

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

SUPPORT ARAB-JEWISH MOVEMENT FOR PEACE!

Standing Together has set up Jewish-Arab Solidarity Guards. They've brought flowers and thanks to Jewish and Palestinian medical staff.



Ziv Hospital, Safed, Israel, @omdimbeyachad

» Peace and independence for Israelis and Palestinians

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How can the political reality in Israel/Palestine be changed? And how can those, like us, many thousands of miles distant from the territory, best contribute to struggles for that change?

Workers' Liberty agrees with those Palestinians and Israelis who stress the irreplaceable role of pressure from grassroots social movements organising on a binational basis, aiming to win equal rights for both peoples.

Supporting efforts to develop such movements is not an immediate answer. It is not a substitute for immediate-term efforts such as increasing diplomatic pressure for a lasting ceasefire. But we are not in a position to make immediate answers happen anyway. Building forces for a wider horizon for change is irreplaceable.

Standing Together (Naqef Ma'an-Omdim be'Yachad) is the largest grassroots Arab-Jewish movement in Israeli society. Since 7 October, it has focused on organising "Arab-Jewish Solidarity Guards", especially in mixed cities, mobilising both Palestinian and Jewish citizens of Israel to carry out community organising and mutual aid. Their "solidarity rallies" have mobilised thousands, and the movement now has around 5,000 members. This grassroots anti-racist work is especially important in a context in which the far-right elements of the Israeli government are working to incite Jews to violence against their Arab neighbours.

Standing Together also runs a hotline for anyone victimised by their employer or educational institution for

making anti-war statements. Activists report being inundated with calls from Palestinian citizens of Israel, facing an authoritarian government crackdown, with right-wing forces attempting to portray them as an "enemy within".

Standing Together's work to build Arab-Jewish solidarity inside Israeli society does not provide an immediate mechanism for stopping the war. But it has the potential to build a movement that consciously aims to break the hold of a politics of perpetual occupation – a reality which oppresses Palestinians, but also makes Israelis less safe. As Karl Marx's adage puts it, "a nation that oppresses another can never be free."

Recent opinion polling in Israel shows that Netanyahu is plunging in popularity. One poll indicates that, if elections were held today, he would suffer a heavy defeat. His likely successor, the "centrist" Benny Gantz, is hardly less hawkish, but deposing Netanyahu, and his alliance with the settler far right, would open cracks of political space that a binational movement for equality could seek to widen.

The organised radical left in Israel is small and beleaguered, and therefore in particular need of solidarity. It can also make an important contribution to the effort to develop an anti-occupation, pro-peace, pro-equality agency. The left party Hadash, linked to Maki, the Israeli Communist Party, was able to mobilise some hundreds for the first formal pro-ceasefire protest in Israel since the war began, on 18 November. Think-tanks like A Land for All, which advocate for a political settlement based on two states within a confederal framework, can also help contribute to an effort to first imagine, and then work to enact, a shared future.

Although Maki has formal links to the

Communist Party of Britain (CPB), which publishes the *Morning Star*, the Stalinist-influenced left in the UK shows little interest in the activity and perspectives of even its own direct counterparts in Israel. The CPB's formal support for a two-state settlement has almost no bearing on its activity. Apart from Workers' Liberty, no current on the UK radical left has engaged with or promoted Standing Together or A Land for All in a consistent way.

The basic reason for that is that much of the radical left sees the Israeli Jewish nation as an illegitimate presence in the region, an artificial implantation of imperialism, out of whose society no progressive potential can emerge. The more "extreme" version of this perspective, as articulated by the Socialist Workers Party, sees change as coming about through an "Arab revolution" in which the "Palestinian resistance", led by Hamas, will sweep Israel away. Groups like Standing Together, Hadash, and A Land for All, which all argue for equal rights between Israeli Jews and Palestinians, are an anathema to this perspective.

An acceptance that two distinct nations inhabit the territory, and that both are rooted in the land, does not provide a political perspective by itself, but it is a necessary starting point. As Edward Said once put it: "The Jews of Israel will remain; the Palestinians will also remain. To say much more than that with assurance is a foolish risk."

If one accepts, then, that binational struggles for equality are an irreplaceable ingredient in any wider programme for change, it follows that the most effective role we can play, from a distance, is to explain and support them. This is why Workers' Liberty emphasises direct support and solidarity for movements

like Standing Together as the key priority for activists internationally.

Hundreds of thousands have marched against Israel's bombing in recent weeks. To channel the energies of even a fraction of those marches into efforts of solidarity with Arab-Jewish movements for equality would be a direct and practical intervention into the situation that would actually connect to struggles for change on the ground. □



UK Friends of Standing Together

Standing Together, Israel's fastest-growing grassroots movement over recent years, unites Jews and Palestinians within Israel to fight for an equal and just society, for peace, and against the occupation.

UKFoST promotes their work in the UK: for peace, justice, and equality for Israelis and Palestinians – Jews and Arabs – including an equal right to self-determination, and for the full equality of Palestinian citizens of Israel.

UKFoST promotes the benefits of joint struggle by Jews and Palestinians to this end, and raises money for Standing Together in Israel. UKFoST's website includes reports from Standing Together, a report of the UKFoST vigil organised in Nottingham, info about an upcoming meeting in London on 11 December, and more. □

 ukfost.co.uk

 [@omdimbeyachaduk](https://twitter.com/omdimbeyachaduk)

Full ceasefire, peace, two states!

As *Solidarity* goes to press, the Gaza ceasefire starting 24 November, to exchange hostages taken on 7 October with Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails, has been extended two days to 7am Thursday 30 November. There is [talk](#) of a new extension, but probably a new Israeli offensive will be raging by the time this paper reaches most readers.

Despite the Israeli military and Hamas accusing each other of impeding aid deliveries and breaking the ceasefire, it has held. But the respite is meagre. A prime factor is Israel's insistence on aid going

only via the crossing from Egypt, not via a crossing from Israel. Free the hostages! End the siege!

The World Health Organisation said on [27 Nov](#) that extra deaths from disease due to shortages of water, food, sanitation, shelter, and healthcare will probably come to exceed deaths from bombing and gunfire as the Israeli ground war restarts (and Hamas's rocket attacks, now few, and its efforts to trigger wider war from Hezbollah and the West Bank). The US is scrabbling to restrain the killing and new forced population movements.

Although [Human Rights Watch](#), very critical of Israel, has concluded that the Al-Ahli hospital explosion on 17 October was probably a stray missile rather than an Israeli bomb, some 15,000 have been killed, and the estimates from Israeli authorities of Hamas military killed have been between 1,000 and 5,000, a clear minority. The war is massacring civilians; it will not destroy Hamas; it will raise new recruits for it, and feed cycles of vengeance.

The US and other governments have been pushed into talk of restarting pressure for a "two states" deal. Our chief

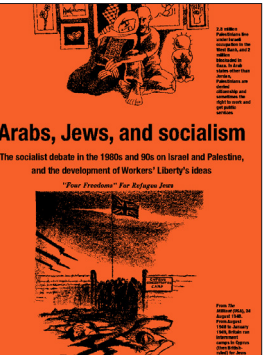
job is to "say what is" about the centrality of the forces on the ground, in Israel and the Palestinian territories, such as Standing Together, which can push to shape things from

below for peace, mutual recognition of rights, and workers' unity. Two states: a real independent Palestinian state alongside a secure Israel!

Workers' unity! □



**Two nations
Two states**
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Arabs, Jews, and socialism
The socialist debate in the 1980s and 90s on Israel and Palestine, and the development of Workers' Liberty's ideas
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Buy "Two Nations, Two States" and "Arabs, Jews and Socialism" together, discounted to £6.50.
workersliberty.org/2-i-p

Labour leaders sit in Tory trap

By Rhodri Evans

After a year in which the NHS and other public services have crumbled as never before, the Tories' 22 November Autumn Statement responded by tax cuts for big business and no relief for public services.

Even before winter starts, the NHS waiting list (on latest available figures, September 2023) is still rising, and at a record level of 7.8 million in England. It was a bit over two million before the Tories came to office in 2010.

Most patients (57.6%) on the waiting list in September 2023 had been there for more than 18 weeks. 391,122 cases had been waiting more than 52 weeks and some for more than two years.

Eleven "section 114 notices" - where an elected council says it can't balance its books, and hands over to unelected commissioners - have been issued by local authorities since 2018, where there were only two in the 18 years previous. Even Tory council leaders warn of worse to come.

Mostly, however, the Autumn Statement was an announcement of planned public-sector cuts in future, calculated to let the government claim that public debt will be falling in five years' time. Some of the cuts are all too likely - like the move to reduce benefits for many disabled people (see back page) - and some others are probably just notional.

The Tories don't expect to be in office

when those cuts fall due. The aim is to enable the Tories to pretend to "balance the books" and to trap a future Labour government.

The Labour leaders are sitting in the trap and making no effort to get out. They criticised the Autumn Statement, but made no commitment to reverse the planned cuts, and no commitment to raise taxes on the rich in order to restore the NHS and public service. Labour leaders just talked rapidly about "growth". They are driving the next Labour government into a brick wall of collapsing public services. The unions and local Labour Parties must mobilise to put taxing the rich onto the agenda.

The Autumn Statement continued a

scheme, which had been temporary, for corporations to deduct investment spending from profits before calculating their tax. (Like a household deducting spending on durables before its income is assessed for tax). It also cut National Insurance contributions. Workers moving into higher income-tax bands through inflation will largely offset that.

A welcome by-product of the 2022-23 pay battles is that the minimum wage will go up to £11.44 an hour from April 2024, a 9.8% rise. Workers who are lower-paid but a bit above the minimum can take that as a cue to demand at least a 9.8% rise in 2024-5 pay deals. □

Two of many deaths

Hundreds attended the funeral of the life-long Canadian-Israeli peace and women's right activist Vivian Silver, on Thursday 16 November. The co-founder of "Women Wage Peace" had been believed to be kidnapped. Her house was burned and gutted. Her body was eventually identified by DNA; she was murdered in her home in Kibbutz Be'eri, Israel.

A tribute to her from WWP: bit.ly/vs-wwp; WWP's first response to the massacre and Israel's retaliation bit.ly/wwp-s; Standing Together organiser Uri Weltmann's update following the funeral bit.ly/vs-st.

Placards on Israeli protests calling for ceasefire and hostage exchanges have honoured her memory. *Socialist Worker*, which responded with a call to "rejoice" at the mas-

sacre of 1,200 people, mostly civilians, many children, is yet to clarify whether it rejoices at her murder too.

Four days earlier, on 12 Nov, a young Fatah supporter, Basel, was killed by an Israeli air strike in Gaza. He had just tweeted: "Oslo returned 750k Palestinians to their homeland, Hamas displaced them, Arafat reclaimed Gaza, but your so-called resistance brought



Basel

Vivian Silver

back the occupation [the IDF]. You [Hamas] have sentenced yourselves to death to chase after Khamenei while selling out your people. Long live

stupidity." Hamas had already responded by threatening his life. [@khaliljerries](https://twitter.com/khaliljerries) □

Senior doctors to ballot on new pay offer

By Colin Foster

The government has made a new pay offer to consultants (senior doctors), and the

consultants' union, the BMA, will ballot on it from mid-December to late July.

In February the Tories said no NHS worker would get

more than 3.5% in 2023-4. In July they shifted to 6%, and said there would be no more talks.

After doctors struck, there were of course new talks. The BMA said the offer will bring more pay rises to doctors, varying from 0% to 12.8%, im-

prove the Pay Review Body, and speed up pay progression.

BMA junior doctors, however, still face only the July offer of 6%. "Speciality and specialist" (SAS) doctors are balloting (until 11 Dec); junior doctors in Wales (until 18

Dec); and in Northern Ireland, 8 January to 19 February. The junior doctors' leadership say: "We've written to our members in England about the consultant pay offer and where we are in our own negotiations with the Government". □

Upcoming meetings

Workers' Liberty meetings are open to all, and unless otherwise stated those below are online over zoom.

Saturday 2 December, 12pm: Workers' Liberty Student day-school, The Red Deer, 18 Pitt Street, Sheffield S1 4DD

Sunday 3 December, 2pm: Socialist Feminist Book Club: Straight Sex by Lynne Segal, Effra Social, London SW2 1DF

Monday 4 December, 7.30pm: North London Workers' Liberty, The rise of the Israeli right, Menard Hall, 14 Galway Street, London EC1V 3SW

Tuesday 5 December, 2pm: Free Sarah Jane Baker protest, Marble Arch, London W1H 7EJ

Thursday 7 December, 4.30pm: Workers' Liberty Students: The war in Ukraine and student solidarity, George Birkbeck Bar, 4th Floor Building, Birkbeck University, London WC1E 7HZ

Sunday 10 December, 11am: Ecosocialist reading group: Growth and Limits (Online)

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



Protests were held on 26 November in London (above), Nottingham, and other UK locations on the eve of the resumption of the National Security mass trial of the Hong Kong 47. After much delay, the trial now looks likely to move to a conclusion within weeks. The 47 are charged with subversion simply for participating in the election primaries of the pro-democracy camp in June 2020. They have been jailed since 2021, and include many leaders of the Hong Kong trade union movement as it was before Beijing repression. The protests were called by the new Workers Against the CCP campaign coalition. Instagram [@WorkersAntiCCP](https://www.instagram.com/WorkersAntiCCP)

Peace, justice... and Stalinism



By Jim Denham

Jeremy Corbyn announced his Peace and Justice Project (PJP) in December 2020, with a mission statement that included: "To bring people together for social and economic justice, peace, and human rights, in Britain and across the world... [It] will work with labour and social movements and provide platforms to those campaigning for change for the many, not the few."

Corbyn's more cultish supporters expressed disappointment that (in the words of the Canary website) he "hasn't launched a new political party in the face of the continuing demise of the Labour Party. But what this new project will hopefully do is work beyond political party lines and foster cooperation and change outside of established democratic processes. And that surely must be a good thing."

The PJP officially launched in January 2021, and since then... nothing. Until Saturday 18 November when the Project held its first international conference.

According to the *Morning Star's* Roger McKenzie this "important conference... covered some of the key challenges facing socialists... in a time of more than 30 armed conflicts across the globe that have been largely been sponsored or have at their core the

promotion of the interests of multinational capitalism and its lap dogs... when we are essentially already in a new cold war"

McKenzie's somewhat Maoist phraseology is highly appropriate: to judge by his roll-call of the "amazing array of speakers" a "campist" view of the world in the tradition of Maoism and Stalinism (Stalinism in the broader sense, as distinct from the personal cult of Stalin) was bound to predominate – together with a distinct whiff of antisemitism.

Truth be told, Corbyn has never had a firm grasp of international matters. He was more Trotskyist, shall we say, from the 1970s to the early 1990s, but since 2005, when he started writing a weekly column for the *Morning Star*, he has mostly been content to follow the lead of the campists of the Stop the War Coalition and the various Stalinists or Stalinoids he surrounded himself with while he was Labour leader (who bear at least some of the responsibility for his floundering incoherence on both antisemitism and Brexit).

Some of the speakers on 18 November were unobjectionable and at least one – Chris Smalls of the US Amazon Labor Union – well worth listening to.

But let's look at some of the others:

- Len McCluskey, the former Unite leader who claims never to have witnessed antisemitism in the labour movement and who has suggested



that Mossad may have known about and turned a blind eye to Hamas's 7 October pogrom

- Sevim Dagdelen, one of the ten German MPs supporting Sahra Wagenknecht's new anti-immigrant, pro-Putin "red-brown" split from the German Left party

- Lowkey, the "rapper and activist" whose song's lyrics include "the Zionist lobby... nothing is more anti-semitic than Zionism... Israel is a terror state, they're terrorists that terrorise... It's about time we globalised the intifada... Israel equals misplacement and ethnic cleansing... curse every Zionist... Shame on Rothschild/ Between them the monster they created has gone wild..."

- Ken Loach, who has made some fine films but in 1987 directed Jim Allen's antisemitic play *Perdition* (which he continues to defend) and in 2017 failed to give a straight answer to a question about whether holocaust denial was acceptable ("history is for all of us to discuss").

Perhaps the most worrying and certainly the most significant speaker was Vijay Prashad, founder of the Tricontinental Institute for Social Research and chief correspondent at the media outlets *Globetrotter* and *Peoples Dispatch*, all of which are funded by Neville Roy Singham, a millionaire tech magnate now based in Shanghai who controls a

network of campaigning groups, news organisations and supposed "charities" dedicated to spreading Chinese government (i.e. Chinese Communist Party) propaganda and denying reports of Chinese human rights abuses.

Ukraine

In a November 2022 [report](#), Intelligence Online revealed Singham was discretely funnelling money to various groups aimed at lobbying against any western support to Ukraine following Russia's invasion, under the guise of anti-war efforts.

Prashad, whose *Globetrotter* and *Peoples Dispatch* articles are frequently republished in the *Morning Star*, is a central part of Singham's operation and clearly has a fan in Roger McKenzie who describes him (in the paper's PJP report) as "the great Vijay Prashad".

Could it be that Jeremy Corbyn, the PJP, and perhaps even the *Morning Star*, are now the "useful idiots" of Neville Roy Singham? □

Wave of protest after murder in Italy



By Rosa Wood

On 11 November, 22-year-old biomedical engineering student Giulia Cecchetin disappeared after meeting her ex-boyfriend Filippo Turetta at the mall to buy her graduation outfit. CCTV footage revealed Turetta beating Giulia in the car park.

On 18 November, Giulia was found brutally murdered, in the bottom of a ravine wrapped in black bags. The following day, after an international arrest warrant had been issued on suspicion of kidnap and murder, Turetta was arrested by German police officers after a passer-by had reported a car

on the highway without its headlights on just outside Leipzig. Turetta has now been extradited to Italy and is in jail. Charges have not been finalised yet.

Data published by the interior minister shows that this is the 102nd case of femicide since the start of 2023, with a partner or ex-partner being the perpetrator in 52 of these cases. The most recent [data](#) by the UN show that globally, 26 per cent of women aged 15 and older have suffered violence from partners.

Elena Cecchetin, Giulia's sister, in a letter to the *Corriere* chain of Italian newspapers, has written: "Femicide is a murder by the state because the state doesn't protect us" and



called for better sex education, funding for "anti-violence centres", and "opportunity to seek help to those who need it".

On 22 November students at Milan University held a "minute of chaos" flash mob in protest and remembrance of Giulia. Protests and vigils were held in other cities around Italy.

On 25 November, Interna-

tional Day Against Gendered Violence, Non-Una Di Meno (Not One Less) posted on their social media "Rome has been invaded, we are 500,000 strong". On Saturday there were also thousands of protestors rallying in Paris in remembrance for Giulia and to call for more legislations in France to protect women from violence and abuse. They had a large banner that read "women are angry, stop violence: actions and resources now".

Even the establishment Pope Francis, on X formerly known as Twitter, said "violence against women is a poisonous weed that plagues our society and must be pulled up from

the roots"; those roots "must be countered with educational action".

Far-right Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni has promised a new educational campaign for schools to tackle the prominent toxic culture of violence in Italy and said that she has already increased funding for domestic violence resources.

Elly Schlein, leader of the opposition Democratic Party, has said that the DP will "do its part" to make sure such measures go through, but also [criticises](#) Meloni for "choices against children and women", for example over nursery provision. □

No Eric Lee column this week, because he's on a book deadline. Back in the New Year. □

Why we advocate “two states”

By Martin Thomas

Solidarity advocates self-determination for both the Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian Arab nations, in other words “two states”, a real independent Palestinian state alongside a secure Israel.

Such mutual esteem and mutual recognition of rights, we argue, is the only possible basis for unity of Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian-Arab workers and Arab workers more widely. It is part of the democratic component of a socialist programme in the region.

In other words, we uphold for the Israeli Jews and the Palestinian Arabs the same principles as we uphold for the world’s other nations.

Karl Marx [scorned](#) “recipes for the cookshops of the future”. We can’t hope to place ourselves as recipe-advisers for “cooks” who, in any near future, will be the Israeli and Palestinian and other bourgeoisies. We have no detailed “two states” scheme of “our own” – no variant of “our own” on, for example, the [Geneva Accord](#), which has the practical advantage of being agreed by negotiators from the last serious Israeli-Palestinian talks, after the talks broke down. We have assessments and general principles.

Borders

As everywhere, we would work for the lowest possible borders between Israeli and Palestinian states.

At the same time, we do not advocate self-determination being conditional on low borders. For a nation to relax its borders with its neighbours requires some sense of established security, which may take longer than an agreement sufficient to allow basic self-determination.

For over 20 years now, most of the powers-that-be have accepted on paper the principle of two states, in the same way that governments everywhere have come to accept, in principle at least, the right to independence for the peoples ruled by the big colonial empires which dominated the world for most of the 20th century. That acceptance-on-principle is a gain won by struggles: both the Palestinian Arabs’ “first intifada” from 1987 and the battle of the Jewish community in what became Israel against Britain and British-sponsored Arab states in 1945-8.

As socialists, we do not rely on capitalist governments to do even what they agree on principle should be done, or to do it right. Trotsky put it [like this](#): “We are not a government party; we are the party of irreconcilable opposition... Our tasks... we realise not through the medium of bourgeois governments... but exclusively... through explaining to the workers what they should defend and what they should overthrow. [That] cannot give immediate miraculous re-



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

The current war looks like pushing the USA to new efforts for “two states”. Our job in any case is to assist mutual recognition “from below”, so as to speed any progress which comes from shifts “above”, to maximise the impact of workers’ and democratic agitation on the shape of that progress, and to link workers’ unity on that basis with workers’ unity on social questions.

In the last 20 years of impasse, though, some people have given up on “two states”, and instead say there must be “one state”.

We are for neighbouring nations freely merging into larger states. But even, say, France and Germany, won’t do that any time soon. Nowhere do we say that nothing short of two neighbouring nations merging can be even a first step. Why, then, say that for the Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs?

Netanyahu and his like have a Jewish-supremacist “one state” plan. Hamas has an Islamist “drive out the Jews” one-state plan. A democratic one-state plan presupposes both nations already seeing their differences as minimal, and freely agreeing to merge; each being confident that the other is no threat to its own self-determination.

The UN partition plan of 1947 and the British Peel Commission plan of 1937 were for forms of “two states”. The Jewish community accepted both. The Palestinian Arab leaders rejected both, and insisted on “one state” with an Arab majority where Jewish immigration and land sales to Jews would be banned. Since the reason why large numbers of Jews had gathered there in the first place was to establish somewhere where Jews fleeing persecution (and then the Holocaust), could come to be with a dense Jewish population able to defend itself without having to rely on the goodwill of a hostile or uneasy ma-

jority, they wouldn’t accept that.

The UN 1947 plan provided for a Palestinian Arab state. In the 1948 war most of the allocated land was seized by Jordan (the West Bank) or Egypt (Gaza). The Palestinians had no confidence to resist.

Until the late 1960s, the post-1948 issue was seen as one of Israel and “the Arabs” in general. The Palestinians were a footnote.

Literally. In a big pamphlet of 1958 on [The Arab Revolution](#), Michel Pablo, a leading Orthodox Trotskyist of the day, declared that: “For the Arabs 1920 was the year of catastrophe – Amal Nakba... The creation of the states of Syria, Lebanon, Transjordan [Jordan], Palestine, and Iraq [by French and British power, from the collapse of the Ottoman Empire] appeared to them as an absurdity contrary to all historical, cultural, and religious traditions”.

Pablo advocated a pan-Arab revolution, simultaneously unifying, anti-colonial, and socialist. From his angle, deeply involved with Algeria’s fight for independence, Israel and “the refugees” (from the 1948 war) figured only in a footnote: Israel should have “self-government”, and “the refugees” should be “reintegrated” in the Palestine area of a “United Arab Republic”.

In the 1960s autonomous Palestinian nationalism burgeoned. “Nakba” came to denote more often 1948 than 1920. Secular nationalists now proposed a (single) “secular democratic state” in the territory delimited as “Palestine” by the British after World War One. The Jews would have the rights of “religious minority”.

Nation

But the Israeli Jews were a nation, not a religious group – [most](#) are “not religious” – and were no more willing to trust minority status than in 1948. A very large proportion of them, by then, were descendants or members of the Jewish minorities who had fled en masse from persecution in the Arab states after the late 1940s.

In the early 1970s, a leftish (Stalinoid) Palestinian faction, the DFLP, mooted (a form of) “two states”. By 1988, under the impulse of the first intifada, the PLO accepted “two states”. The “secular democratic state” became the property only of the would-be Marxists who had got it from the PLO in 1969 and now held onto it when the PLO had discarded it. In recent years, in a worrying shift, some leftists tend to summarise their alternative to “two states” simply as “one state”, relegating to a lower profile the “secular” and “democratic” provisos which the PLO rightly thought necessary even to get past first base.

In 1993 Israel recognised the PLO and began, on paper, edging towards “two states”. But the pressure to make “two states” a reality could not conquer the inertia that time round.

Negotiations

For almost all the last 20 years, Israeli governments have stonewalled even on negotiations. The Palestinian Authority set up in 1994 has been unable to muster enough political authority among its own people to be effective. The USA, seeing the impasse as a likely source of disruption, made sallies in 2003-4 and 2014 to push towards “two states”, but gave up.

Much of the time, Israeli governments have said that there is no “partner for peace”. Facing Hamas and a Palestinian Authority ultra-fearful of Hamas, in immediate terms that has had some truth. Israeli governments have found it easier to “live by the sword”, as Netanyahu is reputed to say, to “contain” the Palestinians in cramped semi-autonomy in 166 separate patches of land, and to cramp them further by expanding settlements in the West Bank, than to do things which could bring forward the “partner for peace”.

A common argument against “two states” is that it is unrealistic: Israel will never concede it. But stronger nations have before now been forced to ease their chauvinism and relax their grip on subject peoples. They have never agreed to dissolve the existence of their core nation into that of a minority with no right of self-determination. “One state”, in a benign “let’s forget nationality and just live together” form, is vastly more improbable. In its Jewish-supremacist Netanyahu form it is, sadly, a looming threat.

In real political life, and despite the wishes of some of their more left-wing authors, “one state” schemes tend to function as yet another way of “delegitimising” Israel and “legitimising” fantasies of liberation by way of conquering Israel: since Israel will not agree to this or that one-state formula, and its authors declare that “one state” to be the compulsory minimum, therefore it must be conquered. □

Hadash's take on "two states"



Interview

By Assaf Talgam

Assaf Talgam, a member of Maki and Hadash, spoke to Solidarity on 14 November. The first part of this interview was in Solidarity 691.

Historically the two state solution was almost the consensus among Jews in Israel: ten years ago, even Netanyahu acknowledged that it was the only viable solution. However, in recent years it has become much less prominent in the discourse.

Labour traditionally supported it, but they do not talk about it any more and it is merely a formality for them. Many Zionists from the centre say that in theory they support a compromise with the Palestinians, but that there is nothing to talk about at the moment because of Hamas and the war.

Even though some others might support it in principle, Hadash-Ta'al are the only people in the Knesset actively fighting for a two state solution.

Hadash is, apart from the Communist Party [Maki], the oldest and most well established force among the Arab citizens of Israel. It has very strong roots among this Arab population. Other Arab parties have come and gone, but Hadash/Maki are the only parties with significant Arab support which have been continuously represented in par-

liament since 1948. At the last election Hadash-Ta'al won 5 out of 120 seats in parliament, and gained 180,000 votes. These were mainly from Arab voters.

Jewish support for Maki and Hadash has seriously declined since the glory days of the 50s and 60s, and since then it has had no significant support base among the Jewish public. We do still insist on being a joint Arab-Jewish organisation however, with Jews and Arabs serving in our leadership, and we maintain a Hebrew-language publication. We also do have meaningful support among Jewish intellectuals, students, and activists.

Two states has been the historic position of the Israeli Communist Party, and of Hadash since its formation. We believe that the Palestinian people have a right to self-determination, as do the Israeli people.

Self-determination

This right should be honoured and respected through the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, alongside Israel, with East Jerusalem as its capital. Opinion polls have consistently shown that this is also what most Israelis and Palestinians want. We respect the rights of both peoples to self-determination, in accordance with the Leninist principle of national self-determination.

On this point, I would like to explain our stance on Israeli nationhood. We do not believe that the Jewish people are a national entity in themselves. Jews in the US are part of the American nation,

Jews in Britain are part of the British nation, and deserve self-determination as part of that nation.

However, in Israel a unique Israeli nationality has emerged. This is the nationality that we believe has a right to self-determination in Israel, not the Jewish people. This is why we disagree with the Law of Return that grants any Jew anywhere in the world the right to be naturalised as an Israeli citizen. This law also plays into the hands of anti-semites who want to drive Jews out of their own nation.

The trend to give up on two states and call for a "one-state solution" is among activists and intellectuals – there is no political party in Israel calling for a one state solution on these grounds. It is a reaction of despair, and they have lost hope in any chance of a two state solution so have instead escaped into their imagination, calling for this mythical single state. Many of these people are cosmopolitan urban leftists, and naive about nationalism in the grassroots of Israeli and Palestinian society.

This often goes together with giving up on any hope of dismantling the settlements. It will certainly be difficult and I don't see it happening any time soon, but there are historical precedents.

We acknowledge the right of return, and it should be recognised as a part of any peace solution. It should apply to the occupied territories, not just the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Palestinian refugees and their offspring do have a right to return. However, in many cases where there was a Palestinian village in 1948 there is now an Israeli village or city. We cannot correct a past injustice by carrying out a new one. Part of a solution could be giving people a different piece of land. We should also give reparations to survivors of the Nakba, just as Germany gave reparations to survivors of the Holocaust.

Talk about the right of return and how it would be carried out in practice feels far off and imaginary today. We can't imagine any political scenario in which this will take place at the moment, but sooner or later we will have to think about how this can happen. However, we can't decide that now.

Palestinians should be allowed to decide where they want to live, and to be able to live in the general areas they (or their ancestors) were expelled from if they wish, but Israelis should not be uprooted from their homes.

Most Zionists also raise these demographic fears about the right of return, and the threat of Palestinians become the majority. We want to convince Israelis that a right of return would mean Palestinians coming to live alongside them, not to displace them.

In general the trade union movement in Israel has weakened during Netan-



Maoz Yinon, whose parents were both murdered by Hamas on October 7, at a Hadash-organised protest: "I now have four goals: 1. To bring back the hostages held by the terrorist Hamas; 2. End the war; 3. Bring down Netanyahu; 4. Revive hope for all of us, Israelis and Palestinians, that we will have a better future" (*translated*)

yahu's terms in power, and more generally it has been in decline since the 90s. However, the Histadrut is still the strongest workers' organisation in Israel and still has quite a lot of power. The existence of this power is an important thing, even if it is rarely used against the government or the employers. Since the 1990s the Histadrut has had a very opportunistic leadership which would often rather cooperate with neoliberal governments than fight for the interests of workers.

Hadash is active within the Histadrut. We have representatives on the Histadrut council, and we want to steer this organisation to take a more militant working class approach against the neoliberal government. We have not had many successes with this, but the fight is still important.

I don't know much about the discourse about the boycott and Histadrut, but in general I think that the boycott should be directed against the government and capital, not the workers' movement, even though its leadership often cooperates with the Zionist movement and government.

Histadrut played an important role in the movement against Netanyahu's anti-democratic judicial reforms. The greatest success of the protest movement was the day the Histadrut declared a one-day general strike against the judicial reform, and caused Netanyahu to back down. The success of the protest movement when it was backed by the Histadrut demonstrates their importance and strength, and the Histadrut can be influenced - it is not a lost cause. □

What Hamas aims for

By Colin Foster

The *New York Times* has sought interviews with Hamas leaders. It was told: "Hamas's goal is not to run Gaza and to bring it water and electricity and such. Hamas, the Qassam [its military wing] and the resistance woke the world up from its deep sleep and showed that this issue must remain on the table."

"This battle was not because we... seek to improve the situation in Gaza", added Khalil al-Hayya. "This battle is to completely overthrow the situation."

"I hope that the state of war with Israel will become permanent on all the borders, and that the Arab world will stand with us", said another Hamas leader, Taher El-Nounou.

Hamas politburo chair Ismail Haniyeh struck a different note on 2 Nov: "We are ready for political negotiations for a two-state solution". This looks like the sentence in Hamas's re-

vised charter of 2017 which describes "two states" as a formula of "national consensus", while all the rest of the document reiterates "no recognition of the legitimacy of the Zionist entity" and would rule out ever accepting "two states".

Hamas leader Ghazi Hamad said on 1 Nov: "Israel is a country that has no place on our land. We must remove that country, because it constitutes a security, military, and political catastrophe to the Arab and Islamic nation, and must be finished".

And Mousa Abu Marzouk (27 Oct) explained why Hamas built many military tunnels but no bomb shelters: "Everybody knows that 75% of the people in the Gaza Strip are refugees, and it is the responsibility of the United Nations to protect them. According to the Geneva Convention, it is the responsibility of the occupation to provide them with all the services". □



“The tears are frozen in my eyes”

From 'Issam Da'ur via B'tselem

The Israeli NGO B'tselem has been collecting testimonies from Gaza. Here is just one of the latest, dated 15 November, from 'Issam Da'ur

I'm a general practitioner at the Indonesian Hospital in the northern Gaza Strip... In the first week of the war, I basically lived at the ER in the hospital and my mother took care of the kids...

On Sunday, 15 October 2023, I slept at home. In the morning, an ambulance came to take me to the hospital because it was too dangerous to get there any other way. Before I left, I went into the room where the kids were sleeping and looked at them, without waking them. It was the last time I saw my son alive...

At the hospital, the situation was very bad because dozens of doctors and other workers had fled the bombings to the south. There was a severe shortage of doctors and we were all working double shifts...

That evening, at 8pm, the director of the hospital came over and told me our building had been bombed and



people from my family were injured. I started crying. They arranged for an ambulance to take me to a-Shifaa Hospital, where the casualties were taken.

I got to a-Shifaa within half an hour. My cousins... met me there and broke the terrible news that my son was dead....

The next day, 16 Oct 2023, my broth-

ers and I buried Fadel. I couldn't bear to look at him. Then we buried my baby nephew, Ahmad Shadi al-Hadad, who was also killed when our house was bombed. He was eight months old...

For two weeks, we lived at my brother Ahmad's house. We heard bombings and fighter jets nonstop. The bakeries were destroyed and we couldn't buy bread. In the end, we decided to go to Khan Yunis.

We set out on Saturday, 11 November 2023, around 9am: my parents, my aunt Shadyah, her daughter Lujayn, Ahmad and his wife, my brother Muhammad and his wife along with their two little boys, me and [daughter] Juri. My aunt, the mother of baby Ahmad who was killed, refused to leave.

We reached Salah a-Din Road that leads south... We drove a short way and then the Israeli military didn't allow cars to go any further. So we left the car behind and continued on a donkey-drawn cart. We went about 500 meters with the cart... then... the soldiers ordered us to get off the cart and continue on foot.

We walked seven kilometres, until we got to al-Bureij Refugee Camp. There, we were picked up by a van from the

satellite channel where my brother Ahmad works as a journalist. They drove us to an UNRWA emergency shelter in Khan Yunis... The situation at the UNRWA shelter is very bad. The agency is hardly providing aid, not even mattresses. People formed tents out of wood, cloths and whatever they could find.

Life here is very hard. You have to queue two hours for the toilet, and wait in long lines when they give out water for drinking or washing. Sometimes, you have to queue all day for a bag of pita bread, if they give any out. There's no medical care and diseases are spreading. The place is suitable for about 10,000 people but there are more than 40,000 people here, and more may come...

I can't feel anything or express emotions any more. The tears have frozen in my eyes. I spend my time in silence, thinking about my little boy and what he did to deserve to die a week after his birthday on 7 October... □

• btselem.org/voices_from_gaza

Mainstream paved way to Wilders' win

Excerpted with thanks from an article by Alex de Jong in [Grenzeloos](https://grenzeloos.nl)

The electoral rise of the extreme right [in the Dutch election of 22 Nov] was largely at the expense of the (centre)

right. With 37 of the 150 parliamentary seats, the [far-right] PVV now has a wide lead over number two, GroenLinks/PvdA, which won 25 seats. The total number of seats for left-wing parties remained

constant, while the parties that were part of the centre-right government all lost seats...

The VVD's [main centre-right party] gamble was that the elections would result in polarization between them and the centre-left on migration... Paradoxically, the VVD's tactics worked too well. The emphasis on an alleged "refugee crisis"... benefited the party that has prioritised closing borders and hostility towards migrants since its founding in 2006: Wilders' PVV...

Rutte [of the VVD] chose to sideline Wilders, his main competitor on the right, by dismissing the PVV's positions as "unrealistic" and presenting his VVD as the party that could implement right-wing policies more efficiently. This approach increasingly normalised the PVV's positions... Instead of trying to position himself as a junior partner for the VVD, Wilders stuck to his position as the right-wing opposition to Rutte and continued to hammer home his core points. On November 22, Wilders reaped the benefits of that long-term approach...

In the past decade... the



PVV has shifted its rhetoric towards a kind of "welfare state chauvinism"... For the PVV, the ultimate cause of the reduction of the welfare state is the presence of parasitic migrant communities, especially Muslims, in Dutch society and the waste of money on "left-wing hobbies" such as measures to combat climate change...

In its election manifesto, the PVV also presented "progressive" proposals such as abolishing VAT on daily necessities, reducing healthcare costs and reducing the retirement age from 67 to 65.

Such ideas... for Wilders they are only means to achieve his goal; closing the borders and attacking the rights of minorities, especially those of Muslims.

The SP [ex-Maoist, now social-democratic], meanwhile, lost four of its nine seats. The party has become fixated on combining an increasingly conservative profile on "cultural" issues (migration, but also measures against climate change) with progressive socio-economic positions... The SP's emphasis in the election campaign on limiting labour migration reinforced the right-wing framework that migrants as such are a problem...

The situation is bleak, but contradictory. In recent weeks there has been the largest demonstration against climate change ever in Dutch history, but the winner of the elections is a party that ridicules climate change as nonsense... □



Almost 1,000 protested in Bristol Trans Pride on 25 November. Protesters ranged from trans and nonbinary people to their families to other LGBTIQ people to wider supporters. We demanded better trans healthcare, and protecting trans kids from transphobic parents, schools and the government. We denounced the vile right-wing culture war against trans people, migrants, and climate action – and Labour accommodation to that. We celebrated trans people and some vlogged. Shamefully, unions had little visible presence.

An open letter about “P

By Seyla Benhabib

Seyla Benhabib, an American academic of Turkish origin, wrote this response to another [open letter](#) signed by many academics, mostly in the USA. It was first published on [Medium](#).

Dear Friends, Dear Colleagues:

These are dark times as multiple crises are erupting around the world while talk of a global conflagration is heard in many circles. These are also times that try human relationships, friendships, and alliances. I have read many of you; taught many of you; have been adviser to some of you and have fought together with you for the rights of women in our universities; for gender-sex equality; for the rights of Muslim students to wear the hijab, for the rights of refugees and the stateless among many other battles. But I do not endorse this [letter](#) and many of the views expressed in it.

I owe it to my friends and to myself to get our ideas clear. Let me first say that ever since I was a student activist in Istanbul, Turkey in the late 1960s, I have supported the rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination, and as I have reflected over the Israeli-Palestinian and also the Arab-Israeli conflict – and the two are not the same – over the last half century, I have advocated sometimes a binational state; sometimes one state, sometimes a federated structure.

My objection to your letter is that it sees the conflict in Israel-Palestine through the lens of “settler-colonialism” alone, and elevates Hamas’s atrocities of October 7, 2023 to an act of legitimate resistance against an occupying force. By construing the Israel-Palestine conflict through the lens of settler-colonialism, you elide the historical evolution of both peoples. Zionism is not a form of racism, though the actions and institutions of the State of Israel towards the Palestinian people of the occupied West Bank, the refugee camps and, of course, Gaza, are discriminatory on the basis of nationality, not colour, and reflect the continuing state of emergency that exists between Israel and its neighbours.

Historically, many Israeli leaders, including none other than Ben Gurion himself, had pleaded for the return of the territories Israel conquered in 1967 because they feared that it would change the democratic and Jewish character of the state. At the time there was no Palestinian Authority, but diverse Palestinian liberation movements emerged in the course of the 1970s such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, led by George Habash, and the Palestine Liberation Organisation, led by Yasser Arafat. Palestinian nationalism, just like many other nationalisms, including Zionism, emerged in the crucible of the struggle for recognition by its opponents. Israeli and Palestinian nationalisms mirror each other, and at the end of the day they have to live cheek by jowl and share the territory with one another.

History

There is no sense of history in your statement nor any sense of the tragedies that befell these peoples, and the many missed moments when another future seemed possible. Although you refer to “the conditions that produce violence,” you do not mention that Yitzhak Rabin was killed by a Jewish extremist and Anwar Sadat, after his visit to Israel, was killed by a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, the ideological progenitor of Hamas. You write: “the people of Gaza have urged allies worldwide to exert pressure on their governments to demand an immediate ceasefire. But they have been clear that this should – this must – be the beginning and not the end of collective action for liberation.”

In endorsing these demands, you also endorse Hamas’s position as the supposed vanguard of the Palestinian “liberation struggle.” This is a colossal mistake. Hamas is a nihilistic organisation which treats the civilian population

of Gaza as its hostage. The leader of the organisation, Ismail Haniyeh, sits in a luxury hotel in Qatar, while children on the streets of Gaza die. Yes, as Amnesty International has said, “Gaza is the largest open-air prison in the world,” but this is also due to the fact that Hamas is an exterminationist organisation, whose Charter endorses the destruction of the State of Israel.

You also implicitly seem to support this when you write that, “If there is to be justice and peace, the siege of Gaza must be lifted; the occupation must end, and the rights must be respected of all people currently living between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean, as well as those of Palestinian refugees in exile.” Amen to that! but do you see Hamas a political organisation dedicated to “respecting the rights of all people currently living between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean”? This defies history and logic. Hamas is dedicated to the destruction of the State of Israel; I do not support that. Do you? What moral or political logic is guiding your reasoning here?

The attacks of October 7, 2023 are not “just one salvo in an ongoing war between an occupying state and the people it occupies, or as an occupied people exercising a right to resist violent and illegal occupation, something anticipated by international humanitarian law in the Second Geneva [Protocol](#)”, as a [letter](#) signed by some Columbia and Barnard colleagues states. They are a turning point not only for the Jewish people in Israel and elsewhere, but also in the history of the Palestinian people.

The murder of 1,300 Israeli Jews, the wounding of 3,000 others, the devastation of kibbutzim and towns and the taking hostage of over 200 people, have created a deep wound in the psyche of many Jews around the world; only compounded by the sense that Is-

rael has lost in the world of public opinion. And it has: antisemitism has raised its ugly head from Paris to Dagestan, from Cornell to Berlin.

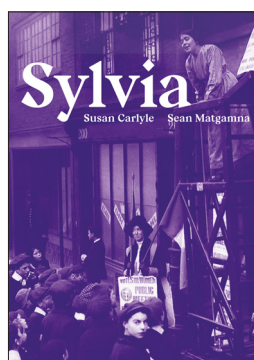
Yes, of course the critique of Israel and Zionism is not antisemitism. Left Jewish groups for peace were the first to say that many years ago around the time of the Oslo accords and they bear the scars of these struggles against the Israeli establishment.

October 7, 2023 is not just a turning point for Israel and the Jewish diaspora; it must be a turning point for the Palestinian struggle. The Palestinian people must free themselves of the scourge of Hamas. The acts of violence engaged in on October 7, 2023 – the desecration and mutilation of bodies; the killing of children and babies; the burning alive of young people at a music festival; rape and ritual murder and kidnappings – are not only war crimes as well as crimes against humanity; they also reveal that Islamic Jihadi ideology, which revels in the pornography of violence, has overtaken the movement.

The struggle for Palestine and the killing of Jewish people is now seen as a jihad. The President of Turkey, never to miss a moment to raise the Islamist flag when it suits him to cover his authoritarian politics at home, called Hamas “mujahideen”, fighters for Jihad, during the 100th anniversary celebration of the establishment of the Republic of Turkey on October 29, 2023. The Palestinian people have to fight against this destructive ideology that is now overtaking their movement.

Cynicism

Yes, it is not only Hamas which has committed war crimes; Israel is in the process of doing so in Gaza as well. The “disproportional” violence and destruction of the civilian population under conditions of hostility is a war crime. The children of Gaza have become



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Philosophy for Palestine"



On Sunday 26 November thousands marched against antisemitism through central London. Organisers claimed 60,000 took part, including Boris Johnson (we thought not that many). The far-right activist, Tommy Robinson, who had said he would be present as a journalist, was arrested by police after the march organisers had said that they did not want him there. The protest was organised by the Campaign Against Antisemitism and stewarded by the Community Security Trust (CST). At the front of the march, two large banners: "United Kingdom, united against antisemitism" and "Bring [the Hamas-held hostages] Home now". Protesters carried placards with the names of Israeli hostages and Israeli flags. "Unofficial" placards were few, and literature-distributors unwelcome, but Peter Tatchell came with the placard above and says he got a friendly response. □

"collateral damage," in the cold language of rules of armed engagement, and Israel must be condemned for not doing all it can to avoid bombing the civil population of Gaza which apparently now has exceeded 9,000 [victims]. But we cannot neglect the utter nihilism and cynicism of Hamas in placing their weapons and headquarters under hospitals and mosques, which they know full well, if and when they are hit by Israel, will cause world-wide outrage.

Nonetheless, I endorse the call for an end to this cruel cycle of violence, almost biblical and apocalyptic in its

ferocity, and also call for a cease-fire in Gaza. The cease-fire must be accompanied by the immediate evacuation of the wounded, the elderly and the young from Gaza. There must not be a second Nakba. Neighboring countries as well as communities in the West Bank as well as Jordan and Egypt, and other countries, must volunteer to receive Palestinian refugees who wish to escape conditions of hostility. But at the end of the day, a Palestinian state must be established. There must be an exchange of prisoners for hostages. Israel is holding thousands of Palestinians in its prisons; some must be released in accordance with conditions conforming to international law in return for hostages.

The Abraham Accords, which neglected the Palestinians, must incorporate them as well and lead towards a final recognition of the borders of the State of Israel and the establishment of a Palestinian state on the West Bank and parts of Gaza. The fact that there is no territorial contiguity between Gaza and the rest of the Palestinian territories will need to be dealt with through some arrangements, just as the close to 500,000 Israeli settlers will need to be withdrawn from the occupied territories. And this may result in a civil war in Israel.

There are two real dangers at the present which will affect any peaceful resolution of this conflict for the next half century: Hamas's victory in the

eyes of the world, and the mobilisation of world public opinion against Israel, also mean that members of the Palestinian Authority, and other Palestinian who accept co-existence with Israel, have been sidelined.

Young Palestinians on the West Bank who are impressed by Hamas, may start flocking to it. Reasonable and honorable voices among the Palestinians who choose peaceful coexistence, such as the philosopher, Sari Nusseibeh, ex-President of the University of Al-Quds, and Mustafa Baghrouti, whose brother Marwan Baghrouti, was one of the heroes of the Oslo accords and who sits in Israeli prison (who knows on what kind of charges), may be completely silenced now. The international community, and above all, the United States, must stop the marginalisation of alternative Palestinian leaderships.

Fascist

Another danger, and here I join those who accuse Israel's colonial-settler policies in the occupied territories, are the efforts of right-wing Israeli parties; of the governing Likud; of the fascist, Itamar Ben Gvir, who is the so-called Minister of National Security; of Bezalel Smotrich, the Finance Minister, and others to create "facts on the ground" by dispossessing, beating, and torturing Palestinians on the West Bank. They intend nothing other than the "ethnic cleansing" of Judea and Samaria – the Biblical names of the land of Israel. They are the legatees of a long line of Judeo-fascism, which none other than Albert Einstein, joined by Hannah Arendt and Sidney Hook, denounced in their Open Letter to the *NY Times* on December 2, 1948, titled *New Palestine Party: Menachem Begin and Aims of Political Movement Discussed*. They wrote:

"Among the most disturbing political phenomena of our times is the emergence in the newly created state of Israel of the 'Freedom Party' (Tnuat HaHerut), a political party closely akin in its organisation, methods, political philosophy and social appeal to the Nazi and Fascist parties. It was formed out of the membership and following of the former Irgun Zvai Leumi, a terrorist, right-wing, chauvinist organisation in Palestine....

"A shocking example was their behaviour in the Arab village of Deir Yassin. This village, off the main roads and surrounded by Jewish lands, had taken no part in the war, and had even fought off Arab bands who wanted to use the village as their base. On April 9, terrorist bands attacked this peaceful village, which was not a military objective in the fighting, killed most of its inhabitants – 240 men, women, and children – and



kept a few of them alive to parade as captives through the streets of Jerusalem".

Today the legatees of this party and movement – Likud was established by Meachem Begin – are in power in Israel and they have brought upon Israel the worst disaster since the Holocaust. The Jewish community in the diaspora must have the courage to speak these truths and intervene in this cycle of violence before the region explodes further in spasms of Messianic violence on both sides.

I am not confident that any of what I believe must happen will come to pass in the near future. But as philosophers we need to get our ideas clear. As Kant said in 1795, although the idea of "Perpetual Peace" among nations may resemble the picture that a Dutch Innkeeper placed on his window of a graveyard, playing on the German word, "ewig," which can mean both eternal and perpetual, we have no choice but to hope that through our principles we can change the world as well. □

• The official Israeli count of killings on 7 October is now 1,200, and includes migrant workers and Palestinian-Israelis. Later death counts of the atrocity at Deir Yassin are 100 to 120. The death count in Gaza is now over 14,000.

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Disavowing the headline was wrong



By Simon Nelson

I was surprised to see the letter from Martin Thomas in *Solidarity* 691 taking issue with the headline in *Solidarity* 690. This is a concern Martin waited until the following week to express, and, as far as I know, one was not mentioned during the review of the previous paper, which takes place as part of our editorial meetings.

Still, Martin has the right to change his mind, and he has attempted to account for doing so as the author of the headline. As another editorial team member who "signed off" on the headline (as did Workers' Liberty's executive committee), I do not share his view.

Martin states that the headline could be read as "neither Israel nor Hamas". Any headline could be misinterpreted, but most people capable of critical thought will surely understand that the reference to Netanyahu is his government and the political project he represents, not to Israel as a nation. There are many ways in which Netanyahu and Hamas are not equivalent; stating that we oppose them both does not mean we think they are the same. There is also a risk of misinterpretation "in the other direction". If Netanyahu

is the leader of Israel, and Hamas are the "resistance in Gaza", then could the headline not be read as "neither Israel nor Palestine"? But indeed, there is no evidence anyone has read or will read it that way – except, apparently, the person who wrote it.

In Israel itself, before 7 October, there had been months of demonstrations calling for the removal of Netanyahu, and now even supporters of the current war are demanding he step down. It is false to imply that saying "no to Netanyahu" is a step towards the delegitimation of Israel's right to exist, any more than "no to Hamas" is a delegitimation of the Palestinians' right to self-determination.

The reality is that the headline was clear and doesn't draw an equivalence between, or conflate, the Netanyahu government, the state of Israel, and Hamas.

Martin says the headline could be read in a manner I have not encountered on any demonstration or public activity with the paper. The commentary in his letter about the leadership of the demos has been made before in *Solidarity*, and does not seem relevant to his case about the headline. Anyone who bought a copy of *Solidarity* 690 at one of the local demos on 18 November could not possibly have come away thinking that we were for the destruction of Israel. The front page also included the slogans "Ceasefire Now!"



and "Two states". Martin is keen for us to disavow the headline for a potential reading that could only be made by our most dishonest opponents.

Martin goes on to say that we would be in favour of Israel suppressing Hamas, although differing on method. But the Palestinians in Gaza cannot just be ignored in the removal of Hamas. There is no method by which Israel could fully "suppress" Hamas that we could support, as any possible attempt would inevitably involve the massive

civilian death toll and devastation to infrastructure we are seeing now. The fact Hamas installs its military facilities amongst and beneath civilian infrastructure shows that Hamas sees a high level of civilian casualties as acceptable collateral for its cause. The fact that the IDF carries out devastating bombardments in full knowledge of the likely civilian casualties (even if they also destroy rocket launch sites and such like) shows that they think similarly. On both sides, Palestinian civilian lives are seen as expendable, sacrificed for Hamas's martyrdom or Israel's "self-defence". We should take a different approach. "Neither Netanyahu nor Hamas" is a way of expressing that.

Abstract talk of Israel suppressing Hamas via some legitimately "self-defensive" military action – not the actual war currently taking place – does not help clarify the paper's political line.

Solidarity has a difficult task as a weekly paper at the current moment. What we say, for now, does not change greatly week-to-week as, whilst influenced by events, our overall demands (ceasefire, two states, and workers' unity) remain vital and current. The challenge is formulating a sharp headline for each edition that captures, ideally in an attention-grabbing way, some key aspect of our perspective. The "neither Netanyahu nor Hamas" headline did that. □

These are not "pro-Hamas" marches



By Ben Tausz

Martin Thomas makes an unfounded generalisation in his letter in *Solidarity* 691: "Despite the official ceasefire slogan, those marches are not peace or anti-war marches, but anti-Israel, pro-Hamas war marches by sections of the left and by political Islamists and others for whom destroying Israel is the aim."

This is counter-productive exaggeration – certainly with respect to the main London demonstrations. (Reactionary peripheral actions by Hizb ut-Tahrir are another story, and perhaps some protests in other UK cities too – I don't presume to know enough about those.)

It is certainly true that some

key organisers, notably the Socialist Workers' Party, support victory for Hamas as "the resistance". But it is also significant that they feel unable to put their views in the slogans of the demonstrations, and indeed went for "Ceasefire Now" even though some of them [equivocate](#) on that demand.

The important thing to hold in mind is that the demonstrations are heterogeneous. They have drawn hundreds of thousands rightly appalled at Israel's slaughter of Palestinians, but with diverse views beyond that. In the sea of demonstrators, there are both explicit antisemites, and supporters of coexistence and equal rights. Calls for ceasefire appear beside (and even, in some confused cases, on the same placard as) slogans rejecting any peace with so-called "colonisers".

Martin has helpfully [re-](#)

[counted](#) the background of chants like "free Palestine". It was introduced to the Socialist Alliance precisely because of its ambiguity (free Palestine in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, or over Israel's legitimate territory too?). This enabled the SWP and its allies to dodge anti-occupation demands that imply accepting Israel's existence, even though they could not have won such wide support for outright "smash Israel" slogans.

Martin has also correctly [reported](#) that many of the people following even the "from the river to the sea" [chants](#) imagine a more benign, democratic interpretation, or have not clearly thought through the implications.

It is illogical to extrapolate the entire character of a varied, hundreds-of-thousands-strong protest from beliefs that organisers withhold from

the protest's headlines, from the maximal conclusion of ambiguous chants, and from sections of the demonstrators, large as they may be. This is not a serious assessment that can inform our approach, it is overblown rhetoric. Destructively, it may deter those who support a better way forward from attending to promote those ideas.

We rightly reject ambiguous slogans that some use to repackage or smuggle their reactionary ambitions. Instead, we insist on slogans that clearly demand an end to the occupation and siege, and peace based on working-class solidarity and equal rights for both peoples. This is part of our task of patient persuasion, and building an alternative to the reactionary politics others offer.

Indeed, Workers' Liberty's interventions, promoting peace



and coexistence based on equal rights and workers' solidarity, have been positively received by many demonstrators, and we are not alone. Solidarity with the Palestinians, support for the anti-occupation left in Israel, tackling the reactionaries, and patient persuasion: none are helped by feverish, generalising condemnations. □

Don't submerge the baselines



By Martin Thomas

The other day a Labour activist, a supporter of ceasefire and someone who has worked in the West Bank, made an apt comment to me on the use of the "From the river to the sea" slogan.

Some may first think it's a bland "freedom everywhere" call. By now they must know that most Jews see it as threatening; as meaning Arab or Islamic rule in all of 1918-48 Palestine, "from the river to the sea", and the wiping-out of Israel. So, use a different slogan, unless you want to make the threat, or don't care.

After some weeks of Gaza demonstrations, those who still go along with "from the river to the sea" must, at least, not care. Most are far from hardened Israel-haters. But they allow themselves to be drawn into the retinue for hardened Israel-haters. When we go to the demonstrations to argue for "two states", many are receptive, but as yet we are a small minority there. We can win the argument only if we mobilise more forces, and only if we don't fool ourselves that people are already "with us" when they are not.

The current agitation around Gaza is full of slippery formulas. Many were deliberately [designed](#) to be slippery. If we fall into one inadvertently, we should climb out again.

As Simon Nelson says, the head-

line "Neither Netanyahu, nor Hamas, but..." was my idea. (Others nodded it through.) If I've been made aware that it can read as "neither Israel, nor Hamas", or "Israel has no more right to defend itself than the revanchist-exterminationist Hamas", then I should take account.

The comrade who pointed out that reading to me suggested "No to mass bombing, no to Hamas" as a possible alternative. Not perfect, but better to have something that avoids an implication that a crushing of Israel is no more undesirable than crushing of Hamas. Hamas being crushed would be good (we say that while also opposing the horrors of the Israeli war in Gaza, and saying that anyway this war won't "destroy" Hamas). Israel being crushed in the "permanent war" drawing in Hezbollah and Iran which Hamas hopes to trigger would be bad.

Could "neither Netanyahu" in the headline mean Netanyahu resigning or being voted out (as of course we wish)? Hardly. There would be no symmetry in the "neither... nor...". "No to Hamas" there can't refer to Hamas resigning or being voted out.

The war now does not depend on Netanyahu personally. If Gantz replaced him, Israeli policy would change little in any short term. However, in Gaza, a [survey](#) on 6 October had 67% saying they had little or no trust in Hamas, 73% wanting a peaceful settlement with Israel, more preferring the notoriously corrupt Fatah than preferring Hamas. 7 October was a Hamas atrocity, not an operation by "Gaza".

(Predictably, on 31 Oct-7 Nov people

in Gaza (and in the West Bank too) responded differently to [pollsters](#). 75% said they approved of 7 October, 88% that they viewed Hamas positively, 73% that they expect Hamas to win this war.)

We've repeatedly asserted in *Solidarity* (and quoted leftists in Israel asserting) that Israel has a right to defend itself. It needs to be asserted. Right now, on the left especially, it doesn't go without saying.

A full ceasefire now might let Hamas quickly regain its military base in Gaza? Maybe. From our point of view that's a downside. It is overshadowed by the horrific toll of the bombing, the evacuations, the siege, etc., all of which, as we have repeatedly argued, will not "destroy Hamas" longer-term. US Assistant Secretary of Barbara Leaf says that the death count (currently 15,000 on Hamas figures) "could be even higher" when the dead hidden under destroyed buildings, and frail people now dead from the consequences of the meagre supplies, healthcare, etc. are added in.

We don't and can't offer "realistic" military advice for a neat "alternative Israeli self-defence" tactic. We are not miracle-workers. Our job is to say what is, and state the basic principles for a way out. We shouldn't have a would-be snappy headline, or illusory "realism", blur that message.

Our opposition to the current Israeli war, with its horrors, makes necessary a conscious effort to have the baseline of Israel's right to exist not submerged in immediate reactions.

We can't rely on benign interpretation of ambiguous formulas. British



public opinion has long been inclined to the thought that any language against Israel is all right because Israel is so strong and aggressive that worry about hurt to it is disingenuous fuss.

Another example: the current marches are routinely described (and not just by SWPers) as "for Palestine", or "pro-Palestine". Of course we want relief for the Palestinians under bombardment and siege, and we are pro-Palestinian in general. "Pro-Palestine" is not clear here, especially as much of the tone is as much "Palestine will win" as "stop the war". The force in military battle at present is Hamas, not "Palestine". The map-images defining "Palestine" displayed on the marches delete Israel. Actually "pro-Palestine" [serves](#) as a bridge from pro-ceasefire to varying forms of pro-Hamas.

We say: stop. But if we let the basic stance of Israel having a right to defend itself, and the politics of a democratic settlement, be buried in our assent to the widespread demand to stop, then we fail at what we must do and no-one else is doing. □

Prospects with "Argentina's Trump"

By Simon Nelson

The election of Javier Milei in Argentina should alarm the left and labour movement across the world. Standing in the populist mould of other strongman leaders, he capitalised on claims to reject the "political caste" and fed on disillusion with the Peronist machine which has dominated Argentina's politics since 1946 including the ostensibly-leftish variants of 2007-15 and 2019-23.

An avowedly "libertarian", by which he means freedom for big business and capital, Milei won 56% of the second-round presidential vote, despite the Peronist Sergio Massa, a minister in the outgoing government, doing better in the first

round. How much Milei can implement his scattergun programme will depend on the support he can build among Argentina's existing political class and the response of the labour movement and left.

Liberty Advances, his coalition founded only two years ago, won in 20 of Argentina's 23 provinces, but none of the governors of the provinces are in his party, and he has a tiny minority of 38 seats in Congress and seven in the Senate.

Milei has said he will take a chainsaw to the state machine and make Argentina a world power in 35 years. He had already won the support of other right-wingers, including 2015-19 president Mauricio Macri, whose Propuesta Republicana party is set to have

several Ministers and supply several advisers.

Milei's campaign promise of converting Argentina to operate in dollars looks to have been dropped almost immediately. (Argentina doesn't have enough dollars to do it).

Playbook

Milei may not make this easy for himself. He has previously described a prominent representative of the main right-wing coalition, Together for Change, as a "leftist piece of shit". Milei took a note from the Trump playbook about the conduct of the election, accusing Massa of being prepared to commit massive electoral fraud to win. His running-mate, Victoria Villarruel, has repeatedly minimised the

crimes of the previous military dictatorship. Milei said during the election that he would cut public spending from 38% of GDP to 23%, privatise the many industries, and cut the number of ministries from 18 to eight. He has supported an abortion ban, calling for all markets to be accepted including a trade in human organs, and described climate change as a "socialist lie".

The previous government had overseen inflation rising from 54% in December 2019 to 143% in October 2023. It could go as high as 210% by the end of 2023. In Argentina 40% of the population are defined as poor, meaning unable to afford a bag of basic essentials and another service, like public transport. That is up

from 36% under the last Peronist government. Half of all children under 15 live in poverty.

If Milei is to get anywhere close to implementing his plans, it will mean attacking the state pension, transport, and utility subsidies, and that will hit the poorest first.

The far left is stronger in Argentina than in many countries. Myriam Bregman, candidate for president of the largest coalition of Trotskyist (mostly "Morenoite") parties, the Workers' Left Front - Unity (FIT-U), won 2.65% of the vote and came in 5th place. Most organisations that made up the FIT-U did not support a vote for Massa in the second round run-off. □

Women's Aid workers strike in Glasgow

By Dale Street

Members of Unite the Union employed – or formerly employed – by Glasgow East Women's Aid (GEWA) begin a campaign of rolling strike action and protests on Friday 1 December.

The dispute began when Unite members in GEWA lodged a collective grievance about bullying in the workplace. Management's response was to suspend all thirteen signatories to the grievance. Which kind of proved their point.

The mass suspensions deprived service-users and would-be service-users of support from GEWA.

GEWA's offices have been closed for over eight weeks. Vulnerable service-users have been directed to an emergency phone number. Women and children who were receiving one-to-one support have been left with no support and no explanation.

A ballot on industrial action was initiated, and GEWA was given the legally required seven days notice of the ballot. Two days later, five of the thirteen Unite members were sacked.

The five had one thing in common: Unlike the other eight, they all had less than two years service.

GEWA was therefore not required to give them any reasons for their dismissal. And, under "normal circumstances", they would have no right to take GEWA to an Employment Tribunal for unfair dismissal.

Interim relief

But claiming unfair dismissal for trade-union-related activities does not require two years service. Unite has therefore lodged Tribunal claims on that basis. It has also applied for interim relief.

If successful, the interim relief claim would mean that the five sacked workers would continue to be paid their salary until the time of the Employment Tribunal hearing for unfair dismissal,

but would not work during that time and still count as dismissed employees.

The ballot produced a 100% vote in favour of strike action and industrial action short of strike action.

Strikes every Monday and Friday, commencing 1 December, have been scheduled until Christmas. Picket lines will be held at starting and finishing times.

It is certainly important to put pressure on GEWA stakeholders, such as Glasgow City Council and the Scottish Government. It is at least equally important to build support for the dispute among other Unite members, especially in the Not for Profit Sector.

The suspensions and dismissals might appear to be an appalling way to treat staff. In fact, they are. But they express an ethos of hostility to trade unionism and workers rights which is all too common across the Not for Profit Sector. □

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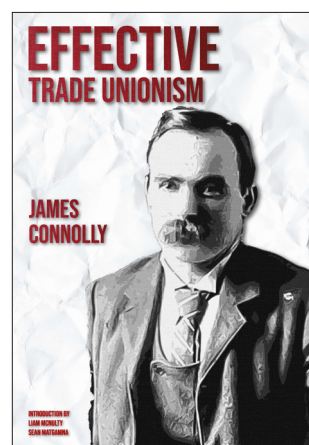
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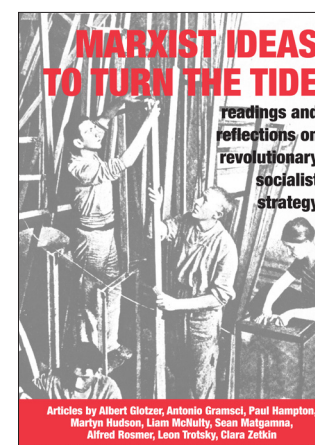
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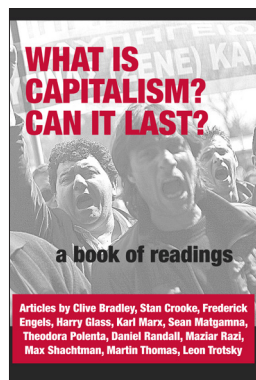
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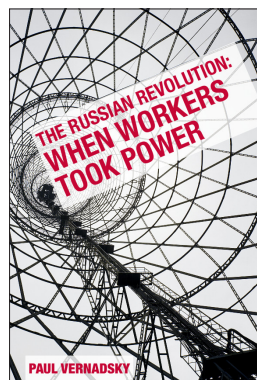
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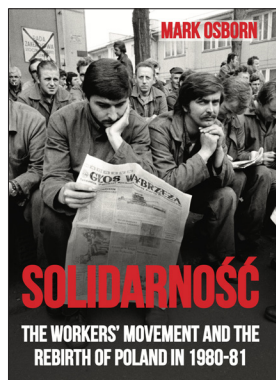
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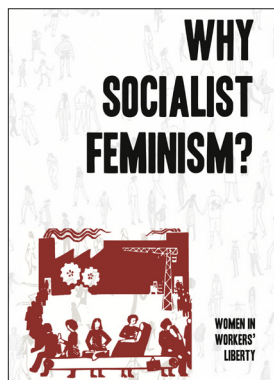
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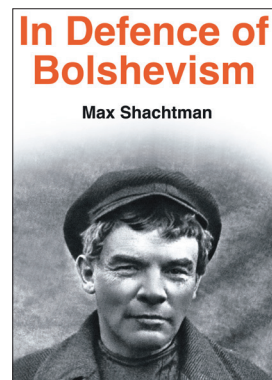
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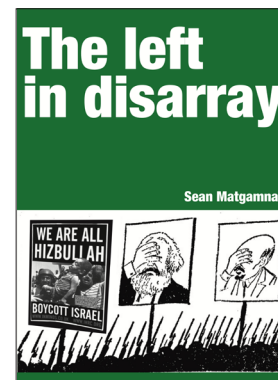
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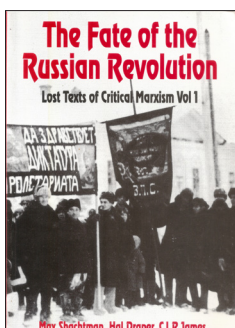
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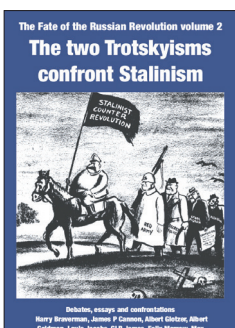
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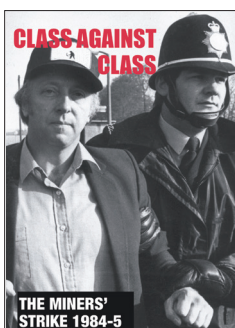
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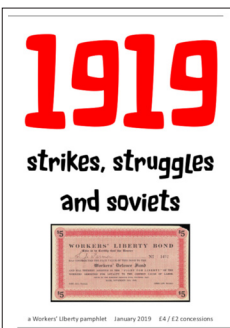
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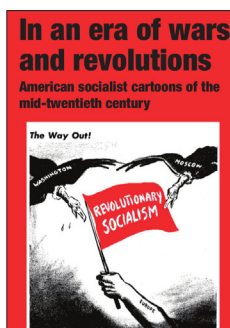
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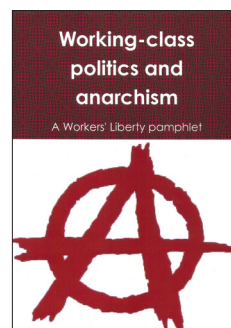
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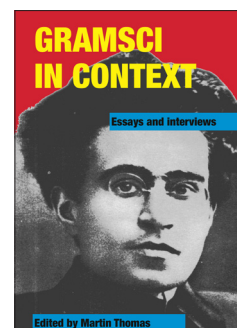
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Canada's Catholic school scandal

By Sacha Ismail

Between the 1880s, when state coercion swelled a previously much smaller-scale system of similar institutions, and the last school closing in 1997, something like 150,000 children from Canada's indigenous peoples – First Nations, Métis and Inuits – were effectively incarcerated in residential schools. In the 1930s, this included one third of indigenous children.

Most of the "residential schools" were run by Catholic organisations; at the system's height in 1931, 44 out of 81, though only a quarter of Canada's population was Catholic and, unlike Ireland, it was not a Catholic state. In 1969 Canada's federal government took control of all the schools, and the numbers in them then sharply declined.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission 2015's report recorded 3,201 deaths of children in the schools – mostly from disease, but also malnutrition, fire, suicide and physical abuse. Records are said to be extremely patchy. The TRC's chair, indigenous but a former judge and senator – no radical – argued that the real number must be many times higher.

Until the 1950s, death rates for children in the schools were, depending on various ways of calculating, between twice and four times as high as for children in Canada's general population. As in Ireland, new discoveries about the burial of victims have sparked new waves of public awareness and debate.

In May 2021, the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation announced that scientific investigations at the grounds of the former Kamloops Indian Residential School in British Columbia had suggested the presence of over 200 unmarked graves.

Since then, other similar discoveries have been announced, with several thousand possible graves identified.

Just under a year ago, in *Solidarity* 657, I told the story of Ireland's "mother and baby homes", run mostly by the Catholic Church, in which thousands of children died and many more were abused. Canada had a similar decades-long trail of murder and abuse to

which the Catholic Church was central.

In a world where religious authoritarianism remains a potent and in some areas growing force, and also where indigenous rights struggles face a growing right-wing backlash, the Canadian story is important to know.

In October 2022 Canada's House of Commons voted unanimously for a motion from an MP of the social-democratic NDP party to recognise the state-backed "residential school" system, in which churches imprisoned and brutalised many tens of thousands of children over more than a century – up to the 1990s – as a form of genocide, trying to destroy the collective being of a people. The Commons vote came after the Pope, visiting Canada in August, used the "genocide" word too.

Yet since that vote, right-wing Catholics have been central to a wave of attempting to play down the seriousness of what was done to indigenous children. Part of the context is a broader rise of the radical right in Canada.

The "Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) set up by the Canadian government in 2008 summarised the historical context of the schools in its 2015 [report](#):

"For over a century, the central goals of Canada's Aboriginal policy were to eliminate Aboriginal governments; ignore Aboriginal rights; terminate the Treaties; and, through a process of assimilation, cause Aboriginal peoples to cease to exist as distinct legal, social, cultural, religious, and racial entities in Canada. The establishment and operation of residential schools were a central element of this policy, which can best be described as 'cultural genocide.'"

Indigenous people and supporters have objected to the qualifier "cultural".

As in Ireland, it took years of campaigning to drag more elements of the truth of what happened in Canada's residential schools into the light. Much remains to be uncovered, but the overall picture seems clear.

The general treatment of the children was similar to Catholic carceral institutions in Ireland – brutal discipline, poor diet and malnutrition, constant verbal



assaults, frequent violence, and widespread sexual abuse – but with the extra toxic infusion of virulent racism. As one indigenous writer put it, "children [were] constantly told they were savages, beasts, pagans, heathens, and worse"; and of course this shaped the viciousness of their treatment. Children were often physically assaulted, for instance, for speaking their native language or trying to practise their family's religion.

Testimony given by survivors to the TRC includes numerous heart-breaking and sometimes extremely disturbing stories, from healthy children knowingly placed in dormitories with those suffering from serious infection diseases to hungry children stealing food from livestock. It is established fact that at one school run by the Catholic church, St Anne's in Ontario, children were tortured in a home-made electric chair.

Unsurprisingly, inmates learnt little. They were not supposed to. Hard physical labour and Christian indoctrination were the mainstays. Canadian police enforced attendance at these schools and prevented escapes.

Until well into the 19th century, indigenous peoples in large parts of what is now Canada maintained a substantial degree of independence from European settler authorities. Although interacting with European traders, manufacturers and officials from a position of weakness, they were to a large extent able to maintain control of their own land and labour. This changed as spreading colonial settlement and capitalist development shifted the colonial governments into a more malignant policy, as summarised in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission quote above.

Part of this was seeking to destroy connections between new generations of indigenous children and their com-

munities (and arguably to reduce the indigenous population by exacerbating the harshness of its social conditions through state coercion). The Canadian prime minister who oversaw a great expansion of the residential school system in the 1880s declared that "in order to educate the children properly we must separate them from their families. Some people may say this is hard, but if we want to civilise them we must do that."

Canadian right-wingers, including prominent politicians, journalists and church figures, have engaged in denialism, claiming supposed hysteria about "mass graves" – in fact few people have used this terminology – and using lack of clear facts about who is buried where to try to distract from and distort the overall reality of what took place in the schools and what they represented.

They have seized on some excavations which have not found remains. Attempts at mass exhumations have not taken place, and indigenous people and organisations are divided on whether they should. But in terms of the basic picture, it is well-established from many angles that a very large number of children died in the schools, and that this was the sharp end of a much wider culture – or rather system – of abuse.

Meanwhile while Justin Trudeau's Liberal government condemns the history and engages in a rhetoric of indigenous rights, its concrete policies are different – failing to address the continued removal of indigenous children from their families, for instance; and siding with oil companies and developers against indigenous communities. It has not even implemented a large number of the TRC's recommendations.

The continued struggle of Canada's indigenous people is part of a wider global struggle by indigenous peoples to assert their rights – from Australia to India, from China to the US. □



A prison doctor working for Practice Plus Group is refusing, against specialist advice, to prescribe oestrogen to Sarah Jane Baker, a trans woman jailed indefinitely after being acquitted in court through the "licence" on which she was released from a previous sentence being revoked. This amounts to trying to medically detransition her. Protest 2pm Tue 5 Dec outside Practice Plus group offices at Marble Arch, London W1H 7EJ. bit.ly/fr-sjb □

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

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Twists and turns on workplace safety



Diary of a trackworker

By Matt Shaw

After the privatisation of rail was announced in 1993, the whole attitude to Health and Safety started to change as the costs of failing to meet legal requirements were astronomical. But as long as your management had something in place and you had signed for it, the buck fell on your shoulders.

Working outside of what was considered safe became a number one crime, if spotted by the management health and safety rep. There was no thought given as to how this might affect your ability to do your job. This led to much talk of "health and safety gone mad".

Take one example: working at heights. No-one initially had a clear idea as to what working at heights even constituted. After much head-scratching, it turned out that any job where you were off the ground over two inches was officially considered as working at heights. In theory this meant that you need to be in a full climbing kit even if you stood on a chair to change a light bulb.

Most of us ignored the instruction for what were regarded as "common sense" jobs, but as time went on, we were sent on courses which meant we could not claim ignorance as an excuse for not being fully compliant, even if it meant work output decreased.

Cases of supervisors tipping the wink to us and making out like we were all in this together against the "bean counters" became common, especially where a bit of overtime was thrown

into the mix, with the result that people began to not use the equipment even when it made perfect sense to do so.

As time went on, the union mounted a campaign on the issue, and we as workers began to realise that the loss of productivity was not our problem. Falling from a height and being made an invalid, and with the possibility of no compensation because we hadn't used the right gear, was our problem.

That was one example, but others were things like use of power-operated machinery, handling of chemicals, breaks for drivers on long shifts and long distances, and lifting heavy objects. All came under health and safety law, and we always came under pressure from some levels of management to break this law in the name of "common sense". □

Will Sweden's workers humble Musk?

By Mohan Sen

Mechanics servicing Tesla's electric cars in Sweden, members of the IF Metall union, have struck for over a month to demand a collective bargaining agreement – the first strike, or sustained and widely reported one at least, in the company's history.

But Elon Musk and his hierarchy are facing off not just with the mechanics,

but large numbers of other Swedish workers.

Starting with metal workers at a supplier, solidarity action has spread to dockworkers, post and delivery workers, cleaners and car painters among others. There are also reports of potential spillover to Germany, where Tesla actually makes cars, has a larger workforce, and is facing a unionisation drive.

Musk has denounced the wave of solidarity in Sweden as "insane".

The other notable context is the new assertiveness and gains of the United Auto Workers in the US. Having won major concessions from General Motors, Ford and Stellantis, the UAW is talking about taking on Tesla.

The chair of Unite the Union's automotive national sector committee, also con-

vener of a Stellantis plant in Merseyside where important campaigns have taken place, recently spoke at a meeting with UAW activists, organised by the Unite Grassroots Climate Justice Caucus. Will we also see new car workers' struggles in the UK?

Meanwhile the Swedish events show the difference that fending off, or repealing, laws against solidarity strikes can make. □

Uyghur film director arrested



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

Ikram Nurmehmet, aged 32, studied cinema at the University of Marmara in Turkey and then returned to China. In 2019 he directed *Elephant in the Car* (which I haven't seen) – a story of two young Uyghur men, a Chinese woman, Xiao, and a taxi driver.

The taxi driver picks up all three and he soon hits it off with the two Uyghurs who enjoy some music together on the taxi's stereo system. Xiao becomes uneasy in the presence of the two Uyghurs and eventually tells the driver to

stop the taxi and she gets out. It appears that this film – and maybe others that he has directed – have angered the Chinese authorities.

Ikram was arrested on 29 May 2023, jailed since then, and charged with "terrorist activities", but not yet put on trial. "Terrorism" in China can mean just about anything the authorities want it to mean, even making a film which shows Uyghurs in a favourable light. There are claims that Ikram has been tortured and held for long periods in a darkened cell. □



PCS and the results of the “pause”

By a PCS member

It is almost six months since the Left Unity leadership of the civil service union PCS decided to “pause” PCS’s national pay, jobs, and pensions dispute, at the heart of which was a 2022/23 civil service wide pay claim for a consolidated 10% pay increase and a £15 per hour national underpin.

They claimed that a “pause” – the cessation of all industrial action and the lapsing of all legal mandates to take strike action – would allow PCS nationally to engage with the government in talks about job security, low pay and pay coherence and allow PCS representatives in the huge number of civil

service delegated pay bargaining units (BU) to enter 2023/24 pay talks to get the “best possible deals” for members.

The outcome of the delegated pay talks for 2023/24 is now plain. The vast majority of PCS members have once again received below inflation pay awards, as the historic, unprecedented, long term decline of civil service salaries inevitably continued:

Since before the “pause”, the government had insisted that 2023/24 pay settlements had to be significantly below inflation; negotiators went unarmed into BU pay talks; and the LU leadership had signalled to the Tories that they did not want further dispute.

Yet the leadership has failed to issue

a report to membership on the 2023/24 pay outcomes, a crucial measurement of the success of the “pause”. We will never see such a report, or not an honest one, certainly not while the General Secretary and Assistant General Secretary elections are in full flow.

Similarly, we have yet to receive a comprehensive report of the national talks on job security, pay coherence, and low pay. It is unsurprising. The Tories can see and smell the PCS leadership’s weakness, as demonstrated in their insistence on greater civil service office working. More importantly, their recently announced £20bn of tax cuts will be funded by slashing public spending. Significantly reducing wild

pay differences for the same grade of work between one BU and another, and ending endemic low pay, is not on the Tories’ agenda.

When the outgoing PCS general secretary first stood for election in 2000, he demanded a return to national civil service pay rates and national bargaining and denounced the divide and rule of pay delegation. We are still waiting, in greatly more difficult circumstances. It is time for a new PCS leadership, starting with the election of John Moloney and Marion Lloyd as assistant general secretary and general secretary. Voting closes 14 December. □

Behind the train driver strikes



Off The Rails

On 1 December we begin a nine day ban on Rest Day Working (RDW, voluntary overtime) and a series of one day strikes by train driver members of Aslef employed by Train Operating Companies (TOCs). A long-running dispute over pay has turned also into a battle over conditions of employment.

On the table since the beginning of 2023 has been an offer of 4% for 2022-3 and 4% for 2023-4 in return for huge cuts to key terms and conditions on training, redundancy, ill-health retirement (important in a job where a wide range of health conditions can make it unsafe to continue work), rostering (what and how much work can be given to a driver in the course of a working week) and diagramming (how a working day is structured – driving time, minimum rest periods, breaks from the cab etc).

These conditions vary from TOC to TOC but there are some features that are pretty much common to all operators that the government and rail bosses (represented by the Rail Delivery Group) would love to slash in order to run the network more cheaply.

This offer was designed to be rejected – the government knows that these are some of the fundamentals of what make the job secure and tolerable, and that many of these items are unlikely to be sold for any price, let alone a below-inflation pay increase.

The day before the start of the RDW ban sees the close of a referendum of RMT members on a revised offer put to their non-driver members employed by the TOCs. That offer is a one-year deal of 5% with “no strings”, other than an obligation to negotiate

the “strings” on the subsequent year’s pay increase, already months overdue. The RMT leadership has made no recommendation on this offer, although it is signalling strongly to its members that it wants out of the dispute rather than to fight any further. There are various possible motivations for the new offer to the RMT but the most likely are just a desire to avoid strikes over the Christmas period, and to isolate Aslef as the smaller (and therefore financially weaker) union.

Drivers will strike at East Midlands Rail and London North Eastern on Saturday 2 December; at Avanti West Coast, Chiltern, Great Northern Thameslink, and West Midlands on Sunday 3 December; at C2C and Greater Anglia on Tuesday 5 December; at Southeastern, Southern/Gatwick Express, South West Rail main line, SWR depot drivers, and Island Line on Wednesday 6 December; at CrossCountry and Great West-

ern on Thursday 7 December; and at Northern and Trans-Pennine on Friday 8 December.

This spreading out of the one-day strikes is a tactical departure for Aslef, which has up to now been holding sporadic one-day strikes of all involved members on the same day. The aim appears to be to appear to be escalating the action without costing any group of members additional pay. In the context of “strike as protest” rather than “strike until victory”, there is a certain logic to trying this, and some of the media reporting on it suggests that it may well be perceived that way. Certainly the union’s leadership will be hoping to stay in news headlines for longer as a result of having its members out for more consecutive days, albeit in much smaller groups and with less overall impact on service on any given day. It remains to be seen whether or how well this approach will work. □

IWGB protests at City University

By Sacha Ismail

On 24 November members of the Independent Workers Union of Great Britain (IWGB) and supporters occupied the foyers of two buildings at City University in London to demand justice for members who work as night cleaners there.

Three workers have been victimised after a wider group registered a collective grievance about issues of mistreatment and overwork with the university’s subcontractor, Julius Rutherford Ltd. One worker (Bianca) has been sacked, one (Maria) disciplined and one (Ana Maria) physically attacked, by the son of the manager the grievance was against.

Updates and links on twitter/X: @



IWGBunion. Send a letter of protest via bit.ly/cu-wgb. Messages of solidarity to charlesaprile@iwgb.co.uk.

So far City University management has tried to pass the buck to Julius Rutherford – shamefully but perhaps predictably, illustrating the dynamics of outsourcing. □

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Tories assault disabled benefits

By Mara

The government Autumn Statement announced changes to benefits which are cruel, vindictive and won't help people return to work. The government claims to be addressing long term economic inactivity as 2.55 million people are off work due to chronic illness.

The changes announced are to the Work Capability Assessment (WCA) starting from 2025. The WCA is a test in which disabled claimants, if assessed as unable to work, are put in the category of LCW or LCWRA – Limited Capacity to Work or Limited Capacity for Work Related Activity. People in the LCWRA group receive an extra £390.06 a month and don't need to look for work or do activities such as vocational training courses.

The government plans to change the assessment so fewer people go into the LCWRA group and more into the lower paid LCW group, who have to do work-related activities. It is important to clarify that the changes are to *assessments* and starting in 2025, so people who have already been assessed are not in immediate danger of losing benefits.

The government announcements, delivered with sneering and casual cruelty, caused distress and panic for disabled people and family members. The message, yet again, was that people who cannot work are taking money from the taxpayers, the real citizens, and are probably just lazy.

The government position is that due to changes in work practices and technology, disabled people should now be able to find jobs working from home. This is a fantasy. Many office jobs could in theory be done from home, but in practice are not. The jobs available as work-from-home often require high level training, and there is a fairly limited amount of those roles available and a lot of competition for them already. Becoming ill doesn't mean that you automatically become a



qualified software engineer.

This also reflects assumptions that difficulties with work caused by disability can be reduced to people basically needing to sit down. In reality people have all sorts of needs, and a lot of people are too sick to work and need to be given support and then allowed to get on with their lives in peace without constant threats and bullying.

Other people would be able to work with support and training, and would like to, but employers do not make the reasonable adjustments so that people are able to work. People who are working are often put under physically harmful amounts of stress due to employer intransigence.

It is disgusting to reflect that these record high numbers of economic inactivity include so many people with chronic illnesses who are ill, often suffering, due to the effects of capitalism running over our lives like a juggernaut, whether this is illness due to Covid, caused by work or bad housing, or mental health conditions exacerbated by stress.

The WCA is already difficult and distressing. Plenty of people who should get ESA or PIP (Personal Independence Payment) do not apply due to the onerous application process, and high numbers of claims are refused that are then awarded on appeal, weeding out many people with valid claims who give up before appeal. More people should be getting disability support not less.

Ill and disabled people are concentrated in the poorest and lowest paid sections of the working class. They are often themselves carers for children or elderly relatives, or for other disabled people.

Benefit cuts will make life more difficult for families who are already struggling and for the poorest communities. These are ideologically motivated attacks on the most vulnerable people and also on our class as a whole. □

Meeting trade unionists in Kyiv

By John Moloney

Between 11 and 17 November, I was in Ukraine as part of a PCS union delegation. During our stay in Kyiv it was quiet with only three air alerts, which everyone ignored (they have a fine sense of what is dangerous). Unfortunately that quiet period has ended with multiple sustained air attacks in the past week. These have been drone attacks but the attacks that people most fear are ballistic missiles, where you get little or no warning (as you can imagine having discussions about ballistic missiles is slightly surreal).

Everybody I met in Kyiv described living there as being in a bubble, and certainly any notion you have of a city at war was not matched by what we saw while we were there: no blackouts, the streets are crowded, traffic was heavy and the shops full. There was a curfew, but compared to six months ago when there was a blackout, an early curfew, armed checkpoints across Kyiv, the city was more relaxed than in the past.

That said, everyone believed that over the winter, when it gets really cold (temperatures can drop to minus 15°C), the Russians will again attack the country's energy and heating infrastructure and try and freeze the people into submission.

Whilst in-country we meet nine unions, visited a hospital, and visited villages and towns that had been on the front line and so saw first-hand damaged buildings.

Trade-union culture is wholly different from that in the UK, certainly for those unions in the FPU, which is a soviet era legacy trade union federation. Instead of membership action and campaigning, FPU unions write letters and try and engage with employers.

There is "social dialogue" where employers and government are meant to consult unions but the clear trajectory of the government is to weaken collective rights of workers. The class war continues amidst the shooting war. This is true for the health service, where the government is seeking to shut hospitals – during a war.

One of the hospitals marked for closure is a children's hospital which we visited. Staff there are members of the Free Trade Union of Medical Workers, affiliated to the KVPU federation which was a breakaway from the FPU. The KVPU,

particularly the miners, have been more militant than FPU unions; but during the war militant action is subdued while attacks on unions are not.

The workers in the children's hospital have been given an ultimatum to either accept pay cuts or staff cuts.

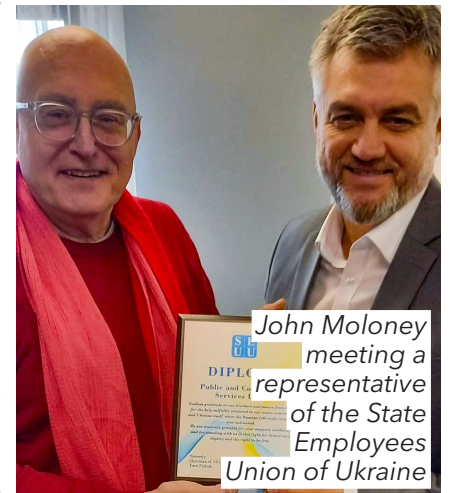
There are not many children on the wards in the hospital and that is because parents do not want their children to stay overnight for fear of ballistic missile attacks on the hospital. That is the reality of life in Kyiv.

Every one we met had lost a relative or a friend, particularly over the last 12 months. The effects of the war are percolating through society. Although there is much war-weariness, no one we talked to was willing to trade land for peace. As one medic said to me, there is no alternative but to go on.

I encourage members of the labour movement to go to the Ukraine and talk to people first hand. The Ukrainian Solidarity Campaign will help with that. You will see for yourself that this is not a proxy war, that Ukraine is not fascist, that there are free trade unions (despite their difficulties) and freedom of speech, and certainly NATO has nothing to do with the conflict.

Indeed, the worry of the trade union movement is that the "West" will abandon them, get bored or worse, with the possible election of Donald Trump as US President, that a peace deal will be imposed on them. If you believe that the Palestinian people have the right of self-determination then you have to concede that right to the Ukrainian people as well. □

• John Moloney is assistant general secretary of PCS, writing here in a personal capacity.





Solidarity

For a workers' government

WHY THERE IS SO LITTLE HOPE FROM COP

By Stuart Jordan

For many years the representatives of fossil capital have outnumbered politicians and scientists at the COP talks, but this year fossil capital has openly, brazenly taken control. COP28, starting 30 November, will be chaired by Sultan Al Jabr, CEO of ADNOC, the UAE's state-owned oil company. He recently announced plans to increase output from 2.7 billion barrels to 5 billion barrels a day, and leaked documents reveal ADNOC's plans to use the summit to broker business deals.

For the past 28 years the capitalist class has demonstrated it will not and very likely cannot halt rising emissions. Instead they have only ever organised a "disturbing acceleration in the number, speed and scale of broken climate records" (2023 UN Emissions Gap report).

Since the 1992 Earth Summit, human activity has added nearly one trillion tonnes of CO₂ to Earth's atmosphere. More emissions have been released since the COP process began than in all previous human history. In the last year, global greenhouse gas emissions rose by 1.2% to an all-time record 57.4 gigatonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent.

Atmospheric CO₂ levels are now at levels not seen on Earth

since four million years ago, when the climate was 2-4°C hotter and sea levels were 10-25 metres higher. Nobody knows how long it will take for temperature and sea level to catch up with CO₂ concentrations, but for 86 days this year temperatures were already 1.5°C above preindustrial levels. September 2023 was the hottest on record with temperatures 1.8°C above preindustrial levels (UN Emissions Gap Report 2023). A recent polar summit in Paris warned that we may already have passed tipping points for catastrophic melt of the cryosphere (the frozen-water parts of the planet), which would trigger feedback loops that further accelerate heating.

28 years of failure are the predictable result of a ruling class that prioritises profit over reason, the anarchy of the free market over planning and control. The ruling class's inability to harness science and technology for social and ecological good was well understood by the earliest Marxists: "Every society based on the production of commodities has this peculiarity: that the producers have lost control... The product governs the producers... Active social forces work exactly like natural forces: blindly, forcibly, destructively, so long as we do not understand, and reckon with, them... As long as we ob-

stinately refuse to understand the nature and the character of these social means of action - and this understanding goes against the grain of the capitalist mode of production and its defenders - so long as these forces are at work in spite of us, in opposition to us, so long they master us... But when once their nature is understood, they can, in the hands of the producers working together, be transformed from master demons into willing servants.

"The difference is as that between the destructive force of electricity in the lightning of the storm, and the electricity under command in the telegraph and voltaic arc; the difference between a conflagration, and fire working in the service of humanity. With this recognition, at last, of the real nature of the productive forces of today, the social anarchy of production gives place to a social regulation of production upon a definite plan, according to the needs of the community and of each individual" (Engels, *Socialism Utopian and Scientific*).

As the floods, droughts, wildfires and extreme weather intensify, we look to the workers' movement as the only social force with the interest and potential power to bring our productive forces under social control. □