdağı in the Antep province, and a few hours later another 7.5 magnitude earthquake occurred in Elbistan, again in the Maraş province. As shown by the separate earthquakes that took place at the same time in Malatya, many movements have been triggered along a fault line hundreds of kilometres long in the region, and violent tremors are continuing.

In an area where the weather is extremely cold, millions of people cannot go into their homes because there is still a strong danger of buildings collapsing. Whilst AFAD (Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency) teams are yet to reach the damaged areas, including Hatay where the destruction is great, the people are trying to reach those trapped under the wreckage with extremely limited means

at their disposal. The highways and airports built by the AKP, which has spent 20 years boasting about its building and infrastructure projects, have become unstable, and many public buildings, including hospitals and municipal buildings, have collapsed into rubble.

It had been made painfully clear that the government and municipalities took no precautions, despite the fact that seismologists (especially Naci Görür) have been warning of a large earthquake for years, almost to the point of specifying the epicentre and magnitude. As seen with many large earthquakes since the 1999 Gölcük earthquake, the disaster has come about under the noses of the officials. And so too has the misery of millions of workers!

While pouring billions of dollars every year into monopoly capital for toll roads, bridges, and even city hospitals, this regime has not lifted a finger to take vital precautions against earthquakes or to strengthen infrastructure in earthquake zones. We are faced with a brutal, profiteering, predatory capital power which even made money from the assembly points after the earthquake. The government claimed to have spent the earthquake taxes on

dual carriageways, airports, and health-care, but we have seen these works reduced to rubble by earthquakes, being submerged under the lightest rain, and getting rendered unusable by the snow; essentially, they fell to pieces.

Even though hours have passed, the true devastation caused by the earthquake has not yet been fully revealed. But we have also learnt from previous similar disasters that even in a situation like this the state busies itself strangling the attempts by workers, labour organisations, and socialists to carry out aid, rather than doing what it should be doing. Not allowing aid teams and donations into the region becomes the greatest struggle. Reports are coming in that a similar attitude is already being taken to this earthquake.

Those who condemned millions of people to be either trapped under rubble or to starve in the cold are trying their hardest to block class solidarity. Unless the workers bury this regime under the rubble it has created, and moreover, unless they condemn the



rule of capital to the dustbin of history, they are unfortunately doomed to experience many more similar pains. Today is the day to raise class solidarity, to come to the aid of our working brothers in the earthquake zone, and to intensify the struggle to hold the government to account. □

• From [Marksist Tutum](#) – translated from Turkish by Pete Boggs. Maraş and Antep are officially known as Kahramanmaraş and Gaziantep, as the Turkish Parliament renamed the areas for nationalist reasons to commemorate battles against the French in the Turkish War of Independence. Marksist Tutum decided to omit the nationalist monikers; *Solidarity* is using the official names for ease of understanding, as these names have been used in the English-language press covering the earthquakes.

Misogyny is not something to sing about

By Wes Harding

Eric Lee ([Solidarity 662](#)) is absolutely correct in deploring the singing of *Delilah* by some Welsh rugby fans. Unfortunately, popular music, folk and blues is riddled with countless examples of deeply misogynistic songs.

I won't be singing along to *Hey Joe* by Jimi Hendrix the next time it's on the radio. The composer of that particular ditty, unlike the *Delilah* lyricist, hailed from South Carolina rather than Wigan, so the murder weapon was a gun, but the motive was the same (*I caught her messin' round with another man*).

Eric mentions the Rolling Stones changing a crucial line in *Let's Spend The Night Together* to satisfy the puritanical standards of mid-sixties American TV. They probably wouldn't have had a problem singing *Under My Thumb*,

where Jagger-Richard refer to a girlfriend as "a squirming dog". And as for *Brown Sugar*, don't go there! It's one of those songs whose lyrics I never listened to until after fifty years the Stones decided it was so inappropriate (racist as well as sexist) that they wouldn't be performing it ever again.

Murder ballads in which the victim is more often a woman abound in folk music. Off the top of my head I can think of *Down in the Willow Garden*, but a trawl through folk song catalogues will quickly throw up many more.

It's a similar story with the Blues. The *32-20 Blues* by the legendary Robert Johnson, where he's going to cut his girlfriend in two with his gun "if she gets unruly", has been covered by scores of artists. There's an early variant on the theme by Skip James with a different calibre – 22-20 – used to the same effect.

There's also the famous *Frankie and Johnny*, with Frankie shooting her man because he "done her wrong", but in the vast majority of instances the violence is against women.

Context

Should songs about domestic violence ever be performed in music venues today? Should we even be listening to them? That is something warranting serious discussion. I would say yes, but with a shedload of context into the mix.

As far as the Blues is concerned there's the added dimension of songs reflecting the lives of Afro Americans living under the Jim Crow of the segregated south. Robert Johnson allegedly poisoned by a "jealous lover", signifying that violence was endemic in the everyday lives of black people.

In recent years though, there

has been a women's fightback in American music, with several artists in the folk and blues field asserting women's rights. Notable mentions would include Rhiannon Giddens' song *No Man's Mama* and a majestic

reworking of *Under My Thumb* by blues singer Shemekia Copeland. Her version of the song would have Mick and Keith cringing! Check it out on her latest album, *Uncivil War*. □



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Bring back hanging? The Tories must be desperate

By Tom Harrison

Venturing into out of the way pubs in the 1970s customers were sometimes confronted with petitions calling for the restoration of the death penalty. It was perhaps unfair to regard all pub landlords as dyed in the wool reactionaries, but given that their profession produced the highest number of alcoholics, ready access to the demon drink maybe turned many licensees into misanthropes back in the day.

Albert Pierrepoint, the state's official hangman, was a pub landlord. His boozier in Oldham was *Help The Poor Struggler*, and since this was meant to be a joke it was a pretty sick one.

Imagine though if the "bring back the rope" brigade manage to get a referendum on the restoration of the death penalty, something dreadful Home Secretary Suella Braverman would probably welcome? The stance of the Brexit supporting press would be obvious. Hysterical articles would gush forth about the need to hang Gary Glitter and his ilk and the Farageist "gammon" channels, GB News and Talk TV would be advocating "stringing 'em up" twenty-four seven.

They wouldn't mention that the abolition of the death penalty in 1969 prevented the execution of scores of people wrongly convicted of murder through miscarriages of justice. Timothy Evans, Derek Bentley, Ruth Ellis, James Hanratty, just some of the names that come to mind. Innocents who could have been destined for the hangman's noose had capital punishment not been abolished included the

Birmingham Six and the Guildford Four.

The death penalty has no place in civilised society and, whatever the shortcomings of European states, it's not on any of their statute books with the exception of Belarus. Not having the death penalty is a condition of European Union membership is prescribed by Protocol 6 (1983) of the European Convention on Human Rights.

Inevitably as sure as night follows day, the Tory MP for the so-called red wall

constituency of Ashfield, Lee Anderson – who owes his seat to Johnson's "get Brexit done" electoral fraud – wants to "bring back hanging". It's been a cry from arch reactionaries ever since capital punishment was abolished in 1969 by the Wilson Labour government.

Though Anderson's call to reemploy the state hangman might have had traction in 1970, it is a non-starter in 2023. For starters, the death penalty for suicide bombers is an obvious nonsense.

Nevertheless, Sunak's appointment of Anderson as Deputy Chairman of the Tory party is a sign of how desperate the Tories are to preserve votes by pandering to atavistic elements within their elderly electoral base, those who've been fed anti-European and anti human rights propaganda. Hopefully at the next General Election it will be the voters who pull the lever and have the Tory government drop through the trap door into oblivion. □

NUS: refresh, don't disaffiliate!

By Workers' Liberty students

In recent weeks motions relating to disaffiliation from the National Union of Students (NUS) have been brought to Oxford and Warwick University Student Unions.

At Oxford the Student Union will hold a binding referendum on whether it should remain affiliated to the NUS. At Warwick the Student Union has voted to disaffiliate by 487 votes to 416 in an all-student vote (around 3% of the nearly 30,000 students at the university).

The immediate background is concern over the [Tuck report](#) on antisemitism in NUS, but the moves reflect long-term political and organisational malaise in and around NUS.

The Warwick motion says:

"The NUS's constant failure over allegations of bigotry and their detachment from key student concerns, as shown by successive low turnout, has left the union without credibility to many students from various backgrounds and politicians from across the spectrum, endangering the success of any future lobbying by NUS UK."

Turning away from NUS in a passive and fairly apolitical protest is no way to change things. A serious approach would be to restore democratic functioning to NUS, re-

versing [decisions in 2019-20](#) which limited democracy, and fight for relevant and militant campaigning. NUS still represents around 95% of further and higher education student unions. What is the point of one or two of the richer student unions, which could have a lot of influence, breaking away?

At this year's NUS conference (15-16 March) Sheffield Students' Union will be arguing for a policy which argues for "refreshed, expanded structures to bring power back to the grassroots and make us a stronger union."

"Democracy is increasingly being sidelined by governments intent on marginalising voices of opposition and protest. The student movement needs to meet that by making a powerful case for democracy in all we do. We believe that ordinary people can make decisions that shape their own lives and we need our institutions to reflect that belief."

Specifically the policy calls for:

"A new national structure with a re-envisioned National Organising Committee (NOC)" which would include full time officers and regional, devolved nation and liberation reps.

This policy, whether passed or not, will be just the start of restoring democracy. We also need to bring back motion-based policy-making at conferences, mandatory elections for delegates, procedures for proper accountability. □

Socialist Worker bemoans backing for Ukraine



Eye on the Left

By Mohan Sen

"Not a single Labour politician", complains Yuri Prasad in *Socialist Worker* of [3 Feb](#), "is today prepared to speak out openly against Nato's flooding of Ukraine with hi-tech tanks and missiles. Whatever their private misgivings about the way arms shipments heighten the danger of nuclear conflict, none will join the platform of a meeting to say so."

Straight off the bat: the big issue of militarism in Ukraine, for *SW*, is not the armed-to-the-teeth Russian invasion, but the provision of (actually so far pretty limited) weaponry to help Ukraine resist.

In an article calling for an anti-war movement, Prasad doesn't mention Russia *once*. He mentions "Ukraine" only as a way of describing supposed aggression by the governments supporting Ukraine.

He contrasts, as an example of when there were better Labour MPs, the 2003 MPs' revolt against Blair on Iraq. In 2003, he points out, there was an "unprecedented wave of anti-war feeling and action that spread across Britain and the world". What's different? Now, unlike in 2003, it is not the UK, US, etc who are the "warmongers". The sort of democratic-minded people who opposed the US-led invasion of Iraq mostly also oppose the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and want Ukraine to win.

"It would [be] far harder for warmongers had even a small number of Labour MPs spo-

ken out." In fact a number of left-wing MPs *have* spoken out against the actual warmongers in this case – Putin's regime – by supporting Ukraine.

Sure, there are left-wing MPs who oppose NATO and fear to say it too publicly. That's a problem, but not a new one: anti-Trident and anti-NATO agitation subsided in the Corbyn years out of desire not to cause difficulties for Corbyn, and the Attlee government was central to launching NATO in 1949. But the reticence about publicly criticising NATO is not a result of opposition to Russia's war, or vice versa.

If there are Labour MPs who oppose arms for Ukraine and don't say it – yes, honesty and outspokenness is better. But we're not sorry this position isn't getting advocated!

Very different too is the issue of increasing UK mili-

tary spending, as shamefully demanded by the [TUC](#) at the behest of the GMB. Among the unions that opposed the GMB's motion at last year's TUC Congress – it only just passed – many take a strong pro-Ukraine stance.

And as usual *Socialist Worker* advocates not unions asserting themselves politically, including in the Labour Party, but passive reflection on "whether Labour is any sort of party for those against war". □

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Sri Lanka: cancel the debt!

By Dan Katz

Sri Lankan workers are suffering from hyperinflation and severe shortages of basic essentials, including food, fuel and medicines.

Acute shortages of foreign currency have made imported goods difficult for workers to obtain or afford.

Inflation in December and January was over 50%. Food price inflation was 85% in October 2022.

In April 2022, Sri Lanka defaulted on over \$50bn of debt to foreign creditors, including the Chinese, Indian and Japanese states. The IMF is refusing to release a \$2.9bn bailout due to the failure of creditors and private external bond holders to agree to the restructuring of Sri Lanka's enormous debt.

In late 2019 Sri Lanka's government – under President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, an extreme Sinhala nationalist who oversaw the murderous obliteration of the Tamil Tiger insurgency in 2009 –

had introduced massive tax cuts which seriously undercut the state's revenues.

Covid-19 decimated the Sri Lankan tourist industry. 200,000 were made unemployed.

And in April 2021 Gotabaya Rajapaksa announced a ban on the import of agrochemicals. Rajapaksa's aim was to save \$400 million in foreign exchange payments. But the consequences were devastating. The rice yield dropped to 2.92mn tonnes in 2021-22, down from the previous year's 3.39mn.

Support for the government fell to 10% in March 2022 when 12-hour power cuts were imposed across the island.

The aragalaya, or "people's protest" brought many thousands onto Sri Lanka's streets. Its slogan was, "Go Home Gota."

On 9 July 2022 Rajapaksa abandoned his official residence in Colombo. Crowds took over the palace

and began swimming in his pool, examining his underwear and sunbathing in the villa's grounds.

Rajapaksa is part of a family of right-wing, repressive, corrupt politicians. Sri Lanka is run by people who are, essentially, venal, well-heeled, thugs and criminals.

President Ranil Wickremesinghe, a former opponent of Gotabaya Rajapaksa who replaced Rajapaksa to head off the 2022 crisis and fill in as President until 2024, was probably responsible for setting up a torture centre during the JVP-Maoist uprising in the late 1980s.

Wickremesinghe has threatened to declare a new State of Emergency and has used the notorious Prevention of Terrorism Act to detain student activists involved in the 2022 protests. He has regularly denounced anti-government protesters as "terrorists" and "fascists".

Wickremesinghe estimates the economy could contract by 3.5% or 4.0%

this year. Under IMF orders taxes have increased. Wickremesinghe promised that, "If we endure this hardship for another five to six months, we can reach a solution." Although he will not be personally suffering any hardship.

Doctors and university teachers working at state-run hospitals and universities staged a 24-hour strike on Wednesday 8 February.

Ranjan Jayalal of the United Trade Union Alliance said, "We have taken to the streets to tell this government that they must immediately and unconditionally withdraw these unfair taxes. If they don't do that, we will make this government kneel and force them to cancel this tax bill."

The brutal repression of Tamils in the north of Sri Lanka continues and the militarisation of society remains a burden on the state's finances and a threat to civil society and the Sri Lankan labour movement. □



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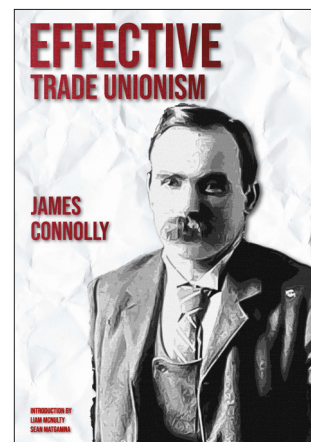
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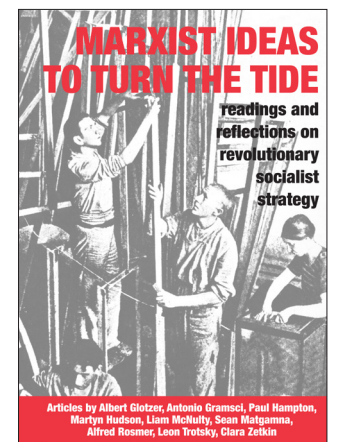
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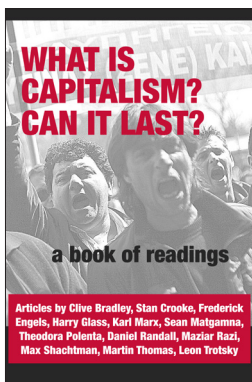
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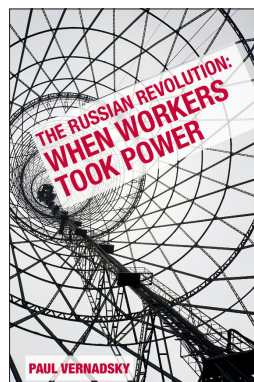
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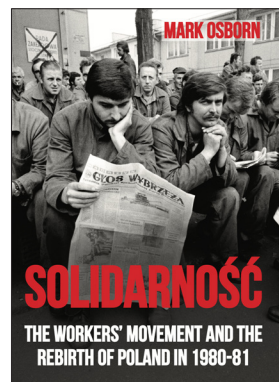
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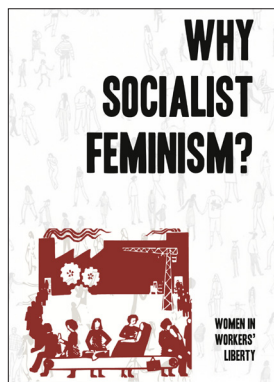
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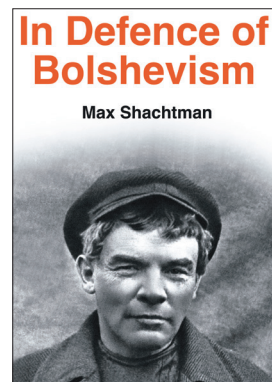
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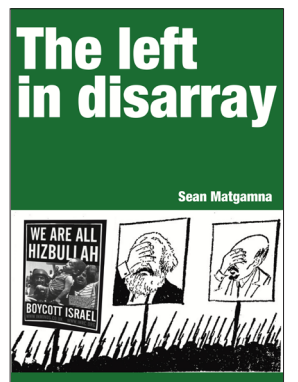
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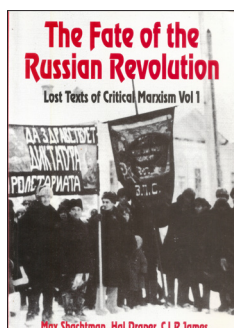
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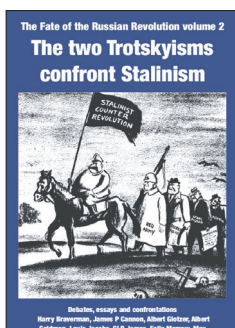
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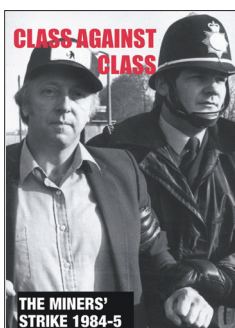
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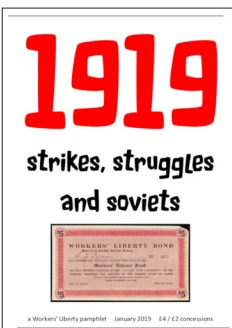
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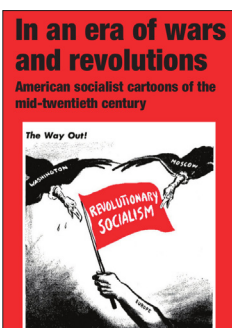
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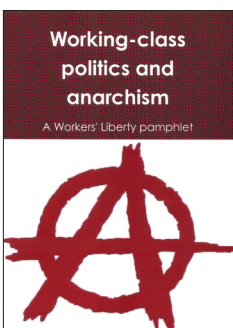
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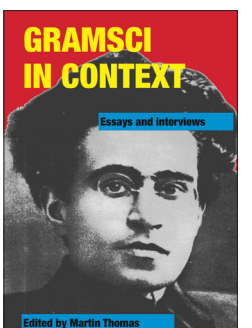
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RCN due to call more strikes

By Alice Hazel

The RCN looks likely to call a 48-hour strike on 1-3 March, with a reduction of derogations in A&E, intensive care, and cancer units. Unison is thought to be looking for unified strike action with other unions.

Escalation and co-ordination are vital and supported by members on the picket lines. For the strikes to win a strategy of increasing action over a short period of time will be much more effective than a long haul of strike days here and there.

It's also important that striking members articulate their demands to maintain pressure on the union leaderships. The RCN demand of 5% above inflation and even Unison's call for an "inflation-busting" pay rise have been set aside by the union leaders in their public statements, with both Pat Cullen of the RCN and Sara Gorton of Unison emphasising their willingness to com-

promise way below that.

The union bureaucracies' attempt to minimise politicisation of the dispute also needs to be challenged. The government has underpaid health workers for years as part of its strategy to demolish the NHS and is especially reluctant to negotiate a way out of the dispute because that would signal rises for other public sector workers. This dispute is very political.

Active solidarity with strikes in other sectors needs to be encouraged through organised NHS-worker picket-line visits. Demands for rebuilding the NHS, taxing the rich, and a workers' government need to be raised on picket lines.

SOS NHS has called a demonstration for 11 March and demands for a union-organised national demonstration for the NHS are growing.

Increasing members' control over the disputes is key. That starts with workers actively discussing the way forward.



Even NHS Confederation chief executive Matthew Taylor said this week that the dispute is "radicalising a generation of NHS workers." Strike committees need to be developed and opened up so that these people are at the fore of decisions about the dispute. Escalation will need effective picketing and increasing strike funds through fund raising. Strike committees should be the centre of organising this activity,

engaging new activists in the dispute.

Trade union branch AGMs are about to happen. Putting motions for escalation and co-ordination of strikes, above-inflation pay rises, political demonstrations and the building of strike committees will mean these picket line discussions are taken up formally in the unions. □

• Model motion: bit.ly/mo-pe

Scottish teachers step up strikes

By James Rink

It is now a whole year since the Scottish teachers' union EIS submitted a 10% pay claim to the Scottish Government and the Scottish local authorities' association COSLA. The employers response was a 5% offer, or 6.85% for the newly qualified.

Teachers have had strikes of various forms since November 2022, including three days of national strikes, and a rolling programme of selective action across all 32 councils in Scotland, two councils each day, over 16 days.

The EIS has recently announced an escalation of ac-

tion in the constituencies of "key decision makers within the Scottish Government and COSLA". This will include the constituencies of the First Minister, Deputy First Minister, and Cabinet Secretary for Educa-

tion, and COSLA Resources Spokesperson Councillor Katie Hagmann. As the Scottish Green Party is part of the Scottish Government, Ross Greer, the Green Education Spokesperson, will also be targeted.

The exact details of schools and dates have yet to be announced, along with potential proposals for a levy across all union members to financially support those taking part in the selective action.

Further all-out strikes are planned on 28 February and 1 March 2023, and a further 20 days of rolling strikes between 13 March and 21 April 2023.

The Scottish Highers exams (equivalents of GCSE and A-level) begin on 24 April, pressure will be building on the Scottish Government and COSLA.

Morale remains high among EIS members, with all the strikes closing all schools affected.

It has been rumoured that Shirley-Ann Sommerville, Cabinet Secretary for Education, will come back to the EIS as early as the week starting 13 Feb with an improved offer. □

UCU: discuss in the branches

By a UCU member

As *Solidarity* goes to press on 14 February, the Higher Education unions have been in talks with employers at the government arbitration service ACAS. In the *Guardian*, Jo Grady, general secretary of UCU, which represents teaching and higher-grade professional staff, has hinted that improvements on non-

pay elements such as workload, casualisation and equalities might be key to a deal. Enforceable framework agreements on these issues would certainly be welcome, but they need to be accompanied by a serious pay rise, not another below-inflation offer. Any offer we do get should be discussed in branches so its implications can be properly assessed before it goes to the members. □

NEU Wales postponement a bad move

By David Pendleton

Following the National Education Union's (NEU) national strike on 1 February, the union is now in rolling regional action:

Tuesday 28 February: Northern, North West, Yorkshire and The Humber.

Wednesday 1 March: East Midlands, West Midlands, Eastern.

Thursday 2 March: London, South East, South West.

Regional demonstrations are planned

on all these days and the national union is pushing for the establishment of strike committees and for as many picket lines as possible. The national union is also pushing Districts to try to involve parents in local campaigning. That is good; but, as more action is called, some parents will understandably become concerned. We should not stop if we can't allay all those fears short-term. If we don't win this dispute the future effect for all school students will be worse. The first day of the roll-

ing regional action was due to be 14 February in Wales. That action has been postponed to 2 March after "detailed" talks with the Welsh government. The Welsh government has offered an additional consolidated award of 1.5% this year, plus a non-consolidated lump sum of 1.5%, all well below the union's demand.

Talks are good, but we would have more leverage in them if the action were ongoing. Our members' action is not a tap that can be turned off and

on at will without an effect on mobilisation and morale. The postponement is a bad signal to our members, telling them that we will stand if the employer is so much as willing to talk.

On the 15-16 March all teachers and support staff in Wales and all teachers in England are due to strike. We need to have significant and escalating action announced now to follow quickly after those dates, before the end of the second term. □

669 What we stand for

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

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

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- Taxing the rich to fund good public services, homes, education and jobs for all
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If you agree with us, take copies of *Solidarity* to sell – and join us! □

• workersliberty.org/join-awl

The keys? You'll have to share



Diary of a railworker

By Steve Allan

In January a person was stabbed at Woolwich station on the Elizabeth Line. Fortunately the victim only sustained minor injuries and the perpetrator was later caught by police. As for staff who witnessed the scene, they were given special leave to process an understandably traumatic experience.

The situation has got staff even more concerned about our own safety. In case of an attack, we have a designated "place of safety", usually the lockable Assistance pods you see by gatelines. Yet many staff do not have the requisite keys to access them.

We have been told for months that more keys are coming, but it is just accepted that we'll have to share. It's not just about safety. We also need these keys to access staff rooms. It's a bit humiliating having to ask a colleague if you can use the toilet.

Meanwhile, attention has turned to-

wards our 2023-4 pay claim. Words from on high suggest the company wants to make a generous offer, but the proof will be in the pudding. More likely they will point towards the allowances made recently and make an offer in line with the national rail dispute.

On our own side, we have no idea what our representatives will demand on our behalf. Basic union democracy demands that members should set the tone, yet the mood is often "trust our benevolent leaders to sort it out". □

• Steve Allan is a worker on the Elizabeth Line in London.

Firefighters should reject offer

By Adrian Noble

The Fire Brigades Union has called off plans to announce strikes, having received a pay offer of 7% for 2022 and 5% for 2023. The union will hold a consultative ballot from 20 Feb to 6 March, with a recommendation to accept the offer.

The offer is a significant improvement on the original 2% in July, and there are no strings attached, but it is still a real-terms pay cut for 2022-3. The union has a strong mandate for action with 88% voting to strike on a 73% turnout, and the offer has been achieved without taking action. The primary reason for this is that each fire brigade is legally

obliged to organise "resilience crews" to provide fire cover during strike action and they have found it very hard to recruit enough scabs. Some brigades have offered up to £1,000 a shift, which shows their desperation.

Firefighters should reject the offer. It is another pay cut on top of the 12% real-terms pay cut since 2010. The union has a lot of leverage due to the lack of adequate fire cover. Even relatively short strikes would put brigades under significant pressure, and could be co-ordinated with other unions. Firefighters and control staff would add their weight to the public sector strike wave during a period

of intense struggle, a context that makes it more likely that a better pay settlement is achievable.

It is a shame that the FBU executive committee has recommended acceptance. Perhaps they felt they would not be able to convincingly win the membership to a reject position – even before the recommendation, the mood on the ground was largely to accept. That is understandable, and there is a feeling that if the dispute went badly, the money spent on scab crews may lead to firefighters returning to a worse offer and cuts. The union is currently enjoying unity and goodwill, which it is important with the three annual fire and rescue ser-

vice white papers gunning for collective bargaining and terms and conditions, and the Minimum Service Level bill coming up.

But the effect is to tell members that they shouldn't have confidence in their ability to win an above-inflation pay rise, and to set a ceiling in the minds of many striking in other sectors of what's possible. There are risks, and a settlement on the offer wouldn't be a terrible outcome to the dispute. But the union has a big mandate and substantial leverage during a generational period of industrial unrest and with employers unable to effectively undermine strike action. If not now, when? □

Ninotchka and Italy's 1946 election



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

Ernst Lubitsch's *Ninotchka* (1939), starring Greta Garbo, was billed as a "romantic comedy", but the comedy dished up is a rather thin gruel.

Garbo plays Ninotchka, a po-faced Soviet bureaucrat who is sent by her Commissar (Béla Lugosi, looking like Count Dracula in a uniform) to Paris on a mission to sort out three wayward colleagues, who have succumbed to the delights of the City of Light. As indeed does *Ninotchka*, eventually falling for the charms of the White émigré Count Léon d'Algout.

The film does make, as might be expected, some valid criticisms of the Soviet Union, but those tend to get lost

in the appallingly clichéd dialogue and wooden acting. Only *Ninotchka's* comment, "The last Moscow trials were a great success. There are going to be fewer Russians but better", hints at the grim reality hovering just below the threadbare plot.

The US State Department sent the film to Italy in time for the first post-war elections in 1946. Some commentators credited it with helping to ensure a victory for the Christian Democracy (who won 35.21 per cent of the votes)... and



if you believe that you'll believe anything! □

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NEC meets 16 Feb



John Moloney

Our reports suggest that the vast bulk of our members who could strike on 1 February did so. We think management have the same assessment. This is obviously encouraging, but we need to step up the action.

We've now announced a further phase of selective action, and a further all-out strike on 15 March, Budget Day, alongside the NEU and hopefully others. This was the outcome of an extensive debate, in which various proposals for more all-out action were discussed.

My position remains that we need as much all-out action, alongside selective action, as possible. Although the NEC eventually decided on just one all-out strike, on 15 March, there is the potential to revisit this if wider coordination around 16 March develops. The next phase of selective action includes a week-long strike at the British Museum, and sustained strikes at various DWP Job Centres which are slated for closure. I reiterate my call to branches and activists to discuss the potential for selective action in their areas and formulate proposals to the National Disputes Committee. The more grass-roots discussion around what action we need to take, the better.

The National Executive Committee next meets on Thursday 16 February. One thing the committee will discuss is the ongoing re-ballots in HMRC, the second biggest section of the union in terms of membership, and various other departments. We're confident of getting these ballots over the line and bringing more members into the action.

With our current mandate expiring in May, we'll also discuss preparations for a national re-ballot some time in advance of that, to ensure a continuous mandate. There'll be discussions about whether that ballot should be disaggregated by department, as our previous ballot was, or a single national ballot. There'll also be a discussion on whether to add a question about taking action short of strikes to the ballot.

On 8 February, I spoke in a personal capacity at a meeting in Parliament organised by the newly-established Committee for Solidarity with the Iranian Workers' Movement, which aims to build support in the British labour movement for workers' and women's struggles in Iran. □

• John Moloney is assistant general secretary of PCS (personal capacity)

Offers rejected, now call more action!



Off The Rails

The National Executive Committee (NEC) of the rail union RMT has rightly rejected the latest offers from the Rail Delivery Group, representing the Train Operating Companies (TOCs), and Network Rail (NR).

Both offers included below-inflation pay increases – i.e., pay cuts – which were conditional on acceptance of a raft of job cuts, closures, and detrimental changes to terms and conditions.

It's positive that the NEC took the decision to reject without conducting a formal referendum, which would have been an unnecessary and drawn-out process. The democratic mandate the NEC needed to reject the offers was

already provided when we voted to renew our industrial action mandate to pursue our demands of an above-inflation pay increase, no job cuts, and no attacks on conditions. These offers are clearly nowhere near meeting any of those demands.

Now we need to call further strikes. Rejecting the offers without doing something to win improvements to them would be pointless. That means intensifying our strikes beyond the previous pattern of sporadic days with months in between actions. It's a little concerning that a circular to Network Rail members talks about beginning the process for a re-ballot for industrial action, even though our current mandate is live until May. We shouldn't re-ballot before we need to, and we can wait until April to ensure overlapping/continuous mandates. Right now, the focus has to be on building for fur-

ther action. We'd like to see an ongoing programme of action named, including strikes on 15 March alongside other unions, but also including escalating action beyond this, and ideally including action before 15 March.

Challenges

There are genuine challenges in the dispute – for example, how to keep the NR and TOCs elements together, and within NR, how to keep the ops and maintenance sides of the disputes together, when maintenance workers are facing the more immediate threat with the imposition of NR's "Modernising Maintenance" plan. But having further strikes to build for, at a level that might actually win concessions, is a necessity for overcoming those challenges. Failing to call serious action sends the signal to members that, despite having rejected the offers, we don't really believe we can win better ones.

We've come this far. Let's see the fight through. This doesn't mean aiming for a drawn-out, "long haul" dispute that drags on through the rest of the year, but rather seeking to end the dispute as quickly as possible on our terms, by taking intensified action that can win. □

An unwanted breather

After last week's escalation it seems that, like some of the unions, our fundraising has gone back to sporadic and token actions. Just £56 this week. To beat our target we will need to dig much deeper.

We estimate now with the funds raised so far an additional £1K will be needed to cover our Ukraine tour (details page 5). The faster we raise this, the better we can publicise and build for a series of important events. □

PCS leader contributes £100,000 to strike fund

By Mohan Sen

In June this year it will be four years since John Moloney, Assistant General Secretary of civil service union PCS, was elected. By then he will have given about £100,000 of his salary to the union's strike funds.

John is fulfilling his election pledge to take only a "worker's wage" – to tie his living standards and their improvement, or otherwise, to those of the union's members, and get only the take-home pay of an Executive Officer (the most common civil service grade) in the Department of Work and Pensions (the biggest department).

For most of his time in office, John gave back just over £2,000, half his post-tax salary. Last year he increased that to £2,200.

Due to automatic pay progression,

John's full salary is now £82,107 (up from £69,466 in 2019). That's £6,842 a month, producing take-home pay of £4,700. He is about to increase his "give back" to £2,400 a month.

John has got the figures published in the union's annual report.

With PCS's national pay fight resulting in rising membership and an increase in dues to fund strike pay, his contribution is only a small percentage of the union's fighting fund – but symbolically very important.

Serious socialists challenge and seek to dissolve the trade union bureaucracy as a caste with significantly different living standards from union members. Socialists elected to full-time union positions should take only a worker's wage; and we should fight for unions to reform their pay scales on those lines.

• See also [2021 report](#); [2019 report](#)

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Erdoğan must pay the political price

From Marksist Tutum

Despite the storm of earthquakes that caused great destruction across ten provinces there are still not enough aid teams or construction equipment in the region, and temporary shelters have not been sent. Additionally, millions of people are trapped outside on the street in sub-zero temperatures without bread and water. In the region where electricity and natural gas has been cut off, it is extremely difficult to get a hold of liquid fuel in many places.

Therefore not only the tens of thousands of people trapped under the rubble, but also the millions of people saving their lives are faced with starvation and cold. While hundreds-strong rescue and aid teams arrived in Turkey from the ends of the Earth in the first 24 hours, we are faced with a rotten government that has failed to coordinate those from within Turkey and send them to the earthquake zones. This earthquake has been the final confirmation that this regime, which has spread incompetence and looting like a net over all institutions of the state, has long since become a rancid corpse.

The destruction wrought by the earthquake and the true extent of the disaster are not yet fully clear. However, the regime knows very well that it is dragging the country into collapse, and burying the workers under rubble. Precisely because of this, the mounting screams from the earthquake zone and the wave of anger gripping the country has struck fear into the heart of the palace.

Erdoğan, who is brooding over how to keep out from under the wreckage of this earthquake, is clinging onto the state of emergency as if he has no authority himself. The fascist government, which failed in its duty to the millions of people trapped under rubble and unable to enter their homes in the critical first two days, has declared a state of emergency in ten regions hit by the earthquake in order to protect itself from the reactions that will rise.

It is beyond a shadow of a doubt that this decision to implement a state of emergency is looking ahead to the election in three months' time, and will be used to strengthen the hand of the regime.



Just as Erdoğan transformed the 15 July coup in 2016 into a gift from God, he is trying to use the earthquake in the same way. The state of emergency means the complete elimination of the freedom of the press, freedom of speech, strikes, rallies, freedom of assembly, the activities of mass democratic organisations, all things which have already been suffocated by the state. The state of emergency means that the fascist regime can do whatever it wants by decree, completely bypassing Parliament and the judiciary.

The unnecessary declaration of the state of emergency spanning the election period shows what kind of atmosphere the state wants to create for this election. The regime, incapable of acting in the face of workers dying under the rubble, wants to use the full power of the bourgeois state to preserve its own power. Whilst the declaration of a "disaster zone" gives the government all sorts of powers, including the ability to mobilise the military, their impotence shows why Erdoğan needs a state of emergency.

But it is clear that, even if the state of emergency is declared, this earthquake will not be God's gift to the fascist regime, but its doom. This doom will be brought about by the tens of millions of conscientious workers mobilised to ask what they can do for the earthquake victims, and the determination to say that enough is enough. Let us repeat, today is the day to raise class solidarity, to come to the aid of our working brothers in the earthquake zone, and to intensify the struggle to hold the government to account. □

• From [Marksist Tutum](#) (headline ours). Translated from Turkish by Pete Boggs. More: page 10

French unions call for ongoing strikes after 7 March

By Rhodri Evans

The Solidaires trade-union confederation and sectors of the larger CGT confederation (France has eight "TUC"s) are calling for ongoing strikes after 7 March, the next-but-one day of action on pensions.

The appeal is for "renewable" strikes, where strikers at a workplace meet each day to decide whether and how to continue.

In 1995, a great wave of such strikes, by some measures even more widespread than the 1968 mass strike, stopped pension cuts proposed by the right-wing government of the time. President Macron is intent on raising the minimum age to get a full pension from 62 to 64 by 2030, and increasing the 41.5 years minimum paid into the system to 43 by 2027 instead of 2034.

Workers have struck and demonstrated on 19 and 31 January, and 7 and 11 February. The next days are 16 February and 7 March.

Those days have drawn often up to a million on the streets, as well as those striking by staying home. As well as traditionally central sectors like railworkers and teachers, the demonstrations have drawn workers from the private sector, including smaller workplaces, and students from both universities and high schools (sometimes blockading and shutting down schools).

A comrade from the French revolutionary-socialist group l'Étincelle tells us: "The marches were like big strike meetings in the streets – places for discussion, for displaying slogans, for placards mocking Macron... 'Retirement, but not arthritis', 'Metro, work, vault' [the slogan rhymes in French, and echoes a 1968 rhyming catchphrase against the exhaustion of life by capitalist work, 'metro, work, sleep'], 'Increase wages, not the retirement age', 'Down with retirement for the dead', 'Another world is urgent'..."

Opinion polls show a big majority against Macron's measures, and even the more conservative union confederations like CFDT, CFTC, and CGC have joined the movement. Macron does not command a majority in parliament. Under France's presidential constitution, he can force his measures through by decree, which only a vote of no confidence in parliament can stop.

But the measures can be stopped. The scale and pace of the French mobilisation contrasts with that of British unions' battle on public sector pensions in 2011, when there were just two one-day strikes, five months apart, June and Novem-



ber. The November strike was quickly followed by the more conservative unions settling for sops, and the proclaimedly more militant unions did nothing further other than token strikes many months later again. The French unions show us the pace and scale of action needed to win, and their tempo contrasts also with the slowness so far of our current strike wave.

France's pension system is settled in law in a way that Britain's isn't, and based on current contributions paying current pensions where Britain's (apart from the minimal state pension) is based on paying into pension funds and receiving from the investment income gained by past paying-in.

The fallback minimum state pension, payable even if you lack the necessary years of contributions, is not available until age 65 (it's now 66 in Britain, due to rise to 68 by 2037-9). The years of contribution necessary to get a full pension have been increased steadily over the years, from 30 in 1945-71 to 41.5 today.

The picture that Macron paints, of the number of pensioners swelling impossibly in relation to the number of workers paying in, is misleading. 73.2% of French people aged 20-64 are in work, a proportion slightly higher than the EU average (though a bit lower than in the UK).

The unions are demanding not just that the age limit to draw a pension be kept at 62, but that it be reduced to 60. In France as in Britain, life-in-good-health expectancy is much lower for lower-paid workers in more gruelling jobs than for the better-off, and a higher retirement age, for many, means no years at all of retirement with reasonable health and capacity to enjoy the new leisure.

Let's learn from the French workers! □



Solidarity

For a workers' government

Oust the Tories! Make unions turn Labour round!

By Martin Thomas

Lee Anderson. Suella Braverman. The Tories are likely to lose a general election in 2024, but their response is not to soften their line.

On the contrary. They are rushing to push through as much as they can: Public Order Bill, Minimum Service law, EU regulations bonfire, Rwanda plan, block on Scotland's gender-recognition law. They do that both because they want the measures through in the limited time they have, and to rally their political base.

The government is being more stubborn than private employers about making real wages and public services bear the brunt of the economic downturn triggered by Brexit, post-lockdown swirl, and Ukraine-war turmoil.

The Tories are not yet weak. They will become weak only as working-class economic and political action becomes stronger.

The Liverpool dockers needed five weeks (about 30 days) of concentrated strikes to win against their private-sector employers, even though the dockers' economic posi-

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tion means that even one day of strike by them hits the employer hard financially.

Coordination – joint strikes on days like 1 February and 15 March, with big demonstrations – can amplify the impact of public-sector strikes, but we'll need much more than a dribble of one-day or two-day strikes, spread over months, to win.

The conflict is political, because the lynchpin of ruling-class strategy is the government.

Weakness of a political alternative weakens the strikes. Keir Starmer still limits his indictment of the Tories to "incompetence", "chaos", and "weakness" (if only...) Labour does not clearly demand fresh funding to restore the NHS, or wide-ranging new taxes on the rich, or an NHS pay rise even matching

inflation. Slogans like "kick the Tories out", which found popularity in the last days of Boris Johnson and in Liz Truss's brief reign (6 Sep to 25 Oct), dropped to the margins in the 1 February demonstrations. We need to get them back into circulation.

To do that needs more strikes and protests, but also a push by the unions to turn round Labour.

The unions still have great clout within the Labour Party, on the National Executive, in the National Policy Forum which meets in July, and at annual conference. At the September 2022 conference they failed to use that clout, and gave Starmer an easy ride.

Union policies, and even most union leaders, are to the left of Starmer on issues like pay, the NHS, and civil liberties. But the union leaders don't fight for those policies. Sharon Graham, leader of the big Unite union, tends to say that she doesn't have time for Labour politics because too busy with workplace issues. Most other union leaders are no better.

We need to turn round the unions politically as well as industrially. □