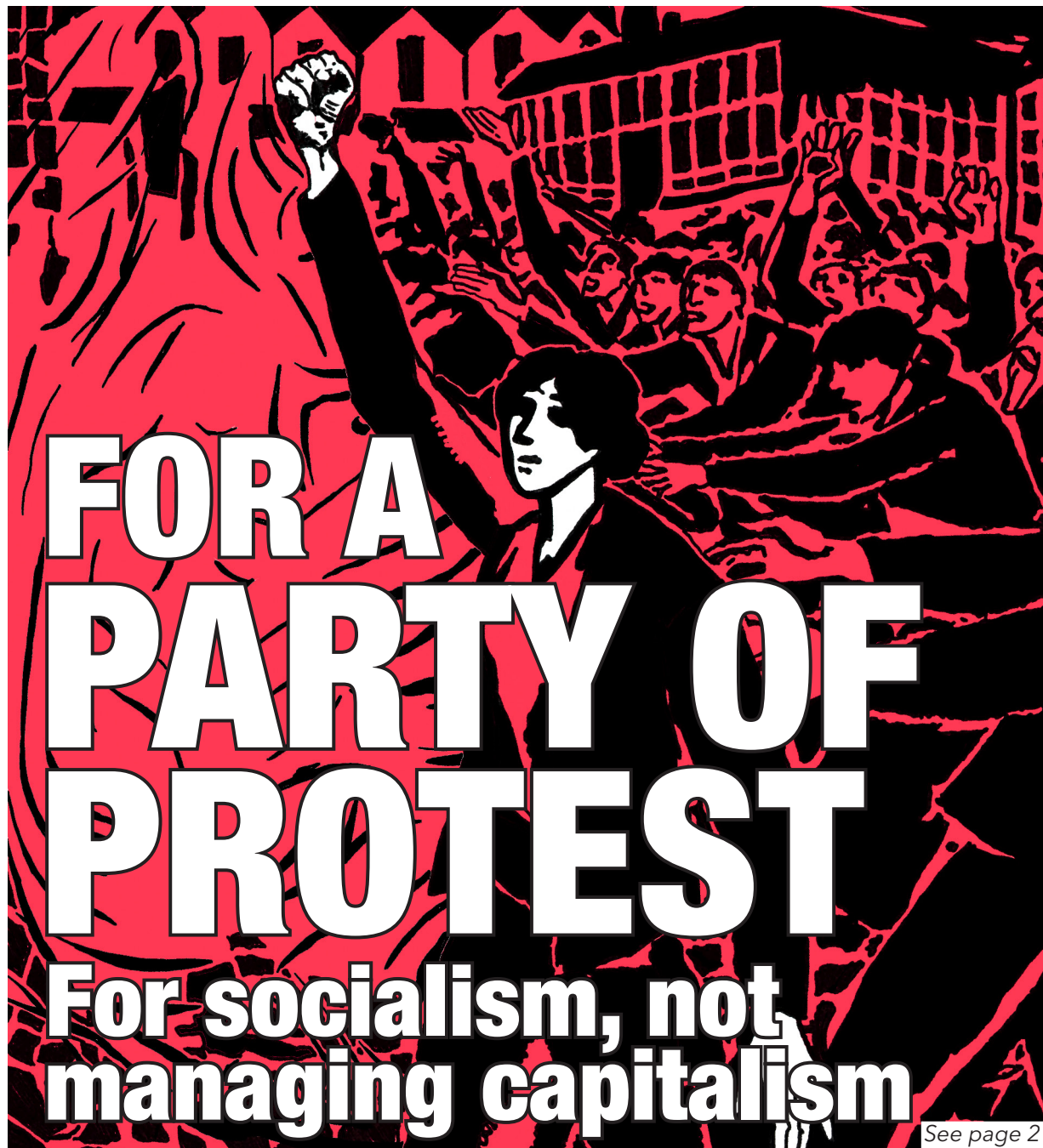


Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry



FOR A PARTY OF PROTEST

**For socialism, not
managing capitalism**

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For a “party of protest”



Labour Party leaders have been repeating Keir Starmer's claim that they have changed Labour “from a party of protest to a party of public service”.

“Party of government” is another favourite.

They want to be, not representatives of the working class, the class which protests against exploitation and lack of social provision, but alternative managers of the private-profit capitalist system.

Worse: alternative managers of capitalism *pretty much as it is*, with almost the same fiscal (budget-balancing) rules, the same tax rates for the rich and big business, the same level of privatisation and contracting-out.

Vote for us, they say, and we will be better managers than Truss and Sunak. Since the Tories' Brexit has turned out so badly, no wonder many voters go with that, even though Labour now promises no more than to tweak Brexit at the margins.

And voters assume that Labour will in fact break its promise not to raise taxes on the rich and big business, and it will improve social provision at least a little. (If you read the *Financial Times* and the *Economist*, you see the rich assume that too. Labour's attempts to reassure them have limited effect).

We can't win equality and social provision without first protesting against inequality and poverty.

Real wages for many workers are down because of the accumulated effect of public-sector “austerity” since 2010 and the inflation surge of 2021-3. Without the strike wave of 2022-3 we would not even have made a start on redress.

Without the huge “save our NHS” street and workplace campaigning of the 1980s and 90s we would not have won the expansion of the NHS in the New Labour years, even part-spoiled as it was by marketisation and PFI.

Street

Labour in the Corbyn era was too little a “party of protest”, not too much. Big street protests from 2010 to 2015 against Cameron-Osborne cuts gave impetus to the Corbyn surge.

But then the Corbyn leadership did less mobilising for protest than Michael Foot had done in the early 1980s or even than the right-wing Labour leader of the 1950s, Hugh Gaitskell, did when he called a demonstration over Suez in 1956.

There were big protests, against Brexit, but the Corbyn leadership did not support them. NHS and cuts protests dwindled in the Corbyn years. After 2017, Labour leafleting against cuts tended to focus mainly on cuts in police budgets rather than social budgets. Labour officials turned their attention to elaborate calculations

(“grey books”) designed to “prove” (to whom?) that they would really balance their budgets.

It's not just Starmer and Reeves. The trade union leaders did call strikes in 2022-3, but piecemeal and with only a token attempt to mobilise broad support (“Enough is Enough”, which after a few very well-attended meetings in late 2022 was in effect wound up).

The union leaders, including the self-proclaimed left-wing ones, have retreated from organising general working-class protest. They have done almost nothing on the NHS or local government cuts. When the TUC was finally pushed into calling a protest against the Minimum Service anti-strike law, it minimised it by having it in Cheltenham rather than a big city with good transport links.

Solidarity will campaign for Labour in the coming general election. Working-class protest can extract more from a Labour government, and with more outcome in ongoing socialist organisation, than from the Tories.

But we will also agitate to transform the labour movement to make it capable of producing a *workers' government*, a government which bases itself on working-class mobilisation and goes not for managing capitalism more adroitly but for asserting “social foresight” against the rules or profit.

When the Labour leaders say they offer a “party of government”, even that meagre promise is an overstatement.

They promise a party of ministers

who will nudge and tweak while most of the actual “governing” is still done by the top officials of the unelected state machine, especially in the Treasury (and in the Bank of England, which is officially and explicitly exempted from democratic control), and by the bosses in industry and finance.

We work to transform the labour movement so that it will first protest for, and then win:

- free movement, migrant rights, and reversing Brexit
- the replacement of that unelected ruling-machinery by democratic accountability
- taxing the rich to rebuild the NHS and social provision
- public ownership and democratic control of utilities and high finance
- social control over the direction of investment, especially for green conversion and the expansion of social housing.

The labour movement will not become a “party of protest” against capitalism, still less push socialist change, unless and until we can build within it an immediate “party of protest” against the current complacent policies and organisation. That's what *Solidarity* is about. Join us in the fight! □

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 • [@ukfost](https://www.facebook.com/ukfost) • [omdimbeyachaduk](https://www.facebook.com/omdimbeyachaduk)

Trump and the billionaires

By Rhodri Evans

Simon Kuper in the *Financial Times* recently reported a “talk to investors in which I mentioned that Donald Trump was a threat to democracy”.

The plutocrats, says Kuper, were “unimpressed. Some literally rolled their eyes. Just another leftie with Trump Derangement Syndrome, they thought. Trump was a ‘business guy’ who would unlock the economy”.

Cashing in on that sentiment, Trump charged \$250,000 a head for a fund-raising dinner on 6 April, and says he raised \$50.5 million.

In return he promised the billionaires tax cuts. His tax cuts from his previous presidency expire in 2025. He pledged to “extend the Trump Tax Cuts”, including the “pass-through”

tax break where businesses, notably hedge funds and such, are not taxed on the grounds that profits “pass through” to the owners who do personal tax returns.

The Center for Budget and Policy Priorities [reckons](#) that extending the pass-through break will save the rich, and cost the government, [\\$700 billion](#) in 2025-35.

Trump also pledged “unleashing [fossil-fuel] energy production, securing our southern border... and eliminating Joe Biden's insane [electric vehicle] mandate”.

Not all the rich back Trump. His campaign fund-raising lags behind Biden's. He is seeking money from the less rich, too, with such ventures as a [Trump bible](#), with the US constitution and a song, God Bless the

USA, added to the text, and promoted as “the only Bible endorsed by President Trump”. \$59.99, so maybe an option for those who can't afford Trump cologne, \$99, or Trump sneakers, \$399.

Some billionaires don't like Trump's wild talk about deportations and tariffs and “retribution” and being “a dictator”, his crude sexism, his transphobia, or his [claim](#) that he “will root out the communists, Marxists, fascists, and the radical left thugs that live like vermin within the confines of our country”. They may not even like Trumpist think-tanks saying all public sector unions should be declared “unconstitutional” and other unions [replaced](#) by joint employer-worker organisations.

But mostly even they reckon

they can cooperate with the “business guy” Trump. Jamie Dimon, boss of J P Morgan, has long been a Democrat. He now [says](#): “Be honest. He was kind of right about NATO, kind of right on immigration. He grew the economy quite well. Trade. Tax reform worked. He was right about some of China.”

Other issues? He'll do as on abortion rights – drop his talk of a 15-week all-USA limit, and say “leave it to the states” – or where he doesn't, the billionaires can live with it.

Some of the left think similar, from a different angle: Trump is just a regular right-winger, only with added bluster.

The force to defeat Trump is not the more “woke” billion-

aires, and, sadly, not the “oh, it's just bluster” left either. It will be a workers' movement roused to defend democratic rights, to fight to extend democracy, and to fight for working-class interests against the billionaires. □

Back anti-war movement in Israel

By Ira Berkovic

After Israeli air strikes killed seven food aid workers on Monday 1 April, Israel's prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu and senior military officials lamented a "tragic mistake" in which "innocent people" had been killed. Two senior officers have been dismissed.

The tens of thousands of Palestinian civilians killed in the war so far, including thousands of children, are no less "innocent", nor are the thousands more who may yet die from starvation and disease. However, the 1 April deaths, which included three British, an Australian, and a Pole, have jolted governments more. US president Biden called for an "immediate ceasefire" and Labour leader Keir Starmer said "this war must stop now". At the same time, the risk of the Gaza war being compounded by another war between Israel and Hezbollah, around the Israel-Lebanon border, has not gone away, and may be increasing.

Untold numbers of Palestinian aid workers working for Gaza-based agencies such as UNRWA have been killed with far less international attention. If the jolt speeds a ceasefire, that will be good for the innocent Palestinian victims of the war, and for the innocent Israeli hostages kidnapped by Hamas.

Inside

Inside Israel, former Shin Bet (security) chief Ami Ayalon called for a ceasefire. (Israeli military deaths peaked in December (100) and January (53), and were 21 in February, 18 in March. Increasing those deaths by a new offensive, even though they remain few compared to Palestinian civilian casualties, has limited support within Israel).

Who are the "guilty" parties? Hamas, certainly. Although the miserable conditions of life long inflicted on Palestinians by Israel helped it build a base, it is not simply a negative imprint of Israel's misdeeds. It pursues its own aims, has ruled Gaza as an authoritarian force, and chose to launch a murderous attack on 7 October. It has refused to take even such steps as it could to protect civilian life, insisting only Israel has the responsibility to do so, even while many of its wealthy leaders live abroad in relative safety and comfort.

And Israel's government is guilty. Decades of rule by an increasingly hard-right regime, claiming it could "manage the conflict" with the Palestinians by gradually choking their national aspirations, and tilting security resources to protect armed settler gangs in the West Bank, substantially shaped the conditions in which Hamas's attack took place.

Since 7 October, Israel has pursued its war with extraordinary brutality, going far beyond "self-defence" retaliation for 7 October. Investigations

by 972 Magazine have shown how its bombing campaigns are designed to cause maximum devastation. These investigations have also highlighted the IDF's use of Artificial Intelligence, with minimal human oversight, to select bombing targets.

Israel's military strategy also suggests a carelessness about the prospect of the wider regional war which some far-right members of Israel's government positively wish for. As well as continuing to exchange fire with Hezbollah across the Lebanese border, it has carried out targeted attacks on Hamas officials in Beirut, and officials from Iran's Revolutionary Guard in Syria. No-one committed to basic progressive values, let alone socialism, should mourn the deaths of military commanders from the vanguard of Iranian imperialism; nevertheless, Israel's actions risk extended war and death.

American diplomatic pressure in the wake of the killings of the aid workers appears to have succeeded in forcing Israel to reopen aid routes into Gaza. That they have been so tightly restricted is an ongoing form of collective punishment. International activist pressure focusing on the humanitarian crisis can help save Palestinian lives. Increasing attention has also been given to the military aid and arms imports Israel receives from other countries. The next Palestine Solidarity Campaign protest in London, due for 13 April, has been called under the single slogan "Stop Arming Israel." The suspension of direct military aid from those countries which provide it would be an important diplomatic and political step. Israel's direct military aid comes overwhelmingly from the USA. Other governments, including Britain, approve licences to allow arms manufacturers based in their countries to sell weapons to Israel.

However, arms sales from Britain account for less (probably much less) than 1% of Israel's total military imports. Withdrawal of the licences would have no immediate impact on Israel's war. It would have symbolic value, but we need additional, higher-priority, focuses. Many on the left call for boycotts of Israel as the main practical activity to focus on. Many of the comparisons between Israel and apartheid South Africa are misleading, but some lessons are pertinent. A cultural boycott of South Africa was pursued for decades. But it was never the blanket boycott advocated for Israel. It exempted links via the ANC. And, for example, Warwick University's scholarships for non-White South African students, including leftists critical of the ANC, were not opposed. When the ANC and the Communist Parties tried to block direct links between unions in countries like Britain and non-racial unions within South Africa critical of the ANC, eventually they

had to back down. And apartheid survived all the boycotts.

An uprising of Black workers, including in industries central to its economy, such as mining, eventually brought down apartheid. In Israel-Palestine, too, best look for forces on the ground that hold potential power. In Israel, that potential agency is Arab-Jewish workers' unity: the Jewish working class and the country's 20% Palestinian minority. The Palestinian citizens of Israel and residents of East Jerusalem are also, for now, the segment of the Palestinian people best placed for positive action.

Equality

Putin's war on Ukraine is unlikely to be ended on terms tolerable for the Ukrainian people without substantial anti-war and wider social upheaval inside Russia itself. Similarly, Netanyahu's war on Gaza can be brought to its quickest end by social upheaval inside Israel. Some on the left argue the consciousness of Israeli Jewish workers is too warped by years of colonial privilege for them to ever play a progressive role in social transformation. But the view that certain peoples are historically irredeemable, or incapable of acting beyond their immediate privileges, is not compatible with the humanism that must underpin any authentic socialism.

Political currents within Israel fighting consistently for equality between Jews and Palestinians are an embattled minority. They can become a larger minority if they can intervene effectively in the burgeoning protests demanding

Netanyahu's ouster and immediate elections to replace him. Movements like Standing Together, with slogans such as "only peace will bring security", seek to persuade those taking to the streets that their desire to live peaceful and secure lives can only be realised within a political framework that guarantees those same rights to Palestinians.

Palestinians, especially those in the West Bank, facing an ongoing project of violent dispossession, are under no obligation to wait for Israeli allies before they resist occupation. But to transform the political reality, a movement for equality including at least a substantial minority of Israeli-Jewish society is required. We make our best contribution by offering what support we can to those seeking to build such a movement. □



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• workersliberty.org/2-i-p



Activist Agenda

Meetings

Thursday 18 April, 7pm: The Carnation Revolution. Marchmont Community Centre, London WC1N 1AB: bit.ly/17apr

Thursdays 2 May: to 6 June, 8pm, Zoom study group on Theses on Feuerbach: bit.ly/e-feuer, Zoomlink bit.ly/thu-8

Many more: at workersliberty.org/events, or scan QR code.

Socialist-feminist book clubs

workersliberty.org/sf-bookclubs: London 14 April, online 17 April, and Sheffield 6 May

At work or on campus

We organise: among health and local government, higher education, school and education workers, on the railway and London Underground, in the civil service, on uni campuses, and more. See workersliberty.org/work-unions,

Insta [@workerslibertystudents](https://www.instagram.com/workerslibertystudents), and email awl@workersliberty.org for more.

Template motions

Texts: to adapt for union branches and Labour Parties. Top of the list currently: "no work notices" and support for Friends of Standing Together: bit.ly/mo-pe

Campaigns

For: UK Friends of Standing Together, Labour Left Internationalists, Workers Against the CCP, Free Our Unions, Solidarity With Iranian Workers, Neurodivergent Labour, India Labour Solidarity, Ukraine Solidarity Campaign, Labour Campaign for Free Movement – contact details, activities, template motions, etc. – see workersliberty.org/agenda. For environmental campaigning, including mobilisation for Reclaim the Power at Drax in August, email awl@workersliberty.org. □

A new left party jettisoning socialism



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

As chatter about a “new left party” arises, the *Morning Star* has a proposal for what it should look like.

A piece on 2 April by frequent contributor John Green advocates a new formation based upon a revival of Corbynism. But a particular sort of revival. According to Green, Jeremy’s main appeal was that he “eschewed jargon and sloganising.” So any new “left-wing formation or party” must jettison that sort of stuff: “we need to recognise that even terms like ‘socialism’ and certainly clichéd rhetoric like ‘smash the Tories’ or ‘down with capitalism,’ so beloved of the far left, can frighten and alienate just the people any new left-wing party will need to bring on board.”

Only by avoiding such talk will the new party be able to attract “a broad spectrum of people, many without firm ideological beliefs, many non-socialists and those with quite different priorities and goals.”

Tony Benn – allegedly – once said “the Labour party has never been a socialist party, although there have always been socialists in it.” The MS now seems to be proposing a “left-wing” party with socialism officially eschewed, probably featuring people like [George Galloway](#), who indeed has “quite different priorities and goals.”

The *Morning Star* and its political masters, the Communist Party of Britain, have been in a state of disarray over voting Labour ever since 2020.

In September last year, the paper published a statement, extracted from the resolution to the CPB’s 2023 Congress the following month: a Labour victory at the next general would be “the best possible outcome in the interests of working people and their families ... However, this should not mean supporting those Labour candidates who have played a prominent part in turning the party to the right, attacking and excluding Jeremy Corbyn and other left MPs, instigating or praising the anti-left purge and advocating neoliberal and pro-war policies.”

And, for anyone who wondered what that last sentence meant: “In such cases, the Communist Party executive

committee will elaborate its alternative position in consultation with our party’s district and nation committees.”

Since then, however, the MS has become increasingly excited by the supposed “anti-imperialist” political potential of the Gaza marches and by the resignations of Labour councillors over Gaza and other complaints about Starmer. (The usual complaint against Starmer has been that of “authoritarianism” – fair enough coming from disaffected councillors but a little odd when endorsed by President Xi’s cheerleaders at the MS).

Against

The paper now regularly carries articles and editorials suggesting that a Starmer-led Labour government would be no better than the Tories. Some contributors go further. Former Corbyn adviser and prominent CPBer Andrew Murray describes Labour under Starmer as “the enemy” and claims “those who would have flung themselves into the struggle for a Labour victory under Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership will now, for the most part, struggle against it” (MS 3 April).

Murray seems to be centrally involved

in the latest attempt to set up an anti-Labour “umbrella” formation around “No Ceasefire, No Vote” (NCNV), which met in London on 3 March to set up a group called [Collective](#), led by former South African ANC MP Andrew Feinstein. It claims to be “laying the foundations of a mass political movement that will eventually transform into a new political party.”

More news on its political basis of this mish-mash of disillusioned councillors, ageing Stalinists, peaceniks, decent people appalled by what is happening in Gaza and – inevitably – antisemites may come from a further conference in Blackburn on [13 April](#). [George Galloway](#) was not there on 3 March, but is top of the speaker list for 13 April.

Galloway’s role in all of this is not clear. Andrew Murray, who spoke at the 3 March meeting, has made it clear he wants Galloway involved. According to the anti-fascist magazine [Searchlight](#): “[Billy Howarth](#), an ‘anti-grooming’ campaigner who’s been involved with numerous far right conspiracy theory groups, including ‘Patriots of Britain’ events at Honor Oak, London, is standing as a Rochdale council [candidate](#) for George Galloway’s ‘Workers Party’.” □

“Planetary boundaries” don’t say it all



Environment

By Eric Fileman

In *Solidarity* [702](#), I discussed climate Tipping Points (CTPs) as a way of framing the climate emergency. They are points of warming beyond which changes to elements of the climate system may cause a runaway feedback loop of warming.

The article also looked at the UN Interconnected Disaster Risks [Report](#) attempts to extend the “tipping point” term. Social and ecological affects of global heating were also considered.

Later discussion in the Workers’ Liberty online ecosocialist discussion group has highlighted the danger of muddying the waters by conflating “planetary boundaries” with CTPs, despite repeated clarifications from the Stockholm Resilience Centre, a major source on “planetary boundaries”.

The planetary boundaries framework doesn’t rely

on CTPs. Discussion of CTPs strengthens the arguments made by advocates of the planetary boundaries framework, as it highlights the difficulty in reversing excesses, but the two concepts are distinct.

The “planetary boundaries” framework was first formulated in a 2009 *Nature* [paper](#) by 29 scientists as a way of defining a “safe boundary within which humanity can continue to develop and thrive for generations to come”.

That paper sketched nine such boundaries: climate change, rate of biodiversity loss, disruption to the nitrogen and phosphorus cycles, stratospheric ozone depletion, ocean acidification, global freshwater use, changes in land use, atmospheric aerosol loading and chemical pollution.

Seven were quantified, but not chemical pollution and atmospheric aerosol loading,

Since then, the “chemical pollution boundary” has been renamed “novel entities” to include Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs).

A 2023 [review](#) concluded that six of the now nine quan-

tified boundaries had been exceeded – all but ocean acidification, atmospheric aerosol loading and stratospheric ozone depletion.

The framework has been widely used to inform environmental policy, but has [critics](#). The framework gives a single figure to measure us against each boundary.

Even for global warming, where a °C figure seems straightforward, it is unclear whether temperature change since pre-industrial or CO₂-equivalent fraction in the atmosphere is more appropriate. (The 2009 paper decided on a CO₂ level of 350ppm, which we had already passed).

For the novel entities boundary, the metric used “percentage of synthetic chemicals released into the environment without adequate safety testing” and the boundary is set at 0%.

The scheme of nine boundaries seems to give each equal weighting and to downplay interconnections. A 2015 [update](#) proposed a hierarchy, with the other boundaries stemming from biodiversity and climate-change bound-

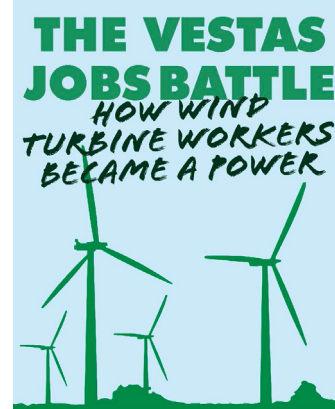
aries, and tried to emphasise interconnectedness. To date, the framework has attempted to promote itself as a purely scientific, apolitical way of framing changes to Earth systems. This has tended to nourish arguments for degrowth or even for Malthusian targeting of population growth as the problem.

I would argue instead for widespread industrial transformation and a system of governance equipped to deal with what are likely existential threats to the future of humanity.

The “planetary boundaries” framework acts as a useful simple quantification of broad swathes of science to inform policymakers.

But it is a simplification. “Cautious” setting of the boundaries, which shows us as way past some of them, creates a risk of inaction in two ways.

Either governments do not take the boundaries seriously; or they are pushed to climate nihilism, ideas that sustainability is unachievable, so all that can be hoped for is successful adaptation, at least for some. □



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Women’s Fightback.
36 pages, £3.00 □ [bit.ly/shop-wl](#)

Anti-abortionists step up backlash



Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

The *Guardian* has [reported](#) that the UK branch of the US-based Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) has more than doubled its spending since 2020 and been appointed a stakeholder in a parliamentary group on religious freedoms, in a role that grants it direct access to MPs.

Ahead of several amendments on abortion coming soon to the Criminal Justice Bill, several anti-abortion campaign groups have increased propaganda campaigns and coordinated mass letter-writing campaigns targeting MPs.

The ADF is a major player on the US Christian right which drove the repeal of *Roe v Wade* and funds attacks on LGBT+ and abortion rights. It had primarily focused on arguing against buffer zones around abortion clinics.

A number of Tory MPs have taken up this argument in Parliament – MPs that have proven links with the ADF, the World Congress of Families and CitizenGo.

The latest financial accounts for ADF International UK, published last week, show it spent almost £1m in the year to June 2023, up from £392,556 in 2020, and that its income almost doubled between 2022 and 2023, from £553,823 to £1,068,552. This has been spent attempting to engage with “significant decision-makers” and providing “brief-



Miriam Cates, Conservative MP

ing material and legal analysis” to MPs.

In September 2023 it spent £1,737.92 flying the prime minister’s special envoy on freedom of religion and beliefs, Fiona Bruce MP, paying for her hotel and travel to attend an unspecified conference. She has spoken alongside ADF on “free speech” and religion.

Other anti-abortion groups have also ramped up activity here in recent months. Right to Life, a leading UK anti-abortion charity, has been coordinating a lobbying campaign encouraging people to write to their MPs to tighten abortion laws, and spent £117,000 on Facebook ads in 2023, ten times the amount in 2020. MPs are due to vote in the coming weeks on proposed changes to abortion law that would see abortion decriminalised in England and Wales.

The proposal on decriminalisation, from backbench Labour MP Diana Johnson, has cross-party support and

had good [hopes](#) of passing. Stella Creasy, another right-wing Labour MP, has now submitted a softer amendment to decriminalise abortion up to 24 weeks.

Under Creasy’s amendment [Carla Foster](#) could still have been imprisoned. Nobody should go to prison for accessing abortion. Nobody should be forced to stay pregnant against their wishes.

Abortion Rights has called a day of lobbying for [22 April](#). The Criminal Justice Bill has been delayed as Sunak seeks to deal with a backbench rebellion against plans that could “criminalise homelessness”.

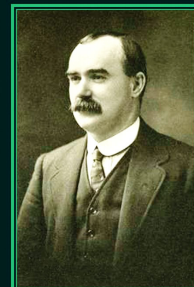
More than 40 Conservative MPs were expected to rebel against parts of the Criminal Justice Bill, which would allow the police to fine “nuisance” rough sleepers.

Education Secretary Gillian Keegan but told Sky News that people “should

not be arrested just if they smell”.

Miriam Cates, Conservative MP for Penistone and Stockbridge had stated that she and many other MPs will vote against the Criminal Justice Bill in its entirety, if Johnson’s amendment passed. □

Liam McNulty



James Connolly
Socialist
Nationalist & Internationalist

This book discusses Connolly not just as an Irish hero, but traces how he was shaped by and responded to the international socialist and labour movement of his time.

It traces his influences and influence through a transnational network of working-class activists, socialist agitators, and revolutionary nationalists. 412 pages **£25** □

workersliberty.org/publications

Monkey Man, Modi, and Netflix



Film review

By Luke Hardy

In UK cinemas from 5 April is *Monkey Man*, an ultra-violent revenge movie starring, written by and directed by film star Dev Patel (of *Slumdog Millionaire*, *The Green Night* and *Lion*). Your tolerance for *Monkey Man* will probably depend on your tolerance for films like the *John Wick* or *Equaliser* series.

As a fan of the genre I think it’s a interesting and satisfying variation. It’s set in a fictional Indian city ruled over by corrupt cops, gangsters and a fictional Hindu nationalist party

that incites attacks on minorities. It touches on themes of extreme inequality, discrimination and the place of hijra (third gender) people in India and in the Hindu tradition.

Dev Patel’s character in the film takes inspiration from the story of the god Hanuman (supposedly half-human, half-monkey) for his Monkey Man persona.

As early as March 2021 the film was finished, and Netflix bought the worldwide rights, describing it in their press release as “John Wick in Mumbai”. At some point Netflix got cold feet and decided to drop the film.

Netflix and Patel have been coy about the reason. Drew Taylor, writing for [The Wrap](#), suggests the issue was with



the political content, and that the film could be seen as fictionalised portrayal of India’s BJP Prime Minister Modi and Adityanath, a Hindu cleric and BJP Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh.

Jordan Peele, a director and producer of politicised horror movies like *Get Out*, moved to ensure the movie got a

cinematic release in several countries. *Monkey Man* had a planned release date for India later in April, but that seems now to have been postponed.

Other movies and TV shows seem to have received similar treatment by both Netflix and Amazon Prime. Anurag Kashyap, an acclaimed director of gritty Hindi language

crime movies and TV series, found his adaptation of *Maximum City*, a non-fiction book about life at the margins in Mumbai, [dropped](#) by Netflix.

Annapoorani: The Goddess of Food, a comedy drama about a chef who clashes with her traditionalist father, a priest from the Brahmin caste, was [pulled](#) from Netflix two weeks after its release after a Hindu nationalist activist started a campaign about the film “intentionally hurting Hindu sentiments”.

Non-English language productions without a Hollywood star shelved by the streamers in this way are likely to sit in the vaults unseen. Which is no doubt how the BJP would like it. □

Boris Savinkov: forgotten revolutionary



Eric Lee

While there have been countless books and articles about V.I. Lenin, whose death in 1924 has been marked in this newspaper and elsewhere, there are some Russian revolutionaries of that time who have long been forgotten.

The largest group of non-Bolshevik socialists was never the Mensheviks. It was the Party of Socialist Revolutionaries (PSR) – a party so large and popular that it won the greatest number of votes in the only free and fair election Russia ever held, in 1917. It would have dominated the Constituent Assembly and possibly changed the course of the revolution, had that assembly been allowed to meet in January 1918. Instead it was dispersed by Bolshevik soldiers. The PSR began its long and painful decline as the party was outlawed and their leaders arrested and often killed by the Cheka, the Soviet secret police.

Boris Savinkov, who was murdered by the Bolsheviks ninety-nine years ago next month, is one of many PSR leaders forgotten by history. But at one time, he was a living legend. A leading figure in the Combat Organisation of the party, he was in charge of a number of ambitious attempts to decapitate the tsarist regime through terror. Though he was not personally involved in the actual



throwing of bombs, he was the mastermind of the PSR's campaign of terror. Among those killed by PSR fighters under his command were the Interior Minister, Plehve, and the tsar's uncle, the Grand Duke Sergei. The tsar too was on Savinkov's hit list.

Savinkov worked as the deputy to Ievno Azef, who in addition to being a ruthless terrorist had also served for many years as a paid agent of the tsarist Department of Police, the Okhrana. When Azef was exposed as a spy, Savinkov took over the organisation.

In addition to being an underground warrior for the PSR, Savinkov had an artistic bent. He was a novelist with at least three novels under his belt. They are all autobiographical, covering the various periods of his life. They are all out of print.

In 1917, Savinkov was delighted by the overthrow of the tsar and welcomed the creation of the Provisional Government. Unlike many socialists, among them the Bolsheviks, but also Mensheviks like Julius Martov, Savinkov

supported the Russian involvement in the First World War. He was joined in this view by the founding father of Russian Marxism, Georgi Plekhanov and the Georgian Social Democrat Irakli Tsereteli. Like Tsereteli, he became a member of Kerensky's government, serving as deputy minister of war. And also like Tsereteli, he was – controversially – a supporter of the restoration of capital punishment for soldiers who deserted or refused to fight.

With the Bolshevik seizure of power in November 1917, Savinkov found himself searching for a new political home, somewhere he could play a leading role in the fight against Lenin and his party. He was initially involved with fellow members of the PSR and other socialist groups, but later found himself working with the various White generals, including Denikin, and Admiral Kolchak. Savinkov knew that these men did not share his views, that they were reactionary, antisemitic monarchists. But they were the only army on Russian soil that was standing up against the Soviet regime.

With the Red Army victory in the Civil War, Savinkov had run out of ideas. He could not bring himself to support the new Soviet regime, nor did he feel comfortable among the White Russian exiles. He was always looking for a way back into the fight.

When he learned of a new underground organisation in Russia that seemed ready to take the fight to the

Bolsheviks, he jumped at the chance to join in. That organisation was known as The Trust and was set up by the Cheka to lure anti-Bolsheviks back to the country. Savinkov walked right into their trap. He was arrested and during his trial, he recanted his views and acknowledged Bolshevik rule. He was sentenced to death, but that sentence was commuted by the Soviet leadership to ten years in prison.

But for Savinkov, it was the end of the road. In May 1925, he died after being thrown out of a window of the Lubyanka, headquarters of the Cheka in Moscow.

Savinkov's legacy is a complex one. He showed real courage in his various fights against autocracy, tsarist and Soviet. But he also made many mistakes – and many enemies. The books he left behind paint an extraordinary picture of life among the revolutionaries in the final years of the tsarist regime.

A year from now, it will therefore be the 100th anniversary of the death of a man who was once the most feared terrorist in Russia. But history has forgotten Savinkov, and it is unlikely that the occasion will be marked anywhere – least of all in Putin's Russia, a country where the Cheka is still formally admired and revered. □

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

Why the Starmer-Biden poll difference?



Debate

By Martin Thomas

Few left papers host a regular columnist who obviously disagrees with the editorial line on many issues and even uses their column from time to time to "have a go" on such issues.

We do. We also carry polemics against us like John McNulty's (page 13), and sometimes angry polemics between our own core activists. We think the left needs a culture of open debate.

Eric Lee's column on Biden and Starmer (*Solidarity* 704) had a different slant from most of our coverage. That one, though, I found it more not making sense than disputing directly. Maybe inadvertently, the article seems to equate "pro-Palestinian", pro-Hamas,

and support for boycotting Israel. They are not the same thing. *Solidarity* is strongly for Palestinian rights, but against boycotts and against Hamas. (And Eric himself, if I have it right, supports some version of "two states". To many that makes him "pro-Palestinian".)

Eric gives too much credence, I think, to the *Sunday Times* extrapolating to a Labour landslide in the next election. All evidence is that the Labour poll lead is unenthusiastic, loose, fluid.

Eric centres on discussion of Starmer's poll figures continuing good, and Biden's being poor, despite both facing anger over Gaza.

"Part of the reason may be that the United States has lagged behind the UK [in] pro-Palestinian sentiment". True since the 1940s at latest, but that would seem to predict lower poll damage for Biden than for Starmer.

Why not? Eric seems to sug-

gest a pro-Israeli backlash in Britain shown by and stemming from Jeremy Corbyn's poor election result in 2019.

I don't think that explains 2019. In any case, the antisemitic sections of the left are far from cowed.

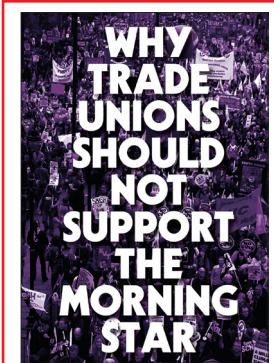
At our stall at the London Radical Bookfair of 29 October 2023, items like Daniel Randall's *Confronting Antisemitism on the Left* were our best-sellers, but readers there are not the broad electorate, and plenty of those readers fired up against antisemitism were also fired up against Starmer.

There are two simpler guesses on the Starmer-Biden polling difference.

Biden represents an incumbent administration doing poorly. Starmer opposes a discredited incumbent administration.

In the USA, Robert F Kennedy Jr is currently polling about 10%, and maybe a good chunk of that taken from

Biden. (Kennedy attacks Biden for being too critical of Israel. Cornel West, who attacks Biden for not criticising Israel enough, isn't doing well.) □



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Hong Kong passes new “security law”

By Chan Ying

On 19 March the Hong Kong Legislative Council, now completely devoid of oppositional voice, unanimously passed a new security law. In addition to the National Security Law imposed on Hong Kong in 2020 by Beijing, new offences have been created – treason, insurrection and sabotage which are punishable by up to life; imprisonment, secession, sedition, subversion against the Chinese government, external interference, theft of state secrets and espionage.

The oppositional forces of the 2019 uprising have already been decimated, with hundreds of activists in jail, either convicted or awaiting trial for years with bail denied, or in exile. So this new legislation would appear to be overkill, a sledgehammer devised to flatten nuts that have already been cracked.

The new legislation has been condemned by what Beijing would regard as the “usual suspects” – [the UN, Amnesty International](#), the BBC and other western media, UK, US, and allied governments.

- The various offences are very broadly and vaguely defined, seemingly designed as catch-all devices to intimidate any opposition and forcing media and NGOs to self-censor.

- Exceptional police powers now include detaining suspects for 16 days without charge, and denying access to a lawyer during detention.

- The definition of “external forces” could be interpreted to include UN bodies, international charities and NGOs, and even multinational companies!

- The legislation was rushed through with just one month’s public consultations and 12 days’ debating in Legco. Even pro-Beijing personalities commented that the draft wording could benefit from fine-tuning.

Article 23 of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HK SAR) Basic Law, imposed in 1997, said that HK would enact a security law. The people of Hong Kong had no say in that Basic Law and the constitutional arrangements negotiated between the Thatcher UK Government and the People’s Republic led by Deng Xiaoping.

The first attempt to implement Article 23 was in 2003. The HK SAR government conducted a consultation over three months and received over 90,000 submissions (fewer than 20,000 this time). There was widespread opposition by the pro-business Liberal Party as well as the “pan-democratic parties” in Legco and people in the streets of Hong Kong. 500,000 people marched against the draft bill on 1 July 2003, the anniversary of the establishment of the HK SAR. Previously, the only large scale protest in Hong Kong was when over a million



marched in support of the Tiananmen democracy movement in 1989.

The then Security Minister, Regina Ip, and the Chief Executive, Tung Che Hwa, resigned.

Article 23 highlighted the contradictions of HKSAR One Country Two Systems formula:

The people of Hong Kong wanted the autonomy promised under the Basic Law to include local democracy and the right to elect their Chief Executive and the Legislature, to retain the city’s distinct identity and have a real say in its destiny. Hongkongers were never able to exercise their right to self-determination, but autonomy looked like a possible way not to become just another Chinese city.

Deng Xiaoping and Thatcher wanted a continuation of neoliberal capitalism, for the golden goose to lay more golden eggs. Hong Kong post-1997 was meant to keep its status as a global financial centre – providing the PRC access to international capital, facilitating greater external investment to continue driving China’s post 1978 economic transformation along capitalist lines, and enabling CCP cadres operating China’s crony state capitalist system to corruptly enrich themselves.

The Hong Kong capitalist class were the earliest foreign investors in Deng’s “Opening Up” capitalist project for China, rapidly transferring their factories from Hong Kong across the border. As a comprador layer, they also delivered large-scale OEM manufacturing on behalf of global brands seeking

super profits in China.

The CCP was prepared to allow these oligarchs a little leeway, with a few extra civil liberties for the city’s population, but opposed any developments towards full-blown democracy that might rock the boat and weaken their monopolistic grip on political power as a one party state.

Tiananmen 1989 was an existential crisis for Deng and Co, but following the repression and with the support of western capital, within three or four years it was business as usual, as the 1997 handover of Hong Kong from one colonial master to another approached.

In 2003 the HK authorities backed down. Given the level of repression since 2020, it is no surprise that this time round the “patriots-only” Legco rubber-stamped the security law with little protest.

Article 23 is done and dusted. However, has the regime killed the golden goose?

Hong Kong is already caught in the middle of a rising geopolitical conflict between the USA and China.

The Hong Kong stock market is in the doldrums. Foreign investment is hesitant to come back, housing prices in Hong Kong have plummeted over 25%. A significant layer of Hong Kong’s skilled workforce has left for the UK, around 135,000 people, despite the cost of a British National Overseas (BNO) visa (£5,425 per adult including NHS surcharge, plus no recourse to public funds for five years).

Hong Kong is severely affected by China’s economic woes – massive housing problems remain unsolved, with leading construction companies defaulting and going bankrupt, paid-for homes unfinished as well as completed houses unsold, together with deflation, local government debt, over-capacity in manufacturing, and youth unemployment. The CCP’s early-March “Two Sessions” projection of a 5% growth of GDP would appear to be optimistic.

The US Government is about to

announce financial and visa sanctions against specific government officials, similar to the sanctions imposed in 2020 after Beijing imposed the National Security Law. These sanctions are of dubious value, and divert people’s attention from the two-fold reality of the situation:

Firstly, global capitalist entities are only interested in profit-making from their investment through the super-exploitation of labour inside the People’s Republic, whether this is forced Uyghur labour in [Xinjiang](#), [North Korean labour](#) in [North East China](#), or the sweatshop factories along the southeast coastal provinces populated largely by migrant female labour from the inland rural countryside.

Secondly, the fightback against repression and exploitation must involve the active agency of working people in Hong Kong and in China as a whole rather than be reliant on the US Government, either under Trump in 2019-20 or Biden in 2024. The most recent example of such fightback is the “A4” or “White Paper” movement which forced Xi Jinping’s government to cease the Covid ultra-lockdown.

Will Article 23 strengthen the resolve of the atomised oppositionists in Hong Kong and the exiled activists in the Hong Kong diaspora, or will the lack of world attention and political disorientation lead to despair?

To avoid such a scenario, it is vital to reflect on the political limitations and geopolitical context of the 2019 protest movement, in order to draw out the key lessons of the defeat. Socialists will aim for much more than a slogan about “Revolution in our Time”. We want to regroup activists into a workers’ socialist party with a working-class programme including democratic rights, and to make that party an active force for speeding the revolutionary overthrow of the Beijing autocracy, for making the overthrow the most democratic achievable, and for winning specifically working-class demands in it.

A fight for Hong Kong’s self-determination, to be successful, needs to be part of a China-wide resistance movement of the working class against the CCP Party-State, a monolith that is on the wrong side of history. One day it will crack under the stresses and contradictions of its own making. □





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How a new start came from exile

The road to Bolshevism

By Sean Matgamna

Eighth in a series of articles around the 100th anniversary of the death of Vladimir Ulyanov (Lenin)

Our Differences is the generative text of the working-class political movement that conquered state power in Russia in October 1917. In it Georgi Plekhanov expounded his analysis of Russian society in the form of a devastating and systematic examination of populism in all its sub-sections, Lavrovist, Bakuninist and Blanquist alike. It is one of the great books of revolutionary Marxism.

It was published in 1885, from exile in Switzerland, as Plekhanov's summing up of the new working-class Marxist course he worked out after the 1879 split in Russia's revolutionary populist movement.

Trotsky's later theory of "Permanent Revolution" argued that the working class could win the typical democratic demands of the bourgeoisie – establish a Constituent Assembly, a democratic republic, democratic rights – and then go on, without any period of stable bourgeois power, to create a workers' government. That is exactly how it happened in 1917. (And, then, things evolved). The theory was accepted, though not in so many words, by the Communist International in 1920.

Identifiable versions of these guiding ideas of Lenin and Trotsky, or approximations to them, are in the 1880s already to be found, in an underdeveloped and unconcretised form, to be sure, in the writings of Plekhanov and Axelrod. When it came to it, in 1905 and after, the former GEL people became convinced that the revolution could not, after all, do without the bourgeoisie, while Trotsky, Lenin and the Bolsheviks took the opposite fork in the road, facing up to the fact that they would have to do it without the bourgeoisie and against them.

As well as being the great scholar of Russian Marxism, Plekhanov was in the Iskra years still the embodiment in that movement of the heroic, audacious, stop-at-nothing, militant spirit of the earlier revolutionaries, with self-sacrifice as needed and always with self-abnegation.

It was Plekhanov who proclaimed at the Marxists' congress of 1903 that a future Marxist government might well have to violate the rules of formal democracy in the interests of the revolution, insisting against much hostility that the well-being of the revolution would



override all other considerations.

If the Russian Social Democracy was the first Marxist party to write the "Dictatorship of the Proletariat" into its programme, and it was, that was the work of Plekhanov.

Yet, in the 1880s, both Black Redistribution (the populist splinter Plekhanov led after the 1879 split in the old Land and Freedom revolutionary-populist group) and then the Emancipation of Labour Group (GEL, the Marxist group led by Plekhanov in exile) seemed to have failed.

Inevitably, GEL suffered from the collapse of revolutionary populism after the killing of the Tsar (March 1881) and from the disillusion, inertia and fear of the police that paralysed the opposition-minded intelligentsia for a decade.

GEL had the added disadvantage that immediately it could be only a negative, critical force, directed against both the old and the new populism. What it stood for positively lay still in the future.

Black Redistribution failed because it had clung to the old populist policy of organising the peasants long after that policy had repeatedly failed in the 1870s; and because People's Will (the majority in the 1879 split) was foremost in the field of action against the Tsarist regime. All Black Redistribution and later GEL could do in that field was express solidarity with the activity that their rivals were doing.

And GEL failed as an organisation for many years because it oriented to organising the industrial workers as an independent political force when that class was still very weak.

Consistent Marxism in Russia remained almost invisible until the mid 1890s and the onslaught on populism by the "second wave" of Russian Marxists, the "legal Marxists" – Struve, Tugan-Baranovsky, Bulgakov, etc. Marxism was only an element in the eclectic education provided in the surviving populist circles.

Personally Plekhanov and the others

had a bad time of it. Lev Deutsch, Vera Zasulich's partner, the organiser on whom GEL relied, was arrested in Germany and handed over to the Russian authorities, to be jailed and then exiled to Siberia.

For a long time they had no contact with Russia.

They did not recruit amongst Russian exiles, fearing that ill-educated newcomers would dilute the group's politics, or organisationally destabilise it. That was indeed their experience in the time when they expanded and allied with Ulyanov and others to produce Iskra from 1900.

And they faced tremendous personal difficulties. Plekhanov, who had a young family, had a hard time reconciling himself to the savage poverty that, circumstances being as they were, was the price of doing the work he had undertaken. Observing the poverty in which the French Marxist Jules Guesde had learned to live helped reconcile him to it.

Both Plekhanov and Zasulich were consumptives. Plekhanov almost died of TB in the 1880s, and did die of it in 1918. Axelrod, the one most concerned with organisational questions, who lived by making and selling a sort of yogurt, suffered from psychological conflicts that often made political and literary work impossible.

Nadezda Krupskaya later recorded the impression Axelrod made on Lenin and herself during the Iskra period:

"Pavel Borisovich had lost three-quarters of his working capacity; he did not sleep for nights at a stretch and wrote with extreme intensity for months on end, without being able to finish the article he had started. Sometimes it was impossible to decipher his handwriting owing to the nervy way in which it was written. Axelrod's handwriting produced a profound impression on Vladimir Ilyich. 'It's simply awful', he often used to say, 'if you get into such a state as Axelrod'. He more than once spoke about Axelrod's handwriting to

Dr Kramer during his last illness."

Plekhanov sometimes despaired. He responded to a letter in which Axelrod had tried to cheer him up:

"Your expression, 'chosen one of history' makes me laugh. How can anyone be persuaded that he was chosen by history? That is possible only with reference to the past, but with reference to the present, it is senseless and only braggarts and swindlers can look at themselves through such flattering spectacles. And I, I simply am probably a failure, fit now only for the dusthole. I am ill, I know not from what – it must be despair, and it is true that such as I am now, I am not suited for anything, so what is there to talk about? A squeezed-out lemon should be thrown away into the dusthole and forgotten the sooner, that is all. Your belief in me does honour to your idealism... but if it is prolonged it will be funny: who idolises squeezed-out lemons! Now I am sick and in general my condition is wretched, and what is to come – unknown."

Words that should be carved above the door of every sect's door, and of every Marxist tempted out of expediency to take the line of least resistance.

When Plekhanov wrote those words, the tide had already begun to turn.

In the years after the 1891 famine, Marxist circles, basing themselves on the politics and the work of GEL, multiplied rapidly throughout urban Russia. They remained separate and isolated from each other and mostly had no contact with GEL.

Some impatient younger people out of Russia saw GEL as conservative, inhibitive, over-assertive and out of touch with new conditions in Russia. The combination of GEL and Lenin, Martov, etc, from the St Petersburg League of Struggle, was for the veterans the first long-term such collaboration.

It involved Lenin, Martov and the others siding with the GEL against those with whom the GEL had fallen out (some of whom, People's Will, had taken terrorism as far as it could go, with the killing of the Tsar in 1881). There is even one academic commentator who argues that the campaign against "economism" waged by Iskra was merely a contrivance, a political blunt instrument, with which Plekhanov, using Lenin, etc, clubbed down his critics.

But indisputably GEL did great work of fundamental significance. An examination of the ideas with which they, and the newer generation, set about building a Marxist working class party in Russia is what will concern us here. We will try to follow them step by step. What had they learned from their experience, and the experience of others of their bent and generation? That will make up our articles to follow. □

Talking about Israel in Germany



Book review

By Owen Flood

Book review of *Über Israel Reden: Eine Deutsche Debatte (Talking about Israel: A German Debate)* by Meron Mendel

On the political left in the UK, the main impression that people have of Germany and its relationship to Israel is two things. Firstly, guilt for the Holocaust has resulted in Germany uncritically supporting Israel and using Israeli-relations as a way to absolve itself of its Nazi past. Secondly, as a way to express its support for Israel and demonstrate its anti-antisemitism, Germany has banned BDS, along with other measures.

Published in 2023, before the 7 October attack by Hamas and the subsequent Israeli siege on Gaza, *Talking About Israel* looks at how Israel-Palestine is discussed in Germany. In the short book Meron Mendel covers a range of issues including the BDS movement and its opposition, Germany's diplomatic relations with Israel, the left split and disarray over the Israel-Palestine conflict, and German remembrance culture with regards to its Nazi history.

Meron Mendel was born in Israel, grew up in a liberal household, and with many reservations, carried out compulsory military service. He later studied at Haifa University, where he became involved in peace campaigning. For the past 20 years he has lived in Germany. He is a founder of the Anne Frank Centre in Berlin and currently works as a professor for transnational social work at the Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences. He writes on the topics of migration, German history, remembrance culture, antisemitism, anti-racism, and identity politics.

Mendel is broadly speaking left-wing, but not a socialist. He is very much disillusioned by the left in Germany, particularly in its divide and political confusion on Israel-Palestine. A topic to which he dedicates a chapter in the book.

Germany has had on the whole friendly and supportive diplomatic relations with Israel. However three provisos need to be mentioned: this has not always been the case, German diplomacy with Israel is reflected weakly in the German population, and this support is not due to German guilt so much as realpolitik.

Consensus

The current political consensus across the parliamentary political spectrum (SPD, FPD, CDU, Die Linke, AfD and the Greens) is to unswervingly support and

protect Israel as the way for Germany to reckon with its Nazi past. Angela Merkel on multiple occasions referred to this as Germany's stately duty ("Staatsräson"). Martin Schulz, former leader of the SPD, echoed this when he said "by protecting Israel, we protect ourselves from the demons of our people's history".

However, the German population stands relatively mixed in its attitude towards Israel, one survey noted that a majority of Germans (roughly 60%) do not think that Germany has a particular duty or responsibility to support Israel.

This turn towards almost unconditional support for the Israeli state is, Mendel argues, a relatively recent phenomenon in German diplomatic relations. It took until 1965 for West Germany to formalise diplomatic political representation in Tel Aviv. West Germany worried that official diplomatic relations with Israel would risk Arab states aligning with East Germany. East Germany never took up any relations with Israel.

Dirty water

The claim that the German state has always tried to reckon with its Nazi past does not hold up to historical scrutiny. In the 1950s the Adenauer government tended to dismiss any risk of Nazi resurgence within Germany. Instead of pushing for further denazification the Adenauer regime distanced itself from the Nazi past, holding a position that admitted a German government was responsible for the Holocaust, but that era was behind them – the denazification policies had done their job. This attitude served to hide how the Adenauer government reintegrated ex-Nazis into the German civil service, state, and universities. Adenauer repeatedly argued for the appointment of ex-Nazis into parts of his regime – "one does not throw out the dirty water as long as one doesn't have any clean water". One of the most senior civil servants appointed under Adenauer was former Nazi Hans Globke. Globke had drafted the legal commentary of the Nuremberg laws, introduced the policy of adding "J" to Jewish citizen's identity documents, and supported drafting laws on relations between Jews and "Aryans".

This attitude that the Nazi era was a thing of the past was also reflected in the German population of the time – in 1952 only 11% of Germans were in favour of reparations for the Jews. The Reparations Agreement signed in 1952, Mendel and other critics argue, did not so much come about out of a genuine concern for Jews and Holocaust survivors but as a way for the West German state to display that it could live by the Western democratic norms of the post-war era.

The German state demonstrates its

opposition to antisemitism in a performative and posturing way via state repression of anti-Israel politics. Mendel recognises this but understates the issues that come with such repression. Meanwhile the anti-Israeli left wrongly paints the German state as steeped in "Zionism", to the extent that parts of it have called for a boycott of Germany.

The German parliament in May 2019 did not "ban BDS" but rather condemned it as antisemitic. This has permitted prohibitions of "BDS groups" accessing public funds and public spaces. However, the implementation of such bans has been mixed at best. Various cities in Germany (e.g. Frankfurt and Munich) have stopped groups aligned to or promoting the politics of BDS using public venues. Nevertheless, in numerous cases these decisions have been overturned and ruled unconstitutional.

There are a host of other examples of the German state's performative anti-antisemitism. Germany's antisemitism commissioner in 2023 argued that the use of the word "apartheid" to describe Israel was antisemitic – while I am sympathetic to the idea that the use of "apartheid" can come from a place of antisemitism, a German state declaration comes packaged with proscribing organisations that describe Israel in this way. A report of the German Conference of Interior Ministers in 2022 has even suggested prohibiting maps of Israel-Palestine that "call into question Israel's right to exist". The same report also suggested further legal regulations on pro-Palestinian groups. In early 2022 Berlin police arrested and detained 170 people attending Nakba day demonstration under the guise of preventing an "antisemitic gathering". The Landesbank Baden-Württemberg (LBBW) went so far as to attempt seizing the funds and terminating the bank account of the Palestine Committee Stuttgart, a group that supports BDS. This account termination was however successfully overturned when the Stuttgart Regional Court ruled that LBBW's actions were unjustified.

BDS

I oppose BDS as a tactic used against Israel as unhelpful and in certain cases antisemitic. I would criticise the use of "apartheid" to describe Israel and its treatment of Palestinians. There is brutal and extreme oppression of Palestinians, but it is inaccurate to call it "apartheid". And more generally I am critical of the antisemitism rife in much of the pro-Palestine movement. Nevertheless, we should oppose these measures from the German state. They are unjust on their own terms. It does the opposite of improving the political discussion on Israel-Palestine. It also threatens those groups and move-

ments criticising Israeli oppression of Palestinians and opposing antisemitism. Moreover, these same measures of state repression and curtailment of freedom of speech risk being carried over and used against other parts of the political left.

Impasse

Mendel to some extent recognises this but presents himself as much more balanced and reasonable than his record on this topic reflects. In 2019 he welcomed the decision by the Frankfurt city council to prohibit all BDS-related groups and initiatives from using city-owned buildings. For a writer who advocates more debate in public spaces on the topic of Israel and Palestine, he seems to miss the fact that proscribing BDS-sympathetic groups and the use of the word "apartheid" to describe Israel results in proscribing much of the pro-Palestinian movement. It also makes seriously challenging those issues within the left more, not less, difficult.

Omission

Unfortunately, while Mendel gives a diagnosis of the issues around how Israel and Palestine are discussed within Germany, he gives no explanation of how to break out of this impasse. In my opinion, his major omission is any discussion of progressive groups and movements within Israel and Palestine and the possibility of the German left making links with them. □

• Slightly abridged: more bit.ly/m-mend

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Different views on Trump



Debate

Excerpts from debate in Workers' Liberty for our conference on 27-28 April

One

We advocate US socialists support a vote for Biden to stop Trump, in the context of a political perspective emphasising the need to build a working-class political pole independent of the Democrats, and to build labour and socialist organisation and struggle to fight the policies of a Biden government and organise resistance to Trumpism. US socialists who pursue a "no vote for Biden" intervention in the election, or rally behind West, are wrong.

Two

In the 2024 presidential election, Biden represents a substantial lesser

evil than Trump. However, to call for a vote for Biden to provide such an "endorsement" from the AWL is politically wrong-headed and serves no purpose. It is unfortunate, to say the least, that we do not have a credible socialist candidate in this election. Our slogans in the election should continue to focus on the need for independent working-class politics and organisation to combat the threat of Trumpism and the "two-party" system.

A

Trump is a strong-state, anti-democratic, racist thug. He is personally rude, ignorant, spiteful and strange.

But Trump is not a fascist, or neofascist or similar. Nor is there a fascist movement in the US, only scattered, small self-identified fascist groupings. Trump is a far-right rallying-point for the amorphous MAGA movement, floating alongside and underneath the Republican Party. The political context which accompanied Trump's rise is a

very different context to that which saw the rise of fascism after 1918 – experience of world war, high inflation, mass unemployment, weak bourgeois-democratic institutions, the Russian Revolution and mass movements of workers in Germany and elsewhere. Current conditions are not a "crisis" in anything like the same way. To state clearly that Trump is not a fascist is not to minimise the threat Trump poses: he and the Republican Party are a menace.

For Trump to be a fascist he and the movement around him would have to match the criteria which our movement originally used to designate Mussolini's movement, and the German Nazis that followed, as a distinct, new type of right-wing political force.

Trump leads no mass movement or militias; he does not put people on the streets to fight for him (aside from 6 January 2021, and that's far more complex than stating the event was a "coup" attempt). Trump's movement is not a movement of crisis. Trump him-

self is a "small state" low-tax capitalist man and a bad fit for the corporatism of e.g. Mussolini.

Trump has opted to circumvent, manipulate and when it suits, performatively denounce, the existing bourgeois democratic framework in the US. He has not, so far, sought to smash it, or anything like that. The existing framework, as deeply flawed as it is, and despite the 6 January 2021, is robust. He has not won his court cases over the "stolen election" for example. He has been resolutely rebuffed.

It is more useful, that is more relevant to the current context and more precise, to define Trump as an authoritarian, far-right, populist demagogue with US peculiarities; he is part of a global set which includes Erdogan, Orban, Marine Le Pen, Giorgia Meloni, Geert Wilders and others. None of these figures, nor the societies some of them rule, are fascist. The Trump movement represents something worse than a

continued on page 11 →

Worker demands for green conversion



Environment

From discussion in Workers' Liberty

Discussions will continue among us on transformation of land-use and agriculture, growth and limits, and other issues, but we reaffirm the following points.

The working class is the agent with the capability and interest in transforming society: through immediate reforms as well as in the battle for democratic, rational control of the economy and society as a whole.

Beyond global warming, there are several major independent environmental threats.

All major industries should be socialised – taken into public ownership, under democratic control of workers – to facilitate transition. Expropriating the banks, and the wealth of the rich, would make available resources to fund rapid transition and adaptation.

In the first place, socialisation of and investment in energy production and transport.

We demand an immediate ban on fracking, tar sands, other "extreme energy", and any new fossil power plants. We advocate the least polluting – which to first approximation means fastest – possible phasing out of all fossil-fuelled power stations, heating, and transport.

Renewable energy production should

be expanded. An integrated and coordinated electricity system using "smart grid" technology would maximise efficiency and reliability.

The urgency of the need to replace fossil-fuel electricity generation makes blanket opposition to nuclear power wrong. The development of solar, wind, tidal, etc. power is an urgent necessity; and so is the redesign of cities and buildings and transport to reduce energy use; but the scale of the task of replacing fossil fuels demands that governments pursue all these changes simultaneously.

Nuclear power will be an essential part of any concerted social effort to control carbon emissions and global warming, at least in the next few decades.

We advocate and fight for a comprehensive programme of measures to redesign living spaces, industry, transport, etc to reduce energy consumption and carbon emissions while protecting and improving living standards. This includes fighting for a shorter working week and longer holidays.

In the energy sector, as in others, we champion a transition organised on the basis of worker planning, and in particular the retraining of workers from polluting or obsolete roles into socially-useful jobs.

Workers' control of production! Workers' plans are central to reducing carbon emission at work. Workers' control is necessary to deal with the shift from wasteful, high-emission or pol-

luting production to alternative jobs. Workers' control is essential for protecting the interests of workers in jobs in existing, often ecologically damaging, forms of production. We fight for the labour movement in the industries affected to discuss and develop ecologically friendly alternatives to existing jobs.

Beyond these sectors, widespread workplace environmental action is important for a society-wide transition, for sparking and spreading class struggle, and for stoking working-class environmentalism on the political front of the class war.

We advocate public programmes of insulation, electrification of cooking, and electrified large-scale heating systems.

We support a moratorium on airport expansion, advocating an expansion of high-speed, affordable, electrified and efficient rail, and policies to radically reduce flights. We support increased taxation on flights and phasing-out of short-haul flights where there are less-polluting alternatives, with flights rationed on the basis of need.

We seek an expansion of local free or low-cost good-quality electrical and efficient public transport, and policies to support cycling and walking.

We support crop rotation and scientific methods to enable more sustainable and environmentally friendly agriculture.

Animal based food production is more energy- and land-intensive and

so has a higher environmental impact than directly plant-based food production, which would also free up substantial land for carbon sequestration through tree-planting. We advocate seriously funded research and development into substitute foods to facilitate a society-wide transition. Genetic engineering is in itself not problematic, and genetic engineering of low-emissions substitute foods is positive.

We demand huge public investment in an ambitious programme of ecological restoration – and mass tree planting – to increase biodiversity and natural carbon sequestration.

We advocate a huge redistribution of wealth from the richest to the poorest countries. Wealth from the global north can help societies in the global south develop to support a high quality of life on a low-emissions, environmentally-friendly basis.

Geoengineering is not a substitute for sharp emissions reductions. Some of the geoengineering technologies might have major downsides and risks. But they may prove necessary to confront a world we never wished for.

The present stage is mostly about research, experiments and testing. On balance, it makes sense to support authorised, publicly-funded research. We raise the questions of governance of geoengineering, pushing for democratic safeguards, scrutiny and accountability, including by the labour movement. □

• Abridged

Views on the Labour Party



Debate

From discussion in Workers' Liberty

One

The current shift to the right is no more fixed forever than previous shifts to the right. A sizeable challenge from the left is unlikely in the run-up to a general election which Starmer looks like winning, and is unlikely to be rapid even after Starmer takes office, but, as the right wing nervously notes, is far from excluded as a Starmer government stumbles.

The Blairite apparatus around Keir Starmer has been able to disperse most of the "Corbynite" left (by exclusions, and, more, by pushing them to drop out in disgust); isolate and cow the left of the party; shift the party policy platform sharply to the right both economically and socially; and largely push even the "soft left" of the party out of positions of influence.

→ from page 10

Trump continued

standard-issue form of unpleasant right-wing populism. It threatens bourgeois democratic norms in a meaningful way.

B

A Trump victory would be a catastrophe on a variety of fronts, including migrants' rights, LGBT+ rights, women's rights, and more, and would almost certainly lead to a defeat for Ukraine in the war with Russia.

Not all forms of far-right authoritarianism are "fascist". But the features which make the label "fascist" inexact for Trumpism – for example, the lack of the "classical" relationship between the movement and a ruling class concerned to crush a revolutionary labour movement – do not mean it is not a major threat.

C

The Trump movement is at least a quasi-fascist or incipiently fascist movement. It has coalesced different strands of the long-brewing US far right behind an authoritarian leader. It has an active base in local gun clubs and churches. It has drawn in the militia movement, previously distant from electoral politics. A Trump victory will be a major defeat and setback (in world politics, not just the USA) compared to even a business-as-usual Democrat victory. This even though fascist measures after a Trump victory will almost certainly be slower than in say Italy in 1922-6. □ • Abridged

That makes Marxists' work within the party difficult. They had a good turn out and intervention at Labour Party conference 2023, selling literature, making contacts, being the most visible left opposition force there, but still only a minority of those Marxists who have not been excluded are really active within the party. That is reflected in getting relatively few motions passed over Gaza and over "no work notices", though almost everywhere that motions along our lines have been submitted, they have passed.

Yet even now, with small forces, Marxists have managed to build fruitful relationships within the party over Israel/Palestine solidarity and other issues. The "Corbynite" left-wingers who have been excluded or quit the Labour Party have largely dispersed. Neither the Socialist Party's long-running TUSC (despite the signals of friendliness to the SP from the Unite leadership), nor any of the really or supposedly "left-of-Labour" efforts constructed since 2020 (Northern Independence Party, revived SLP, Workers' Party, Breakthrough Party, Liverpool Community Independents, Transform, Collective), show promise as vehicles for working-class politics.

Orientation towards the Labour party has always been a tactical question and should not be treated as an eternal truth of Marxism. However, it also reflects our wider perspective that the primary role of Marxists is to work to transform the broader labour movement and fight for working-class politics. Lenin categorised the Labour Party as a bourgeois workers' party. Even now, with the bourgeois pole relatively securely in the ascendancy, the party remains closely organisationally, politically and culturally tied to the trade unions. Starmer has only been able to yank the party hard to the right and attack the left with the active support of the leadership of Unison, the GMB and other unions. The work of transforming the Labour Party is intrinsically linked with our fight to transform the unions. §

Two

The Labour Party remains a Blairite party, that is a bourgeois workers' party with the channels for working class political representation largely but not entirely concreted over. This definition, does not rest on the current leadership or their politics. It rests on our tradition's analysis, developed whilst it happened, over 30 years, of the Blairite counter-revolution and in particular of the closing down of the structures for working class political representation.

The Starmer leadership throws that characterisation of the Party into stark relief because it not only rests on Blairite structures but is a politically Blairite leadership of a Blairite party. The high

priests of Blairism are gathered around its leadership. The leadership of the Party promise next to nothing for our class. They generate little enthusiasm in our class. That is because they don't want to. They calculate not being the Tories will be enough to win the election and on present projections they are right.

Since the Blair reforms, the leader's office rules the Party, they are capable of swatting away any organised opposition from the CLPs that occurs. That was as true under Corbyn, as it is now. The key to understanding where we are with the party is not episodic the policy vagaries.

The Corbyn episode, in a different way, demonstrates the destruction of the party structures. Corbyn's election as leader was a freak event, utilising structural changes, we and the rest of the left had, rightly, criticised as removing collectivity from the party. The "movement" was largely formed after the election around supporting Corbyn rather than by politics and then locating Corbyn as its leader. Corbyn as leader was under more effective pressure from the PLP and the bureaucracy than the rank and file. Indeed, the bureaucracy and the PLP's opposition to Corbyn is the most effective opposition to a Labour leader in 40 years.

During the Miliband years, Jon Lansman on his blog, reprinted without comment in our paper, argued that there was no space for a parliamentary (!) left challenge to the leadership and thus there was nothing to be done. He completely ignored any rank and file organising or even any role for party members. This was the model for Momentum, support the "left" leadership, not a politically educated, independent and active rank and file.

The unions theoretically could still have significant influence within the party. However, there has been no union fight, to speak of, within the party for 40 years! Within the big three affiliated unions (Unite, GMB and Unison) there is no real rank and file organising, let alone rank and file pressure on the leadership. The structures of these un-

ions are heavily weighted in favour of the bureaucracy. The structures for rank and file pressure to find its way through to influence Labour Party policy are virtually impenetrable. This is most clearly demonstrated by the fact that the strike wave of last year had no effect on the Labour Party leadership and very little on the parliamentary party.

Whilst we recognise that any future workers' party will necessarily come from splitting the Labour Party and that in some areas the Labour Party may still be a fruitful area of work, we also recognise that in many areas comrades efforts will be better expended elsewhere. We will view Labour Party work as fraction work. The decision of which comrades will be involved in this fraction work will be made by the Organising Committee and overseen by the National Committee.

We expect that there may, quite rapidly, be working class electoral challenges to a Starmer government. We will assess whether to back these on the basis of whether there is sufficient support from local labour movement bodies. We will intervene to turn them to adequate working class politics. We will investigate opportunities to stand candidates on our own or in collaboration with others. These will be propaganda candidates aimed at building the forces of socialism.

In the coming election, we will call for a vote for Labour in all constituencies. Our slogan will be "Vote Labour, but fight for a workers government!" This has the advantage of sharply drawing out our analysis that the incoming Labour government will be no form of workers' representation. □

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Succession planning in unions



By Matt Sanderson

For many new trade unionists it may be becoming apparent that their union branch is predominantly occupied by members over 50 who have been in the branch committee or in various full-time release roles for quite some time. It seems that the national structures of Unison, anyway, have cottoned on to the impending fact that a lot of their local office-holders who don't shake the boat are due to retire.

"Succession Planning" is the new plan wheeled out to try to tempt the old guard to bring in young but suitable bureaucrats-in-the-making.

The top full-time officials want people who won't radically challenge the

sluggish structures that unions have adopted, and have learned how to do that from the incumbents.

The recommended roles to protect, frequently identified as "essential", are those with full-time facility time release. The aim is preservation of the status quo, not activism that challenges the labour force to expand its knowledge and confidence.

The main aims of official union-facilitated "succession" are broadly speaking good: retaining knowledge, improving progression, protecting the members. It is how succession happens that is the most important part.

Democracy should thrive within unions, with activists making political cases for what work the union executive officers need to be doing and holding them to account to the membership, through frequent and contested elections, not branch-officer-approved appointments. A union is meant to fight

for the improvement of its member's workplaces, and to be a political and cultural hub which can challenge the hierarchy of workplace relationships by showing what open and thriving workers' democracy can achieve.

In some unions there is a new wave of young members, and class consciousness needs to be challenged to be better than what young bureaucrats-in-the-making will achieve.

Sharing

Socialists in trade unions should look for is broadening collective engagement by sharing out full-time officer roles with job shares and part-time facility time. Having more people on release time reduces issues of losing experience when an officer retires and improves the workload for that officer during post.

Reducing individual officer expenses and increasing the number of reps with

access to paid union time will improve training progression into leadership positions. Members' engagement in meetings needs to be heavily increased to hold the executive to account, push the agenda of frontline workers, and educate more activists to engage in workplace and union organising.

Without serious improvement in union branch's member empowerment, these succession plans will only reestablish the same dynamic of union office-holders who are comfortable with their full-time release, sometimes unaware of what their members' workplaces are like, and all-too friendly with the management.

A trade union should be a centre of working-class politics offering a contrast to the hyper-individualistic and hierarchical structures of workplaces. Socialists should demonstrate why we want vibrant and democratic workers' unions. □



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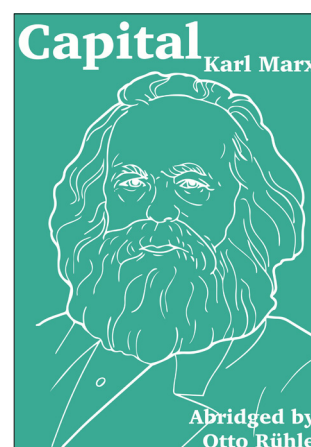
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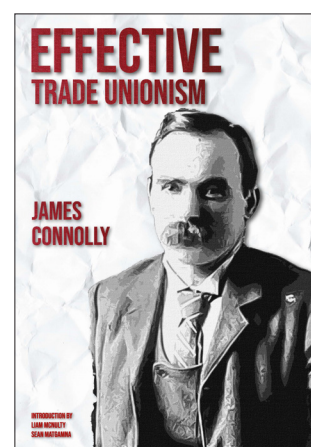
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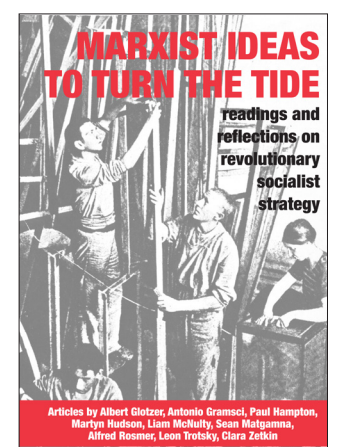
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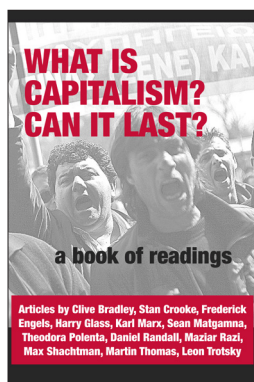
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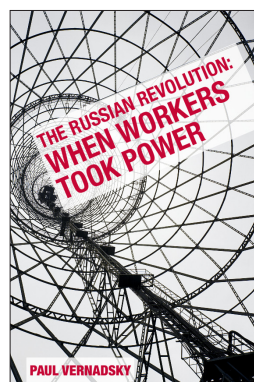
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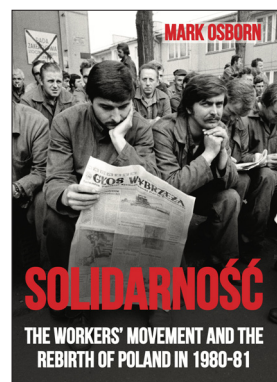
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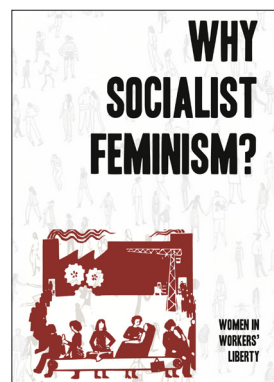
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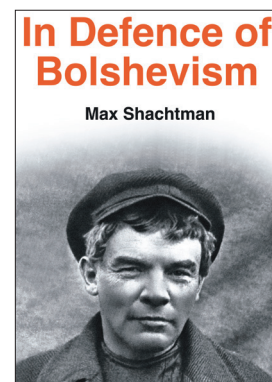
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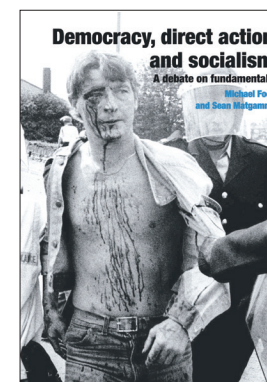
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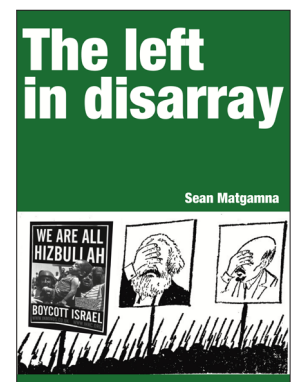
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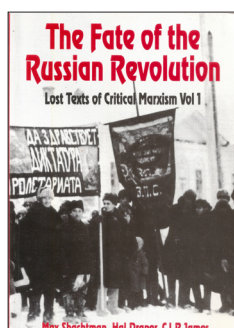
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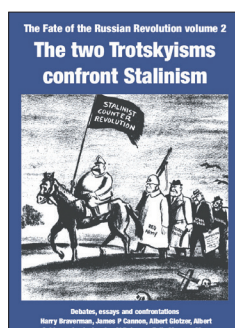
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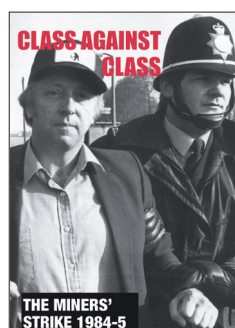
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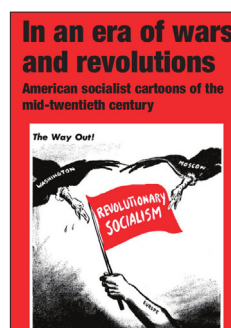
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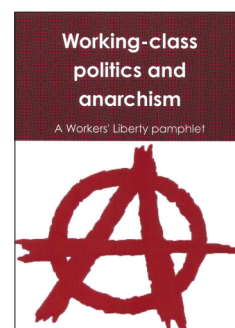
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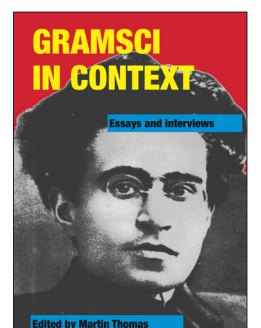
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Fatal flaw in Irish polemic



Letter

Your review of Irish political theory is spoilt by "alternative facts." Some time ago you reviewed Kieran Allen's book, *32 Counties: The Failure of Partition and the Case for a United Ireland*. The review (*Solidarity* 624) has just come to my attention.

The piece, by Micheál MacEoin, suffers from a fatal flaw. Early in its introduction the reviewer replaces opinion with manufactured fact, fatally weakening the overall weight of what was otherwise a reasonable effort at polemic.

Colons

The section in question says: "Its chapter on the Protestant working class is of particular interest. It refutes the notion, expressed by Michael Farrell and

others in People's Democracy in the mid-1970s, that Ulster Protestants are equivalent to colons in Algeria, and can never be won to socialist ideas".

There are no references to People's Democracy in the Allen book. There is a reference to Michael Farrell, but he is charged with saying that sections of working-class Protestants constituted a labour aristocracy, a socialist concept advanced by Lenin and applied in many different struggles. The colon idea was advanced by Ronnie Munck, who was not associated with People's Democracy.

At no time did PD assert this theory. It was founded with a high proportion of Protestant members and the membership of its daughter organisation, Socialist Democracy, continues to reflect different confessional backgrounds. No-one really familiar with socialist history in Ireland could have put forward this smear.

It is true that Kieran Allen has constructed a nasty little confabulation, eliding the idea of colons with the idea of a labour aristocracy in a way that suggests an identity without actually saying so. That's no excuse for Micheál MacEoin. As the Irish-American senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan remarked:

'You are entitled to your opinion. But you are not entitled to your own facts'.

I look forward to a retraction from

Micheál MacEoin and a correction from Workers' Liberty. □

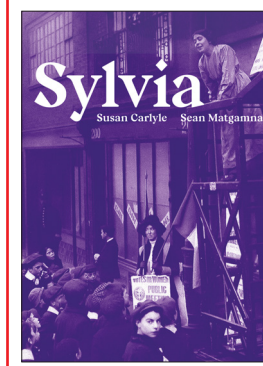
John McNulty (*Socialist Democracy*, formerly *People's Democracy*)

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Seeing "parallels" between Algeria and Ireland



Debate

By Micheál MacEoin

In my February 2022 [review](#) of Kieran Allen's book *32 Counties: The Failure of Partition and the Case for a United Ireland* I wrote that Allen's chapter on the Protestant working-class "refutes the notion, expressed by Michael Farrell and others in People's Democracy in the

mid-1970s, that Ulster Protestants are equivalent to colons in Algeria, and can never be won to socialist ideas."

John McNulty of Socialist Democracy (a successor organisation to People's Democracy) objects that Allen's book references Farrell in connection with the charge that "sections of working-class Protestants constituted a labour aristocracy, a socialist concept advanced by Lenin and applied in many different struggles [and that the] colon idea was advanced by Ronnie Munck, who was not associated with People's Democracy."

McAnulty continues that at "no time did PD assert this theory" and describes the review as a "smear". He argues that "Kieran Allen has constructed a nasty little confabulation, eliding the idea of colons with the idea of a labour aristocracy in a way that suggests an identity without actually saying so" but that this does not excuse the present author.

McAnulty asks for a "retraction from Micheál MacEoin and a correction from Workers' Liberty."

Having revisited Allen, I accept that his book elides the "labour aristocracy" and "colon" idea, and explicitly attributes the latter to Munck.

However, I think McNulty is putting it too strongly in asserting that "at no time did PD assert this [colon] theory."

In 1973 PD published a series of articles by Farrell, later collected into a pamphlet, *The Battle for Algeria*, opening thus: "The story of the Algerian revolution contains many parallels to the struggle in N. Ireland today..." Most of it is narrative of the Algerian war of independence, 1954-62, and of the first years after, until the Boumedienne coup of 1965, with no reference to Ireland.

At the end, though, the pamphlet seeks to spell out the "parallels" announced at the start. Indeed, why publish a pamphlet in 1973 on Algeria with a section on Northern Ireland, one asks, if not to draw an analogy?

It covers itself by stating "*The Protestants of N Ireland are not the same as the European colons of Algeria*", and expanding in a few sentences (material privileges smaller, cultural differences smaller, dissident minority bigger).

However, this caveat that Protestants are "not the same" then licenses Farrell to outline a number of ways in which the situations are nevertheless cited as parallel.

The parallels are:

"The UDA, UVF, etc. would

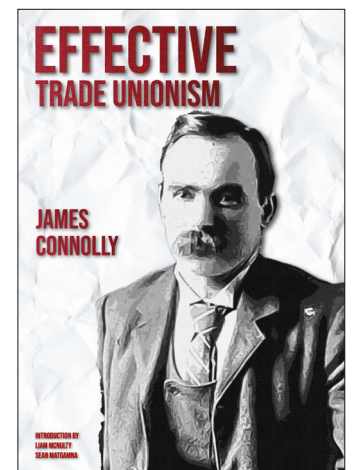
do well to realise that the war of attrition [i.e. the Provo war] here will wear down the British just as surely as it did the French and when the time comes the British will abandon or destroy them without a second thought".

The choice for Northern Ireland Protestants is claimed to be to "adapt" [to the allegedly inevitable victory of the Provo war] or to "back the UDA assassins in a hopeless last ditch defence of an imperialism which doesn't even want them any more".

The Protestant working class is said to provide the "backbone" for the UDA and UVF fascists, and to be immune to appeal on class lines: "There is no point appealing to them as fellow workers because they have no working class consciousness. They see themselves as Protestants not as workers and they have no real hostility to the ruling class beyond a certain jealousy." Nowhere does the pamphlet register that "the Protestants of N Ireland" were then the two-thirds local majority, rather than a one-tenth minority like the colons in Algeria.

Taken together, the clear implication of the pamphlet is the war (or revolution, seen as more or less synonymous) will overwhelm the Protestants, as

it overwhelmed the settlers in Algeria. The Protestants' choice is to submit ("adapt") or go down fighting with the doomed UDA and UVF. □



Aiming to replace capitalism with socialism, James Connolly's organising and ideas evolved considerably. One idea he clung to from the turn of the century to his death was industrial unionism, workers' solidarity across grades and trades, and sympathetic strikes. That is how he saw his work in the Irish Transport Union. 64 pages £5 □

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The zigzags of technology



Diary of a track worker

By Matt Shaw

When I started on the railway quite a lot of signalling equipment was still the old mechanical style with lots of moving parts that needed lubricating, tightening up, and replacing when worn out.

For us, the trackworkers, that involved walking long distances carrying lubricants, coils of signal wire, and spares for the commonly worn-out parts,

As time went on the signal lamps were swapped over from oil lamps to electric lights of varying voltages, some powered by batteries, some from a transformer. The batteries were not your usual 3Ds or triple As but large square objects that were heavy in their own right.

Those were classed as dry cells. Others had to have distilled water added to start them working, which also had to be carried to site.

After a few years I had moved back to signal installation. Erecting signals was a case of getting as many workers as we could around a steel tube with the signal on top, starting it on its journey upright with a ladder to push it, and heaving it to an upright position with ropes.

After a lot of shouting, usually with a generous lot of swearing, several large

nuts would be used to attach it to the base.

Any prospect of using a crane was ruled out as that meant blocking the line to traffic. Better to run the risk of us getting injured or dropping the signal across the tracks than stop the trains running.

Then there were minor things, like a hand lamp which we used for hand signalling to trains when the usual system was faulty. These had changed little over the years. They had a light metal case and were capable of showing three colours and a white light.

Red meant stop, green was proceed, and yellow was proceed at caution. The light would remain where it was last set to until positive action to change the colour. Really simple and almost fool proof.

Unfortunately, some bright spark decided that we needed a plastic replacement with a different battery from the one used in the previous lamp. And the designer of the replacement had made it so that if you let go of the control knob for the light colour, it immediately went back to red.

I guess that was meant to be fail-safe, but it ignored the fact that you could be quite a long time holding a lamp showing green or yellow to an approaching train. If you tired it was very easy to release the control knob and accidentally display a red. If the driver spotted it, that would result in emergency braking which could send anybody on board flying through the air with unknown results.

The new lamp was discontinued and, surprise, we went back to the old style.

The higher end of technology was the introduction of solid-state interlocking and electronic controls. That led to the establishment of huge signal boxes, called Route Operating Centres or RO's for short.

These would control massive areas with dozens of level crossings, stations, junctions, and sidings, many miles from the ROC itself. We're moving towards the closure of the last of the mechanical signal boxes in many rural areas and displacing many signallers.

Only some crossing boxes are being kept, where it is too expensive or too dangerous.

In the area I worked before retiring, there are three swing bridges. In the last re-signalling scheme, all of the old mechanical equipment was removed with the exception of these swing bridges, the oldest of which is over 146 years old. There is a solitary worker, whose grade is now gate keeper and whose job it is to open and close these bridges for river traffic.

The only reason these workers are there is that no technological solution which would pass the safety tests could be found. Even in 2023, technology had to give way to the tried and tested human eye.

I'm not a "Luddite", and fully acknowledge that eventually there will be a technological solution to the swing bridge dilemma. □

Comradeship across borders



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

Kameradschaft (1931) is my third film for the 40th anniversary of the 1984-85 Miners' Strike, this one to celebrate the international solidarity for the strike.

In the Lorraine-Saar region, it was not unusual for mines on either side of the Franco-German border to be close together, separated on the map by a red line which meant absolutely nothing underground. Gas, flooding, subsidence, dust – the ever present dangers of mining life – were no respecter of cartography or the wheeling and dealing of nationalistic politicians.

A fire breaks out in a French mine and threatens to engulf the German side of the workings. The German miners go to help the French and eventually all miners are rescued. Their union leaders address the survivors and their families stressing the need for all miners, whatever their nationality to come together.

The film was partly based on a real life disaster at the Courrières mine in 1906, one of the worst in mining history, claiming 1,099 lives. German miners gave assistance when French rescue workers were overwhelmed.

The film was made in Germany, though the director was an Austrian, G. W. Pabst. The internationalism shown in the film (the title in English is "comradeship") was crushed by the rise of fascism some two years later. However,

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the international solidarity given in 1984-85 demonstrated that this most basic of socialist beliefs was still alive. □

• Watch online via bit.ly/kam-w or download at bit.ly/kam-d



Goldsmiths starts action against cuts

By a UCU member

On Friday 19 April academic staff at Goldsmiths Uni in south London will begin a Marking and Assessment Boycott as part of a programme of industrial action to stop the axing of a proposed 132.3 "roles". It is unclear how many people will be affected. The University and College Union (UCU) branch says maybe 25% of academic staff.

The compulsory redundancies affect 11 out of 19 departments. Some may lose half of their staff and will thus become unviable as separate departments. Many more than the threatened number are in the pool for redundancy.

The job cuts are part of a wide ranging restructure (the second in two years) – a response, according to management, to a £16 million shortfall and declining student numbers. The UCU argues the figures don't add up; that voluntary redundancies, deleting of vacant posts and other cuts alongside cash reserves, will cover the deficit. The scale of the cuts represents a pure act of vandalism against an academic workforce with unique skills, knowledge and artistic experience. It is also a huge attack on the union.

The Marking and Assessment Boycott will take place alongside working to contract, refusal to cover for absence, a boycott of all voluntary activities and some processes relating to the restructure. The UCU branch will undertake targeted strike action if management do not stop the redundancy process. In the event of punitive pay deductions as a result of the "action short of strike", the UCU branch will strike indefinitely.

Goldsmiths UCU are looking to spread solidarity for the dispute. They want UCU to call on all its members across the UK to boycott official Goldsmiths activity. The union plans events on campus to draw in support from the local community and trade unions.

Goldsmiths' fight has to be part of nationally co-ordinated action in support of the very many institutions now facing cuts: see bit.ly/cuts-uni □

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NEU fails to vote on Ukraine

By Lynn Perry

The National Education Union (NEU) conference took place in Bournemouth, 3-6 April. Motion 37 was "Solidarity with Ukraine". It was debated on the Thursday, following a packed official fringe meeting that heard from Ukrainians who had lived under Russian occupation, an Ukrainian trade unionist, PCS Assistant General Secretary John Moloney, and John McDonnell MP.

The motion would have committed the union to showing solidarity with the Trades Union of Education and Science Workers of Ukraine (TUESWU) and the Free Trade Union of Education and Science of Ukraine (VPONU). The motion also reinforced the commitment to support Ukrainians in the defence of their homeland.

The motion had a lot of support from delegates and would have been passed if not for the bullying tactics of some speakers and some dreadful, conspicuous filibustering unworthy of a democratically constituted education union like the NEU. Eventually the motion was ruled out of time and did not go to the vote. Speeches in favour of the motion from Workers' Liberty people and other supporters of solidarity for Ukraine had got vocal support from conference delegates.

Also on Thursday, Motion 36 reaffirmed the union's commitment to an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and in solidarity with the Palestinians. There were six amendments. Workers' Liberty people had entered an amendment (36.6) to support and publicise the work of the Palestinian-Jewish anti-war movement in Israel, Standing Together.

However, the conference elected to go for a vote on the substantive motion, ensuring that 36.6 fell from the agenda.

Workers' Liberty held a well-attended

and successful fringe meeting, with a speaker from Standing Together. Our presence and influence at the conference was strong. We produced daily bulletins, sold *Solidarity*, spoke in numerous debates, and held that fringe meeting.

On 19 March the union had announced a 90% majority for industrial action over pay, on a 50.3% turnout, in an indicative (not legally-binding) ballot.

During the first day of business, standing orders were suspended to allow an urgent motion on the pay and funding campaign's future.

In closed session, Conference decided not to go for an immediate strike ballot, instead settling for continuing and intensifying the current campaign prior to the government's 2024-2025 pay offer and funding settlement. The union will present the offer to members with a snap poll, and then, dependent upon the outcome, move to a formal ballot. There was some opposition to that position, both from members who felt that a formal ballot could not be won, and from members calling for an immediate ballot based on the union's current demands. Workers' Liberty members and supporters proposed an amendment to make clear and distinct demands. However, the debate was ruled out of time. After the vote, Daniel Kebede, general secretary of the NEU, said:

"After achieving an overwhelming majority vote in our recent indicative ballot, NEU conference committed to intensify its campaign to win a fully funded, above-inflation pay rise and greater resources for schools and colleges."

Motions on workforce bargaining and negotiations were taken on Wednesday and Thursday. Support staff members, who want equal nego-

tiating rights and bargaining, mounted a protest in Thursday morning's session for the benefit of guest speaker Paul Nowak (general secretary of the TUC). (The NEU is not part of the established bargaining process for support staff pay. Although the NEU has begun to develop as an "industrial union", uniting workers in school from different grades, the unions who are in the bargaining, Unison, GMB and Unite, are opposed to any change in this position. Indeed, they have made a formal complaint to the TUC about the NEU "actively recruiting" support staff.)

Wearing t-shirts saying "don't turn your back on support staff" and holding placards, they surrounded the podium in a demonstration of their frustration with the TUC. Conference delegates were vocal in their support.

Other significant votes and debates were on motions 26 and 39, both strengthening the representation of LGBTQA+ NEU members, education staff and students. Motion 26 was the response to the government's determination to scapegoat the trans and non-binary community in the pursuit of votes, particularly with the draft [guidance](#) for schools on response to trans and non-binary students. It was passed overwhelmingly, with a handful abstaining or voting against.

Motion 39 instructed the union to continue making progress towards inclusivity for all LGBTQA+ identities. A functioning democratic union is its members. LGBTQA+ identities have not always been acknowledged by the union. Motion 39 directly aimed to raise the voices and confidence of the union's intersectional and identity networks. The digital vote was close but the motions passed. This is a big step forward for the NEU. At its last two conferences the NEU has accepted LGBTQA+ positive motions. □

Junior doctors vote 97% for more action on pay restoration

By Sacha Ismail

Following a new offer on pay and reforms to the doctors' pay review body, consultants (senior doctors) have voted to settle their current dispute. Meanwhile junior doctors have voted to renew their mandate under the anti-trade-union laws for strikes and, now, for other forms of industrial action – with over 97% voting yes to both, on a 62% turnout.

The (quite complicated) terms of the consultants' deal are summarised on the British Medical Association (BMA) [website](#). Their struggle has extracted important concessions from the government, with significant real-terms pay rises for most, though nowhere near enough to undo the real-terms cuts of a decade and a half. The BMA says "pay restoration" remains

its goal and that the changes to the Doctors' and Dentists' Review Body will be tested against that. Even less stitched-up pay review bodies are no substitute for genuine collective bargaining.

Junior doctors have been the backbone of the BMA's struggles, taking 39 days of strike in England action over the last year. Though they have won a better offer than NHS workers whose unions gave up quickly, it's less than offered to the consultants – on average about 9%.

Last month junior doctors in Wales struck for four days, their second round of action in this dispute, and their siblings in Northern Ireland for 24 hours – the first action they have taken. (Scottish junior doctors have settled after a better offer from the Scottish government.)

With junior doctors in England also likely to strike again, socialist activists must try to rouse the wider labour movement in their support. While we wait for more picket lines to visit, we can invite junior doctor speakers to meetings and propose donations to their [strike fund](#).

We need to find ways to put pressure on the Labour Party to commit to meeting the junior doctors' demands. Other socialist trade unionists should engage in discussion with the BMA activists, mainly junior doctors, fighting to transform the organisation into a militant trade union. With the BMA's membership and activist base growing substantially, there are many changes and struggles taking place within it – changes being fought by more conservative elements and noticed and denounced by the right-wing media. □

How to win elections

By Martin Thomas

Since September 2022, when the Tories lost patience with Boris Johnson's buffoonery, and the Truss and Sunak fiascos followed, Keir Starmer has kept a big opinion poll lead. And so he still holds the political whip hand in the labour movement.

He does not deserve it. Starmer has poor "approval" ratings. Even a small scandal or mishap could destroy the poll lead quickly.

And more. Starmer draws on the myth of Tony Blair as Labour's great election-winner. In 1994-7 Blair managed, as the Tories stumbled from blunder to debacle, not to lose the poll lead built up by Labour partly from the afterglow of its 1980s leftism. That's all.

Then Blair used his election victory to turn sharply against Labour's base and to make undemocratic changes in the Labour Party's fabric, a good few of which continue today. Labour Party membership collapsed, and was not really rebuilt until 2015.

The Tories' discredit from Thatcherism was deep, and it took years for them to recover. But Blair and Brown between them, by the end of their era, had lost Labour 4.95 million votes out of the 13.52 million it got in 1997.

Amidst their destructive policies were a few positives – the minimum wage, and their increased spending on the NHS. Those do not outweigh their destructive work in demoralising and dispersing the Labour electorate and membership.

The dispersal was not as sudden as the French Socialist Party's (7.62mn votes in 2012; 1.69mn in 2017) or Pasok's in Greece (3.01mn votes 2009; 0.83mn 2012), but that is not Blair's virtue. The SP's and Pasok's base had always been less solid.

Other Labour governments, even the poorest, have not dispersed the Labour base as Blair-Brown did. In 1951 demoralised and baffled Labour leaders still won more votes than Labour had in 1945. In 1970 and in 1979, after bad Labour governments, the vote losses were much smaller than after Blair-Brown.

Labour began to win back its electoral base really only in 2017, with 3.53 million more votes for Labour in 2017 than in 2015. Between 2017 and 2019 Jeremy Corbyn's stumbling and evasion on Brexit and on antisemitism destroyed trust. Yet in 2019, Labour got 32.1% of the vote, more than the 30.4% in 2015 or the 29% Blair-legacy vote of 2010. (It was 40% in 2017).

Starmer's poll scores are more scooping loose

anti-Tory votes than rebuilding a solid base.

The remedy is not simple. "Instant" socialist candidates advocating the ideas of *Solidarity* would not do well. Many socialistic ideas are still popular, but a solid electoral effort requires a party with activity, strength, and record so that workers (or a significant minority) see it as a trustworthy and capable voice representing the working class in politics.

We're not yet nearly that strong. And the wrecking work done by Blair and others on political working-class consciousness – on the sense that "working class" defines a positive political identity – means we have much to do.

In 1987 one of us, Lol Duffy, was the official Labour candidate in Wallasey (Merseyside). The Labour candidate in the next-door constituency publicly called for people not to vote for Lol. Labour nationally pointedly made no rebuke. Lol increased the Labour vote by 39% and nearly won what had been a safe Tory seat.

Those weren't casual anti-Tory votes. Wallasey has since become a safe Labour seat.

At the launch meeting of his campaign Lol said: "We prop up this system. We work for it, we make it go... It's about time we took control of it once and for all. Let's run it our way for the benefit of the majority... But I'll say this. There is no easy walk to freedom... It will be created by us, fighting together to create a new society. It won't be easy, but what price not joining the fight?"

Lol stood to be a voice for the working class in parliament. He could do that effectively because enough local working-class people knew his record as a trade-unionist and as a builder of a solid local Labour Party in Wallasey visible on the doorsteps, the picket lines, and the streets.

Organised working-class consciousness has to be rebuilt from the ground up to create a real alternative. To do that we must bust the myths of Blairo-Starmerism. □



Lol Duffy campaigning in 1987

Vote for new leaders in PCS!



By a PCS member

Ballot papers for the National Executive Committee (NEC) elections in the civil service union PCS will start to be sent to members on 18 April. It is a critical election at a critical time for PCS members.

PCS is currently undertaking ballots (closing 13 May) across 171 civil service "bargaining units" over pay, pensions and jobs. Civil service real wages are in unprecedented decline. Yet the Left Unity (LU) leadership of PCS is not showing the will, drive and organisation to win the ballots.

In January the Government bluntly stated that "Civil Service average pay within grades has declined in real terms since 2008, due to below inflation increases". PCS advises that in cash terms the average loss of pay for an Administrative Officer since 2010 is £32,088.

Yet the LU leadership called off our 2022/23 pay dispute in June 2023 without adding one consolidated penny to our salaries and passively presided over members again receiving below inflation awards in 2023/24, before belatedly admitting this year that they have not extracted a single Government pay concession from the "national talks" which they mis-sold as a reason for calling off action in 2023. Risibly, despite all

this, the LU leadership claim to have won "historic gains" in 2023.

After many months of passivity, with the elections looming, LU lurched into a ballot for industrial action with little notice to the activists who have to deliver the Yes votes and with no prior campaigning amongst members. The national union was not ballot ready. For example, branches have to wait for weeks for receipt of national leaflets.

In reality the LU leadership wanted to look as if they are doing something positive during the NEC elections. To the extent that ballots are won it will be despite the LU leadership and because of the efforts of activists.

Which is why members and activists need to deliver Yes votes for strike action while building support for the NEC electoral coalition of the PCS [Independent Left](#), other groups, and independents. Vote Yes for action and for a new NEC leadership! □

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Solidarity

For a workers' government



By Ira Berkovic

Two national communities, one Israeli Jewish, one Palestinian Arab, inhabit the territory of Israel/Palestine. Those who believe in equality must support a settlement that guarantees equal rights to both peoples.

The immediate blockage is that the state based on one of those peoples suppresses the national rights of the other people – in other words, the 57-year-long occupation of the West Bank, the blockade and sieges of Gaza, and discrimination against the 20% Palestinian minority inside Israel.

The implied next step for ending that suppression is the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, alongside and with the same rights as Israel, in the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem, with full civil equality for Palestinians inside Israel, with reciprocal citizenship rights in a Palestinian state.

Workers' Liberty is internationalist. In general, we favour fewer borders rather than more, and do not advocate a "two

states" settlement out of any prejudice for partition. We want a federal republic across the region, with guaranteed rights for national minorities such as Kurds and Jews.

But Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs, at war with each other on and off for decades, will not be the world's first pair of neighbouring nations to merge into one. Neither Palestinians nor Israeli Jews will voluntarily dissolve their distinct national claims into a unitary state before a period in which both peoples feel their right to self-determination is secure and mutually-acknowledged.

Some on the left argue two states, or any formulation acknowledging Israeli-Jewish national rights, is an inadmissible compromise with the historic misdeeds of the Israeli state, including the flight or driving-out of some 700,000 Palestinians in 1947-9, or the killing of civilians in Gaza now. But many processes of national and state formation throughout history have involved injustices and brutalities. Some 600,000 Jews fled or were driven out of other

Middle-East countries after the mid-1940s, as those countries won independence and their national majorities asserted themselves.

Democratic rights such as self-determination have capacity to bring equality and peace only if they are universal, not viewed as rewards for the good behaviour of a people or of its ancestors.

Others on the left reject two states because they say Israel is unlikely to concede an independent Palestine. But the same trends which make it difficult to make Israel concede Palestinian independence make any other notional democratic solution even more remote. An equalisation of the basic right to national self-determination, up to and including an independent state, remains the most achievable "next step" towards any confederacy or unity.

In the words of Palestinian socialist Ayman Odeh, "The truth must be told to the citizens. There are two peoples here, two peoples will remain here, and both have the right of self-determination." □