

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

ISRAEL-GAZA: STOP THE WAR!



FIGHT FOR TWO STATES EQUAL RIGHTS WORKERS' UNITY

More on Israel and Palestine

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Against the war, for c



The population of Gaza faces an increasingly desperate situation. Blockaded and besieged by Israel, with access to basic utilities and aid having been cut off, a humanitarian crisis mounts. As of 23 October about 5,000 have been killed. Over 10,000 are injured. UN statistics estimate that 25% of homes in Gaza are damaged or destroyed.

Israel has instructed 1.1 million people, over half of Gaza's population, to evacuate the north of the enclave. The instruction is a practical impossibility. Some humanitarian aid has entered Gaza via the Egypt-controlled Rafah crossing. Aid workers say the quantities – of food, medical supplies and equipment, and other vital necessities – fall well short of what is needed. The transport of aid will be impeded by bomb damage to Gaza's roads. Hospitals in particular are in grave danger of running out of fuel.

Israeli troops mass on the Gaza border. A ground invasion seems imminent. That invasion will see many more civilian deaths, inevitable in an area as densely populated as Gaza.

Israel's ultimate aim in Gaza is far from clear. Its leaders talk about the total destruction of Hamas, and of being prepared to turn Gaza into a "city of rubble" in order to achieve it. But even if Israel succeeds in destroying Hamas as a military force, what then? An attempt to reoccupy Gaza and rule it directly would mean indefinite war (even if low-level at first) and large Israeli military casualties.

Hamas does not exist only as a response to Israel's action, but as an expression of distinct national and regional political-religious currents. Nevertheless, like many fascistic movements throughout history, it draws on real social grievances. Unless the social conditions on which Hamas's eschatological Islamic-nationalism feeds are changed, then it – or an even-worse, more-reactionary successor, closer to Al-Qa'eda or ISIS – will regrow.

Gaza's population is young. A significant proportion of the dead and injured are children. Those that survive will carry physical and psychological scars. On 17 October, the Al-Ahli Hospital in Gaza was bombed, killing many

people. Claim and counterclaim immediately erupted about the responsibility for the bombing. Hamas, many Palestinians, and many in Arab states more widely instantly blamed Israel; Israel has produced evidence that the cause was a misfiring Islamic Jihad rocket. In any case the bombing is a gruesome testament that civilians are the main victims of the war.

In the West Bank, the Palestinian territory subject to a 56-year-long Israeli occupation and de facto military dictatorship, hundreds of Palestinians have been killed, some by armed settlers, some by the Israeli army. Friday 20 October saw images circulate of Palestinian men stripped and bound by settlers, along with allegations of sexual abuse.

Deep wounds have been caused to Israeli Jewish society, too, where the death toll from Hamas's attacks of 7 October has reached 1,400. The Israeli security forces have revised their estimate of the number of hostages held in Gaza upwards to over 200. Hamas has begun releasing videos of the hostages, and a burgeoning movement in Israeli society is calling for more effective action to be taken to secure their release, with many family members of hostages indicting Netanyahu's strategy for putting them at greater risk. A few more hostages have been released from 20 Oct.

Beyond Israel-Palestine, many Arab and Muslim states have seen large demonstrations. In Tunisia, a mob attacked and partially destroyed the historic Al Hammah synagogue – an antisemitic outrage that does nothing to help the Palestinians, but only helps to entrench chauvinist politics. In other countries, antisemitic and anti-Muslim incidents have spiked. Wadea Al-Fayoume, a six-year-old Palestinian-American child was stabbed to death in Illinois. Samantha Woll, the president of a synagogue in Detroit, was stabbed to death on 21 October.

The Israeli state has dispossessed, displaced, and colonially subjugated the Palestinian people over many decades. In that conflict, between Israeli occupation and the Palestinian people's right to national self-determination, any consistent democrat, let alone socialist, should be on the side of the Palestinian people. This does not mean, however, that we side with Hamas in the immediate military conflict with Israel. Or with Hezbollah if outright war also breaks out on the northern border, initiated either by Hezbollah or by Israel.

The US socialist theorist Hal Draper once said that, if war is the continuation of politics by military means, socialists should determine their attitude to a war based on their attitude to the politics of which the war is a continuation – on both sides. Of what politics is the war between Israel and Hamas a continuation?

On Israel's side, it is a politics of collective punishment, stretching Israel's legitimate right to defend its civilian population past breaking point. Its war is inextricable from its policies of blockade and occupation towards the Palestinians; some of its leading politicians now talk more-or-less explicitly about ethnic cleansing. One possible endgame of the current war, from Israel's perspective, could be the wholesale expulsion of the Palestinian populations into Egypt (from Gaza) and Jordan (from the West Bank). Like all the other outcomes, that does not seem "likely", but one of the "unlikely" outcomes will occur nonetheless. All the options Israel might pursue through a continued and escalating war will involve massive civilian death tolls and displacement.

Hamas

And on Hamas's side? Does Hamas's war against Israel merely express the Palestinian people's legitimate right to defend itself, to resist occupation? Is Hamas's aim simply for Palestinian self-determination? No. The statements of Hamas's own leaders make clear that their aim is for the driving out of the Jews. Hamas is for a theocratic Islamic state in all of pre-1948 Palestine. It resists Israel in the name of these, reactionary, aims. The slaughter on 7 October was an expression in miniature of what Hamas would unleash on a bigger scale if it had the means to do so.

Those on the global left who, like the UK Socialist Workers Party, "rejoiced" at Hamas's attacks are not aiding the Palestinian cause. In fact they are saying that that cause should be confiscated by one of the most violently reactionary political forces in Palestinian society, whose maximum horizon is not the "secular, democratic state" the SWP used to say it favoured, but a vicious war between rival imperialisms (Iranian and Israeli) in which not only Jewish, but Palestinian, self-determination would surely be drowned in blood.

For now, Hamas is limited in the damage it can inflict on Israel. Israel is capable of inflicting much more widespread damage on the Palestinians.

But it cannot undo their existence as a national people. The two peoples will remain. There can only be a political, not a military, solution to the disparity of rights between them. As the Palestinian-Norwegian human rights activist Iyad el-Baghdadi put it: "Regardless [of] what anyone thinks, nobody will exterminate anybody. When this is all over, be it in 20, 50, or 100 years, there will be Jews and Palestinians – our children – living in the Holy Land. May it be in peace, love and equality."

El-Baghdadi has a liberal-humanitarian (and liberal-religious) outlook rather than a class-struggle Marxist one. But people with el-Baghdadi's politics have generally responded to the current war with far more moral clarity than the vast majority of the organised Marxist left. There, a perspective that sees world politics as a dualistic struggle between "imperialism" and "anti-imperialism", with Israel the quintessential expression of imperialism, has led many left groups to cheer for anything that wounds Israel and Israelis, even wounds inflicted by political forces hostile to basic left-wing principles of democracy and equality.

Abandoning that perspective, a poisonous legacy of Stalinism, and re-anchoring socialist politics in universalist, humanist and democratic principles will make the organised left a far more effective advocate for Palestinian rights. It is only on the basis of those principles that we can advocate for the Arab-Jewish workers' unity that is a prerequisite for any socialist future in the Middle East.

Whilst there is no military symmetry between the right-wing Israeli government and Hamas, there is a sort of political symmetry – or at least a symbiosis. The hegemony on both sides of a politics of ultra-reactionary nationalism, that sees the people of the "other side" as something less than human, as undeserving of basic human rights, fuels endless cycles of bloodshed. The only way out is to build up a strong, assertive political force, organised across both communities, that articulates a different vision: a politics of equality, of the right of both peoples to self-determine. In the first place this means an end to the occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and an end to the blockade of Gaza, and the establishment of a genuinely independent Palestinian state alongside a secure Israel.

The political force in Israeli society that currently best represents a politics of coexistence and equal rights



onsistent democracy

is Standing Together, a grassroots Arab-Jewish coalition led by Israeli and Palestinian socialists. Since the war began, they have combined anti-war agitation with community self-defence and mutual aid efforts, organising especially in “mixed cities” to establish “Solidarity Committees” to resist attempts by the racist right to stoke intercommunal violence. Out of such common organising, a cohesive political alternative to chauvinism could emerge.

Faced with news footage and social media images of civilian slaughter and worsening humanitarian crisis, the urge to do something to help is surely strong amongst anyone motivated by basic human compassion and impulses of solidarity. Large pro-Palestine demonstrations have taken place across the world, although often under the political leadership of forces that are, implicitly or explicitly, pro-Hamas.

There is a need for campaigns of social pressure on western governments, many of which have signalled carte blanche support for Israel's actions, to change course, and pressure Israel to, minimally, agree a ceasefire, restore regular access to utilities, and facilitate the provision of humanitarian aid.

The leaders of mainstream social democratic parties across Europe and elsewhere, including Keir Starmer, have, whilst calling for the provision of humanitarian aid, mostly held back from calling for a ceasefire, emphasising Israel's right to self-defence. US President Joe Biden talks of providing Israel with increased military aid, whilst telling it to avoid “being blinded by rage.”

Unlike much of the left, which sees all Israeli Jews as legitimate targets, Workers' Liberty believes Israel has a right to defend its civilian population. However, between its “Iron Dome” missile interception system and its existing military supplies, it surely already has the equipment it needs to carry out legitimately self-defensive activities. (Israel is a major military exporter, and UK military exports to it, of components not systems, are minor).

Palestinian trade unions have [called](#) for workers' action to block arms shipments to Israel. Further arms shipments will inevitably be used offensively, as part of the bombardment or ground invasion of Gaza. Supporting the Palestinian unions' demand is not incompatible with supporting Israel's right to self-defence.

The National Executive Committee of the RMT union has voted to support moves by workers to block the transportation of arms to Israel. What this might mean in practice is not clear;

members taking such action would be in breach of the UK's anti-strike laws, which illegalise industrial action over any issues not part of a “trade dispute” between a union and an employer. Unions will need to be prepared to face down those laws if they want to back members who refuse to handle arms. The RMT also has members on Royal Fleet Auxiliary ships Britain has dispatched to the region, who the union says it “will support.”

The call to block arms shipments has most publicly been taken up by political currents who oppose not only Israel's policies but its very existence, and their perspective on that must be challenged. Political narratives arguing that Israel is an artificial creation or implantation of specifically British imperialism must also be challenged.

Colonial

In fact, from the late-1930s until Israel's foundation, British colonial authorities resisted demands for Jewish immigration and self-determination. The Jewish community made war against the British authorities from 1945 to 1947, demanding that Holocaust survivors be allowed to enter Palestine rather than being kept in British detention camps. British officers led regiments in the Arab armies that fought Israel in the 1948-9 war. British imperialism is to be indicted far more for playing off Arab and Jewish national claims against each other, sponsoring one against the other by turns, than for “giving Palestine to the Jews”.

Nevertheless, the general call itself, to block arms shipments to Israel, should be supported. The four [largest](#) exporters of arms to Israel are the USA (70.2%), Germany (23.9%), Italy (5.9%), and Canada (0.05%) Therefore, the workers with the most power to block arms shipments to Israel are in the military industries of these countries. The Italian “base union” SI Cobas has said it will seek to organise action to block shipments from Italy.

Many people will be motivated to donate and fundraise for “mainstream” humanitarian initiatives such as Medical Aid for Palestinians and the International Red Cross. In the absence of any independent labour-movement infrastructure for providing aid, those efforts are the best-available humanitarian projects to which people can donate.

But the most effective political step socialists and trade unionists who want to advance struggles for democracy and equality can take is to make direct links with activists and organisations engaged in those struggles on the ground.

Standing Together is conducting a

[fundraising](#) drive to support its mutual aid and community self-defence work. It has also published an online [briefing](#) giving guidance on what its international supporters can do to give practical support. Supporters in the UK have launched a [network](#) to coordinate solidarity activity. The Democracy and Workers Rights Centre, a Palestinian labour organisation [active](#) in both the West Bank and Gaza, is also calling for support.

While the world's attention turns to Gaza, Russia's colonial war in Ukraine and Turkey's colonial war against the Kurds are continuing. Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad's brutal assaults on his own people go on. The Chinese state's colonial repression of national and ethnic minorities such as the Uyghurs also continues. The clerical-fascist regime of Iran continues to suppress opposition and dissent; trade unionists like Reza Shahabi languish in its jails. All of these struggles are no less deserving than the Palestinian national struggle of international attention and support.

The campist left hides its support for Hamas behind slogans like “freedom for Palestine” (would a Palestine under Iran-sponsored Hamas rule be “free”?), often whilst indulging in apologism for the colonialism, authoritarianism, and brutality of other imperialist powers. The alternative is a politics of consistent democracy, supporting rights for oppressed minorities whilst not vicariously adopting the politics of reactionary political forces within them.

For freedom and democratic rights for all peoples – against *all* coloni-



Alon-Lee Green of Standing Together, with a poster that reads “Only peace will bring security”

alisms, against *all* imperialisms – for solidarity and workers' unity! Self-determination for Palestinians and Israeli-Jews – two states and equal rights! □



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](#).

Thursday 26 October, 5pm: Workers' Liberty Students: Why the Working Class?, meet LEON, Brunswick Centre Unit 2, London WC1N 1AY

6pm: Fighting the Far Right Culture War – Women's Fightback no. 29 launch, County Arms, 85 Romsey Road, Winchester SO22 5DL

Saturday 28 October, 2pm: Battersea Radical Walking tour

Monday 30 October, 7.30pm: Intersectionality and class struggle, Menard Hall, 14 Galway St, London EC1V 3SW

Thursday 2 November, 5pm: Workers' Liberty Students: the fight for free education, LEON Brunswick, Brunswick Centre Unit 2, London WC1N 1AY

Saturday 4 November, 10am: All the Rage: Socialist Feminist festival, Pelican House, 144 Cambridge Heath Rd, Bethnal Green, London E1 5QJ

Monday 6 November, 7.30pm: What is Third Camp Socialism? Menard Hall, 14 Galway Street, London EC1V 3SW

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



Stalin in London: not the true story



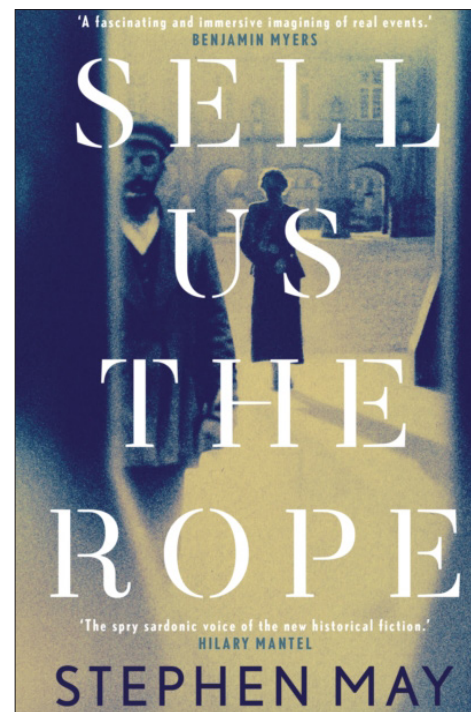
Eric Lee

By Eric Lee

Stephen May's *Sell Us The Rope* is a new novel about the London congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party of 1907. Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin and Rosa Luxemburg play leading roles in the story. I know: it sounds great. But before you click on 'Buy Now' on Amazon, let me tell you a bit more.

The book's premise – that Stalin was a long-term, paid informer for the tsarist secret police (the Okhrana) – made the story especially interesting for me. The fact that it had a positive review in the *New York Times* – that was icing on the cake.

Sadly, this is a very disappointing book. The research seems to consist of the author reading (more likely – skimming) a single book from a couple of decades ago that argued Stalin had been an agent of the tsarist police. The author of that book, Roman Brackman, built his case on the testimony of NKVD General Alexander Orlov, who was perhaps the least trustworthy source imaginable. Following his defection to the West in the late 1930s, Orlov neglected to tell his FBI handlers that during his time in England, he recruited the infamous Cambridge spy ring. And of all the stories circulating about Stalin's role as a police agent, Orlov's is probably the least reliable.



There is little evidence that Stephen May read anything else about the colourful history of the Russian revolutionary movement – and anyone with a passing knowledge of that history will spot the bloopers from early on.

For example, the Okhrana super-spy levno Azef was not "the former head

of the party's combat organisation". He was the head of a different party's combat organisation, a party which was a rival to the Social Democrats. It was called the Social Revolutionary Party.

And the idea that Stalin consorted with Trotsky in London was absurd. Trotsky wrote about meeting Stalin briefly – noting that he could barely remember the man. His disdain for Stalin was one of the many reasons that the future Soviet dictator hated Trotsky and eventually had him killed.

The characterisation of Rosa Luxemburg is actually offensive. She is depicted in this book in the same way as the anarchist Emma Goldman was portrayed in E L Doctorow's *Ragtime*, which was a far superior book. Rosa is shown as a sexually liberated woman giving life lessons to a younger female comrade while bathing together. You'd not imagine such a character as the author of dense economic works such as *The Accumulation of Capital* or *The Industrial Development of Poland*. In this book, Luxemburg seems to have hardly any interest in politics.

The most important figures in the Russian revolutionary movement, including Plekhanov and Martov, are treated as buffoons.

Much of this could be forgiven if there was an interesting story to tell. But there is no story. Nothing happens. Romances that might have taken off go

nowhere. People whose lives appear to be under threat are rescued. In the end, everyone attends a congress – about which we learn almost nothing – and then goes home.

Historically illiterate, offensive in its treatment of key intellectual figures on the Russian Left, and devoid of any drama or tension, this is a completely vacuous work. Meanwhile, the true story of the young Stalin and his relationship with the tsarist police remains to be written. □

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

Strikes

20-30 October: Vanderlande Industries baggage handlers at Heathrow Airport (Unite) strike

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

7-11 and 20-25 November and 4-16 December: Net-a-Porter warehouse workers (GMB) strike

Ballots

13 October-8 November: London Underground workers (RMT) re-ballot to renew mandate for action over jobs, pensions and conditions

More at: bit.ly/ro-up

Labour after the by-elections

By David Pendleton

Labour won the 19 October by-elections in Tamworth and Mid-Bedfordshire, with significant swings.

Good! The central issue for the working-class is getting the Tories out of government and replacing them with a government that may be open to organised working class pressure. Despite the Labour leaders' hullabaloo about "changing landscapes" and "game-changing" moments, the result shows a big antipathy to the Tories – but no positive embrace for Labour.

In the Mid-Beds by-election Labour actually got fewer votes than they did in 2019 General Election. In Tamworth only 800 votes more than in 2019, and many fewer than in the 1996 by-election (a year before the 1997 general election) in South East Staffordshire (the main predecessor constituency).

Labour Party membership rose in early 2020 for the leadership election, but has shrunk since (maybe, only maybe, levelling off now). In the run-up to the election of the Blair government, numbers grew steadily from 1994 to a peak in 1997-8.



Socialists will need to orientate themselves and choose their slogans carefully for the coming General Election. We will call for a vote for Labour.

However, I think we cannot presume, as we historically have, that the labour movement will be disappointed by a Labour government. The evidence is the labour movement expects very little from it. Unlike Blair, a Starmer government will be an austerity government.

Blair was able to spend on hospitals and schools, albeit funnelling it through private finance initiatives and outsourcing. Starmer is not even promising that. There will be relief at getting the Tories out but maybe not expectations for a Labour government.

Simply telling activists to hold on in there and wait for future fights will not be enough. □

Votes at Labour conference

At Labour conference 8-11 October, 81% of CLPs and 54% of affiliates (mostly unions) voted for restriction of motions to "contemporary" issues and 65% of CLPs and 52% of affiliates (mostly unions) supported new rules for CLPs (mostly about officer positions). The National Policy Forum report was carried with 91% of CLPs and 69% of affiliates in favour. These figures are a bit different from our first information. They show an unusually large minority of unions protest-voting where items usually go through "on the nod". Unfortunately, doing little more than protest-voting. □

No Antidoto

Jim Denham is away. His column will be back next week. □

Slogans on Gaza protests

By Rhodri Evans

Workers' Liberty's slogans on Israel-Palestine are as they have been for many years, with minor variants: Two states, equal rights; Israel out of the occupied territories; a real independent Palestinian state alongside a secure Israel; Arab-Jewish workers' unity. And of course immediate demands like "Stop the massacre".

We used to use "solidarity with the Palestinians", because in the first intifada (1987-8) and long afterwards it was clear: general solidarity with the oppressed, specific solidarity with an immediate struggle to get Israel out of the occupied territories. It is [not clear](#) when Hamas appears as the forefront of "Palestinians", and we do not wish solidarity with Hamas.

What of other slogans?

Many take "Free Palestine" to mean just general protest against oppression of the Palestinian people. Some interpret it as meaning "two states". Some even interpret another favourite slogan, "From the river to the sea" as meaning a democratic settlement for the whole area, i.e. two states. But...

"Free Palestine" (or "Freedom for Palestine") came into wide use from April 2002, [introduced](#) by the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) as a slogan for the Socialist Alliance (then an umbrella for most of the activist left groups, including SWP and Workers' Liberty). The SWP said the slogan would make socialists in tune on a [demonstration](#) that month which was the first big public appearance of the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB), British offshoot of

the political-Islamist Muslim Brotherhood.

The MAB's own slogans in that period were [such as](#) "Zionists out of Palestine". The SWP's aim was to draw in left-minded people with an ambiguous slogan, and then explain to those desiring more "militant" or "Marxist" fare that really only "smash Israel" would do.

The SWP persuaded everyone else in the Socialist Alliance bar Workers' Liberty to back their ambiguous slogan. Then the SWP also voted down "Israel out of the occupied territories" (though some oth-



ers voted with us on that). They said it was "the wrong priority", meaning, as far as I could ever [make out](#), that it implied Israel continuing to exist.

The SWP then got the MAB (still a tiny minority among Muslims here) advertised as co-organiser of the huge "Stop the War" demonstrations of 2002-3 against invading Iraq. "Freedom for Palestine" was added to the demonstration slogans to entice MAB but be bland enough not to put off the mass of liberal-minded protesters.

"From the river to the sea" gained currency then as an unofficial chant nailing down "free Palestine" to sweeping away Israel, but less offputting than MAB's original "Zionists out of Palestine".

Variants like "Smash the Israeli terror state" and "End Israeli apartheid" are also now current. They are designed to draw in many who will interpret them as opposition to *Israeli policies*. For their chief promoters, pushing these slogans in opposition to a "two states" message, the slogans mean: "smash" or "end" *Israel*. Wrapping the cause of justice in blanded-down versions of the reactionary Hamas programme is no service to the Palestinians. □

Against suspensions, for discussion

By Michael Baker

The Socialist Appeal society at University College London (UCL) was suspended on 11 October for its "Intifada until Victory" posters, and on 19 October organised a joint demonstration with UCL Socialist Alternative, both protesting against the university's crackdown. Socialist Alternative were not prevented from holding their meeting (as it was held off-campus), but the advertisement for it on the university's website was removed, on grounds (as with Soc App) of "inciting violence".

Protestors also heard about the suspension pending investigation by SOAS university, nearby, of four

students after an earlier Palestine demonstration. SOAS has claimed that the suspensions (which include individuals not present at the protest) are not about the protest or its politics, but about a fire alarm being set off at the same time. SOAS Palestine Society have denied involvement in the alarm.

At Sussex University, the student union's women's officer has been arrested by counter-terror police following a speech on 13 October in which she reportedly praised the attacks on Israeli citizens. The university has announced a separate investigation. We know of no disciplinary moves in other universities yet.

A statement from SOAS PalSoc put out on Instagram ends by saying that

they feel a "moral imperative" to "organise against the imperialist and Zionist forces on our campus". This seems to be about a long-standing demand to break the university's academic link with Haifa university. (Some SOAS students go to Haifa for Hebrew-immersion learning). It is worth noting that as of 2019, 41% of Haifa University students are Palestinian-Israeli. It has also been the site of large anti-war protests since 7 October (and some student suspensions).

No student should be suspended or expelled, or face legal penalties, for political action. At the same time student activists must talk and debate the politics of their slogans. □

Women's vote tips Polish election



By Ann Nukeman

When the results were announced of Poland's general election on 15 October, progressives breathed a sigh of relief. The ultra-conservative Law and Justice (PiS) party was finally out of power.

PiS's eight years in government were characterised by attacks on democratic institutions, LGBTQ+ people, migrants and women. In 2020, a move to further restrict Poland's already draconian abortion law led to the biggest wave of protest in the country's

democratic history. While the mass demonstrations didn't manage to stop the near-complete ban on abortions, the election was seen as an opportunity to reverse this and previous attacks on reproductive rights. "The most important march is the march to the polls," said a popular slogan encouraging women to vote.

And march they did. Unusually, the turnout was slightly higher among women than men, reaching a record-breaking 74%. Of all demographics, women under 30 were by far the most likely to vote for the left.

PiS was not the only danger they were mobilising against. Further to its right, the Confederation party threatened to

reverse not decades but centuries worth of progress. Although its campaign focused on pro-market economic proposals, its misogynistic agenda was widely known. Its leaders had previously called for prison sentences for women who terminate a pregnancy. In September, Confederation politicians were spotted at the launch of an organisation called the Patriarchy Foundation, where participants argued that women "shouldn't be considered partners, but a man's property". One of the party's leading figures, Janusz Korwin-Mikke, is known for his long-standing belief that women don't deserve the right to vote.

In the end Confederation

underperformed, preventing it from governing in coalition with PiS. The next government will almost certainly be formed by the three other groupings in the Polish Parliament: the liberal Civic Coalition, the centre-right Third Way and Lewica, an alliance of left parties (including social democrats, socialists in Razem and smaller organisations).

Yet despite women's growing political engagement, Lewica was the only group to put forward an unapologetically feminist platform: promising legal abortions, action on equal pay, guaranteed menstrual leave for people with painful periods and a new legal definition of rape based on lack of consent rather than

physical violence. Civic Coalition only reluctantly came out in favour of legalising abortion in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy after concerted pressure from activists. Meanwhile, Third Way attempted to sidestep the issue by advocating for a referendum, and refused to back calls for decriminalisation.

Without all three parties on board, and a sign-off from the PiS-backed President Andrzej Duda (who has the power to veto legislation), it would be impossible to pass a bill legalising or decriminalising abortion. It seems like Polish women can't stop marching just yet. □

The politics of the last atrocity



By Katy Dollar

It is personally understandable that Eric Lee in *Solidarity* 686 felt more able to write impressions and thoughts than thought-out analysis after the Hamas attack on Israel (7 Oct), but his column *Six thoughts on Gaza and Israel* muddled reasonable concerns about the reaction to the Hamas attack with straightforwardly wrong statements. In criticising a left that does not recognise Israel's right to self-defence he over-corrects into defending and minimising brutal collective punishment by the Israeli state.

Eric describes Labour leader Keir Starmer as one of the bright sparks following the attacks for speaking out against Hamas terrorism and for Israel's self-defence. Starmer's comments on Israel right to self-defence came in answer to whether "cutting off power, cutting off water" in Gaza was appropriate.

In the context of the siege of Gaza one can't simply declare Israel's right to self-defence with no reference to what that should and shouldn't consist of. In the name of national self-defence, thousands of buildings have been destroyed, thousands of civilians killed, and more than one million people displaced, under siege and deprived of sufficient water, food and energy. The UN has said the volume of aid that has entered so far is just 4% of the daily average before the war. Even before the

situation was already desperate, with 90% of water not meeting WHO standards, and food and energy shortages.

Eric is baffled that Israel's evacuation order is being called a war crime. Whether the evacuation order itself was a war crime, it clearly wasn't just the honest attempt to protect civilian life Eric presents it as. It is not possible to move 1.1 million people to safety in the timescale Israel gave. Following the evacuation the IDF bombed areas they had designated as sanctuaries. There has been premeditated, planned and deliberate killing of civilians both by Hamas and Israel in the conflict.

First

After the first bombs on Gaza, Eric states: "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". A week on from publication of Eric's column, Israel has killed thousands of Gazans, including thousands of children. Many more will die. Israel is still planning a land invasion.

Though I would not choose Eric's phrasing, he is right that where Israel is concerned "the genocide card" is played pretty often. The comparison of Israel to Nazi Germany is common on Palestinian demonstrations. Actions of the Israeli state are compared to the Holocaust pretty obviously to provoke and upset Jews. We must confront the antisemitic implication in that.

But whether or not it would be right to talk about genocide, we must register a change in register in Israeli politics

and recognise Israel appears to be on the verge of ethnic cleansing in Gaza.

An Israeli security official told Channel 13 News no buildings will remain in the region, saying, "Gaza will eventually turn into a city of tents." Roy Sharon, a Channel 10 TV commentator, said "if it means a million dead bodies in Gaza so be it". Adam Keller reports stickers declaring "Exterminate Gaza!" appearing across Tel Aviv.

Eric reports seeing a tweet 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."

It is probably counterproductive that so much energy is sucked into politics by tweets, hurriedly thrown out takes with little space for analysis, with backlashes and responses that blow them way out of context. But the tweet does illustrate a real problem with the idea that solidarity is due to all Palestinians, but only with some Israelis, those who might be considered "internationalists" – Israelis not seen as a legitimate people, Israelis and Jews in general must earn empathy and solidarity through political positions in a way not required of other people.

Eric's response to the tweet is illustrative of a wider problem, too, when he asks "who thinks first and foremost about 'solidarity with Palestinians' long before there was any significant Israeli response". We cannot offer our solidarity based on the politics of the last dead baby. The Hamas attack is situated in a decades long conflict. Anyone



with any understanding of the situation could predict that there would be a disproportionate response from Israel and that Palestinians would die. We must think of their safety as well as that of the Israeli hostages.

Over the next weeks we will see an occupying force and regional super power with vast technical-military superiority level mosques, schools and housing. It will seem almost crass to consider the right of Israelis to live in safety, but we must. Both peoples in Israel Palestine have the right to national self-determination and the right to safety. It is easy to lose a broader picture in the horror of civilians, especially children, dying.

Against Hamas the "fascist death cult" and the far-right Jewish-supremacist government of Israel we promote Jewish-Arab workers' unity, equal rights for both peoples. □

Labour and the right to protest

By Colin Foster

Activists in Southampton Test Constituency Labour Party have been told that a local motion calling for a ceasefire in Israel-Gaza is out of order. Nine members of the constituency executive in Glasgow Kelvin have resigned their executive positions because "we have been informed by the general secretary and the Scottish general secretary that any motions relating to the situation in Israel and Gaza are out of order for all CLPs".

A number of Labour councillors have resigned from the Labour Party over Keir Starmer's statements on Israel-Gaza.

It looks like these moves reflect local right-wing officials "taking advantage" and councillors bailing out in disgust

rather than fighting their corner.

Activists should stick in there, put forward motions (a template using much wording from an RMT union statement is at bit.ly/mo-pe), and challenge officials if they claim those are out of order. When, in 2022, activists put motions opposing the Labour ban on Workers' Liberty, some were told these were "out of order", but after challenges the motions were both allowed and passed.

Akehurst

We can cite a recent article on LabourList from Luke Akehurst, a National Executive member close to Starmer.

Akehurst writes that there are not "restrictions placed on Constituency Labour Par-

ties gagging them from raising motions... and preventing them from openly standing in solidarity with Palestinians and Israelis".

"General secretary David Evans's recent letter to CLPs and branches" counselled care in managing high-emotion debate, and said only that "motions 'prejudicial or grossly detrimental' to the party or which risk infringing party rules on antisemitism and Islamophobia will be ruled out of order".

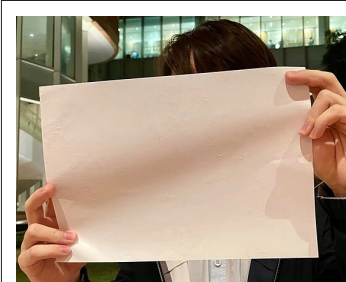
"The letter also alleges a 'ban' on attending protests... This isn't true. John McDonnell was a platform speaker at the Palestine Solidarity Campaign demo on Saturday [21 Oct] and faced no sanction". Resigning councillors "could

have said everything they wanted to, and protested as much as they wanted, from within the party".

We should test the limits.

More widely, bans on protests and meetings, or measures against individuals, have been introduced in several countries. The Tory government talks of legislation to make it illegal for councils to "boycott Israel". (Solidarity opposes such boycotts, but also a legal ban).

But so far the big Israel-Gaza demonstrations in London and other cities have passed with minimal police action. We can defend the right to protest, on the streets and in the labour movement, by continuing to assert it. □



Activist Agenda

"Workers Against CCP Repression", a new umbrella China solidarity campaign bringing in Uyghur Solidarity Campaign, Labour Movement Solidarity with Hong Kong (UK), and others, has published an introductory [leaflet](#) and template motion. □

• Weblinks and template motions for this and other campaigns: workersliberty.org/agenda

“I’ll write while I can still breathe”

By Ameer Fakhoury

I’ll write while I can still breathe.

Murdering and killing innocent civilians is a despicable war crime. It’s a violation of the basic legal and ethical prohibition not to intentionally harm non-combatants. The murder and killing of families and all the horrors being revealed before our eyes are a moral abomination: not just a war crime, but a direct attack on humanity. This position needs to be written and declared loudly, clearly, confidently, and lucidly. No context (apartheid, mass imprisonment, occupation, settler colonialism and war crimes) justifies or can justify cruel and indiscriminate mass murder. A real attack on human morals and humanity. Nothing.

Members of the Arab-Palestinian nation need to say this because and not despite the fact that they belong to the Arab-Palestinian nation. Members of the Arab-Palestinian nation need to say this because of and not despite their justified interest in freedom, honour, and independence.

Human morality is indivisible. Opposition to the massacre that took place on the terrible Shabbat need to be accompanied by no less determined opposition to crimes being planned and carried out in the Gaza Strip (“Finally there’s no electricity in Gaza,” said a senior journalist), as well as crimes that

have been carried out there against the Palestinian people. It’s impossible to hold human morality in one hand and to beat it with the other.

Ignoring the context of violence is not only immoral, but also reveals a lack of political insight, because it doesn’t allow us to develop a politics that will prevent further violence in the future. It won’t allow us to deal with the violence and to replace it with politics (in the broadest sense possible) of talking and reconciliation.

Bloodshed

The bloodshed and the 100-year-war will be ended through peace, reconciliation, and justice between the peoples – this is a nearly universal rule (the precise formula isn’t important right now). Whoever doesn’t invest in this, each according to their ability and circumstances, whoever doesn’t make this part of their daily routine, contributes by default to the continued bloodletting. It’s no longer possible to ignore this fact or to try “to live with the conflict.”

The Palestinian-Arabs with Israeli citizenship are showing responsibility, political insight, ethics, and human, complex and even exceptional political understanding – as one would expect from the special place they have (listen and/or read Aymen Odeh, Hanin Majdli, Samer Swaid, Raef Zraik, Marzuq

al-Halabi, Thabet Abu Rass and many others). They should not be content with that. Through their leadership, they need to strive for a more effective role in shaping a vision of peace, reconciliation, and justice between the two peoples and in convincing the two peoples that this is achievable. They must strive to lead during these dark moments in order to save the two peoples – out of ethical responsibility, civic obligation and a binational understanding of the complexity of this land.

The joint binational initiatives now emerging and blooming from Israeli civil society are a beacon of light, an example and a model, and they provide space to breathe. They are a creation and continuation of a shared civil society and an island of partnership and sanity. They are a glimpse at one of the possible futures here, and the only one that is sustainable. They should be widened to offer a beacon that shines over the entire homeland and region. Anyone who still isn’t invested in these efforts – now is the time.

If we survive the catastrophe and there is space for politics afterwards, there will be a struggle over how to understand what happened and draw conclusions from it. Hatred and violence, continued apartheid, and expulsion will receive a tailwind. Even genocide will be suggested (every

bridge over the Ayalon currently features the sign “Eradicate Gaza”). Only a vision of national and human partnership based on a shared fate and justice for all can defeat these ideas. This has never been the intuitive conclusion, neither here or anywhere else in the world. The community of justice, peace and reconciliation must explain and convince and most importantly practically realize this while showing understanding and empathy for those who are afraid, angry and frustrated – this was always the right thing to do, and it will become more urgent than ever the day after the war. □

• This article was posted on Facebook by Ameer Fakhoury, a Palestinian activist and member of the council of A Land for All – Two States, One Homeland (ALFA). Thanks to ALFA COO Miriam Jacobs for passing on the post with permission to republish.



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

Socialist Worker continues to double down



Eye on the left

By Martin Thomas

Socialist Worker of 18 October gave 20 of 24 pages to Israel and Gaza, doubling down on its “Rejoice” headline (11 Oct) about the Hamas massacre of 7 October.

It printed without comment a claim (solicited from Hamas) about 7 October that it “targeted only military bases”, which other evidence contradicts.

SW has a statement from an Egyptian group linked to it saying 7 October “dazzled the world with its valour”. It talks down the rise in antisemitic attacks in Europe since 7 October. Its headline “Smash Israeli terror state” means “Smash Israel”.

The framing of the 20 pages is that Israel is the “mechanism of domination” of “the West” over the resources of the Middle East, notably oil.

It’s not true. All the US’s big military bases in the Middle East are in Arab states and Turkey, not Israel. The one state that the US definitely did not want inside its alliances for the 1991 Gulf war and the 2003 Iraq war was Israel.

And even if the “geopolitical” claim were more true, SW’s seeing the people of Israel only as tokens of “the beast of imperialism” would be reactionary.

The seeing is based on warped history; and even if the warped history were true would mean writing off today’s Israeli Jews (living there because they were born there) for the sins of their ancestors.

The despotic Turkey-centred Ottoman Empire which for centuries before 1917 ruled the area loosely described as Palestine figures in *Socialist Worker* as “the kind of state [that] existed before”, “a secular and democratic state where Muslims, Jews and Christians live together”!

Then, claims SW, the idyll was spoiled in 1917 by the

Jews acting as British agents to secure Britain’s sway in the region.

In fact British control or semi-control in Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, and south Yemen would last longer than in Palestine.

History

The SW account of the history jumps without comment from 1923 to 1948. By the 1940s the same Ronald Storrs, first military governor of Jerusalem, cited by SW as looking on the Zionists with favour, was a vocal anti-Zionist in British ruling-class circles. Britain soon thought Palestine more trouble than boon. It spent the decades trying to balance between Jews and Arabs, repressing the Arab revolt of 1916-9 and (especially from the late 1930s) limiting Jewish immigration and blocking land sales to Jews.

In 1945-7 the Jewish community, seeking a refuge for Holocaust survivors, went to war against Britain. Britain gave up and handed the problem to the UN, which voted for

a partition plan. The Jewish leaders accepted the plan (as they had an earlier, British, one in 1937). The Arab leaders refused compromise.

Britain withdrew; the UN provided no agency to implement its plan; the Jews set up a state in the area designated for them; the Jews (with opportunist arms supplies from Stalin) won the ensuing war despite the British passively backing the Arab states. Despite what you might imagine from reading SW, Marxists at the time did *not* back the Arab states.

The Palestinian people were shattered and dispersed, mostly coming under Jordanian or Egyptian rule and lacking strength to demand the state the UN plan had promised them.

In 1967 Israel took the West Bank and Gaza in a new war. In 1987-8 autonomous mass Palestinian revolt there forced Israel into negotiations for redress at last for the Palestinians: “two states”.

An ambiguous deal pro-

duced a horrible halfway house: Israeli withdrawal from Gaza (in 2005), but a blockade (by Egypt too); in the West Bank, Palestinian quasi-autonomy in 165 “islands” of land each surrounded by Israeli military and settlements.

Since a possible further deal failed in 2001, Israeli governments have reckoned that “containment” will serve instead of negotiation (stalled: 2003, 2013-4). They are helped in doing so by Hamas’s rise among the Palestinians. The shift to the right or far-right among both peoples has spiralled.

Successive Israeli governments have inflicted terrible suffering on the Palestinians (and so have Arab states). This new war could well be the worst yet.

Progress will come not from depicting Israel’s people today as tokens of bad ancestry, but from supporting the real Palestinian-Jewish left movements on the ground, like [Standing Together](http://StandingTogether.org). □

“Put fossil fuel industry under ownership and run it in reverse”



Environment

By Paul Hampton

Holly Jean Buck has emerged in recent years as one of the most incisive voices on the left on climate change, notably with *After Geoengineering* (2019), along with a range of academic and popular articles. Her recent book, *Ending Fossil Fuels: Why Net Zero Is Not Enough* (2021) is another valuable contribution, confronting realities, facing difficult questions and drawing out serious, grounded political conclusions that take the struggle forward.

The first merit of the book is to underline the power of the fossil fuel industry and the scale of what has to be ended. Fossil fuels still provide more than 84% of primary energy. There are 7,604 coal-fired power plants operating, under construction or proposed around the world.

Jobs

Millions of people work in the fossil fuel industry. In the United States, oil and gas employs around 603,000 and 271,000 respectively, with coal jobs about 75,000. About 770 million people in the world have no access to electricity and 2.6 billion don't have access to energy for clean cooking.

Governments give fossil fuels about twice the level of support they do to renewables. Supporting fossil fuels costs governments between US\$300 and \$600 billion per year, according to the OECD and the International Energy Agency.

Over half of global oil production, and even more than that of reserves, are owned by national oil companies fully or majority-owned by governments: Petrobras, Sinopec, National Iranian Oil Company and Pemex. Major private firms are Shell, BP, Exxon, Chevron and Total. There are one billion cars on the road. The average age of a car is 7 to 8 years, with a lifetime of 15 years.

Over half the world's least developed countries plan to expand fossil fuel production as a lever for economic development. US production of oil and gas increased dramatically because of the shale revolution. Buck sums up the situation starkly:

“Ending fossil fuels demands navigating the risk of energy poverty if replacements don't come online fast enough, the dependence of govern-



ments on fossil fuel revenues, and the dependence of communities and households on fossil fuel jobs. On top of these fundamental challenges, there are also two other unsettling scenarios for this decade that may complicate any planned phaseout. One scenario is a coming disenchantment with renewables. The other is the arrival of low-carbon fossil fuels. Both of these prospects will make it extremely hard to completely end fossil fuels.”

Renewables are the obvious alternative to the fossil fuel industry. Renewables are growing fast, but wind, solar, and biofuels provide just 5% of global primary energy, hydro 6% and nuclear 4%. In the United States, solar employs about 240,000 and wind 120,000.

The Princeton report *Net-Zero America: Potential Pathways, Infrastructure, and Impacts* (2021) sets out plans to phase out the fossil fuel industry by 2030. Seven hundred coal mines would close and 500 coal-fired power plants retired. Oil and gas production decrease. Half a million gas wells close.

Land

In the Princeton scenario, wind and solar farms span an area of 1 million km. This is equivalent to the combined land areas of Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, and Oklahoma – or an area roughly the size of France and Spain. (This is all land visually impacted by wind turbines, not where the turbine pad directly sits). Land for solar is equivalent to the size of West Virginia or an area about half the size of England. The entire Atlantic Coast would be lined with offshore wind farms.

Buck rightly argues that the retirement of nuclear plants makes the situation more difficult. Germany and Japan have decommissioned nuclear power plants. Other states are letting theirs retire at the end of their operating life.

Nuclear used to provide 17% of the world's total electricity generation at its peak in 1996, but now it provides just 10%. A typical nuclear plant provides one gigawatt of power, equivalent to over 3 million solar panels or 400 wind turbines.

Right now, there are just over 400 nuclear reactors in 31 countries, mostly in the United States, France, China, Russia and South Korea. Some new nuclear reactors are getting built, particularly in China. Some new countries are entering, such as Bangladesh, Belarus, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates. But many new nuclear plants are behind schedule.

Buck makes a number of valuable arguments about the difficulties of completely eliminating emissions from sectors vital to human living standards. Transportation, specifically long-haul aviation and shipping, are two hard nuts to crack. Similarly, “methane emissions from agriculture, such as rice production and particularly from livestock, are tougher to eliminate”. Buck is particularly sharp on so-called “natural” climate solutions:

“Whatever the implementation, there are three main problems with relying on ecosystems to deliver negative emissions. First, there are limitations on land. The most ambitious calculations of afforestation capacity rely on switching to plant-based diets and afforesting land currently grazed by cows – which may not be feasible or just around the world. Second, ecosystem-based carbon removals are finite in terms of how much carbon they can store over time. These carbon sinks, once filled, plateau in terms of what they can continue to remove. Third, ecosystem-based methods are vulnerable to climate change itself. Unchecked climate change could flip forest carbon sinks into carbon emitters by mid-century.”

Buck also provides a pertinent critique of the “net zero” framing of climate solutions. The net zero concept appears to have originated with an informal network of women – climate activists, lawyers, and policy professionals – who met at a Scottish country estate in 2013 to reformulate workable yet ambitious goals in the wake of the failed Copenhagen climate summit. Net zero thinking made its debut at the 2015 Paris COP summit.

Net zero targets replaced earlier goals, which were often confusing, such as “an 80% reduction of greenhouse gases from 1990 levels by 2050”. Replacing these reduction goals with net zero targets has generally been welcomed as a strengthening of ambition, although not necessarily so.

Boring

Buck acknowledges the value of the net zero framing. She argues that “net zero does important work: it shifts attention entirely onto emissions, counting and balancing them”. A progressive version of net zero “could be an instrument of climate justice”.

But net zero is “both tedious and a hot trend”. Net zero “has the effect of being able to instantly transform the exciting, terrifying work of our times into something numb and boring”. Net zero is “the stuff of webinars, white papers, consultant reports”. The concept of net zero offers “ambiguity that can be exploited”. Buck argues:

“The real poverty of net zero, as a language and problem framing, is that it strips out the broader socio-ecological crisis from focus... Net zero shifts the focus away from production... Without a plan for managing the decline of fossil fuels, net-zero talk and nascent carbon removal techniques are likely to be a discursive strategy for companies and countries to continue producing large amounts of fossil fuels. Net zero on its own is the wrong target of climate action. Curbing production and climate justice are both better goals.”

A virtue of Buck's work is that while the critique is strident, alternatives are offered to improve the situation. Buck uses the framework of “phase-out” rather than “transition” to describe a programme to urgently and deliberately phase down fossil fuels, while ramping up alternatives in a synchronised fashion.

Phasing out fossil fuels has three parts. There are upstream activities, including exploration and extraction – fossil fuel reserves, or stuff under-

r public se”

ground. Then transport, which includes pipelines, rail lines, ships and liquefied natural gas terminals. Finally, downstream operations include oil refining, distribution (such as gas stations), and power plants. Key demands are:

“Begin with moratoria on exploration and then extraction; incorporate these commitments into a global agreement in which countries can receive acknowledgment for their efforts. Keep pressuring investors not to finance new projects. Phase out subsidies and route them to renewable energy instead. Buy out fossil fuel companies, and institute limits on extraction that will be ramped down each year. Turn these publicly held companies into carbon removal companies, providing jobs for workers formerly employed in fossil fuels. And provide aid to producer countries for offramps around the world.”

Buck demands a more ambitious political project: a worker-centred, publicly owned, democratically planned carbon removal industry. She points to some hopeful signs in the US labour movement, including the Carbon Capture Coalition, Blue-Green Alliance and Solidarity for Climate Action plan. Buck wants to transform the fossil fuel industry and its workforce into a climate mitigation force:

Public ownership

“What we need to do with the fossil fuel industry is put it under public ownership and run it in reverse: transfer the skills and tools to large-scale carbon dioxide storage projects. To be clear, removing carbon from the atmosphere at a climate-significant scale means the creation of a significant new industry.

First, it would involve outfitting bioenergy power plants with carbon capture equipment to run biomass carbon removal and storage. It would also involve building facilities of various scales to capture carbon directly from the air (direct air capture), as well as the renewable energy capacity to run these facilities. Creating this industry also means building new CO2 pipelines to transport CO2 from these facilities. Finally, it would involve drilling injection wells deep into underground rock formations and monitoring these wells.

Scaling up direct air capture would also bring a surge of demand for equipment and steel-workers in trades like cement, chemicals, equipment manufacturing, and construction.’ It is an entire value chain, a new industry from scratch – and it needs to be planned, not left to develop through markets.” □



The hell of war in Mariupol



Film review

By Cathy Nugent

The film *20 Days In Mariupol* confirms many times over the essential truth of the old saying, “war is hell”. At times so grim as to be unwatchable, the film, produced by a small team of Ukrainian journalists working for Associated Press (AP), documents the first days of the siege of Mariupol, (24 February-20 May 2022).

The port and industrial city was an important target of the initial Russian invasion. Its capture was key to providing Russia with a land route to Russia-controlled Crimea (to the west of the city).

Russian-speaking

Mariupol was a city that was largely and traditionally Russian-speaking, although the population was ethnically equally divided between Ukrainians and Russians, with a significant Greek minority. The city’s recent history was complex and bloody even before 2022. In 2014, after the war between Ukraine and Russian-backed separatist forces in the east broke out, the city was briefly taken over by the so-called Donetsk Peoples’ Republic (DPR).

In January 2015 the city suffered a rocket attack by the DPR (in reality the Russian armed forces). The relatively small (around 2,500 combatants in 2017) Azov Brigade, a neo-Nazi militia, played a role in defending the city from that time. The group is now incorporated into the Ukrainian national guard, but Russian propaganda has ludicrously exploited its presence to ideologically attack the whole Ukrainian state and people as “Nazis”.

In the days before the assault, around 100,000 fled the city, and the

journalists were able to escape via a short-lived “humanitarian corridor” in March, along with residents who had the transport to get out. The hundreds of thousands left behind saw an estimated 90% of their residential buildings destroyed. Ukrainian officials estimate 25,000 were killed and many thousands injured.

With only intermittent internet connection the AP team sent only snippets of footage to their producers and those were broadcast. Anyone following the dreadful first weeks of the invasion will remember the footage of an injured pregnant woman being stretchered away from a bombed hospital maternity unit. That woman and her baby, delivered by medics at another hospital where she was evacuated, died.

This film shows much more of the team’s footage over the course of 20 days, and gives a fuller picture of the reality of invasion. It shows the progress and technique of invasion: aerial bombardment, followed by tanks and gun battles, each wave of attack having a different destructive impact on homes and bodies.

Target

Much of the footage is inside a hospital which has been populated by people who have nowhere else to go. As often with hospitals in war, the invaders have targeted it as an essential piece of infrastructure. The doctors and nurses working around the clock with the injured and dying, the relatives and the bombed-out civilians are not safe. Nobody is safe. Nowhere is safe.

The medics are keen for the film-makers to keep cameras switched on showing the lack of basic medicines and nowhere but the basement to put the dead bodies. They want the world to know the reality of what is happening.

Much is not explained by the film makers, including the recent history of the city. The film’s purpose, and its strength, is to show both the universal horror of war and the reality of Russian imperialism.

It would do supporters of Stop the War, Counterfire and the SWP good to see this film. They have designated Ukraine as the west’s proxy, failed to recognise Russian imperialism (which bombs civilians, hospitals, schools, homes...), and called for “peace now” which can only mean the permanent partition of Ukraine, but the film could change their minds. □

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The most horrifying of times

By Adam Keller in Tel Aviv

What happened on 7 October stunned and shocked us all. The reports and pictures of the horror in the destroyed kibbutzim on the Gaza Strip border fueled Israeli society with a tidal wave of blind hatred and calls for bloody revenge, a wave that grew stronger day by day. Under the slogan " Hamas are Nazis, Hamas is ISIS!" public opinion was prepared for a total war – a war with the declared aim of destroying Hamas, and which would inevitably lead to terrible death and destruction in the Gaza Strip.

For many years, when I saw the word "genocide" in the statements of radical groups in Israel and abroad, I would approach the writers and comment that – however appropriate the condemnation of Israeli acts of oppression – genocide is not among these acts. But this week Roy Sharon, a "respectable" radio and TV commentator on the main Israeli broadcasting corporation, spoke very explicitly of his desire to see "a million dead bodies in Gaza".

Stickers

And the streets of Tel Aviv are flooded with red stickers reading "Exterminate Gaza!". Not "Destroy!", not "Flatten!" – but clearly and explicitly "Exterminate Gaza!". "Le-Ha-Sh-Mid!" – "Exterminate!" Every Hebrew-speaking Jewish Israeli knows from a young age exactly what this word means. "Exterminate!" "Exterminate!" "Exterminate!". Hundreds of times "Exterminate!" on every street corner.

Last Friday [13 Oct] I walked for three hours along the Dizengoff and King George Streets in Tel Aviv. I diligently searched for these disgusting stickers and destroyed them. I estimate that I found about 90% to 95% of what the dirty bastards had put up. It gave me momentary satisfaction, but of course it did not really affect what the pilots in the air and the soldiers on the ground already do and may yet do in the near future.

So far, there are not (yet?) a million dead bodies in Gaza. There are "only" thousands of bodies buried under the rubble of the bombed buildings, and a million people who are still alive but who have been displaced from their homes and are wandering the roads without food, without water and without shelter, and who may at any moment fall victim to the bombs that continue to fall. That is the situation "for the time being" – and who knows just how far this madness will go?

There is no escaping the horrifying statement – the idea of genocide has now entered the public agenda in the State of Israel, and there is every justification to use this terrible word and



Standing Together activists in Tel Aviv putting up posters against violence and racism and in support of Arab-Jewish solidarity.

to beat all the drums and raise all the possible alarms. The first group in the Israeli Jewish society to speak explicitly about the danger of genocide were "Israelis against apartheid", a radical group that is not afraid to remain isolated and to swim even against strong currents. But it's time for less radical people to talk about it too.

Almost immediately with the beginning of the war, demonstrations began demanding an exchange of prisoners, which persisted even when they encountered blatant violence by the right-wing people, in some cases joined by equally violent police. The demand for an exchange of captives and prisoners, for the return of the Israelis captured by Hamas and taken to Gaza, is an important and vital humanitarian demand in itself. But it is also the best way to still try to put a brake on the escalation towards a destructive and bloody ground invasion of Gaza.

An invasion in which the army would invade and crush Gaza with all its might would most likely lead to the killing of the Israeli abductees, among all the many others who would be killed. This was expressed with characteristic bluntness and ruthlessness by the extreme right Minister Smotrich: "We need to be cruel, not to think too much of the captives".

Negotiating with Hamas for a prisoner exchange deal is not compatible with a total war whose goal is to completely destroy Hamas. This was explicitly stated by Tzachi Hanegbi, head of Israel's National Security Council. The State of Israel has a choice between two courses that in practice rule out each other – either an effort to bring back the captives and abductees from Gaza, or a ground invasion that will multiply the killing and destruction already caused in the week of bombings.

Michal Warshawski, a veteran activist who had been herself among Israelis held hostage during the 1976 Entebbe plane hijacking, systematically presents on her Facebook page the demonstra-

tions for the exchange of prisoners and that are taking place daily in various places in Israel.

In recent days, the demand that the Israeli government give top priority to the return of the abductees is gaining momentum and is no longer restricted to radical groups. Family members of the abductees, who are terribly anxious about their fate and who enjoy enormous sympathy and moral authority in the Israeli society, mobilised themselves for this struggle.

Avishai Brodetz from Kibbutz Kfar Aza, whose wife and three children were kidnapped, started a sit-in strike outside the gates of the Ministry of Defense in Tel Aviv and intends to remain there until his family is returned. He was joined by other family members, who covered a large section of the Ministry of Defence wall with pictures of their abducted dear ones and posters with their names.

Kaplan Protest

On Saturday night [14 Oct] I was there, in front of the Ministry of Defense on Kaplan Street in Tel Aviv, where hundreds of demonstrators gathered to support the family members. Clearly, they were from the "Kaplan Protest", the mass movement which for the past six months and until the outbreak of war held every week a massive protest on the same location, to oppose Netanyahu's "Judicial Reform" and his assaults on the Supreme Court.

The familiar emblems of the "Kaplan Protest" – blue and white Israeli national flags and khaki shirts emblazoned with the words "Brothers in Arms" – are now mobilised in demanding the return of the abductees from Gaza, combined with calling for the resignation of Prime Minister Netanyahu – responsible for the most resounding military fiasco in the history of Israel.

In contrast to previous demonstrations, some of which were forcibly broken up by violent right-wingers, when on Saturday night some "Bibi fans"

showed up and started shouting "Traitors!", the crowd united against them, crying out: "How dare you say that to the families of the captives! Away from here, away, away, you scoundrels!". They did leave quickly, and then the demonstrators blocked Kaplan Street with prolonged shouts of "Bibi – Murderer! Bibi – Murderer!".

Of course, these demonstrators were referring to Netanyahu's responsibility for the death of 1,300 Israelis, rather than the death and destruction that the Air Force is raining down on the residents of Gaza at the same Netanyahu's command. Nevertheless, a Prime Minister who is called that on the streets of Tel Aviv will find it more difficult to send soldiers into the Gaza Strip, to face the deadly surprises and traps that Hamas has undoubtedly prepared for them.

The Saturday night demonstration included some of the "Kaplan Protest" people, but certainly not in the great numbers that were seen in demonstrations on the same location on the weekends before the war. Will there be more in the coming days?

Patriotic waiting

Protest leader Shikma Bresler announced a few days ago that the protest movement intends to wait "patriotically" until the end of the war, and only then mobilise big crowds to demand Netanyahu's removal. Will the protestors change this policy now? This can have a critical effect, when large military forces are being prepared around the Gaza Strip and wait for the order to go in.

I have been active in the Israeli peace camp since I was a high school student in Tel Aviv in 1969. In all these years, I can't remember a time as grim and horrifying as these days since 7 October. Horrible news is constantly coming in – from the Gaza Strip about the acts of an Air Force which abandoned all restraint and any pretence of moral considerations, from the West Bank about the murderous rampage of settlers under the cover of the war, and from the Lebanese border about an intensifying series of incidents that threaten to open a second bloody and destructive front in this war.

Is it still possible to stop this escalation and deterioration? That is far from certain. What is certain is that we all must must must mobilise and struggle with all our might, do everything that can still be done, all of us together – Jews and Arabs, Zionists and anti-Zionists, veteran political activists and ordinary decent people who still have some human feeling in their hearts. □

• Adam Keller is a long-standing peace activist, currently with [Gush Shalom](#). He has visited Britain on speaking tours with Workers' Liberty.

Why isn't Hamas like the Algerian FLN?

By Clive Bradley

The Algerian nationalist movement, the Front de Libération Nationale, (FLN), from the beginning of its military campaign (1954-62) launched terrorist attacks on civilian as well as military targets within Algeria, and sometimes also on the French mainland (although there they did not target cafés and so on, as they did in Algeria).

Yet Trotskyists supported both the aim of full independence and those fighting for it. The FLN, incidentally, although it had some links with Arab nationalists elsewhere, especially the Egyptian government, was more self-consciously "Islamic" than many other such movements.

So shouldn't we support Hamas, defend their actions, in the same way?

Chauvinism

Hamas's actions are not only chauvinistic towards Jews, but are aimed at the destruction of the Israeli Jewish national entity. The existence of France itself was never in question in the Algerian revolution.

That is not all. Hamas's programme here has significance because of the history of the region and because of previous attitudes towards Israel on the part of the Arab bourgeoisies. Also, its significance depends on an assessment of modern Islamism.

In Algeria, the collective rights for the *pièdes noirs* (European settlers) necessarily entailed denying democratic rights to the majority. The *pièdes noirs*, like the South African whites, were fighting for their privileges.

In the Middle East, it is perfectly possible for the Israeli Jews to have collective, national rights without denying those same rights to the Palestinian Arabs (and vice versa).

There are many ways in which the militant Islamists are not different from old-style bourgeois nationalists. However the differences between groups like Hamas and the old-style bourgeois nationalists are decisive. These are some:

- Old-style nationalist movements, even if in practice they created undemocratic (even, outside the Middle East,

Stalinist) states, drew their legitimacy from "the people" and some notion of popular sovereignty. The movement of masses of people under the banner of nationalism – in oppressed nations – is fundamentally and profoundly democratic, because it is about the establishment of popular sovereignty. Militant Islamism claims to draw its legitimacy from God.

- As a result, even though their practice might be quite different, nationalist movements articulate their demands in terms of "democracy", claim to be fighting for democracy, promise democracy in some form. The word "democracy" is sometimes used by Islamists; but their programme is for a theocratic state.

- Even where religion is an aspect of nationalist ideology (as it was in Algeria), it is used as a cultural reference, or medium of popular mobilisation, not as an alternative source of legitimacy to the people.

- Nationalists were, even when they had shades of religion in their ideology, avowedly secular in terms of the types of laws they wanted, and were sympathetic to secular thought. They were generally in favour of broadly progressive ideas towards, for instance, women's rights. The Islamists are implacably opposed to women's rights in any sense that has meaning for us.

- Ideologically, the Islamists are closed off from any form of debate which is not posed in Islamic terms. Of course Stalinism and bourgeois nationalism can be narrow-minded and closed to rational debate. But with the Islamist movements, the blinkeredness is to a qualitatively greater degree.

- In the Palestinian context specifically: the old "secular democratic state" slogan was an Arab nationalist and implicitly chauvinist formula – but it was also an attempt to relate to the Jews, and other non-Muslims. An Islamic state (or rather, an Islamist one as they see it) would oppress religious as well as national minorities, not to mention secular individuals, etc.

- Even the most dogmatic advocates of the democratic secular state among the Palestinians attempted some kind of relationship with Israeli Jews. The

FLN soldiers



Islamists often pedal antisemitism of a European, fascist kind.

- In the Palestinian national movement there were, from at least the early-mid-seventies, powerful voices in favour of recognising the national rights of the Jews. Mainly these were Stalinoid; but their attitude was not simply determined by Moscow. The Islamists will not countenance the right of Israel to exist.

- The targets of military action, including the suicide bombings of Israeli civilians which first made Hamas prominent, in 2002, at least at first, reflected different attitudes towards the Israeli Jews, and towards the programme of Israeli withdrawal, and two states.

- The growth of Hamas and Islamic Jihad are an expression of popular despair. The symbol of "martyrdom" – the notion that the best thing young militants can do in the cause of their people's freedom is blow themselves up – is a measure of the depths of hopelessness among the Palestinians. A movement for freedom can't be built on hopelessness in this way, promising glory in an afterlife.

That is radically different from the civilian-targeted terrorism of the FLN. Those were actions with concrete objectives (and French withdrawal from Algeria was a rational objective in a sense that the disappearance of the Israelis is not).

One of the measures of the nature of the Islamists, here as elsewhere, is that beyond what are in fact rather vague notions of Islamic law, it is extremely unclear what they will do to improve the lot of the dispossessed poor who support them. They certainly have no programme at all to address social and economic inequality. As opposition movements they typically build through grass-roots programmes of education and social welfare, often through local mosques. But where Islamists have taken power their primary policy is repression.

In Iran, the Islamic Republic had plenty to say about women, thieves, homosexuals and Americans, and knew that it was continuing a violent campaign against the old regime and

the left, but its economic policy was ultimately just old-fashioned capitalism.

Today the secular Palestinian nationalists have extraordinarily little to offer: they can't get Israel to grant them meaningful independence, and they can't deliver economically. They can't even get foreign powers to hand over substantial aid, never mind develop the Palestinian economy independently. And so Islamism represents despair. It is not an alternative economic and political programme, but a retreat from having one, trusting instead in God.

Old-style nationalism was for something positive and concrete in the real world. The Islamists of course have their ideology (or ideologies, plural, ranging from that of Sayyid Qutb to that of Khomeini) – but what it represents is essentially negative.

Independence

The FLN's programme was for independence – the end of colonial rule, the constitution of Algeria as an independent nation, and for national development. From a socialist point of view there was much to criticise in these bourgeois nationalist conceptions of development. But with all the qualifications the national development, from a socialist point of view, was progressive.

There's another way of looking at this question. Economic and social progress depends on relaxing the tensions between Israeli Jews and Palestinians. Equality will be best served by a just, democratic peace. Blowing up restaurants in West Jerusalem does not help advance towards that goal.

The FLN's actions were in a context where Algeria was considered by France to be part of France. The Algerians throwing bombs in settler cafés did not want to be equal citizens in a French state (still less to incorporate France into an Islamic state). They wanted separation from France. To stop the grenades, France needed only to accept Algeria's independence.

The dynamic in Israel/Palestine today is quite different. □

- Abridgement of an [article](#) in *Workers' Liberty* 2/3, 2002

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New gender-identity law in Spain

By Owen Flood

It has been six months since the “Ley Trans” (“Trans Law”) came into force in Spain on 2 March. The law permits gender self-ID for any Spanish citizen over 16. Those between 14 and 16 require parental authorisation; 12 to 14 need approval from a judge. Children under 12 still have no right to self ID.

Those over the age of 16 will also be allowed to receive hormone therapy without parental consent or a psychological assessment. The law bans conversion therapy.

15 different autonomous communities in Spain had passed their own self-ID laws, Andalusia being the first to do so in 2014, but this is the first law of its kind to have been introduced nationally.

Previous attempts to table a self-ID law have faced obstruction, mainly from the PP (Partido Popular) and Vox and sections of the PSOE (Socialist

Workers Party of Spain, no relation to the UK group of the same name). The PSOE opposed the initial law in 2022.

This law is a step-forward, but a watered-down version of proposals made by Unidas Podemos and trans organisations in Spain, which were to allow self-ID for under-16s if accompanied by a parent or legal guardian. Moreover, the law only applies to Spanish citizens and self-ID is limited to either “man” or “woman” – non-binary is not an option.

When the PSOE put in amendments to waterdown the law, trans rights groups and feminists opposed these. At a demonstration I attended in Madrid in late 2022, trans migrants criticised the disregard the new law would have for them and their status. Furthermore, trans activists noted how amendments to increase the age for self-ID threw trans children under the bus and as one speaker poignantly put it “robs these children of their childhood”.

Still, only the effective work of Span-



ish feminist, queer, and trans liberation movements, and a coalition government at least sympathetic to them, have seen this law come into effect.

It is something that can be built on by the Spanish left, the Spanish feminist movement, and the Spanish trans

and queer rights movement. This will require persistent campaigning and pressuring the coalition government, as well as having discussions and struggles within the left over trans rights, the rights of trans children and trans migrants. □



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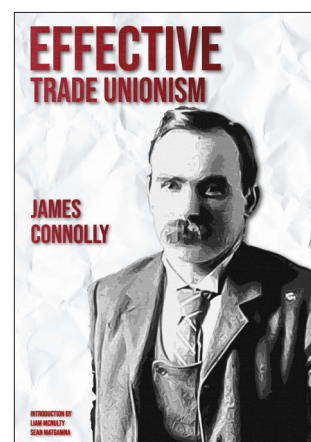
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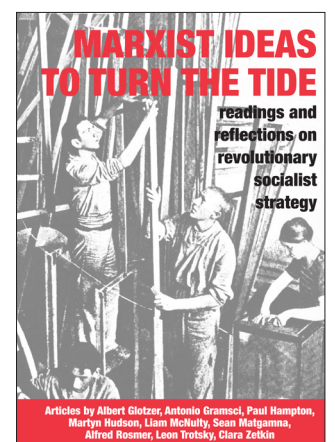
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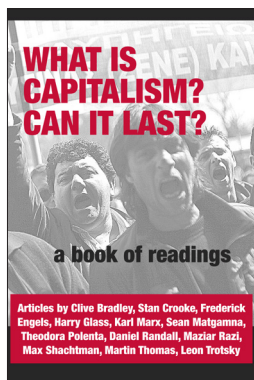
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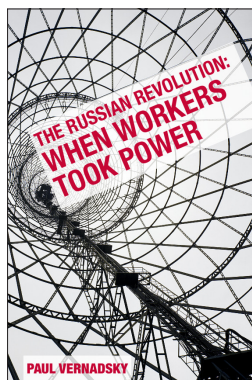
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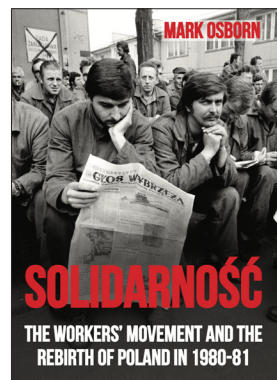
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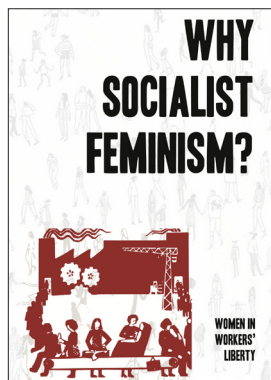
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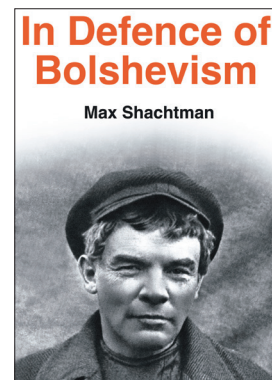
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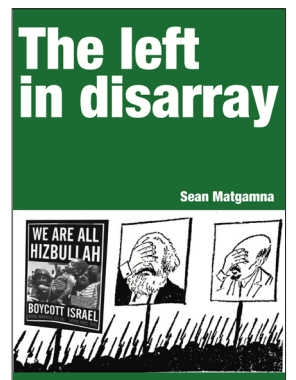
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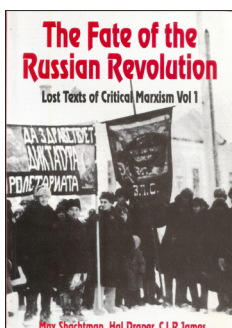
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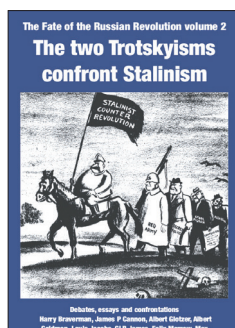
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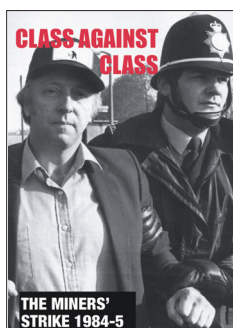
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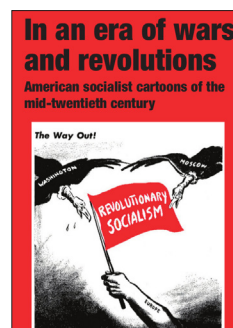
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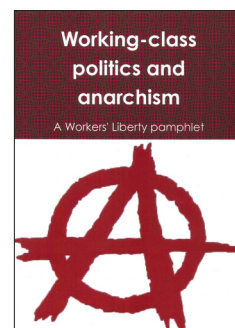
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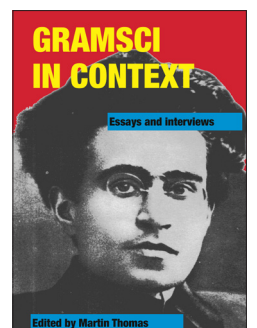
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The history of gender variance

By Riki Lane

Workers' Liberty strongly supports trans and gender diverse (TGD) people's rights, while some on the left see TGD activism as threatening women's "sex-based" rights. This is the first of a series of articles in which I will attempt to thread a path within this hostility about TGD politics; to look for ways that left-wing activists can work toward more agreement on how to fight for the rights of this oppressed minority.

This article outlines the history and origins of gender variance. Future articles will examine political polarisation around TGD people; biological and social materiality, TGD and women's rights; and socialists' attitudes to oppression.

I'll use "assigned sex at birth" to talk about biological sex characteristics, and "gender identity" for how people identify psychologically and socially. My academic background is sociology of science around TGD people, I work at a university General Practice department and a gender-affirming health care clinic, and identify as a gender-non-conforming man. I am writing on my own behalf and nothing here represents the stance of my employers.

Early age

People develop a gender identity by around the age of three, which seems consistent across very different cultures, including ones where ascription of gender stereotypes and gender roles to young children was much smaller than it is in capitalist societies today. For most people, our gender identity tallies with our perceived sex and gender assignment at birth. However, there have always been gender-variant people who from an early age feel a gender identity not tallying with that ascribed to them at birth (recent estimates are around 0.5% transgender plus over 1% non-binary). There have also always been people who are biologically "intersex" (a recent US estimate is 1.7%); many of those seen by themselves and by others as atypical males or females, some less "binary".

The oldest records of gender variance come from South Asia, with clear evidence for thousands of years of Hijra people, and previous traditions. Traditionally, Hijra are recognised as a third gender, and have an established position in the Hindu caste structure, roles around wedding festivities, and their own communal living spaces. Hijra combine elements of TGD and intersex. They are mainly birth-assigned male people who have a female gender identity and undergo ritual or actual ceremonies that remove external genitalia; others are people identified at birth as intersex. This highlights the limitations of applying our recent west-

ern categories to other societies historically and globally. Today India (like Germany) recognises three (not two) legal genders.

Many indigenous societies in North America, Siberia, Polynesia and elsewhere have established rituals and processes for people to adopt the social role aligned with their gender identity rather than their sex assigned at birth. In many South East Asian societies there is high social acceptance of social transition prior to or at puberty, and an absence of the later gender transition historically seen in Western societies.

Does gender transition link with biological brain differences? Certainly, historical and current attempts at "conversion therapy" for trans gender identity (as for same-sex attraction), are notoriously unsuccessful. I think the best approximate answer is that people have biological predispositions that play out differently in varied social circumstances.

Nature

Nature throws up a huge range of variation amongst humans (including neurodiversity, sexual orientation and gender identity), but many cultures have tried to squeeze that into strict binary categories – normal-autistic; normal-homosexual, normal-trans – and treat the "abnormal" as a sin, a crime, or a pathology. Within this framework we can accept the reality of the spectrum of gender identity positions – aligned with the sex assigned at birth (cis-gendered), different from it (trans-gendered) or with elements of both or being neither (non-binary).

This approach is not new – despite differing language, it is fairly similar to that developed by Magnus Hirschfeld in the early 1900s. Hirschfeld was a gay cross-dressing man, a Social Democratic Party member, doctor, and legal reformer who was a pioneer in research, medical approaches to gender transition and struggles for rights for same-sex-attracted and TGD people in Germany up to the Nazi seizure of power.

The Nazi seizure of power, World War 2, and the early Cold War pushed back transgender rights as they pushed back lesbian and gay rights. Medical understanding and possible gender-affirming medical treatments expanded, but from the 1950s onwards, TGD people were seen as having a mental illness (currently "Gender Dysphoria"), with tight gate-keeping around access to hormones and surgery by a very limited number of mental health professionals.

A few famous trans women gained some acknowledgement, such as the writer Jan Morris, but most TGD people went "stealth" after hormones and surgery – aiming to socially pass in



Male, female and hijra public toilets in India

their gender presentation. Over subsequent decades, opinion among scientists and doctors gradually became more accommodating. Sweden passed the world's first modern "gender recognition" law in 1972. Now the dominant understanding amongst relevant clinicians and researchers has changed to seeing gender variance (including the "gender incongruence" diagnosis) not as a mental health issue, but a part of the variation in human personality structures. This is similar to reconceptualisation of autism as part of a range of neurodiversity.

Now a much wider range of health professionals (GPs in particular) engage in assessment and prescription of hormones. This de-psycho-pathologisation of gender variance in developed Western capitalist societies has followed the same trajectory as with sexual orientation, but more slowly.

However, TGD people have greatly increased incidence of co-occurring mental health issues, e.g. suicidality at around 14 times the general population. On all the evidence this is not because trans identity is caused by mental illness, but due to "minority stress": having a stigmatised identity with consequent significant social discrimination in employment, health care, education and other social aspects, even greater than for the broader LBGTIQ community. Trans women experience both a loss of the male privileges available in a patriarchal society, and a virulent prejudice that often results in fetishisation and sexual harassment.

Seeing gender variance as a mental illness is a key point of difference for some of the left leaning "sex-based rights activists". In the 1970s, Janice Raymond argued that growth of the "Transsexual Empire" (as she called it) was driven by medical professionals offering people individual medical solutions to social gender issues. Today Kathleen Stock argues that "woke" academia and NGOs are driving people to think they can deal with social issues by individual adoption of what Stock calls "immersive fictions".

In recent years there have been rapidly increasing numbers of people seeking "social" transition, gender affirming hormones or surgery, across all age groups, but especially among younger people. There is much argument about why this is occurring.

Catch up

One argument, which I support, looks at the early transition patterns seen in south east Asian and other cultures. These indicate that it is likely that what is occurring here is a "catch-up" due to shifts in scientific and social attitudes in advanced capitalist societies from rejection to wide acceptance: broadly towards LBGTIQ people; and specifically of the possibility of young people transitioning socially and/or hormonally. Also, medical options are more developed and safer.

The opposing argument is that there is a "social contagion" through social media etc. I argue that the evidence for this argument is quite poor, largely relying on social media sites of parents who do not support their child's wish to gender transition.

The arguments over gender affirming treatments for younger people are one aspect of the increasing political polarisation around TGD rights in recent years. The next article will focus on that polarisation. □

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How to avoid getting hit by a train



Diary of a Trackworker

By Matt Shaw

When I joined the railway, decades ago, I was repeatedly told that it was the second most dangerous job in the UK after saturation deep sea diving.

Actually it was the second most fatal job. Trains are pretty one sided. Surviving being struck by a train is less likely than surviving cutting your thumb.

Happily for me, in my entire railway career I've never been directly involved with a "death on the line", but I have had a few near misses.

Some because of the shit attitude of management, some because of my own, and other workers', bad working practices. Union activity has made a difference over the decades to both management and worker safety attitudes.

In theory, the person responsible for the gang's safety is the person in charge. Back in my early days this duty was not taken that seriously.

Often, people were told to do jobs with no effective way of being warned

of the approach of trains. I had been ordered to carry a sleeper, a long heavy piece of wood, with one other guy, from around a bend. Being young and not thinking, we got hold of the sleeper, put it on our shoulders, and set off.

It became obvious that it was easier for one person to carry this, because walking set up an uncomfortable rhythm and, as I was junior, on my shoulder it went. The underfoot conditions were easiest in the 4ft, that is the gap between the two running rails, so there I was walking with this thing on my shoulder when round the corner came a train.

Luckily, it wasn't moving that fast, so I managed to chuck the sleeper clear of the line followed by myself.

After recovering my composure, I was told not to worry and "get that bloody sleeper up here as we're all waiting to go home" (the job-and-knock principle still being in force).

Other departments didn't go out on track often enough to train up their own staff to be look-outs, people whose job it was to warn of approaching trains, so would request someone suitably trained from other departments. This sometimes led to confusion, especially



where multiple look-outs were used in a chain enabling them to see a train approaching sooner.

When one of the look-outs was distracted, then, before you knew it, there was a train barrelling down at you, and it was just luck that no one was hit.

Once we were walking towards a tunnel mouth in a cutting with relatively limited room clear of the track. A train had just passed us and we knew the timetable pretty well. Another wasn't due for at least half an hour, so we walked in the 4ft between the rails.

After about ten minutes somebody asked: "Is that smoke coming out of the tunnel?" Realising that it was exhaust fumes being pushed through by a following train, we all dove for the side of the track just as an engine burst from the tunnel mouth.

Luckily nobody slipped, despite a light covering of snow on the ground, and we were all safe but quite badly shaken up.

If anybody had slipped, there was no time to regain your footing.

All of this was on the ground. Working at heights brought another set of risks. □

Terence Davies, 1945-2023



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

One of the greatest of British film directors, Terence Davies, died on 7 October. He grew up in a working-class Catholic family in Liverpool, the youngest child in a family of ten. His father died when Terence was only six and a half but left a legacy from his violent behaviour.

All Davies's films are well-worth seeing, but I would particularly single out *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (1988), which begins in the Second World War with bombs falling on Liverpool. Peter Postlethwaite features as the abusive father figure.

The documentary *Of Time and the City* (2008) follows the ups and downs of a working-class Liverpool family growing up in the fifties and sixties. Davies brings to these films a keen attention to local detail. There is much



use of the popular music of the time and of his own struggles with religion. Catholicism, he once remarked, had led left him with a "deep scar", and

being gay was also something he struggled with.

Finance for his films was often hard to come by. Some people who were in the (now defunct) Film Council should hang their heads in shame at not giving him the financing he needed. □

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Doctors: Tories agree to talk

By Sacha Ismail

After more strikes by members of the British Medical Association in September and October, including the first coordinated action by junior doctors and consultants, the Tories have agreed to more talks (starting in the week beginning 23 October).

The union's hand in the talks would surely be stronger if it called more strikes now.

At the moment no strike dates are set. And once we get into December and January, after months of delay and at a time when pressure and crisis in the NHS will worsen because of winter, it will surely be a challenge to get ac-

tion back on. The doctors' struggle has shown great resilience. Junior doctors have taken many days of strike action. Two thousand BMA members rallied in Manchester on 3 October.

New groups have entered and more may soon enter the struggle. "Speciality and specialist" (SAS) doctors have now voted for strikes; junior doctors in

Wales will ballot 6 November to 18 December; and their colleagues in Northern Ireland 8 January to 19 February.

The wider labour movement must ramp up solidarity.

We also need a fight in the Labour Party to win support for the doctors, linking it to demands to re-fund and rebuild the NHS. □

Amazon workers strike on Black Friday

By Ollie Moore

Workers at Amazon's BHX4 facility in Coventry will strike on 7-9 and 24 November as their fight for better pay and conditions goes on.

The strikes will take the number of walkouts at BHX4 since the dispute began to nearly 30. Amazon has recently announced an intention to increase hourly pay by just £1, a move dismissed by the GMB union as coming nowhere near meeting workers' needs.

The strike is timed to cover Black Friday (24 Nov), a major trading day for Amazon globally. GMB organiser Rachel Fagan said: "This is an unprecedented and historic moment with low-paid workers taking on one of the world's most powerful corporations. Coventry is the beating heart of Amazon's distribution network; strike action here on Black Friday will ripple throughout the company's UK logistics. As Black Friday looms, Amazon must urgently reconsider

their priorities or risk strike action causing widespread disruption to customers and the public."

On 27-28 October, the "Make Amazon Pay" conference will take place in Manchester, bringing together unions with NGOs and campaigning organisations to discuss worker and community resistance to Amazon's exploitation of workers, tax avoidances, and negative environmental impact.

If they do not bring a swift resolution, Black Friday strikes



will need to be followed quickly with further, escalated, action in the pre-Christmas period, another key trading period for Amazon. GMB union activists have also previously said that spreading the strikes

to other warehouses would be key to success. BHX4 remains by far the strongest base of organisation, with over 1,000 members. The need to build in other warehouses and facilities remains acute. □

Railworkers renew strike mandate



Off The Rails

Members of the RMT union at all 14 of the Train Operating Companies (TOCs) involved in the dispute over pay and conditions have yet again renewed the mandate for industrial action.

The ballot closed on 19 Oct. Turnouts were above 65% in more than half the TOCs. The lowest was 53%, at Govia Thameslink Railway. The highest was 75%, at Cross Country. But we should remember that turnout thresholds are arbitrary impositions. Of the 53% who voted at GTR, 87.5% voted to strike.

But the union leadership has insisted on a "marathon, not a sprint" strategy, meaning we've struck only sporadically for 24 or 48 hours at a time, with weeks or months in between action. That strategy has not produced gains, but a deadlock.

Gambit

The union leadership's last gambit to break that deadlock was to write to the Rail Delivery Group, the body representing the TOCs, with a proposal for a settlement that fell well short of the demands we went into the dispute with – for no job losses, no detrimental changes to terms and conditions, and an above-inflation pay rise. That gambit failed.

There has been no further offer from the RDG, nor even any further talks.

It's time for a different approach: a significant escalation of strikes. We need reps' assemblies within and across TOCs to deliberate on the best strategy for action.

There's no guarantee that striking more frequently and for more sustained periods would bring victory. But

we have evidence from other disputes – the Liverpool and Felixstowe dockers, the Camden parking attendants, bus drivers at several companies, and others – that more sustained strikes stand a better chance of getting bigger concessions. □

• Abridged: more at bit.ly/toc-r

RMT to ballot Tube cleaners



Tubeworker

On the Tube, the RMT union has declared a dispute with cleaning contractor ABM over its failure to follow the collective bargaining machinery agreed with the union. Part of this relates to ABM's imposition of "Project Lean", a restructure that has seen dozens of cleaners displaced from their work locations.

Although union reps have been able to represent individual cleaners going through the process, Project Lean itself was never consulted on or negotiated via the collective bargaining structures. ABM has also yet to even respond to a pay claim RMT submitted months ago.

The ballot campaign should be used to expand and deepen union organisation, recruiting more cleaners and electing more reps. That way, even if thresholds are missed, it will put the union in a stronger position to go again. And if thresholds are cleared, it will maximise the impact of any action.

The rest of the union needs to get behind the cleaners' fight – not just in words, but in action. London Underground (LUL) reps and activists are busy too, but we have to make time to support the cleaner reps in our stations and depots with their own ballot, lending a hand with phone-banking and campaign days.

Politically, we have to continually raise our demand for bringing cleaning in-house. All workers across LUL should be employed directly by LUL, on LUL terms and conditions. □

Veolia workers accept

By Tony Southwell

After three weeks striking for a pay rise, waste management workers at three Veolia sites in Nottinghamshire have voted to accept a £500 one off cost of living award which will be paid in January. The deal also included commitments from Veolia to change the workplace culture but they've already reneged on that at the Forest Town site by stopping smoke breaks and trying to discipline some strikers.

GMB Veolia drivers, who also got the payment, have been asking why they weren't balloted even though they would have had an impact in the dispute. Stranger still, some of those drivers have now left the GMB citing the union's failure to ballot them as the reason. □

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Vote Lloyd-Moloney from 9 Nov

By a PCS member

The branch nomination period for the upcoming elections for General Secretary (GS) and Assistant General Secretary (AGS) of PCS, the largest civil service trade union, ended on 16 October. Voting will be 9 Nov to 14 Dec.

Predictably, there are two sets of candidates: Fran Heathcote and Paul O'Connor, of the ruling Left Unity (LU) group, and Marion Lloyd and John Moloney, standing on a Broad Left Network and Independent Left ticket. There is a great deal at stake.

In recent years PCS has been run by a small bureaucratic cabal of senior employed and lay officers on the basis of the LU organisation. Their power outdistances their talent. On all metrics – declining pay, poorer terms and conditions, competence in negotiations, union density, full time officer accountability, and respect for union democracy – their governance of PCS has been an abject failure spiced with bureaucratic and democratic abuses.

Nevertheless, the cabal quite plainly expected Heathcote and O'Connor to waltz into the two positions. The nomination period has shaken their bureaucratic arrogance.

Hustings

The LU candidates embarrassed themselves by their refusal to participate in branch hustings for nominations. They claimed that it would be premature of them to attend as they would not be candidates until they each had fifteen branch nominations and until that process was over they did not know who the candidates would be.

It was possibly the worst explanation ever for avoiding debate – one so transparently ridiculous or deluded that did not fall within the definitions of evasion, cop-out, dodging, pretext, bullshit, and horseshit.

These antics backfired as John Moloney and Marion Lloyd began to build their nominations. When Heathcote and O'Connor finally, partially, retreated and took part in hustings, they lost heavily every time.

On 21 September, during the nomination period, twenty seven long standing Revenue and Customs (R & C) LU supporters resigned from LU and published their reasons for doing so. The Heathcote-O'Connor response within LU was tinned, dismissive, and dressed in pseudo militant language. It did not help them win support or even dissuade people from switching support. It did reveal their bureaucratic, top-down, view of union activists.

LU also issued a risible defence of the Presi-



dent's – Heathcote's – filibustering at the 2023 PCS conference, when she sent a WhatsApp message to LU delegates asking them to put their hand up to speak so she could call them in and time out a motion she did not want heard. Again, all this did was convince some activists that the LU leadership really do lack respect for democracy and conference and would rather brazen the issue out than apologise and promise not to engage in such behaviour again.

This journal and the PCS Independent Left have been forensically dismantling the outrageous spin of the PCS leadership for some months now and there is no doubt that activists have been reading and repeating the evidence, facts and arguments we have presented. No National Executive meeting goes by now without the outgoing General Secretary and his LU chums venting about our public analysis of their spin and failings.

As things stand, it is absolutely plain that John Moloney has piled up far more nominations than LU expected and possibly more than O'Connor, despite the union machinery being thrown behind him. We also suspect that Marion Lloyd has done much better than LU anticipated. While the national machinery will continue to be misused the leadership are no longer as confident as they were. Serious activists, concerned for the future of PCS, must now turn the vote out for John Moloney and Marion Lloyd. □

Israel-Gaza: what are the endgames?

By Martin Thomas

As of 2 October, available figures report over 5,000 people killed by the Israeli bombing in Gaza, approaching 2,000 of them are children.

The attritional effects of blocked supplies of water, medicines, food, and fuel, and the approaching ground invasion will kill more.

Evidence is that the majority in Gaza does not support Hamas. But Hamas are deeply embedded in the population, even apart from their deliberate use of civilians as shields. However careful the Israeli army is about targeting – and what Israeli ministers say gives no confidence – the whole population is at risk.

The Palestinian deaths are already greater than in any of the previous Gaza wars (around 2,000 in 2014, 1,400 in 2009...), greater than in the whole long "first intifada" (from 1987) or the "second intifada" (peak in 2002), and maybe greater than the thousands in Jordan's clampdown on the Palestinians, Black September 1970.

Total deaths could come to exceed those in the 1982 Lebanon war, or in the 1948 war, even if the war remains largely limited to Gaza.

If outright war spreads to Israel's northern border – on the initiative either of Hezbollah or of Israel – or to the West Bank, it will be even worse.

Protesters in Israel, including relatives of the hostages held by Hamas, are urging the government to step back and to negotiate release of the hostages by previously-used methods like prisoner exchange. There is, besides, no indication that the war will be successful in making Israel more secure – any more than the USA's war in Afghanistan from 2001 made anywhere secure.

Defence minister Yoav Gallant has given the nearest to an indication of his government's plans, saying that, after a long ground war, he aims to establish a wide security zone between Gaza and Israel and cut economic links (no more Gaza workers in Israel, no more supplies from Gaza to Israel, so forcing Egypt and other Arab states to organise electricity, water, phone, etc.)

He offered no explanation of how that can be done without vast suffering in a long meantime. Or done stably at all. Who will administer Gaza? Not the 50,000 Hamas-selected government workers who do now? Who, then? Neither the Palestinian Authority nor Egypt nor any consortium of Arab states will want to take it on as a gift from

Israel after it has terrorised the population.

Ultra-right Israeli ministers Smotrich and Strook talked earlier this year of bringing Gaza back under direct Israeli rule. That could not function without large continuing Israeli casualties, and contradicts Gallant's programme of breaking links.

Driving out Palestinians en masse from Gaza? Or from the West Bank if war explodes there? But Egypt and Jordan are well-placed to block that. (In 1948 the flight and expulsions of Palestinians were case-by-case in three distinct stages, spread between Dec 1947 and Nov 1948; were in a time of bigger flights and expulsions elsewhere; didn't happen in much of the north of Israel; and were to areas where no government would push back).

The fact that no Israeli government strategist has been able to spell out a workable endgame, and no Israel-allied big power either, is warrant to fear floundering which brings more horror for Palestinians, and further lurches to the right within Israel.

The loose alliance of Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran does have a defined endgame: "death to Israel", the driving out of the Jews. They lack the power to achieve that, but their attempts remain utterly reactionary.

Immediately the labour movement must call for ceasefires, stopping the war, freeing the hostages, ending the siege. Israel has the right to self-defence, but not to raze Gaza. We must spell out a workable democratic outcome – a real independent Palestinian state alongside a secure Israel, equal rights – and build support for those in Israel-Palestine fighting for that. □

Arabs, Jews, and socialism
The socialist debate in the 1980s and 90s on Israel and Palestine, and the development of Workers' Liberty's ideas
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**Socialism vs
capitalism**

By Colin Foster

About 3.8 million people, around 1.8 million households, in the UK were "destitute" in the UK at some point in 2022, according to a new [report](#) from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

They included a million children. Children in destitution increased 2.5 times between 2017 and 2022; households, doubled.

The report's definitions aim to identify the "destitute" as "people who cannot afford what they need to meet their most basic physical needs to stay warm, dry, clean and fed", and so skip meals or rely on food banks and charities.

The latest figures include more households with children, but the report says "single people aged between 25 and 44 remain the key group who experience destitution". Older people become destitute too, but on average over-65s have done better than worse-off young working-age people.

Other reports shows that life expectancy overall in the UK has now declined slightly. The number of years we can expect to live without bodily disability

limiting us has been decreasing since 2009. Disability-free life expectancy is 17 years lower in poorer areas of the UK than in the more prosperous.

These results are not, or not just, passing products of rapid price rises in 2022-3, or of Covid tolls. And they come in times when unemployment has generally been lower than since the 1970s. People on below 40% of median income after housing costs increased from 4.7 million to 6.5 million between 2002-03 and 2019-20, before most of Covid and before the price spiral.

Capitalism today, in Britain and many other countries, today, is increasing inequality, and the blighting of life among the worse-off, even in its relatively prosperous times.

Key factors in Britain are benefit cuts since 2010 and "sanctions" (benefit cuts imposed on individuals for failing at some hurdle or another).

A more fine-grained [study](#) for the USA by economists Anne Case and Angus Deaton finds that there life expectancy at age 25 for those with university degrees has continued to rise, with a slight Covid dip, but for those with no degree it has *fallen since 2010*.

The life gap between graduate and other was 2.5 years in 1980 and rose to 8.5 years by 2021. And that despite very

heavy physical effort continuing to decline as a proportion of blue-collar labour, and factories often becoming cleaner and quieter. Deaton and Case have called the trend "deaths of despair".

The rise of "deaths of despair" means risks for better-off workers, too. Even university graduates can, after mishap or otherwise, fall into the depths of insecure, low-paid jobs, with hours and wages varying from week to week, and of homelessness or housing that takes an unsustainable part of income.

Case and Deaton see the causes as "an increase in corporate power relative to workers... the decline of unions and their ability to raise wages for workers without college degrees, and the decreased mobility of workers from less to more successful places".

Weaker unions mean wages lose out relative to profits, and also that inequalities within the working class, and thus insecurity for workers, increase.

We work not only to rebuild stronger unions, but to orient them to ending destitution and the threat of distribution by winning common ownership of productive wealth, democratic control, and a move to "from each according to their ability, to each according to their need". □

