

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

STOP NEW HORROR IN GAZA



Protest in Israel for
a ceasefire and
hostage deal.

Pic: @oren_ziv

Ceasefire! Peace! Equal Rights!

See inside

James Connolly and the left

How the "Connolly" of
the left has changed
since 1950s

Pages 10-12

Trying to disarm Ukraine

Efforts by Stop the
War in 2024 to stop
supplies to Ukraine

Pages 8-9

Syria: stirrings against HTS

Still some room for
politics to revive after
Assad

Page 7

NHS: funding, not "fix-it"s

We demand a well-
funded public service
for all

Page 2

NHS: funding, not “fix-its”!



The NHS waiting list is still 7.5 million. The Labour government's latest response is to step up contracting-out to private healthcare, plus a flurry of little fix-its, new “targets” and “league tables” and “incentives” and the like.

Private hospitals have many NHS doctors doing jobs “on the side”, so the contracting-out will funnel scarce NHS cash to private profit much more than it will expand capacity.

As we said during the Covid emergency, private healthcare resources should simply be requisitioned for the NHS.

The 30 October Budget allotted £22.6 billion more to the NHS. But £4.8 billion of that was to fill the gap between spending plans approved by the Tories and the funds scheduled for them. The real increase was better than the squeezes since 2010, but not remotely enough to turn the NHS round.

The [Health Foundation](#) said at the time that real improvement would require a bigger increase than that every year to come.

The NHS needs hospital repairs and maintenance, up-to-date equipment, sufficient staff well-paid, and back-up from care services able to help elderly or frail people in recovery after hospital treatment for acute conditions.

To get all that? Tax the rich! Before the Budget Tax Justice UK [calculated](#)



that a mild wealth tax plus equalising capital gains tax with income tax plus a few other measures would yield £52 billion a year. The Budget brought [no wealth tax](#), and only minor changes to capital gains tax.

Worse

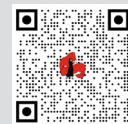
The NHS is in a worse condition than under Thatcher, yet demonstrations and protests are small compared to what we did in the 1980s or 90s or even the early Blair years.

The big public services union Unison is committed on paper to calling a national NHS demonstration, but nothing is moving yet.

We need action for two reasons. To mend healthcare. And to establish the labour movement as the effective force battling the Labour government on working-class issues. If we do not do that, the Reform Party and its like will be able to channel anger in nationalist directions. □



Activist Agenda



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

Meetings

Sat 18 Jan: March for Palestine. Noon, Portland Place, London W1A 1AA

Sat 18 Jan: Women's Marches in many cities, in London from Waterloo

Sat 25 Jan: “Troublemakers at Work” online, 2pm-4pm, [bit.ly/t-mak](#)

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](#), Insta [@work-erslibertystudents](#), 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](#)

Campaigns

For: UK Friends of Standing Together, Labour Left Internationalists, Workers Against the CCP, Free Our Unions, Solidarity With Iranian Workers, Neurodivergent Labour, Ukraine Solidarity Campaign, Labour Campaign for Free Movement – contact details, activities, template motions, etc. – see [workersliberty.org/agenda](#). For environmental campaigning email [awl@workersliberty.org](#). □

The kickback from tick-box feminism



By Katy Dollar

Third of a series on the resurgence of misogyny among some young men

Why do the messages of the manosphere work? Because we are all primed for them!

Sexual entitlement – the idea of women existing to serve men as domestic servants and passive recipients of sex. The natural superiority of men. The idea that structural changes to reduce inequality are unfair or unworkable. Measuring self-worth by how many people you bang, while

at the same time seeming to actually hate the people you're trying so hard to go to bed with. Such ideas extend mainstream views in society. In fact, they're views that infect the left and labour movement too.

Go to the gym/wear a suit/hustle/fuck – shunning empathy and social solidarity for some monstrous violent individualism. Where did they get that from? These are not only ideals of the far right.

Told off

On the other hand less reactionary sections of bourgeois politics have captured vibrant and exciting liberation movements and formed them into a rules-based equality agenda. The politics of liberating humanity feels more like being told off by an HR manager.

Equalities are treated as a set of rules that everyone has to pretend are obeyed by people at the top. Most black workers know that one of the worst things you can do at work is point out unfair treatment from management based on racism: if nobody actually uses the N word then you will be seen as trouble. Mothers at family friendly companies still experience pregnancy discrimination and losing money if their children are sick.

Instead equality between human beings is reduced to tick box training courses and messaging.

- Do not touch black people's hair without permission
- Use people's correct pronouns
- Don't comment on women's appearance in the work-

place. These are all important things for people to know. But we need to teach them in the context that people's feelings and experiences are important.

We should respect each other. We shouldn't be subjected to grinding indignities that chip away at our sense of self.

Neither your employer, nor bourgeois politicians can say we shouldn't be subjected to grinding indignities that chip away at our sense of self because they are working for a system that does just that. Of course, societies need rules, and indeed rules about how we treat one another, but an actual commitment to human equality wouldn't primarily be experienced as a list of things you shouldn't do – it would be

a collective positive endeavour.

In opposition to this censorious liberal method you have influencers present a celebratory version of masculinity. They legitimise male grievances including towards women. Their content is enticing boys and young men who feel masculinity is being unfairly stigmatised. You have Trump, who says: grab what you want/say what you want/there are no rules for me.

We won't counter the rise of the right with moralism or with triangulating with bigotry. We need a social programme that unites our class and reasserts the festival of the oppressed, a view of human equality that centres collective struggle for individual and collective flourishing. □

Stop new horror in Gaza!

By Ira Berkovic

The people of Gaza face worsening conditions, and threats of new horrors, as Israel's destructive war grinds on.

Despite public claims to the contrary, the evidence points to Israel having imposed a version of the so-called "General's Plan" on northern Gaza, based on a "surrender or starve" strategy of a near-total blockade on all aid supplies, combined with sieges and air raids. Strikes have also continued against other sites throughout Gaza.

The operation in the north has fo-

End the cycle of war!

"My name is Varda, I'm originally from Kafr Yasif. I've been an educator for a long time. After 7 October, I saw the scale of the disaster, on both sides, and I started to think, 'How much more do we want to suffer?' I wrote a [social media] post in which I said that these wars only bring more evil, on both the Palestinian and Israeli sides, and it's not ending. I wrote from the depths of my heart, 'How much longer will we continue with this system?' I wrote, 'I am hurting for the blood that has been spilled on both sides.'

"[My employer] sent me a letter: suspension, and invitation to a hearing. I started crying. I felt as if a knife had entered my heart. Every time I remember this moment, I feel the knife in my heart. There has been a wave of silencing directed at the Arab-Palestinian society in Israel, to tell people to be silent, so people will think, 'If this peace activist was silenced, who will dare to speak?'

"There is no solution in war. There is no solution in violence. Only through peace and negotiation. I say this to Israelis, and to Palestinians. This cycle of war and revenge and hatred and death and destruction cannot continue. Between the [Jordan] river and the [Mediterranean] sea, there are 14 million people. All of them deserve to live with equal rights. All of them must live with peace and security. It's in the best interests of both sides." □

• Varda is a Palestinian citizen of Israel who was fired from her job as a lecturer because of an anti-war social media post. She was speaking in a video produced as part of Standing Together's "Yes, Peace" campaign. Text transcribed from Instagram, with minor edits.

cused most intensely on Jabalia, but there are now calls from some political and military figures to subject Gaza City, south of Jabalia, to the same levels of siege and blockade. With at least 100,000 civilians remaining there, any application of the "Generals' Plan" to Gaza City would be a bloodbath.

The aid blockade, the widespread devastation of Gaza's healthcare infrastructure, plus harsh winter weather conditions, are exacerbating acute humanitarian crises. The small number of hospitals that remain able to function have reported babies dying from hypothermia.

On 21 December, a Palestinian official told the BBC that talks to conclude a ceasefire and hostage-release agreement were "90% complete". Hopes have faded since and, whilst ceasefire negotiations in Qatar have resumed, a continued intensification of the multiple humanitarian crises caused by Israel's war seems more likely than any deal.

Within Israel, agitation by the religious far-right demanding the resettlement of Gaza has ratcheted up, with the Jewish-supremacist power brokers in Netanyahu's coalition government insisting settlement be formally incorporated into the aims of the war. According to Amos Harel in *Haaretz*, "Many of the personnel [in the IDF Southern Command], and in the reserve division, are working according to clear Hardali [Religious Zionist, the movement represented by far-right minister Bezalel Smotrich] ideology. As they see it, a window of opportunity beckons not only to vanquish Hamas but to reestablish settlements in the Gaza Strip and to block any future withdrawal."

Divisions

In early December, in an indication of the deepening divisions within Israeli society, former defence minister Moshe Ya'alon, a right-winger and no supporter of Palestinian liberation, publicly accused the government of pursuing a strategy of ethnic cleansing in Gaza, and voiced his support for the International Criminal Court arrest warrants against Benjamin Netanyahu and former defence minister Yoav Galant. Ya'alon also called for warrants to be issued against far-right ministers Itamar Ben Gvir and Smotrich.

A *Haaretz* investigation in December showed how IDF soldiers have been instructed to regard every Gazan who crosses an imaginary border in the Netzarim Corridor, an Israeli-occupied zone bisecting the territory, as a terrorist and legitimate target. *Haaretz* says its investigation revealed "indiscriminate killing and the routine classification of civilian casualties as terrorists."

A renewal of international pressure, and of solidarity with those in Israel and Palestine organising to oppose the war and demand equal rights for both peoples, with a real independent Palestinian state alongside a secure Israel, is needed.

The Palestinian Authority, the semi-state which operates with a limited degree of autonomy from the Israeli military occupation of the West Bank, has intensified security operations in recent days. This has included the closure of the West Bank headquarters of Al-Jazeera, and numerous raids against targets linked to Palestinian Islamic Jihad, an Islamist militia allied with, but distinct from, Hamas.

Interpretation

The most optimistic interpretation of the PA actions, and of the increased Israeli warfare in Gaza, is that they are part of jockeying to nail down the ceasefire deal which Trump says he wants done before he takes office on 20 January and tilt that deal in favour of Israel and to get some role for the PA. But the ceasefire remains hypothetical, the violence and the lack of food and healthcare in Gaza very real.

The PA's actions add to an increasingly violent and authoritarian atmosphere for the people of the West Bank, where over 700 people have died since 7 October 2023. Disposessions and demolitions of Palestinians' homes by Israeli occupation forces, and settler attacks against Palestinians, have also continued. House demolition orders in occupied East Jerusalem have nearly doubled since the start of the war on Gaza.

Israel is carrying out regular strikes on targets in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen, and has recently attacked military infrastructure in Syria. Further attacks on targets in Iran, especially those linked to Iran's nuclear programme, are seen as highly likely. The bellicosity of the Houthis and Iran towards Israel is an extension of the reactionary politics of those forces, which are deeply antisemitic; their attacks on Israel do nothing to advance Palestinian liberation. But equally, attacks by Israel on Yemen and Iran, even when conducted under the rubric of "security" and "self-defence", make all peoples in the region, including Jewish Israelis, less safe by perpetuating violence and militarism.

All peoples of the region – Arabs, including the Palestinians; Iranians; Kurds; Israeli Jews; and others – have a shared interest in a peaceful and democratic future. That future is, at present, extremely remote. Fascistic forces shape the politics of many nations in the region, including Israel and Iran, whose strategies combine the ideological commitments of fundamental-

ist religion with concerns for regional territorial and military power.

Forces consciously struggling towards a horizon of equal rights are minorities, often repressed and embattled. But unless such forces can grow, no peaceful and democratic future is possible. This is why Workers' Liberty stresses the central importance of international solidarity with forces such as Standing Together, a binational (Jewish-Palestinian) movement within Israel which resists war, occupation, and racism and fights for equal rights for both peoples, including an equal right to national self-determination. Our supporters are active in the UK Friends of Standing Together network, which aims to amplify and support Standing Together's struggles. Please join us. □ Stop the war! Ceasefire now! Release the hostages!

End the blockade of Gaza: for humanitarian aid; end restrictions on UNRWA

End the occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem

Full equality for the Palestinian minority in Israel

For an independent Palestine alongside Israel

UK government: recognise the State of Palestine, withdraw arms sale licenses to Israel, increase funding to UNRWA

Workers' unity and consistent democracy: for a socialist federation of the Middle East, with self-determination for national minorities including Kurds and Israeli Jews. □



UK Friends of Standing Together

Standing Together, Israel's fastest-growing grassroots movement over recent years, unites Jews and Palestinians within Israel to fight for an equal and just society, for peace, and against the occupation.

UKFoST promotes their work in the UK: for peace, justice, and equality for Israelis and Palestinians – Jews and Arabs – including an equal right to self-determination, and for the full equality of Palestinian citizens of Israel.

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

• [@omdimbeyachaduk](https://twitter.com/omdimbeyachaduk)

HTS's win in Syria: a plan made up by Israel?



By Jim Denham

Rational worries about the Islamists of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) notwithstanding, surely all self-proclaimed democrats and socialists welcomed the fall of Assad and his barbaric regime?

Well, not quite all: the *Morning Star* carried an article by international editor Roger McKenzie claiming that "activists labelled yesterday's collapse of President Bashar Assad's Syrian government a 'victory for imperialism'."

These "activists" turned out to be Communist Party of Kenya General Secretary Booker Omole: "This is not a triumph for democracy or self-determination: it is a victory for imperialism and reaction" and Vijay Prashad of the (Roy Singham-funded) Tricontinental Centre for Social Research: "There is no Syrian revolution. Syria will face a Libyan future."

In the same edition (9 Dec) an editorial was headed "Assad's downfall was part of imperialism's region-wide plan".

That's right: behind the overthrow of Assad was "imperialism", and, in particular, Israel, whose "assault on Hezbollah's human and material infrastructure" has now been "supplemented by a decisive assault on the Syrian state." Of course! We should have known that Israel would be behind it all!

This remarkable editorial deserves to be quoted at some length and any reader who thinks I'm being unfair can read the whole thing [online](#).

Highlights include

- "... notwithstanding a whole raft of legitimate criticisms that can be levelled against the Assad regime, [it] has been a secular obstacle to both imperial manoeuvres and jihadi assaults."
- "The Ba'athist regime ... stood for the unity and coherence of the secular state."
- "The reactivation of jihadi elements in opposition to Assad's rule and their forced subordination to HTS, the increased activity of Turkey's proxies in the region, as well as Kurdish elements, and the related activity of US-sanctioned elements ... fit exactly into imperialism's plan for the region."
- "The advance of the British-sponsored forces onto Damascus is part of this multi-state imperialist project,

the pivot of which is the assault on the Palestinian nation and the assertion of Israeli hegemony guaranteed by the Western states."

So, according to the MS, the fall of Assad is in fact part of the plan of "imperialism" to undermine the Palestinians and to assert Israeli "hegemony." This may come as a surprise to the many Palestinians who suffered at the hands of the Assad regime: according to a 2021 UNRWA report, at least four thousand Palestinians had been killed across Syria, with 1,796 detained and a further 332 unaccounted for, while the majority of Syria's pre-war Palestinian community had been internally displaced, many at least once, and one in five (around 120,000 people) had fled Syria altogether.

After wading the conspiratorialist geopolitical nonsense spouted by the MS, it was refreshing to read the thoughts of the secular feminist Syrian Leila Al-Shami, writing in *Leila's Blog* just before the fall of Assad:

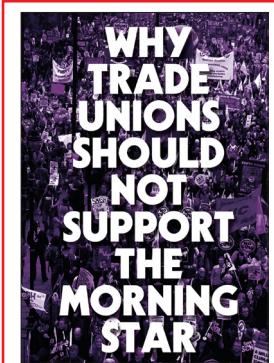
"Syrians are under no illusions; whatever comes after Assad will be a mess. The whole region is engulfed in flames.

"But for millions of Syrians nothing can be worse than this genocidal fascist regime which has murdered hundreds

of thousands, completely destroyed the country, handed it over to foreign powers, devastated the economy, caused half the population to flee their homes, and which now runs the country as a drugs cartel exporting the amphetamine Captagon.

"Should the regime fall, millions of Syrians will be able to return home, allowing civil activism to resume once more. If Assad falls, there is a chance to hope, and hope has been in short supply amongst Syrians."

Meanwhile, all the *Morning Star* (and the CPB, George Galloway, Vijay Prashad and the like) can do is bemoan the fall of a murderous tyrant and predict a "Libyan future" for the people of Syria. □



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Who rules Georgia? Ivanishvili?



Eric Lee

The pro-Moscow ruling party in Georgia, billionaire Bdzina Ivanishvili's "Georgian Dream," is growing increasingly desperate in its attempts to hold on to power following the 26 October elections.

First, they bungled the attempt to steal the election, as foreign and domestic observers pointed out that these were anything but "free and fair". This triggered the first wave of protests, with tens of thousands of Georgian citizens – many of them students – poured into the streets.

A month later, angered at the European response to the obviously fraudulent election result, Georgian Dream's

prime minister, Irakli Kobakhidze, openly turned against the EU. The government announced that accession talks on Georgian membership in the EU would be delayed by four years, until 2028.

And now, a month after that, they've bungled it again. Georgian Dream illegally convened a first meeting of the new parliament which only their representatives attended. All the opposition parties, which are grouped into four blocs, refused to take their seats. Nevertheless, Georgian Dream went ahead and elected a new President, under new rules. And they got this wrong as well.

They elected Mikheil Kavelashvili, a footballer who has played for Manchester City and a number of Russian, Swiss and Georgian clubs. In his time in Manchester, he played 28

games and scored three goals, and was not considered to be a brilliant player. Since retiring from professional football, he's taken up politics. He's earned a reputation in his homeland as being even more right-wing and more anti-Western than the ruling Georgian Dream.

His own faction, ironically known as "People's Power", promptly declared its independence from Georgian Dream, thereby instantly creating an official, albeit very loyal, opposition. So, two birds with one stone: a new president and a "multi-party" parliament.

Among the few who greeted Kavelashvili's inauguration – and indeed, celebrated it – were Putin and his cronies. And Kavelashvili's first acts in office were to sign legislation that further restricted freedom of speech and assembly.

Meanwhile, the current

Georgian president, Salome Zourabichvili, is having none of it. A one-time supporter of Georgian Dream, she has grown increasingly close to the various opposition parties. She announced that as the parliament was not legitimately elected, its decisions carry no legal weight. They could choose any random person – which is exactly what they did – and say that they're the president, but that has no meaning. Only a legitimately elected parliament has that authority.

Zourabichvili initially announced that she would remain in place, in the modest Orbeliani palace in the heart of the capital, Tbilisi, but once the farce of Kavelashvili's "inauguration" took place, she moved out. Bloodshed was avoided, confrontation delayed, and a new stage in the struggle

begun. Zourabichvili remains the president of Georgia. Many European leaders acknowledge this, though none have come to Tbilisi during the present crisis to show their solidarity. More important, the Georgian people still view her as their president. And that is ultimately theirs to decide.

In a democracy, sovereignty rests with the people. Only they can decide who governs their country. For the moment, the autocratic, pro-Russian Georgian Dream with its control of the police, courts and military represents the "organised violence" that, according to Lenin, was the essence of the state.

But this is only a moment. In the end, the sovereignty of the Georgian people, backed up by their friends in democratic countries, will prevail. □

Trump threatens the neighbours

By Tom Harrison

President-elect-again Trump spent nine hours on 25 December posting 40 messages which one commentator described as “basically a villain monologue”.

There were the usual attacks on “radical left lunatics” and boasts about how smart he is, but what noticeably marked this year’s Yuletide offering was a series of threats against America’s closest geographical neighbours.

How seriously should these threats be taken? Even Canada’s own far right do not want to become the 51st US state. When Trump holds out the prospect of having their taxes reduced by 60%, the majority of Canadians know what that means. Goodbye universal health care! Not wishing to be plagued by mass shootings and further opioid epidemics are further sound reasons why Trump’s proposal is greeted with derision in Canada.

In fact you’d probably find a large slice of the US population envious of the welfare provision north of the border.

Trump’s designs on Greenland need to be taken more seriously though. It is an autonomous territory of Denmark, but the US made a \$100 million offer to buy it back in 1946. In his first term at the White House, Trump made similar noises, no doubt wanting to go down in history as making a bigger territorial acquisition than when Alaska was bought from Russia in 1867.

The trouble is that neither Danes or Greenlanders have any desire to sell. Though the Inuit people who are 90% of Greenland’s population have had a troubled relationship with Denmark, their politicians are well aware of how America has dealt with its First Nation population. And they’ve no desire to slip down the ranks of social welfare spending from Denmark’s fifth place to



the USA’s number 21 spot.

Trump’s remarks concerning Greenland have been couched in term of national security, ownership and control being “an absolute necessity.” The US has actually had a military base in Greenland for decades at Pituffik, but Trump is eyeing the territory’s potential mineral wealth, especially its rare earth metals.

If the Danes won’t sell up, what about the idea of taking it over by force? A population of under 60,000 is unlikely to put up much resistance and Denmark’s armed forces would be overwhelmed. Even under Trump the US military is surely not “unwoke” enough to invade a fellow Nato member; but in a couple of years’ time, America may not be in Nato.

Mexico was naturally included in the seasonal splatter of threats. The USA has invaded Mexico at least ten times, but left off doing so just over a century ago. Now the Maga movement wants the practice resumed. “Bomb Mexico to stop fentanyl” is a slogan with wide currency in the Republican Party and plays well with the Trump base as do all other attacks on Mexico and Mexicans.

Trump expects US military action against drug cartels by deployment of Special Forces to play out like some kind of Hollywood movie.

Measures to deal with America’s insatiable demand for them would be better, but that would involve a big rethink about health and social welfare provision. The final country Trump hit on was Panama, calling for a “return” of the canal to US control. Allegedly high fees charged to US shipping and a totally baseless claim that Chinese troops are stationed there were his justification for a reprise of the “big stick” foreign policy promoted by Theodore Roosevelt at the beginning of the last century as American imperialism began its ascent to superpower status.

“Speak softly and carry a big stick”, said Roosevelt. Basically it meant negotiate with other states to get what you want, and if they don’t give in to your demands, threaten them with military force. The idea of Trump speaking softly is improbable – one cartoonist reinterpreted it as “shout loudly and carry a big shtik” – but the power to clobber neighbours to the south is an ever present danger for them.

Panama

Panama was a province of Colombia until a separatist movement with US backing broke away in 1903. The US then established a Canal Zone five miles either side of the canal which cut the new state of Panama in half and was effectively part of the USA for over half a century. For most of its existence the Zone was run on discriminatory Jim Crow lines.

The canal was eventually handed over to Panamanian administration in 1977. But the US invaded Panama in 1989 to replace formerly CIA funded dictator Manuel Noriega after he went rogue.

Trump seems to be harking back to those times of ascendant US imperialism, desiring total US dominance of the entire western hemisphere. It fits in with his view that there should be two or

three major powers running the world, with all the lesser states mere pawns on the board. All in tune with his buddy in the Kremlin, who models his foreign policy on recreating the Russian empire along the lines of Catherine the Great.

There will be big anti-Trump protests – initially called as “Women’s March”, now “People’s March” – on 18 January in Washington and other cities. It remains possible that the Senate will not confirm some of his wilder nominations, like Pete Hegseth for Defense or Robert F Kennedy Jr for health. The Republicans have a 53-47 majority in the Senate, so if the well-known anti-Trump Republican Senators Susan Collins and Lisa Murkowski vote against, it takes only two other Republican defectors to block such people.

But we are being pushed back to a world of spheres of influence – a free hand for Putin in Ukraine and maybe elsewhere in Europe, whilst Trump does similar in the other half of the globe. Socialists must oppose all imperialism whether from Washington, Moscow or Beijing. □

- The final tally for the US House of Reps was a 220-215 Republican majority, not 221-214 as projected. One Republican rep has resigned and not yet been replaced, so it now stands at 219-214.



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The opposite of the promises

Pride in Labour has made this statement about the Labour government making the ban on puberty-blockers for young trans people indefinite.

The Health Secretary, Wes Streeting, [has] announced that the ban on puberty blockers would be made indefinite. This is a deeply concerning and regressive decision that has struck fear in so many trans people.

This decision represents a betrayal of Labour’s commitment to equality and dignity

for trans people.

Wes Streeting, who won his seat in the 2024 General Election by just 528 votes, should, as a gay man, understand the harm caused by discriminatory government policies. His decision to expand the ban on puberty blockers demonstrates a shocking disregard for the needs of trans youth and their lived realities. This policy, which will cause real harm, is not leadership – it is a failure to protect those who rely on the government to safeguard their rights and dignity. Street-

ing’s approach undermines the trust and hope that many placed in Labour’s promise to be a government of compassion and progress.

The Labour Party promised to remove indignities for trans people and this policy does the opposite.

When the Labour Party won the General Election in July, there was no mention of puberty blockers in the manifesto. The Cass Review, which has already faced criticism, did not explicitly recommend a ban on puberty blockers. The

reality is that no one voted for this measure. While we understand that governments must occasionally take decisions not outlined in their manifestos, this decision represents a betrayal of Labour’s commitment to equality and dignity for trans people.

The Labour Party pledged to remove indignities for trans people and this policy does the opposite. It undermines the healthcare needs of some of the most vulnerable people in our society – trans youth. It denies them access to treat-

ment and exacerbates the stigma they already face.

We unequivocally condemn this decision. It is not just a failure to protect trans rights but a failure by the Labour Party to stand by its core principles of justice, equality, and compassion. We call on Wes Streeting to reverse this decision and instead focus on improving healthcare access and outcomes for trans people through informed, compassionate policies. □

- Survey of Cass Report: bit.ly/cass-d

On the sidelines, or inside?



Environment

By Owen Flood

People and Planet (a social and climate justice NGO) launched its Fossil Free Careers campaign in 2021. According to P&P's website at least seven universities have ended fossil fuel student recruitment – this has been mostly at universities that focus on the

THE VESTAS JOBS BATTLE HOW WIND TURBINE WORKERS BECAME A POWER



The 2nd edition contains new material, plus photos from the campaign and occupation. £4 (inc. post) bit.ly/shop-wl

Arts. 19 student unions supported the campaign. The University and College Union (UCU) 2022 congress backed it.

The campaign wants universities to:

- Refuse all new relationships with oil, gas, and mining companies to recruit students on their campuses
- End all existing contracts and agreements with oil, gas, and mining companies to recruit students
- Adopt an Ethical Careers Policy which explicitly excludes oil, gas, and mining companies from recruitment opportunities.

Solidarity agrees that fossil-fuel industries should be run down, but we do not agree that encouraging environment-minded students to avoid jobs there is the way to do it.

Generally, we encourage left-wing students after uni to go for jobs in strategic industries or where there is an active union so that they can do workplace organising. Jobs in NGOs or on the staff of unions may look more “ethical”, but the world will be changed by worker action, not by individual ethical career choices.

Environmental and left causes currently lack worker-activists rooted in workplaces.

The energy by P&P put into stopping universities having fossil fuel companies at career fairs would be better directed to aid for workplace and political organising.

Much as we can't shop our way out of the climate crisis, we can't individually career-choose out of it, either.

The Green Bans movement of builders labourers in Australia in the early 1970s, or aerospace engineering workers at Lucas Aerospace who worked out a plan to move from weapons manufacturing to more socially useful goods, or even [Stanford University](https://www.stanford.edu) students and staff who have got their campus to go for net-zero, are better models.

We need worker-activists in “green” industries too. The renewable energy industry has expanded in the last two decades, but currently it is scaling down in many areas..

In 2009 workers at the Vestas wind turbine blade factory in the Isle of Wight occupied their own factory against it being shut down. In the end solidarity was insufficient for them to win more than better redundancy pay, but that was in part because there was no union organisation in the factory before the occupation began.

Vestas later opened a new blade factory on the island. Now it is shutting that down, too. Once again, there is no union organisation in the factory. This time, it looks like there is also not enough worker activism in the area to stage the protest meetings and action we got in 2009.

In 2019 school strikes across the world denounced the climate emer-



gency. Some small groups of workers did lunchtime protests or walk-outs in solidarity. But, by the time Covid lockdowns overtook us, no-one had yet built enough continuing organisation of students and workers in a school even to get the school to “green” itself.

We know of one school in Australia – [Corinda State High](https://www.corinda.qld.edu.au), in Brisbane – which did declare itself net-zero. But that turned out to be a personal initiative of the school principal, achieved by buying carbon credits.

The way to beat the ecocidal drive of capitalism is not to find places on the sidelines for ourselves personally, but to organise in the belly of the beast. □

Socialist Alternative: a split, but going where?



Eye on the Left

By Matt Cooper

Last year International Socialist Alternative (ISA) [split](https://www.isa-socialist.org). The ISA itself was the product of a 2019 split in the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) led by the Socialist Party of England and Wales ([SP\(EW\)](https://www.spew.org)).

SP(EW) organised the split against a more positive attitude to autonomous campaigning by women, racialised minorities and marginalised groups from the CWI's US section, [Socialist Alternative](https://www.socialistalternative.org), and by the Socialist Party (Ireland) ([SP\(I\)](https://www.sp(I).org)), which launched a socialist-feminist project, [Rosa](https://www.rosafeminist.org), in 2013, active especially in the 2018 abortion rights referendum.

The SP(EW) had moved some way from the old Mili-

tant's dismissal of all feminist and minority campaigning as a middle-class distraction, but evidently felt SAlt-US and SP(I) were out of control.

The ISA was the majority in the 2019 split but developed little critique of the CWI tradition and little new politics. It has lost ground since then, and has now had a full-scale split. The immediate driver is a sexual abuse scandal that many members of the ISA thought was mishandled by a leadership based in the British Socialist Alternative (SAlt(B)). I cannot comment on the case other than to say the accusations appear credible.

The dissidents condemned the ISA leadership as unaccountable, and declared themselves an international Faction to Defend Safeguarding, Socialist Feminism and Internal Democracy (SSFID).

At the end of August 2024 the SSFID declared it was split-

ting and forming its own “Project for a Revolutionary Marxist International” ([PRMI](https://www.prmi.org)). This new body seems to be centred on the SP(I), the Belgian LSP/PSL, and now the ISA Austrian group (which split in October 2024). PRMI supporters elsewhere in the world appear to be very small groups or individuals.

If this a programmatic difference here, it is around the strong commitment, in Ireland, Belgium, and Austria, to socialist feminism as embodied in Rosa.

It is said that SAlt(B) now has only four functioning branches. The PRMI-aligned group in Britain consists of a London-based Rosa group which publishes the socialist feminist [Zetkin Zine](https://www.zetkinzine.org), but has an agenda wider than feminist issues, plus some SAlt branches (mainly Coventry, perhaps Shrewsbury) and other individuals. Socialist Alternative USA

has split at least three ways. Its highest-profile member, Seattle city councillor [Kshama Sawant](https://www.kshama.org), has left to form a new organisation.

Where all this is heading is unclear. Other than its strong commitment to its brand of socialist feminism via Rosa, it is not clear what politics PRMI will develop. There are positive signs, such as support for the democracy protests in Georgia (which the ISA has ignored, having a slightly moderated form of the “neither Russia nor NATO” politics of much of the left).

However, it has not moved away from ISA's ambivalent position on Ukraine (backing the right to self-determination in words, but saying that opposition to NATO must mean opposition to arms for Ukraine).

One of the lessons that can be taken from this is a socialist international cannot follow the command-and-control mod-

els of the CWI and apparently also the ISA. The Third International, set up after the October 1917 Russian Revolution, operated, despite the immense authority of the leaders of the successful revolution, and the urgency it faced in revolutionary times, with lively public debate between and within national sections. The command-and-control model was introduced first by Zinoviev, from late 1923, and then consolidated by Stalin. It quickly corrupted and crushed a vital mass revolutionary movement. A caricature of Zinoviev works even worse with small, under-resourced groups. □

• This article is written by someone entirely outside these disputes and using second hand testimony. If anyone involved, particularly anyone without access to a publication that will carry their views, wants to comment, feel free to contact *Solidarity*.

Syria: stirrings against HTS

By Simon Nelson

Since 2011, the Syrian pound has lost 99% of its value; it stands at SYP 13,000 to US\$1. Syria's foreign reserves [may be](#) as little as \$200m, covering less than a month's worth of imports. Nearly 70% of Syrians live on less than \$3.65 a day. Unemployment stands at 50%. Before the protest movement against Assad began, Syria produced 400,000 barrels of oil per day. It now produces fewer than 100,000. Wheat exports have stopped, with harvests half of what they were in 2010.

The post-Assad Syrian economy will rely on aid and remittances from the diaspora. Saudi Arabia has already hosted a Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) delegation. Qatar, which has a long-term, if complex, relationship with the Syrian rebel groups including HTS, may be another donor. HTS has committed to further liberalisation and privatisation of the economy.

EU leaders have met HTS leader Ahmed al-Sharaa. Their first concern is the return of refugees. They have almost all ([despite protests](#)) stopped processing Syrian asylum claims.

The Gulf states hope to get some of maybe \$200 billion of reconstruction contracts. Turkey probably has the strongest political ties with the new Damascus government, and is promoting Turkish construction firms for the work. Sharaa claims that the Turkey-sponsored Syrian National Army, which continue to fight the Kurds in the northeast, will be integrated into a national Syrian army, but we will see.

The "new army" can't include the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), the Kurdish-led and US-backed force that continues to face SNA attacks. Turkey wants to drive the Kurds from the Turkish border and to root out the Kurdistan

Workers' Party (PKK), the Turkey-based Kurdish group that continues to fight an ongoing guerilla war with the Turkish state.

Turkish President Erdogan wants the SDF dissolved, but the US continues to view it as an essential ally. The SDF now controls the large prisons that hold up to 9,000 Daesh members and their families. The SDF warns that attempts to drive them out of the Kurdish region, known as Rojava, could allow Daesh to escape and regroup.

The Kurds can also count on support from Israel, which has called on the HTS-led government to respect Kurdish autonomy.

The HTS transitional government has rejected federalism in any guise. Its pledge to take all weapons into the hands of a national army implies direct conflict with the Kurds.

A lot will hinge on Trump. He has indicated he doesn't want to be involved with Syria, and may decide to withdraw the 2,000 US troops who support the SDF. But he will face pressure from the EU and Israel to continue to provide some support, and fear of a Daesh revival may have weight.

Sanctions

HTS wants sanctions imposed on Syria during the Assad regime to be lifted. Some target particular figures from the old regime, and HTS is still listed as a terrorist organisation by the US, EU, and, in fact, Turkey. The USA's Caesar Act in 2019 had conditions that would now be met for sanctions to be lifted, but Biden's military-spending bill passed in December extended the sanctions to 2029.

Israel's incursions into Syria now extend to about 30km past the Golan Heights. Israel may settle the Golan Heights, a territory not internationally recognised as Israel's. Netanyahu says that the Israeli troops will stay until he has guarantees that Syria's new government will respect Israel's security. There are already protests from Syrians living in the area.

Israel [continues](#) airstrikes against Assad regime arms dumps and weapons facilities.

HTS is hostile to Israel in principle, but it may seek a diplomatic relationship rather than risk escalation. Likewise with Russia, which, nervous about the future of its naval installations, has said it will not take any decision until March.

HTS is trying to consolidate the transitional government. The initial [cabinet](#) was entirely HTS functionaries who had governed Idlib, and included a Minister for Justice who presided over the [execution](#) of a woman for "adultery/prostitution" in 2015 when HTS was the al-Nusra Front, an Al-Qaeda affiliate.

Sharaa has now expanded the gov-



The second meeting of the Syrian Democratic Movement, in Damascus. Credit: [Omar Hassan](#)

ernment to include technocrats from the Assad regime, including at least one woman (to head the Central Bank); but the new military commanders include several foreign fighters, probably focused on their ideological goals rather than reconciliation in Syria. A group of Uzbek Islamists likely carried out the attack on a Christmas tree in Homs. [An attack](#) on a Greek Orthodox Church may also have been by foreign fighters affiliated with HTS.

Sharaa himself has now met with Christian, Druze and Alawite leaders. There are conflicting reports on the meetings. Sharaa has said that HTS rule in [Idlib](#) may not be the model across Syria, and that he wants a Syria that respects all its minorities. Many see hope in the so-called national dialogue due to start this month. But who will participate? And issues like Kurdish autonomy have been ruled out in advance.

Elections

The new regime has indicated that elections may not be for four years. It is true that Syria needs to develop its civil society, its freedom of assembly, and its rights for people to organise politically, but four years of HTS government will give them a long time to reshape Syria in an Islamist or, as the writer Aaron Y. Zelin says, "political jihadist", direction.

Proposed changes to the education curriculum, as reported by [Al-Monitor](#), include changing the phrase "path of goodness" to "Islamic path," and interpreting "those who have are damned and have gone astray" to refer to "Jews and Christians."

The definition of a martyr was changed to someone who died for "God" (instead of "the homeland"), and evolution was dropped from the science curriculum. After protests, HTS rowed back.

Sectarian attacks, the consolidation of HTS as a de-facto government, and the further fracturing of Syria into territories of competing rebel factions and warlords all remain possible. But there are some signs of revival of civil society. Café culture in Damascus and Aleppo has reopened a little, with some space for discussion about the future.

There has been a demonstration for secularism, which [may](#) have been remaining supporters of the old regime. It was allowed to [go ahead](#) and addressed by an HTS leader.

Omar Hassan from Socialist Alternative (Australia) reports signs of a small and heterogeneous left starting to organise. There have been a small protest of 50 against the changes to the school curriculum, and meetings to discuss the future.

He [reports](#) one response to people who say that the government needs to be [given time](#): "How can we give them more time? They sat down for two hours this week and produced this terrible reform of the education system. If we leave them alone, what damage will they do tomorrow? The first responsibility of a citizen is to hold their government to account". □

• See also [bit.ly/k-threat](#), [bit.ly/no-hts](#), and [bit.ly/wf-syria](#).

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A year of trying to st

Dale Street dissects the arguments from the Stop The War campaign against supplies for Ukraine

"The anti-war movement must not forget about the war in Ukraine" read the headline of an article posted on the Stop the War Coalition (STW) website in May 2024. The article's author – veteran Stalinist Andrew Murray – had a point.

Just three articles about Ukraine had been posted on the website since January. In fact, apart from a sudden spike at the close of 2024, STW had little to say about Ukraine throughout the year.

STW failed to publish even a single article by a Ukrainian in 2024. Instead, its Ukrainian output was a litany of reposts of articles by Lindsey German (Counterfire), Andrew Murray (*Morning Star*), Medea Benjamin and Nicolas Davies (Code Pink), and contributors to the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft.

The latter is held in particularly low esteem by its critics. As one of them commented on the eve of Bashar al-Assad's flight from Syria: "Assad's options are shrinking fast: Dubai, Moscow, or a Quincy Institute fellowship."

The STW's three online "rallies" of 2024 consisted of the usual faces: German, Benjamin, Kate Hudson (CND), Sophie Bolt (CND), Yuri Sheliashenko (the sole active member of the miniscule [Ukrainian Pacifist Movement](#)), German MP Sevim Dagdelen (a [Putin-apologist](#) who [blamed NATO](#) for Putin's invasion) and Tariq Ali (roundly [denounced](#) by the Ukrainian left for his position on the war, which he had [pre-dicted](#) would never occur).

Unsurprisingly, such "rallies" failed to pull a crowd. The STW "rally" marking the second anniversary of the Russian invasion has attracted less than 450 views on YouTube. Its September "rally" has attracted less than 350 views.

STW street activity about Ukraine also reached a new low. Its first, and sole, Day of Action about Ukraine did not take place until December. Protests were scheduled for seven towns, but four were called off due to Storm Daragh.

The protests' demand was the most abject slogan to have been raised by STW since the Russian invasion of 2022: "Pull the Missiles Out of Ukraine."

By contrast, earlier calls for Russia to pull its troops out of Ukraine – "We call for the immediate withdrawal of all Russian troops" (27/02/22), "STW continues to call for Russian troops to leave Ukraine" (23/06/22) – disappeared from view in 2024.

Instead, STW spent the year ruminating about how much territory, and in what form, should be abandoned by

Ukraine:

- "Russia may have to accept territory similar to that its forces currently control. The key outcome will be the separation of the Russian-dominated Donbass and Crimea from the remainder of Ukraine." (01/02)

- "Ukraine will not have to cede its juridical sovereignty over areas which Russian troops occupy in Donbas and Crimea, but it will have to admit it has lost control. The model is Cyprus." (05/12)

- "Kiev's (sic) dream of reimposing its authority on the areas now under Russian occupation is beyond realisation." (24/12)

Insofar as it concerned itself with the war in Ukraine in 2024, STW largely recycled its Putin-apologist propaganda of 2022 and 2023, albeit with an added dash of apocalypticism at the year's end.

STW continued to claim that responsibility for the invasion of Ukraine lay with NATO:

The invasion "owed something to NATO's expansionist policy over the preceding years" (27/11). The invasion could not be understood "without reference to the long history of NATO's aggressive eastern enlargement and attempts at incorporating Ukraine into the alliance" (13/08).

Eastward

But NATO's eastward expansion had largely been completed by 2004, 18 years before Putin's invasion. It had expanded because ex-Soviet states saw NATO membership as protection against potential Russian aggression.

In 2022 there had been no prospect of immediate or even medium-term Ukrainian membership of NATO. Ukraine was no closer to joining NATO in 2022 than it had been in 2008. Rather than "attempting to incorporate Ukraine into NATO", the latter had consistently blocked attempts by Ukraine to secure membership.

The war, STW continued to claim, was not one in which Ukraine defended its right to self-determination against Russian imperialist aggression. It was a proxy war in which Ukrainians were fighting on behalf of their "Western puppet masters" (01/02) and "wire-pullers in Washington and London" (27/02).

The conflict was "a proxy war with Russia" (19/08), "a NATO proxy war" (18/11), "a US-NATO proxy war" (18/11), "a proxy war with Russia" (21/11), "a proxy war of NATO with Russia" (25/11), "a proxy war between NATO and Russia" (24/12).

But STW could not find a single Ukrainian voice – other than Yuri Sheliashenko – to endorse its characterisa-



tion of the war. By contrast, there were plenty of Ukrainian [voices](#), completely ignored by STW, who viewed the claim of a "proxy war" with contempt:

"We find the language on the right and left that Ukrainian soldiers are somehow fighting as proxies for the West deeply offensive. This argument denies us our humanity and diminishes Ukraine's history of hard-won independence and the legitimacy of the people's choice of their democratically elected government. This is deceptive and harmful political rhetoric."

As in previous years, STW claimed that the West had blocked a negotiated end to the war in early 2022, and was continuing to flood Ukraine with weapons.

It was "the United States, with some of its Western allies" which had "stood in the way of peace talks" (27/02). "Boris Johnson and others" had "scuppered peace talks in the spring of 2022" (25/11). "People like Johnson" had "scuppered peace talks early on in the war" (02/12).

STW claims that the West had sabotaged a peace deal in early 2022 were based on (a misreading of) an article published by *Ukrainska Pravda* in April of that year.

In a subsequent [interview](#) the article's author, Roman Romaniuk, rejected the STW spin: Johnson had not "scuppered" the peace talks; the Ukrainian delegation, and Zelenskyy himself, had no confidence that Russia would abide by the deal on offer; and Russia continued to view Ukrainian statehood as illegitimate. Hence the breakdown of the talks.

Blaming the West for the continuation of the war – as if Putin was a mere bystander who had no say in the matter – was coupled with claims that the West continued to flood Ukraine with weapons.

Since Russia's invasion, "the Western powers have flooded Ukraine with weapons" (13/08). "The huge amounts of Western military aid to Ukraine" had turned the war "into a proxy war with

Russia" (21/11). "Right from the beginning, following Putin's invasion of Ukraine back in February 2022," the West had "poured weaponry into the country" (25/11).

This was simply not true. At the start of the war the US had effectively banned Poland from supplying Ukraine with Mig-29 jets. It had then dragged its feet on providing Ukraine with HIMAR rocket systems (eventually providing just four of them), supplying ATACMS missiles, providing Abrams tanks, and allowing Ukraine to be supplied with F-16 jets by other countries.

The same policy of too little, too late continued throughout 2024. In November, STW itself posted an [article](#) containing a quote from James Nixey (Director of the Chatham House Russia Programme) making precisely that point:

"They [the Biden administration] know they have not done enough [to support Ukraine], they have been overly cautious. Their intention was always not for Ukraine to win the war, but just to keep them in the war. Their strategic objective was not to win, but to ensure that it doesn't conflagrate into a wider war and escalate into something global and something they were involved in themselves."

(Nixey has made the same point [elsewhere](#): "The Biden administration and probably the Harris administration (if there is one) are not comfortable with a Russian defeat. They are genuinely worried that it would create anarchy, loose nukes, spillover, civil war, things they can't control. They want to be able to control this war. And a Russian defeat isn't controllable.")

As in previous years, STW shamelessly demanded an end to arms supplies to Ukraine by the West: "Our governments must stop encouraging further conflict and stop sending arms" (19/08).

In late summer a STW/CND statement called on Keir Starmer to "end the supplies of arms to Ukraine and instead seek an immediate ceasefire and peace

top arms for Ukraine

negotiations. Part of this process must be the cessation of British arms shipments to Ukraine" (29/08).

By the end of the year, STW and CND had gone even further and demanded the withdrawal of weapons already provided to Ukraine: "Pull the Missiles Out of Ukraine. Britain needs to withdraw the missiles and get behind peace talks now" (05/12).

STW did not explain why ending arms supplies to Ukraine would force Putin to the negotiating table. The claim [obviously](#) ran counter to common sense and practical experience:

"The delay [in the approval of US aid for Ukraine] allowed Russia to exploit Ukraine's weakened air defence system to deadly effect. While Russia did not significantly scale up the number of weapons used in these attacks, they were more impactful because Ukrainian forces were unable to intercept them.

"Ukraine was increasingly failing to intercept even half of Russian missiles since March 22. As shortages have worsened, Ukraine has had to allocate a lot of its air defence assets to protect large population centres in the rear. That means a lot of the front line is underserved or doesn't have air defence at all".

STW continued its criticisms of those on the left who supported the supply of arms to Ukraine:

"There has always been a strand of the left that supported the arming of

Ukraine in the slipstream of British government policy, on the grounds that it was about the right of small nations to self-determination. It's a spurious argument: Ukraine does not have self-determination from the NATO powers" (25/11).

The idea that Ukraine lacks self-determination from NATO is a bad case of political delirium: NATO does not rule Ukraine. It is also a longstanding Putin propaganda [trope](#). But at least the article's author – Andrew Murray – was consistent.

Just two months before Russia invaded Ukraine, Murray had claimed that NATO, not Russia, was the imperialist predator: "Today, it is NATO that is trying to seize Ukraine" (STW, 10/12/21).

Insofar as STW had anything new to say about the war in 2024, it was summed up by the words "escalation" (used over 50 times in the course of the year) and "nuclear war" (used over a dozen times in the closing months of the year).

Russia had launched a three-pronged invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. It had laid waste to entire cities. It had bombed hospitals, schools, nurseries, cultural sites and apartment blocks. It had implemented ethnic cleansing and forced Russification in the occupied territories. It had annexed Ukrainian territory into Russia on the basis of sham referendum. It had forcibly deported

children to Russia. It had tortured and murdered Ukrainian POWs. It had pumelled the Ukrainian energy infrastructure. It had destroyed water treatment plants. It had imported North Korean troops to bolster its war effort. It had continued to deny the existence of a Ukrainian national identity. Russian "public discourse" was dominated by a toxic anti-Ukrainianism, rampant Russian ultra-nationalism, and berserker anti-Westernism. Russian television talk shows had repeatedly advocated the use of nuclear weapons – on Ukraine, Europe and America.

Absent

In that context – entirely absent from the STW make-it-up-as-you-go-along narrative about the war in Ukraine – it was difficult to think of anything Ukraine could do which might count as "escalation".

But not for STW: Nearly three years of the bombardment of Ukraine by Russian missiles was a humdrum fact of war. But the firing of some missiles by Ukraine at military targets in Russia was "escalation", responsibility for which lay with the US and British governments:

"NATO's intervention [is] escalating in very dangerous ways" (17/06), "the outgoing US President's act of escalation" (18/11), "Biden's major escalation of the Ukraine war" (19/11), "Biden's escalation" (25/11), "the British government's reckless escalation" (26/11).

By contrast, what might appear to be Russian escalation, such as the arrival of over 10,000 North Korean troops to join the fighting, was not escalation at all: "Russia having North Korean troops in their own country is hardly a sign of escalation on their side" (19/11).

After all: "US troops are present in large numbers in Germany, the UK and throughout the Middle East, something which is regarded as perfectly normal." (19/11). NATO countries bordering Russia and Ukraine all had "foreign troops on their territory, but this is regarded as totally acceptable" (25/11).

But this was hardly comparing like with like. US troops in Germany are not about to support a German invasion of France to "regain" the eastern half of the country (because it once belonged to the Germanic Holy Roman Empire).

And the fact that NATO troops ("foreign troops") are stationed in NATO countries bordering Ukraine and Russia is hardly surprising given Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

According to two typically off-the-wall Code Pink articles reposted by STW, Western "escalation" was part of a US plan to unleash a full-scale US ground war against Russia:

- "The US ground war with Russia



that the United States is preparing to fight would involve an estimated 3,600 US casualties per day. US war policy in Ukraine is predicated on a gradual escalation from proxy war to full-scale war between Russia and the United States." (27/02)

- "US preparations for war with Russia are already at odds with the existential imperative of containing the conflict... The United States is preparing to fight a major ground war with Russia." (18/03)

But most STW articles about "escalation" focused on the risk that "escalation" could slip into a full-scale war, possibly a nuclear one, between the West and Russia.

There were "terrible risks of the war escalating into a conflict between NATO and Russia" (29/08). There was "the risk of all-out war between Russia and the Western powers" (21/11). Britain might be "dragged into an all-out war with nuclear-armed NATO and Russia" (05/12).

The conflict could "lurch into an all-out war between nuclear-armed NATO and Russia" (26/11). "We face a greater threat of nuclear war than for more than 50 years" (26/11). "The slippery slope which leads to outright nuclear war between Russia and NATO has moved a step closer" (05/12).

"Step Back from the Nuclear Brink – Ukraine, NATO and Trump" was the title of STW's final online "rally" of 2024. Absent from that list was the one person (apart from STW) actually talking up the risk of a nuclear war: Vladimir Putin.

At the close of 2024 Russia "celebrated" Christmas Day by firing 78 cruise and ballistic missiles and 106 drones at Ukraine – the thirteenth major attack of the year on the country's energy infrastructure.

While Russia used its military might to try to freeze the people of Ukraine into submission, STW continued its campaign to deny Ukraine the means to defend itself.

Only 24 hours earlier STW had called, as it had throughout the year, for an end to British military assistance to Ukraine: "The anti-war movement must continue to press for an end to British involvement in the Ukraine conflict" (24/12). □

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How the left has



Debate

By Sean Matgamna

A response to John McAnulty's [critical review](#) (Solidarity 717) of [The Easter Rising and Irish History](#)

First of all, on People's Democracy in 1969 and the British Army in Northern Ireland. Eamonn McCann and Bernadette Devlin (later McAliskey) called for British soldiers to go on the street on 12 August, and Michael Farrell, on 14 August. I quoted them in *Solidarity* 124.

I never thought this a matter of principle, given the UK's long-term control of Northern Ireland. But the call for troops by the PD people meant taking political responsibility for the British Army in Northern Ireland, and it was wrong politically to take that responsibility.

Britain would or would not send the Army onto the streets according to calculations of its own. The PD leaders were playing low-level politics, and encouraged illusions in Britain and its soldiers. They helped prepare the Catholics to welcome the troops with cups of tea, etc.

It was the Wilson Labour government in power, and the parliamentary Labour Party that had been calling for direct rule of Northern Ireland from London. PD regarded the reform Unionists as the main enemy, and said so. In that belief, PD worked deliberately to provoke and incite the Orange anti-reformists (indeed, reactionaries) and thus make reform Unionism impossible.

The January 1969 "long march" from Belfast to Derry, which was ambushed by Orange supremacists at Burntollet bridge, was a tremendous success as

propaganda, but it helped draw the polarisation of the communities drum-tight and helped lead to the breakdown of the Six Counties into the start of civil war, in August 1969, and then the active role of the British Army.

I criticised that at the time, all too mildly. "The policy of certain people in Northern Ireland of continuing militant civil rights – i.e. Catholic-orientated – demonstrations, with inevitable clashes and the serious possibility of pogroms, when combined with the declaration that the 6 Cos. is sacrosanct this side of socialism, is gross adventurism". The resolution which said that was probably written some time in July 1969 and was sent to the September 1969 conference of IS (now called SWP) in the name of the Manchester branch of IS.

By his call, Farrell took political responsibility for the British army in Northern Ireland, which would stay "on the streets" there for the next 38 years. It was a piece of prime political stupidity and lack of political discernment.

But between October 1968 and August 1969 PD did not do much that was not politically stupid. For instance, Bernadette Devlin McAliskey, soon after she became an MP in April 1969, visited Ian Paisley at his home and proposed to him an alliance against the reform-minded mainstream Unionists of Terence O'Neill and James Chichester-Clark. Paisley, you see, represented the Protestant working class, and she wanted the Protestant workers to unite with the Catholics.

The account of that meeting by Paisley was, as far as I know, never contradicted or denied. Paisley was an evil bigot, but not a notable liar.

That piece of political stupidity was Devlin-McAliskey being naive, rather than the cynical manipulator she soon became. She was PD, and she acted according to the daft political logic of PD's targeting of the reform Unionists, but PD had no membership structure at that time, still less control of what Devlin did.

In this article, however, I mainly want to deal with James Connolly's posthumous status in Irish left politics. I will refer to my own experiences quite a bit.

The first secretary of the Irish Citizen Army (and future writer of plays) Sean O'Casey published a short history of the Citizen Army in 1919. He said that in Connolly Irish labour had not had its first martyr; rather, Irish nationalism had another martyr. I think that was true.

Connolly is lauded on the Irish left because he was a nationalist martyr, with a deservedly high place in the pantheon of Irish republicanism. He was the military leader of the Rising in Dublin in

1916. Certainly I learned to revere Connolly the nationalist first, before I knew anything else about him. I learned from my mother, who also remembered people like Thomas Ashe, who died in jail from force-feeding in 1917.

She had had a cousin, Patrick O'Mahony (my father's namesake, but no relation) captured, tried, and executed (to use the horrible euphemism for state murder) in May 1923, the 75th of the 77 official "executions" in the civil war.

She would tell my sister Mary and me of hearing the shots ring out from the "Home Barracks" in Ennis on the morning of the shooting. Christopher Quinn and William Shaughnessy, shot in Ennis as the civil war drew to an end, were boys. Quinn was 19. They were nos. 76 and 77 of the 77 Republicans shot by the Free State government.

I heard of Connolly in the National School too, I think. Connolly was the "labour leader" shot in 1916, in a chair because his wound would not let him stand. In my child's ignorance, I then thought of "labour" as disruptive and as not being "national".

Connolly Clubs

In Manchester, to move on, I learned of “the Connolly clubs” in the Catholic weekly, *The Universe*. My sister took it, for whatever reason, but the only declared anti-Catholic in the house was the only one who read it.

I learned that there were communists in England who, in the "Connolly Clubs", worked to "turn" Irish people away from "their religion" and towards godless communism.

The name Douglas Hyde was prominent. This was not of course the Gaelic League man who became first president of the 26 Counties, but a former member of the CPGB who had converted to Catholicism. He was usually billed as "former editor of the *Daily Worker*" (he had been its news editor). He made the "Connolly Clubs" seem to be a force that the Connolly Association was not and probably never had been. Hyde claimed that it met immigrants off the boats and was helpful to them in finding digs and jobs. None of that was true in my later experience.

I now believed that working-class communism subsumed everything progressive and worthwhile in Irish nationalism – freedom from foreign rule and constraints on freedom of development. And of course it was much much more. To Irish workers in Ireland and England it offered a revolutionary better system and a road to ending exploitation by the Irish bosses and their sort everywhere. So I believed.

I never had the sense of abandoning Irish nationalism, but rather of subsuming it. That nationalism was my first political consciousness, formed in childhood from my mother's stories and such records as Delia Murphy's *Down By The Glenside* and *The Croppy Boy* and others. The songs were emotionally central. In puberty it all came alive in a way it hadn't before.

To my surprise and delight I found that the Young Communist League and the Communist Party were one of the best places to go to for Irish and "folk" songs. I tried to join the Communist Party, but because of my age they would only let me join the YCL.

They sang Irish songs, even Catholic sectarian songs that I couldn't countenance politically, such as *Johnson's Motor Car* and a song of which I remember only a snatch: "Twas early one morning/ On my way to Mass/ I met a bloody Protestant/ And killed him for his pass". I first heard *The Rocks of Bawn* sung there, by an old Irish communist, Eddie Lenihan.

Connolly did not feature at all, either as a subject for songs or via any of the good songs he wrote, such as *We Only Want The Earth*.

Terry Whelan, both of whose parents were Irish, was secretary. The YCL – we had 40 or so in the Cheetham branch, many of them children of party members, often Jewish – sang the Catholic sectarian songs with zest.

The YCL led to the single Manchester branch of the Connolly Association recruiting me. Our main activity was selling the *Irish Democrat* in the (now long gone) Irish pubs of Rusholme and of Moss Side (which was mainly West Indian, but with a lot of Irish people too). We would shift at least a thousand copies of a new issue on our Saturday night and Sunday morning sales.

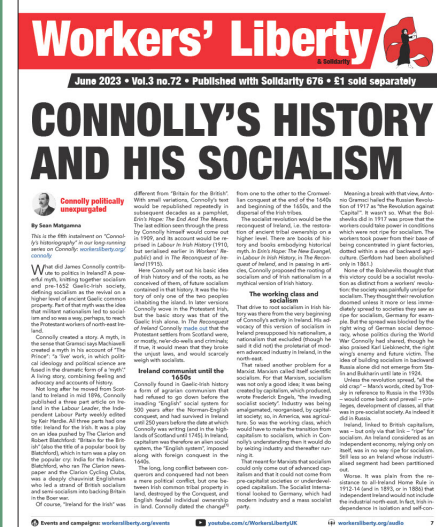
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Workers' Liberty 3/72

used Connolly

Run by Joe Deegan and Michael Crowe, a chemist and an academic, the CA had some non-CP members. I remember Danny Kilcomin, a joiner who always dressed "correctly" (scarf and gloves, etc.) He would tell you that no less than Krishna Menon, then Indian foreign minister, had been "down there on Platt Fields", the Manchester Speaker's Corner, where the CA sometimes had a stall.

Menon, a member of Nehru's Congress Party, was forced to resign when India and China had a brief war in late 1962. I never heard that Danny became Irish foreign minister.

The *Irish Democrat*, edited by Desmond Greaves, an Englishman assigned to Irish work by the CP, was a straightforward Irish nationalist paper, a Fianna Fail nationalist paper, with occasional pieces on Irish foreign policy that tipped you off (if you knew your way around politics) that it was also some kind of Stalinist paper.

The 26 Counties refused to join or give bases to Nato because of Partition. The CA was very enthusiastic for the 26 Counties foreign policy, and in one article Greaves described the 26 Counties as "the most progressive state in Western Europe".

In fact it was a vicious theocracy with a parliamentary front. It lived by exporting meat – cattle and people. With

not quite three million inhabitants, it exported about a thousand people a week, mainly to Britain. In the record year for that period, 1958, it exported 80,000 people. At the National School in Ennis, it was taken as a fact of reality that most of us would migrate.

But for the Stalinist-led CA, Ireland's foreign policy made it "the most progressive state in Western Europe". That's what the *Irish Democrat* told the people who bought it from us in the Irish pubs.

The paper had started as *Irish Freedom*. The more neutral name *Irish Democrat* was a product of the World War, when the CA told people to join the British Army. 50 years later, the *Irish Democrat* would publish Beresford Ellis lamenting that Ireland ill-treated its "aristocracy", meaning the people who were nominal heads of clans and would be called, for example, "The O'Rahilly".

But it wasn't all nonsense or inconsequential oddity. The CA served Russian foreign policy as the CP did.

For its own reason, Russia, from the mid 1920s onwards, tried to use nationalism to disrupt its enemies. For instance, the Yugoslav socialists and then communists wanted a south-Slav federation, and thought Yugoslavia could be made democratic for all its components. But Yugoslavia was the strongest state in the Balkans, and allied to France. So Russia insisted with the Yugoslavs that only Croatian independence would serve.

That was artificial and false, serving Russia and not Yugoslavia. In the cause of using Croatia to disrupt Yugoslavia, the Stalino-communists allied with the forerunners of the Ustase, who in World War 2 would run a Croatian Nazi puppet state.

In Ireland the Stalinists used Irish nationalism to strike at Britain. They gave anti-British Irish nationalism a life that was not quite its own.

Twice, in the 1930s and in the 1960s, the Stalinists got a near-majority or a majority in the IRA. The Workers' Party (former Official Republicans) veered away from nationalism, but collapsed after the fall of the USSR in 1991, when it came out that the WP was financed by Russia.

The Connolly Association fed Irish nationalism. Mostly, it was the nationalism of the Provisional IRA, which was not financed by Russia, that they dealt in. They made IRA causes their own. They provided the lawyer, John Hostettler, in the case of Kevin Mallon and Francis Talbot, IRA members framed for murder.

I didn't object to the CA for its subterfuges, as perhaps I should. (I kept a

notebook then, so I'm not relying on memory). I thought it was the only way we'd get a hearing from Catholic Irish workers.

But it did not lead anywhere. The CA never dropped the mask and took the Irish workers it reached through Irish nationalism beyond that and to socialism. For practical purposes we were just nationalists. In effect we were Fianna Failers with Stalinist quirks.

There was no flow of CA members to socialism, or even to the CP. Sometimes the traffic went the other way, as with me. I joined the YCL first.

The CA did not have literature by Connolly. If they had had things by Connolly, I would have bought them, and I didn't. Desmond Greaves's book on Connolly would be published the following year.

Nonsense

The CA influenced people in the Labour Party close to the CP, but it fed them plausible nonsense like the idea that Partition was responsible for the plight of the 26 Counties economy. It criticised the curtailment of democracy for the Catholics of Northern Ireland, but in order to argue and imply that the Protestant minority in Ireland had no right at all to special treatment as a national minority. It made Irish nationalist confusion on such questions more confounded. And for its own reasons.

Connolly then had no influence at all that I ever saw on the British labour movement, though the CA had some, and amongst CP-influenced people, which included much of the Labour left, a lot.

Later, in 1963, one Saturday morning, a comrade, Rod, and I were selling the Socialist Labour League's weekly paper, *The Newsletter*, on the main street in Moss Side. We saw a small Connolly Association demonstration approaching. They were celebrating the bicentenary of Wolfe Tone's birth, and they had a pamphlet by Greaves on Tone. They shouted at me to join them.

I saw no problem in honouring Tone, the (would-be) founder of secular politics in Ireland, and I joined the march. My comrade, Rod, wouldn't come with me. He made the charge that I was an Irish nationalist, and the SLL branch was assembled to hear me defend myself.

It was not a trial exactly, but a hearing on the charge laid against me. I defended myself and I suppose I told the meeting about the United Irishmen and Tone, and their relationship to the French Revolution – “the rights of man and the citizen in Ireland”. I distinctly remember saying, with supreme confidence: “If Wolfe Tone were alive today,

he'd be in the Fourth International".

The affair ended with the organiser, Ted Knight, pronouncing that "at least" I'd "made a good case" for marching for Wolfe Tone.

There was no anti-Irish feeling involved. The point here is that the members of the politically most advanced and knowledgeable group in Manchester knew almost nothing of Irish history. They just didn't know.

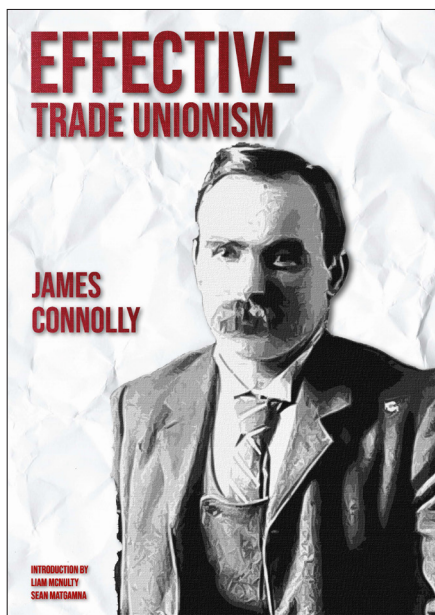
Four volumes of Connolly's writings had been published after 1948, and they were still available from the publisher, "At The Sign of the Three Candles", in Dublin, but they were not on sale in the Manchester Connolly Association or at the CP bookshop.

I got the four volumes by post from Dublin in the middle of 1961. Connolly's *Labour In Irish History* has, I think, more or less "always" been in print, but it was not available in Manchester, either from the Connolly Association or from the CP bookshop. For certain I'd have bought it if it had been, and I did not.

A volume by Connolly had been published by the British and Irish CPs early in 1941. *A Socialist In War* was a collection of Connolly's pro-German articles from World War 1 edited by P J Musgrove, but it too was not available.

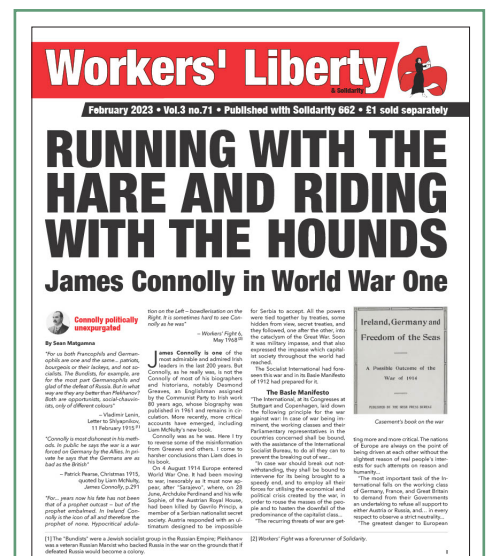
1941 was at the time of the Hitler-Stalin pact, when Hitler and Stalin had invaded and divided Poland and Stalin with Hitler's prior consent had invaded Finland. Stalin was acting, as Trotsky put it, as "Hitler's quartermaster". The CPs were, so to speak, "contracted out", and made propaganda for the Nazi peace-terms offer to Britain. It was for making that pro-Nazi propaganda that the Communist Party's *Daily Worker* was banned in January 1941.

continued on page 12 →



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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→ from page 11

The early 1941 collection was Connolly being used to justify the Hitler-Stalin pact. When Hitler invaded Russia a few months later, it was “withdrawn”. It became “rare” and was no longer quite kosher.

The CP turned to strike-breaking for the Allies in World War 2 and agitating that a “Second Front” be opened in the West. One of the CP songs Terry Whelan sang in 1959 was:

“It’s here, chum; it’s here, chum/ It’s the Second Front for you/ In spite of the old Atlantic Wall/ We’re the boys to see you through/ It won’t take long to finish it/ When we have got their range/ And then we can all go home and live like humans for a change/ It’s here, chum, it’s here, chum”.

Finally, on Connolly and the British labour movement in that era, I will cite the nearest thing to a survey I know of. Vic Eddisford was secretary of the Lancashire and Cheshire CP, a good man fallen among Stalinists, as so many of them were. He knew a bookworm when he saw one, and believed in using anything and everything that would help his cause. So he asked me to set up a lending library for the comrades.

He gave me a sizeable room at the CP headquarters on Rusholme Road and asked in a circular for comrades willing to donate to the library. The room filled up with piles and piles of books and periodicals – for instance, with bound volumes of *Labour Monthly*, where Rajani Palme Dutt, the CP’s leading intellectual for 30 years, would give “the line” in long editorials. There were books of every sort and description, even the books of some of the people shot by Stalin, Bukharin for example.

I spent more time reading or scanning through this Aladdin’s Cave of books and bound magazines than sorting. And there was nothing at all for the putative CP lending library by or about James Connolly. Nothing. I know for sure because I’d have ready anything by Connolly. I wanted *Labour In Irish History*, for example, and I remember that when I got it from Dublin in 1961 I stayed up all night reading it.

There is only one possible exception.

I’d already got Connolly’s pamphlet *Labour, Nationality, and Religion* from the book market at Shudehill – barrows piled high with books and higgledy-piggledy. I had read that. If that was donated to the library, I would not not have read the donated book, and therefore would have forgotten it. A possibility: but, for what it’s worth, my memory says that there was nothing at all by Connolly.

That proves nothing, but it seems to indicate that Connolly was not in circulation among people who responded to Vic Eddisford’s circular. The bowdlerised James Connolly of Irish nationalism was widely known, but Connolly the socialist was then very much a CP phenomenon.

Greaves’s biography the following year, 1961, changed things to some extent. The problem with it is that it is a pack of lies. The barefaced lie I remember most clearly concerns Roger Casement’s return to Ireland from Germany on Good Friday 1916. He came with the news that there would not be a contingent of German soldiers such as the insurgents wanted, expected, and had planned for. He came to stop the rising, but he was arrested at McKenna’s Fort in Kerry.

Greaves boldly says that “Casement came not to stop a revolution, but to join it”. No, he did not!

The general line from Greaves was that Connolly was a straight-line CP like himself, that Connolly was the paragon of CP-style political virtue.

The British and Irish Communist Organisation, when it was populist-nationalist, attempted to treat Connolly as a straight “Leninist”, the measure of all things, an Irish pocket Stalin or Mao. They would live as Unionists to sum up Connolly in the words that Edward Hyde the Royalist used for Cromwell: Connolly was “a brave bad man”.

Then the Cork Workers’ Club inherited some of the BICO’s stock of pamphlets and augmented some of them. How far the CWC is from having a clue is shown by the way they thoughtlessly pile up articles in *Ireland On The Dissecting Table*.

Before Greaves in 1961, the general Marxist line on Connolly – who was in fact the founder of Irish populist nationalism, not of Irish Marxism – was that he was a pre-Leninist, pre-Russian-Revolution, pre-Communist-International Marxist-socialist. That of course served to excuse and explain away whatever you felt obliged to explain away. I think that was what those who knew Connolly said before Greaves’s lying biography appeared, including CP people such as Deegan and Crowe of the Manchester CA. It was certainly what I thought and said.

But in Ireland today Connolly is not just a pre-Russian-Revolution socialist. He is the model, especially in his choices in 1916.

McAnulty says that by criticising Connolly I am dismissing his role in building the Irish labour movement. No, I’m not. Connolly played an important role as



Pic: Will Bakker

one of Jim Larkin’s lieutenants in founding the modern Irish labour movement. Nothing in his last period undoes that. He not only believed in the class struggle as a fact (as many did, even the Labour right winger Ramsey MacDonald for example). He believed in fighting the class struggle on the workers’ side.

With Larkin in America, Connolly, in his last period, was the effective leader of the Irish working-class movement. Though he had been one of those in the labour movement who believed that a general strike could stop war, he made no effort to involve the Irish labour movement in the 1916 Rising. I believe that was because he thought it wasn’t possible. The Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union was then, after the 1913-14 lockout and strike, down to about 700 members.

I wrote a polemic against Connolly in the Great War, *Running With The Hare And Riding With The Hounds*, as an 8-page pull-out in *Solidarity* in February 2023. I think I showed that no “context” justifies Connolly in World War 1. From “The War Against The German Nation” (29 August 1914) to his death on 12 May 1916, Connolly was not an anti-imperialist. He was against Britain and British imperialism, but also a vulgar, and where necessary a lying, partisan and propagandist for Germany and the German empire.

And, unavoidably, for the German-led bloc: Austria, which killed maybe a million Serbs, and Turkey, which committed genocide against the Armenians. Those things were known, and commented on, in Ireland. And, certainly, when Connolly made dishonest propaganda for German imperialism, Germany itself had almost wiped out the whole Herero and Nama peoples in South West Africa, as well as occupying Belgium and part of France. If socialists were to take sides in World War 1 on the “immediate issues” then it would certainly not be with Germany. Marxists like Lenin and Luxemburg argued that world imperialism and capitalism were in an impasse demonstrated in the military impasse of the war. Not one imperialism, but the whole impe-

rialist system, was responsible for the war, and all the imperialisms had to be fought and overthrown.

Pearse himself said: “Connolly is most dishonest in his methods. In public he says the war is a war forced on Germany by the Allies. In private he says that the Germans are as bad as the British”.

There was more than one Easter Rising. There was the one that happened, which inspired and encouraged anti-imperialists throughout the world. (I debated that question at a public meeting in London in 2009 with Ruth Dudley Edwards, who is some sort of Irish Thatcherite). Then there was the one planned, which involved German officers (and possibly soldiers: why not if Germany had taken Ireland seriously enough to commit officers to the rising?).

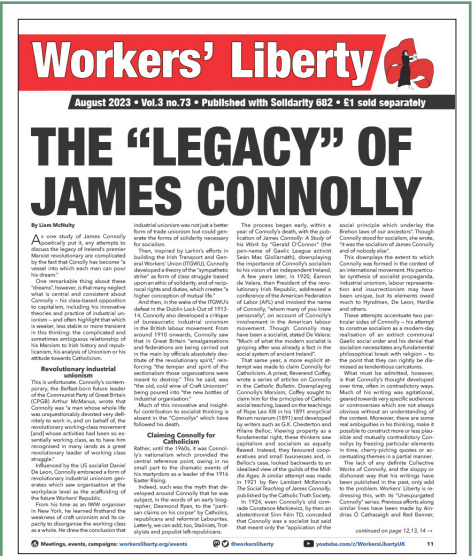
The decision not to land officers was not an Irish one. The Irish wanted the Germans to land. If Germany had committed itself, Ireland would have become a theatre of war, with pro-German and anti-German taking sides in an Irish civil war.

Connolly died a fervent proselytising Catholic. (He made his Protestant wife Lillie promise to become a Catholic, which she did).

If what I wrote in *The Easter Rising In Irish History* is regarded as a polemic, the target is not Connolly, but Provo-type physical-force republicanism. The Provo war made no sense, and the cult of Connolly helped to inspire it.

His article on the eve of the Rising where he lauded minority military action as the detonator of revolution was in the vein of the German March Action of 1921 and the nonsense that inspired Guevarism in the 1960s and 70s.

There is a lot more to say about Connolly, and I’ve said some of it in *Running With The Hare* and *The Easter Rising In Irish History*. If John McAnulty wants to respond to my direct polemic against Connolly, *Running With The Hare*, then I’m sure the editor of *Solidarity* will find space to print that. I will also write further about IS (SWP) on Ireland in 1969, and its links with PD. □



Workers' Liberty 3/73



Korea: then as farce

By Will Roberts

Friday 3 January was the latest flash-point in a seemingly unending drama since the 3 December coup attempt by President Yoon Suk Yeol in South Korea.

Contrary to my assumption in my article about the coup online [last month](#), Yoon's Prime Minister and the head of his party (the PPP, Korea's conservative party) did not convince him to resign. In an impromptu speech to the party on 12 December, Yoon apologised while also claiming that liberals were exaggerating by calling it an attempted "coup", and that he would not be stepping down (much to the dismay and shock of many in the audience).

As a result, the PPP's leadership (Yoon excluded) announced it would call for another impeachment vote, and this time not abstain.

But Yoon has stayed resolute – and stayed inside. He has not left the President's house since giving the speech

on 12 December. That caused significant difficulties on 3 January, when the Corruption Investigation Office attempted to arrest Yoon after granting a warrant on 30 December, at the end of a trial during which the sitting President (a former prosecutor) repeatedly refused to appear in court for questioning.

When it became clear that the President's security detail and fervent pro-Yoon protesters were not going to grant them access, and when Yoon's lawyers claimed that the CIO did not have the authority to investigate charges of "rebellion", meaning police involvement would be challenged formally in court, attempts to carry out the arrest were ceased.

The CIO [reported](#) that "approximately 200 Presidential Security Service and military forces combined guarded the building, putting themselves as a human barricade and armed with personal firearms." Yoon supporters protested nearby, carrying American flags

and placards with the Trumpist slogan "Stop the Steal".

On Monday 6 January, the CIO (a recently-established government body) admitted defeat and handed Yoon's arrest warrant over to the Korean police. At time of writing, the arrest has still not taken place.

The details and motives in Yoon's attempted coup have become somewhat clearer in the month since it took place. The Korean Confederation of Trade Unions released a statement on 28 December confirming that, besides the President planning the coup for well over a year in advance, and colluding with leading figures in the military to do so, he also specifically targeted "left wing forces in the media, broadcasting and labour sectors" who were, in his view, blocking political action in the country.

Unsurprisingly, North Korea was in the firing line as well: Yoon allegedly sent a drone into North Korean airspace at the beginning of December, hoping for it

to be shot down, providing an excuse for declaring martial law. The drone was left be, and Yoon instead blamed a "North Korean cyber-attack" as the culprit in his speech on the 12th.

The KCTU announced a general strike in the immediate wake of martial law being declared, calling on the 1.2 million unionised workers in the country to down tools and take part in the democracy protests that were sweeping major cities (and continue as *Solidarity* goes to press). Two weeks later, when Yoon was impeached, the general strike was declared "temporarily lifted" (the initial demand had been Yoon's arrest). The KCTU claims that 70,000 auto workers downed tools on the day of the insurrection, and the confederation has been centrally involved in organising democracy protests across the country, but beyond that participation is unclear. KCTU has given little further detail on the effect and scale of industrial action taken. □

Blame capitalist production, not working class consumption



Letter

Vicki Morris' article on the apparent limits to consumption (*Solidarity* 728) is badly conceived and politically disorientating.

The article suggests the best we can hope for is the global average income per head of \$10-14,000, somewhere between Algeria and Ecuador. By comparison, the current UK equivalent is \$38,000. The proposed "equalisation" sounds like an argument for green austerity. Or for workers here, back to income per head levels reached in 1960. Then prime minister Harold Macmillan told workers they had "never had it so good". The article implies we will never have it any good ever again.

The mistake is to assume GDP figures capture all important economic activity and the best we can do is divide it up more equitably. This is a category mistake in Marxist terms. GDP crudely conflates what is necessary for human needs with the surplus product appropriated from workers and



other direct producers by capitalism. GDP amalgamates the monetary value of fossil fuels with renewables, conflates necessities with luxuries, and many other errors. There is a big literature criticising GDP in general and for ecology in particular.

It is also mistaken to imply that workers' consumption in places like the UK is the primary cause of damage to ecosystems. It is global capitalists who make the production decisions that are despoiling the planet. Telling workers in large parts of the world to

tighten our belts further, after economic downturn, austerity and the cost of living crisis, will not help generate the only force capable of taking power and introducing socialist planning – the organised, class conscious working class movement. Workers taking the means of production into common ownership under democratic control, expropriating the capitalist class, is the systemic answer.

Speculation about GDP per head does not provide an eco-Marxist critique of capitalism. The proposed degrowth

dystopia will never rally working class forces to fight for immediate reforms or socialist revolution. Plummeting working class living standards will not avert ecological disaster. It is more likely to destroy the only social agency capable of transforming global productive forces to meet sustainable human needs.

Realism is necessary to tackle ecological emergencies. Crude figures and melancholic politics are not. □

Paul Vernadsky, London



Lambert

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Reply to Paul Mason

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“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.

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

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

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When we have hours in the mess room



Diary of a Tube driver

By Jay Dawkey

December was a particularly disruptive time on the job. At times, 40+ trains were out of service due to "flat-ted wheels" and a whole section of the line was suspended, with just a shuttle service for the remainder of the branch. With many trains cancelled, many more of us sat around waiting for jobs or, if lucky, getting to go home.

The messroom became a hive of activity. Where usually there would be two or three people, now there might be eight or nine. The more people in the room, the more likely you'll have a conversation... whether you want to or not!

There is nostalgia from some drivers for the messroom of the past, not the physical space, which hasn't changed, but the belief that it would regularly be full and everyone would talk to each other.

While there is some rose-tinted nostalgia here, it contains some truth. With smartphones, earbuds, and less of a connection to one space as the hive of activity, even a busier room might only have one conversation going on in it. It is much easier now to be in the space without much more than acknowledging other people coming in or out.

Many people enter and put their bags down but are already switched out of the environment and looking at a screen. A smaller minority of people read books; a few might use a work computer. But you'll still often be regaled by some great tale, possibly exaggerated, about some exploits of this or that driver or manager of the past.

Sometimes, you wish some people would say a lot less. You realise why some conversations tend to go against an environment where people feel respected and able to engage. Other times, the conversation is incomprehensible if you don't follow football, don't know the person being discussed, or haven't watched the particular show.

People not part of a conversation might suddenly chip in, and it's a good

way to learn who new people are. The longer people spend together, the more likely you are to hear something from someone.

Thirty minutes together is one thing, but spending six hours will likely provoke most people to say something. It is a good time to learn more about people, know which union they are in, and how they find a job. Sometimes, you get an honest debate going on.

The potential and pitfalls of a supposed move to a four-day week are a big topic of discussion, and one for a future diary. □

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Production team: Martin Thomas (editor), Kayden Jones, Dan Katz, Simon Nelson, Will Roberts, Zack Muddle □

The Day of the Jackal



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

Frederick Forsyth's novel *The Day of the Jackal*, published in 1971, has provided the basis for two films: the first directed by Fred Zinneman (1973) and starring Edward Fox, and a version starring Bruce Willis (1997) which I haven't seen. The recent, much hyped, TV version featuring Eddie Redmayne as the Jackal will be discussed in the next issue of *Solidarity*.

In the first offering Edward Fox plays the anonymous killer – his *nomme de guerre*, as the Jackal chosen, apparently, at random – who is hired by the OAS (Organisation Armée Secrète) to assassinate French President Charles de Gaulle for his supposed betrayal in "handing over" Algeria to its people. The Jackal is strictly a contract killer and the OAS have to rob several banks to pay him the huge fee he demands. He is a consummate professional and utterly cold-blooded, showing no mercy to anyone who might jeopardise his plans. That includes killing the Italian



gunsmith who makes his bespoke, fold up rifle.

Despite all his meticulous preparations the assassination attempt on De Gaulle fails. One of the strengths of this film, apart from the excellent performance by Fox, is its grounding in a sense of contemporary political reality. The OAS attempted, unsuccessfully, to assassinate De Gaulle on 22 August 1962. That features as the prelude to the film. □

- To watch online: bit.ly/day-j. Background on OAS and Sanchez: bit.ly/oas-s

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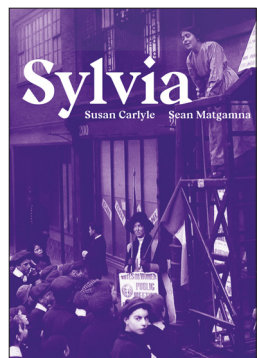


Back Andrea Egan in Unison!

By Dave Pannett

Andrea Egan has been chosen by Time For Real Change (TFRC), the left caucus in Unison, as its candidate for union general secretary. The procedure for this election has yet to be published. Probably the nomination period will be in summer and autumn, and the election in late 2025. Workers' Liberty is active in TFRC, which has a working majority on the National Executive (NEC) of Unison, the UK's largest UK union, with over 1.3 million members.

It is unclear whether Christina McAnea, the right-wing incumbent, will run again. There are many variables. Who will be the establishment candidate? Will there be competing candidates on the right and on the left? Will the union have battles with a Labour government this year? Will the NEC elections produce a majority for TFRC as in 2021 and 2023?



The story of Sylvia Pankhurst including her working-class organising in the East End of London. £4 (inc. post) bit.ly/shop-wl

In 2020 TFRC stood Paul Holmes. Many of the left supported Roger McKenzie, and the Socialist Party stood Hugo Pierre. The nomination stage produced 99 for Paul, 104 for Roger, 31 for Hugo and 210 for Christina. In the election, on a 9.8% turnout, Christina McAnea won 47.7%. Paul Holmes and TFRC managed to turn 22% of nominations into 33.8% of the vote. All the other three got a lower percentage of votes than nominations. AWL supporters backed Andrea to be TFRC candidate.

Andrea has been expelled from the Labour Party during Starmer's purge, but has committed to fight for Labour Party democracy and to oppose measures to reduce trade unionists' say in the party. Andrea pledges that if elected she will take only her social worker wage, instead of the official general secretary rate of £113,000 a year, and so over a five year term put half a million pounds back into Unison's strike and hardship funds.

On the NEC, TFRC has made small but significant steps to move the union from a servicing to an organising approach. The union has won over £100 million in back pay for thousands of health care assistants. Membership has grown for two years in a row after many years of decline. Yet Unison has been unable to win national ballots for action on pay where other education and health unions have. It's quite



common to hear that we can't organise a ballot in two fields at once, or organise a ballot and a demonstration in the same school term. At present the majority of the NEC is undermined by the power of the general secretary and the unelected officials. Winning the NEC

or even general secretary will not be enough, but the contest will provide an opportunity for members to discuss where Unison is going. □

• andrea4gs.org.uk

Compassion put into action



How I became a socialist

By Frankie Peña Brown

As someone who grew up in a rural area I have always felt a deep connection to the natural world.

From the nearby woodlands where I'd encounter deer, badgers and countless species of fungi with the family dog at my side, to the sea whose biting February waters I would rush into with my much braver younger brother as I screamed bloody murder, it was where I felt a sense of peace and belonging and where I escaped to when things at home felt overwhelming. And as someone who was raised by a Christian(-ish) mother and a father who had been vege-

tarian since his days as a fox hunt saboteur in the 80s, I was taught the importance of compassion, empathy, and "doing the right thing" from a young age.

It's therefore not much of a surprise that I first became actively involved in political activism through environmental activism when I started university at Extinction Rebellion's peak in 2019. I felt so angry and let down that it had been known for my whole life how catastrophic climate change would be unless huge changes were made, and how millions of people's lives were on the line, and yet those who supposedly had the power to make those changes had done nowhere near enough to prevent much of the harm that was to come. And doing nothing about it felt like resigning myself to being part of the problem.

Around the same time, though, Extinction Rebellion was receiving more and more criticism for its attitude towards the police. I particularly remember the huge controversy that was sparked when it came out that some XR activists had been chanting "police, police, we love you, we're doing it for your children, too". For me, the criticisms were so undeniably right that I began to realise how much of the picture I'd been missing by limiting the way I engaged in politics to environmental activism. I'd long understood by that point that capitalism was responsible for the lack of action that had been taken by those in power to avoid climate and ecological catastrophe, but my middle-class rural idyll of an upbringing, during which I could count the number of times I'd even seen police in my neighbourhood on



one hand, meant I had never really understood the pervasiveness of state violence until that point. My lack of prior perspective became even clearer with the successive Black Lives Matter and Kill the Bill movements of 2020-21, when I took it on myself to try and fill the gaps in my critical understanding of the world around me through reading.

I talked about this a lot at the time with a university friend who was a member of Socialist Appeal (now the Revolutionary Communist Party). She reminded me that being organised was the best way

to be a part of the change I wanted to see in the world. Keen to collaborate more with likeminded people again, I ended up briefly joining the organisation; while I soon decided that that branch's aims and attitudes at the time weren't the right fit for me and I subsequently left, the fundamental Marxist ideas stuck with me and led me to where I am today as a member of Workers' Liberty. Simply put, socialism felt – and still feels – like the truest expression of the values of compassion, solidarity and integrity that I've long strived to live by. □

Ukraine: new threat posed by Trump

By Dan Katz

Ukraine is fighting to defend itself against Russian imperialist aggression and occupation. In 2024 Russian forces took a staggering 420,000 casualties and Ukraine destroyed 3,000 Russian tanks and 9,000 armoured vehicles.

Nevertheless, Russia's economic clout and relative size, combined with President Vladimir Putin's ruthless and cruel leadership, meant that it continued to grind forward on Ukraine's Donbas front. Russia gained 4,200 sq km of territory in 2024.

Russia continues to advance in eastern Ukraine, now threatening to overrun the towns of Kreminna, Toretsk, Pokrovsk and Kurakhove. Russia has pulverised Ukraine's energy infrastructure, hoping to demoralise the civilian population.

Ukraine has not only been the victim of Russian power, but has also been hampered by a deliberately weak response from the US administration and the Western European states. American President Joe Biden has sought to give Ukraine enough weapons not to lose to Russia, but not enough to push the Russian occupiers out of the country.

That policy has failed and seems about to end.

The danger now for Ukraine is that a US administration under Donald Trump will force Ukraine into a lousy peace deal. Trump has spoken about his admiration for Putin.

Ukraine, a relatively weak and poor country, has been bullied by Western powers before. In 2015, following the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, Germany and France forced Ukraine to sign up to pro-Russia treaties, Minsk 1 and 2,



which substantially impacted on Ukraine's right to self-determination.

France and Germany wanted to reestablish peaceful and profitable relations with Putin's Russia, and were willing to sacrifice Ukraine's rights to do so.

The agreements signed in 2015 led to a simmering war in Donbas and allowed Putin time to prepare for the full-scale invasion of February 2022.

A botched, Putin-friendly, peace in 2025 may well allow Russia to continue its aggressive actions against Moldova, Georgia and in the Baltic, as well as prepare the way for a future war in Ukraine.

Benefits

Trump might hope for economic benefits from an agreement with Putin and which is forced on Ukraine by denying Ukraine the weapons and financial aid it needs to defend itself.

According to Ukrainian media Russia's envoy to the UN, Vasily Nebenzya, dismissed an approach from Trump's representatives to end the war as "vague". Trump appears to have proposed that Ukraine's membership of NATO be delayed for decades, while European peacekeepers monitor a ceasefire in Ukraine.

Nebenzya said Russia was opposed to a freeze in the conflict. Russia flatly opposes Ukraine's membership of NATO and wants the four Ukrainian regions of Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson

ceded to Russia, including the areas currently under Ukrainian control.

This falls short of Putin's stated objective of abolishing Ukraine, which he denies has the right to exist.

In September Trump's future Vice President, J D Vance, who is hostile to Ukraine's rights, said the current battlelines would become a demilitarised zone, fortified so that Russia would not invade again. The *Wall Street Journal* reported that the demilitarised zone would be 1,300km long and be policed by European troops.

Vance has declared that he "did not really care what happens to Ukraine."

Ukrainian officials have been lobbying Trump, flattering and praising him to try to get some political advantage. Oleksandr Merezhko, chair of Ukraine's foreign affairs committee, has even nominated Trump for the Nobel peace prize.

The latest polling data from Ukraine suggests that there is still a narrow majority (51%) for refusing any peace with Russia which requires territorial concessions. 38% would accept peace in return for territorial concessions (in 2022 the figures were 85 to 10%).

On 27 November Trump appointed former US general Keith Kellogg as his special envoy to deal with the Ukraine-Russia war. Last April Kellogg produced a paper in which he argued the US could

continue to support Ukraine with military aid as long as Ukraine agreed to participate in peace talks; Russia would be offered some sanctions relief if it joined peace discussions.

The Russian economy appears to be under strain. This year's growth forecast is under 1%, inflation is around 10% and there are serious labour shortages in many industries.

Kellogg recently condemned the assassination of Russian general Igor Kirillov in Moscow while also opposing Russian drone and missile attacks on Ukrainian cities. However, the killing of a Russian general and the deliberate, systematic destroying of civilian electricity supplies in Ukraine are not equivalent.

Kirillov was a central figure responsible for Russian chemical, nuclear and biological warfare and a legitimate target for a state fighting for the survival of their nation. The destruction of essential civilian infrastructure is a war crime.

Workers' Liberty and the internationalist socialist left will continue to demand an end to the war on the basis of the unconditional withdrawal of Russian armed forces from occupied areas of Ukraine.

We demand the West gives weapons and financial aid in sufficient quantities, promptly, so that Ukraine can defend itself.

If Ukraine is forced by a Trump-led US to sign a poor deal with Russia in order to avoid even worse consequences we will not necessarily criticise Ukraine. But it is down to Ukraine, and only Ukraine, to decide, not the US or other big powers.

Victory to Ukraine! For the Ukrainian working class! □

Musk, Kickl, Farage, and the rest

By Martin Thomas

With Elon Musk's attack on safeguarding minister Jess Phillips as a "race genocide apologist" and call to jail her, the far right is on a roll internationally.

South Korea's right-wing president refuses to step down after his failed coup. George has a new right-wing president after a rigged 26 October election. In Austria, Herbert Kickl, the "ultra" leader of Austria's far-right Freedom Party, has a mandate to form a government.

In Germany, the far-right AfD will do well in 23 February elections. In Romania, far-rightist Calin Georgescu won the presidential first round in November. The result was annulled; a new vote is due in April.

In France, long-time fascist leader Jean-Marie Le Pen died, aged 96, on 7 January. His party, now with a new profile as Rassemblement National and led by his daughter Marine Le Pen, scores 38% in opinion polls, way ahead of all others, for the next French presidential election, which is scheduled for 2027 but may be earlier.

Musk attacked Phillips for not calling a new national inquiry into child abuse. Alexis Jay, who led the last such inquiry, rebuffed Musk. Jay's inquiry reported in 2022, and the Tory government largely ignored it. Better to implement its recommendations than to do another inquiry.

Health minister Wes Streeting has promised implementation. Socialists want action on the social conditions which can feed child abuse – poverty, lack of social provision, social atomisation. Not Musk's bigotry!

Nigel Farage of the Reform

Party dissociated from Musk when Musk backed Tommy Robinson. Musk then said Reform should get a new leader. Farage responded that Musk's attack on Phillips is "not beyond the line". No doubt Farage hopes that Musk will keep his semi-promise to give £100 million to Reform. Reform is now around 22% in opinion polls, 1% or 2% behind the Tories, only 6% or 7% behind Labour.

Two lessons for us. The far right is dangerously on the rise. It is not monolithic, not a juggernaut, not unstoppable.

Spearhead

The RN, once the political spearhead of Europe's far right, with a clear fascist filiation, has been at pains to "moderate" itself and dissociate from the AfD and Trump. Italian prime minister Giorgia Meloni, with a less-clear fascistic back-story and only a recently-concocted and loose party, has kept in with the "centre-right".

Far-right movements do not have well-debated, nailed-down programmes as socialists do. They are chancers. "Action has buried philosophy", said Mussolini when he came to office. "Our doctrine is the deed". There is usually a big element of deliberate extravagance tempered with vagueness to allow for switches in direction.

We can neither conclude from these movements going "moderate" now, like the RN, that they will stay that way; nor from Trump-Musk ultra-bombast that they can see the way ahead cleared of obstacles.

Much depends on us: whether we can unite the left in action, and whether we can transform the labour movement. □



Solidarity

For a workers' government

SOCIAL CARE NEEDS PUBLIC OWNERSHIP AND DECENT PAY

By Sacha Ismail

The Labour government has kicked the problem of social care into the grass by announcing an [“independent commission”](#) that will not even report its final recommendations until 2028. Again! The last 27 years have seen six official commissions or similar, five White Papers and 14 parliamentary inquiries on social care – and virtually no change, except more and more privatisation.

The issues, and a wide variety of solutions, are well known. But in the unlikely event that the new commission comes up with real new answers, the Starmer government will not be able to implement them before the next general election.

The outlines are clear. Social care needs a lot more money, comprehensive public ownership, and NHS-type rates of pay. Also needed are the restoration

of funding to councils, improvements to benefits, and reversal of attacks on migrants' rights.

In terms of funding, the extra money announced by the government, in the region of £170 million, goes nowhere. Both demographic trends and the higher pay the government says it wants to see in the sector will increase funding pressures still further. Meanwhile, with large amounts of social care spending going through councils, renovating social care means addressing local government's funding crisis.

Carer's Allowance, supporting some individuals who work for free as carers, is only £81.90 a week; and bizarrely, it reduces to nothing if the carer earns £151 a week after tax (£196 from April), rather than tapering as even Universal Credit does.

Brexit, the end of free movement with Europe, and anti-migrant measures broadly have all

worsened workforce shortages in social care, with applications for Health and Care Worker visas declining 87% between August 2023 and a year later. Yet the government is not even planning to reverse the Tories' attacks on eligibility for these visas.

Since 2021, under the banner of a “national care service”, the largest union in social care, UNISON, has campaigned not for its conference policy of public ownership – [but](#) for more funding for the private providers, in alliance with those employers and with Tory MPs.

The left-wing majority on UNISON's NEC and growing left-wing networks among its members could play an important role in launching labour movement campaigning for a real, public National Care Service. □

• More: bit.ly/so-care