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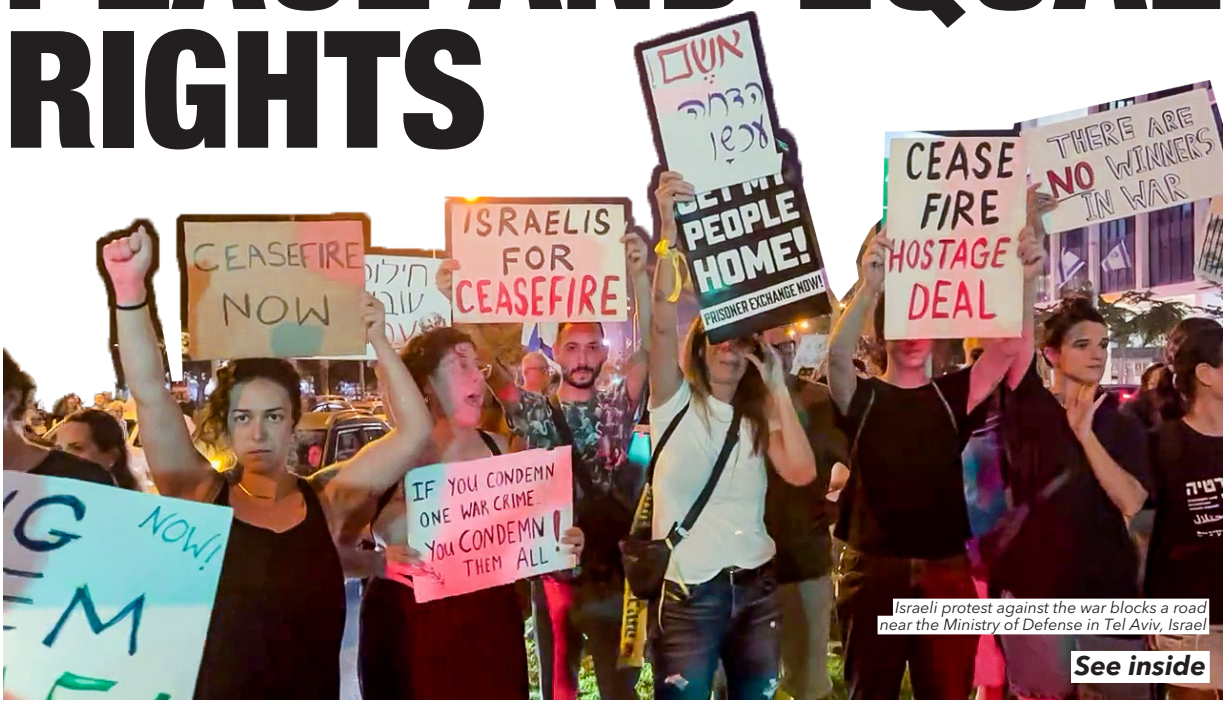

Israeli protest against the war blocks a road near the Ministry of Defense in Tel Aviv, Israel

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No to Netanyahu, no to Hamas!

Editorial

Israel's war on Gaza goes on, with over 10,000 Palestinians killed, and close to 30,000 injured. Aerial bombardment continues; Israeli troops and tanks are now deep inside Gaza. Settler violence against Palestinians in the West Bank has intensified, and the Israeli state has launched a crackdown against internal dissent, primarily targeting Palestinian citizens. Over 200 hostages, Israelis and foreign nationals, are still held by Hamas in Gaza, although it is likely some have already died in the bombing. The humanitarian crisis caused by the war becomes more acute by the day, with hospitals, which are also being used as shelters, running out of fuel and other supplies, whilst also being caught in the fighting.

The US has now given signals that it wants the warfare ended soon, but what Israel sees as its "endgame" – what its war aims to achieve – is still unclear. Recent statements from political leaders send contradictory signals.

On 20 October, Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant said that winning the war would involve "the removal of Israel's responsibility for life in the Gaza Strip." In an interview with Fox News on 9 November, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said: "We don't seek to govern Gaza, we don't seek to occupy it." But on 10 November, Netanyahu said: "IDF forces will remain in control of the Strip, we will not give it to international forces." Netanyahu has also said Israel will retain responsibility for security in Gaza "for an indefinite period."

Civilians

In the aftermath of the 7 October attacks, Israel set out to completely "destroy" Hamas. Given how deeply embedded Hamas is in the Gazan population – many don't support it, but it has a significant base, and it has its own military infrastructure enmeshed in dense civilian infrastructure – this was always an aim that probably could not be achieved, or only at the cost of astronomical numbers of civilian lives. Even if Israel succeeds in destroying Hamas's military capabilities for now, unless the broad political situation is changed for the better, Hamas, or another organisation like it, will be able to renew itself in Gaza (as well as gaining strength in the West Bank).

Some have speculated about the possibility of the Palestinian Authority (PA), the body which nominally has power in the occupied West Bank, overseeing a post-war authority in Gaza. But it is unlikely that the embittered surviving population of Gaza will accept the PA coming in on the back of Israeli tanks – the PA was already widely and justly regarded as corrupt and self-serving – and the PA says it wouldn't even try. PA control would also require a significant policy shift from Netanyahu, who has for years pursued a deliberate strategy of provoking division amongst the Palestinians, often by boosting Hamas against the PA.

Hamas leaders, meanwhile, say their aim was to spark a "permanent" state of war. Taher El-Nounou, Hamas's media adviser, told the *New York Times*: "I hope that the state of war with Israel will become permanent on all the borders, and that the Arab world will stand with us." Hamas always expected massive retaliation, and probably calculated and desired it. Khalil al-Hayya, a member of its leadership body, said: "It was known that the reaction to this great act [the 7 October attacks] would be big." Hamas cannot expect to conquer Israel on its own, but rather hopes for a regional conflagration in which Hezbollah, Iran, and others intervene on its side.

SWP

For some on the left, the military defeat of Israel by Hamas is a hoped-for outcome. The Socialist Workers Party, one of the largest groups on the UK left, says that, if Hamas "hurls back [Israel's] offensive", it "can mean a new era of socialist revolution." Exactly how a military victory for an Islamist militia, backed by the regional-imperialist ruling class of Iran, could hasten "socialist revolution" is not explained. For the SWP, "imperialism" means the US, the UK, and Israel, and anything that is bad for "imperialism" must, by definition, be an advance for "socialism."

The SWP repeats one of the central, fatal errors of the left throughout the last 80 years: the belief that socialism can be advanced by agencies other than the organised working-class, acting consciously on the basis of democratic socialist politics, indeed by agencies mortally hostile to the working class. A victory for Hamas would be a blow to Israel and its allies, but it would also be an advance for the brutally oppressive political and social project of Hamas and its allies.

Socialists might back the victory of a ruling-class military force in a given war, if its victory would mean protecting or expanding democratic freedoms, thus holding open space for workers' organisations to prosecute the class struggle. But, whereas historic anti-colonial revolutions had democratic implications even when carried out by authoritarian forces, Hamas's programme is not even nominally for self-determination and equality, but to conquer and drive out the Jews in order to establish a Islamic-theocratic state. Its prospects for realising its programme are remote.

But the unlikelihood of its success does not make its aims any less reactionary. Speculation about possible endgames and outcomes can be helpful for attempting to track the situation and define what "victory" for either side might mean, but what does not require speculation is the stark reality of the war as it is actually happening: a first-world military power bombarding a besieged population.

Hamas's reactionary politics no more justify what Israel is doing than the reactionary politics of Netanyahu's government justify Hamas's attacks on Israeli civilians. With tens of thousands dead and injured, no "good outcomes" are possible. An Israeli victory will mean even more Palestinian deaths and possibly an IDF military dictatorship over Gaza, and vast embitterment which will raise up new Islamist forces around Israel. An immediate-term "victory" for Hamas might mean fighting the IDF to a standstill on Gaza's streets, but what then? Hamas tightens its own authoritarian rule over the rubble and ashes and gains more strength in the West Bank, whilst Israel prepares a new assault and continues its blockade. Hezbollah is emboldened to try in the north what Hamas has done in the south.

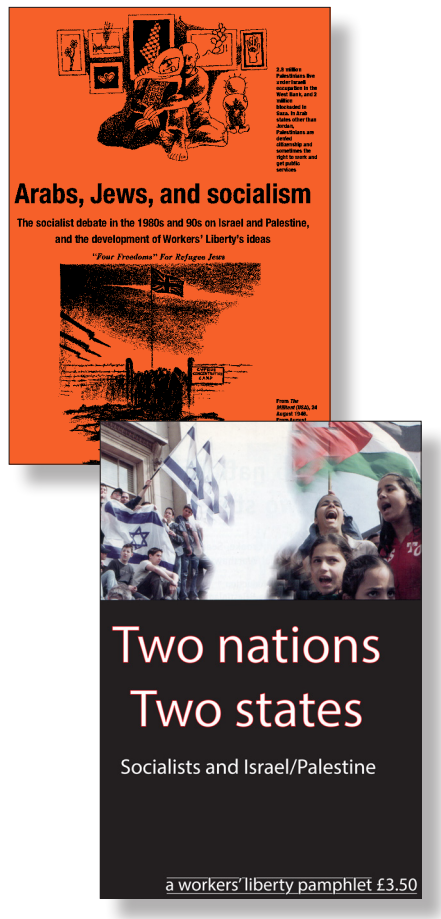
Socialists cannot support the victory of either military party. This is part of why we call for an immediate ceasefire. We want a victory for peace, for democracy, for equal rights. Those aims are, currently, tragically remote. But belligerent parties with maximalist programmes, both fighting for a one-state solution "from the river to the sea", cannot bring them closer. Netanyahu's Jewish-supremacist one-state is the current reality; fantasies of supplanting it with Hamas's Islamic-theocratic one-state are not a progressive alternative.

Instead, we must do whatever we can to support those forces in both Palestine and Israel working to develop democratic alternatives to the violent chauvinism and counter-chauvinism represented by Netanyahu and Hamas. The best hope for progressive change in the region is in efforts by movements such as Standing Together to mobilise Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel to win a change of course. Standing Together's recent Solidarity Conferences in multiple cities have brought together over 1,000 Jews and Palestinians to discuss co-resistance to war and racism. In the face of a worsening state crackdown, international solidarity with such efforts can have a real impact.

Addressing the solidarity rally in Haifa, Palestinian socialist and Member of the Knesset Ayman Odeh said: "In these days we commemorated the most terrible day, in which the largest number of Jews were killed since 1948, and this month in which the largest number of Palestinians were killed since 1948 […] Every human being should stand firm and denounce […] harming the innocent in the most obvious way […] The national rights of both peoples must be recognised. Yes, country next to country. This is the solution."

The potential for a shared future, represented in embryo by a movement like Standing Together, is the democratic alternative to both Netanyahu and Hamas: an equal right for Palestinians and Israeli Jews to peace, security, and self-determination. ☐

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



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workersliberty.org/2-i-p

A joint Jewish-Arab declaration for peace

The statement below was published in the name of multiple Jewish, Arab, and cross-communal organisations in Israel-Palestine, including the left-wing political party Hadash.

We – movements, organisations and activists, Jews and Arabs – write these words out of heavy mourning for the thousands of people killed in recent weeks, and out of terrible anxiety for the safety of the abducted and those who will still be harmed in Israel, Gaza and the West Bank.

The brutal massacre carried out by Hamas on 7 October left us all – Jews and Arabs – stunned and shocked. In the weeks that have passed since that cursed Sabbath, additional atrocities have been added to the atrocities committed by Hamas: thousands of people have been killed, and are still being killed, by the Israeli bombings in Gaza, many of whose residents have even been cut off from water and electricity.

Countless innocent children, women and elderly, lost their lives on both sides; hundreds of thousands lost their homes and their world – harming innocents on one side does not balance the pain of the killing on the other side, it just adds more pain to the immense pain.

The occupation, the siege, the wars, the terrorism, the oppression, the racism and the violence, the violation of democracy and human rights – all these brought the two peoples who live between the sea and the Jordan River to an unimaginable disaster, which has no measure. Precisely in these terrible days, the simple truth is clearer than ever: the freedom, security and life of all living in this land depend on each other.

In memory of the murdered and for the sake of the living, we must act together – Jews and Arabs – for the release of the kidnapped and captives, for the end of the war, for the end of the occupation and the conflict, for peace.

We, who believe in the way of democracy and peace, call to:

1. Strive for a stable ceasefire, within which negotiations for a political agreement will be started immediately based on mutual recognition of the right of the two peoples to self-determination – an agreement that will guarantee security, freedom and well-being for both peoples.

2. Immediately promote a broad prisoner deal ("all for all").

3. Immediately stop harming innocent civilians. There isn't and cannot be any justification for harming the innocent.

4. Act immediately to curb the rampant settler violence in the West Bank with the backing of the army, and to curb the transfer that this violence is trying to promote.

5. Stop the persecution and oppression of Palestinian citizens of Israel and of those who express solidarity with the residents of Gaza and oppose the war. Stop the violation of basic rights, including freedom of expression, freedom of demonstration, and more.

We have all experienced the rounds of violence. Time and time again it is evident that there is no military solution to this conflict, nor can there ever be one. The only way to stop the bloodshed is a political agreement that will guarantee security, justice and freedom for both nations.

There are no winners in war. Only peace will bring security. ☐

Academia for Equality; Arava Institute for Environmental Studies; Banki; Bimkom – Planners for Planning Rights; Combatants for Peace; Druze Initiative Committee; The Forum for the Fight Against Incitement; Hadash; Hands of Peace; Horiya; Jahalin Solidarity; Jordan Valley Activists; Kaa"- political working group; Looking the Occupation in the Eye; MachsomWatch; Mesarvot; Mothers Against Violence; Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality; New Profile; On the way to Sulha; Parents Against Child Detention; Parents Circle Families Forum; PsychoActive; Rabbis for Human Rights; Social Workers for Peace and Welfare; Tandi; Tomorrow's Women; Torat Tzedek; Women in Black; Woman to Woman; Yesh Gvul; Your Neighbor as Yourself; Youth Against Dictatorship; Zazim – Community Action; Zochrot ; Itach Ma'aki – Women Lawyers for Social Justice

Why "from the river to the sea" is wrong

By Alon-Lee Green

It needs to be said: We, the Jewish people who live in Israel, are not going anywhere. Too often we hear calls to "go back where we came from", or "from the river to the sea", and the only answer to that is the simple fact that millions of Jews are going to remain on this land.

Like it or not, it's a fact. And unless you're supporting a forced transfer or a genocide... we need to work with this fact. Now, we need to understand the completing fact: the Palestinians are not going anywhere as well (hope you listen, Bibi!)

And if both peoples who live on this land, millions of Palestinians and millions of Jews, are to remain here, that's the only starting point to any solution. It does not help to the end the occupation, to achieve peace or the end the killing of innocent people, to ignore this.

As any other society, we have here in Israel fears, hopes, clashes with our government, which does not serve our interests. Our fight, my movement's fight, is against the occupation and the killing and for full equality to all.

A slogan with reactionary and antisemitic implications

We fight for peace not only because we stand with the Palestinians in the West Bank and in Gaza, but also because it is our self-interest. Because it is the only way to achieve security and safety to our people...

Our call to our allies around the world is to understand the complexity of our society, to understand that we have Jewish and Arab-Palestinian citizens who are fighting together to change our country and to end the endless wars and killing. To save lives on both sides.

If you're forgetting this fact, that also in Israel we have people, or if you live in a fantasy world of academic terminology of colonisation and decolonisation, remember we are not in the New School's library [in New York], but here on the ground. And on the ground, we have to fight to win.

This fight – for the end of the killing and occupation, for an independent Palestinian state and for full equality for all people on this land – can only be won by organising the people who live here, Jews and Palestinians, and by building a majority here. Please support that. ☐

• Taken from a Twitter thread: bit.ly/alon-l. Alon-Lee Green is co-director of Standing Together in Israel.

Upcoming meetings

Workers' Liberty meetings are open to all.

Monday 20 November, 7.30pm: Israel-Palestine: Unravelling the Issues, Menard Hall, 14 Galway Street, EC1V 3SW

Wednesday 22 November, 7pm: Lewisham Workers' Liberty: the Vestas occupation and climate justice, New Cross Learning, 283-285 New Cross Road, London SE14 6AS

Wednesday 22 November, 7pm: Online reading group: The Right to Sex by Amia Srinivasan, see online

Thursday 23 November, 5pm: Workers' Liberty Students: Israel-Palestine: fighting against Netanyahu and the occupation, George Birkbeck Bar, 4th Floor, Birkbeck University, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HZ

Sunday, 26 November, 3pm: Hong Kong 47 Protest called by Workers Against CCP Repression, Chinese Embassy, 49-51 Portland Place, W1B 1JL

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

SWP on "anti-imperialism": cowardice and opportunism

Antidoto

The Socialist Workers Party's immediate response to the 7 October massacre of Israeli civilians ("Rejoice") and its repeated statements of support for Hamas – all that is aimed at presenting an image of being the most militant "anti-imperialists" in the hope of recruiting people who are appalled by Israel's horrific actions in Gaza

Now, the SWP's hatred of Israel and Israelis is long-standing. But its "tough-guy" pro-Hamas stance is sheer opportunism and entirely in line with a record of inconsistency and cowardice.

The SWP's forerunners, the Socialist Review group, started out in 1950 on the basis of refusing to support North Korea fighting US imperialism. In the early 1960s, especially, one of its proudly-worn political badges was an opposition to "Third Worldism", which often went as far as downright disdain for national liberation struggles.

When it came closer to home in 1969, the SWP (then called IS) de facto supported British troops going onto the streets in Northern Ireland in 1969.

In theory, from 1971 the IS gave "critical but unconditional" support to the Provisional IRA's military campaign; but following the bombing of two pubs in Birmingham in 1974, killing 21 people, and widely believed to be the work of Irish republicans, *Socialist Worker*'s headline was "Stop The Bombings – troops out now". "Stop The Bombings" was presumably a demand on the Provos, who mostly bombed military and economic targets (the Provos' leaders condemned the Birmingham bombing, and it seems to have been by mavericks).

Argentina

As for "critical but unconditional" support for the Provos, that pretty much disappeared from SW's coverage, being mentioned just once, tucked away in the small print, in the editorial that followed the bombings.

IS had had lurches into what it might have called "Third Worldism" (chanting Ho! Ho! Ho Chi Minh! on Vietnam protests), but still remembered some things. When much of the British left sided with Argentina's military junta's invasion of the Falkland Islands (1982), because the subsequent war with Britain must axiomatically define Argentina's role as "anti-imperialist", the SWP took much the same line as the AWL: it opposed the British-Argentine war on both sides.

1987

All that changed abruptly in 1987. The SWP (as it had become) suddenly came out in support of Iran in the Iraq-Iran war, having previously denounced both sides as reactionary. From that point on, the SWP's approach to international politics has mostly been "campist". It sees the world as divided into "imperialism" (the USA and allies) and "anti-imperialism" – including reactionary regimes like Iran and fascistic military-terrorist groups like Hezbollah and Hamas.

In 2001 the SWP refused to condemn "9/11" (at least until February 2002, when, under pressure at a Stop The War conference, SWP then-leader Lindsey German backtracked).

But then when a similar attack happened closer to home, it was a different story. Here is *Socialist Worker*'s response to the 7 July 2005 Islamist bombings in London: "Whoever carried out the bombings, there is no political justification for such barbaric tactics. The bombings were aimed at ordinary people traveling to work and school in one of the most multiracial cities in Europe – people who don't in any way bear responsibility for the policies of the government that rules over them. The attack took place only two years after an estimated two million people took to the streets of London to protest the impending Iraq war – in the biggest demonstration in Britain's history. The odds are that some of these antiwar protesters were among the dead. Plus, one of the bombings took place in a largely Arab immigrant neighbourhood." In short: bomb other "imperialist" civilians, by all means, but *not us*.

Opportunism, inconsistency and cowardice: that's what characterises to SWP's approach to "anti-imperialism" and acts of terror. Denounce them when they're close to home, applaud them when they happen far away to nationalities you don't like. ☐

Why I oppose a ceasefire in Gaza

Eric Lee

By Eric Lee

This article is not going to win me any friends. And it may convince no one. But it demands to be written.

I oppose the increasingly loud calls here in Britain and around the world for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. Let's be clear: those are not easy words to write. Of course I support an end to the fighting. And not only an end to the current round of fighting. Like all of you, I prefer peace to war, and life to death.

But the demand for a ceasefire in Gaza is not about peace or saving lives. It is about the opposite of that. Let me explain.

The Hamas death-cult deliberately planned, over many months and probably years, to cross the border with Israel and raid the neighbouring villages and kibbutzim. Those kibbutzim were filled with people who always voted for the Left and supported peace with their Palestinian neighbours.

Hamas planned and then executed their plan knowing exactly what would happen. They knew that the slaughter and the capture of hundreds of innocent civilians would trigger a massive, unprecedented Israeli response. And they got exactly what they expected.

Israel, it turned out to no one's surprise, was not a defenceless "paper tiger", as Hamas told its supporters. It is a powerful modern state with an exceptionally powerful military. And it is doing exactly what the leadership of Hamas expected it to do.

Knowing that the complete defeat of Hamas is imminent, its leaders soon to be killed or captured, the organisation has very limited options. Its armed forces, though far better trained and equipped than anyone had believed possible a month ago, are no match for a modern army like Israel's. That is why day by day, hour by hour they are losing control of Gaza.

The only thing that might keep Hamas alive as an organised force, and possibly still in control of some parts of Gaza, would be if the Israeli war machine would grind to a halt.

If the leaders of Hamas could push a button, that button would stop every Israeli tank, every fighter jet, every piece of artillery, every drone, and every soldier. They would stop in place, stop shooting, give Hamas a chance to breathe and regroup. And maybe survive.

A ceasefire is the only thing that would prevent the complete destruction of Hamas. And that destruction is the precondition for any decent ending to this terrible and unnecessary war.

As many Israelis will tell you, so long as Hamas is in power in Gaza, and Netanyahu is prime minister of Israel, there can be no progress towards peace. Right now, according to public opinion polls, Netanyahu seems politically finished. He cannot win an election.

Meanwhile, Hamas seems to be days away, maybe even hours away, from being finished as well.

There are many proposals for what to do when the fighting ends. Some want the Palestinian Authority to take control of Gaza. Others talk about foreign states assuming security control – such as Egypt or Turkey.

But the precondition for any of those things to happen is the complete destruction of Hamas and its armed forces.

Of course there need to be humanitarian pauses. Aid needs to come into Gaza. Injured people need to be taken out to hospitals outside of the territory. Civilians need to be given safe corridors to move away from the fighting towards less dangerous parts of the Gaza Strip.

And Israel should do more – much more – to ensure that civilians are not the victims of a war they did not want. The enemy is not the Palestinian people. The enemy is Hamas.

I'm sure that most of the people who have been demonstrating in London every Saturday, and also around the world, think that calling for a ceasefire is the same thing as calling for peace. It is not. It is what Hamas wants – a lull in the fighting, a chance to survive for another day and to prepare for the next war.

If you want peace, call for peace. If you want more war, call for a ceasefire. ☐

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

• For a reply to another polemic against us on the issue of ceasefire, see page 13 of this issue.

Why "rewind history" is no answer in Israel-Palestine

By Rhodri Evans

The Israel-Palestine conflict is rooted in a long history of clashes, a history in which the Palestinians have been repeatedly the losers.

In Israel-Palestine, and in the whole Middle East, we are, as elsewhere, for socialism, for workers' unity and independent politics as the only way to socialism, and for mutual recognition of equal rights as the only workable basis for workers' unity.

That is why we support the Palestinian Arabs' aspiration to have a real independent Palestinian state, in contiguous territory, where the Palestinian Arabs are a majority, alongside a secure Israel, and aid to that Palestinian state.

All that is different from a programme of rewinding history, of seeking to go back to before there was a big Jewish community in the area, or before the Palestinian Arab nation coalesced.

As in the Americas, Australia, New Zealand, etc., to try to reverse the bad effects of European and other migration on other local peoples by expelling or subjugating the migrant-origin population is not possible, and would anyway be unjust. The only way forward is guaranteeing rights to current generations of mistreated peoples, and assistance in overcoming the heritages of mistreatments.

"Expel the incomers" is not even an answer for Kaliningrad, a now-Russian Baltic enclave of one million people where Germans lived for centuries before all being expelled in 1944-7.

Trying to reverse migration is even more unjust in the case of Israel, since Jewish settlers there mostly arrived as refugees, and have nowhere to "go back to".

Skewed

The desire to rewind history comes partly from a skewed picture of the history. *Socialist Worker* on 15 October, for example, asserted that "a secular and democratic state where Muslims, Jews, Christians and others live together is possible. This kind of state existed before Balfour's agreement". People often talk about being "pro-Palestine", without specifying what they mean: the actual Palestinian *people*? or that fictional before-the-fall "Palestine", to be restored? In fact:

- The area delimited as Palestine by the British when they took the area in World War 1 was previously not secular, not democratic, and not a state. "Palestine" had been a vague term for a collection of sub-units ruled autocratically by the Ottoman (Islamic) empire from Constantinople (now Istanbul).
- Aiming to win support in the World War, Britain made promises to both Jews and Arabs. Then it broke them. The British soon concluded that they had more trouble than benefit from their contradictory promises, and spent the rest of their "Mandate" period of control (to 1947-8) trying to balance concessions and repression for both Arabs and Jews.
- There are now *two nations* in and around the territory of British-mandate Palestine, the Israeli Jews and the Palestinian Arabs (plus several small minorities). There were no such nations in 1900. There were Jews and Muslims and Christians under Ottoman rule, but identities were defined by religious communities, localities, families, not nations. Rewinding history would mean rewinding those nations out of existence: it can't be done, and attempts to do it are destructive.

An ideological minority of European Jews, calling themselves Zionists, had started to develop Jewish settlements in the area from 1904, under the Ottoman Empire. They were fearful of rising antisemitism in Europe, and argued that Jews could defend themselves effectively only if they became a local majority at least somewhere.

There was already a longstanding Jewish minority in the area (8% in 1882, though religiously-defined, whereas most Zionists were outspokenly secular). Jerusalem had a Jewish majority in 1900.

Most of the early Jewish settlers "looked down on" the Arab people of Palestine. Most Europeans then saw migration to sparsely-populated lands as brave pioneering, not aggression. In the 19th century, many socialists had focused their efforts on setting up "utopian" communist colonies in North America.

The Zionists tried to reassure the Ottoman and then British authorities. The majority "Labour Zionists" said that new Jewish agricultural settlements alongside Arab agriculture would benefit all, and Arab hostility was an artefact of narrow-minded landlords. The "Marxist Zionist" Ber Borochov said that after Jews eventually became a local majority, the Arabs would freely assimilate into a new Hebrew nation, of a secular culture different from European Jewry. The more right-wing "Revisionist Zionists" said that the Arabs would have to be forced to accept a Jewish majority, rather than welcoming it, but claimed that thereafter the Arabs would have full equal rights and would be conciliated. All quietly hoped that Jews would become a majority, as, say, migrant-origin people had become a majority in New Zealand about 1860.

There were many millions more Jews in Europe alive and able to migrate then than there would be in 1948, and the local population was about 500,000 in 1900, maybe 3% of the current population of the area.

In Europe, Marxists disputed with the Zionists, arguing that Jews should instead join the class struggle in the countries where they lived.

By a twist of history, Arab nationalism began to stir very soon after Zionist efforts began. By 1921 there were the first Arab riots against Jews. That the Arabs were suspicious and resentful about incomers is no more surprising than that the Zionists were inclined to "look down on" the Arabs.

Population

Actually the Jewish proportion of the population was only 11% in 1922, down on 14% in 1914, and would rise (after a wave of flight from persecution in Poland) only to 17% in 1931. The Zionists bought land from Arab landlords, but even by 1948 would have bought only 6% of it (12% of the cultivated land). Mostly Jewish agriculture developed alongside Arab agriculture, rather than displacing it. Arab agriculture also expanded, and Arabs too migrated into Palestine. But most Arabs were worried, and no wonder.

If revolutionary socialists had been strong among both Jews and Arabs, then things could have gone differently. In fact the Jews were led by social-democrat-tinged communalists, and the Arabs had a reactionary demagogue, Amin al-Husseini, named as their leader via a Supreme Muslim Council appointed by the British.

The Nazi conquest of power in 1933 changed things. The Jewish percentage of the population rose to 28% in 1936 and 30% in 1946; they had become a small local nation-in-formation. Responding to Arab revolt, in 1939 Britain banned almost all Jewish immigration to Palestine and almost all further land sales to Jews. Around the same time almost every country in world restricted entry for Jewish refugees.

Then the Holocaust. From the end of World War 2 the Jewish community went to war against the British, fighting for Jews fleeing Europe to be allowed into Palestine and for independence as a way to get them allowed in. Britain decided to withdraw and asked the United Nations to find a solution. The UN voted for a partition. The Jews accepted; the Arab leaders didn't.

From late 1947, first Arab militias coming from Syria and supported by Palestinian Arabs, and then (from May 1948) the Arab states, made war on the Jewish community and the state it set up on the UN plan in May 1948.

The Jewish community, despite still being tiny (600,000-700,000), despite Britain passively backing the Arab states and the US imposing an arms embargo, won the war, thanks to high motivation and arms-supply support from Stalin, who saw a chance to disturb the British empire.

700,000 Palestinians fled or were driven out of what became Israel. Since the Jews won, fewer Jews fled or were driven out of areas which ended under Arab control. In several stages, starting before 1948, almost all the Jews in other Middle Eastern countries fled or were driven out, some 600,000 in total. By 1970 Israel's Jewish population was over four times what it had been in 1947. Its Arab population has increased faster, from about 12% in 1950 to 20% now.

After the end of the 1948-9 war, there were attempts, half-hearted on both sides though encouraged by the USA, at peace deals between the Arab states and Israel with relief for the refugees. But governments on both sides saw the evils of the status quo as "containable". Most of the land allocated by the UN to a Palestinian state had been taken by Jordan (the West Bank) or Egypt (Gaza); the Palestinians were mistreated by all Arab states, but as yet in no political condition to resist. Palestinian nationalism had started to grow in the first half of the century, incubated within broader Arab nationalism, and became more autonomous and assertive from the 1960s.

After a number of wars, the "first intifada", starting 1987 (the first Palestinian mass resistance in the West Bank and Gaza, which had been taken by Israel from Jordan and Egypt in the 1967 war), forced moves to a "two states" deal. Faltering progress broke down at an unviable "halfway point" in 2001.

Since then successive Israeli governments have stonewalled, thinking they can "contain" the Palestinians indefinitely (i.e. partially "rewind" the Palestinian nation) while they increase Jewish settlement on the West Bank.

The only basis on which workers across the region can unite is an equal right for all nations to self-determination, and equal rights for all within each state. □

Rents crunch hits students

By Sam Myerson

Report after report has pointed to a rapid rise in rents for students, and poor levels of maintenance.

Universities have added to the housing crisis, with a move to private providers rather than in-house accommodation, so direct control over rents is removed. In any case, university-owned accommodation rents have risen more than maintenance support.

A report from the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) on ten university cities found rents up 14.6% 2021-22 to 2023-4, and private sector rents up 19%. Meanwhile the maximum student maintenance loan in England rose 5.2%. In 2023-4 in England, the average rent of £7,566 will take up nearly 100% of the average loan received and 76 per cent of the maximum loan.

The combination creates a vicious circle of misery for students. Other reports show that student mental health is at an all-time low, with financial burdens as a leading cause.

The current model of funding is broken. It means students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds coming out of higher education with the highest levels of debt, and those from middling and better-off backgrounds relying on support from parents.

The cut off point for the maximum maintenance loan in England is low. So students rely on other borrowing, parental support, or work for more than 18 hours a week, just to pay rent and living costs.

The report is explicit about blame: "The student maintenance system needs resetting". Poor regulation of the housing market and the privatisation of student accommodation make things worse.

The report makes some good recommendations, but with woolly suggestions like advice to students and awareness, plus calls for maintenance to increase to cover higher rents rather rents to be lowered and for more use of bursaries or hardship funds rather than a system providing for all.

Its suggestion that maintenance loans need to be "based on what it actually costs to be a student" do not go far enough. A maintenance system based on loans is a lifelong barrier to students from disadvantaged backgrounds and offers nothing to international students.

In the UK there are four different systems of funding for higher education. The tiered system in Wales seeks to balance between maintenance and loans. It would be an improvement for English students, but still doesn't go far enough.

We need to see the abolition of loans, replaced with grants at the level of a real living wage for all.

For that we need to build strong campaigns in student unions, in the National Union of Students (NUS) and in the wider labour movement. Low levels of financial support coupled with high levels of tuition fees, and all via loans, are a barrier to working-class young people and even more to those in work who want to re-educate themselves.

Current NUS policy is weak and confused. We need to get organised, for NUS and the wider student movement to take up demands to fix higher education and in coordination with the wider labour movement to build the necessary political pressure. ☐

The far right on 11 November

By Harry Sheeran

Far-right activists converged on central London on Saturday 11 November. Whipped up into a fury by Braverman's dog-whistling, the far right sniffed an opportunity. Tommy Robinson, Lawrence Fox and Douglas Murray all either put out Powell-esque rhetoric, or encouraged their followers to attend to "protect statues" and to demand that the Gaza-ceasefire demonstrators show respect to the war dead.

Unlike in 2020, when he helped unleash a similar situation in Central London in defence of war memorials, Tommy Robinson even made an appearance. However, when things began to turn ugly in Chinatown, he jumped into a taxi and left. This was met with some chagrin among elements of the far right.

Made of mainly football hooligan elements, essentially, the rump of the DFLA, fascists turned up early in the day to drink.

So, what to take from this? Who knows what Braverman was thinking. I can only guess she hates Palestinian demonstrations a lot, and is experimenting with mobilising Trumpist style "swarms". As her new bedfellow Robinson has found, however these are difficult to control when unleashed. It already cost her her cabinet job. In time, her political career may recover, or may not.

As for the fascists, the civic nationalist leadership has been eclipsed by the more ethno-nationalist Patriotic Alternative and its splits. Big London piss-ups and rucking with Police seemed to have been replaced with demonstrations outside migrant hotels and drag queen story hours.

The far right breaking police lines

Who will lead the far right is up in the air right now. The far right is split over Israel-Palestine, and Mark Collet (leader of PA) advised his followers not to go to London, accusing Robinson of being a stooge for his "Zionist masters". Robinson himself is not unlikely to see another term in prison for breaking (yet another) court injuction.

Whether similar will occur again remains to be seen. Remembrance Day may have been a particular flash point. However, some fascists will most likely continue to attempt to disrupt Palestine marches in London, even if on a much smaller scale. The left needs to be aware of this, and counter fascist mobilisations whenever and wherever they appear. ☐

Sheffield bar workers demand safe transport

By Sam Myerson

Bar workers in Sheffield are getting organised. A local campaign aims to achieve paid transport home after the end of our shifts.

Recently Sheffield Council passed policy that stipulates as a condition of new licences that employers must provide transport home for workers at the end of their shifts.

Currently, workers in hospitality find ourselves paying up to two hours pay for taxis, or waking home at night across the city. Sheffield is the low pay capital of Britain, according to researchers from Sheffield Hallam and other universities. It is not right that workers face an additional penalty for the lack of public transport provision.

The council policy came from agitation with Labour councillors, on the back of a successful campaign by Unite in Newcastle which saw the city council bring in the same policy on licensed premises.

Some establishments in Sheffield already offer contributions towards, or organise pooled fares. We want to see fully-funded transport across the board.

Women workers make up the majority in hospitality. They face harassment in and out of the workplace.

The Office for National Statistics reports that everyone finds walking alone after dark less safe than during the day, and 50% of women find walking alone on the streets after dark unsafe, as against 17% of men. More women (27%) than men (16%) reported they had experienced at least one form of harassment in the previous 12 months. Disabled people also face more harassment and feel more unsafe.

Bar workers and sympathisers, including students from both of the city's universities, have got together to launch a campaign to organise workers to bring about changes in their workplace.

We are currently leafleting workplaces and organising meetings of workers to discuss tactics and the next steps of a campaign to establish this as a question of staff safety for which the employer must take responsibility. ☐

Bangladesh workers still in battle

By Sacha Ismail

The government-appointed body responsible for setting the minimum wage in Bangladesh's garment industry has agreed to raise it 56% on 1 December.

That sounds good, particularly when the garment bosses proposed 25%. In fact, workers are outraged.

The previous minimum of 8,300 Taka (£61) a month was a dire poverty wage, and one long eroded by inflation. The last increase was in 2018. As we reported last week, workers and unions have been staging militant strikes and protests for 23,000 Taka. Following the announcement of the new minimum wage protests have surged again.

Four workers have been killed during repression, and there has been major destruction.

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

Border regime empowers abusers

Women's Fightback

By LCFM

New data has exposed how police continue to report domestic abuse survivors and victims to immigration enforcement.

The government's independent Domestic Abuse Commissioner (DAC) obtained figures showing that, between April 2020 and March 2023, police reported 537 victims and survivors to the Home Office after they came forward for help.

The DAC shared the story of L, who sought help from the Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS) after three years of abusive treatment in and after ending a relationship. Her ex-partner was sending threats and stalking her.

A LAWRS caseworker helped L make a report to the police. The police then came to her home, demanded her immigration documents and called Immigration Enforcement to make a report in front of her. As threats and harassment from her ex continued, L received a letter from immigration enforcement. This drove her to disengage from LAWRS support altogether.

Mistreatment of women like L also has a wider effect. According to Imkaan, a Black feminist organisation countering violence against women and girls from ethnic minority backgrounds, 90% of abused women with insecure immigration status had their abusers wield the threat of deportation in attempts to prevent them reporting the abuse. Both undocumented migrants, and those with temporary and conditional visas, are affected.

Pic: @femfight

Social security

No Recourse to Public Funds policies, which deny many migrants access to the safety net of social security, compound the problem. Too often, victims and survivors face an appalling choice: stay with the abuser, or risk destitution and homelessness.

Campaigners have fought on these issues for decades, gaining more widespread recognition in recent years.

In 2018, Southall Black Sisters and Liberty launched the first Super-Complaint against the police for reporting crime victims and witnesses to Immigration Enforcement. In 2019, the Right to be Believed report showed that women with insecure immigration status waited twice as long to report abuse to the police. When they did, 45% were denied support. In 2022, JCWI revealed that over two years, 2,656 victims of crimes including slavery, human trafficking and abuse were referred for possible deportation after calling the police.

Similar problems plague access to other services, deterring many migrants from seeking vital healthcare or reporting workplace rights violations. Campaigners, and the government's own DAC, demand firewalls to block information sharing from police and other public services to Immigration Enforcement. By refusing, the government empowers abusers and exploiters. ☐

• This is republished from LCFM, the Labour Campaign for Free Movement, a network of Labour members and supporters, campaigning in Labour and the trade union movement to defend and extend free movement and migrants' rights.

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

Minimum Service law can be beaten

From Free Our Unions

The government has now set the minimum service levels in three of the sectors covered by the new Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act.

For Border Force and some HM Passport Office staff, the minimum service stipulates that services "should be provided at a level that means they are no less effective than if a strike were not taking place", and must "ensure all ports and airports remain open."

For ambulance staff, the minimum service level says "vital services" must continue "throughout any strike", with all life-threatening calls, or calls "where there is no reasonable clinical alternative to an ambulance response" are responded to.

For passenger rail, the minimum service level has been set at 40% of timetabled train services. For strikes by rail engineering and infrastructure workers, the minimum service level stipulates that services must be able to run on a series of "priority routes", between 6am and 10pm.

The government's wording is less than specific. What does "a level that means they are no less effective than if a strike were not taking place" actually mean? On the rail, how does a requirement to run 40% of timetabled services translate into determining a staffing complement involving signalling and maintenance staff, as well as station staff and train crew?

The legislation itself gives the government license to be unclear, because the responsibility for issuing the "work notices" that specify the staffing required, and will actually compel workers to attend work, lies with individual employers.

The Act says employers *"may"* issue work notices, *but not that they must*. That means there is significant scope for labour-movement campaigning to demand that employers refuse to do so.

The Scottish government has already said it will not issue work notices. This means that, for example, workers on government-run ScotRail services will be unaffected by the law and can continue with all-out strikes. Other public authorities run by parties that oppose

the Act should make a similar commitment – for example, Sadiq Khan's mayoralty in London. Khan is the chair of the Transport for London board; a commitment from him that TfL and subsidiary companies such as London Underground Ltd. will refuse to issue work notices would have a major impact.

Our unions must campaign to demand these commitments, but we can't rely on them. We also need organisation to prepare direct defiance if work notices are issued. Individual workers defying work notices in ones and twos could be picked off – mass defiance will, obviously, be immeasurably more powerful.

The Trades Union Congress has called a special congress for 9 December to discuss resistance to the laws. That's an important step and could be an important forum for discussion and coordination. But the congress is only scheduled to take place from 10am to 1pm; how much can really be discussed or decided in three hours? Union branches, Trades Council, and regional and national bodies within unions must also call meetings to discuss and plan campaigning. The meeting called by Battersea and Wandsworth Trades Council on 29 November is one example.

Currently, Labour is committed to repealing the Act when next in government, as well as the 2016-7 Trade Union Act which legislated for turnout thresholds in ballots. But without pressure, it will go no further, and may renege on even these commitments. A new initiative from the Greater London Combined branch of the CWU aims to mobilise union bodies to apply that pressure.

The labour movement as a whole needs a three-fronted campaign: holding Labour to its commitments and pushing them further; demanding employers refuse to issue work notices; and preparing mass defiance if and when work notices are issued.

Free Our Unions aims to empower rank-and-file union activists – with briefings, bulletins, model motions, and other resources – to push within their unions for increased activity on this issue. The new laws are not only an attack on workers' rights, but an attack on democracy. ☐

• freeourunions.org

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, including for a ceasefire in Israel-Gaza) at workersliberty.org/agenda and bit.ly/mo-pe. ☐

The cross in the White House flag in the sanctuary

Book review

By Will Sefton

Bradley Onishi's book *Preparing for War: The Extremist History of White Christian Nationalism – and What Comes Next* is an attempt to trace back from the 6 January 2021 riot at the Capitol the influence of White Christian Nationalism (WCN) and see how it has become, according to Onishi, a core part of the Trump-MAGA movement.

He concludes that 6 January will not be the last attempt at a coordinated, violent insurrection against democracy.

He also tells his personal story about how he became a born-again Evangelical in Orange County, California, a teenage zealot in the Rose Drive Friends Church. Having now left his faith, he is a writer, podcaster and theology academic with a particular interest in secularism.

Onishi traces the emergence of WCN as a political force to the Barry Goldwater Presidential campaign in 1964. Goldwater, like Trump, represented what Onishi says was the concept of the American cowboy, popular among white conservatives. "Imagined as a rugged White individualist who was self-reliant and never asked the government for a handout. Usually envisioned as a military veteran, the cowboy thwarted enemies of the state – such as Mexicans, Chinese, and Native Americans – without compromise or apology… It also operated as a model for the no-nonsense leader who didn't need fancy degrees or an army of bureaucrats to take sides, draw lines in the sand, and act decisively."

Goldwater's campaign had many proto-Trumpian elements to it. Like Trump, Goldwater was not a committed Christian evangelical. He had a record of supporting some civil rights legislation before the March on Washington. Still, he saw an opening in opposing the 1964 Civil Rights Act and rose to prominence, "stealing" the Republican nomination from Nelson Rockefeller, the more moderate and supposed frontrunner.

Goldwater was the political outsider, on the fringes of the Republican Party who was also born into wealth but managed to project himself as a self-reliant man. He could posit himself as personally favouring desegregated education but that it was not for him to "impose that judgement of mine on the people of Mississippi or South Carolina".

As Onishi says, Goldwater helped to pave the way for a populist-right candidacy, where you could "de-emphasise one's economic privilege, foreground individualist capitalist success and self-reliant manhood, and throw in a good dose of anti-intellectualism and anti-elitism… appeal to 'real Americans' and their 'old-fashioned values' of individualist capitalism, anti-communism, and de facto racial segregation".

WCN

WCN's holy trinity of god, nation, and freedom has placed it at the forefront of the current political divide. Goldwater was an innovator because he put politics at the centre of "values". For the evangelical devotees of the Republican right, the beliefs to exercise are not love or neighbourliness but "individualism, capitalism and Whiteness".

Goldwater lost the election to Lyndon B Johnson by a landslide. His brand of hard-right politics gained control only in the Reagan era. But where Goldwater did win, in the deep South, he was a key player in turning anti-civil-rights white-majority areas from Democrat to solidly Republican.

WCN had flourished in the South since Reconstruction in the 1870s and was a significant force trying to push back at the victories won in the civil rights struggle. But in the late 1940s and 1950s, many white southerners moved west to Southern California, including Orange County, where Onishi was raised and "born again".

Orange County helped secure Goldwater the Republican nomination, and Onishi attended the same Church where Nixon was a congregant. Ronald Reagan launched his political career in Southern California. John Wayne Airport, named for the archetypal American cowboy, is in Orange County.

But the explicit ties between WCN and Republicanism really date from the ousting of Jimmy Carter, the Democrat president 1977-81. Carter was a white Southern Baptist military veteran with an appealing farmer background, not one of the East Coast elite. Although he did relatively well with Southern white evangelical votes in 1976, he did not keep that support in 1980. Although personally opposed to abortion, he would not commit to the US changing policy (he did refuse more federal funding for abortion services). Carter opposed moves to allow prayer in schools, another hot issue for evangelicals.

In 1979, six years after Roe v Wade and without as yet much of a concerted opposition to it from white evangelicals, Paul Weyrich, a former Goldwater staffer and founder with Jerry Falwell of the Moral Majority movement which flourished for a few years from 1980, took up abortion as a "hot button" issue to deny Jimmy Carter a second term. Despite Carter's rock-solid credentials as a Christian true believer, WCN and those who saw faith as the guiding principle of the United States chose Reagan.

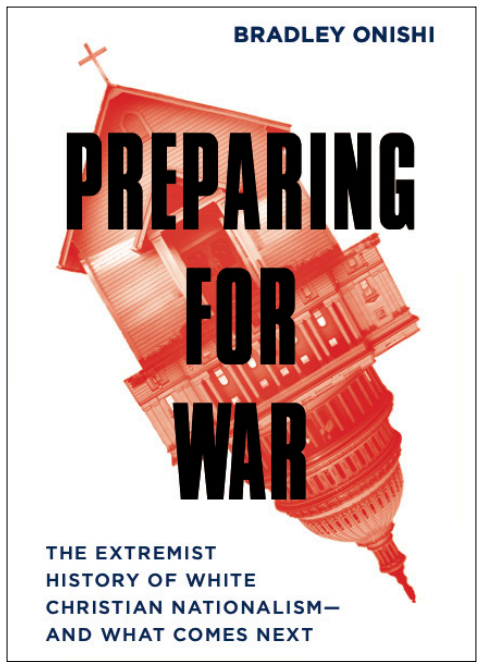
The Goldwater campaign had set off a chain of events, according to Onishi, that would push white evangelicals into the forefront of right-wing politics across the United States. In 1969, Brown v Board of Education had forced public schools to desegregate. Across parts of the South, desegregated schools became predominantly black and white students were enrolled in private Christian institutions. One district, Holmes in Mississippi, had no white students enrolled in public schools in 1970. Tax exemption for religious institutions which refused to desegregate became a driving issue for WCN.

Black parents

Legal actions initiated by black parents in the Holmes district, Green v Kennedy and Green v Connally, banned those tax exemptions. The text case came when Bob Jones University, in South Carolina, fought retain tax-exempt status while still segregating, claiming that the Bible mandated that. By 1976, Bob Jones University was no longer exempt, but Weyrich (who himself was a Greek Catholic) and his co-thinkers had helped build a movement of white Evangelicals geared to turning out to vote and organise to ensure that the USA stayed true (as they saw it) to the principles of the Constitution. Many of them believed the Constitution to be divinely inspired.

Falwell and others had big audiences at their mega-churches and on television and radio, and tremendous power to mobilise voters. Onishi argues that the alliance between Falwell's Liberty Church in Virginia and Tim LaHaye in California helped unite Southern Whites with the growing number of White evangelicals in southern California.

Explicitly white nationalist politics, says Onishi, were not at the forefront of the movement. Its leaders knew that was a harder sell than playing the victims of an overreaching government that wanted to end religious liberty, override the right for parents to choose how to educate children, and negate



family values. If Washington could attack a Christian University like Bob Jones, what would be next? The leaders of the religious right urged their followers to take their children out of the public school system.

By 1978, when Carter decided that the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) should start enforcing the law which actually had been passed by his Republican predecessor Nixon, the new Moral Majority organisation was activating White conservative Christians, particularly in the South, the Midwest and the Sunbelt, to vote Republican against Carter. With Reagan in power, evangelicals had shown their voting power. They came to focus on what it meant for them to preserve family values.

It is Onishi's view that White Christian nationalism envisions the American body politic as straight, white, Christian, born in the USA, and abiding by patriarchal norms. Preaching abstinence to teenagers means you can oppose all other sex education. To follow Christian teaching, women should seek to marry and reproduce, and so renew the nation and bring it back to an ideal envisaged as an overwhelming white majority with respect for God and respect for the constitution.

Increasingly, the "family values" of the white evangelicals bring them to attack LGBTQ+ rights and collaborate with far-right organisations and make links with governments, particularly in Europe, which share their stance and often favour a "strong man" leadership style. The World Congress of Families (founded 1997) has become a place for American evangelicals to hobnob with Victor Orbán and acolytes of Vladimir Putin. An obsession with falling white birth rates and admiration for right-wing authoritarianism has drawn the groups together.

Onishi quotes Sara Posner, author of *Unholy: Why White Christians Worship at the Altar of Donald Trump*, "[M]any in

and the

the US Christian right believe America has failed as a role model for the rest of the world – that liberalism, unrestrained, has brought a once great nation to its knees. To them, the 'illiberal' autocrats across the Atlantic are fast becoming the new standard-bearers in a global battle for traditional values, an antidote to what they see as rising decadence and moral relativism in the West."

This goes some way to explain how these same evangelicals can be so loyal to Trump despite his religious devotion being almost entirely made up. He claims the Bible to be his favourite book, with *The Art of the Deal* no doubt a close second. When asked to name his favourite verse, he responded, "I wouldn't want to get into it. Because to me, that's very personal… I don't want to get into specifics."

Alliances

At root for Onishi the specifics of WCN are a refusal to separate the cross and the flag. It has less to do with theological doctrine, on which evangelicals are often split. They are happy to make alliances with those they consider heretical when needed, Catholics, Mormons etc.

The core for them is a cultural identity that sees the USA as a uniquely Christian nation and its power as a sign of God's favour. If the USA is weakened or declining in global influence, that is down to a turning away from God. The Bible and the Constitution should be the guiding documents of the republic. Although the proportion of Americans identifying as Christian and white has gone down from 80% in 1976 to 44%, and 25% now avow no religious affiliation, white evangelicals have become more cohesive and and weighty politically.

Onishi looks at the relationship some of the groups and individuals involved in 6 January have with WCN. He concludes that "we will see that the insurrection was the logical next step for a certain diminishing White Christian population trying desperately to retake what they considered theirs. Acclimatising or adjusting themselves to the inevitable waves of religious, racial, and other forms of diversity, for White Christian nationalists, is no option at all. This was not the last stand of a dying faction. It was the first violent battle in what they foresee as the coming civil war."

Onishi's diagnosis may be correct. His hopes for what can shift the prospects seem limp. If, he writes, after 6 January, "politicians, media voices, religious leaders, and celebrities had formed a united front that painted the insurrection as a disqualifying event that barred Trump and anyone who advocated for the attempted coup from serving in political office, our political future might look differently". Despite this, the book is a good read. □

Afghanistan under the Taliban

By Dan Katz

On 3 October the Pakistani government ordered that all undocumented foreigners leave the country or face deportation, setting a deadline of 31 October. 25,000 Afghans crossed the border into Afghanistan on 1 November and Pakistani police began raids to remove others.

Pakistan has a population of more than 4mn Afghans, of which, according to the Pakistani state, 1.7mn have no papers. Pakistan has received waves of Afghan refugees and migrants following the various political upheavals since the Russians invaded in 1979. Most recently, when the Islamist Taliban movement returned to power in August 2021, 700,000 Afghans fled to Pakistan.

It seems that the Pakistani authorities are using the poor Afghan refugees as a lever to press the Taliban to clamp down on Islamist terrorist groups which operate in Pakistan and are based in Afghanistan. There were two suicide bomb attack in Pakistani mosques in September.

Hundreds of thousands of Afghans also escaped the Taliban in 2021 by moving to Iran. Three million Afghans, many undocumented, now live in Iran. One million arrived after the Taliban takeover.

Violence and discrimination against Afghan refugees is now widespread in Iran. In May 2023 the Iranian government issued a decree aimed at preventing Afghans working in the southern region of Fars.

Also in May Iranian and Afghan troops fought a series of gun battles on their common border in a dispute over water rights. Afghanistan has suffered three years of drought.

On 6 October a large mob armed with sticks rallied in Eghbaliyeh, a town 200km from Tehran, to demand the expulsion of Afghans from the country.

Isolation

Afghanistan remains staggeringly poor and isolated.

The US pull-out of Afghanistan, the collapse of the Western-backed government of Ashraf Ghani and the coming to power of the Taliban in 2021 led to the political quarantining of the regime and the withdrawal of much foreign aid money.

The US impounded $9bn of Afghan foreign exchange reserves. GDP dropped by around 20%.

Until China appointed an ambassador to Afghanistan in September 2023 no country had this level of representation in Afghanistan. No country formally recognises the Taliban's "Islamic Emirate" regime.

A period of terror and extra-judicial executions of former Afghan officials and security personnel took place after August 2021. UN agencies suggest at least 237 killings took place in the first ten months of Taliban rule.

Taliban fighters in a captured Humvee after the fall of Kabul, August 2021

Within three months of the Taliban takeover nearly half of all Afghan media organisations closed. According to Reporters Without Borders, "Of the 10,780 people working in Afghan newsrooms (8,290 men and 2,490 women) at the beginning of August [2021], only 4,360 were still working in December (3,950 men and 410 women)."

At their first press conference, after taking power the Taliban promised to "allow women to study and work within our framework." However, women's rights have been systematically curtailed:

- In September 2021 secondary schools reopened for boys, but girls were instructed to stay at home. Women workers at Kabul city administration, with few exceptions, were told to stay at home;
- December 2021: The Taliban's so-called Ministry of Virtue and Vice decreed that women travelling more than 72km must be accompanied by a close male relative. Women protested in the streets against the restrictions and some were arrested and tortured;
- In May 2022 a new dress code was introduced which mandated that women cover themselves, head-to-toe. Increasingly, destitute women are seen begging;
- From October to December 2022 women were banned from studying at universities, going into public parks, gyms, swimming pools and public baths, and prevented from working for NGOs;
- In July 2023 beauty salons were closed, throwing an estimated 60,000 women out of work.

A UN report from May 2023 criticised the Taliban regime's use of public flogging, stoning and execution, stating that in the previous six months 274 men, 58 women and two boys have been whipped in public. The Taliban-run Supreme Court stated that 175 death sentences had been handed out since they came to power, including 37 people sentenced to die of stoning.

Following the Taliban seizure of power the Islamic State group, Islamic State Khorasan (ISK) increased its attacks inside the country. Its main area of activity was Nangarhar, the region on the Pakistan border, east of the capital Kabul.

ISK averaged over 20 attacks each month for the first year of the Taliban's rule, until a Taliban crackdown after late 2022. ISK seem to now be attacking fewer, but more high-profile targets. In March 2023 ISK began a wave of assassinations against Taliban leaders. ISK have attacked Shia mosques, and in June 2022, a Sikh Temple in Kabul. In an effort to damage the Taliban's relations with neighbouring powers, and destabilise Taliban rule, ISK have targeted Pakistani and Russian embassies and a hotel used by Chinese nationals.

9/11

The Taliban was previously in power from 1996 until the US-led invasion and overthrow of the regime in the aftermath of the 9/11 terror attacks of 2001. During this first period of Taliban rule they paid little attention to Afghanistan's economy. After August 2021 that changed, and, having come to power quickly, they inherited functioning economic and state structures. They dispensed with ministries of Justice and of Women, for which they had no use, but maintained functioning economic structures.

Although Afghanistan remains desperately poor, the economy is fragile, but has stabilised. The World Bank believes the economy has shrunk by 25% in the last two years and has been hit by an appreciating currency and deflation.

The Taliban, desperate to end political isolation and develop the economy have signed deals with Chinese companies for mineral and oil extraction. The Chinese recently invited the Taliban for discussions on joining their vast Belt and Road economic initiative. The Chinese state is mainly concerned about instability in Afghanistan and the possibility of an Islamist insurgency into China from Afghan bases. Chinese investments in Afghanistan are mainly about politics and political stability, rather than economic development. □

Climate interventions

Environment

By Zack Muddle

Already, wildfires have wiped towns off the map and burned people alive in the USA. Across Europe, 2022's heatwaves attributable to climate change killed over 60,000 people. The same year, floods in Pakistan impacted over 30 million people, with more than two million left homeless, and an excess of five million forced to rely on unsafe drinking water. Five of the Solomon Islands in the Pacific have disappeared under the waves.

Pandemics

Climate change is propelling wildlife loss and extinctions worldwide. Droughts, warming, and ecosystem disruption are impacting food production around much of the planet. Disturbing ecosystems, aided by climate change, has abetted an "age of pandemics."

All this, and more, at a little over 1.1°C. 1.5°C promises worse. Current plans will take us far beyond that. The horrors of 2°C would in turn be eclipsed by 2.5°C. And even if fossil fuels were phased out tomorrow, historic emissions, already there in the atmosphere, mean sea levels will continue to rise, species to go extinct, ecosystems to degrade....

To stop adding greenhouse gases to the atmosphere remains the most effective, important, and reliable climate measure. But even with that, and the more so each year more greenhouse gases are pumped out each year, ecosystem "restoration", including restoration of carbon sinks – soil, forests, peatlands, ocean ecosystems – will be necessary. Supporting ecosystems and biodiversity is important for the wider health of the biosphere, for food security, limiting pandemics, and more. "Reforestation" and "rewilding" aim to do this.

This would promise some "nature-based" Carbon Dioxide Removal (CDR): at a cost, in terms of land availability and labour, and insufficiently. Straightforward restoration provides essentially one-time CDR. Once ecosystems are restored, they tend to release carbon back into the atmosphere at a similar rate that they take it in.

To start making a dent in carbon which has gone into the atmosphere from fossil fuels, further mass *carbon sequestration* (putting carbon back underground) on a scale comparable to existing fossil fuel infrastructure will be necessary.

The most widely advocated form is mass afforestation (as distinct from restoration of existing forests). It would require vast areas of land, replacing existing ecosystems, with wider ecological and weather impacts. Monocrop afforestation, for example, could cause soil degradation, and a loss of soil carbon into the atmosphere; by supplanting existing ecosystems, it could damage biodiversity and even endanger species. It would take some time: we don't know how fast or how much it could sequester. The land use would have various implications on human activities, in particular for food production.

Similar issues are raised by mass "afforestation" of the oceans – kelp "forests" of seaweed or algae. Ocean fertilisation, aiming to promote algae growth, may devastate ecosystems, and may not even sequester net carbon long-term.

Soil

"No till", "low till", or other methods aiming to improve soil health would be valuable, and could sequester some net carbon. But we don't know how feasible it is, and on what scale. Soil ecology is complex. Beyond a certain point, it would have wider ecological impacts: turning deserts into savannas, and so on. And like afforestation, increasing soil carbon would at best be essentially a one-time CDR.

We will need *ongoing CDR*, year-after-year pumping of carbon from the atmosphere to below-ground. *"Bioenergy Carbon Capture and Storage" (BECCS)* is included as a plan in official IPCC scenarios. It would seek to remove carbon from the atmosphere through growing trees, crops, or seaweed, then burning for energy, capturing (some of) the carbon dioxide, and storing it (mostly underground). This means that you can carry on removing carbon once a forest has fully grown: chop the trees down and plant replacements.

For speed at scale, this would require vast areas of land or ocean. Pumping such vast quantities of carbon dioxide underground raises other questions: how much could be stored? How fast? and how long would it stay there?

Drax power station

In this sphere as elsewhere, the ruling class can make bad from a good idea. The biggest really existing bioenergy plant in the UK, Drax, even with the proposed CCS which it is nowhere near having, is not "net negative", but seriously harmful. Ancient North American forest, which cannot easily regrow, is clear-cut, with extra releases of carbon via soil degradation, and then brought across the ocean on fossil-powered ships to be burned.

On the other hand, we cannot generalise from one destructive "BECCS" scheme to blanket opposition to "BECCS". BECCS, if done in a more rational way, may still offer CDR, or at least a low-carbon energy source.

CCS alone does not make good past fossil-fuel burning, only diminishes the impact of current burning. In itself we do not oppose it, but even if it were implemented on a large scale (which it isn't) it should not stop us demanding an end to fossil fuel use. Really existing "Carbon Capture", aside from often being used to license further pollution, is very often used for "Enhanced Oil Recovery". The CO2 is pumped underground to squeeze out more oil, with additional ecological problems on top of the further emissions released. We must unconditionally oppose EOR.

Instead of BECCS, the wood, crops, seaweed, etc. could be heated at high temperatures without oxygen, leaving high-carbon liquid, gases, and *solid "biochar"* which could be used on soils, in building materials, and elsewhere.

This is energy intensive, only so much biochar could be used, and it creates pollutants in the process. Some research suggests that when you add biochar to soil, it sequesters less carbon because the soil bacteria release more.

Direct Air Capture (DAC) extracts CO2 directly from the air. It does not currently exist on any significant scale. To remove all fossil-origin CO2, it would require quantities of energy comparable to all that released by fossil fuels from before the industrial revolution began until when we stop burning them.

Also, for the transportation and storage of carbon captured via BECCS, DAC, and such methods, we would need to repurpose the expertise, technology, and trade secrets currently to a large extent in the hands of fossil fuel corporations.

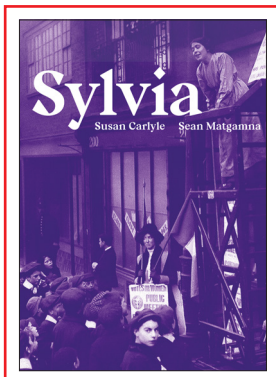
Rocks

"Enhanced weathering" seeks to speed up natural processes whereby minerals in rocks react with carbon dioxide dissolved in water to form other minerals which will hold onto the carbon for longer. By spreading finely ground rocks over large areas of land or into the ocean, carbon could theoretically be removed from the atmosphere for, perhaps, millions of years.

At scale this would require spreading huge amounts of fine rocks over large areas of land or in the ocean. As well as the mining of rocks, the fine rock dust could be harmful if breathed in, the minerals formed could impact ecosystems, and it may introduce heavy metals into food. Enhanced weathering may poison the lungs of workers and locals, poison the soil it is spread on, and not work even so.

None of the possible methods for large-scale CDR is "proven" for the necessary scale. All have significant ecological costs, many unknown. Each is more difficult than leaving carbon in the ground. But some, or all, may be necessary evils to deal with historic emissions.

So far, IPCC modelling, and official planning to meet climate targets, rely significantly on mass CDR or "negative emissions technology". Targets such as 1.5-2°C, or previously 350ppm CO2 or 1°C, were formulated as compromises given assumptions of continued capitalism-as-usual. Yet the steps necessary to limit warming to 1.5-2°C are not being taken. Now promises of speculative CDR methods are offered as more "cost effective" ways of continuing to meet – or pay lip service to – those goals than rapidly phasing out fossil fuels. That substitution must be



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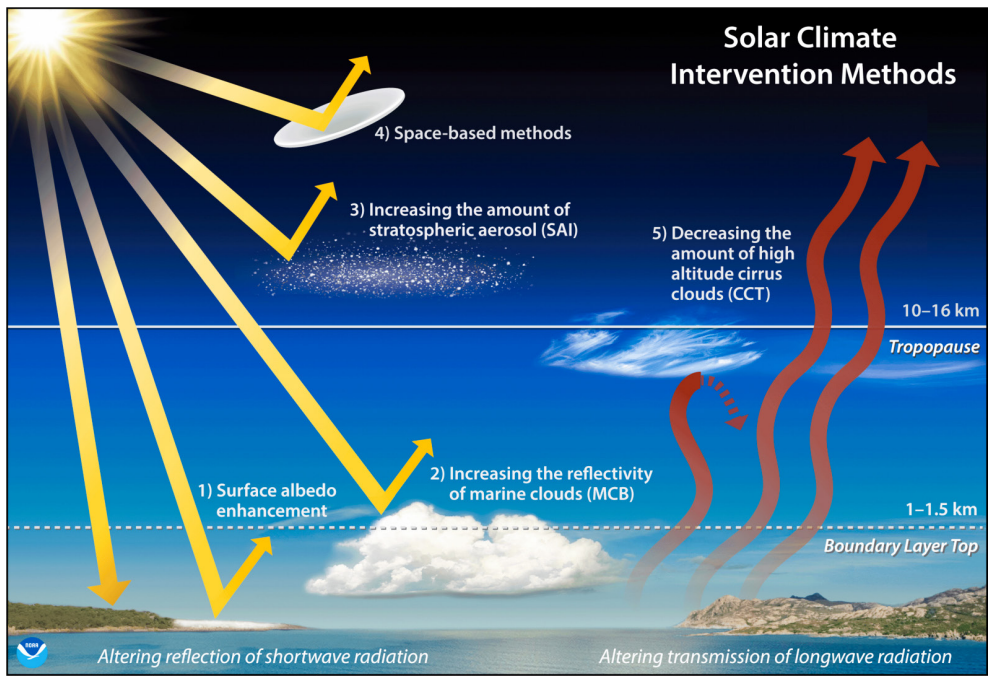

rejected.

Some dismissal of CDR and other "climate interventions" (or "geoengineering"), or of CDR beyond the more "natural" solutions of "restoration" or "rewilding", comes from valid but one-sided recognition of the problems and limitations of these interventions, overlooking the impacts of not intervening. But some is motivated by a less grounded suspicion of technology in itself, as distinct from how it is used.

To support attempts at "restoration" (or "rewilding") of forests, peatland, soil health, other land and ocean ecosystems is relatively straightforward. But it will not be enough.

Oversight

We should advocate a massive programme of *critical and cross-disciplinary research and development for different CDR methods*. This should be funded by taxing the rich, through public institutions with democratic oversight. All research should be open access, and unpatented. It needs to involve critical research to document the limitations (and over-selling of promises) that many CDR proposals have in terms of their carbon sequestration potential, and also the often serious ecological and human side-effects.

We cannot trust private capital to do the necessary research and development, nor to be transparent about the possibilities and damaging side-effects.

There are potential ecological and human downsides to each CDR method. Some may not even draw down any net carbon, or not when done badly. We need more research, but also good governance of the research. Driven by the desire to *present* as sequestering carbon as cheaply as possible, corporations and even researchers will dishonestly big-up how much is sequestered, and minimise human and ecological costs. The profit motive spurs companies to big up those techniques so as to win "carbon credits" or to advertise green credentials.

CDR is not much pursued now, but where it is, it is for "carbon offsetting", to generate "carbon credits" or the like. Even if the CDR functions well, the credits are used to license ongoing pollution.

As more research and development is done, the labour movement should evaluate different CDR methods and intervene accordingly. That may come to mean, for example, drawing up plans for the least harmful and most effective workable mass CDR methods, and demanding implementation. Before more research and pilot projects are done, it would be presumptive and premature to make demands in great detail. (That said, we support mass afforestation, and should continue to do so; though not as an alternative to other CDR methods. It should be done in the least ecologically damaging way workable: supporting biodiverse ecosystems rather than monocrops, preserving as far as possible rather than degrading soil health. We must recognise the impacts that such widespread land-use would have on humans, in particular on food production.

Solar Radiation Modification (SRM) proposals are a different approach from CDR. They would seek to limit global warming more short-term while atmospheric carbon is brought back down again, by decreasing the energy brought to the earth as solar radiation and increasing the quantities reflected back into space.

SAI (*"Stratospheric Aerosol Intervention"*) is the most studied SRM method, followed by *"Marine Cloud Brightening"* (MCB). Methods such as space mirrors are generally taken less seriously. Painting roofs white could have a very small offsetting impact, and re- and afforestation would increase reflection of sunlight a bit. *"Cirrus cloud thinning"*, through attempting to disperse cirrus clouds, would aim to increase successful re-radiation of heat back into space.

There are many known and unknown negative side-effects of SAI and MCB – from disrupting weather systems and impacting ecosystems, to (SAI) depleting the ozone layer and causing acid rain. Yet the day may come when the impacts and risks of these technologies, at least when administered well, could be a lesser evil.

In short: aggressively cutting emissions is top priority, CDR is an important complement if workable, and SRM may be a further complement, phased in then out again to lower the peak of climate impacts, because of its quicker effects.

Glaciers

Another category of climate intervention, beyond CDR and SRM, includes "glacier stabilisation" attempts to slow the speed that glaciers enter the sea and so, among other things, limit sea level rise. For example, draining water pooling under glaciers may slow their speed, or modifying their capacity to reflect sunlight may slow their melt. How viable these methods may be, and what impacts they may have, are open questions.

Then there is aid for ecosystems to migrate to different or more favourable climates, or to assist selection and propagation to speed up evolution and adaptation, currently discussed for coral reefs, which are ecologically important and hit hard by ocean heating and acidification.

Asides from all such interventions, adaptation will be necessary: defences against storms and increasing sea levels; cities and residents relocating; adaptation of crops, buildings, and working hours to changing heat. These all have major downsides, too.

With climate interventions as with seatbelts, "risk compensation" psychologically impacts even those who recognise and seek to guard against the phenomenon. The reassurance that proposed interventions could *perhaps* reduce climate change's impact can encourage more risky behaviour; inadequate action in the face of vast (and growing) emissions.

On the other side, left critics of "climate intervention" proposals generally argue that we could meet acceptable climate goals without them. After decades of continued fossil-fuel expansion, that argument plays down the severity of likely climate change.

With SRM, unlike CDR, the impacts can be significantly different depending on how, where, and how much it is deployed. Also, much early interest in SRM types of climate interventions was military. That raises a series of questions different to those with CDR. In a world of rival capitalisms, large-scale SRM could well be used for geopolitical or military gain.

And the good effects of SRM have complications. SRM's impacts may turn out good on a global level, but have very bad impacts in particular regions, and especially for poorer people in those regions. Risks deemed acceptable for the ruling class may not be for us.

Another issue beyond those with CDR is that if mass SRM is started but then stops suddenly, this could cause "termination shock". The suppressed heating impacts from greenhouse gases could lead to warming at an even faster pace, which would push some ecosystems over the edge and cause devastation beyond that from the same warming over a longer time period. Useful SRM would need to be phased up, and then down again. The timescale would need to be many decades at least; it is normally modelled for in excess of a century.

The last century, from 1923 to now, does not inspire confidence in the kind of political stability and long-sightedness that would be necessary to im-

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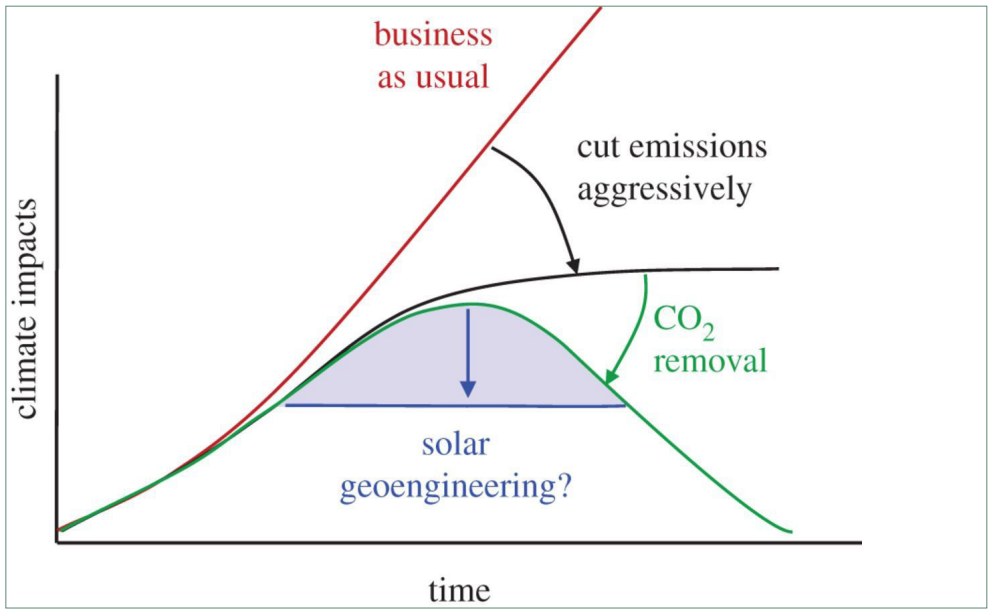

→ *from page 11*

plement such a huge and long-lasting intervention. And SAI research, even if not to be deployed, may arguably be helping to develop dangerous military and geopolitical weapons.

However, the flooding of the atmosphere with greenhouse gases at an increasing rate over the last couple of centuries is, arguably, an accidental analogue to "geoengineering", to SRM. The choice then is not, so some argue, between "geoengineering" and not. The choice is between de facto Solar Radiation Modification via GHG emission, and that plus countervailing deliberate SRM. Such an argument risks oversimplifying.

Delicate

The global climate system isn't a room with a simple temperature control system, where we can just turn the thermostat back down, turning off the radiator and turning on the air con. It is more like tinkering with a living organism full of positive and negative feedback loops, delicate and volatile parts.

David Keith, researcher and proponent of SRM, writes:

"Climate change from carbon dioxide cannot be so accurately offset because the radiative forcing by carbon dioxide is qualitatively different from radiative forcing by geoengineering.. [With (already) added CO2 then deliberate SRM] the resulting climate will have warmer nights and cooler days than the original unperturbed climate…. Carbon dioxide's warming is felt about equally in summer and winter whereas cooling from geoengineering is strongest in summer when solar heating is most intense."

There are many other differences, besides. Plants use sunlight, not heat, for photosynthesis. SRM, reducing sunlight and hence photosynthesis, may cause impacts which cascade through ecosystems. The increased GHGs that the SRMs seek to abate would not mitigate the SRM's impact here.

Another difficulty is that SAI in particular can only be researched and modelled so far without some degree of implementation. Local and computer modelling aren't sufficient. In medical R&D, tests in cells and computer modelling are vital. But so are tests on wide numbers of subjects: animals and humans. Sometimes the testing goes wrong, but statistically, it can be evaluated overall. We don't have test Earths, we only have one. But more research could help reduce risks.

Research into the negative impacts of CDR and in particular SRM has so far been even more limited than research into their positive viability: those who are interested in developing them are biased towards looking for positive viability. However, the general bias is to minimise all research.

Less research now does not necessarily save us from the dangers which come in different ways with all the CDR and SRM techniques. It may not, in time, mean less deployment. It may instead mean more blind deployment.

On balance, and especially given our political aim is to win democratic rule by the working-class, and in time to regulate the future large-scale implementation, I'd argue that we should advocate a massive programme of cross-disciplinary and critical research into "carbon dioxide removal", "solar radiation management" and other climate interventions (for now, SRM "phase" 1, theory and laboratory; and 2, "local" tests in atmosphere). We cannot trust private capitalists to direct such research; nor to fund adequate research. We should demand that it be carried out with democratic oversight, in public institutions, transparently with open access, and due attention to side-effects and negative impacts. *Even if*, in the end, we *may* only trust workers' states to implement SRM, research now would be valuable for that later use.

Capitalism

It is unlikely that there will be serious attempts in the near future for phase 4 SRM. *Even if*, in decades soon, research, development, and understanding of impacts get to the point where starting phase 4 SRM becomes the lesser evil, it seems likely it wouldn't be started anyway under capitalism. Capitalist governments may deem it too economically or politically costly, at least without significant pressure on them. At such a point, labour movement campaigning for it to be started, with qualifications and criticisms, may be the best course of action. It *may* reach a point that even SRM carried out by untrustworthy and unstable actors – the world's capitalist governments – would seem the lesser risk compared to no SRM. We don't know.

Developments and industry should not be patented or closely guarded in a way which seeks to further the interests of either corporate profit or particular states. On the other hand we shouldn't relish an expansion and sharing out of additional potential military powers; nor empowering some maverick capitalist state, group of states, or billionaire to unilaterally start SRM on their own. Such unilateralism seems unlikely now: but in the future, as crises bite, it may become possible.

SRM is not likely to be seriously attempted in the very near future (aside from on a research scale, "phase" 1 and 2, or at a push 3 – minimal global deployment for research only). Nor, with the current level of research, would it be correct to demand it. If it came to it, I think we'd have to oppose (beyond research scale) unilateral implementation of SRM, by any capitalist state or corporation, or small group of them. (That is, oppose unilateral actual if gradual deployment – phase 4; and probably oppose *unilateral* "phase 3".)

Cheapness

For capitalist states, immediate upfront cheapness may be decisive in making particular interventions seem more attractive. But not for us: there is plenty of wealth in the bank accounts of the wealthy!

What should we say of technical interventions on a potentially global scale or with global consequences, which may be the lesser evil if done well, but which we cannot trust a world of rival capitalist states to implement well? And for which there is currently so much technical complexity and uncertainty that we cannot currently reasonably hope to make detailed prescriptions?

Full-scale SRM would be a global initiative which would impact everyone, everywhere. Can we say – given a right to national self-determination – that every nation has a veto? Such a principle would likely mean SRM never being implemented, even if the vast majority of people supported it. Wouldn't other nations have a right to shield themselves from the worst impacts of global warming in extremis, i.e. implement SRM?

We should not trust bourgeois international treaties and institutions to effectively manage SRM. We should not oppose all such treaties, and indeed some are positive: though some currently *may* even be too strong. But they cannot be relied upon.

Immediately, *more research* is the most important demand the labour movement should be making on SRM.

In the next few years, if faced with concrete proposals or attempts to start large scale SRM (phase 4), still under capitalism, we must criticise its problems: insufficient research, specific impacts, and the rest. We must reaffirm that at best it is palliative. We should preach a lack of trust in the world's competing ruling classes to plan or carry it out well. We should however not simply blanket oppose it. Nor could we actively endorse or support it without significant qualifications.

As we fight to transform and rebuild the labour movement, and win it to fighting for ecological and social transformation, we should organise to make it evaluate SRM and intervene accordingly. For that, and for immediately posed questions, engaging with the debates technically as well as politically is important. But we shouldn't seek to be "the experts" on SRM, rather to organise for the labour movement internationally to take informed leadership in campaigning on SRM.

It should engage with peasant, indigenous, environmental and other movements, and scientists, and seek to formulate positions or demands around SRM. This might mean opposing certain proposals, supporting others, proposing modified combinations of different proposals, or other approaches. ☐

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Why we say: stop the slaughter

Debate

By Daniel Randall

Barry Finger ("Questioning the call for a ceasefire", *Solidarity* 689) wants us to support Israel in its immediate military conflict with Hamas. But if there is an abstract case for supporting a state in a war against a clerical-fascist militia, the means by which Israel carries out its side of that conflict puts it beyond support. Israel's military strategy, which aims to reduce Gaza to a "city of rubble", means it is not merely making war on Hamas, but on the population of Gaza as a whole. How many Palestinian lives are acceptable collateral in the pursuit of the destruction of Hamas?

And how many especially when there is little chance of the war "destroying" Hamas? Eric Lee, in a column this week arguing a similar conclusion to Barry's, writes that the Israeli armed forces may be within days or even hours of finishing off Hamas. They are not.

In 1982 Israel invaded Lebanon with the aim of "finishing off" the PLO and any military threat from the north. It had advantages which it does not have in Gaza. The Beirut government was also hostile to the PLO, and a thousands-strong Lebanese militia would ally with Israel in controlling south Lebanon. The Palestinians were a ghettoised minority in Lebanon.

Hezbollah

The PLO leadership fled to Tunis. But the net result by the time that Israel withdrew from south Lebanon in 2000 was to generate a fascistic-Islamist anti-Israeli force in Lebanon, Hezbollah, many times stronger and more intractable than the scrappy PLO of 1982, and to help make Hamas strong in Gaza (and even, it seems, Lebanon too).

Hamas probably does not have majority support in Gaza, but it has wide support. Young boys who survive in Gaza are now being trained by Israel to want to become Hamas "martyrs" when they grow up. Hamas has an apparatus outside Gaza, and strength in the West Bank. It is not a force that can be neatly packed off to Tunis, or wherever. Netanyahu's war is not, and could never have been, a war to surgically remove an external military tumour with minimal damage to the civilian body.

Israel has not seriously contested the Hamas-run Health Ministry's figures of over 10,000 dead (over 4,000 children), and has claimed only a fraction of those deaths as killings of Hamas cadre. The war will kill many more if it extends to the West Bank and the northern border. It will not finish off Hamas. Only political efforts will do that.

Workers' Liberty supports a ceasefire because it will pause the slaughter, and could allow space for mobilisation for a more lasting peace. We have also consistently and prominently supported the demand to free hostages. The front page of the edition of *Solidarity* with the editorial Barry objected to said: "Ceasefire – End Siege – Free Hostages." Support for a ceasefire – from both sides – also makes clear that we oppose Hamas's rocket attacks on Israeli civilian targets – mostly ineffective, but wholly reactionary in their aims.

Barry justifies his support for Israel's war partially on the basis that, in Hamas, it is fighting a force like Daesh ("Isis") or Boko Haram, an army with a globalist project for a worldwide caliphate, rather than a nationalist movement. But the Israeli attack on Gaza is not like the US-Iranian operation to drive Daesh out of Mosul in 2016-7 – and we did not endorse even that (although we didn't campaign to stop it). US officials have been at pains to tell the Israeli government that it took nine months to drive out Daesh, and 10,000-plus civilian deaths. And that was much "easier". Daesh had arrived from outside to take Mosul, and succeeded because the Iraqi army ran away. There was wide opposition to it in the civilian population. The US and Iranians could hand over to the Iraqi government, with grudging assent from the people.

There have been protests against Hamas in Gaza, including very recently before the current war, and opinion polling shows them far from universally popular. But, having razed Gaza and killed thousands, Israel can hardly count on any, even grudging, assent for whatever "post-Hamas" arrangement it envisions.

Hamas

Barry's assessment of Hamas's political character also seems wrong to me. Islamist currents, even those at the fascistic end of the political range, are not all the same, and the situations where they gain control are not all the same. Hamas did not arrive in Gaza as an external military force. It does not proclaim a caliphate as its aim; Hamas's nationalism is an ultra-reactionary religious nationalism, but it surely is nationalism. In both its 1988 and 2017 charters, it describes its project in terms of an effort to reconquer the territory of (pre-1948 British Mandate) *Palestine* for Islam.

Barry asks what Workers' Liberty's support for Israel's right to self-defence means in practice, if we oppose what Israel is doing now. I'm not a military strategist or security expert, and it's not our job to pose as security advisers to the Israeli state. But, in brief, had the Israeli military, on 7 October, been less focused on providing security for armed settlers in the West Bank, and more alert to the threat to civilians on the Gaza border, it could have taken action to save their lives. Of course we would support that; only those who see all Israeli Jews as legitimate targets could possibly have opposed it.

Deflect

If the Israeli military strengthens protections for civilian communities on the border – it is surely easier to fend off bulldozers and trucks than to fend off rockets, which Israel already does – then that will protect Israelis much better than the current atrocities. Netanyahu wants to deflect inquiry into why the border defences failed, but why should we?

The definition of "self-defence" cannot be stretched to cover any action taken "against Hamas", no matter how high the number of Palestinian civilian deaths, without becoming unmoored from morality, or even from realistic calculation, if one wishes to think solely in those terms. Nor can support for this war be deduced from our support for Israel's right to exist. Hamas aims at the destruction of Israel, but is not capable of achieving it in the current war. That would only be in prospect if Hezbollah, Iran, Syria, and others also intervened against Israel. If that happened, it would surely trigger a wider, possibly global, conflict: a different war, in which, moreover, specific questions of national self-determination, both Israeli Jewish and Palestinian Arab, would likely be drowned.

Meanwhile Israel's actions make the widening of the conflict, and thus the risk of a more direct existential threat, more likely, not less.

Barry has, although I'm sure he'll baulk at the comparison, become a kind of mirror image of some of those on the left who apologised for the 7 October massacres. Not those who uncritically cheered them on, but those whose apologism was subtler, arguing that while civilian deaths were shocking, Hamas's attacks were an inevitable lashing-out against Israeli oppression. "Yes, the violence is regrettable, but ultimately it's self-defence" is a formulation that apologists for Hamas or Israel's war could both use, and have used.

Barry ends his critique by saying that socialists can not "opt out of selecting between the only horrible alternatives that actually do exist." But I put it to Barry that "selecting between horrible alternatives" is not the business of revolutionary socialist activists. The "lesser evil" outcome Barry presumably wants, a relatively "surgical" operation to uproot Hamas and free the hostages, was never in prospect, and we cannot hope to counsel Netanyahu's government to achieve it even if it was. The illusion that we can will stop us doing what we can and must do; striving, even when our resources are small, to change the conditions that produce "only horrible alternatives." We will inhibit our ability to do that if we cannot, in the face of wanton slaughter, even bring ourselves to say "stop". ☐

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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.

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

In workplaces, trade unions, and Labour organisations; among students; in local campaigns; on the left and in wider political alliances we stand for:

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

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

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Story hour at the fire station

Diary of a firefighter

By Adrian Noble

More than fires, or poles, or food, stories and gossiping are the absolute essence of the fire brigade. Without them, every fire and rescue service would be on its knees in days. They can travel to every corner of the brigade in a matter of hours.

After two and a half years at station I have heard certain stories repeated over a dozen times. Sometimes, if you don't have a decent job for a while, it's only storytelling and gossiping that takes the edge off firefighters living on top of each other for long shifts. Here are the rules as I understand them, honed by generations of tea drinking and religiously adhered to.

- Traditional topics include fuck-ups, shouts, family events, football, secondary employment, grievances, drunken hi-jinks, but anything goes really. There's no statue of limitations, and it can be second, third, fourth or fifth-hand. Like a fine wine, certain iconic stories only improve with age and each retelling.
- Project your voice and command the room. This is your stage. Your colleagues are your captive audience. Like most public speaking, it comes down to a combination of confidence and trust in your material.
- Paint a picture at great length. The problem that needs to be solved is the same one that unfortunately birthed cricket – during a slow spell at a quiet station, there may be days rather than hours to kill. No detail is too insignificant.
- Specifically, and this is absolutely non-negotiable, the make and model of any cars involved in the story, no matter how tangentially, must be mentioned. Feel free to reference individuals by their cars. It is similarly important to spend several minutes recalling the name and current posting of a firefighter you knew 15 years ago if needs be.
- Physical comedy strongly recommended. We want impressions, absurd facial expressions, dynamic body language. Have fun with it.
- If we're interrupted – by a shout, or the guvnor dragging us to the yard for training – even a 15 or 20 minute break is not necessarily an impediment to finishing the yarn.
- And finally, don't be a grass. If it's about something sensitive and not widely known, don't drop someone in it. But if it's not sensitive, absolutely drop them in it. ☐

Antisemitism a factor in Russia

Letter

Michael Baker's discontent (*Solidarity* 689) with the sentence added in sub-editing to *Solidarity* 688 to signal how there come to be so many people of Russian background in Israel must be partly down to us being too elliptical.

The sentence said that Russians came to Israel in the 1990s "fleeing antisemitism", not that they were fleeing antisemitic *violence*. It did not seek to deny that better economic prospects in Israel, and the fact that Israel would let them in, were factors. I had in mind the book *Love and Math*, by Edward Frenkel. Frenkel describes how as a talented young mathematician in the 1980s, he was barred because he is Jewish from Russia's only pure-maths university (Moscow State Uni). He enrolled at the Gas and Oil Institute and, with other Jewish students, climbed walls and crept through corridors to get to the MSU maths classes.

He wasn't beaten up or killed. But... antisemitism? Yes. Given the importance of maths in Russian academia, the centrality of MSU, etc. the central government must consciously have licensed it. Even if by the 1980s many fared better than Frenkel, adults in 1989 would remember worse antisemitism in the 60s and 70s? And think that in a period of turmoil (which it clearly was by 1989) antisemitism might get worse again?

The *big majority* of USSR Jews left, and starting with large numbers in 1989, well before "shock therapy". Among "other Soviet citizens" the big majority did *not* leave.

The Russian-Israeli Jews are now on only slightly less than the average income for the Israeli-born, but less, although many had good qualifications from Russia.

It wasn't immediate luxury in Israel: many were housed in caravan parks, and had trouble getting their qualifications recognised. And they had to learn Hebrew. ☐

Martin Thomas, London

A railway documentary

Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

Night Mail is said to be one of the most popular British documentaries ever made. With lyrics by W H Auden, music by Benjamin Britten, produced and directed by Basil Wright and Harry Watt, this story of the night mail train's journey from Euston station to Glasgow (and onward) was part of what was broadly known as the British documentary movement. It was shot by the General Post Office (GPO) Film Unit in 1936.

In the 1920s and 30s there was a sense, among some, that society might be improved if people were better informed as to how society "worked". It was a vague notion, partly inspired by John Grierson (head of the Film Unit) reflecting on his time in the USA. *Night Mail* was also, according to publicity, designed to improve the morale of postal workers who, like most workers in Britain, were by 1936 in the grip of a depression. No-one appears to have thought that the postal workers' morale might be improved by a pay rise, wages having seriously fallen by the mid-30s.

Nevertheless, the film is a joy to watch, and although I am no fan of Auden his "verse commentary", set to the rhythm of the train rattling over the tracks, is a delight. ☐

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Pic: @zenscara

Back Vicky Blake for UCU GS

By a UCU member

On 13 November Vicky Blake announced her candidacy for General Secretary of the University and College Union. Other candidates so far are Jo Grady (re-standing), Saira Weiner from the UCU Left/SWP, and Euan McGaughey, a law academic who brought a legal case over pension misevaluation.

Vicky, a former Vice President and President of the union, is standing as an independent. She has a background in fighting casualisation, has recently championed solidarity with Ukrainian trade unionists, and has been a consistent left critic of the leadership and defender of union democracy.

The ballot opens on 5 January and closes on 1 March 2024.

Meanwhile, in the latest reballot for industrial action in the UCU's long-running dispute on pay and conditions, the union failed to reach the legal turnout threshold. On a 42.6% turnout, just over 68% voted for strike action and nearly 76% voted for action short of strike action.

UCU general secretary Jo Grady responded to the vote by bemoaning anti-strike laws (reasonably, as far as it goes) and welcoming employers agreeing to further talks (something that was always going to happen).

In contrast, activists in the union blame the undermining of industrial strategy agreed by the union's democratic structures; a delay in starting the reballot (despite a conference decision to ballot over the summer); many other halts in action and subversions of union democracy – all faults of the Grady leadership. To those factors can be added a loss of members and fatigue with the length of the dispute.

A Branch Delegate Meeting and Higher Education Committee will be held in December. In the run up to that meeting, the left in the union needs to develop a comprehensive critique of the last period, out of which some strategy to reverse this big setback can be built. ☐

Vote no to TOCs offer!

Off The Rails

The Rail Delivery Group has made a new offer to the RMT rail union to settle the long-running dispute over pay and conditions at mainline Train Operating Companies (TOCs). The offer is a 5% pay increase for 2022-3, or a flat-rate £1,750 increase, whichever is higher for a given grade.

Formally, the offer is "strings free", in that it does not require RMT to accept job cuts or changes to terms and conditions. It also includes a no-compulsory-redundancies guarantee running through to the end of 2024. The offer also puts the withdrawal of the ticket office closure programme in writing, and ends the current recruitment freeze.

But acceptance of the offer would commit RMT to a TOC-by-TOC negotiation process, through which TOCs "may propose workforce reforms", covering pretty much every aspect of our working conditions.

RMT has chosen to put this offer to TOC-by-TOC referendums, which close on 30 November. This means that some TOCs could accept the deal, and some could reject. Those that reject will be left to fight on alone, and even those that accept will face renewed battles against "workforce reforms", which they will then have to fight on an individual TOC basis rather than as part of a unified national dispute. By even agreeing to put the offer to referendum in this way, the union has surrendered one of our most powerful weapons: a single, unified, national dispute with a live industrial action mandate, which we just voted overwhelmingly to renew.

Overall, the offer is not radically different from the one we rejected in February. At the time, our leaders said that offer was "dreadful". The offer hasn't changed much... but perhaps their will to fight has ebbed.

As with the Network Rail referendum, the RMT Executive is not making a recommendation. However, they have been looking for an exit strategy from the dispute for months. Only, they-have never countenanced the one that would give us the best chance of "exiting" by actually winning: a significant escalation of action.

After a dispute that has gone on for more than a year, and with the prospect of a significant amount of back pay hitting our bank accounts before Christmas, there's a fair amount of war-weariness and desire to just have the thing over and done with.

With less than three weeks to deliberate and vote, we urgently need a campaign network to coordinate and mobilise for a vote to reject. Even if we're ultimately unsuccessful, a strong "Rail Workers Say No" campaign will put us in a better position for mobilising in the fights to come. ☐

Tube mandate renewed with pay and cleaner ballot next

Tubeworker

Rail union RMT has renewed its industrial action mandate on the Tube in the fight for jobs, pensions, and agreements for the fifth time. Members voted by a 95.92% majority for continued action, on a 54.74% turnout.

This shows a clear will to continue fighting over these issues, and is a testament to the hard work of reps and activists in clearing the arbitrary, undemocratic thresholds of the Tories' anti-strike laws. But to win major concessions, we need to put the employer under more pressure than they have felt recently. Strikes due to take place in July (all grades) and October (stations) were cancelled at the last minute.

The company has budged on some of the stations staffing issues. But Tubeworker believes sustained strikes could have forced even greater concessions – and still could, on the still outstanding aspects of the dispute.

RMT has written to the employer to demand that a planned consultation into pension reform, due to begin in 2024, will be stopped. If the consultation takes place, it will be an inevitable prelude to TfL/LUL initiating the actual process of reform. They are also preparing massive job cuts on Fleet, with the "Trains Modernisation" cuts plan for drivers sure to come back in some form too.

Following a reps' assembly on 3 November, RMT has announced it has rejected LUL's latest pay offer of 5% for 2023-4, and will prepare for an industrial action ballot to win a better offer.

That ballot needs to be organised with urgency. As in any fight with the bosses, some workmates are more up for it than others; Aslef, who have a slim majority of drivers, have accepted the deal. We need a campaign that empowers those who are up for the fight to spread that spirit.

The campaign must also re-emphasise the flat-rate element of RMT's pay demand. Winning an increased percentage offer would be positive, but RMT demanded a £5,000 flat-rate minimum for a reason. The £4,300 flat-rate deal won on Eurostar shows it can be done.

We know bosses were panicked by our plan to conduct a rolling strike that would have shut down the job for a week in July. Naming two sets of that rolling action, either side of a pay period, would mean that no-one will have to strike for more than four days.

Meanwhile, RMT cleaner reps are working hard to prepare for an upcoming industrial action ballot.

Cleaning contractor ABM has displaced dozens of cleaners via its "Project Lean" restructure, and is yet to respond to an RMT pay claim demanding a pay rise and company sick pay. Meanwhile, the value of cleaners' pay falls behind inflation, and they continue to face a situation in which they cannot afford to be ill.

The union has rightly concluded that enough is enough, and it's time for action. Cleaner reps and activists will need the assistance and support of LUL reps and activists in stations and depots to ensure the ballot gets over the line. The last RMT ballot on ABM, in November 2019, missed the Tories' anti-strike threshold by 11 votes! ☐

•Abridged from the *Tubeworker* blog workersliberty.org/twblogger

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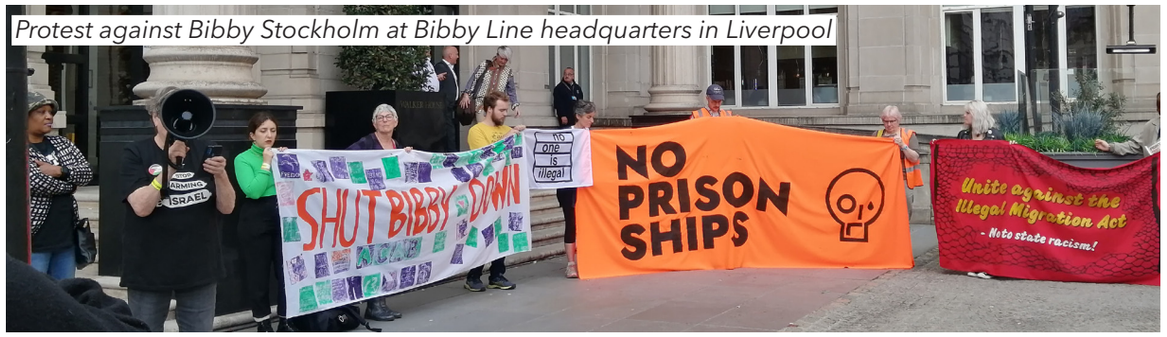

Protest against Bibby Stockholm at Bibby Line headquarters in Liverpool

Braverman's out. But her politics?

By Matt Cooper

Suella Braverman's sacking as Home Secretary on Monday 13 November shows much about the direction of, and tensions within, the Conservative Party.

The immediate reason for Braverman's dismissal was her refusal to expurgate the most egregious parts of her article in *The Times* of 8 November, but the underlying reasons are more political. Braverman has consciously and cynically shifted to a hard-right position. It would appear that some of this was licensed by Number 10, but tension between her and the core round Sunak has become more evident recently. She asserted in September that multiculturalism has "failed" and in early November that rough sleepers in tents had made a "lifestyle choice".

Her *Times* article went considerably further than her previous rightward forays. It argued the police have developed a "double standard", tolerating (and even embracing) left-wing demonstrations such as Black Lives Matter, but not anti-lockdown activists, football fans and (in her terms) the nationalist right. This followed on her branding Gaza-ceasefire demonstrations as simply "hate marches" and saying that the one planned for Armistice Day, 11 Nov, should be banned.

This was not so much a dog whistle as a full canine howl. Unsurprisingly, it attracted the real dogs of the far right to "defend" the Cenotaph.

There is some base of support for Braverman within the Conservative party, mainly among the overlapping membership of groups of MPs such as the Northern Research Group and the New Conservatives, but in total those amount to no more than fifty MPs. Many of these are from "Red Wall" seats and will likely not survive the next election.

Braverman's defenestration and the ensuing reshuffle suggests a shift of emphasis from the leadership away from the full throttle populism that hard-right block favours.

Although Braverman's replacement, James Cleverly, was appointed to the Foreign Office by Liz Truss, and voted for Brexit, he is not identified with the Tory ultras. He was a strong supporter of both Johnson and Truss, and is now a Sunak loyalist, which does not suggest a strong political core beyond personal ambition. He has advocated the UK remaining in the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). With the Supreme Court judgement on the government's Rwanda scheme expected on Wednesday 15 Nov, after *Solidarity* goes to press, that is significant.

If the court ruling goes against the government it will fuel calls from the Conservative ultras to leave the ECHR.

Even more telling is the replacement of Cleverly at the Foreign Office by the former Conservative Prime Minister, David Cameron.

Cameron departed from the New Right playbook in an important way. He maintained the neoliberal elements for the Thatcher agenda and mobilised the rhetoric of austerity to reduce the size of the state after the New Labour years, but joined that to a more liberal social ideology. Within narrow limits: his Home Secretary was Theresa May, who developed the "Hostile Environment" regime on immigration at the Home Office that led to the Windrush scandal.

A possible shift by the Conservatives to less abrasive rhetoric would be relative. The anti-immigrant racism will not abate, particularly if the 15 Nov Supreme Court ruling goes against the government, although since 2020 the court has been cautious about overturning government policy.

Similarly, the government seems committed to further restrictions on the right to protest. Anti-trade-union measures, pro-fossil-fuel policies, and more will likely continue unabated. And whatever the wrapping, the Tories' drive to pursue neoliberal cuts to welfare to pay for tax cuts for the better off will be a central concern.

Nor will the hard-right populism of Braverman disappear. If it is not fully expressed in the Conservative Party, Reform UK (and worse) will put pressure on the Conservatives from the right. □

• The far right on 11 November: see page 6.

Capitalism, socialism, and war

Socialism vs Capitalism

By Martin Thomas

Battle of Busaco, 1810

Some hunger-gatherer societies have a lot of violence and (small) wars. Others are peaceful and gentle.

War is not hardwired into humanity. If some propensity to violence is hardwired – maybe it is – we are malleable enough that societies can re-channel that propensity in harmless ways.

Marx wrote in *Capital* that the rise of capitalism came with "the commercial war of the European nations, with the globe for a theatre. It begins with the revolt of the Netherlands from Spain [1568-1648], assumes giant dimensions in England's Anti-Jacobin War [1792-1802], and is still going on in the opium wars against China [1839–42 and 1856–60], etc."

These were mostly wars between capitalist states to conquer trade access, preferences and monopolies. In the same era European powers waged many wars to conquer tracts of Asia, the Americas, and Africa.

In the era of high imperialism, in the late 19th and early 20th century, the world was more tautly divided up into rival territorial empires of the European powers. The big capitalist powers developed standing armies and navies with destructive powers far beyond those of earlier times (and that trend has continued), constantly posing the threat of wars for redivision.

War had been devastating before. The Thirty Years War of 1618-48, starting with a feud between Protestant and Catholic princes in Germany, killed almost a tenth of the whole population of Europe. The Taiping war of 1850-64 in China, between peasant rebels and the Manchu Qing dynasty, killed maybe more than World War One. But the new "militarism", as socialists called it, made for quicker, vast, mechanical killing: World Wars One and Two.

Since 1945 the capitalist big powers have generally thought they will profit better in a relatively open world market than by attempting costly conquests. And indeed Aldi and Tesco can compete without gunfire, as feudal and absolutist dynasties scarcely could.

But the world of 1945 had Stalinist power, and of today has many medium capitalist powers, unable to triumph through market competition and geared to the older territorial paleo-imperialism: thus the USSR conquest of Eastern Europe, Serbia in Kosova, Russia in Ukraine…

The USA has set itself since 1945 to be the "police" of the capitalist world market, to copper-fasten the smoothing of territory into that world market, often against the will of the peoples of the territory. Its last ventures in such policing, Iraq 2003-11 and Afghanistan 2001-21, failed at great cost in lives and treasure.

Capitalism generates nationalism in parallel with its generation of (limited, bourgeois) democracy. It has thus generated, from the early 19th century and at increased tempo in 1945-75, a series of national wars, about securing national independence, territory, security.

Marxists have regarded national wars for liberation from empires large and small as progressive. National warfare can however curdle and morph over time into chauvinist and imperialistic wars. We have seen such curdling with Israel's successive wars. The term "chauvinism" comes from Nicolas Chauvin, a diehard warrior in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars after 1792, which started off as battles of French national and revolutionary self-defence.

A nationalistic root can also be subsumed into reactionary wars shaped by political religion: see Hamas and the Taliban.

Capitalism also generates the potential to end wars.

It creates the economic basis for competitive urges to be expressed in making and seeking recognition for efforts for the common good within an economic life based on cooperation and providing enough for all. Peacefully, rather than in battles to gain more land, or to make one dynasty or religious hierarchy outdo another.

It generates the working class, the first class in history to see itself, when fully mobilised and self-aware, as global and internationalist class, and to set international solidarity and mutual aid as a guiding rule.

From the working class as it is now, trammelled by capitalism and its ideologies, to the working class fully mobilised and self-aware, is a long journey. To take ourselves and our fellow-workers on that journey is our task. □

Solidarity

For a workers' government

VOTE LLOYD-MOLONEY TO REBUILD UNION DENSITY

By a PCS member

The elections for Assistant General Secretary (AGS) and General Secretary (GS) in PCS are underway (ballot opened 9 Nov, closes 14 Dec).

The ruling Left Unity (LU) group is standing Fran Heathcote for GS and Paul O'Connor for AGS. Both will, if elected, take the enormous salary for these posts (guaranteed pay progression to £103,100 pa) in a union where, under their leadership, tens of thousands of members are on or close to the minimum wage.

In contrast John Moloney, current PCS AGS and the candidate of the Independent Left (IL), has returned over £120k to the PCS Fighting Fund since his election in 2019 and has tied his AGS income to the DWP London Executive Officer pay maximum.

Marion Lloyd, the Broad Left Network's (BLN) candidate for General Secretary, is committed to taking only her current salary (£30,000 pa) and tying her future income to annual pay deals in her current department. The pay interests of members will be the pay interests of Lloyd and Moloney, who are standing on a joint ticket.

Neither LU candidate admits that under their leadership PCS membership is less than 50% in swathes of the civil service, an

John Moloney

issue vital to union power and a key theme in the Moloney/Lloyd campaign.

The LU candidates claim that only they can win for members but presided over a pay freeze in 2021, a massively below inflation award in 2022, and a below-inflation award, the worst in the public sector, in 2023.

Unsurprisingly, Heathcote and O'Connor have repeatedly refused to debate with Moloney and Lloyd in front of members. In their absence, deeply unimpressive to the members who have attended the hustings, the IL/BLN candidates have set out their positive programme for change.

Just as revealingly, PCS's "head office" obstructed the efforts of London and South East Region to hold hustings and build membership participation in the election, claiming they lack the "locus" to do so. However, the outgoing General Secretary, the Returning Officer for the election and not a member of PCS, has repeatedly, unashamedly, ensured people know he favours the LU candidates.

LU claim that only their candidates can unite the activist base despite:

- LU relying to a considerable extent on the PCS machine in their campaign.
- Mass resignations from LU of longstanding activists in Revenue & Customs.
- The resignations from LU of two longstanding Black NEC members, after being told "We Don't Do Black for Black's sake".
- A former LU NEC member, who was subsequently made redundant, imploring members to vote for Moloney and Lloyd because of her woeful experience of LU's leadership.
- LU refusing to debate their opponents, who are supported by a very large number of activists.

These elections must be the start of a fight to transform PCS from a top-down organisation, dominated by a narrow stratum of bureaucrats and careerist lay officials, to an open, inclusive, democratic, lay led trade union. LU members should break with the LU leadership. Activists should throw themselves into the campaign to elect Moloney and Lloyd. ☐