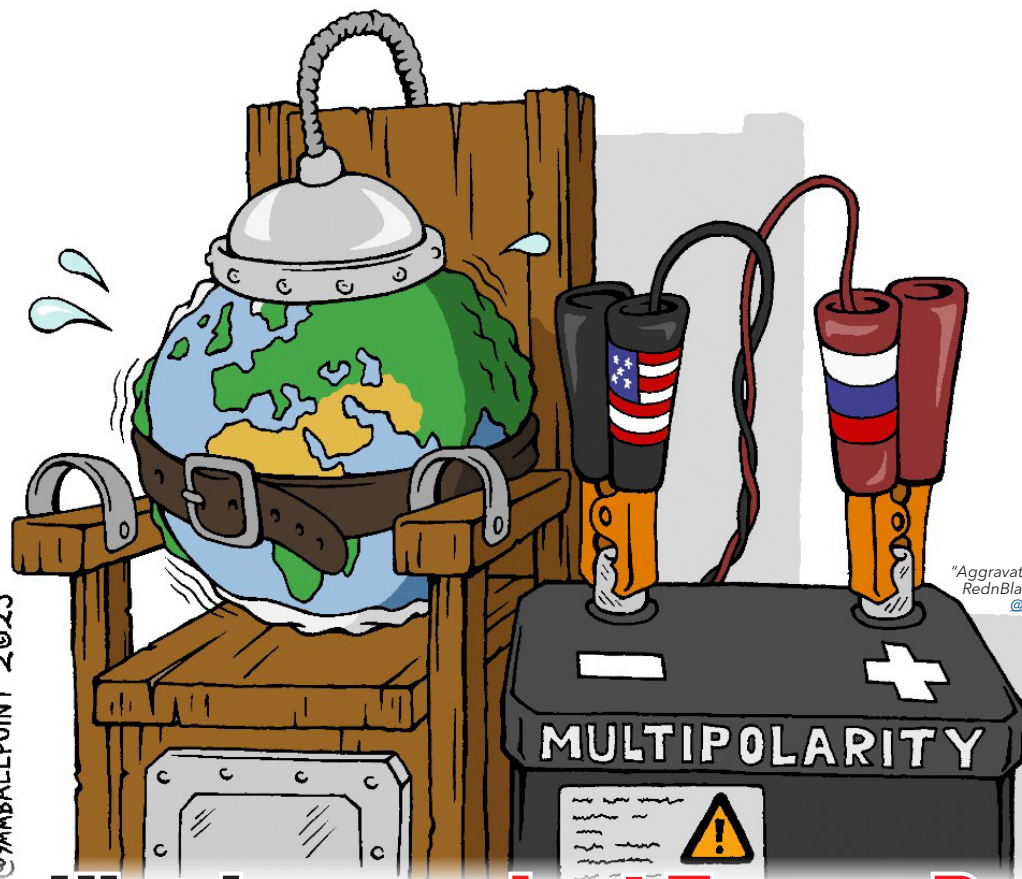




For social ownership of the banks and industry

STOP TRUMP'S OLIGARCHY



"Aggravated Battery" by
RednBlackSalamander
@9mmballpoint

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For Ukraine, **against Trump-Putin**

Threat of more war in Gaza

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Trump and Netanyahu push to restart war



On Sunday 2 March, Israel halted the passage of all humanitarian aid into Gaza. The express aim of this new policy of starvation is to force Hamas to agree to an extension of the first phase of the ceasefire agreement, rather than moving onto the second phase, as stipulated in the agreement's terms. On 9 March, Israel announced that had also cut off electricity (but people in Gaza say it was almost all cut off already). Israel has also carried out some drone attacks in Gaza.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu wants to obstruct the agreement's second phase which would involve Israeli withdrawal from Gaza. Why? Because if it seems the war has decisively ended without the "total destruction" of Hamas, his far-right coalition partners may collapse his government, triggering early elections. Opinion polls suggest Netanyahu's bloc would lose such elections, and Netanyahu himself, once out of office,

would be more vulnerable in the ongoing corruption trial against him.

Yet again, Netanyahu sees Palestinian lives as little more than collateral in his own efforts to maintain power and prolong his political career.

Close allies of Israel, including Britain, France, and the UK, have suggested the aid blockade may be in breach of international law, and called on Israel to lift it. A joint letter from their foreign ministers states that "Humanitarian aid should never be contingent on a ceasefire, or used as a political tool."

Demanding

Donald Trump has joined Netanyahu in demanding Hamas agree to his terms, indicating the US will support a resumption of all-out war. Trump posted on social media, "I am sending Israel everything it needs to finish the job, not a single Hamas member will be safe if you don't do as I say." He added, "Also, to the People of Gaza: A beautiful Future awaits, but not if you hold Hostages. If you do, you are dead!"

The left-wing binational (Palestinian-Jewish) social movement Standing Together said, "The Israeli government

is ensuring that the ceasefire collapses so they can restart the war. Netanyahu is making good on his promises to the extremists in his government, abandoning the hostages and starving Palestinians in Gaza in the process."

Israeli military activity and settler violence has continued in the occupied West Bank, where tens of thousands of Palestinians are displaced and a humanitarian crisis is mounting. New settlement-building activity has been recorded in areas such as Bardala, in the north of the West Bank. Israel Ganz, the leader of a prominent settler organisation, has said, "We have to behave exactly like we did in Gaza."

Standing Together has partnered with numerous other groups to organise a fundraising campaign to provide food and other aid for displaced Palestinian families. Donations can be made at causematch.com/ramadan_aid_25.

On Wednesday 5 March, the Arab League endorsed a \$53 billion plan proposed by various member states for the reconstruction of Gaza. The Arab League said the plan's proposals for emergency relief and reconstruction must "proceed in parallel with a politi-

cal track" towards the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel.

The states responsible for authoring the plan include authoritarian dictatorships and ultra-repressive theocratic monarchies. Nevertheless, unlike Trump's plan for Gaza, their proposal is not premised on the forced transfer of the Gazan population.

Air strikes

Meanwhile, Israel has launched air strikes in Syria, targeting what it says were weapon stores. No casualties were reported. Israel also says it killed a Hezbollah commander in a strike on Lebanon on 4 March.

The efforts of Standing Together and other anti-war, anti-occupation forces inside Israel to pressure the government not to sabotage the ceasefire remain vital. Without shifts in the political reality in Israel, the Israeli government will block reconstruction efforts, deepen the occupation, and continue to resist any moves towards self-determination for Palestinians. UK labour movement support and solidarity can help Standing Together's efforts to resist that government. □

Permanent ceasefire! Rebuild Gaza!



With entire neighbourhoods [in Gaza] wiped out, the World Bank estimates over \$53 billion is needed for reconstruction over the next decade. Nearly 70% of the buildings are destroyed or damaged, leaving families with nowhere to go.

The destruction is not just about homes. Almost 90% of schools are damaged or destroyed, leaving 625,000 children without access to education. More than half of the hospitals in Gaza aren't functioning, leaving Palestinians without medical care. There's barely any clean water, electricity, or

basic services. Life isn't just hard, it's unbearable.

The Associated Press reported that, since the ceasefire, six infants have died from cold. These infants didn't die from a harsh winter, they died because they are displaced and living in conditions that are near impossible to survive. 30,000 people are left with injuries that will change their life forever, with no access to the care they desperately need.

Children are traumatised. A study by Save the Children revealed that four out of five children in Gaza exhibit signs of severe trauma, including nightmares, anxiety, and withdrawal. According to the organisation, approximately 19,000 children have been orphaned due to the ongoing

violence. Israel's decision to halt all humanitarian aid and use starvation and collective punishment as a tactic to pressure Hamas to agree to a completely new ceasefire deal is a war crime and leaves Palestinians more vulnerable than ever as Ramadan begins. Recent threats to cut off electricity are deeply worrying.

Amid these conditions, the people of Gaza show remarkable steadfastness. Children have returned to school, attending classes in tents or damaged buildings, determined to continue learning. Right now, during Ramadan, families are coming together for Iftar among the rubble, sharing meals and decorating streets. People are cleaning and rebuilding their homes, shops, and institutions.

An alternative to Trump's delusional call to ethnically cleanse Gaza was adopted this week by the Arab League. The promising Egyptian plan outlines a roadmap to a sustainable future in Gaza, and a process toward an end to the war and an Israeli-Palestinian peace. This is the direction we must go in.

Stopping the airstrikes won't end the suffering in Gaza. Only an Israeli withdrawal, a true end to the war, and a sustainable solution for leadership in Gaza will allow Palestinians to pick up the pieces and rebuild their lives. There must be a diplomatic solution that guarantees freedom, safety, and peace for everyone in this land. □

• From [Standing Together](https://standingtogether.org)

No increase in military spending!

While it cuts overseas aid, and all across social provision, the Labour government plans to raise military spending.

Aid to Ukraine is no justification for this. So far that has totalled £7.8 bn over three years, which is 0.09% of UK economic output, and only 4.7% of military spending in those years (probably less, because some of the aid will have been sending items already in stock, not new-purchased).

The British armed forces are no longer apt to seize colonies across the world for a British Empire. But their recent big operations have been to help the destructive US invasions and occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Large standing armed forces are by their very nature hierarchical, conservative, democracy-threatening forces. □

Stop Trump's oligarchy!

By Tom Harrison

Federal judges getting anonymous pizza deliveries which police interpret as “we know where you live” [messages](#), and Republican politicians not speaking out against him because they [fear](#) for the safety of their families give us some idea of the current climate in the States.

Discontent over Trump rule has been evident at Town Hall meetings in Republican voting areas where people have lost their jobs thanks to the Musk purge. Attendees there have been dismissed as “professional agitators” and Republican representatives told to boycott the meetings. Trump has also threatened student protests, calling for protesters to be expelled or deported. Colombia University has had \$40 million federal funds withdrawn.

Trump may be waiting for the moment when he can invoke the Insurrection Act. A [pardon](#) for George Floyd's killer Derek Chauvin? That might provoke a riot.

Meanwhile Trump rages about money [supposedly](#) spent making mice transgender? Actually it was about mice being used in hormone therapy research.

There will be a fightback against the illegal and unconstitutional actions of Trump and Musk. The AFL-CIO union federation, which represents 15 million workers, has set up a [campaign](#) – Department of People Who Work for a Living – which it says will organise opposition.

Concrete proposals on what it will do are pretty vague so far. Leading Democrats have mostly retreated towards hoping the mid-term elections in 2026 will help them, and the United Auto Workers, one of the USA's more combative unions, has shamefully endorsed Trump's tariffs, [saying](#) “we look forward to working with the White House to

shape the auto tariffs”. History [shows](#) that, outside some cases of “nursery tariffs” to help new industries to get started in poorer countries, the overall impact of tariffs is to raise prices, increase exploitation, and reduce jobs.

Carl Rose, General President of the United Electrical Workers, says he wants a message to “Trump and Musk that our country is a democracy, not an oligarchy, and that we won't tolerate them enriching themselves by stealing our future.” That message can be sent effectively only by action on the streets and in the workplaces.

Propagandists

Much is made by Trump propagandists of him donating his salary to charity and his tech buddy Elon Musk taking none at all. In DJT's case, though, a presidential salary of \$400,000 is chicken feed, when he can use his office to enrich himself in countless other ways.

The “golden age” Trump 2 promises America is in reality one of oligarchy and corruption on an unprecedented scale. Just a few days before he assumed office again, he launched his meme coin – essentially a means for any oligarch or foreign state to pay him bribes anonymously. Now personal access to the President at Mar-a-Lago is offered with a price tag of a million dollars if you meet him in a group or five million dollars for an individual dinner date.

Elon Musk's project has nothing to do with eliminating government waste and inefficiency. The drive is to get rid of regulatory controls over his businesses. The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau investigating his car company's debt collection and loan policies. Gut it! The Federal Aviation Administration which has fined Space X many times for safety violations. Gut that too! The National Labour Board, investigating labour conditions at Musk companies. It has been [hamstrung](#), and may be [abolished](#) as “unconstitutional”.

The Trump campaign against government waste and fraud is actually a project to expand the very same, overseen by one of the very people who'll benefit from it. Trump has reined in independent oversight by firing important ethics and corruption watchdogs including the head of the Office of Government Ethics and over 18 inspectors general.

Musk's conflicts of interests, really should by now become a matter for criminal investigation, also revolve around AI. Just what will happen to all the personal data his six-figure-salary tech goon squad has collected from numerous government agencies? He's out to get his AI company a government contract and the information gained from DOGE raids on government data bases might help see off po-



“Majority Whip” by RednBlackSalamander @9mmballpoint

tential competitors.

Musk isn't the only oligarch to benefit from Trump's return. The fossil fuel industry chipped a billion dollars into his campaign and has been duly rewarded by him invoking the Nation Emergency Act to increase their drilling.

Appointments

His government appointments are also akin to putting Dracula in charge of the blood bank. The head of the US Forest Service was previously boss of a lumber company. His Energy Secretary is former CEO of a fracking company.

There has been a bonfire of regulations. Some [62,500](#) federal workers were laid off in January and February alone. What comes next is the promised [mass deportations](#).

Social Security has already been under attack thanks to planned sackings of 7,000 staff. The aim of the Republican-controlled Congress to cut government spending by \$1.5 trillion will inevitably involve cuts in social security and Medicaid. The true Gulf of America is the ever increasing gap between the uber rich and the rest of American society.

Tax cuts for the rich are always on the agenda whenever the GOP is running the show, only now the intention is to implement them with a vengeance.

Now Trump admits that the US may be heading for a recession. And of course inflation is not “ending on day one”. Those egg prices are rising to ten dollars a dozen, with his fan club on Fox

News advising viewers to either keep chickens in their backyard (a bit difficult if you live in an apartment block) or eat chickpeas instead! Let them eat chickpeas? Why didn't Marie Antoinette come up with that! □



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](#)

Trump not welcome here!

The Stop Trump Coalition has denounced the offer of a State Visit to Donald Trump. It is circulating a petition against it, and preparing for protest if it goes ahead. Hundreds of thousands joined protests organised by the same coalition when Trump visited Britain in July 2018. Check out [stoptrump.org.uk](#) □

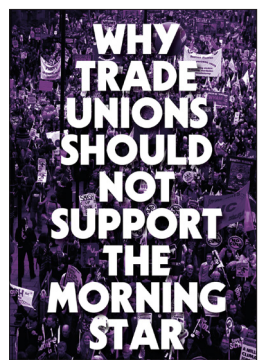
Unhealthy enthusiasm for Wagenknecht



By Jim Denham

The 23 February federal election in Germany saw a worrying advance for the far right AfD, which is now the second largest party in the Bundestag (parliament) behind the CDU (German Tories) and ahead of the SPD (akin to the Labour Party). Because of the long-standing convention in Germany that the mainstream parties will exclude the far right from government, a CDU-SPD coalition seems virtually inevitable.

One surprise was the revival in the fortunes of Die Linke, the left social democratic party. In recent years it had suffered a decline (11.9% of the vote in 2009, 4.9% in 2021), but in the run-up to this election it won thousands of new recruits, topped the 5% bar, and regained representation in the Bundestag. Anecdotal evidence suggests this is at least in part because of the party's vigorous anti-racist stance.



£3 (inc. post) ☐ bit.ly/shop-wl

One might have expected the *Morning Star* to welcome the revival of Die Linke, but in fact the paper has been strangely unenthusiastic. A possible explanation might be that the relatively good performance of Die Linke is overshadowed by the massive advance of the AfD and the general shift to the right in German politics.

But there's more to it than that: for several years the *Morning Star* and, in particular, frequent contributor and leading CPBer Nick Wright, have been massively enthusiastic about Sahra Wagenknecht. A leader of Die Linke, ubiquitous on political talk-shows and easily its most prominent figure, in January 2024 she took away several Bundestag members and a chunk of Die Linke to join her new party, modestly named the Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht (BSW) or "Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance."

Wagenknecht had long claimed that Die Linke had lost its working-class roots and become dominated by middle class "identity politics."

Whatever grain of truth there may be to that criticism, in practice the BSW's calling card was to combine a few mildly leftist economic policies with a hostility to immigration almost as vicious as the AfD's.

On 31 January Friedrich Merz, the CDU's candidate for chancellor attempted to gain parliamentary support for a highly restrictive immigration law. It narrowly failed in the Bundestag after 12 CDU members either voted against or abstained and the SPD, Greens and Die Linke voted against. The AfD group



voted in favour ... as did seven members of the BSW.

Another similarity with the AfD has been opposition to Ukraine and the claim that (to quote the BSW's manifesto) the war (or "proxy war" as they define it) was not really caused by Russia but "would have been avoidable".

Amazingly, the *Morning Star* (or at least Nick Wright) has consistently made what might be called sympathetic noises about Wagenknecht's attitude to immigration. (Their sympathy for her attitude to Ukraine is, of course, much less surprising).

In early January, when the BSW seemed to be on the rise (it had won three successful regional election results in eastern Germany, taking 10%-15% of the vote in Brandenburg, Saxony and Thuringia and looked set to cruise into the new federal parliament) an article by Wright predicted: "Die Linke's electoral strategy recognises that it has lost its chance of reaching the 5 per cent

threshold... BSW thinks its more substantial national polling figure and its stronger local base in some areas will give it a solid representation in the Bundestag and a more decisive role at state and local level."

After the BSW flopped in the federal election Wright claimed [MS 27 Feb]: "While some in Die Linke, and especially key elements in its leadership, have collapsed into liberal and identity politics, BSW has formulated an unorthodox and distinctive position on migration ... But it has been unable to convey the anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist nature of its overall position or combine this with a sufficiently sophisticated critique of German state policy on migration that deals with the way in which large numbers of working people experience the issue."

I for one cannot work out exactly what that word-salad means, but I think we can be clear that he's disappointed. □

Belarus: Time for solidarity against Putin



Eric Lee

Last week I interviewed Liza-Lveta Merliak, who runs Salidarnast, a group campaigning in support of the embattled independent trade union movement in Belarus. Liza was an activist in the Belarusian unions who was forced to leave her country as repression intensified.

By April 2022, the Belarusian dictator Alexander Lukashenko had crushed the independent trade unions in his country. Most of the top leaders were in jail while others were forced into exile. The unions were legally banned. There remain only what Liza calls "yellow unions" – the

successor organisations to the trade unions of the Soviet era which never actually represented workers, never went on strike, and always served the interests of the state.

The crushing of the Belarusian trade unions is unusual, at least in Europe. It has happened nowhere else, not even in Putin's Russia where even the democratic and independent unions remain legal. Even Turkey, where unions are regularly subjected to state repression, they remain legal and continue to represent workers, albeit with some difficulty. But in Belarus, they have been completely wiped out.

I asked Liza why this was the case and she told me that Lukashenko destroyed the trade union movement after the Russian invasion of

Ukraine. He did so because the Belarusian unions, like unions across Europe, had condemned the brazen Russian aggression. Russia had used Belarus as a staging area, putting its military forces there and crossing the border from there into Ukraine. It had turned Belarus into a partner in its criminal war.

Worst

And the reason why Belarus is the worst place in Europe for trade unionists, as Liza explained it, is Vladimir Putin. Putin tells Lukashenko what to do, and Lukashenko does what he is told.

Putin is playing the same role in Belarus as the Tsars did in the 19th century, ensuring that democratic revolutions in countries bordering

the Russian empire are swiftly crushed. Russian leaders think of democracy as a dangerous virus that could spread across borders, even into Russia.

If Putin gets his way, Ukraine will be transformed into a second Belarus, loyal to the Kremlin, with no free speech, no trade unions or opposition political parties. Ukrainians need only look at the bleak image Belarus presents to understand their fate if Russia wins the war.

To mark the third anniversary of the crushing of the independent trade union movement in Belarus, Salidarnast will be running a number of activities in partnership with unions around the world, including the International Trade Union Confederation. They will be running an online cam-

paign hosted by LabourStart aiming to put pressure on the Lukashenko regime.

Unions in Europe in particular need to support these efforts and to raise awareness of the tragic situation facing our brothers and sisters living under the Lukashenko dictatorship. We must show them the same level of solidarity as we have shown to the embattled people of Ukraine. Their fight is our fight and they deserve our full support. □

- Interview with Liza Merliak: bit.ly/l-mlak
- Salidarnast website: salidarnast.info
- LabourStart's Belarus news page: bit.ly/lb-belarus
- Eric Lee writes here in a personal opinion column. He is a founder-editor of LabourStart

Climate change feeds child marriages



Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

Pakistan's "monsoon brides" – child brides sold off to repair family budgets in the rainy season – have spiked since the devastating floods of 2022.

From 15 June to October 2022, floods in Pakistan killed thousands of people, and caused about US\$40 billion in damage, particularly to agriculture. The immediate causes of the floods were exceptionally heavy monsoon rains and melting glaciers after a



New Women's Fightback. 36 pages, £3.00 ☐ bit.ly/shop-wl

severe heat wave, all linked to climate change. Extreme weather events will increase in Pakistan in the coming years, with further devastating effects on the country's agriculture.

Before 2022 Pakistan had seen a decline in child marriages, but the trend is reversing due to the economic strain caused by extreme weather. Families struggling to support children see early marriage as an economic route for the child and the remaining family. Disproportionately girls, who are seen as more of an economic burden, are married off.

Young girls are often sold off to older men, who are more likely to forego dowries or pay for their brides. But child marriage is not driven by economic expectations alone. Families cite child marriage as a way of preventing pre-marital sexual activity which would bring shame on the family.

Al Jazeera has reported the case of Asifa, who was married at the age of 13 and pregnant a year later. Her parents had hoped that Asifa could access further education, then following the floods said getting her bride-price was the only way to feed their younger children.

Child marriage has increased in recent years even though legislation

against it has become stricter in Pakistan. Moral condemnation and legal prohibition aren't enough.

Gender inequality, religious conserv-

atism, lack of welfare, poverty, and inadequate education are all driving the practice. Climate change will increase those problems. ☐



Activist Agenda

Meetings

Thu 20 Mar: Stop Trump's coup in the USA. 7:30, Vat and Fiddle, 12 Queensbridge Road Nottm NG2 1NB

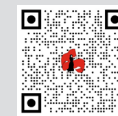
Wed 26 Mar: Women's Fightback 33 launch. 7pm, Marchmont Community Centre WC1N 1AB

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

Template motions

Texts: to adapt for union branches and Labour Parties: bit.ly/mo-pe



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

Socialist-feminist book clubs

workersliberty.org/sf-book-clubs

19 Mar: Sylvia Pankhurst. 7pm, online.

20 Mar: Red Rosa. 7:30, Leicester, tbc

6 Apr: The Longest Revolution. 3pm, Gallery Café, 81 Princess St M2 3JL

6 Apr: Caliban and the Witch. 6pm, University Arms, 197 Brook Hill S3 7HG

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. ☐

Sanctions on Syria increase poverty

By Simon Nelson

Military operations against remaining pro-Assad forces in the Alawite areas along Syria's coast has left over 1,000 people dead, the majority of them civilians. The UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights has described the killings as sectarian reprisals.

There is increased fear among Alawites that such attacks could happen again. It remains unclear what level of control the transitional government of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) have over the clashes. Some of the attacks were taken by groups or militias outside direct government control, but allegations that bombs were dropped from a helicopter over the coast suggest that senior figures in the government must have been aware of the conduct of the fighting.

The operation started when pro-Assad militias attacked transitional government security forces in Jableh, which led to reprisals in Latakia and Tartous. Ahmed al-Sharaa, the

interim president and leader of HTS, said there will be a fact-finding committee to investigate civilian deaths and the conduct of the operation.

Following the "national dialogue" convened by Sharaa but with the exclusion of the Kurds, a deal has been reached between the government and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which the Kurds dominate (they account for up to 10,000 of its fighters). This deal is still unclear, but aims to integrate the SDF into the state.

It recognises Kurds as being an "integral part of Syria", but Sharaa has already confirmed there will be no federal system. Just what rights to language, culture and governance the Kurds will have, we do not know. A nationwide ceasefire is part of the deal. If enforced, will mean the Turkish proxy, the Syrian National Army (SNA), will have to stop its operation against the Kurdish-controlled areas, the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria; and, somehow or another, the SDF will stop

being the Kurds' military force and integrate into a new supposed national army. Whether it will "work", we don't know.

Ankara

Sharaa is close to Ankara, and this deal may have been made easier by the ceasefire called for by Abdullah Ocalan, the leader of the PKK, with the Turkish state. Sharaa also wants to regain central control of the oil fields, the airport, and the border crossing with Iraq within the current "Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria".

The bloodshed on the coast is the single biggest wave of violence since the Assad regime fell in December 2024. Syria's economy has shrunk by 85% since 2011. 90% of its population live below the poverty line. Sanctions continue to stifle improvement. Those sanctions, imposed primarily by the US and EU, were extended in 2024. They were targeted at Assad, but they are yet to be lifted. Even though we surely cannot trust the HTS, we should support lifting of

sanctions, which hit the general population and possible emerging democratic forces as much or more than they do HTS.

HTS is still designated as a terrorist organisation by the EU and US. Direct funding to the government is, therefore, blocked. The US sanctions affect domestic industries, which are already vastly depleted, and also prevent and deter non-US organisations, including those involved in humanitarian aid.

Under Assad, Syria relied on Russia and Iran; the transitional government of Ahmed al-Sharaa now looks to Turkey and the Gulf states for support. Even here, sanctions are slowing down potential aid. Qatar has stalled on sending \$120m per month to Syria's central bank.

Assad's regime relied economically on production and export of captagon, an amphetamine. Captagon production is not tolerated under Sharaa.

The HTS regime has legalised the use of foreign

currency within Syria, partly because of a physical shortage of Syrian pounds, which under Assad were printed in Moscow. The move has made some minor difference, but it can do little to alleviate poverty or make supplies like fuel and bread more readily available. Fuel continues to be smuggled in from Lebanon and sold on the street.

Half of the civil service has now been dismissed as part of a coordinated "purge" of the previous state. Sharaa has appointed members of his own family as ministers, and other ministers remain almost entirely recruited from the HTS government in Idlib. ☐

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Events and campaigns: workersliberty.org/events



youtube.com/c/WorkersLibertyUK



workersliberty.org/audio

The evolution of Extinction Rebellion



Environment

By Owen Flood

Though fewer than at their peak, there are still around 150 local XR groups in the UK. There are also relatively sizeable branches in different cities across the world.

XR's Strategy Team published its strategy [document](#) for 2025-26 in February. The emphasis of the strategy is for local groups and individuals to build thriving communities that "disempower institutions", to rebel but in your own small and creative ways, "practise the skills of resistance", and that by doing so you and others will build the necessary power to take on bigger things. At least this is a possible interpretation of it. The suggestions and the rationale are quite broad and vague. How much and what impact this will have on what local groups are doing is not clear.

The lack of any concrete suggestions or aims for the coming year will be obvious to anyone reading it. It suggests

a general lowering of expectations and further reduction in activity.

Despite all this many XR groups still exist and have some life in them and are generally quite open. Where Workers' Liberty activists have intervened in local branches of XR, XR Youth, or youth branches of JSO it has been fruitful, particularly so with sustained week-by-week engagement. Crucially, by advocating orientation to the working class and organised labour and the central role our class must play to win environmental transformation.

Over time – and spurred on by our and others' agitation – sections of XR have become more working-class and labour oriented: visiting picket lines of striking workers, the XR leadership issuing a statement of solidarity for striking oil refinery workers in Fawley. For a time XR Trade Unionists were active, and some important worker initiatives such as Safe Landing were pioneered by activists who had been involved in XR originally. More activity from socialists in the environmental movement will generate more of these tendencies and initiatives and they will be more effective and sharper in their politics.

XRTU focused on picket-line del-



egations during the strike wave and on promoting a class approach in the wider XR and the climate movement. Doing so was however most accessible to retired trade unionists, students, and irregular workers. While supporting that activity, we advocated that XRTU encourage and empower its members to organise around climate issues at work. This harder, longer-term, less immediately glamorous but more important work didn't take off much, unfortunately.

XRTU, like the successor organisation to the COP26 Coalition, "exists" now

primarily only as a network of local national WhatsApp (and Facebook) groups. That may be usable, as may be the "brand" of an officially-sanctioned XR Trade Unionists section when intervening in local XR groups.

In some local areas, there may be other environmental groups with a similar or higher level of activity to XR (or its spin-offs). Engaging with your local XR group would likely help you find out about such other groups even if and where that is the case. □

• More: bit.ly/evo-xr

Sheffield holds anti-cuts referendum

By Sam Myerson and Kayden Jones

Sheffield Anti-Cuts Coalition escalated the campaign against course cuts and job losses at the University of Sheffield open day on Saturday 8 March. Students dropped banners reading "Stop Course Cuts" and "No to Uni Austerity", others gave out a petition to prospective students and their parents or carers. The action was well-received by the visitors.

The university is pursuing aggressive cuts, including £23m from its staffing budget this year and the same next academic year. Those cuts could result in 400 jobs lost. Sheffield Student Union has had £400,000 cut from its block grant.

Sheffield Student Union is calling a referendum with two questions: "Should Sheffield Student Union express 'No Confidence' in the University Executive Board?" and "Should Sheffield Student Union support University staff taking Industrial Action?". The referendum will be held 17-20 March.

The outcome of the referen-

dum will have an effect on the Sheffield UCU ballot for industrial action, which ends on 30 March. The Anti-Cuts Coalition is meeting to discuss activity during the referendum.

Strikes against university cuts started at Brunel and Newcastle in the last week of February. The University and College Union (UCU) nationally has finally, over a year since the wave of cuts began, launched a campaign in Higher Education.

The UCU campaign is mostly a virtual affair, with a glossy website page and a lobby of parliament planned for [18 March](#). The union is now collating information about the current cuts and disputes [on-line](#), but with less detail and information than the work (bit.ly/cuts-uni) by the UCU branch at Queen Mary University London.

Under the leadership of Jo Grady, nationally the union has left local branches to fend for themselves against cuts. Many of those have already been driven through, and now management is looking at second and, in the case of UEA, a third round of cuts.

Campaigns against the cuts



vary from university. At Cardiff and Sheffield there are lively broad campaigns with students and staff working together. Socialist Students (SP) and the Revolutionary Communist Party have national "campaigns" they have initiated, but on the ground those have come to little. The Books Not Bombs campaign of the RCP was fundamentally a talking tour, and they withdrew from the anti cuts campaign in Sheffield. Socialist Students

at their national conference committed to launching campaigns on campus where they have members, to invite other student groups... but so far so little.

Yet the numbers in the rounds of cuts currently proposed or complete are staggering. At [Brunel](#), over 500 professional services staff are facing redundancies. That is at one university.

In the last year and a half courses have been closed

and jobs lost. The Department for Education, under Bridget Phillipson and Higher Education minister Jacqui Smith has repeatedly said there will be no new funding. There are other priorities. They say that a new funding model should be looked at, with the strong hint of a [further rise](#) in tuition fees. Campaigners call instead for the scrapping of fees and replacement by direct public funding. □

How McSweeney made his coup



Book review

By John Lacey

Review of "Get In" – The Inside Story of Labour Under Starmer, by Patrick Maguire and Gabriel Pogrund

Above all else this is a story about the counter-revolution against Corbynism. Riding high on the tide of a backlash against the 2019 General Election result, a right-wing clique staged a decisive coup against the left. Starmer and his acolytes arguably now have as firm a grip of the party as any internal faction has had for decades.

The book meticulously charts that ruthless and highly organised takeover by a relatively small coterie of right-wing men. They mostly are men. It's objectively a good piece of well written and immensely readable journalism.

Neither of the authors, who published an earlier volume about the rise and fall of the Corbynite project, *Left Out*, in 2020, could be labelled as archetypal right-wingers. Although not discernibly of the left, neither Maguire nor Pogrund is ideologically hostile to the labour movement, despite both working for titles in the Murdoch stable.

With a length of nearly 450 pages, *Get In* is at times akin to a highly extended version of a gossip Sunday newspaper long read.

However, there's real substance to the book, which is immaculately sourced and based on "up close" interviews with some of the leading players from the last five years in Labour politics.

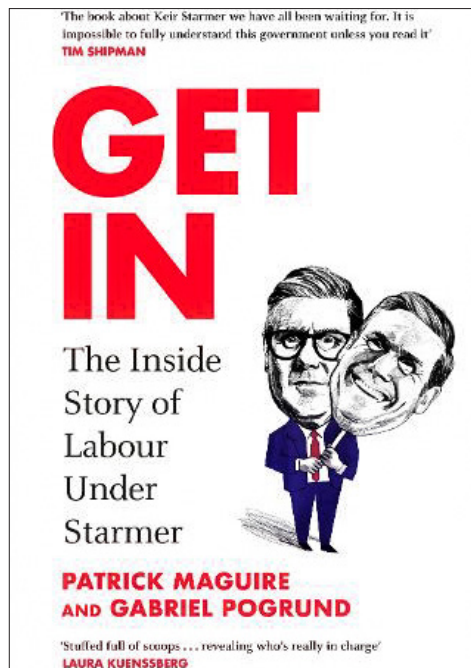
Morgan McSweeney looms large throughout the book as Starmer's consigliere. The leader's chief of staff is accurately portrayed as a shadowy figure driving the project that has forced Labour's dramatic lurch to the right.

Masterminding a leadership election on a "Corbyn-lite" platform in early 2020 in order to win over a largely left leaning membership, before installing a command-and-control style structure that saw policy commitments shelved and leftist candidates blocked from standing for public office, are well documented in *Get In*.

However, the most shocking aspect comes in the early chapters, when setting the scene, it charts the early days of McSweeney's activities as director of the "neo-Blairite" Labour Together group.

Harvesting and distributing anti-Corbynite propaganda, then ruthlessly fed to the media, was a routine tactic employed by elements of the hard right in order to destabilise their own party.

So much of this was stepped up in the wake of Labour's relative success at the 2017 General Election – the high



watermark of Corbynism.

Tragically, Corbyn himself, and some of those around him, would either walk into so many of these attacks or fail to properly push back against them.

This failure would be at its most glaring and egregious with the ridiculously inadequate response to the antisemitism crisis, which would grip Labour so severely and drain so much of the vibrancy from the Corbynite project.

The authors of *Get In* do not delve too deeply into that debacle, having covered it extensively in the first volume – *Left Out* in 2020.

Antisemitism

However, weighty sections of the latest book chronicle Jeremy Corbyn's downright wrong claim in late 2020, that claims of antisemitism were "dramatically overstated" by opponents.

There was a clear lack of natural justice in arbitrarily suspending Corbyn following those ill-judged remarks on the day the Equality and Human Rights Commission published its report on antisemitism within Labour. But the former leader and his close allies grossly mishandled their response, just as they did during the initial crisis.

A ludicrous tragicomic back and forth with Starmer's office played out for far too long, with Corbyn haggling over a form of contrite words he would agree in order to secure his readmission to the Labour Party.

At one stage Corbyn goes off grid and fails to respond to calls from comrades on the left seeking to negotiate the lifting of his suspension.

For all the unjustified smears and the authoritarianism of suspending Corbyn, the tardiness of response from some in his inner circle and occasionally the former leader himself is breathtaking.

Maguire and Pogrund write a balanced account of how Starmer dramatically changed the goalposts after

Corbyn was readmitted to Labour membership as part of a peace deal following an apology of sorts.

Having lifted Corbyn's suspension from Labour, Starmer then bowed to pressure from right wing MPs to refuse the former party leader the whip at Westminster, while allowing him to remain an individual member.

That ridiculous state of purgatory would never be resolved, with Corbyn ultimately standing against Labour, going down the blindest of blind alleys.

Strikingly, there are scant revelations about what makes Starmer tick.

A lack of even basic politics, let alone ideology, is conspicuous.

Looking back at Starmer's leadership campaign in early 2020, despite a relatively left leaning policy platform, *Get In* proves beyond any doubt that the organised forces behind it were thoroughly right wing.

As Shadow Brexit Secretary in Corbyn's Shadow cabinet, Starmer ran his own tight knit operation.

Loyal

Entirely separate from the official party machine, Starmer's office was staffed by two ultra-loyal and very right-wing wing lieutenants – Ben Nunn, now spin doctor to Chancellor Rachel Reeves, and Chris Ward, who was later handed the candidacy for the Labour seat of Brighton Kemptown after the sitting left winger Lloyd Russell-Moyle was ousted on a trumped up internal disciplinary charge.

McSweeney would formally join Starmer's office later after spearheading his leadership campaign in early 2020.

While not publicly agitating against Corbyn, Starmer's entourage styled themselves as a leadership in waiting.

Get In makes a case that Starmer only championed a second Brexit referendum to further his own interests. Given his swift abandonment of that pro-EU stance as leader, it's a highly plausible one.

McSweeney emerges in technicolour on almost every page that he's featured on as the red-baiter in chief.

A ruthless protege of Peter Mandelson who's determined to break Labour's historic status as the "broad church" that Harold Wilson once claimed the party was.

Despite being a gripping read, there's far too much adulation for McSweeney, who may ultimately find that the book has put a target on his back, making himself "the story" rather than his political boss.

There's a compelling case to be made that McSweeney is not after all some kind of political genius, who should strike fear into the hearts of anyone on the Labour left.

An emerging question for the reader

is whether McSweeney is simply a highly competent right-wing operator within Labour with a predilection for purges and authoritarian leadership, as well as a disdain for internal party democracy.

There's ego's aplenty, throughout the book, with turf wars and purges never far away, whether that McSweeney's successful battle with former top Whitehall mandarin Sue Gray, or the dramatic shadow cabinet reshuffle held in the wake of Labour's defeat in the Hartlepool by-election after which Starmer considered quitting.

It was Starmer's thoughtless attempt to blame deputy Labour leader Angela Rayner for that setback in May 2021 that provide one of the few sections of *Get In* that see the leader's office come off second best.

Certainly, the botched attempt to demote Rayner makes for one of the more entertaining passages, after the Mancunian MP walks out on Starmer and decamps to a Westminster pub, where she successfully forces key concessions to cement her power base.

Get In is an informative account of a coup against the left, taking in a slew of dirty tricks, as well as authoritarian stitch-ups including the ousting of sitting Labour parliamentarians, a metro mayor and a Scottish Labour leader.

It's striking that many of those at the top of "Team Starmer", including McSweeney, were at the heart of the campaign for the 2015 Labour leadership of ultra-Blairite candidate Liz Kendall, winning just 4.5 per cent of the vote.

Many would reemerge in the doomed leadership challenge to Corbyn fronted by that highly forgettable nonentity Owen Smith in 2016.

That shallow factional base within the labour movement and Starmer's early pratfalls in government suggest that the project surrounding his leadership may yet prove to be a castle built on sand, and much less enduring than Blair's New Labour.

For that reason alone, *Get In* should be read by everyone on the Labour left, including those in the Socialist Campaign Group of MPs, many of whom as things stand are failing to show any meaningful leadership in the face of the "Starmerite" coup.

Over to you, comrades. □



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Film shows Israeli-Palestinian “co-resistance”

By Samah Salaime

Samah Salaime is a Palestinian-Israeli activist and writer. This article is abridged, with thanks, from +972 magazine (bit.ly/n-ol)

No sooner had directors Basel Adra, Yuval Abraham, Hamdan Ballal, and Rachel Szor accepted the Academy Award for best documentary for their film *No Other Land* – which tells the story of Israel’s ongoing ethnic cleansing of the Masafer Yatta region in the occupied West Bank, including Basel and Hamdan’s own communities – than the attacks began.

Israeli Culture Minister Miki Zohar accused the film of “defamation” and “distort[ing] Israel’s image,” urging movie theatres in Israel to refrain from screening it. Many in the Israeli media rushed to denounce it.

[The Israeli right’s attacks are expected. But other] critics accused Yuval and Rachel, the two Israeli directors, of feigning solidarity with Palestinians while actually promoting a subtler form of “liberal Zionism.” Yuval, in particular, was chastised for daring to condemn the Hamas attack of October 7 in his brief speech and stating that our fates as Israelis and Palestinians are intertwined, as well as for not using the word “genocide” when denouncing Israel’s onslaught on Gaza – of which he himself has exposed many aspects.

Then came the official statement from the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI), an arm of the BDS movement, which declared that the film “certainly violates” its guidelines on anti-normalisation.

No Other Land is, in fact, an exemplary case of co-resistance. The directors have stated their views explicitly on every platform available to them, while the film documents and embodies a superb example of this struggle on the ground...

Accordingly, many Palestinian academics, activists, writers, and artists have criticized PACBI’s statement as detached and unjust. They have warned of the harm such a declaration inflicts on the camp of nonviolent resistance and much of the opposition to the occupation, from Palestinians and left-wing Israelis alike...

To cut through the noise of this messy and toxic debate, I decided to see what those actually living in Masafer Yatta – whose villages are raided daily by Israeli settlers, soldiers, and bulldozers – had to say about the film and the controversy it has engendered.

“I don’t know what the BDS people are talking about,” Jihad Al-Nawaja, head of the village council in Susiya, told +972. “What do they want from us? I want you to quote me word-for-word: I swear to you, after many years of struggle, confrontations, arrests,

beatings, and demolitions, I know – not think, know – that without people like Yuval and Jewish activists from Israel and around the world, half of Masafer Yatta’s lands would have been confiscated and razed by now. Our steadfastness here is thanks to their help.

“As far as I’m concerned, Yuval is far more Palestinian than most of these on-line commentators attacking him – he is Palestinian to the core,” Al-Nawaja continued. “He is Jewish and Israeli, but he understands exactly what’s happening here just as I do, and he chose to stand with us. Yuval and dozens like him have lived with us, eaten with us, slept in our homes, and confronted soldiers and settlers alongside us every single day. I invite all the critics to turn off their air conditioners, get in a car, and come live here with us for just one week. Then let’s see if they still call on me to boycott the film.”

Tariq Hathaleen, an activist from the village of Umm Al-Khair, explained: “Everything we stand for here is in real danger. We have been under daily attacks from settlers. On the same evening that the whole world was talking about [*No Other Land*] winning the Oscar, the settlers organized themselves and came to take revenge. To all those scrutinising the legitimacy of our struggle, I say: take your statements, turn them into juice, drink it, and calm down.

“I have personally been active in this struggle for more than two decades,” Hathaleen continued. “After much thought and discussion, we decided back then that we would welcome all supporters who identify with us on the ground. Twenty years ago, groups from Israel and abroad came, and I accompanied them. For me, they are a force I cannot afford to give up on. All these years, we have heard the accusations from the boycott movement against us – we expected it.”

Activists

Hathaleen believes that the overwhelming majority of residents in the area still stand behind this decision to welcome Israeli activists into co-resistance, especially now when the community feels more vulnerable than ever. He also thinks the BDS movement’s denunciation has a class element and is part of a struggle over narrative ownership...

For Nidal Younis, the head of the Masafer Yatta village council, the success of *No Other Land* at the Oscars should not only be celebrated, but used “as a lever to shed more light on what is happening in Masafer Yatta and all of Palestine. In the current reality, with settler violence and daily attacks on our communities, alongside the moral decline in Israeli society, this film is a very loud cry against oppression and injustice. No film can bring about historical justice to our people, but it is one of the available means in our struggle, and must



be used in our international efforts.”

Regarding the PACBI statement against the film, Younis told +972 “I respect the criticism: I myself think the film is calling for justice within the [existing] de facto regime, and I don’t accept that. But the pros outweigh the cons, and the film should not be boycotted. It tells our story, the Palestinian story – there is no Israeli story in it. Yuval is a true partner, and so are all the international and Jewish activists, who sleep in Masafer Yatta and defend us from settler and army attacks.”

Demolished

A Palestinian activist and teacher whose home Israel has demolished multiple times, and who requested anonymity, said: “Honestly, I’m tired of all the criticism from people who don’t know who we are or how we survive here, yet lecture us on what to do and how to tell our story. I am incredibly proud of Basel and Yuval for making this film.

“Our struggle has been going on for [decades]. We are forgotten here in caves, and no one cares. Without this film, who would even know where Umm Al-Khair or Susiya are, or what their story is? I’m about to cook an Iftar meal for all the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim activists who live here with us. I invite anyone to spend just one night here in the freezing cold with them. Maybe the settlers will attack us before dawn, and we’ll need their help.”

Another activist from a different village who also requested anonymity, added: “I am ashamed of all these critics and attackers. Instead of supporting Yuval and Basel and contributing to our struggle, even just with words online, this is what they choose to do? Preach to us and tell us what the Palestinian struggle should be? This film has shed light on our reality in a way that no Palestinian politician in a suit, speaking multiple languages, has ever dared to. I don’t know a single person in Masafer

Yatta who doesn’t support it”...

I can also appreciate how despair has taken hold of many Palestinians around the world, amid the ongoing trauma of the new Nakba that Israel has wrought upon Gaza, and that it’s hard to see any light at the end of the tunnel. In this darkness, a film painstakingly made by Israeli and Palestinian partners in struggle, standing side-by-side on one stage and insisting on dreaming of a different future, can seem frightening. Whereas sinking into despair offers a kind of mental relief from the burdens of our current reality, aspiring for a peaceful future has become an act of bravery that carries within it a call to action. And not everyone can or dares to act: to go to Masafer Yatta and stand arm-in-arm with the residents against their eradication.

Partnership

The image of genuine Palestinian-Israeli partnership against occupation and apartheid is extremely rare nowadays. It’s something that is supposed to be hidden or suppressed. After all, the driving force behind Israel’s assault on Gaza and the dominant current in Israeli society is the idea that “it’s us or them” – and as we’ve seen in the backlash to the film, this sentiment is growing among Palestinians too.

And yet, here is a group of young Israelis and Palestinians proving to the world that such a partnership indeed exists. At the same time, they are proving to Palestinians that there are Israelis and Jews who don’t raise guns against them but instead stand in front of the guns, alongside them, protecting them with their own bodies...

So let me add my voice to those offering many congratulations to Basel, Yuval, Hamdan, and Rachel on what is an exceptional honor and a tremendous achievement – for them, for activist cinema, for Masafer Yatta, and for the Palestinian cause. □

Former Polish political prisoners denounce Trump

By Lech Walesa and others

After the US decision to withhold supplies to Ukraine, Lech Walesa, historic leader of Poland's Solidarnosc trade-union movement in 1980, and 30 former political prisoners under the martial law of 1981-8 and previously, have written an open letter to Trump.

We watched the coverage of your conversation with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy with dismay and distaste. We find your expectation of showing respect and gratitude for the material aid provided by the United States to Ukraine fighting Russia offensive. Gratitude is due to the heroic Ukrainian soldiers who shed their blood in defence of the values of the free world. It is they who, for more than 11 years, have been dying on the front lines in the name of these values and the independence of their homeland attacked by Putin's Russia...

Our dismay was also caused by the fact that the atmosphere in the Oval Office during this conversation reminded us of the one we remember well from the interrogations by the Security Ser-

vice and from the courtrooms of the communist courts. Prosecutors and judges commissioned by the all-powerful communist political police also explained to us that they were the ones with all the cards in their hands and we had none. They demanded that we cease our activities, arguing that thousands of innocent people were suffering because of us. They deprived us of our freedoms and civil rights because we refused to cooperate with the authorities and show gratitude to them. We are shocked that you treated President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in a similar manner...

Freedom

Mr President, material aid – military and financial – cannot be an equivalent for the blood shed in the name of the independence and freedom of Ukraine, of Europe, and of the whole free world. Human life is priceless; its value cannot be measured by money. Gratitude is due to those who make the sacrifice of blood and freedom. For us, the people of Solidarity, former political prisoners of the Communist regime serving So-

viet Russia, this is obvious.

We call for the United States to honour the guarantees it gave with the United Kingdom in the Budapest Memorandum in 1994, which explicitly included a commitment to defend the inviolability of Ukraine's borders in exchange for it surrendering its nuclear weapons stockpile. These guarantees are unconditional: there is not a word in there about treating such aid as an economic exchange. □

Walesa, now aged 81, moved to the right under the martial law, and he was president of Poland in 1990-5 when, after winning (bourgeois) democracy, it imposed capitalist economic "shock therapy". The full text of the letter praises Woodrow Wilson, F D Roosevelt, and Ronald Reagan for their foreign policies, without comment, for example, on Reagan's help for the Contras in Nicaragua. He and his comrades deserve a hearing, though, for their courage against the old Stalinist regime and their successful efforts to rebuild a workers' movement in Poland after decades of suppression. When they write that Trump's treatment of Zelenskyy

reminds them of how Stalinist prosecutors and judges treated them, they write from knowledge. • bit.ly/l-wal □

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Minerals deal? Stand with Ukrainian workers

By Michael Baker

After the blow-up between Trump, Vance and Zelenskyy on 28 February, there has been much talk of the minerals deal that Zelenskyy had, in theory, arrived to sign. The deal is still on the table, and its economic consequences could be significant.

Of course, just because something makes economic or geopolitical sense, it doesn't mean Trump will do it. His position on a wide range of issues seems to veer from one direction to the other, easily influenced by the loudest voice in the most recent meeting.

That said, Ukraine's "rare earth" minerals are not a small matter. These are not in fact "rare", but difficult to find in good concentrations. Ukraine may have 10% of the world's reserves of lithium (centrally important in making batteries, among other things), and large reserves of titanium, very important for arms and other production. A deal to get 50% of proceeds from Ukrainian mines would be a big boon for America, which imports lithium from Chile and Argentina and wants other options.

But there are a lot of caveats. Ukraine's estimates are very old, dating back to the

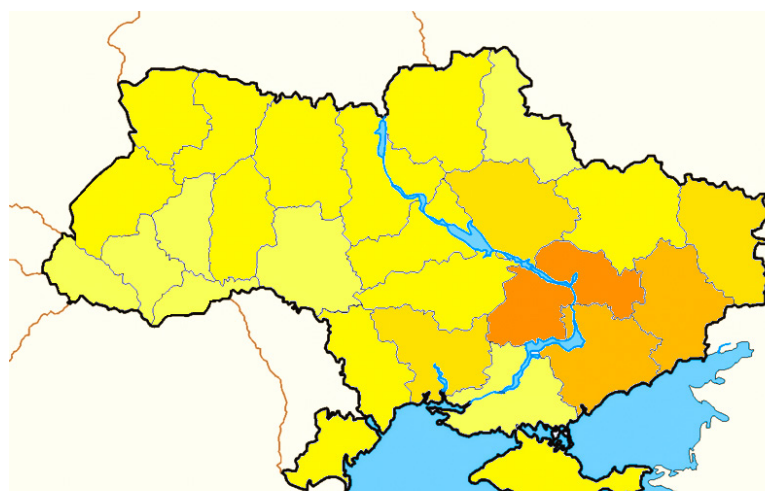
USSR era; and 20% of those estimated reserves, says Kyiv, are currently under Russian control.

Almost none of the lithium reserves have been developed yet. That process takes years under normal conditions, and will take longer in Ukraine currently. There are reports of new sites being established to develop some potential mines, but no details have been revealed yet. America is also offering no help in rebuilding infrastructure or preparing sites, which will be much more arduous after years of missile fire and ground warfare.

Obstacles

The prospect of foreign investment faces obstacles: an active (or recently active) conflict zone, a corrupt and bureaucratic government likely taking cuts of profits, and collapsing energy infrastructure due to Russian attacks, meaning running machinery to dig up and process lithium will be much more expensive than usual. The US government will have to do a lot to incentivise American business investing in these resources.

The deal Zelenskyy was going to sign would have created an investment fund jointly run by the US and Ukraine with



Metal production by region of Ukraine, by monetary value per capita, in 2007. Dark orange was over £40/year per person.

some share of income from rare earths (exact percentages hadn't been agreed), but none from Ukrainian oil and gas, which are state-owned.

Meanwhile, a deal opening up new oil and gas trade with partners of the US, and a relaxation of the sanctions regime, would be very good news for Putin.

A series of talks between the US and Russian governments – excluding Ukraine entirely – have attracted understandable attention. There are rumours that Russia is pushing to reopen the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, a project that Trump criticised loudly in his first

term, but now sees as a strategic tool in peace negotiations – and a way for America to have a say in Russian gas supply to Europe.

There are no guarantee any minerals deal will be signed. But all versions of the deal currently in play will leave Ukraine economically damaged, and extra pressure from foreign investors will encourage further Thatcherite attacks on Ukraine's labour laws and trade unions. Building links with Ukrainian workers and putting pressure on both our government and theirs for workers' rights will be vital. □



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What was “militancy” in No

By Sean Matgamna

Part of a series of articles exploring the role of the left in the great political upheaval in Northern Ireland in 1968-9, written in response to John McAnulty’s polemic (Solidarity 217)

PD in October 1968

People’s Democracy, which would become well-known as a left-wing force in the turmoil, was set up in Belfast on 9 October 1968.

On 5 October a civil rights (and housing) march in Derry had attempted to ignore a police ban. The peaceful demonstrators assembled and were then set upon by the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), wielding batons indiscriminately. Labour MPs like Russell Kerr and Anne Kerr were present. Gerry Fitt, the Westminster “Republican Labour” MP for Belfast West, was hit and bloodied by a police baton. The RUC was seen to be on the offensive, beating peaceful demonstrators. We saw one jabbed with a baton in the stomach by an RUC man. It was very like what cops in America did to Black people demonstrating for equal rights. The association of Northern Ireland Catholics and people of colour in the USA came to be a common one.

It was the time of great marches against the Vietnam war and of the American civil rights movement. Disturbing and unsettling film from Vietnam and the USA had been pumped raw and uncensored into American and British TV news. Now we saw bully-boy Northern Ireland police beating Catholics who wanted equality.

In Britain, there was very wide support for the Northern Ireland Catholics. All the British press, the Tory press too, backed Catholic demands for equal rights, for “civil rights”. The song of the

American Black people’s movement, We Shall Overcome, was sung on Irish civil rights marches: I remember seeing a whole crowded pub in Derry on a Saturday night singing it together.

An American Black Panther film was popular among Republicans and pro-Republicans in Derry: “The revolution has come/ Time to pick up the gun”. It was sometimes sung satirically, mockingly, against Republicans. People’s Democracy leader Michael Farrell was influenced by the US civil rights movement.

The Provo war was then a thing of the future – 15 months in the future, to be exact. The Republican movement had not yet split, though that would happen soon (December 1969 for the IRA, January 1970 for Sinn Fein).

The police riot of October 1968 made more intensive the pressure on the would-be reforming Unionists in power, under Terence O’Neill as Northern Ireland prime minister. A Labour government ruled in London and was in favour of equal rights for Northern Ireland Catholics. Some of the “leftists” in the government or in the Parliamentary Labour Party, for instance Stan Orme MP, had been educated in an Irish nationalist (Connolly Association) view of the Catholics in Northern Ireland. They were very much for them and against the Unionists. Another Labour MP, Paul Rose, a future judge, wrote a pamphlet on the Manchester Martyrs, Allen, Larkin, and O’Brien.

In Northern Ireland it was Protestant-sectarian, majority rule. The Unionists who wanted reform were in a minority, beleaguered amidst traditional “keep the Catholics down” Unionists.

I once asked a Derry Catholic woman about differences among the Protestants, between, say, Methodists and Episcopalians. She answered: “Ah, no. They’re all the same”. To the Catholic second-class citizens, they were all part of the ruling Protestant elite.

The great British upsurge of opinion in favour of the Catholics in 1968-9 was just; but it was also shallow and thoughtless. The central civil right which the artificial Catholic minority in the Six Counties lacked was national self-determination. That issue would inevitably come to the fore. That was the underlying logic of what led many of them to “pick up the gun”.

The Protestants were an Irish minority; but the second minority, the Catholics of Northern Ireland, were an artificial minority because two Catholic counties, and other Catholic-majority areas mainly along the border with the 26 Counties, had been given to Northern Ireland at partition. The Northern Ireland state had been so carved out in

1920 that Catholics could not foreseeably get a majority there.

On the night PD was declared or the day after, a syndicalist comrade, Ron Marsden, and I, in Manchester, having little knowledge, tried to puzzle out what the new organisation was, politically. People’s Democracy? With a name like that, we thought, it had to be some sort of Stalinist outfit.

The Stalinists called Russia’s satellites in Eastern Europe “the People’s Democracies”. But there were at least three lies in those two words. It was not rule by the people, whatever was meant by “people”. It was not democracy in any sense, bourgeois, proletarian, or any other sense. And there had never been, could never be, a “people’s” state. The state is always a class state.

So, Stalinist of some sort, we had no doubt. In fact, PD in Belfast was led by co-thinkers of IS (today SWP) in Britain, which thought that Russia and its “People’s Democracy” satellites were “state capitalist” formations. Those Belfast people were former comrades of mine in the Irish Workers’ Group. The IWG had split in Dublin on 17 March 1968 with the Northerners, who were all Cliffites, IS sympathisers, on the other side to ours. Cyril Toman, not the notional IWG leader Gery Lawless, spoke for the IWG majority, advocating the system of organisation which IS in Britain was then trying to abolish. I spoke for the minority which would go on to found the League for a Workers’ Republic.

The IWG was mainly an Irish émigré organisation in Britain. It began as the Irish Communist Group, in which Maoists and ostensible Trotskyists managed to coexist for a while, under the political hegemony of the Maoists, who imitated the Irish Communist Party of the early 1930s. In the split that was inevitable, the hard-core Maoists were isolated. The Trotskyists, and others including softer Stalinists, soon abandoned the name Irish Communist Group and became the IWG. That did not render us more coherent.

In March 1968 the IWG split. The minority had no-one in Northern Ireland. The 1967-8 majority in the IWG was a strange conglomerate of IS people who thought the USSR “state capitalist” with ultra-“Pabloites” who retrospectively sided with the Russians against the workers’ rising in East Berlin in 1953. The two groups were united in hostility to the Orthodox Trotskyist faction.

Immediately after 5 October, the Six County Home Secretary William Craig denounced Trotskyism in the Northern Ireland parliament, using a few snipers from the manifesto adopted by the September 1967 IWG conference: “A revolutionary socialist organisation which aims to mobilise the Irish section



of the international working class to overthrow the existing Irish bourgeois states, destroy all remaining imperialist organs of political and economic control, and establish an All-Ireland Socialist Workers’ Republic”.

Rory McShane, who was a Queen’s University Belfast student elected chair of the IWG at the September 1967 conference, denied all knowledge of the IWG, and the IWG quietly ceased to exist at that point.

But the leaders of PD, except Bernadette Devlin, had been part of the IWG. I could guess, but I never did find out for sure how they came to have a quintessential-Stalinist name like People’s Democracy.

IS and ourselves in 1968

The British group, IS (today, SWP), was going through its own turmoil. Its leader, Tony Cliff, had proposed that its previous federalist and loose organisation be centralised, and the group was in ferment for six months. The ferment ended in November 1968 in a conference which voted to centralise IS and elected a National Committee.

The drive to centralism had been accompanied by a call for left unity. Why left unity? Because, said IS, fascism was an immediate threat in Britain. Tory MP Enoch Powell had speechified that immigration threatened Britain with “rivers of blood”. He had been sacked for it from Edward Heath’s Tory Shadow Cabinet, and London dockers had struck, ostensibly for “free speech” for Powell, but in fact because they agreed with him. Some of those same dockers had from September 1968 been on a ten-week strike against the reorganisation of the ports by the employers.

These events were alarming. Workers’ Fight (forerunner of Workers’ Liberty) had called “for a Trotskyist regroupment” in October 1967, on the grounds that there was no viable Trot-



rthern Ireland in 1968-9?

skyist group in Britain. That was true to reality. But of course there were ostensibly Trotskyist groups, and they were very much bigger and, as organisations, more credible, than we were. The "Trotskyist regroupment" never happened.

Workers' Fight was alarmed by the London docks strike for Powell. We did not believe the IS nonsense about "the urgent threat of fascism"; we did however believe in IS's call for unity, and (falsely) believed that the Mandelites (IMG) would join IS too. We fused with IS at its conference in November. In doing so we lost more than half the previous Workers' Fight group: they refused to join an organisation we all called "centrist" (vague, half-revolutionary, politically unstable). They were placid sectarians who never did anything in politics more onerous than sing good folk songs well.

Workers' Fight became the "Trotskyist Tendency" of IS. We considered ourselves Cannonite Orthodox Trotskyists. I had thought the Socialist Labour League (SLL, "Healyite", then the biggest "Orthodox Trotskyist" group by far) had been ok until it turned very sectarian. It indulged in sectarian strike-breaking to assert its own leadership in the November 1964 engineering apprentices' strike.

I had been expelled from the SLL in September 1963. That involved a trial with no charge I could reply to and a direct clash with the SLL's tyrant Gerry



Healy. For the next fourteen months I was an SLL supporter but with decreasing commitment. I broke with them when they broke the apprentices' strike in November 1964. Yes, that was very late in the day. After breaking with the SLL, I joined Militant (as the main other would-be Trotskyist group available).

Ted Knight had operated for Healy in other organisations – he split Militant (forerunner of the SP and others) and the International Group (future IMG), both groups then linked to the "Mandelite" Fourth International (United Secretariat). He had recruited me to the SLL from the Young Communist League five years earlier. I had read some of Trotsky, including his *Diary in Exile* and the introduction to it by Max Shachtman, and was a subscriber to the Pablo-Mandel magazine *Fourth International* and the little biweekly *International Bulletin* they published.

I was a Trotskyist, sort of, but I was a Deutscherite. Knight lent me Trotsky's *Revolution Betrayed*, which I had so far been unable to get, and convinced me that only a workers' rising could overthrow the bureaucracy. He formally recruited me to the SLL.

Shortly before Easter 1965, Gerry Healy sent Knight to see me. Knight proposed that I rejoin the SLL and work for them inside Militant. I refused. I had broken with the SLL politically, forever. I remember talking to Knight in the café, "The Shalom", on the corner of Queen's Road, owned by an Israeli who let the YS have the upstairs room for nothing.

On the 1965 annual Easter Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) march from the nuclear facility at Aldermaston to London (it took four days), I made a point of telling Pat Jordan of the International Group, of which Ted Knight was then still supposedly a member (having split with them from the Granite organisation, the Revolu-

tionary Socialist League (RSL/ Militant)), that Knight was working inside the IG for the SLL. Jordan was very officious. Oh, they had everything under control. But they didn't. Thereafter the SLL press, when it referred to me, always said that I was "very hostile" to the SLL. After more than five years' involvement with them, I was.

Socialist Worker from October 1968

As the Catholic civil rights movement in Northern Ireland, and a Protestant backlash against it, escalated in 1968, the typical response of *Socialist Worker* was exemplified in an article by Paul Foot (26/10/68), under the headline: "Do-It-Yourself Politics Threatens Northern Ireland's Police Rule".

Foot gave readers, who in the main would know next to nothing of the realities of Northern Ireland, details of the discrimination in housing, jobs, and votes against Catholics. Politically speaking, the important part of the article, defining IS's approach, was this: "The exploited people of Northern Ireland, denied even the semblance of parliamentary democracy available to the rest of the UK, are beginning to 'do it themselves', to act to seize the basic rights and services denied them by the intolerant and reactionary government".

In fact the system for electing Northern Ireland's Westminster MPs was not interfered with. Election-rigging mainly concerned the local councils in Catholic-majority areas. Foot's response to what he saw when he visited Northern Ireland in October 1968 was described to me soon after. He had repeatedly burst out laughing, not in scorn, but in disbelief at what the Unionists did. But still he got his facts wrong in his *Socialist Worker* article.

Direct action, said Foot, showed the way. The ruling Ulster Unionist Party set religious sectarianism to divide the workers, he thought.

Foot noted the upsurge of student militancy for civil rights, and claimed that created a "terror of the authorities at the prospect of workers and students acting for themselves".

All of the IS of 1968 was there. There had been a strong strain of quasi-anarchism in IS's youth segment. Direct action, "do-it-yourself" reforms, and "militancy" were the central values.

Alongside the quasi-anarchism in Foot's article, and of IS's typical approach then, was, right from the start, a lack of awareness of, or a refusal to notice, central features of the reality of Northern Ireland.

In Foot's picture the fact that "the people" in revolt were only (a section of) the Catholic minority was resolutely

pushed aside. He depicted a worker and student uprising against the Northern Ireland equivalent of a Greek military dictator (Papadopoulos) or a white supremacist in Africa (Lardner-Burke).

This was a view of Northern Ireland seen through spectacles that filtered out everything that was specific to Northern Ireland. For the next year, anyone relying only on *Socialist Worker* for information about Northern Ireland would not have been able to make sense of events there. The national, communal, denominational, sectarian realities of the real Northern Ireland were not admitted into the pages of *Socialist Worker* until August 1969, when panic led the IS leaders to face realities (sort of) and abandon some of their fantasies.

In December 1968 the IS Executive Committee (EC) agreed: "There was perhaps scope for a campaign on Vietnam Solidarity Campaign lines which should be more fruitful because it could bring workers into contact with the revolutionary left. The campaign should take in questions coming from the south as well, although main emphasis on the North".

The committee duly agreed:

"a) To educate the group (and the British left, especially revolutionary Marxists);

"b) Start an Irish campaign;

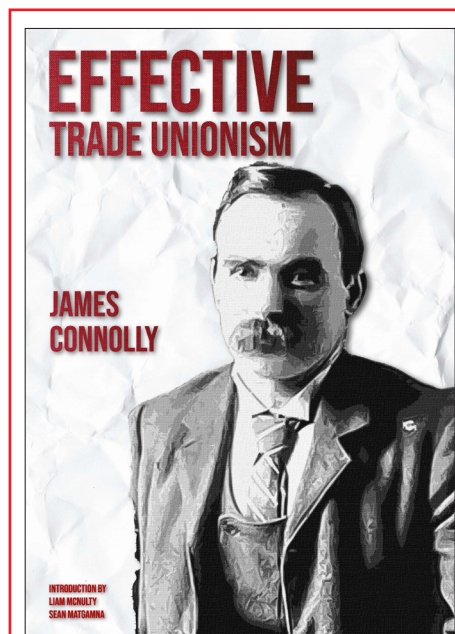
"c) Assist the re-formation of an Irish group".

The political conclusions and proposals for action from the EC meeting appeared in *Socialist Worker* on 4 January 1969, on the eve of a meeting of the broader National Committee that would discuss and, notionally, decide. The article, "Ulster: what the left must do", was the work of former IWG leader Gery Lawless, under the pen name "Sean Reed".

"The Northern worker will never be won to a programme which calls for the absorption of the Six Counties into the present Southern regime with its Rome rule in the schools which tends to confirm his ever-present fear that a break with Orange Toryism will open the floodgates and relegate him to the position of a second-class citizen. He will only be won for the establishment of a Republic when it is clear in his mind that what is envisaged is a Workers' Republic in which he as a worker will control his own destiny without fear of Thames or Tiber.

"The complexity of the situation has in the past been used by many in the labour movement in Britain as an excuse for doing nothing, or else indulging in the old British habit of telling the Irish how to run their own affairs. This

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

British... attitude to Ireland will come as no surprise to Irish revolutionary socialists, who have long recognised if not accepted the inability of the labour movement in Britain to show an understanding of the Irish problem. The result of this attitude in practice is that even the best-informed British left-wing organisations fail to take any part in the struggle against British imperialism in Ireland. What is to be done? First and foremost British socialists must refrain from penning long high-flown theoretical articles (which all end up telling Irish socialists what to do) and instead launch a campaign of solidarity with the Irish movement...

In fact the text of the *Socialist Worker* article agreed between the IS leaders and Lawless implicitly ruled out self-determination: the worker "will only be won for the... Republic when it is clear... that [it] is a Workers' Republic".

On one level this was ultra-left. The "constitutional question" had dominated Irish politics then, and would do for the next 50 years, but IS said it would think about that only after two Irish socialist revolutions, one in the Six and the other in the 26 Counties. The Stalinists presented a "stages theory", first the Republic (united Ireland), then

the workers' republic. And so did IS, but differently: first win two separate socialist revolutions, Six and 26 County, and then Irish unity (self-determination) could be the next stage.

Despite the reference to socialism as a necessary first stage before Irish unity, the IS demands were not explicitly for socialism, or, in Irish parlance, for the Workers' Republic.

The IS Executive had chosen as its model the Communist Party's front organisation, the Connolly Association. The Connolly Association presented itself to Irish workers in Britain as a pseudo-nationalist organisation with a focus on the labour movement. The IS leaders wanted to present IS as a pseudo-liberal, militant civil rights front.

The January 1969 discussion

A new period began with the first "new" IS NC in January 1969, and the EC meeting and *Socialist Worker* article that prepared for it. A third would begin with Bernadette Devlin's election as a Westminster MP in April 1969, and a fourth period would begin with IS's change of line in August 1969 to one of justifying the deployment of British soldiers in the Six Counties and de facto supporting them.

The first post-federalist meeting of the IS National Committee (NC) took place in January 1969. Of course the EC, i.e. the actual leadership, had never ceased to function. How things were going to be was signalled when Cliff marched in at the head of a group of his friends and nominated the entire new EC, including who would represent the loose "block of 11" of which Workers' Fight was part. Tony Cliff and his allies prepared for the NC by the minutes of the 12 December EC meeting, which Gery Lawless had attended, and the 4 January article.

IS had recently taken over an old warehouse at Cottons Gardens, not far from Liverpool Street station in London. A cluster of chairs arranged in rows was an oasis in the centre of a big and empty room there, faced by a small table at which sat Jim Higgins. I suppose we must have elected him as permanent chair at the beginning.

Ireland was the most important discussion of that January 1969 first NC meeting of the new IS. The "Burntollet" march, ambushed by civilian Orangemen and RUC and B-Specials out of uniform, had just taken place, followed by a serious Catholic mobilisation and Catholic-Protestant fighting when the march got to Derry City (two miles from the Donegal border, and then called Londonderry, in the county of the same name). The Cameron Commission was set up to "investigate" what happened in Derry in January 1969. Its report in October 1969 would cause a new organisation, also named People's Democracy to be launched. But that was at the other side of the beginning of civil war and the British army coming into mainstream politics as "controller" of the streets in the Six Counties.

The EC had discussed Ireland. IS's response was now in theory to be discussed and decided by the NC.

Many years later, when Jim Higgins, then long out of IS, was writing his very personal account of the history of IS, he wrote to John Palmer to ask him what the IS policy on Ireland had been in 1968-9. It was not obvious to the chair of the NC meetings, Higgins, what the IS policy had been. It had not been clear at the time to him, either, though he spoke, voted, and at one crucial point used his "chair's" tie-breaking second vote to stop the organisation advocating "the workers' republic" to



the Irish in Britain.

John Palmer had been the main contact for IS with PD and specifically with Michael Farrell. Back wrote Palmer to Higgins, saying that IS didn't have a policy on Ireland then. That was in big part true. Palmer had been the "main man" on Ireland, backed by Cliff, in 1969. He had reported on Ireland to the NC. He had been PD's spokesman on the NC. IS did not, he told Higgins, have a policy on Ireland in 1969. (The exchange is in Higgins's papers at Senate House library.) Palmer meant, I suppose, that IS had no independent analysis of Ireland. But it certainly had a policy: it followed wherever PD led.

And it certainly had appetites. It wanted to grow, and it wanted PD to grow, on any political basis. Later it would want its British-based organisation, the Irish Civil Rights Solidarity Campaign, to grow. □



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

After Reform UK, the RCP's turn next?



By Matt Cooper

In *The Communist* (#22, 28/2/25) the RCP (formerly Socialist Appeal) argues that the increasing working-class electoral impact of Trump, Reform UK, and AfD is no cause for concern.

Adam Booth claims working-class voting for Reform "does not represent a 'shift to the right' in society, but rather a rejection of the political establishment. In 'The rise of Reform' Joe Russell argues "to call Reform UK 'far-right' implies that they are worse than the hated capitalist establishment" (so we shouldn't). The

surge in Reform support shows only that "the conditions are being prepared for an explosion of the class struggle".

"The label 'far-right' is especially misleading when talking about those workers who are turning towards Reform in order to give the establishment a kick in the teeth" (who are therefore better than other workers who don't turn that way?) Russell cherry-picks data from a YouGov poll to suggest around three-quarters of Reform voters think that businesses take advantage of ordinary people, that the rich can get around the law, and the working-class do not get their fair share.

But then so do most people. The populist right punch up (an out-of-touch "liberal elite") as well as down (migrants,

benefit claimants, the under-serving poor).

The YouGov survey asked 24 questions. Reform were like average voters on six questions (including all three that Russell quotes) and much like the Conservatives on another six. They were more (often much more) right-wing than the Conservatives on twelve, including "British values", supporting the death penalty, opposing multiculturalism, supporting low taxes and spending cuts, opposing economic redistribution of wealth, supporting Israel's actions in Gaza.

Reform's rage at "woke"? Just anger at "condescending nonsense and liberal ('woke') identity politics [which] has been embraced by much of the so-called 'left'."

"The death of woke" by Dan-

iel Morley reproduces an RCP tweet which states, "USAID is a CIA front ... let it go to the woodchipper." "Public rejection of wokeness reflects a rejection of the liberal establishment; a repudiation of the petty-bourgeois [identity politics] ideas that a wing of the ruling class has adopted and pushed in order to cut across class consciousness and class struggle. And that is a good thing."

Nothing could be less clear. In fact the "public rejecting" so-called woke ideas is not going beyond snooty or tokenistic liberalism to working-class socialism, but falling back towards racism, misogyny and transphobia.

There is a serious discussion to be had on the relationship between state-led diversity

policies, activist groups of oppressed sections, and the working class, but the RCP are not engaging in such a discussion. They simply declare that adherence to their politics and organisation (and no other) is the only route for liberation.

As for anything liberal or reforming which does not meet this standard, they will construe wanting to "throw it into the woodchipper" as a first step towards... themselves.

Under Third Period Stalinism, the Stalinised Communist Parties announced that all parties other than their own were fascist. All rebellion (even by actual fascists) against liberal or reform politics was a step toward the imminent revolution. The CP's turn would come next. The RCP is veering down the same track. □

Gaining a real right to strike

By a PCS member

The Employment Rights Bill comes back to the House of Commons for amendments to be debated at "report stage" on 11-12 March. It was introduced in October 2024, and after this goes to third reading in the Commons and then to the Lords.

In this article we won't go into detail as to the toing and froing of the amendments, but instead discuss the Tory, Labour, and TUC or union movement approaches to the Bill.

The Tories are opposed to virtually every change set out in the Bill. For now they argue that all firms with less than 500 people should be opted out

of most of employment rights in the Bill. This would exclude over 24 million workers and allow the changed rights to apply only to about nine million people.

On trade union rights they oppose all changes. In fact, they want to actually make things worse, so they have put amendments to extend the current strike notice requirement from 14 days to 21 days.

Given their ambivalence on paid maternity leave and diversity in general, you can see the Tories working up an offer to "liberate" small business from the yoke of wokery and employment laws as a means to reengage with that base of supporters.

The Labour leaders claim "Labour is pro-worker and pro-business, and we will work in partnership with trade unions and business to deliver our New Deal". This balancing act shapes the Bill, with Labour trying to find the golden mean in not antagonising business too much.

They are less worried about the TUC and most unions, as they may huff and puff but they have no intention of trying to blow down this particular house. In reality the TUC and the big unions are grateful for the proposed changes, though here and there they wish Labour would go further.

The area where the unions are certainly not seeking any real changes in the Bill are in the laws against strikes introduced in the Thatcher years and still with us. If Labour gives the unions electronic balloting for strikes (in place of postal), scraps the 50% turnout threshold for strike ballot, and ends the Minimum Service requirement brought in by the Tories, then they will be happy.

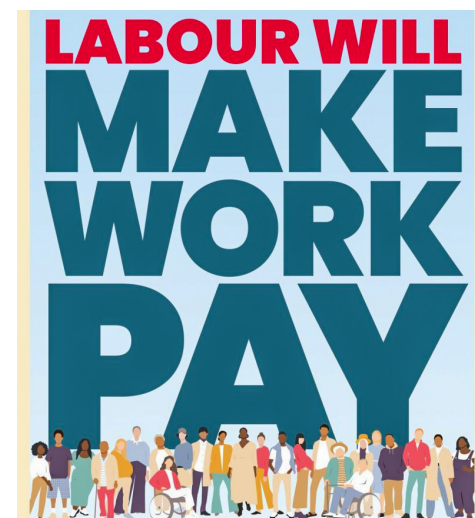
If, on top, Labour legislate as they say they will to extend strike mandates from six months to twelve and reduce strike notice periods to 10 days, then they will be even happier.

All that leaves in place the pre-2016 anti-strike laws, the requirement for a legal ballot, no secondary action etc. It still means there will be no legal right to strike in this country, unlike in France, for example. All we have is immunity from breach of contract claims, and we have never had more, not even under the 1906 Trades Disputes Act.

No major union, in reality no union, is really campaigning for scrapping those older anti-strike laws, despite all the motions passed at the TUC and union conferences saying we should. The union movement in general is content, in broad terms, with what is on offer. Like Labour, they don't want to go too far.

On collective bargaining rights, although Labour has said "Stronger trade unions and collective bargaining will be key to tackling problems of insecurity, inequality, discrimination, poor enforcement and low pay", in reality, apart from setting up the School Support Staff Negotiating Body and promising to introduce sector bargaining for the adult social care sector (though that won't happen until close to the end of Labour's term of office, if at all) there is nothing more.

In the EU, the Minimum Wage directive (which is under legal challenge) sets the aim of having 80% collective bargaining coverage in each country. But Labour has no such aim and truth be told, in terms of really wanting it and campaigning for it, neither do the TUC and most unions. In general, the union

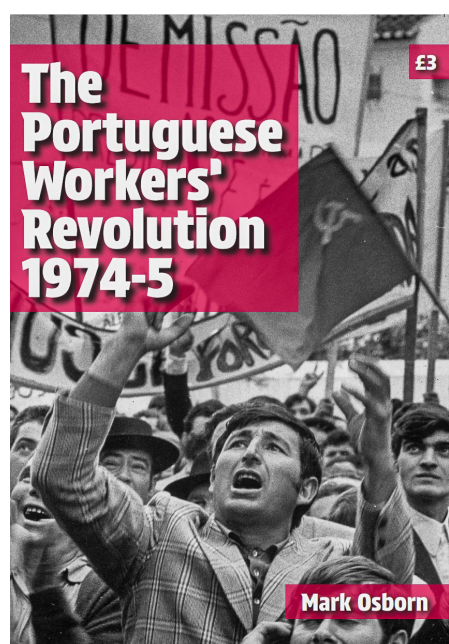


movement has no ambition.

Whilst acknowledging the improvements, we have to be clear they don't go far enough. Unlike the union leaderships, we have to say that all anti-trade-union laws must be scrapped and replaced by a positive right to strike and to take secondary action.

Given that most unions have conference policies to this effect, we should make the democratic argument that such motions be honoured. We have to make the case why such moves as scrapping the need for a legal ballot are vital for the union movement and workers. At present, unions have no legal capacity for instant response.

The same holds true for boosting collective bargaining rights. We argue for that as important in itself. Allied to a real right to strike, it would mean that the unions, and the workers in those unions, becoming more powerful. That is important for a democratic society. Strong unions are a vital pillar of any democratic society, and they are vital in fighting the far right. □



The story from the 25 April 1974 overturn to the 25 Nov 1975 restabilising coup. £3 □

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A new threat from H5N1 bird flu

By Matt Sanderson

Alongside a backdrop of the largest flu seasons in 15 years, H5N1 bird influenza is spreading amongst poultry. There has been some crossover into cattle herds in America, as well as bird-to-human "zoonotic" transmission. 40 people have become mildly ill when infected with bird flu genotype B3.13, and 24 people have been infected by a different genotype D1.1 directly from farmed poultry, with two severe cases, one resulting in death. In the UK there has been a single case of farmed-poultry-to-human infection of a different genotype to the two in America.

Bird influenza strain H5N1 first emerged in 1996 and has since slowly evolved and become endemic, always present within part of the global population of wild birds. With the migratory patterns of birds, their influenza spreads across the globe and has many opportunities for transfer between species. Outbreaks amongst farmed poultry is common and increase their exposure for humans.

Although H5N1 has a low probability of evolving so as to infect humans, a low risk multiplied by many chances of exposure to potential human hosts has generated consistent cases since 1996 of transfer to humans. Mortality rates

have ranged from 30% to 80% depending on the severity of the strain and the genotype caught from poultry.

Our last large flu pandemic was the 2009 H1N1 swine flu, which spread widely due to lack of immunity to that strain in humans.

This time, there are increasing numbers of cases of bird-to-human transfer but none yet of human-to-human transfer.

Concerns

There are larger concerns regarding how this disease with pandemic potential is being handled. The Trump administration in America, where cases have been spreading

since before Christmas, has enacted massive cuts to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and other research and disease monitoring, pulled the USA out of the World Health Organisation (WHO), stopped sharing its influenza data, and cancelled its seasonal flu vaccination campaign.

The spillover into dairy cattle is additionally concerning as H5N1 D1.1 bird flu has been found in cow's udders and their raw milk, creating even more opportunities for the flu strain to evolve into a more virulent strain. The new American fad of raw milk increases risks from H5N1 as well as other health dangers.

Meanwhile, the economic

impact of bird flu in poultry has increased egg prices 36%.

We could yet see Trump blaming Covid-19 on China and then presiding over a deadly bird flu pandemic originating in America

The capitalist hack and slash of US government services will weaken American pandemic preparedness and pose a global danger if scientific data is not shared. In the UK we are still seeing further cuts to the NHS. With frontline staff still burnt out from Covid-19, we need to see a significant change from the neoliberal model of healthcare to improve our preparedness. □

“What we stand for

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

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

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

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

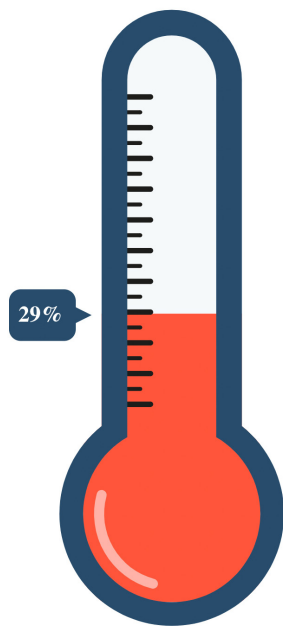
We fight for trade unions and the Labour Party to break with "social partnership" with the bosses, to militantly assert working-class interests.

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

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

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

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£5,869 raised so far

Solidarity supporters and readers responded reasonably well to the appeal two weeks ago after a meagre £50 was raised. Between *Solidarity* 735 and 736 we raised an additional £2,569, thanks to Jill, Paul, Bryan, Daniel and Stephen.

We are now at almost 30% of our goal, and with over five months to go until our Summer Camp, if we continue as we are, we'll have no trouble reaching it.

Now is not the time to be complacent. Some of these donations result from back pay from pay deals that have taken some time to agree. We cannot rely on that for week-to-week fundraising.

With clocks due to change at the end of March, we can expect an upturn in street sales and visibility for our publications and our ideas.

If you subscribe to *Solidarity*, why not consider upping your monthly standing order and taking multiple copies to sell on the street, in your workplace, and at your campus, school, or union branch meetings?

Our supporters can commit to helping us spread our ideas and sell our publications, we will be in a stronger position to reach or even surpass our goal by the Summer Camp. □

• Donate: workersliberty.org/fund

This “four day week” is no good



Diary of a Tube driver

By Jay Dawkey

Apart from an upcoming strike, no issue that has dominated the mess-room, train cab, and changeover discussions as much as the London Underground's proposal for a four-day week presented to us on 7 March.

Summaries from the two unions, RMT and Aslef, have widely circulated on WhatsApp, and have been followed by the companies' full proposals. Everyone wants your opinions on them.

The proposals would ultimately introducing a 34-hour four-day week in three years' time, but they involve so many sacrifices, changes to existing agreements, deletions of whole shift patterns, and worsenings in finish time (to 0230) and start time (to 0345) that at least among RMT union members on manual lines the opinions span from "it's too much to give away" to "this is one of the worst proposals we've ever been offered, we should reject it immediately".

Besides the proposals having an adverse effect on work-life balance, the extra day you'll eventually claw back probably won't be the respite you hoped for.

The company has said there is no negotiation. It is take it or leave it. Aslef is holding a referendum with a recommendation to accept. It had, after all, already promised its members that a "groundbreaking" agreement was coming.

RMT is yet to decide how it will get members' views. A meeting has been arranged for drivers to give opinions, and union reps are busy finding as many views as they can. That isn't a difficult job.

Opinions

People I have never before heard speak up are voicing opinions, asking questions, or sometimes just expressing shock that an offer that they had some hope for can be quite so bad.

There had been increasing support for drivers to be able do overtime. The proposed deal would include that, but that has not persuaded many to back it. The prospect of increased driving time, from 4 hours 15 minutes to 4 hours 45

minutes, is a step too far – particularly with the spate of signal failures and stalled trains we regularly deal with.

All this has helped make the argument in favour of an actual 32-hour four-day week, long an RMT demand that has fallen by the wayside, much easier. If we can defeat the company's proposal and build momentum for that real four-day week, we can come out of this in a strong position. □

Join Workers' Liberty!

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

The best Australian film ever?



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

If you like films with a "proper ending", then Peter Weir's *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975) is not for you. It is 1900 and a party of young women from Apleyard College in Victoria, dressed in white gloves, crinolines and trussed up in

corsets, set out for a picnic at nearby Hanging Rock, an eerie, spooky place. The atmosphere is enhanced by the film's sound track which included Romanian Pan pipes.

Four of the young women leave the picnic area to explore the Rock. Three of them wander into the crevices in the Rock and get lost. Their teacher, Miss McCraw, also goes missing. A search party eventually goes out looking for them and one of

the students, Irma, is found but has no recollection of what has happened. The missing persons are never found and the film offers no explanation as to their fate.

Interpretations

Given the nature of the mystery surrounding the disappearances, any number of interpretations have arisen about the film. One critic offered the following, the film "... employs two of the hallmarks of mod-

ern Australian films: beautiful cinematography and the clash between settlers from Europe and the mysteries of their ancient new home". In 1996 it was voted best Australian film of all time (though more recently some have challenged devotees to "rethink the stories we tell at Hanging Rock and remember Aboriginal suffering in that (real) location: mirandamustgo.com.au) □

• Watch online: bit.ly/p-h-r

NEU strike against victimisation

By a Sheffield NEU member

National Education Union (NEU) members at Longley Park Sixth Form in Sheffield have been striking again in a dispute with their employer, Brigantia Learning Trust, that has been running since December 2024. The core dispute is around the misuse of “capability” procedures to target an NEU rep at the college, Duncan Blackie. Duncan is also the Sheffield District NEU joint secretary and on the NEU NEC.

It is positive that the union has recognised the strike also reflects anger over increased workloads and a failure of the college and Trust management to engage with the trade union on these issues.

Striking NEU members and supporters from the labour movement in South Yorkshire are turning up regularly to the picket lines to show solidarity and a determination to win this dispute. It's important to reach out to students and parents to explain the reasons behind the strike and to widen support. Hopefully, NEU members across Brigantia Learning Trust will also show their support for their striking colleagues. A victory in this dispute can strengthen union organisation and representation across the Trust. □

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German left and 23 Feb

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First conference to discuss policy:
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PKK disarming?

Discussion article by Asso Kamal:
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Word4Word

Manager-speak, capitalist philanthropy, and Carnegie:
bit.ly/w-be

PCS ballots in Rayner's department

By a PCS member

Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union members working in the Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government (MHCLG) are currently being balloted for industrial action in response to a series of attacks on the terms and conditions of staff initiated by the senior management team:

- The closure of six departmental offices, including MHCLG bases in Newcastle, Truro, Sheffield, and Birmingham. Flying in the face of Labour's espoused commitment to “the regions”, and

- Ironically, given the programme of office closures, the continued enforcement of arbitrary and unequal office attendance policies, despite the evidence from the pandemic (and since), including the Department's own evidence, showing that the vast majority of departmental roles can be undertaken from home without impact on the output and quality of work, and that staff are the best judges of where to undertake their roles from, consistent with their wellbeing and their personal lives.

- The proposed abandonment of the department's current location neutral recruitment policy, that allows existing staff to apply for and take up any departmental role from their current locations, greatly expanding job choice and promotion opportunities, especially for staff in smaller offices.

Members of the PCS Independent Left, within which AWL PCS members are active, have been crucial in leading PCS MHCLG Branch's “Our Work, Our Way” campaign in opposition to these wholly unnecessary attacks.

Offices threatened with closure are being balloted on an aggregated (collective) basis that will end on 26 March.



All other “regional” offices are also being balloted on a collective basis, with the ballot set to end 9 April. London is the subject of its own ballot, also ending 9 April.

In the face of management intransigence, PCS representatives are working hard to secure a mandate for industrial action and fight back over the continued erosion of the flexibilities and terms and conditions of MHCLG members and other civil servants.

Failed

Whilst these proposals have been initiated by senior management, MHCLG is headed by Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner, who [declared](#) in the House of Commons last October, “...I am a life-long proud trade union member.” Tellingly, however, despite invitation and representation by the MHCLG Branch, Rayner has failed to meet with PCS over

this issue and has not met MHCLG PCS representatives once since becoming the Secretary of State over seven months ago.

Rayner's unwillingness to engage with MHCLG representatives undermines her public commitments to the importance of workers' representation, “back[ing] working people to take their voice back, [and] improve their terms and conditions.” Successful ballots would represent a test for Rayner, who would be the first Secretary of State of this Labour Government to face strikes by Civil Servants within their own department over issues initiated during their incumbency. □

FM strikes may restart

By a PCS member

For over six months, Facility Management (FM) members of the PCS have been taking extensive strike action against contractors OCS, G4S and ISS over pay and terms and condition. All work on civil service contracts, so in reality their pay and terms are controlled by the government, e.g. Labour can add a clause to all existing contracts that FM staff get full contractual sick pay, it could add that all FM staff be paid more than the minimum wage etc.

So as well as pressuring the companies through the strikes, the union has been lobbying the civil service and Ministers. All this paid off three weeks ago, with the strikes being key, when the government wrote to PCS, saying it wanted talks between the union and the FM companies. It asked that the

strikes stop for this. This sparked off a lively internal debate.

The General Secretary was desperate for the union to fall in with the Ministers' request and tried to pressurise the FM reps into agreeing what effectively would have been a stop in the action. They resisted, arguing that there had to be firmer guarantees.

This resistance paid off, with the union winning an agreement from the civil service that the company talks would actually happen and there should be extra money for a settlement. The reps ensured that the strikes would be paused only for two weeks, with an option to extend the pause by a week if the union was certain a deal was about to be struck.

The strikes start again on 17 March if no progress is made. □

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Against Putin-Trump!

By Dan Katz

Donald Trump may be able to force a peace agreement which ends the Russia-Ukraine war on rotten terms.

By bullying and threatening Ukraine, a much weaker and poorer state and a victim of Russian imperialism, the US hopes to re-establish political and economic ties with Vladimir Putin and his despotic, aggressive Russian regime. Trump is now openly siding with Russia against Ukraine. He wants American capitalism to gain from a settlement with Putin and a normalisation of economic relations between the two powers.

Trump also openly admires Putin, a ruler responsible for snuffing out free speech, killing opponents, trampling on democratic freedoms and imposing strict nationalist-dictatorial rule in Russia.

On Friday 28 February, in a staged provocation in the White House, Zelenskyy was ambushed by Trump and his deputy, J D Vance. Trump and Vance, in front of world media, accused Zelenskyy of "ingratitude" towards the US for support Ukraine had received. Trump then used his performance as an excuse to cut aid to Ukraine.

The US has suspended arms shipments to Ukraine, including materials that are not available from Europe, such as Patriot missiles for self-defence against Russian missile attacks on civilian infrastructure.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Sunday 9 March that Ukraine had been hit by 1,200 guided bombs, 870 attack drones, and 80 cruise and other missiles in the last week.

Trump has also ended intelligence sharing, which will seriously impact Ukraine's self-defence. And, apparently, the US is considering revoking the legal status of 240,000 Ukrainian refugees in the US who sought sanctuary after the Russian full-scale invasion of 2022.

Elon Musk, the plutocratic, far-right, Nazi-saluting Trump ally, has threatened to stop Ukraine's access to the Starlink internet system, which would further dent Ukraine's ability to fight off Russian forces.

The US is exerting a great deal of pressure on Ukraine. And, so far, no pressure on Putin.

On Tuesday 11 March a US delegation will meet Ukraine in Saudi Arabia. It is expected that Ukraine will sign-off on the multi-billion dollar "rare earths" agreement with Trump. This deal which allows the US exploit Ukraine's mineral wealth, will give the US some minimal stake in Ukraine. The Ukrainians, who have been badg-

ered into signing this deal, including by Labour leader Keir Starmer, hope to gain some US help to fend off Russia. But that help will not be explicit in any agreement.

The US government has shamelessly used Ukraine's distress and vulnerability to its own economic advantage.

Talking with the imperial arrogance of a colonial overseer, and showing ignorance and contempt, Keith Kellogg, Trump's special envoy for Ukraine, said, "they brought it on themselves, the Ukrainians... it is like hitting a mule with a two-by-four across the nose. [By hitting them in the face we] got their attention."

Kellogg also indicates that he has lined up, obediently, behind Trump. Kellogg, Mike Waltz and Marco Rubio, the supposed "pro-Ukraine" members of Trump's administration, have all piled in against Ukraine. Rubio, a spineless little toad, echoing Putin (and wretched left-wing groups like Socialist Worker in the UK) has suggested the war is a "proxy war... between the United States and Russia."

This is nonsense. The US government has not sought a war to do down Russia. Why would it want one? The US have overpowering economic advantage over Russia. US imperialism does not need debilitating, costly war there.

Deal

If a peace deal is signed between Russia and Ukraine now, it will not be favourable to Ukraine and will probably be a terrible affront to Ukrainian rights. A US-forced deal will probably mean Ukraine cedes at least 20 percent of its territory, which Russia currently occupies, or more. Plus political concessions which might include Ukraine abandoning EU and NATO membership. Putin wants no Western guarantees for future Ukrainian independence, in the form of military assistance or foreign troops on Ukrainian soil.

The European powers, warm with their words for Ukraine, must step up and fund and back Ukraine so it can continue its self-defence. That is not where Starmer, for one, is heading. Starmer, acting like the senior-manager type he is, accepts Trump's framework and looks to mould a future deal at its margins.

The Marxist internationalists remain clear: we are for Ukraine against Russian occupation, and for the Ukrainian working class against Ukraine's capitalists and oligarchs. □

• More on Ukraine: page 9

Ceasefire-protection troops in Ukraine?

By Dan Katz

One possibility now is that, post-peace deal, European and other troops will police a ceasefire in Ukraine. Starmer claims to have put together a "coalition of the willing" to help Ukraine after a deal is signed. Putin objects to the presence of foreign troops, but he might sign up.

What should the socialist left say? Firstly, this isn't our answer. We say: arm Ukraine so it is able to defend itself. And, more fundamentally: international working-class solidarity, especially with anti-war people in Russia.

It does not follow, though, that we campaign for Britain or France to abandon Ukraine.

From the start of the Ukraine war Workers' Liberty has defended Ukraine's right to fight for its self-determination.

Ukraine has been the victim of Russian imperialist aggression. Russia is a repressive dictatorship led by President Vladimir Putin, a man who believes Ukraine has no right to exist.

National oppression

Ukraine has had a long history of suffering national oppression under Russian Tsars and inside Stalin's Soviet Union. In areas of Ukraine Putin now controls Russia rules through terror; all independent political and trade union organisations have been suppressed, and oppositionists have been abducted, tortured and killed.

Ukraine, a poor country, has been pulverised. The state is currently investigating 140,000 cases of alleged Russian war crimes in Ukraine.

In such conditions Ukraine has the right to ask for help.

We have demanded the West fund and arm Ukraine, so it is able to defend itself. We have fought in the labour movement for the unions and Labour Party to clearly back Ukraine.

We approach these questions as Marxists, people who aim to have a long, broad, consistent view, and people who are careful with the words they use. We don't just go along with "common opinion".

Sometimes we have not backed Ukrainian demands.

We criticised the Ukrainian attack on the southern Russian town of Belgorod, in January 2024, which targeted civilians despite taking place in response to a particularly gratuitous and bloody

Russian attack on Kyiv.

At the start of the war a common demand amongst Ukrainians was for a No Fly Zone over Ukraine to be imposed by the US-NATO. We opposed this because it would have quickly led to direct military confrontation between Western powers and Russia, and could easily have broadened into some type of World War.

For a similar reason we opposed those who wanted European and American troops on the ground in Ukraine.

We do say: arm Ukraine so it can defend itself. The West is perfectly capable of doing this, but has chosen not to for political reasons. Biden's US administration, in particular, was scared of Putin's reaction if Russia looked like losing in Ukraine.

Nevertheless, British and other European and Commonwealth troops might end up in Ukraine. You can understand why Ukraine would want them. They don't trust Putin. Moldova, the Baltic States, Europe, Georgia, Kazakhstan also remain at risk.

We would tell Ukrainians not to trust Starmer and Macron, or UK and French governments in years to come. France helped push Ukraine into the adverse and unworkable Minsk agreements of 2014-5. We oppose increases in British military spending "sold" with the argument that they are needed to help Ukraine.

As Leon Trotsky put it, we are not "the inspectors-general of history", or military advisers to capitalist big powers. "Our tasks... we realise... exclusively through the education of the masses through agitation, through explaining to the workers what they should defend and what they should overthrow..."

"We do not even pretend to be miracle workers. As things stand, we are a revolutionary minority. Our work must be directed so that the workers on whom we have influence should correctly appraise events".

However, should we, like the "pro-peace left", *Socialist Worker* and the Stop the War Coalition, people who have spent three years effectively working for a Russian victory, depict British or French ceasefire-protection troops in Ukraine as a priority to overthrow, an outrageous threat against which we must defend Russia?

No. That would leave Ukraine even more vulnerable. Victory to Ukraine! □



Solidarity

For a workers' government

BLOCK THE CUTS! TAX THE RICH

By Rhodri Evans

A small wealth tax, equalising the tax take on capital gains and on income from wealth with the take on wages, and a few other measures, would yield [£60 billion](#) a year for public services.

A great deal of Rachel Reeves's £40 bn tax rise in the October Budget was mopped up by Tory funding-gap legacies and by the fact that so much of it only moved money from other parts of government (via increased National Insurance [payments](#)) to the Treasury. Maybe only £12 bn really increased public resources. £60 billion would be different.

Banks

Solidarity also campaigns for public ownership and democratic control of high finance. That would win social control over investment, and recoup the vast sums – around £100 bn a year – paid to high finance by the Treasury in interest on government IOUs and on deposits at the Bank of England. But the taxes would start to turn round the prospects – from cuts, to improved public provision.

Instead, in a Green Paper, out any day now, and in a Spring



Statement on 26 March, the Labour government plans to cut health-related benefits, as well as cutting civil-service and NHS jobs.

The Tories programmed benefit cuts of £3 billion over four years, to come in this April, and the Labour government last year said it would continue with them. Then a court ruling in January [blocked](#) them.

Labour's promised economic growth isn't happening, of course, with green public investment reduced to token amounts and hospital rebuilding pushed back. That may get worse with a "Trump" world recession.

The government is scrambling for cuts. Making it harder to qualify for incapacity-related benefits, and freezing their

value, have been floated.

Spending on health-related benefits has [increased](#) a lot, despite repeated and cruel Tory efforts since 2010 to cut access. But, as even Labour right-winger Andrew Harrop [puts it](#), "The UK is spending so much on sickness and disability payments because so many people are sick and disabled".

And poor. [38%](#) of households among the poorest 60% – the majority – have at least one disabled adult. And [48%](#) of adults in a household where someone claims health-related credits are in a household without reliable access to enough affordable, nutritious, healthy food.

The high rates are down to Covid sequels ([worse](#) in Britain than in other countries, probably because of higher inequality); NHS shortfalls; higher pension ages; and worse mental health.

Those call for improved public services, more job and wage security, and education which is less "exam-factory". The Tories went the opposite direction. Now Labour is lurching the same way.

The "fiscal rules" don't help, but less quick-fix is available there. Right now: tax the rich, reverse the cuts! □