



For social ownership of the banks and industry

“CHANGE WILL COME FROM US — THE PEOPLE OF THE TWO NATIONS”



Tal Mitnick is the first Israeli military refuser to be jailed in the current war. See page 2.

Pic: @OrenZiv, April 2023. Tal's sign: "We will die before we enlist [in the IDF]"

Uri Weltmann interview

And more on the Gaza war, Hamas, and Israel-Palestine

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Full ceasefire, peace, two states!



Editorial

In late December, 18-year-old Tal Mitnick became the first Israeli to be jailed for refusing to serve in the Israeli Defence Force since the war began. Mitnick has [said](#): "This land has a problem – there are two nations with an undeniable connection to this place[...] we could not erase the Palestinian people or their connection to this land, just as the Jewish people or our connection to that same land cannot be erased. The problem here is supremacy, the belief that this land belongs to only one people. [...]"

"The violence that the army uses and has used over the years does not protect us [...] In practice, it is nothing more than an army of occupation and its maintenance. At the moment of truth it has abandoned the residents of the south and the entire country. [...]"

"The change will not come from the corrupt politicians here, or from the leaders of Hamas, who are corrupt as

well. It will come from us – the people of the two nations."

On 28 December, around 1,000 Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel rallied in Tel Aviv to demand a ceasefire agreement, the return of hostages, and a peace settlement between Israel and the Palestinians. The protest, organised by Standing Together, was the largest action in Israel explicitly calling for an end to the war since 7 October. Chants and slogans included "In Gaza and Sderot [an Israeli town on the Gaza border], children want to live."

According to the UN, 150,000 more Palestinians have been displaced from central Gaza as the Israeli army advanced on the Bureij, Nuseirat, and Maghazi refugee camps. Israel's war has now killed over 22,000 people in Gaza, many of them children. Over 50,000 are injured. Large swathes of northern Gaza have been reduced to rubble and ashes, becoming an uninhabitable wasteland.

On 5 January, Yoav Gallant, Israel's minister of defence, set out a plan for Gaza's future. Gallant envisages war continuing until all hostages are freed and Hamas's "military and governing capabilities" are dismantled. Then, Israel would retain "overall security control", with unspecified Palestinian bodies assuming day-to-day civil administration.

Endgames

As with all the "endgames" suggested by Israeli government ministers so far, Gallant's plan is unviable. However long Israel's war, Hamas will survive outside Gaza, and in Gaza at least in

the form of small guerrilla units (which will recruit from the rage and despair), until other politics undercut it. There is no Palestinian civil authority willing to ride to power over ashes, on the back of Israeli tanks.

The assassination of Hamas leader Saleh Arouri in a Hezbollah stronghold in Beirut on 2 January has increased the risk of a widening of the war. There have been repeated exchanges of fire between Israel and Hezbollah since October. On 25 December, an Israeli strike near Damascus, Syria, killed Sayyed Razi Mousavi, a senior Iranian military official. The Houthis, another Iran-backed Islamist militia based in Yemen, are carrying out drone attacks on shipping traffic in the Red Sea.

Iranian regional imperialism is a significant military element. Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis, Assad's regime in Syria, and the Iranian regime itself represent a rival imperialist pole that opposes and resists Israel in the name of a reactionary alternative.

As its aerial bombardments and ground invasion go on, Israel continues to claim it makes efforts to avoid targeting civilians. However, there is much evidence of disregard for civilian life and willingness to destroy civilian infrastructure. Israel's retort, that Hamas's embedding within and beneath civilian infrastructure makes some "collateral damage" unavoidable, does not excuse the IDF. Its strategy is only possible on the basis of a profound dehumanisation of the Palestinians, seen as an enemy people.

Senior figures in Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party, including Netanyahu

himself, have again raised the prospect of "ethnically cleansing" the Palestinians out of Gaza altogether. Israel is unlikely to be able to force Egypt, the only plausible receiving country, to accept expelled Palestinian refugees. But the fact such discussions are taking place, in forums that are by no means fringe, is indicative of the way in which many on the Israeli right see the current war as a means to expand and deepen Jewish supremacy.

Israeli settler and state violence in the occupied West Bank has heightened, with recent army raids described by Al-Jazeera as "the most intense" since 7 October. Israel is withholding tax revenue it collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority, the body that governs the areas of Palestinian semi-autonomy in the West Bank, despite US pressure to release it.

Activists internationally are right to demand arms embargoes and the withdrawal of military aid to Israel, although Israel is a net exporter of arms and not dependent on further imports for its war. Pressure from a growing peace movement, and the wider movement led by families of hostages held in Hamas captivity demanding a hostage-exchange agreement, stand the best immediate chance of imposing restraint on the government and thus saving Palestinian lives.

Socialist-internationalists who believe in equal rights for all peoples will do most to bring that horizon closer by supporting forces inside Israeli and Palestinian society resisting war, occupation, and racism and fighting for a shared and equal future. □

Solidarity 696

We are back on our usual weekly schedule, after our special Easter Rising pamphlet issue and a Xmas/ New Year break. *Solidarity* 696 will be 17 January. *Solidarity* will probably skip a Wednesday on 24 January to make space for a new issue of *Women's Fightback*, due soon. □

Popes, presidents, and markets



Socialism vs Capitalism

By Martin Thomas

"I used to think that if there was reincarnation, I wanted to come back as the president or the pope... But now I would like to come back as the bond market. You can intimidate everybody", said the US political operator James Carville.

Under capitalism, capitalists as well as workers are dominated by "the markets", an entity constructed by humans but which then dominates us. Falling unemployment, for ex-

ample, is regularly [reported](#) as "bad news for markets".

Fully-developed socialism means "from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs", with economic life consciously planned, so no markets.

But, as Trotsky [wrote](#): "The deathblow to money fetishism will be struck only upon that stage when the steady growth of social wealth has made us bipeds forget our miserly attitude toward every excess minute of labour, and our humiliating fear about the size of our ration".

In the meantime, he [added](#), for a workers' government (and not just in poverty-stricken Russia): "The budget and credit mechanism is wholly adequate

for a planned distribution of the national income".

He denounced Stalin's efforts to set prices administratively, arguing that prices must be set by markets so as to give useful information about real costs.

Marx was scornful about "[recipes for the cookshops of the future](#)". But he both rejected "market socialism", in the sense of schemes to reset prices to make them all "fair", as proposed for example by [Pierre-Joseph Proudhon](#), and admitted [that](#) "communist society... as it emerges from capitalist society" would be "economically, morally, and intellectually, still stamped with the birthmarks of the old society".



His particular scheme, in his [Critique of the Gotha Programme](#) (not written for publication), makes little sense: that each worker be paid according to their social labour-time contribution. Marx himself had shown that individual labour times in a capitalist economy will differ from their social labour-time equivalents, and the differences cannot be calculated on the spot unless the economy is already planned with comprehensive knowl-

edge, i.e. unless we don't need wages and prices at all.

When the German socialists tried to explain more, around their Erfurt Programme (1891), they [wrote](#) of "developments of the existing system of wage-payment". Frederick Engels, who followed their work closely, did not demur.

Only, more equalised. But that "only" says a great deal. So does the free provision of health care and education, also demanded then. A workers' revolution can reshape markets rather than abolishing them, and still be a revolution.

Critical there, though, are the "markets" which connect present and future, like the "bond market". More on that next time. □

Run water, post, and other utilities as public services

By Alan Gilbert

One quarter of England depends on Thames Water for water and sewage. It is now so near being unable to deal with its debts that there is talk of the government renationalising it.

Why? After privatisation of water in 1989, the private owners sucked out billions in dividends, covered by loading the company with more and more debt.

Thames Water is also the worst water company in England for leaks due to ill-maintained pipes. Others do worse for dumping raw sewage into rivers,

but Thames Water is bad on that too.

All that comes from a basic public health function being run not as a public service, but as a private-profit operation.

The Post Office is still publicly owned, but in a "transitional" form, as a commercial company, run by its bosses on commercial criteria, where the government owns all the shares and mandates minimum service obligations, but stays at arm's length. The government's aim for many years has been to drive the Post Office to profitability so it can be sold off without government subsidy.

The Post Office made losses for 16 years up to 2016-7, but since then has made increased profits almost every year. It has paid its bosses hugely. Paula Vennells got £4.5 million as top boss in 2012-9, and Nick Read, CEO since then, has recently been shamed into paying back £455,000 bonus awarded on top of a £400,000 salary.

No wonder the Post Office was slow to admit that the Horizon computer software bought from Fujitsu was falsely flagging sub-post-office operators as fraudsters. In the year it admitted that, profits would slump and the top boss

would lose their bonus. If utilities were run as public services, then within an overall capitalist system much would still go wrong. As socialists, we fight for democratic and workers' control, open scrutiny, and managerial jobs done at workers' wages.

Privatisation, and being driven into privatisation, worsen all the effects of the capitalist environment.

Demand that Labour commit to making water a public service again, and ratchet the Post Office back from pre-privatisation to being a public service! □

Reject new schools "guidance"

By Rebecca Knights

On 19 December, the government released draft guidance for schools for "supporting" trans students. It does little to provide clarity for educators and nothing to support vulnerable students. Instead we have a document full of transphobia and erasure. It does not even include the word "trans".

It is only "guidance", in fact draft guidance, not any sort of binding law. Schools should continue to abide by the Equalities Act and the established guidance, [Keeping](#)

[Children Safe in Education](#). Schoolworkers' unions should push school managements and local authorities openly to defy the new draft. For guidance that has been written by schools, for schools, I can recommend the [Brighton and Hove Trans Inclusion Schools Toolkit](#).

As well as stating that educators should "out" students to their families by default, the new non-statutory guidance states that where a child identifies as trans "no teacher or pupil should be compelled to use these preferred pronouns".

Here is where the guidance

fails in its promise to clarify the position for educators.

Keeping Children Safe in Education, the established document all schools follow for safeguarding procedures, states "failing to listen to the views of a child" is seen as an example of "poor practice" and describes bullying as "including prejudice-based and discriminatory bullying".

Trust

It states that "risks can be compounded where children who are LGBT lack a trusted adult with whom they can be open."

The Equalities Act 2010 has

gender reassignment as a protected characteristic. This means a student who uses a chosen name, or wishes to be referred to by a different pronoun, is protected under law. To deliberately misgender is a discriminatory act under law. In leaked information to *Schools Week*, the Department for Education's own lawyers have highlighted several passages in the draft guidance that will fail to stand up to legal challenge.

Using a correct pronoun or using non-gendered language in the classroom is actually a very simple thing to do.

It isn't noticed by the majority of students, but for those who are questioning their gender it makes a massive difference.

Allowing adults to condone and promote misgendering means that school is no longer a safe space for any of our LGBTQ+ children. When a school community loses trust in those who are there to safeguard, every child suffers.

You can respond to the [consultation](#) on the gov.uk website. You can also email gqcguidance.consultation@education.gov.uk. □

Free Joe Outlaw! End IPP sentences!

By Katy Dollar

Joe Outlaw is in solidarity confinement, and in jail indefinitely, despite his actual sentence, 12 years ago, being what would normally result in four and a half years jail.

On 21 June he got out of a caged yard and climbed onto the roof of HMP Frankland, in Durham. He was protesting about the treatment of prisoners on "imprisonment for public protection" (IPP) sentences, who have no set date for release.

Tony Blair launched IPP sentences in 2005, claiming they would protect the public from serious offenders whose crimes did not merit a life sen-

tence. They were abolished in 2012 after evidence they were "unclear and inconsistent" and resulted in people stuck in jail for many years, often for minor crimes and sometimes no crimes at all, with no route to release.

Thousands of prisoners are still being held under sentences the state has admitted are unjust and unhelpful. They could not face the same sentencing if they committed the same offence today.

Outlaw was on the list of prisoners "likely to attempt escape", as earlier in 2023 he'd escaped to the roof at HMP Manchester (Strangeways). Outlaw wrote "Free lppz" on

Strangeways' roof in gloss paint that kept running in the rain.

Now 37, he was given an IPP in 2011 after robbing his local takeaway with a fake firearm while high on drugs. Outlaw is a care leaver who says getting an IPP rather than an ordinary sentence was in part due to past offences including firing a pellet gun in a park as a minor.

Outlaw told the *Guardian* that he had attempted suicide, by setting fire to his cell. That led to an additional conviction for arson. He claims other IPPers have ended up committing murder in prison, figuring out they are basically in for life anyway. □



Upcoming meetings

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

Sunday 14 January, 11am: "Metabolism" discussion – ecosocialist reading group

Sunday 14 January, 2pm: Socialist Feminist Reading Group: Effra Social, 89 Effra Rd, London SW2 1DF

Tuesday 16 January, 6.30pm: The Labour party after Corbyn, The Lost Wanderer, 46 Leazes Park Road, Newcastle, NE1 4PG

Wednesday 17 January, 6.30pm: Israel-Palestine: unravelling the issues, Zionism and the formation of Israel, New Cross Learning, New Cross Road, London, SE14 6AS

Thursday 18 January, 3pm: Tubeworker monthly meeting

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



Using Gaza to undermine solidarity for Ukraine



By Jim Denham

Israel's war with Hamas has come as a godsend to Vladimir Putin, allowing him to court the Global South with the claim – true as far as it goes – that the West's apparent indifference to Palestinian deaths proves the "rules-based" order is based upon hypocrisy and double standards.

And, of course, Israel's horrific pulverisation of Gaza provides political cover for Russia's systematic targeting of schools, hospitals and civilian homes in Ukraine.

It would be untrue and unfair to suggest that people like those who run the *Morning Star* and the Stop the War Coalition take any satisfaction from the devastation of Gaza, but it has certainly allowed them to claim that the call for a ceasefire in both conflicts is essentially the same thing – despite the obvious fact that in Gaza a ceasefire is a precondition for peace and eventual justice,

whereas in Ukraine it would mean a victory for Russian imperialism and the likely destruction of Ukraine as an independent nation.

But for those who have never supported Ukraine's right to defend itself, and have sought, ever since February 2022, to justify (or at least "contextualise") Putin's invasion, what's happening in Gaza makes their case, once not very popular on the left and the labour movement, much easier to sell. The *Morning Star* has been attempting to link calls for a ceasefire in both conflicts ever since Israel's attack on Gaza began – though these calls, often couched in pacifistic terms, sit somewhat uneasily alongside articles like those by Ramsey Baroud (12 Oct) celebrating the Hamas attack and John Wight (17 Oct) looking forward to Hezbollah joining the war.

The supposed linkage between Gaza and Ukraine has been made time and again in the pages of the MS.

An editorial (18 Oct) that correctly denounces Starmer's apparent backing for Israeli collective punishment in Gaza then claims that "of course it aligns with his servile backing for the Tory government over the Ukraine conflict, a pos-

ture that has left Labour aligned with the most bellicose forces in the world today" ... which presumably doesn't include Russia.

For Andrew Murray (1 Nov) it's quite simple: "Ceasefire [is] the word imperialism hates today ... it will escape nobody that the countries pushing for a peaceful resolution to the Ukraine war and those demanding an end to the Israeli assault on Palestine are very much the same" (again, it is unclear whether Russia is included).

Galloway

An editorial (7 Dec) implicitly welcomes the far-right US Republicans being "increasingly opposed" to arming Ukraine and calls for a peace deal based upon acceptance of the Russian annexation of Crimea. It concludes: "The continuation of the Ukraine conflict only benefits imperialism in its drive to weaken Russia the better to isolate China ... In Gaza the Nato powers likewise oppose a ceasefire".

But the most shameless attempt to suggest that support for Ukraine is somehow incompatible with support for the Palestinian cause came in an ar-

ticle (23-24 Dec) by George Galloway's former bag-carrier Kevin Ovenden. It is a piece that has surprisingly little to say about the justice of the Palestinian cause per se, but a lot to say about how pro-Palestinian sentiment is "upending politics across the globe" and is "a refutation of the liberal conceit that the 'populist' demon of the 2010s has been put back in its box." Ovenden goes on: "You could see what ('establishment' politicians) thought would happen in the days after the shock October 7 attacks."

"As with the invasion of Ukraine in 2022, there would be ironclad consensus at the top of politics and across corporate media. Buildings to be lit up in the colours of an ally's flag ... Nato governments of centre-left and centre-right utilised Ukraine to try to liquidate the radical left in Europe... They had some success over Ukraine and followed the play-book over Israel. They failed."

What people like Ovenden fail to explain (but simply take as read) is how support for Ukraine's right to self determination is incompatible with being on the "radical left". Or incompatible with solidarity with the Palestinian people. □

Free the HK 47! Free Jimmy Lai!

By Chan Ying

The Hong Kong-based tycoon Jimmy Lai has pleaded not guilty to two charges of colluding with foreign forces to endanger national security, and publishing seditious material in *Apple Daily*, the tabloid newspaper he founded, in his trial which began on 18 December.

This is an extraordinary delay, well over three years (1084 days) after he was first arrested for collusion on 10 August 2020 under the National Security Law. Lai is currently serving a five year sentence for fraud (accommodating a consultancy firm inside Apple/Next Media HQ without informing the landlord), and had already served an 12 month sentence for unlawful assembly and got another 13 month sentence in Dec 2021 for organising and inciting others to take part in the banned 2020 Tiananmen vigil.

The offence of sedition

has been revived and used as a broad sweeping charge against many Hong Kong protesters, alongside unlawful assembly and rioting, all part of Hong Kong's Common Law heritage as a former British colony, such as the ban in October 2019 against protesters wearing masks which stemmed from the Emergency Regulation Ordinance enacted to attack the Hong Kong Seamen's strike in 1922.

Prosecution and sentencing data since 2019 [analysed](#) by Georgetown Law School clearly showed the justice system in Hong Kong used as a political weapon to punish and intimidate protesters – lengthy remands in custody, denial of bail, use of no-jury magistrate courts, high level of successful prosecutions and severity of sentencing.

Furthermore, the authorities had been issuing \$HK1M bounties for overseas exiles to be brought back to Hong

Kong. Most recently, two more leading dissidents, Agnes Chow and Tony Chung, have escaped from Hong Kong and are claiming political asylum in Canada and UK respectively.

The hearing of evidence for the Hong Kong 47, who organized an unofficial primary election, closed on 4 December, and verdicts are due in "three or four months".

There is no doubt that the authorities consider Lai to be one of the key leaders orchestrating against the CCP over many years. Lai's attempts to hire a UK barrister to defend him has been blocked by Beijing's "interpretation" of the National Security Law, stating that the HKSAR government had the right to disallow the use of non-Hong Kong based barristers in National Security court cases. The UK, US and other western governments have called upon the Hong Kong government to release Lai, who is a UK citizen.

Lai is stridently anti-CCP and a prominent backer of the pan-democrats in Hong Kong, but also a billionaire media tycoon. Socialists and trade unionists have no truck with his business empire and his support for Trump in the 2020 USA elections. His media publications are often a thorn in the side of the Hong Kong government and business establishment, and regularly attack the Chinese Communist Party, but also misogynistic sensationalist tabloids like the *Sun* and the old [News of the World](#).

The previous convictions against him and these latest trumped up charges are aimed to silence him and all critics of the CCP. The shutting down of *Apple Daily* and the harassment of journalists is a vicious attack on the freedom of the press.

We should demand that the charges of sedition and colluding with foreign forces

against him are dropped. We are against all sedition, public order and national security charges, not just against Lai but all others involved in the 2019 protest movement in Hong Kong.

The focus of our concern is the labour movement activists and socialists like Carol Ng (former Chair of disbanded HK Confederation of Trade Unions and former British Airways Cabin Crew Union activist), Leung Kwok Hung (leader of the League of Social Democrats), Lee Cheuk Yen (general secretary of the HKCTU), Winnie Yu (founder of the Hospital Authority Employee Alliance) and Elizabeth Tang (former general secretary of HKCTU and current gen sec of International Domestic Workers Federation), but maverick tycoons as well as ordinary citizens should have civil liberties – rights to free speech, assembly and association, as well as the freedom to travel. □

Neglect hits women's health



Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

Every year, at least 40 million women are likely to experience a long-term health problem caused by childbirth, according to a new study published on 6 December in *The Lancet Global Health*.

Part of a series on maternal health, the study shows a high burden of postnatal conditions that persist in the months or even years after giving birth. These include pain during sexual intercourse (dyspareunia), affecting more than a third (35%) of postpartum women, low

back pain (32%), anal incontinence (19%), urinary incontinence (8-31%), anxiety (9-24%), depression (11-17%), perineal pain (11%), fear of childbirth (tokophobia) (6-15%) and secondary infertility (11%).

"Many postpartum conditions cause considerable suffering in women's daily life long after birth, both emotionally and physically, and yet they are largely underappreciated, underrecognized, and underreported," said Dr Pascale Allotey, Director of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Research at WHO.

Despite their prevalence, these conditions have been largely neglected in clinical research.

The series, titled "Maternal health in the perinatal period and beyond", calls for greater attention to the long-term

health of women and girls – after and also before pregnancy.

Medical progress is not just a question of research in labs; it has always reflected social realities of the changing world assumptions about bodies and what a "normal" human is.

The Government Women's Health "Let's talk about it" survey found over 4 in 5 women (85%) feel, or are perceived to feel, comfortable talking to healthcare professionals about general physical health concerns. This falls to fewer than 3 in 5 women when discussing mental health conditions (59%). More than 4 in 5 (84%) said there have been times when they (or the woman they had in mind) were not listened to by healthcare professionals.

Although women experience more

chronic pain conditions than men, there is a "gender pain gap" whereby their pain is treated less seriously. Studies in the US show men wait an average of 49 minutes before receiving pain medication in instances of acute abdominal pain while women wait an average of 65 minutes in the same situation. Women are half as likely as men to receive painkillers after a coronary bypass surgery.

Medicine has reflected and enforced socially constructed gender and racial divisions. Male as standard, the superiority of the male body, assumptions about women's weakness and decision-making capacities, women's primary role to be bearing children, are woven into the history and current practice of medicine. □

Nikolai Yuriev gets 18 years

From Solidarity Zone

Nikolai Yuriev, who is accused of planning to set fire to a military recruitment centre, has been sentenced to 18 years in prison.

The Central District Military Court in Yekaterinburg sentenced Yuriev for planning to set fire to a military recruitment centre in Novouralsk, one of

Rosatom's "closed cities" [cities in Russia and the former USSR where migration in and out is monitored by the state].

Nikolai was detained on the street on 5 February. He confessed to planning to commit arson on a military recruitment centre using a Molotov cocktail. According to the investigation, he prepared bottles with incendiary mixture and even

listened to the radio communications of on-duty officers at the recruitment centre. He claimed he wanted to commit the act to "seize power in several cities in the Urals and overthrow the constitutional order". It was also revealed that he was a member of the society "Citizens of the USSR".

In his trial, Yuriev called his confession unreliable, and claimed that the entire incident had been instigated by military personnel. During witness interrogation, it turned out that he had been approached by three members of the Rosgvardiya: Dmitry Bronnikov, Dmitry Khomyak and Vugar Ibragimov.

In their words, "they had long been looking for an organisation that would be amenable to following their commands", which led them to Citizens of the USSR. Nikolai spent time with them and began to consider the Rosgvardiya employees his friends, so he gave his initial accusatory testimony "in their defence". After the investigation began, the young man realised that they had been plants. According to Yuriev, they encouraged Nikolai in several conversations to set fire to the military enlistment office.

The prosecutor requested a prison sentence of 19 years. The resulting sentence reached a total of 18 years of incarceration, under three separate articles: "facilitation of

terrorist activity" (part 1 of article 205.1 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation), "preparing to commit a terrorist act" (part 1, article 30 and part 2, article 205), "training for terrorist activity" (article 205.3). Four years will be served in prison, the remaining 14 in a strict-regime penal colony.

According to Nikolai's lawyer, Alexander Kozlov, they plan to appeal the court decision. □

• This article is a translation of a 22 December post by Solidarity Zone. Solidarity Zone is an activist organisation that identifies, contacts and provides aid to political prisoners in Russia who have been arrested for anti-war activity. The majority of NGOs that aid prisoners in Russia refuse to help those arrested on more extreme charges – often railway sabotage and arson on military recruitment centres. Solidarity Zone exists to make sure that nobody who takes a stand against the war in Ukraine is left without financial support, trustworthy legal counsel and solidarity. Solidarity Zone has just started a Twitter account, posting in both English and Russian: @solidarity_zone. It is on Instagram at @solidarity_zone and on Telegram. It has ongoing fundraisers for prisoners' legal costs and support for families.

WORKERS AGAINST THE CCP



Activist Agenda

Workers Against the CCP, the new coalition that is bringing together the Uyghur and HK labour movement solidarity campaigns we've been part of, and other allies, now has a live website, workersagainsttheccp.org. It also has a newsletter signup, a model motion, a copyable leaflet you can print to promote the campaign, and links to social media.

Since the 26 Nov HK47 demo, the campaign has also supported a demo run by community groups in London on UN Human Rights Day. It is discussing a protest at Apple (possibly coordinated in multiple cities). Even small local protests at high-street shops linked to forced Uyghur labour or worker abuses in China are worthwhile. □

• Info on more campaigns and template motions: workersliberty.org/agenda

Trans people in Russia "scared for their lives"

By Michael Baker

On 30 November, the Russian Supreme Court officially designated the "international LGBT movement" an extremist organisation, following a request made by the Ministry of Justice on the 17th.

This action is the latest in a long string of repression against the Russian queer community, going back continuously to at least the 2013 "gay propaganda" law. The ambiguous wording is very deliberate: with no formally designated organisation known as the "International LGBT Movement", prosecution can be justified indiscriminately against individuals and (more likely) NGOs and campaign groups.

The immediate ramifications are as unclear as the

wording. It is likely that the new ruling is intended to scare the Russian queer community as much as enabling any specific persecution; it is certainly achieving the former. Russian human rights group OVD-Info quotes Yan Dvorkin, founder of trans shelter and resource initiative "Centre T", who says that "people are in a very intense panic – they are deleting their social media and breaking ties; they are taking impulsive, rash decisions because they are scared for their lives".

Such conservative policies of the Russian government are linked to the war in Ukraine, presented as a rallying against the prevailing order of the West. □

• Abridged. More: bit.ly/lgbt-



Nativism, species, and ecology



Environment

By Stuart Jordan

A major new report from the International Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services has concluded that “people and nature around the world are threatened by invasive alien species”. They claim invasive species cost the global economy at least \$423 billion a year and are either fully or partially responsible for 60% of extinctions across the world.

The report was produced by 86 scientists from 49 different countries who reviewed over 13,000 scientific papers and surveyed the perspectives of indigenous people. It addresses one of the five drivers of biodiversity loss identified in the IPBES’s 2019 report that found one million species are at risk of extinction. It is the most comprehensive global assessment of invasive species to date.

But a growing number of ecologists are raising doubts about the whole framing of “invasion biology”. Professor Chris D Thomas FRS, Director of the Leverhulme Centre for Anthropocene Biodiversity at the University of York, spoke to *Solidarity*.

According to the report, humans have introduced more than 37,000 alien species to ecosystems outside of their natural range in the last three hundred or so years. But despite headline claims of the dangers of invasive species, the IPBES found that only 3,500 alien species were associated with “negative impacts”, suggesting that over 90% of invasive aliens have either neutral or positive effects.

Chris Thomas told us: “The fundamental difficulty associated with the IPBES report on invasive species, and many other publications in this field, is that the subject lacks proper controls. In context of an economic estimate of the costs of ‘invasive species’, it is pertinent to ask ‘what are the financial benefits of ‘non-native species outside of their ‘natural ranges’?’, and ‘what are the costs and benefits of the management of species regarded as ‘native’?”

“Equally, from an ecological (biodiver-

sity) perspective, are the positive and negative effects of species outside of their ‘natural range’ any higher or lower than the impacts of ‘native species’ that are themselves responding to a myriad of environmental drivers? These comparisons are barely ever made. If one only focuses on the subset of ‘negative’ outcomes, then this is neither good science nor good policy. It is self perpetuation of a world view.

“Some ‘invasive species’ are undoubtedly harmful to human and other environmental interests, but so are many ‘native’ species, and we obtain benefits from species outside their historical distributions as well as harms”.

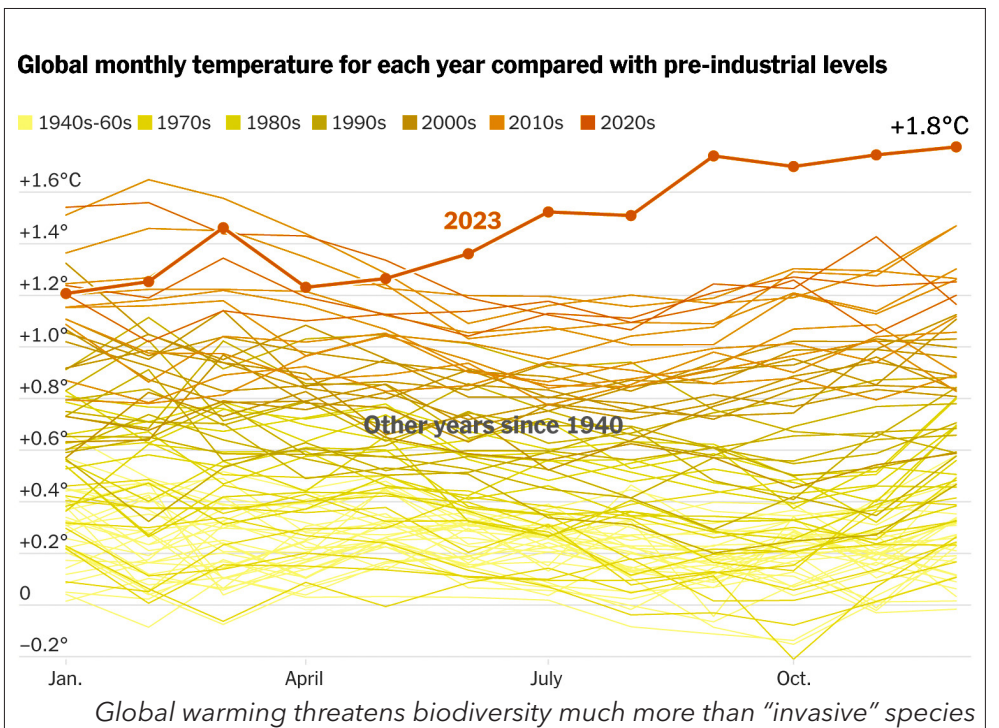
The report gives no references for the \$428 billion figure. Fred Pearce in his book *The New Wild* takes issue with some similar studies. He found one report that included a \$1 billion bill for controlling invasive weeds on golf courses!

Thomas: “Many of the costs of invasive species control are voluntary, in the sense that they represent a social decision to spend money trying to reduce or remove a particular species that is regarded as ‘out of place’ rather than because the world’s ecosystems will somehow collapse because of their presence. Nearly all agriculture stems from growing plants and rearing animals outside of the native distributions of the ancestors of those plants and animals. According to the Statista World Agriculture [estimates](#), the Gross Production Value of agricultural products is US\$3.5 trillion for 2022, at least eight times the costs of the control of non-native species. This is without adding in horticulture, forestry, aquaculture and other markets in non-native species”.

Biodiversity

“There are some invasives that do cause huge problems. but dig down into the detail of this report and it is not clear that it is their alien character which is the problem. Of the 3,500 invasive alien species, the report includes the dengue fever virus, the chytrid fungus (responsible for amphibian extinctions) and other microbes. It seems to me that these microorganisms have negative impacts not because they are invasive. but because they are powerful pathogens.

“It is absolutely clear that many species are problematic for some or many people, and that we will wish to manage and control many species for all sorts of reasons. But it requires more sophisticated thinking. Where are the greatest problems to biodiversity, for example? In isolated oceanic islands and ancient lakes (where the species have evolved in isolation) is the clear answer. Elsewhere, species arriving from elsewhere can result in ecological changes, for



sure, but it is exceptionally rare that they drive any other species to extinction (the main exception being diseases of amphibians). Likewise, nearly all threats to native species that might cause the global extinction of entire ‘native’ species are caused by just a handful of invaders (such as predatory mammals on oceanic islands). Otherwise, living with species and managing them in the same way as other species – without prejudice because of their origins – seems a more logical approach, rather than singling them out for special hatred”.

The report implicates invasive species in 60% of extinctions but presumably much of this is simply that alien species move into degraded ecosystems created by other human activity.

“The vast majority of species that are established outside their historical ranges are associated with human-modified urban and agricultural environments, thereby adding to diversity in these otherwise relatively depauperate locations. Earlier this year, the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland announced that over half the plant species living wild in Britain were now non-native species, which was reported widely with a [fanfare](#) of how dreadful this was; but it could equally have been represented as a narrative that there was a doubling of plant diversity in Britain – we now have twice as many species!”

Of these other drivers of extinction, climate change is likely to play an increasingly important role in the decades to come. The multi-billion dollar conservation industry with its focus on keeping species within their native ranges may actually contribute to extinctions by preventing species from moving.

“The majority of species that have

been studied have distributions that are shifting in response to human-caused climate change, and these changes to species’ distributions are essential to the survival of species in the long run. This underlies the fact that the distributions of species are dynamic. Trying to police where each species lives for centuries to come is a Sisyphean task that one has to question. As I articulated in my 2017 book, *Inheritors of the Earth*: how nature is thriving in an age of extinction, the movement of species across the world has been how species have survived past perturbations to the Earth’s system in the geological past, and the same is true of the perturbation unleashed by humanity today”. □

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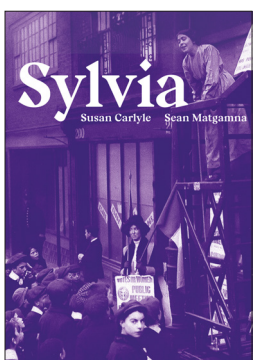
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Hamas's record in power in Gaza

By Dan Katz

"Hamas just has one 'no' – no to the existence of Israel." Osama Hamdan, Hamas Political Bureau member, 11 October 2023.

In the summer months of 2005 the right-wing Israeli government under Ariel Sharon evacuated the 21 settlements in Gaza, forcibly withdrawing all 9,000 settlers.

Sharon's Likud-led government calculated that attempting to defend a few thousand Israeli settlers in Gaza, living alongside (at that time) 1.3mn Palestinians, was a strategic problem that needed resolving.

The unilateral withdrawal of the Israeli state from Gaza allowed Hamas to claim that its tactics in the 1990s, and during the second intifada of 2000-05, had defeated Israel.

The first intifada (beginning in December 1987) was characterised by civil disobedience and mass protests, with stone-throwing against Israeli soldiers, coordinated by local committees in Palestinian areas occupied by Israel in 1967. The second intifada, following the breakdown of peace talks between the PLO and Ehud Barak's Labour government, was launched by Yasser Arafat, leader of Fatah and the PLO, as a mechanism to gain political concessions from Israel. However, the second "uprising" quickly became run by armed groups, often targeting Israeli civilians rather than military. It became symbolised by the Islamist suicide-bomb attack.

Over 3,000 Palestinians and more than 1,000 Israelis died. The political effect was to boost and entrench support for the right in Israel, and for Hamas amongst the Palestinians.

Palestinian President and PLO-Fatah leader Yasser Arafat died in November 2004. In January 2005 Mahmoud Abbas, the Fatah candidate, won the vote for the new President with 62%. The poll was boycotted by Hamas.

However, Hamas did stand in the January 2006 Legislative Council (parliamentary) elections, winning with 74 out of 132 seats and 44% of the vote. Fatah took 45 seats with 41%.

Before 2006 Fatah had held 68 of the 88 Council seats (elected in 1996). Hamas refused to participate in 1996, stating that to do so would legitimise the compromises for peace and a two state solution which the PLO-Fatah had made with the Israeli state.

Prior to the election in 2006 a split had taken place in Fatah with Marwan Barghouti, jailed for life by the Israelis on terrorism charges, accusing the Fatah leadership of corruption. The split was papered over.

Why did Palestinians back Hamas in 2006? An exit poll showed that electors

voted for Hamas despite its absolute hostility to Israel. 80% wanted peace with Israel; 75% wanted Hamas to change its attitude towards Israel. But 78% believed Hamas would act against corruption and 68% thought Hamas would act to stamp out criminality and disorder.

In 2006, the Palestinians voted for Hamas because Fatah in power was venal and incompetent. The police and courts protected the PLO elite who grew rich from graft and patronage.

Fatah, backed by the US, and Hamas, backed by Iran, prepared for a showdown in the Hamas heartland in Gaza. By early 2007 the newly-created Hamas Executive Force had 6,000 fighters. Abbas's Presidential Guard had 3,500 members and was being helped to arm and train by the US. Street fighting took place between the groups of fighters. Gaza was increasingly lawless.

From 10 to 15 June Hamas and Fatah openly fought each other for power in Gaza. Fatah was routed. At least 150 people were killed, hundreds were injured, and in the following weeks over 1,000 members of Fatah and officials from the Palestinian Authority were detained. Many were tortured and some were expelled or fled from Gaza.

The Fatah leadership, including the wretched Mohammed Dahlan, managed to avoid the fighting, hiding outside Gaza.

Police state

Hamas then proceeded to build a theocratic police state, integrating their militias into new police and security forces, replacing the judiciary with their own people, merging sharia law into the legal system, and purging secular teachers from the education system.

Some Islamist organisations have had limited freedom to organise, on the understanding that they subordinate themselves to Hamas. Hamas has allowed Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ, a pro-Iran splinter), to operate, occasionally finding it useful to deny PIJ rocket attacks on Israel have anything to do with them.

Hamas also heavily repressed Salafi-jihadist groups, including several which emerged after 2005 and considered themselves aligned to al-Qaeda.

In the immediate aftermath of the

Hamas takeover a series of attacks took place against Christian targets. A convent and school were burned and looted, the owner of Gaza's only Christian bookshop was murdered, and a building belonging to the YMCA was blown up.

To mark the third anniversary of Yasser Arafat's death Fatah organised a demonstration on 12 November 2007. Maybe 200,000 marched and the rally was attacked by Hamas gunmen. Six people died and 80 were injured as the demonstration was dispersed.

Beyond the police, Hamas controlled a largely plainclothes force, Internal Security, and their own armed wing, the Qassam Brigades. Hamas held a monopoly of brutal armed force in Gaza.

Israel imposed sanctions and a blockade on Gaza in July 2007. Gaza was sealed off by Israel with the help of Egypt. Israel was attempting to prevent Hamas arming itself with more sophisticated weapons and rockets. However, weapons from Iran continued to be smuggled into Gaza.

Iran

Iran's Shiite Islamist regime had backed Hamas through the 1990s. Its financial support ran to \$20-50mn annually. In 2008 it increased its financial and military support. Iran supplied Hamas with the rockets it fired at Israeli cities during the 2008-9 Gaza war.

In 2010 Iran moved 1,000 mortar shells and hundreds of short-range rockets into Gaza.

Iran smuggled arms to Hamas through Sudan, where the Iranian Quds Force ran warehouses, through Egypt to Sinai and into the tunnel system leading to Gaza. That route became more difficult after Egypt started to destroy Hamas tunnels when the military overthrew the elected Muslim Brotherhood government in Egypt (2013) and Sudan cut ties with Iran (2016, when Sudan followed the Saudi lead after the Saudi state executed a Shiite cleric).

Iran then helped Hamas to develop its own local arms production facilities. Iranian General Ami Ali Hajizadeh explained, "Instead of giving them a fish or teaching them how to catch a fish, we taught [Hamas] how to make a hook."

Iran suspended support for Hamas (but not PIJ) in 2012. Hamas backed the Sunni majority population and Sunni fundamentalist militias in the Syrian civil war, and Iran backed the homicidal Alawite regime of Bashar Assad.

Iran resumed funding Hamas when it elected Yahya Sinwar as its Gaza leader in 2017.

After 2012 Qatar also funded Gaza, with Israeli agreement, providing \$1.3bn. UN agencies sent \$4.5bn in aid.

After Hamas took power in Gaza

their police began to harass women who were walking on the streets and beaches with unrelated men. Women were stopped from using male hairdressers and were prevented from smoking in public.

In 2013 a marathon organised by the UN was cancelled after Hamas banned women from competing. In 2017 the regime banned dog walking to "protect women and children." In 2018 Hamas stopped a ballet school opening and banned the launch of a women's television station. In 2021 a Hamas court decreed that women would need the permission of a male guardian to travel. In 2022 street music was banned.

Under Hamas education is segregated and women are expected to wear the hijab in educational and legal settings. Male teachers are prevented from teaching girls.

World Bank data (2023) suggested that only 18% of women in the Palestinian Territories are in work (and the big majority of those were in the West Bank). There is no law against violence against women within marriage. Divorce and inheritance law discriminate against women.

In 2014 the Palestinian Authority reported that 53% of women had been subjected to sexual violence.

In the years after 2007 there were several rounds of major fighting between Hamas in Gaza and Israel, most seriously (prior to October 2023) in 2008-9 and again in 2014. Israel's stated aims were to end Islamist rocket fire into Israeli towns. The use of missiles against Israeli civilian targets (and in previous years the use of suicide bombings) underlines the contempt Hamas has had for Israeli Jews and the lack of interest it has in building links with pro-peace Israelis.

Before the 7 October Hamas pogrom and the Israeli invasion, the World Bank estimated Gaza's unemployment rate to be over 40%, the UN stated that more than 65% of the population lived under the poverty line, and the World Food Programme estimated that 63% were "food insecure."

A poll from 2018 showed that half of Gazans wanted to emigrate.

In 2019 a mass protest movement, We Want To Live, emerged to confront Hamas and the imposition of new taxes. Amnesty reported that, "Hundreds of protesters have been subjected to beatings, arbitrary arrests and torture since 14 March..."

Some Hamas leaders had become enormously rich. Khaled Mashaal and Ismail Haniyah reportedly became multi-millionaires. Hamas takes a cut from all businesses operating in Gaza. A PSR poll from September 2022 suggested about three-quarters of Gazans believed the Hamas regime is corrupt. □



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Building an alte



Interview

By Uri Weltmann

Uri Weltmann is the National Field Organiser of *Standing Together* (Naqef Ma'an-Omdim be'Yachad), a left-wing social movement bringing together Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel to fight for peace and equality. He spoke to Daniel Randall during a recent visit to London. The conversation took place on 15 December.

These are the reports that people sent to our National Coordinating Team, made up of 60-or-so members from our local chapters, from around the country about what happened just yesterday.

In Reineh, on the outskirts of Nazareth, we had an event in Arabic oriented towards Arab Palestinian youth. We aimed to bring together those Arab youth who, following 7 October, felt it has been very dangerous to be critical, to speak out on social media, to speak out on Instagram.

There are people in Gaza dying; they feel themselves to be part of the Palestinian people, but feel that there's no no space to talk about this. And we organised a youth event called "Let's Build Hope".

Sally Abed, who is a Palestinian leader of Standing Together, spoke. Razi Tattour, who is a young local Palestinian journalist, also spoke. He is also running for city council. He is in his early twenties and if he is elected, he will be the youngest city councillor in Reineh ever. Alon-Lee Green, one of the Jewish leaders of Standing Together, also spoke; he was the only Hebrew-language speaker at that event. He has become well-known amongst some

Arab Palestinian youth because of his viral TikTok and Instagram reels about the conflict, against the occupation and against racism.

Our local Jewish-Arab Solidarity Guard in the area to the northeast of Tel Aviv did an event for families, where families brought their children, both Jews and Arabs, to speak together and light Hanukkah candles together. They made banners in Hebrew and Arabic, and after the event went out and hung them throughout the area, both in Arab towns such as Tira and in Jewish towns such as Kfar Saba, with messages of supporting Israeli-Palestinian peace.

In Deir al-Asad, which is an Arab city in the Galilee, our local Jewish-Arab Solidarity Guard in that area organised a peace event in coalition with an organisation called Rabbis for Human Rights that does a lot of interfaith work but is very much a political organisation. It participates in demonstrations in the Occupied Territories. It organises an annual olive harvest, where volunteers from Israel go to the Occupied Territories to help Palestinian olive farmers take in the harvest, on Palestinian agricultural land close to the settlements, where settlers often attack.

Strategy

Also yesterday the local Tel Aviv-Jaffa group of Standing Together met for an educational discussion about strategy. It was run by activists from Rosa Media, which is the social media arm of Standing Together. The aim was to train our activists about how to frame politics, especially in social media, but also in day-to-day conversation.

The day before, in Haifa, we had a panel discussion with 45 people attending, called "From Inequality to Equality", with several speakers.

We have many local groups meeting throughout the country, each doing its thing, but within the framework of the politics of Standing Together. Some events draw more national attention and resources.

Tomorrow, Saturday (16 December), we have a rally in Haifa, and we are holding it in an open space. We did not ask for police permits. But for us, it's very important to be out in the public sphere.

For tomorrow's rally the most prominent message is not the message of Jewish and Arab equality within Israel, but the message of the need to advance towards peace. We are always holding these two messages at the same time. But in the beginning of the war, the first message appeared more prominently because we feared inter-

communal violence and wanted to put a stress on the need for Jewish-Arab solidarity within Israel.

Now, when the fear of intercommunal violence somewhat subsided, there are discussions about where to go next. These discussions are not only happening on the left, but in the mainstream of Israeli politics. We really want to put our weight behind the demand for a diplomatic resolution. The slogan of the rally is "only peace will bring security", and it will feature Jewish and Palestinian speakers from Standing Together and outside of the movement.

One of the speakers will be Maoz Inon, who has featured quite prominently in UK media also. He's a peace activist. Both of his parents were murdered on 7 October. Ever since then, he has been on a quest to speak out against the continuation of the war, saying it will not bring back his parents and will only cause more people to be orphaned. He has a very clear and conscious voice.

Activity

The day-to-day for Standing Together activists is very diverse, from small activities, mobilising a few dozen, to bigger events such as the one that we have tomorrow in Haifa, where we hope to attract a crowd of hundreds.

Activity is tilted towards the northern part of the country. This is a new development since 7 October. Many of the Jewish-Arab Solidarity Guards, and our newer chapters, are in various parts of the Galilee. This is the area where Jews and Palestinians live most close to each other. So for us, this shift to the north is a good development. It is important in terms of our ability to intervene more in the politics of the Arab Palestinian national minority within Israel, which is centred in the northern part of the country, but also because it's the part of the country that needs our message the strongest because of the enmity between Jewish and Arab communities.

Standing Together rests on several social blocs, which, though different from each other, we seek to unite through our messaging and our way of engaging with people.

The first is young Palestinian people, some in their late teens but also people in their twenties, who are becoming politicised, who feel themselves very much to be part of the Palestinian people, but also feel themselves very much



to be part of Israeli society, holding Israeli citizenship, and trying to reconcile these two things and to understand the tension that exists between them.

Standing Together interacts with this layer of young Palestinian people through public forums, such as the one I mentioned in Reineh. We had similar ones in Nazareth and Haifa. Our social media platforms, Instagram and TikTok, are bilingual, and every video that goes out in Hebrew has Arabic subtitles, and vice versa. Our TikTok page, for example, has more followers than the TikTok of any political organisation in Israel, to the left or to the right. There are individual politicians who have more followers, but no organisation or party.

That serves as a platform to engage with a social layer that is generally excluded from an Israeli political mainstream that is unfriendly to Arab Palestinians. But it is also excluded from the politics of the Arab Palestinian minority, which tends to be dominated by older people, particularly older men. So by building relationships and offering space for young Palestinians, especially young Palestinian women leaders, we are engaging with this social layer and helping it to become politically active.

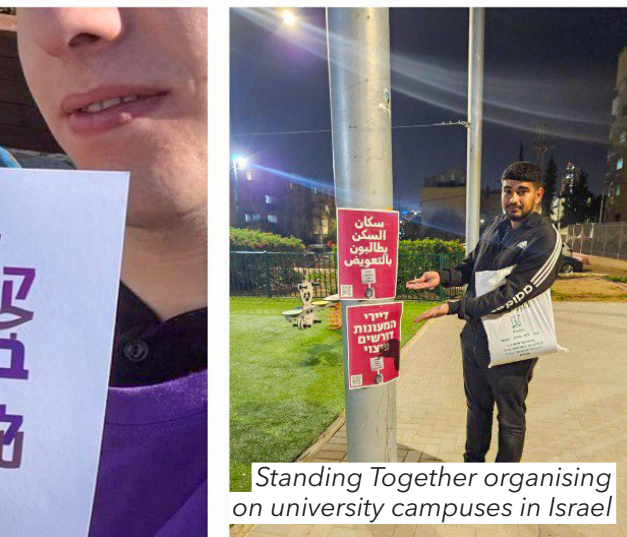
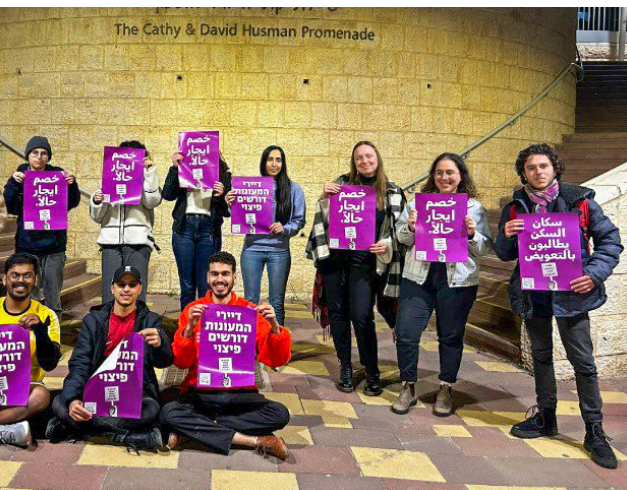
A second social bloc that we interact with is old lefties, veterans of the left – people who may have been in

UK Friends of Standing Together

Standing Together unites Jews and Palestinians within Israel to fight for an equal and just society, for peace, and against the occupation. UKFoST promotes their work in the UK. □

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Alternative in Israel



Standing Together organising on university campuses in Israel

isations that they started to support in the 1970s and 1980s. They have gravitated towards Standing Together which, for them, seems to be a continuation of the kind of politics that they decided to draw their fates together with in their youth.

The fourth social bloc that Standing Together rests on is among the Jewish population. These are younger, educated, urban youth in their twenties, mostly in the bigger cities such as Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Haifa. Our consistent messaging on the question of housing in the past two years, where we oriented Standing Together to speak louder and also to do activities on the ground around the housing crisis, which is one of the biggest social crises currently within Israel, really resonated with these people, especially in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, where the housing crisis is acute and people pay 50% and sometimes more of their wage on rent.

This is all drawn with very crude lines, but these four blocs comprise the kind of audiences we speak to. And as a political movement with a broad messaging, it is a balancing act to speak to different audiences at the same time, who are quite different from each other.

The diversity of the blocs with which we seek to engage is reflected in the very diverse composition of our national leadership. In our national leadership team you have, sitting side by side, Sally Abed, a young Palestinian feminist leader, alongside Dr. Suhail Diab, an old-time member of the Communist Party who was deputy mayor of Nazareth under the legendary Communist mayor Tawfiq Ziad. He led the CP's activities in the Histadrut trade union federation for several years.

Sitting alongside them you can find Erez, a young person from Tel Aviv who finished a degree in philosophy and physics and is now working in high-tech. Nonetheless, he feels that the cost of living crisis and the housing crisis is a strain on his shoulders. And alongside him you can find Zvi, who's in his sixties, who lives in a kibbutz in the Galilee. He's a veteran member of Meretz, he was in Peace Now in the 1980s, and very devoted to Jewish-Arab coexistence.

These are four people who hail from very different backgrounds. They have very different personal sociologies. But the balancing act of Standing Together

Peace Now in the 1980s, in Meretz in the 1990s. They were the backbone of the so-called Israeli peace movement. They were the ones marching against the Lebanon war. They were the ones protesting in solidarity with the Palestinians during the First Intifada. They were the ones opposing Netanyahu in his first tenure.

Political home

These people, many of them, now feel that they are devoid of a political home. Labour has practically collapsed. Meretz disappeared from the Knesset. Peace Now is a shadow of its former self. So you have a considerable group of people who hail from this background who come to our events and become members of our movement.

A third social bloc that we interact with is among the Arab population, similar in age perhaps to the group that I just mentioned, but who had a different path of politicisation. These are people who were politicised mostly in and around the Communist Party, around the values of Jewish-Arab equality, support for Israeli-Palestinian peace, support for negotiations with the PLO. But some of them feel that the Communist Party and Hadash [the electoral coalition linked to the Communist Party] are now a far cry from the organ-



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is to speak to these various audiences at the same time. We want our work within these social blocs to extend, and we continue to think about what other audiences we can relate to. It's a complicated task.

7 October

7 October really tilted Israeli politics very sharply in one direction. It has become very hard to raise political questions that are not related to the war, because it's like a thick blanket over all of Israeli society. Currently, even when addressing social questions, it is in the context of the war.

We have collapsing social services, social workers are overworked and underpaid. And we saw that following 7 October when more than 100,000 Israelis evacuated from the Gaza envelope. They were being put in hotels in the Dead Sea, in Tel Aviv, and Eilat. And social workers were unable to tend to the needs of people who were suddenly cut off from their daily life.

This was something that was spoken about a bit in the media, and we are trying to do more to shine a light on that. But against the backdrop of the war, the possibility of campaigning, for example, to raise the minimum wage, which we did in our Minimum 40 campaign in 2021, has become very complex.

The mainstream media gives little hearing to stories that are not war-related.

So for us, it has been a challenge to make a conversation around direct class issues, work-related issues, issues that revolve around the lives and the realities of people in the context of the war. The way we respond is by drawing links between the two. Smotrich, the Minister of Finance, is now planning next year's budget. That will include more resources for the settlements and for settlement-related NGOs that are going to receive money from the state. At the same time, he's not providing the necessary funds for social services that are so badly needed. This is how we can make connections between the economic and political spheres, the class questions and the questions of the occupation and settlements.

But there is no doubt that campaigning directly around social questions like housing and raising the minimum wage has become very difficult against the backdrop of the war. For the most part they will have to wait until a later time in which the space opens up for this conversation. □

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Getting a hearing



Interview

By Adam Keller

Adam Keller, a longstanding peace activist in Israel, spoke to Solidarity in December 2023. Since then he reports that police repression against anti-war demonstrations has lessened. There is some small but growing discontent about the war among Israelis as more hostages die and more soldiers are killed.

While our anti-war demonstrations are very small, and we have little expectation that they will shift opinion now, they are a matter of principle. The largest movement, a genuine mass movement, is the protests to release the hostages. That is a very popular cause affecting the whole of Israeli society. It is a mass movement. It is not just the families of the captives. It is many thousands on these demonstrations.

The families of the captives and the captives have enormous public support. These demonstrations are, of course, not against the war. Most people who attend there say they are for the war, for destroying Hamas, but the priority should be to free the hostages. And this is a contradiction: the more you intensify the war, the greater the risk that the captives, all captives, will themselves be killed.

In fact, the captives who have come back are saying one of the most frightening experiences is the bombing by the Israeli Air Force.

The peace movement is also participating in these demonstrations. We are quite marginal, but while these are not anti-war demonstrations, in practice, they are about putting a brake on the war. When you are a left-wing group, you are also trying to introduce yourself into all kinds of demonstrations, which are partially going in the right direction, even if they don't go all the way.

Some on the extreme right are also participating. In some cases, they argue that we have to continue to finish Hamas. And if the captives are killed, then that's a pity. But this kind of stand of the extreme right is quite unpopular. When the extreme right publicly attacks the hostage's families, they are running against the general trend of public opinion.

We can talk to people at these demonstrations and have arguments with them.

A third set of demonstrations is happening, calling for Netanyahu's

immediate resignation. They accuse Netanyahu of being responsible for Israel being surprised by Hamas on 7 October. They are not as widely supported as the hostage release demonstrations. We also participate in these demonstrations, which are also gathering momentum.

This is all happening at the time of further disturbing developments in the West Bank, where settler attacks are increasing on the isolated Palestinian communities, especially the shepherd communities, which are the weakest and most vulnerable part of Palestinian society. And the settlers want to force them off the land and are often succeeding. There are very courageous activists going there and standing in solidarity with the Palestinians and very often getting themselves violently attacked by settlers and sometimes getting severely wounded and having to go to hospital. "Looking The Occupation In the Eye" are doing very good work here. I think this is the very best grassroots movement on the Israeli left.

When we demonstrate, we also take up this subject. We talk about Gaza, but we also talk about the de facto ethnic cleansing which is going on in the West Bank and the settler violence.

The increase in settler violence is also linked to a very serious situation in the army. To a considerable degree, the army command has lost control of the units on the West Bank. Many of the soldiers are settlers and sympathetic to the settlers. There has been a sociological shift in the military. Historically the kibbutz movement was the backbone of the Israeli army. Its members have been represented highly in the officer corps.

But this has shifted over the years. The settlers now have taken the position of the kibbutzniks. Young people, and often young women who oppose the occupation, do not like what the army is doing. So what kind of person chooses to devote their life to a military career? The people who are comfortable with the occupation are the settlers who are now over-represented among the junior officers of the Israeli army. And they are over-represented in both the West Bank and those who are now fighting in Gaza.

There are reports of soldiers in Gaza who are for wiping Gaza out, ethnically cleaning it of Palestinians and rebuilding settlements that were dismantled. Photos have already come out showing anti-Palestinian and anti-Arab, nationalist graffiti, which the high command has ordered to stop but is continuing. These are soldiers defying their

leaders. Recently a photo of a soldier showed them standing by the slogan "Instead of erasing graffiti, let us erase Gaza".

I don't know if this is going to happen, but I think that we are coming closer to a situation where we might have something like what happened to France in 1958 with the uprising of the French army in Algeria in cooperation with the French settlers.

Pressure

If the United States manages to put pressure on Netanyahu to stop the war in Gaza before Hamas has been destroyed, as they see it, then there might be this kind of uprising or right-wing protests inside the Army.

Now the Israeli army is committed to the Gaza Strip, and still, it is taking them two months to conquer something like half of the Gaza Strip. So if it succeeds in conquering the whole Gaza Strip, which I think they can do, it will mean killing a huge number of Palestinian civilians.

You will still have the Gaza Strip full of Hamas people in small groups of two, three, or five people very determined to carry out guerrilla attacks. And they think that then the Israeli army could very well end up with 10 or 20 years of guerilla war as Israel had in Lebanon.

Some Israeli government ministers have said explicitly that the next step should have been to order the Palestinians to cross the border into Egypt. And then to block them from being allowed to come back.

But President Sisi is not willing to hear of this.

Can Netanyahu survive this? That is the major question for a lot of Israeli society. Golda Meir paid the price for a military fiasco in 1973. Netanyahu has already tried to shift the blame to the army and the intelligence communities, towards the left, towards anybody, anybody except him!

In the polls, you see very clear trends that consider a significant number of Likud voters are breaking away from Likud and mainly going to the party of Benny Gantz. He has established his reputation as being centre-right and a responsible politician. He's considered a sober man, not driven by emotion or acting out of fear. I'm not happy with the idea that he will be prime minister. In some ways, he might become even worse than Netanyahu because he will have some public credit.

There will be no left-wing government in Israel in the next year or two for sure, but also, our outcomes depend on what happens in the United States.

If Biden starts putting serious pressure on Israel, then the many people who are saying they will make no concessions to the Palestinians may change what they are saying.

The situation of the Palestinians inside Israel is very complicated and contradictory. On the one hand, they have been politically radicalised. It is now common to call them Palestinian citizens of Israel, which is important. In the past, they were usually called Israeli Arabs. They say we are Palestinian citizens of Israel. So younger people have more of a Palestinian identity than the elders.

On the other hand, they are more and better integrated into Israeli society. They all speak Hebrew; they are heavily involved in the medical profession, even in Jewish cities, from nurses and pharmacists to doctors. But there are many professions where they are almost completely unrepresented, and they feel and are discriminated against.

The Nation-State Law, which declared that the only nation recognised in Israel is the Jewish nation, generated lots of anger and protests. And there is the continued problem of refusing building permits, so houses get built anyway and then destroyed. There are contradictory forces that both push for more integration but also push against it. There have been riots in mixed cities during previous bombings of Gaza but not since 2021.

On the contrary, there has been quite good neighbourliness despite the tension. Standing Together has taken the initiative in Tel Aviv and elsewhere to create the so-called Jewish-Arab solidarity groups.

That sort of organisation looking to build up Jewish-Arab solidarity despite the war is important in trying to confront any manifestation of racism and discrimination.

Ben-Gvir wants to create militias among Jewish Israelis and to stir up tension between Jews and Arabs inside Israel. He wants a massive distribution of guns, often to notorious racist activists, who will be empowered to patrol around at night. This is very scary.

The Palestinians with Israeli citizenship, are very worried about what is happening in the Gaza Strip, about the evacuation orders and the threat of deportation to Egypt if Egypt was willing. The memory and history of the Nakba are very deep among all Palestinians, whatever the circumstances. And I think that some of them are clinging to their being part of Israel as a protection. Israel cannot deport its citizens.

The Bedouins in the Negev are also in

for peace

Adam Keller at an anti-war protest in Tel-Aviv in December 2023. His signs read: "No to war – Yes to peace" and "All for All" (i.e. all Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons in exchange for all captive Israelis in Gaza)



a difficult situation. Because on the one hand, some of them are serving in the army; they are not obliged to, but some volunteer. But they also suffer racist discrimination, more than nearly anybody else. They have villages that are not recognised by the government and that are denied basic services like electricity and water. And the government is destroying houses in these villages all the time. On 7 October, Hamas treated them as Israelis, kidnapped some of them to Gaza, and Bedouins were also killed in the Hamas missile attacks. This is a very real issue for the Bedouin communities.

The Iron Dome missiles are expensive and the system is computer-pro-

grammed not to send the interceptors if it is predicted that the rocket will fall in an open area outside the city. The Bedouin villages in the Negev are all defined as open areas. About a third of Israeli citizens killed by Hamas rockets are Bedouin. And many of them have relatives in Gaza.

Some Bedouins are particularly angry with Hamas and have more of an affiliation with the Israeli state, and that might explain some of the research and surveys from the Israel Democracy Institute that showed that Palestinians in Israel felt more a part of Israel since 7 October. But I don't think that can be the whole picture.

Across the world, there are a lot of

people who are willing to see only the atrocities which were committed by Hamas on 7 October and unwilling to hear about Palestinian victims in the Gaza Strip.

And, not so much in Israel, but worldwide, you have quite a lot of people who are willing to see the suffering of the people in Gaza and are not at all willing to acknowledge what Hamas did.

Or worse, who want to find ways to deny what happened or say that Israelis deserved it and worse. These positions are mirror images.

You could say there is a kind of implicit assumption that you want your side to have the status of the victim be-

cause the victim has the license to do whatever he wants. So there is the assumption that if Israel is the victim, then Israel has the right to bomb Gaza, to starve Palestinians and to force millions of Palestinians to leave their homes. And if Palestinians are the victim, then Palestinians have the right to go into Israel and to kill Israelis indiscriminately and rape Israeli women and so on, if they get a chance.

I think that this whole concept of the victim with an unlimited license to do whatever he wants is wrong. □

• Abridged. More: bit.ly/adam-k

Myanmar: a challenge for unions



Eric Lee

By Eric Lee

The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) exists to certify that products coming from the world's forests are produced responsibly. You may never have heard about the FSC, but if you look around your home, you'll see its logo everywhere – on your toilet paper, inside your books, maybe even on your furniture.

The Bonn-based global organisation is a network of over 1,200 members in 89 countries. Some of those are corporations, some are non-governmental organisations (e.g., Greenpeace), some are individuals. And some are even trade unions – large, well-known unions. These include UNIFOR in Canada, IG Metall in Germany, the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union as well as others in Brazil, Chile, India, Malaysia and Sweden.

What does the FSC logo on your kitchen roll mean? Among other things, it means that forestry workers are treated fairly. And that's not some general, meaningless platitude. The FSC says clearly that it "shall uphold the princi-

ples and rights at work as defined in the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (1998) based on the eight ILO Core Labour Conventions."

For those of you who may not be completely up-to-date with that International Labour Organisation declaration or the "core conventions" referred to, here's a reminder:

- freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining;
- the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour;
- the effective abolition of child labour;
- the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation; and
- a safe and healthy working environment.

There's more to it than that, but you get the general idea.

The FSC will obviously not allow forestry products made in countries like Myanmar to be certified, right? After all, the military regime in that country has arrested over 26,000 dissidents and killed around 400 trade unionists. It has one of the worst human rights records in the world. And it is currently at war with its own people.

Incredibly, the FSC continues to certify products from Myanmar as being "responsibly" sourced and compatible,

somehow, with that ILO declaration and related conventions.

When pushed by unions to explain this, the FSC said it was waiting for the publication of an ILO Commission of Inquiry report. That report was published on 4 October 2023, three months ago, but still the FSC continues to certify Myanmar's forestry products. They now claim to be waiting for a "final version" of that report before considering what to do about Myanmar.

The ILO report is remarkably clear about what is going on in Myanmar. And it's worth noting that such ILO "Commissions of Inquiry" are a rare event to begin with. In the more than 100 years that the ILO has existed, there have only been 14 of them. As the report notes, "Such Commissions represent the highest level of ILO supervisory mechanisms."

The ILO report "concluded that the actions taken by the military authorities since February 2021 have resulted in far-reaching restrictions on the exercise of basic civil liberties and trade union rights, as well as in the incapacity of trade unionists to engage in trade union activities."

The Commission made a number of immediate recommendations, including calling on the military rulers of Myan-

mar "to immediately cease all forms of violence, torture and other inhumane treatment against trade union leaders and members; to release and withdraw all criminal charges against trade unionists detained in relation to the exercise of their civil liberties and legitimate trade union activities; and to fully restore the protection of basic civil liberties suspended since the coup d'état. The recommendations also urge the military authorities to end the exaction of all forms of forced or compulsory labour by the army and its associated forces, as well as forced recruitment into the army."

There's not a lot of room for interpretation there: the military junta ruling Myanmar is clearly beyond the pale. And yet the Forest Stewardship Council is still not sure, still waiting for further evidence.

Or maybe it's just that the fees companies pay the FSC to get that logo on their products are not something the organisation is keen to lose.

Building and Wood Workers' International (BWI), the global union federation for forestry workers, has tried to persuade the FSC to reconsider. BWI represents 12 million workers worldwide. But the FSC isn't listening. For that reason, BWI has launched a major online

campaign on LabourStart calling on the FSC to "to promptly revoke and terminate its certification system and Chain of Custody certificates in Myanmar."

It's important that the campaign receive the widest possible circulation. The FSC has to hear the loud and clear voice of people everywhere demanding that they immediately stop certifying Myanmar's forestry products.

But questions also have to be asked of the unions that are FSC members. Surely they oppose the FSC decision to continue certifying forestry products from Myanmar? Some of those unions are even BWI affiliates. The labour movement must come up with a clear position expressing its unanimous support for the people of Myanmar and against the military regime. It's not enough to issue statements condemning violations of human rights in the country. If the FSC doesn't change course, those unions should at the very least terminate their membership in the organisation.

The people of Myanmar, including those working in its forests, deserve nothing less. This is what solidarity means. □

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

JSO people in jail, Elbit protesters on trial

By Colin Foster

Just Stop Oil supporter Morgan Trowland was released from HMP Highpoint in Suffolk on 12 December, 14 months into a three year sentence.

He was sentenced in April 2023 after he and Marcus Decker scaled the Queen Elizabeth II Suspension Bridge, stopping traffic for almost 40 hours in October 2022. His was the longest sentence in British history for undertaking

nonviolent climate action. Marcus Decker was sentenced to 31 months.

They acted for Just Stop Oil's demand that the UK Government halts all new licenses for fossil fuels in the UK.

Marcus Decker is still imprisoned. JSO has a [petition](#) to stop him being deported to Germany, and is working for the release of [other](#) JSO protest prisoners.

On Monday 8 January, seven activists started a four week

trial in Bristol, charged with burglary and criminal damage after a May 2022 protest at El-

bit's Bristol headquarters. Elbit is an Israeli military producer with sites in Britain. The activ-

ists were protesting against Israeli attacks in the West Bank and Gaza. More: bit.ly/bris7 □

5 December protest for Sarah Jane Baker

Friends of Sarah Jane Baker and supporters of prison reform and trans rights protested on 5 December outside the offices of Practice Plus group in London. Practice Plus employs the prison doctor who has refused to prescribe Sarah Jane the oestrogen which she received when previously in prison, during and after her gender-transition, and after released "on licence" in 2019.

Sarah Jane Baker has been jailed again, indefinitely, because her "licence" has been revoked, despite her being



acquitted on the Public Order Act 1986 charges brought against her after the Trans Pride protest in July. It looks

unlikely she will even get a hearing about this until March or April 2024. More: [@freesa-rahjanebaker](https://freesa-rahjanebaker) □

Workers' Liberty

Discussion Bulletin on Ecology

November 2023

Ecology discussion bulletin now available at bit.ly/eco-db1

A reply to critics



Letter

Ben Tausz (*Solidarity* [692](#)) is right that many come to the Gaza ceasefire marches out of elemental human solidarity with the people of Gaza. But there is heterogeneity and heterogeneity.

One part of the demonstrations has placards, megaphones, banners, chants, and that part is overwhelmingly on absolutist anti-Israel wavelengths. Three months on, everyone must know that "from the river to the sea" is understood and was coined as "erase Israel", unless they choose to suppress that awareness.

The other part marches behind, perhaps perplexed, but quiet. The open dissent is only our Workers' Liberty group and a few people with home-made placards.

The SWP is not among the "key organisers", but they, the Islamists (Friends of Al-Aqsa, MAB), and others

on like wavelengths, have been able to hegemonise the big London marches, even eclipsing the official ceasefire slogan.

We work to increase the internationalist profile on those protests. To pretend that the job is already done, or half-done, doesn't help.

On Zack Muddle (*Solidarity* [694](#)): I didn't suggest that "Neither Netanyahu nor Hamas" could be read as "destroy Israel, destroy Hamas", or "Hamas should kill Netanyahu/ IDF should destroy Hamas".

My worry is that it could be read as (though when I drafted it I didn't mean) indifference as between Israel (as a society) and Hamas. Both equally bad. In this war we oppose both Israel's onslaught on the whole population of Gaza, and Hamas's attacks on the civilian population of Israel, so that's an interpretation we have to guard against.

We want Hamas crushed (but Israel's onslaught won't do that, and it is doing vast harm to the civilian population of Gaza). We don't want Israel crushed. □

Martin Thomas, London

A socialist vision for Mars



Letter

In his interesting article, *The name of the new world we aim for* (*Solidarity* [693](#)), Martin Thomas, rightly, I think, is guarded about blueprints for the future, confining himself to some brief comments from Marx and William Morris.

There are however some interesting ideas about the socialist future, how it might look, how it could work, in the writings of the one-time Bolshevik and former collaborator with Lenin, Alexander Bogdanov. His science fiction novel *Red Star*, first published in St. Petersburg in 1908, tells the story of Leonid, a Russian revolutionary who travels to Mars after meeting a group of Martians who are visiting planet Earth.

Mars is organised along socialist lines, all the basics of life are planned but in a very flexible and non-oppressive manner. Unlike a number of nov-

els about the future, Orwell's 1984 being the classic example, *Red Star* is not a dystopia, nor does it portray a future where everything is organised systematically and rigidly, such as Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*.

It's worth reading along with other works by Bogdanov, who might be undergoing a bit of a revival of late: *Red Hamlet*, *The Life and ideas of Alexander Bogdanov* by James D. White was published by Haymarket Press in 2019 and his major philosophical work *Empiricism* has also recently been published. In addition, I would recommend the chapter on Bogdanov in Paul Le Banc's *Revolutionary Collective*, interesting in its own right and a corrective to some of the "anti-Leninism" contained in White's book.

Red Star is published by Indiana University Press and is relatively easy to access. It shouldn't be confused with the novel (by Aleksei Tolstoy) and better known film *Aelita* (directed by Yakov Protazanov), which also tell of a Bolshevik traveling to Mars. □

Len Glover, Lancashire

Foster: soiling his own nest



Environment

By Paul Vernadsky

John Bellamy Foster has done much to revive interest in Marxist approaches to ecology. In particular his emphasis on the “metabolic rift”, originating with Marx, has provided a crucial path into understanding ecological questions from a Marxist perspective. However his latest book, *Capitalism in the Anthropocene* (2022), continues a trajectory that risks spoiling this contribution.

This book certainly contains some insights. Foster explains how the notion of the Anthropocene – a new geological period in which humanity has become the main driver of planetary ecological change – originated with the prominent Russian geologist Aleksei Pavlov in 1922. The Russian geologist E. V. Shantser made reference to Pavlov’s coinage in *The Great Soviet Encyclopedia* in 1973, apparently the first documented use of Anthropocene in the English language.

Yet the book is replete with political blunders. First, Foster unfairly demonises the two modern pioneers of Marxist metabolism analysis – Alfred Schmidt and Neil Smith. Second, Foster grafts onto the metabolic framework some incompatible and erroneous notions, such as unequal exchange. Third, Foster advocates Soviet nostalgia, cross-class popular frontism and apologism for the Chinese ruling class. Resuscitating the corpse of Stalinism will ruin the burgeoning climate movement.

Foster should heed the quote from John Ruskin at the beginning of the book: “It’s an ill bird that fouls its own nest.” Foster’s second camp approach risks wrecking the rejuvenated Marxist ecology he has done much to promote.

Alfred Schmidt’s *The Concept of Nature in Marx* (1962) was the first serious attempt to establish Marx as an ecological theorist. Schmidt identified Marx’s conception of Stoffwechsel (translated as metabolism) as the key to humanity’s relationships with nature. Despite the limitations of Schmidt’s text, his breakthrough paved the way for more serious Marxist engagement with ecology ever since.

Foster castigates Schmidt for his “Western” Marxism, derived from the Frankfurt School. Foster’s polemic stitches together random quotations from Horkheimer, Adorno and others to create a pastiche. Foster’s approach towards the Frankfurt School is deconstructed by Carl Cassegård’s *Toward a Critical Theory of Nature* (2021).

Foster’s most substantial criticism

concerns Schmidt’s pessimism about ending the antagonism with nature under socialism. He wrote: “The exploitation of nature will not cease in the future, but man’s encroachments into nature will be rationalised, so that their remoter consequences will remain capable of control.”

Schmidt seems to have recognised this weakness. In his preface to the English translation of his book (1970), he wrote: “Marx wanted to achieve something qualitatively new: mastery by the whole of society of society’s mastery over nature. This mastery would certainly still depend on the functions of instrumental reason. But since it would ‘finalise’ these functions, and subject them to truly human aims, the mastery of society would undertake its own self-correction.”

Schmidt’s bleak portrayal of the continued domination of nature after capitalism was an accurate critique of the Stalinist states’ ecological record. It was also a useful counter to the naïve belief that a socialist society would automatically resolve environmental problems. Schmidt erred by failing to emphasise the importance of conscious, democratic planning for ecological goals under socialism.

Smith

Neil Smith’s book *Uneven Development* (1984) made a sophisticated and nuanced evaluation of Marx’s conception of nature, built around metabolism. Smith carefully evaluated Schmidt’s contribution. He reconstructed a Marxist approach to human intervention throughout history, which he provocatively called “the production of nature”. This stimulated Marxist geographers to assess the ecological impact of capitalism, putting political action centre stage.

Foster’s remarks about Smith are disingenuous. He accuses Smith of “monist, hyper-social constructivism”, suggesting that “such left thinkers go so far as to exempt humanity altogether from nature’s laws”. Foster states that “the general scepticism of Smith and other left thinkers toward discussion and action on climate change amounts to an acquiescence to the status quo, and to the distancing from environmental concerns”.

Foster’s comments are false. Smith’s book, first published in 1984, referred to climate change as an example of human damage to the planet. This was long before most other Marxists had engaged seriously with the issue. Smith rightly criticised green activists for fetishising “pristine” nature and for apocalyptic framings of environmental issues. There are some serious differences of interpretation among Marxists. However Foster’s impugnation of Smith seems designed only to elevate

his own contribution, while disparaging those thinkers who blazed the trail for Marxist renewal.

Foster further spoils the Marxist metabolic approach by seeking to graft onto Marx obtuse and mistaken conceptions. In particular, he wants to integrate “unequal ecological exchange” into Marxism. Foster claims that Marx took from the German chemist Justus von Liebig the conception of “Raubbau”, a system of robbery or overexploitation of the land and agriculture at the behest of the new industrial capitalism emerging in the towns.

Foster reaches for textual support in *Capital*. Marx wrote of a new international division of labour where “one part of the globe into a chiefly agricultural field of production for supplying the other part, which remains a pre-eminent industrial field”. In February 1881, Marx wrote to the Russian economist Nikolai Danielson about England’s “bleeding process” in India.

Marx was referring to the cotton industry and England’s domination of the United States, Australia and India – the latter still a colony at the time. Foster transposes classical imperialism onto the modern world. In particular, he ignores post-WW2 realignments between the big powers, decolonisation and capitalist development across the globe.

Foster seeks to import into Marxism the work of writers such as Howard Odum, whose embodied energy calculations of unequal exchange between the peripheral, primary resource-exporting countries and the “core” imperial centres. However Foster admits that Odum’s approach fell prey to “physico-reductionism” and attempted an erroneous “energy theory of value”.

The crucial weakness with theories of “unequal ecological exchange” is their one-sided emphasis on uneven development, while ignoring the “combined” development of capitalism over the last century. Simply painting the West as a rich bloc and the working class as some sort of labour aristocracy prevents a serious analysis of class relations within and between “Western” societies. It downgrades working class agency in the struggle for socialism.

Foster’s rejection of working class socialism is made plain in the book. He points to a “nascent environmental proletariat”, by which he means “Third World workers, working-class women, oppressed people of colour in the imperial core, indigenous populations, peasants/landless agricultural workers, and those fighting for fundamentally new relations of sexuality, gender, family, and community – as well as highly exploited and dispossessed workers everywhere”.

Foster names the organisations he

looks to: the Landless Workers’ Movement (MST) in Brazil, the peasants’ movement La Vía Campesina, the Bolivarian communes in Venezuela, the farmers’ movement in India, a People’s Green New Deal, environmental justice, just transition in the developed countries, and the Red New Deal of the North American First Nations.

No doubt all these forces and campaigns are part of modern ecological struggle. Making alliances with them is vital. However missing is the organised labour movement. Foster has almost nothing to say to the largest organised forces of workers, with the most economic and political power, who are capable of confronting the capitalists and their states.

Stalinism

The root problem with Foster’s politics is the lauding of past Stalinism and present-day authoritarian states. In this latest book, he claims that the USSR, Maoist China, Castro’s Cuba and other “post-revolutionary societies did not have the same inner drive to environmental destruction – since they were not inherently ruled by the capital accumulation process”. Foster also claims that “the existence of planning... made it more likely that such countries could effectively address environmental problems once these were brought to the forefront of their societal agendas”.

Foster claims the “Great Stalin Plan for the Transformation of Nature”, after the Second World War, “was the most ambitious plan of afforestation in all of history up to that point”. He argues that 21st century activists should recognise “the positive achievements of Soviet ecology”.

By the end of the book, Foster descends into full-scale apologism for the current Chinese state, run by the repressive Chinese Communist Party. Foster coos about how “so much hope... is now being directed at China”. It is no accident that two of the chapters were first published in *International Critical Thought* journal, edited and staffed by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Foster makes no effort to raise the condition of the millions-strong Chinese working class or indeed the oppressed nationalities within China. Instead, the Chinese state and its rulers are awarded the role of substitute social agency.

This leaves Foster a long way from Marx and far from working class socialism. It overshadows the positive contribution he has made to Marxist ecology and provides ammunition for those who want to dismiss Marxism as irrelevant to modern ecological struggles. The job of serious eco-Marxists is to salvage the treasure and clear away the refuse. □



“What we stand for

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

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

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

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

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:

- Independent working-class representation in politics
- A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement
- A workers' charter of trade union rights – to organise, strike, picket effectively, and take solidarity action
- 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! □

• workersliberty.org/join-awl

Christmas on the tracks



Diary of a trackworker

By Matt Shaw

Most places of work look forward to Christmas and New Year as a brief respite from the grind of the rest of the year. The rail industry is not like many others, in that the only time it shuts down completely is Christmas Day morning 06.00 to 22.00 on Boxing Day.

Usually the last passenger train has been about 21.00 on Christmas Eve, with the network putting everything to bed by midnight. At that point most people went home, including trackworkers, unless there was a problem. If there was indeed a problem, then you cursed your luck and got on with it.

Over the years that pattern has changed quite dramatically, starting with the growth of special jobs that could only be completed with the closure of the railway to all traffic: bridge renewals, heavily used points that could not be changed safely, jobs that needed huge amounts of testing before being pronounced safe.

With higher use of contract staff, it's

often been down to the local workers to sort out problems left behind after a job has overrun. Pressure then can lead to compromises on safety, both for the contract staff and ourselves.

In one particular incident, I can't name the company involved, but it had a train sent through where the person responsible for safety had assured the traffic staff that all the workers were clear of the track and in positions of safety. As the train proceeded, two of my workmates had to scurry out of the way as it came through where they had been working only briefly before.

The following enquiry was a masterclass in carpets and whitewash. The job had been running late and the person responsible for safety had come under increasing pressure. Luckily, no one was hurt, but that was a good few years ago and the pressure has not lessened.

Meanwhile, with the pressure of inflation and below-inflation wages settlements, Christmas, with its pay enhancements, has become a source of extra income where staff are asking in October if there is any work planned.

Having worked a few Christmases myself, I know that it is ok for single people, but it is a killer for family life.

Often these jobs start the instant the usual railway closes down and can run through the entire Christmas period with no consideration given to how that affects home life.

This use of Christmas as an extra gap for awkward jobs will only expand unless we put some major efforts into making it so expensive that it's used only as a last resort, and not as a rostered first choice. □

Join Workers' Liberty!

Want to be part of an organised long-haul collective effort to spread the socialist ideas you read in *Solidarity*, and to link together activities in diverse campaigns and conflicts around that consistent socialist thread? Then take some copies of *Solidarity* to sell each week, and contact us to discuss joining Workers' Liberty, the group that produces and sustains this paper. Check it out and contact us via workersliberty.org/join-awl □

Tube strike suspended: keep up pressure



Tubeworker

RMT has suspended the strikes planned for 8-11

January, after an intervention from City Hall which commits £30 million of new money to re-opened pay negotiations. In the coming days, *Tubeworker* will host contributions from LU work-

ers giving different views and responses to the suspension.

Winning £30m of new money is a major concession, and one that would not have been won if we had not

named a week of strikes. This is a testament to the power of workers' organisation and action. □

• Heavily abridged from bit.ly/tu-sus

Oppenheimer: a complex film



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

Given the complexities of J Robert Oppenheimer's life even the three hours of Christopher Nolan's epic *Oppenheimer* probably aren't enough.

The film opens with Oppenheimer at Cambridge University in 1925. His sojourn at Cambridge is troubled, but he does meet the brilliant German physicist Werner Heisenberg. We only encounter Heisenberg briefly but, later, as the leader of the Nazi atomic bomb project, which the Americans mistakenly think is ahead of them, he is an unseen "presence".

In fact the Nazis, more-or-less, abandoned their atomic bomb research in mid-1942 after a meeting with Heisen-

berg and other scientists left the Nazi head of industry, Albert Speer, distinctly unimpressed. It was too expensive, it would take at least three to four years, the Nazis didn't have the necessary industrial capacity and the scientists, hardly any of them Nazis, weren't that enthusiastic about making a bomb for Hitler. None of which is mentioned in the film.

This meant that the race to "get there first" was something of a non-contest. Oppenheimer oversees the Manhattan Project, which switches to targeting Japan after the surrender of Nazi Germany.

The bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki prompts the Japanese to surrender and is depicted as a straight case of cause and effect. However, it is not so clear cut. The entry of the Soviet Union into the war in the Far East is not mentioned, yet the use of the bomb was certainly prompted, in part, by the need

to deter the Soviet Union and get the Japanese to surrender quickly before the Red Army could occupy any Japanese territory.

Both the scientists and the military agree that the bomb had to be tested under "real" conditions. The fact that this meant the deaths of over 129,000 people was simply ignored.

Many of the scientists later have deep regrets about this and Oppenheimer – the "father of the bomb" – becomes deeply troubled about what he has done. The film winds up with Oppenheimer accused of past communist sympathies and having his security clearance withdrawn. He is later "pardoned" with a medal bestowed on him in the White House.

A complex film, hard to sum up in a short space, with much to discuss and certainly worth seeing. □

• *Oppenheimer* can be streamed, bit.ly/ke-opp, or found on DVD.





Nottingham rebels against the cuts

By Liam Conway

After Nottingham City Council issued a "section 114" notice, saying it could not make a balanced budget and so freezing all spending not already committed, Notts TUC and the unions representing city council workers organised a lobby of the council on 18 December.

The lobby was covered extensively by local TV. The council faces a projected £23 million hole in the budget this year and £50.9 million next, mostly caused by a cut in grant from central government of approximately £100 million a year since 2013.

The lobby demanded: no more cuts – defend jobs and services – demand more money from the Government.

Several Labour councillors attended the lobby. Some showed tentative interest in meeting with the Trades Council and the city council unions to explore a joint campaign against the cuts.

Nevertheless, the council went on to agree mitigation against the cuts rather than challenging the Government in any serious way. David Mellen, the Labour Leader of the council, said that "the scale of the challenge (means) it is inevitable that there will need to be reductions in service provision or withdrawal in some areas, subject to decisions made by councillors... We will need to work together as one city to manage this as well as possible."

We believe the best way "to work together as one city" is to unite unions, service users, the wider public and Labour Councillors in a campaign to fight, not implement, the cuts. Up to one in five councils face the same financial nightmare as Nottingham, so we must unite towns and cities facing cuts in joint campaigning to force more funding from Government.

Notts TUC has called a public meeting on 18 January 18 to discuss launching a campaign. This meeting must also focus on how the unions in the city need to do more than just demand no compulsory redundancies. Strikes will be needed to defend jobs and services.

The city is facing the closure of libraries, community centres, charges for public toilets and much more besides. □

Unity can break LU control

By a PCS member

The results of the General Secretary (GS) and Assistant General Secretary (AGS) elections in the civil service union PCS which closed on 14 December revealed a significant desire amongst members for change in the national leadership.

Fran Heathcote, existing national president and member of the dominant Left Unity group, secured GS victory with only 783 votes more than Broad Left Network's Marion Lloyd, and the Independent Left's John Moloney secured a decisive AGS win over LU's Paul O'Connor, obtaining just shy of 59% of the vote. The vote for the IL/BLN joint ticket was 21,262 to LU's 18,492.

Support for the IL/BLN candidates soared during the campaign, against an opponent that lacks a positive programme for the critical issues facing PCS members. LU shed a significant number of important LU members during the election, most critically in the Revenue and Customs Department, and lost the support of formerly LU controlled branches to John and Marion. Two long standing LU NEC members also resigned from LU. One came out in support of the IL/BLN joint ticket candidates.

The timing of the elections was designed to provide the LU candidates with a shoo-in and to remove John Moloney, elected as AGS in 2019, from office early. Those plans went badly wrong, LU was shaken to its core during the election campaign and has



emerged from these elections far weaker than when it went in.

In their desperate attempt to put the election experience behind them, while continuing to manipulate PCS media for their factional advantage, the LU tops have deliberately reduced John's clear victory to a mere acknowledgement that he will "continue as PCS Assistant General Secretary" while boosting the narrow election of Fran Heathcote and allowing her, but not John, to issue a message to members.

Nevertheless, the elections have shown that if activists, not just those of us in IL or BLN, are able to develop and unite around the principled programme that underpinned John and Marion's election campaign, we have the potential to break LU's control of the National Executive Committee in the elections coming up within a few months.

Change is certainly needed. For example, under LU:

- PCS membership levels are histori-

cally low, a critical issue of union power that LU did not acknowledge during the elections.

- Membership engagement on various metrics is low. Just 11.5% of members voted in the GS/AGS elections, which saw LU use the national PCS machine for their factional advantage rather than to promote membership debate, participation, and engagement.

- Members continue to suffer from historic, long term, reductions in the purchasing power of civil service pay. In December PCS [reported](#) that the national pay talks, which LU overhyped last summer as a reason for sinking the 2022/23 pay claim and industrial action campaign, are "...highly unlikely... [to] produce enough gains on pay for 2024 to meet our demands...", which in reality means that the Tories are pushing back the possibility of significant pay concessions until after the next general election, when they will not be in government. □

Junior doctors need solidarity

By Sacha Ismail

Junior doctors struck again for three days before Christmas (20-23 December) and six days after (3-9 January). Since March they have had 34 days of strikes in their campaign for "pay restoration" (reversal of large real-terms pay cuts since 2008).

Their action, far more determined than other public-sector strikes, and escalating in December, has moved the government. Yet what is being [offered](#) to the junior doctors remains poor, yet another real-terms pay cut for many.

In London British Medical Association (BMA) members organised city-wide pickets or demonstrations at different hospitals on different days. Most of the strikers I spoke with in the 250-strong crowd outside St Thomas's on 3 January remained determined and keen to strike again, and there were similar reports from elsewhere in the country.

Junior doctors in England will vote on renewing their strike mandate under the anti-union laws soon (existing mandate expires 29 Feb). Junior doctors in Northern Ireland are now (8 Jan-12

Feb) also balloting to strike, for the first time. They plan to strike on 7-8 March.

The government and NHS employers have used a range of tactics against the junior doctors. The Christmas period saw renewed denunciations of the strikers by ministers including Rishi Sunak, and revelations about NHS Trusts abusing the system of "derogations" (union-agreed exemptions from striking for patient safety) in order to undermine the strike.

They should be met by renewed solidarity with the junior doctors from the wider labour movement.

My FBU flag was very welcome at St Thomas's, but it doesn't seem many other trade unionists have visited London BMA pickets recently. When the BMA next strikes, socialist trade unionists must push across the country to do better.

Many of the strikers outside St Thomas's mentioned the need for pressure on Labour. Working out how to build a serious campaign in and around the Labour Party to demand support for junior doctors remains a necessity. □

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Ukraine in danger

By Dan Katz

The damage inflicted following Russia's February 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine has been devastating. Ukraine was poor before the Russian war began, with a GDP per capita of only \$3700 pa (about one third of the EU's poorest state, Bulgaria).

Last year Ukraine's GDP fell by 30%. The IMF estimates Ukraine's unemployment is 19.4%. Unemployment is high partly because of Russia's deliberate destruction of Ukraine's industry.

Currently about 18% of Ukrainian territory is occupied by Russia.

The Office of the Ukrainian Prosecutor General has recorded more than 110,000 cases of war crimes.

At least 6mn people, or 15% of Ukraine's population, have fled the country and 5mn have become internally displaced.

The UN's World Food Programme states that one in three of Ukraine's population is "food insecure", rising to half near the battle lines in south and east of Ukraine.

The Kyiv School of Economics (report, October 2023) estimates the damage to Ukraine's infrastructure to be \$151.2bn (prior to 1 September 2023). 167,200 housing units have been destroyed or damaged together with 18 airports, at least 344 bridges, and over 25,000km of roads.

1,700 secondary schools, 1,000 nurseries, and 586 higher education institutions have been damaged or destroyed, as have 1,223 medical facilities, including 384 hospitals and 352 pharmacies.

Following Ukraine's failed counteroffensive, which began later than expected, in early June, Russia is on the attack across the entire eastern front-line.

Ukraine's June offensive stalled because they were denied the weapons they needed by the US and European allies, allowing the Russians time to entrench themselves in enormous, long, deeply-defended, heavily-mined positions across eastern and southern Ukraine.

The unwillingness to hand over state-of-the-art fighter aircraft, long range missiles and adequate numbers of modern tanks, promptly, is not a mistake by the Western powers. It is a deliberate result of a policy pursued consistently through this war.

The West is scared of Putin's Russia winning this war, which would bring political instability and the possibility of future Russian military aggression against other democratic European states. But Western leaders are also wary of Russia losing. They fear Putin's possible reaction.

The EU powers, France and Germany, have a record of putting peace with Putin ahead of Ukraine's rights. In 2014-5 they forced Ukraine into the pro-Russian Minsk agreements believing an accommodation with Putin was possible and to their advantage.

Consequently, the US has armed Ukraine enough to prevent it losing, but not sufficiently to allow it to force Russia out. US, German and French political leaders have never talked about Ukraine regaining all territory lost to Russia since 2014. They want a deal to stop this war



which offers Putin a way out that does not put Putin at political risk at home. In other words, a deal that Putin might find acceptable because he can present it as a victory. Such a deal would involve major concessions from Ukraine and might put it at further risk in the future.

However, right now, Putin shows no sign of compromise.

Now the West's balancing act is in danger of unravelling. Russia is confident and Putin's recent statements indicate his stated aims, to "de-Nazify" Ukraine, i.e. overrun the country, remain. He believes the West will give up on Ukraine. He might be right.

Against the background of a new Russian offensive squabbling is now appearing publicly amongst Ukraine's political and military leaderships. Doubts about Ukraine's prospects are openly expressed in the Western media.

The US is demanding that Ukraine shift tactics and concentrate on building a domestic arms industry and creating heavily-defended trench lines and minefields similar to the Russians. That is politically difficult for the Ukrainians, who want to be seen to be on the offensive.

Most importantly, however, are the shifts in the balance of US

politics. Putin hopes for a Trump victory in the US Presidential elections in November 2024, which would almost certainly lead to the cutting of US aid to Ukraine.

However, the danger to Ukraine is more immediate. The far-right, sometimes pro-Putin, politicians that now control the US Republican party are blocking a Biden-Democrat proposal to donate \$61bn in military and humanitarian aid to Ukraine.

Unless a political deal is reached in the US, funds and equipment to Ukraine will start running out in January.

Compounding the problem for Ukraine, on Friday 15 December the pro-Putin, Hungarian Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán, vetoed an EU aid package worth \$52 billion. Orbán is trying to use aid to Ukraine as a lever to free money impounded by the EU because of Hungary's increasingly authoritarian regime which has repeatedly undermined the rule of law.

Putin celebrated as Ukraine's support stuttered: "Ukraine today produces nearly nothing, they ... bring everything in for free."

"But the freebies may end at some point and, apparently, it's coming to an end, little by little". □

Minimum Service Law: win "no work notice" pledges!

By Gerry Bates

The TUC has complied with its congress decision for a national demonstration against the Tories' new Minimum Service anti-strike law, but called it in Cheltenham (27 January, Montpellier Gardens, GL50 1UL).

The official reason is to celebrate the fight for union rights at GCHQ, which is in Cheltenham.

However, Cheltenham is neither a big industrial city, nor a labour-movement stronghold, nor central to transport networks so that demonstrators can easily travel from the major cities.

We will still work to make the protest as big as we can, but other modes of resistance will surely be necessary.

Perhaps the most significant sentence in the [resolution](#) of the TUC 9 December special congress on the anti-strike laws said that unions will "refuse to tell [their] members to cross a picket line."

That means unions refusing to take the "reasonable steps" to ensure members comply with work notices which the law requires of them, i.e. persisting with strikes in the face of injunctions banning those strikes on grounds of such refusal, and of fines following breach of injunctions.

It will take considerable work to bridge the likely gulf between words and deeds. Sadly we currently have a distinctly "telling-members-to-cross-picket-lines" culture in the movement. In multi-union industries, it is [standard](#) for non-striking unions to explicitly instruct their members to cross the picket

lines of striking unions.

That the special congress, the TUC's first in 40 years, even took place is significant. With the 2016 Trade Union Act the TUC organised a single lobby of Parliament, and little else. The tone of many delegates' speeches was clearly defiant.

The resolution also included a commitment to campaign for employers to refuse to issue work notices, as the [Scottish Government](#) has already done. (The law says that employers *may* issue work notices, but *not* that they *must*).

Several Labour mayors and council leaders, including London's Sadiq Khan, have signed a [letter](#) saying they will "explore every possible option to avert any prospect of work notices being issued in our areas." Unions, Trades Councils, and Labour Parties must press to solidify that "exploration" into explicit commitment not to issue work notices.

The resolution commits to maintaining pressure on Labour nationally to honour its promise to repeal the law, and implement its [New Deal](#) for Working People, it is unfortunate the text did not go further and call for Labour to repeal all legal restrictions on the right to organise and strike. Successive TUC congresses, including the one which [resolved](#) to call the special congress, have called for that, so for this resolution to hold back from restating that demand, and to instead blandly praise Labour's proposed New Deal as "ambitious", is a significant watering-down. □

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YES, AN EARLY ELECTION; BUT FIGHT TO BLOCK TORIES NOW

By Martin Thomas

Labour and the Lib Dems have called for a quick general election, and the *Daily Mirror* has 200,000 signatures on a petition for that.

We agree. Sunak claims a mandate from the 2019 general election, but life has moved on. The Chartists, the first big workers' movement, demanded annual parliamentary elections, and they were right; so have been those who have demanded open channels for voters to recall MPs.

It's like Thatcher in 1979-82, before the Falklands war. Thatcher, pushing through attacks sketched only loosely or not at all in the 1979 Tory manifesto, was 10% behind Labour in the polls in late 1980, and clearly behind both Labour and the Liberals (augmented by the SDP split from Labour) until the war. Yet voters could do nothing about it.

To force an election then would have needed bigger resistance to the Tories' anti-union laws, privatisations, etc., which could widen rifts among



the Tories and make the country "ungovernable". Trouble is, resistance now to the Tory measures – Illegal Migration Act, Public Order Act, Minimum Service Law, stonewalling on public sector pay and NHS – is weaker than it was then.

It needs to be stronger, both to get an election, and, immediately, to block the measures.

The TUC has voted for unions to refuse to advise workers to cross picket lines – i.e. that unions should defy injunctions under the Minimum Service Law – and to demand public bodies pledge, as the Scottish government has done, to refuse to issue "work notices" under that law. See inside-outside pages.

Signing a petition is good. Rallying forces for defiance in the workplaces and on the streets is better. □

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