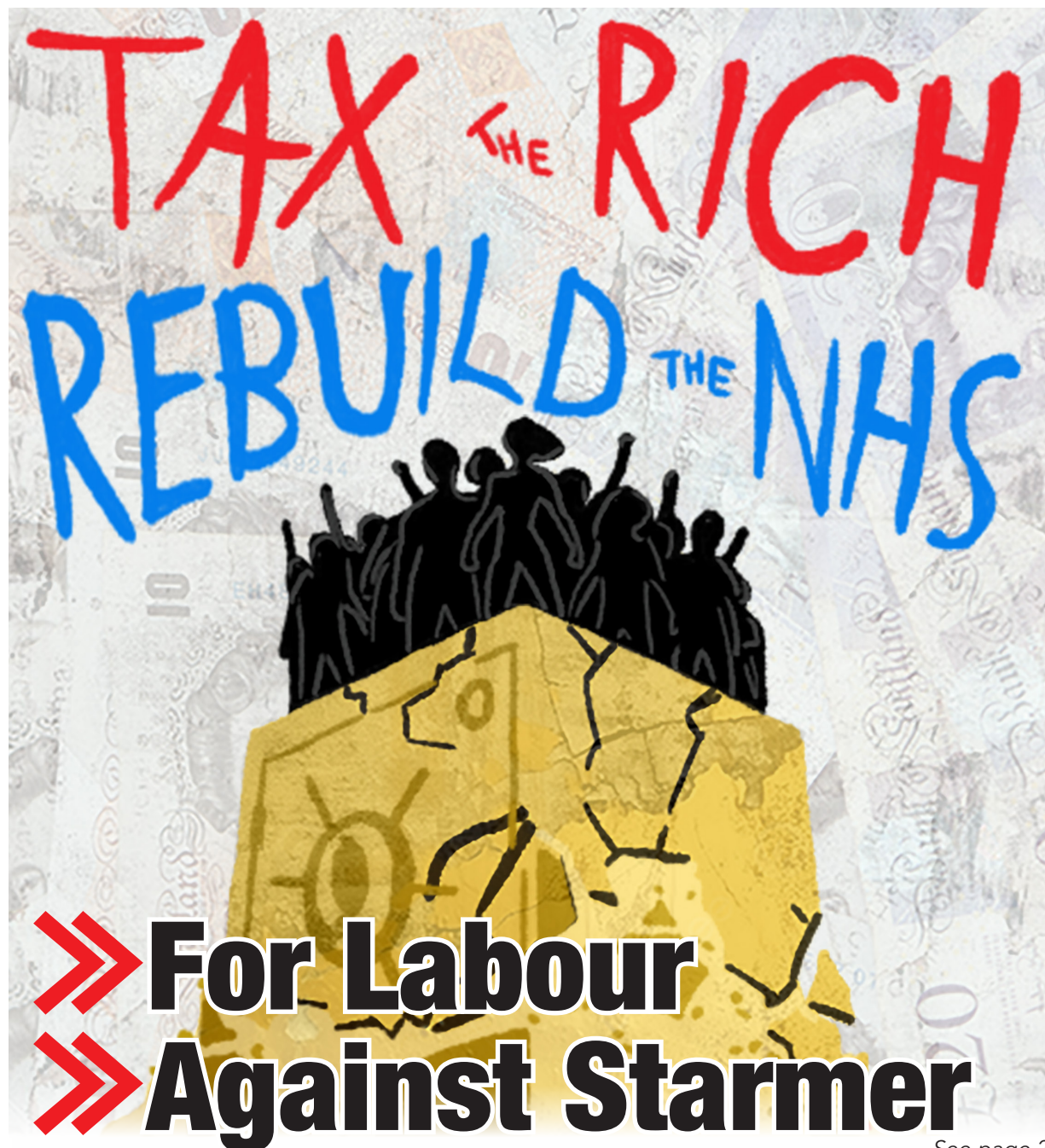


Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry



See page 2

Doctors strike from 27 June

Support the junior doctors' continuing pay battle

Page 15

Free the Hong Kong 47

They face long jail terms for organising a "democratic primary"

Page 5

Labour New Deal and the unions

Not a settled boon, but an important terrain of struggle

Page 13

Trotsky's call for free Ukraine

Trotsky backed independence for the long-oppressed nation

Pages 8-9

Vote Labour but fight for a workers' government



"No longer the party of protest, Labour is the party of national security", declared Keir Starmer on 2 June.

The actual policies proclaimed – for Trident renewal and for NATO – were also in the Corbyn 2017 and 2019 manifestos. The difference is that in 2017 and 2019 Labour stressed "Labour issues" – NHS, trade-union rights, etc. Now Starmer stresses "Tory issues" – the military, business expansion – claiming that Labour will be more "competent", less "chaotic", on them.

There are mild promises on trade-union and worker rights (see page 13), but Starmer deliberately plays them down so as not to alarm "business" and "floating voters".

Where we say "vote Labour but fight for a workers' government", Starmer says "vote Labour and get a more competent pro-business government".

In some ways this makes the election like 1997. Comparing now with then can help us see in perspective our tasks of the coming weeks – street stalls with *Solidarity*, working with Labour and trade-union people in the election and seeking conversation with them on battles after 4 July.

Our "vote Labour but fight for a workers' government" means that we vote Labour as a step in the fight for revitalisation, growth, and transformation of the labour movement. We work to make the labour movement able to impose demands on the Labour government. In the first place, to make it tax *the rich to rebuild the NHS*.

Through battles and victories of that sort the movement can brace itself for more.

The aim is a government accountable to a lively labour movement and thus as ruthless for pro-working-class measures as the Tories have been for their pro-capitalist policies.

We said much the same in 1997. That too was an election where the combination of Tory discredit and a battered labour movement was used by a right-wing leader to stifle politics.

Mostly, we were defeated in the battles that followed the 1997 election. We were not wrong to pursue those battles. Those who gave up and hived off did worse and cut themselves off from a period of revival when it came, very late and limited, in 2010-9.

How do chances today compare with 1997?

In 1997 the scene was set by a Tory government wearied and discredited after 18 years in office; today, ditto after 14 years.

Back in the 1980s, Neil Kinnock had planned, in his own words, to "get



his betrayals in early", before Labour reached government, rather than suffer the backlashes which the 1964-70 and 1974-9 Labour governments had after making leftish promises.

In 1997 Blair went full-force on "early betrayal".

The Minimum Wage, working tax credit and pension credit, new schools and hospitals, Sure Start, what seem in hindsight the not-so-bad bits of the New Labour governments, weren't in the "five pledges" of 1997.

Pledges were deliberately minimal (shift NHS money from "red tape" to treatment) or "mock Tory" ("fast-track punishment").

The theory was to woo "floating voters" and to give Blair and his friends, in office, maximum insulation from the demands of the labour movement. It "worked" for Blair because after a house-price crash (from 1989) and a 1992 financial crisis the Tories were deeply discredited.

So far, so similar. Many of our [thoughts in 1997](#) apply also now. "A Tory victory will only perpetuate the conditions that have bred Blairism. The point is that a Labour victory will also begin – it will not happen in a week – to empower the working-class movement with the realisation of its own strength and an awareness that it can rely only on its own strength."

"The essential work of socialists in the labour movement now is to help it to such a self-realisation and such a new self-empowerment."

"For socialists not to advocate a Labour vote... for socialists to stand aside, is for socialists to cut themselves off from the process of labour movement political self-renewal."

"Even if it is entirely and mechanically predetermined that Blair will come out on top [within the labour movement] – and nothing in politics is ever that cut-and-dried – we should be inside, not outside, these political processes".

There are also important differences.

In 1997 the major union leaders were right-wingers who backed Blair (they called it "new realism"). The unions had been battered in the aftermath of the miners' defeat in the great 1984-5 strike. Membership was falling, from 13 million in 1979 to less than eight million. (It would continue to fall under Blair). Strikes had declined sharply since the start of the 1990s, except for higher figures in the one year 1996

(mostly postal strikes).

Labour Party individual membership had been slowly declining for years, but the prospect of ousting the Tories brought a rise from about 250,000 in 1993 to 400,000. (Its Corbyn-era peak in 2017 was 560,000. It went down from then to 2019, rose again in early 2020, and has withered since to about 360,000. There has been no pre-election rise like in the mid 1990s).

The mid-1990s new members were probably even more docile than the "soft left" in the Labour Party today. When Tony Blair threatened to bypass Labour conference for his junking of Clause Four in 1994 by balloting the individual members, no-one doubted that he would win the ballot.

Two journalists recently dug out some quotes from 1997.

"Asked for their view of Labour, 46 per cent agree that 'I am not enthusiastic about them but they can't be any worse than the Tories', compared to just 27 per cent who thought they would change Britain for the better". "There's no enthusiasm for us out there," [a top Labour MP] said. "People do not expect government to do much any more. All we can do is influence things at the margin".

The comments sound the same as today. Yet hopes from Blair in 1997 were surely not so low as from Starmer now. And the Tories were more on the defensive then. The start on reversing Thatcher's NHS cuts came from the Tories after 1990 (when Thatcher was replaced), not from Blair. In 1996 Tory plans to privatise Royal Mail were defeated. There were street protests.

This time the Tories have responded to discredit by doubling down on a right-wing agenda. They have pushed through the Illegal Migration Act, the Public Order Act, and the Minimum Service law, with little street protest.

Union membership has [increased](#) (but marginally, and only in the private sector) in 2022-3, and union density has ticked up (but marginally).

There is more anger against Starmer now than there was against Blair, but more diffused and dead-end. Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party was a sizeable force when it split from Labour in 1996, and it did well in some constituencies in 1997 (though it soon became a tiny Stalinist rump). The Socialist Party, formerly Militant, who had hived off in the early 1990s, ran candi-

dates too, and Dave Nellist got 6.5% in Coventry. Their socialist effort would dwindle decisively in 2009, when they sunk themselves in "No2EU".

This time the SP are running "30-plus" candidates through TUSC, an electoral vehicle which is more "anti-cuts" than socialist. The Socialist Workers Party is running Maxine Bowler as an "independent socialist for Palestine" in Sheffield. Some from the disappointed-Corbynite diaspora are standing as "independents". Jeremy Corbyn himself is standing in Islington North, after being undemocratically barred as Labour candidate there, and may well win. We can see the difference between those candidates and the reactionary demagogues, George Galloway in Rochdale and Akhmed Yakoob (see page 4) in Birmingham Ladywood, who lead the wider spectrum of "independents". But there are too many interconnections, direct or at one remove. And the positive political content is too poor to offset those. In a sort of caricature of Labour's 2017 slogan, "For the Many not the Few" (itself taken from Blair!), Corbyn's this time is "For All of Us".

In some ways we have a better starting point for the struggle after the election than in 1997, in some ways worse. The immediate imperative is the same: to gain as many footholds in preparation as we can. No-one ever said the struggle for socialism would be easy.

None of us ever thought that a capitalist world lurching through sharper rivalries, wars, vast debt burdens, and ecological crises, could fail to produce setbacks and disruptions for us, as well as openings for resistance.

"One form of life", as was famously written, "has become old, and by means of grey it cannot be rejuvenated, but only known. The owl of Minerva takes its flight only when the shades of night are gathering". □

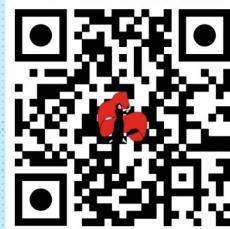
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End the horrors in Gaza!

By Ira Berkovic

The main UN agency responsible for distributing aid in Palestine, UNRWA, says that all 36 of its shelters in Rafah are empty, due to the numbers fleeing the Israeli assault on the city.

Around 1.7 million people, over 75% of Gaza's total population, are now estimated to be displaced. Many of them have experienced multiple rounds of displacement, as Israel's invasion has moved through the enclave.

As *Solidarity* went to press, the assault on Rafah was continuing, with predictably deadly consequences. Over 36,000 people have now been killed by Israel's war, with many more injured, and many more still at risk of death from the mounting humanitarian crisis and the devastation of Gaza's health and sanitation infrastructure.

As we have often spelled out, we want more than a ceasefire. But right now international protests which have been generically pro-ceasefire must now make clear, specific demands for Israel and Hamas to accept the deal on the table. When the war began, some on the left [equivocated](#) about the demand for a ceasefire, arguing socialists should instead support Hamas's war of "resistance" against Israel. As international protests coalesced around the ceasefire demand, that dissent faded. If the SWP and others now equivocate

again, or suggest Hamas should reject the deal, they will display only a reactionary fantasy about Hamas overrunning Israel.

Standing Together has continued its agitation against the war inside Israel, intervening in mass anti-government protests with an anti-war, anti-occupation message, as well as organising its own actions. On Friday 31 May, it called a demonstration against the war in Iskal, an Arab-Palestinian town in northern Israel. Speakers included the local mayor Abd el-Salam Darawshe, former MKs Dov Khenin and Sondos Saleh, and Palestinian Standing Together leader Sabreen Msarwi. Ayala Mezger, the daughter-in-law of Yoram Mezger, who is held hostage by Hamas in Gaza, also spoke.

Meanwhile, the network of far-right settlers which had been organising attacks on aid convoys bound for Gaza has announced it is "pausing its actions" to focus on "rebuilding [its] organisation."

The move follows a fortnight in which it was continually confronted, disrupted, and blocked by the efforts of the Humanitarian Guard, an initiative launched by Standing Together to defend aid convoys from attack.

Standing Together's National Field



Organiser Uri Weltmann said: "A little more than two weeks ago we launched the Humanitarian Guard, as a response to the violent far-right settlers stepping-up their attacks on aid trucks, carrying badly needed food supplies to the besieged Gaza Strip. In front of the eyes of Israeli soldiers and policemen, who stood idly by and did nothing, the food supplies were trashed, bags of flour and rice destroyed, the Palestinian drivers of these trucks beaten and hospitalised, and the trucks were set on fire.

"We called on people in Israel to sign up to take shifts, coming to Tarqumiah checkpoint (which is the biggest border crossing connecting the Occupied Palestinian West Bank with Israel), and to protect the aid convoys from the vio-

lence of the extremist settlers.

"Around 1,000 people signed up to volunteer in the Humanitarian Guard, and every day dozens came to be physically present on the ground, coming between the far-right bullies and the aid trucks, forcing the police to do their job, which is to prevent the settlers blocking the road and attacking the trucks. Our protective presence was an overwhelming success, with us outnumbering the far-right hooligans, and the police forced to take action. When we were there, aid trucks were passing safely by the hundreds.

"[The far-right's pause in its attacks] represents a tremendous victory. It proves that we can out-organize and outnumber the far right. It is a case in point about the power of grassroots movement organizing. Politically, the Humanitarian Guard was not just our way to express our solidarity with the Palestinian civil population in the Gaza Strip, but it was also our way to fight over the moral character of our own society, not to allow it to be hijacked by the most genocidal, fascist-minded elements that raised their head following 7 October." □

Sabreen Msarwi reinstated

By Ira Berkovic

Following domestic and international campaigning, Palestinian teacher and Standing Together leader Sabreen Msarwi has been reinstated to her job in Ganei Tikva, central Israel.

Sabreen was suspended after she attended a Nakba Day protest. However, the Israeli Education Ministry ruled there was no case to answer.

Sabreen said: "What made me most happy was the broad turnout and support from the Arab and Jewish communities, including Arab political leaders, associations and institutions [...] as well as parents, students, and teachers from schools I previously worked for.

"It is said that every crisis is an opportunity to bring about change, and that's what it was: this crisis raised students' awareness of freedom of expres-



sion and the right of Palestinians in the country to participate in demonstrations, as well as informing school students about the Palestinian Nakba and what it means to us as Palestinians.

"I believed from the beginning that the issue is not a personal one [but] part of the public intimidation campaign against the Arab masses in the country, from which our voices were asked to be silenced." □



Activist Agenda

Meetings

Sat 8 June: noon. March for Gaza. Workers' Liberty contingent assembles outside Pret 40 Bernard St WC1N 1LE.

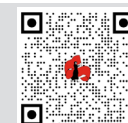
Sun 9 June: 2pm, 18 Bedford Sq, WC1B 3JA. Hong Konger protest to mark anniversary of start of HK movement in 2019.

Sun 16 June: 8pm. Environment reading group online: *The Tragedy of the Commodity*

Wed 19 June: 7pm. London Workers' Liberty forum on Tiananmen Square. Marchmont Community Centre. More details and more events at workersliberty.org/events, or scan QR code.

At work or on campus

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



Scan the QR code to see our events & meetings page.

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: bit.ly/mo-pe

Socialist-feminist book clubs

workersliberty.org/sf-book-clubs
9 June London, 1 July Sheffield

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. □

The “TikTok lawyer” and misogyny



By Jim Denham

One of the main arguments you hear from people backing various (supposedly) “left of Labour” candidates is that they want to feel good about the person they’re voting for.

Some “independent” candidates appear to be decent individuals with some record of left wing and/or labour movement activism. It remains unclear how supporting them would help build any kind of useful movement, but you can see a case for them as individuals.

None of that can possibly apply to Akhmed Yakooob, backed (inevitably) by George Galloway and standing against Labour’s Shabana Mahmood in Birmingham Ladywood. His ostensible reason for standing is “for Gaza” and because Mahmood abstained in the ceasefire vote in November (she has since expressed regret over that). In fact, his publicity, both in Ladywood and, before that, when he stood for West Midlands mayor is, to say the least, unclear about his exact views on Gaza beyond “freeing Palestine”. He has nothing to say about Hamas or 7 October, and only seems to use the word “ceasefire” in the most passive possible way, i.e. to echo majority public support for it, rather than as a demand upon Israel and Hamas.

Even if we overlook the complete absence of any left-wing record or



credentials, his spivvy boasts on social media about his £1 million worth of luxury sports cars and his claim to be “one of the UK’s leading legal minds”, what makes this character especially odious is twofold.

Firstly, his promotion of a doctored video, using subtitles to suggest a young teacher had used a racist slur against Pakistani people while out canvassing for a (Pakistani) Labour council candidate in Dudley.

Yakooob promoted this manipulated video on TikTok and X, where he has hundreds of thousands of followers and was slow to take it down even after forensic analysis proved it to have been falsified.

Worse still, he also posted the teacher’s name, school details, and her phone and email details. Inevitably, death threats followed, turning the young woman’s life into a nightmare. Yakooob belatedly issued a half-hearted

apology that has not been as widely circulated as his original accusation.

The Dudley “racism” affair is now reasonably well known and the true facts have been publicised in the mainstream media.

Secondly, and less well-known, is another matter: his participation in a misogynistic podcast that has been exposed by the website Roll On Friday (ROF: bit.ly/tiktokl). It is an episode of the “Minted Minds” podcast in which Yakooob appeared with five other men saying disgusting things about women and extolling “the essence of true manhood.” An attempt was later made to edit out the most offensive section, but ROF located the original and published the deleted section.

ROF stated that not all the quotes came from Yakooob and only attributed quotes to him where video footage matching the audio was available. The group’s conversation starts off with a

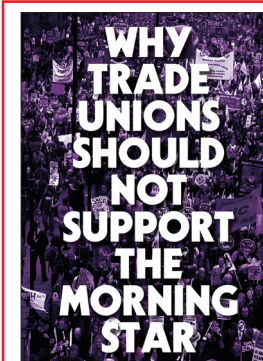
defence of misogynist Andrew Tate and someone saying “the problem” is that “loads of girls” had “all turned into feminists”.

To the resounding approval of all present, one speaker says that if a woman is about to leave the house, a man “should say, where are you going like this, cover yourself up”. Yakooob agrees, commenting that a husband is “given that authority by Allah.”

Elsewhere in the segment, one of the men says women who challenge “masculine authority” are “unmarriageable” and “nobody with any sense of honour is going to endure you”: Yakooob can be seen banging the table in agreement.

The men conclude that “the Zionists, the establishment, have watered down people’s religious values.”

The *Morning Star* of 1-2 June carries an article by George Galloway’s leading fan at the paper (and the Communist Party of Britain), Andrew Murray, giving Yakooob uncritical support: “‘Lend Gaza your vote’ was Mr Yakooob’s mayoral pitch – and it may be enough to seal Ms Mahmood’s fate” gloats Murray. □



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The ILO and Russia: choose sides



When Russia launched its unprovoked and illegal invasion of Ukraine more than two years ago, most trade unionists – like most people – looked on with horror. Unions around the world were swift to condemn the aggression. But not the Russian national trade union centre FNPR. Instead, FNPR turned into a cheerleader for the Vladimir Putin and the Russian state.

It was not supposed to be that way. With the collapse of the Soviet Union a generation ago, unions in Russia declared their independence of state control. FNPR’s betrayal of core union values shocked their sister unions in the International Trade Union Con-

federation (ITUC). There were calls for their expulsion. In the end, the FNPR suspended its membership and walked away in a huff.

This week [3-14 June], the International Labour Conference convenes in Geneva, as it does every June. This year one of its tasks is to elect members of the ILO Governing Body. A number of those elected for three year terms are chosen by the Workers’ Group, representing trade unions around the world. And this year, there is a problem.

The unions need to choose 33 representatives and in advance of the vote, the ITUC has proposed 31 candidates. They have deliberately not made recommendations for one full member and one deputy member. Apparently, there is a history to this. During the Cold War, the ITUC’s predecessor



left a seat vacant which was taken up by the Soviet Union. In recent years, they’ve left a vacancy for the Chinese regime as well.

Until this year, they have included representatives of the Russian trade union federation FNPR in the list of recommended candidates. But not this time. For the first time this century, the ITUC is not recommending them, for obvious reasons. The FNPR’s support for Putin’s criminal war makes them unacceptable as representatives of the international trade union movement.

Nevertheless, the FNPR are standing for one of the deputy positions. They are likely to have supporters from countries which have been less critical of Putin and his war – for example, the South African, Brazilian and Indian unions. ITUC affiliates need to decide individually if they will cast votes for the FNPR candidate. Among those needing to make a decision is the British TUC.

Frank Hoffer, in the “Global Labour Column”, has called that decision a test for unions. “The fewer votes the FNPR candidate gets the stronger the signal,” he writes.

Unfortunately most trade unionists, even the activists, even those concerned about international solidarity, proba-

bly know very little about the ILO, its Governing Body and the Workers’ Group. There will be almost no pressure from below on national trade union centres like the TUC to vote one way or another.

And yet, it does matter. The election of one of Putin’s loyal men to the ILO Governing Body would be a bad thing, and would send the wrong signal, especially to Ukraine and other countries threatened by Russian aggression. More than 100 years after its creation, the ILO is still important to the labour movement. Activists who do care about international solidarity must pay attention – and make our voices heard. □

• Eric Lee writes here in a personal opinion column. He is the founding editor of LabourStart

More on FNPR at bit.ly/fnpr

Just one working hospital remains in Rafah



Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

Just one hospital, Emirati Maternity Hospital in Tal al-Sultan, remains functioning. Both Najjar Hospital and al-Kuwaiti Hospital were forced to close in May, the second after two medical staff were killed in an attack.

Around half of Gaza's 2.3 million people have been crowded into Rafah after fleeing repeatedly for safety. Emirati Hospital has only five delivery beds, but following the mass influx of people into Rafah that began in December, the hospital became the main place for women to give birth in Rafah.

Early this year NGOs began warning about maternity health in the war with nearly 200 Gazan women are giving birth every day.

"Women face elevated risks during pregnancy and post-delivery, placing their newborns in jeopardy due to the dire humanitarian situation and the absence or limited access to nutrition, hygiene and basic health services,"



Ammar M. Ammar, regional chief of advocacy and communication for the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, told ABC News in January.

Other hospitals in the city had admitting war wounded and directing births to Emirati but it is now the only hospital left in the city. The UNFPA told Reuters that the hospital, Al Helal Al Emirati Maternity Hospital, had been handling some 85 out of a daily total of 180 births in Gaza prior to an escalation of fighting between on Rafah's outskirts. Other births largely happening in

field hospitals in Rafah operated by charities and NGOs.

UNFPA had brought in "mobile maternity services". Just 13 WHO coordinated international emergency medical teams are left in Gaza. The Palestine Red Crescent

Society (PRCS) has also been forced to evacuate its field hospital in Rafah, "due to growing insecurity, including artillery and air bombardments, and evacuation of residents," the UN said in its latest update (29 May).

Médecins Sans Frontières estimated that at least 493 healthcare workers have been killed in Gaza during months of "relentless attacks on healthcare."

Every factor for newborn and maternal health has worsened as the war wages on, most recently after the Israeli assaults on refugee camps and on Rafah, from which huge numbers have

fled to even worse conditions. Women are having to give birth amid rubble, or if they are very lucky in overwhelmed health care facilities, where sanitation is worsening, and the risk of infection and medical complications is on the rise. □



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Free the Hong Kong 47

By Chan Ying

The no-jury landmark trial of the Hong Kong 47, presided over by three specially designated national security judges, has convicted 14 out of 16 activists of taking part in a "conspiracy to commit subversion".

Two were found not guilty, but the prosecution has already signalled appealing against this decision, and bail was immediately imposed on the two, preventing them from speaking out or leaving the territory. The other 31 had already pleaded guilty, with four having turned witness for the prosecution.

The 47 had been arrested for their part in an unofficial primary election to decide on candidates for the 2020 Legislative Council election in order to secure a majority on the Council.

The Hong Kong authorities postponed the LegCo election, changed the ground rules so that just 20 out of 90 seats were to be directed elected, and imposed a "patriotic" test to disqualify dissenting candidates, which resulted in an overwhelming

"rubber stamp" legislature being "elected" in December 2021, with the lowest ever turnout in history and 89 out of 90 legislators pro-Beijing.

Most of the 47 had been held in police custody without bail since February 2021, over three years ago. This is an outrageously long delay by any standards of natural justice.

According to the report by *Hong Kong Free Press*, two key defense arguments were brushed aside:

- The defence had argued that the phrasing of Article 22 of the national security law – which outlines the subversion offence – suggests that any "other unlawful means" used to subvert state power must involve the use of force or the threat of force. This was dismissed by the judges as being too "narrow," saying that limiting the scope this way would be "absurd and illogical."

- The defence had also argued that the prosecution should have to prove that the defendants knew at the time that their acts were unlawful. During the trial, some of the defendants said they believed that their plan of vetoing the budget and forcing the chief

executive to step down did not breach the national security law.

The judges, however, said the prosecution were not required to prove this. Whether a defendant "acted with a mistaken belief that his or her means was lawful" was "irrelevant," the judges wrote.

Of the two found not guilty, the barrister Lawrence Lau had not advocated vetoing the budget in his election manifesto, and the other had joined the Civic Party late and was not part of its decision to veto the budget. The prosecution's declared intention to pursue these two is ominous, given that it had secured a very high rate of success in appealing against judgements on trial cases related to the 2019 protests.

The convicted 45 face sentences of a minimum of up to three years to a maximum of life imprisonment.

The UK labour movement must rally its support for all convicted to be freed, in particular for trade union activists and strike leaders Winnie Yu and Carol Ng and veteran socialist "Long Hair" Leung Kwok Hung:

Verdict of 16 Hong Kong democrats in landmark national security case over unofficial primaries

● = Found guilty ● = Acquitted



Winnie Yu is a nurse and the founder and chairwoman of the Hospital Authority Employees Alliance (HAEA), a labour union representing Hospital Authority staff.

Carol Ng was former chair of the disbanded Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions, former member of the disbanded Labour Party and founder of the British Airways Hong Kong Staff union.

Leung Kwok Hung is a thorn in the side of Beijing and the HK establishment, a co-founder of the League of Social Democrats, repeatedly elected to LegCo on a platform of universal suffrage, workers' rights, a liveable minimum wage, comprehensive social security, collective bargaining and taxing speculative business.

Free the Hong Kong 47! □

A true story from a hotter world



Environment

By Vicki Morris

Fire Weather: A True Story From A Hotter World by John Vaillant, published in 2023, describes the events of May 2016 in Fort McMurray (FMM), a remote city in Alberta, Canada, which has grown up around the hideously polluting tar sands industry.

On 1 May a fire broke out in the forest near the city and because of the unusually hot, dry weather quickly and unprecedentedly became a conflagration of a size not seen in Canada before.

Amazingly, only two people died, as most of the population fled along the highways north and south of the city. But the C\$10bn cost of the fire made this the most expensive disaster in Canadian history.

It's a well written book combining a pacy narrative of the May events with plenty of science well explained for the lay reader. You will learn about fossil fuel extraction, where tar sands sits at the dirtiest, least accessible level, only worth extracting when the price of oil rises high. Vast areas of land are laid waste to get at the sometimes barely profitable bitumen they contain. You will learn a lot about fire, what it is, what happens in a wildfire, and alarm-



ing developments in our heating world, particularly the possibility of 'fire tornadoes'.

Very useful is a history of climate science and the fossil fuel industry's initial interest in it that turned to debunking once it became clear that the industry's days should be numbered if we are to stop and reverse global warming.

The book won the Baillie Gifford Prize for Non-Fiction, and it is easy to see why. Read it through once for the narrative but then use the index to refer back to the scientific disquisitions.

The author does get rather breathy at points about the characters he meets, firefighters and construction workers, and the kit and monster trucks they use, but to be fair the scene where they bulldoze streets of houses to save the town

merits awe.

When I was reading the book, Fort McMurray was in the news again as a new fire broke out nearby though mercifully it was soon controlled. And that is the core point of the book, to describe how wildfires that could once have been anticipated and planned for have become more frequent, fiercer, and less manageable in our warming world. The Wildland Urban Interface where wildfires can become deadly to humans is growing. Seasonal 'fire weather' is becoming more dangerous as 'the season' lasts all year round.

Vaillant's solutions are a belief in following and acting on the science, the need for governmental action. He hints at workers in these industries themselves being part of the solution but

doesn't put it all on them.

Part of the wonder of the book is that the fire Vaillant chooses to study is in the heart of the industry that is helping to fuel the climate crisis itself. Is it payback time, baby, with the tar sands workers suffering for their sins?

That's not how Vaillant sees it. He has empathy for the gas-guzzling folks of FMM. He understands the petrolhead culture, which is only particularly acute here, not exceptional. He is perceptive on the hard working lives that tar sands workers have, working long gruelling shifts in a remote and dirty environment, hustling for dollars in the good times in an industry that can boom and bust – comparisons to the gold rush are pertinent – while the real money is made in the boardroom and by shareholders.

What do the citizens of FMM learn from the fire of 2016? The tar sands industry, temporarily halted by the fire, has booted back up. We can't hope or expect that the workers in one fossil fuel industry will account for and change human civilisation's self-destructive dependence on industries that are destroying our environment. But they will certainly be a part of the story when that happens, as it must, on a societal level.

We will look at *Fire Weather* in our environment reading group on 28 July: bit.ly/fw-rg

The far right mobilises in London

By Colin Foster

On 1 June, long-standing far-right demagogue Tommy Robinson mobilised maybe 7,000 (according to the [Searchlight](#) anti-fascist website) for a march in London.

This "rag-tag of the far right, football hooligans and others who had been active in anti-lockdown protests" (*Searchlight*) was one of the biggest far-right marches in Britain for a while.

Nominally, the protest was about Robinson's claim that the UK has a "two-tier policing system", harsher on white right-wingers than on minorities and Gaza protesters. The march called for the resignation of Met Police chief Mark Rowley.

The main drive was anti-Muslim, with a banner leading the march saying "London, not Londonistan".

There was a small coun-



ter-protest, called by Stand Up To Racism and supported by other groups and trade unions.

Worryingly, Football Lads and Lasses Against Fascism [said](#) that people should not counter-protest because that would be "to direct activists away from... protesting Israeli atrocities". They said: "Let June 1st be a conflict between Liberal Zionism and Fascist Zionism; between Labour Friends of Israel and EDL Friends of Israel." (EDL is English Defence

League, a group founded by Robinson which flourished in the early 2010s. Unlike most far-right groups, it was pro-Israeli-government).

FLAF also [supports](#) George Galloway.

In an adjacent spectrum of politics, former Bristol university professor David Miller has come out [criticising](#) Jeremy Corbyn, Diane Abbott and others for "Judeophilia". They fail because they see the defenders of imperialism in the UK as "capitalists". The problem, Miller says, is actually "organised and established Jewry and Jewish institutions [who] work directly for the State of Israel."

Conspiracy

Corbyn, [says Miller](#), has been "under the narrative control" of "Zionist handlers". (Miller names some Jews in Corbyn's close circle).

Some former supporters of

Miller have distanced themselves, but Bristol Palestine Alliance, who organise most Gaza protests in the city, still promote him. Antisemitism is not, as some claim, a non-issue, or absent within the left.

No consistent fight against fascism and racism is possible without a fight against antisemitism, including antisemitism dressed up as conspiracy theories about "Zionists" being the world's great evil. □



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A call from France for solidarity, against antisemitism

By RAAR

The text below is translated from the French Network Against Antisemitism and All Racisms, [RAAR](#)

Support student protests for Gaza and an immediate and permanent ceasefire. Condemn Hamas there and antisemitism here.

The recent student demonstrations in solidarity with Gaza have raised a number of questions for an anti-racist association like RAAR.

Solidarity, first and foremost, with the students who have been repressed.

Police intervention on the campuses of Sciences Po, the Sorbonne in Paris and Sciences Po Lyon to remove students is a serious attack on freedom of expression, a fundamental right in any democracy. By peacefully occupying the premises, these students were simply protesting against the massacres of Palestinians perpetrated by the Israeli army in Gaza. They were expressing a sense of shared humanity in the face of the catastrophic humanitarian situation in Gaza and the mass crimes committed there, and an internationalist solidarity that should be a credit to a democracy open to the world, of which university institutions are a pillar.

We can measure the significant erosion of public freedoms over the last forty years. Displaying pro-Palestinian banners on the facade or inside the walls of a university, wearing a keffiyeh, displaying a Palestinian flag or chanting slogans in support of Gaza become acts so intolerable that they would have to be banned by law enforcement. It is really the intervention of the police in universities to ban political demonstrations by students that constitutes an illiberal reflex in contradiction with the principles of our democracy.

Freedom of expression is guaranteed by Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 11 of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (a text included in the preamble to the current French Constitution) states that: "The free communication of thoughts and opinions is one of the most precious rights of man: every citizen may therefore speak, write and print freely, without being held accountable for the abuse of this freedom in the cases determined by the law".

As a democratic and anti-racist association, RAAR's first move is therefore to



express its solidarity with the repressed students and condemn the government's repressive excesses.

For an immediate and permanent ceasefire in Gaza and recognition of a Palestinian state!

As well as showing solidarity with the student movement, the RAAR is involved in the campaign for an immediate and permanent ceasefire in Gaza, for Israeli withdrawal from the territories occupied since 1967 and for recognition of a Palestinian state. The massacre of tens of thousands of Palestinian civilians in Gaza, the destruction of the health system, the famine and the murders of Palestinians in the West Bank are unacceptable because they are contrary to the principles of international law. All states and institutions that claim to be democratic should condemn them, put pressure on the Israeli government and, at the very least, refuse to supply it with arms.

Does this mean we should organise a boycott of Israeli universities and break off partnerships with them, as the student movement often calls for? We believe that boycotts can be a useful peaceful weapon in the face of oppression or humanitarian emergencies, but only if they target specific objectives.

Boycott

Israeli universities, like universities in other democratic countries, are places where critical thinking and international openness are taught. The critical forces that exist in Israeli society are particularly well represented there, among teachers, researchers and students alike. A widespread call for a boycott of universities and the abandonment of partnerships could only further isolate and weaken the critical currents at home, to the benefit of conservative and even extreme right-wing forces. The RAAR is opposed to this.

On the other hand, a targeted boycott of university departments directly involved in the colonisation of the West Bank or military operations in Gaza would be entirely legitimate.

Solidarity with Palestinians must not turn into hatred of Israelis. Internationalist solidarity with emancipatory Palestinian and Israeli forces should be the priority in this respect. And French universities should be promoting dialogue between progressive Palestinians and Israelis rather than negatively essentialising the latter. We must not confuse the fight against a government with hatred of a population.

We must not forget the antisemitic massacres of 7 October and we must stand firm here against minority antisemitic excesses

The far right, Les Républicains, the Macronists and unconditional supporters of the Israeli government have unduly stigmatised the current mobilisations, presenting them as "antisemitic" overall. These criticisms have been strongly echoed in the conservative and far-right media. Fighting for a ceasefire in Gaza is legitimate and has nothing in itself to do with antisemitism. To claim the opposite is to weaken the fight against antisemitism, by helping to discredit the notion through widespread and erroneous use, for the benefit of narrow political motives.

From river

However, student protests have been accompanied by real antisemitic excesses on the part of minorities (for example, an internal investigation is underway at Sciences Po Paris into antisemitic words and deeds), intimidation (such as that suffered by members of the Golem collective at the University of Lille on 22 May) and slogans (such as "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free", which would imply the disappearance of the state of Israel) and symbols (such as the "red hands", which could refer to the lynching and killing of two Israeli soldiers on 12 October 2000 in Ramallah) with an antisemitic

meaning, or ambiguities around multiple-meaning terms such as "anti-Zionist" and "Zionist".

We condemn these acts, which are unacceptable within emancipatory movements, and we call on student mobilisations to clearly disassociate themselves from them.

We recall that historically Zionism is a complicated reality: it is both a demand for national emancipation in the face of the violence of European antisemitism and a colonial practice that despoils the Palestinian people. Reducing this reality to a purely colonial logic is contrary to an intersectional vision of the world, capable of taking into account the plurality of oppressions and violence that intersect in reality, from which antisemitism must not be excluded. The hypostasis of colonial logic alone and the exclusion of antisemitism, both here and there, from intersectionality is a danger today within emancipation movements.

Moreover, a certain indifference towards the antisemitic crimes perpetrated by Hamas on 7 October has been observed in student mobilisations. We would point out that Hamas is not an ordinary component of the Palestinian resistance, but a totalitarian, sexist, homophobic and antisemitic Islamo-conservative organisation. The RAAR fights against any complaisance towards it.

The fight against all forms of racism and oppression must not be allowed to sideline the fight against antisemitism.

Solidarity with the students mobilised for Gaza! Solidarity with the massacred population of Gaza! No to complaisance towards Hamas! Zero tolerance for antisemitism in universities! □

• Paris, 23 May 2024

Student camps face threats

By Sam Myerson

University of Sheffield management has issued a letter to the student Gaza protest camp demanding that they dismantle it and leave by Monday 3 June. In response the camp called for a mass demonstration in solidarity, and held a "trial" of vice-chancellor Koen Lamberts. About 40 people attended. Until now the University has been quite hands-off with the camp, and has even provided some support on access to facilities. It seems it now wants to take advantage of reduced numbers and clear the camp in preparation for graduation ceremonies.

In Manchester, the camp continues to be one of the liveliest in the UK, large and ongoing. The university attempted to clear the occupation of Whitworth Hall with the assistance of Greater Manchester Police. The po-

lice have entered the camp and confiscated "terrorist symbols" – in fact, the Starry Plough flag. Newcastle has seen similar action by the police. Students had moved to occupy a building and were dragged out by police.

Camps are still ongoing at other universities, with daily schedules of discussions. Attitudes on political debate and discussion varies. Some camp leaders out-and-out refuse to engage with ideas outside a "One State" position, although a ban is not a public and "official" position in any of the camps. The mood is mixed. Fewer students are taking part now, with the pressure of exams and the approaching end of term. Activists have called for students returning home to join their nearest protest camp to keep it going over the summer break. □



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Trotsky's call for in

By Leon Trotsky

Vladimir Putin blames Ulyanov (Lenin) and the early Bolsheviks for "artificially" creating Ukrainian nationalism. Stalin regressed to old Tsarist attitudes to Ukraine, and worst. Against Stalin, Trotsky upheld self-determination for Ukraine. "Western Ukraine", so described in this article, was Polish-ruled ("eastern Poland") at the time Trotsky was writing, in 1939.

The Ukrainian question, which many governments and many "socialists" and even "communists" have tried to forget or to relegate to the deep strongbox of history, has once again been placed on the order of the day and this time with redoubled force.

The latest aggravation of the Ukrainian question is most intimately bound up with the degeneration of the Soviet Union and of the Comintern, the successes of fascism and the approach of the next imperialist war. Crucified by four states, the Ukraine now occupies in the fate of Europe the same position that was once occupied by Poland; with this difference – that world relations are now infinitely more tense and the tempos of development accelerated. The Ukrainian question is destined in the immediate future to play an enormous, role in the life of Europe. It was not for nothing that Hitler so noisily raised the question of creating a "Greater Ukraine," and likewise it was not for nothing that he dropped this question with such stealthy haste.

The Second International, expressing the interests of the labor bureaucracy and aristocracy of the imperialist states, completely ignored the Ukrainian question. Even its left wing did not



pay the necessary attention to it. Suffice it to recall that Rosa Luxemburg, for all her brilliant intellect and genuinely revolutionary spirit, found it possible to declare that the Ukrainian question was the invention of a handful of intellectuals. This position left a deep imprint even upon the Polish Communist Party. The Ukrainian question was looked upon by the official leaders of the Polish section of the Comintern as an obstacle rather than a revolutionary problem. Hence the constant opportunist attempts to shy away from this question, to suppress it, to pass over it in silence, or to postpone it to an indefinite future.

The Bolshevik party, not without difficulty and only gradually under the constant pressure of Lenin, was able to acquire a correct approach to the Ukrainian question. The right to self-determination, that is, to separation, was extended by Lenin equally to the Poles and to the Ukrainians. He did not recognize aristocratic nations. Every inclination to evade or postpone the problem of an oppressed nationality he regarded as a manifestation of Great Russian chauvinism.

After the conquest of power, a serious struggle took place in the party over the solving of the numerous national problems inherited from old Czarist Russia. In his capacity as People's Commissar of Nationalities, Stalin invariably represented the most centralist and bureaucratic tendency. This evinced itself especially on the question of Georgia and on the question of the Ukraine. The correspondence dealing with these matters has remained unpublished to this day. We hope to publish a section of it – the very small section which is at our disposal. Every line of Lenin's letters and proposals vibrates with an urge to accede as far as possible to those nationalities that have been oppressed in the past. In the proposals and declarations of Stalin, on the con-

trary, the tendency toward bureaucratic centralism was invariably pronounced. In order to guarantee "administrative needs," i.e., the interests of the bureaucracy, the most legitimate claims of the oppressed nationalities were declared a manifestation of petty-bourgeois nationalism. All these symptoms could be observed as early as 1922-23. Since that time they have developed monstrously and have led to outright strangulation of any kind of independent national development of the peoples of the USSR.

In the conception of the old Bolshevik party Soviet Ukraine was destined to become a powerful axis around which the other sections of the Ukrainian people would unite. It is indisputable that in the first period of its existence Soviet Ukraine exerted a mighty attractive force, in national respects as well, and aroused to struggle the workers, peasants, and revolutionary intelligentsia of Western Ukraine enslaved by Poland. But during the years of Thermidorian reaction, the position of Soviet Ukraine and together with it the posing of the Ukrainian question as a whole changed sharply. The more profound the hopes aroused, the keener was the disillusionment. The bureaucracy strangled and plundered the people within Great Russia, too. But in the Ukraine matters were further complicated by the massacre of national hopes. Nowhere did restrictions, purges, repressions and in general all forms of bureaucratic hooliganism assume such murderous sweep as they did in the Ukraine in the struggle against the powerful, deeply-rooted longings of the Ukrainian masses for greater freedom and independence. To the totalitarian bureaucracy, Soviet Ukraine became an administrative division of an economic unit and a military base of the USSR. To be sure, the Stalin bureaucracy erects statues to Shevchenko but only in order more thoroughly to crush the Ukrainian

people under their weight and to force it to chant paeans in the language of Kobzar to the rapist clique in the Kremlin.

Toward the sections of the Ukraine now outside its frontiers, the Kremlin's attitude today is the same as it is toward all oppressed nationalities, all colonies, and semi-colonies, i.e., small change in its international combinations with imperialist governments. At the recent 18th Congress of the "Communist Party," Manuilsky, one of the most revolting renegades of Ukrainian communism, quite openly explained that not only the USSR but also the Comintern (the "gyp-joint," according to Stalin's formulation) refused to demand the emancipation of oppressed peoples whenever their oppressors are not the enemies of the ruling Moscow clique. India is nowadays being defended by Stalin, Dimitrov and Manuilsky against – Japan, but not against England. Western Ukraine they are ready to cede forever to Poland in exchange for a diplomatic agreement which appears profitable at the present time to the bureaucrats of the Kremlin. It is a far cry from the days when they went no further than episodic combinations in their politics.

Not a trace remains of the former confidence and sympathy of the Western Ukrainian masses for the Kremlin. Since the latest murderous "purge" in the Ukraine no one in the West wants to become part of the Kremlin satrapy which continues to bear the name of Soviet Ukraine. The worker and peasant masses in the Western Ukraine, in Bukovina, in the Carpatho-Ukraine are in a state of confusion: Where to turn? What to demand? This situation naturally shifts the leadership to the most reactionary Ukrainian cliques who express their "nationalism" by seeking to sell the Ukrainian people to one imperialism or another in return for a promise of fictitious independence. Upon this tragic confusion Hitler bases his policy in the Ukrainian question. At one time we said: but for Stalin (i.e., but for the fatal policy of the Comintern in Germany) there would have been no Hitler. To this can now be added: but for the rape of Soviet Ukraine by the Stalinist bureaucracy there would be no Hitlerite Ukrainian policy.

We shall not pause here to analyse the motives that impelled Hitler to discard, for the time being at least, the slogan of a Greater Ukraine. These motives must be sought in the fraudulent combinations of German imperialism on the one hand and on the other in the fear of conjuring up an evil spirit whom it might be difficult to exorcize.

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dependent Ukraine

Hitler gave Carpatho-Ukraine as a gift to the Hungarian butchers. This was done, if not with Moscow's open approval then in any case with confidence that approval would be forthcoming. It is as if Hitler had said to Stalin: "If I were preparing to attack Soviet Ukraine tomorrow I should have kept Carpatho-Ukraine in my own hands." In reply, Stalin at the 18th Party Congress openly came to Hitler's defense against the slanders of the "Western Democracies." Hitler intends to attack the Ukraine? Nothing of the sort! Fight with Hitler? Not the slightest reason for it. Stalin is obviously interpreting the handing over of Carpatho-Ukraine to Hungary as an act of peace.

This means that sections of the Ukrainian people have become so much small change for the Kremlin in its international calculations. The Fourth International must clearly understand the enormous importance of the Ukrainian question in the fate not only of Southeastern and Eastern Europe but also of Europe as a whole. We are dealing with a people that has proved its viability, that is numerically equal to the population of France and occupies an exceptionally rich territory which, moreover, is of the highest strategical importance. The question of the fate of the Ukraine has been posed in its full scope. A clear and definite slogan is necessary that corresponds to the new situation. In my opinion there can be at the present time only one such slogan: A united, free and independent workers' and peasants' Soviet Ukraine.

This program is in irreconcilable contradiction first of all with the interests of the three imperialist powers, Poland, Rumania, and Hungary. Only hopeless pacifist blockheads are capable of thinking that the emancipation and unification of the Ukraine can be achieved by peaceful diplomatic means, by referendums, by decisions of the League of Nations, etc. In no way superior to them of course are those "nationalists" who propose to solve the Ukrainian question by entering the service of one imperialism against another. Hitler gave an invaluable lesson to those adventurers by tossing (for how long?) Carpatho-Ukraine to the Hungarians who immediately slaughtered not a few trusting Ukrainians. Insofar as the issue depends upon the military strength of the imperialist states, the victory of one grouping or another can signify only a new dismemberment and a still more brutal subjugation of the Ukrainian people. The program of independence for the Ukraine in the epoch of imperialism is directly and indissolubly bound up with the program of the proletarian

revolution. It would be criminal to entertain any illusions on this score.

But the independence of a United Ukraine would mean the separation of Soviet Ukraine from the USSR, the "friends" of the Kremlin will exclaim in chorus. What is so terrible about that? – we reply. The fervid worship of state boundaries is alien to us. We do not hold the position of a "united and indivisible" whole. After all, even the constitution of the USSR acknowledges the right of its component federated peoples to self-determination, that is, to separation. Thus, not even the incumbent Kremlin oligarchy dares to deny this principle. To be sure it remains only on paper. The slightest attempt to raise the question of an independent Ukraine openly would mean immediate execution on the charge of treason. But it is precisely this despicable equivocation, it is precisely this ruthless hounding of all free national thought that has led the toiling masses of the Ukraine, to an even greater degree than the masses of Great Russia, to look upon the rule of the Kremlin as monstrously oppressive. In the face of such an internal situation it is naturally impossible even to talk of Western Ukraine voluntarily joining the USSR as it is at present constituted. Consequently, the unification of the Ukraine presupposes freeing the so-called Soviet Ukraine from the Stalinist boot. In this matter, too, the Bonapartist clique will reap what it has sown.

But wouldn't this mean the military weakening of the USSR? – the "friends" of the Kremlin will howl in horror. We reply that the weakening of the USSR is caused by those ever-growing centrifugal tendencies generated by the Bonapartist dictatorship. In the event of war the hatred of the masses for the ruling clique can lead to the collapse of all the social conquests of October. The source of defeatist moods is in the Kremlin. An independent Soviet Ukraine, on the other hand, would become, if only by virtue of its own interests, a mighty southwestern bulwark of the USSR. The sooner the present Bonapartist caste is undermined, upset, crushed and swept away, the firmer the defence of the Soviet Republic will become and the more certain its socialist future.

Naturally an independent workers' and peasants' Ukraine might subsequently join the Soviet Federation; but voluntarily, on conditions which it itself considers acceptable, which in turn presupposes a revolutionary regeneration of the USSR. The genuine emancipation of the Ukrainian people is inconceivable without a revolution or a series of revolutions in the West which

must lead in the end to the creation of the Soviet United States of Europe. An independent Ukraine could and undoubtedly will join this federation as an equal member. The proletarian revolution in Europe, in turn, would not leave one stone standing of the revolting structure of Stalinist Bonapartism. In that case the closest union of the Soviet United States of Europe and the regenerated USSR would be inevitable and would present infinite advantages for the European and Asiatic continents, including of course the Ukraine too. But here we are shifting to questions of second and third order. The question of first order is the revolutionary guarantee of the unity and independence of a workers' and peasants' Ukraine in the struggle against imperialism on the one hand, and against Moscow Bonapartism on the other.

The Ukraine is especially rich and experienced in false paths of struggle for national emancipation. Here everything has been tried: the petty-bourgeois Rada, and Skoropadski, and Petlura, and "alliance" with the Hohenzollerns and combinations with the Entente. After all these experiments, only political cadavers can continue to place hope in any one of the fractions of the Ukrainian bourgeoisie as the leader of the national struggle for emancipation. The Ukrainian proletariat alone is capable not only of solving the task – which is revolutionary in its very essence – but also of taking the initiative for its solution. The proletariat and only the proletariat can rally around itself the peasant masses and the genuinely revolutionary national intelligentsia.

At the beginning of the last imperialist war the Ukrainians, Melenevski ("Basok") and Skoropis-Yeltukhovski,

attempted to place the Ukrainian liberation movement under the wing of the Hohenzollern general, Ludendorff. They covered themselves in so doing with left phrases. With one kick the revolutionary Marxists booted these people out. That is how revolutionists must continue to behave in the future. The impending war will create a favorable atmosphere for all sorts of adventurers, miracle-hunters and seekers of the golden fleece. These gentlemen, who especially love to warm their hands in the vicinity of the national question, must not be allowed within artillery range of the labor movement. Not the slightest compromise with imperialism, either fascist or democratic! Not the slightest concession to the Ukrainian nationalists, either clerical-reactionary or liberal-pacifist! No "People's Fronts"! The complete independence of the proletarian party as the vanguard of the toilers!

This appears to me the correct policy in the Ukrainian question. I speak here personally and in my own name. The question must be opened up to international discussion. The foremost place in this discussion must belong to the Ukrainian revolutionary Marxists. We shall listen with the greatest attention to their voices. But they had better make haste. There is little time left for preparation! □

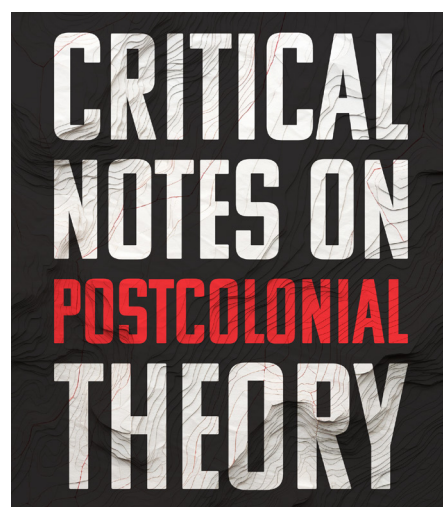
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Omissions about the Democrats



Debate

By Katy Dollar

Claureen Ryan (*Solidarity* 710) lays out what is contemptible about Donald Trump, former president of the USA. We are told that he was, so to speak, doubly not elected president in 2016 both getting through on the electoral college system and using his significant financial advantage.

On the first point, there have been five United States presidential elections in which the successful candidate did not win a plurality of the popular vote, including the first President John Quincy Adams. Rutherford B. Hayes, Benjamin Harrison, George W Bush and Donald Trump all followed Adams winning by a majority in the electoral college not the popular vote. Clearly in we favour voting reform to make the US political system more democratic, but we cannot claim that Trump is a “cheat” for winning this way – within the US constitution it is how the President is elected.

You can win without a popular-vote majority here too. In 1951 the Labour Party won the most votes any political party in any election, a record not beaten until the Conservative Party’s victory in 1992. Labour won almost a quarter of a million votes more than the Conservatives. However, due to First Past the Post, the Conservatives formed a government with a majority of 17. That is because our democracy is based on seats, not votes. In February 1974, Labour secured 301 seats to 297 for the Conservatives – despite the Conservatives beating Labour by over 200,000 votes.

On the question of money and its impact on US politics, this is obviously well documented. There have been a lot more United States presidential elections in which the successful presidential candidate has simply outspent their rivals, they might not have been as rich as Donald Trump but they were certainly rich.

In the 2020 book *The Cash Ceiling: Why Only the Rich Run for Office and*



What We Can Do About It, Nicholas Carnes, a Princeton political scientist, explained:

“Working-class Americans – people employed in manual labour, service industry, or clerical jobs – almost never go on to hold political office in the United States. If millionaires formed their own political party, that party would make up about 3 percent of the general public, but it would have unified majority control of all three branches of the federal government. The Millionaires’ Party would be the majority party in the House of Representatives and would have a filibuster-proof super majority in the Senate. It would have a majority on the Supreme Court. It would have a record-setting majority in the president’s cabinet. And it would have a commander in chief in the White House – not just a millionaire but a full-fledged billionaire.

“If, on the other hand, working-class Americans formed their own party, that party would have made up more than half of the country since at least the start of the twentieth century. But legislators from that party (those who last worked in blue-collar jobs before getting involved in politics) would never have held more than 2% of the seats in Congress.”

The impact of money in elections in a major capitalist power is clear – it favours the existing ruling class. But both candidates tried to “buy the election”. In 2020 Biden spent £1.68bn and Trump £1.06bn.

Of course, not every political candi-

date used their “advantage in money” in the way Trump did paying \$130,000 hush money to cover up an extra-marital affair but the implication of the article that Trump bought an election everyone else won without “advantage in money” is farcical. “A combination of money, lawyers, and aggression has allowed Trump to do as he likes, whether legal or illegal, most of his life.”

Bill Clinton claimed to have left the White House £16 million in debt due to legal bills, but the Clintons were most recently valued at \$120 million so he probably managed to scrape it together. Clinton’s legal bills were piling up of course because he lied under oath, proof if you required it that Trump is not the first President to be a liar. Nor the first to have been accused of sexual assault and use money and influence to “delay delay delay”.

What sets Trump apart is not that he is rich, or petulant, or playing a rigged electoral system, or lying, or has committed sexual assault – it is that he heads a large and militant collection of right-wing forces, both organised and unorganised, which is trying to roll back limited gains made by women, black and LGBT+ people in the US. This movement needs to be analysed properly.

If Claureen thinks that Trump is a fascist they must explain why Trumpism does not fit our traditional way of analysing fascism; no street mass movement or militias; movement is not a movement of crisis; no widespread destruction of labour movement bodies and strongholds.

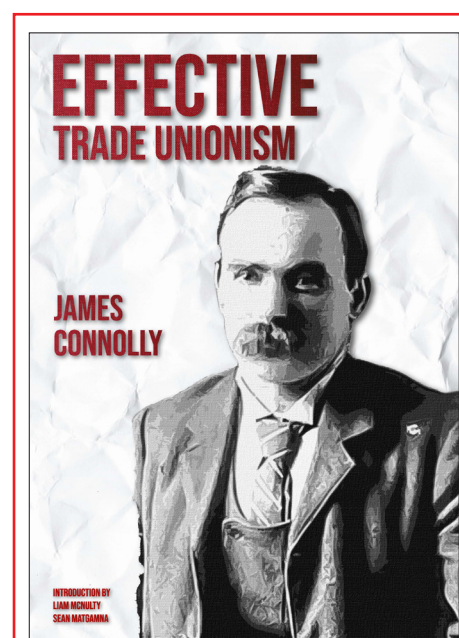
Around the 2020 election Claureen believed there would be a fascist coup to attempt to keep the President in office. When he lost both the popular vote and the Electoral College, Trump supported a coup of sorts. From early morning on 6 January, he made speeches and tweets support to save the election and march on the Capitol, by 3pm he is making calls against violence and 4pm telling his supporters to go home. There certainly are right wing wannabe revolutionaries amongst the

Trump movement including fascists. But fascist Presidents at the head of fascists don’t give up power after a few hours of low-level rioting. He may want to be an absolute monarch or an absolute dictator but there is not crisis sufficient in the US for that to be realisable or force to make it happen.

The decision to call for a vote for Biden at our Workers’ Liberty conference was always going to lead to more polemic like this, one of omission of the truth about Biden, the Democrats and the normal bourgeois politics of America. In one set of brackets we’re told Trump is an example of how money controls politics, but you would be forgiven for believing the author thought if the Democrats could just pull themselves together all would be well. All mention of the Democrats only admonishes them for being too defensive:

“The Democrats have been, in many areas, in retreat. The prosecutions have been ridiculously late, and almost all of them will not be heard before the election...”

It seems Claureen has taken up the position of special adviser to the Biden Presidency. No explicit advice to the organisation or population of the US working class of course. But if you read between the lines you can see it. Trump is a billionaire. Trump uses money to win elections and pervert American justice. Trump does not respect women or black people and wants to deport foreigners. Vote Democrat, they’d never do that... □



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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Bernie Sanders on Gaza, Biden, and Trump

By Bernie Sanders

I strongly, strongly, strongly disagree with President Biden over his administration's approach to what's going on in Gaza. In my view... while Israel has every right in the world to respond militarily to the terrorist attack by Hamas, they do not have the right to go to war against the entire Palestinian people, and that is precisely what we are seeing right now.

As we speak, 35,000 Palestinians have been killed, over 77,000 have been wounded. That is more than 5% of the entire population. Infrastructure destroyed. Education destroyed. Health care system destroyed. And right now we're looking at the possibility of hundreds of thousands of children starving. I think the president is dead wrong on that issue, and I will continue to do my best to make sure that Israel does not get US military aid to continue that war.

Having said that, I would hope that [for the 4 November] people take a deep breath and say ok, what are our options here? We disagree with Biden on Gaza? We're going to look at Donald Trump?

Donald Trump is a pathological liar. Donald Trump is a guy who does not



believe that women have a right to control their own bodies. He is somebody who thinks that climate change is a hoax. Somebody who has said incredibly bigoted and racist remarks, who wants to give massive tax breaks to billionaires, who wants to throw millions of people off healthcare. That is not an alternative.

What is the alternative? Elect progressives to the House and occasionally to the Senate. Build a political movement which demands that Biden starts addressing the needs of

working people, the environment and changes foreign policy.

One of the things I think that concerns the American people is the growing extremism of the Republican party. There used to be a kind of centre-right party... but they have become a right-wing extremist party... a party which increasingly does not believe in the right of all people whether you're elderly, whether you're 18, whether you're black, whether you're white, whether you're Latino, to fully participate in the

political process. This is a party which has a number of people who look to Putin as an example of what "democracy" is about.

Democracy will not disappear in this country by fiat, by "oh, guess what, no more elections". It'll happen because voter officials are intimidated, because people are not able to vote or it's made harder for people to vote or where people are videoed as they walk into a polling booth...

We are living in a very corrupt political system where any billionaire who wants to can spend hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars to elect or defeat candidates that they want. We need fundamental campaign finance reform.

Both parties are heavily influenced by big money and in corporate interests. That's the reality of American politics and we are trying very hard to change that. □

• Bernie Sanders is an Independent Senator in the USA who contested the Democratic nomination for President in 2016 and 2020. He was speaking on the Brian Tyler Cohen show, 5 May 2024.

Workers' Liberty on 4 November

At our conference on 27-28 April, a majority resolved that "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 [Cornel] West, are wrong".

A minority voted for this view: "In the 2024 presiden-

tial 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.

Slogans

"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". □

Why there are Congo protests in London

By Paul Abbott

Protests in London have been organised by [Stand For Congo](#). The latest was on 1 June outside the Apple store on Regent Street, protesting against the complicity of Apple and the wider tech industry in exploitation of Congo.

The mining industry has been central to the conflict in Congo. The eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is full of coltan deposits, from which tantalum can be extracted, an essential component in small electronics. In May M23 captured the mining town [Rubaya](#), and the Congolese government has accused Apple of purchasing stolen minerals.

In mid-May a farcical attempt at a coup in the DRC failed. The formerly exiled opposition politician Christian Malanga led a small force of armed men on an attack against the presidential palace, but were defeated



within a matter of hours. Malanga was dead and the surviving combatants were arrested, including Malanga's son (an American citizen).

This coup follows months of increased clashes between the Congolese army and the March 23rd Movement (M23), a largely-Tutsi militia based in North Kivu (a Congolese province bordering Rwanda and Uganda). It has received support from the Rwandan government, and the Rwandan army has even fought alongside it in clashes in DRC.

The Rwandan government accuses the Congolese government of working with the FDLR (Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda), a "Hutu Power" militia tracing its heritage back to the Interahamwe, the organisation which carried out the Rwandan

genocide of Tutsis in 1994.

In addition to these larger militias, there is a vast array of smaller localised armed groups known as Mai-Mai, which ostensibly exist for community self-defence, but regularly turn to banditry and carry out massacres. M23 carried out the Kishishe massacre in late 2022 as retribution for local support for the FDLR and associated Mai-Mai groups, killing 131 people according to the UN and 300-plus according to the Congolese government.

Unlike other Western states, the British government has failed to call for Rwanda to cease its support of M23. The £250 million given to the Rwandan government as part of the Rwanda asylum [plan](#) has surely helped revitalise M23 after a period of weakness. □

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How wealth warps democracy under the capitalist system



Socialism vs Capitalism

By Martin Thomas

Again and again, Keir Starmer boasts that he is “pro-business”. He and other Labour leaders sweated to induce 121 capitalists to sign a [letter](#) to *The Times* backing Labour. No thought of getting 121 workers to do an open letter on what they hope for. This is new evidence that current parliamentary democracy, “bourgeois democracy”, is only a quarter-democracy, warped by wealth.

Starmer and his friends will have made their effort partly to get donations from the rich. Labour got £8.5 million in donations from plutocrats in 2023. Those millions enable Starmer to risk annoying the unions and having their contributions reduced.

In capitalist democracy, even to start running for election requires money. Richard Tice, Nigel Farage, George

Galloway, Akhmed Yakoob and such can get a high electoral profile fast because they are rich.

In the USA, it's even worse. To run in a primary and then in the substantive election is difficult unless you have your own personal wealth. The Democratic Party tells its new congresspeople that once elected they must spend four hours a day, every day, on the phone seeking donations for the next campaign.

With state funding of political parties, common in Europe, established parties always start off ahead.

Geert Wilders, in the Netherlands, has a “party”, the PVV, which by its own rules has only one member, Wilders himself. He opened a way for it thanks to funding from rich individuals and right-wing US groups.

Then there's the billionaire media. Social media have “democratised” discourse in some ways, but also debased it, replacing debate, however slanted, by competition between fake-news and artificial-scandal factories.

Starmer's wooing of the rich will

also have been shaped by his worries about running a government. To run a government operating the established economic system of capitalism (with a tweak here or there) means working with the people who run that system, primarily the capitalists, who are absolute monarchs in the workplaces.

Otherwise “flight of capital”, “investment strikes”, etc., the sort of “chaos” which horrifies Starmer. For working-class people in insecure jobs and housing, life is often “chaotic” even in the most “stable” capitalist economy; but the system teaches politicians to regard that as normal, not a crisis.

The purpose of working-class political parties, from the late 19th century onwards, was to break through all these wealth-warpings. Collecting millions of small financial contributions; generating organisation and in-person activism sufficient to offset the political advantages of wealth; creating spaces of education and debate; democratic accountability of elected representatives to the movement – “such an organisation”, as Marx [put it](#), can transform “uni-

versal suffrage from the instrument of deception that it has been until now into an instrument of emancipation”.

But those working-class parties have operated in capitalist society and under its pressures. “Spontaneously”, unless there is an organised counter-pressure from an educated and determined rank-and-file, they come under the domination of better-off people – lawyers, union full-time officials, and these days NGO and think-tank careerists.

As the worker-based parties become more conformist, workers become more disillusioned with the idea that voting can achieve anything except perhaps “sending a message” of frustration. The politicians tilt towards wooing the votes of better-off, more leisured people, who are more likely to vote.

The core reason why capitalist democracy is undemocratic is because it sits within economic undemocracy. Workers' socialist rule will become more democratic by creating more economic equality. □



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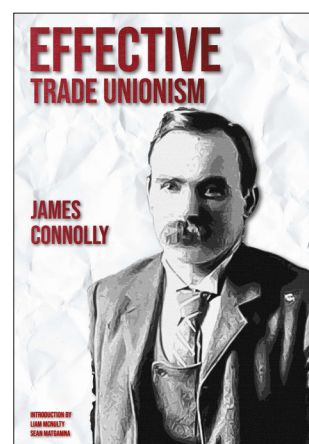
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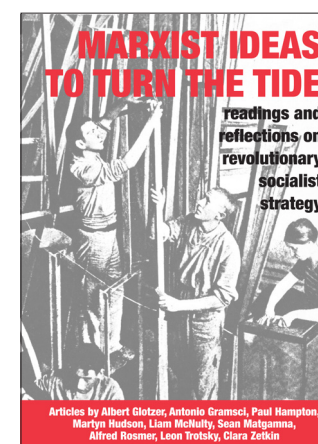
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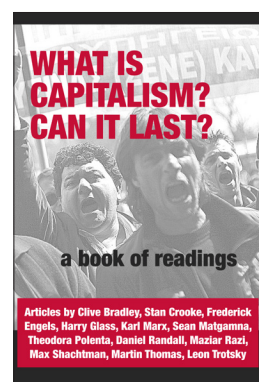
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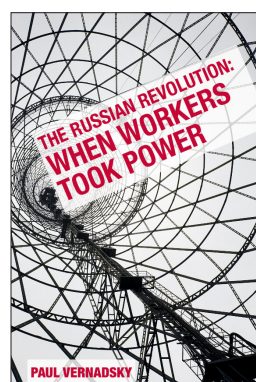
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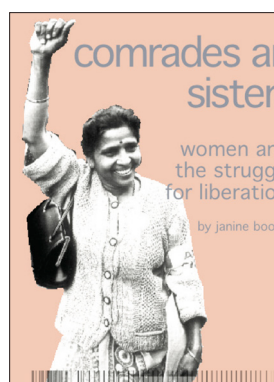
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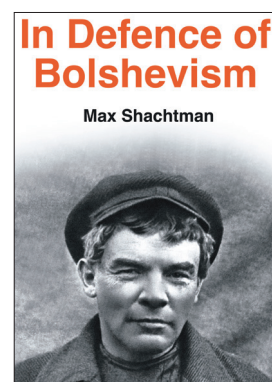
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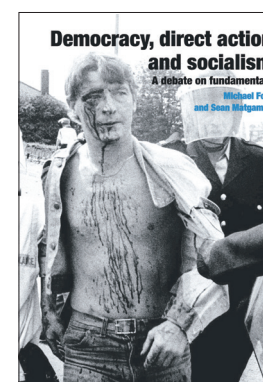
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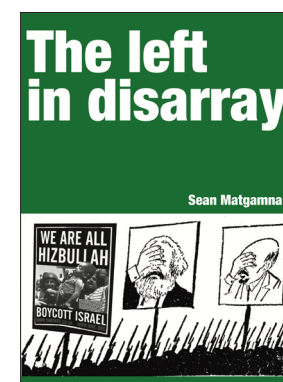
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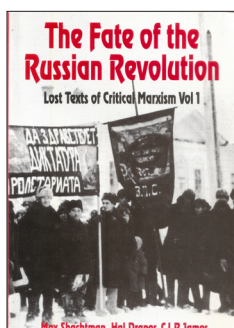
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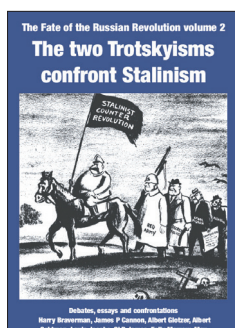
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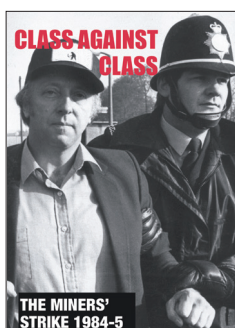
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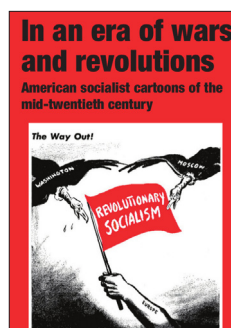
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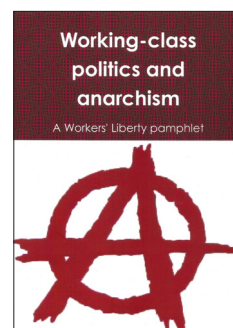
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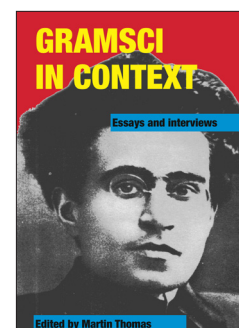
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Labour's "New Deal": a terrain of struggle



John Moloney

The finalised [version](#) of the New Deal for Workers, now re-badged as the "Making Work Pay" plan, has been published by the Labour Party.

Several versions of the New Deal have been issued since [2021](#), each more watered down than the last. Our view is that unions and the wider Labour movement should see the Plan as a terrain of struggle rather than literally a done "deal".

The reason for that can be readily seen in the following quote from the finalised version: "Labour is pro-worker and pro-business".

Trying to square the circle of the antagonistic interests of capital and labour is impossible. In reality, the Labour Party, which still remains a bourgeois workers' party, will very firmly bend the stick towards the bourgeois when it comes to implementing the plan.

This has been telegraphed by an unnamed source talking to the [Financial Times](#) (it is widely believed that Rachel Reeves is that source) and by the heavy emphasis in the plan on consulting business. For example:

"That is why we are committed to following a proper parliamentary process for our legislative proposals, with a full and comprehensive consultation on the implementation of the New Deal".

Unions rightly fear that this full and comprehensive consultation is code for lengthy delays and that business

will drown the intent of the policies by proposing masses of detailed changes to draft Bills and Regulations.

As it is, the original positions relating to zero-hours contract and fire and rehire have been radically changed, mostly in the 2023 [National Policy Forum](#).

The policy now states that Labour Party will ban "exploitative zero hours contracts" but does not define what explorative means. In the 2017 manifesto and in 2021 Labour's position was to ban all zero hours contracts.

On fire-and-rehire, Labour now agrees that: "businesses can restructure to remain viable, preserve their workforce and the company when there is genuinely no alternative, but this must follow a proper process based on dialogue and common understanding between employers and workers".

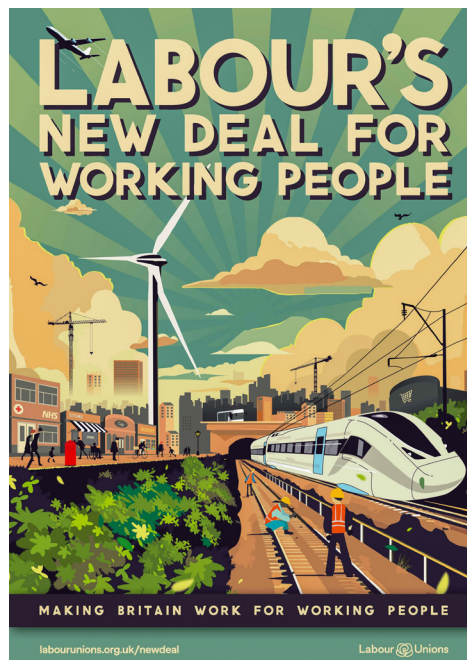
So you can fire and rehire, but Labour will make it more difficult than currently. Before, Labour were going to ban all fire and rehire.

One of the key proposals in the original versions of the New Deal was around increasing collective bargaining rights for the unions. That sentiment still exists:

"Stronger trade unions and collective bargaining will be key to tackling problems of insecurity, inequality, discrimination, enforcement and low pay".

But the means to do it is not fleshed out in the policy. In the original drafts of the Deal, the means chosen was via Fair Pay Agreements (FPAs) and access of unions to the workforce.

FPAs would have introduced forced



sectoral bargaining into the economy. Employers in different sectors of the economy would have been obliged to bargain over terms and other conditions with the relevant unions. FPAs also set out a route by which unions could recruit and be recognised in the sector. That has been scrapped. In its place is a very tentative FPA for the social care sector.

As for union access to the workforce: "Labour will ensure reasonable access within workplaces by introducing a transparent framework and clear rules, designed in consultation with unions and business".

And just in case you were unsure of where Labour intends to go on access, you find:

"We recognise it will be necessary to

formally monitor these reasonable and regulated new rules, to ensure trade union officials and workplaces are complying with their responsibilities and obligations, and that rules allowing access are used proportionately and effectively".

There are more positive parts of the Plan such as clear commitments to repeal the Trade Union Act 2016 (50% threshold), the Minimum Service Levels (Strikes) Bill and the Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Businesses (Amendment) Regulations.

When repealed, they will free up unions, and make taking industrial action easier. The pledge to allow electronic balloting (rather than all industrial action votes having to be by post, as at present) is also important.

It must be remembered that the Labour Party is the only major party to talk about insourcing work and for making winning union recognition easier. All that is important.

The Deal opens up an opportunity for a real debate over worker and union power and in particular the right to strike, which means a fight over repealing all the anti-trade union laws and replacing them with positive rights.

The idea of compulsory sectoral bargaining across the entire economy must be argued for and can be joined up with Just Transition and indeed socialisation of the economy. □

• John Moloney is assistant general secretary of the PCS civil service union, writing here in a personal capacity

Scottish FE campaign steps up

By Ann Field

The campaign of rolling strike action by EIS FELA – the Further Education section of the Scottish teachers' union – entered its third week at the start of June.

EIS FELA members have not had a pay rise since 2021. The latest offer from the employers' side, College Employers Scotland (CES), is a single pay rise of £5,000 for 2022, 2023 and 2024. Taking inflation into account, this amounts to a pay cut in real terms. It is also a lower pay rise than that received by other public sector workers in Scotland over the same period.

The current wave of strikes began at the end of February with a one-day Scotland-wide strike by union members. This was followed by six one-day strikes during March in individual colleges in the constituent

cies of the then First Minister, Deputy First Minister, Education Secretary and Minister for Further Education.

In April EIS FELA members struck on different days in all Scottish FE colleges, leading into the current action of nine days of strikes in May and June by union members on the same days in all colleges.

This culminates in four days of strikes in the first week in June.

The CES is taking a hard line. It has described its current offer as "full and final", and one that will need to be funded through cuts to services and courses (i.e. a higher pay rise would result in even bigger cuts and job losses).

According to the CES, EIS FELA members who take part in the marking boycott scheduled for the end of the academic year will have 100% of their pay docked, although in-



dividual colleges have varied in their enthusiasm for carrying out this threat.

In fact, EIS FELA members will still mark coursework. Only, they will not upload the results into their colleges' IT systems. This makes the threat of docking 100% of pay even more outrageous.

Individual colleges have also already been pushing ahead with course closures. Last week the City of Glasgow College, for example, announced

that it was shutting its trade union education department, run under contract to the TUC.

The Scottish Government has taken a back seat throughout the dispute. It has not condemned the plan to dock 100% of pay. It has not proposed to increase the funding of the FE sector in Scotland. In fact, with Swinney and Forbes now in charge, the direction of travel is in the opposite direction.

The dispute raises much

broader issues than just rates of pay. It also intersects with government underfunding of the FE sector and plans to "reform" the FE sector, by promoting closer ties between colleges and the private sector business and by imbuing the FE sector with a stronger "business ethos".

Some FE colleges are already well advanced along that road and need no encouragement to continue to do so. Hence the recent strikes in individual colleges in opposition to cuts in courses, cuts in jobs, and increased workloads for lecturers.

Union branches should organise delegations to support local picket lines on strike days. But the EIS also needs to issue a call, backed by the STUC, for support, including financial support, from the trade union movement throughout Scotland. □

What we stand for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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A slow week. Our total stands at £12,790. The election campaign will have distracted attention, but, as we produce more posters, leaflets, and other materials, it

also means we need more money. □

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Sharp talk then a letdown



Diary of a trackworker

By Matt Shaw

This week I complete my series on NUR and RMT general secretaries I have known. Still in office at the time of writing, Mick Lynch has proved something of a disappointment after a relatively good start.

He took over briefly when Mick Cash went off sick, complaining of bullying at head office. That was convenient. The National Executive and some full timers had started to take their responsibilities more seriously and were putting the leadership under more pressure to take action. After a short break we had the news that Mick Cash was resigning,

Lynch was elected as a more militant leader. But only in comparison to Cash.

In the early days, with his vigorous campaigning in the strike ballots of 2022 for Network Rail and the Train Operating Companies (TOCs), it felt like we had turned a corner. I liked his sharp handling of the media and the aggressive way he dealt with interviewers.

As time went on, however, this seemed to be all it was, sharp talk. No way forward. And then even the TV appearances lost their initial charm. What was being said became like the TV at Christmas, all repeats and nothing fresh. Indeed it looked like a re-run

of the driver-only operation dispute on Southern Rail, where repeated one day strikes and overtime bans went nowhere. In both the engineering dispute with Network Rail and the disputes with the Train Operating Companies, the three days of initial action were downgraded to odd days, months apart.

We had talks where management called the tune, then the withdrawal of planned strikes in return for two weeks of "deep talks". What did that mean? It turned out to be nothing except exasperating to the membership.

With the separation of the Network Rail staff from the TOCs in terms of strike days and other action the stage was set for the final act. Putting out the offer to the members in Network Rail with no recommendation, while leaving the TOCs workers still in dispute, was a tragedy worthy of a Shakespearean play.

After months of stagnation and little news coming out of head office, the vote was nearly two to one to accept. The "success" was truly a pyrrhic victory. We received a below-inflation wage settlement for the two years it covered, and the deal also waved through the "Modernising Maintenance" document which management was mad keen to bring in.

The settlement of the pay dispute torpedoed any organised fight against "Modernising Maintenance", as it was to be brought in through the areas with little or no national input.

The TOCs dispute over pay was allowed to run on and at the time of writing has not been resolved. Indeed, the next pay claim has been submitted with no sign of movement.

Lynch is still making appearances here and there, but not getting the headlines of old.

Mick Lynch is setting out his stall for retirement quite soon. The next General Secretary will need to have a magic wand as a lot of the membership are feeling pissed off, and rightly so.

The name that keeps cropping up is Eddy Dempsey, another "professional agitator" with not a lot of agitation to be professional about. His background is one of links to the *Morning Star* and the CPGB. His political style is aligned with a blend of Stalinism, nationalism, and populism that has led him to support Brexit and associating with reactionary warlords in Eastern Europe.

During the Network Rail and TOCs disputes he supported Mick Lynch, while also making regular appearances in the background while Mick Lynch was giving interviews. Somebody who wants to be seen as important and at the centre of things!

Suffice to say, nothing he's said or done shows anything other than a willingness to say what people want to hear at the time. If he gets into the General Secretary's position it will be to the detriment of genuine trade unionism both in the RMT and in the wider labour movement. □

An early film about transition



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

I Want What I Want from 1972 is based on a 1966 novel by Geoff Brown and directed by John Dexter (1925-1990). It tells the story of Roy/Wendy who, born a man, is increasingly uncomfortable about this. He feels trapped in his male body and wants to break out and become a woman.

His father, an army officer, is none too pleased when he discovers Roy dressing up in women's clothes. An almighty row breaks out and Roy leaves the parental home, adopts the name Wendy and begins a new life.

Given the problems still faced today



by individuals who wish to transition, imagine what it must have been like over fifty years ago. Wendy eventually finds lodgings where she is accepted, and wants to save up for an operation but the cost is £1,000, an impossible figure (approximately £23,000 today).

Despite an impressive performance from Anne Heywood playing both roles, the film does show its age and appears somewhat "stagey" in places.

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Nevertheless, online comments from people in the LGBTQ community suggest it is valued as one of the best of the early films dealing with transition.

• To watch online: bit.ly/aiwvf



Steel: Unite promises escalation



By Matt Dunn

On 30 May the Unite union announced it would be starting its industrial action at Tata Steel in South Wales with an overtime ban and work-to-rule from 18 June. This is a very limited form of action from just one of the three unions involved. The response from Tata was swift and aggressive.

During the campaign by Unite to build public support and win the strike ballot, Labour announced it would make £3bn available to protect steel-making in South Wales. The Labour Party urged Tata to pull back from "any irreversible decisions" until after the general election.

A deal from the Tories to give Tata £500m, with no guarantees of jobs, won't be signed off before the election. Labour have promised to ditch that deal. But Labour's offer falls well short of Unite's demands to keep one blast furnace open while work is done to modernise the site, and keep all jobs.

Following the announcement of industrial action Tata threatened to instead bring forward the date for closing blast furnace five (September; it's June for blast furnace four) and to pull enhanced redundancy packages from the table. (Voluntary redundancy opens 3 June).

Unite general secretary Sharon Graham has said: "Unite and its members will not tolerate Tata's bullyboy tactics and neither should Labour. The union is now preparing to escalate industrial action in direct response to the company's threats."

Reps are meeting to consider this escalation and a demonstration is being planned by supporters. □

Doctors will strike from 27 June



By Sacha Ismail

Junior doctors in England have not struck in their dispute for "pay restoration" – a serious plan to restore real-terms pay to 2008 levels – since late February. (There have been strikes in Wales and Northern Ireland.) Now their strike is back with a bang, for five days just before the general election (27 June to 2 July). Come the election, junior doctors in England will have struck for 44 days since March 2023. They are half the hospital-doctor workforce.

Of course the government and the right-wing media have denounced the

junior doctors and the British Medical Association (BMA) for striking during the election. In fact, the decision should be reason for congratulation. If only more workers were making use of this opportunity to publicise their cause and press their demands.

The Labour Party has said it will negotiate with the BMA to bring the dispute to an end, but refused to commit to anything concrete. Labour activists and trade unionists should use the election period and the strike to ramp up pressure on the Labour leadership, making this a big issue in the labour movement.

UCU congress: a mixed bag

By a UCU member

Against a background of acute financial crisis in post-16 education, the congress of the college lecturers' union UCU met on 29-31 May.

Motions passed included support for: recruitment, resisting casualisation, winning union recognition, the abolition of tuition fees, working with other sector unions, a UK-wide demonstration in the autumn term in defence of education.

Shamefully the second day of the congress was stopped by a strike by UCU staff organised in Unite. Key issues are the undermining of industrial recognition agreements and the heavy-handed use of disciplinary procedures, which have been discriminatory against black workers.

In the debate on Ukraine, activists were rightly pleased that affiliation to the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign went



through. However the motion was amended so that "military aid" was taken out of the clause, "call on governments to continue providing aid and military aid to Ukraine" and the "call for an immediate ceasefire" was added. Thus an incoherent pacifist twist was given to an otherwise excellent motion. The amendments directly contradict the motion's "support for the right of the Ukrainian people to self-determination and self-defence."

Motions on Gaza were, as [previously reported](#), a mixed bag. More incoherence was injected into UCU policy when a clause which asked the union to endorse the "single democratic secular state in Israel-Palestine" was removed from a motion, while the statement "the two state solution is unviable" (in any context whatsoever?) was retained.

Activists in the union will need to push hard for policy passed at a special conference last month committing the union to return to UK-wide action over cuts. We need an industrial strategy and we need to link to demands on a Labour government to fully invest in post-16 education and to reintroduce free education. □



THE VESTAS JOBS BATTLE



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Public-sector trade unionists need to push and prepare struggles under and against a Labour government. Mobilising support for the junior doctors can help generate the right attitude and spirit.

The BMA says "details about pickets and rallies will be available soon" – hopefully a good sign after a period in which the union sometimes seemed to discourage picket lines. Socialists and trade unionists should make a proper effort to mobilise a wider labour movement presence.

We should also invite BMA speakers to meetings and propose donations to the junior doctors' strike fund: bmastrikefund.raisely.com □

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Stop the victimisation of Justine Canady!

By Katy Dollar

The Lewisham Branch Secretary of the public services union, Justine Canady, is facing redundancy in a clear case of victimisation for trade union activities by Lewisham's Labour Council.

The planned restructure was not flagged up on forward plans, as is the rule with restructures at Lewisham. Hers is the only post affected. At the meeting to discuss the restructure she was told by HR representatives that she would no longer be eligible for the Branch Secretary post, a decision which would be for the union not the employer.

Justine is a young member and Chair of the Greater London Young Members' forum.

The Branch Secretary post had previously been held by a male member who had been Nalگو, then Unison, secretary since the 1970s. It is clear Lewisham Council, or at least some in the hierarchy, are spooked by a change, and trying to prevent a new leadership establishing itself.

The change of branch leadership has led to increased turnout in national consultation, a net increase in membership for the first time, recruitment of new reps and activists, and a new branch focus on equalities work with a Black Members' Officer, an LGBT Officer, a Women's Officer, a Disabled Members' Officer, and an Equalities Officer recruited.

Lewisham is a Labour Council and the local

labour movement, as well as Unison branches across London are mobilising to fight back.

The labour movement has not been giving rep victimisation the priority it deserves. Over 100 CWU reps in Royal Mail were suspended in during the strike wave.

Yet anti-victimisation campaigns are winnable if the unions are committed to win them. This is important not just to save Justine's job and protect Lewisham Unison from the Council's attack, but as a warning to other employers. The Institute of Employment Rights say there has been an increase in rep victimisation since 2000.

The law – Section 146 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 (TULR(C)A 92) – protects workers from being subjected to detriment related to trade union membership or taking part in trade union activities. Some employers take a calculated risk that paying out after an employment tribunal case is worth it to prevent union militancy building in the workplace. Even where cases can won in court, our chance of success is increased by lively campaigning alongside legal action.

We must not allow any rep to be victimised. A vigorous campaign is already underway in the local community and the Labour Party.

Write to the Mayor, Brenda Dacres, at brenda.dacres@lewisham.gov.uk. Sign the open letter, bit.ly/letter-jc

They make Tony Blair look like a pluralist

By Rhodri Evans

Tony Blair, in his heyday, was criticised for being right-wing, but also and bitterly for being a "control freak".

Behind Keir Starmer sit a cadre of ultra-Blairites. Morgan McSweeney and Matt Pound are most often named in reportage. For them, it seems, the lesson from the New Labour years of 1997 to 2010 is that Blair was not "controlling" enough.

In the end Blair allowed room for the unions to nudge him into a few social policies, and for the Labour left to revive, although slowly and clumsily, in 2010-9. For them, that is what "went wrong". Not the privatisations, the contracting-out, the tuition fees, the Iraq war...

The new ultra-Blairites are also people who have spent almost all their adult lives doing politics "top down" from an office via electronic media. Old-style Labour right-wingers usually had more background of lived pluralism, with "real-life" politics in a union or at least among Labour students.

Thus the regime in which even a slightly "off-message" comment on social media can bring instant suspension, which can last years without a hearing or even statement of charges.

We should not forget that the Corbyn leaders and Momentum, over four years in which it changed many things, did nothing to help our (defeated) efforts to end the instant-suspension rules. We should not forget that the culture of dealing with differences by banning has been widespread on the left too. In future left-wing surges in the labour movement, we have to do better. But we should not paralyse ourselves by exaggerating the power of those ultra-Blairites. They messed up badly over trying to block Hackney North Labour MP Diane Abbott and had to retreat.

In October last year, a good few Labour activists declared that they had been banned from advocating a ceasefire in Gaza, and some quit because of that supposed ban. In fact, where members mustered the will to put pro-ceasefire motions in local Labour Parties, mostly they were not blocked and they won the votes.

Not all left MPs have been cleared out. The Socialist Campaign Group of left MPs has more members now than when it was set up in 1983, at a height of Labour leftism. It is quiet and ineffectual, but then over the 40 years it has rarely been



otherwise. Many Labour right-wingers, like John McTernan and Michael Crick, are loudly hostile to the ultra-Blairites' push, and many "soft lefts" quietly so. The unions are audibly resentful.

None of that is a guarantee. Maybe the dissidents, the soft-leftists, the pluralists, or the unions will develop a fight back after the battering down for (and probably for some while after) the election. Maybe not.

Blair was able to impose new rules on Labour and empty out the local Labour Parties very fast. His main trouble in his early days as prime minister was from backbench MPs, not local parties or the unions.

The French Socialist Party and the Dutch Labour Party, once their countries' biggest parties, have seen "victories" which brought them to "power" (neoliberal administration) reduce their base to almost nothing. The SP had 1.75% of the vote in France's 2022 presidential election. Labour's base has been resilient than the SP's, but it would be foolish to rely on historical fact to save us.

It depends. But partly it depends on us, on what we do now.

Members in Brighton Kemptown Labour Party, seeing their Labour left MP Lloyd Russell-Moyle barred from standing on a contrived pretext, have responded by [declaring](#): "If we are to give our blood, sweat and tears to return the next Labour MP to parliament then we should be at the heart of the process of their selection".

Some of them, we understand, plan to demand of the new imposed candidate that he stand down as MP when Russell-Moyle is cleared of the spurious charges, and allow Russell-Moyle to replace him in a by-election.

They may also call for Jeremy Corbyn to be re-admitted to the Labour whip if (as is likely) he wins in Islington North.

Steadfastness for such demands and for socialist ideas is the answer, not quitting and dispersing. □



Solidarity

For a workers' government



By Ira Berkovic

On Friday 31 May, US President Joe Biden announced to the world's media a new proposal for a ceasefire and hostage-release agreement. Biden and other US officials first presented the proposed deal as originating from Israel itself. On 2 June, Ophir Falk, a senior adviser to Netanyahu, said Israel had agreed to the "framework" of what Biden announced, but not its detail. An initial response from Hamas indicated it viewed the proposal positively. US officials said they expected Israel to accept the deal fully if Hamas did.

Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich, far-right ministers in Netanyahu's coalition government, have said they will quit if the deal is accepted. Yair Lapid, leader of the largest opposition bloc outside of Netanyahu's coalition, has urged the government to accept the deal, and said he will provide a "safety net", suggesting his Yesh Atid party will provide votes to allow the government to continue functioning should the far right quit.

In terms of its substance, the deal appears little different to the one that was on the table in early May, which Hamas said it accepted but Israel turned down. The agreement involves three-phases, beginning with a six-week ceasefire, the withdrawal of Israeli troops from populated areas, and the release of some Israeli hostages and Palestinian prisoners. During this phase, at least 600 aid trucks per day would enter Gaza. The second phase would see the release of remaining hostages and full withdrawal of Israeli troops. The final phase would focus on reconstruction of Gazan infrastructure.

Up to now, Hamas has insisted that any ceasefire agreement must state clearly that the ceasefire is permanent and the war is definitively over. Israel has rejected this, insisting that the war will not end until Hamas is completely destroyed. In recent days that language has occasionally softened slightly in Israeli government statements, some of which now say its aim is to destroy Hamas's "military and governing capabilities".

From a democratic, internationalist perspective, any settlement which does not address the national oppression at the root of the conflict and secure Palestinian self-determination (an Palestinian state alongside Israel) is limited and inadequate. The deal appears to lack clarity on postwar arrangements for Gaza, and leaves much in the hands of further negotiations between Israel and Hamas – i.e., reactionary and bad-faith actors.

But acceptance of the deal is the best, in fact the only, immediately available mechanism for halting the slaughter in Gaza, creating conditions for an increase in aid to stem a horrific humanitarian crisis, and return surviving Israeli hostages. As the left-wing Arab-Jewish social movement Standing Together [put it](#): "Anyone who has been chanting 'ceasefire now' or 'bring them home' over the past eight months must support Biden's proposal for Israel and Hamas. No deal is perfect, but this is not a moment to seek perfection, it is a moment to act urgently to save lives." □