COURIERS URGENTLY NEED MORE FOR STRIKE FUND

By Michael Elms

Couriers working for JustEat and their delivery subcontractor Stuart have been mounting a strike campaign which has now lasted over 10 weeks. The strike is now at a critical turning point. It has new potential to expand. But it urgently needs fresh donations to the strike fund. At the same time, we need to mobilise volunteers to support the dispute.

Couriers subcontracted by Stuart have been on strike since 6 December. On that day, Stuart finished the roll-out of a new pay structure which cut the base rate of pay per delivery by 24%. This was a devastating blow to drivers, who worked through the pandemic delivering food and medicine. Many were already struggling to make ends meet before the pay cut.

The strike began in Sheffield, and Sheffield has maintained a daily rhythm of strike action, targeting first McDonald’s, then Greggs: the two biggest delivery clients of JustEat/Stuart.

The strikers’ strategy was always: spread to win. Couriers understood from the outset that there was no way they could cause the company enough economic pain to win if the strike remained stuck in one city alone.

Spread

Since then, the strike has spread and strike action has taken place in Sunderland, Middlesbrough, Blackpool, Huddersfield, Dewsbury, Chesterfield and Leicester. Daily or weekly strikes are still ongoing in most of those places.

Meanwhile, strike action has started to break out across the south of England: last week there were strikes in Colchester, Aldershot and Farnborough in Hampshire; and Ashford and Folkestone in Kent.

This accelerating spread of the action means that the drivers’ strategy is finally paying off. The breakthrough into new groups of workers across the south of England opens up the possibility of creating a sharp crisis for JustEat and Stuart.

But this places new demands on the union’s strike fund and demands more efforts from volunteers. The IWGB is a small and under-resourced union. To keep the dispute going, especially as it is now set to rapidly expand, more money is required. The central staff of organisers in the union also needs assistance: more volunteers are needed to leaflet couriers, spread the word, and offer community support to picket lines.

Please put the model motion (bit.ly/mo-pe) and donate at tinyurl.com/StuartStrike or via Couriers & Logistics Branch account, 23-05-80, 17001094 □
Support Ukraine’s war of self-defence! Russian troops out now!

Nearly two weeks into Putin’s invasion of Ukraine the Ukrainians continue to fight, against the odds, and we continue to work to support their war of self-defence against Russian imperialism. We aim to rally the British and international labour movement to back Ukraine as the war becomes more intense and the battle for Kyiv looms.

Putin probably intends to permanently occupy much greater areas in eastern Ukraine than Russia currently controls following the predatory wars against Ukraine in 2014. He will drive out opponents from these areas and impose terror against Ukrainians who stay. He intends to force Ukraine into a post-war agreement that destroys Ukrainian self-determination, possibly partitioning the country and subordinate-nating a rump Ukraine to Russia.

Putin may also try to enlist the Western powers to exert pressure on Ukraine to sign a lousy deal which will end the war. And he may get that help from states like Germany and France who want to re-establish stable working relationships with the Russian state as quickly as possible.

We oppose any attempts by the West to force Ukraine to sign away its rights. We demand the EU speed processes for Ukraine to join, as an act of solidarity which would offer a measure of political protection, and that the UK and European states open their borders to any and all Ukrainian refugees.

On UK demonstrations for Ukraine a tremendous upsurge of Ukrainian national pride is visible. Expats Ukrainians and their British-born families in London, Sheffield, Glasgow and Nottingham are calling for arms to defend their homeland, for sanctions, for Russians to take to the streets against Putin, similar protests are taking place across the world. Almost all also involve Russians who—often ashamed/ashamed—object to Putin’s war. We have nothing but praise and solidarity for Russians who take a stand against Putin’s war, and we demand the release of all those arrested in Russia for anti-war activity.

Ukrainian demonstrators in Britain call, occasionally but increasingly, for a No Fly Zone across Ukraine. The only call, occasionally but increasingly, for a No Fly Zone would be organised by them, not by the battered, weak, Ukrainian air force. The US is adamant that its forces will not directly confront the Russians in Ukraine. And, in fact, if they did so, it would almost certainly spiral very quickly into some sort of new World War, dragging in the whole of NATO into battle against Russia. It would probably prompt Putin to invade the Baltic states (since he would be at war with them anyway) and it would be relatively easy for Russia to encircle them by cutting off their short border with Poland.

The problem in Ukraine is not that NATO and the USA are too anti-Putin, or too intent on risking war with Russia (let alone deliberately seeking it). No: they don’t want Putin to step back, but what they want primarily is a deal to contain Putin and restless allies with Russia. That ranks for them above Ukrainian rights. For a force that will champion Ukrainian rights without inhibition, we must look to the labour movement.

That fact underlines how stupid the sections of the left are who argue that the war in Ukraine is really a war between NATO and Putin. Wake up, NATO is not fighting and has no intention of doing so! Are they not even able to read the front page of the Guardian?

Knee-jerk yankee-phobia

Knee-jerk anti-Americanism on the left is political poison. The left that navigates its way in international politics by working out what the American state is doing, then opposing US and allied policy, is not independent. It is a mirror image of the US.

The political roots of this method lie in the Cold War when the USSR opposed the US and saw all damage done to the US and Western capitalism as positive. The propaganda outlets for the USSR in the West, the Communist Parties, promoted this nihilistic negativism in Western labour movements, poisoning Marxism as a force for human liberation in direct proportion to how successful they were.

Those ideas still remain in much of the international Marxist left’s political DNA. This is also the source of left support for Brexit and the “left” anti-semitism of the Corbyn movement.

The political root of these stupidities needs pulling up, or similar mistakes will be made over and over again.

Last week that left which, day after day, told us there would be no Russian invasion, disgraced itself again. Most of the far left groups continued to stay away from Ukrainian solidarity protests. Socialist Appeal declared it would not take sides between Ukraine and Russia. At the Stop the War meeting in London’s Conway Hall there were no Ukrainians on the platform. The only Ukrainian at the meeting objected to Jeremy Corbyn’s banal anti-NATO speech. Raising a Ukrainian flag, he demanded Corbyn protest against the Russian war, and was immediately bundled out by stewards.

Stop the War now campaigns using a logo with a map of Ukraine which omits Crimea! Crimea was seized and annexed by Putin’s Russian imperialism in 2014. By itself that tells us who runs SW. People who—effectively, practically—back Russian imperialism, though they now want it to ease off a bit.

Minsk 2

The National Education Union’s president, Daniel Kebede, was forced to withdraw a statement from the union on the conflict after outraged union activists complained about the lack of union support for Ukraine, and that the union was demanding Ukraine negotiate with Russia on the basis of Minsk 2 (a deal which Ukraine was pushed into accepting by France and Germany in 2015).

Some members threatened to resign from the NEU over the statement. We urge members to stay in the unions and overturn pro-SW policies and end union funding for the dreadful, pro-Russia Morning Star newspaper.

Besides, if members left the NEU every time Kebede said something stupid, soon there would be no one left.

One wonders if Kebede even knows exactly what Minsk 2 says. Minsk 2 is a pro-Russia document the Ukrainian state was forced to sign in 2015. It demanded the re-incorporation of the totalitarian police mini-states of the Luhansk People’s Republic and Donetsk People’s Republic into Ukraine, while they still remained under Russian control. Minsk 2 is an outrageously pro-Russia document, which would abolish Ukraine’s sovereignty, but anyway it was made obsolete when Putin recognised the LPR and DPR as states distinct from Ukraine in the run-up to this war. These tiny stateslets, carved out of eastern Ukraine, which are run by Kremlin-controlled thugs, where torture is widespread, in which the economies have partially collapsed and trade unions are driven out or terrorised, are small-scale versions of what Putin intends for Ukrainian territory he plans to permanently seize after this bloody war formally ends.

And what do British leftists who refuse to back Ukraine think they are to demand the Ukrainians negotiate with Putin? and even negotiate on the basis of Minsk 2? The Ukrainian government wants to negotiate, and that is its right. Our job is to rally working-class support to help Ukraine fight to defend itself.

That is the division now on the UK left.

Groups like Socialist Worker, covering their backsides, now finally demand Russian Troops out of Ukraine and oppose the Russian war. But that is not controversial. Almost every political organisation, from the right and left, in the entire world is against that.

The issue on the left is: do you support Ukrainian self-determination, Ukraine’s war of self-defence, the demand from Ukraine for military, financial and political backing from the West? Do you work to rally the working class for Ukraine? We do, and groups like Socialist Worker (quite quietly) do not. They should look at the destruction Russian imperialism is inflicting on the towns of Mariupol, Kharkiv and Kyiv and feel shame that they do not back the defenders.

Elsewhere in this issue of Solidarity we carry an appeal to regroup the real socialist left around a programme to back Ukraine’s right to self-determination and their fight against Russian imperialism.

Readers of Solidarity, we need your help! We have a political job to do. You can help us by moving our motions in the unions and Labour Party, donating money to us, selling our paper, and joining Workers’ Liberty.

Support the Ukrainian unions and left!

Support the Russian anti-war movement!

Defend Ukraine!
Unite the left to defend Ukraine!

An appeal from the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty to the international left and individual socialists:

Comrades: Ukraine is being destroyed by a predatory Russian imperialism. The Ukrainian left and trade unions need our solidarity. Labour movement bodies, working-class communities and numerous left-wing individuals have mobilised in solidarity with Ukraine and taken a strong stand against Russia’s invasion. But there is a crisis in the established organisations of the British and international left. It is a scandal that much of the Marxist left will not support Ukraine against Russian imperialism. Instead these socialists evade the need to positively back Ukraine, and hide behind a slogan that most of the world now agrees with: end the Russian war.

Knee-jerk anti-Americanism, the idea that the US’s enemies are our friends, the idea that any damage to the West is to the working-class’s benefit, is discrediting us. We need a socialist movement which sets its course independently by positive aims of working-class emancipation, not just by negating whatever it sees as the main enemy.

Of course we oppose NATO. But NATO has not gone to war in Ukraine. The threat to Ukraine comes from Russia. The main risk from the NATO powers is of them pushing Ukraine into a bad settlement which allows them to regain stable relations with Russia.

In the UK most of the Marxist left groups are refusing to join the pro-Ukraine protests. The groups which told us Russia would not invade Ukraine, now, without a word of self-reproach or self-criticism, tell us they are against the Russian aggression. But still they refuse to positively back Ukraine. Some, in fact, still support Putin’s Russia in this conflict, or do so in practice by stressing an end to war, in general terms, and saying this must be done by negotiations based on something like Minsk 2, i.e. by offering strong guarantees for Putin in Ukraine.

We call for left unity around the following:
• International workers’ solidarity to defend Ukraine! Support Ukrainian self-determination and Ukraine’s fight to defend itself
• Arm Ukraine.
• Russian troops out of Ukraine, now.
• Down with Putin! Defend the anti-war activists in Russia, release those that have been arrested.

We invite individuals and the organisations of the left to sign up to this platform and collaborate with us on this basis. We propose joint initiatives, leaflets, statements, motions and actions.

We urge UK activists to build the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign. Within this framework of joint political campaigning we urge the left to work for clarity on the roots of this political crisis on the left. Without clarity we will repeat, again and again, the stupidity of refusing to back Ukraine, standing back while Mariupol, Kharkiv and Kyiv burn. Solidarity, the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty □

Back Ukraine Solidarity and Ukraine’s left

The Ukraine Solidarity Campaign has launched a drive for funds, for its own activities and to support appeals from the Ukrainian left organisation Social Movement and from the country’s trade unions. The union appeal is mainly to aid labour movement support for internally displaced people. USC is trying to raise £5,000 as quickly as possible: bit.ly/ukrainesubs

USC is also promoting a global left anti-war statement calling for Russian withdrawal from Ukraine and solidarity with internationalists in Ukraine and Russia. It is supported by 23 organisations (including Workers’ Liberty) and about 900 individuals in countries across the world: bit.ly/ukraineus

Break the government’s blockade of refugees!

By Sacha Ismail

Given the Tories’ chest-beating about the Ukraine conflict, you’d think they’d have made an exception to their general hostility to migrants.

So far they are standing firm for their inhuman principles.

The government claims the number of visas issued to Ukrainians since the war began was now up from 50 – the number that caused outrage – to... 300. This in the context of 1.7 million having fled Ukraine. Poland, with a population not that much more than half the UK’s, has already taken over a million people. Of course Poland is much nearer to Ukraine.

Equally, the Tories are outflanking the right-wing Law and Justice government on the right.

The result of this is a “visa blockade” at Calais, where the number of Ukrainians who want to come to the UK but can’t is growing steadily.

The labour movement should demand waiving of visas and free entry for Ukrainians and everyone fleeing conflicts. Meanwhile, on 2 March the House of Lords passed big amendments to take the sting out of the Tories’ regressive Nationality and Borders Bill (see page 11). We need to mobilise to deter the Tories from using their majority in the Commons to roll back those amendments.

• Protest at the Home Office to admit Ukrainian and other refugees – 5pm, Tuesday 15 March, 2 Marsham St, London SW1P 4DF. Called by Ukraine Solidarity Campaign, Labour Campaign for Free Movement. Another Europe is Possible.

Drop Ukraine’s debt now!

By Mohan Sen

There is a simple thing Western governments could do to support Ukraine – cancel its debts to governments, banks and financial institutions.

Before the war Ukraine’s foreign debt stood at £95 billion. The debt servicing expenditure for 2022 was expected to be £4.6 billion – about 12% of all state expenditure. Ukraine is a poor country (GDP per head only one-third of the EU’s poorest country, Bulgaria), and now will be devastated by war.

The fact that Western governments have not taken this obvious step says a lot about their priorities in the world. They have been working hard to impose and deepen neo-liberal reforms in Ukraine – both collaborating with and pushing its pretty right-wing government. In November the openDemocracy website exposed the UK government’s activity supporting attacks on workers’ rights in Ukraine.

Ukraine’s trade unions have called for the abolition of its debts, and the demand is being championed by the left organisation Social Movement.

For more see the Brexit Spotlight website and the explanatory notes on the petition at bit.ly/payingbills. Please also use Another Europe is Possible’s tool to write to your MP: bit.ly/jkrdd2 □

Corrections

The estimate of 14,000 deaths arising from Russian military action in Ukraine in 2014 is for action in the Donetsk and Luhansk areas as well as Crimea (cf Solidarity 626), Mikhail Fridman’s London house cost £65 million, not £615 million. □

Workers’ Liberty meetings are open to all, held online over zoom (unless otherwise stated).

Upcoming meetings

Wednesday 9 March, 2pm: Students – Defend Ukraine against Russian imperialism – Brunei Gallery, SOAS, London

Wednesday 9 March, 6pm: Students – The Bread Trick, SHEFF. Postponed due to Ukraine protest: India’s elections: has the farmers’ revolt thrown back Modi? – New details TBC

Sunday 12 March, 9:45am: Green Bans, Red Union – Q&A + Book Club

Sunday 12 March, 6:30pm: Lessons of Saltley Gate and 1972, a year of strikes

Tuesday 15 March, 6pm: Students – Northern Ireland, the Troubles then and now – The Pack Horse Pub, Leeds, LS2 9DX

Wednesday 16 March, 2pm: Students – Fighting antisemitism on the left – Brunei Gallery, SOAS, London

Sunday 20 March, 6:30pm: Capital study group

Tuesday 22 March, 6pm: Students – Organising couriers, gig workers – The Pack Horse Pub, Leeds, LS2 9DX

Wednesday 23 March, 2pm: Students – Trans rights, struggle and backlash – Brunei Gallery, SOAS, London


For our calendars of events, updated details, zoom links, more meetings and resources, see workersliberty.org/events or scan QR code □

Events and campaigns: workersliberty.org/meetings  youtube.com/c/WorkersLibertyUK workersliberty.org/audio
Morning Star: for solidarity, turn to the Sports pages!

Letter

Crimean War wasn’t “collective security”

Eric Lee’s latest column (2 March) contains the occasionally repeated claim that Marx supported the Anglo-French forces in the Crimean War (1853-6). Reading Marx’s articles in the New York Tribune from the time, which were written in the style of a war reporter and most likely by Engels, it is difficult to discern any clear support for the war.

Certainly the articles unequivocally denounced Tsarism and Russian expansionism. It is clear that Marx/Engels saw the Anglo-French axis as more “progressive” than Tsarist Russia. They were scathing of British and French conservatives who showed pro-Tsarist sympathies. But they did not argue that the war was being fought for European “collective security” in the sense that would be understood by the 20th century liberal international order. Rather, they posited that Anglo-French commercial interests in the Ottoman Empire were driving the intervention. They did skirt close to campism, for example stating that “in this instance the interests of revolutionary Democracy and of England go hand in hand” because “neither can afford to let the Tsar make Constantineplot one of his capitals.” Their writings were laced with a kind of Oriental xenophobia that saw Russia as a semi-barbaric “Asiatic” country opposing “Western civilisation”. They were primarily concerned, however, with the impact of the war on the revolutionary-democratic forces of Europe.

To this end they argued that the bungled nature of the Crimean campaign and the resulting humiliation of the British and French governments would strengthen the revolutionary-democratic party. If the conflict developed into a general European war, they argued, this would inevitably result in a European revolution. This perspective was proved right in a general sense but only after 1914, when it was the Western powers and not the Tsarist empire itself who led the revolutionary wave.

In the mid-19th century the closest thing to collective security in European affairs was the post-1815 “Concert of Europe”, an international order of reactionary states in which the Russian Tsars played the role of continental Chiefs of Police. Russian forces suppressed national-democratic uprisings in Hungary and Poland to uphold post-Napoleonic reaction. Marx and Engels were of course implacably opposed to this but they did not posit as an alternative an imperialist states of the kind that found expression in the post-WW2 era through the establishment of NATO.

Eric states that NATO was supported by European social democrats, and in so doing echoes pronouncements by Keir Starmer about the role of Attlee and the British Labour Party in founding the alliance. This is undeniably true but should be seen in the context of the Attlee government continuing a generally liberal-imperialist foreign policy from 1945, such as brutally restoring European colonial rule in Indonesia and Indochina. Leaving aside the issue of whether NATO is itself an intrinsically “imperialist” organisation, it certainly was and is an alliance led by imperialist states (witness the behaviour of the French military across West and North Africa, for example). Rather than looking to alliances of bourgeois anti-imperialists to guarantee collective security, we should be looking to strengthen the “third force” – or, in the language of Marx and Engels’ time, the “sixth Power” – of the international workers’ movement.

Edd Mustin, Sheffield

Karl Marx: sixth campist

Eric Lee’s column in Solidarity 626 gives a potted social-democratic history of NATO, and all but makes the claim that Karl Marx would have supported NATO against Russia, as he supposedly supported “British and French troops in the Crimean War” against the Tsar.

Solidarity... and Eric Lee both trace our political inheritance back to the erstwhile American Trotskyist Max Shachtman, who fought for independent working class politics in the face of a Trotskyist movement which lent its support to the imperialist Russian state, but in old age moved towards the right and supported American imperialism against its Russian counterpart. Our Max Shachtman is that of 1971, Eric Lee’s that of 1946, whereas Lee’s is that of 1971.

We cannot quote Lee’s claim to the political legacy of Shachtman’s final years. However, we should fight a bit harder to keep Marx’s legacy to ourselves. Marx and Engels did not support the European powers against Russia in the Crimean War. Just as revolutionary socialists during the Cold War promoted the working class as the third camp against the Western and Soviet imperial blocs, Marx too heralded it as the “sixth power” against the various empires of the world: “...but we must not forget that there is a sixth power in Europe, which at given moments asserts its supremacy over the whole of the five so-called ‘great’ powers and makes them tremble, every one of them. That power is the Revolution. Long solitude... awakening from its slumbers... A signal one, a decision one, and this sixth and greatest European power will come forward...” (Hal Draper wrote about this in more detail: http://www.history.com)

Much of what Eric Lee has written for Solidarity is great, such as recent pieces on strikes in Cambodia and Lithuania. He can hardly be blamed for also writing articles that go against our politics: if I were given regular space in a newspaper whose purpose and ideas I was at odds with, I would use that opportunity to cause maximum aggravation. In the face of an ongoing Russian invasion, many on the British left have acted as if NATO and Russia are equal aggressors in this war: this is dishonest and risible. However, NATO is our enemy, not an ally of convenience against Putin.

Pete Boggis, Lambeth

By Jim Denham

Having spent the whole of January and February dismissing the possibility of Russia invading Ukraine as western propaganda, driven by war-mongers, the Morning Star performed a screeching u-turn on 25 February and declared in its editorial: “Vladimir Putin’s invasion of Ukraine is a catastrophe with horrific consequences in that country and beyond.”

But not everything had changed. Some favourite old themes remained. The same editorial claimed “Ukraine is not the ‘front line of democracy,’ Britain, like the US and EU, connived at the violent overthrow of its elected government in the Maidan coup of 2014.” It then went on to blame Nato for “stifling the Minsk peace process” and to call for a commitment (from whom?) that “Ukraine [doesn’t] join Nato, and to a dial-in of martialist showboating by the world’s most powerful and dangerous military alliance, of which Britain is a part.”

You’d never guess, would you, that Nato had long made it clear that it would not intervene, or that it was actually in the interests of that country and beyond.

And for all the criticisms of the invasion, it’s been clear that the Morning Star really believes that Nato and “the West” are more to blame for it than Putin. An interview with two “peace activists” from the US “anti-war” group ANSWER on 3 March made the position clear: As Becker [one of the interviewees] explained, the true purpose of the Russian invasion is for Russia to signal to the US and Nato that “the era of appeasement has ended... in terms of allowing Nato influence to inch close and closer to Russian territory” (we’re back to “on our terms”) to stop the invasion, but on the basis of what they’ve said, it’s difficult to work out why.

The editorial of 5-6 March makes the paper’s message to the people of Ukraine quite clear: surrender! It states: “The ‘arm Ukraine’ argument rather rests on making the Russian invasion so costly in terms of attrition that Putin retreats or is overthrown. But these are remote prospects and bleeding Russia to the point where its morale collapses is a plan demonstrations in the US and experiences in Vietnam or Afghanistan – defeats that took decades and imposed an appalling cost in human life and destruction. Nobody genuinely concerned about Ukrainians can see this as a reasonable option, though it would be ideal from the point of view of arms firms profiting from weapons supply.”

So what is the answer, according to the Morning Star? “But the reality is that the West cannot intimidate Russia into backing down – it has, after all, been trying to intimidate Russia for years. Nor have sanctions generally proved effective in isolating and dislocating hostile governments. Only through talking can we hope to end this nightmare.”

Of course, we should not condemn the Ukrainian government for negotiating, or even necessarily for making concessions under duress. But the MS’s line is like saying in a strike, or rather a lock-out: “this is causing disruption, and must be ended by negotiation”, without saying you support the workers.

And anyway, what the Morning Star advocates is not negotiations between Ukraine and Russia. It is negotiations between Ukraine and Nato and/or the EU and/or the USA, in which Ukraine may well be thrown under the bus. Astonishingly, real solidarity is to be found in the paper – on the sports pages! An article by Layth Yousif (5-6 March) is headed “Why sport must do all it can to help Ukraine.” Layth writes: “On Friday morning, Andriy, my new friend from Ukraine cursed Vladimir Putin. Explicitly, furiously, articulately.”

“We had been exchanging messages for 48 hours after our love of sport brought us together. Prior to signing off on the phone, Andriy did not expect to see his mother from Kharkiv arrive at his home. This war is awful. We will fight for Ukraine and freedom with our last breath. But you must also tell the world we need help.”

Letter

Crimean War wasn’t “collective security”
For Ukraine on International Women’s Day!

By Jill Mountford

As Russian citizens and feminists, we condemn this war. Feminism as a political force cannot be on the side of a war of aggression and military occupation. The feminist movement in Russia struggles for vulnerable groups and the development of a just society with equal opportunities and prospects, in which there can be no place for violence...

The Feminist Anti-war Resistance manifesto (#FeministAntiWarResistance) has called for solidarity action for International Women’s Day, against Putin and his war and in solidarity with Ukraine.

Hardly surprising, it’s difficult to find any up-to-date commentary and activity from feminist groups in Ukraine right now amidst the chaos of war. But Ukraine has a variety of feminist groups and organisations. They mostly exist online through Facebook and other social media. As with feminist movements everywhere, there are many healthy, and some not so healthy, with divisions around gender, LGBTQ rights and sex workers.

According to Kateryna Semchuk, the only left-wing feminist group in Ukraine is the “Queer Anarcho-Feminism” group. In more peaceful times it concerns itself with the rights of Roma women, support for sex workers, and campaigning for rights for women living with HIV.

Commentary on women’s lives that can be followed more easily, though with fewer demands, is in the glossy magazines such as the Ukraine Marie Claire. Over the last two weeks articles on fashion, diet, careers and sex have taken a back seat to articles such as “How to get your acrylic nails off so you can more easily hold a weapon”:

“A guide to child-birth at home during the war”;

“Menstruation and war; tips from a gynaecologist”;

“What to do if you find yourself trapped under the rubble of your home”.

These popular magazines have responded to the real world around them with less of their usual myth-making articles about women’s lives and bodies. They have responded to women giving birth in air raid shelters and on the metro as hospitals and nurseries are shelled by the Russian army. To reports of rape and other sexual offences by Russian soldiers. They have responded to the real world where droves of women and children flee Ukraine with their lives packed into carrier bags and suit cases; where grandmas take on Russian soldiers; and women of all ages set up makeshift Molotov cocktail factories, and take up rifles to join the Ukraine resistance.

For now, at least, the real world is shaping the content. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of most of the organised British left groups: they have a real-world bypass.

International Women’s Day 2022, and beyond, must be about solidarity with Ukraine and Russian women opposing Putin, opposing Russian imperialism. We should give practical support, attending protests, raising funds for the Ukraine trade movement for them to buy arms to defend themselves. The best solidarity we can show to any oppressed groups anywhere and especially Ukraine right now is to take up the arguments and fight to defeat the Putin apologists in our own labour movement.

Solidarity with women in Ukraine and Russia opposing Putin and fighting against Russian imperialism!

ITUC: kick Putin’s union out

By Eric Lee

According to its website, the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR) is “a national trade union centre independent of the state, political and business structures.” Founded in 1990, it is the successor to the state-controlled labour fronts of the Soviet era, and it claims to be the largest national trade union centre in the country.

It boasts of having some twenty million members – “which is about 95 percent of all organised workers in Russia,” they say.

They are one of two national trade union centres in Russia which are affiliated to the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). But it is now time to throw them out.

Because it has become abundantly clear that the FNPR is not “independent of the state,” but is a mouth-piece for the Putin regime.

As the war in Ukraine intensified and unions around the world joined with pretty much everyone else in condemning Russia’s brazen aggression, the FNPR rushed to issue a statement of their own.

It began by declaring that the FNPR “supports the decision of Russian President Vladimir Putin to carry out an operation to denazify Ukraine”. They refer to the elected leaders of Ukraine as “gangs of Bandera [followers], nationalists and accomplices of the Nazis”. They express sympathy with refugees – not all refugees, but those who “were forced to evacuate to Russian territory” and declare that those refugees (mostly from the Donets region) will be helped by Russian unions.

The statement ends with the ringing declaration that “Hitlers and Zelenskys come and go, but international worker solidarity remains. Peace to the nation! War on the Nazis!”

Take a moment to consider that statement in its entirety.

At best, we can say that the FNPR leaders who drafted it are either delusional or wrote this with a loaded gun pointed at their heads. At best – well, I’d rather not think about that.

As Frank Hoffer, a German trade unionist and former ILO staff, wrote recently for the Global Labour Column, the FNPR’s continued “membership in the ITUC is incompatible with the ITUC’s values and constitution that clearly states: ‘The federation proclaims the right of all peoples to self-determination and to live free from aggression and totalitarianism under a government of their own choosing’.”

Hoffer also points out that while Russian individuals, companies, sports teams and others have been quickly expelled from international organisations, the ITUC has so far done nothing about the FNPR’s membership.

The FNPR’s president -- who has served at his post for some 30 years now -- is Mikhail Shimakov. Shimakov is a Vice President of the ITUC.

He and Natalia Klimova, also representing FNPR, sit on the ITUC General Council. Shimakov also has a seat on the ITUC’s 22-member Executive Bureau.

Our trade union leaders sit with him on those bodies -- leaders of Britain’s Trades Union Congress, the AFL-CIO in the USA, Germany’s DGB and the Canadian Labour Congress, among others.

As Hoffer writes, “Continuing business as usual and keeping the FNPR in its ranks will destroy any moral authority of the ITUC.”

He’s absolutely right. It is time for the ITUC to do the right thing.

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

Activist Agenda

Many union branches and Labour Parties have passed motions on the lines promoted by Solidarity (see bit.ly/mo-pe) and supporting the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign. They have faced challenges both from people supporting the “Stop the War” or Morning Star line, and from people wanting to delete the clause of opposition to NATO (or, in one case, to rule the motion out of order for including that clause). The Uyghur Solidarity Campaign is demonstrating this month on Sunday 27 March (from 2pm at the Apple shop, 235 Regent St, London W1B 2EL, over Apple’s use of forced labour in its supply chain), instead of the usual 5th of the month (skipped because of the clash with Ukraine solidarity protests).

• Links and info for these and other campaigns, suggestions for labour movement motions and petitions: workersliberty.org/agenda

Second hand books!

Workers’ Liberty is selling hundreds of second hand-books -- politics, but also fiction, history and much more. Visit bit.ly/2h-books for the current stock and prices, and to order.

Events and campaigns: workersliberty.org/meetings  youtube.com/c/WorkersLibertyUK  workersliberty.org/audio
By Tom Harrison

A fortnight into the invasion of Ukraine by Vladimir Putin’s mafia state the erroneously termed “social media” are awash with whataboutery. What about Palestine? What about Iraq? What about Afghanistan etc.? Such stances are the political equivalent of not being able to chew gum and cross the road at the same time.

It shouldn’t take much intellectual effort for people who regard themselves as socialists to denounce the actions of one imperialist power and also condemn similar actions by another. The “what about” brigade are effectively excusing dreadful crimes against humanity which the Putin dictatorship is committing in Ukraine by saying its rivals do similar so we shouldn’t be bothered too much.

The “what about” line is precisely the that used by Putin cronies like Sergey Lavrov when they appear on TV to “justify” their colonial reconquest of Ukraine, amplified by a big element of whataboutery — many such Facebook posts coming from obvious trolls.

The 300 staff in the GRU BOT factory in St Petersburg are working overtime pumping out this crap and finding a ready audience amongst the far right, Trumpists, anti-vaxers and unfortunately some people who regard themselves as leftists but have succumbed to various forms of conspiracy theory — the curse of the digital age.

Yet opposition to Russian imperialism has been a major part of socialist internationalism.

In the mid nineteenth century two socialists wrote many articles on the subject, subsequently published as The Russian Threat to Europe. The authors concerned were Karl Marx and Fred Engels. This would no doubt be condemned by some as “dupes of imperialism”. During the Crimean War they said:

“But let Russia get possession of Turkey... and she becomes superior to all the rest of Europe put together. Such an event would be an unspeakable calamity to the revolutionary cause... in this instance the interests of the revolutionary Democracy and of England go hand in hand”.

Engels would later refer to the Crimean war as a “sham war” fought half-heartedly by the Britain. Marx believed the Prime Minister of the day, Lord Palmerston was not conductive to the war effectively because he was a Tsarist sympathiser. Marx also accused him of taking bribes from Russia. Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose! Marx would rather trust revolution movements championed by the working class, than put any faith in the British ruling class to seriously challenge autocratic regimes.

Marx’s and Engels’s antagonism towards the Russian state stemmed from the role it played in suppressing the democratic revolutions which broke out across a broad swathe of the European continent in 1848. Russian military intervention was particularly important in defeating the Hungarian Revolution against the Hapsburg Empire.

The defeated Hungarian revolutionary army itself was welcomed as a hero among the working class in Britain, whilst the Austrian general Haynau, whose reputation for brutality spread throughout Europe, was famously horsewhipped by brewery workers who chased him down Borough High Street in Bermondsey chanting “Down with the Austrian Butcher!”

The labour movement in Britain was similarly outraged when Britain established a military alliance with Tsarist Russia – “triple entente” – in 1907. The words socialists most associated with Tsarist Russia were Knot (a scourge-like whip), pogrom, and Siberia.

The October Revolution proved to change attitudes towards Russia when a state established by a workers’ revolution was achieved. Russia would no longer intervene in Europe to suppress revolutionary movements, but instead support them. (Nevertheless, the Bolshevik’s attempt, opposed at the time by Trotsky, to stimulate a revolution at bayonet point in the Russo/Polish war proved a big mistake). The ascent of Stalin in the Soviet Union in the 1920s effectively ended the six years or so of socialist government in Russia. Stalin carried out a counter revolution and restored the imperialistic traits of Tsarist times. He betrayed the Spanish revolution and subjected the countries of Eastern Europe to decades long repression under police state regimes. Such behaviour was not just personified by one man. Three years after Stalin’s death the Russian army put down a revolution in Hungary against the dictatorial regime they’d set up.

Peter Fryer, the Daily Worker (forerunner of the Morning Star) correspondent reported what was essentially a working class revolution, only to have his reports spiked.

As with Ukraine now, the Hungarians in 1956 were denounced as “fascist” for their stance against the invader.

The Trotskyist movement in 1956 knew whose side they were on. Nowadays some claiming that legacy are not at least in the way of the US/S the fiction could be maintained that these were the actions of a “socialist” country.

Today it’s a regime of gangster capitalists ruled by someone reputed to be the richest man in the world who sadly cannot enjoy his ill-gotten gains, but instead chooses to inflict untold misery on others.

Socialist Appeal and SWP on the invasion they said was false scare

By Sacha Ismail

Shortly before Putin’s 24 February invasion of Ukraine Socialist Appeal posted the claim “false alarm” after the war began.

The Socialist Appeal was founded in 1971 by avant-gardists who had broken from Leninism and Trotskyism.

Socialist Appeal is one of thefew original socialist groups who remain committed to the ideas of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. As Trotskyists, their opposition to Russian imperialism can be attributed to the influence of Trotsky on their thinking. Trotskyist parties were a phenomenon brought into being by World War I and the Russian Revolution, so it is only fitting that the Russian Revolution should shape the political position of the Socialist Appeal.

Socialist Appeal regards the Russian Revolution in 1917 as a great historical event because it was a spontaneous mass movement of the working class that overthrew Russian autocracy and the tsarist regime and created the first socialist state in the world. It was achieved by workers and peasants who were also carrying out a revolution of the social and political conditions that had brought about the war and had led to the failure of the Tsar’s army.

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Worker boycotts back Ukraine

By Stuart Jordan

A flurry of worker-imposed boycotts on Russian trade in solidarity with Ukraine has followed Russia’s invasion.

On 6 March workers refused to unload Russian oil from the tanker Seacod docked at a terminal on the River Mersey. Unite’s General Secretary, Sharon Graham said: “Unite workers at the facility will not under any circumstances unload any Russian oil regardless of the nationality of the vessel which delivers it.” At the time of writing, the boat is sailing directionless in the Irish sea.

On Monday 28 February, Unite issued a statement that they would support workers’ boycott of the NS Champion oil tanker due to dock in Flotta oil terminal on the Orkney Islands the following day. Their action led to the government tightening sanctions to ban vessels “with any Russian connection” in UK waters. The NS Champion was turned around.

On Wednesday 2 March dockers organised in Unison at the Isle of Grain terminal in Kent issued a statement that they would refuse to unload cargoes of Russian oil and gas. Unison activists had realised that ships due in Kent were not Russian-owned and so did not fall under government restrictions. The following day two tankers carrying Russian liquid natural gas (LNG) had turned around.

On the West Coast of the USA, the International Longshore Workers Union, issued a statement they would not work Russian ships or cargoes: “With this action in solidarity with the people of Ukraine, we send a strong message that we unequivocally condemn the Russian invasion.” The ILWU has a proud tradition of solidarity action, with the recent BLM protests and previously in opposition to the Iraq war.

As “political” industrial action, these acts of solidarity are illegal under the UK anti-union laws. It is extremely positive that workers are defying the law and showing unequivocal support for Ukraine.

Russian exports of oil and gas amounted to $235 billion in 2021. Government sanctions so far have not targeted Russian fossil fuels which they regard as the “lifeblood of the western economy” (Financial Times, 4 March).

‘Gazprombank, which organises the payments for Russia’s state-owned gas company, is not included in the list of financial institutions that NATO countries want banned from the SWIFT payment system. But the markets suggest capitalists are shunning Russia hydrocarbons. 70% of Russian crude was struggling to find a customer last week and the Russians have been forced to offer their oil at record high discounts. European gas firms are pulling out of contracts with Russia early or planning to not renew. There are growing calls for Iran-style sanctions. The International Energy Agency has released a 10-point plan to wean Europe off dependency on Russian gas and oil.

Yet Western governments are still worried about the effect on their own economies. Each further squeeze on Russian fossil fuels will drive up the price of other commodities, and they are already soaring. Putin himself may decide there is a tactical advantage in cutting off the fossil fuel supply to Europe. Last week Russia suspended the export of fertilisers.

Unison and Unite have pointed out that the sanctions regime is full of loopholes and has called on the government for a total ban on any Russian fossil fuels entering the UK.

But bourgeois governments and commentators have been clear that they expect workers to shoulder the economic pain of war and sanctions. Early indications suggest they are looking to replace Russian hydrocarbons with gas and oil from other sources, rather than organise the long overdue shift to renewables. Without worker action on renewables, jobs and pay, sanctions will likely increase inequality and fossil fuel extraction.

The private ownership of energy has created vast inequality and vicious imperialist military powers, and has locked the world into a trajectory of an ever escalating climate emergency. The Stanlow Oil Refinery workers took an important stand against Russian imperialism this week, but they remain employed by Essar Energy, which is 50% owned by Russia’s state-owned oil company Rosneft.

Since the takeover in 2017, the wealth produced by their labour has been siphoned off to further Putin’s war aims. The labour of all energy workers goes to enrich and empower fascist capitalists and petro-states at the expense of peace and a liveable future for our children.

Who pays for this crisis, and whether it will be resolved by international workers’ solidarity or an imperialist carve-up, will be determined by the extent to which workers can build on these first acts of solidarity and stand together for our collective interests.
Listen to Ukrainian and Russian socialists!

By Dale Dale

Ukrainian and Russian socialist organisations are saying that the war on Ukraine is an act of Russian imperialist aggression. They have nothing but contempt for the argument “Of course, Russia should withdraw from Ukraine – but it’s really all the fault of NATO.”

Even before the launch of the Russian invasion the Ukrainian anarchist website Nasilist had defined any such invasion as an act of imperialist aggression. It would be: “A conflict between the empire and the former colony: domination and enslavement on their part, and emancipation and decolonization on our part. Russia’s position in this conflict lies in the belief that Ukrainian independence is a mortal danger to the half-collapsed Russian empire. The Kremlin believes that Russia’s ‘historical mission’ will fail if its closest neighbours – the former Soviet republics – adopt ‘Western values’ that are destructive to dictatorial power and incompatible with Moscow as a model.”

This was also the core of a statement issued by the Ukrainian socialist organisation Proletar Ukraini on the day Russia launched its invasion (24 February): “The current war is not a direct clash between the imperialist camp of the U.S. and the EU (NATO) on the one side and Russia and its satellites on the other side. Neither the US, nor the EU, nor NATO are fighting in this war! This war is imperialist and neocolonial only from one side – from the Kremlin, which is trying to reclaim its former part of the empire.”

A statement issued by the Ukrainian Social Movement (SM) the same day declared: “Ukraine has been directly attacked by Russian imperialism. The reason for this military operation is Putin’s imperial ambitions. His government wants to subdue the Ukrainian people, who do not support an authoritarian dictatorship.”

A statement issued by the Russian Socialist Movement (RSM), also on 24 February, likewise stated: “The sole reason (emphasis added) for this intervention is the imperial ambitions and the irrepressible greed of the Russian elites. … Today is not the time to have discussions about the political regime in Kiev. The aggressor is obvious.”

The same point was emphasised in another statement issued by the RSM on 25 February: “Russia has unleashed a new war [following that of 2014]. Its aim is to turn the whole of Ukraine into the Donbass (occupied by Russia since 2014). Because it is easier for bloodthirsty puppets to rule the intimidated population of a ravaged country. To cite [protection of the Donbass as justification for the invasion of Ukraine diverts attention away from the catastrophe sweeping across both Ukraine and Russia, a catastrophe which has not been unleashed by NATO, and not by Ukraine either, but by the Russian Federation.”

A resolution adopted by the Russian “Anti-War Round Table of the Left Forces” the same day condemned the Russian invasion as “Solely (emphasis added) the satisfying of the unhealthy foreign policy ambitions of a narrow circle of individuals in the leadership of the country, and also a way to divert attention away from the failures of the Russian government in domestic politics.”

Some of the signatories to that statement, it is true, have a dubious past. But it may be the case that the invasion has led them to a political self-reassessment.

These statements are not examples of the kind of facile, almost nationalistic, “division of labour” preached by the Stop the War Coalition (STW) and the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), whereby it’s ok for socialists in Russia to target Putin, but socialists in the West must ease off on Putin and target NATO instead. According to an article on the STW website, for example: “Our own government is not our only enemy but the one that we have to fight against primarily. The same is true for those in Russia, the US and anywhere else.”

Nor are they the “stick-bending” advocated in an article on the website of Counterfire (one of the main components of the STW). “For the anti-war movement, the task will be to bend the stick in the other direction – in the spirit of saying the ‘main enemy is at home’.”

The statements by the Ukrainian and Russian socialist organisations are simply a statement of what is: the nature of the conflict as an outright attack on Ukraine’s right to national self-determination by Russian imperialism.

Attempts by sections of the left in Europe to revise the false narrative of the “fascist coup” of 2014 (i.e. the mass Maidan protest movement) and pose the war as the result of NATO expansion have triggered some particularly sharp polemics by Ukrainian socialists.

An article by the Ukrainian anarchist Dmitry Machnik entitled “Why are Western leftists so fucked up?” says: “Western leftists and anarchists don’t ask us whether we need medical supplies, food, and military equipment. They ask us about fascists patrolling the streets in Ukraine. Sweet Jesus, our president is Jewish, and the only right-populist party in the parliament is fucking pro-Russian. The benign discussion of what should be an uncontroversial issue within the leftist crowd makes them lose their mind, blaming Ukraine for the mere existence of the far-right movements within. And how about the fact that Russia doesn’t even try to cover up its imperialist plan for Ukraine, one that cannot be justified by any leftist ideals? Nyeeh, it’s all NATO’s fault. NATO should pull out of Ukraine! Yeah, yeah, that’s right. Fuck us.”

Wider failure

A letter to the Western Left from Kyiv by Social Movement (SM) member Taras Bilous is aimed at “those sections of the Western Left who imagined NATO aggression in Ukraine’, and who could not see Russian aggression.” Amongst their many failings is that “they exaggerated the influence of the far-Right in Ukraine, but did not notice the far-Right in the ‘People’s Republics’ and avoided criticising Putin’s conservative, nationalist and authoritarian policy. Part of the responsibility for what is happening rests with you.”

This was not an isolated failure but part of the wider phenomenon in the Western ‘anti-war’ movement, usually called campism by critics on the Left.”

Just as sections of the left were silent on Russian involvement in the war in Syria on the basis that “the main enemy is at home”, so too now “we have seen the same ideological cliché repeated over Ukraine.”

Bilous concludes: “A large part of the Western Left should honestly admit that it completely fucked up in formulating its response to the ‘Ukrainian crisis’.”

The sentence “today is not the time to have discussions about the political regime in Kiev” in the SM statement of 24th February should be read in the context of the articles by Machnik and Bilous.

The SM is not saying that discussion and criticism of the Ukrainian government is off-limits. It is saying that responding to the Russian invasion by asking how many fascists there are in the Ukrainian government (answer: none: and Ukraine is the only country in the world apart from Israel to have simultaneously had a Jewish President and a Jewish Prime Minister) is deliberate obfuscation, and whataboutery.

The same exasperation with the willful refusal of sections of the European left to confront the reality of the nature of the war in Ukraine can also be found in an article by Ukrainian anarchist and former member of DIEM 25 (Democracy in Europe Movement 2025) Denys Sultanahliev:

“After a horrific attack by imperialist Russia on democratic Ukraine, they are still continuing the rhetoric of blaming NATO and the EU. I have never been a big fan of NATO as a defence structure, but what DIEM25 are doing is pathetic political opportunism. Their (i.e. the European left’s) declared concerns for minorities somehow goes hand in hand with ignoring agency and the right to self-determination of the Ukrainian people. … In the worldview of such ‘leftists’, all decisions belong to the few strongest players at the table, and all the rest are vassals and representatives of someone else’s will.”

Noting that the Polish organisation Razem has resigned from the “Progressive International” and DIEM25, because of its position on Ukraine, Sultanahliev concludes: “In the Polish left, Ukraine finds a close friend, while the Western left continues to shock with their ignorance and disregard.”

A further, more diplomatic critique of the position taken by sections of the European left, epitomised by the STW, is provided in the article “US-planning is not enough. To the Western left, on your and our mistakes” by Volodymyr Ar-tiukh, now an Oxford academic but written “as a member of the post-Soviet left”.

After praising the European left for what it taught the post-Soviet left in the early years after the collapse of the original page 9 continued
Putin’s far-right lies about “de-Nazifying” Ukraine

By Dale Street

Putin’s claim that he ordered the invasion of Ukraine in order to “de-Nazify” the country is nonsense. But it is the continuation of a narrative developed over almost two decades. And one that sections of the left in Europe and America have bought into.

In the early 2000s the electoral base of the pro-Russian Party of the Regions (PoR) was predominantly in the Donbass: The PoR was a party of oligarchs who owned the major enterprises in the Donbass and presented themselves as the region’s defenders.

One way in which the PoR sought to consolidate that base was by counterposing the Donbass “work ethic” – it was no coincidence that Stakhanov came from the Donbass – to the “indiscipline” in the rest of Ukraine, especially Kiev and the West.

Thus, the PoR raised slogans such as “We work while they go to protest marches” and “Donbass ploughs while they wave their fists around.”

A second strategy to solidify electoral support was to attribute the economic decline of the Donbass – which had been underway since the 1970s, and had accelerated as the PoR oligarchs plundered the region’s wealth after Ukrainian independence – to “Ukrainian fascists.”

As early as 2004/2005, when the Orange Revolution forced a re-run of the rigged presidential election which had attributed victory to Yanukovich, Ukrainian media owned by PoR oligarchs denounced the protest movement as “a coup” carried out by “orange fascists.”

Yanukovich’s opponents were denounced as “fanatical nationalists”, “Nazis” and “fascists.” Street posters in cities is the east and south of Ukraine showed Yanukovich’s opponent in the presidential elections, Yevgeny Yushchenko, with a Nazi swastika imposed on him.

The PoR narrative of ‘Ukrainian fascists’ became increasingly important in subsequent years. “This myth was the primary material used by the Party of Regions in its struggle against its political opponents,” writes Alexandr Osipian in his chapter in Russian Media and the War in Ukraine.

In 2011 western regions of Ukraine refused to fly Soviet-era flags on Victory Day (anniversary of the end of the Second World War). The PoR siezed on this to contrast the “anti-fascist Donbass” with the west of Ukraine.

The west had been “accomplished of German fascists” during World War 2. And so now the West did not wish to celebrate Victory Day but preferred to commemorate “OUN-NPA Nazi accomplishments”. Refusal to fly the flag by people in the west was further proof of “fascist tendencies” in Ukraine.

The PoR also bussed members of small Russian-nationalist organisations in Ukraine (Russian Unity and Motherland) into the western city of Lviv to provoke clashes with Ukrainian nationalists. The PoR oligarchs’ media then reported the clashes as “clashes between Ukrainian Nazis and anti-fascists”.

Later the same year Yanukovych’s ally Vadim Kolesniychenko launched the International Anti-Fascist Front (IAF) in Kiev and the Kremlin-linked Russian oligarch Boris Spiegel launched World Without Nazism (WWN) in the same city.

In the name of a spurious “anti-fascism” the WWN promoted the Putin version of twentieth-century history and Russian foreign policy. The IAF had a domestic agenda: it sought to discredit all domestic opposition to Yanukovych as “fascist.”

In 2013 the PoR staged a series of rallies under the slogan “Into Europe – Without Fascists,” including a 20,000 strong rally in Donetsk under the slogan “Donbass Against Neo-Fascism.”

Stakhanov, leader of the local PoR chair, Nikolai Levcenko, declared: “Fascism was taken care of by our grandpas in faraway ’45, but today we face a new threat, no less terrible. This is the threat of neo-fascism.”

At the same rally the local PoR deputy chair, Andrei Shishatski, declared: “The politicians who are trying to change history force us to sound the alarm and say a decisive ‘No!’ to neo-fascism. Would we betray our memory, our glory and our victory (in 1945)? Long live our native Donbass – fascism will not pass!”

The immediate focus of the IAF and the PoR was Svoboda. This was in direct contrast to nationalist organisation which had previously used Nazi symbols. But this “anti-fascism” had a broader political purpose.

**Opposition**

It equated all opposition to Yanukovych with fascism or neo-fascism, thereby making support for Yanukovych inherently “anti-fascist”. And it allowed the PoR to present itself as the only force standing between its core electorate and “the neo-fascist gang which has penetrated the Ukrainian Parliament.”

The “anti-fascist” narrative also dovetailed into Putin’s mythologising of the “Great Patriotic War of 1941-45”, which the PoR “imported” into Ukraine. (In fact, virtually all the PoR’s politics were a Russian import.)

This mythologising provided the backdrop for a new Russian identity (inherently anti-fascist) and a rewriting of history in which Russia had been the world’s leading anti-fascist force. According to the popular Russian historian Andrei Fursov:

“Today, we can say that the Great Patriotic War and our victory in it is the central event of not only Soviet but also Russian history. In 1941-1945, the Russian people, using the Soviet regime and the Stalinist system as a sword and shield, not only defended their right to historical existence, but also to greatness.”

The cult of the Great Patriotic War was used by Putin to boost Russian nationalism and his own authoritarian rule. “Russia – My History,” a network of museums throughout Russia with identical displays, praises Putin for restoring the centrality of the War in Russian identity:

“The memory of the Second World War is a means of uniting the Russian people. There has been a high degree of consolidation of society’s rejection of attempts to revise the history and outcomes of the war, de-heroising the feat of the people. The formation in Russian society of genuine historical memory and a return to national values (under Putin) has become a mass phenomenon, dedicated to the popular memory of the war.”

Thus it was no coincidence that PoR speakers at the Donetsk rally of 2013 coupled their “anti-fascism” with their “anti-April 2014” and “our memory, our glory and our victory” in 1945.

Putin’s response to the Maidan protests of 2014 was therefore nothing new. His denunciations of the protests as a fascist coup were a direct continuance of the bogus “anti-fascist” narrative which had been developed over the proceeding decade.

Russian media referred to “a fascist coup” and a seizure of power by “the Kie junta”. The latter “continued to wage its fascist ideology” and had despatched “fascists armed with NATO weapons” to the east of Ukraine to crush opposition to the coup. It had also created “fascist concentration camps.”

Putin himself claimed that the Maidan had resulted in “an orgy of banditism and neo-Nazism.” Russia’s seizure of the Crimea was justified because it protected its Russian population from “the rampacy of neo-Nazis, nationalists and antisemites in some parts of Ukraine, including Kiev.”

Russian media also portrayed the Maidan protests as a joint US-Nazi endeavour directed against Russian interests.
"The American-Nazi [i.e. American-Banderites] coup in Kiev and the aggression of the Ukrainian junta was egged on by the USA against Novorossiya ["New Russia"]; an old Tsarist term for most of the territory of Ukraine]. This is, in fact, the first direct aggression of the West against the Russian world since 1941, against historical Russia."

After Russia’s annexation of the Crimea, government spokespersons appealed to Western leaders to "stop the co-operation with neo-Nazi actors". "... the year 2014 was celebrated 75 years since the start of the Second World War, we should remember the consequences, which are the result of playing with Nazis."

If the Maidan protests were "a fascist coup", then its opponents were automatically anti-fascist, standing in the tradition of the other limb of the already established bogus "anti-fascist" narrative: Russia’s heroic participation in the Great Patriotic War.

This was how the anti-Maidan separatist movements defined themselves and were portrayed in Russian media, symbolised by the wearing of the St. George Ribbon, a Tsarist military decoration revived by Stalin during the war, and then revived again by Putin in 2005.

Denunciations of the Maidan as "a fascist coup" or "the American-Nazi coup" bore no relation to reality. But that’s not prevent sections of the left in Britain, and elsewhere, adopting Putin’s narrative.

Socialist Appeal was probably the worst offender, with the smaller Workers Power and Socialist Fight groups not far behind. In Britain, the most abject expression of this embrace of the Putin narrative was the self-styled Solidarity with the Anti-Fascist Resistance in Ukraine campaign.

Now, in 2022, Putin has invoked the same bogus “anti-fascism” and the same cult of the Great Patriotic War as a “justification” for his invasion of Ukraine.

"The leading NATO countries support extreme nationalists and Neo-Nazis in Ukraine, who, in turn, will never forgive the Crimeans and Sevastopol residents for choosing reunification with Russia. They, of course, will crawl into the Crimea, just like in the Donbass in order to kill, just as the gangs of Ukrainian nationalists, Hitler’s accomplices, killed defenceless people during the Great Patriotic War. Its (the invasion’s) goal is to protect people who have been subjected to abuse and genocide by the regime in Kiev for eight years. And for this we will pursue the demilitarisation and denazification of Ukraine."

“I also need to address the military personnel of the Ukrainian armed forces. Your fathers, grandfathers, great-grandfathers did not fight the Nazis and defend our common Motherland, so that today’s Neo-Nazis can seize power in Ukraine. …"

Continuing the same “anti-fascist” theme, only days after the invasion Russian Defence Minister Sergey Shoigu announced that Russia would be hosting an International Anti-Fascist Congress in August.

This would unite the efforts of the international community in the fight against the ideology of Nazism and neo-Nazism in any form of its manifestations in the modern world.”

In 2014 the “anti-fascist” narrative was designed to cut off the Maidan provoking a similar popular uprising in Russia — anti-Russian. “The Maidan was necessarily a fascist who would have backed the Nazis in the Great Patriotic War.

Today it serves as a ‘justification’ for full-scale war on Ukraine. And yet sections of the left continue to give degrees of credence to it. — Virtually on the eve of the invasion the Morning Star uncritically reported — instead of pouring scorn on — the call by the nationalist and antisemitic Russian Communist Party (CPRF) for the "denazification“ of Ukraine:

“Russian communists have called for a united anti-fascist front against the Nazi ‘invasion of Ukraine’. The CPRF warned that capitalist powers in the US and Europe were ‘ready to contribute bloodshed and aggression’ in the region as they promote fascism in Ukraine. It said there is no point in dialogue with ‘the heirs of Bander and Goebbels’ or former fascist leaders celebrated by the Ukrainian government. It also called for a ‘decisive political offensive’ against the rehabilitation of fascism and for support from global anti-fascist and anti-war movements. ‘The task of denazification of Ukraine should become the most important concern of the world community’.

A statement issued by Socialist Appeal on the day of the invasion gave credence to Putin’s claim that he would ‘denazify’ Ukraine: “It is self-evident that the Russian occupying forces will want to rid themselves of actual or potential enemies, and this will certainly include the Ukrainian fascists and ultra-nationalist armed militias.”

In another bland statement (capitalism is bad, wars are bad, but socialism is good) the Socialist Party found it necessary to refer to “a bloody coup” (i.e. the Maidan) which “brought a pro-Western regime to power”, since when “Ukraine has been ruled by right-wing, authoritarian governments, involving far-right nationalists and fascistic elements.”

According to a statement issued by Workers Power — which has clearly learnt nothing since it hit political bankruptcy in 2014 — on the day of Russia’s invasion: “The current conflict started in 2014 when the UK, EU and US connived to turn popular protests against corruption and repression into a violent coup, spearheaded by neoliberal politicians and openly fascist militias which overthrew the popular, but elected, pro-Russian government of Viktor Yanukovych. A government of rivial oligarchs with an anti-Russian and ultra-nationalist ideology was installed by a parliament purged of opposition parties.”

The current issue of the newspaper of the Scottish Socialist Party carries a short statement referring to “the nationalist right-wing regime in Kiev” (did they miss the elections of 2019?) and “the desire for peace and security on all sides” (did they miss the invasion?).

But its main article on Ukraine (“Invasions and Military Action Won’t Solve the Crisis in Russia”, in which is penned by the SSP’s in-house Stalinist Bill Bonnar) condemns the Russian invasion.

But then promptly moves to “challenge the narratives” which have developed around “the crisis”.

One such narrative is “this is all to do with Russian aggression and expansion” But this narrative fails to take account of the importance of the Great Patriotic War for Russians: “Anyone who has visited Russia will quickly become aware of all the references to the Second World War. For Russians these are not events from the distant past but rather real living history. When Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union, … it largely invaded through Ukraine. The same route was used when Germany occupied large parts of Russia during the First World War. After 1945 Soviet foreign policy towards western Europe was based on one single principle: never again.”

Another narrative, continues Bonnar, which needs to be challenged is “the presentation of the Ukrainian government as an innocent victim.” Not so: “This government was and is, right wing, nationalist, pro-American and anti-Russian.”

It caused “an insurgency in the Russian-speaking east of the country and a violent military campaign by Ukrainian forces in which 14,000 mainly Russian people have been killed and hundreds of thousands forced from their homes. Again, mostly Russians.”

For anyone who fails to understand what Bonnar is really arguing, the picture accompanying the article has the caption: “Ukraine 2014: Ukraine’s former President Petro Poroshenko awards Ukrainian citizenship to Belarusian neo-Nazis, Serhiy Korotkykh, for defending a Donetsk airport from Russian-backed separatists. Korotkykh was a member of the far-right Russian National Unity party and also a founding member of the neo-Nazi National Socialists in Kiev whose main goal is to prepare for a race war.”

The importance of the Great Patriotic War for Russians? Mass murder and ethnic cleansing of Russians by the Kiev government? Glorification of fascists by Kiev? Where have we heard that before?

Russia’s invasion is not a reason to shut down discussion about Ukraine’s domestic politics.

There are fascists in Ukraine and the Ukrainian armed forces – as is the case in every other country in the world. In fact, in some, maybe most, western European countries parties of the far right very far from the extreme right are backed by powerful forces in government and dismantling workers’ rights.

But the extracts quoted above are not contributions to a serious discussion about Ukraine’s domestic politics. Like the political equivalent of a Pavlovian conditioned reflex, once Ukraine is on the political agenda the response from sections of the left is: fascists in Kiev!

This is what Ukrainian anarchist Dmytry Mrachniy rightly complains of in an article in the Nigelist website: “It’s quite fucked up how Western leftist discussion on Ukraine quickly devolves into mentions of far-right groups like Right Sector or Azov. … The very mention of Ukraine as the victim of Russian aggression makes people lose their minds: ‘They have Right Sector! Azov!! Bandera!!!’

The same left organisations who once and again try to downplay Putin’s “anti-fascist” narrative make no mention of the well-established links between Putin’s puppet “People’s Republics” in Donetsk and Lugansk and parties of the European far right.

Nor do they mention any of the prevalence of fascist organisations in Russia – or the “star treatment” given to Tommy Robinson when he visited Russia in early 2020.

The fake “anti-fascist” narrative dates back to 2004. In 2014 it was ramped up to the level of a fever pitch. Sections of the left endorsed and propagated that narrative.

Now the same “anti-fascist” narrative is being used by Putin to justify his invasion of Ukraine and his war on its people. Those who got drawn into it in previous years should reassess.□
Ukraine’s centuries under Russian imperialism

By Sacha Ismail

If someone suggested that we could understand the Black Lives Matter struggle without some knowledge of the historical background of slavery, lynchings, Jim Crow and so on, we would find it unconvincing, to put it mildly. But many on the left seem to think that they can comment on the crisis in Ukraine while being totally ignorant of that country’s history. So begins Sri Lankan-Indian Marxist Rohini Hensman's article for the US socialist magazine New Politics (2 March).

After a thought-provoking review of that history, her conclusion is: “Socialist internationalism in this crisis means supporting the right of the Ukrainian people to self-determination as a multi-ethnic democracy.”

Hensman explains that what became Ukraine has a long history as a distinct people, but also of being dominated – from the late 17th century mainly by Russia. By the late 19th century, which saw the growth of nationalist and socialist politics in Ukraine, Russian socialists analysed the relationship as colonial. Lenin compared it to Ireland and England.

Hensman also discusses the oppression of the Crimean Tatars, a mostly Muslim ethnic group present in Ukraine for many centuries.

She discusses the long history of Russian imperialism, and how debates about Russia’s colonies was central to development of the empire’s revolutionary movements.

During the Russian revolution, Ukrainians fought a national liberation struggle. In the early years of Bolshevik rule Ukraine enjoyed a period of national freedom as a strongly autonomous Soviet Republic.

Hensman emphasises the Bolsheviks’ commitment to national self-determination: “Lenin’s anti-racism, anti-imperialism, and identification of Great-Russian chauvinism as the Russian version of White supremacism set an example for all socialist internationalists to follow.” She explains Lenin’s “last struggle” against Stalin’s nascent Great Russian chauvinism, including in relationship to Ukraine.

With the rise of Stalinism, Ukraine’s fortunes went sharply into reverse. Once the bureaucratic counter-revolution had triumphed, restored national oppression burgeoned in extreme form, resulting in genocide and millions of deaths in the 1930s. In 1944 Stalin deported the Crimean Tatars en masse, with half their population perishing.

Ukraine suffered genocide again under the WW2 German occupation, with 3.5 million dying at the hands of the Nazis, including 1.5 million Jews.

After the war Ukraine continued to suffer national oppression under the Stalinist USSR. Hensman argues it is testament to the Ukrainian sense of national identity that the country again asserted its independence, in 1991. With 84% participating, 92% voted for independence, including 83% in the eastern regions of Luhansk and Donetsk. This although the US government was opposed to Ukrainian independence.

Decolonisation

She points out that the end of the USSR involved a process of decolonisation. “While the economic plunder and corruption which followed were disastrous, it should not be forgotten that in his own way, Gorbachev initiated a democratic anti-imperialist revolution.” Putin’s rise represents a counter-revolution, seeking to crush all democracy and rebuild the Russian empire. The article describes in some detail the evolution of Putin’s regime since 2000, including how it has revived some of the political features of Stalinist rule.

Hensman emphasises Putin’s alarm at the popular upheaval in Ukraine in 2014. She describes the brutal oppression of the Crimean Tatars after Russia annexed Crimea that year.

She discusses Putin’s support for far-right movements in many countries – and the disingenuousness of his claim to be fighting to “denazify” Ukraine.

Hensman is no apostle for Western imperialism. She argues that Western adventures, for instance in Iraq and Afghanistan, have undermined democracy globally. She notes that Western governments have never consistently defended Ukraine’s sovereignty, pointing out how, for example, the EU states approved the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline despite burgeoning Russian aggression in Ukraine and Syria.

Hensman considers what can be done. She argues that “there is no harm in talks, but it should be understood that negotiations with Putin are about as useful as negotiations with Hitler turned out to be. They will not stop the war. The only people who can really end it are the people of Ukraine and Russia” – and they need solidarity.

Reviewing Putin’s criminal activities far beyond Russia’s borders, she argues that “winding up NATO is a worthy goal, but it will have to wait until Putin stops acting as its recruiting agent”.


More online

Ukraine and the slogan “the main enemy is at home”

Dale Street shows how Karl Liebknecht’s famous slogan is being misused. bit.ly/2k-hc-t

Lords slashes anti-migrant bill. Up the pressure!

By Mohan Sen

Following a stream of protests against the Nationality and Borders Bill, the House of Lords has inflicted multiple defeats on the government. It has:

• Removed Clause 11, which would create a two-tier asylum system based on whether asylum-seekers arrived in the UK with or without official entry clearance.

• Removed Clause 28, which would allow asylum-seekers to be removed from the UK and sent to a third country for their claim to be processed.

• Removed the parts of Clause 39 that would make it a criminal offence for a person to arrive here without valid entry clearance to seek asylum.

• Removed the section of Clause 40 that widens the offence of helping an asylum-seeker to include all assistance rather than just “for gain”.

• Added an amendment to ensure that Clause 15 on inadmissible asylum claims – if an asylum-seeker has travelled through a safe third country or has a connection to a safe third country – can only come into force when actual safe return agreements with third countries are in place.

• Amended the Bill to allow unaccompanied children in Europe to be united with family in the UK while they claim asylum.

• Amended it to commit the UK to resettling 10,000 refugees annually.

• Added a new clause to say the Bill must be enacted only in ways that comply with the UK’s obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol on the Status of Refugees.

• Amended the Bill to specify that powers of immigration and enforcement officers can only be used when they do not endanger life at sea (this in the context of Government plans to “push back” boats in the Channel).

And:

• Removed the high-profile Clause 9, which would allow the Home Secretary to remove citizenship without notice.

Once again, if the House of Lords acts as the bulwark of humanitarian and democratic values, it shows how far right ordinary politics has shifted.

The government may well attempt to overturn the amendments; even amended the Bill is poisonous; and it builds on decades of anti-refugee and anti-migrant legislation. It needs further gutting, and complete wrecking if possible. The left must escalate the protests – and push for a serious labour movement campaign to demolish the whole anti-migrant structure.
Barry Gardiner, Modi, and Gujarat

By Sacha Ismail

I hope readers were sad to be reminded, or shocked to learn, of the anti-Muslim pogroms in Gujarat in 2002 (Solidarity 626).

I wrote recently about Labour MP Barry Gardiner’s support for Narendra Modi and the Hindu right. Gardiner has vocally defended Modi over Gujarat specifically.

Gardiner’s presents himself as some sort of left-winger; he is a regular presence at labour movement events and demonstrations. After a union fringe meeting at Labour conference last year I argued with him about the Indian farmers’ struggle.

After a union protest about London Transport cuts in December, the argument continued. Defending his “friendship” with Modi, Gardiner praised his record specifically in Gujarat. When I raised the 2002 massacres, he responds that India’s Supreme Court had found Modi completely innocent. As explained in Solidarity 626, that is a gross misrepresentation on multiple levels.

In 2013, as Modi approached power nationally, after the UK government lifted a decade-long de facto ban on him coming here, Barry Gardiner defended Modi over Gujarat on the world stage.

Shortly after the ban was lifted, Gardiner invited Modi to the UK! Modi declined but Gardiner militantly defended the invitation, praising Modi.

Appearing on India’s NDTV in August 2013, Gardiner was challenged about this. After attempting to deny that Modi had ever been banned from the UK, he said:

“It’s a matter for the people of Gujarat who have now re-elected Narendra Modi in successive elections since he was first elected in 2001. They have seen fit to restore him to office. And it is not for me as a foreign politician to interfere in the process in any way.”

Apply this to any far-right leader around the world who has won an election. And in fact Gardiner did interfere, supporting Modi – inviting him to the UK, praising him and appearing on Indian TV to defend him, all in the run up to 2014 Indian election. (In 2019, when Modi was re-elected, Gardiner tweeted congratulating him, praising his commitment to “diversity”.)

Challenged again, Gardiner said: “It seems you have no respect for your own Supreme Court. The Supreme Court of India has looked at those allegations, I believe, on a number of occasions. And has absolved Mr Narendra Modi completely from those allegations...”

This a distortion of what the Supreme Court-appointed “Special Investigation Team” actually said; it ignores dire problems with that process; and in any case it whitewashes Modi in defiance of blatant facts.

Imagine if a “left” Labour MP engaged in this kind of apologism for Benjamin Netanyahu or Donald Trump; neither of whose records includes anything quite like the Gujarat massacre. ☐

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Serco workers win in-housing and pay rise

By Mark Simon

Two weeks of strike action by Serco workers at the Bart’s NHS Trust in London have ended with a major victory.

The strike, with big noisy picket lines and several well-supported demonstrations, moved Serco and the trust from a “1% and not a penny more” position to a 3% pay rise backdated to April 2021 plus £400. More importantly the strike ended contracting out of porters, cleaners and patient food staff across the Bart’s NHS Trust.

In-housing was the key demand of the strike. These services have been contracted out across the Trust for years, and in Whips Cross, Newham and Mile End Hospitals contracting out to various companies is more than a decade old. From May 2023 workers will be employed by the NHS Trust, and, in a ground-breaking agreement won by the strike and the tough stand of the Unite stewards, workers are guaranteed full NHS terms and conditions from day one. This will see some workers gaining a 15% rise in pay.

The strike was locally led by a strong group of Unite shop stewards. They have shown that it takes consistent day by day organising and a clear set of demands to win ballots and take effective strike action. It is a stark contrast to the national efforts of NHS unions, which have used failed ballots as an excuse not to act.

New uni strikes from 21 March

By a UCU member

After ten days of strikes across two disputes, ending 2 March, the University and College Union (UCU) leadership has called further strikes in the weeks beginning 21 and 28 March, with half the institutions out in each week.

Action Short of a Strike continues in the 68 institutions involved in the disputes, one of which centres on massive cuts to future pensions, and the other on “Four Fights” around pay, workload, casualisation and equality.

Management are still refusing to negotiate in the Four Fights dispute, and the threatened cuts to pensions were passed on the casting vote of the supposedly independent chair of the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) and take effect from 1 April. They will see six-figure sums slashed from the value of future pensions.

There is still the possibility of stopping them, but it will take a fight. It is clear that management are hoping to sit out the dispute, with one Vice-Chancellor telling the Guardian back in November: “I don’t care if it’s bloody, as long as the blood spills within the union”. We are still seeing what that attitude means in practice.

The UCU’s new action represents another five days per individual striker, but after ten days of strikes in the universities with dual mandates this past month, it also represents de-escalation.

Pressure

We need more action to put pressure on management, not less. Some institutions are already heading into the Easter break, and it will be late April before further strikes are viable. Meanwhile, the current mandate for action expires on 4 May, meaning the union has to convince members to turn out in sufficient numbers in reballots. If the strategy to win is not persuasive, there is a real risk of the dispute petering out.

There is some better news: in a local dispute, the Royal College of Art UCU branch has shown that determined action can win. After autumn strikes, an extended period of action short, and further strikes in February, they have won an end to the use of zero-hour contracts and assurances on employment rights, workloads and routes to permanency.

Meanwhile, Newcastle University UCU have pressurised management to back down on a threat to deduct full pay for refusal to reschedule lectures hit by the national strikes. However, at Queen Mary, University of London, deductions are going ahead and the branch is now balloting for further action. Other institutions continue to make threats.

We are calling for an urgent Special Higher Education Sector Conference of the UCU to address the dispute strategy. Branch motions calling for a SHESC under Rule 16.11 can be sent to Justine Mercer (jmercer@ucu.org.uk) and Paul Bridge (jbridge@ucu.org.uk) at headquarters.

GOSH strikers forge links

By Ollie Moore

Striking security guards at Great Ormond Street Hospital held a rally on Friday 4 March, with a further rally planned on Friday 11 March, as the strike nears its full 44 days.

The rally heard speeches from striking workers and supporters from a variety of unions, including RMT, whose members’ strike on London Underground had concluded the previous day. A delegation from the United Voices of the World union (UVW), including a striking GOSH worker, had visited the RMT picket line at Oxford Circus station.

The rally marched from the hospital to the offices of the GOSH charity to call on the hospital’s charity arm to support the workers’ demands. Security guards are demanding parity of conditions with directly-employed NHS staff. UVW also recently a delegation to a GMB protest at Lewisham Hospital on 7 March, where outsourced workers employed by ISS are fighting for a pay increase to £11.05 per hour.

GOSH strikers say they are prepared to take further action once their current strike concludes.

Union sets new strikes in GDST

By a Lewisham teacher

The National Education Union (NEU) has now named further strike dates, Tuesday-Wednesday-Thursday every week until the Easter holidays, for teachers in the 23 private schools run by the Girls Day School Trust (GDST).

The teachers have already completed six days of well supported strikes to defend their pensions against the threat of being removed from the Teachers Pension Scheme (TFS). The NEU-Naming these dates, an effective escalation, is entirely correct.

Having already won some small softeners from the GDST, members were dismayed when the management refused proposed ACAS talks. Members had decided to offer to waive the financial enticements offered to them in return for remaining in the TPS.

The new dates bring the management back to the negotiations and the strikes for 8-10 March have been suspended for the talks at ACAS. Solidarity does not believe that the strikes should have been suspended: we are more likely to win if we keep the pressure on during talks. However, as more dates have been named, they may be sufficient to win the dispute.

Rail cleaners strike again 12 March

By Ollie Moore

Cleaners employed by the contractor Churchill on multiple train companies across the south east of England will strike again on 12-14 March. Their strike on 23 February was the largest cleaners’ strike in mainline railway history. The next walkout will extend the action to 48 hours.

The cleaners are demanding a pay increase to £15 per hour, and a company sick pay scheme, although RMT’s ultimate demand is for jobs to be brought in-house, guaranteeing parity of terms and conditions with directly-employed staff, including pensions and staff travel benefits.

Statement

An RMT statement said: “Churchill’s treatment of cleaning staff who have risked their health and safety to work throughout the pandemic is a disgrace. Workers on low pay are much worse off now than 12 months ago and multi-million-pound contractor Churchill has failed to recognise that.”

Picket lines will be held throughout the region, including major London stations such as King’s Cross, St. Pancras, Victoria, and Stratford.

Circus station.

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GOSH strikers say they are prepared to take further action once their current strike concludes.
What we stand for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

workersliberty.org/join.awd

By Jayne Evans

On 2 March six Liverpool Labour councillors were suspended from the Labour party for refusing to vote for the Labour council’s proposed budget.

They are opposing the cuts that are being proposed by the Labour party at the behest of the Tory appointed commissioners, they are doing so following several years of corruption allegations and investigations, and they are also opposing the attacks on democracy in the Labour party that have been seen since Starmer’s election as leader.

The sequence of events is: Joe Anderson, who was Labour Mayor of Liverpool from 2012 to 2021, was arrested as part of an investigation into building and development contracts in Liverpool. He was arrested on suspicion of bribery and witness intimidation. He was suspended from the Labour party but not charged with any offence.

Candidates in the Labour party selection for the new Mayor were barred with no explanation. Anna Rothery, a long-standing Labour councillor of 16 years, was one of those stopped from standing. She subsequently left the Labour party and continues as an Independent councillor.

Their June 2021 Tories brought in commissioners who produced a report which has resulted in a budget of further cuts (the commissioners themselves have had a budget of £10 million to cover the cost of their investigation and report).

The Labour Group has gone along with the commissioners’ budget recommendations and has brought in a cuts budget.

Anna Rothery and six current Labour councillors refused to vote for the cuts: Alan Gibbons, Alfie Hince, Alison Clarke, Lindsey Melia, Rona Heron and Joanne Calvert.
The six were suspended when they made their decision to vote against the cuts known.

Poverty

£18.7 million in cuts will be made with the largest cut, £11.6 million, in adult social care. These come on the back of years of cuts that have increased poverty and inequality in the city.

In interviews Anna Rothery has declared that the press spin on her actions and that of the six refusing to vote for the cuts has been purposefully misleading. They are not the same as the 47 Labour councillors of the 1980s who were surgached and banned from office for delaying their budget. The seven didn’t call for an illegal budget. They submitted an alternative budget which was fully costed. She also explains the bullying and silencing of her views which led her to leave the Labour Party.

However, the move by the other six councillors comes against a backdrop of sections of the Liverpool left walking away from the Labour party following the election of Starmer. Some of the pro Corbyn left that joined when Corbyn got elected are looking for a way to leave the Labour party in a vain belief that they can build a big new Corbynite organisation outside Labour.

On Skwawk Talk, one of the six, Alan Gibbons, has said that they are looking to form an Independent Socialist party which they hope will spread across the country. From some, the decision to vote against the cuts now may have been more to do with looking for yet another scheme to launch an alternative to the Labour Party than with a serious attempt to build an anti-cuts left in the Labour party.

By a SOAS occupier

From Wednesday 23 February, a group of students at SOAS in London occupied the management corridor in our university for nine full days, until we were illegally evicted (dragged out) by private bailiffs late on the night of Thursday 3 March. The occupation has led to a big uptick in on-campus political organising, with over 30 students inside the occupation, and hundreds more gathering outside at times in supporting rallies.

The occupation demanded of the university management: accept the demands of the UCU and Unison workers’ disputes; accept and implement the demands of student-led campaigns; make a fundamental shift in the university to reflect “demarketisation and decolonisation”. Practically this means cutting international student fees to match UK students, cutting managers’ salaries to the average uni workers wage, increasing Sanctuary scholarships, and addressing the poor quality and exploitative accommodation that SOAS, like many unis, offers.

A central demand is the removal of Adam Habib, director of SOAS. The authoritarian crackdown on the occupation reflects his repressive handling of student protests when VC at Wits Uni in South Africa. Protests continue for the occupation’s demands, including Habib’s removal. A student and staff walk-out is being organised for Thursday 9 March, with more protests on Friday 10th.

The National Union of Students held a national “walkout and teach-in” on 2 March, centred on a rally at Tottenham Square, London, just round the corner from SOAS. Sadly, an hour into the event there were at most 200 people there, and many of those UCU strikers rather than students. NUS needs not only more left-wing policies, but also a reorientation towards organising and mobilising.

New protests follow SOAS occupation

A symbol of defiance

By John Cunningham

This week I wanted to cover a film which, somehow, reflects the horrors of the Putin regime.

“Z” has oddly been taken as a pro-Putin symbol in Russia, but the 1969 file Z, by Greek director Costas-Gavras, was on very different lines.

It concerns an investigation by an unnamed magistrate into the murder of a prominent Greek Deputy (based on the Grigoris Lambrakis of the United Democratic Left, murdered in 1963). It is adapted from the novel by Vassilis Vassilikos, with music by Mikis Theodorakis (under house arrest at the time). The parallel with 1960s Greece is clear, although this is never mentioned.

The authorities claim the murder as a traffic accident (the Deputy is clubbed to death outside a political rally) but before they can happen there is a reorientation towards organising and mobilising.

The murder and resulting investigation precipitate a crisis, the government resigns, and elections are called but before they can happen there is a military coup.

Z in the title refers to the Greek expression Zai, “he lives”. It became a symbol of defiance in Greece.

Liverpool cuts producing Labour split
Going for clear anti-Putin line

John Moloney

The National Executive Committee of our union, PCS, will discuss the Russian war on Ukraine at its meeting on Wednesday 9 March. The motion that will be tabled is a straightforward condemnation of Russia’s invasion and a call for Russian withdrawal.

It’s possible amendments will be tabled, but I haven’t picked up any pushback from any quarter within the union against that position, so I hope that the union’s formal position, once agreed, will be unambiguous. The motion also calls for the UK to open its borders to refugees.

Our consultative ballot for action over the cost of living crisis is continuing. It closes 21 March. We need a final push to get the vote out. Part of the purpose of the ballot was to stress the union and in particular engage our activist base after the long Covid pause. After the ballot we will have a wealth of information on how the different parts of the union campaigned. That will give us a firm base from which to propose improvements to our organising culture.

Members at Atos are considering an improved offer on pay following their vote for strikes, and members at the British Council are discussing next steps after returning a vote in favour of strikes over staffing cuts. PCS has also recently donated to strike funds for United Voices of the World (UVW) members at Great Ormond Street Hospital, and IWGB members working as couriers for Just Eat/Stuart.

I’ll also be proposing we help finance a UVW legal case which will soon heard in the Employment Appeal Tribunal (EAT). UVW won a landmark legal decision at Employment Tribunal against Royal Parks, contending that outsourcing represented a form of indirect racial discrimination. Royal Parks is now appealing that; the case will be fought at EAT. Clearly it has enormous significance for the entire working class. I believe PCS should support that case, especially as we have dual-carding members in UVW and PCS at Royal Parks, and we organised the strikes with UVW.

I’ve also been supporting a local PCS branch in a campaign against racism in the Cabinet Office. Our pressure forced the Cabinet Office to commit to a review of all its practices in terms of racial equality, but at a meeting on 7 March, the branch has decided it doesn’t believe the department is carrying out that review seriously, and have voted to withdraw from it. I’ll continue liaising with the branch as it discusses the next steps for the campaign.

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

Tube: now follow up on 1-3 March impact!

By Jay Dawkey

Two days of solid action across the Tube network (1 and 3 March) have bolstered the fight against proposed job cuts, the tearing-up of agreements, and the upcoming attacks on the pension scheme.

The strike was more effective than the company predicted, and caused much wider disruption than even we could have hoped for. The knock-on effect on 2 and 4 March, particularly the lack of shunters, meant the service remained up the wall till well past the morning peak. For many pickets this was their first time on strike, with no strike of station staff since 2017. Pickets were lively, often organised by new reps, and got new members involved despite the rain!

Some drivers were worried about calling action without Aslef, the other union with London Underground (LU) drivers. RMT members proved they could shut the job down and are powerful across the combine both in density and organisation.

Aslef and TSSA members largely respected the pickets. Where a few did show up, they could barely get any trains moving. Aslef, who have a live ballot, should be encouraged to use their mandate and strike alongside RMT. TSSA should ballot its members as a matter of urgency.

Now we are past the opening salvo, we have to turn to the next steps in the dispute. 31 March is the publication of the pension review. Reps and activists should be making the case now for more action, announced as soon after that date as the two-week legal period of notice allows. At that point Aslef could also decide to join the action. The launch of Crossrail in the coming months, which TfL wants to go smoothly, could provide significant leverage.

Selective action

As well as all-out strikes, we need to think about the possibility of rolling and selective action, calling out different groups at key times. We know from the downsizing tools of the shunters and maintainers that such action has the potential to be disruptive without everyone out at once. The Night Tube drivers dispute also remains ongoing, and the de-escalation of that action to only cover the Central and Victoria lines should be turned around. Action was most effective when the three other existing Night Tube lines were called out. Action covering Night Tube hours in the run up to the new timetables due in April to return the service on all five lines should be seriously considered.

Now is also the time to step up the political campaign around TfL funding cuts. Sadiq Khan can continue to call for RMT to work with TfL but he is doing nothing to challenge the cuts. At best London Assembly members and Labour MPs are wringing their hands.

Public support was a mixed bag on 1 and 3 March, as always, but many people understand that a race to the bottom is neither fair nor desirable as the cost of living crisis intensifies. Despite some fairly lurid smears from the Telegraph, the invective that was previously a mainstay of the press was more limited this time round.

As this battle continues, the attacks from the media are likely to increase. The labour movement needs to rally to the defence of a publicly run, accessible and affordable transport network. A community campaign like Hands Off London Transport (HOLT) is much needed.

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Russia’s anti-war people still defiant
By Michael Baker

On Friday 4 March, Russia introduced a new law was introduced allowing up to 15 years of imprisonment for promoting “fake” messaging about Ukraine – including on placards, making public protesting potentially much riskier. Yet Sunday 6 March saw large protests across the country, and social media channels (for those still able to access them) were flooded with images and videos of tasered bodies, protestors packed into riot vans like sardines, and one particularly shocking recording of a young woman being beaten by a police officer in Moscow for refusing to cooperate during her interrogation.

In Solidarity 626, I reported an OVDInfo statistic that over 5,000 people had been arrested since 24 February in connection with anti-war protests. A week later, that same figure is now over 13,000. The silver lining is that, for the time being, the Russian people do not appear to be bending under the considerable strain of police violence and state repression. The protests continue en masse, and the Russian anti-war movement remains an incredibly impressive force, both in its support for the Ukrainian people, and its hatred for the absurd violence and naked imperialism of the Russian president.

The Russian government has stepped up its repressive measures against the infrastructure of the country’s liberal opposition and independent press, too.

On 28 February, Memorial International, an NGO dedicated to cataloguing and preserving records of repression and mistreatment in the USSR, was formally liquidated by the Supreme Court after a denied appeal. On 3 March, Memorial’s now-defunct offices were searched by law enforcement officials for eleven hours. After the mass-designation of “foreign agents” over the last year, Putin’s government seems ready to take more concrete action to quash dissent – all it needed was a plausible excuse to begin.

Early March has seen a media crackdown unlike anything in recent memory, which has focused primarily on the internet as a means of accessing information on Ukraine and the protest movement. The government blocked the websites of over twenty independent news sources for their “fake” (accurate) reporting on the “special operation” (war) in Ukraine. Two of the sites, Dozhd (which also runs a major TV channel) and Znak, have decided to stop their work altogether.

Most of the journalists from these sites, fearing the increasing risk of staying in the country and continuing their work, have either already left Russia or are busy making arrangements to leave. The social media sites Facebook, Twitter and TikTok, as well as the Apple and Google app stores, have also now been blocked within Russian territory. The majority of the blocked sites are still operational, and accessible through the use of a VPN, but a large portion of the population will lack either the technological know-how or the willpower to go through a lengthy installation process, and instead they will be left at the mercy of the state-approved narrative.

Alexey Navalny, the figurehead for Russia’s last wave of protests in summer 2020, has utilised his ongoing trial as a means to agitate. Navalny noted in the courtroom that the new laws against organising protests could only result in a prison sentence – a fairly tame threat for a man serving an effective life sentence already. He encouraged Russian people to protest against the invasion on every weekday at 7pm, and at 2pm on weekends, in the main square of their respective cities. Vague and unorganised calls to protest are not ideal, but for the most part people still seem to have found means of gathering and arranging large numbers to protest. □

Energy workers act against Putin’s war
By Vicki Morris

Workers at National Grid’s terminal on the Isle of Grain, Kent, stopped the landing of a consignment of Russian liquefied natural gas (LNG) at the start of March. The workers, members of Unison, were facing the prospect of unloading the LNG because of a loophole in the Government’s new ban on Russian shipping: the ban does not extend to Russian cargo.

The union members could fall foul of the anti-union laws that ban political strikes if they refused to unload the cargo, and potentially lose their jobs.

As the Boris Vilkitsky, the ship carrying the LNG, approached Grain, Unison officials bought time for the branch by issuing a press release calling on the Government to clarify its position.

The attention provoked by that press release persuaded someone that the ship should not dock at Grain, and the ship was diverted. It ultimately docked in Brittany in France, where it was greeted by a Greenpeace inflatable carrying a banner that said “Fossil Fuels War”.

The move to boycott the Boris Vilkitsky came strongly from rank and file union members. Their branch chair Peter Read told the Unison press team: “Some of them were quite passionate about it and stated that there was no way they were going to do anything to unload the ship.”

Read polled branch members and found that two-thirds were prepared reluctantly to unload the gas but they also said “I would do it under duress and be uncomfortable about doing it...”, while a third of members replied: “I don’t care what the consequences are, I’m not doing it.”

To be clear, these workers were ready to make a radical gesture of self-sacrifice in order to protest against Putin’s war on Ukraine.

Unison later made the episode sound far from radical: “The union’s action had averted the possible risks to security at and around the site from protests and press descending en masse, together with reputational damage.” But this was, nevertheless, a radical protest.

The Isle of Grain comes under Medway Council in a less affluent part of Kent. It has a Conservative council and Conservative MPs and voted for Brexit. The Boris Vilkitsky episode is a welcome and precious example of workers’ independent organisation and readiness to show international solidarity.

The leader of the local Labour group, Vince Maple, told Kent Online: “Clearly workers here in Medway and particularly on the Isle of Grain want to show solidarity and support to Ukraine... “Any stop of an amount of electric or gas will have an impact... I think there has to be a recognition by all of us that sanctions of any form will have an impact – but most people will be willing to make these sacrifices to show support and solidarity for Ukraine.” Whatever about that, workers taking action against Russian aggression in the ways that they can certainly points to a better future. We must build on that.

Unison organises a number of workers in the formerly publicly owned energy utilities. They have discussed energy policy, including issues of a just transition and improving energy-efficiency of homes, at their sector conferences. This is an important group of workers for socialist environmentalists to engage with. □

• Other groups of workers have also acted against Putin: see page 6.

Meetings, events, campaigns: workersliberty.org/meetings
By Michael Elms

Couriers working for JustEat and their delivery subcontractor Stuart have been mounting a strike campaign which has now lasted over 10 weeks. The strike is now at a critical turning point. It has new potential to expand. But it urgently needs fresh donations to the strike fund. At the same time, we need to mobilise volunteers to support the dispute.

Couriers subcontracted by Stuart have been on strike since 6 December. On that day, Stuart finished the roll-out of a new pay structure which cut the base rate of pay per delivery by 24%. This was a devastating blow to drivers, who worked through the pandemic delivering food and medicine. Many were already struggling to make ends meet before the pay cut.

The strike began in Sheffield, and Sheffield has maintained a daily rhythm of strike action, targeting first McDonald’s, then Greggs: the two biggest delivery clients of JustEat/Stuart. The strikers’ strategy was always: spread to win. Couriers understood from the outset that there was no way they could cause the company enough economic pain to win if the strike remained stuck in one city alone.

Spread

Since then, the strike has spread and strike action has taken place in Sunderland, Middlesbrough, Blackpool, Huddersfield, Dewsbury, Chesterfield and Leicester. Daily or weekly strikes are still ongoing in most of those places.

Meanwhile, strike action has started to break out across the south of England: last week there were strikes in Colchester, Aldershot and Farnborough in Hampshire; and Ashford and Folkestone in Kent. This accelerating spread of the action means that the drivers’ strategy is finally paying off. The breakthrough into new groups of workers across the south of England opens up the possibility of creating a sharp crisis for JustEat and Stuart.

But this places new demands on the union’s strike fund and demands more efforts from volunteers. The IWGB is a small and under-resourced union. To keep the dispute going, especially as it is now set to rapidly expand, more money is required. The central staff of organisers in the union also needs assistance: more volunteers are needed to leaflet couriers, spread the word, and offer community support to picket lines.

Please put the model motion (bit.ly/mo-pe) and donate at tinyurl.com/StuartStrike or via Couriers & Logistics Branch account, 23-05-80, 17001094 □

SUPPORT UKRAINE’S RIGHT TO DECIDE ITS OWN FUTURE

See pages 2-11