

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry



TORIES OUT!

See page 2

Tax rich to save NHS

The road to Bolshevism

The story of the first, pre-Marxist, workers' movement in Russia

Pages 8-11

Standing Together in Israel

Jewish-Arab social and peace movement meets in conference

Pages 2, 6

Drax camp set for 8-13 August

Protest at "ecological" power station which actually emits more

Page 7

Longest strike in NHS history

Wirral Clinical Support Workers' 50 days of strike over pay

Page 15

Labour: tax rich to repair NHS!



A National Health Service dentist opening recently in Bristol had a queue down the street from early on its first day, and police warning many in the queue that they had no hope of getting in to sign on before the dentist shut.

NHS waiting lists are still at a catastrophic level. More and more people who can scrape together a few thousand pounds are going to private hospitals for treatments like hip replacements because they would have to wait so long for the NHS.

A [new report](#) from the Academy of Medical Sciences finds that long-term trends are now being reversed so that the health of children under five is worsening markedly. And that in a time of relatively low unemployment and increases in the legal minimum wage. Probably welfare benefit cuts, worse conditions in private rented housing, and decline in good daycare for under-fives, are to blame. Shortfalls in childhood vaccinations are increasing, probably because of both NHS shortfalls and anti-vax agitation during the Covid lockdowns.

The first demand on a Labour government must be to repair the NHS. That means reversing privatisation but also increasing funds – to fix hospitals' repair bills, to build new hospitals, to retain and recruit staff with decent pay.

Yet Keir Starmer's Labour leadership refuses to commit to taxing the rich to mend the NHS.

To the NHS and to the working class it offers tawdry magic. "Reform", "efficiency", and general "growth" will bring relief. By contrast, it scurries to give solid and hard promises to big business. No tax rises apart from fixing a few loopholes, like the "non-domiciled" one. No increase in high-income personal taxes, and none on corporation tax. The Tories' corporation tax loophole, offering zero tax on profits shown to be reinvested, will stay.

Shadow chancellor Rachel Reeves has even promised to stick with Liz Truss's scrapping of the cap on bankers' bonuses which came in with EU regulations in 2014. The measure is largely symbolic, since banks generally just give bigger regular pay when they are limited on bonuses, but the symbolism is strong.

There have been [hints](#) that Labour will drop its [plan](#) to close the loophole that allows private equity fund managers to claim their million-pound bonuses as "carried interest" (taxed at 28%) rather as income (taxed at a marginal rate of 47%). Rachel Reeves has said the plan

remains. For now.

Keir Starmer has reaffirmed the target of £28 billion "green investment" (for the "second half" of a Labour government term), but in such vague terms as not to quell doubts after Reeves has repeatedly refused to repeat the figure, and Labour's behind-the-scenes Director of Campaigns Morgan McSweeney has been widely reported as wanting to ditch it.

Tory chancellor Jeremy Hunt is promising "strategic, smart tax cuts" in the 6 March policy. Rebuffing remonstrations from the International Monetary Fund, no less, that repairing public services must come first, and tax cuts are foolish, he says cuts will be "a very important part of the strategy to grow the economy".

That is "the economy" of the rich, at best. Mostly these end-of-regime Tory tax cuts are exercises in vote-catching. The tax cuts are offered with most of the consequent loss of revenue to come after the Tories expect to be gone, and "balanced" in the fiscal projections by pencilling improbably large service cuts in four or five years' time, when (the Tories think) they will be someone else's problem.

Respect

Yet the Labour leadership is likely to box itself in even further, saying it will respect new Tory tax cuts (except perhaps a cut in inheritance tax, if Hunt goes for that), and vowing once again to abide by Tory-designed "fiscal rules".

The "fiscal rules" are based on a real problem. The government is currently paying about £100 billion a year to financiers in interest payments on government IOUs (bonds) – a figure comparable to the whole budget of NHS England, after netting out taxes paid by NHS employees. The figure has gone up drastically because of the government's huge spending in Covid lockdowns (much of it to dodgy private contractors and consultants) and because of the increase in the RPI inflation measure, which regulates the interest paid on many bonds.

Many of the bondholders are non-UK. Even a workers' government – if not immediately supported by other workers' governments in Europe, the USA, etc. – might find it advisable to keep up payments, in order not to be frozen out of international credit. Equally, it would not be carefree about selling more IOUs or printing more money.

But the workers' government would not treat Tory-designed budget-balancing fiscal rules as immutable canon. The Tories themselves didn't treat the rules that way during the Covid lockdowns. The decay of the NHS and public services is also an emergency.

Bottom line: a workers' government

would tax the rich – indeed, confiscate a large part of their wealth.

Keir Starmer declared in his 2021 [Fabian pamphlet](#), or earlier, that he is terrified of disapproval from big business. Any and every social policy, for him, is "subject to approval" from big business.

He, and his backroom people, are also terrified of the "socially conservative" ex-Labour voters whom they see as having given the 2019 election to the Tories.

By now Starmer Labour has come round to calling for a "humanitarian truce", to be followed by a "sustainable ceasefire" in Gaza. A ceasefire, in other words. Late in the day, since Benjamin Netanyahu and Hamas themselves are now heavily hinting at some sort of ceasefire.

But Starmer still won't say "ceasefire". That is (whatever "Zionist conspiracy" fantasists say) not because of deference to big business. Emmanuel Macron got no kickback from French big business for calling for a ceasefire from early on.

Starmer's hesitancy is because of those foggily-perceived "social conservative" voters. For the same reason, Starmer refuses to speak for trans rights or against Brexit (though it is very far from a "done deal": the Trade and Co-operation Agreement has to be renegotiated in 2025).

Left-wingers will waste our time if we hive off into ineffectual political efforts like Transform, the Trade-Unionist and Socialist Coalition, and so on. There has been an outflow of left-wingers from the Labour Party since 2020, but most of those left-wingers have dispersed. None of the efforts like Transform show life remotely comparable to, say, Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party of 1995 (which in any case proved a dead end). They show less life and engagement with everyday class struggle than local Labour Parties even in their current shrivelled condition; and some of them, such as George Galloway's Workers Party, are outright reactionary.

Socialists should not leave Labour to Starmer. Even "soft left" Labour people are discontented with Starmer, despite being swayed to caution by the nearness of the next general election. There is a political revolt ready to be brewed – over time: it may take years – within the labour movement, unions and Labour Party.

We will argue for Labour to treat "socially conservative" undecided voters with respect, as thinking people, and work to persuade them through honest argument – including argument that they should vote Labour because Labour will tax the rich to repair the NHS, even if they still disagree on this or that.

Corbyn Labour did that in 2017, with



success. It failed in 2019 because it "did a Starmer" on Brexit and antisemitism, weaselling and evading.

The unions have mostly, for now, retreated to pushing Labour to keep to its "New Deal for Working People" promises, and worrying little what it does on any other front. But in any case the "New Deal" is inadequate on scrapping anti-union laws. And union members are also NHS users, trans people, migrants, people shocked at the deaths in Gaza.

Solidarity will campaign for the labour movement to push Labour to move on the NHS, on taxing the rich, on workers' rights, and to break with subservience to the bosses and bankers across the board. □



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• workersliberty.org/2-i-p

Gaza: build solidarity on the ground

By Ira Berkovic

On 2 February, over 1,000 Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel met in Haifa for the 4th National Congress of Standing Together, the largest grassroots social movement in Israel campaigning for peace and equality.

Addressing the congress, Palestinian activist Shahd Bishara, a member of Standing Together's national leadership, said: "Do you understand the lack of hope and helplessness of the Palestinians between the river and the sea from the situation? [...] As a Palestinian who sees the catastrophe that is happening to my people, I am also part of this country that experienced horrors on 7 October, and from this place I want to reach out and fight together for peace.

"Peace that is not only the absence of war, but also the recognition of the rights and dignity of all the people who live here. For me, peace is not only political agreements, but also cooperation and listening to the needs and desires of all the groups involved. And no, peace is not just a dream, but also a real possibility if we work together for change."

Standing Together, and other social movements within Israel demanding a change of course, represent a key form of leverage on the Israeli state. We have a duty of solidarity with them.

Reports indicate that negotiations

between Israel and Hamas, conducted through mediators, towards a further ceasefire and hostage release agreement are ongoing, but being held up by hardliners on both sides. The Israeli military and political consensus now seems set on keeping troops on the ground in Gaza indefinitely, or at least for a prolonged period, and Netanyahu continues to signal absolute hostility to any political settlement including any form of genuine Palestinian sovereignty.

Motivation

Part of Netanyahu's motivation for wanting a prolonged or indefinite continuation of military operations is that his own political fate is substantially bound up with the war. As long as the war, or its direct military sequels, continue, Netanyahu can invoke the need for stability and national unity behind his leadership. The mainstream Israeli opposition has generally been timid in calling for Netanyahu to go. But cracks have started to emerge, with Gadi Eizenkot, a member-without-portfolio of the war cabinet, publicly criticising the conduct of the war and calling for elections "in the next few months."

Should a ceasefire agreement be signed, the far right in the cabinet, wishing to prosecute the war with even more ferocity and opposing any deal with Hamas, may topple the government themselves by withdrawing from

Netanyahu's coalition, thereby triggering elections. Far-right groups have recently organised protests which attempted to block the provision of aid to Gaza, which were dispersed by the police and army.

Opinion polling within Israel shows that Netanyahu would be trounced in a postwar election. Ousting him from office would be positive, especially because it would eject the worst elements of the far right from the government. But Netanyahu's likely replacement, Benny Gantz, has at times criticised Netanyahu from the right on questions of military strategy and treatment of the Palestinians.

A report in the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* on 2 February profiled activists involved in direct action to resist ethnic cleansing in the West Bank, the forced displacement of Palestinians by armed Jewish settlers. Connecting the widespread and growing discontent with Netanyahu to a democratic programme that persuades Israeli Jews their future peace and security requires that Palestinians enjoy the same is vital.

An old adage of Karl Marx contends that "a nation that oppresses another can never itself be free" – or, in some translations, "a nation that oppresses another forges its own chains." The truth of that adage is well illustrated in Israel/Palestine. Ongoing efforts by Standing Together and others to build

a movement against war, and for peace and equality, offer hope for a better future. □

Standing Together UK

נقف מֵעָא
עומדים ביחד

UK Friends of Standing Together

Standing Together, Israel's fastest-growing grassroots movement over recent years, 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: for peace, justice, and equality for Israelis and Palestinians – Jews and Arabs – including an equal right to self-determination, and for the full equality of Palestinian citizens of Israel.

UKFoST promotes the benefits of joint struggle by Jews and Palestinians to this end. □

- ukfost.co.uk
- [@omdimbeyachaduk](https://twitter.com/omdimbeyachaduk)

Farmers' protests sweep Europe

By Rhodri Evans

Farmers' protests have subsided somewhat in France, following government concessions, but continue in many countries across Europe.

They were sparked by new European Union rules which require a certain proportion of fallow land, crop rotations, and reduced fertiliser use. The EU is now stepping back.

German farmers object to the phasing out of tax breaks on agricultural diesel; Netherlands farmers, to rules curbing nitrogen oxide and ammonia emissions. In Greece, fuel tax is a target; in Bulgaria, food imports from Ukraine.

The French Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (*Révolutionnaires*) reports that new prime minister Gabriel Attal has promised a "pause" in the plans for pesticide reduction, to reduce requirements for fallow, and to restore subsidies

for tractor fuel. The NPA (R) summarises this as: "The government is using 'green austerity' as a scapegoat so as to spare the giants of agrobusiness, the banks, the big food firms, or the supermarkets. They are just asked to... obey the law better. A law which has shown that it is incapable of ensuring an income for those who work the land".

"In the mobilisation", continues the NPA (R), "there were both the small farmers, crushed by their debts, living below the minimum wage, under pressure from the big capitalists, and the leaders of real empires of agrobusiness".

It reports however that "the anger of the peasants elicited deep sympathy among workers. The slogan 'live, don't just survive' struck a chord with the stagnation of wages and the increase of prices in the cities".

The average farm household income in France is £45,000,

but that often includes outside-farming incomes. 18% of farm people are below the official poverty line, as against 15% overall; the farm work is often harder than much wage-work.

Lutte Ouvrière, another French activist-left group, was more sceptical about the progressive potential of farmer revolt.

"Many farmers have difficulty in paying themselves the minimum wage, but the sector is very lucrative for the shareholders of [agribusiness]..."

"No basic problem will be resolved for the small farmers as long as the laws of the market embedded in capitalism reign. However, in their overwhelming majority, the farmers are attached to the capitalist order..."

"The market economy and competition grind down the small farmers, but they see their future only in that economy. They defend private

property and free enterprise all the more because they fear to lose their own.

"It is like that with many tradespeople, shopkeeper, or self-employed people who have one foot in the world of labour and another in that of the bosses. They denounce the weight of the state but demand more and more subsidies from it. They defend the market and free enterprise, but also want guaranteed incomes and protected markets.

"That is why the perspective of overthrowing capitalism to get rid of the law of devil-take-the-hindmost can be carried forward only by those who live only by their labour-power, that is, the wage-workers".

Lutte Ouvrière will have precedents in mind. For many decades now, the European Union has been operating a gradual rundown of small farming in favour of higher-productivity, large-scale farming, softening

it by subsidies to the farmers. Agriculture now has 2.5% of the working population, where it was near 40% in 1949.

A large movement of small farmers in the 1950s, the "Poujadists", was initially supported by the Communist Party, but took a markedly fascist direction. Across Europe, the far right seems to be gaining most from the current farmers' revolts.

The other NPA, the NPA (*L'Anticapitaliste*), makes much of opposing "productivism" in agriculture. However, a world population of eight billion needs highly-productive agriculture. It also needs the environmental protections attempted by the EU. Indeed, many more.

Socialists have to seek alternative ways of social protection for farm people than tax breaks on fossil fuels, looser eco-rules, or blocking imports from poorer countries. □

Morning Star confused on Labour



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

Robert Griffiths, general secretary of the Communist Party of Britain, has a profound insight – no doubt informed by his mastery of Marxist theory and practice – into what a good result for the working class at the next general election would be:

“A Labour victory at the next general election would be a better outcome than a Conservative victory, raising working-class morale and demands” he wrote in the *Morning Star* of 12 September 2023.

That’s clear enough, isn’t it? It’s Griffiths’ next comments that might cause more confusion:

“But this cannot mean voting for those Labour candidates who have played a prominent part in turning the party to the right, purging the left and advocating neoliberal and pro-war policies.”

What exactly this proviso (reflected in

the resolution on the general election passed at the CPB’s November 2023 congress) will actually mean in practice remains a mystery. Labour leaders being poor on wars is not new: they supported the government in World War One. Under what circumstances, and in which constituencies, will the CPB and *Morning Star* advocate a Labour vote?

Some clues may be found in the pages of the *Morning Star* since the November congress. The paper has been especially excited by the resignation of Labour councillors over Starmer’s (initially) uncritical support for Israel’s attack on Gaza and his refusal to call for a ceasefire:

Municipal

“This is unprecedented. Even at the height of the Iraq war, there was no comparable movement at municipal level against Tony Blair,” gushed the MS editorial of 22 December, going on to note (probably correctly) that: “There is an element of Gaza being the last straw for some, coming on top of undemocratic and increasingly right-wing leadership in Labour, including a barely concealed indifference to Islam-

ophobia.”

The editorial noted that there have been “others who have already successfully broken with Labour and won elections in working-class communities, including Liverpool and Tower Hamlets” and enthused: “This is a movement of striking political potential. Increasingly these groups of newly minted independents – now sometimes the largest force in their councils – will seek to co-ordinate and amplify their efforts.”

So that’s the CPB/*Morning Star* position, is it? Build a new left-wing movement based upon councillors who’ve resigned from Labour over Gaza and other matters?

Well, perhaps not. The editorial suddenly backtracks: “There must be a note of caution concerning this development. The great majority of Labour councillors, including those opposed to Starmer’s position on Gaza, will likely stay with their party.

“It cannot be insisted that leaving Labour is the only correct thing to do. There is an obligation on all socialists to challenge Starmer on Gaza and much else besides, but many will decide that this can still best be done from within.”

So is staying in the Labour Party to fight Starmer’s line on Gaza and his rightward lurches the right or the wrong thing to do? The MS simply doesn’t know, it seems.

The confusion is merely deepened by the editorial’s conclusion: “‘No ceasefire no vote’ has become one of the most potent slogans on the Palestine protests. It must be a call to arms, not electoral abstention. The emerging network of councillors will be central to giving it meaning.” I defy any reader to explain what that word-salad actually means when it comes to voting in an election. Mind you, this may be an attempt to respond to CND general secretary Kate Hudson, who wrote in the MS of 25 Nov: “we will never vote for a politician who has not called for a ceasefire. That is now a powerful rallying cry of this movement: no ceasefire – no vote”

Finally, a worrying sign: the *Morning Star* front page of 1 Feb reports (with apparent approval) that George Gallo-way, now of the so-called *Workers Party*, is standing in the 29 February Rochdale by-election. Will the paper support this unsavoury red-brown opportunist? □

Stalin and the Angels



Eric Lee

Keke would have been so proud. When her son Joseph was growing up in the small, dusty town of Gori, she dreamed that one day he would be a priest. He did eventually study at the Tbilisi Theological Seminary, but like so many others, he spent more time secretly reading banned books than studying for the priesthood. He was eventually thrown out of the seminary, and according to stories that made the rounds, he told the authorities about all the other students at the seminary who shared his radical views – who were then expelled as well.

Joseph went on to become a revolutionary, and took on the name by which he would become infamous: Stalin.

Stalin seemed to hate organised religion. After the Red Army conquest of his homeland, Georgia, Stalin and his

fellow Bolsheviks launched a bloody war on the Orthodox Church. Many churches were destroyed, priests were killed and the Catholicos himself, who had sent an open letter of protest to world leaders meeting in Genoa, was jailed following a show trial.

But things may be a bit more complicated than they appeared. While Stalin himself never publicly returned to the faith of his youth, he did reach out to the church during the Second World War, trying to mobilise the faithful in defence of the Soviet motherland.

Ever since then, and particularly under Putin’s leadership, a mythology has grown up saying that Stalin was always secretly a devout Christian. There are those in Russia who claim that the Soviet dictator communicated with angels who defended the Russian capital Moscow when it was attacked by the German Luftwaffe.

It is in this context that we need to understand the latest bizarre story emerging from Tbilisi, the Georgian capital. A pro-Russian group known

as the “Alliance of Patriots” recently donated an icon to the city’s giant Sameba cathedral featuring Saint Matrona of Moscow. Standing next to Matrona is an image of Joseph Stalin. According to some believers, Stalin went to Matrona, who lived in Moscow during the war, to get help and advice.

Images of the icon were shared on social media, including by Giorgi Kandelaki, a former member of Parliament who currently works for SOVLAB, the Soviet Past Research Laboratory. SOVLAB has done outstanding work on Georgia’s recent history. When challenged about the Stalin image, a church spokesman admitted that the image was, in fact, the Soviet dictator. But he insisted that Stalin was playing a supporting role in an icon dedicated to a modern Russian saint. He compared it to an image of a Roman emperor that might appear in a fresco depicting Saint George. The spokesman added that the controversy was meant to overshadow the celebration of



Orthodox Christmas this year.

Meanwhile, an activist-artist named Nata Peradze defaced the icon with paint. Far right groups, including the notorious Alt-Info, together with Orthodox priests, then surrounded her house in a menacing protest. Police were called in.

An unholy alliance now exists in Georgia consisting of extreme right-wingers, pro-Russians and the Church. It has been in the news mostly because of their homophobia, which has led to violent attacks

on gay people and journalists. In rallying around the image of Stalin, they have revealed another side to their world-view: a renewed “cult of the personality” tailored for the 21st century. Such a thing has no place in an independent, modern and democratic country which is seeking membership in the European Union. It is time for Georgia to finally put the ghost of Stalin to rest. □

• Eric Lee is founder-editor of Labour Start, writing here in a personal opinion column.

Gender bias in Indian courts



Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

In India millions of women's lives are impacted by sexual violence. Gender inequality, poverty, and the criminal justice system all contribute to this issue. Gender and caste discrimination combine to make marginalized women most likely to be affected by sexual

violence. The criminal justice system struggles to both try and convict perpetrators and odds are worse when crimes were reported by women.

A study published in the *American Political Science Review* found that in India's northern state of Haryana male complainants who register cases on behalf of their woman friends or relatives are less likely to "face burdens or exclusions" than if a woman was listed as a primary complainant.

Nirvikar Jassal, Assistant Professor of Political Science at the London School of Economics, surveyed 418,190 FIRs

("First Information Reports") between January 2015 and November 2018 in Haryana, of which 37,637 or 9 per cent were registered by women.

The cases studied included burglary and violence against women, and they were tracked from the initial filing to the final outcome in court. The study matched more than 250,000 FIRs with judicial records found on the e-courts website and found that women's complaints are less likely to go to court and have fewer convictions – 5 per cent – even when they do, compared to men's complaints at 17.9 per cent.

"Women's cases have, on average, a lag of over a month longer than men between incident and registration, suggesting significant delays between crime occurrence and when the state takes cognizance of the case," the study finds. It also states that women's cases "spend longer in the judiciary by over a month."

Women reporting crimes have "a lower chance of a suspect that wronged them being sent to prison for either type of complaint". □

Academic freedom battle remains

By Colin Foster

Former sociology professor David Miller has won an employment tribunal case about his sacking by Bristol University in October 2021. Miller is a high-profile "absolute anti-Zionist" who considers himself left-wing.

The decision has been hailed by some as a victory for academic freedom. Bristol University said it sacked Miller because of his treatment of students, not because of his views.

At the time we wrote that those could be good grounds to sack him; we couldn't say whether the university's case was sufficient, since it had given no details. We despised Miller's views but were against him being sacked for those views.

We took a similar attitude with Kathleen Stock, a lecturer at Sussex University

well-known (and awarded an OBE by the government) for decrying trans rights claims. Demands for her sacking were small-scale, and the university stated it would not sack her; but in October 2021, she resigned.

Miller told the employment tribunal that he would have resigned soon (like Stock) if Bristol had not sacked him. Like Stock, he seems to have prospered since.

We are against academics being sacked for aberrant views, though not necessarily against them being sacked for mistreating students or co-workers. It's an important principle: the main consequence in Britain now of licensing sacking of academics for "bad" political associations would probably be a purge of visiting academics from Israeli universities.



In Lewisham, the candidate for Mayor of George Galloway's "Workers Party" is protesting because he was briefly arrested by police for a blatantly antisemitic "Zionists equal Nazis" placard.

The "Workers Party" denounces "a coalition of Trotskyites and others", i.e. people concerned to restrain antisemitic overtones, for keeping it off the platforms of Gaza protests; it is pro-Iran, pro-Putin, pro-Xi-Jinping, anti-woke, against "mass immigration". Miller has worked with Galloway

Stock has moved on from the urbane tone of her 2021 book *Material Girls* (which says that though transgender people are pursuing "fictions", we should empathise and go along with those "fictions") to endorsing the anti-trans agitator Posie Parker, who has organised street protests alongside neo-Nazis.

Miller, likewise, has expanded to statements which make it hard to believe that he would ever treat Jewish students fairly, and which other "absolute anti-Zionists" have said "cross a line". The tribunal said he could well have been sacked fairly on the basis of those later comments.

The tribunal ruled that "anti-Zionism" (not clearly defined) is a protected belief (like a religion) under the Equality Act 2010, i.e. you are protected against mistreatment on grounds of that belief. Case-law says scientology is a protected belief, and so are veganism and "democratic socialism", but not Trotskyism.

Miller's tribunal seems to show mostly that Bristol university did poorly in documenting its case. It does nothing to reverse the growth in restrictions on student protest and on-campus dissent. Students continue to campaign. □



Activist Agenda

On Saturday 17 February, from 2pm, Workers Against the CCP is protesting outside the Apple Store at Covent Garden, London WC2E 8HB.

Demands: End Uyghur forced labour in Apple supply chains • End Apple's collaboration with CCP censorship • Union rights for factory workers in China • Decent conditions and union recognition for UK Apple workers

Investigations have repeatedly linked the factories that build Apple's products to the Chinese state's forced labour programmes for the persecuted Uyghur people.

Even outside the forced labour programmes, Chinese workers are banned from forming free trade unions.

To maintain a cosy business relationship with the Chinese state, Apple helps its censorship regime. In 2019 the company removed access to an app that Hong Kong democracy activists had used to organise during protests. In 2022, it curbed the AirDrop feature that activists had used to spread dissident messages.

• Info for campaigns, template motions, etc.: workersliberty.org/agenda



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“Efforts to silence us serve Israel’s leaders”

Statement from Palestinian members of the national leadership of [Standing Together](#)

As Palestinian citizens of Israel, our daily existence is marked by systemic discrimination, persecution, neglect, and violence. We live in a state of constant tension, denied recognition of our Palestinian history, identity, and culture. Since the Hamas attack on October 7th, we have been facing a deeply traumatised Israeli society and a political leadership that capitalized on these atrocities to further incite against us. Our situation has become even more untenable, as we face collective trauma and the fear of a second Nakba, as well as deep grief and oppression within our society.

Our ability to speak, act, or effect change under a fascist government is already severely limited and seems to be diminishing further. The call [by [PACBI](#)] to [boycott](#) Standing Together, an organisation we are proud to co-lead with numerous elected Jewish and Palestinian partners, was infuriating. Efforts to silence and isolate Standing Together do not serve the Palestinian cause, they serve the interests of Israel’s political establishment, which is also attempting to silence us.

Standing Together is the only organisation that has provided us and tens of thousands of Palestinian citizens of Israel a safe political refuge during these challenging times, a place to demand a ceasefire, grieve safely, and organise for a future where we are free and equal in our homeland.

Standing Together also offers tens of thousands of Jewish Israelis an alterna-

tive vision. In a political reality where many support our government’s attacks on civilians in Gaza, Standing Together has been a safe political haven for Jewish Israelis to resist dominant narratives and fight against the dehumanisation and subjugation of Palestinians, out of allyship, solidarity, and self-interest.

The fight for Palestinian liberation is multi-faceted. As a movement operating within Israel, we took upon ourselves a specific role: to shift Israeli public opinion away from supporting policy that maintains and deepens the subjugation of Palestinians. Our strategy is not to morally lecture or attempt to shock Jewish Israelis with the ugly truth of our reality, to “force them into liberating Palestinians.” This, historically, here and around the world, does not work on its own. Our role is to empower and develop joint leadership, shift public opinion, and create a shared, embodied struggle for liberation between Palestinians and Jewish Israelis.

No-one is going

We believe that all politics, whether we like it or not, begins from a place of self-interest. We believe that it is politically effective to argue that oppression, racism, and bigotry harms the people of the oppressor as well as the oppressed. The harm is by no means equal, though the role of self-interest in political organising must not be underplayed. We work under the basic assumption that millions of Palestinians and millions of Jews live in this land today, and no one is going anywhere. Ending Israeli control over Palestinians and forging a society in which every-

one is free and equal between the river and the sea is in the interest of both Palestinians and Jewish Israelis.

Palestinians have always paid the highest price for decades of Israel’s systemic oppression, in the form of military occupation, siege, incarceration, and apartheid, and the Israeli public is already starting to understand that they are paying a price too. Since October 7th, it is more clear than ever that the security, freedom, and ultimate fate of Israelis and Palestinians will forever be linked and we must forge a politics of multiethnic solidarity grounded in our common humanity, pain, and purpose. Our role at Standing Together is to organise our society toward understanding this reality, toward recognising that the majority of people who live in this land – not only Palestinians, but also most Jewish Israelis – are not benefiting from this reality, and need to rebuild the very foundations of our society for a different, sustainable and just future.

We actively campaign against Israel’s oppressive regime and have made specific efforts to increase the visibility of the atrocities committed by Israel in Gaza, both to Israeli and international audiences, despite the risks involved in doing so within Israel. Standing Together was among the first organisations inside Israel to actively call for a ceasefire and is currently leading the movement to revive conversations about ending the occupation and striving for peace.

Our short-term goal is to reach a ceasefire agreement to save the lives of our people in Gaza and the West Bank and to secure a hostage deal so



that people can return to their families alive and safe. Our long-term goal is to create a new majority in Israeli society, composed of both Palestinian and Jewish citizens, who are united in the fight to end the occupation and advance equality and justice, and ultimately, liberation – a sustainable and just peace.

We are part of the Palestinian people and we take on the collective demands for freedom and historic justice from all of our people – including the Palestinian diaspora and refugees. We welcome criticism and dialogue from other Palestinian groups with different realities, missions, organising programs, audiences, and strategies.

It is disheartening to be silenced by other pro-Palestinian groups at a time when we are being silenced and persecuted by the Israeli government and Israeli institutions for fighting for the lives of our people, but it will not stop us from continuing to organise. We are proud to organise Palestinians and Jews together, we stand by our movement, our strategy, and our theory of change, and we will continue to organise until we are all equal and free. □

Boycott calls are a diversion from solidarity

By Will Sefton

The profile of calls to boycott Israel has risen since 7 October. The official Boycott Divestment Sanctions (BDS) movement is playing catch-up with a primarily social media-driven effort, which has now spread to advocate [boycott](#) of the most active anti-war movement in Israel, Standing Together.

Following the Hamas attack and the Israeli onslaught, people used TikTok and other social media platforms to call for boycott of various brands. At one point, the four being targeted were McDonalds, because an Israeli franchisee provided free meals to the IDF; Puma, as the kit supplier to Israel’s national football team; Disney, for planning

on producing a Marvel film featuring a mutant Mossad agent; and Starbucks because it decided to [sue](#) its US union for posting what it says is copyright-infringing imagery on social media.

By December 2023, [#boycottisrael](#) had 340 million views and [#bds](#) three billion. The *Washington Post* reports that by the start of 2024, there were almost 500,000 posts [#boycottisrael](#) and 887,000 hashtagged [#bds](#) on Instagram.

BDS, the organisation, did not target those particular companies, and quickly ran to catch up. Omar Barghouti, the movement’s founder, told the *Washington Post* the aim of BDS is “for boycotts of corporations and institutions seen as supporting Israel’s stance to-

ward the Palestinians, including through the contribution of financing, goods and services, or cultural backing. BDS also calls for a withdrawal of investment in ‘complicit’ projects, an end to specific company activities in Israel and sanctions against the country”.

BDS does not prevent activists from targeting particular companies. It has fallen foul of more hardline activists, particularly in the US, where it distanced itself from the more overtly antisemitic “[Boston Mapping Project](#)”.

As directed by social media, the boycott provides something simple for an individual to do, often divorced from any political activity about the conflict. Workers’ Liberty has consistently argued that a boycott of Israel, as well as being an

ineffective way to achieve the national aspirations of the Palestinians, has a distinctly antisemitic undertone. It places Israelis, including those who are active against the occupation and against the Netanyahu government, “beyond the pale”, and damns Jews outside Israel who, though often very critical of the government, feel empathy with the people and have family and friends there. It writes off any progressive role for Israelis or indeed Palestinians living in Israel to do anything about the war and occupation.

The boycott agitation also has little economic effect on Israel. A 2018 Brookings Institution analysis noted that Israel’s economy is reasonably resistant to boycotts because it exports goods that are difficult to

source elsewhere, and mostly tech and intermediate goods not bought by final consumers anyway.

The recent outbreak of war and the constant flow of social media content about the war assisted the boycott. While people consume social media as individuals and away from collective discussion, wholesale boycotts of “bad regimes” can feel meaningful.

The challenge for socialists is to persuade people to undertake meaningful solidarity with movements like Standing Together, who are campaigning on the ground in Israel, where it matters most, for an end to the occupation, for peace, and self-determination and equal rights for Israeli Jews and for Palestinians. □

Drax camp planned for 8-13 August



Environment

By Alan Gilbert

Reclaim The Power, a group in the tradition of the “climate camp” of 2006-9, is planning a protest camp at Drax power station, near Selby in North Yorkshire, on 8 to 13 August. Workers Liberty students and others will be part of it. If you want to join our contingent, email awl@workersliberty.org.

There is a [planning meeting](#) in York on 24-25 February.

Drax bosses claim that the power station is a pioneer in renewable energy, but it is not. The power station has been converted from coal to burning wood. The theory is that the wood can be taken from sustainable forests, which as new trees grow consume car-

bon dioxide, and the CO₂ emitted as it is burned can be put underground by Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS).

But the CCS is only experimental, and it would be better to do experimental CCS in smaller-emissions trials. The wood is chopped in the USA and shipped across the Atlantic. The official regulator Ofgem is so dissatisfied that it has launched a [formal inquiry](#) into whether the supply is actually sustainable.

Emissions from Drax are [bigger](#) than from any other UK power station, indeed from any in Europe other than Germany’s notorious lignite-burning stations (now being phased out). Yet Drax produces relatively little electricity. You have to burn a lot of wood to get a kilowatt-hour.

Reclaim The Power’s plan renews a tradition from action such as at Kingsnorth power station in 2008.

Workers’ Climate Action, a group in which Workers’ Liberty was active, took a [distinctive part](#) in that action, building links with workers in the power station to argue for workers’ control and green reconversion.

Workers’ Liberty activists will also be there for the [launch](#) of a London free public transport campaign on 10 February. This initiative comes out of the campaign to stop a new car tunnel under the Thames at Silvertown.

Workers’ Liberty people spoke at and took part in the We Make Tomorrow conference on 28 January in London, called by the Trade Union Group of the Climate Justice Coalition, an alliance which was active around the COP 26 talks in Glasgow in 2021.

Considering that the conference was sponsored by the PCS and Unison unions, and many other groups including Extinction Rebellion, the turnout was

disappointing. The conference was designed to be about trade unions’ part in the environmental struggle, but attendance was 100 at most and, as far as we could see, mostly not trade-union activists.

There is however a follow-up on 8 February, a meeting on unions and a just transition organised by the Environment Forum of the Islington Labour Parties. We’ll report. □



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

Quetta rally hits Baloch repression

By Sacha Ismail

Since December there have been major protests against state repression in the part of Balochistan occupied by Pakistan, including Baloch-led protests in Pakistani capital Islamabad. The immediate focus is killings, disappearances and abductions by the Pakistani army, security services and allied militias, which have reached huge proportions in Balochistan.

Even the Pakistani government admits thousands of “disappearances” in Balochistan in recent decades, while human rights activists say there have been many thousands.

In many ways Balochistan is to Pakistan what Kashmir is to India.

The current protests were sparked by the killing of four men – Balach Mola Baksh, Saif Baloch, Shakoor Baloch, and Wadood Baloch – by the police Counter Terrorism Department in a supposed “encounter” in October. In fact, it seems, the police had already arrested the men and faked the encounter to cover up their murder.

In December large numbers of protesters travelled the best part of a thousand miles to Islamabad, facing arrests and repression along the way. Their sit-in in the capital drew national attention to the repres-

sion in Balochistan, usually embargoed from serious discussion in Pakistan, and pulled in people from other communities alarmed by increasingly out-of-control state violence.

The movement has been characterised by extensive women’s participation and leadership. Many Baloch are very hostile to the Islamist politics that have grown so strong in Pakistan; some have argued the protests should also be seen in the context of women’s rights struggles in Iran and Afghanistan.

Although the Islamabad action is now over there is still major unrest in Balochistan. Many tens of thousands rallied in the provincial capital Quetta on 25 January.

Solidarity

The international labour movement and left should stand in solidarity with the Baloch people, their struggle for basic human rights and their right to democracy and self-determination, on their own merits and as a core part of the struggle for democracy in Pakistan.

The country is due to hold elections on 8 February, but they are widely acknowledged to be a farce, with the army blatantly deciding the outcome. Former prime minister Imran Khan, a reactionary demagogue but popular for a complicated mix of reasons,

has been jailed and his party suppressed in order to ensure the desired result.

Balochistan comprises almost half of Pakistan’s land area, though it is relatively sparsely populated. Always denied self-determination and subjected to repression since its ruler handed it to the newly independent Pakistani state in 1948, its position has worsened since the supposedly liberal military regime of Pervez Musharraf (1999-2008), with a further degeneration under the current unelected caretaker government of Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar.

Kakar, himself from Balochistan, but not Baloch, denounces those demanding human rights in his home province as supporters of terrorism.

Despite being rich in natural resources including oil, natural gas, gold and copper, Balochistan remains the poorest province of Pakistan by a long way, with the Baloch people who make up its large minority disproportionately poor. It was disproportionately devastated by the 2022 floods.

That is the background to both armed insurgencies that have clashed with the Pakistani state and broader civil unrest in Balochistan. Pakistan has responded to any sort of unrest, even the most peaceful, with violence, terrorising the Ba-

loch people.

The Baloch are also oppressed and repressed in neighbouring Iran.

The Balochistan issue has been a source of friction between Pakistan and Iran, but also a source of repressive unity the two states. In January Iran fired missiles into Pakistan, saying it was targeting a Pakistani-Baloch Sunni jihadist group, and Pakistan responded in kind. At the end of the month however the two foreign ministers met in Islamabad and agreed a common

strategy for suppressing the Baloch people.

Self-determination for Balochistan is not totally straightforward, since only a third of the population is Baloch. But the first step in self-determination here is meaningful democracy, and the first step in democracy is bringing an end to repression of the Baloch people’s basic civil rights. □

• Background bitly/baloch-s • EDM bit.ly/b-edm • Teach-in 13 Feb bit.ly/t-baloch



Upcoming meetings

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

Wednesday 7 February, 7pm: Israel-Palestine: unravelling the issues: The rise of the Israeli right, New Cross Learning

Monday 12 February, 7.15pm: Confronting antisemitism on the left: arguments for socialists

Tuesday 13 February, 6.30pm: Workers’ struggle in the UK, The Lost Wanderer, 46 Leazes Park Road, Newcastle, NE1 4PG

Wednesday 14 February, 7pm: Israel-Palestine: unravelling the issues: Israel-Palestine and the left, New Cross Learning

Thursday 15 February, 3pm: The fight for in-house employment: Tubeworker monthly meeting

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



The road to Narodniks and workers

By Sean Matgamna

Second in a series around the anniversary of the death of Vladimir Ulyanov (Lenin) in 1924.

In the first instalment of this series (*Solidarity* 697) I traced in broad outline the populist revolutionary environment in and from which Russian Marxism emerged.

In the mid 19th century a great wave of radical, leftist, rebellion developed among the educated youth of Russia. It was “populist” in the sense of oriented to the working people as a whole, in the first place the mass of peasants and only secondarily the wage-workers. In 1874-6 the populists “went to the people” in the countryside with socialist education and general enlightenment and failed completely.

Then the populist movement *Zemlya i Volya* (ZiV), now Bakuninist, tried to rouse the peasants to immediate rebellion. They failed again.

In June 1879, at the congress of *Zemlya i Volya* (Land and Freedom), the organisation split in two, into *Narodnaya Volya* (People’s Will), committed to turning to terrorism against government officials in order to force the Tsar to grant Russia a constitution, and a group around Plekhanov which would be called *Chornyi Peredel* (Black [i.e. peasant land] Redistribution) and at first stood for the old ZiV policy.

They agreed that neither would use the old name, *Zemlya i Volya*. Very small numbers were involved on both sides.

The terrorists, *Narodnaya Volya* (People’s Will) had a spectacular future in front of them, which would culminate in the killing in March 1881 of the Tsar himself, the “Tsar Liberator”, Alexander II, who had freed the serfs in 1861. That changed the already very repressive climate in Russia into a regime, lasting about a decade, under which it became more or less impossible for any opposition to function, and effectively smashed *Narodnaya Volya*.

The group around Plekhanov, which eventually included the unwitting pioneer of terrorism, Vera Zasulich, were the conservatives here. They had been and were Bakuninists. They wanted to maintain the anti-politics of ZiV. They remained operationally socialist. They

rejected politics, while the 1879 majority, *Narodnaya Volya*, was now focusing on a “political” slogan, demanding a constitution from the Tsar. *Narodnaya Volya* were still nominally socialists, but in practice they focused on what the liberals also demanded, a constitution – and focused on that until it defined them.

The Plekhanov group, the minority of *Zemlya i Volya* in 1879, would from an independent position endorse and defend the terrorist acts of *Narodnaya Volya*, but they rejected the focus on terror and on calling for a constitution. Plekhanov had said, in response to the majority, that he could not imagine a revolution that did not involve the mass of the people. *Narodnaya Volya* could and did.

The Bakuninist programme and tactics to which Plekhanov and his comrades clung had been discredited already among the revolutionary intelligentsia. They had no future. Neither did Black Redistribution. But before discussing Plekhanov’s movement to Marxist socialism and the foundation of the Group for the Emancipation of Labour in 1883, we must first discuss what could be called the Narodnik working-class movement.

Impact on workers

The “theory” of the Narodniks, the Russian populists, was that they would turn to the peasants, the overwhelming majority of the working people. The peasants did not listen to them, and thus the majority at the 1879 congress, the future *Narodnaya Volya* (People’s Will) turned to terrorism and to the demand for a constitution, which de facto was and would become a turn to liberal politics.

But *Zemlya i Volya* did have an impact on, and moved, some of “the people” – the factory workers, still ex-peasant or nearly-peasant. ZiV regarded workers in the factories as only a small sub-section of “the people”, a small and not necessarily centrally important component. But they found the factory-based ex-peasants far more responsive than the peasants. And thus they came to found the first trade unions. There was an interplay between ZiV and the working class.

For instance, the factory worker

Stepan Khalturin was the organiser of a trade union, and became a *Narodnaya Volya* terrorist. He would be hanged by the Tsarist regime in 1882 for killing a police chief.

On the eve of the abolition of Russian serfdom, in 1861, many of the jobs which in Western Europe were performed by wage labourers – by legally free women, men and children who sold their labour power for specific periods of time to those who owned the means of production, the mills, mines, quarries, factories, etc. – were in Russia performed by unfree labour. One worker in three was a serf.

Of 565,000 workers in 1860, the year before the emancipation of the serfs, 135,000 were unfree. In some industries, the majority of the workers were serfs. Of 245,000 miners, 70% were serfs.

Overnight, as tens of millions of serfs became legally free peasants, that whole labour force in Russia was turned, at a stroke of Tsar Alexander’s pen, from serfs into wage-workers, into proletarians with nothing to live by but the sale of their labour-power.

For those formerly serf workers, freedom meant that they could if they liked go back to their villages and to the land. Many of them did.

The number of workers declined in the first half of the 1860s. Thereafter, the working class grew in a process of recruitment of “voluntary” proletarians.

The proletariat was still a very small, scattered class. Around 1870, there were 800,000 proletarians; a decade later, about a million, in a population of perhaps 100 million.

Many workers in the less skilled, less specialised trades, in the cotton industry for example, remained half-peasants. In late summer many of them would go “home” for the harvest.

They retained peasant habits of living, dress, and drunkenness. Many of them lived in village-like communities. When the early working-class conflicts with the employers were being fought, the unorganised workers created committees or councils modelled on the rural assemblies of the mir, the people of the obshchina, the peasant commune which held land in common. Those assemblies also pointed to the future – to the soviets of 1905 and 1917, which

had a long tradition behind them.

For their part, the employers too were often slow to begin to behave as West European-style employers of wage labour by now did. Often they would be days, or weeks, or months, late in paying wages. At first some of them did not pay their workers at all, insisting that workers who had possession of strips of land did not need wages! The employers had to discover that “free” labour need to have an incentive to work.

Early working-class self-awareness was often angry insistence that they were entitled to receive a wage for their labour – that they were wage workers. Early labour conflicts were often about forcing the employers to pay any wage at all.

Minority

The Russian working class would remain a minority in the population for a long time, but soon it became a very powerful minority, concentrated in giant factories and industries, built on up-to-date European and US technology which was imported ready-made into backward Russia. These were islands of modernisation dotted in a society like Europe in the early Middle Ages.

In little more than half a century, 56 years after the abolition of serfdom, the Russian working class, children and grandchildren of serfs, would take and hold state power in 1917.

Russia would prove, as the populists insisted it was, “exceptional”. But in a way starkly opposite to the populists’ conception of what would be “exceptional” about Russian development.

The populists of all the different sorts, anarchists, Jacobins, and even pre-Plekhanov Russian Marxists, had thought that Russia’s exceptionalism lay in the widespread existence there of the peasant communes, with their collective ownership and periodic redistribution of land. Russia would be exception in that it could stop the development of capitalism.

They saw Russia, in its rural economy, in the peasant communes, as already socialist, needing only a political revolution to destroy or seize the state. In fact, Russia would ripen politically as far as workers seizing power in the October Revolution. But the Bolsheviks and

Bolshevism

others knew in 1917 it was still a Russia too socially backward for the realisation of socialism.

All the populists saw the development of capitalism, the encroachment of market relations in the countryside after 1861, which undermined the peasant commune, as a mortal threat to the prospects of rural-based Russian socialism.

In historical fact Russia's real exceptionalism would lie in the consequences of the development of that Russian capitalism which sapped the foundations of the "socialist" peasant commune. Russia's exceptionalism lay in the concentration, social strength, militancy and political acumen of the working class in late 19th and early 20th century Russia, and in the existence of a revolutionary Marxist party.

The Russian workers would be able to seize state power, not in a Russia where socialist relations of production already existed in the peasant commune, but in a Russia where socialism in isolation was – according to the conceptions of "Western" Marxism and of the Bolsheviks, who led the Russian workers – a stark impossibility because of Russia's overall economic and social backwardness.

The first phase in the political history of the Russian working class is the history of its interaction with the populists.

Not the least of the peculiarities of the populist experience was that though the peasant was essentially what they meant when they spoke of "the people", it was elements of the industrial urban working class who responded most readily to their appeals and activities. All the populist movements through the 1870s, then *Zemlya i Volya* (1876-79), the terrorist *Narodnaya Volya*, and the Social Revolutionary party founded in 1902, found the urban workers far more responsive to their agitation than were the peasants.

The movement in 1874-5 to "go to the people" involved migration of the activists from the urban centres to the countryside, there to try to root themselves in the villages so that they could educate the peasants. The populist students abandoned their studies and attempted to transplant themselves among the people.

In so far as they concerned themselves with urban workers, they were concerned to recruit individual workers to go back and do their missionary work in the countryside. They saw the urban proletariat as a mere subsection of the peasants – as peasants who had been forced by economic necessity to



Arrest of a Propagandist, by Ilya Repin

move to the towns, but who yet maintained links with their peasant roots and rural relatives, and would want to return.

Many of the urban workers did indeed retain connections with the countryside, especially those whose work was in the processing of agricultural products – cotton workers in Moscow, for example – and required least skill, training and prior socialisation. It was only gradually, in the evolving experience of the generations, that the urban workers began to see themselves as a distinct, permanently urban, social group.

At first it was only the most skilled, the metal workers, for example, whose training, technical education and wages marked them out, who took it that they and their children were permanently rooted in the new town life.

It was a central idea of all the populists that Russia should avoid the creation of a proletariat like that of the West, an urban proletariat with no property in the means of production, uprooted forever from the land. They believed that once the existing "Russian socialism" of the *obshchina*, the *mir*, was freed from Tsarism and landlordism, then all the population, including the peasants who had been forced into the towns, would be attached to a village commune.

Where there was only one case of a sizeable response – involving about

a thousand people – to the calls by *Zemlya i Volya* (Land and Freedom) for peasant rebellion, workers' strikes and demonstrations, often spontaneous in the 1860s or involving prior agitation by populists, more readily flared up.

The town workers – or, as *Zemlya i Volya* saw it at first, the transplanted peasants of the towns – were more aware of the broader world they lived in, more mobile, more willing to act, more mentally attuned to think afresh. Life had already forced them to do that, giving them different worlds to contrast and compare, and forcing them to change much in their old thinking.

Life itself was generating in them an irrepressible militancy, as they responded to their experience in the early capitalist industrial hellholes and to populist agitation and propaganda.

It was as if a socialist propagandist had been in the habit of going to a house regularly to "explain" things to the father and the older brothers, "at" whom he talked at length and repeatedly, evoking perplexity, bemusement, and hostility – and then suddenly heard one of the growing children, who had been listening, pipe up: "That makes sense to me. I can see that. I'll help you. I'll do my bit".

"The question of the city workers is one of those that it may be said will be moved forward automatically by life itself to an appropriate place, in spite

of the a priori theoretical decision of the revolutionary leaders", wrote Plekhanov, in the journal of *Zemlya i Volya*.

But the history of the beginnings of a labour movement in Russia is nevertheless a subordinate part of the history of populism. The first Russian labour movement was a populist movement. It was initiated by populists who "went to the people" in the cities. It was made up of workers whose political outlook was populist.

When "native" working-class leaders emerged, the most developed of them had journeyed as populists through the different stages of populism which I have described.

Some of them moved from anarchist rejection of "politics" all the way to *Narodnaya Volya*'s politics of systematic terrorism in support of the "immediate demand" for the granting by the Tsar of a constitution and the convocation of a Constituent Assembly.

The idea that a proletariat of the sort that the populists saw in Western Europe – people with no land and nothing but the sale of their labour power to live on – should not be allowed to develop was one of the energising principles of all the populists.

Over time some of them began to relate to the urban "peasants" as a specific and permanently urban proletarian class. But that would take time.

One of the first labour organisations,

the Southern Union of Russian Workers, founded and led by populists, was conceived as a workers' movement that would immediately develop its own "fighting organisation" and use terror and the threat of it against employers of labour to force concessions from them and thereby improve the workers' conditions. [1]

Some of the best early working-class leaders were hanged as terrorists, which they were. So would be some of the upper-class populists who had been heavily involved in work with the factory proletariat, Sofia Perovskaya for the best example.

Some of the early working-class leaders embodied in their personal history the dilemma that would be posed in various forms to the revolutionary Marxists a quarter of a century later. Which was it to be: build a movement of the workers that would concern itself primarily or exclusively with day to day issues, or develop a working-class movement, and a movement of the socialist intelligentsia based on the working class, which would concern itself primarily with the political struggle to overthrow Tsarism (in the case of the early working-class leaders, by political terrorism)?

The imaginary conundrum that would play an enormous part in the development of 20th century socialism, and in 20th century discussions about socialism and Bolshevism – does "socialism" emerge spontaneously in the working class, or it is brought to the working class "from outside", by the "intelligentsia" – was, in the first Russian working-class movement, answered very clearly in terms of fact. Socialism, their socialism anyway, came from outside the working class.

Even when the socialism consisted of a special conception of Russian history and of the potential which the populist-socialists thought existed in the village community, it was brought to the Russian proletariat by members of the intelligentsia, those who sometimes referred to themselves as the "proletariat of thought". The idea of a labour movement would eventually come from Western Europe.

The "Chaikovists" (a circle of co-thinkers of N G Chaikovsky) were the most important populist group of the early 1870s in the build-up of forces that would in the "mad summer" of 1874 "go to the people" – to the villages – were the first to "go to the proletariat".

As the historian Franco Venturi puts it in his monumental history of Russian populism, *Roots of Revolution*, they were "the first to plant the seeds of a genuine working-class organisation".

He goes on: already "the local unorganised and spasmodic fighting spirit of the workers themselves had produced spontaneous revolts", but the Chaikovists "provided the impulse for a working-class movement which, despite its original limitations and the violence of the persecution it had to face, always thereafter maintained some measure of continuity, and which grew

in scope and influence as revolutionary populism developed during the [1870s]". They triggered a movement of the working class that was not primitive and not merely episodic revolt with no continuity between isolated outbreaks of resistance. This was continuous.

The Chaikovists included the future anarchist propagandist Peter Kropotkin, a full prince no less, from a very ancient family, who would become well-known throughout the socialist and labour world, and whose writings, including his [Appeal to the Young](#) to devote themselves to the socialist struggle, would influence generations of western socialists.

Beginning eleven years after the abolition of Russian serfdom, in the summer of 1872 in the Vyborg district of St Petersburg, the Chaikovists sent people – disguised with false papers and false personal histories – into the factories to work there and to talk to and recruit workers to their study circles.

They who would find it impossible to move or even educate the peasantry, the real "people" of their theories, found the working class responsive. The workers lived in a world where things were less fixed and less set in age-old routines defined and limited by nature and the inexorable movement of the seasons than they were for the peasants. The will and decisions of the employer were the easily identifiable cause of major events that would affect them – and that will and those decisions could be resisted.

Spontaneous

There was often a spontaneous spirit of rebellion among them. Workers responded to the employers and fought back where the rustic "people" did not.

What did the Chaikovists and later populists doing the same work – and, after them, the fully-fledged Marxists – say to the workers? They explained to them their own situation, and gave them an overall picture of the society in which they lived.

They taught them to read and write. Even in England in the late 1880s and early 1890s, Eleanor Marx had to teach some of the proletarian leaders of the new mass unions to read and write – famously, Will Thorne, founder of what became the GMB [2]. In Russia, leaflets and pamphlets usually had to be read out to the mass of workers. Later in the 1870s, the young populist women who "colonised" themselves into the factories won influence and a degree of leadership simply by reading out leaflets, official statements, and employers' regulations, and explaining them to their workmates.

The populists taught workers, buried deep in the medieval backwardness of Russia, the things that elementary schooling would have taught them – basic geography, for example. They gave them some idea of the history of Europe and the world. They told them about political liberty in other countries, about the Western labour movements, their history, and the so-

cialist society with which they fought to replace capitalism and class society. Thus they gave the Russian workers an idea of what they themselves could do. They taught political economy, using Karl Marx's work.

They told them about populist struggles in other countries, giving them accounts of the fight by "the Irish populist party" – the Land League – against the landlords in Ireland.

They taught them the history of Russia, giving them an account of how the world they lived in and the institutions and classes that made it up had come into existence, and might go out of existence. They showed them that things which seemed immutable were themselves the products of change and of struggles in the past, and so could be changed in their turn.

Their accounts of history turned easily and naturally into a radical critique of the Russian workers' own world.

Naturally, the populists explained to the workers their own conception of the reality and the possibilities in Russia.

They found that the workers responded especially to history, that they drew out of it a sharpened conception of themselves, of their place in the world, and of what they could hope to do in it if they educated and organised themselves.

They told them of the great revolts by Cossacks and Ukrainian peasants in the 17th century, led by Stenka Razin, and in the 18th century, led by Pugachev. Myth-enshrouded, uncritical accounts of those revolts, held up as great ideals of revolutionary action, played a central part in all populist propaganda, perhaps especially in that of the Bakuninists.

The development of a critical account of those events in the educational and discussion circles of the working class in the late 1870s – for example, of Pugachev's attempts to make himself an "alternative" Tsar, replacing Catherine "The Great" – would mark a sharp shift towards proletarian self-differentiation from peasant myths and hopes.

N Flerovsky, who travelled to observe conditions throughout the Empire and in 1869 published a study entitled *The Situation of the Working Class in Russia* (by working class, he meant all the working people, peasants and workers alike) defined what was different about the town working class. (He was greatly praised by Karl Marx).

"Whereas the peasant in the north and east of Russia remains apathetic for part of the year, without work or the hope of obtaining it, the worker in industrial Russia is never quiet.

"Here one can hear complaints on all sides that there is no work, that the rewards are not high enough. Here machinery is hated because it lowers wages and gives profits to the capitalists. Here the capitalists are hated when wages go down.

"Here the mentality and determination of the workers are more highly developed... There are strikes. Methods



Peter Kropotkin

are found to fight against the capitalists and increase pay.

"But though the workers are bolder in their fight to live, the conditions of their lives are even more oppressive [than those of the peasants]".

In his memoirs Peter Kropotkin described what the Chaikovists did:

"Many of [the workers] lived grouped in small artels of ten or twelve people who lived and ate together. At the end of the month each bore his share of the common expenses. We began to frequent these communities. Very soon the textile workers introduced us to other artels of stone workers, carpenters, etc. In some of these groups our comrades had become part of the family; all night through they discussed socialism with them. In many districts and suburbs of St Petersburg we had rooms which our comrades had rented for this very purpose. Every evening about a dozen workers came to learn to read and write, and then to chat".

The result was that the populists set in motion a movement that would soon develop its own momentum. But police supervision in the towns was far more intensive than in the countryside. The groups of populists who targeted the factory and the workshop proletarians in their agitation faced terrible state repression that would again and again destroy their organisations.

In the case of the Chaikovists in St Petersburg, the result of police action was that by the winter of 1873 the group no longer existed. Kropotkin escaped to the West. Other populists deserted the cities to go "to the people" in the countryside, abandoning activity among the factory workers, which in any case had the goal of recruiting workers who would leave the town and go back to the countryside to spread the ideas which the populists had planted in them.

It took time after the abolition of serf-

dom in 1861 for a working-class mentality to become distinct. For a long time most workers, especially those engaged in digging, in building, and in less skilled work in the cotton industry, did not see their condition as permanent. A sharp distinction existed within the working class between them and the more skilled permanent proletarians such as the metal workers in the workshops of St Petersburg.

The normal economic strike as we now know it is a finely tuned weapon designed to put maximum pressure on the employer without breaking the nexus binding the worker and the employer who hires out his or her labour power. Despite what bourgeois propaganda maintains, it is a rational means to reach a definite objective. Strikers formulate demands.

It took time for that norm to emerge in Russia, and for workers' revolts to become means of exerting pressure for defined goals within the proletarian-capitalist relationship.

Fleeing

At first workers' struggles often took the form of fleeing back to the countryside, or rioting rather than striking.

On the other side, too, it took time for the "normal" attitude to wage labour to emerge. The early workers sometimes had to fight to receive any wage at all. Employers initially treated workers as serfs. In 1861 fifty free workers digging a canal were flogged by their employer.

The struggle of the workers against the bosses' imposition of fines that ate into their wages went on for decades in Russia as in every capitalist country. In the 1860s, the decade when serfdom was abolished, there were only 50 recorded strikes in Russia. In the 1870s strikes became much more frequent, reaching a peak at the end of the decade. One account puts the total at 326 strikes.

That was the background against which the populists turned to the working class, though in fact the peak of working-class resistance to the employers coincided with the desertion of the towns by young people going to the peasantry.

The state too needed time to clarify its response to strikes. At first "ringleaders" might be deported home to their villages, or given a few days in jail. Repression quickly became more severe.

By the mid 1870s it had become barbarous. Sentences of years, sometimes ten or even fifteen years, at hard labour in chains were handed down. "Outside" agitators were treated with special severity.

The arrests of the Chaikovists would eventually lead to a trial of 193 persons, one of a number of such mass trials in the 1870s. For educating workers and "spreading disaffection" among them, sentences of three and even nine years were handed down. Two of those jailed would die in prison, one first driven mad.

In the summer of 1873 another group of populists in St Petersburg found it-



Narodnaya Volya members on trial for killing Tsar Alexander II

self able to assemble groups of thirty or forty workers to hear the group's organiser, S Sinogub, expound their ideas. Sofia Perovskaya, the regicide who would be hanged in 1881, did work around the Tortini factory. Here too repression in late 1873, with the arrest of the "intellectuals" and some of the workers, smashed the work the populists were doing.

The "seed-sowing" effect of what proved to be short-term populist work within the proletariat took forms other than the implantation of ideas. They gave the workers the tools of knowledge, not only teaching some of them to read and write, but helping them as-

semble libraries.

For example, the group started in the summer of 1873 set up a library, and workers regularly paid in two per cent of their wages to keep it going. The books would be dispersed among a number of custodians, hidden like armaments from the state, which regarded books and knowledge as what they were, a dangerous high explosive.

Trotsky once remarked on the paradox that it was not the terrorists with their bombs and guns who smashed Tsarism, but the Marxists who started out with books, like Marx's *Capital*. The populists too started out with books, and with imparting the tool of simple

literacy to the proletarian "people" to which they "went". □

[1] Something similar happened in the Pennsylvania coalfields in the 1870s. The workers were beaten down in a strike and the remnants of an Irish Catholic peasant society, the Ancient Order of Hibernians, resorted to terror. (The strike-breakers in the Dublin Labour War of 1913-4 were a different organisation, the AOH (Board of Erin)).

[2] In the 1940s both the Workers Party and the SWP-USA held evening language classes for refugees.

Genocide charge not so easily dismissed



By Ben Tausz

Solidarity 696's [editorial](#) was wrong to inveigh so heavily against describing the Israeli government's onslaught on Gaza as genocidal.

There is little dispute within Workers' Liberty about the overarching political perspective and tasks. Whether in Gaza, Ukraine or the Uyghur Region, we cannot rely on the International Court of Justice and mechanisms of ruling class international law to save the day. As the editorial pointed out, Russia ignored the ICJ's 2022 order to cease its invasion of Ukraine. After the ICJ's interim order on 26 January, Israel's fascist National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir sneeringly replied on social media "Hague schmague".

Moreover, we must urge no trust in response to the widespread and increasingly uncritical adulation of capitalist state actors such as South Africa. We can endorse SA's call for the ICJ to attempt to restrain Israel (as the editorial did) without deluding ourselves about the ethical and political consistency of a government which, for example, massacred strikers at Marikana and defied international courts to roll out the red carpet for the butchers of the Darfuri and Sudanese masses. Even more obscene is the spectacle of the Turkish and Pakistani governments formally backing the case, while they occupy and slaughter the Kurdish and Balochi people.

Shortly before the verdict, Palestinian socialist and Standing Together leader Sally Abed said "while we might want to use such tools to help our cause for freedom, equality and peace – it is still up to us, the people on the ground, to lead the fight, and build the power for change". We agree – socialist internationalists' main task is to support Palestinians and Israelis on the ground like Abed, who are working to build mass struggles against the occupation and for working-class unity and coexistence, liberation and peace.

Positive developments include not only growing protests in Israel by Standing Together and related organisations, but extraordinarily brave peace demonstrations by Gazans. The latter risk both Israeli bombs and Hamas retort by [taking to the streets](#) and

demanding the release of hostages and a [ceasefire](#) from Hamas and Israeli leaders.

Despite disputing the terminology, the editorial rightly said that it would be welcome if a ruling from the court could somehow succeed in imposing any restraint on Israel, agreed that the mass displacement and massacre of Gazan civilians "represent a form of ethnic cleansing", and echoed genocide scholar Omer Bartov's warning that there is a strong risk of worse.

There are academic and legal debates about how to understand and define genocide, reflected now in disagreements between analysts and scholars on whether to apply the term to Israel's atrocities in Gaza. The ICJ has recognised that there is a legitimate case. Deliberations will likely take years.

I argue for describing Israel's onslaught as genocidal, but this is not to suggest some sort of formal semantic policy would be useful or necessary. Disagreements over this language can be reasonable and do not alter the basic moral horror of the racist slaughter, nor the urgency of the political tasks. As [Sally Abed](#) wrote, "whatever the international court decided to call what's happening to our people in Gaza – it should not, and it cannot change facts of the unfathomable catastrophic de-humanization and massacres in the context of decades of systemic violent oppression".

Context

Out of context, this article could itself be accused of semantic quibbling. Something does feel tasteless about arguing over words while thousands are being killed. But I think a response is warranted since our editorial – seen as our collective voice – has weighed in heavily with its own objections. The approach it took is politically wrong, and some of the arguments it used are inconsistent and superficial.

The editorial warned: 'Some of the definitions [of genocide] being relied upon, about any action that destroys "in part or in whole" a national, cultural, or ethnic group, would also mean the British firebombings of Dresden (at least 25,000 dead) and Hamburg (nearly 40,000), or the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (over 100,000, maybe over 200,000), or many other war atrocities, were genocides. It is not necessary to call those acts "genocide" in order to condemn them.'

This reference appears to be a de-

contextualised part of the Genocide Convention [Article II](#) definition. It defines genocide as "any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, as such" and then lists acts including "killing members of the group", "deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part" and "imposing measures intended to prevent births".

Note that we (Workers' Liberty) already [accepted](#) the civil society Uyghur Tribunal's use of that definition to judge as genocidal the imposition of forced contraception and sterilisation on Uyghurs. Articles in *Solidarity* have applied the terms "genocide" and "genocidal" to Russia's [assault](#) on Ukraine without pushback. Reasonable counter-arguments are possible in each case and to the definition in general, but we must be consistent.

Moreover, the condemnable bombardments of German and Japanese civilians cities in WW2 clearly do not meet this threshold because the intent was different. The purpose was not to destroy substantial parts of the German or Japanese ethnic groups or nations as such.

(An aside: it is doubtless inadvertent, but these comparators are problematic. The editorial authors clearly did not intend to liken Israel's war on the Palestinians to the war against the Nazis, but we must take care not to unintentionally feed narratives that the Israeli right is using to whip up consent for the slaughter. It is probably best just to avoid most WW2 analogies.)

The editorial cites genocide scholar Omer Bartov, who indeed states in the [linked interview](#) that he remains "reluctant to say that Israeli policies in Gaza constitute genocide". However, Bartov's rejection of the term is rather less sweeping than the editorial's. He explains that Israel is at least "on the verge" of genocidal acts. He says the ICJ could rule either way.

So far, the IDF has not only killed well over 20,000 Gazans but driven 85% of the population from their homes by threat of death, and then flattened entire neighbourhoods. It is pushing those refugees into a smaller and smaller area of south-western Gaza, where they lack sufficient food, clean water, sanitation and infrastructure. These conditions [could kill](#) an order of magnitude more



than have already been massacred with bombs and bullets.

The Israeli authorities know this. Smotrich has [endorsed](#) a former general's commentary actively welcoming the prospect of mass civilian deaths by disease (cf. "deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part").

Not only outright fascists Smotrich and Ben-Gvir, but conservatives like Yoav Gallant and "moderates" such as Isaac Herzog, have spewed genocidal rhetoric from the highest levels of government and military authority. These are not idle words. They have translated into military practices of collective punishment and racist mass murder.

Bartov points out that Gallant has explicitly relaxed the rules of engagement. The IDF no longer recognises civilians once it has ordered an area evacuated. The IDF has bombed "safe" areas to which it had ordered civilians. It has shot civilians waving white flags. *+972* magazine has [documented](#) the relaxation of restraint and the dramatic increase in attacks on non-military targets. Soldiers are [on film](#) echoing officials' rhetoric, dancing and singing: "We know our slogan – there are no uninvolved civilians ... wipe off the seed of Amalek". And the Dahiya doctrine, levelling entire civilian neighbourhoods as punishment for guerilla and rocket attacks, is in full force.

The inciting rhetoric falls on more and more open ears in the IDF because, as Bartov explains, the army's composition has changed. The far-right settler movement has made a concerted effort to enter the military and climb the ranks. Now, in both civilian and military seats of power as never before, they

see a chance to finally re-take Gaza. These soldiers and commanders are plastering seized Gazan neighbourhoods with posters declaring that the settlements are back, and even officers who may not share those ambitions are unable or unwilling to rein them in.

Meanwhile, Netanyahu has been [pressing](#) Biden since October to accept the expulsion of Palestinians from Gaza altogether. His diplomats have [brought proposals](#) to US legislators to “thin out” the Palestinian population of Gaza to the “minimum possible”, and to disperse virtually the entire remaining population as refugees to various other states.

This would mean the extirpation and dispersal of Gaza as a substantial part of the Palestinian nation, by a combination of direct murder, the imposition of unliveable conditions, and forced displacement. These ideas are not a preserve of a fringe minority of the war coalition government – rather, the head of government is pushing the possibility. It is at least strongly arguable that this meets the Convention definition of genocide.

For sure, there is no sign that the US and Egypt will accept a plan to expel

the surviving Gazan population. But equally, that does not mean that the Israeli government will then simply relent, halt the humanitarian catastrophe in the pocket of land to which Gazans are being driven, and allow them to return and rebuild. The alternative could be even worse. As Bartov has warned elsewhere, failing attempts to forcibly displace populations can also descend into simply murdering them.

Path

Thus, Israel’s war is on a genocidal path. And, out of cynical self-interest if nothing else, Netanyahu has thrown his lot in with Ben-Gvir and Smotrich and is doggedly sticking to this path, refusing to discuss any plausible way out of the killing. The longer he can sustain the bloodshed, the further he hopes he can postpone his eviction from power.

It is indeed still possible to force a change of course. (Clearly, various parts of the Israeli state and government cannot even agree on their war aims.) But quibbling, as the editorial did, about the description of genocidal acts in progress, on the basis that they have not yet been completed and might yet be halted, wholly misses the

point. Logically, this implies only ever using the word in retrospect, having resisted it all the way up until it is too late.

The editorial goes on to object to lines, common in the wider movement, that denounce the very existence of the Israeli nation as always and intrinsically genocidal, as “a kind of unique and essential evil”, and as comparable to the Nazis. *Solidarity* is right to object. The Israeli state is unfortunately far from unique in the kinds of oppression it is inflicting. Internationalists should not present it as exceptional (a presentation that tends to require ignoring or even downplaying other causes). We should locate it within wider trends: for one thing, to highlight potential commonalities between the causes of various oppressed and occupied peoples.

And whatever word one uses to describe it, the assault on Gaza is very different from the systematic industrialised Holocaust. (We, and the Uyghur Tribunal judgement, were likewise [adamant](#) that the Uyghur genocide should not be likened to the Holocaust.) Invoking the Holocaust in this context is inaccurate, offers little insight, and instead merely weaponises Jewish suffering and fear while [suggesting](#) an appalling

expectation that genocide should have been a [morally improving](#) experience for the Jewish people.

However, the fact absolutists are wrong to declare that a nation’s very existence is and always has been intrinsically genocidal, does not constitute a logical argument against identifying specific acts as genocidal. Clearly Israeli comrades who supported the ICJ case and are among the same political and social forces that Workers’ Liberty looks to support, such as Hadash MK Ofer Cassif, think otherwise.

Bending stick

Our job is to determine and say, as best we can, what is, and then to rebut the errors of others where necessary. It is not to bend our own analysis in over-compensation for those errors. We cannot oppose double standards by falling into inconsistencies such as those that become evident when we compare *Solidarity’s* commentary on the Uyghurs or Ukraine. This sort of “bending the stick” is a politically poor reflex that misleads and miscommunicates, and even risks corroding independent political thought. □



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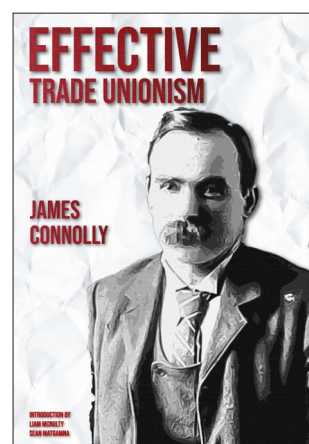
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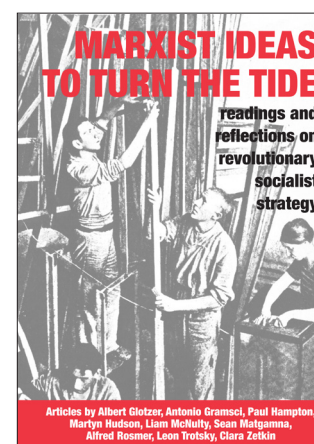
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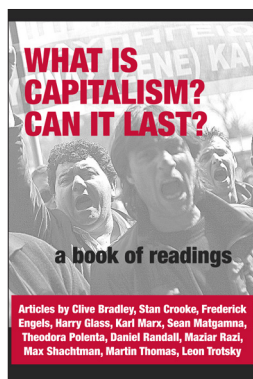
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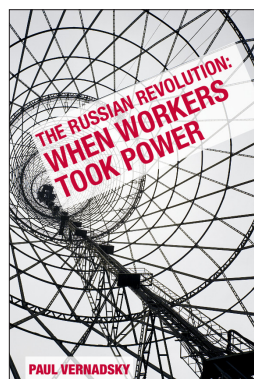
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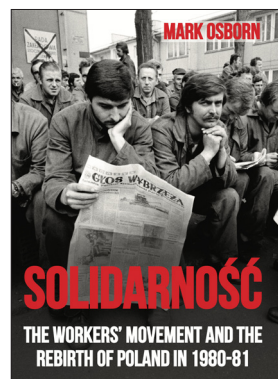
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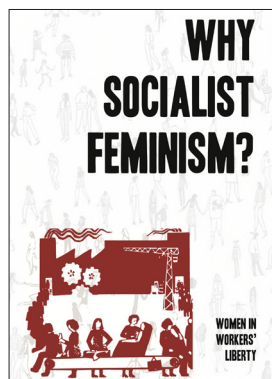
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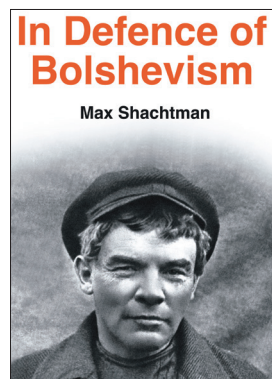
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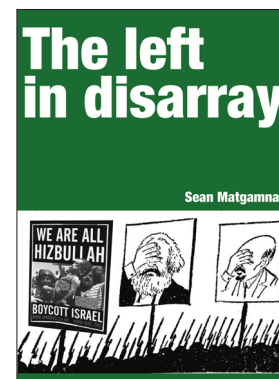
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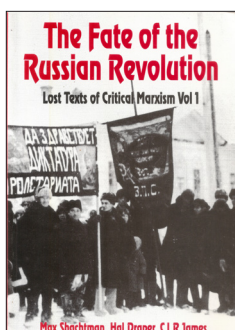
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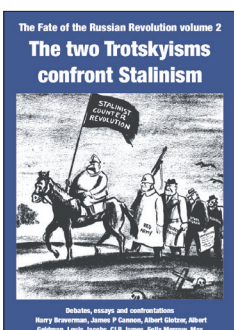
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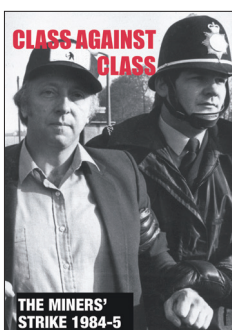
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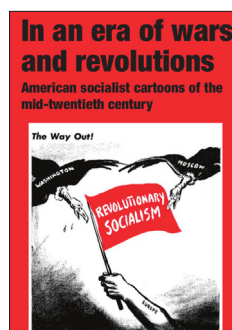
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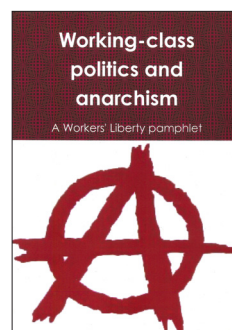
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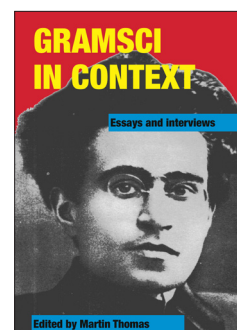
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The Alliance for Workers' Liberty wants socialist revolution: collective ownership of industry and services, workers' control, and a democracy much fuller than the present system, with elected representatives recallable at any time and an end to bureaucrats'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

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

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

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- Taxing the rich to fund good public services, homes, education and jobs for all
- Workers' control of major industries and finance for a rapid transition to a green society
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- Full equality for 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

LGBT+ conference is largest-ever

By Janine Booth, delegate

On 2-4 February, 350 lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and other non-straight education workers gathered in Birmingham for the National Education Union's largest-ever LGBT+ Educators' Conference.

Most of the conference was a series of workshops run by rank-and-file activists – which covered issues including industrial action, history of protest, behaviour, union organising, neurodiversity and many more – and caucuses, which enabled different sections and identities to meet and discuss their issues and concerns.

Executive representative Kacey de Groot and new general Secretary Daniel Kebede both addressed delegates. Notably, Daniel responded to a question by expressing full support for trans rights and regret for comments he had

made in the past. The conference debated and passed four motions. The most contentious was the motion on Palestine, where an amendment supporting Standing Together was defeated following a speech denouncing it for not supporting BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) or the "right to return". Some delegates were also concerned that the motion called on the union to work with Muslim LGBT+ groups but not Jewish LGBT+ groups. Nevertheless, the motion was passed by a large majority.

Another motion condemned the government's continued persecution of trans and gender-questioning students through its draft [guidance](#) for schools, which explicitly denies students a right to socially transition through, for example, changing names.

A further motion addressed the in-

adequacy of the union's recording of members' equality information. Delegates chose this motion to go to the union's annual conference, which, if it passes, will require the union to change its membership forms so give members more options for how they identify themselves, without having to label themselves as "other".

The final motion drew unanimous and enthusiastic support. Noting that this year is the fortieth anniversary of the start of the miners' strike, it called for the NEU to help local activists organise showings of the film *Pride*, with speakers from [Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners](#), in order to ensure that the new generation of LGBT+ activists knows the story of one of the turning points in the fight for LGBT+ liberation and understands that we win through working-class struggle. □

Help us raise £15,000 by July

Solidarity and Workers' Liberty supporters have been on the streets at Palestine solidarity protests since 7 October.

We are unique in these protests, arguing not just for a ceasefire but for a democratic and lasting settlement to the Israel-Palestine conflict. That is for two states and equal rights for Israelis and Palestinians.

We have sold hundreds of papers and distributed thousands of editorial bulletins.

Workers' Liberty supporters have also

led these demonstrations promoting UK Friends of Standing Together. The largest movement in Israel of both peoples fighting for peace and equality.

This work all requires money, and to increase our ability to do more of this activity and make ourselves more visible and accessible, we need more of it.

Sales of the paper and of our books and pamphlets help us cover the costs, but we need specific fundraising drives to step up our activity, help us pay for rooms for meetings and events, fund more publications and help our organ-

isers do their work. Ongoing financial support through regular monthly payments will also help us if you are reading *Solidarity* for the first time. Why not subscribe? If you have been considering buying one of our books, then there is no time like the present!

We need to raise £15,000 by Ideas for Freedom 2024, which will be held over the weekend of 5 and 6 July.

The more we can raise, the more we will be able to do.

The more we can raise the more we will be able to do. You can donate online at workersliberty.org/donate and keep up to date with our fundraising appeal at workersliberty.org/fund. □

Roy Battersby (1936-2024)



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

Probably best known for the TV drama *Leeds United!* (1974) which features a women's textile workers' strike (and was discussed in Kino Eye of *Solidarity* 584), Roy Battersby had a highly productive and varied career as a writer and director of mainly TV dramas. He started off as part of that generation of left-inclined writers and directors (such as Ken Loach, Alan Bleasdale, Jim Allen, Dennis Potter, David Hare) who worked at the BBC on the Play for Today and then

branched out into writing *Cracker*, *Between the Lines*, *Morse*, and many other dramas.

As one of his last works he directed the film *Red Mercury*, which was shown at the Cleveland Film Festival. Three young Muslim men are making a bomb in a London flat when they are discovered and forced to go on the run. A hostage situation then develops inside a restaurant.

Battersby was for a time a leading member of Gerry Healy's so called Workers' Revolutionary Party (WRP) but broke with them in 1981. At times he was blacklisted. He died in California in January 2024. □

• To watch *Leeds United*: bit.ly/l-unit

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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 □

Oust Grady, vote for democracy

By a UCU member

Ballots slipped through letterboxes for education workers in the University and College Union (UCU) from 25 January. Incumbent Jo Grady is being challenged for general secretary (GS), and there are elections for the National Executive (NEC) members and for the union vice-president (who becomes president after two years). Voting closes 1 March.

In online hustings this week Grady

admitted her term had not been easy, blaming the difficulties on having to implement an industrial strategy that was not of her design (despite implementation being her actual job).

Given how often she undermined democratic decisions for action with delays, result-engineered polls, and confusing surveys, it's clear the pure Grady plan would have more secret chats with bosses and less action designed to win.

In contrast Vicky Blake, recent UCU President, argued for a GS to be accountable, democratic and transparent – desperately needed – and for a serious fight on casualisation, the key issue for younger members.

Blake has a solid history of pushing left issues and transparency on the NEC and is well liked among branches. She gets our support.

The other candidates are Saira Weiner from the UCU Left/SWP, and

Euan McGaughey, a law academic. For VP it is a Grady/UCU-left head to head – I'll be voting left for Peter Evans. For the NEC, some good indie left candidates are Rhian Keyse, Grant Buttars, Cecilia Wee, Sam Morecroft, and left activists may also wish to second preference/vote [UCU Left](#) as they fill out the long STV lists.

Oust the Grady entourage and take a serious fight to the government for education. □

Tube: bumped-up offer received



London Underground Ltd. (LUL) has made a new pay offer to the unions.

The headlines are that, on top of the 5% increase to everyone's basic salary that LUL had already offered, the company is now offering:

A £1,400 flat-rate increase for anyone earning less than £35k

A £1,200 flat-rate increase for anyone earning between £35k and £40k

A £1,000 flat-rate increase for everyone else

LUL was previously planning to freeze pay bands, meaning anyone on banded pay (mainly workers in engineering and technical roles) for whom the pay award would move them

into a higher band would receive it as a one-off lump sum rather than an actual pay increase. The company is now proposing to unfreeze pay band movement for anyone on banded pay earning £99.5k or less.

The company has also said it will convene a working group to explore implementation of a "Leisure Priv", a pass giving LUL workers discounted national rail travel at certain times, by

2025. RMT union reps will soon meet to discuss a response. It falls short of RMT's original demand of an RPI+ increase with a £5,000 flat-rate.

This pay settlement covers 2023-4. Talks over the 2024-5 settlement are due to begin in March.

We can use the improvements we've won by holding firm as a springboard to press our demands for further flat-rate increases to ensure pay

keeps pace with the cost of living, and that lower-paid workers – those who need it most – benefit more.

We also need to reassert the other elements of our claims, including unions' historic demands for a four-day, 32-hour week. □

• Abridged from bit.ly/tw-pay

The longest strike in NHS history

By Elaine Jones

In August 2023 over 400 health staff at Wirral University Teaching Hospital NHS Foundation Trust (WUTH) began strikes in a dispute over pay. They have now had 50 days of strikes.

Clinical support workers (CSWs) assist nursing staff on the wards. They're employed across the trust's sites at Arrowe Park and Clatterbridge hospitals on the Wirral.

CSWs on the band 2 pay scale had routinely been undertaking clinical tasks like taking and monitoring blood, electrocardiogram (ECG) tests, and inserting cannulas. They should be on at least a band 3 salary, which is nearly £2,000 a year more than they get.

Seven health trusts across the North West have moved many low-paid CSWs staff onto the higher rate, and paid back pay to April 2018. However, WUTH has refused to draw up a similar agreement.

The trust has agreed to rebanding but on terms where many workers would not get the extra pay for the work they have already done.

Throughout the dispute picket lines have been lively and well attended.

Unison union organisers and branch members have made sure members attend negotiation meetings in large numbers. Union membership has increased from 300 to 670 members and many new members have become union activists.

The CSWs recently joined a lobby of the Integrated Care Board (ICB) to bring the dispute to their attention. Links have been made with NHS campaigns and with other unions.

Seems that the trust management would rather refuse to pay some of the lowest paid workers in the NHS the pay they are owed than be seen to allow the union win the dispute! Trust chair David Henshaw is also chair of National Liverpool Museums, where strike are taking place over their to make a one off payment of £1,500 which should have been part of last year's pay deal.

The anti-union laws have once again stopped more effective action. If other workers in the hospital and other unions could take solidarity action – specifically, if industrially stronger workers like the bin workers, bus drivers and dockers, who have won disputes locally over the last year, could take solidarity action, then the strike would be strengthened.



After the next few strike days, there will be a further ballot. The current mandate will have run out. With a yes vote for further action, more plans can be made to increase the profile of the dispute both politically and industrially.

This dispute shows again why the demand that the next Labour government repeals all the anti-union laws need to remain central. □

• Elaine Jones is a member of the Unison NEC, writing here in a personal capacity.

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 solidarity@workersliberty.org

 Write to: 20E Tower Workshops, Riley Road, London, SE1 3DG

 Production team: Martin Thomas (editor), Sacha Ismail, Dan Katz, Simon Nelson, Zack Muddle □



Sinn Féin wins First Minister

By Micheál MacEoin

Stormont, the Northern Ireland parliament, was restored on Saturday 3 February. The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) ended its two year boycott in protest against post-Brexit trading arrangements.

A Tory-DUP deal has led to the restoration of the institutions and the nomination of Sinn Féin's vice president Michelle O'Neill as the very first Irish republican First Minister. Though symbolic (the powers of the First Minister are no greater than those of the Deputy First Minister, a post which SF has held before), this marks a real change from the one-party Orange State that existed before 1972.

The DUP agreed a deal with the British government, which was published on 31 January and secondary legislation (legal change made by ministers, which Parliament can theoretically veto, but not amend) was introduced in the House of Commons on 1 February.

The deal essentially uses flexibilities in the existing Windsor Framework – presumably with tacit EU blessing – to significantly reduce checks (though not paperwork) on goods travelling from Great Britain to Northern Ireland and being consumed there. It is, in essence, a rebrand of the Windsor Framework's "green lane".

Added to this is a new rule that government ministers must assess whether new legislation will not adversely impact Northern Ireland's place in the UK internal market and are encouraged to make a statement to this effect. This could make it politically more difficult for Great Britain to diverge radically from EU regulations, and that has concerned the Brexiteer right of the Tories.

The tone of the Government's Command Paper *Safeguarding the Union* and the fact that this was a secretive deal with one side of the Northern Ireland community, and indeed with one party, may not strictly breach the letter of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement of 1998. However they strain to breaking point the conceit that the British government can at the same time act with "rigorous impartiality" as the sovereign power from which authority is partially devolved, rather than being

an active party in the conflict in the North.

That conceit was, of course, already under pressure from the 2017 confidence and supply agreement between the DUP and Theresa May which propped up the Tories after they lost their majority to Corbyn's Labour.

The watershed nomination of O'Neill as First Minister is, at the same time, a marker of the profound change that Sinn Féin has undergone. It is conditionally accepting and "working" the partitionist settlement. Its line is it does so pending a referendum vote North and South on the constitutional future of the North. But there looks to be little probability of such a vote soon, less that it would give a majority for a united Ireland, and almost none, for now, that such a majority would carry political authority in the core Protestant-majority areas.

The DUP nominated Emma Little-Pengelly as deputy First Minister. That proved controversial given that she was not elected in 2022 but co-opted to party leader Jeffrey Donaldson's seat when he decided to remain at Westminster.

Sinn Féin also took the positions of Economy and Finance ministries, giving it power but – especially – the political responsibility for administering the North's dire economic situation. This may prove a political risk, especially as the party seeks power in the South on the back of discontent about housing and the cost of living.

The two junior partners in the new Executive will be the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), with Health, and Alliance, with Justice and Agriculture/Environment.

The Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) did not gain enough seats to enter the Executive so has opted to form the first Irish nationalist opposition since the old Nationalist Party opposed the Unionist Party in the old pre-1972 Stormont.

Gerry Carroll of People Before Profit, who said there should be "no honeymoon" for the new Executive, pointed to the social issues. As the Assembly sat, striking workers were gathering outside to demand that money is paid for stalled public sector pay increases.

Stormont or not, the class struggle continues for wages and jobs for the working class. □



Teetering on the brink of wider war

By Simon Nelson

The drone attack that killed three US troops in Jordan on 28 Jan has led to an escalated US response to Iranian-backed militias. The US says it has hit 85 targets in Iraq and Syria in early February.

Especially given how long it has taken the US to respond, this will have been far from a decisive blow against the militias and their arms caches. Since 7 October, there have been over 160 attacks on US troops in Syria and Iraq. 28 Jan was the first resulting in soldier deaths, which meant the US was almost certain to respond.

The targets are the local militias, but the message it sends is to the Iranian regime and its Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), who provide the logistics, equipment and, at times, personnel to pro-Tehran groups. The "axis of resistance" so-called, the network of armed groups from Iran to Yemen and Lebanon, all have the potential to expand the war in the Middle East since 7 October. So far Iran has held back, unconfident about its ability to sustain a full-scale war, or one it is directly involved in.

The bombings, which the US says will continue, go together with diplomacy. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has been on a tour of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Qatar, Israel and the West Bank.

Unlike some Republican hawks and evangelical leaders, the US administration is cautious about pushing Iran too far. Arkansas Republican Tom Cotton's calls for "devastating military retaliation against Iran's terrorist forces both in Iran, and the Middle East" are not likely to get a hearing. Biden

and Blinken do not want a war. Iran faces a choice of how to respond. It wants to assert itself as the leading regional imperialist power in the Middle East. It has long hoped that increased incremental attacks via its proxies or pro-Iran militias would drive US forces out of their small bases in Syria and Iraq.

Fortunately, the Iranian regime fears a big war which it cannot sustain or secure popular assent for. Iranians are weary of the long-term involvement in Syria, and the domestic political crisis, protest and strike movement that erupted following the death of Jina Mahsa Ahmini has left the regime still vulnerable.

Kataib Hezbollah, the strongest Iran-backed group in Iraq, confirmed on 30 January that they would suspend attacks on US targets.

Iran does not have everything its own way. The militias are reliant on Tehran for support, but they are not simple proxies. Many compete with each other, and groups like the Houthis have their own agenda.

Biden is wrestling for hegemony in the Middle East with few allies and no confidence in the ability of US military might to prevail. Thomas L Friedman, writing in the *New York Times*, argues that an emerging "Biden doctrine" is contingent on finding some form of demilitarised Palestinian state that the US can recognise and get wide Middle East support for.

That would mean Saudi Arabia recognising Israel and working on containing Iran as a power-broker across the region. The US military strikes signal an unconfident and shaky tactic. The risk of a wider war remains. □



Solidarity

For a workers' government



18 January, Tel Aviv, Israel. Around 1,500 protest against the war, calling for ceasefire and a political settlement. Pic: @Ha_Matar

By Ira Berkovic

Over 26,000 people have been killed in Gaza since the current war began. 65,000 people have been injured. A large majority of the dead are civilians – Israel's own claim for the number of Hamas fighters it has killed is 10,000. Over 80% of Gaza's population is now displaced. Health crises caused by the destruction of healthcare infrastructure, damage to basic sewage and water systems, and lack of essential supplies and provisions could ultimately kill even more than direct military assault.

Satellite image analysis by the [BBC](#) suggests Israeli bombardment has destroyed or damaged between 144,000 and 175,000 buildings, representing between 50 and 61% of Gaza's total infrastructure. Large areas of agricultural land have been damaged. Tent cities covering an area equivalent to nearly 500 football pitches have

sprung up near the border with Egypt.

On 3 January, the United Nations reported more than 400,000 cases of infectious disease since 7 October. More than 90% of families are experiencing crisis levels of hunger and malnutrition. Only one third of the hospitals in Gaza have even partial functioning. Those which do are severely overcrowded.

The Centre for Strategic and International Studies think-tank summarises the situation: "The stark reality is that in 2024 Gazans are likely to be forced to live for an indefinite period trapped in conditions of unspeakable suffering, without anything approaching minimal housing, nutrition, health services, mental health support, water, a functioning economy of any description, and hope. A higher and higher percentage of Gaza's population is likely to experience premature death,

extreme injury, and life-threatening illness.

"Gaza is steadily becoming the site of thousands of tents occupied by a sick, grieving, and burgeoning population, where the death toll from preventable and treatable disease increasingly competes with that from bombardment."

As well as continuing to protest for a full ceasefire, and supporting Palestinians and Israelis fighting for peace and equality, socialists and the labour movement internationally must campaign for a massive injection of humanitarian aid. Where possible we can donate to humanitarian relief efforts directly; politically, we must campaign for governments to increase aid funding. Governments which give military aid to Israel should redirect those funds to humanitarian aid for Gaza.

• The statistics in this article are taken from: bbc.in/4bkGB5X and bit.ly/g-csis

