

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

ISRAEL-GAZA: STOP THE MASSACRE

» **Against Hamas • Against
IDF onslaught**

» **Free hostages • Stop the
siege**

» **For a real independent
Palestinian state
alongside a secure Israel**

» **Arab-Jewish workers'
unity**

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The war in Israel-Palestine



Thousands of people, overwhelmingly civilians, have now been killed in the war between the Israeli state and Hamas.

Some 1,300 Israelis were killed in Hamas's attacks and over 100, including many children, taken hostage. Thousands of Palestinians, including many children, have been killed in retaliatory air strikes, with many more sure to die as Israel tightens its siege and prepares a ground invasion. Palestinians, including children, have also been killed by settlers in the West Bank. The civilian population of Gaza is suffering under a brutal siege, with access to basic utilities cut off by Israel. Israel has told 1.1 million Gazans to evacuate – an impossible task. Israel's siege of Gaza represents a crime against humanity. It is an act of vengeance that will devastate Gaza and will bring neither peace nor security to Israelis.

Palestinians and Israelis have a right to security and to life. In the face of attacks on its civilian population, Israel has a right to self-defence. Some on the left [oppose](#) this, believing all Israeli civilians are legitimate targets. This "leftism" is a grotesquely distorted caricature of the principles on which our politics should be based.

Collective punishment

But Israel's response – cutting off utilities to Gaza, devastating air assaults, a potential ground invasion, and further intensification of its military dictatorship over the West Bank – goes way beyond "self-defence". Israeli leaders talk of reducing Gaza to "a city of rubble." Much of what Israel does in the name of "self-defence" is unjustifiable collective punishment. Even if it is successful in immediately undermining Hamas's military capacity, the humanitarian crisis Israel is creating will kill thousands, displace hundreds of thousands, and will encourage Palestinians to see Israel only as a hated oppressor.

The slaughter and brutality must end: hostages must be freed, there must be an immediate ceasefire. Basic utilities must be restored to Gaza, and humanitarian aid urgently increased. Longer term, peace and justice requires a framework that guarantees equal rights to both Palestinians and Israeli Jews, including an equal right to self-determination: an end to the occupation, and the establishment of a genuinely independent Palestinian state, alongside and with equal rights to Israel.

The Palestinians are a colonised people. They have a right to resist and to

defend themselves against military attack, although Gaza's pummeled civilian population has little means of doing so. They need international support, via diplomatic pressure on Israel; governments like the US and UK must end their public carte-blanche attitude to Israel's actions and demand it ends the siege.

However, it does not follow from the principle of supporting Palestinians' right to resist that we must support any action undertaken in the name of "resistance". Hamas's attacks on Israeli civilians – indiscriminate rocket firing at civilian targets, and gunning people down in their homes – cannot possibly serve emancipatory and democratic ends. One video circulating on social media appears to show fighters parading the mangled corpse of an Israeli child, stripped almost naked, through the streets on a truck, whilst chanting "god is great". These are actions carried out by partisans of a violently reactionary ideology, hostile not only to the Israeli military or state but to Israelis as such, and specifically to Jews. Socialists who cannot see this worldview has nothing in common with our own – egalitarian, democratic, humanist – perspective have lost their bearings.

[Hamas is](#), in any case, not merely an abstract expression of "resistance". It has a developed political programme and social project, and is allied to several of Israel's regional-imperialist rivals, including the clerical-fascist regime of Iran. Hamas uses brutal means because its ends, the imposition of a theocratic state, are brutal. Other Palestinians, women, LGBT+ people, atheists and others, have also been victims of that brutality. Some leftist commentators initially [celebrated](#) Hamas's actions as an advance for "democracy and human rights". But democracy and human rights cannot be advanced by a political force that explicitly opposes both.

Ukraine

Some have [argued](#) those who support Ukraine's right to militarily resist Russian invasion should support all Palestinian resistance on the same basis. Politics by analogy is always limited, but the relevant parallel here would be to a hypothetical scenario in which a far-right Ukrainian militia was attacking Russian towns, indiscriminately shooting at civilians, and taking Russian civilian hostages, all on the basis of a political programme that advocated the wholesale destruction of Russia. There is no such situation in Ukraine, but if there was, there would be no socialist or anti-imperialist principle that could justify any support for that.

Hamas's attacks were not merely re-



Israelis with Standing Together demonstrating against Israeli settlements in the West Bank

active, but a proactive pursuit of their reactionary political aims.

Nevertheless, the situation cannot be understood outside of its context. The current Israeli [regime](#) is the most far-right government in the country's history, with an explicitly Jewish-supremacist policy. Leading figures use quasi-genocidal language about Palestinians. [Settler violence](#) is at an all-time high, with settler gangs carrying out [pogroms](#) against Palestinians. Israel's occupation of the West Bank has intensified its repression. The residents of Gaza continue to live in abject conditions, with widespread poverty. All of this cannot but have deepened a sense of desperation amongst the Palestinian people, which will have bolstered support for Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

While Hamas can inflict significant damage, they cannot militarily overwhelm Israel by themselves. They could only hope to do that as part of a regional, possibly global, conflict, in which Hezbollah, Iran, Syria, and other states also intervene against Israel. Such a conflict would be a bloodbath out of which no democratic outcome could emerge, and in which any prospect for distinct Palestinian self-determination would almost certainly be squeezed out by the regional-imperialist aspirations of competing states.

Hamas's incursion was launched a week after a [Qatar-brokered deal](#) saw Israel reopen border crossings from Gaza to allow residents who work in Israel to cross. The deal itself followed demonstrations at the border, to which Israel responded violently. In launching its incursion, Hamas has evidently decided to risk its own relations with Qatar – which may, in any case, have soured recently for other reasons. According to an article in the Israeli newspaper [Ha'aretz](#), Hamas has also claimed that Qatar has also unilaterally reduced the amount it pays to Gaza in aid. Although, according to a deal with Israel, it is meant to pay \$10 million per month, for the last several it has, Hamas says, paid just \$3 million.

It may also be the case that part of Hamas's aim is to snuff out prospects for a "normalisation" deal between Saudi Arabia and Israel. Any such deal

will be for the benefit of the Saudi and Israeli ruling classes rather than the Palestinian people. But if Hamas's alternative is to spark an all-out war, that will harm, not help, the Palestinians. Recognition by surrounding states of Israel's right to exist will be a necessary part of any future peace settlement.

That Israel, one of the most militarised states in the world, and possessing the most developed security apparatus in the region, was caught unawares by attacks

that were clearly meticulously planned, and must have taken weeks of preparation, is extraordinary and, for now, inexplicable. Israel tells its people that militarisation, the occupation, and its periodic raids on Gaza are all necessary in order to protect Israeli Jews. That claim has been spectacularly undermined.

Iran

The risk of a wider war is now acute. If Hezbollah, or Iran itself, intervenes, it will be in pursuit of Iran's own regional-imperialist and ideological aspirations, not in pursuit of democracy and equality for Palestinians. Civilians on all sides will pay the price. Whatever happens in the immediate term will set back, rather than advance, prospects for social transformation that improves life for the Palestinians.

The activity of the sizeable Palestinian minority inside Israel will be an important factor in the developing situation. Although they face intensifying racism and discrimination, they have substantially more freedom to act than the occupied and blockaded Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza. Significant mobilisation, including strikes, by Palestinians in Israel for democratic demands could check the warmongering of the Israeli government, especially if such activity is able to unite in any way with continuing mobilisation by the anti-occupation wing of Israel's democracy movement.

Activists in that movement must resist the nationalist drive for "unity" behind Israel's war. Several survivors of Hamas's massacres, and relatives of the kidnapped and killed, have already made inspiring statements condemning Netanyahu's response. The son of Vivian Silver, an activist in Women Wage Peace who has been taken hostage, has said "vengeance is not a strategy." There is a burgeoning campaign in Israel society demanding more effective government action to ensure the release of hostages. Protests were held in Tel Aviv on 14 October. Standing Together is forming community self-defence organisations to resist attempts by far-right politicians such as Itamar

continued →

Israel has the right to defend itself, but not to raze Gaza. The Palestinians have the right to win a state of their own, but not to despoil Israel.



Eye on the left

By Martin Thomas

To Israeli Jews, Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh [declared](#) on 7 October, when Hamas forces invaded Israel to kill over 1,300 people, overwhelmingly civilians, and take over 100 hostage.

"We have only one thing to say to you: get out of our land... There is no place or safety for you".

This was not an "excess" on the fringe of a basically justified struggle, but an effort to kill or panic as many Jews as possible. And probably done by Hamas as part of the network of a regional-imperialist power, Iran, pledged to the destruction of Israel.

The rise of Hamas has been framed by Israeli governments' blocking of a democratic political settlement, but 7 October cannot be put down to "inevitable reaction" against that. The Iranian regime is not an "inevitable reaction" to Israeli misdeeds.

Socialist Worker (11 Oct) headlined "Rejoice as Palestinian resistance humiliates Israel" in response to 7 October, equating it with the 1968 Tet Offensive against the US forces in Vietnam. But the Vietnamese Stalinists never sought to massacre civilians in the USA, or to drive Americans out of the USA. Actual movements for national freedom from imperialism have committed atrocities on the edges of their struggles, but not like this. Not, that is, unless the "9/11" 2001 attacks on the World Trade Centre and other US targets by Al Qaeda are reckoned as part of a "progressive" struggle. They weren't.

Socialist Worker refused to condemn

"9/11" (at least until February 2002, when, under pressure at a Stop The War conference, SWP then-leader Lindsey German backtracked). But it did not "rejoice" at "9/11".

For decades, critics, and even some friends, of Workers' Liberty have said we go too far when we say the "smash Israel" politics of the SWP and others are de facto antisemitic. The "rejoice" headline is macabre proof.

Socialist Worker describes the areas overrun (part of "core" Israel, not of the West Bank) as "illegal Israeli settlements". On that reckoning, all Jewish population in Israel is "illegal settlement". All Jews in Israel are fair targets for massacre of civilians. How is that not antisemitic?

SW's "programme" is for the "masses across the Arab world and wider" to make a revolution against "Zionism and imperialism". If 7 October was a first stage of that "revolution", which is what SW implies, then it would be fascist rather than socialist. Or at best, it would be something like the 1947-9 war of, first, militias organised in Syria, then the Arab states, against Israel, where some Arab leaders proclaimed the aim as "drive the Jews into the sea".

Marxists in 1948

Marxists – SW's forerunners as well as ours – emphatically did not support the Arab states at that time. The Orthodox Trotskyists (Cannon and others) opposed both sides; the Heterodox (Shachtman and others) sided with Israel. What has changed?

SW now describes Israel as "the West's imperialist project". Factually, Israel was founded in wars against Britain, then the biggest imperialist power in the Middle East (1945-7), and against the Arab states (1948-9) when their strongest military unit was commanded

by British officers. The USA has allied with Israel since 1967, but only since 1967, and almost all states have alliances with big powers.

[Socialist Appeal](#) allows that "ordinary men and women" react with horror to the Hamas massacre. They say they themselves have "differences with" Hamas. They concede that Iran probably helped organise 7 October.

They themselves, however, are evidently not "ordinary" people. They do not "weep" at the Hamas massacre. They "understand". Their "understanding" tells them that the massacre was about the oppressed taking on oppressors. They flay Bernie Sanders, Ihlan Omar, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and the French Communist Party for denouncing the massacre.

Weeping

Such ideas are carried along in a wave of formulaic "weeping", or raging, at imperialism, at the USA, at the hypocrisy of US and other governments, and at then-impending Israeli violence against the people of Gaza. (So, when there is a massacre of Israeli civilians, we cannot denounce the actual massacre, but only the excesses of future retaliation by the Israeli government?)

Like SW, *Socialist Appeal* offers no prospect of an independent Palestinian state or a secure Israel short of a "revolution" across the whole region with no determinate programme. "The capitalist system... is tottering", they claim, and will fall with only "a good push". Until this delirium comes good, they offer nothing to the workers of Israel except to submit philosophically to massacres; and nothing to the workers of Palestine except to expect oppression and massacres and wait for revolution across the whole Middle East, plus the hint that the Hamas atrocity is somehow a first step of that "revolution".

The Socialist Party observes more moral decency. They [call](#) for building cross-community sympathy within Israel, and their small-print programme is a socialist Israel alongside a socialist Palestine. The formula comes from the Militant Tendency of the 1980s, from which Socialist Party, *Socialist Appeal*, and *Socialist Alternative* all originate. *Socialist Appeal* has forgotten it. The SP maintains it.

So far, so good. But under pressure in the lively in-person arguments among the left about Israel-Palestine around the time of the 1987-8 intifada, the

Militant were evasive. Refusing to be associated with our arguments for "two states", they interpreted their support for a "socialist Israel" as implying nothing much for the actually-existing capitalist Israel – in effect, as long as Israel remained capitalist, its people could hope for little sympathy.

Sometimes the SP are better. Not on the big demonstration in London on 14 October. Their voiced slogan was for a "socialist intifada", which would have been heard by many people around them as "build on what Hamas does, wish for it to be eventually socialist". To learn different, demonstrators would have to read the small print of the SP leaflet and choose a particular interpretation of it.

[Socialist Alternative](#) has been halfway. All that remains with them of the old Militant "socialist Israel and socialist Palestine" formula is "a socialist Palestinian state with its capital in East Jerusalem... a socialist change in Israel" and "a socialist change in the region, guaranteeing equal rights for self-determination". For whom, and whether anyone has rights to self-determination now, before socialism, they don't spell out.

Their headline formula, however, is "solidarity with the Palestinian masses". Yes, sympathy, and help where possible, for the ordinary people of Gaza and the West Bank, facing the Israeli government moves to flatten Gaza and the increase in settler and Israeli-military violence in the West Bank! But when the section of "the masses" on the battlefield is Hamas, this is a formula designed to be read by some as "with Hamas, but we would prefer a different approach", and by others more generously.

Neither evasion, nor declamation that the peoples of Israel-Palestine just have it coming to them until workers overthrow capitalism all across the region, will help the cause of Palestinian liberation or of a secure future for the people of Israel. □

→ from page 2

Ben-Gvir to stoke racism against Palestinian communities in Israel.

There has never been a "military solution" to the political crisis in Israel/Palestine – neither for Israel, whose military occupation will never extirpate Palestinians' aspiration for a national future in their historic homeland, nor for the Palestinians themselves. Progress is only possible on the basis of a framework that guarantees equal rights to both peoples, Israeli Jewish and Palestinian Arab,

including an equal right to national self-determination via two independent states. However remote the prospect of such a framework is, and it is surely remote, it remains the only possible platform for moves towards the future unity and confederation that internationalists advocate.

In a frightening and tragic context, fighters for real democracy and equality in Israel/Palestine, such as the Standing Together movement, will have to redouble their efforts of advocacy and mobilisation. The best role we can play is to support them. □

Solidarity 687

From this issue we are back to our usual weekly schedule, so *Solidarity* 687 will have masthead date 25 October. □

“Violence of the oppressed”... or a pogrom?



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

Immediately following the Hamas pogrom of 7 October, some on the UK left did not even pretend to hide their glee. The SWP was the most blatant, with this headline in *Socialist Worker*: “Rejoice as Palestinian resistance humiliates racist Israel.”

As this column assumes its readers have at least a minimal sense of decency I will make no comment on that.

The reaction of the Communist Party of Britain and its mouthpiece, the *Morning Star* has been more restrained, but they have refused to “condemn” the pogrom. The *Morning Star*’s editorial of 11 October (entitled “The violence

of the oppressed”) began:

No-one should cheer the slaughter in Israel. Those Israeli families in their homes, the young people at the music festival deserve to be alive. The small Israeli boy taken hostage and videoed being tormented deserves to be home and safe.

And when Jews are massacred indiscriminately it is inevitable that Jews everywhere, and not only they, will see a pogrom. Any response that does not understand the fear Jewish people feel lacks moral imagination.

But to forebear from cheering is not to condemn. When the Mau-Mau killed farming families in their beds, socialists did not cheer. They saw instead the refracted violence of British colonialism and fascist settlers denying land and freedom to the Kenyan people.

Nor did anyone celebrate when the FLN bombed cafés and concert halls in



Algiers. Yet those blasts were the echo of 150 years of French imperialist brutality.

This is, superficially, more acceptable than the SWP’s call to “rejoice” but in reality it’s coming from much the same

place and is based upon the presumption that victims of oppression cannot be conscious political actors and can only react to what their oppressors do.

In any case, neither of the comparisons stands up to scrutiny: the Mau Mau (Kenya) and FLN (Algeria) certainly used brutal methods, but both were conducting national liberation struggles with broadly democratic aims. Hamas is a clerical fascist organisation opposed to democracy and to human rights of any kind.

The Mau Mau fought to drive the British government out of Kenya and limit its rule to Britain, the FLN fought to drive the French government out of Algeria and limit its rule to France. Hamas wants to drive Israeli Jews out of their homeland... to where? The sea, perhaps?

Hamas

The only criticism of Hamas to be found in the editorial is this: “Its charter anti-semitism is an ignorant, imported and inexcusable reaction to a modernity that has failed to deliver for Palestinians.” It ends with the downright lie that “those who denounce Hamas’s attacks today also denounced the unarmed demonstrations at the Gaza border fence in 2018.”

Other highlights of the MS’s coverage include Ramzy Baroud (editor of the *Palestine Chronicle*, where his uncritical support for Hamas and Islamic Jihad is obvious) hailing Hamas’s “insistence on not killing the elderly and children” (12 Oct), whereas the next day MS editor Ben Chacko warned readers not to dismiss stories of babies being beheaded as Hamas “has openly and deliberately killed civilians and stated its readiness to commit further breaches of international law.”

Sometimes it’s what’s not said that counts: while the MS (rightly) denounced “outbursts of the crudest Muslim-baiting in the [UK] media, regardless of the likely impact on community relations” it has, at the time of writing, yet to carry one word about the massive rise (300% according to the Community Security Trust) in antisemitic incidents in the UK following the pogrom, and Jewish schools in London feeling it necessary to close out of fear for the safety of pupils and staff.

Every weekend edition of the MS carries a photographic feature of “the best photos from the week’s protests around the world.” The latest of these (14-15 October) includes “Palestinian supporters wave flags as they march to the Sydney Opera House in Sydney on Monday”.

There is no mention of the video evidence that a section of the marchers chanted “Fuck the Jews” and “Gas the Jews”. Did the *Morning Star* not know – or not care? □

Six thoughts on Gaza and Israel



Eric Lee

“I got a head full of ideas, that are drivin’ me insane,” sang Bob Dylan. I know the feeling. It’s been more than a week now, and with an extended family and close friends living in Israel, I can think of little else.

This week’s column will therefore not be an orderly, three point analysis ending on an optimistic note. It will be impressions and thoughts and maybe will help others understand how many – probably most – Jews and Israelis are thinking and feeling right now.

1. A friend, someone I respect, posted a tweet on behalf of an organisation that I like and support on the day that Hamas massacred over a thousand innocent Israeli civilians including children and babies. The tweet read: “Solidarity with the Palestinians and Israeli internationalists.” First of all, while the massacre was happening, long before there was any significant Israeli response, who thinks first and foremost about “solidarity with Palestinians”? And second, as the tweet says, solidarity with (presumably) all Palestinians, but only with some Israelis, those who might be considered “internationalists”. What an obscene message – and despite explanations and apologies that I’ve received, it still appears on the organisation’s Twitter feed, followed by several similar posts.

2. Some people – who I don’t necessarily agree with on most things – had a different gut reaction on the day of the massacre. One of those was Ukraine’s president Volodymyr Zelen-

sky, who gave full-throated support to Israel from the beginning. He instantly identified with the Israelis as the victims of a fascist death-cult, something he is intimately familiar with thanks to Vladimir Putin. Zelenskyy showed his solidarity with the Jewish state in spite of Netanyahu’s stupid pro-Russian attitude and his refusal to provide any meaningful support to Ukraine. No, I don’t agree with everything Zelenskyy says and does, but compared to people who are busy tweeting about “solidarity with Palestine” while the blood was still fresh on the ground in Sderot and Be’eri – compared to those people, Zelenskyy is indeed a comrade.

3. Another organisation, not in the UK, that I respect and support is sharing on social media an appeal to support protests against “genocide” in Gaza. The “genocide card” is played every time Israel carries out any military operation in Gaza, no matter how small or large. Israel is obviously not carrying out genocide because if it was, you’d know about it from the casualty figures. The Israeli Air Force dropped many tons of bombs on Gaza this week and the result was several hundred deaths. Either the bombs don’t really work, or the aiming was very poor – or maybe Israel really was trying to destroy Hamas and not just randomly kill thousands of Gazans. It’s a possibility, right?

4. Many people, even those who support Israel, are very concerned about the Israeli order to Palestinians to evacuate the northern part of Gaza, where ground operations are likely to take place. Some are calling this a war crime. I find this absolutely baffling. A war crime would be to target those ci-

vilians. To warn them of an imminent attack, to tell where to go for relative safety, is the opposite of a war crime. Many of those who consider the evacuation order to be a war crime believe that the Hamas attack on 7 October was not a war crime, but instead was a legitimate act of “resistance” which should be applauded. Think about that.

5. One tiny bright light in the darkness has been the reaction of leaders of the world’s main social democratic and labour parties. Keir Starmer, Bernie Sanders, Jagmeet Singh, Olaf Scholz and Anthony Albanese have all spoken out clearly against Hamas terrorism and for Israel’s right to self defence. Most on the “hard Left” including Corbyn and Mélenchon have covered themselves in shame.

6. And finally, from a man who is completely shameless – Vladimir Putin – we get Israel compared once again to the Nazis. According to the Russian President, Israeli actions in Gaza are no different from the German siege of Leningrad, which lasted almost 900 days and led to the deaths of 1.5 million people. Putin sees Nazis everywhere – in Ukraine, with its Jewish president and prime minister, and now in the Jewish state itself. The only place he doesn’t see Nazis is in Russia, which has launched the biggest land war in Europe since 1945 with an illegal attack against its sovereign neighbour.

Thinking back to how I opened this article, let me re-phrase that. I do have a headful of ideas. But maybe it’s not me that’s gone insane. □

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

Warmongering anti-war protest

By Sean Matgamna

Many of those who marched through London in the demonstration called by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign on Saturday 14 October, marched to express their horror at the slaughter in Israel and Gaza and the slaughter now and to come which the IDF inflicts on the Palestinians (amongst whom the murderous holy warriors of political Islam shelter themselves, by force where they need to). The official lead slogan of the march was “End the Violence”. And who would not agree with that?

Who in general is not in sympathy, in solidarity, with the Palestinians, in Gaza and elsewhere? Who is not horrified by the deliberate close-up killings of Jewish adults and many Jewish children, and by the rockets raining down indiscriminately on Israel? Who does not have eerie feelings as we watch the widespread acceptance that Israel will and should now use its immense technical superiority to get at a Hamas that uses Palestinians as a shield? (And maybe – it is not clear yet – end the threat of war on Israel from Gaza by clearing out most of the Palestinians?)

The marchers, almost certainly the big majority of them, marched to express that sympathy, that horror, those feelings.

And where did they find themselves, a week after the anti-Jewish massacre in Israel? On a pro-Hamas, pro-war march, implicitly (at best) for the pogrom on 7 October. On an anti-Israel, anti-Jewish demonstration. (It might have been more explicit if the police had not said



that they would arrest those who tried to display Hamas flags). They found themselves on a march whose moving spirits were on the side of the Muslim pogromists in Israel.

Jeremy Corbyn, one of the speakers, was asked on camera, did he support those who massacred Israelis? He wouldn't say. He said and repeated that he was “against all violence”.

That, he thought, was a clever way to avoid condemning those Palestinians who had murdered even Israeli Jewish babies and to focus on Israel. Israel is the eternal villain and the only one. Jeremy keeps his powder dry and virtuously aims his anti-imperialist popgun.

He doesn't see that the pogrom is a miniature of the programme he tacitly goes along with, despite his stated support for “two states” – the replacement of Israel by an Arab-Muslim state. That it can't be anything else – unless Israeli Jews accept it voluntarily and put themselves at the mercy of those who do such things.

He goes along with those who pretend that 7 October was just “anti-im-

perialism” and really Israel's own fault. Even if Corbyn doesn't quite understand that and them, he surely wants now to keep in step, not to be out of step, with it and them. Whatever he thinks instinctively, he must understand.

Whatever they said on other things, those who made an outcry about antisemitism in the Labour Party when Corbyn was leader were not mistaken. There is a strong strain of antisemitism in the labour movement now, and many on the “left” are its special carriers. It originates in and around the Communist Parties in the last years of Stalin. It did subside for a while. Now it is stronger than ever. Today it is the politics of the pseudo-Trotskyists also. Antisemitism has had different forms and different patrons. Today it is “destroy Israel”, “wipe it off the map”, and is the special property of the “left”. It is based on lies which they tell themselves.

- That Israel is an illegitimate state. That is said from ignorance of the history of Israel. In any case, it is now irrelevant. Israel has been a state for 75 years; it exists, and has a right to defend itself in general and against events like 7 October.

- That Israel is only a manifestation of imperialism, and in itself is the worst imperialism in that part of the world

- That all anti-imperialism is the same, even the “anti-imperialism” of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia or of the fascist mullahs in Iran. Or even of the anti-Jewish pogromists. That there is no such thing as a reactionary anti-imperialism. That anti-imperialism is itself, irrespective of what comes after,

socialistic or at least tending towards socialism

- That Israeli Jewish nationalism is racism

- That not the reform but the annihilation of Israel is anti-imperialist and socialist virtue; that anything else is not socialist, is a betrayal of socialism. That all serious socialists and all serious anti-imperialists now must be for the destruction and abolition of Israel, by no matter whom

- That it is not only acceptable but good when sections of marches ostensibly for peace call for the victory of one side, that is for war; when people chant for an Arab-Islamic state “from the river to the sea” or for “a free Palestine” meaning an Arab-Islamic state in all of pre-1948 Palestine, without Israel, and with Jews driven out or killed, down to their babies.

- That in fact show little concern with the living Palestine people; that reject all solutions other than the destruction of Israel; that side with Hamas against the PLO. □

Statements on Israel-Gaza

A frequently-updated collection of responses from across the region, including the Ma'an Workers' Association, Standing Together, and others in Israel; the Democracy and Workers' Rights Centre (Palestine); Marksist Tutum (Turkey); and more: bit.ly/s-ip □

For free speech, against nonsense

By Michael Baker

On Wednesday 11 October, the Marxist Student Society (the student organisation for Socialist Appeal) was suspended by the administration at University College London, pending investigation.

The suspension came after the society refused to take down posters for an event that evening on Gaza. The posters used the IMT's new slogan, “Intifada Until Victory”, which the university administration claimed could be seen as “inciting violence”.

At SOAS University in London, worse: individual students [suspended](#) after a demonstration on 9 October (Palestine Society, not IMT).



Whatever we think of the IMT slogan, this move continues a trend of worsening repression of student activism across the country. It comes in the wake of the appointment of a new University Free Speech Tsar by the Tories, a former professor of philosophy at Cambridge,

who has strongly hinted that his interests will lie not with free speech among student activists, but the right for reactionary academics to say what they want with impunity. The IMT's case is unlikely to get much of a hearing.

However, we should also be critical of the slogan. Speakers at the event on the 11th (held in the rain outside UCL, after their room booking was cancelled) called for a Socialist Federation of the Middle East, and then linked this to the new slogan with the phrase “not one state, not two states, but intifada until victory”.

If Socialist Appeal are calling for a mass workers' movement in both Israel and Palestine,

then why are they using the chant to cheer on the actions of Hamas – a theocratic ally of Iran whose killing of Israeli citizens cannot possibly serve democratic or emancipatory ends? The mismatched response and inhumane killings by the Israeli state cannot retrospectively transform the Hamas killings into a first step of an “intifada” for socialism.

The answer is presumably that this slogan is mostly opportunistic – Socialist Appeal speak out of one side of their mouth to the socialist left, to imply that they are advocating a mass workers' uprising. They then turn to Palestinian nationalists and young people who are neither left-affiliated nor

particularly well-versed in the history, and imply to them that Hamas are a liberatory movement that will win Palestinian nationhood at the expense of Israeli rights.

Socialists in the student movement and beyond should call unequivocally for university administrations not to interfere with student activism, and uphold the right to free speech on campus – the Marxist Society should be reinstated immediately. But that should not stop us from having open and frank discussions within the organised left and the broader student movement about the slogans we are using, and the way forward for Palestinian liberation. □

What is left antisemitism?

6699 As we were saying

1. The belief that Israel has no right to exist. That is the core of Left antisemitism, though it comes in more than one version and from more than one root, ranging from the skewed anti-imperialism of the Orthodox Trotskyists through Arab nationalism to Islamic chauvinism. Advocacy of the destruction of Israel, which is what separates left-wing and Islamist antisemites from honest critics of Israeli policy, should not be tolerated in the labour movement and in the serious left.

2. The belief that Israeli Jewish nationalism, Zionism, is necessarily a form of racism. That this racism can only be expunged if Israel, Zionists, and Jews abandon Israeli nationalism and support of any kind for Israel. That Jewish students, for example, can only redeem themselves if they agree that the very existence of Israel or of an Israeli Jewish nation is racist.

3. The view that Israel alone is responsible for the conflict with the Arab states (and, now, with Islamic states). The idea that Israel alone is responsible for creating Arab refugees, and is uniquely evil in doing so. In real history the Arab states mostly refused the Palestinians citizenship or even the right to work.

4. The claim that the Palestinians have

a "right of return", that is, the right to the organised settlement in Israel of six million people (only a tiny and dying-off number of whom were born in what is now Israel) is one of the many codes for in fact demanding the self-abolition of the Jewish state and justifications for war to conquer and abolish it because it will not abolish itself. It is not the equivalent of free immigration to the UK, or even of mass migration to the UK of millions from Syria, Libya, and Africa. Its equivalent for Britain would be the settlement in the country, organised by a hostile authority, of 60 million people. Socialists should of course be in favour of agreements between Israel and the Palestinians for compensation and for letting individual Palestinians into Israel. Support for a collective right of return is only another form of the demand to conquer and destroy Israel, if it will not surrender.

5. The idea that the forced migration of 700,000 Arabs was a unique evil is also extravagantly wrong. In 1945, 12 to 14 million Germans were driven out of Eastern Europe. They were driven into a Germany reduced to ruins by wartime bombing, where economic life had seized up and millions were starving. Only fringe German nationalists now propose to reverse that forced population movement and to drive out the Poles, Czechs, Russians, etc. who live where Germans once lived.

6. There is a peculiar dialect of Holo-

caust semi-denial current on the Left. I have never heard of anyone on the Left who denies that six million Jews were murdered by the Nazis (though, in the nature of things, someone will now jump out from behind a bush wearing a "Hitler was Framed" badge, and call me a liar). What the anti-Zionist left habitually deny is that this unique fact of history had repercussions that we should at least recognise and try to understand, with some sympathy for the surviving Jews and their descendants. On the Left the Holocaust is not denied, but it is relegated almost to the status of a "virtual fact". In truth, the Holocaust discredited all Jewish-assimilationist programmes, including ours, the socialist one. It created and hardened the will for a Jewish solution to the Jewish question and for the creation of Israel. There is nothing to be surprised at or scandalised by in that. The Holocaust should be appreciated as a real fact of history, with repercussions and reverberations, and not as something outside the history we are all part of, as a sort of side-show, as a two-dimensional hologram rather than the enormously weighty, reverberating event it was and continues to be.

7. The idea that there are good peoples entitled to all rights, and bad peoples, entitled to none. That too is something I have never heard anyone voice plainly and explicitly. But it is there as an implicit subtext in the idea

that we are concerned with national rights only for the presently oppressed, i.e. in this case the Palestinians.

8. There is no one-state solution. Not, as now, by Israeli domination of the whole territory and Palestinians living indefinitely in a purgatory of Israeli occupation, nor through a Palestinian state "from the river to the sea" incorporating Israel after its Jewish population have been killed or overpowered by Arab or Islamic states. The only just solution that can serve both Jews and Arabs is two states: a sovereign Palestinian state in contiguous territory, side by side with Israel. If, as may be possible, a Palestinian Arab state is made impossible by the spread of Israeli settlements, then the future will be grim indeed for both Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews. □

• From *Workers' Liberty* 3/57, August 2017. By SM.



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

The horror of US jails and pregnancy

Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

A US woman is suing after being forced to give birth in prison showers. Pregnancy Justice, Southern Poverty Law Center and Sullivan & Cromwell LLP filed a federal civil rights lawsuit in Alabama on behalf of a woman whose constitutional rights were violated when a US prison treated her with cruel indifference, first restricting her access to necessary medical care during her high-risk pregnancy and then ignoring her pleas for help as she delivered her baby alone in a filthy jail shower – almost losing her life.

Ashley Caswell was two months into her high-risk pregnancy when she was detained. Citing her pregnancy,

the jail denied her use of her lawfully prescribed psychiatric medication and later restricted her access to recommended regular prenatal visits. The jail forced her to sleep on a thin mat on a concrete floor.

In October 2021, Caswell's water broke, but cries to be taken to a hospital were ignored. During nearly 12 hours of labour, she lost amniotic fluid and blood but claims the only medical assistance was paracetamol. She was taken to the showers, where she delivered alone while standing on the concrete floor. During the labour she experienced a life-threatening placental abruption. Soon after birth she lost consciousness.

"Giving birth to my son without any medical help in the jail shower was one of the most terrifying experiences of my life. My body was falling apart, and no one would listen to



me. No one cared," said Ms. Caswell. "I thought I'd lose my baby, my life, and never see my other kids again."

"Ashley is the latest victim of the Etowah County Jail, which consistently punishes pregnant women in the name of protecting 'unborn children' while simultaneously endangering their lives," said Pregnancy Justice Senior Staff Attorney Emma Roth. "They stripped her of her dignity, violated her constitutional rights, and again showed their callous disregard for mothers

and children. The abuses and violations are numerous, and there is simply no word to describe what she endured other than 'torture.'"

Ashley Caswell's case is part of a pattern at the jail, where most women are held on Chemical Endangerment of a Child charges for alleged drug use during pregnancy. Investigation by Pregnancy Justice revealed:

In 2018, staff refused to take a woman in labour to the hospital for hours as she suffered through severely painful contractions, even after her water broke and she experienced vaginal bleeding.

In 2019, ECDC staff refused to take a pregnant woman to the hospital for five days after her water broke prematurely, and she experienced vaginal bleeding and lost amniotic fluid. She later experienced a stillbirth.

In 2019, the ECDC forced a woman who had recently delivered her baby via caesarean surgery to sleep on a concrete floor without a mat for nine days and denied her access to prescribed pain medication.

In 2020, a woman was forced to labour and give birth alone without medical assistance or pain medication.

Alabama ranks near the bottom for maternal and foetal outcomes, in large part because criminalisation deters pregnant women who use substances from seeking necessary medical care. As a result, the Alabama Maternal Mortality Review Committee recommends that "punitive measures for pregnant women with mental health and substance use disorders must be eliminated in order to create an environment that encourages them to seek assistance during pregnancy." □

The House of the squabbling scum

By Tom Harrison

Historic firsts just keep on coming in US politics. The attack on the US Capitol by far right insurrectionists. A US President twice impeached by the House of Representatives. That President in turn now facing multiple criminal indictments.

The ejection of Kevin McCarthy as House speaker by his own party is also hitherto unprecedented event and underlines the situation that the Republicans in Congress are fast becoming a

fractious nihilistic rabble. McCarthy had it coming though when he accepted it only needed one member to challenge his position. Judgement day duly arrived, when Mike Gaetz, apparently egged on by fascist misanthrope Steve Bannon, called for a vote of no confidence. McCarthy had sinned by cooperating with the Democrats to pass a budget that prevented a government shutdown.

In the USA, unlike practically all bourgeois democracies, the opposition party often controls one or both leg-

islative branches of government. Historically it has mostly cooperated for "bipartisan" outcomes. With the GOP now in thrall to Trump, this is becoming increasingly impossible. Trumpism is all about disruption. The aim of extreme MAGA Congress members is to make America ungovernable.

The two replacements for McCarthy who've stood so far – Steve Scalise and Jim Jordan – are both election deniers. With Scalise dropping out, Jordan commands most support. He is against LGBT+ rights, abortion, Medicare etc.

He's gone out of his way to attack independent organisations investigating disinformation in American politics, and he is ranked at 217 out of 222 House Republicans by Vanderbilt University's Centre for Effective Lawmaking.

Jordan is unlikely to get the House Speaker's job, but the contest for it could be long. It took 15 goes before McCarthy. Frequent government shut-downs and legislative chaos beckon... feeding sentiment for a strong leader, nay an autocrat, to establish order. □

Rojava: bombings, millions without electric and water

By Pete Boggs

Turkey has stepped up its bombing campaign of both Iraq and the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria, more commonly known as Rojava. This is in response to a suicide bombing in Ankara carried out by the PKK on 1 October, which in-

jured two police officers but killed no-one other than the attackers themselves.

The attacks have targeted civilian infrastructure, and at least 48 civilians have been killed so far. Erdoğan's recently appointed Foreign Minister, Hakan Fidan, claims that the PKK members came from Syria, and that Turkey would

be counting "all infrastructure, superstructure and energy facilities that belong to the PKK and YPG" as legitimate targets from now on. Rojava is governed by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a coalition led by the YPG (People's Defence Units). Turkey claims that the YPG and the PKK are one and the same organisation.

The PKK and their recent suicide bombing are not comparable to Hamas and its attacks in Israel, but the responses of the Turkish and Israeli states have been very similar. They are both larger imperial nations with an ongoing project of colonisation against a smaller and weaker neigh-



bour, and are both now "advising" civilians to stay away from "legitimate targets" despite knowing they have nowhere to go.

The Turkish state has carried out a century-long campaign

of ethnic cleansing against the Kurdish people. These latest bombings, which have left over [two million](#) people without access to water and electricity, are another escalation. □

UAW strike makes progress

By Lewis Joyes

The US United Auto Workers (UAW) dispute rages on with Ford, General Motors (GM) and Stellantis (who subsumed Chrysler). Strikes started on 15 September.

The strikes remain highly targeted, with the union leadership dictating the strategy of which shops can enter the fold, and when, resulting still in only small fraction of the union membership being out on strike. Longer term, this could damage democracy in the union.

Short term, the strike is having tangible, positive impacts. This last week saw a breakthrough tentative agreement with GM; the inclusion of electric vehicle (EV) battery manufacturing in any new union contract. With automotive industry shifting more towards EV production, this agreement could potentially secure 1000s of union jobs well into the future. □



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Upcoming meetings

Workers' Liberty meetings are open to all, and unless otherwise stated those below are online over zoom. We have many local (in-person) meetings, [see online](#).

Wednesday 18 October, 6pm: Workers' struggles in Turkey, University Arms, 197 Brook Hill, Sheffield S3 7HG

Wednesday 18 October, 7pm: War in Israel-Palestine: unravelling the issues, Chadswell Healthy Living Centre, Harrison Street, London WC1H 8JF

Thursday 19 October, 3pm: Tubeworker: The Strike Wave in the USA (online)

Thursday 19 October, 5pm: All the Rage! Socialist feminism today, LEON, Brunswick Centre Unit 2, London WC1N 1AY

Monday 23 October, 7pm: The war in Israel/Palestine: unravelling the issues (online)

Wednesday 25 October, 6pm: What is Socialist Feminism? University Arms, 197 Brook Hill, Sheffield S3 7HG

Wednesday 25 October, 7pm: Why read the Communist Manifesto? New Cross Learning, 283-285 New Cross Road, London SE14 6AS

Thursday 26 October, 5pm: Why the working class? LEON, Brunswick Centre Unit 2, London WC1N 1AY

Thursday 26 October, 6pm: Fighting the Far Right Culture War: Women's Fightback no. 29 launch, County Arms, 85 Romsey Road, Winchester S022 5DL

Saturday 4 November, 10 to 6: All The Rage! Socialist feminist day school, Pelican House, London. bit.ly/atr-23

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



Israel-Palestine: un

Why a Palestinian Arab state?

The Palestinian Arabs are a defeated people, the main victims of the Jewish-Arab war of 1947-9 and of wars since, especially the 1967 war in which Israel won control of the West Bank from Jordan and of Gaza from Egypt.

The root problem of the Palestinian Arabs is their dispossession by the Israeli state. However, their condition today is not just Israel's responsibility, and it cannot be mended by seeking revenge on Israel.

The fact that many Palestinians continue today as refugees is also to be explained by intra-Arab politics, and by the desire of various Arab states to have them as a living indictment of Israel. Arab states, to different degrees, deny rights to Palestinians living in their territories, and push them to rely on facilities provided by the UN.

The part of Palestine allotted to the Arabs by the UN in 1947 was not unilaterally taken over by Israel, but divided between Israel, Jordan, and Egypt in the 1948-9 war, most of it going to Jordan.

Since 1988 Palestine Liberation Organisation policy has been for a fully independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. A detailed plan for that has been worked out in the "unofficial" Geneva Accord.

Israel will not easily agree to that. The many Israeli settlements built in the West Bank, in a deliberate political effort to establish claims to permanent Israeli control, since the 1967 war stand as an obstacle. The big role in Palestinian politics of Hamas is also an obstacle. But while merging the Palestinian and Israeli-Jewish nations by decree in a democratic single state is impossible, an independent Palestinian state can be won by struggle on the basis of justice for both Jews and Arabs. Those who want to help the Palestinians should argue for it.

Is a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza viable?

No small state is viable on its own in the modern world economy. In fact, not even large states are viable as sealed-off units, except on a much lower economic level than capitalism has so far achieved.

But small nations can and should have the right to political independence. If the Irish, why not the Palestinians?

Support for the oppressed

Socialists must side with the oppressed against their oppressors. In general, we side with the Palestinian Arabs against Israeli oppression. However, to side

with an oppressed people should not mean that we adopt all the views of every group within it, or even of its majority. Those views may be one-sided or even chauvinist.

As Lenin put it: "We fight against the privileges and violence of the oppressor nation, and do not in any way condone strivings for privilege on the part of the oppressed nation".

Who are Hamas?

Hamas grew out of Mujama' al-Islami, which in turn grew out of the Gaza branch of the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood. They have since switched their links towards Iran. In the 1970s and early 80s they focused on welfare activities, religious preaching, and a drive (often violent, but eventually successful) to force Palestinian women to wear the hijab. The Israeli occupation authorities then favoured them over the relatively secular nationalists.

The Mujama' and Hamas turned to anti-Israeli activity during and after the 1987-8 intifada. They have grown from the despair created by the impasse since 2001 of political efforts, and were strong enough in 2007 to stage a coup in Gaza (from which Israel had withdrawn in 2005). Their aim is to make all of (British-Mandate) Palestine an Islamic state. Their message to the Israeli Jews is: "We have only one thing to say to you: get out of our land. Get out of our sight... There is no place or safety for you" (Ismail Haniyeh, 7 October).

Hamas is clerical-fascist. It is not a national liberation movement. More realistically, it is part of the network of a regional-imperialist power, Iran, bigger than Israel. Iran has sway also in Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq, and over oppressed nationalities like the Kurds in its own state borders.

Fighting imperialism

Some say the destruction of Israel is necessary to defeat imperialism in the Middle East. Israel is more prosperous than the immediately surrounding countries, but it does not rule them or draw super-profits from them. Since 1967 Israel has had close ties with the USA. But the Israeli state existed before those links existed – the USA imposed an official arms embargo on Israel in 1948 – and could continue to exist if they were broken.

Israel is surrounded by Arab and Islamic countries, hostile to varying degrees, with much larger populations. Those countries have their own ruling-class ties with the big powers, and some of them, like Iran, their own regional-imperialist drives. Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman. Qatar, Turkey, and the UAE host



sizeable US military bases; Israel has only two tiny US facilities (for its missile-defence system).

To identify Israel as the arch-imperialist, or as the prime tool of imperialism, in the area, is to be an apologist for the Arab and Islamic ruling classes.

The Israeli workers

Implicit in the common argument that "the answer" in the Middle East is a socialist revolution made by the Arab workers is the idea that the Israeli workers can play no positive role.

Within Israel, there is a peace movement pushing for compromise with the Arabs.

It has won huge support at some times, less at others. For decades now it has been marginalised by the failure of the peace negotiations in 2000-1 and of increasingly feeble attempts to revive them, and by the rise on both sides of right-wing politics. But it exists, today in movements like the Jewish-Arab group Standing Together.

Not all the peace activists are workers, by any means, but some are. Israel has an independent trade union movement and Israeli workers have organised large strikes. The trade unions organise Israeli Arab workers too.

The "right of return"

There was war in 1947-9 between the Jewish community in the "British Mandate" (1918-48) territory of Palestine (before that the area was part of the Ottoman Empire) and, first, Arab militias coming mostly from Syria, then, the surrounding Arab states. The Jews had become about a third of the total population and sought to set up their own state in part of Palestine to be a refuge for Jews after the Holocaust. Although Marxists censured the politics of the Jewish leadership, almost no Marxist supported the Arab states in the 1948-9 war.

The Jewish community won that

war. About 700,000 Palestinian Arabs fled or were driven out of what became Israel, and a smaller number of Jews were driven out from other areas of Palestine. In the following years, over 600,000 Jews fled, or were driven out from, Arab and other non-European states, and came to Israel. Those refugees and their descendants have been integrated into Israeli society. The majority of the Jews in Israel today were born there.

Today there are about 14 million Palestinian Arabs scattered across the world. Nearly six million of them are registered as refugees. They are almost all great-grandchildren, grandchildren, or children of 1948 refugees. The Arab states' poor treatment of them makes them continue to seek facilities from the UN refugee programme set up in 1949.

Socialists are in favour of the free movement of people. That is one thing. But "return", as in the now-popular slogan "Exist! Resist! Return!" is about the collective resettlement into what is now Israel of a special cohort numbering two-thirds as many people as are already there, not about scope for



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travelling the issues

a variety of individuals who want to live in that majority-Jewish society.

The collective "return" has been understood by both Arabs and Israelis as implying the replacement of Israel – as one of many coded ways of proposing the destruction of Israel. Omar Barghout, the leader of the "BDS" campaign, writes in his book on it: "You cannot practically reconcile the right of return for refugees with a negotiated two-state solution".

Anti-Zionism and antisemitism

In the earlier part of the 20th century, the different strands of Zionism compromised only a minority political current among Jews. Most Jews opposed Zionism. Marxists argued that Jews should unite with non-Jewish workers for the class struggle in the country where they lived, rather than going off to create "utopian" Zionist colonies and inevitably compromising themselves by seeking protection by big powers for those colonies. Conservative and religious Jews had their objections too.

The Jewish state is no longer a scheme for the future. It is a fact over 75 years old. Most Israelis live there because they were born there. The meaning of "Zionism" is not so clear. Usually it is taken to mean any sort of sympathy or identification with Israel, however critical – in other words, the reflex response of most Jews worldwide.

Then "Zionism" is denounced as something akin to racism. This is ideological terrorism, used to prevent any consideration of the issues that does not start with root-and-branch condemnation of Israel.

The "absolute anti-Zionist" demand that "Zionism" should be undone – i.e. that the Israeli Jewish state should cease to exist, and that the Jewish nation should instead dissolve into an Arab state – is not necessarily racist, but it is inescapably antisemitic. It implies hostility to the Israeli Jews, and hostility to that big majority of Jews worldwide, the "Zionists", who instinctively identify with Israel.

Should we boycott Israel?

No. It would be a gesture having no plausible positive practical effect but a very large negative ideological effect on our ability to establish an independent working-class stance against both Israeli and Arab chauvinism.

Most practical "boycott, divestment, and sanctions" activity has been aimed against "accessible" targets – Israeli film-makers or

academics seeking international links, Israeli LGBT activists seeking to join international protests, and so on. Those are not the people responsible for the misdeeds of the Israeli state.

If the boycott activity acquired momentum, it would also feed into, and in practice quickly become, antisemitism, targeting not Israel but non-Israeli Jews.

Israel = South Africa?

Israel is said to be the same sort of "settler state" as South Africa was before 1994, when rigid legal divisions gave the white people vast privileges over the black. A common political programme is advocated for both: smash the settler state.

But the big waves of original Jewish settlers in what is now Israel were refugees, not colonists backed by a home country using them to dominate the land.

The pioneer Zionists insisted on Jewish labour within their settlements, as part of their drive to build up a compact Jewish society in Palestine. Whatever one thinks of that "Jewish labour only" policy, it was the opposite of the mass exploitation on which modern South Africa was built.

In Israel there is not a ruling Jewish caste exploiting Arab helots. In South Africa white people used to hold all the positions of wealth and power while black people did all the basic labour in the mines and the factories. In Israel there are low-paid Arab (and immigrant) workers, but the big majority of all people employed are Jewish.

"Smash the settler state" in South Africa meant: abolish the monopoly of power and the caste privileges of the white minority. Let the majority rule.

But what would "smash the settler state" mean for Israel? It is a state which is relatively democratic for its Jewish majority. For an external force to "smash" this state would not be a matter of destroying a repressive apparatus, but of overrunning Israel and forcibly destroying or suppressing the Jewish nation.

In recent years many have described Israel as "the apartheid state", usually to imply it must be destroyed. They refer to reports by respected human rights groups.

In fact the brief B'tselem document attempts no equation with South Africa before 1994. It lists inequalities suffered by Palestinians, and says that they amount to "apartheid" in a looser sense, with no argument about comparing to South Africa rather than to, say, Algeria in its treatment of Berbers.

The much longer Human Rights Watch document states that it "does not set out to compare Israel with South Africa under apartheid or to determine whether Israel is an 'apartheid state'." Its chief argument is that the horrors of Israeli rule in the West Bank feed back to and shape the whole picture. True. The answer is for Israel to get out of the West Bank.

A secular democratic state?

In 1969 the Palestine Liberation Organisation proposed the scheme of reuniting Palestine in a "secular democratic state" where the Arabs who were expelled or fled Israeli territory in the wars of 1947-9 would exercise their collective "right of return", but Jews would have the rights of a religious minority.

In 1988 the PLO dropped that policy in favour of an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel. Many leftists used to advocate the old PLO formula of single "secular democratic

state"; many now promote Hamas as the foremost expression of Palestinian militancy, and so have faded out "secular democratic". Hamas wants an Islamic state in Palestine "from the river to the sea".

Socialists want every state to be secular and democratic. What has been special about the "secular democratic state" slogan for Israel-Palestine is the proposal to merge the two nations in one state.

National identities and conflicts will not be overcome or superseded by decree. A joint "secular democratic state" could be established only after (long after) the conflict between the two nations had been allowed to fade by some other settlement.

The only practical meaning of the "secular democratic state" slogan can be as an ultimatum – merge the two nations – behind which is posed a fear-some "or else". □

Planets: a jumbo discovery?

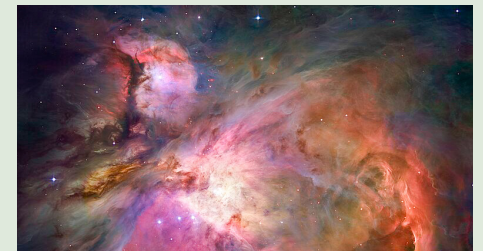
By Josh Lovell

In early October, astronomers using newly acquired data with the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) announced the discovery of a new type of astrophysical object; Jupiter Mass Binary Objects (or "JuMBOs" for short).

When peering at a patch of the sky associated with a recent phase of star formation, the Orion Nebula, the team found a statistically high number of faint objects that appeared in pairs. By analysing the amount of light arriving from these objects, the team concluded that instead of being light from stars, these are instead better interpreted as systems of twin planets, freely roaming through the region, disconnected from any star.

Free-roaming planets have been discovered by other astronomical instruments. Classically these have been understood to have formed around a star, and due to gravitational instabilities with larger neighbour planets, have been subsequently ejected into deep space. This caused the team a problem: existing models struggled to reproduce the frequency of "Jumbo"-like objects being scattered into space.

Within days however, a [new paper](#) appeared on the open-access preprint server arXiv which offers a possible solution to the initial co-



nundrum. This team posits that close "flyby" events between young stars give enough of a gravitational kick to their planetary systems that even these giant bodies can be scattered out into space. If true, this could imply that planets are more regularly lost by stars into space than previously thought, with the intriguing prospect that pairs of Jupiter-like planets are wandering freely in the deepest stretches of our Galaxy.

In the Orion Nebula, stars and planets have only been forming over the past million-or-so years: a stage of evolution that happened around five billion years into our Solar System's past. Regardless of the specific mechanism that led to the presence of these "Jumbo" objects, studies of Orion help us to piece together how our own planetary system might have developed, and how differently such development may proceed elsewhere in the universe. □

• Dr Joshua Bennett Lovell is a postdoctoral fellow at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics □

Demand is a distraction



Letter

Pro-Ukraine activists in the UK seem to have tacked on to the Veolia workers' pay dispute in Notts the demand for the company to pull out of Russia, as an act of solidarity with Ukraine's fight against the Russian imperialist invasion.

Clearly, as I have already stated, the Veolia workers' pay dispute should be supported.

My objection is that the additional demand is a distraction and wrong.

Firstly, because the demand for Veolia to pull out off Russia will have no impact on Putin's war. If Veolia gave in tomorrow it would not stop a single Russian bullet being fired.

Putin's state (in so far that his propagandists are paying any attention) would simply use a pull-out of a company not involved in the Ukraine war to propagandise that Western trade unions hate Russia and want to damage its economy.

Very large Western companies have pulled out of Russia, some of which have been important to the Russian economy. The Western sanctions, imposed at the start of the full-scale invasion with the aim of pressuring Russia to get out of Ukraine, have not stopped Putin at all. They've damaged and re-configured the Russian economy, but failed in their stated aim.

Ralph Peters (*Solidarity* 685) needs to register that fact.

There is, essentially, no connection between the demand (Veolia out of Russia) and the stated intention (to make solidarity with Ukraine in its war of self-defence). The Veolia workers, if they do in fact back Ukraine, could be asked to make a public announcement in solidarity with Ukraine's unions and the anti-war protesters in Russia. That

would be much more useful than demanding Veolia pull out, a seemingly radical demand without any useful grip.

Of course Western arms manufacturers should not sell to Putin. Yes, sanctions to stop the arms trade to Russia. But this is nothing of the sort.

And the straightforward logic of this demand against a company which is not involved in the war in any direct way is to advocate all Western companies end trade with Russia (and presumably Belarus). No doubt one might concoct a convoluted argument that all trade with Russia helps Putin. And that seems to be where the argument is heading: cut all economic ties with Russia.

I suppose if I was a Ukrainian nationalist and simply wanted Russia damaged, in revenge for the destruction and killing in Ukraine, I might well support any and all blows against Russia. But I'm not a Ukrainian nationalist, I'm a Trotskyist.

And be careful what you wish for, Ralph. Breaking up trade, and cutting economic sinews which bind together the world economy, is a dangerous step in the long-run. It will have widespread political consequences. Including increasing the likelihood of war.

It is not the socialist programme to attempt to dismember the globalised world economy.

In Russia's case it would help China bring Russia into its orbit.

In general, the knee-jerk activist response to a crisis in another state seems, increasingly, to be: demand blanket sanctions, close the embassy (Iran), throw them out of the ILO (Belarus, Iran).

These issues need assessing concretely, case by case, of course. But, again, in general, we need to reassert the need for international workers' links and for working-class solidarity, instead of the negative: stop this, break that link, cut that tie. □

Dan Katz, London

Veolia may aid Putin's war



Letter

Dan Katz (*Solidarity* 685) argues against Ukrainians and British GMB workers calling for the Veolia company to end their operation in Russia.

It is important to note this is a propaganda call, not a demand of the current GMB strike in Notts. Under Tory anti-union laws, no worker can take strike action for "political" reasons. Indeed during this strike, Veolia has not shrunk from threatening action against not only the GMB and the USC but also the workers themselves. They are desperate to stop anyone, especially their own workers, questioning their activities in Russia.

It is little surprise to Veolia UK workers that their bosses put the profits they make in Russia above calls for solidarity with Ukrainian people. Across the UK, Veolia has a record of continuing belligerence towards its workers. Through its poverty pay and anti-union actions, it has provoked strikes and disputes across the UK, in Liverpool, in Sheffield and now in Notts.

How should socialists respond to Veolia's threats to keep out of their Russian affairs?

Dan argues that "Veolia is providing services that have no bearing on Putin's ability to wage war on Ukraine", repeating the argument of Veolia management. How does he know?

Veolia's general business is "water, waste and energy management".

In pursuit of its war aims, Russia has blown Ukrainian dams and sabotaged water and energy supplies – even to

the extent of risking mass drownings and threatening nuclear disasters.

A Veolia pull-out would not lead to anything comparable but it is possible that some of the logistical support given to Russia's war in Ukraine might have to be called back and that might weaken its war capabilities.

Dan does not think that "all damage to the Russian economy is necessarily positive". However the orderly functioning of the Russian economy isn't necessarily positive either – to Ukrainian workers or to any Russian workers who want to see the downfall of Putin.

The starting point for socialists should always be workers' solidarity. In any strike, workers explore possibilities of workers' solidarity. This of course is impossible in Putin's Russia. If any Russian worker were found in contact with the GMB union of the Veolia workers which is opposed to its war in Ukraine, they would be locked up. The continuing operation of Veolia in Russia makes solidarity not one bit easier for its workers.

The AWL has argued against blanket sanctions and trade boycotts where they might divide workers rather than unite them. However trade with the Russian regime can no more unite workers and advance democratic rights than the trade deals Blair did, and the Tories do, with reactionary dictatorships around the world such as Saudi Arabia.

We should be defending workers whether they are on strike against an anti-union company or considering action against its operations within repressive regimes. □

Ralph Peters, Nottingham

Why read Eric Blanc



Letter

Simon Nelson (*Solidarity* 685) is right to criticise Eric Blanc's adoption instead of a "Finnish model" and of the ideas of Ralph Miliband. But he is also right to recommend reading Blanc's book.

It is the best compact demolition of the cod "Leninism" initiated by Zinoviev in the early Communist International, only partly rectified at that time, codified into a rigid myth by Stalinism, and taken as truth both by most bourgeois scholars and by "Orthodox Trotskyists" (and some not so orthodox, like the SWP).

The Bolshevik faction was lively and often unruly. It was distinguished from other factions, as Blanc notes insufficiently, by intense striving for clarity

and definition and self-correction, as against the German Social Democracy's usual search for bland consensus; but that was an untidy process, not monolithic or exclusive.

Rosa Luxemburg did not represent a "broader" party idea than the Bolsheviks; in fact, the Polish party she led, the SDKPiL, was more tightly controlled and (often destructively) disinclined for united action, than the Bolsheviks ever were.

The core differentiation between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks was not over party rules, but a divergence after 1905 as the Mensheviks softened their attitude to bourgeois liberals and the Bolsheviks stuck to independent working-class politics.

And there's much more. Read the book!

Martin Thomas,
London

• Abridged: more bit.ly/r-eb

Who are terfs?



Letter

Martin Thomas's comparison (*Solidarity* 685) with Class War's slogan is useful. Much of the rest is confused. Keith Road patently and correctly opposes the no platforming of "anti-trans activists", and criticises both the term "Terf" and Sarah Jane Baker's speech. The only disagreement, then, is who was referred to in the "punch Terfs" speech.

Martin concedes that "Terf" wasn't referring to all women – i.e. not all women are "Terfs". But he does maintain, without argument or evidence,

that those denounced as "Terfs" are specifically women – i.e. "Terfs" are all (or mostly) women.

As Keith and I have explained "Terf" ordinarily now means simply "transphobe", often – arguably mostly – men. As Martin puts it, "Terf is now irredeemably a scattergun swearword." It is not used accurately, in accordance with its etymology as acronym. More specifically, Sarah said "...if you see a Terf, punch them..."; rather than "...punch her...": the singular third person as gender-neutral makes clear that Sarah was specifically not referring to women. □

Zack Muddle, Bristol

• The rest of this discussion is online at bit.ly/d-terf

The debates on geoengineering



Environment

By Paul Vernadsky

What if fossil fuels continue to be burned unabated? What if greenhouse gas emissions continue on their upward trajectory?

What if capitalist firms carry on putting profit before human needs and the ecosystems on which we depend? What if bourgeois states fail to reach the necessary agreements to reduce emissions and undo the damage already done? What if the impacts of climate change are greater than expected? What if tipping points are reached and boundaries exceeded?

Socialists active in climate struggles have a duty to face realities now and in the foreseeable future. We have an obligation to assess the situation and to propose answers that maximise working class power, universal emancipation and ecological renewal. We have to keep strategies under review and where necessary, fight for measures that might give humanity time to reverse the damage.

Geoengineering

Does geoengineering have the potential to contribute to the climate fight? The science and technologies, but even more the political economy of geoengineering, cannot be ignored. A welcome contribution to navigating the issues is a recent book by J P Sapinski, Holly Jean Buck and Andreas Malm, *Has it Come to This? The Promise and Peril of Geoengineering on the Brink* (2021).

The book is a collection of essays by academics and activists on the left. They represent a range of opinion on geoengineering. The authors make the scientific and technical aspects accessible, while drawing out the political dimensions of the debates. As such, they provide a helpful route for socialists and climate activists trying to find the right orientation on geoengineering.

Geoengineering is defined as “the deliberate, large-scale manipulation of the planetary environment in order to counteract anthropogenic climate change”. Technologies are often divided into carbon dioxide removal (CDR) and solar radiation management (SRM).

Carbon dioxide removal

Carbon dioxide removal (CDR) covers technologies that seek to remove CO₂ from the atmosphere and to secure it in long-term reservoirs. Sequestration means to capture and store the carbon underground, in rocks, the soil or vegetation. Examples include:

- Biochar
- Capture and sequestration of carbon dioxide at power plants
- Enhanced mineral weathering
- Afforestation
- Ocean fertilisation
- Bioenergy with carbon capture and storage (BECCS)
- Direct air capture (DAC).

Biochar comprises decomposed organic matter heated to high temperatures to create a kind of charcoal, which effectively traps carbon originally absorbed from the atmosphere. This can be mixed into soil to store more carbon, as well as improve agricultural productivity.

Carbon capture and storage (CCS) involves a filter inside chimneys that scrubs the CO₂ from the smoke, then buries it underground. Although originally aimed at power plants, it could also be applied to cement and steel plants, still necessary for renewables.

Enhanced mineral weathering means adding minerals to accelerate the process by which rocks dissolve in rainwater and suck up CO₂ from the air. The process is low risk, but the scale of mining, transport, energy and land involved could be prohibitive.

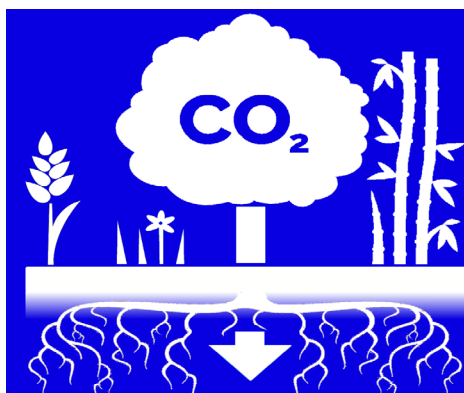
Afforestation is the conversion of land that historically was not forests. Planting more trees increases the storage of CO₂ in terrestrial vegetation. The main risks are the reversal of carbon removal through wildfire and disease.

Ocean fertilisation involves adding nutrients to the ocean to feed algae. When the algae die, they sink to the bottom, locking carbon in the deep ocean. This process is slow, likely to be expensive and with unknown consequences for marine life.

Bioenergy with carbon capture and storage (BECCS) starts with extensive eucalyptus plantations, which extract CO₂ from the air through photosynthesis. The plants are harvested and burned at power plants. Carbon is captured and injected into cavities underground. A key criticism is that BECCS requires land perhaps twice the size of India.

Direct air capture (DAC) comprises machines that capture carbon directly from the air, which is then injected underground. Similar technologies exist from submarines and space stations, but planetary machines would be expensive.

Christian Parenti provides a sympathetic defence of the potential of carbon dioxide removal. He describes an experiment in Iceland, which has mixed carbon dioxide and hydrogen sulphide into water and then pumped the mixture into underground basalt rock formations. Within two years, the CO₂ in the water mixture precipitated into a carbonate rock similar to limestone.



The project, called CarbFix, operates at the Hellisheidi geothermal power plant.

Another test project, conducted by the US Department of Energy's Pacific Northwest National Laboratory, found that a mixture of mostly liquid CO₂ with only a small amount of water also mineralised within two years. Parenti suggests there are 17 such CDR and mineral storage experiments around the globe.

Solar radiation management

Solar radiation management (SRM) refers to technologies that seek to reduce incoming solar radiation by reflecting some sunlight back into space. Examples include:

- Space reflectors
- Cloud albedo
- Surface albedo modification
- Stratospheric aerosol injection (SAI).

Space reflectors are structures that would reflect sunlight from outer space – a fleet of mirrors orbiting around Earth. Costs are likely to be prohibitive.

Cloud albedo modification (marine cloud brightening) involves whitening clouds over the oceans so that their albedo – their ability to reflect sunlight back into space – is increased. Special ships could spray seawater into the air to brighten the clouds.

Surface albedo modification means spreading plastic sheeting in deserts, melting glaciers or designing lighter surfaces in urban areas by painting roofs white. Given the limited surface area suitable, the overall planetary effect would probably be negligible.

Stratospheric aerosol injection (SAI) envisages depositing large quantities of sulphur dioxide gas in the stratosphere. This would reflect some of the incoming sunlight back into space and thereby reducing lower atmospheric heating.

Stratospheric aerosol injection

SAI is the most controversial geoengineering proposal considered in the book. A number of authors refer to the Harvard Solar Geoengineering Program, led by David Keith, and his book, *A Case for Climate Engineering* (2013). Keith describes his SAI proposal as “cheap and technically easy”, similar

to simulating a volcanic explosion. In 1991, the Pinatubo eruption led to temporary global cooling. SAI would be delivered by a fleet of Gulfstream jets.

Other authors describe the failure of early experiments, due to opposition from scientists and campaigners. In 2011, the stratospheric particle injection for climate engineering (Spice) project was designed to test hardware for a larger-scale deployment of the technology. Scheduled to take place on a disused military airstrip in Norfolk, England, it was aborted after opposition. The first field experiments for the Stratospheric Controlled Perturbation Experiment (SCoPEX), part of the Harvard research and scheduled for Sweden in 2021, were also halted after local opposition.

Conclusions

This book *Has it Come to This?* is an accessible way into the debates around geoengineering. The range of opinion from across the left is welcome, as is the willingness to tackle difficult questions. It follows Holly Jean Buck's book, *After Geoengineering* (2019), which is also reflective and insightful.

Both supporters and opponents of geoengineering agree that the overwhelming priority remains the struggle to reduce emissions as swiftly as possible. Geoengineering is not a substitute for sharp emissions reductions. It is not a techno-fix for climate change. Some of the technologies might be a last resort. But they may prove necessary to confront a world we never wished for.

The book is right to carefully distinguish CDR and SRM. There is a significant difference between technologies that directly address the effects of climate change by burying carbon emissions, and climate intervention that tries to manage the heat warming the earth from the sun.

The scientific and technological questions deserve to be explored. The impacts, side-effects and unintended consequences need to be drawn out. The present stage is about research, experiments and testing. The most drastic technologies are currently far from planetary scale deployment. On balance, it makes sense to support authorised, publicly-funded research, with democratic safeguards, scrutiny and accountability, including by the labour movement.

The chief merit of the book is to put politics centre stage. The hardest questions revolve around the “governance” of geoengineering, of who decides and how decisions are made. Questions of power, states, capitalists – matters of politics – are the terrain where Marxists have much to contribute and where the labour movement must become a prominent voice. *Solidarity* should become a forum for these discussions. □

Trashing HS2 is part of eco-regression

By Colin Foster

On 4 October Rishi Sunak cancelled most of the HS2 rail project.

There are reasons for being more sceptical about high-speed rail (or new rail lines generally) in Britain than in Spain, France, and China, where new lines can go through more relatively “empty” space.

But cancelling the project and writing off most of the years of labour which have gone into planning, securing the route, and part-building, is bad. Especially bad as it is part of a whole Tory policy of rowing back on measures to limit carbon emissions.

The case for HS2, since 2010 at least, was not primarily about making it a bit quicker by train from London to Birmingham, or to Leeds and Manchester. It was an “engineering” case that a whole new line (which might as well be high-speed) was a more cost-effective and quicker way to increase rail capacity than piecemeal improvements



on existing lines. I am no engineering expert, but I know no convincing argument against that engineering case. It has been much undermined by the constant delays and semi-cancellations by “austerity” governments since 2010; but the new cancellation signifies a large abandonment of the very aim of facilitating transfer of a lot of freight and passenger traffic from roads and airways to lower-carbon-emission rail.

Sunak promises that money ear-

marked for HS2 will be spent instead on piecemeal transport improvements, but the promise is shaky; much of it is about improvements to roads, abandoning the aim of transfer to rail; and any rail improvements will be slow, expensive, and involve reducing existing capacity while lines are worked on.

Socialists will demand from a future Labour government serious measures to transfer traffic from roads and airways to rail. □

Strikes

20-30 October: Baggage handlers at Heathrow Airport (Unite) strike

7-9 and 24 November: Workers at Amazon’s BHX4 facility in Coventry (GMB) strike

Ballots

13 September-mid-October: Engineering construction workers (Unite) ballot for strikes

22 September-19 October: Rail workers at multiple Train Operating Companies (RMT) re-ballot to renew mandate for action over pay and conditions

13 October-mid-November: London Underground workers (RMT) re-ballot to renew mandate for action.

More at: bit.ly/ro-up



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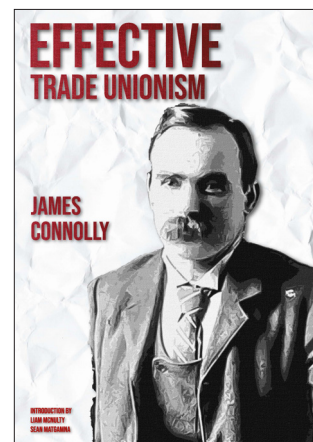
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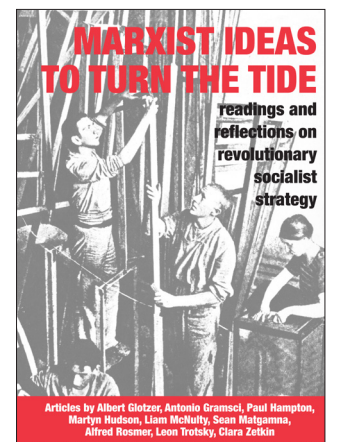
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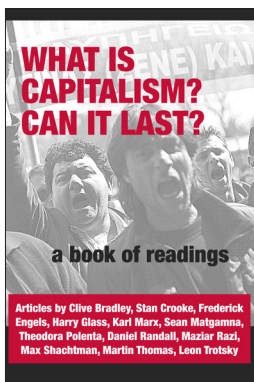
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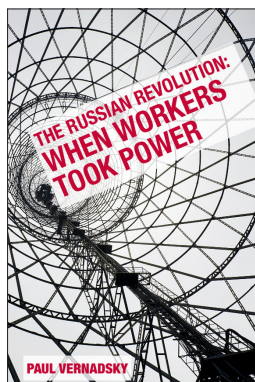
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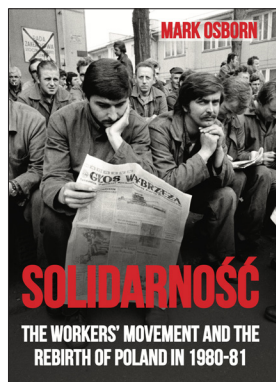
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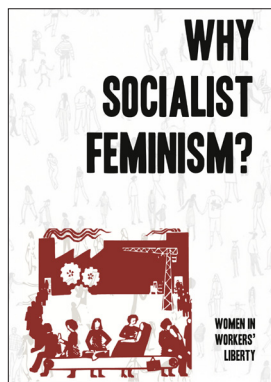
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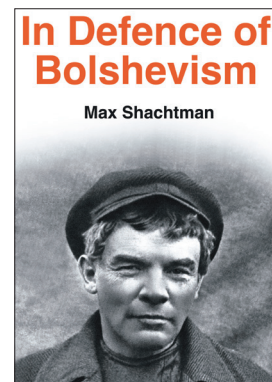
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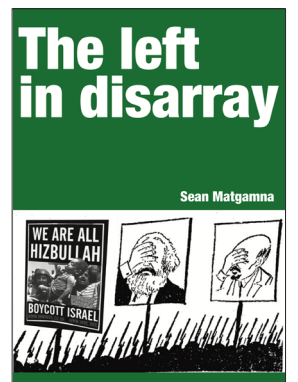
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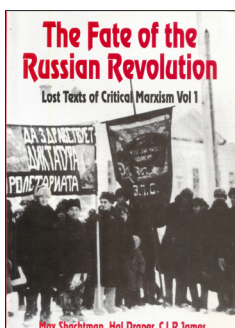
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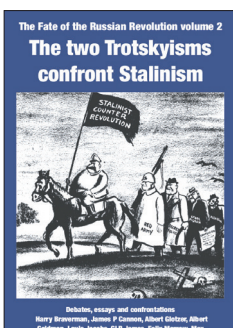
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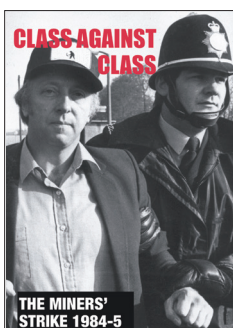
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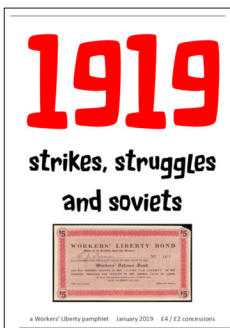
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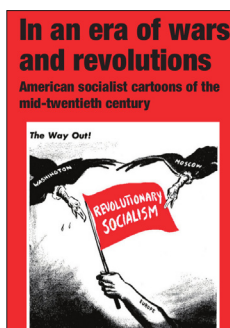
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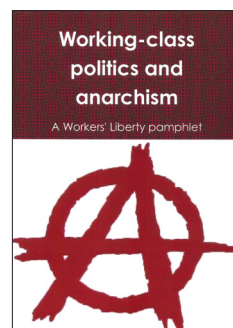
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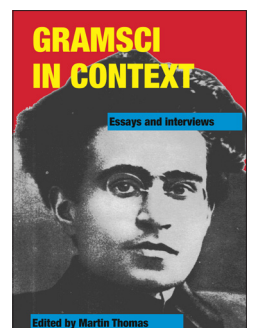
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Rallying to face a Starmer government

By Kayden Jones

Jeremy Gilbert opened the session on “Strategies for a Starmer government” at The World Transformed (fringe event at Labour conference 2023, 7-10 October) by comparing the probable next Labour government to Blair’s victory in 1997.

Blair took power after the exhaustion of the Conservative Party and the Left when the labour movement had been thoroughly defeated by Thatcher. Blair accepted that there was no possibility of challenging the power of capital so only ameliorating reforms were possible. These reforms were successful due to the context of an economic boom, which allowed reforms to be implemented without increasing tax. The end of this boom meant reforms were no longer possible, leading to the exhaustion of the Blairite political project.

Gilbert argues that Starmer’s political project most closely resembles the dregs of Blairism in 2005, when their political project had unravelled. Voters’ exhaustion with the Conservatives mean that Starmer will come to power deeply unpopular but with a large majority, like Macron in France. Gilbert believes that the political left is weak but much stronger than in 1997. On the other hand, the Labour Right have no real political project other than crushing the left; they cannot be pushed in a progressive way without kicking them out. They will again and again demonstrate their loyalty to capital against the majority of the population. They will be faces by constant pressure from within the Labour Party and the wider Labour movement. Gilbert ended by arguing that there is no evidence that a new left party would help this situation, which is correct.

Fascists

Shami Chakrabarti argued that the Sunak-Braverman led Conservative Party is a distinct force from previous Conservative leaderships and asked when it was ok to call them fascists. She pointed out Theresa May’s support for trans rights in comparison to Sunak’s current attacks on them. I think it correct that the Sunak-Braverman Conservative party represent a significant change, but there are specific differences between authoritarian Conservatives using state power and fascists organising street violence. Equating the two only further distorts the meaning of fascism. Chakrabarti then repeated the words: “Hope, Values and Change” a lot. This seemed to have no political content or strategy.

Neal Lawson, the director of Compass, argued that Starmer was devoid of political talent and could only rule in a permaculture. Lawson joked that Starmer in power couldn’t just get Luke Akehurst to discipline the coun-



try. Unlike Gilbert he compared Starmer’s rule to the 1974 crisis, a period of economic depression. He framed the coming conflict as that of democracy vs the Populist Right. Lawson pointed out that the Right were already thinking strategically while we have a maximum of three years to make a new vision.

Lawson argued that the task of the left was to prepare the ideas, organisation, and culture so it would be ready. This would require working in Labour and with the Greens – and, he said, with “business” and “faith” – based on a politics of pluralism. We must be bold for pluralism and democracy. We want an alliance able to intervene at the moment of crisis, but can only do this if the division between “hard” and “soft” left is buried.

While Lawson made some important points, his idea of pluralism seems more like the politics of the lowest common denominator. Socialists should work with people of differing political beliefs, but that must involve the clarification of political differences, rather than muddling them, and working-class independence rather than alliance with “business”.

John McDonnell was the last speaker. He said that we will have a Labour Government though he has anxiety over whether people will bother to vote. Starmer cannot take the electorate for granted and needs to inspire the party membership. In 1997 people were inspired by limited concrete improvements. Today the country is broken. McDonnell proceeded to list all the depressing cuts to public services and the billions of pounds it would take to restore those services to 2010 levels. We would need a minimum of £10 billion to prevent the NHS collapsing and £39 billion to match EU levels. An additional £2.9 billion in care, £21 billion for education, £15 billion for local government, £13 billion to restore public sector pay and so on...

In contrast Labour will only raise an extra £5 billion and a 1% growth (its currently 0.4%) in the economy could generate an extra £13 billion in tax revenues, far short of the money needed

just to restore the country to 2010 levels. Starmer’s government is doomed to fail. McDonnell argues that the left’s job is to save a Labour Government from itself. This requires a detailed plan, and when the government, society and economy collapses into crisis, then the left must be ready to campaign for it.

There were then some questions from the floor by GND Rising members who said that they had no hope of change. I would also have no hope if I was in an undemocratic door-knocking operation. McDonnell in response pointed out that there are periods when an incoming Labour Government could be influenced. He argued that the real world would make it vulnerable to ideas from the left in its first 12 months of power.

Gilbert talked about the probable collapse of the youth vote and it was important to build coalitions out on issues like ecology. He argued that a new organising vehicle is necessary in the Labour Party to bring the “soft” and “hard” left together. Gilbert said it should be called something boring like “Labour Democratic Socialists” not something dumb like Momentum. He then argued that the focus of the left’s organising effort must be on the Unison trade union as it is the weak point of the Starmer project.

It was good that Gilbert put forward some solid proposals for the left to focus on and he may be right about his tactical suggestions. Lawson made some decent points about building the architecture to contain the forces of the left. He said that the Labour Right is brittle and that they will come down like the Berlin Wall.

An audience member asked what John McDonnell was doing and why left MPs were just writing ineffectual letters to Keir Starmer. McDonnell responded that the reason why he wrote was to bear witness. He argued that things come in waves. We are currently in the residue of Corbynism and the next wave will come because of economic crisis. McDonnell believes that his job is to protect the next generation of the Left in Parliament. These parlia-

mentarians would then be able to use their platform to encourage people to engage.

McDonnell said that now is the time to bite your tongue, to stay in place and strike at the strategic time. He then told the audience to think and read *The Art of War*. It was very good that McDonnell set out his strategy in no uncertain terms.

Gilbert argued against those of the left that can only speak in moral religious terms like Jeremy Corbyn, and said that we need to always be showing people’s material interests lie with our political project. As if to prove Gilbert’s point, an audience member argued that we must embrace “collapse-aware organising”, that incrementalism had failed, and that we must have no demands on the state, government and business.

That suggests someone has not learned the lesson from Occupy Wall Street, which petered out after a contested decision to “have no demands”, just to be. The apocalyptic “no increments possible” view is a complete abandonment of politics. If the left is not actively trying to prevent climate, societal, and economic collapse, then why will people listen to us?

Another audience member said that we should just rob supermarkets and give the products out. Such ideas that we should abandon big political projects that can change society must be combatted.

Overall, debate from the speakers was insightful and well-reasoned but the floor was in complete disarray! I thought we should make more of an effort to work with Gilbert and Lawson. To me it reinforced the point of intervening in the Labour Party and arguing that comrades who have given up should re-engage. Most of the left at TWT seemed utterly disillusioned and disorganised. It is our job to drag them kicking and screaming into, or back into, the labour movement and the Labour Party. □

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Defeat in Australia

Voice referendum: bit.ly/voic23

After Rutherglen

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Sydney, 9 October

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Do we need the TUC?

Debate at TWT: bit.ly/twt-tuc

“ What we stand for

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- Black and white workers' unity against racism
- Open borders
- Global solidarity against global capital – workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers
- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation
- Equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small
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Labor and fossil fuel projects in Australia



Environment

By Janet Burstall

"No new fossil fuel projects" is currently the most unifying demand of the climate movement in Australia.

As the International Energy Agency (IEA) has said, there can be no new coal, oil and gas projects if there is to be any chance at limiting warming to 1.5°C. Around two thirds of Australia's contributions to global GHG emissions are from burning of exported fossil fuels in other countries, and the majority of extraction in Australia is for export.

Only governments have across-the-board powers to stop new coal and gas projects. Companies and corporate investors can decide to halt or withhold funds from specific projects. I'll get back to examining campaigns against specific projects, but first to the federal Labor Government and new fossil fuel projects.

Labor policy is mired in contradictions, between protection of the environment and the climate, versus investment, employment, profitability and economic stability that currently flows from, and would be disrupted by curtailing, fossil fuel extraction. As I explained in *Solidarity* 684, the latter dominates decision making.

The generally agreed legal basis for refusing projects would be a "climate trigger" in national environment laws,



currently the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act. The Climate Council, and Bushfire Survivors for Climate Action are petitioning to require the Environment Minister to consider climate change, and its impacts, including the damage that any new coal, oil or gas project built anywhere does to people, places and wildlife everywhere." A climate trigger in the revised Act should include the emissions from burning exported fossil fuels, called Scope 3 emissions, as well as emissions produced within Australia.

Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek has made no mention of this in the anticipated review of the EPBC Act. Her press release claims "our Nature Positive Plan is a win-win: a win for the environment and a win for business", in effect declaring that there is no contradiction between environmental protection and the interests of capital. Yet the promise to "speed up decisions" is likely to mean less time for objections on environmental grounds, or to protect indigenous values, and faster track-

ing for investment.

A new clause that Labor Environment Action Network (LEAN) had inserted in the platform at Labor's National Conference in August 2023 implies the possibility "of ensuring that government policy and economic activity remains within ecological limits, mindful of impacts of the climate and biodiversity."

This brokered agreement on policy wording does not commit to a climate trigger and leaves scope for Ministerial interpretation. When Plibersek rejected

two coal mines earlier in 2023 climate campaigners were excited, but we have since been outraged by four approvals. 25 more proposals for new or expanded coal mines are waiting for Federal Government approval. The potential "29 new coal mines, and the 12.6 billion tonnes of emissions they would cause, is incompatible with limiting dangerous climate change."

An interim demand is for a moratorium on approvals pending the reform of the EPBC Act.

Labor's platform on fossil fuels is in favour of continued extraction. Amendments in 2023 have removed explicit "support for new gas projects and associated infrastructure", but retained "policy settings that ensure sufficient gas supply to meet domestic needs and international obligations" leaving scope for Ministerial interpretation.

The emissions caps in the Safeguard Mechanism provide grounds for the Minister for Climate Change and Energy to reject applications if they would break the total emissions caps. Yet the Government is trying to circumvent this provision so it can approve huge gas projects, using a "net" emissions technicality. A new bill would "allow export

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UCU ballot closes 3 Nov

By a UCU member

At the start of October the University and College Union (UCU) reached an agreement with Universities UK (UUK) to reverse a 35% cut made to the Universities Superannuation Scheme pension. The pension scheme covers around 400,000 current and retired academic and academic-related staff, mostly in those universities established prior to 1992.

The agreement involves benefit restoration to pre-April 2022 levels by Monday 1 April 2024. £15 to £17 billion will be restored to the fund and there will be one-off pension payment of around £900m to help make good the money members have lost since April 2022. New, lower contribution rates will also be introduced next year.

The win is partly explained by financial circumstances – by the "investment outlook" of the fund being stabilised. However, it is still an important win, following action which started back in November 2017. And it has to be attributed to the industrial action taken by thousands of Higher Education workers over those six years.

This is an important point to make to workers who did not participate or who have dropped out of action – "the sacrifices of your co-workers made this happen". It is an important point to emphasise, as the union ballots to renew its industrial action mandate for the continuing fight over pay and conditions; the ballot closes on 3 November. □

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Kennedy in Dallas 60 years on



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

Listing all the books, documentaries etc. about the Kennedy assassination would be impossible, as the pile continues to mount. Expect more to come: for 22 Nov. is the sixtieth anniversary of the events in Dallas.

One film absolutely stands out, whatever its faults: Oliver Stone's *JFK*, released in 1991, with Kevin Costner



as New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison and Gary Oldman as the "not-so-lone" gunman Lee Harvey Oswald. Criticism of the film has ranged far and wide but, I suspect, for many people

JFK is the version of events which still carries most resonance.

The film focuses on the attempt by Garrison to bring to trial gay New Orleans businessman Clay Shaw (Tommy Lee Jones) for his alleged role in a complex conspiracy (embracing the CIA, the Mafia, Cuban exiles and, possibly, Vice-President Lyndon Johnson). The trial collapses because one of Garrison's witnesses is clearly mentally unstable and other witnesses have an unfortunate tendency to die before their day-in-court.

At the film's heart is the proposition that Kennedy was assassinated because he was planning to withdraw US

troops from Vietnam. The evidence for this is, however, very slim. The "dove" Kennedy was as committed to fighting the Vietnam war as the "hawk" Johnson. Stone was also criticised for his portrayal of Shaw and the New Orleans gay community as a bunch of degenerate narcissists, dreaming up right-wing fantasies about assassinating Kennedy or Fidel Castro.

The film does have some strong points: it debunks the "lone gunman" theory. There was a cover-up and, *probably*, some kind of conspiracy at play. Whether or not the truth will ever come out seems unlikely. Despite its faults *JFK* is still worth watching. □

Veolia strikers to vote on offer

By Tony Southwell

After a meeting with management at ACAS, striking GMB workers at three Veolia waste-management sites in Nottinghamshire will vote soon on a new offer. One member described it as nothing to get excited about. It includes an agreement to negotiate on

other issues.

After a strong start workers stopped challenging lorries bringing loads into the facilities, having been cowed by management threats. Some members of the local Trades Council and a few socialist activists have succeeded in blocking the entrance until the

police turn up, which does enthruse the pickets. But the numbers and availability of activists need to increase dramatically before this becomes an effective tactic. A few more workers have joined the action but the union has got to restore the confidence of the workers to talk to the drivers with a view

to turning them back, as they had been doing successfully in the first week.

There seems to be some confusion among GMB full timers and about some local Labour Party councillors' stated desire to attend the picket lines. At the instigation of Labour-aligned supporters,

however, county councillors have visited the picket line and been well received.

The union has also been lacking on calling for solidarity from local trade unions. They could cut through problems if there was greater urgency in showing some basic working-class solidarity. □

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of CO₂ for the purpose of 'sequestration', or storage under the sea" – a technology that "has not worked effectively in Australian waters. If a permit is given for CO₂ waste to be exported to poorer countries, it's unclear how these countries will acquire the capacity and knowledge to achieve successful carbon storage when wealthy fossil fuel companies operating in Australia could not."

There is a lack of will or intent in the Labor Government to stop new fossil fuel extraction. The climate movement and the labour movement have to convince the government that the political costs outweigh the politico-economic calculations in favour of approval, and that alternative genuine low emissions solutions to livelihoods can be achieved.

The latter is necessary for the two major prongs of climate action in Australia – reducing emissions within the country, and reducing exported emissions.

The union movement will be central to winning popular support for low emissions alternatives. But the union movement is conflicted over climate policy, partly because of employment in extraction. There are some small positive steps being taken by the union movement. One case is the campaign

to stop fossil fuel expansion is Santos's Narrabri Coal Seam Gas project. This was approved by the previous NSW Coalition Government, and the new state Labor government has promised not to overturn it.

It will damage the Pilliga Forest, groundwater quality and fertile agricultural land on the Liverpool Plains. The Gomeroi First Nations people of the area, supported by environmental group Lock the Gate, have rallied farmer and other environmentalist organisations along with Unions NSW to oppose the project and demand that the State Government prevent it from going ahead. Members of the Labor Environment Action Network (LEAN) are also opposing the project and working inside the ALP. This coalition held a 1,000 strong protest outside NSW Parliament in September 2023, with a speaker from Unions NSW who had led a union delegation to the Pilliga and individual union flags present.

These Labor-affiliated unions could be taking up the case inside the ALP, as well as amongst their own members, to educate and mobilise opposition. The CFMEU's endorsement of the demand to stop Narrabri CSG does not yet appear to mean that the union is trying to educate and organise the workforce in Narrabri to oppose Santos. In theory the Net Zero Economy Agency should

provide the union a take-off point for discussion with CFMEU members in mining, about government support for transitions to alternative employment.

The group Workers 4 Climate Action (a project of the Solidarity group, linked to SWP-UK) obtained signatures of around 320 trade unionists on a statement of opposition to the Narrabri Gas Project when the Coalition was in government at both state and federal levels. A speaker at a recent Workers 4 Climate Action event lamented that it's harder to get people to protest against Labor governments than conservative governments. This matters to groups who believe that the principal way to win change is with people on the streets.

Yet with Labor in government, the contradictions between capital and environmental protection become more obvious, as we can no longer blame climate denial for the failure to take effective action. And democratic decisions on both policy and action to back it up, made by workers in their unions, and amongst members of the ALP, become much more immediately relevant, when Labor is in government.

The seeds for a working class socialist movement for climate action and the environment need to be fertilised and nurtured into bloom. □

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Labour's conference in Liverpool

By Simon Nelson

Labour Left Internationalists (LLI) had a visible presence at both the Labour conference and the World Transformed (TWT) in Liverpool (7-11 October) and so did Workers' Liberty (though officially banned by Labour). The Labour conference was, as expected, dominated by the right with the call to rally behind the leadership for unity in the coming general election, but a good few delegates and visitors were open to left-wing ideas.

LLI distributed a conference bulletin to delegates (bit.ly/lli23), with information about many campaigns and issues. Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs) can vote for six topics to get onto the conference floor. The LLI bulletin called for delegates to choose Asylum and immigration, Climate change and ecology, health funding and structures, Housing, Reform of Universal Credit and UK-EU relations. As in 2022, a push from the right to choose for debate topics where there would be no debate ("divisiveness") succeeded, and none of these areas was prioritised, despite, for example, 46 CLPs having submitted on housing. The Edinburgh Central motion, the only one on the EU to contain a clear call for a return of free movement and an aim of rejoining the EU, was not discussed. Brexit was barely mentioned on conference floor.

A worse-than-usual stitch-up was the splitting of motions on the NHS into two separate "topics". "Health funding and structure" contained motions with strong commitments, notably from Calder Valley having the strongest commitments. Weaker motions, with a soft line on future private initiatives in the NHS, were classified under "An NHS fit for the future", which was prioritised.

The Socialist Health Association called on unions to lobby the Conference Arrangements Committee (CAC) for the merging of the artificially-split NHS "topics". The CAC was receptive, but in a conference first, the National Executive Committee (NEC) officers' group overruled the CAC. The unions made no open protest, and did not use their choice of six topics for debate to get any of the excluded debates onto conference floor.

Stitch-ups by the leadership, frequent in the Brown and Blair years and probably even more common under Miliband as conferences became more restive, were less frequent under Corbyn and in the earlier years of Starmer's leadership. The reimposition (from 2024) of the pre-2019 rule

on contemporary motions was a backward step for Labour Party democracy.

A clear majority of CLP and union delegations passed the NEC changes to CLP executives, removing obligation for CLPs to have equalities and young members' officers and merging the vice-chairs campaigns and membership. Those rule changes had a sizeable over 30% of union affiliates voting against them, but CLPs voted by about 90% for them.

The national women's conference, just one day before the party conference, saw a clean sweep for right-wing candidates in contested posts. LLI called for conference delegates to prioritise the abortion rights strand and to send the abortion rights motion forward to general conference. Instead a bland motion on violence against women and girls was forwarded, and nodded through without opposition at the general conference.

The conference floor saw a steady stream of prospective parliamentary candidates (PPC) and councillors making prefabricated loyalist speeches, while most ordinary delegates seemed invisible to the chair. Some delegations, including Unite and almost all affiliated socialist societies, were seated in remote parts of the conference hall, out of the chair's view and often in darkness. Between 2016 and 2019 speaker selection was often chaotic, but ordinary delegates did get to speak in nearly every debate.

As a result of the right-wing dominance on the conference floor, the conference shut out a lot of genuine debate and controversy. Unite and Aslef got a composite through that would mean nationalisation of the whole energy industry (it had been classified under a different topic from "Climate change and ecology", so as to avoid CLP ecology motions getting to conference floor). The CWU and FBU got through a composite that would seek to hold Labour more firmly to the New Deal for Working People, but it was all very mild, and the Labour leadership can now ignore both composites if the unions don't assert themselves more.

As a general election approaches and all the union leaders, including many of those not affiliated, make overtures to help secure a future Labour government, the pressure to go along with whatever Starmer, Reeves, and the right want will only grow. Starmer advisor Lord Mandelson was quick to get to the press following the passing of



Protesting an anti-choice group

both composites, warning Labour not to listen too closely to the unions.

In the exhibition hall, Labour made it quite clear that it was friendly and compliant with business, with over £5m taken from exhibitors, including large multinationals and trade bodies for the aerospace industry and the private rented sector. The conference was stage-managed to reassure British and international capital, not Labour members or working-class voters.

On defence, the conference passed two motions, almost identically pro-NATO, pro-expanded arms manufacturing, but one with an added line about supporting Ukraine. Unfortunately the official fringes on Ukraine had not invited any Ukrainian left-wingers to speak.

To emphasise what he is trying to coin as "sound money", Starmer's speech can be well summarised by his calls for caution. "It means not being able to do things – good Labour things – as quickly as we might like. That's what responsible government looks like."

Rachel Reeves and Keir Starmer's speeches, which were the main press event of the conference, were both well received by the commentariat. The address by Mark Carney, the former head of the Bank of England, also set the tone for the Starmer and Reeves leadership being the actual "responsible" incoming leaders of the country. Speeches were calculated to promise little while addressing some real issues. Angela Rayner, who is playing a role akin to John Prescott to Blair of the working-class trade unionist in lock-step with the leadership, did a similar job with her speech.

The cost-of-living crunch was mentioned, but talk about having to promote growth before committing to spending was the main thrust. That put Starmer at odds with the calls from union leaders at the conference about wages and support for the strike wave, and at odds with the urgent need to rebuild the NHS.

A confident and militant labour movement can still pressure an incoming Labour government. The battles on pay across the public and private sectors are an integral part of that.

Outside the conference, the presence of both LLI and Workers' Liberty was if anything better than in 2022, and the reception no worse, but otherwise the left seemed much weaker.

The Campaign for Labour Party Democracy (CLPD) Yellow Pages, which used to be essen-

tial reading for conference delegates on the goings-on and manoeuvres on the conference floor, is a shadow of its former self. It is still daily, but on several occasions only two or three people were handing it out, and the content was weak. Even under Blair and Brown, they could rely on more people than that.

CLPD fringe meetings were no longer the packed and must-attend events for left-wing delegates. Tuesday's review of the conference attracted fewer than 30 and had dropped below 20 by the time the meeting closed. The tenor of the contributions was a quiet waiting it out while relying on the unions to push anything left-wing. Momentum also had a weak presence, despite much larger financial and paid-staff resources than CLPD.

Workers' Liberty was the only revolutionary socialist group to be at the conference centre and TWT for more than odd visits. TWT has struggled with the collapse of Corbynism, but it was still sizeable. Workers' Liberty supporters were able to circulate a lot of our literature freely, and we sold over 200 copies of our latest *Women's Fightback* magazine, 100 copies of *Solidarity*, and many pamphlets.

Outside the conference centre, Workers' Liberty was the only group, left, right, or other, there permanently with things to say to delegates. Our comrades supported the distribution of literature for Free Our Unions, Solidarity with the Iranian Workers, Labour Campaign for Free Movement, Student Cost of Living Campaign, India Labour Solidarity, and LLI. We were also crucial to protests organised by SCOL and ILS. And the only force who counter-protested an anti-choice group who turned up on the Tuesday.

Following the Hamas attack on Israeli civilians, we distributed copies of our statement on the war in Israel/Palestine – the only organisation to put out anything on the issue. We could have fruitful discussions about what the labour movement should be saying and campaigning for while both the kitsch left and the Labour leadership fail to debate the issue.

Labour activists will have to work against the memo after conference from general secretary David Evans, which calls for local CLPs to be careful when discussing the issue (not outright wrong as such), being used to stifle the debate the left needs to have. □

• More on Labour conference: p.13



Solidarity

For a workers' government



Pic: @BMA_JuniorDocs

TORIES DESPERATE TO END DOCTORS' STRIKES

By Sacha Ismail

The government is desperate to end doctors' strikes for a real pay rise (part of their campaign for "pay restoration", reversing huge real-terms pay cuts since 2008).

It knows that a serious win for the doctors will make renewed strikes in other parts of the public sector next year more likely.

So it is resorting to both stick and carrot. The sticks include leaking that it [plans](#) to recruit thousands of doctors from India to break the strike. The *Daily Mail* quotes a "Whitehall source" as citing Ronald Reagan's smashing of the US air traffic controllers' union in 1982. This [may not](#) be real or plausibly workable, but it should be denounced and vigorously opposed by the UK labour movement, on the basis of building stronger links with doctors and their organisations in India.

The unappetising carrot is a reported [offer](#) to consultants (senior doctors) of an additional one-off payment of 6%, just for this year, on top of the 6% pay rise already agreed.

If true, this underscores the absurdity of claims that no

more money is available and the current offer is "final". However, one-off-payments in place of pay rises are a terrible policy the entire labour movement should oppose; and this is manifestly an attempt to divide consultants from junior doctors, the driving force of the BMA's struggle. Their recent coordination has no doubt rattled the Tories.

The BMA has set no more strike dates for either junior doctors or consultants, arguing that this means the Tories have absolutely no excuse not to negotiate. That seems like a dangerous strategy, particularly as winter approaches, the crunch in the NHS grows ever sharper,

and strikes become more difficult. It seems crucial that strikes are put back on urgently.

Unite members in the NHS recently struck over pay and may again soon, creating possibilities for wider coordination.

BMA organisations and activists also need to find ways to intervene in and pressure the Labour Party, which is still steadfastly refusing to support the doctors and coming under very little pressure about it. Rumoured activity by doctors at Labour Party conference seems not to have materialised.

To help with all this, the labour movement must ramp up solidarity. □

PCS: vote Lloyd-Moloney

Nominations for the General Secretary and Assistant General Secretary of the PCS civil service union closed on 16 October, and voting is 9 November to 14 December. *Solidarity* calls on readers to vote for Marion Lloyd and John Moloney. They are standing for a democratic fighting union and for rebuild-

ing the national pay campaign de facto trashed by the incumbent Left Unity faction. If elected they will take no more than their civil service workers' pay, and return the rest of the bloated official salary to the union, as John Moloney already does. More: bit.ly/li-pcs □