

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

WORKERS' UNITY

PEACE

TWO STATES

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Ceasefire, two states, workers' unity



As Israel's assault on Gaza continues, with the Palestinian death toll passing 10,000 (four thousand children), the Israeli state and the settler movement are intensifying repression of Palestinians elsewhere – both in the West Bank, and of the Palestinian minority inside Israel itself.

The Israeli campaign group Yesh Din, which monitors settler violence, reports 172 incidents in at least 84 Palestinian towns and villages since the Hamas atrocity on 7 October. The Palestinian Authority's Health Ministry says 130 Palestinians have been killed, by settlers and by Israeli security forces. A *New York Times* article reports almost 1,000 Palestinians have been displaced from their homes.

A leaflet placed on the windscreen of cars in Palestinian areas reads: "A great catastrophe [referencing the 'Nakba', the Arabic word for catastrophe, the name Palestinians give to their displacement in the 1948 war surrounding Israel's foundation] will descend upon your heads soon. We will destroy every enemy and expel you forcefully from our Holy Land that God has written for us. Wherever you are, carry your loads immediately and leave to where you came from. We are coming for you." Israeli figures report 550 Palestinian attacks on Israelis – settlers and military personnel – in the West Bank since 7 October.

Ben Gvir

A *Times of Israel* article on 4 November reports a clash in a cabinet meeting between far-right minister Itamar Ben-Gvir and Ronen Bar, the head of Israel's Shin Bet intelligence agency.

Many figures in Israel's security establishment are, like the USA, concerned about the risk of a second war in the West Bank, or even a third one, with Hezbollah, on the northern border; Ben-Gvir and other Jewish-supremacist politicians barely conceal their positive desire to provoke wider war. The *Financial Times* reports a split in Israel's cabinet over whether to suspend paying over tax revenues collected on behalf of the West Bank's Fatah-run Palestinian Authority, with Bezael Smotrich pushing hard to cut payments.

Some in Israel feel that the tilting of Israel's security priorities towards defending settlers in the West Bank helps explain why Israel was so exposed on 7 October. (Israel could easily repair its neglect on the Gaza border; instead, Netanyahu seeks revenge).

Commenting on the recent appointment of Zvi Sukkot, a member of the Knesset from the far-right Religious Zionism party, to head a subcommittee on West Bank security, left-wing MK Offer Cassif said: "A day before the horrific massacre in southern Israel, Zvi Sukkot initiated a pogrom in the heart of Huwara, in which a Palestinian youth was murdered. 32 battalions were there to protect Sukkot's pogromists, and only two battalions remained on the border with the Gaza Strip."

Crackdown

Meanwhile, Palestinian citizens of Israel face a growing crackdown on their rights. Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* reports a "systematic witch-hunt", involving "arrests, interrogations, firings, [and] expulsion from college." There are several instances of health workers in particular being targeted. Israel's health sector has a mixed workforce, and is one of the main places in Israeli society where Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian-Arab workers work alongside each other. *Ha'aretz* reports Palestinian nurses who immediately volunteered for additional shifts to treat victims in the aftermath of the Hamas massacre on 7 October being suspended from work following allegations of support for Hamas.

Ha'aretz also reports: "Certain local authorities, including the Tel Aviv suburbs of Ramat Gan, Givatayim and Bat Yam, have gone as far as to ban Arabs from certain realms of activity. For example, Givatayim Mayor Ron Kunik shut down construction sites in the city, explaining that the very presence of Arab workers is problematic at present, because people are anxious. Following court intervention, work was resumed, but under guard. In Ramat Hasharon, Arab cleaning women were not allowed to work at their jobs in schools, until an arrangement was worked out whereby they would be present only after classroom hours and would have no contact with the schoolchildren."

Israel has also recently sent over 3,000 Palestinian workers back to Gaza. The workers had been held in Israel

since 7 October, many reporting that they faced arrest, torture, and interrogation. Palestinian worker Zaki Salameh, quoted in an Al-Jazeera article, said: "They wanted to know what we knew about the Al-Aqsa Flood operation. Some of the young men were tortured and insulted in a very brutal way. The questions were ridiculous. The Israelis know exactly who we are, and if we had any ties to Hamas, we wouldn't even be granted the work permits."

Immediately prior to the 7 October attacks, Israel had increased the number of work permits granted to workers from Gaza, as part of a Qatar-brokered deal following protests at the Gaza border. Israel now says it is "severing all contact with Gaza": "There will be no more Palestinian workers from Gaza. Those workers from Gaza who were in Israel on the day of the outbreak of the war will be returned to Gaza."

Netanyahu has rejected calls for a ceasefire without first the release of Israeli hostages. But his strategy of re-



lentless bombing and a ground invasion is surely risking the lives of those hostages and may already have killed many. The best hope for stemming the tide of death is that Israel feels compelled, by a combination of international and internal pressure, to pull back, creating space for mobilisation to re-emerge for a democratic settlement, equal rights and a real independent Palestinian state alongside a secure Israel.

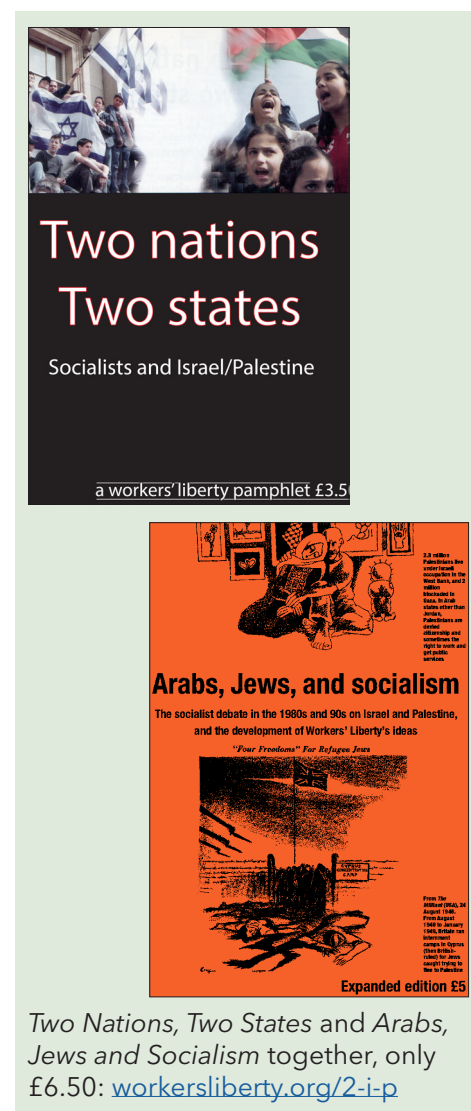
We say that in full awareness of how reactionary Hamas is, and while recognising Israel has a right to self-defence. Given how deeply Hamas is embedded in Gaza, its influence elsewhere, and its international links and support from Iran, those insisting Israel must push along present lines until Hamas is "destroyed" are endorsing an almost boundless war. That war will "destroy" tens of thousands of civilian lives and deepen the despair and yearning for revenge on which Hamas feeds. Netanyahu has no workable "endgame" for this war, only his push for revenge.

The best source of hope inside Israel itself comes from the Arab-Jewish social movement Standing Together. In recent days it has held a number of solidarity gatherings in mixed cities, mobilising 250 in Tel Aviv and 600 in Haifa. It has organised "Solidarity Guards" to mobilise Palestinian and Jewish citizens to carry out mutual aid work, community organising, and to resist racist incitement. A demonstration was also held in Tel Aviv to demand a ceasefire.

Significantly, a demonstration organised by families of hostages held by Hamas marched on Netanyahu's residence, facing down mounted police in the process.

There is undoubtedly a strong spirit of patriotic-nationalist fervour in Israel and broad support for its war, but there are growing cracks. Socialists internationally must do all we can to support those organising on the ground for a different future.

- Ceasefire! End the siege. Free the hostages
- Peace. Equal rights. Two states: a real independent Palestinian state alongside a secure Israel
- Workers' unity. □



Tories push an ugly “new normal”

By Matt Cooper

The Conservatives are reaching new lows in their recent lurch to the right. We have had the de facto abandonment of the net-zero target with the postponement of the ending of petrol and diesel car sales and the licensing of new oil drilling in the North Sea.

Rishi Sunak has falsely claimed that the Labour Party’s “eco-zealots” plan to tax meat. A government minister has retold the alt-right conspiracy theory that fifteen-minute cities (a reasonable planning goal that people live within easy walking distance of amenities they need) is an attempt to control people’s lives.

The underlying ideology of the Conservative party since Margaret Thatcher became leader in the 1970s has been that of a New Right with two components. The first is a neoliberalism of a smaller state, tax cuts, privatisation and the unleashing of the free market. The second is a neoconservatism of a strong state which both attacks trade union power and seeks to police working class communities more oppressively through the enforcement of socially conservative values. It was always a contradictory mix.

In the 1980s Thatcher looked through a neoliberal lens to see the EU’s Single Market as a bulwark of the free market in the UK. By the 1990s she was looking through a neoconservative lens, seeing Europe as undermining British sovereignty, with an increasingly nationalistic scepticism on the EU. The Tories lurched to and fro in the Blair-Brown years, tilted more neoliberal with Cameron and Osborne, then ramped up the neoconservatism with Johnson.

In recent years, the right globally has become more overtly right-populist in character. These projects are underpinned by antediluvian nationalism that encompasses an anti-immigrant nativism; the rolling back of women’s equality especially in reproductive rights; and the “anti-woke” crusade that

incorporates barely concealed homophobia and racism and overt transphobia. This has been accompanied by a move away from neoliberalism and a rejection of globalisation, seen as culturally cosmopolitan and undermining the political sovereignty of the nation-state.

Such a conservative realignment can be seen in Boris Johnson’s premiership. While it was sometimes difficult to discern a coherent political programme behind his incompetence and egoism, his premiership marked a shift away from neoliberalism. He believed it would take a higher spending and greater state intervention to level up and create an economically successful UK able to compete on the world market.

Thus, his attempts to boost the manufacturing sector through such as the state sponsored EV battery project Britishvolt. He moderated the cost-cutting and privatising side of the New Right, and was even willing to increase tax to increase funding for the NHS and social care. At the same time, he developed a more populist neoconservatism, particularly drawing on the Trumpian US right, ratcheting up the rhetoric on immigration and generally pursuing the culture wars agenda. Johnson sought both to level up and dumb down. But little levelling-up happened.

Johnson’s fall was caused by a more general rejection by Conservative MPs of his retreat from neoliberalism, as well as by Partygate.

Some Tories wish a return to Johnson’s policies (e.g. Theresa May’s advisor Nick Timothy, the Jake Berry faction of Conservative MPs who won “red wall” seats in 2019 and organised in the Northern Research Group, but were sidelined with the end of Johnson’s premiership).

Mostly, since Johnson, the Conservative government has attempted, in manic form under Truss and in more measured form under Sunak, to reinvigorate the neoliberal side of the New



Right, while retaining and boosting the right-populist side.

Sunak was a neoliberal Brexiteer, driven by the dream of an unshackled Britain boosting the free market, with a different emphasis from the right-wing populists whose anti-Europeanism was fuelled more by anti-immigrant nativism and chimera of national sovereignty.

Perhaps Sunak’s increasing adoption of a populist agenda is more from desperation than commitment (this ex-Goldman Sachs multi-millionaire and son-in-law to one of the richest men in India would make an unconvincing elite-bashing populist). But more important is the question of who will follow along the road that Sunak is currently paving with opposition to the “war on motorists”, the mantra of stopping the small boats and increasing submersion in the waters of the culture wars.

The Conservative government generally has run with this ball. In early November we have seen leaked proposals to identify anyone who “undermines” the values of the current UK system as extremist, labelling of those who call for a ceasefire in Israel-Gaza as

“hate marchers”, and attacks on homeless people in tents as having made an unacceptable “lifestyle choice” (exacerbated by being “foreigners”). As the election gets closer, it can only be expected that this torrent of filth will thicken.

It is not only the Conservative right that are empowered by this. The far right have attempted to ride in the slipstream of the government’s rightward shift. A [report](#) by Hope not Hate earlier this year showed that when the government turns up its rhetoric on immigration, with the supporting press coverage, this fed directly into online and real-world activity by the fascist right. If after the election the Conservatives back away from this populism, then the overtly populist parties such as Reform UK, and the fascist right, could pick up disappointed “culture-warriors” feeling let down by the Tories.

It would be too easy to think that this is sound and fury signifying nothing more than a Conservative government that has lost all credibility. More likely that these lows will become the new normal: the Conservatives attempt to sugar their neoliberal pill with a coating of a right-populist bigotry. □

Labour stirs on Israel-Gaza

By Alan Gilbert

Despite this being a period when many local Labour Parties are not taking motions because of reorganisation for new constituency boundaries, at least two local Labour Parties have passed motions for a ceasefire in Israel-Gaza. Others have motions tabled.

There are moves to set up a “Labour for a ceasefire” group, and UK Friends of Standing Together looks set to gain sup-

port in local Labour Parties and trade unions.

Sixteen front-benchers have supported a ceasefire. 580 Labour councillors have signed one or another of two letters calling on Keir Starmer to back a ceasefire. Less usefully, a few dozen have resigned from Labour.

A survey across Labour councillors found 43% saying they see the Labour Party “more negatively” because of Starmer’s line on this, and 15%

saying they see it “more positively”, although surely councillors would be inclined to dampen the negativity when asked by external pollsters. Councillors newly elected since 2019 are more critical than older ones.

Unison and other unions have backed a ceasefire.

Starmer remains anxiously in lockstep with the Tories, calling only for “humanitarian pauses” (short ceasefires). He is unable to keep a lid on the

labour movement on this.

As far as we know, union and Labour resolutions so far mostly condemn the Hamas atrocity on 7 October and support a “two states” democratic settlement (a real independent Palestinian state alongside a secure Israel). The letter from the first ten Labour councillors to resign was also clear for “two states”. Often the advocates of “smash Israel” are hesitant about pushing that line in the labour movement.

Solidarity wants labour movement bodies to become a visible presence on the ceasefire demonstrations, with their own placards and slogans for a democratic peace. □

- Motions and texts at bit.ly/mo-pe
- UK Friends of Standing Together [@omdimbeyachaduk](https://ukfost.co.uk)

At last! Morning Star takes antisemitism seriously



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

In an editorial on 3 November the *Morning Star* has warned of a “horri-fying increase in anti-semitic incidents across Britain since the start of the present Gaza crisis” and stated that social-ists “cannot ignore this” even “as we fight for peace in Gaza.”

This is a significant development. The sharp rise in antisemitic incidents that began immediately following Hamas’s pogrom on 7 October (i.e. well before Israel’s attack on Gaza) had previously scarcely been mentioned in the *Morn-ing Star*.

In fact, between 7 October and 3 November, while the paper frequently, prominently and correctly denounced anti-Muslim racist incidents, there were just two clear condemnations of anti-semitism – a quote from an open let-ter calling upon Keir Starmer to resign, which also condemned “the surge in

anti-semitic and Islamophobic inci-dents in Britain” (Oct 9) and an editorial (Nov 1) condemning both antisemitism and Islamophobia that went on to claim that “the Establishment unites in de-nouncing anti-semitism, where it exists and where it doesn’t [but] Muslim-bait-ing is positively encouraged.” I don’t think it unreasonable to read into that particular wording the implication that claims of antisemitism are often not genuine and anyway of rather less con-cern to the left than anti-Muslim racism.

Self-criticism

So the 3 November editorial is signifi-cant. It contains several points that go directly against the paper’s previous editorial statements and articles and even notes that “combining the two evils [Islamophobia and antisemitism] as one can lead to overlooking specific features” – an observation that could be read as a very mild form of self-crit-icism, given that such “combining” is exactly what the paper had previously been doing.

Other points never previously made include:

- “Most, but not all Jews in Britain feel

a degree of affinity with Israel. That is by no means the same thing as endorsing ... its far right government.”

- “Some 70 per cent of British Jews in Britain have family living in Israel [and] feel traumatised by the Hamas attack.”

- “The Holocaust is not just history, but a present fear of many Jews.”

- “The attacks on Corbyn’s Labour ... have led to an instinctive assumption of bad faith [towards] anyone drawing attention to anti-semitism”

- “Some on the left blunder into an-ti-semitic attitudes through embracing a conspiratorial rather than a Marxist understanding of the ills of our society. Capitalism and imperialism are organic systems of oppression, not the manipu-lation of sinister cabals”.

The editorial closes with a call for “a ceasefire in Gaza [and] a democratic solution to the crisis... in the interests of all the people of Israel/Palestine.”

Who could disagree with that last point? The paper probably means a two state solution, which is Communist Party of Britain (CPB) policy, though the *Morning Star* rarely mentions it and gives more prominence to articles by writers (Ramzy Baroud, John Wight,

Marcel Cartier) who clearly favour “one state” and the destruction of Israel.

And remember, too that the paper has made a point of refusing to “con-demn” the 7 October pogrom and has repeatedly referred to the Israeli victims – all of whom lived behind the 1967 “Green Line” and many of whom were peaceniks – as “settlers”.

It is also a publication that has been criticised by prominent CPB member Mary Davis, for carrying antisemitic ar-ticles (though she doesn’t publicly use that term), and had to withdraw and apologise for an antisemitic article in 2018 after Davis complained.

I suspect Mary Davis (who has a nu-anced article about Zionism and anti-semitism in the Summer 2003 issue of the CPB’s theoretical magazine *Com-munist Review*) may well be behind the abrupt turn reflected in the 3 Novem-ber editorial.

If so, good luck to her – though I doubt she’ll thank me for backing her. □

- The *Morning Star* always uses the term “anti-semitism” with a hyphen, unlike *Solidarity*, which does not use a hyphen.

Turkey responds with antisemitism

By Pete Boggs

The Israeli-Gaza War has prompted a significant rise in antisemitic incidents in Turkey. A second-hand book-shop in Istanbul went viral for displaying a sign [saying](#) “Jews Not Allowed”, and the Etz Hayim Synagogue in Izmir was [spray-painted](#) with the slogan “Murderer Israel”.

Süleyman Sezen, an AKP (Erdoğan’s party) councillor in Samsun, [said](#) in a council meeting: “Historically, every-one gets angry with Hitler be-cause he was racist. Hitler had a saying: ‘You will curse me for every Jew I did not kill.’ This is true. Once again I honour Hit-ler’s memory.”

Şahzade Demir, an MP for Hûda-Par (a Kurdish Islamist party allied with Erdoğan, and linked to the militant group Kurdish Hezbollah) [called for](#) Turkish Jews who volun-teeer for the Israeli army to be prevented from going and

stripped of their citizenship. The next day, he [held](#) a press conference in the Turkish par-liament with Basem Naim, a Hamas spokesperson. This was echoed by the far-right Isla-mist newspaper *Yeni Akit* went further with their front page headline “Strip the Servants of Zionism of their Citizenship”, [claiming](#) falsely that Turkish Jews are by default citizens of Israel, and that many have gone to fight in the IDF since the Hamas attacks.

Hamas

The Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan [said](#) that “Hamas is not a terrorist or-ganisation, it is a liberation group, ‘mujahideen’ waging a battle to protect its lands and people,” and said that the Is-raeli attacks on Gaza “amount to murder and mental illness.” Initially his comments on the war were more cautious, but this changed after the Al-Ahli Arab Hospital explosion.

Turkey and Israel have mostly had diplomatic and economic ties since 1949. Since Erdoğan came to power, ties have been disrupted from time to time, though, so far anyway, always later reknitted.

Throughout his time in of-fice, Erdoğan has been con-sistent in saying that Hamas are not a terrorist group. When the external Political Bureau of Hamas relocated from Damas-cus to Qatar at the beginning of the Syrian Civil War, the somewhat errant figure Saleh al-Aroui built his own semi-au-tonomous base in Istanbul, with (at the very least) the con-sent of the Turkish state. He stayed there until 2015.

As with most international tragedies Erdoğan has seized on this conflict as an oppor-tunity to increase his own prestige, both abroad and at home. There will be munic-ipal elections in March 2024, and last time Erdoğan’s AKP

[lost](#) the big cities, despite their attempts to overturn the results. Turkey has [now](#) put it-self forward as a potential U.N guarantor for an independent Palestine, pointing to their suc-cesses as the guarantor of the Azerbaijani state’s right to Na-gorno-Karabakh, which it has just ethnically cleansed.

Azerbaijan

In recent decades Azerbaijan has been a key military ally of Israel, in large part due to both states’ hostility to the Islamic Republic of Iran. Israel is heav-ily reliant on Azerbaijani oil, and Azerbaijan is heavily reli-ant on Israeli weapons: in 2021 approximately 65% of Israel’s oil was [imported](#) from Azer-baijan, and from 2016 to 2020 69% of Azerbaijan’s [weapon imports](#) came from Israel. Is-raeli-manufactured Harop drones were central to Azer-baijan’s victory over Armenia in 2020, and Israeli-manufac-tured Pegasus spyware is used

to crack down on Azerbaijani dissidents. Beyond these im-mediate concerns, there is also a shared interest in deny-ing and downplaying the Ar-menian genocide among the Turkish, Azerbaijani, and Israeli states.

The response to the Isra-el-Gaza war in Azerbaijan has been very different to that in Turkey. Instead of seeing massive protests like its coun-terparts in Turkey, the Israeli embassy in Baku has been covered in flowers and teddy bears, and the government has put out statements con-demning “violence against civilians” calling for de-escalation and a two-state solution. At the moment it seems un-likely that Turkey would force the issue with Azerbaijan, and Azerbaijan is in a privileged position due to its reasonably friendly relationship with both the US and Russia. □

Snarers in Poland after election

By Eduardo Tovar

There is much to agree with in Ann Nukeman's article on the Polish election (*Solidarity* 687). I would like to add some further detail on the mobilisation of pro-choice voters and a more critical assessment of Lewica, the main left-wing electoral alliance.

The All-Poland Women's Strike, the organisation that provided the most prominent leadership in the 2020-21 mass protests against the near-total abortion ban, supplied a website where people could enter their postcode to see a list of politicians in red who do not support abortion.

However, Women's Strike's role was minimal and politically poor. Its social media output seldom went beyond the very general aim of getting Law and Justice out of power ("PiS off!"). This reflects a broader tendency to frame the election as Law and Justice versus a largely undifferentiated "progressive" or "democratic" opposition.

Having made virtually no effort to develop an infrastructure that could outlast the 2020-21 protest wave, Women's Strike has much less organisational strength to intervene now that it is clear that Law and Justice "PiS-ing off" is insufficient to guarantee safe and legal abortions in Poland.

This brings me to Lewica. Despite Lewica candidates from Razem performing much better than their coalition

partners in New Left (formed in 2021 from the older social-democratic Democratic Left Alliance and the newer social-liberal Spring), Lewica's overall vote share decreased from 12.6% to 8.6%.

Considering the highly visible role Razem played in the 2016 Black Protests and 2020-21 Women's Strike protests for reproductive rights, Lewica suffering a major vote-share decrease in an election where abortion was the second-highest-priority issue for voters after the economy is a bad sign.

Lewica's leadership and many of its members, including many Razem members, have welcomed entering a governing coalition with Civic Coalition and Third Way. They see this as a way of stopping the far right and passing more progressive policies.

While Civic Coalition is often described as "centrist" or "liberal", it is really centre-right. Its economic policies and general ideology are thoroughly neoliberal, and its "progressive" stances on social issues are only partial, reluctant concessions.

Civic Platform, the main party in Civic Coalition, opposed abortion legalisation when it was in government from 2007-2015. As Nukeman acknowledges, its current promise to legalise abortion up to twelve weeks is a compromise made under tremendous pressure. Third Way is also centre-right, but opposes even the twelve-week compromise on abortion.



Therefore, we should be frank that Lewica entering a coalition government with Civic Coalition and Third Way means Lewica joining a centre-right government. With Lewica holding only 26 seats to Civic Coalition's 157 and Third Way's 65, it is unlikely to force meaningful concessions out of its prospective coalition partners. This means it is almost certain that the coalition will not pass the kinds of bold measures needed to tackle Poland's inflation and cost-of-living crisis.

Already Lewica has accepted major compromises like the twelve-week abortion limit. During the election, it let vote-chasing and fear of media backlash prevent it from pushing back strongly against Law and Justice's

state-sponsored anti-migrant [campaign](#).

Instead of organising extra-parliamentary pressure on the coalition negotiations, Razem co-chair Adrian Zandberg has stated that "We need to let the people who sit behind these doors and work on the government's programme simply work".

In short, Lewica – including Razem – is already showing troubling signs of succumbing to parliamentary horse-trading.

That approach that will neither advance working-class consciousness nor provide an effective bulwark against the still widely-supported far right as the economic crisis continues. □

Israel-Gaza: there has to be a wider answer



By Sean Matgamna

We are right to call for a ceasefire. The alternative is to support mass bombing of civilians amongst whom Hamas hides. However, we should do that as people who are seriously in favour of Israeli self defence.

Hamas wants to destroy Israel, any Israel. It wants to do to all Israelis what it did to 1,400 of them.

There are perhaps, tens of thousands of Hamas hiding in the civilian population. There is more than an Israeli decision to it.

They should get out? Yes, in principle. But effective Gaza independence has led to the rule of Islamic clerical fascism, and the horrible events in Is-

rael of a month ago and to the present 200 Israeli hostages (those of them who haven't been killed).

The fundamental truth is that there will be a regional solution or none. Israel is at fault for not using its strength to find such a solution and instead replying to Islamist terror attacks in Israel with the terrible things it is doing in Gaza. As Bernie Sanders puts it, "there's got to be a better way" than indiscriminate killing of Palestinian civilians in order to get at the Hamas that chooses to hide amongst them.

Any "demand" on Israel – even if it does come from legitimate horror at Israeli bombing and the belief that what it is doing will not eliminate Hamas – any demand that it gives a free hand to Hamas is nonsense. Reactionary nonsense. No state would do that. Only its inveterate enemies, or active supporters of its enemies would "demand"

that it should.

Only outright supporters of its enemies will back such demands. (*Socialist Worker*

backed Hamas against the PLO in its 2007 coup that split the West Bank and Gaza). □



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 9 November, 5pm: Workers' Liberty Students: What is Trotskyism? Meet, Leon, London WC1N 1AY

Sunday 12 November, 11am: Ecosocialist study group: Solar geoengineering in the capitalocene

Monday 13 November, 6.30pm: The fight for Abortion Rights, The Lost Wanderer, 46 Leazes Park Road, Newcastle, NE1 4PG

Wednesday 15 November, 7pm: Israel-Palestine: understanding the issues, Marchmont Centre, London, WC1N 1AB

Thursday 16 November, 5pm: Workers' Liberty Students: occupations – history of a tactic. Meet, Leon, London WC1N 1AY

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



Activist Agenda

The new "Workers Against CCP Repression" campaign is protesting in support of the "Hong Kong 47", people on trial for pro-democracy activity, on Sunday 26 November, 3pm-4pm at the Chinese Embassy, 49-51 Portland Place, London W1. Pdf leaflets and more information (plus information, model motions, etc. about other campaigns) at workersliberty.org/agenda and bit.ly/mo-pe. □

Just transition and curbs on aviation



Environment

By Sacha Ismail

Aviation sector bosses globally are pursuing rapid expansion despite the climate crisis, with the International Civil Aviation Organization predicting doubling of air traffic by the late 2030s.

Even in the UK, with its already over-expanded aviation industry, the Government's climate-indifferent "Jet Zero Strategy" endorses 70% expansion by 2050. Expansion plans have already been launched or greenlighted at around the country – though with strong opposition from community and climate campaigners.

A key way the industry sells its antisocial agenda is job creation. Even before the wider climate and social questions are reached, however, the "argument" is false. Rapid expansion of the sector in recent decades has not meant a jobs bonanza and will not in future.

A [report](#) on aviation published by the New Economics Foundation (NEF) in July found that, despite major industry expansion, the number of jobs in air transport was lower in 2019 (pre-pandemic-job losses) than in 2007. *The number of jobs relative to passenger numbers has steadily declined*, from 695 per million in 2000 to 459 in 2019. Moreover the sector's job potential creation per pound invested has since 2015 ranked among the lowest.

NEF also reports that since 2008, amidst expansion, air transport has experienced the largest real-terms wage cuts of any of 96 "sub-sectors" of the UK economy: and before 2019 it was already second worst. Wage decline in air transport supporting jobs, eg in airports, has also been far larger than across the economy as a whole. The spate of pay strikes at airports this year have been about current inflation, but also trying to make up major lost ground.

As NEF sums up: "So who exactly is benefiting from ever more air travel? You needn't look much further than the highly paid executives, the private shareholders, and the wealthy minority of frequent flyers."

This reality surely means there is the possibility of the labour movement, or sections of it, agitating effectively against expansion of aviation and for alternative policies, on grounds of jobs, wages and workers' rights as well as climate.

Unite the Union, which has a large membership in many parts of aviation, has generally generally echoed employers' arguments in favour of expanding the industry, as has GMB. Civil service union PCS, which also has members in the sector (NATS air traf-

fic control, the CAA industry regulator, and some workers in airports), has taken a more independent and left-wing stance, and produced resources usefully exploring the issues.

Unfortunately these resources cannot be found on PCS's website – perhaps reflecting, in addition to the general poorness of the site, devaluing of the union's important climate work by the dominant section of its leadership. But *Protecting Jobs, Protecting the Planet* (2013), *A Green New Deal for Gatwick* (2020) and *Aviation Democracy: The Case for Public Ownership* (2020) can all be found on the [website](#) of aviation workers' organisation [Safe Landing](#). Safe Landing has also republished the RMT's 2008 *Who Says There's No Alternative?* on expansion of rail as an alternative to aviation.

The 2013 report resulted from discussion on reconciling PCS's developing climate and environmental policy with protecting the interests of its members in aviation. It noted that already at that time, "in an increasingly deregulated industry, the formula that increased amounts of air traffic leads inevitably to job creation cannot be assumed... indeed the signs are that the opposite is likely to be true".

Advocacy

The report's advocacy of solutions was tentative – probably deliberately, given its purpose of developing discussion between the union's national leadership and its Aviation section. Much of what it focused on, though, was present.

At that time the Review Group that produced the report argued that a holistic view allowed "for some limited expansion of flight numbers". However it criticised the automatic push for further expansion driven by the dominant "free market approach" and criticised particular proposals for expansion.

(Safe Landing opposes expansion specifically on the basis that it will mean a disastrous reversal for the sector in the near future, maximising job losses and more general regression, very likely at workers' expense. A sustainable future for aviation, in both senses, means "right sizing" the sector now, at least dramatically curbing its expansion. Moreover such curbing might actually be compatible with increasing employment – see below.)

The PCS report critically assessed a number of supposed technological fixes proposed by industry employers, for instance use of different fuels – which has since, under the name "[Sustainable Aviation Fuels](#)", become an even more favoured "solution" of industry and government, despite remaining what the report called both "discredited" and "a distraction".

It considered various forms of taxing the chronically [under-taxed](#) aviation

sector, including from standpoints of curbing air traffic, financial progressiveness and use of funds raised, emphasising channelling funds into green measures such as expanding public transport.

In general the report was most enthusiastic about the kind of solutions it grouped under the heading of "Climate jobs". It outlined three broad strands: making existing jobs greener through incremental changes such as eliminating waste and reforming working patterns and travel arrangements; making existing jobs greener through considerably different procedures and operational structures, i.e. more radically transforming the industry; and creating jobs in alternative "green" sectors.

The second plank could allow the creation of large numbers of new jobs *within aviation*. As Safe Landing explained more recently: "a lot of work [is] required to transform aviation from high- to low-emissions: developing new technology, reconfiguring airports and re-training staff within the sector. For example, if there is a significant reduction in fast, long-haul travel in large aircraft, this may be replaced by shorter-range travel in smaller electric or hydrogen aircraft."

The PCS authors emphasised progressing in the first strand through workplace-level collective bargaining – what is now being called "green bargaining" – on the basis of expanded and better organised union membership; in the second through a mix of workplace and wider green bargaining and government policies and action; and in the third primarily through political action.

In terms of alternative jobs, the report again particularly emphasised creating jobs in public transport, because of the contribution to tackling climate change as well as social justice.

On multiple more purely economic axes too, including both general economic benefits and job creation specifically, investment in rail is a much better way of expanding transport links than expanding aviation. The 2008 RMT *Who Says There's No Alternative?* report found that creating new high speed inter-city rail links, even if requiring large initial investment, would eventually generate many times greater benefits than expanding Heathrow. Investment in buses is, obviously, also badly needed.

The 2013 PCS report emphasised the kind of policies it sketched out would not flourish without "greater regulation, international co-operation and indeed public ownership" – with "direct public ownership... by far the quickest way to drive investment towards desirable and social and environmental outcomes".

Seven years later the union's *Aviation Democracy* pamphlet, by its for-

mer Aviation Group president Tahir Latif and climate change policy officer Sam Mason, set out sharper positions on some issues of controversy, such as air traffic expansion, and made a more emphatic and detailed case for comprehensive public ownership in [aviation](#). It also profiled in some detail various aspects of the aviation industry, its workforce and the issues they face, providing an informative overview of the sector.

By that time the industry had gone through multiple severe crises, including the existential crisis of the pandemic and the ever more pressing one caused by the impacts of climate change. *Aviation Democracy* made the likelihood of more and more frequent such crises central to arguments both against market-driven expansion of the industry and for public ownership.

Also published in 2020, the *Green New Deal for Gatwick* report looked specifically at the impact of the pandemic in an area of the UK heavily over-reliant on aviation – with aviation-linked jobs accounting for one twelfth in the "Gatwick Diamond" of West Sussex and East Surrey and a third in the borough of Crawley. Advocating a public sector-led diversification of the local economy, the report expanded the focus on alternative jobs to consider care, health, education and other public service work alongside public transport.

For socialists and trade unionists who want to develop ideas for the future of this economically, politically and climate-pivotal sector, all these publications are worth reading. □

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More than a hundred people joined us for our socialist feminist day school *All The Rage* on 4 November. With talks on secularism, the revolution in Iran, resisting state violence, medical misogyny, sexism in the unions and building the workers' movement, the "green wave" in Latin America, and more, the event was a great success. We will be writing up speeches and interviewing our guest speakers for the next edition of *Women's Fightback* – among them: Elinor Cleghorn, author of *Unwell Women*; Rhianna Pratchett, video game and screenwriter; Diana Nammi, activist in the 1978-9 Iranian revolution and Kurdish freedom fighter; and more. Subscribe to *Women's Fightback*: workersliberty.org/wf □

Victimisation by a prison doctor



Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

Sarah Jane Baker, a jailed trans woman, has had her hormones stopped by her prison doctor, who is employed by the private company Practice Plus Group.

Sarah was acquitted in court on 31 August on Public Order Act 1986 charges about an outburst in her speech at Trans Pride on 4 July, but remains in jail as the "licence" on which she was released from a previous sentence was revoked. Hundreds of other people are in jail without new convictions or even charges because of revoked "licences".

She is being held indefinitely, with not even a hearing until March 2024. Since 15 September she has been in Isle of Wight prison, which is chiefly for

male sex offenders. In induction she faced inappropriate comments from other prisoners. Staff have taken away her female clothes.

Sarah castrated herself when she was previously in prison. She was then started on oestrogen on the advice of gender specialists, and it was continued by her GP after her release in 2019.

The campaign for her release (Instagram: [@freesarahjanebaker](https://www.instagram.com/freesarahjanebaker)) has reported:

"The prison doctor has now decided to stop her oestrogen and has said the appropriate treatment for someone with XY chromosomes who has been castrated is testosterone. He does not acknowledge her gender dysphoria or identity as a trans woman. His proposed treatment amounts to a medical detransition.

"Sarah is suffering severe menopausal symptoms now her oestrogen has been stopped, including hot flushes, night sweats, fatigue, memory and concentration difficulties, and worsening

mental health. The only treatment she is being offered to manage this is testosterone, at a dose that would give her the same level as if she still had testes."

Under Prison Service Instruction 17/2016, *The Care and Management of Transgender Offenders*, prisons must make sure that those who have been diagnosed with gender dysphoria have access to the same quality of care that they would expect to receive from the NHS if they had not been sent to prison.

The PSI further states that "if medical treatment for gender dysphoria is commenced before reception into prison, and the prisoner applies for it to be continued, it should be continued until the prisoner's gender specialist has been consulted on the appropriate way to manage the prisoner's treatment unless the doctor working in the prison has reasonable clinical grounds for not doing so".

Sarah Jane Baker reports the specialists, the gender identity clinic, have

written to her saying that her prison doctor is refusing to prescribe her anything but full-dose testosterone no matter what they advise. □

Hate crimes on the rise

By Rhodri Evans

The proportion who describe themselves as "not at all prejudiced" against transgender people has fallen from 82% to 64% since 2019. The proportion saying transgender people should be allowed to change the sex on their birth certificates has gone down since 2019 from 53% to 30%.

Hate crimes against trans people have increased 186% in the last five years, and hate crimes on the basis of sexual orientation, by 112%.

Some of that may be better reporting – still only 37% of people physically harassed or attacked for being LGBT+ report it. But 16% of under-25s and 15% of 25- to 34-year-olds say LGBT+ people are "dangerous" to others, though only 4% of 55-65 year olds. 27% of under-25s say "being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender is immoral or against my beliefs".

Meanwhile, attitudes on immigration have become more open. In 2002 only 17% thought immigration clearly economically beneficial; in 2022, 59%. The percentage saying immigrants make the country a better place to live has gone up from 20% to 56%. It is possible to push back on the "culture wars". □

Bangladesh garment workers resist

By Mohan Sen

As we went to press on 7 November, Bangladesh's wage board was due to set a new figure for the minimum wage in the country's garment industry.

The week before saw a virtual uprising by the country's garment workers, with hundreds of thousands on strike, militant mass demonstrations and a factory in industrial city Gazipur burned.

Two deaths of workers have been reported, one of them of garment industry electrician Russel Hawlader, confirmed shot by the police.

Bangladesh is the world's second largest "ready made garments" exporter after China, and the sector accounts for 80% of its export earnings. But most of its four million-plus workers (70% women) are in dire poverty.

Workers and their unions are demanding the minimum is increased from 8,300 Taka (£61) a month to 23,000 (£169). The bosses have been proposing 10,400 Taka, though some signalled increased willingness to move after last week's protests.

Many brands sourcing clothes in Bangladesh have made noises about the need for higher wages, es-

entially to bring unrest to an end – but simultaneously indicated unwillingness to pay more for them. In the difficult circumstances of brutal bosses, a violent state, deeply authoritarian government and predominantly right-wing opposition, Bangladesh's workers have repeatedly shown willingness to fight aggressively for their rights. □



The high point of firs



Book review

By Paul Hampton

A century ago, an international communist women's movement began to develop a perspective for women's self-liberation that still resonates today. The record of those early struggles has been translated into English for the first time by Mike Taber and Daria Dyakonova, *The Communist Women's Movement, 1920-1922*. The book provides a history of the greatest working class-based women's movement to date, through the voices of the women involved. It is one has great relevance for today's socialist feminists.

Communist Women's Movement

In 1917, the Russian working class took power led by the Bolshevik Party and proceeded to establish the first workers' state to sustain itself for years. Bolshevik women were central to the revolution, demonstrating, making speeches, writing newspaper articles, serving as soviet and дума delegates, running committees and building militias, the Red Guards. Led by Alexandra Kollontai and Inessa Armand, they organised conferences, published their own newspaper *Rabotnitsa* (Woman Worker) and participated in the seizure of power.

After the Bolsheviks took power, they scrapped old, reactionary laws. They legislated for full legal and political equality for women, including the right to divorce and the right to vote. The Bolsheviks also abolished all laws against homosexual acts and other consensual sexual activity. During the first months of soviet power decrees were passed aimed at improving the material conditions of life for working-class women. Under the pressure of the dire economic and social circumstances of the civil war, some functions of the family were transferred to the state, through public dining halls and communal laundries. In November 1920, abortion was legalised.

In March 1919, the Bolsheviks and their international co-thinkers launched the Communist International (Comintern). Its founding congress declared that the new International's goals could only be met "with the energetic and active participation of working-class women". In June 1919, the Women's Department of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party, known as Zhenotdel, was agreed and a few months later began to function.

Between 30 July and 2 August 1920, the First International Conference of Communist Women was held in Mos-

cow. Only 20 delegates from 16 countries attended, plus another 30 other attendees. The proceedings are printed in this book in English for the first time. The conference was held concurrently with the Second Congress of Communist International. Immediately after the conference, the Comintern established the International Women's Secretariat. Clara Zetkin was elected general secretary, with Kollontai as assistant secretary.

In April 1921, the first issue of *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* (The Communist Women's International) was published in Berlin, edited by Zetkin. It became the international journal of the communist women's movement.

Between 9 and 15 June 1921, the Second International Conference of Communist Women took place in Moscow, attended by 82 delegates. The proceedings, which comprise the longest section of the book, are published for the first time in any language. A week after the women's conference had finished, the Third Congress of Communist International was held in Moscow. The congress adopted some of the resolutions passed by the Second International Conference of Communist Women.

On 12 December 1921, the Communist Women's Conference for the Near East was held in Tiflis.

The second communist women's conference agreed to hold regular meetings of women's correspondents writing for their press. On 25-26 January 1922, the First Conference of International Women's Correspondents was held in Berlin. On 24-25 October 1922, the Second Conference of International Women's Correspondents, met in Berlin. The proceedings are printed in this book.

What did this international communist women's movement achieve in its first three years? One editor suggests five key gains. First, its central organ, the journal *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale*, was one of the most well-written, lively, independent-minded and far-reaching publications of the world Communist movement. Second, the gatherings supported and spread the formation of women's sections, committees or departments within each Communist Party. Third, the conferences and publications provided a vehicle for mutual collaboration by Communist women activists around the world. Fourth, the communist women's movement drove forward the importance of the fight for women's emancipation, as well advancing women's participation as both members and leaders, in the entire Communist movement. Finally,

the communist women's movement initiated important internationally coordinated campaigns, notably reviving International Women's Day as a vehicle for mobilising working women around the world.

Communist Party women

The book also includes valuable reports on the women's sections within individual Communist Parties. Most Communist Parties were not formed until 1920 and most started with very low women memberships. After the international communist movement conferences, density improved, notably in Czechoslovakia (24%), Germany (17%), Norway (15%) and the USSR (14%). However the PCF in France had only 4% and PCI in Italy perhaps 2%.

Another measure of the success of communist women's work were the conferences they were able to organise. Bolshevik women had led the way, with a conference was held in Petrograd just after workers seized power. The meeting was attended by 500 delegates representing 80,000 women from local soviets and other organisations. On 16-21 November 1918, they organised the First All-Russian Congress of Working Women. Even during the civil war, a wide range of party and non-party women's conferences were organised across Russia.

German Communist Party women organised the First Women's National Conference on 8 December 1920 in Berlin, immediately after the party congress. The second was held on 7 May 1921 and on 28 September 1922, the Third National Women's Conference of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) convened in Berlin.

In October 1921, the Czechoslovak CP held a national women's conference and on 27 December 1921, the French CP organised a national women's conference during the main party gathering. By 1922, Bulgarian communist women had organised their sixth national women's conference.

Another indicator was the range of publications produced by women's sections in these Communist Parties. In Russia, the women's department published *Kommunistka* (Woman Communist), with a circulation of 30,000 copies. Women's pages and women's supplements appeared periodically in the general party press, including *Pravda*.

In Germany, a Communist central organ, *Die Kommunistin* (The Communist Woman) was launched back in May 1919 and had a press run of 40,000 copies. There are also women's pages in many provincial Communist newspapers. Communist women in Sweden published *Röda Roster* (Red Voices), a fortnightly with a print run of 5,000

copies. Bulgarian communist women produced *Ravenstvo* (Equality), also a fortnightly journal of 10,000 copies. In Austria, communist women produced *Die Revolutionäre Proletarierin* (The Revolutionary Proletarian Woman).

International Women's Day

Probably the greatest lasting achievement of the international communist women's movement was the establishment of International Women's Day as 8 March. The idea to celebrate the struggle for the liberation of working women was first formulated in 1910 at the International Socialist Women's Conference in Copenhagen, held under the leadership of Clara Zetkin. But during its first decade, International Women's Day had been celebrated on different days.

In Russia, the February 1917 revolution (8 March on the western calendar) had been triggered by women's action. The second women's conference in June 1921 featured a discussion on the issue. Some delegates called for more consistency. The Bulgarian comrades proposed to keep International Women's Day on the same date throughout the world, which was supported by Zetkin and Kollontai. The conference moved that the 8 March was "established as a permanent international day of working women of all countries", to mark the day when the women of Petrograd initiated the revolution. Henceforth, communist women led united front work with other socialists and trade unionists, making 8 March the international commemoration we still hold today.

Internationalism

Probably the next greatest achievement of the communist women's movement was to establish a truly global perspective and at least begin the task of drawing women from the most underdeveloped places into struggle. The various conferences had delegates from "the East" and discussed how to work with women who lived in very different conditions from Europe.

The high point came at the final session of the Second International Conference, 15 June 1921. Delegates voted for Theses on Methods and Forms of Work of Communist Parties among Women. This included the stipulation to "conduct a vigorous struggle against all prejudices, customs and religious practices that bear down on women". It added: "The sections or commissions must strictly avoid tactless, inappropriate or rude attacks on religious beliefs or national traditions, while still resisting the influence of nationalism and religion."

Shortly after the resolutions were carried, 70 women from Turkestan – who

t-wave feminism

were in Moscow to attend a planned (but cancelled) All-Russian Congress of Eastern Women – entered the conference hall wearing veils, and then symbolically began removing them. The incident was described by eyewitness Marie Vaillant-Couturier:

“The women of the Orient in a narrow line poured into the hall where there were representatives of women workers of the whole world. Exactly locked up in gray, stifled with heavy black fabric, the women of the East, mysteriously, came out in front of their western sisters. Their eyes glanced down shyly, unused to bright light; their weak shoulders stooped beneath the triple yoke of the prejudice of sex, patriarchal mores, and the oppression of imperialism... The applause did not fall silent. No one could speak; everyone wept with joy. The West opened its embrace to the working women of the East... Would there be sufficient strength to tear away so many sacrifices of age-long oppression? The veils began to rise, and one of the women in a small, embroidered cap with a haughty profile and blue-black hair braided in two plaits, stepped up to the tribunal. Without doubt, the gesture was purely symbolic. Out of millions of women sentenced to a life of total submission and unchanging labour, a few women had torn themselves away and come to us... The veils were lifted and the women began to see.”

Abortion

Although the international communist women's movement discussed many aspects of working class women's lives, both at work and at home, they did not discuss important matters such as violence against women or sexual harassment. However they did support abortion rights, which would have historical importance.

Again, a guiding line had been laid in Russia, led by Nikolai Semashko, the Soviet commissar of public health. In November 1920, the People's Commissariat of Health and the People's Commissariat of Justice adopted Resolution 471, entitled “On the Protection of Women's Health” (sometimes as “On the Artificial Termination of Pregnancy”). The resolution legalised and made free of charge the artificial termination of pregnancy in Soviet hospitals by trained doctors, and prohibited abortions outside hospitals and carried out for profit. In the April 1921 issue of *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale*, Semashko published theses on abortion. The matter was discussed at the Second Women's Conference in June 1921.

In early 1922, the KPD's Women's Secretariat sent a memorandum to the party Central Committee regarding

paragraphs 218 and 219 of the German Penal Code. The law in Germany punished women who had an abortion by five years imprisonment, with ten for those who assisted them. The KPD women argued that “In actively opposing the exceptional laws against proletarian women, the Communist Party must demand for women the right to determine their own fate, and to decide by themselves whether they are in a position to bring up and educate a child”. During the 1920s, the KPD joined in coalitions with Social-Democratic and feminist organisations to fight against Germany's abortion restrictions, under the slogan “Dein Körper gehört Dir” (Your body belongs to you). In 1926 the restrictions were liberalised, although the Nazis reversed them when they took power.

“Bourgeois feminism”

Perhaps the most jarring aspect of the book for contemporary readers is the persistent disparaging references to “feminism” and “feminists”. However this reflects the very different context a century ago, as well as the translation of peculiar terms into English.

The German SPD leader August Bebel's epoch-making book *Woman and Socialism*, first published in 1878, did not include a separate discussion of the feminist movement. However he did use “enemy sisters” to refer to women's rights activists who were hostile to socialism. The phrase became well known to the socialist women. Clara Zetkin began to build the international socialist women's movement in 1889. She emphasised the centrality of waged work to women's emancipation. In 1892, she began publishing *Die Gleichheit* (Equality), the SPD's women's paper.

On 28-29 March 1894, the Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine was founded in Berlin as an umbrella of women's rights organisations. Zetkin took the opportunity to demand a “clean break” (Reinliche Scheidung) between the working class and bourgeois women's movements. This meant separation, based on the class divide and the existence of the SPD as a mass workers' party.

In April 1894, Zetkin argued in *Die Gleichheit* that bourgeois advocacy of women's rights (bürgerliche Frauenrechte) and the proletarian women's movement were two fundamentally different social movements. This was because bourgeois feminists wanted to achieve reforms for women within the framework of bourgeois society, while working class women were fighting the class struggle as the pre-requisite of women's liberation. Bourgeois feminists demanded voting rights only for women with property, what Zet-

kin called “Damenwahlrecht” (ladies' suffrage), while the SPD called for the unrestricted women's right to vote, namely universal suffrage.

Zetkin underlined this political and organisational demarcation in her letters to the SPD paper *Vorwärts* in 1895. She nevertheless maintained relations with women's rights campaigners and fought for common objectives where this was advantageous to the SPD.

During the First World War, many suffragists supported their own governments and the slaughter, while workers were conscripted to fight each other. After the Russian revolution, Marxist women saw themselves as building a mass working class movement to take power. This would introduce a far more thoroughgoing democracy and open far greater possibilities for women's freedom.

This is the context in which Zetkin, Kollontai and other communist women maintained their political and organisational separation from women's rights campaigners. This was similar to their separate party from social democracy. This did not prevent the communist women's movement from organising united front campaigns and fighting alongside other women on reproductive rights, trade unionism and other campaigns.

Another important contextual reason for hostility towards “feminism” was because of criticism from communist men that the women were only concerned with women's rights. This men's “anti-feminism” was identified in every Communist Party, but was particularly highlighted in France. French communists reported to the Comintern that they faced “many comrades who are still full of petty-bourgeois prejudices when it comes to women's rights” and that “the vulgar short-sightedness of the men played into the hands of the feminist delusions of the women”.

As Zetkin told the Third Comintern Congress in 1921, “In most countries, the gains of the Communist Women's Movement have been achieved without support from the Communist Party, indeed in some instances against its open or hidden opposition”. And she scolded the reticent men: “As for the comrades who do not gather and train women to be conscious partners in revolution, I call them conscious saboteurs of the revolution.”

Stalinism

The international communist women's movement was eclipsed by the bureaucratisation of the Russian workers' state from the mid-1920s and was snuffed out by Stalin's “second revolution”, which destroyed the workers' state by the end of the 1920s.

In July 1924, the Third International

Conference of Communist Women took place. However, the decision was made to move the International Women's Secretariat from Berlin back to Moscow. In May-June 1925, the last issue of *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale* was published. In April 1926, the International Women's Secretariat lost its autonomous status, becoming the Women's Section (or Department) of the Comintern Executive. On 29 May-10 June 1926, the Fourth International Conference took place, formally as the “Conference of the ECCI on Work among Women”.

In March 1930, the women's section of Russian Communist Party (Zhenotdel) was dissolved. On 12-16 August 1930, an international conference of leaders of women's departments of CP central committees met. This was the last meeting organised by the international women's secretariat.

Contemporary relevance

The communist women's movement in 1920-22 operated at a far higher level of struggle than today. However it indicated the potential of a working class-based women's movement, both for women's liberation and for socialism.

What does the communist women's movement offer today's activists, in addition to its historic example. The editors argue that its strategic insights on the fight for women's emancipation and the relationship to the revolutionary struggle are highly relevant. Among these are:

“Working-class women have the biggest stake in the fight for women's emancipation, and must be its foundation. Activists in the Communist Women's Movement understood the ‘double oppression’ of toiling women...”

“While working-class women will be key to the struggle, the oppression of women nevertheless affects women in all layers of society...”

“The struggle for women's emancipation in itself has a deeply revolutionary dynamic...”

“Women's emancipation can be accomplished only through the revolutionary transformation of society...”

“The struggle for women's emancipation must not stop even after capitalist rule is done away with...”

“Such a revolutionary struggle cannot be successful without drawing in women in their masses...”

The international communist women's movement, as well as and its immediate predecessor, the socialist women's movement, can inspire and educate a new generation of socialist feminists. Our women's publications, conferences and mobilisations today are part of a rich tradition and are the best methods to advance the struggles for socialism and women's liberation. □

Clarifying the demands



Letter

There is a popular campaign in the North East to shut down Rafael arms manufacturing factory in Newcastle.

I think it's right to say End The Arms Industry and transition to socially useful green jobs. And, right now, No Arms To Israel, Stop The Siege Of Gaza.

However, I am concerned about the arguments focusing on Rafael as an Israeli-owned company "killing children in Palestine".

According to PSC (and others), Rafael is manufacturing missiles and armoured vehicles for use in Gaza, but how do I verify this? Some of the arguments seem knee-jerk reaction to the horror, and possibly misleading.

Does it matter, so long as we fight the war machine, and specifically, right now, oppose arming Israel?



Demonstration by Palestine Action at Rafael arms factory

Personally I believe it does matter. We need clear, focused demands, arguments, aims and tactics. We need honesty in debating how we defend Palestinians. How do we achieve this in an atmosphere of understandable anger? □

Theo Allen, Teesside

• On the evidence available to us, the

Rafael site in Newcastle produces stuff to be sold to the UK military. Rafael can make its sales to the Israeli military from its sites in Israel. This is about *Israel arming the UK*, not the UK arming Israel. We have no wish to defend the arms trade, but it's not clear how a focus on Israeli products as worse for the UK military helps here – *Solidarity*. □

1992-6 and 2019-23 compared



Letter

A point in my article on the Tamworth by-election (*Solidarity* 687) is garbled. Labour's vote in the by-election was lower than in the South East Staffordshire by-election in 1996; but the point I really intended to make is this: the Labour vote grew from the 1992 General Election to that 1996 by-election by over 4,000 votes. 1996 is a particularly useful comparator as it was a year before a general election, as we probably are now. South East Staffordshire was the main predecessor constituency to Tamworth. □

David Pendleton, Isle of Wight



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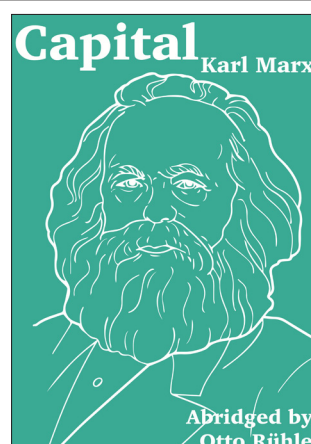
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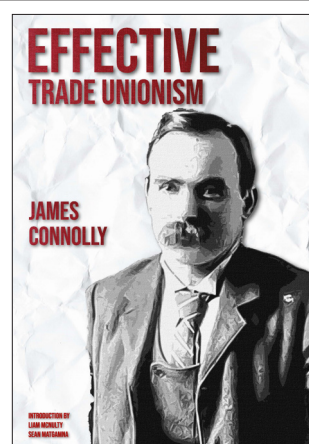
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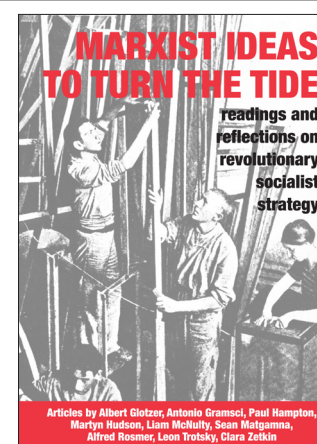
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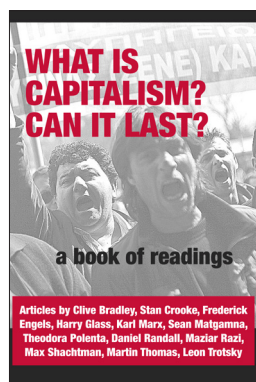
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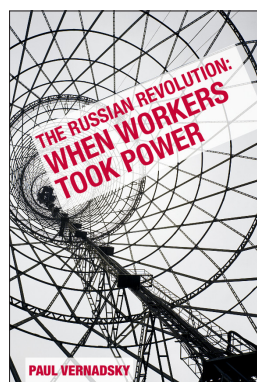
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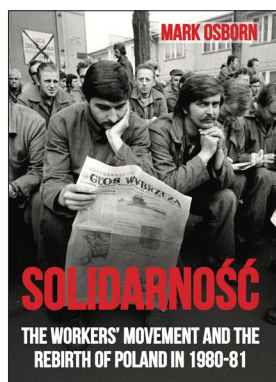
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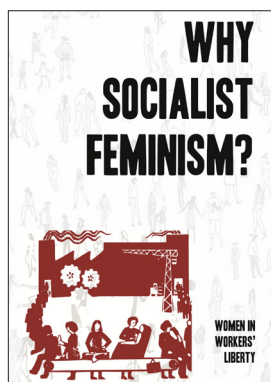
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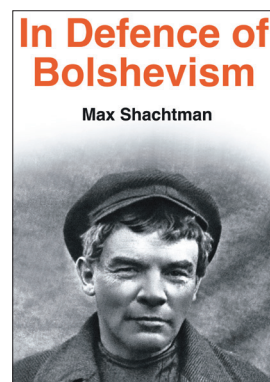
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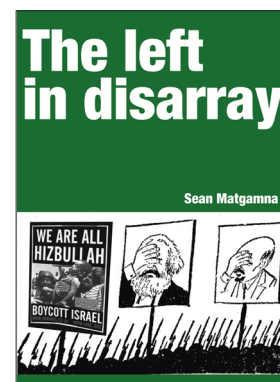
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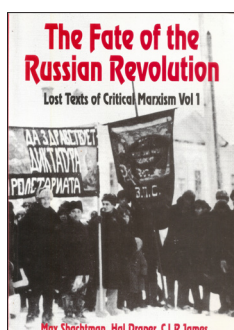
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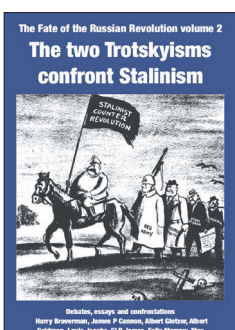
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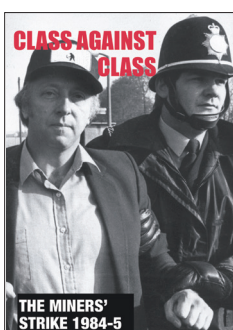
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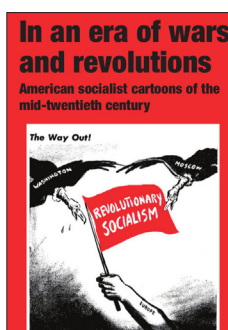
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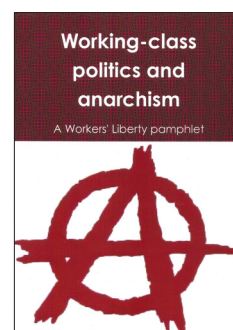
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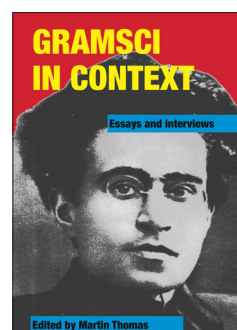
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Questioning the call for ceasefire



Debate

By Barry Finger

There is much that is unique and noble, principled and courageous in *Solidarity's* [25 October editorial](#). There's so much to agree with, and yet...

The editorial asks pointedly, "Of what politics is the war between Israel and Hamas a continuation?" But this won't quite do.

Israel is a state; Hamas is a theocratic fascist organisation that rules a semi-autonomous state/region. The correct symmetrical ways of posing this are either: of what politics is the war between the Likud-Kahanist government and Hamas a continuation? Or of what politics is the war between Israel and Palestine a continuation?

Still, the editorial inadvertently posed the question, I think, correctly, but for reasons it does not properly acknowledge. This is a war between Israel and Hamas, not between the reactionary leaders of Gaza and the reactionary leaders of Israel; nor between the Palestinian and Israeli nationalisms.

If this were a war between two reactionary governing elites, in which the peoples of both nations had no essential stake, then we might raise the call, in anachronistic terms, for the fraternisation of soldiers of opposing armies.

This is so blindingly absurd that no one could make this demand and still claim to be taken seriously. Who are the dissidents that "Breaking the Silence" or "Combatants for Peace" could speak with in Hamas and Islamic Jihad? And how would they speak? By séance?

And if AWL thinks that "Standing Together" is a replicable example of "fraternisation", it is simply deluding itself.

Neither is this a war between two national chauvinisms that could be resolved through territorial compromise. This is a war between Israel, led by a revocable coalition including dyed in the wool racists, domestically opposed by at least half of their citizens – many of whom accept the right of Palestinian self-determination – and a Palestinian people deprived of political agency by nationalist *usurpers*.

The problem with this editorial is that it is trying to maneuver two enemies, Palestinian nationalism and Hamas, into the same place. If the editorial writers don't do it consciously, they do it blindly and unwittingly by assumption.

Hamas is *not* a nationalist movement by any rational understanding. It does not seek self-determination; it does not use its resources to build a state; it does not choose its alliances to leverage concessions needed to elbow a state into existence. It lives solely to erect a



military powerbase. And it therefore uses its resources and chooses its alliances and leverages its concessions for one purpose and one purpose alone: to aggrandise its armed capabilities.

Ok, a military power platform, but for what end? To realise the elimination of Israel as a step towards a broader caliphate. Any future Palestinian state in the West Bank would simply add one more obstacle to be eliminated on the way to consolidating its goal of an Islamic empire. It is about as sensible to see Hamas in nationalist terms as it is to see Boko Haram or ISIS in nationalist terms.

Palestinian nationalism is only an imaginary factor, a deceptive signifier, in the war between Israel and Hamas; a delusion of the left, but not only of the left. If this eludes many observers, it is because more secular versions of Palestinian nationalism have been tinged by Pan-Arabism. And they have been infused with unifying Islamic cultural and religious symbols, including the commitment to Sharia injunctions. Nationalism and Islamism bleed into one another at the edges. They use one another. They camouflage themselves in the other's uniforms. They poach from each other's ranks.

But the fact remains that Palestinian nationalism and Islamic imperialism remain two mutually incompatible projects. Palestinian self-determination is the exercise of a democratic right; a caliphate is the antithesis of all democratic rights.

Israel must be prepared to make concessions to the former. This is something different. It is neither a war of Israel against Palestine, nor of the Likud against Hamas, but of an aspiring caliphate against an upstart infidel obstacle to a reordering of the Middle East.

What then to make of AWL's humanitarian call for a cease-fire? There have been innumerable cease-fires, the last negotiated in June, that have all been abrogated by Hamas. So the call for a cease-fire is operationally only a demand that Israel and Israel alone halt all military actions. And to nail it down, the editorial also calls for an international arms embargo against Israel.

The editorial doesn't even make the call for a cease-fire contingent on the release of hostages.

AWL recognizes in principle the right of Israel to defend itself. But evidently not through armed force. Or at least not beyond its Iron Dome, a military and technological marvel powerless against the forces unleashed upon its southern borders. The editorial characterises targeted bombings of Hamas storage depots, weapon assembly plants, rocket launching pads and military bases nestled in housing blocs, schools, hospitals, UNRWA facilities, etc as "indiscriminate." And advanced warning to Gazans to flee likely battle zones given by phone, by leaflet and by duds ("knocks on the door") is labelled as "collective punishment." It's an abuse of language, but so be it.

Now, no one with an ounce of humanity regards bombing or any other operation of war with anything but disgust. But there is something very distasteful in asserting the "right to defence" while dodging responsibility for its more obviously barbarous consequences.

And this editorial does both, which is far worse than the crime of language abuse.

Two hundred thousand Israelis have been internally displaced. Towns and communities on the Gaza border long weathered gasoline balloons, lit kites, terror tunnels and border breaches and remained steadfast. Defying expectations, the residents were remarkably dovish in their political leanings.

But this pogrom has done what these earlier offences failed to do. It left a swath of Israel totally depleted and uninhabitable, a no man's land. A cease-fire without security guarantees from a power whose words are intrinsically worthless means that Israel agrees to permanently relinquish sovereignty over its own territory.

And should Hezbollah, an Islamic ally, make the north similarly uninhabitable, and squeeze another several hundred thousand Israelis to the interior, and with Israel again urged to accept a one-sided ceasefire, Israel will slowly unravel.

In twenty five years, predicted the



caliphators of Iran, Israel will cease to exist. That is a possible reality, which this pogrom laid all too bare and which the repeated call for unilateral ceasefire could make a bit more likely.

One of the trenchant things Orwell wrote was this. "You can let the Nazis rule the world; that is evil; or you can overthrow them by war, which is also evil. There is no other choice before you, and whichever you choose you will not come out with clean hands."

So let me turn back to the demand for a ceasefire. Is it Israel's responsibility to save Hamas for the sake of the Palestinians? Could this proposition be sold to any combatant? Should Sherman have ceased his march to the sea, even if it required the burning down of Atlanta, to save innocent Southern lives?

But, I can anticipate your objection. The cause of the South in the American civil war was not equivalent to the cause of the North, which was to end slavery. And because our attitude towards war is conditioned by our understanding of the underlying politics, this analogy cannot hold. For unlike the American civil war, the politics of this war are symmetrically equivalent. The right to Palestinian self-determination is surely equal to the right of Israel to self-determination.

But that is exactly what I contest. It is a red herring. Hamas is not fighting for self-determination. It is fighting for a transnational religious empire. It is indifferent to the issues of one-state or two with regards to a future Palestine. It wants no Palestine, no Israel and no states.

The demand for a unilateral ceasefire, and that is exactly what it is, for this reason is both ahistorical and unprecedented.

Why not raise the demand that Hamas surrender in exchange for safe passage to any country that will take them? That is exactly what the PLO did as it departed from its strongholds in Lebanon to Tunis.

That at least has historical precedent.

What you can't do is opt out of selecting between the only horrible alternatives that actually do exist. Magical realism is not politics. □

“What we stand for

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

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

The working class must unite to struggle against the accumulated wealth and power of the capitalists, in the workplace and wider society.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty wants socialist revolution: collective ownership of industry and services, workers' control, and a democracy much fuller than the present system, with elected representatives recallable at any time and an end to bureaucrats' and managers' privileges.

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- Independent working-class representation in politics
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- Taxing the rich to fund good public services, homes, education and jobs for all
- Workers' control of major industries and finance for a rapid transition to a green society
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- Full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people
- Black and white workers' unity against racism
- Open borders
- Global solidarity against global capital – workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers
- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation
- Equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small
- Maximum left unity in action, and full openness in debate

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

• workersliberty.org/join-awl

How to become an underpaid monkey



Diary of a trackworker

By Matt Shaw

It surprised me that there was no formal policy on working at heights before the early 2000s. In the early part of my time it was expected of you to get up there, somehow, and get the job done without falling off.

I was terrified of working at heights and would not even go up a step ladder if I could avoid it. As time went on, however, it was made clear to me that it was part of the job and so up I went, learning how to juggle an AVO meter, oil can, various spanners, cleaning fluids, and cloths.

The principle was straightforward: keep three points of contact at all times, that is two feet and one hand, or two hands and one foot if you were trying to manoeuvre so as to access some difficult piece of equipment which some clever designer had put out on a limb.

Eventually, I overcame my fears and actually started to enjoy climbing some of the signals. The higher ones gave quite spectacular views of the country-

side or the roofs of buildings in our cities that most people don't see.

But it was still risky, with structures being old and corroded, and often no indication of just how frail they were.

Outside Barnsley was one of the tallest signals, about 60 ft. It was an old mechanical signal which required oiling and a wipe-over to clean the glass lens. Being the youngest, I was detailed to go and climb. Off I went with my oil can and cloth. As I got about half way up I started to realise just how tall this thing was, so clutched the ladder a bit tighter.

I should point out that all signals have a fixed steel ladder up the back, and sometimes a platform at the top to stand on. This particular one had a platform at the top. As I put my foot on it and raised my other foot it gave way. Down went the oil can, as I desperately clung onto the rail round the top of the ladder and looked down to see what was left of the oil can. Not a great deal.

In Sheffield, there is a bridge called the Wicker Arches which carried the old Trans-Pennine route from Sheffield to Manchester via Penistone. The route had been electrified in the fifties with gantries which carried overhead lines

and sometime also had signals which we had to service.

Some Einstein in the design department had the ladder from the signal coming down – but it finished over the drop to the ground some 65ft below, so you had to get on top of the wall, swing yourself out onto the ladder and repeat the process when you came back down along with any tools you had.

Nowadays, the climbing has been brought into the 21st century with the use of harnesses and climbing hooks, but it can still cause problems due to human nature. It takes quite some time to put on your equipment over the top of your other hi-visibility clothing. Especially if it's a "quick" job like wiping over a signal lens or dusting inside a signal head, and the protective equipment can limit your flexibility, the temptation is not to bother and hope nobody sees you.

Yet again, something that looks "fixed" in the management manuals, but isn't always in the real world. □



Russia: it wasn't antisemitism



Letter

A sentence that was added by an editor for context to my article for *Solidarity* 688, on the antisemitic protests in Dagestan, unintentionally misrepresented my views on migration to Israel from the (former) Soviet Union. Contrary to the editor, I do not believe that

the majority of Soviet Jews were "fleeing Russian antisemitism". While Soviet Russia certainly had a horrific history of antisemitism, by the 1980s and 1990s this was considerably less pronounced than it had been for almost the entirety of the rest of the union's existence.

The reasons for migration to Israel were far more linked to the comparative prosperity and better economic prospects in Israel (and elsewhere) than the threat of violence at home. Russia's collapsing public infrastructure

and the impending economic destruction of shock therapy were significant factors that drove millions to opt for emigration. Jewish people were a significant portion of those millions – but by most indicators, this was due to existing familial and cultural ties with the hundreds of thousands that migrated to Israel and the USA in the 1970s. It is misleading to suggest that the collapse of the Soviet Union led to a significant threat of antisemitic violence, and that the Jews that left were emigrating for different reasons to the many other Soviet citizens who emigrated in the 1990s. □

Michael Baker, Enfield

A film for trackworkers everywhere



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

It's no surprise that the first film to be screened featured a train. Think of the number of films that include train journeys: *The General* (Buster Keaton), *The Lady Vanishes* (Hitchcock), *Shanghai Express* (von Sternberg)... and many more.

Night Train (1959) by Polish director Jerzy Kawalerowicz does have resemblances to a Hitchcock thriller, but there is more to the film than that. There is a killer on the Łódź-Hel train (Hel is a resort on the Baltic coast). The murder occurs before the journey

starts and the director seems more interested in exploring the personas of nine particular passengers, one of which, Staszek is played by the famous actor Zbigniew Cybulski.

Nervousness and paranoia grow as the train trundles on through the night, feelings intensified by the claustrophobic nature of the train's corridors and compartments. The finger of suspicion starts to point to Jerzy (Leon Niemczyk), a man who reveals nothing of his past till the end of the film.

For the director, *Night Train* was not so much a whodunnit but an exploration of emotional hunger and desire (mentioned in the Second Run DVD sleeve notes by Martin Brooke). Many Poles saw it as some kind of allegory about Polish society. □

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Amazon strikes resume

By Ollie Moore

Amazon workers at the BHX4 facility in Coventry resume strikes on 7 November, walking out for three days, with a further strike planned on 24 November, the so-called "Black Friday" which is a major trading day for Amazon and other retailers.

24 November will also see strikes and other protests against Amazon in over 30 other countries. Speaking to a recent conference of the "Make Amazon Pay" campaign coalition, US senator Bernie Sanders said: "No company is a better poster child for the corporate greed and arrogance that we are seeing in the US, the UK and throughout the world than Amazon."

Workers at BHX4 have struck multiple times in a long-running battle to win improved pay and conditions, as well as union recognition. The campaign of strikes has forced Amazon into slight increases in pay; following the most recent increase, which took effect on 15 October, the minimum starting pay for warehouse workers rose to £11.80 an hour (from £11 an hour). A further increase to £12.30 is due in April. But the GMB union rightly insists these increases are not enough, as they lag well behind increases in the cost of living. The union's demand is for a £15/hour minimum wage.

GMB continues to make efforts to spread the Amazon fight to other warehouses, although so far only one, a site in Rugeley earmarked for closure by Amazon, has joined previous rounds of strikes, taking two days of action in August. Building the same workplace strength in other sites as had been developed at BHX4 will surely be vital for winning major concessions. □

Firefighters issue new manifesto

By Jack Horner

Nearly a thousand firefighters rallied at Westminster on 1 November to make political demands about the fire and rescue service. The FBU launched its Firefighters' Manifesto, pulling together its assessment of the state of fire and rescue and the union's main demands on central government.

The past 20 years have devastated the fire and rescue service. The so-called "modernisation" reforms imposed by New Labour and accelerated by Tory-led governments since 2010 have worsened the service in every respect.

Ministers removed national standards, including fire cover, which has led to slower response times for fire engines getting to incidents. They tore up safeguards on the number of firefighters and imposed austerity cuts, which has since led to the loss of 20% of the workforce, nearly 12,000 firefighters.

Ministers deregulated building safety standards and weakened fire safety, scrapping fire certificates and diminished enforcement, which has led to terrible tragedies, most devastatingly with the Grenfell Tower fire. They scrapped the statutory advisory body, the CFBAC, which oversaw fire safety and firefighter standards.

Ministers have also privatised and contracted out parts of the service. They attempted to sell off fire services via mutualisation, privatised the Fire Service College, imposing PFI-funded fire stations and equipment. Chief fire officers enriched themselves, while

justifying and implementing these changes.

At the same time, governments and employers froze and capped firefighters' pay and attacked conditions of service. They have imposed drastic measures such as crews of three on a fire engine (instead of five) and day crewing, meaning fewer firefighters at night. These have worsened the service to the public and put firefighters at greater risk.

The FBU argues that the downgrading of the fire and rescue service has taken place at the same time that firefighters have had to tackle greater risks. Firefighters continue to deal with thousands of fires, as well as road traffic collisions and other non-fire incidents. Firefighters are on the frontline of adaptation to climate change, tackling floods, storms, droughts and wildfires with increasing frequency.

Aging

Firefighters have also had to deal with the aging population and other wider work such as bariatric patients. Firefighters worked throughout the Covid-19 pandemic and many carried out additional work to support the NHS and vulnerable people. All these risks have increased and deepened during the first decades of the twenty-first century. In the context of austerity and deregulation, this has weakened UK-wide resilience.

The FBU's manifesto underlines the necessity of investment in the fire and rescue service. This is the key to improving public safety and improving the

pay and conditions of firefighters. The union also wants democratic control over the service, rather than the fragmented current system, split between councillors, police and crime commissioners and unelected boards. The FBU emphasises the need for professional standards and for a statutory advisory body to drive those improvements.

Throughout its history, the FBU has been crucial to the professionalisation of the emergency service and its skilled workforce. For the last 20 years, the union has been excluded from influence on regulation and guidance. Ministers and chief fire officers have made a mess of it. The FBU underlines the need for workers' voice and workers' control, both for the democratic management of the service and for the central role of its members.

The FBU is taking its manifesto to national and local politicians over the coming months. This will also inform its campaign around the general election and the agenda for an incoming Labour government. Mobilising its members is crucial. The November rally was a good start to the campaign. □

Union's steel campaign must reach out

By Kayden Jones

On 2 November the Unite Save UK Steel campaign held a day of action in Sheffield, Port Talbot, Teesside and Scunthorpe. In Sheffield about 20 people took part, mostly Unite staff members, Unite Community, and retired members.

Three students from Sheffield Solidarity Group also took part. The action consisted of a short march followed by holding banners above bridges over the roads.

The main chant was "We don't need your pity, invest in our steel city", and most of the banners read "Support UK Steel". There was a lack of specificity to the chants and demands, though a detailed policy report is promised

this month. Sheffield Solidarity Group brought a 8-metre-long banner that read "For Workers' Climate Action" which injected some much needed socialist and ecological politics into the action.

A student taking part in the action told *Solidarity* that: "I'm here to support the Unite Steel campaign because I'm studying materials science. so steel is quite literally my job future and steel is used in absolutely everything and it's really important that we decarbonise it now".

Workers

The campaign is a good opportunity to organise engineering and other STEM students about to go into industrially important jobs.

But the campaign's strategy seems to be primarily about mobilising community activist groups to pressure local and national politicians. Yet if this campaign is meant to save steel jobs then the most powerful force is the steel workers themselves. Local activist groups and Unite staff members cannot be a substitute for the workers.

In Sheffield, in fact, most trade-unionists in steel are not in Unite, but in Community, which is absent from the campaign. The campaign should be targeting the steel mills and engaging with rank-and-file Community members.

Socialists should engage with the campaign and push for an immediate focus on worker organising as well as a ecological just transition. □

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Ukraine is in danger

By Dan Katz

In June 2023 Ukraine launched its long-expected offensive with the intention of breaking through Russia's well-prepared defensive lines in southern Ukraine.

Ukraine aimed to get to Tomak, Melitopol and Berdyansk in a drive towards the occupied Black Sea coast, but has fallen far short.

The US, EU states and the UK had eventually provided Ukraine with some of the modern weapons it had been demanding for many months. However, the delay in donating the equipment which Ukraine needed to follow-up spectacular victories against the Russians in Kharkiv and Khereson at the end of 2022 allowed the Russians time to create formidable defences.

And Ukraine attacked without adequate air cover.

Five months later Ukraine's offensive has gained little ground, an average of only 90m per day in its push towards Tomak, and at great human cost.

Reluctance

The reason for Western reluctance and timewasting is political and strategic, not financial. The West wants to stop Ukraine losing to Putin's primitive imperialism, but is frightened of the possible Russian reaction if its army is defeated in Ukraine.

Some modern, F-16 fighter planes have been promised to Ukraine, but they will arrive only in 2024. The US has donated some longer-range ATACM artillery rockets, small numbers of which have been used recently by Ukraine to great effect against Russian airfields and air defence systems. However, the US, has only given Ukraine about 20 of these missiles.

Speaking to the *Economist* magazine last week Ukraine's senior general, Valery Zaluzhny, admitted the battlelines had not changed much and the war was now in "stalemate."

However, the Russian army is attempting to seize the initiative, attacking the Ukrainian-held town of Avdiivka, north of Donetsk city, in October, at the expense of staggering numbers of Russian dead. The UK's military assess the Russians have also lost 200 tanks and other vehicles as they sent badly prepared troops into devastating Ukrainian minefields and artillery fire.

Nevertheless, Putin's disregard for the loss of the lives of his troops allowed him to take Bakhmut in May. And the attack on Avdiivka seems motivated by the political need to be seen to be taking Ukrainian territory.

Hard

It is now hard to see how Ukraine might force Russia out. But it is also clear how Ukraine might possibly lose.

The deranged right wing of the US Republicans is pressing to end aid to Ukraine. And the US Presidential election of 2024 – depending on the precise result – might result in great damage or even an end to US support for Ukraine.

Right now the Israel-Hamas war is taking the news and political focus from Ukraine.

And, given that Ukraine seems unable to force Russia out, it seems that the US and EU leadership are beginning to discuss again the possibility of ending the war in Ukraine by brokering a deal between Kyiv and Putin. If such an agreement is concluded, in this situation, it would mean that Ukraine would be forced to make very substantial territorial – and probably political – concessions to Putin.

And that would imply the West forcing Ukraine into a lousy agreement. The French and German states did this in 2015, following the Russian seizure of Crimea and territory in Donbas.

We oppose any such move. □

Against bans, against slippery slogans

By Martin Thomas

Rishi Sunak, Home Secretary Suella Braverman, and deputy prime minister Oliver Dowden have urged the police to ban the 11 Nov Israel-Gaza [protest](#) in London.

The Tories say it might harm the anniversary of the World War One Armistice on 11 November. But the march is planned to go to the US embassy in South London, nowhere near the Cenotaph, and the Remembrance ceremonies are 12 Nov, not 11 Nov.

The Tories also talk of officially defining as "extremist" any effort deemed to "undermine the UK's values".

Solidarity opposes state bans on protests. Where protests have reactionary slogans, we counter-demonstrate, rather than calling on the police as arbiter.

On 11 November the official slogan is straightforward: ceasefire.

We have criticisms of the tone set on the marches by the best-resourced placard-distributors and megaphonists, notably the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) with the "unofficial" slogans Free Palestine, From the River to the Sea.

SWP does not even support the march's slogan; it [opposes](#) a ceasefire by Hamas. We want the maximum visible presence to counter that bias.

Socialist Worker now ([1 Nov](#)) says it does "not share Hamas's views". What its differences are, it does not say. After 7 October SW headlined "Rejoice". [Now](#) it looks to a long ground war in Gaza in which Hamas fights the Israeli army to a standstill as the best outcome: "a massive blow against global imperialism" which might "mean a new era of socialist revolution".

Hamas are not comrades from some of whose views we differ. They have a reactionary programme – to drive the Jews out of Israel and impose a theocratic state – and are part of a loose network with Hezbollah and a regional imperialism, Iran, which now holds sway in Syria and Iraq as well as oppressing the Kurds.

Of course the big majority on the ceasefire protests do not go along with the SWP. In *Solidarity* [687](#) we explained how the phrases "Free Palestine" and "From the river [Jordan] to the [Mediterranean] sea" were brought as placard slogans and chants from April 2002 by the SWP and others. They were designed to be in tune with the

agitation of the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB, British offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood) but softer and smoother for left-minded people than MAB's "Zionists out of Palestine".

Now many demonstrators interpret the slogans differently – as a form of what *Solidarity* advocates: the right of both nations, Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews, to have their own state, free of invasion and conquest.

Ambiguous slogans are [bad](#). For example, "Palestine" here can mean the hoped-for independent Palestinian state (West Bank, Gaza, and a connecting corridor), or the British-mandate area of 1918-48 (covering Israel too). Or it may be read as shorthand for "the Palestinian people" (it is people we want freedom for, not patches of land). Or it can have a fourth or fifth meaning. For many centuries before 1918 "Palestine" was a geographical term for a loosely-defined area in the Ottoman Empire (not a "country", not a political sub-unit of the empire).

From 1944, an American League for a Free Palestine was active. It was a maverick "ultra" Zionist group, led by Hillel Kook and Ben Hecht, and repudiated by most Zionists!

Its "Free Palestine" would cover the whole territory granted to Britain by the Allies from the collapsed Ottoman Empire after World War One, i.e. both "1918-48 Palestine" and "Transjordan", now Jordan. (The British partitioned their "mandate" Palestine in 1921 so as to set aside "Transjordan" for a client Arab monarchy).

Kook's "Free Palestine" in 1944 must have alarmed Arabs; "from the river to the sea" agitation by "smash Israel" people alarms Jews. (Kook speculated on there being enough Jews still alive and able to flee Europe to be a majority in the bigger Palestine, which, he claimed, could function, if freed from British rule, with equality for all inhabitants. Hamas is explicit: no "Zionists" allowed).

Against bans, but against slippery slogans which incubate chauvinism and give nesting space for the dead-end politics of revenge! □

• The politics of Remembrance Day: bit.ly/dlc-r



SWP placards dominate the demonstrations in many cities



Solidarity

For a workers' government

WHAT IS “LEFT-WING” IN THE PCS?

By a PCS member

The elections for Assistant General Secretary and General Secretary of the PCS civil service union commence on 9 November (and close 14 Dec).

The ruling Left Unity (LU) group is standing Paul O'Connor for AGS and Fran Heathcote for GS. The PCS Independent Left (IL), including AWL supporters, is standing John Moloney for AGS and supporting Marion Lloyd, of the Broad Left Network (BLN), for GS.

All formally left-wing candidates, but proclamations of “socialism” are never a sufficient guide in trade union elections. PCS's LU leadership love to make “left wing” speeches. Yet under their leadership PCS's membership “density”, the proportion of members to workforce, is at an all time low in the civil service, with less than 50% in many areas.

High or low membership density goes to the heart of union power and therefore to the ability of workers to fight for and secure better pay and other terms, to recruit new workers, and to be able to imagine and struggle for a better society.

The LU leadership is silent about the membership decline they have presided over. They



John Moloney

lack the proposals and ambition to reverse the decline. For years, they chose not even to establish an accurate record of membership density. Rebuilding PCS is a core concern for the IL, an integral part of our programmatic agreement with BLN, and an essential task for a competently run trade union.

Membership density is a great deal more telling for serious trade unionists who want an effective PCS than “left wing” LU speeches that are left behind in the conference hall. It is also more telling for socialists who want to go beyond the constraints of workplace bargaining, to build a labour movement capable of achieving society-wide changes.

The LU leadership is failing on every metric and is tin-eared

even to its own supporters:

- Civil service pay rates are in an unprecedented long-term, fifteen years, decline.

- The national strike campaign was called off without one penny being added to 2022 salaries.

- We received the worst 2023 public sector pay deal.

- Low pay is so endemic across the civil service – tens of thousands of members are on or near the legal minimum wage – that LU argue members are too poor to strike under their leadership.

- Pension age is up and severance terms are down.

- Less annual leave and less sick pay, and, in London, an extra hour on the working week, for members who joined the civil service during in the last ten years

- Lay representatives and members in the private sector receive woeful levels of support.

In recent weeks leading LU members in Revenue and Customs and leading black LU National Executive (NEC) members have resigned from LU. One of those NEC members is calling for a vote for John Moloney and Marion Lloyd.

It is time for change in PCS! Vote Moloney and Lloyd. □