

Workers' Liberty

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The left in Ukraine

By Dale Street

Workers' Liberty members met with members of Sotsialny Rukh (SR – Social Movement) in Lviv and Kyiv during our visit to Ukraine in August 2023.

SR emerged from the regrouping of (and splits from) the left which took place around the Maidan Revolution of Dignity in late 2013 and early 2014. It was formally launched in 2015 and now has functioning branches in three Ukrainian cities, plus members in others.

SR defines itself as “a Ukrainian political organisation and initiative towards the legal registration of a left political party based on the principles of democratic anti-capitalism, feminism and eco-socialism.”

Like the British left SR faces a government which pursues neo-liberal policies, a history of the country defined by nationalist narratives, the spread of casualised labour, and threats from the far right.

In other respects much is different.

There is no equivalent of the Labour Party (i.e. a trade-union-based political party), there is no single trade union centre (i.e. no equivalent of the TUC). For an older generation the fake socialism of Stalinism has been a lived experience.

There is strong and pervasive pro-EU sentiment, which undoubtedly involves illusions in the actual EU, but is also an expression of national self-identity: we are European, not a sub-section of Russia.

Political parties in Ukraine are distrusted even more than in Britain – in fact, creations of different oligarchs, as opposed to ideologically and politically defined organisations.

There is even a “black market” where, if the price is right, you can buy the name of a registered but actually non-existent party and stand candidates under its name.

This helps explain Zelenskyy's success in the presidential election of 2019 and the success of his Servant of the People Party in the parliamentary elections. Voters saw them, rightly or wrongly, as a break with oligarchism in the party-political sphere.

The left in Ukraine is even weaker than in Britain. Aside from a few small groupings of anarchists and leftists, such as the Social Democratic Platform, SR, roughly the size of the AWL, effectively is the left in Ukraine.

The struggle to defend Ukrainian self-determination against Russian imperialism overarches everything. You can scarcely find anyone who does not have a family member, friend, neighbour or workplace colleague fighting in the Ukrainian armed forces. 78% of Ukrainians have a relative or friend who has been killed or wounded in the war.

The war can also warp political judgements.

One trade union activist we spoke to, for example, thought that Boris Johnson was a great man. He had stood with Ukraine against Russia from the outset and ensured supplies of British weaponry for Ukraine. His only major failure was his “mistake” of having supported Brexit.

Obviously, if there are any inaccuracies in the summary above, or in the outline of our discussions with SR below, then the fault lies with ourselves.

SR won't be standing candidates in the next parliamentary elections (originally scheduled for this year but now put back, given the wartime conditions, to 2024) even though it could meet the legal requirements to do so.

The main arguments are that an electoral intervention would, albeit wrongly, be tarred with the same brush as other “political parties” (i.e. creations of different oligarchs). SR needs to build a stronger base among trade unionists, in workplaces, and among young people before standing candidates.

Being based in Ukraine, SR is better placed to make judgements about the value or otherwise of standing candidates.

But not standing candidates – bearing in mind that SR is effectively the left in Ukraine – means the absence of any socialist alternative on the ballot paper. No prospect of a substantial vote? That cannot be decisive.

In South Africa's first post-apartheid elections in 1994, for example, the miniscule Trotskyist group Workers Organisation for Socialist Action (WOSA)

stood candidates. Given the (under-served) status of the African National Congress, WOSA knew that its vote would be minimal. (And it was: 0.02%.)

But WOSA was right to stand candidates, given that the alternative was to abandon the electoral arena to various forms of bourgeois political parties.

In some local elections SR members have stood as individuals. And surely standing SR candidates as such in the next parliamentary elections could be used to help build a stronger base, rather than posing the existence of that base as a precondition for standing?

Another issue we discussed, especially in our meeting with SR members in Kyiv, was launching a regular SR newspaper. SR opposed the idea, not because of lack of resources but as a wrong thing to do.

Given how many newspapers are produced by socialist organisations in Britain (and elsewhere), this may seem outlandish. But SR did have some solid arguments.

There are no daily newspapers in Ukraine. The nearest thing to a weekly newspaper is “Sobitiya Nedelyi” (“Events of the Week”). It carries tittle-tattle rather than actual news, and its circulation, for good reason, appears to be minimal.

Ukraine is not like Britain, where fewer people read newspapers today than twenty or thirty years ago. Ukraine is much more “extreme”. It is a post-newspaper, online country in which hard-copy newspapers do not exist. It would be a matter of trying to sell a newspaper in a country where people simply did not read newspapers.

A weaker argument in support of the SR position was that a Ukrainian version of Socialist Appeal UK had attempted to launch a regular newspaper, but quickly abandoned the project with no success.

But given the quality of journalism in Socialist Appeal's network, that failure looks unsurprising. And, if the paper were still being produced, the fact that *Socialist Appeal* has been an apologist for Putin since February 2022 would guarantee a Ukrainian readership of



zero.

Although the arguments against producing a newspaper certainly carried weight, they did not engage with the more basic concept, which we failed to introduce into the discussion, of a revolutionary newspaper being, as Lenin put it, being “not only a collective propagandist and a collective agitator, but also a collective organiser.”

A revolutionary newspaper is not just a medium through which to promote socialist ideas to a broader audience. It is also a mechanism around which to build, train and organise the revolutionary party itself. Does the total absence of a newspaper-reading culture in Ukraine mean that a revolutionary paper is no longer required for that function?

The SR comrades were not arguing: Why produce a newspaper when you have Facebook and Twitter/X? They were clear that online “campaigning” by itself does not amount to much.

They argued that social media allows SR to gain an audience for its ideas, and that needs to be followed up by what we would call “contact work”: chasing up and engaging in political discussions with individuals who have shown an interest.

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They cited the SR intervention into the Be Like Nina health workers' campaign.

SR argument is not arguing that there is no point in producing any hard-copy material. On the contrary, they cited numerous examples of where they had intervened in workplace disputes and campaigns through the production of targeted hard-copy materials.

SR has also published a handbook on workers' rights (as a campaigning tool, not just as a handbook of legal rights) and produces a zine which, very roughly, is the equivalent of *Women's Fightback*.

There was a more confusing discussion – due to our own lack of clarity – about what political activities should or could be undertaken by the (very limited) number of SR members in the Ukrainian armed forces.

Equally unsuccessful, through no

fault of SR, were our attempts to clarify the reasons for the split in the Ukrainian trade union movement between the FPU (the Stalinist-legacy trade union federation) and the KVPU (a more militant federation).

Was it simply a split between conservative and more militant trade unionism? Had it been a split between supporters of Poroshenko and supporters of Tymoshenko? And when did it take place?

SR's membership has increased, if not massively, since Russia's full-scale invasion in February of last year.

Relatively speaking, it has been easier to gain a hearing for traditional left-wing causes, such as anti-fascism and anti-imperialism. (And anti-imperialism in Ukraine is the real thing – not the bogus anti-imperialism of the likes of the Socialist Workers Party and the Stop the War Coalition.)

There have been opportunities to tap into the popular discontent about

anti-social measures adopted – and then sometimes withdrawn in the face of that discontent – by the government. (Particularly when such measures have hit those serving in the armed forces).

Shortcomings in the government's failure to adequately equip and supply members of the armed forces have also created openings for campaigning. Arguably, a kind of network of "civil society" organisations has emerged to provide soldiers with what the government is failing to provide.

SR has benefited from support provided by the (not-pro-Putin) left internationally since the Russian invasion, through networks such as the European Network in Solidarity with Ukraine (though more could be done).

The far right in Ukraine seems to be weaker than it was previously (contrary to the delusional claims of the likes of the *Morning Star*, it was never a mass force anyway).

An online attempt by sections of the

far right to whip up transphobia against trans members of the armed forces, for example, backfired badly. The social media response was: These people are fighting for their country – unlike the keyboard warriors denouncing them.

Ukrainian "leftists" who share the politics of the British Stop the War Coalition are also thoroughly discredited. Or, more accurately, the sole such "leftist" out of a population of some 44 million, Volodymyr Ishchenko, now based in Berlin University, and a speaker at the SWP's recent Marxism 2023.

SR is a "looser" organisation than the AWL. But its active opposition to the Russian invasion and its ongoing campaigning in support of workers' rights even in the midst of war puts much of the British (and not just the British) left to shame.

SR is at [@SocRuch](https://www.facebook.com/SocRuch), Facebook [social.ruh](https://www.facebook.com/social.ruh), [rev.org.au](https://www.rev.org.au), and email info@rev.org.ua □

Back Ukraine's teachers and children

By Mark Osborn

Mark Osborn, a teacher from south London, recently met activists from Ukraine's Free Trade Union of Education and Science Workers (VPONU), an affiliate of the Confederation of Free Trade Unions (KVPU), in Lviv and Kyiv.

On 22 August, in western Ukraine, I met the Lviv Committee of VPONU. Nataliia Babych told me that Ukrainian education workers needed solidarity from British unions: "We want to survive. We want to be free and live in an independent Ukraine. We want to live in a democratic state."

Nataliia told me that educators face increased workload and low wages. Despite the fact that teachers are exempt from conscription into the army, many have joined up and are now fighting at the front, including several elected union officials from the Lviv area.

During the course of our discussion, we were interrupted three times. Once by the sirens announcing a possible missile attack. Twice by sirens from convoys of trucks and ambulances ferrying wounded Ukrainian troops to a military hospital. In the basement of the building there was a bomb shelter, with sandbags piled up on the street outside.

The union activists were almost entirely taken up with the question of defending Ukraine against the Russian

invasion. That question dominates everything else. The day after I met Lviv VPONU a Russian drone strike hit a school in Romny, Sumy Oblast, north-east Ukraine. Students are not back in school until the beginning of September, but some staff were on site.

The Principal, Tetyana Prokoopenko, her Deputy Principal, School Secretary and Librarian were all killed.

In Kharkiv, Ukraine's second biggest city and close to the border with Russia, 60 classrooms have been built in underground Metro stations. 1,000 students will be taught underground.

On Independence Day in Ukraine, Thursday 24 August, I met leaders of the KVPU and Tatiana Zuivra, an English teacher and VPONU rep at a secondary school. At the KVPU office in the capital, Kyiv, we discussed the issues Ukrainian teachers face.

The union activists proudly showed me photographs of relatives serving in the armed forces. Again, these union leaders asked for solidarity from British trade unions. Tatiana said that the wage of a Ukrainian teacher is the equivalent of around £140 per month, before tax.

Volodymyr Fundovnyi, National Chair of KVPU, explained how, during the 1990s and the transition in Ukraine from a Soviet-style economy to free market capitalism, the union had fought for wages that had been unpaid for many months.



Volodymyr Fundovnyi (left); Tatiana Zuivra and KVPU vice-chair Petro Tuley, (right); with UK visitors

The KVPU is the smaller but more radical of the trade union centres in Ukraine. Strikes have been banned under Martial Law. And Zelenskyy's capitalist government is deregulating the economy. Unemployment stands at least 20%.

A new report from Unicef states that 1,300 schools in Ukrainian held territory have been destroyed since Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022. Only about one-third of Ukrainian school-age children are attending classes fully, in person.

Some schools have been destroyed as a result of missile hits, others have closed as a precaution.

Deputy Education Minister Andriy Stashkiv states, "Out of 13,000 schools in Ukraine, 6,500 will work as usual [when schools open in September], 3,800 will work in mixed format and 2,500 secondary institutions will work entirely online [this school year]" (29 August, Ukrinform). Stashkiv also reported that 70,000 internally

displaced Ukrainian children have moved from Russian occupied areas into government-controlled areas.

Ukraine believes that up to 80,000 students will log on to Ukrainian schooling from Russian-occupied areas. This is dangerous for the students and their parents. If the Russian occupying authorities find out, the children and their parents' lives could be at risk.

Following Covid, this is the fourth consecutive year Ukrainian children have had their education disrupted and the war means many are distressed, worried, and without safe spaces to learn. Regina De Dominicis, Unicef's regional director says, "Not only has this left Ukraine's children struggling to progress in their education, but they are also struggling to retain what they learned when their schools were fully functioning."

Unicef also report that more than half the children who have fled the country are not enrolled in a school in their

new home.

Ukraine has opened 3,200 criminal cases into the treatment of Ukrainian children under Russian occupation. Yulia Usenko, Head of Child Protection in the Office of Ukraine's Prosecutor General, says the allegations include, "murders, mutilations, abduction... deportation and sexual violence." Usenko states that Ukraine has evidence of torture used against 75 Ukrainian children and 13 cases of sexual violence.

In March 2023 the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin for the deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy states: "371 children have been returned to Ukraine from deportation... we know for sure that at least 19,505 children ... are still with the enemy. And we must return them all." A report in February 2023 by Conflict Observatory claims that Russia puts Ukrainian children in camps where they are subjected to "political re-education".

UN official Rosemary DeCarlo states that 545 Ukrainian children have died, and 17,000 have been injured since the full-scale invasion began in February 2022. DeCarlo accepts that the actual numbers are almost certainly much higher. Ukraine believes 1,165 children are also missing. □

Rescuing the Holocaust from Stalinism I: Babyn Yar

By Dale Street

In mid-September 1941 German troops occupied Kyiv. On 26th September a decree ordered all "Yids" (sic) resident in the city to assemble three days later at the junction of Melnikova Street and Dokterivskaya Street, on what was then the north-western edge of the city.

From there the Jews were marched to the nearby Babyn Yar ravine, where they were stripped of their possessions and clothing and then systematically massacred. 22,000 were killed that day. Another 12,000 the following day.

By November, according to the report of an SS commander responsible for the mass murder, some 75,000 Jews had been killed in the ravine.

But that was not the end of the slaughter. By the time of the Nazi retreat from Kyiv in November of 1943, over 100,000 people had been massacred in Babyn Yar – mainly Jews but also Roma, Ukrainian nationalists, the mentally ill, clergymen, Communists, and Ukrainian and Russian prisoners of war.

In the post-war years Ukraine's Stalinist rulers wrote this chapter of the Holocaust out of history.

In the late 1940s Nikita Khrushchev, the then head of the Ukrainian Communist Party, rejected calls for a monument to be erected to the victims of Babyn Yar. So too did his successor, Mykola Podhorny.

Instead, in order to erase the very existence of the ravine, Podhorny ordered it to be filled in with earth. A dam the height of a six-story building was erected at its northern end, and for three years slurry from a local brickworks was pumped into the ravine.

But in 1961 the dam wall broke, flooding the adjacent Kurenivka district. Estimates of those killed as a result vary widely, but the minimum figure is 145.

The same year Yevgeny Yevtushenko published his poem "Babi Yar", initially in the underground press and then in *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, in protest at the ongoing refusal of the authorities to acknowledge Babyn Yar as a site of the Holocaust.

Yevtushenko was immediately denounced in state media for supposedly attaching more importance to the sufferings of Jews than the sufferings of the Russian people. According to Khrushchev, by this time General Secretary of the USSR Communist Party, the poem portrayed Babyn Yar "as if only Jews were the victims."

Jewish activists who did not enjoy Yevtushenko's prestige faced harsher treatment in their attempts to commemorate the massacre of September 1941. They were detained at railway stations to prevent them from travelling to Kyiv, sacked from their jobs, and, in some cases, imprisoned.

In 1965 the authorities ran a compe-

titition for the design of a memorial in memory of those killed at Babyn Yar. They rejected all entries. None of them corresponded to the Stalinist mythology of the Great Patriotic War.

In 1972 27 Jews were arrested and sentenced to fifteen days imprisonment for laying flowers at Babyn Yar on the anniversary of the massacre of September 1941. The following year five Jews were arrested for unlawful assembly in attempting to commemorate the massacre.

In 1976 a grotesque memorial was erected by the authorities at Babyn Yar. The central figure in the monument is a Soviet soldier. The monument's inscription makes no mention of the Jews who had been the primary victims of the successive slaughters at the site:

"Here, between 1941 and 1943, over 100,000 citizens of the city of Kyiv and prisoners of war were shot by the German fascist predators."

Subsequent plans to build a sports stadium on the site were abandoned, but not the construction of a television tower (targeted in a Russian missile attack in the second week of the war), a multi-lane dual carriageway, and apartment blocks.

Work on these building projects constantly uncovered corpses from the slaughter of 1941. The work also involved digging up graves and destroying headstones in the old Jewish cemetery of Lukianovka, immediately adjacent to the ravine.

Only after the demise of Stalinist rule did it cease to be a crime to acknowledge and commemorate Babyn Yar as the site of a chapter of the Holocaust. Annual commemorations became not just legal but also officially supported by municipal and state authorities.

In 2016 work began on transforming the site into a Memorial Centre, one in which the mass murder of Jews was no longer written out of history. A plaque at the entrance to the sprawling site

invokes the memory of "those tens of thousands of inhabitants of Kyiv who were killed here on 29-30 September 1941 only because they were Jews. But let us also honour the tens of thousands of Ukrainians, Jews, Romani and representatives of other ethnic groups whose lives were taken away here by the Hitlerite regime during the Nazi occupation in 1941-43."

A Road of Sorrow leads from the entrance into the centre of the site. Triggered by the body movements of anyone walking along the path, 36 overhead microphones quietly play extracts from Jewish prayers and the names of some of the victims.

The ceiling of an eleven-metre-tall symbolic synagogue designed in the shape of a book, assembled from wood gathered from derelict buildings across Ukraine, shows the positions of the stars in the Northern Sky in the night of 29 September 1941.

A Crystal Wall of Crying, made of anthracite and rock quartz crystals, stands as a symbolic extension of the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. The Crystal Wall is positioned, within ten metres of accuracy, where a straight line drawn as an extension of the Wailing Wall would pass through the site.

A tall monument of bricks, topped by a tank of slurry water, recalls the deaths in the Kurenivka district in the man-made disaster of 1961. The bricks are taken from derelict buildings throughout Ukraine, including the local Zejcev brickworks.

(One employee of the brickworks had been Mendel Beylis, charged with ritual murder in the infamous Beylis Trial of 1913.)

Another monument is dedicated to the poet and head of the Ukrainian Writers' Guild Olina Tehila, one of the 600 or so members of the OUN (Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists) killed at Babyn Yar.

An Alley of the Righteous is dedi-

cated to the Ukrainians who saved the lives of Jews during the Nazi Holocaust. Over 2,500 Ukrainians have been awarded the title of "Righteous Among the Nations of the World."

Other monuments and memorials are dedicated to the memory of other victims of the massacres committed at Babyn Yar – Roma, clergymen, Ukrainian nationalists, and children – and to all those who fell victim to Nazism.

The Memorial Centre is not yet complete. The planned museum at the entrance to the site is still under construction (or renovation). So too is a massive pyramid-shaped kurgan dedicated to the victims of the 1961 disaster. The task of adding to the collections of archival material is also ongoing.

But there is a contradiction between the aim of the Memorial Centre ("to prevent the resurgence of totalitarianism and the spread of xenophobia, including antisemitism, Romaphobia and Ukraineophobia") and versions of Ukrainian history which uncritically glorify the role of the OUN during the war.

Both wings of the OUN – the OUN-M led by Andriy Melnik, and the OUN-B led by Stepan Bandera – collaborated with the Nazis in the Holocaust. At Babyn Yar itself both factions were members of the Ukrainian Auxiliary Police which assisted in the massacres.

But Kyiv's Prospect Stepana Bandery is, literally, just five minutes walk to the north of the Memorial Centre.

Legal challenges to prevent the re-naming of the boulevard, previously Moskovsky Avenue, were initially successful but subsequently overturned on appeal.

Rescuing the Holocaust from the silence of Stalinism is a positive. But it should not be at the expense of being silent about those who shared the antisemitism of the Nazis and collaborated with the latter in carrying out the Holocaust. □

Student organising in Ukraine

By Dale Street

During their recent visit to Ukraine Workers' Liberty members met with some members of the student organisation Direct Action (Priama Diia) in Lviv.

The Direct Action organisation of today, they explained, is the latest version of a succession of student organisations which have periodically existed under that name since the 1990s. Today's Direct Action has existed for just over a year.

It aims to be a broad organisation, bringing together Marxist socialists, anarchists and students with a more "liberal" outlook (i.e. anti-discrimination and pro-equalities), with a focus on:

- Opposition to the ongoing commercialisation of higher education, such as the introduction of fees for exam resits and the transformation of education into a commodity. Direct Action members were active, for example in last year's campaign against the closure of the Ukraine Academy of Printing attached to the Ivano Franko National University in Lviv
- Opposition to all forms of discrimination and harassment in education and in society in general, including support for trans rights. A leaflet produced by Direct Action, for example, provides advice to women who are victims of bullying and emotional



Pic: Priama Diia

abuse.

- Promotion of a pro-environment consciousness and the adoption of environment-friendly policies by educational institutions.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February of last year has created new challenges for students – and seems to have acted as the trigger for the relaunch of Direct Action – in terms of

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Rescuing the Holocaust from Stalinism II: Lviv

By Dale Street

At the start of the Second World War around 100,000 Jews lived in Lviv, nearly a third of its total population. Poles made up half the population – at that time Lviv was part of Poland – and the remainder (about 17%) were Ukrainians.

The Jewish population quickly increased to 150,000, as a result of Jews fleeing Nazi-occupied Poland. But in June of 1941 Lviv itself was seized by the Nazis.

Almost immediately, a “popular” Jewish pogrom was carried out by a mixture of members of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and the local population. A second “popular” pogrom was staged in late July.

SS Einsatzgruppen, helped by the newly formed Ukrainian militia, “intervened” in the pogroms by rounding up Jews and conducting mass executions by firing squad. In the course of July around 5,000 Jews were killed.

In November the city’s new Nazi authorities banned Jews from all spheres of economic activity, ordered them to carry out forced labour, confiscated their possessions and accommodation, and confined them to a ghetto on the northern edge of the city centre.

It was the third biggest Jewish ghetto, after Warsaw and Lodz, in Nazi occupied-Europe.

“Popular” pogroms were replaced by systematic mass murder. Jews were deported to the death camps (such as Belzec, less than a hundred kilome-

ters away) or murdered in the ghetto itself and the forced-labour camp on Yanivska Street.

Living conditions in the Jewish ghetto – 25 people would “live” in a two-room apartment – facilitated diseases, malnutrition and suicides, which all added to the death toll.

By the time of the Nazi withdrawal from Lviv, in July of 1944, less than 1% of the city’s pre-war Jewish population had survived. Prior to the war there had been a hundred synagogues in Lviv. By 1944 just two remained.

In the post-war decades Stalinist historiography dissolved the Nazis’ specifically antisemitic mass murder into a generalised violence inflicted on the Soviet people as a whole.

Despite the significance of Lviv in the history of the Holocaust, no monuments were erected in memory of its victims. The sites of the destroyed synagogues were variously left vacant, redesigned as public squares, or transformed into car parks (with no acknowledgement of their previous role).

The administration building of the Yanivska camp, where Nazi functionaries drew up the lists of Jews to be sent to their death in Belzec, became just another apartment block. So too did the accommodation blocks of the camp guards who murdered Jews in the camp itself.

That has changed in the decades following Ukrainian independence. The first monument to the victims of the Holocaust in Lviv was erected in 1992, designed by a Lviv Holocaust survivor.

In the late 1990s work began excavating the site of the Golden Rose Synagogue, the main synagogue in Lviv prior to the Nazi occupation, uncovering sections of remnants of its interior.

In 2008 the “Space of the Synagogues” project was initiated and a series of marble monuments installed on the Golden Rose Synagogue site, commemorating not just the synagogue itself but also the overall destruction of Lviv’s Jewish community.

The sites of other former synagogues, including that of the sixteenth century Great Synagogue, partially demolished by the Nazis in 1941 and subsequently blown up in its entirety, will also be memorialised as part of the project.

Since 2021 street signage and displays have been installed in the streets of what were once Lviv’s Jewish quarters, outlining the history and destruction of the city’s Jewish community.

Particularly impressive, if that is the right word, has been the creation of the “Memorial Museum of Totalitarian Regimes – Territory of Terror”, located on the site of the wartime Jewish ghetto and a Stalinist transit camp for post-war deportations.

Initiated in 2009, it was built between 2014 and 2016.

The bulk of the museum consists of displays of Holocaust “artefacts” (such as the instruments of a concentration camp “orchestra”, or the possessions of Jews who were killed in the Yanivska camp), oral-history recordings of Lviv Holocaust survivors, the reconstruction of a concentration camp barracks, and

hundreds of family photographs of local victims of the Holocaust.

Other displays cover Stalin’s post-war mass deportations of Ukrainians, mainly carried out in the years 1949-52.

These displays include one of the railway cattle wagons (manufactured in the German “Democratic” Republic in 1951) used for the deportations, the reconstruction of a typical NKVD archive, and a collection of Soviet-era monuments which gave visual expression to the Stalinist mythology of the Great Patriotic War.

To bring the theme of totalitarian regimes and terror up-to-date, a display at the entrance to the museum has the names and pictures of the 53 Ukrainian soldiers murdered by the Russians in the Olenivka prison camp in July of 2022.

Lviv’s rescue of the Holocaust from the Stalinist rewriting of history which, at best, glossed over the targeted mass murder of Jews, has an obvious immense value in and of itself.

But it also exposes the mendacity of Putin’s “justification” for his war on Ukraine, a “justification” which is parroted by his apologists who write for and read the *Morning Star*, and by their counterparts in other countries.

Ukraine, they claim, has been run by Nazis and neo-Nazis since the Maidan Revolution of Dignity of 2014. And yet, a country supposedly run by the heirs of Nazism is restoring the memory of the victims of the Nazi Holocaust.

Something which certainly cannot be said of Putin’s “anti-fascist” Russia. □

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physical attacks on education institutions by the Russians, the flight of students from Russian-occupied Ukraine, and further cuts in education spending by Ukraine’s neo-liberal government.

Direct Action remains a small organisation. But campaigning around the new issues for students triggered by Russian aggression, alongside of ongoing campaigning around more “traditional” student issues, has enabled Direct Action to grow over the past twelve months.

Direct Action members have been active in the Students UA campaign, which defends the right of Ukrainian students to study abroad even under war-

time conditions.

A leaflet produced by Direct Action – “Students Against All Forms of Fascism” – poses opposition to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine as a form of anti-fascist struggle (it is unclear if the leaflet’s images of Putin as Hitler are intended as a form of agitation or as a “scientific” definition of Putin’s regime).

More recently Direct Action has launched a [petition](#) for the (former) Russian Embassy in Kyiv to be transformed into a community centre where “students can conduct courses, workshops, lectures and other events. Once established, active students will have the opportunity to create cooperatives, mutual aid organizations and any joint initiatives.”

One issue that came up in

the course of the discussion with the Direct Action comrades was their attitude to the Ukrainian Association of Students (UAS).

The Stalinist states had fake trade unions which were trade unions in name only but functioned as part of the state apparatus, and fake “student unions” too. Some of those fake “unions” have mutated into (weak) real unions since 1989-91, some haven’t. The UAS is the Stalinist-legacy “student union” in Ukraine.

Direct Action members argued – convincingly, I think – that there is no point in trying to organise within the UAS. The UAS is not the Ukrainian equivalent of the British National Union of Students (NUS).

The NUS of today is a (weak)

bureaucracy which presides over a moribund mass student organisation, and helps keep it moribund.

By contrast, the UAS is effectively a bureaucracy without a union. Winning leadership of the UAS, even if there were a mechanism for doing so, would be the equivalent of taking over the driving seat of a car with no engine, and not much by way of a chassis either.

The UAS functions as an extension of university administrations. Some Student Unions in British Further Education colleges function similarly, but as the result of weakness; in Ukraine, it’s the result of design.

When Direct Action members campaigned against the

closure of the Ukraine Academy of Printing in Lviv, for example, the UAS backed plans for its closure, thereby enabling the administration to falsely claim that closure was backed by the real “representative” student body at the institution.

Some Direct Action students in Lviv are now at risk of expulsion from their institution, after running a Direct Action stall at the equivalent of a freshers’ fair, with claims that given the existence of the UAS, Direct Action supposedly has no right to present itself as a student union and encourage students to join it.

Direct Action is at [@PriamaDiia](#) and Facebook [PriamaDiia](#); email priama.diia@gmail.com □