

# Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



**For social ownership of the banks and industry**



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# Stop Tories running amok



The government is under attack from the Tory right wing for being too “soft” on immigration and on Brexit.

Probably the critics are setting out their stall for a Tory leadership contest after the next general election. The big fact for the labour movement is that this Tory government is already very right-wing even on the Tory scale, and feels itself under as much pressure from the further-right as from the labour movement and the left.

Sunak has always been on the Tory right. The government is pushing back against pay demands harder than private employers, and putting through a concentrated burst of repressive legislation – Public Order Act, Illegal Immigration Bill, Minimum Service Bill – unequalled even in the Thatcher days (when, for example, anti-union legislation came in careful stages over many years).

The Tories can push those laws through however big the probability that they will lose the next general election, and currently Labour commits to repeal only the Minimum Service law,

not the Illegal Immigration Bill (virtually abolishing the right to asylum), nor the Public Order Act, nor the Police Act 2022.

## NHS & social care

The Tories have been able to refuse to budge on NHS and social care funding as stubbornly as they have refused to budge on pay, or more so, and to keep their eyes fixed on getting some tax cuts to the well-off before the general election.

The strike wave since last June is a tremendous revival which has brought forward many new union activists and reps in many areas. As long as it remains a matter of disconnected sectional battles, though, with no accompanying political push, the Tories can do flank attacks on it, like the Minimum Service law or the [Police Act](#) and [Public Order Act](#), which may be used against strikes as well as protests.

The strikes can win a moderation of cuts in real pay, and that is something; but they will leave workers still toiling with and in cuts-ruined public services and with diminished scope to fight back in future.

The Unite union has launched a sort of political campaign, “For a Workers’ Economy”. It’s mostly just expressing a



wish for higher wages, though now, in a welcome move, it has started to agitate for public ownership of the energy sector. It’s been mostly online and on advertising hoardings rather than on the streets.

## Unions

Other unions have not done even that. The unions have not campaigned to pull Labour to restoring public services and repealing Tory laws.

*Solidarity* is working to revitalise the labour movement at all levels. Pushing forward the pay battle, pushing to coor-

dinate and unite them. Pushing for and building street protests against the Tory laws. Stirring up union branches and local Labour Parties to become more active and to put demands on union and Labour leaders.

Longer-term, this is the basis for building new forces for socialism, integrated into and based in the labour movement. Immediately, this is the best way to stop the Tories running amok and to give the labour movement enough new energy to force social policies on an incoming Labour government. □

# Education, community, and the markets



By Martin Thomas

The Royal Statistical Society asked MPs [three questions](#) to see if they had the background knowledge to understand reports on, say, measures to curb Covid, or economic prospects. However simplified, such reports require some understanding of probability and statistics.

48% of the MPs couldn’t answer the first question correctly, 36% the second, 84% the third. And yet 86% of MPs have university degrees (up from 53% in 1983).

Today’s capitalism has generated a huge, ramshackle education system. That is an advance over previous modes where the majority got scant schooling. But it is warped by being a system of “exam factories” and “certificate factories”. It is inefficient at developing



the basis for informed public discussions with common points of reference, let alone a rich world of culture.

It is moderately serviceable as a system of economic “signalling”. Employers can gauge that degrees, or GCSEs, “signal” some industriousness and adaptability, and an aptitude for writing assignments on time. The system also generates, haphazardly, a cohort

of qualified scientists and engineers, though channelling many into socially-useless jobs like hedge-fund “quants”.

## Markets

The system is regulated by markets, job markets for graduates, pseudo-markets via exam grades for schools. And in odd ways. You can do ok as an engineering graduate, on maybe £30,000-plus in your first year. Britain is short of en-

gineers. You can do better in the Graduate Area Manager scheme of Aldi supermarkets. It will start you on £50,000 if you have a 2:1 degree in anything from art to zoology, and irrespective of whether you’ve forgotten everything you crammed for your exams.

## Organisation

In modern capitalism, more managers are “qualified”, but qualified like Aldi’s. They may know little about the shop-floor job. Their qualifications may make them better at doing each other down in capitalist competition, but not at organising work to be cooperative, creative, as little burdensome as possible, and instructive.

Many find themselves on the wrong side of the “credentials ceiling”, from ill-luck or just because they do better at hands-on creation than at desk work. Or find that the main thing school teaches them is that they are “failures”. Or feel resentful, and as much

and more against those in their range of view – better-off workers with degrees or other credentials – as against the top few. Such resentment seems to be a factor in the rise of right-wing populist voting.

We fight for more education. But not just for “more of the same”. For education less regulated by the markets and by credential-signalling for the markets, and more connected to creative work. For broad education which allows those with diverse talents to develop as well as those with talents for desk work. For education which is life-long and allows second and third chances.

For education free of fees. For education which can develop, not just individuals who do well in markets, but an informed community of public discussion and a rich and diverse world of culture.

(I promised this follow-up to a previous column, in *Solidarity* [669](#), earlier; here it is at last). □





On 22 May, Free Our Unions activists supported the TUC's last-minute emergency demonstration against the Minimum Service Bill, distributing our briefing on the anti-union laws and advertising our meeting "Where next in the fight against anti-strike laws?" with Nadia Whittome on [8 June](#).

Despite the TUC call, the demonstration was only around 1,000 at its peak. Many speeches focused on lobbying the next Labour government to repeal it. Jo Stevens MP claimed that Labour would repeal it, "no ifs, no buts".

Little was said about the other trade union laws which have shackled the labour movement since the 1980s, or about defying the legislation in the meantime. □

# Students criticise deflection tactic

By Sam Myerson

Against the ongoing campaign at Sheffield University over the securitisation of campus and policing of student organising, Andy Winter, the university Chief Operating Officer, responded that the private-investigator firm Inter-sol Global had also been paid to investigate cases of sexual misconduct.

The UK-wide campaign Not on My Campus has replied with a [statement](#) condemning

the use of "sexual misconduct as a way to deflect criticism" on "hiring external investigators to probe the political protests of students".

It condemns the university's spending on investigations into student protests while universities cite lack of resources as a "barrier for expanding support and prevention programmes" on sexual misconduct.

Meanwhile 11 students at Manchester University face [penalties](#) after a long-running

rent-strike campaign did an occupation in the last semester.

The university sought a possession order, and called in bailiffs to forcibly remove the occupiers. Footage and images posted to social media showed heavy-handed tactics.

An [open letter](#) is in circulation. Sheffield campaigners call on all to sign it, support the right to protest, free speech, and the right to organise on campus.

In Sheffield, students con-



tinue to demand that all investigations and proceedings against protesters be

dropped: sign the statement at [linktr.ee/sheffieldinvestigation](https://linktr.ee/sheffieldinvestigation). □

## Strikes

**From 20 April:** Higher Education workers (UCU) marking and assessment boycott

**23-25 May:** Staff at the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (Unite) strike

**25 May:** City of London Corporation staff at various sites (Unite and GMB) strike

**23-25 May; 6-8 June:** Workers at Prendergast schools in Lewisham strike against academisation (NEU and GMB)

**From 24 May** (25-26-30-31 May, 1-5-6-7-8 June) SOAS academic staff (UCU) strike

**25-27 May:** Heathrow Air-

port security workers (Unite) strike

**31 May and 3 June:** Train drivers at multiple TOCs (Aslef) strike

**2 June:** Rail workers at multiple TOCs (RMT) strike

**14-16 June:** (ends 7am 17 June) junior doctors in England (BMA) strike

## Ballots

**12 May-9 June:** Amazon workers at warehouses in Mansfield and Rugeley (GMB) ballot for strikes

**15 May-27 June:** Senior doctors (BMA) ballot for action over pay

**15 May-28 July:** Teachers in England (NEU) ballot for action over pay. Nasuwt rebal-lots 15 May-12 June (in 6th form colleges) and 5 June-10 July (in schools), and NAHT 15 May-31 July. ASCL will start its ballot in June.

**23 May-23 June:** NHS nurses (RCN) re-ballot for industrial action

**23 May-4 July:** Local government workers (Unison) ballot for action over pay and conditions

**25 May-14 June:** Royal Mail postal workers (CWU) hold referendum on employer's offer on pay and conditions.



## Upcoming meetings

Workers' Liberty meetings are open to all, and unless otherwise stated those below are online over zoom. We have many local (in-person) meetings, [see online](#).

**Sunday 28 May, 2pm:** Socialist Feminist Reading Group: Betraying Big Brother – Leta Hong Fincher. Ruskin Park, London

**Thursday 8 June, 7pm:** Free Our Unions, Anti-union laws: where now in the fight? with Nadia Whittome MP

**Sunday 11 June, 11am:** Environmental Study Group, Zoom

**Friday-Sunday, 14-16 July:** Ideas for Freedom 2023, London, a weekend of socialist debate and discussion.

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





# Qatar, the ILO and the unions



Eric Lee

By Eric Lee

Six months ago, news broke that Belgian police had arrested the newly-elected general secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) as part of the “Qatargate” scandal.

The government of Qatar was accused of paying bribes to several members of the European Parliament – and to Luca Visentini, the ITUC leader, in exchange for softening criticism of the Gulf state’s record on labour rights. Visentini’s predecessor, Sharan Burrow, had increasingly expressed support for “reforms” carried out by the Qatari regime, though she was not implicated in the scandal.

In the months that followed, the ITUC removed Visentini from his post and is trying hard to distance itself from the scandal. But the issue of Qatari influence in the labour movement is bigger than the ITUC, as the *Guardian* [reported](#) on 16 May.

According to the newspaper, the International Labour Organization (ILO) “is facing a backlash over the nomination of Qatar to chair its flagship annual



conference” which takes place every June in Geneva.

Leading the criticism of the ILO for giving such prominence to the Qatari government is the ITUC itself. According to the *Guardian* report, the acting ITUC General Secretary Luc Triangle “has written to the UN body to express ‘strong concerns’ about Qatar’s likely presidency of the conference” and warns the ILO of “reputational risk” if it goes ahead with the appointment. The ITUC letter specifically mentions “allegations” that “attempts have been made to influence decision makers in the European Union in a highly inappropriate manner” though without, apparently, naming its own former General Secretary, Visentini.

The ITUC letter is not available on the organisation’s website, but a press release from just two months ago reflects a somewhat different view of the ILO role in Qatar. “The ITUC recognises the ILO’s role in striving to ensure the rights

of workers in Qatar, especially migrant workers,” it said.

Under Triangle’s leadership, the ITUC has clearly taken a more critical approach. He told the *Guardian* that with “this letter we wanted to make clear to the ILO president that we are absolutely unhappy with this proposal because it undermines the credibility of the ILO.”

The ILO seems completely unfazed by the criticism. Just a few days before the publication of the *Guardian* report, the ILO website announced that an important conference on “occupational heat stress” had been held – in Qatar. Among those speaking were ILO officials and representatives of the Qatari government. One of those was Ali bin Samikh al-Marri, the Qatari Minister of Labour who has been implicated in the Qatargate scandal.

## Representatives

To be fair to the ILO, discussing heat stress in a country where large numbers of migrant workers died building facilities for the FIFA World Cup might have made sense – except that it is not clear if any workers actually attended the event. The ILO press release mentioned “workers’ representatives” from the Arab states participating, but the only group named was the “National Committee of Labour Committees of

Saudi Arabia”. That organisation is not part of the ITUC and a Google search for it produced no results. When I wrote to the ILO press office to enquire which other “worker representatives” participated in the conference, I received no reply.

The decision of the ITUC’s new leadership to distance itself from the previous policy of shameless whitewashing of the Qatari regime is a good beginning. But unions must do much more – and pressure on the ITUC must come from below, meaning from national trade union centres like the TUC in Britain and its affiliated unions.

As for the ILO, its tripartite character means that collusion with authoritarian regimes seems to be baked into the organisation, despite all the good work it does to promote workers’ rights and better conditions for working people.

Unions have successfully put pressure on the ILO to not recognise dictatorial, anti-worker regimes like Belarus and Myanmar. But much more needs to be done – including making sure that the International Labour Conference next month is not chaired by a Qatari minister implicated in the cash-for-influence scandal in Brussels. □

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

# Stalinists still lying about Hungary 1956



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

In recent years it has become widely accepted, even by Communist Party members, that Hungary 1956 was no counter-revolution, and that the Russian invasion was wrong.

So it came as a genuine shock to read a piece in the *Morning Star* of 15 May, headed: “Despite its best efforts, you can still see socialism in Budapest” with a sub-heading that includes the words “Infamous for the misunderstood events of 1956”. By “misunderstood” it’s clear that the author (one John Pateman) does not mean the Stalinist lies about a “counter-revolution” – quite the contrary.

The piece is a sort of travel guide to the relics of what Pateman calls “the socialist period of development... from April 1945... to October 1989.”

Pateman recommends a visit to the Soviet Military Plot in Kerepsie cemetery where you can (presumably) honour Janos Kadar (leader of the Hungarian CP 1956-88) and “party members killed during the 1956 counter-revolution.”

According to Pateman, the (reformist) CP leader Imry Nagy was “executed for his role in the 1956 counter-revolution.” In the course of his turgid travelogue, Pateman uses the term “counter-revolution” to describe what happened in 1956 three times, and puts scare-quotes round the word “uprising”. He claims that “The Hungarian people... are also clear that during the socialist period the standard of living of the majority of the population improved; there was full employment, secure housing, free education and health care, social benefits and a wide range of cultural and sports facilities.”

You do have to wonder why, then, tens of thousands of workers, students, peasants and soldiers rose up and fought. No doubt Pateman would tell you they were all “fascists” while spitting on their memory.

What really happened? On 23 October 1956 tens of thousands of Hungarians rose up in Budapest to demand democratic socialism, land reform, equal treatment of national minorities, workers’ control of the factories and the removal of the hard-line Stalinists from the government.

The government failed to crush the movement and eventually the Russian army was sent in. The soldiers were told they were fighting fascists but this lie was soon exposed and many soldiers even handed their weapons to the protesters. The movement spread across Hungary. An estimated 5,000 regional councils involving over 500,000 workers, peasants and soldiers sprang up.

In early November the Kremlin sent in new troops but they were met by fierce resistance from mutineer Hungarian army regiments, workers’ militias and heroic individuals. A general strike was called but after two weeks the exhausted revolutionaries were finally defeated. Many of the leaders were executed and over 200,000 Hungarians fled to the west.

The forerunner of the *Morning Star*, the *Daily Worker*, had sent a correspondent to cover these events. Peter Fryer was a longstanding member of the British Communist Party but also a good journalist and an honest man. One of his reports read: “If the Soviet intervention was necessary to put down counterrevolution, how is it to be explained that some of the fiercest resistance of all last week was in the working-class districts of Újpest, in the north of Budapest, and Csepel, in the south – both pre-war strongholds of the

Communist Party? Or how is the declaration of the workers of the famous steel town of Sztálinváros to be explained: that they would defend their Socialist town, the plant and houses they had built with their own hands, against the Soviet invasion?”

Unsurprisingly, his reports began to be censored, so sent his material to the *New Statesman* and the American Trotskyist paper *The Militant*. He was suspended from the party before resigning, along with over 7,000 others. The *Daily Worker*’s cartoonist James Friell also left the party, but not before telling the Stalinist editor John R Campbell: “How could the *Daily Worker* keep talking about a counter-revolution when they have to call in Soviet troops? Can you defend the right of a government to exist with the help of Soviet troops? Gomulka said a government which has lost the confidence of the people has no right to govern”. □



# Anti-LGBTQ law mooted in Georgia



**Women's Fightback**

By Katy Dollar

Mamuka Mdinaradze, chair of the parliamentary faction of the ruling Georgian Dream party, said on 3 May that "the majority will not consider a bill to ban LGBTQ propaganda in Georgia."

The project was initiated on May 2 by the anti-gay "Conservative Movement" party with the TV company "Alt-Info", which is seen as pro-Russian.

The party had proposed to amend the law "On meetings and demonstrations" to prohibit "propaganda of

non-traditional sexual orientation". It wanted to:

- Ban meetings and demonstrations where propaganda of a non-traditional sexual orientation may take place.
- Prohibit meetings or demonstrations "during which there may be any statements and appeals directed against any religious movement" or which may incite "national, regional, religious or social discord".

Participants could be fined three thousand lari, almost £1,000, or face "administrative imprisonment" for up to 25 days; organisers, five thousand lari or up to 30 days.

The draft was similar to legislation that has been passed in Russia. The ruling party initially showed signs of support but backed off.



Mamuka Mdinaradze

Over the past two days, the Imedi TV channel has devoted two long pieces on air to a sociological study conducted in the United States, according to which the number of people who identify themselves as LGBTQ has increased there.

Mdinaradze said the ruling party

would not support the draft.

"First, for legal reasons.

"Secondly, there is a pragmatic consideration: such a law may become more favorable for LGBT propagandists and radical forces that build their entire narrative around it.

"Thirdly, many members of our team believe that healthy propaganda should be opposed to unhealthy propaganda, and not legal mechanisms..."

LGBT and democracy organisations fear the proposal may have been used to test the waters and see if movement in favour of restrictions can be built from below. There have been frequent attacks on the LGBT+ community over recent years, with the support of right-wing politicians and the Georgian Orthodox Church. □

# Repression against anti-war activists in Russia

By Michael Baker

Action from Russia's civil society, labour movement, and individual protestors continues. It is undeniably at a low ebb, but may be the base to build a larger and more resilient movement at a future stage, and aid the Ukrainian resistance in their fight for self-determination.

The Russian anti-war movement has faced severe and broad repression, with laws tightening and punishments

being given both to experienced activists who could organise anti-war activity, and average people who might otherwise be tempted in taking part in street protest or other actions. An article in the [Financial Times](#) (19 May) by Dan Storeyev, from the Russian protest-tracking group OVD-Info, is a good basis for understanding how Putin's repressive measures over the



An earlier derailment

last several years force protest off the streets and restrict the action of Russian civil society.

On the evening of 20 May, a cargo train in the Zabaikale region of Russia was derailed, with eleven carriages coming off the tracks. While no official explanation has been given, this follows a pattern of action taken by underground rail saboteurs, active sporadically across Russia and Belarus, using small explosive charges to derail trains and prevent them from transporting materials to the Russian army in Ukraine. The cargo train had minimal people onboard, and the derailment caused no casualties.

Activists who engage in more "risky" anti-war activity – usually either rail sabotage or throwing Molotov cocktails at empty military enrolment offices – are often not covered by the financial and legal aid provided by larger Russian NGOs, which have an explicit "non-violence" statement in their codes of conduct preventing them from providing help to "violent" protest.

Because of this, the work being done by the group [Solidarity Zone](#) is important, rais-

ing funds to hire trusted lawyers for defendants who have been accused of "violent" protest methods. The first full sentence on such charges has just been given out: Kirill Butylin received 13 years of imprisonment for an act of arson on an enlistment office in February 2022. No anti-war activist should be on trial for trying to stop an unjust war; if the least we can do is ensure they do not face a kangaroo court alone, we still have a responsibility to do that.

## Arrests

Seven workers have been arrested during an ongoing dispute over wages at the UAZ automobile factory in Ulyanovsk. The factory, one of several in the Ulyanovsk "Military Defence Complex", produces largely all-terrain and 4X4 vehicles for the Russian military. 50 workers at the factory downed tools one hour before the end of the workday on Wednesday 17 May and called for a meeting with management, in which they demanded a wage equal to other industrial jobs in the same city. The factory management denied any disruption, instead calling the incident a "planned meeting with personnel".

Details of the following few days are unclear, but the seven workers were taken to a regional office of the Interior Ministry and detained, reportedly based on a statement by the factory owner regarding

"illegal actions". While the seven are expected to be released shortly, workers at the factory released a video message saying that they believed the management to be "using politicians who hadn't visited the factory in several years to further their own interests".

The website 73Online reports a private source highlighting the management's fear that the factory would miss deliveries for orders placed by the Russian MoD.

It said that "after increased internet activity, Siloviki [FSB and other state authorities] visited the factory". □

## Telegraph gets it wrong

By Michael Baker

An open letter to the [Telegraph](#), signed by over 40 academics, has condemned Oxford University Student Union for disinviting the Oxford Union debating society from the annual freshers' fair. The letter claims the move had been motivated by the Oxford Union's upcoming event with former academic Kathleen Stock, known for her denunciations of pro-trans-rights groups like Stonewall.

This open letter gets a number of significant details wrong, largely as a result of a misleading article in the same newspaper a couple of days prior. Oxford SU did vote to disinvite the Oxford Union (a private organisation not affiliated to the university, despite having a membership of almost entirely Oxford students). But the

motion passed discussed the Union's internal culture, including constant complaints of harassment, abuse and sexual assault that the organisation shows little interest in resolving. The motion makes no mention of Stock, "cancel culture", transphobia, the speakers the union invites, or in fact the events the union puts on.

The Union's backlash is in large part due to the income it makes at the university freshers' fair – a key opportunity to sell new undergraduates on the £300 annual membership fee.

An open letter has been circulated around the university's student body, calling on the lead signatories of the [Telegraph](#) letter to retract it and issue an apology to the university's LGBTQ+ student organisations. □



**Activist Agenda**

The inaugural meeting for a united campaign in solidarity with battles against Beijing repression (Chinese workers, Uyghurs, HK, etc.) is on [3 June](#), 1:30pm to 5pm at Birkbeck University of London. The new campaign will have its first outing the next day, 4 June, taking part in the protest organised by "China Deviants" to mark the 34th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre. A rally in Trafalgar Square from 5pm to 7pm will be followed by a march to the Chinese Embassy (8pm). □

- Links for campaigns and motions at [workersliberty.org/agenda](#)





# From here to “two states”



## Debate

By Barry Finger

I have no broad disagreements with the political conclusions of Ollie Moore's article "Israel-Gaza: no security without peace" (*Solidarity* 672). My problem is with the journey.

Perhaps I'm reading too much into this, but the framing of the piece seems politically misplaced. Ollie appears to suggest that the air strike that killed the Islamic Jihad commanders who had instigated the attack against Israel is a crime, because it occurred after a ceasefire had been agreed upon, but before it was implemented. This harkens back to the schoolyard complaint that "it all started when he hit me back."

My more serious reservation is that raising the asymmetry of power, as Ollie does, in itself clarifies nothing. If I am robbed at gunpoint, there is clearly a power imbalance in play at the point of interaction. But behind me stands the whole apparatus of the state – its police, justice bureaucracy and prison system. And that's a far greater power imbalance and one that may ultimately prove far more devastating to the robber than the loss of my wallet is to me. Must we therefore stand with the criminal, for fear of standing with the victim and thereby with the capitalist state, one degree removed?

What conclusions can be drawn from framing conflicts in terms of such "power imbalances?" If my assailant is a desperately poor individual and my wealth is the cause of his distress, it may oblige socialists to stand in moral solidarity with the lesser criminal against the greater.

But if the target of the bandit is a worker who just got paid, our obligations – I think – are to stand with the worker and by involuntary inference with the capitalist state, which safeguards the system of exploitation under which the worker is paid and astrides a system to which we are opposed.

Is that a betrayal of our values? It is, if we only seek vengeance for the worker without consideration for the circumstances of the criminal. We cannot give the state carte blanche to run roughshod over the rights of the criminal. We do not, in other words, support the victim by giving uncritical support to the state. We seek social justice to attenuate the causes and appeal of criminality and to make the victims of criminality whole, even when the scope for capitalist justice reform is stacked against such pursuits.

When bombs are falling on Ashkelon or Tel Aviv, the residents are powerless

to defend themselves. That is clearly the immediate power imbalance. The bombs were not provoked by the action of these civilians. And yet behind the powerless residents of Israel – Jewish and Arab – stands a highly evolved military apparatus capable of exacting overwhelming harm and destruction. And that is a far different power imbalance.

Where does Ollie's analysis fit in here? This is where I lose the thread. Is Israel the greater criminal because it, along with Egypt, imposes an arms embargo on Gaza? Is this arms embargo – by broadly targeting materials that can be fashioned into weapons and terror tunnels – so sweeping that it is the primary cause of Gaza's deprivations? Does Islamic Jihad seek to break the embargo so that Palestine can build viable state infrastructures: of schools, medical facilities, water/sewer systems and electrical grids? Does Israel even oppose the use of materials for such purposes?

If we held the opinion that Israel seeks to squash a viable Palestinian state in Gaza by means of its embargo, and PIJ is a movement of resistance to that, then we would give critical support to the resistance. We would support PIJ in its effort to break the Israeli's embargo, while opposing its authoritarian political orientation against Palestinian democrats, women, gays, socialists and atheists. But Ollie doesn't make that case. It would be indeed absurd to attempt it.

### Ambition

PIJ aspires to "the liberation of the whole of Palestine and the liquidation of the Israeli entity, and the establishment of Islamic rule on the land of Palestine which guarantees the achievement of justice, freedom and equality." It aims to "inspire and mobilize the masses of the Islamic nation everywhere and urge them to fight the decisive battle with the Israeli entity." It has no real ambitions other than killing Israelis.

Is Islamic Jihad rather the lesser criminal simply because of the power imbalances between its army and the military of Israel? And are we therefore, as socialists, obliged to stand critically with PIJ, as we might with a bigger bully against a lesser bully?

In fact and to the author's credit, Ollie draws no such conclusions. Well, not exactly. Why then bring up power imbalances and embargos? And why compound this misdirection by asserting, behind the authority of Anshel Pfeffer, that Palestinian lives are sold on the cheap to save the hides of venal Israeli



unfortunately, would have a more moderate Israeli regime. Hamas, happy no doubt in seeing its rivals routed, refused. This time.

If socialists are going to imply, and I read Ollie perhaps wrongly this way, that Israel has no right to target terrorists actively involved in terrorism against Israelis, we will be speaking to ourselves. But again, we cannot extend carte blanche support to the Israeli state. Yes to qualified support for strikes against PIJ; no

support for a war against Gaza. And, no confidence that this Israeli government won't use this or any future provocation to widen the conflict.

The Israeli operation, which lasted five days and decimated PIJ's leadership and rocket launching capabilities, was an unqualified success for the IDF and Netanyahu. And Ollie is quite right to assert the symbiotic relationship between Palestinian and Israeli extremists – the Israeli government and, in this case, Hamas – was clearly on display.

Where, then, does this leave the anti-occupation forces? The Israeli anti-occupation movement is by and large also a two-state movement, a peace movement and a pro-democracy movement. The problem is that there is no mass Palestinian two-state peace movement of any consequence. The last influential voices for a genuine two-state solution were Issam Sartawi and Said Hammami, both assassinated by breakaway factions of the PLO decades ago.

The PA's position is ostensibly for two states, but two Palestinian Arab states: a Palestinian state without Jews in Gaza and the West Bank and an Arab majority state in Israel through the mass

politicians if not to weigh the relative criminality of the right wing Israeli political regime with that of Islamic fanatics? Israel has a rotten government, but this racist rightwing government did not escalate tensions with Gaza by intensifying the embargo. It did not provoke, but it was easily provoked. And that's what PIJ counted on.

For in the Middle East, politics is war by other means. Palestinian Islamic Jihad did not fire 1,500 rockets into Israel to break the blockade and improve sanitary conditions in Gaza or to show solidarity with the Israeli peace, pro-democracy and anti-occupation movements.

It, unlike Hamas, is not merely aligned with Iranian imperialism, but is an integral arm of that imperialist archipelago. Its members voluntarily converted to Shi'ism as proof positive of their loyalty. Unlike Hamas, which sources its arms from multiple sources, PIJ is entirely reliant on Iran. According to an uncredited report on Israel's TV channel 12 (15 May), Iran has paid PIJ \$5 million per day of fighting. The purpose of these actions was to draw Hamas into a wide scale confrontation with Israel and to ignite a broader Mideast conflict that Iran could exploit. The reactionary Israeli government took the bait. So,

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The Israeli operation, which lasted five days and decimated PIJ's leadership and rocket launching capabilities, was an unqualified success for the IDF and Netanyahu. And Ollie is quite right to assert the symbiotic relationship between Palestinian and Israeli extremists – the Israeli government and, in this case, Hamas – was clearly on display.

The PA's position is ostensibly for two states, but two Palestinian Arab states: a Palestinian state without Jews in Gaza and the West Bank and an Arab majority state in Israel through the mass

politicians if not to weigh the relative criminality of the right wing Israeli political regime with that of Islamic fanatics? Israel has a rotten government, but this racist rightwing government did not escalate tensions with Gaza by intensifying the embargo. It did not provoke, but it was easily provoked. And that's what PIJ counted on.

continued on page 7 →



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# West Bank surveillance echoes China

By Ben Tausz

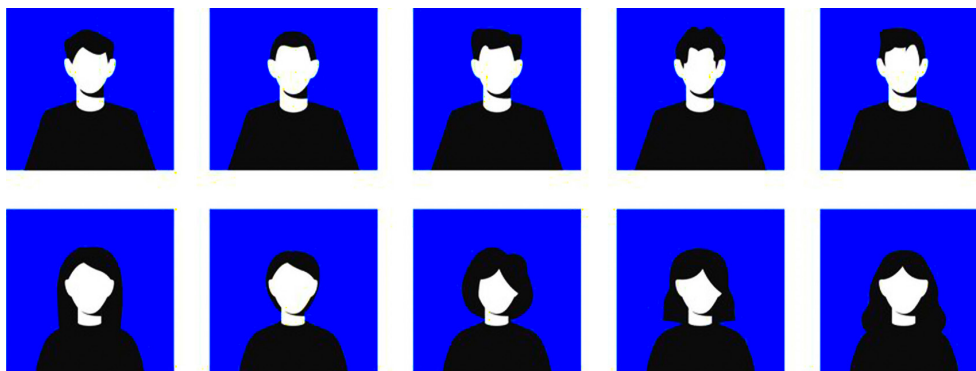
In a development that echoes the Chinese state's repressive methods against the Uyghur people, the Israeli military is monitoring Palestinians in the occupied territories with a vast and intrusive database of personal details. This database is connected to facial recognition cameras and smartphone apps that Israeli soldiers and settlers use to stop, scan, control and detain civilians.

The database and the apps have been described by former Israeli soldiers interviewed by the [Washington Post](#) and Breaking The Silence. BTS is an Israeli organisation of ex-soldiers campaigning against the occupation and the oppression of Palestinians; BTS leader Avner Gvryahu has denounced the tools as "another instrument of oppression and subjugation of the Palestinian people."

The so-called "Wolf Pack" database holds profiles and photographs of almost every Palestinian in the West Bank, and a security rating for each. Human Rights Watch (HRW) has [highlighted](#) the similarity to Xinjiang security services' IJOP (Integrated Joint Operations Platform) that collates and integrates myriad data sources on the Uyghur and other Turkic populations, and produces "trustworthiness" scores.

Israeli occupation soldiers are equipped with the "Blue Wolf" smartphone app. Units compete for prizes to collect more photographs of Palestinian civilians. Consent from the subjects is, of course, not required. In these exercises, and at stops, the app's facial recognition software matches individuals to the database, and flashes a colour alert to indicate whether the soldiers should allow them to pass, stop them, or arrest them.

Now, BTS has helped Amnesty International to [expose](#) the extremely dense networks of facial-recognition cameras in Hebron (dubbed "Red Wolf") and East Jerusalem ("Mabat 2000"). These



escalate the automatic recording of Palestinians in biometric databases without their knowledge or consent, and the control of their movements with automated judgements. Palestinians have even been blocked from reaching their own homes.

Similarly, Uyghurs in China stopped at checkpoints, or caught on CCTV, are digitally identified, and stopped or taken away based on the nebulous "trustworthiness" ratings. Amnesty even identified that the Israeli military is using cameras from the same manufacturer, Hikvision, as the Xinjiang surveillance regime.

Wolf Pack does not monitor Israeli Jewish settlers in the West Bank – it discriminatorily targets Palestinians, just as Han Chinese people in Xinjiang are not subject to the same repression as Uyghurs. Instead, the "White Wolf" app enables settler volunteers – who already harass, assault and kill Palestinians with relative impunity – to stop and check Palestinians.

Yaser Abu Markhyah, a Palestinian resident of Hebron interviewed by the *Washington Post*, explained the suffocating psychological and social effect of the surveillance regime: "We no longer feel comfortable socializing because cameras are always filming us", and that relatives living in less-surveilled neighbourhoods no longer come to visit. Another Hebron resident, Eyad, told Amnesty how the crackdown has "killed all forms of social life" in

their once-thriving neighbourhood.

HRW has highlighted the similarity between such testimony and those of interviewees from the Uyghur Region: "People didn't visit each other... If someone... crosses the street to come to talk to me, I'd run away."

It is consistent with other former soldiers' reports to BTS about Israeli strategy in the West Bank. The euphemism "demonstrating presence" refers to practices designed to create a "feeling of persecution" or "of being chased" among the civilian population. Pop-up checkpoints, constant monitoring, night raids on the homes of civilians not suspected of any crime, are all meant to [instil fear](#) in the population and tell them that soldiers could be anywhere, at any moment.

Issa Amro, an activist and neighbour of Abu Markhyah, suggested another motivation – to create conditions so suffocating in certain neighbourhoods that Palestinians move out and settlers can move in. Indeed, many residents have already left that part of Hebron.

Connections between the methods of repression used against Palestinians, Uyghurs and other groups are not new. Chinese security services [borrowed heavily](#) from Israeli, US and European states' "counter-terror" and "counter-insurgency" strategies both at home and in militarily occupied territories. The US tech giant Oracle, whose executives have close relationships with Trump, was exposed marketing intrusive sur-

veillance and policing technology to unscrupulous cops around the world, from Chinese state security in Xinjiang to the Brazilian police terrorising favelas in Rio.

In the context of intensifying competition between geopolitical camps, these parallels expose the lies of both sides' cheerleaders. The rhetorical game of "whataboutery", played by both camps' propagandists and useful idiots with Palestinian and Uyghur oppression, is cynical, hypocritical and destructive. It is also particularly patronising coming from western leftists when, for instance, most Palestinians polled are in solidarity with the Uyghur people (unlike the officials of the Palestinian Authority who defend Beijing's policies, or Hamas and Hezbollah who stay quiet to maintain its favour).

The international rivalry is not about one camp championing "freedom" and "democracy" against a camp of tyrants. Nor is it about a bloc of "socialist" or "anti-imperialist" states against another of capitalists and imperialists.

And the duplication of repressive methods is not down to one state being the source of some sort of unique, original evil that is corrupting the others – as some opponents of either China or Israel imply, with sinophobic or antisemitic implications.

Rather, the copying, exchange and convergence of techniques reaffirms that all these states serve the interests of ruling classes that have much more in common with one another than they would like to admit, acting within the same global capitalist system.

Palestinians, Uyghurs, other oppressed peoples, and indeed the entire international working class, are caught under and between these ruling classes. Liberation will never be won by lining up behind one or other geopolitical bloc. The only way forward requires drawing the links between these struggles, and building working-class solidarity across borders. □

→ from page 6

resettlement of Palestinian refugee descendants from 1948 to Israel. The PA and its BDS international support movement have been unyielding on that account. When several Israeli governments offered land for peace exchanges with Palestinians – as they had with Egypt and Jordan – an exchange that would have resulted in a Palestinian state, the answer was a resounding no followed by mass intifadas. Palestinian nationalism has consistently rejected a genuine two-state solution since the Peel Report first proposed one in the late 1930s.

This suggests that independence for the West Bank will come about, if it comes about at all, as it did for Gaza: by unilateral Israeli withdrawal. Militating against that withdrawal is the not unrealistic Israeli fear that the West Bank, like the Gaza test case, will be a launching pad for terrorism and a failed state enterprise susceptible to capture by Iran. Few Israelis relish a future of being ringed by Hezbollah in Lebanon and by Syria and Palestine allied to a regime that openly proclaims its intention to eliminate the Jewish state.

Why then should Israelis

back a withdrawal without security guarantees and a mutual discharge of territorial claims? At this point, the Israeli peace movement is largely a two-state movement, with a minority who advocate a single, either non-national or bi-national state. This movement is a shadow of its former self. It was discredited when genuine offers for a two-state solution post-Oslo were rebuffed. Two-state mass parties – Labor and Meretz – were repudiated and its activist program dismissed by the test of history as naïve.

That is why the pro-democracy movement writ large is

not, per se, a pro-two-state or an anti-occupation movement. It has a radical wing, but its mainstream is reticent to engage with the Palestinian issue. And yet there is no escaping it. All the challenges to Israeli democracy that are roiling the nation have their roots in the occupation: the chauvinism, racism, religious zealotry, contempt for women and gays, opposition to free expression and minority rights, even modernity itself, are all incubated in the occupation and by the occupation.

What Netanyahu did, in the arrogant belief that he could master these forces,

was to import the repressive regime that has been abusing Palestinians for decades and unleash it on Israel itself. And now they are setting the agenda, a painful reaffirmation of that old socialist nostrum that a nation that oppresses another nation cannot be free.

Peace may indeed be elusive. But the future of Israeli democracy resides in defanging and uprooting the forces of occupation. The Israeli Left needs to advocate for unilateral withdrawal, but this time without illusions. □

• A response from Ollie Moore: [bit.ly/i-asyim](https://bit.ly/i-asyim)



# Getting thermodynamics wrong



## Environment

By Zack Muddle

Zack Muddle takes up the debate on ecology and entropy after Stuart Jordan's contribution in *Solidarity* 672

Thermodynamics is integral to modern science. Devised before atomic theory or relativity, it remains consistent with both, has wide-ranging practical and theoretical uses, and has been applied far beyond its initial domain; from quantum refrigerators to black holes and beyond.

Many are tempted to try to wield fundamental and universal scientific laws in service of a particular social theory; to draw a straight line from a seemingly simple physical fact to argued conclusions about complex social and economic systems. But such attempts are often simplistic, and frequently either make mistakes along the way, or else are so general as to offer little insight.

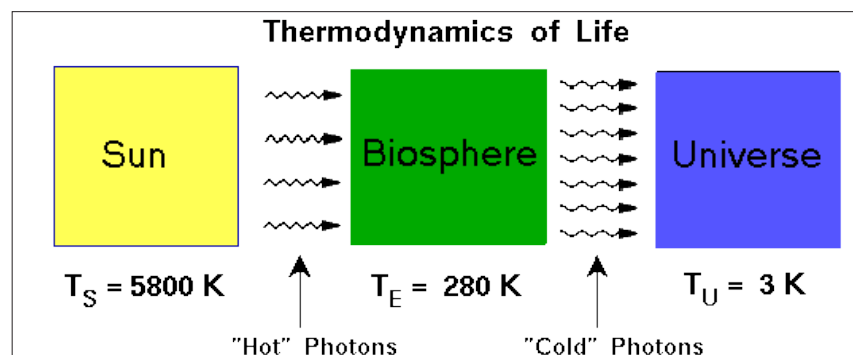
In the 1970s, ecological writers were often preoccupied with scarce resources running out, "peak oil", and the like, consequently favouring population control and slow-downs of extraction. In that context, Georgescu-Roegen attempted from 1971 to derive ecological economic conclusions from the first two laws of thermodynamics. His arguments, however, get the basic science

wrong.

The first law of thermodynamics, conservation of energy, states that energy can neither be created nor destroyed, only altered in form.

Entropy is a measure of the amount of energy in a system which is available to do work (the higher the entropy, the less energy available to do work). The second law of thermodynamics states that entropy of an isolated system never decreases. Two dyes that spontaneously mix will not then spontaneously separate again. Heat flows from a hotter body to a colder body, but never spontaneously the reverse. A heat engine can generate work – such as movement or electricity – if it has a heat source and a cold sink. But if the heat source and cold sink reach the same temperature, no more work can be extracted, no matter how hot they both are. So entropy is also, equivalently, a measure of the disorder in a system (the more disorder, the higher the entropy).

The *apparent* ecological significance of these laws is quite straightforward. In



an isolated system you can't get something for nothing; and you can't even break even. As Georgescu-Roegen put it in 1975, "the Entropy Law is the taproot of economic scarcity". This simple explanation even offers a simple measure of ecological degradation, entropy. One problem with this approach is that the earth as a whole is not an isolated system. The sun continuously pumps in huge amounts of energy. Indeed, too much of that energy remaining within the earth system brings us the catastrophes of global warming. (Taking a wider picture, the sun will, eventually, run out of fuel and die, but very far in the future, and regardless of human use of solar energy.)

With an external energy source, *local* entropy can be reversed. If you plug in a refrigerator, heat flows from cold to hot. With an external input of energy, batteries can be recharged, engines can carry on running, and spontaneous mixes can be separated.

Life maintains and expands a highly-ordered (low-entropy) form using, primarily, the sun's energy.

To apply his theory of the taproot of economic scarcity to the open system that is the earth, Georgescu-Roegen made a distinction where none exists. He treats the entropy of energy and the entropy of matter as distinct and separable. Huge amounts of energy flow into and out from the earth's system, but comparatively little matter does (asteroids come in, and hydrogen and helium escape the atmosphere, but on human timescales these aren't that significant). As such, low-entropy matter is scarce, even though energy isn't.

But energy can be used to create "lower-energy matter". Plants, using the sun's energy, are lower entropy than the water and carbon dioxide (and trace soil minerals) that they use to grow. The oxygen they release is lower entropy than the carbon dioxide they take in. A refined and purified material is often lower entropy than the impure ore it was made from.

Reportedly realising that this distinction was a dead-end, that he'd misunderstood the physics, Georgescu-Roegen attempted a new approach, formulating a "fourth law" of thermodynamics. Considering a system which is closed to materials, but not to energy,

and building on the inevitability of some friction, corrosion, and decomposition, this law states that "available matter continuously and irrevocably dissipates, thus becoming unavailable", and therefore "complete recycling is impossible".

This law does not hold up theoretically, and indeed there are [counter examples](#) in nature. Available matter dissipates, but can eventually be recycled. There are theoretical as well as practical constraints, although much less strict than stated by Georgescu-Roegen. It is not possible to have everything in active use simultaneously. That is, for complete recycling it is necessary to have a significant stockpile of inactive, high-entropy materials at any one time, to which "waste" is added, and from which new active and low-entropy materials are created. We can see such stockpiles in nature: there is much inactive carbon and nitrogen in the soil, the ocean, the atmosphere, and sediments, for example – all part of carbon and nitrogen cycles.

There are very real and serious practical issues with waste and with recycling. In the future, scarcity of usable resources (themselves a result of *increasing* gravitational entropy) and even of energy generated may loom larger.

But the harm of waste and byproducts is not them being high-entropy. Some low-entropy waste is environmentally harmful. Some high-entropy waste is not particularly harmful. CO2 waste from burning fossil fuels is harmful because it increases the greenhouse effect, not because CO2 is high-entropy. Methane is lower entropy than carbon dioxide, but a *much* more potent greenhouse gas. Fossil fuels should be left in the ground, but not because they are scarce low-entropy materials. We'd be better off as regards global warming if they were scarcer!

The entropy of solid radioactive uranium – a scarce resource – is lower than that of water vapour, but most of us are more concerned by radioactive waste than steam.

Georgescu-Roegen's bad science and "entropy pessimism" led to generic generalisations: use less, exist less, do less. Better science leads to more precise and accurate recognitions of the necessary constraints.

Paul Burkett in *Marxism and Ecological Economics* (chapter five), outlines Georgescu-Roegen's argument and defends its core thrust against criticisms. Burkett seeks to bring a "Marxist", "class", or "dialectical" "perspective" to economic and social implications of the argument. But no amount of "Marxist" spin can make bad science good. □

• Another response, from Paul Vernadsky, at [bit.ly/pv-ee](http://bit.ly/pv-ee)

## "Brotherly"? It depends



## Letter

Dan Katz's article in *Solidarity* 672 is a necessary corrective against blanket anti-Russian policies in Ukraine. Stoking divisions based on perceived national or ethnic lines within a country helps no-one, and socialists should argue strongly against policies and practices that attack the Russian language itself, as if it were the real enemy.

However, while I understand the motivation, it is wrong to describe it as a "tragedy" that fewer Ukrainians now see Ukraine and Russia as "one people" since the beginning of the full-scale invasion. If this statistic tells us anything, it is that the meaning of that phrase has shifted over time.

Calling Ukraine and Russia "one people" or "brotherly nations" has been used to suggest that there is

therefore no reason for two separate nation states to exist. Putin did this repeatedly in speeches during the run-up to the full-scale invasion. The Russian ambassador to the UK, Andrey Kelin, opened a talk in Oxford two weeks ago by stating that Ukraine and Russia are "one country/culture". The language has become extremely loaded as a consequence, in ways Dan does not account for.

In 2013, might have seen some cultural parallels and agreed that Ukraine and Russia were in some sense "one people". Once the same wording is being used to justify shelling your home, the question is no longer innocuous, and your answer will change. This is just Ukrainians asserting their nation's right to self-determination, as that right faces an immediate threat.

This poor wording should not, however, detract from the main argument made in the article, which is absolutely correct. □

Michael Baker,  
Oxford



# A hundred years ago: the Irish Civil War

By Micheál MacEoin

The Irish Civil War ended 100 years ago on 24 May 1923, with the victory of the Irish Free State over its republican opponents.

The Civil War erupted on 26 June 1922 but had its roots six months earlier, when a section of Sinn Féin concluded the Anglo-Irish Treaty with Britain, cementing partition and settling for dominion status within the British Empire.

The Treaty, which narrowly passed in the Dail by 64 votes to 57, was denounced by a majority in the Irish Republican Army (IRA), Cumann na mBan (the Irish republican women's organisation) and the republican youth movement Na Fianna Éireann.

In April 1922, around 200 Anti-Treaty IRA militants led by Rory O'Connor seized the Four Courts building in Dublin, aiming to spark a renewed conflict with the British.

However, buoyed by a victory in the June 1922 elections, Free State leader Michael Collins came under pressure from Winston Churchill and the British Government to use his newly-created National Army to crush the IRA.

The assassination of Field Marshall Henry Wilson in London on 22 June – which recent research suggests may have been linked to pro-Collins elements of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) – almost provoked the British to clear the Four Courts themselves. However, the kidnapping of a National Army general led Collins to give the Anti-Treaty IRA an ultimatum, before bombarding the building with British heavy artillery.

Though it would be an over-simplification to describe the Civil War as a class struggle at root, there was nevertheless a strong social divide.

Big business, including large farmers, the Catholic Church and the professional classes largely rallied to the side of the Free State, presenting itself as a party of Order against anti-IRA "irregularism".

Historian Gavin Foster has written that "based on the results of the 1923 election... a rough social geography of the political split in the Civil War can be discerned: the highest percentage of first preference anti-Treaty votes were concentrated in the poorest, highest emigration, and heavily subsistence farming regions of the south and west, whereas pro-government support predominated in the comparatively more prosperous east and midlands."

One anti-Treaty leader, Liam Mel-

lows, inaugurated a variety of populist left-republicanism when he denounced these "stake in the country" people and called on the anti-Treaty forces to adopt a social programme to raise the urban and rural working-class and small peasantry behind its banner.

Mellows had been influenced by efforts of the young Communist Party of Ireland (CPI), who met with the Comintern's Mikhail Borodin in July 1922 in London. David Convery recounts that Borodin said of the anti-Treaty forces that it was "really laughable to fight the Free State on a sentimental plea." He asked of the anti-Treaty IRA: "What the hell do they want a Republic for?"

Though such thinking was reflected in Mellows's "Notes from Mountjoy", the Irish communists failed to persuade the IRA chief of staff, Liam Lynch, to adopt a social programme based on land redistribution and state ownership.

## Military

Despite a potentially promising backdrop of land disputes, labour conflicts and forms of "social banditry" in 1922 and 1923, the anti-Treaty IRA instead fought a more narrowly military campaign, for the socially nebulous goal of "the Republic". It soon succumbed to the superior numbers and better arms of the newly-formed National Army in the towns, and its rear-guard guerrilla campaign of attacks and sabotage was defeated by spring 1923.

The conflict was a brutal one, pitting former comrades against one another and ripping families apart. It left a legacy of bitterness in Ireland which remains to this day. The most dramatised example of former comrades at war is, of course, the assassination of Michael Collins in County Cork in August 1922. It was not the most brutal.

In reprisal for the shooting of TD Seán Hales on 7 December 1922, the Free State executed four prominent Republican prisoners, Rory O'Connor, Liam Mellows, Richard Barrett and Joe McKelvey. The grisliest episode of the War was the summary execution of nine anti-Treaty fighters in Ballyseedy, County Kerry, who were tied to a landmine which was then detonated. Only one survived.

In the middle, so to speak, was the official Irish Labour Party. It implicitly backed the Treaty and called a general strike against "militarism" in April 1922. Taking its seats, Labour became the opposition to the Free State wing of Sinn Féin, rebranded as Cumann na nGaedheal.

Cumann na nGaedheal would prove



Free State soldiers escorting an IRA POW

to be a reactionary political force in power. One of its earliest acts was to break a postal strike. Its economic policies were fiscally conservative, designed to "balance the books" even if it meant, in the words of its Minister for Industry and Commerce, "people may have to die in this country and may have to die through starvation."

## Toothless

Labour proved to be a toothless opposition, meaning that when a section of the Anti-Treaty republicans led by Eamon De Valera rebranded as Fianna Fáil in 1926, the new party was able to harness widespread discontent with the Free State government.

Fianna Fáil rode to victory in 1932, cementing its hold on power the following year. It based itself initially on a populist programme of economic self-sufficiency and nationalism, appealing to small farmers and urban workers, and established itself as the main governing party in twentieth century Ireland.

Cumann na nGaedheal increasingly aligned itself with the Army Comrades Association, better known as the quasi-fascist Blueshirts, led by sacked Garda commissioner Eoin O'Duffy. An alliance of farmers and demobilised National Army soldiers, fearing social agitation and retribution from republicans and "communists", the Blueshirts merged with Cumann na nGaedheal and the Centre Party in 1933 to form Fine Gael.

The IRA experimented, again, with social agitation in the early 1930s, forming a short-lived political party, Saor Éire, in 1931, which was soon banned. In 1934, the left of the IRA tried again to form a party, and walked out when the proposal was narrowly defeated.

The resultant Republican Congress was hobbled by a split from its very inception, with delegates dividing between Peadar O'Donnell, Frank Ryan and George Gilmore's proposal for a populist cross-class "front" to form a "republic" and Roddy Connolly and Michael Price's proposal for a political party to fight for a "workers' republic."

The mainstream IRA continued on its plodding campaign of apolitical militarism, declining in number and influence. Meanwhile, the Free State – renamed Éire in 1937 – was consolidated under its erstwhile opponents in Fianna Fáil. □

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# The Irish working class



## Connolly politically unexpurgated

By James Connolly

This second instalment on "Connolly's historiography" in our series "Connolly, politically unexpurgated" ([workersliberty.org/connolly](http://workersliberty.org/connolly)) is the Foreword to Connolly's booklet *Labour in Irish History* (1910). Its conclusion, "only the Irish working class remain as the incorruptible inheritors of the fight for freedom in Ireland", is one of Connolly's most-quoted maxims. But the lead-up to that conclusion defines "freedom" as restoration of (supposedly communistic) Gaelic tradition, and equates capitalism with "foreignism".

In her great work, *The Making of Ireland and its Undoing*, the only contribution to Irish history we know of which conforms to the methods of modern historical science, the authoress, Mrs. Stopford Green, dealing with the effect upon Ireland of the dispersion of the Irish race in the time of Henry VIII and Elizabeth, and the consequent destruction of Gaelic culture, and rupture with Gaelic tradition and law, says that the Irishmen educated in schools abroad abandoned or knew nothing of the lore of ancient Erin, and had no sympathy with the spirit of the Brehon Code, nor with the social order of

which it was the juridical expression. She says they "urged the theory, so antagonistic to the immemorial law of Ireland, that only from the polluted sinks of heretics could come the idea that the people might elect a ruler, and confer supreme authority on whomsoever pleased them". In other words the new Irish, educated in foreign standards, had adopted as their own the feudal-capitalist system of which England was the exponent in Ireland, and urged it upon the Gaelic Irish. As the dispersion of the clans, consummated by Cromwell, finally completed the ruin of Gaelic Ireland, all the higher education of Irishmen thenceforward ran in this foreign groove, and was coloured with this foreign colouring.

### Foreign Influence

In other words, the Gaelic culture of the Irish chieftainry was rudely broken off in the seventeenth century, and the continental Schools of European despots implanted in its place in the minds of the Irish students, and sent them back to Ireland to preach, a fanatical belief in royal and feudal prerogatives, as foreign to the genius of the Gael as was the English ruler to Irish soil. What a light this sheds upon Irish history of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries! And what a commentary it is upon the real origin of that so-called "Irish veneration for the aristocracy", of which the bourgeois charlatans of Irish literature write so eloquently! That veneration is seen to be as much of an exotic, as much of an importation, as the aristocratic caste it venerated. Both were

"... foul foreign blossoms

Blown hither to poison our plains."

But so deeply has this insidious lie about the aristocratic tendencies of the Irish taken root in Irish thought, that it will take a long time to eradicate it from the minds of the people, or to make the Irish realise that the whole concept of orthodox Irish history for the last 200 years was a betrayal and abandonment of the best traditions of the Irish race. Yet such is undoubtedly the case. Let us examine this a little more closely!

Just as it is true that a stream cannot rise above its source, so it is true that a national literature cannot rise above the moral level of the social conditions of the people from whom it derives its inspiration. If we would understand the national literature of a people, we must study their social and political status, keeping in mind the fact that their writers were a product thereof, and that the children of their brains were conceived and brought forth in certain historical conditions. Ireland, at the same time as she lost her ancient social system, also lost her language as the vehicle of thought of those who acted as her

leaders. As a result of this twofold loss, the nation suffered socially, nationally and intellectually from a prolonged arrested development.

During the closing years of the seventeenth century, all the eighteenth, and the greater part of the nineteenth, the Irish people were the lowest helots in Europe, socially and politically. The Irish peasant, reduced from the position of a free clansman owning his tribeland and controlling its administration in common with his fellows, was a mere tenant-at-will subject to eviction, dishonour and outrage at the hands of an irresponsible private proprietor. Politically he was non-existent, legally he held no rights, intellectually he sank under the weight of his social abasement, and surrendered to the downward drag of his poverty. He had been conquered, and he suffered all the terrible consequences of defeat at the hands of a ruling class and nation who have always acted upon the old Roman maxim of "Woe to the vanquished".

To add to his humiliation, those of his name and race who had contrived to escape the general ruin, and sent their children to be educated in foreign schools, discovered, with the return of those "wild geese" to their native habitat, that they who had sailed for France, Italy or Spain, filled with hatred of the English Crown and of the English landlord garrison in Ireland, returned as mere Catholic adherents of a pretender to the English throne, using all the prestige of their foreign schooling, to discredit the Gaelic ideas of equality and democracy, and instead, instilling into the minds of the growing generation feudal ideas of the divine right of kings to rule, and of subjects to unquestioningly obey. The Irish students in the universities of the Continent were the first products of a scheme which the Papacy still pursues with its accustomed skill and persistence – a persistence which reckes little of the passing of centuries – a scheme which looks upon Catholic Ireland simply as a tool to be used for the spiritual re-conquest of England to Catholicity. In the eighteenth century this scheme did its deadliest work in Ireland. It failed ridiculously to cause a single Irish worker in town or country to strike a blow for the Stuart cause in the years of the Scottish Rebellions in 1715 and 1745, but it prevented them from striking any blows for their own cause, or from taking advantage of the civil feuds of their enemies.

It did more. It killed Gaelic Ireland; an Irish-speaking Catholic was of no value as a missionary of Catholicism in England, and an Irish peasant who treasured the tongue of his fathers might also have some reverence for the principles of the social polity and civilisation under which his forefathers had lived

and prospered for unnumbered years. And such principles were even more distasteful to French, Spanish or Papal patrons of Irish schools of learning on the Continent than they were to English monarchs. Thus the poor Irish were not only pariahs in the social system of their day, but they were also precluded from hoping for a revival of intellectual life through the achievements of their children. Their children were taught to despise the language and traditions of their fathers.

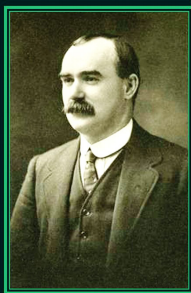
### Peasantry

It was at or during this period, when the Irish peasant had been crushed to the very lowest point, when the most he could hope for was to be pitied as animals are pitied; it was during this period Irish literature in English was born. Such Irish literature was not written for Irishmen as a real Irish literature would be, it was written by Irishmen, about Irishmen, but for English or Anglo-Irish consumption.

Hence the Irishman in English literature may be said to have been born with an apology in his mouth. His creators knew nothing of the free and independent Irishman of Gaelic Ireland, but they did know the conquered, robbed, slave-driven, brutalised, demoralised Irishman, the product of generations of landlord and capitalist rule, and him they seized upon, held up to the gaze of the world, and asked the nations to accept as the true Irish type.

If he crouched before a representa-

Liam McNulty

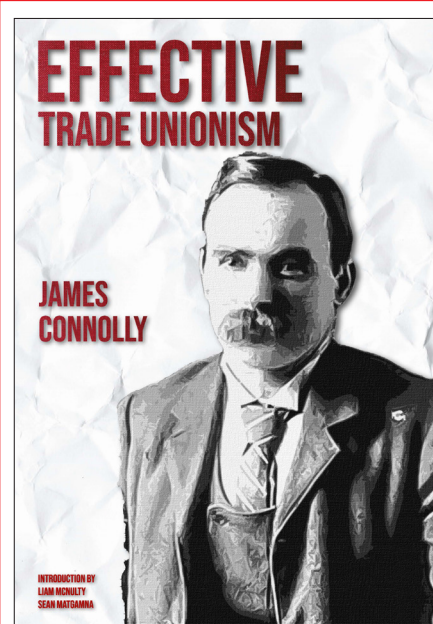


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# and its inheritance

tive of royalty with an abject submission born of a hundred years of political outlawry and training in foreign ideas, his abasement was pointed to proudly as an instance of the “ancient Celtic fidelity to hereditary monarchs”; if, with the memory of perennial famines, evictions, jails, hangings, and tenancy-at-will beclouding his brain, he humbled himself before the upper-class, or attached himself like a dog to their personal fortunes, his sycophancy was cited as a manifestation of “ancient Irish veneration for the aristocracy”, and if long-continued insecurity of life begat in him a fierce desire for the ownership of a piece of land to safe-guard his loved ones in a system where land was life, this new-born land-hunger was triumphantly trumpeted forth as a proof of the “Irish attachment to the principle of private property”. Be it understood we are not talking now of the English slanderers of the Irishman, but of his Irish apologists. The English slanderer never did as much harm as did these self-constituted delineators of Irish characteristics. The English slanderer lowered Irishmen in the eyes of the world, but his Irish middle-class teachers and writers lowered him in his own eyes by extolling as an Irish virtue every sycophantic vice begotten of generations of slavery.

Accordingly, as an Irishman, peasant, labourer, or artisan, banded himself with his fellows to strike back at their oppressors in defence of their right to live in the land of their fathers, the “respectable” classes, who had imbibed the foreign ideas publicly deplored his act, and unctuously ascribed it to the “evil effects of English misgovernment upon the Irish character”; but when an occasional Irishman, abandoning all the traditions of his race, climbed up upon the backs of his fellows to wealth or position, his career was held up as a sample of what Irishmen could do under congenial or favourable circumstances. The seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were, indeed, the Via Dolorosa of the Irish race. In them the Irish Gael sank out of sight, and in his place the middle-class politicians, capi-

talists and ecclesiastics laboured to produce a hybrid Irishman, assimilating a foreign social system, a foreign speech, and a foreign character. In the effort to assimilate the first two the Irish were unhappily too successful, so successful that to-day the majority of the Irish do not know that their fathers ever knew another system of ownership, and the Irish Irishlanders are painfully grappling with their mother tongue with the hesitating accent of a foreigner. Fortunately the Irish character has proven too difficult to press into respectable foreign moulds, and the recoil of that character from the deadly embrace of capitalist English conventionalism, as it has already led to a revaluation of the speech of the Gael, will in all probability also lead to a re-study and appreciation of the social system under which the Gael reached the highest point of civilisation and culture in Europe.

## Gaelic Principles

In the re-conversion of Ireland to the Gaelic principle of common ownership by a people of their sources of food and maintenance, the worst obstacles to overcome will be the opposition of the men and women who have imbibed their ideas of Irish character and history from Anglo-Irish literature. That literature, as we have explained, was born in the worst agonies of the slavery of our race; it bears all the birth-marks of such origin upon it, but irony of ironies, these birth-marks of slavery are hailed by our teachers as “the native characteristics of the Celt”.

One of these slave birth-marks is a belief in the capitalist system of society; the Irishman frees himself from such a mark of slavery when he realises the truth that the capitalist system is the most foreign thing in Ireland.

Hence we have had in Ireland for over 250 years the remarkable phenomenon of Irishmen of the upper and middle classes urging upon the Irish toilers, as a sacred national and religious duty, the necessity of maintaining a social order against which their Gaelic forefathers had struggled, despite prison cells, famine, and the sword, for over 400

years. Reversing the procedure of the Normans settled in Ireland, who were said to have become “more Irish than the Irish”, the Irish propertied classes became more English than the English, and so have continued to our day.

Hence we believe that this book, attempting to depict the attitude of the dispossessed masses of the Irish people in the great crisis of modern Irish history, may justly be looked upon as part of the literature of the Gaelic revival. As the Gaelic language, scorned by the possessing classes, sought and found its last fortress in the hearts and homes of the “lower orders”, to re-issue from thence in our own time to what the writer believes to be a greater and more enduring place in civilisation than of old, so in the words of Thomas Francis Meagher, the same “wretched cabins have been the holy shrines in which the traditions and the hopes of Ireland have been treasured and transmitted”.

The apostate patriotism of the Irish capitalist class, arising as it does upon the rupture with Gaelic tradition, will, of course, reject this conception, and saturated with foreignism themselves, they will continue to hurl the epithet of “foreign ideas” against the militant Irish democracy. But the present Celtic revival in Ireland, leading as it must to a reconsideration and more analytical study of the laws and social structure of Ireland before the English Invasion, amongst its other good results, will have this one also, that it will confirm and establish the truth of this conception.

Hitherto the study of the social structure of Ireland in the past has been marred by one great fault. For a description and interpretation of Irish social life and customs the student depended entirely upon the description and interpretation of men who were entirely lacking in knowledge of, and insight into, the facts and spirit of the things they attempted to describe. Imbued with the conception of feudalistic or capitalistic social order, the writers perpetually strove to explain Irish institutions in terms of an order of things to which those institutions were entirely alien. Irish titles, indicative of the function in society performed by their bearers, the writers explained by what they supposed were analogous titles in the feudal order of England, forgetful of the fact that as the one form of society was the antithesis of the other, and not its counterpart, the one set of titles could not possibly convey the same meaning as the other, much less be a translation.

Much the same mistake was made in America by the early Spanish conquistadores in attempting to describe the social and political systems of Mexico and Peru, with much the same results of

introducing almost endless confusion into every attempt to comprehend life as it actually existed in those countries before the conquest. The Spanish writers could not mentally raise themselves out of the social structure of continental Europe, and hence their weird and wonderful tales of despotic Peruvian and Mexican “Emperors” and “Nobles” where really existed the elaborately organised family system of a people not yet fully evolved into the political state. Not until the publication of Morgan’s monumental work on Ancient Society, was the key to the study of American native civilisation really found and placed in the hands of the student. The same key will yet unlock the doors which guard the secrets of our native Celtic civilisation, and make them possible of fuller comprehension for the multitude.

## Propositions

Meanwhile we desire to place before our readers the two propositions upon which this book is founded – propositions which we believe embody alike the fruits of the experience of the past, and the matured thought of the present, upon the points under consideration.

First, that in the evolution of civilisation the progress of the fight for national liberty of any subject nation must, perforce, keep pace with the progress of the struggle for liberty of the most subject class in that nation, and that the shifting of economic and political forces which accompanies the development of the system of capitalist society leads inevitably to the increasing conservatism of the non-working-class element, and to the revolutionary vigour and power of the working class.

Second, that the result of the long drawn out struggle of Ireland has been, so far, that the old chieftainry has disappeared, or, through its degenerate descendants, has made terms with iniquity, and become part and parcel of the supporters of the established order; the middle class, growing up in the midst of the national struggle, and at one time, as in 1798, through the stress of the economic rivalry of England almost forced into the position of revolutionary leaders against the political despotism of their industrial competitors, have now also bowed the knee to Baal, and have a thousand economic strings in the shape of investments binding them to English capitalism as against every sentimental or historic attachment drawing them toward Irish patriotism; only the Irish working class remain as the incorruptible inheritors of the fight for freedom in Ireland.

To that unconquered Irish working class this book is dedicated by one of their number. □



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# An anti-racist politics “with DuBois”



## Book review

By Dan Katz

Writing 120 years ago in the introduction to his *Souls of Black Folk*, the American intellectual W E B DuBois declared that the “problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the colour line.” These were the bleakest of times for Black Americans who faced Jim Crow, lynching, terror. And in Africa and Asia the European empires continued to repress and exploit Black and Asian populations.

*The Souls of Black Folk* was a demand for Black freedom and also a polemic, in the first instance against Booker T Washington. Washington was criticised for attempting to make a pact with dominant white racism: acceptance of a loss of political power and civil rights in return for better, basic education for Black people.

In this, his most politically impactful book, DuBois demanded equality: in voting rights, education and in society. While others despaired, out-faced by the terrible situation of Black America, DuBois began to campaign for equality. His work led, in 1909, to the creation of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP). DuBois edited the NAACP’s newsletter, *Crisis*, for over 20 years.

Later DuBois came into bitter conflict with the Black nationalist, Marcus Garvey. DuBois regarded Garvey as personally unreliable and politically fantastical.

In both these discussions, W E B DuBois, the consistent democrat, demanding equality, was broadly right.

Now Kenan Malik, a columnist for the *Observer*, has written an interesting book, *Not so Black and White*, which in a very general sense is “with DuBois”. Malik defends the Enlightenment, and specifically the plebeian forces that fought for democracy, fraternity and equality for all.

Unlike many on the left, Kenan Malik also considers the history of the vicious persecution of Jews. He examines the rise of modern anti-Black racism, entwining the story with the development of antisemitism.

Understanding that racism arose at a specific point in history, for particular reasons (to square a circle in a world that proclaimed for liberty and democracy, but denied equality to slaves), also implies that it is possible to rid societies of racism, too.

And Malik’s work is important too for being willing to see “beyond race,” or perhaps, “in addition to race” is better: hence the title “Not so Black and White”.

Consider this, at the school I teach in, in inner London. Currently the white kids do considerably worse in exams, overall, than other groups at the school. The biggest grouping, of West African origin, do well. So this is an issue of race, yes? No, or not entirely. The families of the British kids of African origin are relatively recent immigrants and

they are often from middle class backgrounds, with corresponding attitudes: get decent exam grades, go to university, get a professional job. The white kids are largely from working class families in the area for generations, once employed by now-vanished factories and docks. The white kids often have different expectations, shaped by that background and their parents’ experience of the British education and class systems.

At the end of the book Malik discusses “white privilege”, pointing out that it is no sort of “privilege” not to be discriminated against. When I discovered my (white) Head Teacher discriminating against non-white teachers I did not demand he rid himself of his “white privilege”. What would that mean, anyway? No, I demanded he treat black and white teachers equally. And who fought for the black teachers in that situation? The union did, black and white workers together. The agency to defeat racism is the united, militant working class. □



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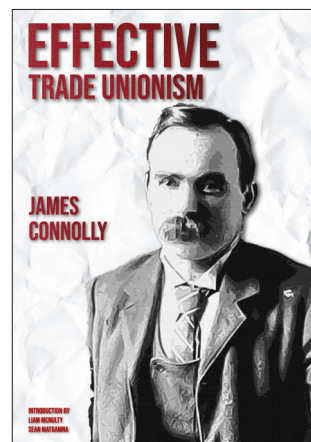
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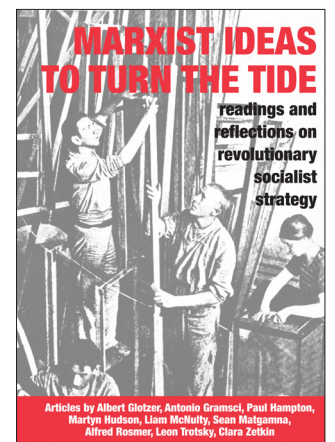
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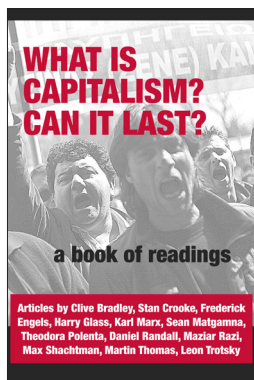
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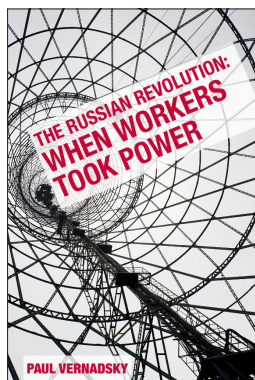
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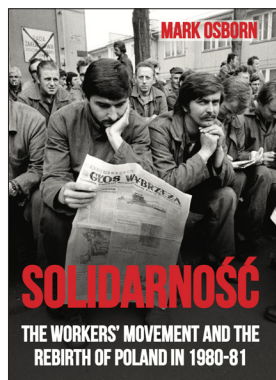
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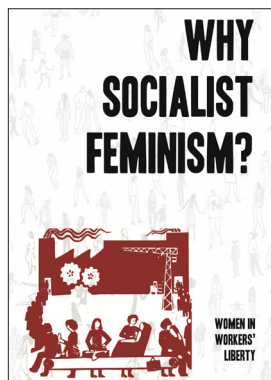
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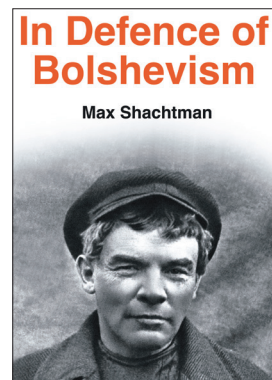
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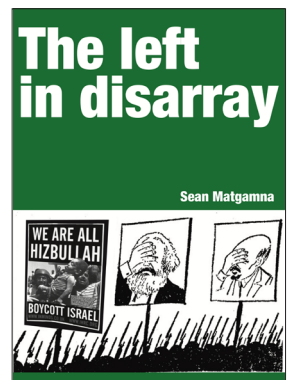
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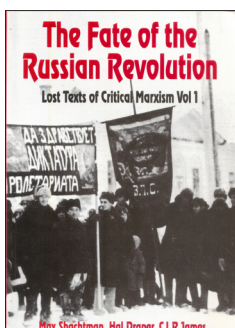
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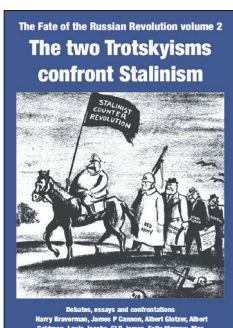
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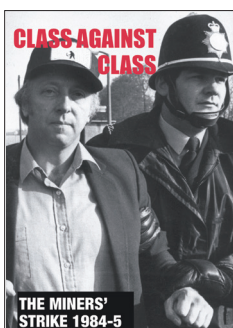
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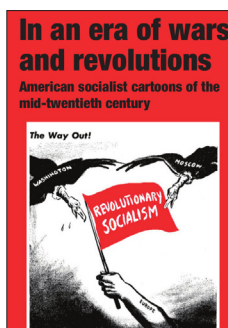
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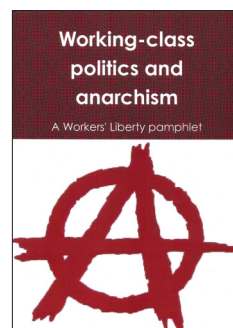
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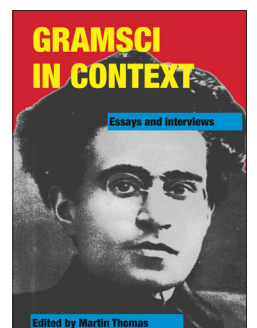
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# Socialist Worker and “end Israel”



## Eye on the Left

By Rhodri Evans

*Socialist Worker's* front page on 10 May read “End the Israeli terror state”. That issue carried nothing on SW’s positive alternative, but it made clear that it was advocating the “end” of Israel as a political unit – “finis Israeli” in the sense that Sigmund Freud wrote “finis Austriae” when Germany took over Austria and declared it part of Germany.

Not the end of terroristic methods by Israel in the occupied West Bank. Not the end of that occupation. Not conceding the Palestinians’ right to self-determination in an independent state of their own, in contiguous territory, alongside Israel. Not easing the bombing and blockade of Gaza. But wiping out Israel.

When SW [writes](#) about a positive alternative (rarely, these days) it is “a single, secular state in all of Palestine, with equal democratic rights for all of its citizens”. Socialists want democracy and secularism everywhere. And when the neighbouring peoples, Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs, find their disputes so small that they freely agree to merge into a single political unit, that will be excellent.

But such merger has happened yet with no pair of neighbouring nations world-wide, even when on friendly terms for many decades. SW’s formula, “end Israel”, can only mean that Israel is to be wiped out to make way for the “single state”.

### Defence

Since the Israeli Jews will defend themselves, and with military clout, they can be denied their self-determination only by military conquest. So SW’s formula reduces in practice to urging on the nearby states the old Arab or Islamic-revanchist slogan, rejected by socialists in the years it was current, “drive the Jews into the sea”.

That programme is (fortunately) unrealistic; and even if practicable would offer the Palestinians only life amid war ruins under the domination, not democratic and not secular, of Iran or some other nearby state.

To recognise Israel’s right to exist as a unit, to recognise its right to defend itself, and to combat its efforts to oppress others, is the only workable working-class or democratic policy to win advance by and for the Palestinians, even though it is a way off in anything like the current political balance of forces.

SW usually has its “end Israel” message only by implication. Since 2002 at least, its usual slogan has been “Free Palestine”. (Oddly, the same slogan,

with similar ambiguity but a different “steer”, was used by the Revisionist (right-wing) Zionist Hillel Kook in the 1940s). On the big protests over the Gaza war in 2021, such ambiguous slogans dominated.

Today, and not just for SW, the ambiguous slogan is designed to draw in those who would be put off by “end Israel”, and to draw them into a discourse where “end Israel” is the only militant-sounding answer. □

## Keeping the lines clear



### Letter

It was an error, I think, by me as editor, not to carry some explicit explanation of Israel’s right to exist alongside Kayden Jones’s report (*Solidarity* 672) on the Sheffield protest against an antisemitic “Beyond Israel” meeting on 12 May.

The slogan “Solidarity for Palestine” which the protesters used to signal that their sympathy with the Palestinian people is, sadly, as vulnerable to “drawing in” as *Socialist Worker's* “Free Palestine”.

Even if “Palestine” is taken as short for “the Palestinian people”, the slogan is more ambiguous today than such wording was at the time of the first intifada: Hamas’s is, sadly, the best-publicised “Palestinian struggle”. And “Palestine” can be (and, among activists, usually is) taken to mean the

British Mandate unit (1920-48), so “Solidarity with Palestine” suggests “solidarity for that unit to be revived, but under Palestinian rule” (with silence on the fate of the Israeli Jews).

Much of today’s left antisemitism is rooted in a hostility to the Israeli Jewish people and a consequent hostility to Jews worldwide who empathise with Israeli Jews even if they despise Netanyahu. But the linkages are not simple. Being sincere and militant against rightist antisemitism and even much left antisemitism does not guarantee against a view on Israel which is wrong and counterproductive for Palestinian rights.

Especially when we work with comrades rightly motivated to protest against right-wing antisemitism, but disagreeing or just not sure on Israel-Palestine, we have to make ourselves clear on our own stance. □

Martin Thomas,  
London

## NEU ballots support staff

By Patrick Murphy

The National Education Union (NEU) National Executive met on 18 May but did not name the three strike days due to take place in late June or early July. Instead, it confirmed that the action would take place in the week beginning 3 July. The precise dates are to be decided at the next Executive on 17 June.

The arguments for refusing to identify the dates were not particularly clear to me but there was more than a hint in some speeches that we might reconsider whether to go through with the three-day strike plan at all.

On support staff, the Executive decided to launch an indicative ballot for strike action, immediately, to close on 7 June, in advance of a formal ballot which would allow members to join teachers’ action in autumn. It’s a requirement of NEU rules that a successful in-



dicative ballot takes place before a formal, legal ballot for action. Workers’ Liberty members submitted a motion to this year’s Annual Conference to remove the requirement to hold a preliminary ballot, but it did not reach the agenda.

The NEU is not part of the NJC bargaining process for support staff pay and the unions (Unison, GMB and Unite) who oppose to any change in this position. Indeed, they made a formal complaint to the TUC and cited our previous ballots of support staff in England and Wales on pay as

evidence of misdeed and their complaint was upheld. The Executive agreed that the ballot of support staff would focus instead on increased school funding to avoid redundancies and worsening conditions and to finance the pay claim made by the recognised NJC unions.

It’s an indictment of our labour movement and its priorities that the obstacles to a simpler, more effective action ballot for the lowest paid school staff are entirely self-imposed. And imposed not by any industrial logic but by grubby inter-union territorial concerns. It’s as if workers exist to serve the interests of union bureaucracies, when unions should exist to empower workers.

There could hardly be a clearer case for the building of industrial unions which unite all workers in a particular industry or service. □

• Abridged. More: [bit.ly/neu-s](https://bit.ly/neu-s)

## UEA ballots over cuts

By Patrick Yarker

University of East Anglia (UEA) staff still wait to hear from the Executive Team the exact number of compulsory redundancies being sought in response to the projected financial deficit (perhaps £45mn in three years’ time) which bad decisions by that same team have brought about.

### Cuts

When news of the deficit broke, the university’s vice-chancellor wished everyone luck and took early retirement. The new vice-chancellor wasted no time before asserting the need to cut staff. In his view, the university employs too many people and needs to “right-size”. In a previous role, he published material in favour of increasing online “teaching” and “standardised

learning packages”. This may indicate how he intends to proceed at UEA.

### Ballot

In recent weeks UEA staff have recorded two votes of no confidence in the Executive Team and endorsed the UCU branch policy of no compulsory redundancies. A ballot for local industrial action, alongside the current Marking and Assessment Boycott, is under way. Students have rallied and demonstrated against cuts. How the Executive Team thinks may be gauged from their decision in March to refuse to raise the real living wage for the university’s 300 lowest paid staff such as cleaners and nursery workers. This disgraceful decision saved about £300,000, or slightly more than the retiring vice chancellor’s salary. □





## “What we stand for

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

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

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- 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
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## Help us raise £35,000 by 16 July!

With £20,972 now raised, donations have slowed down a bit. Thanks to John this week for the donation of £120. With more branches planning fundraising

events we should be able to share details of these events and activities, very soon. □

• Donate at [workersliberty.org/fund](http://workersliberty.org/fund)

# Ruined by the “upgrade”



## Diary of a Railworker

By Steve Allen

Pay talks on the Elizabeth Line in London continue at a snail's pace, with an extra 0.5% over the previous offer. A further meeting is scheduled for 11 June and patience is starting to wear thin on the ground. There is a growing mood that we need to escalate, potentially with the threat of a ballot to force the company's hand.

Our reps say it's too soon to ballot,

as we haven't received the “final” offer. But how often have we seen a “final” offer suddenly improved after strikes? London Overground staff have informed bosses that if they don't receive a decent offer before the end of May then they will move to dispute. London Underground branches are making similar demands, so why don't we?

Meanwhile, it's been a tough couple of weeks with service disruptions and software failures. The latest “upgrade” to information screens ruined the whole system, leading to wildly inaccurate train times. Staff have been forced to manually announce every train,

while fielding questions from every direction. In the busiest stations, that's a train every three minutes, so barely a moment to take a breath.

This week sees the introduction of the final phase of the Crossrail project, with trains running all the way through from Shenfield to Reading and Heathrow. This means trains every 150 seconds in peak time through the central section. Staff have been told that every second counts, but with failing infrastructure it feels like bringing a lemon to a knife fight. □

• Steve Allen is a worker on the Elizabeth Line

# Fight for telecom jobs, for broadband for all!

By Gerry Bates

On 17 May BT announced plans to cut 55,000 jobs by 2030, reducing its workforce by 40%. It also reported a 12% decline in pre-tax profits, down to £1.7bn.

Maria Exall, a long-standing activist in the Communication Workers' Union (CWU) and currently president of the TUC, told *Solidarity*: “We need direct-labour jobs in the digital industries of the future and the public needs access to broadband services”.

She pointed to reports that over the last year one million people, cash-squeezed, have cancelled their broadband contracts, and to the importance for the whole working class as well as for telecom workers of reviving the 2019 Labour manifesto commitment

to a national broadband service.

However, the CWU has responded only that the BT announcement is “no surprise” and that “we want to retain as many direct labour jobs as possible... any reduction should come from sub-contractors in the first instance and natural attrition”.

Even the managers' union Prospect was bolder, though demanding only “an urgent meeting with the Chief Executive”.

In fact job cuts are already in train, and have been going on for some time. At present they are mainly hitting desk-based jobs. Formally they are voluntary redundancies, but often workers are offered redeployment in unworkable form.

The *Financial Times*, from a ruling-class point of view, has dismissed

BT's announcement of cost-cutting as vague and inadequate, and not without some justice. In this industry, job-cut plans based on technological advance never work out as projected. The company ends up hiring anew, whether to meet the next wave of technology or to expand to new services facilitated by new technology.

The newer workers, however, are on worse terms and conditions. Since 2014 BT has had a two-tier workforce.

BT is a big firm which receives government subsidies, in an industry where workers need substantial retraining every couple of years anyway. The CWU has 40,000 members in BT. There is time to organise defence of these jobs, to demand more retraining, expansion of services, and cutting the working week without loss of pay.

Philip Jansen was paid £2.63mn last year, with his total package coming in at over £3mn. Frontline BT workers were paid 113 times less, taking home on average £11.90 per hour. □

## Satjit Ray's Apu trilogy



## Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

I must confess to not watching very much cinema from India. I've never been a big fan of Bollywood; however I hope to make some small amends by highlighting Bengali director Satjit Ray's brilliant Apu Trilogy: *Pather Panchali* (1955), *Aparjito* (1956) and *Apu Sarvar* (*The World of Apu*) (1959). With original music by a then almost unknown Ravi Shankar, these films are a story of the childhood, education, youth and early manhood of

Apu in the early twentieth century.

Apu is born into rural poverty. His family moves to the city of Benares/Varanasi, but their life does not improve. His father dies and the family move back to their village. Here Apu attends school, shows promise and moves to Kolkata to develop his education, where, despite a problematic marriage, he works hard to become a writer.

This is India's greatest film success (as judged by critical response and awards) and a classic of world cinema. Ray was born in 1921. After his death (in 1992) the Japanese film director Akira Kurosawa said “... not to have seen the cinema of Ray means existing in the world without seeing the sun or the moon”. □

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## Debates at conference



**John Moloney**

By John Moloney

The Annual Delegate Conference of the PCS union is 23-25 May.

This will be the second “in person” conference (though branches can attend by Zoom) since the lessening of the pandemic. We are hoping therefore that delegate numbers will be up from last year, and begin to head towards pre-Covid levels.

Regardless of the number of people attending, in many ways, it will be one of the most significant conferences held since the formation of the PCS union. That is of course, because we are in the middle of a live dispute with the Scottish, Welsh, and UK governments over pay, job security, redundancy and the level of pension contributions.

Given the recent rebalot successes, only marred of course by the DWP not getting over the 50% threshold, delegates have real choices to make as to the form of the coming action.

We are all united that the dispute must continue and therefore strike action is needed, and that the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) should be rebalotted. Notwithstanding that, there are real differences of approach in regards to the industrial action tactics.

Do we repeat the previous tactics of selective action and occasional all members action? Should we lessen the reliance on selective action and go for more all members’ action? All this will be thrashed out on the conference floor.

My position is that there should be as much all-member action as possible, allied with selective action, and

that we need to intensify our strikes. We will know by 25 May what delegates have decided.

In any case, a key task for the union over the coming months is to increase our density in the workplace and to build upon the wave of new activists who have been recruited into the union over the last year.

We are now hitting up against our density. That is, as far as we can estimate, the number of members taking strike action is virtually all the members who are available to take such action. If we are below 50% in areas, though, then even if all members take action, that will be a less effective strike than if we had well over 50% membership. We have to aim to be a super-majority union everywhere we organise.

In regard to Scotland and Wales, I believe that we have to be very much driven by what members and activists there say as to the tempo and tactics of the dispute, in other words, there should not be a central strike template to which all areas have to adhere, even if they have a different employer, as is the case in Scotland.

Mark Serwotka [PCS general secretary] will be retiring early next year and therefore General Secretary and also Assistant General Secretary elections are being proposed for later this year.

I have put my name forward to the Independent Left for them to consider me being their AGS candidate. Clearly it’s comrades’ decision whether they will support me in this. If they don’t, then I will not stand.

If they do support me, then I will stand on my record as well as my promise not to take the full AGS wage. By next month I will have given back £100,000 to the union. □

• John Moloney is Assistant General Secretary of PCS, writing here in a personal capacity

# Increased yes vote: now time for action



**Tubeworker**

The rebalot result on the Tube (23 May) shows turnout up from 53% to 56%, and 97% yes for strikes.

An RMT union all members’ meeting on 30 May will discuss the next steps. Tubeworker has argued that we have to urgently step up our action. That should mean multiple days of all-grades action, possibly escalating from three days one week to four the next.

The union has to move away from sporadic one or two day strikes every few months. The job cuts on stations, the non-filling of vacancies in engineering and the proposed tearing up of all agreements of trains alone are enough reason to step-up the action. With the continued threat looming over our pensions, we should strike to get back on the front foot.

### Overtime ban

The station overtime ban for a week from 1 June will show the company that we are serious about ramping up our fight. Increased press coverage around station closures has put the issue into the spotlight and we should build on public support for maintaining safe staffing levels.

Skeleton staffing levels often keeping stations open only by workers working outside of their hours has become the norm. This action could have a significant impact. Why should we help the company paper over the crack its cuts have created?

The “Train Change” plan is an attack on a scale not seen by most drivers in the grade. The last threatened change on this scale was perhaps when guards were ditched or “Company Plan” implemented. Other grades have seen such attacks, “Fit for the Future: Stations” for example, but many train operators thought it would never happen to us. Perhaps some still think that.

Tube bosses’ plan is to rip up the agreed limits on our driving parameters and to replace them with something much more flexible for them. They want to sell this as a compressed four-day week (previously trialed unsuccessfully in 2017) but this is more like a “compressed” five-day week!

The proposal would see the current 4hr15m limit to driving time go up to 5 hours. The 5hr15m maximum spell without a meal break would be increased to 6 hours. Maximum duty lengths would increase to 10 hours, from 8.5 hours.

All this flexibility would ultimately mean they need fewer drivers and

therefore could save money by cutting jobs.

The duty parameters of an 0445 earliest start and 0125 latest finish will be scrapped, meaning you can book on and off at any time. This will likely mean no more distinct night duties (and what of Night Tube, over which management has already betrayed us once by abolishing the Night Tube driver grade?)

Bosses also want us to book on and off in depots in our own time. This would mean the previous walking time we were paid for would be unpaid. This could perhaps mean we are on an 11-hour working day or more, doing the activities that were previously limited to an 8.5 hour shift.

Alongside the ballot result the first round of negotiations have now taken place, and London Underground has offered unions the princely sum of 3.3% for our 2023/4 pay rise. They’ve dismissed claims for a reduction in the working week out of hand as “unaffordable”.

3.3% is miles behind inflation (RPI up 13.5% March 2022 to March 2023). RMT’s claim was for at least RPI, with a £5,000 flat-rate minimum. Reps have, rightly, rejected the 3.3% insult.

It will surely take industrial action to win a significantly better deal. Let’s declare a dispute and launch a ballot as soon as possible. We should be guaranteed a good result. □

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# RCN looks strong for re-ballot

By Alice Hazel

Junior doctors in England will strike again on 14-16 June (ending 7am 17 June). And the congress of Royal College of Nursing on 14-18 May is reported as marking a big step in the journey the organisation has been taking from its long past as a “professional association” towards performing as a trade-union body that seeks to involve and represent its members as workers.

The activism and drive that has developed during the strikes was reflected at the congress, with a large number of first-time delegates, and passion for continuing the dispute. Most felt that the launch at congress of the re-ballot (aggregated, 23 May-23 June), with useful materials, training, and support, indicates the leadership is serious about getting the result over the threshold.

The vote to reject the government’s pay offer, won against leadership recommendation, did turn out enough votes to reach the threshold, but had the advantage of being conducted online. Achieving over 50% in the re-ballot (by post) will be difficult, but escalating the dispute and being “in it, to win it” is really the only option if nurses are to achieve a better pay deal and push back the Tories’ disintegration of the NHS.

A fringe meeting held by NHS Workers Say No was well attended, with speakers from the NEU and BMA. The networks built up during the strikes and the reject campaign will be vital to winning the current ballot, and can also lay the basis of the RCN growing in strength as a union with the ability to organise meaningfully in workplaces.

The congress voted not to participate further in the Pay Review Body (PRB). After Unison’s similar decision last month, this is another step towards return of directly negotiated pay in the NHS. The strikes have at least achieved that much.

A vote on affiliation to the TUC was lost, despite strong arguments for the RCN to recognise the common struggle nurses have with other workers and the broader context of the attacks on the NHS, on working conditions, trade-union rights and political freedoms. A majority felt that the RCN has been able to make a strong stand in part



despite other (health) trade unions, and that the cost of affiliation would not bring enough benefit. However, the vote was close, showing that the “trade union side” of the RCN is growing, a belated

## Equalities

Other debates saw the RCN taking strong stance on inclusivity and against discrimination, including committing to becoming an anti-racist organisation, taking a strong stand on rights of international health workers, endorsing active steps on women’s health campaigning, and against LGBT hate crime. There was no sign of the anti-trans mobilisation found in some other trade unions.

Despite its history, the RCN has led the strikes in the NHS. Many thousands of other health workers wanted and voted to join action, and ambulance workers did take part in the historic strikes, but the leaders of the other main health unions have actively undermined the struggle on pay.

That has given momentum to the call for a separate pay spine and separate pay negotiations for nurses, popular at the congress. But dividing from, and therefore breaking up, the collective NHS terms and conditions would be a mistake and play into the government’s hands (although there is probably is an argument (and at this point a certain industrial logic) for nurses specifically to achieve better pay.

The argument for joint struggle across the NHS is still to be won across all the trade unions. Health workers in Unison and the GMB (and Unite) need to show their solidarity with RCN members to boost the case for this collective struggle. □

# Posties organise against Mail deal

From 25 May, Royal Mail postal workers in the Communication Workers Union (CWU) will vote in a referendum on a [settlement](#) on pay and conditions agreed between their employer and their union leadership. A grassroots campaign has been launched, [Postal Workers Say Vote No](#). J, a postal worker, CWU delivery rep, supporter of Workers’ Power, and activist from the campaign spoke to Solidarity.



The proposed deal concedes to almost all of Royal Mail’s demands in some form. It would be a downgrade in pay, terms and conditions, will lead to a big hike in workload, and fails to guarantee job security. It also undermines the ability of the union to fight back in the future.

The deal accepts the pathetic 2% for last year, which workers have already been paid anyway, gives 6% this year and another 2% next year and a one-off £500 lump sum. Altogether, given still spiraling prices, that is a pay cut of more than 10% in real terms. Promises of 20% of any profits, and schemes to “incentivise” workers with payments for extra parcels delivered, also hike our workload. It would also lead to longer hours, particularly over the Christmas period, and extend outdoor, physical work.

All this follows a fight where members lost 18 days pay on strike days, and hundreds of reps were disciplined or sacked. While Royal Mail bosses paid themselves nearly three quarters of a billion pounds in dividends, bonuses and shares last year, the deal demands that workers pay to turn “the fortunes of the company around”.

Postal Workers Say Vote No is aimed at building a grassroots network of activists in the CWU to campaign against the deal, based upon postal workers who are opposed to the leadership’s acquiescence to the Royal Mail bosses.

If the deal is rejected, we will need a renewed approach to the strike. After that people differ on

what needs doing. I believe we need to shift to rapid escalation and if needed all-out strike action to win, and this action needs to be led by the rank-and-file, who must elect strike committees in every office and depot. The leadership limited the pace of the strikes and then suspended them, hunting for a deal with Royal Mail, and that has sapped momentum and workers’ militancy. In order to win, we need to ramp up activity and keep the pressure on.

This is unlikely to be done by the union leaders themselves, which is why members need to take control.

One of the main reasons such a shoddy deal is being considered is because the strikes so far have been firmly under the control of the bureaucracy, who conducted negotiations with no input or oversight from the rank-and-file.

Throughout the strike, union leaders have fought to contain escalation, for fear of losing control of the union to members. They have refused to ballot workers locally to fight suspensions and sackings, even though offices have requested them. Little has been done to stop cuts and other attacks. Action has been restricted to a couple days of strike action at its highpoint – not enough.

We’ve also had a classic example of the union leaders trying to keep a separation between politics – which they think should be the sole preserve of Labour MPs – and trade unionism. Of course, such a separation is impossible, as this dispute has proven. The issues with Royal Mail, such as their insistence that pay and conditions have to be degraded to “save the business” are the direct result of privatisation, and a natural response should be to demand that Royal Mail be taken back into public ownership if the private sector can’t run it. □

• Abridged. More: [bit.ly/post-no](https://bit.ly/post-no)





# Solidarity

**For a workers' government**

## UCU: BUILD THE BOYCOTT!

**By a UCU member**

The future of the University and College Union (UCU) disputes will depend on members holding the line in the Marking and Assessment Boycott (MAB), as dates for exam boards draw nearer. But, as UCU members who have taken part in MABs in the past will know, managements will use any number of tactics to try to undermine our dispute. So far, the most serious threat has been over pay deductions, the threat of 100% at some Unis, and 50% in many others.

That is why it is critical that UCU stands fully behind its National Executive decision to extend the fund to all members facing any level of deduction. And the national union needs to give full support for UCU branches, starting at SOAS and Sheffield Hallam, striking against the punitive deductions.

Branches must provide support to individual members under pressure to mark. Groups of students are actively supporting the union, but UCU branches need to reach out to students.

The extension of the fighting fund and national solidarity with local disputes is critical in help-



ing these efforts. Meanwhile the University of Brighton and University of East Anglia (see page 13) are the latest institutions to announce big redundancies. 100 teaching and 30 professional services staff are threatened at Brighton. Local strikes on pay continue at Imperial after the UCU branch rejected the latest offer.

Nine Unison branches have cleared the turnout hurdle, and are now picking dates for strike action (including at SOAS).

There will be many more cuts and local attacks on us and other campus workers if the UCU does not win its national action demands on pay, pensions, casualisation and conditions. Looking further ahead, we need a discussion on building cross campus unity between HE workers – support grades, lecturers and others might be best served being part of the

same union. UCU members will be disappointed that we are not further on in our disputes. While most of the blame for this is of course down to the intransigence of the employers, we need to know what has gone wrong in our own union. Members will have a chance to do this at the UCU Congress on 27-29 May, when motions of censure in General Secretary Jo Grady will be discussed.

Members will have lost track of the number of ways in which our General Secretary has ignored decisions of the Higher Education Committee and other democratic structures or manipulated the machinery of the union (through e.g. holding plebiscites) in order to pursue personalised strategies. By sidelining negotiators, we lost valuable expertise and continuity in negotiations. By stopping strike action while negotiations were taking place, we threw away a vital weapon in our armoury. None of this has shown the employers that the union is competent; quite the opposite.

We need to take stock now while building and defending our current round of industrial action. □

• Abridged: more [bit.ly/ucu-bc](https://bit.ly/ucu-bc)