

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry



Steel: nationalise, workers' plans

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Workers' Liberty pull-out

Workers' Fight, our forerunner in the stormy years 1972-5

inside

Their globalisation may be crashing, but ours must not



On 9 April Donald Trump postponed many of the tariffs he had announced on 2 April for ninety days, to 8 July, pending negotiations with the states affected.

The sober big-business magazine *The Economist* wrote: "The scale of the shock to global trade is still, even now, unlike anything seen in history".

"Even after the about-face, the incoming levies represent the most disruptive policy in the history of global trade".

The tariffs and their knock-on could disrupt the market in US Treasuries (government bonds or IOUs), which, with a total of \$28 trillion in circulation, is a keystone of many global financial markets.

54% of all export invoices worldwide are cited in dollars. About 60% of international loans and deposits are in dollars; 70% of international bond issuance. 88% of all foreign exchange transactions have dollars as one side of the deal.

45% of actual dollar cash, some \$1 trillion, is [held](#) outside the USA. No other currency is anywhere near as global.

The Economist writes: "The dollar system is not perfect, but it provides the stable ground on which today's globalised economy is built. When investors doubt America's credit-worthiness, those foundations are in danger of cracking".

In Karl Marx's day, he concurred with bourgeois economists who said: "Symbolical money or credit money... can function as means of purchase and means of payment in place of the precious metals in domestic circulation, but not on the world market. Paper notes are consequently 'money of the society', whereas gold and silver are 'money of the world'." That is no longer true. For decades the US dollar has been the "money of the world". To return to gold as "money of the world" would be unworkable, certainly unworkable without a vast slump in the interim.

Trump's 9 April announcement leaves 10% tariffs (very high by recent standards) on almost all countries, and huge tariffs on Chinese imports. China has responded with big tariffs on US goods. Trump says that further tariffs are on the way on pharmaceuticals and semiconductors, omitted from the 9 April policy.

Trump's gang have talks under way with many states. Maybe they will produce deals for lower rates than 2 April. Maybe Trump will quietly step back from the prohibitive tariffs on poorer countries like Lesotho and Cambodia, which export clothing to the USA but can offer the US little for "deals" (such countries have few people who can afford US imports).

Or maybe not. Even on the "optimistic" scenario, tariffs will have gone up drastically, and no-one knows what new tariffs may be imposed in a month's time, or a year's.

There have been big shifts in the capitalist world-market order before, but, outside world wars, all much more incremental. There has been a serious [shift](#) since 2008-9, but again, more incremental.

The de facto regime since 1980 has been of continuing US budget deficits and trade deficits, "balanced" by investment flows into the USA, so the US now pays \$1 trillion a year in interest on its IOUs. It is a ramshackle, unsustainable, makeshift. Trump's attempt to crash it and replace it with regulation by improvised and erratic nationalist-autocratic intimidation is something else again.

Outcome

No-one knows the outcome of Trump's trade war with China. China has restricted export of "rare earths", minerals necessary for much electronics, and it has some 90% of the world's refining capacity. Australia's Lynas Rare Earths, the only major refiner outside China, is building capacity in Malaysia and in the USA, but that takes years rather than months. For many other components and inputs, US corporations depend heavily on supply from China, and would need many years to build the necessary high-tech replacement factories in the USA even if they could afford them.

In his push for "deals", mostly Trump is not going for other countries to cut tariffs (already low). He wants concessions such as South Korea easing its emissions standards for vehicles to match the USA's, which Trump has anyway vowed to reduce. ("It doesn't mean a damn bit of difference for the environment. It doesn't matter" – 31 March).

It is a push to win the USA trade advantages, and also to impose a Trump model of reduced environmental and safety regulation across the world.

There have been previous such drives to impose dominant states' modes of economic regulation across the world – the era of the big European colonial



empires, or the IMF "Structural Adjustment Policies" which had their heyday in the 1980s and 90s – but this one is more sudden, and in a time of higher environmental emergency.

Trump is running up against serious opposition in the USA: now from the free-trade, sound-finance Republican right, as well as the left.

Trump says he wants Jay Powell, head of the Federal Reserve (central bank), "terminated", "soon". Trump needs that because to negotiate his tariff storm without an economic crash and without drastic inflation, or at least to have a better chance of that, he wants the Federal Reserve to do his bidding on interest rates.

Powell was appointed by Trump himself in Trump's first term, but he has shown a will to resist, and he has backing from many on Wall Street.

Harvard University, the richest university in the world, has also shown some will to resist Trump's drive for control. Hundreds of right-wing Establishment figures have signed a [protest](#) about his victimisation of dissident officials: "Behavior of [Trump's] kind is more to be expected from a royal despot than the elected leader of a constitutional republic. This is the path of autocracy, not democracy".

Trump could retreat on some economic issues, as previously he has "forgotten about" his pledges to scrap Obamacare and to complete "the wall". Long-term, or just until he finds a "crisis" which will give cover for his drive for mass deportations, for "one very violent day" supposedly to quash crime, and for using the Insurrection Act.

We don't know. And Trump's right-wing opponents are unbothered by his drive to bully weaker states, his scrapping of federal employees' union rights, his mass sackings, his gang's plans to suppress union rights more widely, and his plans for huge tax cuts on the rich. They may be more bothered about his plans to squash universities, his assault on transgender rights (he says he will cut off all federal funding for Maine's schools because they allow transgender girls to take part in school sports), etc. But we cannot rely on them even

there.

Keir Starmer has commented that "globalisation is over". In fact some main pillars of "globalisation", as it has developed since the 1980s, are not "over" at all: free-flowing global financial markets, without exchange controls and without fixed exchange rates; complex global supply chains spanning many different countries. There are not even solid bourgeois plans for alternatives, though a world divided into several "mini-globalised" economic blocs may emerge as an improvisation.

Heyday

Back in the heyday of globalisation, Workers' Liberty and other Marxists stressed that we were not "anti-globalisation". We were hostile to the globalisation propelled by the multinationals, the IMF, and the WTO, not because it interconnected countries, but because of who was doing it, with what priorities (i.e. profit), and how they shaped it.

We counterpose, not a nicer capitalist globalisation, but a globalisation of working-class organisation and struggle.

We need that today, more than ever. In Britain, as everywhere in the world, we need working-class resistance to the Trump re-regulation agenda. Everywhere in the world, we need workers' plans for green transition, against the Trump fossil-fuel frenzy.

We must support the left and the labour movement in the USA as it re-assembles itself – slowly so far; more urgently, we hope, soon – to resist Trump. *The Economist* is right that we are at a turning-point in world history. □



Corrections

A technical glitch lost the following italicised words in the *Solidarity* 740 article about Runcorn: "a hit-piece from the Telegraph attacking her for defending Cheshire West and Chester Council's support for refugees. She has now started a petition to close an unspecified local asylum hotel, lauding...". □

Solidarity 742

Solidarity 742 will be out on 7 May, not 30 April, because of the Workers' Liberty conference on 26-27 April. □

20,000 protest for trans rights

By Will Roberts

The Supreme Court [ruling](#) on the interpretation of the 2010 Equality Act has been claimed as a victory for transphobic campaigns and the “movement” around them. It is a worrying period for trans people, who are seeing a vicious backlash both in public opinion and at all levels of political life. Socialists must stand in solidarity with trans people and fight the current backlash.

This decision is *not* a new legal definition of “women” for general purposes, despite most media coverage saying it is. It’s a verdict on the use of words in one particular law. The ruling [made clear](#) that it was *not* about establishing a legal definition of “woman”, and that the Equality Act still explicitly *prohibits discrimination against trans people*. It makes *no official change* to the legality of denying trans people access to spaces like toilets, changing rooms and specific health and care services.

However, that is not how the decision has been interpreted by the winning side. Transphobic Equality and Human Rights Commission chair Kishwer Falkner said on the radio shortly after the ruling that it should be interpreted as preventing trans women from using women’s toilets and changing rooms, and that trans people should instead advocate for “third spaces”.

Figures in and around the Labour Party have exacerbated the situation. Peer and former Women and Equalities Minister Harriet Harman, who led the drafting of the Equality Act, welcomed the decision and said that it correctly interprets the law, explicitly linking it to the ability to exclude trans women from single-sex spaces. Transphobic former Labour MP Rosie Duffield has called

for Keir Starmer to apologise to her over her “gender-critical” views, and an official government spokesperson said that the government “had always supported the protection of single-sex spaces based on biological sex” and that the ruling brought “clarity and confidence.”

The opposite is likely true. Individual companies, sporting bodies and various other institutions may now feel encouraged or emboldened to discriminate against trans people in providing services, and many will be pressured by anti-trans organisations to change their policies. They may have no clear guidelines from the government on how best to proceed, or worse, regressive guidelines.

Public bodies

We must argue that the public and institutional policies developed over recent decades allowing trans people access to services and facilities they need should not be removed as a result of this ruling. Indeed, in the majority of cases they should be vastly improved. Conservative leaderships and managements will feel encouraged to bring in discriminatory policy, claiming wrongly that they have to do that to be “in line with the law”.

The British Transport Police have already announced new interim policy that strip-searches in custody will be carried out “according to biological sex” (i.e. that male officers will strip-search trans women arrestees). We must fight to make sure policies like this, which have no grounding in the Supreme Court judgement, are not the outcome. Not all institutions will follow suit. Lloyds Bank, of all people, has said it will “remain committed to inclusivity”. Unions must press for other employers to do the same.

The labour movement’s fight should not be to reverse this individual court decision. We want a direct change to legislation. Self-identification must be enshrined in law (including the legal recognition of non-binary genders). The law should also prohibit any discrimination against someone on the basis of their gender, not biological sex. The Gender Recognition Act 2004 has largely been made redundant by the current ruling – a Gender Recognition Certificate gives you little you can’t get without it – but it should be reformed to allow self-identification and to make acquiring a GRC, if wanted, as painless and straightforward as possible. Conversion therapy of any kind must be banned, with no exceptions.

The ruling itself is the wrong decision, but it is a legal interpretation of a political Act. Having identified potential ambiguity in the way the Equality Act used the terms “sex”, “man” and “woman”,



Pic: @JoelLyon

the ruling decided that the most logical option was for sex to be interpreted everywhere within the Act as biological sex, and so found in favour of “For Women Scotland”.

There are multiple legitimate criticisms to be made of how the hearing was handled. Most notably, not a single trans person was heard from in the courtroom. The Good Law Project and trans former judge Victoria McCloud tried to [intervene](#), but were denied without any reason given by the Supreme Court. But, to repeat, the answer is legislative change and defence and extension of public and institutional policies which respect trans rights.

Demonstration

Much of the left has come out explicitly in favour of trans people and against the ruling. A demonstration in London on Saturday 19 April was initiated by Lambeth Unison and sponsored by Workers’ Liberty, rs21, ACR, Workers’ Power, and trans rights and labour movement groups such as Pride in Labour, TransAction and Trans Action for Housing Justice. It was also sponsored by the CWU, UCU, Equity, UTAW, with RMT agreeing to the use of their logo on publicity, alongside a number of other local and regional sections of national unions. Over 20,000 attended, as well as hundreds in other cities up and down the country.

Some sections of the left maintained a callous indifference, or active opposition, to trans rights. The CPB and YCL put out a joint [statement](#) celebrating the decision, for which they should be given hell at every union conference this season. Counterfire released a statement that positively welcomed the ruling and made no suggestion of legislative change to sustain trans rights

(other than “simplifying” the Gender Recognition Act).

This Supreme Court ruling will not do anything to “protect women”. It will stoke an attack on the trans community by the right and transphobic political campaigners, all for the sake of restating rights that already existed. Transphobes will now try and apply this ruling as widely as possible around the country to agitate against trans people (or, in practice, people who look atypical of their gender) accessing toilets, changing rooms and shelters, and use it as a springboard for further legal and political attacks on trans rights.

We have to take the fight to them everywhere we can: local Labour Parties, trade union branches, campaigns and demonstrations. Socialists, trade unionists and activists in support of queer rights up and down the country have to respond with their own demands: legislate to explicitly defend trans people and enshrine self-identification; repeal the recent ban on puberty blockers for trans kids and restrictions on gender-affirming healthcare; tax the rich to save the NHS and massively expand and reform trans healthcare. □



Pic: @JoelLyon



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The Morning Star's Jewish problem



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

The *Morning Star* and its political masters at the Communist Party of Britain have a Jewish problem, and it surfaces time and again.

While Corbyn led the Labour Party, the paper dismissed allegations of antisemitism as "manifestly untrue and malicious" and the work of "not only British and Israeli state actors but an unscrupulous assembly of reactionary forces of all kinds" (*Morning Star* article by Nick Wright, 22 October 2020).

The only admission of fault the paper has ever made on the subject of antisemitism was in June 2018, following the publication of an article headlined "Rising antisemitism cannot be tackled without addressing Israel's crimes".

The article claimed "mainstream Jewish communities everywhere... appear unwilling to accept the connection between developing international antisemitism (or anti-Israel sentiment) and Israel's decades-long... acts of barbarism".

It continued: "No amount of protestations about the symptoms of rising antisemitism or anti Israel sentiment in Britain and elsewhere will end the problem until its root cause – Israel's criminal behaviour – is dealt with."

Only when two longstanding Communist Party members, Phil Katz and Mary Davis, wrote a letter of protest, did the paper seem to realise they had made a mistake – running a too-explicit statement of what they really believe. The article was taken down from the paper's website and an apology published.

Now, Phil Katz has had to protest again.

Epidemic

The MS published a review/ preview of Simon Schama's BBC2 documentary *The Road to Auschwitz*. The reviewer (under the name "Maurice Oxford") predicted "an engrossing hour of documentary telly" but went on to ask: "Why has it been produced now? Schama was one of those who joined the hue and cry over the alleged epidemic of anti-semitism in the Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership and previously likened a call for an academic boycott of Israel to Hitler's order that

Jewish businesses be shunned. Now, with criticism of Israel having hit a peak over its genocidal war in the Gaza Strip, could Schama be trying to smear sympathy for the Palestinians as a step on the road to a new Auschwitz?"

Schama is a liberal Zionist. He supports two states and has condemned the present Israeli government in strong terms. He has expressed horror at what is being done to the Palestinians and called for an end to the fighting in Gaza.

The MS of 16 April carried a letter from Phil Katz, which I suspect wouldn't have been published if he wasn't a respected member of the CPB:

Your TV reviewer admits to writing a review without having seen the programme they are reviewing: 'Yes the Holocaust wasn't the work of Nazis alone, but why say that now?' (April 7).

Now like the rest of us, if they have had a chance to actually watch it, I wonder if they would care to correct the shameful assertion: 'Could Schama be trying to smear sympathy for the Palestinians as a step on the road to a new Auschwitz?'

I would ask them in particular to consider, if now is not the time to confront anti-Jewish racism, when is? In the

Morning Star we do not conflate all Jews with the actions of the Israeli government. Nor do we say that anti-Jewish racism can only talked about when the left deems it appropriate. Nor by the 'right' Jews, which apparently Schama is not, even though very recently he publicly and vehemently denounced the Netanyahu government in front of an audience of a thousand people at Darwin College, Cambridge and called for an end to the carnage in Gaza.

The point of the programme, brilliantly put by Schama, is that the Holocaust is too often linked to one place and one nation – Auschwitz and Germany.

But the majority of Jews, Roma and communists killed in the Holocaust died before Auschwitz was built, at the hands of local militia and civilians, right across Europe, except in the Soviet Union. And just so your reviewer can be sure, the Holocaust took place before Israel was established.

Comrade Katz: you have once again protested against the antisemitism of the *Morning Star*: but surely you know this publication reflects the politics of the organisation of which you are a member?

What's happening with We Demand Change



Eye on the Left

By Matt Cooper

In the closing speech at the Summit of Resistance on 29 March, SWP national secretary Lewis Nielsen announced that the We Demand Change group launched there will be an umbrella group for Palestine solidarity, anti-austerity, anti-racist and other campaign activity, and also form the basis of a socialist electoral challenge to Labour in the May 2026 council elections.

The SWP has now rolled back on at least one of those aims. In his column in *Socialist Worker* of 9/4/25, Alex Callinicos wrote that WDC must not be the vehicle for electoral challenges.

"The Summit... drew in supporters of Labour, the Greens and of no party at all... it would be disastrous to divide all the participating coalitions – and We Demand Change more broadly – along partisan lines." Maybe Callinicos is

concerned that Jeremy Corbyn and his Peace and Justice Project, which gave tepid support to 29 March, insist on electoral activity being "local independent" rather than an over-arching party-type project in opposition to Labour. In Corbyn's heartland, Islington, core Corbynites were absent, and the SWP dominated, at a 12 April WDC-branded "protest about everything".

Fault line

There is a further fault line in the project – class. Callinicos states, correctly, that socialists should seek to "approach elections from the perspective of class struggle." Much of the campaigning he seeks to amalgamate is not class-based. Much of the Palestine solidarity movement has no class orientation, and even the SWP's Stand up to Racism tends to emphasise a moralistic opposition to racism rather than linking this to class concerns. Talk of class struggle in SW often merges with vaguer ideas of "mass movements" and "radicalism".

What all this means for the

SWP's desire, as stated at their December 2024 conference, to build a "broad-based, pluralist umbrella" to stand in elections is not clear. A lone SWP member is standing in this May's council elections in Chesterfield as an [independent](#). That may be the SWP cautiously putting their toe in the water. We don't know what shape their electoral project will take outside of WDC is unclear.

Umbrella

The development of WDC as a campaign umbrella is also faltering. The 29 March Summit of Resistance got a good turnout partly because just ten days prior to the event the government proposed its cuts in disability benefits. That gave the event a boost in energy and anger, and probably numbers too.

There is a pressing need for open, labour-movement-based coalition campaigns against the cuts, the major elements of which may be put before Parliament in June or even May. Pressure needs to be put on Labour

MPs, through the Labour Party, the trade unions, and more generally in their constituencies, to vote against these specific cuts, but WDC prefers "protests about everything".

So far one WDC group has been established. In Manchester. One meeting has been held and has led to a busy but unfocused WhatsApp community. In Sheffield a demo was called that attracted 200 people (some beyond the already-known left), and a local summit has been promised for 18 May.

From what we can glean from *Socialist Worker*, anyway, it would appear that in the weeks after the Summit, WDC will have called only two meetings and two demonstrations.

At the 14-17 April conference of the National Education Union (NEU), a union in which the SWP are well-organised, WDC was not promoted other than by a pile of leaflets on the SWP stall. SWP organised its own fringe meeting (on the "manosphere") and promoted Stand up to Racism and their summer event, Marxism 2024.

On WDC, nothing.

In the 16 April [SW](#) coverage of WDC was limited to a short article summarising the small number of recent events, with nothing looking forward.

Rival

Stop the War (led by Counterfire) has organised "Welfare not Warfare" branded meetings in a few places (there has been one in London and another scheduled for 30 April, in Islington, an apparent rival attempt to claim the same constituency as WDC in the same area). These are not attempts to build broad campaign coalitions for taxing the rich to end austerity, but rather "propaganda efforts" to say an end to arming Ukraine to repel Russian invasion is the key to end austerity in Britain.

There is a pressing need for campaign committees based on the labour movement, disabled rights activists and community groups. We urge WDC to join that effort, but won't wait for them. □

Having to travel for abortion



Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

None of Scotland's regional health boards provide abortion after 20 weeks except in the specific cases of foetal abnormality or threat to parental life. Instead, women are forced to turn to the charity British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS) and make the journey to a clinic in England. This is stressful and expensive and in some cases is a risk to maternal health.

The Scottish government committed to address this in 2022 but with no progress. The Minister for Public Health, Jenni Minto, said improvement to abortion care in Scotland "has taken much longer than any of us would have wished" and that health boards must fund travel and accommodation costs "if patients do need to travel to England for treatment".

In 2024, there were 88 women from

Scotland treated by the charity BPAS at abortion clinics in England, up from 67 the year before. Many reported having to fund travel themselves or rely on charity.

Majority

The majority of women seeking an abortion after 20 weeks for reasons other than foetal abnormality or threat to parental life have additional needs. Late-term abortions are more common in circumstances of domestic violence, sexual abuse and very young people afraid their family may find out.

Where the NHS cannot provide abortion services they are obligated to pay for alternative provision. The historic stigma surrounding abortion services has meant that the majority of abortions are not provided in NHS facilities. The NHS pays for 98% of abortions but 80% are carried out by independent sector clinics. This separation from mainstream NHS care makes abortion services vulnerable and feeds further stigma that abortion is not "normal" healthcare. □



Make Unison act against benefit cuts!



Fighting the cuts

By Cathy Nugent

The most significant recent development in the campaign against Labour's proposed cuts to disability benefits is the 17 April decision by Unison (the UK's largest trade union) to oppose the cuts. A meeting of its National Executive has agreed to run an active campaign of opposition.

If that campaign is run vigorously, and involves the union's

public sector members, many of whom will work with people, or are themselves, affected by these cuts, it could push the government into retreat. Unison is also well placed to fight for policies to force employers to make the adjustments disabled people need to take up work – something that is not part of the government's rhetoric on this issue. Unison activists will need to make sure this happens.

Protests

In the last fortnight protests against the government's proposals have tailed off some-

what. They are likely to step up again soon, especially as government in-person consultation events begin (the first is in central London on 30 April). There will be protests organised at these meetings. The fact that they are few in number and not genuinely accessible to people affected by the cuts is a disgrace.

Disabled People Against Cuts (DPAC) has already announced a protest on 3 June outside the Cardiff consultation.

Meanwhile some national and local campaigning is continuing:

DPAC has called on local groups to lobby Labour MPs. Putting pressure on these MPs is critical. They also plan an action on 11 June when the government Spending Review takes place.

Feature

In several places this issue will be a feature of labour movement May Day events.

On 24 April Sheffield Labour Against Benefit Cuts will meet to plan a campaign strategy.

Calderdale Labour group of councillors have joined Wakefield in calling on the government to reassess these cuts.

Crips Against Cuts in Basingstoke and Northampton have called protests on 22 April and 26 April. Groups in Hampshire are organising actions around the county up to a protest in Southampton on 10 May.

The SWP-driven We Demand Change coalition and the People's Assembly are also organising on the ground (the latter plan a national demonstration on 7 June and organised a local meeting in Lewisham). However this organising is, or soon will be, geared towards general campaigns against austerity.

We will be arguing for benefit-cuts campaigns to be democratically constituted and base themselves on local trade union branches and Labour members, and of course disability groups. Disability groups inside unions could play a key role.

Above all else we need to act very quickly – campaigners now say parliamentary votes on cuts to Personal Independence Payments will come at the end of June – and what we do now, whether we are successful or not, will heavily impact on future fights. □

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The realities of climate migration



Environment

By Owen Flood

Claims of large upheavals in cross-border migration due to climate change are often exaggerated and highly speculative. Or so Hein de Haas – a leading researcher in global migration patterns – argues in his book *How Migration Really Works*.

In their 2021 Groundswell report, the World Bank claimed there would be 216 million climate refugees by 2050. NGOs such as Christian Aid and the UN International Organization for Migration have claimed that up to 1.5 billion people could be displaced by 2050 because of climate change. De Haas questions these numbers, arguing that they are based on modelling that assumes all people impacted by natural disasters will move away. They simplistically map emigration onto areas increasingly vulnerable to natural disasters linked to climate-change. They assume natural disasters will immediately lead to migration. For example, these models assume that all those hit by rising sea-levels will move away. The reality is more complicated. De Haas shows that research and data on migration do not support these forecasts or assumptions.

Natural disasters linked to climate change are still not a major factor when it comes to large-scale migration. The major factors are labour demand in destination countries and the level of development in origin countries – but these factors are complicated. Poverty

does not simply push people to emigrate. Wealthy countries do not simply pull poor people to them. Most migrants do not move from the poorest countries to rich countries. Migration tends to be higher between the so-called “middle-income” countries and wealthier countries. Emigration is highest in countries such as Turkey or Mexico. The poorest countries in sub-Saharan Africa rank among least migratory countries in the world. Development in origin countries is often associated with more not less emigration.

Some effects of climate-change are slow on-set and give time to adapt. Even for sudden disasters like flooding, most research shows that people move to the next city, town, or village, with the intention of returning and rebuilding their lives. Many people in the poorest countries affected by climate-change do not have the resources to migrate over long distances. Natural disasters often make them poorer and so with fewer resources to migrate. Where there is migration, it is usually internal and to urban areas.

Previous claims about climate-induced international migration have not happened. For example in 2011 the UN distanced itself from claims made six years earlier that there would be 50 million climate refugees. In fact, in some areas classified as environmental danger zones there were population increases.

The simplistic link made between climate change and migration leads to simplistic conclusions. The right argues that climate change will lead to more migration, so we need to close the borders and protect our nation. The left

(the ones that support free movement) says that we need to do what we can to halt and adapt to climate change and extend free movement.

De Haas argues that the focus solely on climate rather than the local and international political context can distract from measures to mitigate the effects of natural disasters, such as increasing international aid to tackle poverty, increasing investment in infrastructure and climate adaptation or tackling state corruption. In extreme cases such as the Maldives, climate change has been used opportunistically by politicians to argue for forced displacements of pop-

ulations – the actual motivation is to reduce costs of state provision.

Free movement is important. Immigration controls whip up nationalism, divide workers, and are used to intimidate and punish migrant workers. Migration and exploring new places and cultures are good things. We should call for: free movement for climate refugees; international aid to tackle underfunding and poverty; international aid to support adaptation to natural disasters; support for workers, environmentalists and progressives tackling state corruption and underfunded infrastructure. □



Activist Agenda

Meetings

Sun 18 May: AWL environment reading group on aviation. 8pm, Zoomlink bit.ly/envi-z

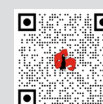
Sat-Mon 7-9 June: Lutte Ouvrière fete, at Presles, near Paris. Info about AWL contingent: awl@workersliberty.org

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



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and Labour Parties: bit.ly/mo-pe

Socialist-feminist book clubs

workersliberty.org/sf-book-clubs

24 Apr: Leicester. The Right to Sex, Amia Srinivasan. 7:30pm, tba

4 May: Manchester. [Cannibal Capitalism](https://www.cannibaltalism.com). 3pm, The Gallery Café, 81 Princess Street M2 3JL

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 eco@workersliberty.org. □

Students back Sheffield uni strike

By Sam Myerson

Strikes by the University and College Union (UCU), mostly against compulsory redundancies, continue at universities around the country, with some student solidarity.

At the University of Sheffield students are organising to support departmental pickets, and to build on the recent referendum vote in the Student Union to back union action. Activists in the Anti Cuts Coalition are now organising in the Student Union to make campaign materials to share on campus. Sheffield UCU are due to strike 30 April and 6-16 May.

Some campuses have little student action, but students at Cardiff are organising along

the same lines as Sheffield. We have seen little from the RCP recently, though unlike other left groups they have their main strength on campus.

We are heading into a fallow period, with reading weeks, exams, and dissertation deadlines all now firmly in the sights of students. It will be harder to build in these coming weeks.

The UCU has called a demonstration, “Protect Education Now”, on 10 May, 1pm from Bessborough Gardens SW1V 2JE (near Vauxhall Bridge, in London). Workers’ Liberty Students will be supporting it.

Socialist Party Students has written an open letter to the National Union of Students calling on them to back the

demo and mobilise students from around the country in support. So far NUS has made no public move for a fight against the cuts, other than a short public appearance at a Parliamentary Select Committee.

We welcome Socialist Students’ call for joint work. All left groups, student societies and campaigns should work together to fight for a new settlement for Higher Education, against cuts and fees, and for free lifelong education.

We say to the Socialist Party Students: we should work together now, on the issues we agree on, to build a democratic campaign, to fight cuts and fees nationally. □



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USA: has the pushback started?

By Tom Harrison

Cody Balmer, arrested for an arson attack on Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro's residence, said he would have beaten the Governor with a hammer if he'd found him there. The admission brought to mind the vicious assault on Nancy Pelosi's husband in 2022. Dissident Republican senator Lisa Murkowski says: "we are all afraid... I'm oftentimes very anxious myself about using my voice, because retaliation is real".

Yet physical attacks on opposition politicians have been few and far between so far.

Not much activity has come yet from fascist outfits like the Proud Boys or any of the 6 January criminal insurrectionists Trump pardoned en masse. Maybe that's because they're not needed? There are plenty enough members of America's heavily militarised law enforcement agencies with fascist mindsets willing to carry out repressive measures of dubious legality with glee.

"Trump is back in town", a border officer told an Australian with a valid work visa before the man was kicked out without explanation. Always notorious for their officiousness, US border controllers are maxing up arbitrary expulsions in order to fulfil quotas. Arbitrary arrests of anyone who looks like an "illegal" – invariably a person of colour – and people being whisked off the streets by plain-clothes masked ICE agents threaten everyone without US citizenship rights.

That regime might be extended to US citizens pretty soon. Entering the White House on 14 April was Nayib Bukele of El Salvador, who self-describes as "the world's coolest dictator". Much admired by Trump, and we don't need to wonder why! He's fired judges, suspended civil liberties including due process, and dodged a constitutional prohibition for running another presidential term. In three years his regime has arrested 1.35% of the country's whole population – the equivalent of about a million in the UK – and given El Salvador the world's highest imprisonment rate. He's even had the country adopt bitcoin as legal tender.

Bukele needs Trump to fund his massive prison system and Trump needs Bukele to provide an offshore gulag. We've already seen the arbitrary deportation of alleged Venezuelan gang

members, some of whom weren't Venezuelan and the vast majority with no criminal record, all without due process. Trump has been caught saying to Bukele "Home grows are next. The home grows. You've gotta build five more places. It's not big enough."

The idea of sending US citizens to mega prisons abroad would have seemed highly unlikely in the era before Trump, but few nowadays underestimate what he is capable of. Those unfortunates who've been shipped to El Salvador have things pretty grim in the here and now. Particular focus has been placed on the case of Armando Abrego Garcia, an undocumented resident of Maryland, who had been deported to El Salvador due to an "administrative error".

The US Supreme Court has ruled unanimously that the government "facilitate" the return of García. However, elements in the White House have gone ultra macho on the issue, stating they will never let García back and again asserting without evidence that he's a gang member. It's not clear that the Court can or will do anything about that.

The USA is in a constitutional crisis, as Trump seeks to establish personal rule untrammelled by institutions or previous laws. As well as the deportations, the numerous other illegal actions of the Trump regime include the mass sackings of federal workers and attacks on Universities. The message is that it doesn't matter how many times the courts rule against the government, their rulings can be swerved, nullified, or ignored. They don't have the means to enforce them. The US Marshals Service, the court's regular agency for enforcement, comes under Trump's Department of Justice. The state's central "armed bodies of men" are under Trump's command!

But maybe yet Trump and his sycophantic crew won't have it all their own way. Pushback is developing in the university sector after a previous capitulation to Trumpist restrictions on academic freedom by Columbia. Harvard, Yale, and Stanford have all pledged to resist these demands, particularly regarding the winding up of diversity programmes.

Trump has said he wants Federal Reserve (central bank) chief Jay Powell "terminated" "soon". Powell, unlike many other officials, is pushing back



and says it's unconstitutional to remove him. He has wide support on Wall Street.

Trump's attack on Ivy League institutions plays into the highly erroneous idea held by his "base" that it's all part of his struggle against "the elite".

Disastrous

Trump voters may not realise that depriving institutions like Harvard of billions of dollars in federal funding could prove disastrous for the substantial medical research they undertake and the care their affiliated hospitals provide. Old worm brain Robert F Kennedy Jr., in charge of the nation's health, isn't bothered about that of course. He continues to peddle quack remedies and conspiracy theories, the latest being that inhaled steroids "cure" measles though in actual fact they damage capacity to fight the infection.

Already it's obvious that many members of Trump's cabinet are pretty much incompetent in any ordinary terms. When you've got Education Secretary Linda McMahon saying AI stands for A One there's not much hope for the education system, but then McMahon, whose qualification for the post was experience in running a wrestling entertainment business, is only there to close down the Department of Education.

Trump rule is rule by chaos aiming at massive tax cuts for the rich; autocratic power for himself and his gang; and slashing environmental, safety, or worker-rights regulations which might impede profit. It thrives on the constant

need to grab the headlines and media attention. The debacle over tariffs, with Trump's actions bringing the world economy close to a financial meltdown, has dented his credibility. Some of his billionaire backers who didn't profit from the crisis rue the day they supported him.

The consequences of oligarchic rule are cutting through. Prices haven't dropped "on day one". "Tariffs" will raise them further. In the unlikely event that manufacturing industries "return", there won't be many blue collar jobs in an age of automation. Musk's DOGE attack on the federal workforce also has major impacts, the closure of local social security offices to name but one.

America will see a rapid immiseration of much of the population as the top 1% of oligarchs trowel fresh quantities onto their already massive wealth piles.

That is why current campaigns such as the Fighting Oligarchy tour are so important. Millions of protesters have turned out against the Trump travesty. Despite the Democrat politicians who claimed only months ago they would be leading resistance going quiet, and despite United Auto Workers leader Shawn Fain's support for Trump over tariffs, there is definite momentum to build a mass movement in defence of democratic rights and working-class living standards. The US left needs to be counted at the forefront of this struggle. □

“No Kings”, 1775 and 2025

By Harry Braverman

April 19 was the 250th anniversary of the start of the American Revolutionary War, which would lead to the Declaration of Independence in 1776 and recognised independence from the British King in 1783.

By the time of the US constitution in 1789, conservative forces had some ascendancy. It protected slavery and allowed very limited democracy. Nevertheless, some things from the Revolutionary War reverberate through the centuries, though the French Revolution of 1789-94, Haiti's revolution of 1791-1804, and through the centuries to the “No Kings!” agitation against Trump today.

The Declaration of Independence declared: “That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of [human] ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it”. Below is the final summary article in a series by Harry Braverman (Frankel) in the US Trotskyist paper *The Militant*, 1951-2 on the Revolution and one of its early leaders, Sam Adams. Whole series at bit.ly/a-revo

The American Revolution comprised, as we have seen, not merely a revolt against Great Britain but also a struggle by farmers, artisans, planters and sections of the merchant class against the wealthy ruling classes of the colonies: the large landowners, big merchants and the top layers of the clergy and professional class. This fight of class against class resulted in important changes in America.

The most important, single, social aspect of the revolution was agrarian. Decisive changes in the land system were wrought. The vast crown lands, slated to be formed into proprietary estates, were all confiscated outright. The question of their future disposition was fought out in the Continental Congress, where Sam Adams, supported by Thomas Jefferson, enforced the rule that these lands were to be held by the state legislatures for the benefit of the inhabitants, rather than ceded to proprietors in large parcels.

Hundreds of vast landed estates were confiscated, in most cases under laws that decreed forfeiture of property by persons found guilty of Tory activity. However, some estates were confiscated even when their owners went along with the revolution. For example, the Virginia estate of Lord Fairfax, one of the most extensive in the country, was taken from him despite the fact that he never opposed the revolution, but solely because of revolutionary opposition to landholding aristocracy.

The confiscation and division of these large estates and crown lands were accompanied by the destruction of all feudal and semifeudal property

laws, such as primogeniture and entail, which were designed to hold the big estates intact, and quit rents, which cost the colonists tens of thousands of dollars each year. Further, the laws that restricted voting to owners of land were largely eliminated. While many property qualifications remained after the revolution, a citizen no longer had to own land in order to vote. Personal property of any type sufficed.

These changes add up to a social revolution on the land. All restrictions on the development of capitalist agriculture were removed. The landholding aristocracy held enormous political and economic power in some parts of New England, throughout the middle colonies of New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania, and to some degree in the southern colonies solely by virtue of its ownership of land. This landholding aristocracy was smashed and was never able to rise again in the United States.

Property confiscation was not limited to landholders alone. Many merchants, clergymen and professional men lost their fortunes through the action of revolutionary decrees and tribunals. It is difficult to estimate the extent of property values confiscated by the revolutionary people. At the end of the war, a group of 2,560 exiled Tories appealed to the British Parliament for restitution of their losses. A commission appointed to sift and reduce their claims arrived at the conclusion that this group had lost about \$40,000,000 in property values. This was the extent of property lost by perhaps 2.5 percent of the exiled Tories. For purposes of comparison, the total land valuation in the United States ten years after this time was only about ten times this amount.

Confiscations

Although exact figures are not available, indications are that these confiscations add up to one of the largest noncompensated expropriations on record in the capitalist revolutions of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Slavery was seriously shaken. As a direct result of the revolution, and partly as a result of the participation of Negroes in the revolution (there was an average of 54 Negroes in each of Washington's battalions), about 11 or 12 percent of the slaves were freed. Most important, slavery was abolished in the six northern and middle colonies, thus establishing the solid nonslave area that was to serve as the base for the later assault on southern slavery.

An established church existed in nine of the thirteen colonies prior to the revolution. In most cases, the established church was one that was adhered to by a minority of the people. These church institutions received financial support



The Appeal to Heaven flag of 1775 drew on a passage by John Locke, an early bourgeois-liberal theorist, asserting that people had the right to appeal “to heaven”, i.e. in fact to their own consciences, against kings. Some Trumpists have tried to appropriate the flag, as well as anti-Trumpists.

out of public tax money and were further buttressed by various discriminatory religious laws. Establishment of the church was totally destroyed as a result of the revolution.

Nor did the merchants escape unscathed. This class, and particularly its wealthiest portions, was shaken to its foundations by expropriations of property, loss of former power and position, exile and impoverishment. Its place was taken by an overhauled capitalist class, very different in personnel and changing in the nature of its activities. The colonial capitalist was predominantly merchant-capitalist. It made its money not by producing commodities for sale upon the market but by buying them cheap and selling them dearer. In other words, this class did not transform the old modes of production, but preserved and exploited them. Its dominance was therefore reactionary.

The American Revolution, while not definitely bringing the dominance of merchant capitalism to an end, established the conditions for its destruction. All restrictions on the development of industrial capitalism were destroyed, at least in the northern region of the nation. Moreover, the state power was utilized to facilitate the growth of the capitalist mode of production. The fact that manufacturing took an immediate upward leap in the years during and immediately following the revolution is not at all accidental.

The place vacated by the old wealthy classes was taken by a new aristocracy of wealth, which was soon far richer than the old. These are the rich we have with us yet, the capitalist class that still rules over America. At that time, this class was progressive, since it had a great mission to fulfill. It would destroy slavery, settle the whole continent, develop production, multiply factories, mines, mills, transportation facilities. It was to be the organizer of a vast and immensely productive economy. In

the process, this class would become bloated with wealth, senile and reactionary. It would bring into being its own gravedigger, the industrial working class of America, by transforming the immense majority of the people into propertyless proletarians.

From our vantage point in time, we can thus see the part played by the American Revolution in the growth of our nation and in preparation for the socialist stage of society on this continent. The immense struggles of labor against the enslaving powers of capital that are now developing have their roots in the revolutionary past.

The workers' socialist movement will produce new Sam Adamses in the coming struggles. These new revolutionists will differ in many ways from Sam Adams, for they will be socialists, and not petty-bourgeois individualists. They will differ from him in many other aspects of ideology and background. But they will not differ from him in one respect at least. The coming Sam Adamses, like the Adams of old, will know how to pursue the struggle of the oppressed with courage, with intelligence, with devotion, until they see the fight through to a victorious conclusion.

We have not attempted to deal with every aspect of Sam Adams's career. For example, his reactionary attitude of opposition to the Shays's Rebellion of New England farmers in the postrevolutionary period has not come within our scope. We have been concerned with Sam Adams solely as a revolutionist.

The art of revolution occupies a peculiar position in world history. There is perhaps no other that is mastered by so few and is of service to so many. Like all other revolutionists, Sam Adams, who devoted his life to this art, met with social disfavour for most of his life, and the very height of social approbation when it came into its own, as a revolutionary crisis gripped the nation. □

“Neither London nor Birmingham, but the bostin’ Black Country!”



Interview

Pete Lowe talks to William Daniels

In March, Pete Lowe, Leader of the Dudley Labour Group of councillors, stood down and quit the party after 41 years of membership. In his resignation letter, he said “I always believed I could better serve my community from within the Labour Party. I no longer believe that is the case under Keir Starmer’s leadership.” Since his resignation, Lowe has formed the Dudley Independent Group (DIG) alongside five other former Labour councillors. The council is 35 Tories, 25 Labour, 6 DIG, and six others. I sat down with Pete to ask him about his decision to quit the party, his political history, and the DIG’s plans for the future.

What was the straw that broke the camel’s back for you and the Labour Party? How long had you been considering your position?

The straw that broke the camel’s back was both the decision and the rhetoric around the welfare cuts. The decision wasn’t in isolation, of course, and there were a few issues even before the Labour government was formed that made me question my continued membership, Palestine being the most significant. Then, when we had the Labour government, we had the breaking of various manifesto pledges and the issue around the WASPI women, among other issues. Ultimately, I felt I couldn’t be true to my principles if I was on the one hand condemning the Conservative administration in Dudley for £42m of cuts but not also condemning the Labour government for £5bn of welfare cuts.

Clearly the Starmer-Reeves project is on borrowed time – even some sympathisers on the right of the party are upset with the direction in which things are going. What’s your assessment of how it has gone so wrong so quickly?

It has gone wrong for a number of reasons. People rightly ask me, why leave now, why not under Blair? I think the difference is around the engagement – even in the darkest days of the Blair government, there was always a space to discuss, engage and debate, however isolated that was. What we see now is a far more centralised party, in both policy formulation and the selection of candidates. Under Starmer, we have a centralised diktat telling you what to do, not asking you what

to do. Labour is now very distant from the needs of the people who voted the party into office. The leadership is so focused on Westminster that they’ve lost all sense of what is going on in working class communities up and down the country. That will ultimately be Starmer’s downfall.

How can we organise and fight for socialist policies in the current climate? What is the role of the trade unions? And what are the key demands in your view?

We have got to reset the whole political landscape – the first thing we need to do is learn the lessons of past failures, listen to communities, and address the issues in those communities, rather than meeting at the national level and telling communities what is relevant for them. We need a bottom-up structure, from the grassroots upwards, as opposed to one dreamed up in the smoke-filled rooms of London or Birmingham.

When I’m knocking on doors in my local community, I find core socialist values are still firmly held. For example, the trade union-led campaign to stop Dudley leisure centres being outsourced to private companies received thousands of signatures. The vast majority of our communities believe that public assets shouldn’t be held for private profit, that they should remain publicly owned. These are the key areas we can focus on to win broad support from within our communities.

A key demand is the anti-austerity agenda, where we can provide an alternative narrative. We need a progressive taxation system where everyone pays their fair share. Instead of welfare cuts and taking money from vulnerable people, why don’t we look at wealth taxes. This is what people tell me on the doorstep all the time. In just a few weeks, we’ve got 3,500 signatures to stop the closure of the Crystal Gateway Dementia Centre. The Dudley Diggers (Dudley Independent Group) submitted a motion to the council on this. It is a bottom-up campaign, not a campaign we have dreamt up – it is us listening to what is going on in our communities.

You are now part of the Dudley Independent Group. What are the politics of DIG?

The DIG was set up on a clear and simple community-led programme. The core principle is that we will be led by the community, for the community, unlike the Westminster-centred major parties. “Neither London nor Birmingham, but the bostin’ Black Country!” We believe in the anti-austerity agenda, and oppose both Dudley Council cuts



from the Tories, and those of the Labour government at the national level. Both hit the most vulnerable people in our society. We believe in a publicly funded council – wherever possible, we need to ensure that the very assets of our community are owned by our community. We will be solely focused on the interests of working class people in Dudley.

As socialists, we are for building a mass movement for working class political and industrial struggle. What can a localist, “independent” political grouping hope to achieve?

Local groups don’t have to work in isolation. We can build broad alliances outside of the area, on regional, national and even international levels. The important thing is debate and discussion, and we can achieve more with that than the approach of an increasingly centralised Labour Party. My reluctant view, a heartbreaking view after 41 years of membership, is that the debate has to be held outside of the Labour Party. Not one local resident has condemned me for leaving the Labour Party – I have found broad support for my decision to take a principled stand. My view is that I haven’t left the Labour Party, but the party has left me. Democracy isn’t encouraged within the party, and neither is robust debate. It is now completely distant from the communities they say they serve.

There have been a number of independent groupings of disenchanted former Labour councillors set up across the country. Many, though not all (see Pendle, Lancashire), have been electoral flops. What are DIG’s realistic electoral ambitions?

As a trade unionist of more than 30 years, I know we need to learn the lessons of the past. And we need to look at those lessons from the other independ-

ent groups. We recognise what our limitations are – at first, we need to defend the six councillors we have. We need an organising initiative to look at how we can win community support, and use that as a vehicle to get Dudley Digger councillors elected or reelected. We can’t do it as six individuals – we need a group of hundreds of people to take the initiative forward. It can’t be run by independent councillors alone, we need to build a groundswell of support within the community. We have a list of several hundred people who are keen to get on board with what we are proposing at the moment, and I am excited this will give us a platform to make a difference in Dudley politics. We are in discussions with independent councillors from Liverpool to Broxtowe and elsewhere to see where we can work on a collective basis.

Working class political revival means more than electing or maintaining a few councillors. Do you have plans to evolve the DIG into something bigger, e.g. an actual party with a membership structure?

Absolutely. Our first intention was to set ourselves up as an independent group, which was successfully achieved. The next step is to evolve into a political party so we can spread our wings much further. We don’t want to be centred on the council chamber, but on the council estates. We want to look at how we can, as a group or a party, establish Dudley Digger social clubs and youth clubs, in much the same way as we used to have Labour clubs before they were sold off. We need to be properly embedded in the community in that way.

As Leader of the Labour Group in Dudley, you were in a position to make things uncomfortable for the Labour leadership from within. Wakefield’s Labour Council and a few others have put out strong statements against the benefits cuts. How do you feel you can be more impactful as an independent councillor?

Being an independent councillor gives me the freedom to speak without amendment or contradiction. In the weeks before I made my decision to resign, I implored the Labour Party at regional and national levels to listen to the concerns of the Dudley Labour Group, but this fell on deaf ears and I didn’t receive acknowledgment. I am now free to fully condemn the impact of welfare cuts, and we have already achieved more as the DIG by taking the battle outside of the council chamber. We have seen letters written by Labour

continued on page 10 →

→ from page 9

members of parliament applauding the welfare cuts – I don't want to be associated with a party that does that.

Going back to your time as Leader of the Labour Group in Dudley – were there any decisions you made that you were uncomfortable with? Especially during the austerity period, when you were Council Leader (2014-17, 2018). And, in that difficult environment, what were the key successes in Dudley in your view?

I was Group Leader during the dying days of the Tory-Lib Dem coalition, and we had a number of difficult, unpalatable decisions to make around council cuts. One example was the loss of bank holidays for some council workers. The reason I remained Leader was that we recognised we could make more focused decisions to protect working class people from the full force of the cuts, for example decisions were made in consultation with Unison, the GMB and other unions. We worked in partnership with the unions, which I was proud of doing. I also took a 10% pay cut to my allowance to show the cuts were across the board, and it wasn't just staff impacted.

We saw unprecedented cuts to local government under the Tories – Dudley lost over £100m of funding. Historically, left-wing Labour councillors have offered real resistance – Poplar in the 1920s, Clay Cross in the 70s, various councils under Thatcher. Why do you think there was such little push back against the cuts among Labour Councils in the 2010s, including during the Corbyn period? What do you think can be done now to push for more funding?

This comes back to one of the core reasons as to why I very reluctantly left the party. For understandable reasons, Labour is more focused on Westminster elections, and does not want to rock the boat when it comes to local election campaigning. Labour has not wanted to promote radical councils that take a stand. We launched the Fair Deal for Dudley campaign for a change to the funding formula, but this was to no avail because Westminster Labour didn't see it as a priority. This was the case under both Corbyn and certainly under Starmer. The views of Labour Group Leaders were sidelined and not taken into account.

What we need to do is build independent groups that are freed from the old ties of Westminster and demonstrate that there is an alternative, that we can build a different society, promoting the priorities of our communities. Our agenda in Dudley is very simple – no to austerity full stop, no caveats. Why is it that councils such as Dudley are impacted so much more than areas like Suffolk and Surrey? Our demands are not watered down or lessened, which they are when you are part of a national organisation that also has a voice in Suffolk or Surrey, or has Westminster aspirations. We are unbridled and free.

Momentum regularly touts "community wealth building" as an alternative for left-led Labour Councils. Do you see this as a particularly left-wing policy?

No. I was a proud member of Momentum for many years. But Momentum has many of the same failings I attribute to the Labour Party – a centralised system that informs members what they should say, rather than seriously and democratically consulting

them. Community wealth building tinkers around the edges, it does not pose a fundamental shift like a properly anti-austerity platform does. We need to provide that real alternative.

You have previously implied that you were gagged on the issue of Gaza as Labour Group Leader. Can you expand on this a little?

There are levels of expectation within the Labour Party – members are relatively free to attend discussions and campaign rallies and so on. The more responsibility you gain, the more restrictions are placed on you. Regarding Palestine, the Labour Group of Councillors were notified very clearly by the national and regional party that they were not to attend demonstrations. We managed to put a statement out around the end of October 2023 calling for a ceasefire following 15 or so draft emails, finally getting to a position that the Labour Party was comfortable with. We went further than most groups, something I'm very proud of as a supporter of the rights of the Palestinian people since I was 15. I attended some pro-Palestine demonstrations, almost undercover, in London and Telford – I was not able to do the same in Dudley in my capacity as Leader.

You stood to be Labour's candidate for the Mayor of the West Midlands in 2020 and, despite the left vote being split, came close to winning. You then backed the former PwC partner Richard Parker to be Mayor in 2024. Why did you back him, and how do you assess his period as Mayor so far?

The reason I backed Richard was that I worked with him around the creation of the West Midlands Combined Authority when I was Leader of the Council in 2016. I got to know him well personally throughout that whole process. When the election came around, it was clear that I was not going to be selected to stand, and I had to make a decision – who would be best placed to win? Following many conversations with all of the candidates, I found Richard was the one who was most focused on a Black Country offer, with the metro to be delivered in Dudley and the reclamation of brownfield sites as priorities.

It has been a mixed bag – he has done well on areas such as transport, but he is severely curtailed by the financial restrictions of the office. Unless we see a shift in funding from the government, he will likely suffer defeat at the ballot box next time around.

Going back a little further, to the early 2000s, you helped lead one of the longest strikes in NHS history against plans to implement PFI in Dudley. What lessons did you draw from that strike?

At the end of my political career, one of the things I'll look back on with most pride is that dispute, which started in 1999 would you believe it. We protected workers in Dudley and hundreds of thousands, maybe even millions of

NHS workers since that date with the protection of employment model. We protected the salaries and pensions of the workers. The lessons learnt were that you can galvanise workers through relatively simple campaigns and activity, and politicise people who weren't previously political. The fight in Dudley wasn't just around PFI in Dudley, but around the private sector model full stop.

While we didn't stop PFI from going ahead, we did restrict it—prior to Dudley, every PFI scheme slashed terms and conditions and took away pensions and job security; post-Dudley, this was not allowed to happen. For that, I'm immensely proud. We saw campaigns up and down the country use Dudley's example to build on our successes and win reforms.

Finally, every 30 years or so we get a left surge in Labour: Bevanism in the 1950s, Bennism in the early 80s, Corbynism in the 2010s. Pressing issues like the climate crisis and the rise of the far-right mean we can't just wait around for the next leftwards shift in Labour. At the same time, workers currently have no obvious, viable electoral alternative. Simply, where do we go from here?

Where we need to go is look towards where we can build that local resistance. Locally, some people I talk to feel there already is an alternative – Reform. They are parking their bus firmly on our lawn. Just like the left movements, the far-right threat is cyclical in nature – in the 1930s we had the blackshirts, in the 70s the National Front, in the 2010s the EDL. The biggest fear is that Labour is no longer best equipped to be the voice of working-class communities. That umbilical cord has been broken and people are looking around for alternatives. Historically, Labour has never been a socialist party, but it always had the greatest number of socialists in it. What you'll find now is a drip-drip of good socialists leaving the party. We need those socialists in community-ran, community-led campaigns, making an impact on council chambers and ultimately at Westminster elections too. □

Class vs "local"

Since 2020-1, many former Corbynites have quit the Labour Party. Yet the group aiming to make them into a "mass party", Collective, has come to nothing. Most have gone into inactivity or "local independent" politics. In *Solidarity* we have argued that is a dead end. The axis has to be class, rather than local vs national or international. In our view it is especially wrong to bail out of the current fight inside the Labour Party and the unions to block the disabled benefit cuts. □

UK Tour

Hear Uri Weltmann and Amin Amara at these meetings...

May 14th 7:00PM

London

May 15th 6:00PM

Cambridge

May 16th 3:00PM

Oxford

May 18th 2:00PM

Nottingham

May 18th 7:00PM

Sheffield

May 20th 7:00PM

Bristol

Register to attend your nearest event at bit.ly/fost-tour



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WORKERS'

FIGHT, 1972-5



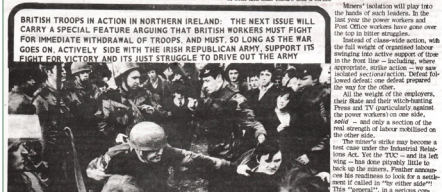
WORKERS' FIGHT

January 14th 1972

MINERS' SOLIDARITY ACTION CAN TURN THE TIDE ON THE TORIES

OVER A QUARTER OF A MILLION miners are not in the first official week of the strike, and the first day of the strike is still to come. But the strike is not a mere protest. It is a struggle for the survival of the mining industry, and for the survival of the working class. The miners' strike is a struggle for the survival of the mining industry, and for the survival of the working class. The miners' strike is a struggle for the survival of the mining industry, and for the survival of the working class.

THE CASE
The miners' case is a simple one. It is a case of a working class fighting for its rights. It is a case of a working class fighting for its rights. It is a case of a working class fighting for its rights.



BRITISH TROOPS IN ACTION IN NORTHERN IRELAND. THE NEXT ISSUE WILL CARRY A SPECIAL FEATURE ARGUING THAT BRITISH WORKERS MUST FIGHT FOR IMMEDIATE WITHDRAWAL OF TROOPS, AND MUST SO LONG AS THE TORIES GO ON ACTIVELY RIDE WITH THE IRISH REPUBLICAN ARMY, SUPPORT ITS FIGHT FOR VICTORY AND ITS JUST STRUGGLE TO DRIVE OUT THE ARMY.

DOCKS-STEWARDS SAY A 30hr WEEK
ON JANUARY 15th THE NATIONAL dockers' union is expected to announce a 30-hour week. This is a significant step in the struggle for a shorter working week. The dockers' union is expected to announce a 30-hour week. This is a significant step in the struggle for a shorter working week.

workers' fight

No.57 - Jan 1st - Jan 15th 1972

SAVE THE HUNGER STRIKERS

ACT NOW!
The hunger strikers are a small group of people who are fighting for their rights. They are a small group of people who are fighting for their rights. They are a small group of people who are fighting for their rights.

NORTHERN IRELAND RACISTS TRIUMPHANT AS WILSON DITHERS

THE IRISH REPUBLICAN ARMY (IRA) has been victorious in its struggle for independence. The IRA has been victorious in its struggle for independence. The IRA has been victorious in its struggle for independence.

WORKERS' FIGHT

No.23 7th-20th July

Tories want 2nd class workers DEFEND BLACK WORKERS DEMONSTRATE ON JULY 22nd!

THIS IS THE SECOND ISSUE OF THE NEWSPAPER. It is a newspaper for the working class. It is a newspaper for the working class. It is a newspaper for the working class.

FASCISTS ROUTED IN LIVERPOOL

On December 30th 1968, a group of fascists were routed in Liverpool. This was a significant victory for the working class. This was a significant victory for the working class. This was a significant victory for the working class.

Support the right of the workers to make their own decisions. Support the right of the workers to make their own decisions. Support the right of the workers to make their own decisions.

workers' fight

No.114 - October 20th 1975

A STAB IN THE BACK BY THE TUC

THE TUC has been a long time in the making. It has been a long time in the making. It has been a long time in the making.

LABOUR HITS AT WOMEN'S RIGHTS

THE TUC has been a long time in the making. It has been a long time in the making. It has been a long time in the making.

Support the right of the workers to make their own decisions. Support the right of the workers to make their own decisions. Support the right of the workers to make their own decisions.

By Martin Thomas

"The memory of the working class is in its party", wrote Leon Trotsky. "The reformist party is a party with a short memory".

He wrote that in 1925, a time of high struggle. The truth is weightier in times like today of fewer strikes and duller meetings. Short memory, in our times, pushes us towards accepting working-class passivity as normal.

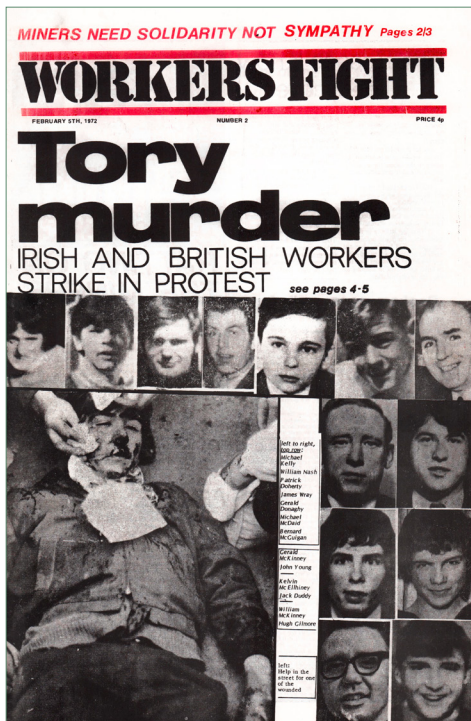
Revolutionary socialist politics needs a memory. Not only such as we can get from reading about the 1917 Russian revolution or the 1871 Paris Commune, but also such as we can get from our own lived experience over decades.

Solidarity has been running since 2002, and is the continuator of several publications before that. One of those was the *Workers' Fight* newspaper. Its first issues were in January 1972, month of a great miners' strike in Britain and the Bloody Sunday massacre by the Parachute Regiment in Derry. Its last were in October 1975, a few months after the Labour government legislated a £6 limit on wage rises which trade union leaders had proposed for fear that otherwise the army or the far right might be triggered into a coup against the government.

We were then a much smaller organisation, and most of us very young and inexperienced. The whole avowedly-Trotskyist left was possibly smaller (though more active) than now. The "broad left" (Communist Party and broad Labour left) were bigger.

But it was a time of great class battles in Britain, dramatic events internationally, and intense and fluid debate within the left. It was a time which made for vivid and weighty memories.

The *Workers' Fight* newspaper was concerned with reaffirming the ideas of long Marxist tradition in less-than-revolutionary times, with the aim of keeping



the ideas in circulation and creating a body of people educated in the tradition and able to give it life in future upheavals. It had reprints, retrospectives, reviews. But in those years especially we could do much more.

As we wrote in mid-1975, in a survey of the first 100 issues, we had "not simply recited correct formulae about picketing and workers' self-defence.

"*Workers' Fight* 22 (15 Feb 1973) carried the news of the arrest of the Shrewsbury 24 – being the first paper on the left to do so".

These were building workers (18 in the first swoop, and then more) arrested months after the 1972 national building workers' strike (the only one of its sort ever), and charged under "conspiracy" laws for activities on picket lines in North Wales. They came to be known as the Shrewsbury 24 because court hearings were in Shrewsbury. 22 were convicted, and two, Ricky Tomlinson and Des Warren, jailed for long periods. All eventually had their convictions overturned in 2021.

"We campaigned consistently for the victimised North Wales pickets. Our was the initiative that led to the setting up of the North Wales Defence Committee. Ours was the suggestion for the committee's bulletins, and we helped produce and distribute all the earlier bulletins.

"It would be some weeks before anyone else on the left took any notice". Some of the arrested workers were members of the Communist Party, but the CP's *Morning Star* initially refused to publish anything.

"We helped set up local Shrewsbury Defence Committees. When Des Warren and Ricky Tomlinson had their appeals turned down and were sent back to jail in November 1974, it was our action, on Pochins Manchester Poly site, that spearheaded what could have been a rolling strike movement, if it were not for the sabotage of the Communist Party".

We had had long and fractious debates about the use of the general strike slogan before we started the *Workers' Fight* newspaper, when we

were still a small grouping (the Trotskyist Tendency) inside IS (forerunner of today's SWP), producing occasional discussion documents but selling *Socialist Worker* weekly.

In 1972, especially around the jailing of five dockers in July under the Tories' Industrial Relations Act, we were able to give that slogan life. An unofficial strike surge of some 250,000 workers led the TUC to call a one-day general strike, and the government to find a legal expedient to free the dockers.

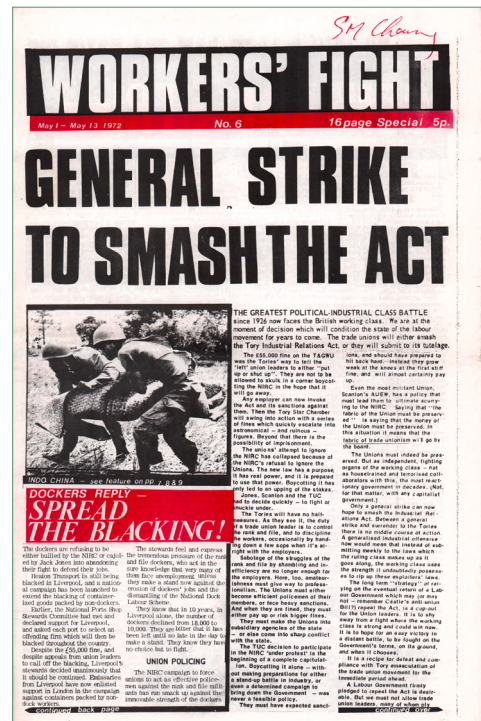
The general strike slogan was commonplace then in left-wing papers and in chants on demonstrations. We argued for an open-ended version of the slogan – "General Strike to Smash the Industrial Relations Act" – which neither posed it as the revolution-or-nothing ultimate, nor foreclosed its political prospects in advance by posing it as an electoral gambit ("General Strike to Kick The Tories Out", a formula favoured at one time or another by all the other avowedly-Trotskyist groupings. Militant, forerunner of the SP, RCP, and Socialist Alternative, made it "24 hour General Strike", telling us that the labour movement was so strong that 24 hours would be enough).

After the July 1972 experience, we published a pamphlet, *The Left and the July Crisis*, dissecting and criticising the vacillations of the other groups, and making some criticisms of our own agitation. In the occasional magazine we published along with the paper, *Permanent Revolution*, we translated for the first time articles by Rosa Luxemburg on the general strike.

Mobilisation

Our tiny newspaper was able to be a vehicle for independent mobilisation, too, when the Prevention of Terrorism Act was rushed through Parliament without amendment or dissent in November 1974. We, together with the London branch of the Irish organisation People's Democracy, organised the first street demonstration against that Act.

We had previously, on 25 September 1973, been the only left organisation in Britain to have our office raided by



armed police in connection with Ireland. We were able to fill Conway Hall in London with a protest meeting after the raid with speakers from all the other main left groups.

The Catholic nationalist revolt in Northern Ireland had turned into guerrilla war. The Provisional IRA emerged in 1970. The mass internment without trial of Catholic nationalists in August 1971 increased its support, as did the shooting dead of 14 unarmed civilians by the Parachute Regiment on a peaceful demonstration in Derry on 30 January 1972.

Workers' Fight sided with the guerrilla war against the British army of the Catholic nationalist minority in Northern Ireland, arguing that the only way out was through the British state ceasing to prop up the unworkable Partition and through the creation of a federal united Ireland with autonomy for the compact Protestant minority area.

As we would write later in *The Left in Disarray*, "The British left responded to the beginning of the IRA war in 1971... with panic-stricken cries of dissociation". Most of the British far left dug out the term "individual terrorism" from the Marxist archives. Marxists, so they (falsely) claimed, had utterly denounced the 19th and early 20th century Russian radicals who set to assassinating Tsarist officials. We dug out and reprinted what Marxists had really written about that "individual terrorism" in Russia. It was utterly different from what is mostly understood as "terrorism" today, the killing of civilians supposed to be religiously deviant or associated with "the West" practised by groups like Daesh and Al Qaeda; and different from guerrilla war too.

Over the years the rest of the far left swung away from denouncing the Provisionals' military campaign as "terrorist", and towards seeing it as a step in a supposed "process of permanent revolution" through which a national-democratic struggle would grow over into socialism.

We had argued that "permanent revolution for Ireland" scenario was nonsense back in 1966. In July 1972,

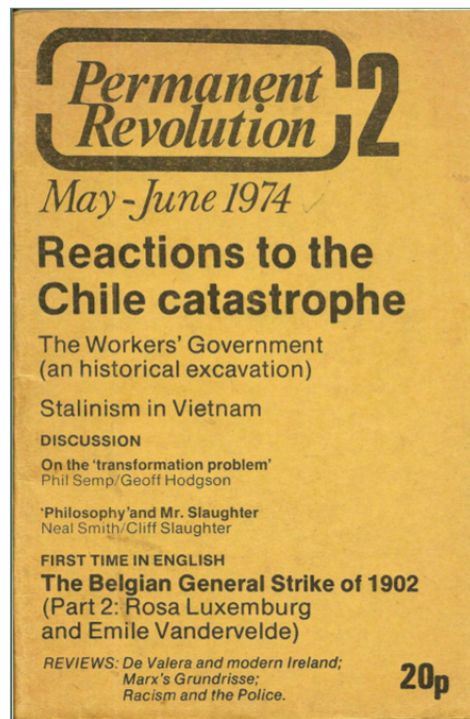
The left in disarray

Sean Matgamna



Politically, the left is still very weak and disoriented. It needs to emerge from defining itself primarily in a negative and reactive way, and rediscover what, positively, the real left must be for. 408 pages. £12

workersliberty.org/publications



when talks with the British government during a brief ceasefire broke down, the Provisionals carried out a "Bloody Friday" bombing of economic targets in Belfast, which killed nine people, mostly civilians. *Workers' Fight* wrote: "Support for the IRA against British imperialism and its militant allies cannot exclude criticism when they indiscriminately bomb civilians. The terrible tragedy of an intercommunal civil war is very possible".

Workers' Fight also published criticism of the Provisionals from Irish socialist groups. Our criticism would grow over the years. By the time the next Provisional IRA ceasefire (February 1975 to January 1976) broke down, the *Workers' Fight* group had merged (in December 1975) with the Left Faction of IS-SWP and the paper had been replaced by a new title, *Workers' Action*. Our more critical articles would cause some contention with our new partners.

In later years, we came to think that we had been too quiet in our criticism of the politics of the military campaign in the 1970s. We explained that the Northern Ireland conflict was not just "anti-colonial", as many came to present it. We still felt a moral obligation to play down our criticism of the most militant, with whatever political inadequacies, in battle against the British army which was fighting to sustain a sectarian and historically imperialistically-imposed structure.

In 1972-5 we were at odds with the rest of the left and the far left on Europe.

In 1968-71 our forerunner-group had been the Trotskyist Tendency inside IS-SWP, producing pamphlets and discussion documents on various issues, notably Ireland, but using *Socialist Worker* on the streets and in the labour movement. (We would occasionally get a letter printed in *Socialist Worker*. Less as time went on).

It was on the issue of Europe that we were evicted from IS-SWP, prompting us to start our own paper.

Britain had applied to join the European Union (then called EEC, and more loosely-knit than now) in 1961

WORKERS' WEEK

Nov 11 July 23 Aug 1972 4p

DEFEND DOCKERS! SMASH THE ACT!

SIR THOMAS CORNELIUS CLANCY ANTHONY MEARNS KENZIE EYLES DEREK WESTWOOD

GENERAL STRIKE!

THIS IS THE CRUNCH!
TRADE UNIONISTS ARE
IN AIL. TO BE HELD
INDEFINITELY, FOR ACTING
AS TRADE UNIONISTS.
 The National Industrial Relations Court has claimed its first victory. The Tories are using their power, the power of the courts, the police, and their laws, against the labour movement.

Now we must reject our power, the power of industrial action — the power of the General Strike.
 The issues involve a threat. Every worker has no interest in

defeating Trade Union rights and fighting neo-fascism. There's what the dockers are so just here.

Every labour, every office, every building, every every, must stand by the dockers.

And if the Tories of the Trade Unionists are to take the initiative in giving all private industrial action — action, not work — with the dockers.

And if the Tories of the Trade Unionists or the Action Committee must stand by the dockers.

The dockers are right to go to work. In the last 10 years the number of dockers has declined from 60,000 to 40,000 and continuing to decline at the rate of one job lost. In light of a new job loss. In light of a new job loss, the dockers

Continued on p.2

BRITISH TRADES

THE IRA, and its affiliates in it, has again become the backbone for the various agencies in England and the Republic of Ireland. In the last 10 years, the IRA has become, in particular, the British Army is relying on its officers against the IRA. Already it has issued part of the IRA, which is to be the most recent outbreak of thousands of working men's families.

More evidence is likely. A recent outbreak of these events could well be the most recent outbreak of these events.

Regime has not to be abandoned. Certainly there will be a new wave in British Army intervention in the Catholic region to operations to "keep out the IRA — that is, to break the will of the Catholic population to go to supporting the IRA.

It is the IRA, and its affiliates in the IRA, who are responsible for the IRA. The IRA is the IRA, and its affiliates in the IRA, who are responsible for the IRA. The IRA is the IRA, and its affiliates in the IRA, who are responsible for the IRA.

British officials must be clear on the issues.

However, the IRA is not the IRA. It is the IRA, and its affiliates in the IRA, who are responsible for the IRA. The IRA is the IRA, and its affiliates in the IRA, who are responsible for the IRA.

Government and the Army — that is, to influence the British army's response to the situation in the IRA. The IRA is the IRA, and its affiliates in the IRA, who are responsible for the IRA.

to expect the revolution and the threat of all things as they are. They are the IRA, and its affiliates in the IRA, who are responsible for the IRA.

to be maintained in the IRA. The IRA is the IRA, and its affiliates in the IRA, who are responsible for the IRA.

of civil war, in order to be the IRA, and its affiliates in the IRA, who are responsible for the IRA.

one must ensure that the IRA is the IRA, and its affiliates in the IRA, who are responsible for the IRA.

TRUCE

The brief time from the outbreak of industrial protest by the UCU and the British Army. One who Direct Force, the Army — supported by the great pressure, having got the Great and Orange Trade — has allowed the Orange group, the Unionist population of the IRA, to still enjoy and be able. The increased British of the British Army, since its rising movement on the industrial population.

Continued on p.2

[illegible]

and again in 1967. It had been vetoed by France. The Communist Party, then maybe 30,000 strong, and influential in the unions and Labour, opposed the EEC-EU for Russian foreign-policy reasons dressed up in nationalist arguments which depended on the idea that the labour movement was much stronger in Britain than in other West European countries and would be "levelled down" by EEC-EU entry. Many right-wing Labour people argued against it on grounds of trade with the Commonwealth, the ex-Empire, which in the early 1960s was much bigger than with the EEC countries. Some also saw an alternative in the European Free Trade Area (from 1960, with Austria, Denmark, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland: a free trade area, but, unlike the EEC even then, not a customs union).

All the avowedly Trotskyist left agreed that bringing down international economic barriers was desirable, but said we could not advise British capitalism on EEC vs EFTA vs Commonwealth. All had some variant of the slogan proposed by IS-SWP until 1971: "In or out, the fight [i.e. the class struggle] goes on".

Attempt

The Heath Tory government of 1970-4 made another attempt to join, and would succeed. Opposition from old-fashioned Tories and almost the whole labour movement was strong. Some at the Easter 1971 conference of IS-SWP wanted to change IS-SWP's line to chime in with the labour movement opposition. The old line was reaffirmed.

Then in June 1971, at the IS-SWP committee, Tony Cliff and Chris Harman moved a tweak: IS-SWP would still have the old line as its first option, but if that had been defeated in a labour movement meeting, then it would “vote with the left”, i.e. against EEC entry. Within weeks, and without further formal decision, the supposed “fallback option” became the operative policy: No to the bosses’ Market!

All the other far left groups had already made a similar shift.

The Trotskyist Tendency campaigned for a special conference of IS-SWP to reaffirm the Easter conference policy. We said we had the constitutionally-required minimum number of branches to requisition a conference. The IS-SWP leaders said we were one short. Then they short-circuited the issue by calling a special conference to expel us.

Partly, IS-SWP was now growing fairly fast, and they saw having to debate with us as a diversion. And partly, they had seen us as in poor condition (at a conference of the Tendency in July 1971, two substantial subgroups had split away from us), and wanted to nix us before we could revive on the Europe issue.

But we did revive. Enough that we gave them a real fight at the special conference on 4 December 1971 (we lost about 40:60), and enough that we had the confidence to go for a fortnightly paper after expulsion. In 1971 working-class struggle was still nowhere near as high as it would be in 1972-5. The Tories were making a first attempt at what they would do under Thatcher from 1979, and until the end of 1971 they looked like succeeding. We did not yet know about the big workers' struggles to come in 1972-5; but we were determined that we would be an activist lever in the class struggle, not just a discussion group.

We scraped together funds. Comrades took second mortgages on their houses. We rented an office (though we could pay no staff) and bought a small printing press and other equipment.

Producing the paper was many times more difficult than with the technology of today, and in its first months the fortnightly was, as we ruefully remarked, "the first Trotskyist three-and-a-half-weekly in history". But it came out. It regularised. It went weekly, with just four pages, in January 1974, first as an experiment when the Tory government mandated a three-day week for industry because of a world oil-supply crisis and a miners' overtime ban leading up to a strike.

We sold the paper, and with some energy. It was often more difficult then than now to sell socialist papers on the streets, but we sold it on the streets, on picket lines, at strike meetings, round pubs and Labour Clubs, on demonstrations, door-to-door, and outside workplaces. More active people would sell dozens, or even a hundred, of each issue.

We sold with all the more energy to challenge majority opinion on Europe. The EEC was the big parliamentary issue of 1972: the legislation to join passed by only eight votes at its second reading in February 1972, though the Tories had a majority of 28, and became law in October.

In 1974 Labour regained office. Labour leader Harold Wilson staged a "re-negotiation" and took it as a basis for recommending "yes" in a referendum, 5 June 1975, on remaining in the EEC-EU. Many other Labour leaders said "no", but "yes" won by 67%-33%.

workers' fight

Inside
Massimo Ind
South American mud
CHILE type-A
Bombes in Britain

25p
12/21 (20th September) - 10th October 1973

Hull Dockers boycott Junta ARMY TERROR IN CHILE

THE COOP FRONT ISSUED THE POPULAR UNITY FRONT'S ultimatum to the Chilean Government to withdraw its army from the Falkland Islands. It said that if the ultimatum was not met, the COOP would call for a general strike in the UK.

The issue of nationalisation in Chile has been a major factor in the recent political and economic crisis. The Chilean Government has refused to nationalise the copper and iron mines, and the COOP has called for a general strike in the UK to protest against this.

The Chilean Government has also refused to withdraw its army from the Falkland Islands. The COOP has called for a general strike in the UK to protest against this.

Books burned

THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT has ordered the burning of books which are deemed to be "harmful to the revolution". The books include "The Great Leap Forward" by Liu Shao-chi, "The Hundred Flowers Campaign" by Hu Yaobang, and "The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution" by Mao Zedong.

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IRISH INTERNEES SUPPORT SHREWSBURY 24

DEFEND THE NORTH WALES 24!

Defend the right to picket

Pay Board warning on Phase 3

AN SPECCOFT TEAM warns that the Government's proposed Phase 3 pay award for the P.A.T. BRABO will lead to a general strike in the UK.

The Chilean Government has refused to withdraw its army from the Falkland Islands. The COOP has called for a general strike in the UK to protest against this.

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Almost the entire far left was furiously for “no”. We recommended not voting. We still thought a “yes” vote suggested approval of the specific terms of EEC entry (which included, for example, higher food prices, and not free movement, which became part of the EU only in 1992) and not just of the general idea of bringing down borders.

In our discussions around the 2016 Brexit referendum, some of us concluded that was a mistake in 1975: voting yes would not have contradicted reforms in the EEC-EU, a few of which indeed happened, and there was no way that British withdrawal could have been a way towards a preferable form of integration. Even in 1975 we said, deliberately to shake up left “no” campaigners, that their stance was really to the right of the bourgeois-cosmopolitan “yes” campaigners.

We covered the Popular Unity government in Chile and the military coup which crushed it in September 1973. We debated with others on the left the tactics and policy of the left in Chile. We gave much coverage to the upheavals in Portugal after the decades-old decayed-fascist regime fell in April 1974, and tried to transmit what we learned from Portuguese political exiles in Britain (the Portuguese Workers' Coordinating Committee) and interviews and discussions done by comrades visiting

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Workers' Liberty

Reason in Revolt • For social ownership of the banks and industry

Portugal.

That too set us at odds with most of the other far-left groups, which swung towards enthusiasm for the left-wing (but militarist-populist) of the Armed Forces Movement of radicalised officers.

Vietnam

We supported the Vietnam's war against US imperialism. In hindsight, as we discuss in an appendix in the new Workers' Liberty pamphlet *The Fall of European Stalinism*, we were far too soft in criticism of Vietnamese Stalinism. We were still (and would be until the 1980s) "Orthodox Trotskyists", looking to the tradition defined by writers such as James P Cannon. *Workers' Fight* still sometimes had reprints from the SWP-USA (then Cannon's organisation – he died in 1974 – and no relation to the IS-SWP-UK). We still, incoherently, saw the Stalinist states as "degenerated and deformed workers' states".

But we gave that formula the strongest anti-Stalinist twist, giving the most minimal definition to "defence of the USSR against imperialism". "In any conflict, or apparent conflict, between defence against imperialism and the proletarian struggle against the bureaucracy, we believe in the primacy of the workers' struggles". *Workers' Fight* defended bourgeois-liberal oppositionists in the USSR, and when some of us countered with mechanical transposition from Trotsky's attitudes in the early 1930s, we argued it out.

Even on Vietnam we were more critical than other far-left groups. IS-SWP defined North Vietnam as "state capitalism", but said much less about that than about the virtues of "revolution" in general, and in practice, saw it as a very



"progressive" state capitalism.

An incident in early 1976, soon after *Workers' Fight* was replaced by the new *Workers' Action*, is telling. A motion from a union right-winger, supporting dissidents in the USSR, came up in a union branch where four of us were members. Each individual had to respond instantly, on the spot. Two of us from *Workers' Fight* voted for the motion; two of the new comrades from an IS-SWP background, who still had some "state-capitalist" view of the USSR, voted against. Nothing wrong with the motion on paper, they said, but on such issues one should vote with the left. Writing for *Workers' Fight*, selling it, discussing it, had trained us in the idea that, after decades of Stalinist seepage, we could often establish what was really "left" only by digging deep.

We had a policy of open debate in our paper, not yet "codified", but practised. There was a debate, for example, in which some comrades proposed we support a first version of a "Two States" policy for Israel-Palestine which came from the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Most of us rejected that then, and held to the "secular democratic Palestine" formula which we had swung to, like most of the far left, after 1969. The debate would reopen among us from 1976.

We had coverage of the then-lively feminist movement. The National Abortion Campaign was started in early 1975: James White's attempt then to narrow access under the Abortion Act 1967 would fall only after winning two parliamentary votes. The Working Women's Charter, an activist movement formed on a platform adopted by the

London Trades Council but rejected by the TUC, started in 1974. There were several large socialist-feminist conferences in the 1970s, and lots of local women's liberation groups of various sorts. *Workers' Fight* ran a debate on "wages for housework". (None of us, and few in the whole feminist movement outside a vocal group round Selma James, backed the actual demand; but some saw some merit behind it than others).

Our summary of our first 100 issues reckoned that we had the merit of "a painstaking step-by-step development of ideas, regulated by the class struggle" rather than posing as "world geniuses, cooking up whole new 'theories' on the spur of the moment". The 1970s were all-too-rich in such unappreciated geniuses, usually telling the rest of us that they had discovered what Marx really meant but no-one else had noticed.

Stuck

We also acknowledged "misjudgements, bad articles, political mistakes. In late 1973, for example, our initial reaction to Phase 3 [of the Labour government's restrictions on wage rises] was too pessimistic". We could also have mentioned that in 1972 we had got a bit "stuck" in advocacy of a general strike, tending to pose it as an all-purpose alternative to the political processes within the labour movement, or indeed to lapse into a sort of syndicalism. We set about correcting that in the course of 1973, and stepped up activity in the Labour Party and its youth movement. We criticised slogans like "Labour to power with socialist policies", then, in varying formats and styles, "consensus" on the far left, advocating specific transitional demands instead. We criticised the "Mandelite" IMG for the view it favoured in 1975 that the Labour Party was a two-class party with the unions representing the working-class element and the politicians the bourgeois (thus slogans like "a Labour government based on the unions").

In the February 1974 general election we had a little article favouring the nine candidates of the Workers' Revolutionary Party (then still a real left-wing force, with a daily paper, though very aberrant) and the three of the "Mandelite" IMG as valuable protest efforts. By the next general election in October 1974 we had unanimously come to see it as foolish to back "propaganda candidates" for bad propaganda.

The lead story in *Workers' Fight* 106 in

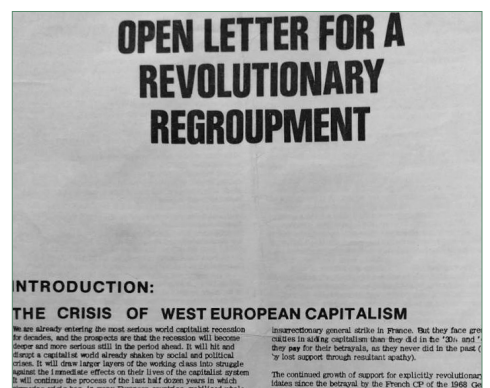


August 1975 was a response to a front-page lead in the *Sunday Express*, later taken up by the *Sun* and the *News of the World*, denouncing a template motion for Labour Parties we had circulated to challenge the Labour government's restrictions on wage rises. Militant (forerunner of the Socialist Party and RCP) felt obliged to dissociate publicly from our thoughts. No-one got expelled, but in the following months we felt it wise to take some evasive action.

The conclusion of the *Workers' Fight* 100 summary is still true today.

"We do not often end articles... with calls to 'build the socialist alternative' or 'join the party'. As answers to the concrete political questions of class struggle, these are empty: what will the 'socialist alternative' or 'the party' do, and what about the struggles of the vast masses who have not yet joined 'the party'?

"But it remains true that our answers to those concrete political questions, if correct, cannot be made useful without the active work of the supporters of *Workers' Fight*. A sword may as well be used to spread butter if it is not in the hands of a warrior. And we need more warriors!" □



How workers beat the Kapp putsch

In March 1920, a general strike defeated the right-wing Kapp putsch in Germany which at first seemed to have triumphed easily over the Social-Democrat-led coalition government of Gustav Bauer. Germany had had a revolution in November 1918 which overthrew the old monarchy, but in 1919 workers' risings and brief workers' republics in Berlin, Munich, Bremen etc. had been bloodily defeated. This account is adapted from Pierre Broué's *Révolution en Allemagne*. The precedent was much cited in the 1920s and 30s. Any relevance today, in the USA or elsewhere, of course a matter for [debate](#).

The military officers [after Germany accepted the Versailles Treaty imposed by the victors of World War One] were particularly sensitive to the threat posed by the Allied demand for the extradition of "war criminals": as early as July 26, 1919, they made this known to the government, where Noske [the right-wing Social Democrat defence minister] gave them his unreserved support.

The surge of discontent and anguish provoked by the Allied demand was soon to be amplified by the return of the Freikorps who, since 1919, had been fighting in the Baltic States against the Red Army, and whose withdrawal the Allies demanded, having sent other troops to relieve them.

General von Lüttwitz, commander of the Berlin troops... was at the forefront of those who were increasingly considering a putsch.

The fate of the Freikorps was not the only issue at stake. The reduction in manpower imposed by the treaty was a source of concern for the military of all ranks. Captain Ehrhardt's naval brigade, based at Doberitz, just outside Berlin, was to serve as a test case: General von Lüttwitz assured his commander that he would not allow "such a unit to be broken up at such a stormy time". He blamed the government's "weakness" in the face of the "Bolshevist threat", spoke openly of a coup d'état, and the Berlin police chief, Colonel Arens, tried to dissuade him by taking him to a meeting with the parliamentary leaders of the right.

Those leaders, who were campaigning for the dissolution of the [National] Assembly [elected on 19 January, with a near-but-not-quite majority for the Social Democrats and the more left-wing Independent Social Democrats] and a new election for President [held by right-wing Social Democrat Friedrich Ebert], were unable to convince him of the imprudence of his plans: the General believed only in the strength of his battalions, and that the elections would be much better if he had first swept aside the politicians. So he embarked on a conspiracy whose main players were himself, Ehrhardt, Ludendorff

[main commander of German armed forces in the war, and a future Nazi], and a civilian, Wolfgang Kapp, Prussia's director of agriculture and representative of the junkers and high-ranking imperial officials.

It was a risky venture, premature or too late. The authorities learned of it, but it benefited from complicity in all the key offices.

The Cabinet Council, meeting on the 12th, examined the situation and postponed the necessary decision until its meeting on the 15th. On the same day, however, [defence minister] Noske issued a number of arrest warrants for the more conspicuous conspirators, such as Captain Pabst.

Pushed into a corner, General von Lüttwitz returned to the Doberitz camp. The senior officer assigned by Noske to check on the situation at the camp telephoned to announce his arrival, and returned with assurances that all was calm. That same night, Captain Ehrhardt's brigade set off for the centre of the capital.

The insurgents issued an ultimatum demanding the resignation of [the Social-Democratic president] Ebert and the election of a new president, the dissolution of the Reichstag [parliament] and new elections, and, in the meantime, a cabinet of technocrats with a general at the War Ministry. Noske, who summoned the military chiefs not involved in the plot to his office at 1.30 a.m., was told that there was no question of resisting with arms in hand. The Council of Ministers, meeting at 3 a.m., finally decided to evacuate the capital, leaving only two of its members behind. Before dawn, almost the entire government and over two hundred members of parliament had set off for Dresden, where they hoped to find protection from General Maercker.

Decrees

In the early hours of the morning, Ehrhardt's men occupied Berlin, hoisting the imperial flag on public buildings. Installed in the Chancellery, Kapp issued his first decrees, declared a state of siege, suspended all newspapers and appointed General von Lüttwitz Commander-in-Chief. By noon, he could reckon that all staffs and police forces in the Berlin military region had rallied to his cause.

Worried about General Maercker's attitude, the members of the government set off again, this time in the direction of Stuttgart, where they believed they could count on General Bergmann. By the evening of 13 March 1920, the putsch seemed to have won without bloodshed, since nowhere did the army or police pretend to oppose it, and the authorities in the north and east recognised the new government.

But while the government fled, the resistance organised. In the morning,



[Carl] Legien [head of the Social Democrat trade unions] convened a meeting of the unions' general commission. It issued a call for a general strike at 11 a.m. Otto Wels, one of the few Social Democratic leaders to have stayed behind, had a poster drawn up and printed, followed by the signatures of the Social Democratic ministers – whom he had obviously not consulted – calling for a general strike on the theme of unity against counter-revolution and in defense of the republic.

The Independent Social Democratic Party also called for a general strike "for freedom, for revolutionary socialism, against military dictatorship and the restoration of the monarchy". At Legien's instigation, talks began on setting up a central strike committee made up of all the workers' organisations, whose authority would go far beyond that of the unions' general commission alone. Agreement could not be reached...

But Legien had taken the initiative. At dawn on 13 March, he refused to flee, stigmatised the attitude of the social-democratic leaders, and threw all his authority and weight as a man of apparatus into the balance in favor of the general strike. He, the old opponent of the general strike [in the Social Democrats' debates before World War One], the cautious reformist, the patriarch of the revisionists, the man who embodied decades of class collaboration, decided to go underground and seek links widely – including with the Communists – to ensure the defeat of the putsch. He proved to be closer to the masses than the Communist leaders of the time.

[Paul] Levi [then the foremost leader of the Communist Party, following the killing of Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, and Leo Jogiches] was absent, serving a prison sentence. Under pressure from the leftist Berlin leaders Friesland and Budich, and against the opposition of Jakob Walcher alone, the central committee of the Communist Party of Germany (Spartacus) (KPD-S) issued an appeal, probably drafted by

Mieczysław Bronski, which [its paper] *Die Rote Fahne* published on 14 March.

It expressed the conviction that, for the time being, there was no possible response to the military putsch...

"Should the workers go on a general strike? The working class, only yesterday shackled by Ebert-Noske, unarmed, in the worst conditions, is incapable of action. We believe it is our duty to speak plainly. The working class will take up the struggle against military dictatorship in the circumstances and with the means it deems appropriate. Those conditions have not yet been met".

Scuffles

German workers did not heed this call to passivity. As early as 14 March, even though it was a Sunday, it was possible to gauge the extent of the movement. Train after train stopped. By 5 p.m., Berlin was without streetcars, water, gas or electricity. Scuffles between soldiers and workers broke out everywhere.

The day before, there had already been reactions: in Chemnitz, on the initiative of the Communists led by [Heinrich] Brandler, an action committee was set up, comprising the trade unions and all the workers' parties. It took the lead, with no troops around, and formed a workers' militia, the Arbeiterwehr, which occupied the rail station, the post office, and the town hall.

In Leipzig, negotiations began between workers' parties, but the Communists refused to sign the text prepared by the other organizations calling for a general strike. On the night 13th-14th, the first violent incidents occurred in Dortmund, between police and worker demonstrators.

On the 14th, the first fighting broke out in the Ruhr. General von Watter ordered his troops to march on Hagen, where the workers took up arms. Social democrats and Independents issued a joint call for a general strike.

In Leipzig, the Freikorps opened fire on a workers' demonstration: twenty

continued on page 12 →

→ from page 11

ty-two people were killed, and the fighting continued. In Chemnitz, the workers' organisations decided to set up a 3,000-strong workers' militia immediately.

In Berlin, realizing its initial error, the KPD-S committee drafted a new appeal [this time backing the general strike], which nevertheless lagged behind the development of the struggle, since it did not endorse the slogan "arming the proletariat".

By 15 March the Kapp-Lüttwitz government was completely paralysed... Everything stopped in Berlin, where the authorities failed to print a single poster.

In the Ruhr, where the Lichtschlag Freikorps went into action, it was immediately attacked by detachments of armed workers. Fighting was also going on in Leipzig, Frankfurt, Halle and Kiel. The Wilhelmshaven sailors mutinied and arrested Admiral von Levantow and four hundred officers.

In Chemnitz, again at the instigation of the Communists, an action committee made up of representatives of the workers' parties called on the workers to elect their delegates to workplace councils. A few hours later, these delegates, chosen by 75,000 workers with proportional representation, in turn elected the city's workers' council: ten communists, nine Social Democrats, one Independent and one Democrat.

Heinrich Brandler was one of the three presidents of this revolutionary body, whose authority and prestige extended over an entire industrial region where the forces of repression were disarmed or neutralised, and the workers armed. A few months later, he wrote, not without pride:

"In Chemnitz, we were the first party to launch the slogans of general strike, disarmament of the bourgeoisie, arming of the workers, immediate re-election of political workers' councils. We were also the first, thanks to the strength of the Communist Party, to put these slogans into practice".

A new danger was emerging, however, precisely in the very region where the initiatives of the Chemnitz Communists seemed to be building a



Karl Leigen

solid front of workers' resistance to the putschists. Max Hoelz, a KPD-S militant [with an erratic record]... had the gates of Plauen prison opened, recruited and summarily organized guerrilla units which he dubbed "Red Guards", and began harassing the Reichswehr, organising raids against its isolated detachments, looting stores and banks to finance his troops and do spectacular deliveries of supplies to the inhabitants of the working-class suburbs... Brandler and the Chemnitz Communists condemned him as an adventurer...

In the Ruhr, a similar phenomenon, but involving larger working-class masses, gave rise to what came to be known as the "Red Army". An action committee formed in Hagen on the initiative of the Independent Social Democrats militants Stemmer, a miner, and Josef Ernst, a metalworker, created a "military committee". Within a few hours, 2,000 armed workers were marching on Wetter, where the workers were battling it out with the Freikorps

Fighting

On 16 March, fighting or preparations for it seemed to be going on all over Germany, except perhaps in the capital... The Red Army of the Ruhr workers was marching on Dortmund. The Freikorps and Reichswehr held the center of Leipzig against improvised workers' detachments. In Kottbus, Major Buchrucker gave the order to shoot any civilian carrying weapons on the spot. In Stettin, where an action committee based on the Chemnitz model had been set up, the garrison was the scene of fighting between supporters and opponents of the putsch.

From his Berlin prison Paul Levi wrote an extremely violent letter to the central committee, criticising its passivity, its lack of initiative, and its blindness to the opportunities offered to revolutionaries by the fight against the putsch. Communist leaders throughout the country, with the exception of Berlin, reacted in the same way... In almost every case, regardless of the central instructions, the Communists called for a general strike and helped organise it. On the other hand, several [ultra-left] opposition-Communist groups – notably in Hamburg – adopted a wait-and-see stance, justified by their refusal to take joint action with the "social traitors": neither in Berlin, nor in Dresden, around Rühle, did the leftists play any role...

In Berlin, a desperate Kapp negotiated with Vice-Chancellor Schiffer, who represented the Bauer government. Kapp agreed in the common interest that General Groener should try to mediate with President Ebert. But Ebert was in no hurry... Kapp's government was suspended in a vacuum. Bread and meat were running out in the capital. The head of the Reichsbank refused to pay the ten million marks demanded by Kapp.

On 16 March, at 1 p.m., he gave the order "to shoot the agitators and workers who are on the picket lines from 4

p.m." This time, the bosses came out against a measure that risked triggering civil war. Ernst von Borsig assured Kapp that: "The unanimity is so great within the working class that it is impossible to distinguish the leaders from the millions of workers who have stopped work".

The Ruhr workers recaptured Dortmund at six in the morning. On the night of the 16th-17th, a regiment of sappers mutinied in Berlin itself, imprisoning its officers. It took the intervention of the spearhead of the putsch, the Ehrhardt marine brigade, to secure their release...

On 17 March 17, Kapp, having realized his defeat, chose to flee... General von Lüttwitz followed suit a few hours later... His deputies, who were no longer sure of their troops, asked for command to be handed over to a general who had not compromised himself in the putsch: von Seeckt was to be the man of this moment. All in all, the putsch lasted no more than a hundred hours, and was well and truly crushed by working-class reaction, chiefly the general strike...

Germany was not yet covered by a network of elected workers' councils – Chemnitz and the Ruhr remained the exception – but it was covered by a tight network of executive committees (Vollzugsräte) or action committees, formed by the workers' parties and unions, and which the fight against the putschists and the organisation of defence led to play the role of genuine revolutionary powers, posing, in practice, and during the general strike itself, the problem of power and the more immediate one of government...

Workers' government

As early as 17 March, Legien addressed the executive committee of the Independents, asking them to send representatives to a meeting of the general trade union commission [79]. The executive delegated Hilferding and Koenen, to whom Legien proposed the formation of a "workers' government", made up of representatives of the workers' parties and the unions. He justified his proposal by explaining that no government was now possible in Germany against the unions, and that the latter, in an exceptional situation, were ready to assume their responsibilities. [The Independents refused, saying that meant compromise with "traitors to the working class"]...

Legien [kept on pushing and] warned the pre-coup government that he would not hesitate, if he deemed it necessary, to form a "workers' government" himself, which would oppose by force the return of the Bauer government to the capital... He laid down a number of absolute prerequisites, including... a radical purge of the army and police....

Legien had to give up [on a coalition workers' government] but on the morning of the 19th, after lengthy negotiations, the Bauer government representatives solemnly undertook to fulfill the conditions dictated by Le-



Friedrich Ebert

gien...

[The strike continued. On the evening of the 22nd the unions, the Social Democrats, and the Independents announced a deal and called for a return to work. The KPD-S called for the strikes to continue, but took a new stance on the government, not however published until 26 March, when it was too late]...

"The KPD believes that the formation of a socialist government without the slightest bourgeois and capitalist element will create extremely favorable conditions for energetic action by the proletarian masses.... The party declares that its activity will retain the character of a loyal opposition... By stating that our party's activity 'will retain the character of loyal opposition', we imply that the party will not prepare a revolutionary coup, but will retain complete freedom of action as regards political propaganda in favor of its ideas".

[But Ebert had now returned to Berlin and cut across Legien by organising a new coalition government on the same basis as the old one, with the liberal German Democratic Party and the Catholic Centre Party. It would send troops to suppress the armed workers in the Ruhr].

[Many in and around the Communist Party condemned the "loyal opposition" statement, but Lenin, in his famous pamphlet *Left-Wing Communism*, would write: "This statement is quite correct both in its basic premise and its practical conclusions. The basic premise is that at present there is no 'objective basis' for the dictatorship of the proletariat because the 'majority of the urban workers' support the Independents. The conclusion is: a promise to be a 'loyal opposition' (i.e., renunciation of preparations for a 'forcible overthrow') to a 'socialist government if it excludes bourgeois-capitalist parties'. In the main, this tactic is undoubtedly correct".

This comment set in train reconsiderations which led to a big debate on the "workers' government", as a slogan to be used flexibly by Marxists, at the Communist International's Fourth Congress of 1922.]□

Li Dazhao, China's first communist



Book review

By Harry Glass

Li Dazhao was China's first communist, a founder of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) when it was an authentic workers' party and one of its first martyrs, executed during the Chinese workers' revolution in 1927.

Li Dazhao's writings and activism are barely known in English. The only previous biography, *Li Ta-Chao and the Origins of Chinese Marxism*, by Maurice Meisner, was published in 1967. Since then, much more of Li's writings have been found by Chinese, Russian, Japanese and other scholars. His collected works published in Chinese in 2013 ran to five volumes.

Patrick Fuliang Shan, Professor of History at Grand Valley State University, Michigan has produced a valuable new biography, *Li Dazhao: China's First Communist* (2024). Shan provides a crisp overview of the main periods in Li Dazhao's life, clarifying previously mistaken interpretations and reviewing debates in light of the new evidence.

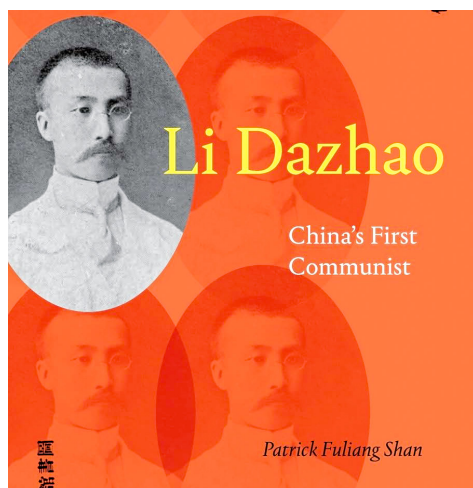
The book covers Li's childhood from 1889 to 1905, his modern education from 1905 to 1913 and his study from 1913 to 1916 in Japan. From 1916 to 1918, Li's served as an editor of various nationalist and democratic newspapers in Beijing. From 1918, Li worked at Beijing University as a leading librarian. From 1921 to 1924, Li was central to the establishment of the Chinese Communist Party. Between 1924 and 1927, he was instrumental in forging the united front between Sun Yat-sen's Kuomintang and the CCP.

Early life

Li Dazhao was born on 29 October 1889, not a year earlier or later as is stated in many previous accounts. He had a tough childhood after both parents died when he was very young. He was raised by his grandfather. The book also emphasises the important role of Zhao Renlan (1884-1933), Li's wife, both as a personal relationship and with enabling much of his revolutionary politics. They had nine children, of whom five grew to adulthood.

Li had expected to earn a career as a civil servant, but this was thwarted in 1905, when the examination system for entry was abolished. This meant Li went instead to the city of Tianjin, where he acquired a modern education and was exposed to political ideas. It was during this period that he became a republican, democrat, nationalist and supporter of Western civilisation. He supported the 1911 Revolution.

Li's disillusionment with China after the revolution led to a three-year study



in Japan. Here he came into contact with socialist and Marxist ideas, along with activists with a greater knowledge of global politics. In Japan, he also had his first engagement with Chen Duxiu. Li's intellectual horizon was broadened in Japan and he returned to China with more advanced, developed ideas about how to change the world.

From democrat to Marxist

Li returned to China in 1916, where he became editor of the *Morning Bell* newspaper. Li looked to young people to drive China's renaissance. He argued that "the country cannot exist for a single day without the youth... A youth is the king of life, the spring of life, and the essence of life. In the dictionary of youth, there is no word for 'difficulty' and there is no term for 'barrier' among their vocabularies."

Li Dazhao championed gender equality and women's rights. He wrote that "only after women are liberated can true democracy be realised" and that "a fair and pleasant gender relationship solely relies on the interdependence, equality, and mutual aid between man and woman".

The Russian Revolution, starting in February and culminating in October 1917, was absolutely pivotal to Li's political development. He wrote more than thirty articles championing the revolution, calling the October workers' revolution "a twinkling little star in the deep dark night shedding light on the road to a new life".

In 1918, Li started his job as the director of the Beijing University library. He took part in organising struggles by university staff over wages, including organising strike action in 1921.

Becoming a communist

During 1918, Li Dazhao published his first public articles on revolutionary socialism and formed a Marxist Study Society. His early Marxist articles included "Victory of Bolshevism" and "My Marxist view", both published in Chen Duxiu's *New Youth* magazine. In the latter, he cited a German socialist aphorism that "anyone under fifty years old claiming to understand Marxism should be regarded as a swindler".

In March 1920, Li secretly organised the Marxist Doctrine Study Society, attracting over a hundred people to study communism. He met Voitinskii and other Comintern representatives. In March 1921, he published an article titled, "The Corporative Training and the Renovated Enterprise", in which he voiced his admiration of the Russian Communist Party. Li argued that "we urgently need to organise a new party. It should not belong to politicians, nor should it be a traditional democratic party for the bourgeoisie. It should be a political party for the common people, the workers. It should be a socialist party." Along with Chen Duxiu, he was central to the formation of the CCP.

The CCP started as a very small party, with barely 50 members in a country of nearly 500 million people. In its early years, the CCP was financially dependent on the Comintern, which provided more than 90% of its income. The Comintern was also instrumental in determining the CCP's early orientation and tactics. In particular, its leading representative Henk Sneevliet (Maring) insisted that the CCP form a "united front" with Sun Yat-sen's Nationalist Party.

United front

The leading Chinese communists opposed this tactic at the beginning. It took a special meeting, the Xihuhuiyi in Hangzhou on 29-30 August 1922, to resolve the matter. Li Dazhao played a prominent role in supporting Sneevliet's united front proposal. He met with Sun Yat-sen before the gathering and spoke in favour of the tactic within the CCP. Li accepted Sun's condition that the communists join the Kuomintang as individual members. Li spoke for the united front at the third CCP National Congress in Guangzhou on 12-20 June 1923, which ratified the turn. At this gathering, Li was elected a member of the CCP Central Committee.

The formal launch of the united front took place at the first Kuomintang National Congress on 20-30 January 1924. Li stayed at Sun Yat-sen's official residence during the conference. Among the 196 delegates, 23 were communists. Li played an important role in the reorganised Nationalist Party. He was one of the five members of the presidium and served as one of the conference chairs.

Li Dazhao visited the USSR from June to December 1924. The principal reason was to attend the fifth Comintern Congress. His report was included in the congress proceedings and summarised in *Pravda*. He lived in the Lux Hotel and later the dormitory of the Communist University of the Toilers of the East, known as KUTV. Li spoke at a rally held by the Do Not Interfere in China Association at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow on 22 September 1924,

which thousands attended.

Last years

Li returned to China and wrote a series of important articles about the workers' movement, the alliance with the peasantry and in favour of Mongol liberation. In 1925, Li established a party school in Beijing. Over the next two years, several thousand communists were trained.

During the May Thirtieth Movement in 1925, Li Dazhao led protests, issued proclamations and organised rallies. After Sun Yat-sen died in 1925, sections of the Kuomintang organised against the CCP. Li continued to support the united front, building nationalist provincial committees in Henan, Suiyuan, Rehe, Hebei, Shandong and Chahar.

In the heightened political situation and given the personal risks, from March 1926 Li Dazhao lived in the Russian Embassy in Beijing. On 6 April 1927, the warlord Zhang Zuolin dispatched more than three hundred police officers to the foreign legation and had Li and others arrested. After torture, on 28 April Li was executed. The killing came shortly after Kuomintang leader Chiang Kai-shek's massacre of communists in Shanghai. It was the end of the workers' revolution as well as the end of Li Dazhao's short but remarkable life.

Shan concludes his study by arguing that a thorough biography of Li Dazhao remains to be accomplished. Such an endeavour would be greatly advanced by the translation of Li's principal Marxist writings into English. In the meantime, Shan's book is a valuable starting point to help educate the new generation about the origins of the CCP, before it was dominated by Maoist Stalinism. □

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The Bolsheviks and the syndicalists



Book review

By Paul Vernadsky

After leading the Russian workers to power in 1917, the Bolshevik Party pursued international socialist revolution through the formation of the Communist International (the Comintern). The first five years of the Comintern are full of vital lessons for socialists today. One crucial sphere of the Comintern's work concerned the trade unions and one aspect of it was the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU).

RILU, also known as the Profintern, has mostly been regarded negatively, by both historians and socialist activists. E H Carr judged RILU "a step taken in a moment of hot-headed enthusiasm [which] had unexpected and fatal consequences". Geoffrey Swain wrote that the RILU was "a footnote [that] never amounted to much". Pierre Broué's history of the Comintern characterised RILU as a "failure".

Similarly, the SWP's Tony Cliff argued "the trouble with the whole concept of RILU was not merely that it was ambiguous, but that it was fundamentally wrong". RILU failed because "it was attempting the impossible – to be an official mass union body committed to Communist politics before a revolutionary crisis made such an organisation possible".

Reiner Tosstorff's [book](#), *The Red International of Labour Unions (RILU) 1920-1937*, originally in German (2004) and in English (2015) provides a rounded

assessment of the Profintern's strengths and weaknesses, and outlines the various stages of its evolution. Now, Mike Taber has translated and published the proceedings and resolutions of the RILU's first congress, *The Founding of the Red Trade Union International* (2024).

Context

At the beginning of the 20th century, some trade union leaders instigated international collaboration. In 1913, the organisation was renamed the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU). During the First World War, the majority of union bureaucrats sided with their own governments, pitting worker against worker in the slaughter. The IFTU was refounded at its Amsterdam congress in 1919. Its representatives took part in the Versailles Treaty and the International Labour Organisation.

By contrast, a layer of syndicalist militants emerged to oppose the growing bureaucratisation of the unions. In 1906, the General Confederation of Labour (CGT) in France adopted the Amiens Charter, which became a model for many syndicalists. Taber's volume carries a translation. The charter was notable for its rejection of politics in the unions:

"The congress assures to all union members the right to take part, outside the union framework, in any form of struggle that corresponds to their philosophic or political conceptions, reserving only the right to ask, in return, that they not introduce within the union the opinions that they profess on the outside."

New syndicalist organisations were formed, such as the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and the National Shop Stewards Movement. In 1913 they organised a world syndicalist congress, although the CGT remained within the IFTU and did not participate.

The Bolsheviks also had decades of trade union experience to draw upon. During 1917, 2.7m Russian workers were organised in more than 2,000 industrial unions. The Bolsheviks won majorities in the factory committees and the soviets. They also engaged with workers' control.

RILU founded

RILU was bound up with Bolshevik revolutionary internationalism. The Comintern was founded in Moscow on 2-6 March 1919. It rallied the best socialist militants to form communist parties. Towards the end of 1919, Comintern chair Grigorii Zinoviev and Russian trade unionist Grigorii Tsyperovich made the first public calls for a "red trade union international".

In June 1920, a conference of trade unionists from Britain, Italy and Russia was held in Moscow. Zinoviev elaborated three possibilities: a communist

fraction within the IFTU, an independent revolutionary trade union international, or a trade union section within the Comintern. (He favoured the latter). The International Trade Union Council (ITUC) was formed on 15 July 1920, led by the Russian union leader Mikhail Tomsy, the French syndicalist Alfred Rosmer and Solomon Dridzo (Lozovsky), the Comintern representative. They carried out the preparatory work to establish RILU.

The founding congress of RILU took place from 3 to 19 July 1921. It held 19 plenary sessions, in between the Third Comintern Congress (which trade unionists also went to). Some 380 delegates attended RILU, some with impressive mandates.

Syndicalist forces were strongly represented at the congress. The two most important contingents were the CNT delegation from Spain and the Revolutionary Syndicalist Committees (CSR) in France. Other syndicalist forces present were the Italian Syndicalist Union (USI), the IWW from the United States, One Big Union in Canada, a number of German syndicalist unions, plus others from the Netherlands, Sweden, and Latin America. Two national union federations affiliated to the IFTU also attended the congress: the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions and the General Confederation of Labour from Italy.

The RILU congress set five conditions for membership: recognition of the class struggle and carrying it out in practice; recognition of the dictatorship of the proletariat; prohibition of dual affiliation with the IFTU; unity in action by RILU affiliates within a country; and international discipline. A key question debated was the relationship between RILU and the Comintern. Rosmer's resolution advocating an "organic link" was carried.

Debates

The Amiens Charter was a key referent at the first RILU congress. Lozovsky took a hard line:

"We must propose to our French comrades to work out a new programme instead of their charter. The Amiens Charter was good for a certain period, but now it has lost its significance. It is dead, and let it rest in peace. We want a new programme to answer the requirements of the present day, in which the forms, means, and methods of struggle needed at present would find their echo and reflection. This should be the duty imposed by the congress upon our French comrades."

Rosmer took a different perspective. He said:

"The Amiens Charter is a document of great importance... It contained different elements: some coming from the anarchists, some from different socialist parties, and others coming from no-

where – the pure syndicalists. All these diverse elements were united by the ideal they aimed at: the suppression of the wages system. They did not care so much to define a new theory, but to establish a correct method of action. In this they succeeded."

One of the main subjects of debate at the congress was how to approach existing bureaucratised unions: whether to fight to transform them, or to leave them and instead build explicitly revolutionary unions. The German syndicalists put forward the slogans "Out of the unions!" and "Smash the old unions!" Lozovsky chastised this view:

"In fact this slogan, at the present juncture, is not only dangerous but counterrevolutionary. Just think of it. We come to the workers and tell them to smash their unions, when we know that it has taken the working class dozens of years to build them, and those unions have proved to be beneficial to the working class. The workers and the union are strongly linked together. Workers consider the union as their home, and when we come to them and say, 'smash the union', we meet with the obstinate resistance of the masses. The masses are unwilling to destroy the unions they have built."

Workers' control was another important question at the congress. It meant workers keeping close tabs on operations in the factories under their capitalist owners – through oversight, monitoring and supervision – and struggling to take charge of these operations. Tsyperovich argued that struggles for workers' control could lead to the political rule of the working class.

RILU stalled

After RILU's founding congress, most of the syndicalist organisations distanced themselves from the Profintern, notably the CNT, USI, IWW, and the FAUD and AAU in Germany. Many of these forces participated in founding the anarcho-syndicalist International Workers' Association in December 1922. A few important syndicalists drew closer to the RILU, such as the French CSR, which soon became the CGTU, along with some German syndicalists and individuals such as Andreu Nin.

The national confederations that had considered affiliation to the RILU, such as the CGL in Italy and the labour confederation in Norway, decided against it. Many union leaders were deterred from affiliating by the IFTU's threats of expulsion.

A second RILU congress took place between 19 November and 2 December 1922, overlapping with the Fourth Comintern Congress. Some 213 delegates from 41 countries attended this RILU gathering. The most important discussion concerned the relationship between the Comintern and the RILU. The French CGTU had not resolved its

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international affiliation. The Bolsheviks reached a compromise agreement with CGTU leaders shortly before the RILU congress began, agreeing to remove the “organic link” formulation.

However Tosstorff argued that by 1922, “the RILU was able to establish itself firmly as an organisation, while experiencing a certain decline in political influence”.

Decline

After Lenin died in 1924, the troika of Stalin, Zinoviev and Kamenev took over in Russia, to the exclusion of Trotsky. The Fifth Comintern Congress, convened from 17 June to 8 July 1924, began the bureaucratisation of the Comintern through so-called “Bolshevisation” (monolithic, Moscow-approved communist leaderships). The third RILU congress took place soon afterwards (8-22 July 1924) and faced calls for its liquidation. By then, the Russian trade unions wanted to join the IFTU and close down RILU.

RILU held no congress for the next four years and its central council met only once. It lost valuable cadres, such as Rosmer and Nin, who supported the opposition to Stalinism.

By the time the fourth RILU Congress convened between 17 March and 3 April 1928, Stalinism had consolidated its grip on the Russian state, as well as the Comintern. RILU was corralled to support the Stalinist third period lurch towards the sectarian “dual unions”. RILU held its final congress on 15-30 August 1930. It was dissolved without a murmur on 27 December 1937.

Balance sheet

RILU never came close to rivalling the IFTU for the affiliation of the bulk of the trade union centres. Nor did RILU give instructions to the communist trade union fractions and therefore it did not influence real industrial struggles or rank and file movements. As Tosstorff put it, RILU “simulated a power and a strength that it did not possess”.

The early RILU floundered because of the change in the situation and the resulting reorientation by the Comintern. Zinoviev pointed out that RILU was formed “at a moment [1920] when it seemed that we would be able to break through the enemy front in a frontal attack and quickly conquer the trade unions”. By 1921, the revolutionary wave had ebbed. The Comintern leadership

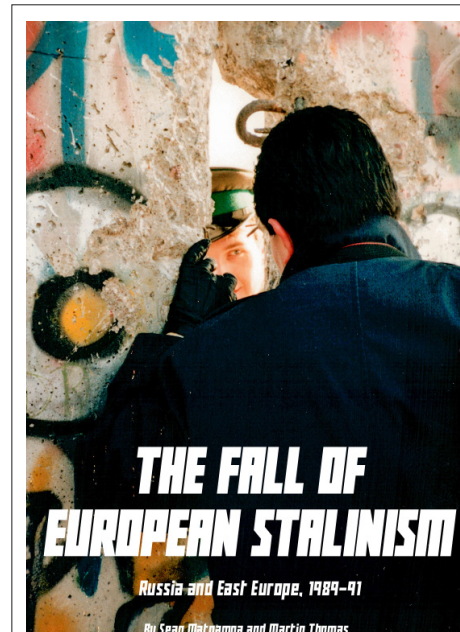
reassessed and developed a new set of tactics, based around winning a majority of workers through united front work. RILU still largely operated within the framework established in 1920.

The main justification for RILU was as an alliance between syndicalists and communists. Many syndicalist militants rallied to the Russian revolution. It was politically essential and tactically astute of the Bolsheviks to draw these syndicalists into joint activity. RILU was a primary means of this collaboration.

RILU was also a means of communist party building. In the United States, the Communist Party recruited two thousand members from the IWW: perhaps twenty percent of its early recruits. The Bolsheviks made great efforts to convince the syndicalists that their conception of an “active minority” was an underdeveloped form of the revolutionary party. Recruiting and integrating a militant layer of activists into communist parties was facilitated by collaboration around RILU. Convincing Rosmer, Nin, Victor Serge and others were tremendous gains for the Bolsheviks.

Taber’s conclusion is about right. RILU cannot be presented as a model for fu-

ture attempts at international working class action. But it did provide important experiences that new generations can learn from, including its mistakes. □



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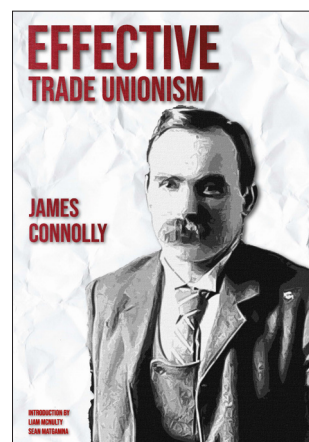
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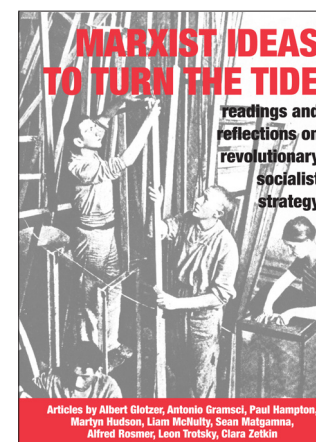
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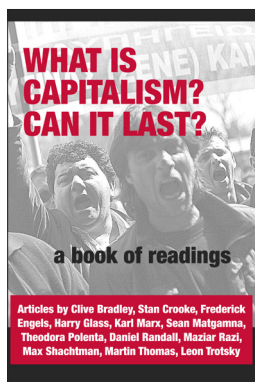
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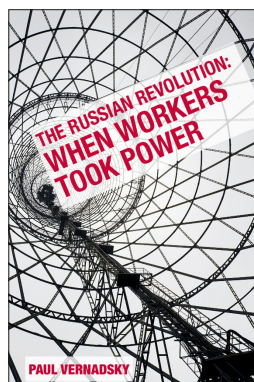
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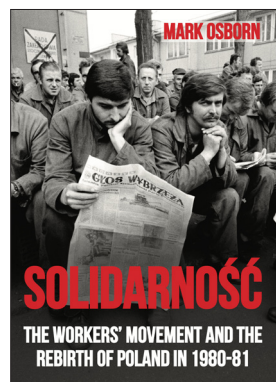
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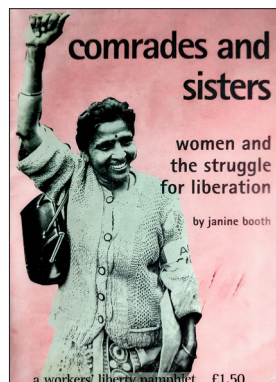
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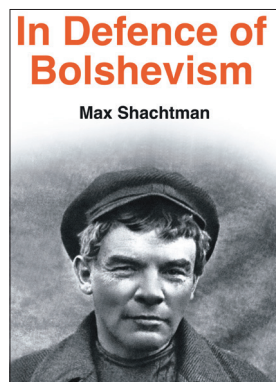
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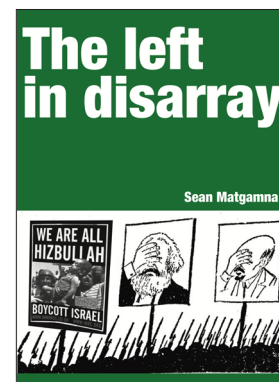
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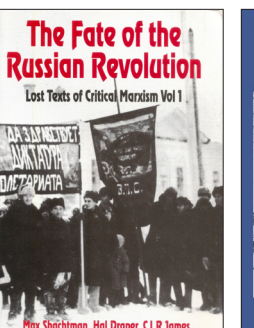
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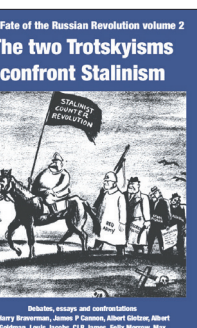
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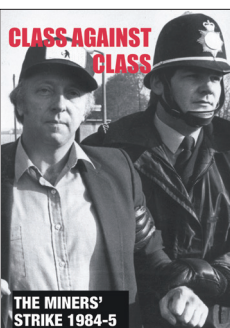
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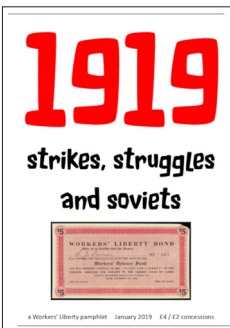
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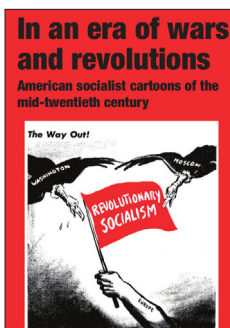
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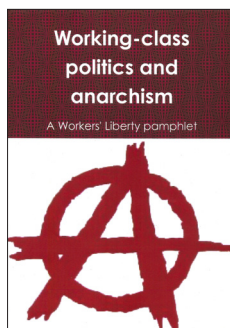
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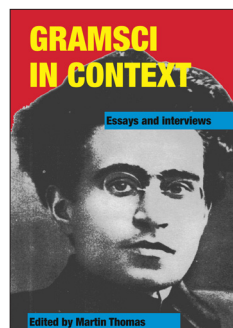
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Vote for a fighting democratic union in PCS

By a PCS member

Members of the civil service union PCS began to receive their ballot papers for the union's annual leadership elections from 16 April. Voting closes on 9 May.

Standing in these elections are two slates of candidates with different views of how the union should act for its members in the coming year.

The Coalition for Change is a group of grassroots reps and activists from across PCS, made up of several organisations and independents, including the PCS Independent Left, which Workers' Liberty supporters have been central to supporting.

Last year this coalition won a majority of seats on the National Executive, but have been hampered by the National President and the NEC minority – members of the Left Unity faction – ruling out of order almost all attempts to introduce their alternative strategy or scrutinise the behaviour of an increasingly out of touch minority.

Challenge

The position of the coalition has been that the union must be on a continual war footing, with the resources and competence to fight against jobs cuts and to ensure the government begins to redress years of real-terms pay cuts and erosion of terms and conditions across the civil service and outsourced contracts.

Throughout the year, the incumbent

Left Unity General Secretary alongside the minority have blocked these attempts, claiming that the government should be "given a chance" and treating warnings of cuts as "mere speculation" and "scaremongering".

As the union goes into these elections, the Labour government has announced wide-ranging attacks on jobs, starting with a third of the Cabinet Office with much more to come.

It didn't need to be like this and doesn't have to be. But there does need to be a change at the top of the shop in PCS to ensure the union doesn't sleepwalk into another year of inaction.

Union democracy

It is simply undemocratic for a minority to have the ability to over-rule a majority of the national executive elected by the membership. This year motion after motion and amendment after amendment laying out the programme of the majority of NEC members has been ruled out of order by the National President. Resulting in inertia and sabotage of members.

Equally undemocratic has been the imposition on the union of a new staffing structure without any NEC scrutiny by the General Secretary. This restructuring has provided incredibly well remunerated union jobs to Left Unity supporters. All paid for by the subs of union members, many of whom languish on poverty pay.

For decades, PCS and the Left Unity leadership have accepted and encouraged secretive bargaining agreements which serve employers and keep members in the dark about negotiations until it's too late. The union needs a leadership which promises to open up negotiations so that demands and strategy are fed up from the grassroots rather than dictated from the NEC down.

Equality

PCS has an unenviable track record of accepting deals with significant unequal outcomes for members. Be it the

£1,500 one-off cost of living payment which was pro-rata'd for part-time staff without so much of a word of opposition from the General Secretary, or the disaster of the Employee Deal in the largest government Department which has resulted in thousands of the lowest paid members being paid the minimum wage, having sold their week-ends to the employer for the privilege.

A vote for the Coalition for Change is a vote for equality-proofing deals and not accepting deals which provide crumbs from the table for sacrificing long-standing terms and conditions.

Left Unity also have a less than healthy track record of supporting trans-rights. Despite national conference continually overturning them with overwhelming votes in solidarity with trans members' rights, Left Unity continue to frustrate attempts at the NEC to put that into practice, whether it's supporting motions to Annual Conference or at the TUC.

The Coalition for Change are united in our support for trans rights and are clear: trans women are women, trans men are men.

Validity

Under Left Unity, PCS is moving towards a service model of trade unionism. Every decision, whether it's to call action, support victimised reps, or provide legal support to members, is put through a spreadsheet to determine its validity.

This is a clear dividing line between them and the Coalition for Change, who stand by the principle that an injury to one is an injury to all. And who will ensure, that legal support is a right, rather than a privilege for those that the computer says yes to.

Unfortunately, largely since the departure of Mark Serwotka as General Secretary, Left Unity have descended into the sort of pro-authoritarian politics many PCS members thought had been consigned to the dustbin of history. Providing cover for regimes where

independent unions like PCS would be outlawed and its leaders locked up.

This has included opposition to motions supporting workers and independent trade unions suffering oppression in Hong Kong on the basis that it is wrong to criticise the Chinese Communist Party, despite its overwhelming record of human rights violations and incarceration and torture of opponents.

Ukraine

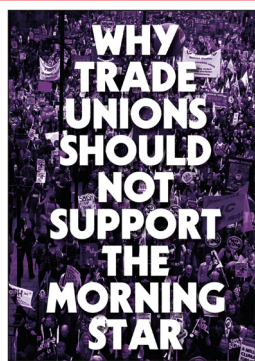
It has also resulted in a 180-degree turn on support for our brothers and sisters in Ukraine. The latest NEC (with, wrongly, support from members of the Socialist Party) voted to support a motion which, echoing Trump and Reform, called for an end to arms to Ukraine.

Arms which are called for by Ukrainian unions and used to defend Ukrainians, including civil servants in Ukraine from Russian missile bombardment, and are the only things preventing Russia from winning the war.

PCS Independent Left are now the only faction in the union consistently in solidarity with the calls of Ukrainian workers against Russian Imperialism.

There needs to be consistent support for all workers and nations facing oppression, from the Palestinians and the Ukrainians to the Uyghurs and the Sudanese.

On this basis, we strongly encourage PCS members to vote for the Coalition for Change candidates. □



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MHCLG striking from 22 April

By a PCS member

Following a second successful ballot that closed 9 April, the PCS civil service union in MHCLG (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government) has announced that it has expanded its existing strike mandate to a further 16 offices, including the department's London HQ.

All MHCLG offices now hold mandates for industrial action, including strike action and action short of a strike, after members were balloted

over office closures, attendance policies, and proposed changes to the department's recruitment strategy.

Members in the most recent ballot voted with 70% in favour of strike action and 86% in favour of action short of a strike, on a turnout of 56%.

Having put to the department the interim demands of the membership and the branch's "our work, our way" campaign, including the immediate pausing of planned office closures, and a commit-

ment to maintain an office location in Newcastle for at least the next 18 months to allow negotiations to continue, and having seen no movement or concession from the department that would warrant or countenance further delay in using their mandate for industrial action, the branch has now reported that members will take industrial action from Tuesday 22 April for up to nine days.

Members in the Birmingham, Exeter, Truro, Sheffield,

and Warrington offices will be taking strike action 22-25 April, whilst those in Newcastle, the first office proposed for closure, will extend their strike action to the following week up to 2 May. Pickets have been organised by branch reps and members during the period of strike action.

With staff in her own department taking industrial action during the continued passage of the employment rights bill how Rayner responds will be a key test of her and Labour's

commitment to engage with trade unions and support working people to take their voice back in the workplace. PCS MHCLG has made clear that the planned action in offices threatened with closure is just the first step in its campaign and will continue to take action with membership support if the department do not bring to the table meaningful proposals on how they will meet PCS members' demands to avoid further escalation. □

Wide support for hospital workers

By Robert Hudd

Unison health care support workers (HCSWs) have had excellent turn-outs at the two big hospital picket lines in Nottingham and are striking again on 22/4/25 and 28/4/25.

Up to 50 strikers at the QMC hospital were in great spirits on the picket lines, communicating to visitors, passers-by, and most importantly the thousands of health workers who make the Nottingham University Hospitals Trust the biggest employer in Nottingham, with over 17,000 staff.

Persuading others not to cross the picket lines and others not to cover their work marks this dispute out from the junior doctors' long strike last year. The doctors relied on the enormous cost to the employer to cover their work. In the end the Labour government were able to end that strike with

a pay rise that was the most popular thing Starmer has done since being elected.

TV, press and media coverage has been good and most people have shown sympathy as HCSWs have been doing complex level 3 work for years whilst being paid the lowest wages in the hospital, level 2. The Trust admit they made an error, but are refusing full back pay.

The picket lines had success in recruiting new members and getting others to refuse to cover work. Labour councillors and Nadia Whittome MP addressed the picket lines showing their support, as did many other trade unionists and socialists, including Workers' Liberty supporters.

The exhaustion prevalent particularly since Covid is obvious to anyone who goes to a hospital or knows workers there. The sticking-plaster approach of

giving more work to GP surgeries and pharmacies has not worked, and is the reason health workers there are looking to take strike action too. Doctors and nurses all say that things are worse now than four years ago at the height of Covid.

This strike could be settled. Nearby Leicester and Northampton hospitals have settled for six years back pay which is what Unison, who represent most of the nearly 1,000 HCSWs, are asking. That is far less than the up to ten years that many have routinely done the level 3 work whilst only being paid for the personal care washing etc. of level 2.

Like the Tories who were prepared to spend over a billion pounds to cover the strikes of the doctors, health minister Wes Streeting wants hospitals to refuse to pay as they try to do the impossible when an ageing population,

with many whose health is made worse by poverty, need an increase in budgets.

Nottingham May Day will feature the strikers in a march and rally, but the UK's biggest union with over a million members will be key to winning. The leadership have been largely on the right for decades, but the last year or two has seen significant challenges in the huge health section, not least in the branch electing more left officers and supporting Time for Real Change candidates in the elections now underway across the whole union. Workers' Liberty are supporting this left challenge, but the established right wing national leadership want to be photographed supporting, as the mood is members in health can't survive without strong action. □

FM strikes pause for reballots

By a PCS member

The Facility Management (FM) strikes called by the PCS civil service union took place 7 to 10 April. No further ones are planned while the union reballots many of the FM workers.

Talking to activists, they are very confident that these will result in huge yes votes. Our members are as solid as ever,

showing no battle fatigue.

As far as we can tell, the decision whether to fund a pay settlement is with ministers. So the Labour government can stop this dispute if it wishes. Of course the companies can do the same. They make good profits out of the hard work of our members and have the cash on hand. They are just trying to get someone else to pay for the problems they created.

A government on the side of the workers and thinking rationally should learn the lesson that outsourcing is a dead end, and they end up paying for things in any case.

The irony is that in many departments more and more staff in the civil service grades equivalent to cleaners, security guards and receptionists are on the minimum wage, but FM staff are on the "real" liv-

ing wage. When you factor in the costs associated with tendering, awarding contracts, and then monitoring those contracts, the whole life-of-the-contract costs are high. So there is no real cost advantage of keeping work in the private sector.

Over the years "market forces" have led to the racial segregation of employees employed on civil service

contracts compared to those working in-house. The reasons for this are complex, but it is a fact that it has happened. This racial segregation is indirect discrimination and the only proper way to end that, is to bring FM staff in-house.

But let's win the dispute first. □

G4S striker says: no two-tier system!

On 9 April there was an extremely lively picket and protest outside the Cabinet Office at 70 Whitehall, with strikers joining from other sites; about 150 workers taking part. Union rep Mohammed Miezou spoke to Sacha Ismail.

I work at 70 Whitehall, employed by G4S, and I'm one of the PCS reps here. I've been here 25 years.

Our dispute has been going on six months; now we're being reballoted [as required every six months under the anti-union laws]. In that period we've been out a fair bit.

This has been my first experience of going on strike; and I'm new as a union rep too, so it's been a learning curve. Even during those six months every day has brought new challenges. However it has absolutely been a positive experience. I'm one of the relatively small number of people in the UK who has so far got to have that experience of withdrawing my labour from my employer – and in that process coming up

with new ways to motivate workers so we can fight to change things.

So: if there's something you believe in, that's worth fighting for, if industrial action seems like the only way forward – do it. We as the people have to start fighting back for our rights. All these companies do is try to strip us of what we deserve. There shouldn't be a two-tier system at work [as created by outsourcing]. There should be only one tier of rights. In reality we have more than two!

Up till the last month, it was nothing, nothing from the company and the government, but the last month has started to bring progress. The employer is getting a bit fed up of it, and so are the GPA [Government Property Agency, an executive agency in the Cabinet Office] and so are ministers. Now it looks like they're agreeing to most of our demands; we're just waiting for it to be signed off. Then it will be time to start looking at our pay claim for next year!

As I said we're being reballoted, and I hope the union will keep that ballot in place as one of our bargaining chips in those new pay negotiations.

Beyond that, we have the aspiration to win insourcing. All these companies operate by stripping workers of rights, demoralising us, and also pushing to get rid of the most experienced workers. Bringing in new staff is good, but not if it's on worse terms and conditions; and if you eliminate experienced workers, the new ones don't immediately have the experience and skills to react to the issues that regularly arise in our workplace, in a very sensitive area of government.

PCS has got a clear mandate to win insourcing of staff, so we hope for a strong campaign on that as G4S's contract here draws to a close. Now is the time to get started.

What the Labour government says about this, and other issues, and what it does, are unfortunately two different things. I'm a Labour supporter, I want a

Labour government that stands for the people, but I see this government as more like "blue Labour". They're going to have to convince me and many others if they want our votes.

We've had other trade unionists come and support – just yesterday we had a really great, loud presence from another union at the [Department for Education] Sanctuary Building [I think United Voices of the World] – and from left-wing Labour MPs, and of course that solidarity has made a difference. □

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

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Expecting a good weekend

Our readers and supporters have had a nice gap and an extended weekend to help us reach our £20,000 target. Unfortunately for our reporting of our progress, it appears that people are waiting to be generous during our conference on 26-27 April.

We expect large donations to flow in to help us get back on track and

achieve our target. Our previous column left our grand total at £8,100. Well, we've crept up to only £8,440, certainly nowhere near where we need to be.

We hope that sales of our new pamphlet, *The Fall of European Stalinism*, will help bring in new readers and supporters. Over £120 worth of literature was sold at the London trans rights demon-

stration on Saturday, 19 April. We need to keep up those sales as well as getting in new regular payments and one-off donations if we hope to reach our target by our Summer Camp in August. □

• Donate workersliberty.org/fund

How can he get away with it?



Diary of a Tube worker

By Jay Dawkey

"You've seen what he has done now?" G, who usually doesn't say too much about world affairs, says in a quiet moment in the mess room. S instinctively knows what this will be about: "You didn't win big on the bond market, then?"

"That's blatant insider trading, isn't it? Simply telling people it's a good time to buy and then changing your policy. But anyway, these arrests now, and he is just ignoring the court that says you can't do this. People are just being picked up for their tattoos. I mean, come on, man, that's outrageous."

"How can he get away with it, and his

man J D, he's just sacked the lad [it was a woman] in charge of the US Army in Greenland, because he wouldn't stick the boot into Denmark. But you tell me, how can he just keep spouting and doing this shit, how long can that go on for?"

"A long time, if people don't stop him", I say. "But, who will he listen to, surely whoever comes next won't want to walk into this shitshow. America will have no friends at the end of this. And now he says he wants to change the Constitution! Can you even do that? Surely that is too far even for them".

"He is deporting people for having tattoos with clocks on, it feels like he can do anything he wants". G says. "And what have the government said? Almost nothing, they've acquiesced out of fear or a belief that they'll get a good deal to stop the worst of the tariffs."

"You are heavily unionised" G says to me, by which he means I pay attention

to what's going on, am active in the union at work. "It's going to affect what we ask for in the pay claim? If prices start going up?". Our claim has already been submitted, and well before the tariffs kicked in.

"Well, we should always fight for the best deal we can. If costs go up, then we have to be prepared to ask for more and to back ourselves with strikes. Same as workers anywhere. If you were an American worker, you'd want your union to stand up to Trump as well. Prices are going to go up for them as well."

The London Transport Region of the RMT has passed a policy stating it will support demonstrations against the as-yet-unconfirmed state visit. With Trump almost nonstop in the news, it will be easier to convince our coworkers why they should get involved in campaigning against Trump now. □

Agnès Varda: a life in images



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

Agnès Varda (1928-2019) has been mentioned before in Kino Eye (11 July 2023) for her fascinating documentary *The Gleaners and I* (2000). The recent opening, in Paris, of *Here and There*, a multi-media exhibition of her life's work is a good reason for another

glance at her varied career in the arts. Her debut feature film in 1955, *La Pointe Courte* (the name of a fishing village), was thought by some commentators to anticipate the French New Wave of the Sixties in which she was one of the few women involved, with such films as *Cléo from 5 to 7* (1962) and *Le Bonheur* (1965). I don't expect readers of Kino Eye to go whizzing off to Paris for the exhibition at the Musée Carnavalet – it runs till 24 August – some of the many items on display,



particularly her photography (and the statue of her cat Nini) can be accessed on the web a sortiraparis.com and carnavalet.paris.fr. An article on Varda in the *Guardian* (11 April, by Agnès

Poirier) also contains some images from the exhibition. Her biographical essay film *Les Plages d'Agnès* (2008) is an excellent summary of her life and its ups and downs: watch online at bit.ly/pl-ag □



Lambeth libraries to ballot from 30 April

By Katy Dollar

Libraries staff in Lambeth council, South London, are being asked if they are willing to strike to save jobs in the service. The indicative ballot came back with over 90% yes vote and turnout, and the union, Unison, is recommending a yes vote. Ballot notice will be issued on 23 April. The ballot will be open from 30 April to 21 May.

The library service has a history of official and unofficial action, and is one of the few areas of the council to have had no compulsory redundancies during the austerity period since 2010, which looks set to continue under Labour.

London boroughs say they face a £500m funding gap in the coming year, despite receiving a 6.6% increase to their Core Spending Power. Austerity policies are leading to massive overspends in statutory services, with more people homeless and requiring temporary accommodation, and children requiring social care for various reasons, including needing additional support at home, facing neglect or abuse, or lacking family support.

Cutting universal and preventative services has increased need, but councils are now again cutting services. To stop this spiral, the government needs to restore central funding to local government to expand services. □

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Birmingham bin strikers reject new offer

By Jim Denham

Voting on 14 April, the Birmingham bin strikers overwhelmingly (by 97%) rejected the council's supposedly "improved" offer.

The new offer would have retained the council's plan to abolish the role of Waste Recycling and Collections Officers (WRCOs) involving the loss of up to £8,000 a year for 150 Unite members and – equally as important – offered no firm guarantee against pay cuts for 200 drivers. This is of crucial importance as the council is urging WRCOs to take up driver training.

Bin lorry driver Derek Roberts said: "We need to move the narrative away from the fact that it's only this [WRCO] role that's being deleted and that nobody else is affected."

"We've already been told as drivers that we'll be next. We're currently

going through an evaluation process ourselves, which could potentially lead us to the same-sized pay cuts. We haven't had anything from our employer to allay those fears."

Meanwhile, the Labour council is stepping up its efforts to break the strike. Agency workers have been brought in. A "major incident" allowing the police to use the Public Order Act, and potentially allowing the use of the army, has been declared. Strikers have been issued with a letter from the council's Director of Employee and Industrial Relations, threatening them with "formal action" as a result of an unspecified "incident" that each individual was supposedly involved in.

Underlying all this is the fact that the council is effectively bankrupt and is implementing a massive round of cuts (£300 million over this year and last) ordered by unelected commissioners



appointed by the Tory government but kept in place under Labour.

Council leader John Cotton has told the media that the latest offer means "no-one has to lose any pay at all, with alternative roles offered within the service", but Unite has disputed this, saying in a statement: "The job roles people are being asked to move to are likely to be downgraded in the coming months. If what John Cotton says is true, why was it not in the offer?"

It has to be said that while the rank and file Unite members remain solid, the Unite leadership both nationally and locally could be doing more to build solidarity amongst other trade unionists and support amongst the public.

Donations to: Unite WM/7186 Branch. a/c 20308397, sort code 60-83-01, with reference "BCC Strike Donation". □

Nationalise steel! A workers' plan for green transition

By Matt Dunn

Scunthorpe is dominated by the steelworks. 2,700 people work there. These are well-paid, secure, unionised jobs. They are all at risk.

The impact on the local community would be huge. Steel wages support local pubs and shops and cafés. Local businesses supply and support the works. There aren't alternative jobs for people to go to.

British Steel is owned by the Chinese company Jingye. As with Tata at Port Talbot, the owners have steel producing plants elsewhere. It makes little sense for them to invest in transitioning to new, cleaner steel production, when they can import cheap steel from their other plants.

It is no surprise that ageing blast furnaces are reaching the end of their productive lives or that the plants are not making big profits for their owners, or that these are hugely polluting plants.

The Unite union has suggested a plan for steel, to invest in greener steel production and protect jobs. The joint unions at Scunthorpe proposed a very moderate plan to protect some jobs. The Labour government has put through emergency legislation to take control of the site and stop the blast furnaces being shut down, but has offered no clear plan. It should have a plan to transition these plants – to create new jobs to replace the jobs in the old blast furnaces that are going. It should be

developing transition plans for all ageing industries. The voice of the workers and their communities should be at the centre of such plans.

Right now, the Government could make steel a critical industry and use UK steel on infrastructure projects. It could tackle the high energy costs faced by households and industries by bringing energy into public hands. It could nationalise British Steel. But so far it is failing to act.

Reform

Meanwhile Reform are waiting in the wings, calling for nationalisation of British Steel, declaring steel a critical industry and using UK steel on major infrastructure projects. Nigel Farage has posed in Scunthorpe with union literature.

Reform blames the loss of steel jobs, and jobs in the oil and gas industry and automotive on "net zero nonsense". Failure to create jobs before they disappear in industries like steel will mean that workers will lose any faith in a "just" transition and will likely line up behind calls to "drill baby, drill".

Labour's weakness on steel jobs, like its failure to improve living standards for working class people or take on the super-rich, allows Reform to grow. The threat posed to the working class movement and to the environment by a potential Reform government is very real. □

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NEU votes to back Ukraine

By Richard Driver

At its conference (Harrogate 14-17 April), the National Education Union voted to make solidarity with Ukraine and Ukrainian trade unionists, and move forward with a formal ballot on pay. It reinforced union policy to actively recruit support staff.

After three years of hard work trying to get solidarity with Ukraine onto the agenda, conference voted to pass motion 35 – Solidarity with Ukraine – unamended.

The motion faced two wrecking amendments. The first tried to erase the voices of Ukrainians by removing text supporting the right of Ukrainians to defend themselves, support for Russian anti-war protesters, and opposition to war crimes committed by the Russian army including the mass abduction of Ukrainian children. The second was clear on moral support for Ukrainian self-defence, but deleted text on Ukraine's right to seek arms, making this "support" entirely abstract. Supporters of Workers' Liberty argued successfully for meaningful solidarity and both amendments were comfortably voted down.

Ballot

The conference decided to ballot over the government's 2.8% unfunded pay offer was taken despite a 47.2% turnout on the indicative ballot. An amendment put forward by supporters of Workers' Liberty supporters was not heard in the debate. It called for the ballot to also include support staff and for a clear demand of a 3% above inflation, or flat rate of £3,000, fully-funded pay rise. The amendment also sought to instruct the union to campaign against all anti-union laws.

The continued requirement for 50% turnout thresholds almost a year into a Labour government that promised to abolish them is an indictment of the party that is supposed to represent workers. We will have to work hard for a successful ballot result under the current legislation, work which would be aided by clear demands on pay and funding from the union.

Conference chose to uphold previous deci-

sions to end agreements with Unison, Unite and the GMB on not recruiting support staff. The executive was instructed to begin actively and openly recruiting support staff with immediate effect and to break off attempts to appease the NEU's sister unions. The NEU has taken a further important step towards genuine industrial unionism in the education sector – where currently multiple unions represent different workers in different jobs. This was a resounding rejection of a set of principles presented to the NEU which would have forced the union to seek permission from other unions in the sector to carry out basic organising work with support staff.

Stop the Shenanigans

Educators' Fightback supporter Janine Booth was successfully elected to NEU conference committee under the slogan "Stop the Shenanigans". Conference committee has the power to composite and correct motions, and to decide the order of amendments. Though this function should be exercised without bias, there was criticism of the edits conference committee made this year. Conference committee made changes to 130 out of 150 motions submitted. This would, doubtless, include spelling and grammar corrections, but also included removing an amendment to motion 32 on setting up a women's conference, which included necessary rule changes. Janine called out the alteration of motions in her election material and pledged to consult with NEU Districts over any proposed changes to motions moving forward.

Educators' Fightback, the network around the blog of that name published by Workers' Liberty supporters, held a successful fringe meeting to discuss politics in the age of Trump and Reform. US labour movement activist Traven Leyshon spoke on the situation in America and Patrick Murphy and Janine Booth spoke on the threat posed by Reform in the UK. Educators' Fightback supporters worked together to fight for conference policy on support staff, Ukraine and many other issues. Contact: bit.ly/educ-f ☐

• More online: bit.ly/neu-co

Israel pushes people to the coast in Gaza

By Ira Berkovic

Israeli units have expanded the so-called "security zones" under direct military control in Gaza, including encircling the city of Rafah. Since the resumption of the war, 505 children have been killed. Israel intends to forcibly displace all civilians from populated areas within the security zones into cramped encampments along the coast. Those remaining will be assumed to be Hamas fighters. *The Economist* recently reported that Israeli policy is to totally destroy entire neighbourhoods.

A blockade of humanitarian aid continues, exacerbating a food and health crisis described by the Red Cross as "hell on earth". The same *Economist* report indicates that Israel may oversee the resumption of some aid once civilian refugees are crowded into coastal areas. Direct provision of aid by Israel itself, something it has so far been unwilling to undertake, also suggests a possible reoccupation of Gaza, or at least an indefinite presence for Israeli forces.

Egypt could, and surely should, open the Rafah crossing, to provide aid from the Egyptian side, and allow Gazans to flee into Egypt if they wish. Opponents of Israel's war have previously been justifiably reluctant to make such a demand, seeing it as a call on Egypt to help Israel facilitate its ethnic cleansing. But the situation is now so dire that the demand is necessary.

In the occupied West Bank, six more military brigades have been deployed. Israeli troops recently shot and killed 14-year-old Amer Rabee, a Palestinian-American, who they claim was throwing rocks at cars.

But as Israel's war on Gaza grinds on, anti-war dissent inside Israel is growing. The Israeli military is facing what *972 Magazine* calls "its biggest refusal crisis in decades". Over 100,000 reservists have stopped reporting for duty. Some units have reported attendance rates of 50% or lower.

In a recent anonymous op-ed in the *Haaretz* newspaper, one refuser wrote: "the current war in Gaza is meant to buy political stability with blood.

I will not take part in it."

On 10 April, 970 air force reservists published an open letter opposing the war, and demanding a ceasefire and hostage-release agreement. Around 250 reservists from the navy, and elite military intelligence squad Unit 8200, also added their names. Signatories were told by military officials that failure to retract their signatures would lead to dismissal. Only 25 agreed to withdraw their names.

Refusers

Much of the current rhetoric from refusers foregrounds the need to free the hostages, and the threat the war poses to Israeli soldiers' lives, rather than internationalist solidarity with the Palestinians. One might also wonder why an upsurge in refusal is only coming now, after 18 months of slaughter and over 50,000 killed. But a mass wave of refusal, whatever its precise ideological motivations, has the potential to seriously undermine the Israeli military's operations, and therefore save Palestinian lives. It would be posturing purity politics to sneer at it, or dismiss it as "too little, too late".

The binational (Palestinian-Jewish) left-wing social movement Standing Together is supporting and encouraging refusal via its latest campaign, "Refuse War". The movement has referred to a "tsunami of refusal", and said, "we need more and more soldiers declaring: we refuse the war".

Standing Together is also currently organising a fundraising campaign to hire a billboard on a major highway in Tel Aviv to commemorate the 15 emergency service workers recently executed by the IDF in Gaza. The movement has frequently used billboard campaigns to seek to raise awareness within Israel of the realities of the military's actions. ☐

• Ella Keidar is an 18-year-old trans rights activist and member of Maki, the Israeli Communist Party. She is currently jailed for refusing to serve. Ella was interviewed in *Women's Fightback*, the socialist feminist magazine published by Workers' Liberty, in February.



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