

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry



Peace, two states, equal rights

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Pic: Tel Aviv, Nov. 2023, Israeli activists call for ceasefire [@oren_ziv](#)

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Halt the war. Peace. Two states



On 14 January, Israel's assault on Gaza passed its 100th day. At the time of writing, the death toll was nearing 24,000. According to Israel's own statistics, around 66% of casualties have been civilians. Of those, a large proportion were children.

The UN says around 60% of homes in Gaza have been destroyed. Some 80% of the population is now internally displaced. With healthcare infrastructure severely degraded, additional crises arising from homelessness and the spread of disease could lead to even more deaths than the direct Israeli attacks.

Large street protests have taken place recently in Israel calling for Netanyahu's resignation. On 13 January, thousands protested in Tel Aviv, Haifa, and elsewhere. These protests, which include families of hostages, are not explicitly anti-war, but are fiercely critical of Netanyahu's leadership.

But the Israeli government offers no credible plan for the rebuilding of life in Gaza, nor any realistic horizon for when the war will end beyond vague statements about "destroying" or "eliminating" Hamas. However badly its immediate military capacities are affected, Hamas will surely be able to replenish its ranks with young men who see no other immediate avenue for resisting Israel. This is a perspective for endless war.

Israeli raids continue in the occupied West Bank, where Palestinians have a degree of nominal autonomy over fragmented areas, within an overall framework of de facto Israeli military dictatorship.

Inside Israel, the state is trying to clamp down on anti-war agitation. Several anti-war protests have happened, but one in Haifa, called by a coalition led by the left-wing party Hadash, has been denied a police permit (that is, effectively banned, on the pretext that the police could not ensure its safety). A demonstration planned in Tel Aviv by Standing Together, Women Wage Peace, and others, was also denied a permit. Protests planned in Novem-

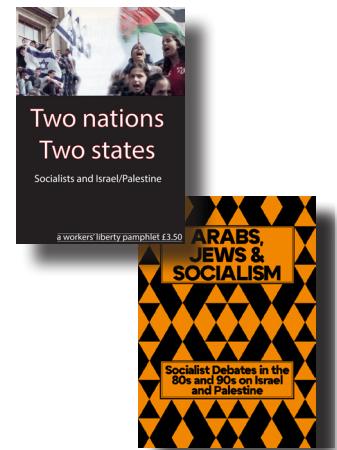
ber, in majority-Palestinian-Arab cities within Israel, were also banned.

Standing Together is organising for a new protest on 18 January, and [fund-raising](#) towards organising costs. A Standing Together rally in Tel Aviv on 28 December, which mobilised around 1,000 people, was the largest protest against the war in Israel since it began. Standing Together and other left-wing, anti-occupation, and peace campaigns argue that a ceasefire agreement is the only means not only to stop the destruction of Gaza, but to ensure the safe return of hostages held by Hamas.

Perpetuating the war is vital for Benjamin Netanyahu's political career. As long as it continues, he can argue for all internal political conflict to be deferred in the interests of "security" and national unity. On 1 January, Israel's supreme court struck down the law passed by the Knesset (Israeli parliament) to severely restrict the court's powers, part of a package of judicial reform pushed by Netanyahu and his far-right allies which was a further blow especially to Palestinian rights.

Prior to the war, that move might well have destabilised the government and

would surely have re-ignited the mass protests that were taking place across the country. But the war gives Netanyahu cover, and Israel's mainstream opposition, united with the government behind the cause of nationalist vengeance, has been timid at best in calling for Netanyahu to go. □



Buy "Two Nations Two States" and "Arabs, Jews & Socialism" discounted together for £ 6.50. Individual prices online. □

• workersliberty.org/2-i-p

We look to solidarity with the movement in Israel, not the ICJ



International pressure on Israel continues to mount, but with little visible impact on its military action. On 11-12 January South Africa brought a legal case to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), accusing Israel of perpetrating a genocide in Gaza.

However it rules on the "genocide" question, the ICJ is likely to issue a ruling condemning Israel's war and ordering it to cease. A comprehensive judgement could take years, but an interim ruling could come within weeks. A cease-and-desist order will be good, but the ICJ has no binding power. A 2022 cease-and-desist order on Russia's war in Ukraine was wholly ignored.

If an ICJ ruling has the effect of imposing some restraint on Israel, and thus saving Palestinian lives, that will be welcome.

Socialist-internationalists who wish to oppose Israel's actions on the basis of a consistently democratic and egalitarian politics should also be

as precise as possible in the language and terms we deploy, and clear-eyed about the ideological roots of some of the arguments made on the left about Israel.

Omer Bartov, a prominent genocide scholar who denounces the Israeli onslaught, [argued](#) in November that there was "no proof a genocide is occurring". He said that "war crimes and crimes against humanity" were likely occurring, with a strong risk of the war developing in an even worse direction, but [as yet](#) he sticks to his opinion. The presence in the Israeli government of figures who advocate exterminationist policies shows the risks. A strong claim can certainly be made that the mass displacements and destruction of civilian life already inflicted on Gaza represent a form of ethnic cleansing.

There are good reasons to be wary about insisting Israel's war represents "a genocide". Some of the definitions being relied upon, about any action that destroys "in part or in whole" a national, cultural, or ethnic group, would also mean the British firebombings of Dresden (at least 25,000 dead)

and Hamburg (nearly 40,000), or the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (over 100,000, maybe over 200,000), or many other war atrocities, were genocides. It is not necessary to call those acts "genocide" in order to condemn them. Would it add anything to our political understanding of the Second World War retrospectively to add the word?

Some Israeli politicians have used genocidal rhetoric about the Palestinians, since 7 October and before, but it does not necessarily follow that those who oppose them have already been defeated.

On Gaza demonstrations, accusations that Israel has been essentially about a "slow genocide" of the Palestinians ever since its foundation have been common, in different tones and variants. The reflexive insistence that whatever Israel does must be the worst thing imaginable, that it represents a kind of unique and essential evil, fuels and is fuelled by a nexus of ideological claims that Workers' Liberty and others have described as left antisemitism. Comparisons of Israel with the Nazis, and claims that its pol-

icies towards the Palestinians are consciously informed by the Holocaust, or represent a "new" (sometimes, implicitly worse) Holocaust, also belong to this nexus.

It remains the case that the social forces with the best immediate chance of imposing restraint on Israel come from within its own society. If the anti-war left is able to intervene in the broader anti-Netanyahu, hostage-return protests and persuade significant numbers that, as Standing Together's slogan puts it, "only peace will bring security", this could help build a movement with real leverage. Especially in the context of ongoing state clamp-downs – against the anti-war left, against the Palestinian minority – dissident voices inside

Israel need our solidarity more than ever.

A meaningful peace settlement must be based on the establishment of a genuinely independent Palestinian state alongside, and with the same rights as, Israel. A framework guaranteeing an equal right to self-determination to both peoples is the only possible basis for future confederation and unity. That horizon is surely remote, but so too for now are all others beyond the perpetuation of a brutal war. It will only become less remote if it is consciously advocated and fought for by socialists and internationalists, around the world but especially on the ground, as part of our immediate agitation and organising against the war. □

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

Support Ukraine, criticise Belgorod bombing

By Dan Katz

Ukraine is the victim of unprovoked Russian imperialist aggression. Ukraine is facing an enemy – Russian President, Vladimir Putin – who has openly stated that Russia’s war aims are to abolish Ukraine and subsume it into Russia.

Russia’s brutal war has probably cost Ukraine 70,000 military dead, some thousands of civilian casualties including at least 550 children.

1700 secondary schools and over 1,200 medical facilities have been damaged or destroyed together with 170,000 units of housing.

18% of Ukrainian territory is currently occupied by Russia and 5mn people have fled the country.

Russia has, for the second successive

winter, targeted Ukraine’s energy infrastructure in the hope of demoralising the population in cold as bad as -20°C.

Since late December waves of missiles and drones have been used against civilian targets. On the night of Friday 14 January Russia launched 37 missiles and three drones at five regions of Ukraine. Russia is now using North Korean ballistic missiles, which are difficult to intercept, as well as Iranian drones.

By the end of 2023 Russia had launched 7,400 missiles and 3,900 Shahed drone strikes against Ukraine, according to officials.

Ukraine is also running out of anti-missile munitions, as aid for Ukraine is being blocked by Republicans in the US Senate and by Hungarian leader Victor Orban in the EU.

A particularly heavy assault on Ukraine began early on the morning of 29 December, lasting for 18 hours. Russia used 122 cruise and ballistic missiles and 36 drones; Ukraine said the majority were shot down, but, nevertheless, at least 58 people were killed and 160 injured. 100 private homes, 45

multi-occupancy housing blocks, hospitals and shops were hit.

This was an attack on civilians. This was a war crime.

In response, on 30 December, Ukraine launched its own strike. Belgorod in southern Russia, a city of 330,000 close to the border with Ukraine was shelled. 25 civilians, including parents with their children, were killed as bombs exploded in the centre of the town, leaving glass shattered and cars burning.

Ukraine does not comment on attacks on Russian territory. Off the record an official said Ukraine was aiming for military targets and the carnage in central Belgorod was caused by debris falling from incompetent Russian air defence. That’s not convincing.

No doubt many Ukrainians will simply shrug: the Russians are simply getting a little bit of what they have been subjecting Ukraine to. Yet the six-year-old-girl and her mother who died in the Ukrainian attack while ice skating in central Belgorod were not responsible for Russia’s war.

Residents of Belgorod reacted with

shock, anger and panic to the attack. The war, or “special military operation” as Putin euphemistically calls the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, is not supposed to kill Russians in Russia. The Russian state had clearly made no provision for civil defence. Basements were locked, and the small number of residents who were given temporary accommodation elsewhere were treated shoddily.

Given the repression in Russia it is difficult to gauge the political ramifications of such attacks. Probably, immediately, the reaction will be chauvinist and buttress Putin.

Small scale incursions and drone attacks on Russian munitions factories, and bomb attacks on rail lines have taken place in 2023, but nothing on this scale, and generally against targets which have military justification.

Solidarity supports Ukraine’s war of self-defence and believes that Ukraine has the right to strike military targets inside Russia in that frame. However, it is neither politically sensible, nor reasonable, for Ukraine to bomb Russian civilians. □

Solidarity 697

Solidarity 697 will be dated 31 January, to make space for a new issue of *Women’s Fightback*. □

Millions in Russia disagree with war and Putin

From a speech at a local Workers’ Liberty meeting by an anti-war, anti-Putin Russian exile

My name is Salavat Ablykalikov, and I come from Russia. My actions and speeches against Putin’s aggressive war on Ukraine have placed me and my family in a dangerous position. I sincerely thank... all of you for making sure my family is now safe. However, today I don’t wish to speak about myself.

Often, Putin is portrayed as the embodiment of evil, but in reality, he’s just an ordinary person with certain personality traits. He lacks moral compass, principles, and beliefs. He thinks like a criminal, ready to break laws and rules.

Typically, such politicians are stopped by the separation of powers and checks and balances. But Putin never received a worthy rebuff until February 2022. Impunity and a long period of one-man rule turned Putin from a thief into a war criminal and the most dangerous villain on the planet.

Russia is a country with underdeveloped institutions, lacking the experience of a stable democracy, except for the ancient times of the Novgorod Republic. Unfortunately, Russia is also a nuclear power.

Hopes for democratisation and freedom after the collapse of the USSR were dashed. Instead of various pathways, our country turned on a path of seeking revenge for a lost Cold War, instead of trying to build a united Europe from Lisbon to Vladivostok.

The initial years of Putin’s rule were successful owing to a well-chosen team, recovery from crisis, and the rise in oil and gas prices. Had Putin exited politics in 2008, he could have been remembered as one of the most successful leaders of Russia. However, during this time, independent television was suppressed, and the oil company Yukos was liquidated.

From 2012, Putin focused on preserving and consolidating his power. For this aim, he’s ready to spare no expense –

organising the Winter Olympics, the FIFA World Cup, armed conflicts with neighboring countries, suppression of civil society, creation of a powerful disinformation and propaganda system.

He used minor wars to solidify his position. He personally and single-handedly decided to attack Ukraine, counting on a quick and easy victory. It wasn’t unarmed Russians he faced, but the regular army of Ukraine and its volunteers who repelled the attack.

I know there are different opinions regarding supporting the Russian opposition, but currently, the main task is to support Ukraine. Putin attempts to prolong the war, counting on the opponent’s tiredness. However, this cannot be allowed; resistance against Putin must be employed using all available means.

I’m filled with concern but also hope that if Putin loses and his regime collapses, the next attempt to democratise Russia will be more successful than all the previous ones.

There are chances for this. Despite repression, monstrous prison terms, torture, and political killings, there are millions of Russians who disagree

with the war. Especially among the young, the future leaders of the new Russia. Among your peers and mine. □



Upcoming meetings

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

Wednesday 17 & 24 January, 7pm: Israel-Palestine: unravelling the issues, New Cross Learning, 283-285 New Cross Road, London, SE14 6AS

Thursday 18 January, 3pm: Tubeworker monthly meeting

Tuesday 23 January, 6.30pm: Socialist chat, The Lost Wanderer, 46 Leazes Park Road, Newcastle, NE1 4PG

Thursday 25 January, 6.30pm: Why Socialist Feminism?. County Arms, 85 Romey Road, Winchester, SO22 5DL

Thursday 25 January, 7pm: “Metabolism” discussion, ecosocialist reading group

Friday 26 January, 7pm: Women’s Fightback #30 launch: Sojourner Truth Community Centre, 161 Sumner Rd, London SE15 6J

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



John Pilger: once an inspiring truth-teller



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

John Pilger, who died on 30 December 2023, was once a brave and principled journalist who spoke truth to power.

Many of us of a Certain Age can remember being moved and inspired in the 1970s by his exposures of war crimes, racism, injustice and human rights abuses. He was a war correspondent in Vietnam, Cambodia, Bangladesh and Biafra and probably (in Britain at least) did more than any other journalist to bring the horrors of those conflicts to public attention. He twice won the UK Journalist of the Year Award: in 1967 and 1979. His eponymous TV series on ITV was required viewing as far as I was concerned. His 1979 *Daily Mirror* reports and the subsequent documentary *Year Zero: the Silent Death of Cambodia*, exposing the genocide committed by Pol Pot's monstrous regime in Cambodia following the Vietnam war, were examples of political journalism at its very finest.

But something happened to Pilger in the 1990s. It seems to have been triggered by events following the breakup of Yugoslavia.

Serbia – under Slobodan Milošević – set out to ethnically cleanse Bosnian territory by systematically removing all Bosnian Muslims (Bosniaks). Many Bosniaks were driven into concentration camps, where women and girls were systematically gang-raped and other civilians were tortured, starved and murdered.

In July 1995, Serbs committed the largest massacre in Europe since World War Two, in Srebrenica. An estimated 23,000 women, children and elderly people were put on buses and driven to Muslim-controlled territory, while 8,000 “battle-age” men were detained and slaughtered.

When Serbia refused international demands to remove its troops from Kosovo, grant autonomy to Kosovars, and allow armed peacekeepers in Rambouillet in 1999, the US-NATO aerial intervention started.

Perhaps under the influence of Noam Chomsky, Pilger (in the *New Statesman*) called the bombardment a “cowards’ war” and down-played Milošević’s attacks on Kosovar Albanians.

In December 2004, he wrote a [column](#)

calling Kosova “a genocide that never was,” despite the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia charging Milošević with genocide (along with 65 other counts) in 2002.

Like Chomsky, Pilger [endorsed](#) Diana Johnstone’s book *Fool’s Crusade*, a revisionist history of the Yugoslav wars that denies the Srebrenica genocide and questions the authenticity of events like the 1999 Račak Massacre of Kosovars. He also [endorsed](#) Herman and Peterson’s dreadful book *The Politics of Genocide*, which cast doubt on (in fact, more or less dismissed) both the Srebrenica massacre and the genocide of Tutsis by Hutu militias in Rwanda.

In 2004, he was asked (by *Green Left Weekly*) whether he thought “the anti-war movement should be supporting Iraq’s anti-occupation resistance?” Pilger [replied](#): “Yes, I do. We cannot afford to be choosy.” The fact that this so-called “resistance” was murderously opposed to Iraqi trade unionists, women, communists and democrats, was apparently of no consequence as far as Pilger was concerned. By now his political creed was becoming “my enemy’s enemy is my friend”, leading him to support dictators, clerical fascists, misogynists and mass murderers – just



This short pamphlet making the case against trade union support for the Morning Star £3 (inc. post) bit.ly/shop-wl

so long as they opposed “the West”.

He excused Assad’s murderous regime in Syria and became a regular on the Putin’s TV channel RT (formerly Russia Today), where he denied Assad’s use of chemical weapons in Douma and elsewhere, [telling](#) viewers: “There’s no real evidence of a chemical attack”.

Again on RT, he [described](#) the heroic White Helmets in Syria as “a complete propaganda construct”, a phrase seized on and repeated by every Putin/Assad apologist.

On Ukraine, Pilger [parroted](#) Putin’s propaganda: “The invasion clearly was provoked. Indeed, if it was a breach of international law, so too was the provocation”: he didn’t explain what the “provocation” was. He endorsed the Kremlin’s claim that Ukraine as “a regime infested with Nazis” and straightforwardly lied when he [said](#) “NATO now completely surrounds Russia in the west”.

Small wonder that the *Morning Star* has been in mourning, publishing a gushing obituary, followed up by no less than six (at the last count) further eulogies, hailing Pilger as a great and heroic “anti-imperialist”. □

1924: when they all came together



Eric Lee

By Eric Lee

The Bernie Sanders campaigns in 2016 and 2020 were a high-water mark for Socialist politics in the U.S. Sanders, who campaigned as a Democrat, won over thirteen million votes, 43% of the total, in his first attempt.

The self-defined “democratic socialist” came within a hair’s breadth of defeating Hillary Clinton and winning the Democratic nomination. He would almost certainly have defeated Donald Trump in the general election. It was a remarkable result, considering the history of socialist politics in the U.S.

Most historians point to 1912, when Eugene V. Debs,

the Socialist Party candidate, won nearly a million votes, as the party’s “golden age”. Debs won even more votes in 1920, running as a federal prisoner, but it was a lower percentage due to the vastly increased electorate, which now included women.

Debs never ran again, and the Socialists entered a period of terminal decline. But what is usually missed is what happened in 1924. Arguably, that forgotten election was the most successful the Socialists ever fought – and there are lessons for progressives today.

That year, both the Democrats and Republicans nominated conservative candidates. Former Wisconsin governor Robert “Fighting Bob” La Follette went to work to put together a coalition to challenge the conservative dominance of American politics. La Follette was no Socialist,

and had been a Republican, but his views and those of the Socialists overlapped on many key issues.

La Follette pulled together a wide range of organisations in his Conference for Progressive Political Action. In addition to farm groups, African Americans, women voters and others, La Follette managed to bring together two organisations which had previously had a fraught relationship: the American Federation of Labor, headed up by Samuel Gompers, and the Socialist Party of Eugene Debs. After twenty years of running independent Socialist campaigns, it was Debs who urged the party to support the Progressives in 1924.

On Election Day, the Democrats won the states of the former Confederacy, with the support of racist white voters, while the Republicans won

pretty much everywhere else. The Communist Party decided to run its own candidate, William Z. Foster, who won fewer than 40,000 votes. The Progressives did surprisingly well. La Follette won over 4.8 million votes, which was five times what Debs had won in his best campaigns. One in six voters broke from the main parties to back the labour and Socialist-dominated Progressive campaign.

La Follette had insisted that the Progressives not field any candidates for lower office. This was entirely a Presidential campaign, and as a result, the movement collapsed shortly thereafter. Samuel Gompers died just after the election, La Follette died a year later, and was followed in 1926 by Debs.

There was never again to be a progressive third party effort on this scale in the U.S. Is there anything we can learn from the

La Follette campaign of 1924 one century later?

For one thing, it showed that when the Socialists and the trade unionists teamed up, overcoming their differences, they became a force to be reckoned with. By breaking with sectarianism and embracing a popular form of progressive coalition politics, the Socialists had a huge impact. The 1924 La Follette campaign paved the way for Franklin D Roosevelt and the New Deal – which ushered in the most progressive era in American history.

A century later, facing the real possibility of a second Trump presidency, the importance of building a progressive coalition politics for our time should be clear to all. □

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

Firefighters win on maternity pay



Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

The country's second largest fire service has approved maternity leave of 52 weeks on full pay.

West Midlands Fire Service, the second largest in the country, has approved 52 weeks full pay for employees on maternity and adoption leave. Paternity leave was increased from one to two weeks with full pay.

"This is a fantastic result for mem-

bers in the West Midlands, for which we applaud the efforts of the brigade representatives and the local women's committee," said FBU assistant general secretary Ben Selby.

"We are seeing other services move significantly too, which again is positive – but our fight will not cease until we achieve 52 weeks' maternity pay for all, in all fire and rescue services".

The win was boosted by the FBU's national Fight for 52 Campaign. The union say there is a postcode lottery in the UK fire and rescue service. A firefighter in Cornwall receives £15,000 less maternity leave pay than her equal in Derbyshire.

Fight for 52 seeks to address the dire imbalances in maternity provision across the UK and is part of the Equality Matters campaign, the union's commitment to fighting inequality at work.

Fight for 52 demands include that:

"All UK fire employers extend the current arrangement for maternity leave to 12 months on full pay following the date of birth. Pre-birth provisions must also be addressed, ensuring that expectant mothers are protected from the work-related exposures to fire contaminants. These improvements must be reflected urgently in maternity provisions laid out in the Grey Book (the scheme of conditions which apply

across the service)." Improved parental leave is a key demand across sectors. In firefighting there are particular issues, lack of proper maternity leave puts new mothers and babies at risk from fire contaminants.

One of the significant outcomes of a study conducted by childcare provider Koru Kids and the Fatherhood Institute research and consultancy organisation, was that eight in ten parents feel that unequal maternity and paternity policies reinforce traditional gender stereotypes, encouraging the mother to take on a homemaking role, while the father returns to work. □

Capitalist markets block social foresight



Socialism vs Capitalism

By Martin Thomas

In his book *Revolution Betrayed*, evidently thinking through lessons from "war communism" in 1918-21, Trotsky argued that a workers' government (and not just in poverty-blighted Russia) would for a long time use goods and services markets to signal costs, but would push aside financial markets.

"The budget and credit mechanism is wholly adequate for a planned distribution of the national income. And as to prices, they will serve the cause of socialism better, the more honestly they being to express the real economic relations of the present day".

Even in bourgeois economic writing, the theories (Arrow-Debreu, etc.) about the efficiency of markets are mostly limited to exchanges at a given time. (Arrow himself was a [socialist](#)). Much of economic life, though, is about activity which cannot be assessed immediately by those

markets – large-scale, long-term projects, public works.

Marx was one of the first economists to show that capitalism depends on large-scale credit and financial markets.

According to the standard story, these work to scoop up small savings into sizeable stashes which can then be invested efficiently, through transactions which exchange not money for goods, but immediate cash for titles to future cash (dividends on shares, bond interest payments).

In fact those financial markets – where bourgeois theories about optimality, though

they exist ([Malinvaud](#), [Bliss](#)), are thinner – operate as gambling dens where the wealthy vie to redistribute surplus value among themselves.

They are endemically short-termist. Capitalist bosses have to gear to paying dividends, sustaining share prices, or repaying "venture capital" funds, within a few years. Governments have to sustain the market price of their bonds (IOUs). The British government now, for example, pays out about £100 billion a year in interest on its bonds, and worry every month about what price it can get for new bonds.

Long-term public provision, or ecological sustainability, are constantly pushed aside. Ecological sustainability doubly so, because that depends on world aggregates. Each capitalist firm or government has an incentive to cash in for themselves, short-term, even if they know that the total of such short-term choices will be destructive world-scale and longer-term.

A workers' government will suppress financial markets, and direct investment according to transparent, far-sighted, and common-good criteria, decided democratically. □

Sudan: RSF slaughter escalates

By Matt Cooper

Since civil war returned to Sudan in [April 2023](#), the Rapid Support Force (RSF), formerly the Janjaweed, responsible for much of the killing in the genocide in Darfur since 2003, has taken a murderous grip on much of the country.

UN figures state that seven million people have been displaced within Sudan, with 1.5 million fleeing the country. There are fears that the level of violence will escalate if the RSF seeks

to take control of the northeast of the country, some of which is still controlled by the SAF.

The roots of the current conflict are in 2003 when armed resistance was growing among neglected non-Arab groups in the Darfur region in the west of Sudan. The response of the longtime dictator, Omar al-Bashir, was to foster an armed Arab militia, the Janjaweed. He used them not only to put down the armed rebellion but to launch a war against non-Arab civilians in the area. The Janjaweed not only killed but used mass rape as a weapon of genocide and ethnic cleansing.

Of Darfur's population of six million (the targeted ethnic groups were only part of that population), between 2003 and 2005 an estimated 300,000 died, with a similar number fleeing as refugees to neighbouring Chad. A far greater number were displaced within Sudan. Although the intensity of attacks decreased after 2005, they never stopped.

In 2013 al-Bashir reorganised the

Janjaweed to become a formalised state paramilitary force, the RSF. Under Mohamed Dagalo (Hemedti) the RSF seized resources in Darfur, notably gold mines. One mine is now reportedly run by the Russian mercenary Wagner Group, who have helped arm the RSF. The UAE has also armed the RSF.

Coup

Following months of popular protests and strikes in late 2018 and 2019, al-Bashir was toppled in a military coup in April 2019. Strikes and protests continued, leading to some of the leadership of the protest movement agreeing to form a transitional military-civilian government in August 2019. This was never stable, with the military pushing out its civilian partners. The working class struggled bravely but was never sufficiently organised as a [force](#) that could challenge for power.

In April 2023 the military block split with the regular army (SAF) and RSF turning on each other. (The SAF has its own record of war crimes.)

The main fighting was initially in the capital, Khartoum, which had been at the centre of the protests. Much of the population fled with the RSF controlling most of the city. The RSF controls part of the south and west, including large sections of Darfur, with reports of the resumption of genocide and ethnic cleansing, focused on the Masalit minority. Over a thousand civilians are said to have been massacred in Ad-damata in November 2023.

In December 2023, the RSF took the southeastern city of Wad Madani, which had been considered an SAF stronghold, leaving the SAF's grip on the country weakened. Many from Khartoum had fled to Wad Magani. There were reports of looting and rapes by the RSF.

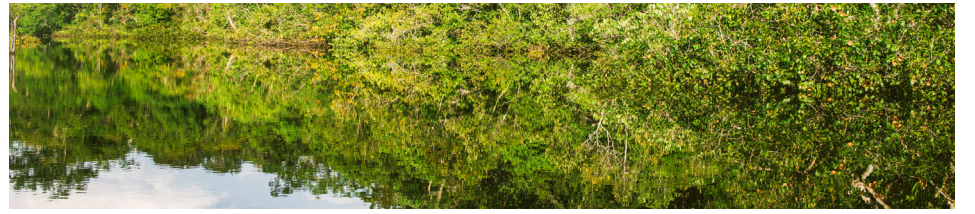
At the same time as launching its International Court of Justice case against Israel, South Africa has hosted what amounted to a state [visit](#) for Dagalo (Hemedti). It previously allowed al-Bashir to visit despite the International Criminal Court warrant for his arrest. □



For socialists to understand and confront left antisemitism from primitive or Stalinist roots to the "anti-imperialism of fools". 265 pages, £9.99 [bit.ly/shop-wl](#)



Amazon drought signals wider dangers



Environment

By Stuart Jordan

Last year, 2023, was the hottest year on record, with one dataset finding temperatures 1.54°C hotter than pre-industrial levels. 2023 also brought the harshest drought in the history of the Amazon rainforest; an early sign that we may have triggered a major climate tipping point.

The Amazon is one of the world's largest terrestrial carbon sinks. Covering an area equivalent in size to the USA, it is estimated to contain 123 billion tonnes of carbon. As the forest dies it releases this carbon further accelerating global heating. A 2021 study in *Nature* by Luciana Gatti and colleagues found that the

Southern Amazon had flipped from carbon sink to carbon source. The drought will further intensify this feedback loop.

The immediate cause of the Amazon drought and a contributing to record temperatures is an El Niño weather event. El Niño occurs every two to seven years as warmer water circulates to the surface of the Pacific. It tends to bring drier, hotter weather to northern South America and wetter weather to the south. This El Niño, supercharged by global heating, has also dried up the Panama Canal, causing disruption to one of the world's major shipping lanes, while Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and southern Brazil experienced severe flooding.

The drought is exacerbated by decades of ecological destruction. As a rainforest, the Amazon plays a role in creating weather conditions for its own flourishing. Rain from the Atlantic falls in Eastern Amazon, is absorbed by trees and transpires. The water cycles in this way several times as the forest spreads West to the foothills of the Andes. About 25-35% of rainfall in the Amazon basin is produced this way and it has a cooling effect on the region.

Deforestation is destroying the rainforests ability to recycle rain. Around 20% of the rainforest has been clear cut to make way for intensive agriculture and mining operations. Brazil's farmland has expanded by 50% in the four decades in an ever expanding frontier of primary production.

Beef farming is the largest driver. According to the Climate Observatory, Brazil's 220 million cows have a carbon footprint greater than Japan; 43% of

the herd grazes in land that was once the most biodiverse habitats on Earth.

In addition to deforested areas, 40% of the land has been degraded by selective logging. Selective logging operations remove the larger trees – expensive tropical hardwoods – ostensibly to “make room” for new growth. Such practices are branded “sustainable” although 90% of selective logging is done illegally. In reality, it is the largest trees that do most of the heavy lifting of transpiration, pumping out vast quantities of the water into the atmosphere. They are also more efficient at storing carbon than the fast growing softwoods that replace them. A 2023 study found that emissions from degraded forest are equal to and may even exceed those from deforested areas.

Fire

In normal conditions the Amazon is too wet to burn. But the drier, degraded forest is vulnerable to fire. Studies have shown that slash-and-burn by land-grabbers is a major cause of fire in the Amazon. Philip Fearnside, an ecologist at Brazil's National Institute for Research in Amazonia, says, “Brazil is basically the only country where you can still go into the forest and start clearing and expect to come out with a land title. It's like the Wild West of North America in the eighteenth century.”

Deforestation went into overdrive under Jair Bolsonaro. Since Lula da Silva's presidential election tougher

enforcement has curbed rates of deforestation. But curbs are not the same as putting an end to this wanton ecocide, still further from restoring farmland to rainforest. A \$204 million fund called Arc of Restoration was set up at COP28 to reforest some farmland. But as long as the Amazon's land and natural resources can be exploited for profit, the destruction will continue.

The speed of these climate events has taken scientists by surprise. Carlos Nobre, who led the research into the Amazon tipping point in 2016 says: “What we were predicting to happen perhaps in two or three decades is already taking place.” Similarly, Gavin Schmidt, director of Nasa's Goddard Institute for Space Studies was alarmed at the spike in global temperatures: “We are having a real hard time explaining why 2023 was as warm as it was. What happened last year was unprecedented and it's a concern. This is the first year I've been doing this where I'm far less sanguine about my ability to explain what's happening.”

CO₂ levels are now at levels not seen in over 3 million years when temperatures were 3°C hotter and sea levels were at least 10 metres higher than today. The speed at which temperatures rise to catch up with CO₂ levels is unknown but capitalist production is adding to atmospheric CO₂ destroy the Earth's carbon sinks. Unless our productive forces can be brought under social control, the acceleration to hot-house Earth is likely to continue. □

Paul Burkett, 1956-2024

By Paul Hampton

Paul Burkett, the prolific author on Marxist ecology, sadly died on 7 January 2024. He was aged 67 and had sudden complications from acute myeloid leukaemia. He began teaching at Syracuse University, then worked at the University of Miami and at Indiana State University for more than twenty years. He retired in 2020.

At the turn of the century Burkett made several seminal contributions to the revival of Marxist ecology. His book *Marx*

and Nature: A Red And Green Perspective (1999) re-examined Marx's works in light of ecological questions. He made good use of the Marx and Engels Collected Works, published since the mid-1970s, to set out a far more nuanced and well sourced account of Marx's ecological thinking.

Burkett also engaged directly with critics of Marx, including other Marxists. He was able to convince Ted Benton, probably the foremost critic at the time, that Marx had much to offer on ecology. He also reviewed other crucial literature,

such as Alfred Schmidt and Jonathan Hughes, in journals such as *Organization and Environment* and *Historical Materialism*. Burkett was a combative defender of Marx against the green eco-socialists around *Capitalism Nature Socialism* journal.

Marxist

Burkett's book *Marxism and Ecological Economics* (2006) engaged directly with the works of key ecological economists. He argued for a red-green alliance, but very much on Marxist terms. Burkett took

on their arguments against Marx and broke new ground in connecting Marx's metabolic theory to modern conceptions such as sustainability. In collaboration with John Bellamy Foster, Burkett showed how Marx had corresponded with the energetic economist Sergei Podolsky, providing both helpful comments and a trenchant critique.

Burkett was supportive of other scholars. He was kind enough to provide me with detailed comments on my own [climate change book](#) and to give it a public endorsement.

Burkett admired [Hal Draper's](#) books, modelling *Marx and Nature* on this approach. He understood the importance of the class-based approach to ecology and the necessity for trade unions to play a key role in these battles. Burkett's writing on ecology and political economy deserves to be read and discussed by the new global generation of eco-scholars and activists. We should remember Paul Burkett's contributions and mark his passing by carrying on the struggle for socialism. □

Economic strife in Iran

By Dan Katz

Iranian pensioners have regularly taken to the streets in recent years to demand an end to corruption, free access to health care, and improvements to pensions which have been decimated by inflation. On Wednesday 10 January thousands of retired teachers demonstrated for better pensions and the release of jailed teacher trade union activists.

Protests across Iran's strategically important oil and gas sectors have been running since early September 2023. Workers are demanding pay increases,

Iran's currency, the rial, fell by 5% after the US-UK strikes on the Yemeni Houthis movement as fears grow of a major regional war. That will add to consumer price inflation, which has been running at 50% for several years.

The Iranian currency has fallen 12-fold against the dollar since 2018 when the Trump government in the US pulled out of the nuclear deal and imposed banking and oil export sanctions on Iran.

Released on bail

However, two brave Iranian journalists, Niloofer Hamedani and Elahah Mohammadi, have been granted "temporary release" from prison.

The women were released on bail pending an appeal against sentences of 13 and 12 years, respectively, for reporting on the murder of Mahsa Jina Amini by Iran's "morality police" in September 2022.

They were pictured after leaving Tehran's notorious Evin prison on 14 January. They have spent the last 17 months in detention for simply doing their jobs

and telling the truth about the killing.

Jina Amini was taken into custody for allegedly breaking Iran's mandatory headscarf rules, and Hamedani took a photograph of Jina lying in a coma in hospital, being hugged by her parents, after being beaten by police.

Mohammadi was arrested for covering Amini's funeral in Saghez in the Kurdish north west of Iran. Jina Amini's murder sparked a mass street movement, Women, Life, Freedom in opposition to Iran's misogynistic laws and the vicious clerical regime.

In the months that followed over 550 protesters were killed, many were jailed and tortured, at least seven have been executed, and 22,000 were arrested as the Mullahs used violent repression against the movement.

In December Jina's parents and brother were prevented from travelling to receive the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought awarded in memory of Jina.

Roya Heshmati, a 33-year-old Kurdish-Iranian woman, announced on Facebook that she had been whipped 74 times on her back for posting a picture of herself walking down a Tehran street without a hijab. The punishment was carried out on 3 January. For her "crime," which took place in April 2023, she was held for 11 days and charged with propaganda against the establishment, violating public decency and order and disseminating immoral social media content.

Originally, and outrageously, she was sentenced to 13 years in prison on those charges. On appeal her sentence was reduced, and she was banned from leaving the country for three years,

and sentenced to 74 lashes. Heshmati detailed the experience on her social media. During the punishment she refused to wear a hijab and had to be handcuffed in order for women officials to forcibly cover her hair.

Heshmati described being whipped in front of a judge in a room she described as a "medieval torture chamber". During the ordeal she chanted the words of a popular song from the Women, Life, Freedom movement: "In the name of women, in the name of life, the clothes of freedom are torn, our black night will dawn."

Elections

Iran is heading towards elections for its fake parliament which will take place on 1 March. All but the most hardline of regime supporters have been excluded from the ballot. So-called "reformist" and "moderate" clerics and Islamists have been purged. Already, in November 2023, 28% of the prospective candidates who applied to stand for the 290-seat parliament had been disqualified after "initial screening."

A former President, Hassan Rouhani, has suggested the turnout in March will be very low. Apparently in elections held in 2020 before the recent wave of protests, the turnout averaged around 40%. But in some areas where there has been significant opposition to the regime, like the industrial areas round Karaj, near Tehran, turnout was under 5%.

Recent legislation raised the retirement age for men to 62 years. Social security contributions must also now be paid for 42 years by men, before qualifying for a full pension. □

WORKERS' RIGHTS FROM CHINA TO UK:
PROTEST APPLE!

2pm Saturday 17 February
Apple, Covent Garden, London



**Activist
Agenda**

The new "Workers Against the CCP" campaign is protesting on 17 February, 2pm at the Apple Store, London WC2E 8HB.

Its demands: End Uyghur forced labour in Apple supply chains • End Apple's collaboration with CCP censorship • Union rights for factory workers in China • Decent conditions and union recognition for UK Apple workers.

Investigations have repeatedly linked the factories that build Apple's products to the Chinese state's forced labour programmes, conscripting the persecuted Uyghur people to make profits for big business and state bureaucrats. And even outside the forced labour programmes, Chinese workers are banned from forming free trade unions.

The campaign appeals to activists outside London to organise similar protests (even small ones) outside a local Apple shop. □

• Info for campaigns, template motions, etc: workersliberty.org/agenda

Defeat Rwanda scheme, win asylum rights

By Gerry Bates

The Tory government's "Safety of Rwanda" Bill comes back to the Commons for further debate and a vote on 16-17 January.

Tory ultras are pressing to sharpen it, and saying they will vote against if their amendments fail; other Tories dislike the Bill's conflict with international law even as it is.

The Bill declares: "Every decision-maker must conclusively treat the Republic of Rwanda as a safe country... The provisions of this Act apply notwithstanding the relevant provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998... It is for a Minister of the Crown... to decide whether the United

Kingdom will comply with [an] interim measure" [ordered by the European Court of Human Rights]. It is designed to get round the Supreme Court decision on 15 November that the government's plan to deport refugees to Rwanda, rather than let them apply for asylum in the UK, is unlawful.

Risk

The judges unanimously agreed that there is a real risk refugees will not be safe in Rwanda. Rwanda's government is itself accused of torture, extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances.

Whether Rwanda removals ever go ahead or not – immigration lawyer Alasdair Mac-

kenzie, for example, [thinks](#) them unlikely to happen soon if ever – it is clear that the Tories want to make the show of pursuing performative cruelty a core plank of their "culture war" electoral strategy.

In Parliament, Labour's Yvette Cooper has denounced the Tories for incompetence and "wasting time, wasting money", rather than over the principle of asylum rights.

Such strategies of triangulation allow the racist right to dictate the narrative and drag politics ever rightwards. Pleading for parliamentary norms, managerial competence, respect for legality, and an imagined standard of "civility" in ruling class politics, will not

vanquish rightwing populism.

We must step up the political fight – making an unapologetic case for migrants' rights, including free movement, safe passage, sanctuary and equality for all.

This means pressing within the Labour Party for transformed policies; building working-class solidarity against discrimination and immigration raids and deportations; pushing for workers' collective non-compliance with immigration enforcement; winning our trade unions to action; and taking to the streets. □

• Labour Campaign for Free Movement: labourfreemovement.org

More online

Pat Markey memorial

Meeting, 13 December:
bit.ly/p-markey

Antonio Negri 1933-2023

A figure of "autonomist Marxism": bit.ly/a-negri

Solidarity with Balochs

Protests in Pakistan:
bit.ly/baloch-s

On geoengineering

Yes to research:
bit.ly/geoeng

Peace with a Palestinian state

By Ayman Odeh

Yesterday, I spoke with Dr. Khalil Shikaki, the most respected opinion pollster amongst the Palestinian people. I asked him about the Palestinian people's views regarding the peace process in the 1990s. He answered that 85% of Palestinians supported the Oslo Accords and the two-state solution. He added that, after Netanyahu's election, these support rates dropped by 10%, only for them to reach 85% again in 1999.

These high rates of support were not at the beginning of the conflict. They came after the First Intifada, after the war in Lebanon, after the bloody wars, and after the terrible Nakba. And yet, the vast majority of the Palestinian people supported this historic compromise. We have already stated that these support rates dropped after Netanyahu's election. We continue to see Netanyahu being elected, over and over again, more than any other Prime Minister in Israel. Unfortunately, this is also reflected in the Palestinian opinion polls, which show support rates [for a two-state settlement] have decreased.

Netanyahu promised to be "Mr. Security", and we see the consequences. He promised to be "Mr. Economy", and we see the consequences. He promised to eliminate the Palestinian issue. Two-

and-a-half months ago, he even stood in front of the United Nations, all condescension, and stated that Palestinians constitute 2% of the Arab people. And now we see that the Palestinian cause is at the forefront of the international stage. Everyone is talking about the two-state solution, and the need to establish a Palestinian state. As Pyrrhus said, "Another such victory, and we are undone." This describes our situation after this war, which has not achieved any of Israel's goals, save for revenge, and killing of Palestinian civilians.

Today there are 25,000 new Palestinian orphans. How will they be raised? Think of the kids, two, five, 10 years of age, who lost their parents. Not to mention the 9,000 murdered children. These are the consequences of the war, which will force us to forever "live by the sword".

I spoke about Netanyahu, but I also want to address you [the opposition]. This side has not spoken about peace for fifteen years – fifteen years! It has abandoned the cause of peace. When the government of Naftali Bennett and Ayelet Shaked was formed, you were thrilled – with a government that deepened the occupation, expanded settlements, and killed Palestinians in the West Bank no less than any of Netanyahu's governments. It was only we who stood and stated that [peace] is the

foundational question.

During the protests against the judicial reform, I met with leaders of the centre-left and asked that they look for the connection between the occupation and the judicial reform. Where does [Itamar] Ben Gvir come from? Where does [Bezalel] Smotrich come from? Where does [Simcha] Rothman come from? They are all settlers. [The opposition] said [the occupation] was not the issue, and that they wanted to focus on the harm inflicted upon the legal system. But we stood firmly, and connected the two things. And I want to tell [the opposition] that the judicial reform, the overhaul, is being implemented against Arab citizens, who are silenced; against Palestinians in the West Bank, with all the acts that the settlers are committing.

The government decided to prevent Hadash [the left-wing party Odeh represents] from holding its assembly. This is a political movement whose roots go back one hundred years. Why is it forbidden from assembling its council? I have not heard a single word from the leaders of the opposition against this dictatorial decision. We at Hadash will, regardless, hold our assembly on Saturday. Disregarding the police, we will hold Hadash's assembly. We will continue with our most valuable paths, for the sake of peace, equality, democracy,

and justice. We will continue. We will not lose hope.

A week ago, I was in Paris. I passed through the Arc de Triomphe, and I thought about the days when the Third Reich passed right under it. I imagined two underground anti-Nazi French activists: one tells the other that, in eight years, we will form a shared European market with Germany. The Second World War was not their [France and Germany's] first conflict, nor the First World War. Bismarck had occupied France, Napoleon had occupied Germany. And yet, they arrived at a settlement in the end. They have a common market, they have a common currency. It is not an ideal situation, but there is no doubt that it is evidence. Are Israelis and Palestinians really unable to reach an agreement? We saw this during the Oslo Accords. We saw Palestinian youths who had thrown rocks at Israeli soldiers in the West Bank waving olive branches. They supported peace. [...]

I still believe that there will be peace. And the key to achieving peace is the formation of a Palestinian state, within 1967 borders, an act which will bring strategic security and peace to all of us. □

• Lightly-edited transcript of a speech given by Palestinian socialist Ayman Odeh in the Knesset (Israeli parliament) on 17 December. Video: bit.ly/a-odeh

Stop and make peace

By Alon-Lee Green

Dear friends, we are here in these difficult times, in this difficult and unbearable time in all of our lives, to say in the clearest way possible, that we demand, first and foremost, a ceasefire agreement that will release the hostages and stop the killing of innocent people in Gaza.

We are here to say that only an agreement like this, a bilateral ceasefire agreement, will bring the hostages back

alive. Only an agreement like this can stop the killing, the destruction, and the hatred.

We are also here today to demand the only thing that will allow us to end the deathly status-quo, to stop the never-ending wars – this is our solution, and it is Israeli-Palestinian peace. This is what we are here to demand this evening. [...]

Operation First Rain, 2005. Operation Summer Rains, 2006. Operation Hot Winter, 2008. Operation Cast Lead,

2008-9. Operation Pillar of Defence, 2012. Operation Protective Edge, 2014. Operation Closed Garden, 2018-21. Operation Black Belt, 2019. Operation Guardian of the Walls, 2021. Operation Breaking Dawn, 2022. Operation Iron Swords, 2023-4. A decade-and-a-half of wars. A decade-and-a-half of bloodshed on both sides. A decade-and-a-half of deepening the occupation and building more settlements between

each war. Each and every time, they tell us, "This is the last time. This time we will achieve security. This time we will defeat Hamas." But this has not worked, not a single time. And it won't work this time. This war will not bring us security.

We are here tonight to say that the time has come to stop. To stop the killing, the destruction, the deepening of despair that exists in both peoples. The time has come to take the opposite path, the path of Is-

raeli-Palestinian peace. In this framework, everyone who lives in this land will live with peace, will live with liberty, and will live with independence. This is the reason we are here this evening, this is the reason to continue to fight, until our path wins. □

• Lightly-edited transcript of an excerpt of a speech by Alon-Lee Green, National Co-Director of Standing Together, Tel Aviv, 28 December. Video: bit.ly/a-l-green

A joint struggle for peace and liberty

By Sally Abed

We Palestinians do not get a lot of acceptance, and I want to speak about that a bit. Because of that, I also wore my keffiyeh. It's a demand for peace, for our people in Gaza.

And then I thought, I don't want to talk about numbers, about statistics. I refuse for our deaths, or our humanity as Palestinians, to be some kind of topic for debate. However many dead Palestinians is too many, and the numbers of

innocent Palestinians that are dying is justification enough to say: let's end the killing. Ceasefire now! [...]

I'm here as a Palestinian woman, asking you to fight for the liberation of my people – [but] not to save me, to save us. I refuse for you to be part of a joint struggle just to "save us".

I demand that every Jewish Israeli joins this struggle out of personal interest, out of patriotism, out of a belief that we have a deep interest in ending the occupation and in peace. Other-

wise, we won't build a real and equal partnership. I invite you to a joint struggle, in which we both have an interest, for a better life, for a better future, for peace, for liberty.

And I really hope that we will come out of this stronger than we were before, that we will come out of this with hope. We're really creating hope – hope and belief in our ability to change things. And we can. Together, we are a force. We need to organise. We need a plan. We need to be angry, not just hurt.

We need to be angry about this reality, about the fact that they are abandoning us. And only together will we reach a place of equality. Here, now, let's start to imagine a better future [...] a future of peace and freedom for all of us. □

• Lightly-edited transcript of excerpts of a speech given by Sally Abed, a Palestinian socialist activist and leader of Standing Together, at a protest in Haifa on 16 December. Video: bit.ly/s-abed

Was 7 October an act of “decolonisation”?

By Camila Bassi

On the 7th of October 2023, for some academics, “decolonisation is not a metaphor” [1] became a mantra, a mantra to celebrate the re-invasion of indigenous land.

In the paper, the battle line of settler colonialism is clearly demarcated. Settlers have stolen the land of Indigenous peoples. Settler colonialism represents the totality of the ills of colonialism more generally.

Settler occupation of Indigenous land is seen as an ongoing structural violence against the native, rather than a series of intersecting events, forces and conditions of existence. Vis-a-vis a post-colonial analysis of Israel-Palestine, then, the events within the years of 1948, 1967, 2001, and the 7th of October 2023, for example, tend to be framed beyond their specific crisscrossing and interrelated empirical detail and instead are pre-to-post moments of an ongoing, relentless process of structural racist destruction, disappearance, and erasure of Palestinians.

Perhaps this goes some way to explaining why in the International Critical Geographies group, the [Palestine Statement](#), signed by over 1,000 of my geography colleagues, the 7th of October is discussed as a pre-to-post moment that escalated the violence against the Palestinians, with no reference whatsoever to the slaughters, rapes and hostage-taking of Israeli civilians by Hamas.

As for the public cheer of some left-wing academics on the 7th of October, including some who signed the statement, the images of literal re-invasion fit the script. People who illegally invaded a country and dispossessed its indigenous population are now fleeing. The arc of history is long, but it bends toward justice.

A two nations two states settlement on pre-1967 borders, which would make the Gaza Strip and the West Bank part of an independent Palestinian nation state, is generally considered an anathema because it is seen to legitimise the settler colonialism of Israel proper.

Implicit is an inverted racialisation of settlers and indigenous peoples. All settlers are guilty, complicit, and have no future as worthy human beings unless and until they give up their land. Settlers are less than human. This operates through an inversion of the obser-

vation that settlers racially dehumanise indigenous people.

There appears room for only one perpetrator, and this perpetrator is made into a fantasised monster.

In this absolutism, the Jewish question fuses with the narrative of settler colonialism and the goal of decolonisation. Something must be done about the ills that Jews deal out to humanity.

“Decolonisation is not a metaphor” is not per se a paper about the history of stolen Indigenous land. It is a cry against the settler in toto, and more specifically against the settler touching and tainting decolonisation. The politics of decolonisation here is a separatist project that belongs to indigenous people. Any joint strategic work can neither reconcile present grievances nor foreclose future conflict.

The settlers once more are essentialised, are made into the same monster, from the settler who advances a politics of annihilation to the settler who wishes to reconcile with Indigenous people. Both, it is argued, reflect an innate tendency of the settler to erase the Native.

Hence, it follows, either a cheer for the 7th of October or silence. All Israeli Jews are seen as fair targets from Netanyahu and his far-right coalition government, eliminationist politics for one Greater Israel to the peace and reconciliation efforts of Israeli Jewish leftist activists, because both reflect different degrees of a genocidal tendency to erase the native.

[In the statement] Israeli Jews are absent, both as victims of Hamas and as a resistance movement inside Israel. Solidarity is made with everyone but Israeli Jews who oppose the Israeli state violence against Palestinian civilians in Gaza and the settler violence against Palestinians in the West Bank.

As one signatory to the statement remarked on social media, of the young people at the Nova Music Festival attacked by Hamas, sometimes partying on stolen land next to a concentration camp where a million people are starved has consequences.

And later, there’s no Israeli left. It’s just different degradations of genocide.

Tuck and Yang’s seminal paper is a call for an ethic of incommensurability, an epic that recognises that settlers and natives are not comparable as people, in contrast to aims of reconciliation, because settlers and natives can never be united as human beings.

“Reconciliation is concerned with



questions of what will decolonisation look like? What will happen after abolition? What will be the consequences of decolonisation for the settler?... Decolonisation is not obliged to answer those questions. Decolonisation is not accountable to settlers or a settler future. Decolonisation is accountable to Indigenous sovereignty and Indigenous futurity”.

What’s more, the answers to these questions necessitate, they say, moves that may feel very unfriendly. “Decolonisation is not a metaphor” represents a racialised identity politics of resentment, rage and fantasised revenge in which monsters are made out of human beings and conflict is not released, but is locked in, leading us into a total war with no end and without end.

Both peoples are without independent agency to meet together in the dream and pursuit of freedom.

Relegated to a footnote in their paper, yet highly significant: Tuck and Yang state that racism is an invention of colonialism. Furthermore, while talking, Tuck and Yang briefly concede that not all settlers are white. They later elaborate on the colonising trick, presumably of supposedly real white settlers, to quasi-assimilate the immigrant refugee, or migrant, a quasi-assimilation into whiteness which can revert back at any moment.

As Robert Miles reminds us, while colonialism was an integral moment in the history of racism, it was actually the articulation between the capitalist mode of production and the nation-state rather than between capitalism and colonialism that mapped the primary set of social relations within which racism has its origins and initial effects.

But the history of Zionism as a nationalist movement and as a colonial

settler-state project whose fate was tied to the unprecedented genocidal antisemitism of the Holocaust is erased in favour of an approach to Zionism through the Jewish question. Antisemitism is banished as a form of racism, as a racism against the Jews, but represented as a racist weapon of Zionism and Israel against the Palestinian plight, as a racism of the Jews. □

• Abridged. More: bit.ly/decol-cb

[1] After a [paper](#) by Eve Tuck and K Wayne Yang. Tuck herself has condemned 7 October: bit.ly/tuck-h

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The Covid inquiry and political accounting

By Cathy Nugent

“Leading world authority” in oncology Professor Karol Sikora, writing recently about the Covid Inquiry (in the *Daily Telegraph* and on Twitter/X), has called it “pro-lockdown” and a gigantic waste of money. Sikora is a vocal opponent of blanket pandemic lockdowns, arguing these are more harmful than the effects of Covid itself.

Sikora’s outburst came during the latest module of the inquiry’s hearings which has examined issues of governance, and where questioning has heavily focused on the mitigation policies leading up to the first lockdown, as well as how policy decision-making structures operated. In the media’s summaries of the hearings, uncertainty over whether or not to lockdown and the functioning of government have appeared to be linked together.

Blunt

Other medical and science professionals, less blunt than Sikora (who is also in favour of funding the NHS through mandatory health insurance), have made similar and related points about lockdown, and have argued that the inquiry, which began its hearings in June 2023, should have concentrated on how science informed policy-making and avoided how the Tories mishandled all sorts of things, as we already know a lot about that.

Whether the inquiry’s approach will help the overall evaluation of the policies remains to be seen. It seems to me that, while the WhatsApp messages (those that didn’t go missing) and reports of the actions of Johnson, Cummings, Hancock et al are often unedifying, if the inquiry had not dealt with the “real time” decision-making of the Tories, it would have deprived bereaved families, the biggest advocates of a public inquiry, of a measure of political accountability.

The aim of the Covid Inquiry is a good one: it seeks accountability from the key decision-makers for action throughout the pandemic; it aims to learn lessons for the next pandemic, so that the UK can be better prepared. It is no bad thing to collate all the evidence, about all the issues, in one place.

On the other hand there are two structural problems with the Covid Inquiry. Despite the way questioning has linked issues, its modular structure could artificially separate out issues

which are inextricably linked. For example module one – pandemic preparedness – was separated from the current module of political governance. Yet the lack of preparedness was a crucial problem of governance! It will be a big effort to analytically link everything together in the final reporting.

In addition, the inquiry will take a long time. With modules still being added, it will continue until at least 2025, by which time this government will be out of power. It is not even certain that the first interim report, set to be released next summer, will appear before the general election. Will 2025 or 2026 be too late to correct or prevent a new problem of lack of preparedness for a pandemic? For example, recently NHS England has [watered down](#) infection prevention and control (IPC) advice.

The picture of the relationships between politicians, senior civil servants, special policy advisors (SpAds) and the scientists that emerged from the current module has been disturbing. The way that political policy decisions were made on the hoof, with a lack of a plan or strategy, cannot be accounted for by the pandemic’s generation of extreme uncertainty: there was something chronically dysfunctional at the top.

Self-serving

Dominic Cummings, far from being an exceptional person who, according to his own account was virtually the only person taking the Covid threats seriously, typifies the problem with the people at the top: gigantic egos and enormous hubris. Ignore his propensity to use the c-word as punctuation, it’s his WhatsApp messages where he refers approvingly to super brainy hedge fund types promoting the benefits of UV rays, and how Covid was a great “opportunity” for the UK to actually “take back control” of its borders, that paint the picture for us.

The inquiry has exposed the self-serving narratives of political insiders. Even Tory politicians need to show some contrition and that’s where narratives about the timing of the first lockdown have come into play. Matt Hancock has told the Inquiry, “With the benefit of hindsight the UK should have locked down earlier”. Whatever the truth of it, by saying it he can avoid accounting for problems leading up to and surrounding 26 March 2020: the failure to contain early infections, poor public health

communication, earlier mask wearing, slowness to get adequate testing capacity up and running and the failure to renew a stockpile of degraded PPE and perhaps most importantly, inadequate sick pay across the UK’s workforce. Lockdowns, in context, did help to curb surges of the virus but the picture is nowhere near as simple as Hannock tries to make it. He is bullshitting once again.

At the time politicians said they “were following the science” but the inquiry has shown a. this is not entirely true and b. the structures framing the decision-making relationship between scientists and the politicians was at best poorly defined. For example Kemi Badenoch, a minister with responsibility for equalities during the pandemic, refused additional support to groups who were more at risk of Covid, despite those risks becoming clear early on in the pandemic when doctors from Asian, African or Caribbean backgrounds were the first to die. She argued demagogically that getting the vaccine out was more important than “special” treatment. That’s not an argument based in science, but in a stupid political obsession with not appearing woke. Whatever the lessons to be learned about how science informs policy in future, it is clear that even those scientists who felt they needed to be discreet about their views at the time, were often very frustrated with the politicians.

Johnson

Johnson’s manner at the inquiry may have been more measured than his performance at the “Partygate” investigation by the Parliamentary Privileges Committee, but he was still gas-lighting us. His glib assertion that the UK is low down the European “league table” of mortality rates (deaths per million of population) was sleight of hand. Data sets which compare numbers of deaths to past averages show the cumulative number of deaths from all causes recorded in the UK between January 2020 and April 2022 was 9.2% higher than the projected total based on past averages. Those deaths will have been caused by a range of factors, some not directly comparable to other countries. Nonetheless although the UK’s percentage is lower than Italy, Spain, and Greece it is higher than many other countries in Europe including Belgium (8.3%), Austria (8.2%), the Netherlands

(8.1%), Portugal (7.6%), Ireland (6.2%), France (6.1%), Sweden (4.9%), Germany (4.1%), Finland (3.9%) and Denmark (1.3%).

Johnson is the man who, according to the former Downing Street Director of Communications Lee Cain, was in the “wrong crisis” for his “skill set”. Unfortunately for us Johnson’s unique skill set is delaying decision-making; his talent, if you can call it that, is to wait to see which way the wind is blowing before committing, in order to claim glory for making the wind blow in the “correct” direction.

The inquiry should deal with how to confront and manage how reasonable uncertainly stymies action, such as Chief Medical Officer Chris Whitty’s admission that he did not pursue his hunch that the Covid outbreak would get very bad because he feared it would not get traction. More open and transparent government would help, but what can socialists advocate here?

Social care

Lee Cain probably hit the nail on the head when he described the key policy dynamic throughout the period before the introduction of the vaccine as a trade-off between stopping the virus and what the Tories termed “keeping the country running”, that is, keeping the economy running. Some of that was more about the optics than real effects – such as Rishi Sunak’s expensive, and now discredited, “Eat Out to Help Out” scheme. If mitigation had been the government’s top priority, would 1,500 NHS and social care workers have died? According to a [recent report](#) many of those lives might have been saved by simple infection control measures.

The tensions implicated in the trade off contributed to inconsistent rule changes, ineffective communication around rules and an unproductive focus on generating fear and guilt to secure compliance with the rules. For instance Hancock said the government should “frighten the pants off everyone” about the Omicron variant which hit the UK in late 2021. A better alternative was to be clear about the risks to provide the kind of comprehensive financial and social support to people at work, school and college that Workers’ Liberty [argued for](#) throughout the pandemic and to make those measures permanent. □

Big socialist debates before 1914



Book review

By Paul Hampton

In August 1914, the Second International collapsed after most of its constituent parties sided with their own governments and sanctioned the First World War slaughter. At its height, the Second International included mass working class parties, notably the German SPD with more than a million members, as well as other sizable parties in France, Italy and elsewhere in Europe and North America.

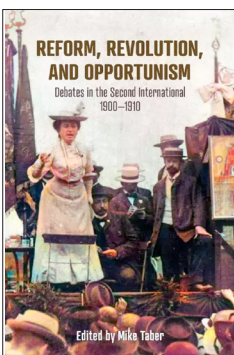
Mike Taber's new book, *Reform, Revolution, and Opportunism: Debates in the Second International, 1900-1910* (2023) is a welcome contribution to help today's activists learn the lessons from the Second International. This new volume complements Taber's earlier book, *Under the Socialist Banner: Resolutions of the Second International, 1889-1912* (2021).

History

The Second International was founded in Paris in 1889. Its first congress laid out the revolutionary orientation: "The emancipation of labour and humanity cannot occur without the international action of the proletariat – organised in class-based parties – which seizes political power through the expropriation of the capitalist class and the social appropriation of the means of production." The Second International held subsequent congresses in Brussels (1891), Zurich (1893), London (1896), Paris (1900), Amsterdam (1904), Stuttgart (1907), Copenhagen (1910) and Basel (1912). These were regarded as the world parliament for the labour movement. Delegates mostly came from socialist parties in Europe, North America and Australia. Only parties in Argentina, Japan, South Africa and Turkish Armenia were represented beyond the core. The virtue of Taber's books is to lay out both the resolutions agreed, but also the process of debate that led to them. Taber is right that oral debates have one important advantage over written exchanges – speakers tend not to sand down the rough edges of their words. Such verbal duels provide a candid window into the underlying differences, which are sometimes glossed over in formal resolutions. The usual format was for alternative drafts to first go to a commission for debate, followed by further discussion and voting in the main congress.

These books illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of the Second International. On the plus side, these were deliberations by serious working class leaders, who represented tens of thousands of militant workers. On the

down side, most of these parties and their leaders became sclerotic, bureaucratised and reformist. This would seal the Second International's fate in 1914. Taber's new book collects five of the most relevant debates: on socialist participation in bourgeois governments, colonialism, immigration, women's suffrage and war.



In bourgeois governments?

In June 1899, the socialist lawyer Alexandre Millerand accepted a position in the capitalist government of France as minister of commerce. At the Paris Congress in 1900, a resolution authored by Karl Kautsky condemned socialist participation in capitalist governments under "normal" circumstances, but left the door open for "exceptions".

An alternative by Jules Guesde and Enrico Ferri prohibited any socialist participation in bourgeois governments, arguing that socialists remain in "irreconcilable opposition". Ferri dubbed Kautsky's text a "rubbery resolution" for the way it fudged the issues. Guesde argued that a socialist who entered a bourgeois ministry might still believe themselves to be a socialist, but they would cease to be so. It was not possible to serve two classes.

Although Kautsky's resolution carried in 1900, by the Amsterdam congress in 1904, opposition had hardened. The "exceptional" clause was eliminated. Ferri argued: "If one sticks too much to principles, action risks becoming futile. But if... one forgets principles, then we lose the route indicated by the compass and the working masses become disoriented. So tactics must proceed from principles... Our compass is the class struggle."

Colonialism

European colonialism had been going on for centuries by the time the Second International was formed. However modern imperialism as the re-division of the globe took a turn in the 1880s and culminated in bitter rivalry for colonial possessions between the big powers.

The colonial question was discussed at every Second International congress from 1896 onwards. Initially they voiced support for independence struggles. However by 1904, Hendrick van Kol, a leader of the Dutch party, openly backtracked. By the 1907 congress, right-wing social democrats openly advocated a "socialist" colonial policy, supporting the "civilising mission" of Europeans towards "backward natives". Kol made racist jokes about Europeans getting eaten if they went to Africa with

machines. The commission passed Kol's draft by 12-10, but Kautsky's sharper resolution against colonialism won the congress floor vote, though only by 127 votes to 108.

This signified a serious degeneration, as Lenin noted in his report. The only saving grace in 1907 was a short address by Bhikaiji Cama, representing the Indian National Congress. She gave an impassioned speech for the right of self-determination for India.

Immigration

The Second International discussed the related international question of immigration, which also divided left and right across the organisation. Since the 1880s, a raft of anti-immigration laws had passed, including the prohibitions against Chinese and Japanese people in the USA, the White Australia policy and the Aliens Act in Britain.

In 1896, a resolution stated that trade unions "should not appeal for restrictive legislation against the immigration of aliens". However in 1904, the US delegate Morris Hillquit presented a resolution using racist tropes such as "workers of backward races (Chinese, Negroes, etc)" and argued it was "absolutely necessary to keep the coolies away". The congress ran out of time with the discussion.

The immigration debate in 1907 was bitter. Hillquit talked of migrants as strikebreakers that "cannot be organised". However Hungarian delegate József Diner-Dênes replied that "we must permit completely free immigration and emigration". A broadly pro-migration policy was carried.

Women's suffrage

The Second International discussed women's liberation at five congresses, beginning with Clara Zetkin's speech to the founding congress in 1889. In 1891 it passed a brief resolution calling for complete equality. In 1893, it carried a resolution on protective legislation for women workers. In 1904, it passed a short resolution in favour of universal women's suffrage.

The 1907 congress marked a qualitative improvement. An international socialist women's conference was held in Stuttgart, just before the Second International congress. The women's conference carried a strong resolution for women's suffrage, rejecting both the Fabian compromise of property qualifications and the downgrading of campaigning on women's votes in countries like Austria, where male suffrage had still not been won. This was then put to the congress.

Zetkin told the congress, "our fight for votes for women is not a suffragist movement, but a mass movement of the working class". The next international women's conference in 1910 would make international women's day

a key mobilising demand, one that still resonates to this day.

Militarism and war

At all but one of the nine congresses between 1889 and 1912, the Second International opposed militarism and war. The crucial fault-lines were exposed at the 1907 congress, where four separate resolutions were debated. Bebel supported defence of the fatherland on grounds of national self-determination. Perhaps the sharpest intervention was made by French delegate Gustave Hervé, who advocated a general strike to stop any outbreak of war. Hervé lashed out at the SPD leaders:

"You have now become an electoral and accounting machine, a party of cash registers and parliamentary seats. You want to conquer the world with ballots... the whole German Social Democracy has now become bourgeois... Today Bebel went over to the revisionists when he told us: 'Proletarians of all countries, murder each other!'"

Although the Stuttgart resolution incorporated amendments from Luxemburg, Lenin and Martov in its final draft, the breach was visible. Subsequent resolutions held out pious hopes for disarmament conferences between the big powers, or abstract calls for reduced military spending. Despite some strong words at Basel in 1912, in 1914 the Second International was unable to hold the line.

Conclusions

Taber is right that the Second International of 1889 to 1914 cannot offer a guidebook for the present. However properly examined in context, the experience of socialists a century ago can provide valuable lessons and examples. It is somewhat ironic that some of the lefts in the Second International, such as Guesde, Ferri and Hervé, supported their own governments in 1914, while more serious lefts such as Lenin, Luxemburg, Radek, Marchlewski and Rakovsky remained firmly international socialists.

At present in some circles on the left, there is a vicarious social democratic nostalgia for the glory days of the Second International. This is sometimes expressed by the embrace of Karl Kautsky, at least before 1914. This represents a yearning for mass working-class parties and perhaps, a more consensual, less sectarian form of socialist politics. Such sentiments are understandable, but naïve. The best of the Second International was continued and developed by the Comintern, at least in its first four congresses, and then by the Trotskyist movement. The best of the Second International is part of our renewal, as long as we discard the baggage that prompted its demise. □

Risks from invasive species



Letter

Stuart Jordan's "Nativism, species, and ecology" (*Solidarity* 695) is interesting. It draws attention to an important [report](#) on "Invasive Alien Species", while presenting an alternative perspective. Yet it seems to me far too strong in its critique of the report, in playing down the risks that the report raises.

The International Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) is for biodiversity and ecosystems what the infamous IPCC is for climate change. Both are rightly respected UN-established bodies. As Stuart recognised, this is an extensively researched, comparatively comprehensive, and serious report, commissioned following a much wider 2019 publica-

tion, alongside similar on the stated other four key drivers of biodiversity loss: changing use of sea and land; direct exploitation of organisms, such as over-fishing; climate change; and pollution. Its careful and evidenced claims come with confidence intervals.

I, like Stuart, am no expert in the field. I therefore would be very cautious about making such a withering critique of the closest to a "consensus" document in the field.

The report's 56-page "summary for policymakers" is persuasive and alarming. Stuart's critique here is not comparable to his or others' reasonable [critiques](#) of IPCC and similar assessments for conservatism. The political context arguably encourages IPCC publications to compromise with what seems "realistic" in modelling the possible speeds of transition; political pressure, scientific caution and "consensus" arguably plays down extreme

risks which are (on current models) low probability but very devastating – where a more precautionary approach may be warranted. Stuart's critique of the recent IPBES IAS report is pushing in the other direction, and a much stronger break with its findings.

Stuart makes a number of profound mistakes in his reading of the report and to draw his conclusions (see appendix, [online](#)). What Professor Chris D Thomas says, as quoted by Stuart, is more measured and interesting. Thomas raises important questions about, for example, balancing protecting ecosystems against destruction caused by invasive species while protecting species' survival by allowing (or supporting) them to migrate to adapt to climate change. How accurate his characterisation of existing approaches to invasive species is, how far his critique would apply to the IPBES IAS report, and indeed how true his claims are, I don't know either way.



A cane toad

But where Chris Thomas does flag difficult trade offs, Stuart's additions mostly seem to play down the problem. □

Zack Muddle, Bristol

• In the printed *Solidarity* 695, the para "There are some invasives..." is attributed to Chris Thomas, but is Stuart's. It is correct online.

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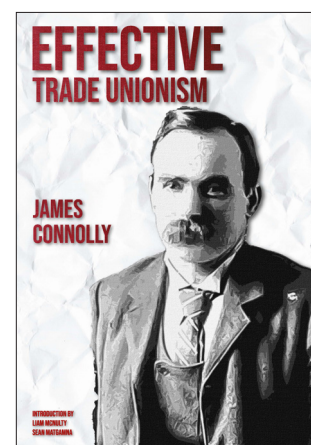
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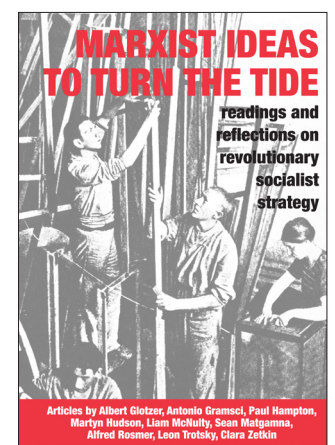
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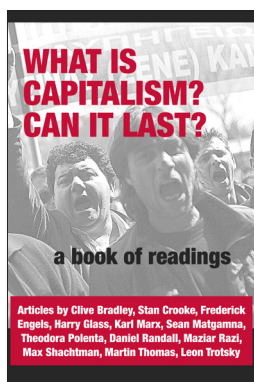
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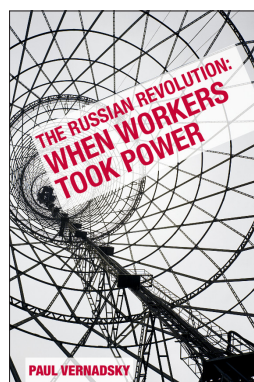
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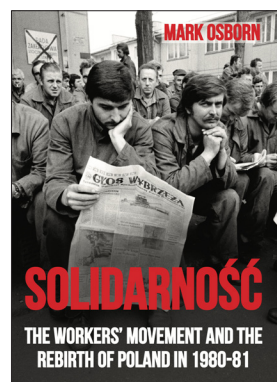
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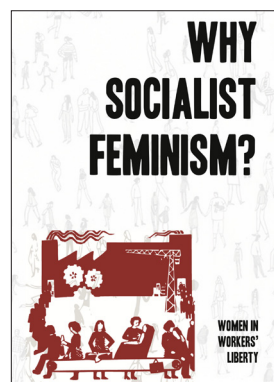
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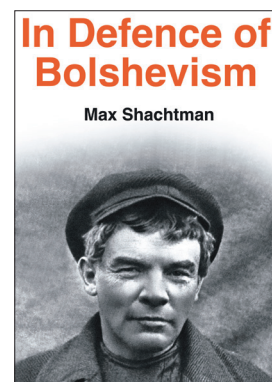
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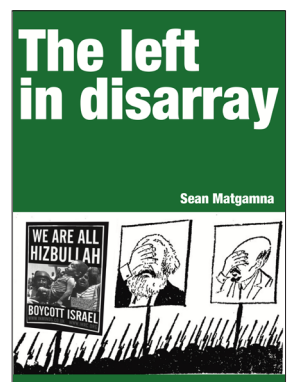
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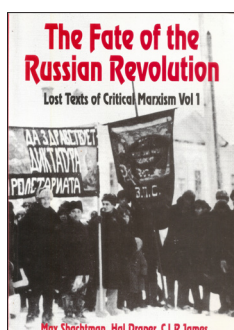
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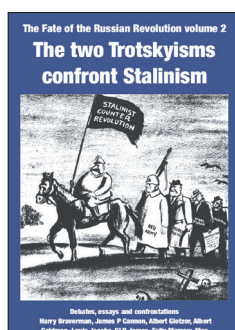
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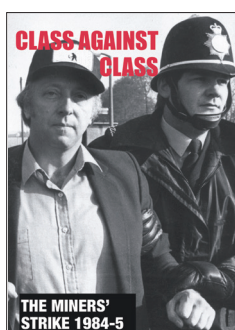
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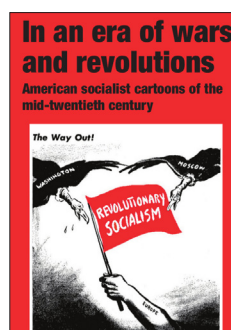
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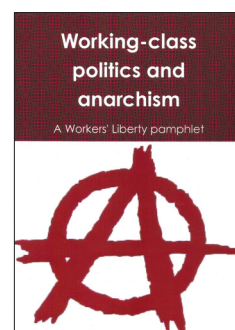
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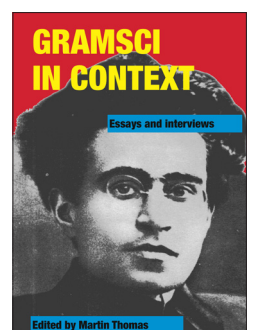
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1914-18 in Ireland: different sorts of anti-war



Book review

By Martin Thomas

At the start of World War Two, Eamon de Valera's government in the 26 counties of Ireland banned public commemoration of World War One.

Commemoration had declined in the 1930s, according to Niamh Gallagher's book *Ireland and the Great War*. It had also declined in England, as more and more people saw 1914-18 as a waste of life to serve rival imperialist robbers. In the 26 counties, though, commemoration did not revive after 1945, or not until wreath-laying ceremonies in 2018.

Gallagher's main finding is that Irish Catholic nationalists mostly backed the Allies right through to 1918.

This seems to fly in the face of facts. With the official killings and the six months of British martial law after Easter 1916, and with the British government in April 1918 announcing plans (never carried through) for conscription in Ireland, radical nationalists (regrouped in summer and autumn 1917 in the "new" Sinn Féin), triumphed. They swept the board in Ireland (outside the north-east) in the December 1918 Westminster election, set up an independent Irish parliament, and won a war of independence, 1919-21.

Those radical nationalists had all been pro-German, in different tones. Surely their triumph must have reflected a mass shift of opinion on the British-German conflict?

A look at the *Irish Independent* confirms Gallagher's account, however. That was the paper of William Martin

Murphy, who had been at the centre of the bosses' lockout which started the great Dublin Labour War in 1913-14.

On 12 May 1916 the British army shot James Connolly and Sean Mac Diarmada, the last two to die of the 90 condemned to death by courts martial after the Easter Rising. The shootings had started on 3 May. Outcry against them was already high. The remaining 75 would have their sentences commuted to life imprisonment, then be released within months. On that same day an *Irish Independent* editorial called for the killings to continue, repeating the message of a previous editorial on 10 May.

"Certain of the leaders remain undealt with, and the part they played was worse than that of some who have paid the extreme penalty. Are they because of an indiscriminate demand for clemency to get off lightly, while others who were no more prominent were executed?"

By 1917-8 Murphy and the *Irish Independent* had shifted. It became the chief newspaper giving favourable coverage to the "new" Sinn Féin which burgeoned in 1917, and to the campaign against conscription. It hailed the by-election victory in East Clare in July 1917 of Eamon de Valera, a surviving commander from the Rising.

On the day after the Armistice, 11 November 1918, the *Irish Independent* carried on its editorial page, with a note "as passed by censor", a warm report of what Sinn Féin people had told American journalists. "The demand for independence was no new thing; it had been uppermost in the mind of Nationalists ever since England invaded the country... Asked as to what they would do if turned down at the Peace Conference [where Sinn Féin sought US support for Irish representation] they said they would carry on the fight as it had been carried on for seven centuries..." "On the charge of pro-Germanism, they explained that they were in reality pro-Irish".

The same issue reported:

"In Dublin the rejoicings were on an extensive scale... The news [of the German surrender] had quite an exhilarating effort on all classes, and it soon became evident that work and business had been disorganised for the day, a spirit of holiday-making being quickly evoked... As soon as the great news became known, flags of the Allies were displayed from all the public buildings, and from many shops, warehouses, and institutions".

Gallagher explicitly does not aim to describe the changing responses of radical nationalists, and says little about the changing responses of the Catholic Church. But those explain much of the paradox of apparently simultaneous rejection of and support for the war.

The radical nationalists – the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), the Irish Volunteers, Arthur Griffith's Sinn Féin, and, sadly, James Connolly's Citizen Army – were all pro-German, in one register or another, from August 1914 to April 1917. The IRB had been pro-German "in advance", since at least 1911. The radical nationalists changed in April 1917, when the USA entered the war. From then on they supported the USA, and so also, with whatever demurs, the Allies.

Thus Arthur Griffith's paper *Nationality* appealed to US President Wilson's talk of self-determination:

"To the constituencies in Ireland now we say: the issue upon which you must vote is whether Ireland accepts England's rule and whatever England may decree. Or whether Ireland rejects that rule and claims from the Peace Conference the right that the Allies declare they stand for, the right that the United States declares it stands for – the right of Belgium, the right of Poland – the right of a nation to govern itself" (19 May 1917).

Many people were neither jingos nor internationalists. Most people never faced a choice whether to vote for war credits or not, as the German Social Democrat MPs famously did. The war was a fact decided above their heads. They could not end it at will. Many then thought that they must "go through with it". They might be sceptical of their governments, to one degree or another, and shift along that axis as war went on. Yet (unless a force like the Bolsheviks intervened to shape the outcome) they would do that without becoming internationalists or socialists, or ceasing on some level to side, mostly, with the army in which their relatives and friends served.

Many Irish people had enlisted voluntarily not because they were especially pro-British, but because they identified with other Irish who had long served in the army, and because enlistment offered good and stable pay, and little greater danger of death or maiming than dangerous jobs like construction or dock work. Recruitment in Ireland was highest from the urban working class. By 1915, nearly half the pre-war members of Larkin's and Connolly's

Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, the union which had fought the great Dublin Labour War of 1913-14, were in the British Army.

Women, and older men, did "war work" because their relatives and friends were in the army.

Revulsion against the war grew in every country, but whether that translated into class struggle against the war-makers – as it did in Russia in 1917 and Germany in 1918 – or into more conservative forms depended on the political forces in the field.

The Pope had deplored the world war from the start. "We implore those in whose hands are placed the fortunes of nations to hearken to Our voice. Surely there are other ways and means whereby violated rights can be rectified".

He also counselled no revolt against the warring governments, and cited as a chief cause of the war "the absence of respect for the authority of those who exercise ruling powers... The bonds of duty, which should exist between superior and inferior, have been so weakened as almost to have ceased to exist..."

Catholic clerics could thus swivel between the general opposition to war and the support for "ruling powers". In Australia, Daniel Mannix, archbishop of Melbourne and before that president of Maynooth seminary in Ireland, was a central leader of a campaign which defeated conscription. By August 1920 his Irish Catholic nationalism had angered the British government so much that it seized him off a ship travelling from the USA to stop him visiting Ireland.

Mannix, however, promoted "loyalty" in 1914. Even in 1919 he had "no design against the Empire". He was a conservative in Australian politics.

The currency of Catholic-hierarchy and narrow-nationalist versions of anti-conscriptionism, and the absence of international-socialist versions, may explain why the revulsion against the war in its later years could take Catholic-nationalist-militant but socially-conservative forms. As Kevin O'Higgins, who would be deputy prime minister 1922-27, put it: "We were probably the most conservative-minded revolutionaries that ever put through a successful revolution".

The value of Lenin's and Luxemburg's stance on World War One was not just that they opposed it, but that they did so with a consistent working-class internationalist policy. □

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Helping fellow-workers? Or not?



Diary of a trackworker

By Matt Shaw

It's not often that violence at work affects workers in the engineering side of the railway. We don't have a lot of contact with the public, and I've not ever seen sober disputes between workers descending to that level. Only once have I been directly involved with the public being aggressive with staff.

We'd been working late into the night just outside Victoria station, and were returning to our hotel in Croydon. We were all very tired. It was the end of a weekend night engineering renewal, and it had been a bit of a bastard by

anybody's standards. None of our team could drive, so we had to get the early trains, which often had revellers traipsing back from central London. As we approached East Croydon, we got up, and one of the other passengers got up too.

At that time in the morning the station staff were very low in numbers, but they still had to check tickets of everybody disembarking.

Ticket

We followed this character up the slope. The lone station worker approached him. "Ticket, please". No response. "Ticket please". Still no response.

The guy said something which sounded like "fuck off". We were pretty close behind, and it was clear this guy either didn't have a ticket or was unwill-

ing to get his hands out of his pockets to find it. Third time of asking, and the guy started to push past the ticket collector. Since we were good trade unionists and didn't want to see a brother get in a fight, one of our group said "Oi. There's three more of us back here".

Unfortunately, the ticket collector took it that we were threatening him and advised us accordingly. We reassured him that we were all railworkers and trying to help. By that time, the guy had pushed past and legged it out of the station.

The station member thanked us but advised us not to "help" again in the future.

I was never sure if we helped or hindered, so take from this any moral you like. □

Amazon strikes spread further

By Darren Bedford

Workers at an Amazon fulfilment centre in Sutton Coldfield in Birmingham will strike on 25 January, after members of the GMB union at the workplace voted for industrial action over pay and conditions.

The centre, where GMB says "up to 100" workers will strike, is the latest workplace to be brought into the union's campaign in Amazon. The 25 January date marks the one-year anniversary of GMB's campaign of strikes in

Amazon sites, overwhelmingly concentrated at the BHX4 facility in Coventry, where workers have so far struck 28 times. Strikes have also taken place at a warehouse in Rugeley, Staffordshire, where workers have recently renewed their industrial action mandate.

Although GMB's membership at the Sutton Coldfield site comprises only a minority of the workforce, meaning the strike will have little direct economic impact on Amazon's profits, spreading the strikes beyond BHX4 has symbolic

significance. Activists have long argued that spreading action, and empowering workers in other Amazon workplaces, is key to forcing significant concessions from the company.

Since the strikes began, Amazon has made a number of incremental increases to its basic rates of pay, which are due to rise to £12.30/hour in April. GMB is demanding a minimum wage of £15. GMB has also been carrying out organising activity at Amazon warehouses in Swansea, Doncaster, and elsewhere. Building substantial bases in large workplaces, similar to the 1,000-plus members the union now has at BHX4, is vital, but GMB is right to empower smaller groups of members to take action even before a majority of the workforce has joined the union. □

Abel Gance's Napoleon



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

I haven't yet seen the new *Napoleon*, but this much earlier (1927) film by French director Abel Gance is well worth taking the trouble to visit. It was controversial at the time of its release and Gance's career went into a steady decline. However, a superb restoration by Kevin Brownlow, in 1980, went some way to restore Gance's reputation as a major and innovative filmmaker (in his use of triple screen projection for example).

The film was criticised, at the time of its release, for its truncated and

one-sided portrayal of the French Revolution and its main players such as Robespierre and Marat. Even Danton (who usually gets a "good press" – see Andrzej Wajda's film about him) is shown as lacking in human qualities. The rest all are sadists, revelling in blood and executions.

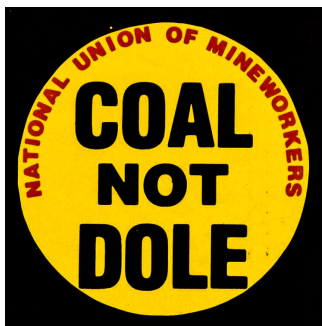
In the words of the prominent French film critic Leon Moussinac (writing in *Humanité*, the French Communist Party newspaper, 24 April and 1 May 1927) Gance offers us a "... Bonaparte who is a pure figment of the imagination, who emerges from a French Revolution that is historically false and even from a bourgeois point of view totally unacceptable. A Bonaparte for budding fascists".

See if you agree. □

• To view Napoleon: bit.ly/nap-g

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40 years since the miners' strike

Sat 2 March: Women Against Pit Closures, [Durham](#), national day of events

From Wed 6 March: [National Coal Mining Museum](#), Caphouse Colliery, New Road, Overton, Wakefield WF4 4RH, a year-long exhibition plus events

Fri 8 March, 7pm-11pm: 1984-5 Miners' Music Night organised by Preston and South Ribble Trades Union Council, Jalgos Social Club, Roe Street, [Preston](#) PR1 3XY

Sat 23 March, 10:15 and 1:15pm: Guided gallery tours. Miners' strike 40th anniversary archive, People's History Museum, Left Spinningfields, Manchester M3 3ER

Sat 15 June: Orgreave Rally, [Sheffield](#) □

Rail strike challenges Minimum Service Law

By a train driver

Aslef, the union representing the vast majority of train drivers working for Train Operating Companies (TOCs) in the UK, has announced more strikes on pay, alongside nine days of a rest-day working ban.

Members of the union will walk out at Southeastern, GTR Southern/Gatwick Express, GTR Great Northern Thameslink, SWR Island Line and South Western Railway on Tuesday 30 January; at Northern Trains and Transpennine Trains on Wednesday 31 January; at Greater Anglia, C2C and LNER on Friday 2 February; at West Midlands Trains, Avanti West Coast and East Midlands Railway on Saturday 3 February, and at Great Western, CrossCountry and Chiltern on Monday 5 February.

This will be the first strike by the union since Minimum Service Level regulations were finalised in parliament. It is not clear whether TOCs will actually issue "work notices". There are credible rumours that at least some TOC senior managers are opposed to using "work notices".

It would be foolish, though, to assume that TOCs will hold off forever.



Despite the fine words coming out of the 9 December TUC Special Conference on Minimum Service Levels, Aslef General Secretary Mick Whelan has stopped short of real defiance of the new laws. He heavily hints in one paragraph of his message to members that drivers should make the individual decision to disobey any work notices they might be given.

These next strikes could prove to be a very important moment for the trade union movement and for the govern-

ment. If Aslef members "read between the lines" and strike en masse in the face of "work notices", it will be hard for employers to victimise workers or attack the union legally. But if TOCs go for "work notices" and drivers do not feel sufficiently reassured that the union will protect them, then we may not get large enough numbers.

Elsewhere in the message, Whelan virtually guarantees his members that the legislation will be repealed within the first 100 days of a Labour government. Many of us, understandably, will not share his confidence. □

PCS impasse on pay

By a PCS member

Members of the PCS civil service union appear to be heading for another tough pay year. National talks with the Cabinet Office (CO) are going nowhere fast following the PCS leadership's June derailment of our 2022-23 national pay campaign.

On the 10 January the Government published its "[Civil Service People Plan 2024-2027](#)". Despite the national pay talks the People Plan does not address:

- The fifteen year historic decline in the value of civil service pay, even though it acknowledges that "Civil Service average pay within grades has shown a general downward trend in real terms since 2008, due to below-inflation increases."
- The lack of pay progression.
- Endemic low pay.
- Civil servants undertaking differently graded work being paid the same salary because they are all on the national living wage.
- The substantial variations in pay between civil servants in the same grade but working for different civil service "delegated units".
- The demand for national pay bargaining.

The only pay aim identified as an "objective" and a "key priority" in the Plan is individual performance related pay, a pay practice long opposed by PCS.

While the Plan commits to developing a pay reward strategy in 2024, it does not suggest that it will address PCS's key concerns as part of the 2024/25 pay year. The Tories appear

intent on again playing hardball over pay before the next election.

Early last September the outgoing General Secretary Mark Serwotka reported that PCS had told the CO that it needed "...to see significant progress over the next four to six weeks..." but he stated that the "government is already beginning to talk tough about what it intends for the public sector in terms of pay in 2024... it is reasonable to assume further strike action is likely to be needed... later this year or early next."

On 7 December PCS reported that the talks were "...unlikely to be enough to end our dispute and we are putting in place plans to get members ready for a ballot in the new year."

Four to six weeks have come and gone more than once, as the CO knew they would do, because the Left Unity group that dominates PCS had allowed legal strike mandates to lapse. Yet members have still to be told of either "significant progress" or of a ballot for strike action.

The difficulty for LU is that they have demobilised members for the last seven to eight months, pumped out untrue and misleading messages, the core of which is that they have extracted a fortune from the Government; stopped collecting the strike levy; and failed to keep members properly informed of negotiations.

There is no easy way to put this debacle right, but it must be put right. With National Executive Committee elections due the spring, it is vital that all those who opposed the NEC's derailment of the national pay dispute join forces in a single campaign to change the leadership and policies of PCS. □

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Yemen: Oppose Houthi attacks! No support for US-UK bombing!

By Dan Katz

On the night of Thursday 11-Friday 12 January the US and UK militaries bombed sites in Yemen controlled by the Houthi movement. The stated aim of the action, according to a UK spokesperson, was to, “protect vessels and freedom of navigation [in the Red Sea],” by destroying Houthi military bases, radar installations, drone and missile launch sites.

The US claimed to have hit 28 targets with 150 missiles. The Houthis say there were 72 strikes and five of their fighters were killed. They promised to take revenge on the US.

The relatively small death toll, if accurate, probably indicates that the sites the US hit had been largely evacuated. The US issued a warning to the Houthis, in advance, and probably has not so far done much damage to Houthi military infrastructure.

Since October the Houthis have launched missile and drone strikes on the Israeli port of Eliat and international shipping in the Red Sea in support of Hamas in Gaza.

Hijack

On 19 November Houthi troops landed by helicopter on Galaxy Leader, a Japanese-operated cargo ship linked to an Israeli billionaire. The hijacked ship was taken to Salif, a port in Western Yemen.

The Houthis have conducted 27 attacks on civilian ships since mid-October and on the evening of Tuesday 9 January they launched 18 drones and three missiles at UK and US warships which had been sent to the Red Sea to defend the shipping lanes.

Cargo has been re-routed, and complex supply chains have been disrupted, including, for example, Tesla and Volvo car production in Europe which depends on components shipped from Asia.

The Houthis are Shiite Muslims based in the north of Yemen who currently control most of the inhabited areas of the country, including the capital, Sana’a, which they overran in 2014. The ultra-reactionary movement’s main slogan is: “God

is the greatest, Death to America, Death to Israel, Curse the Jews.”

The Houthis are aligned with Iran, which supplies them with weaponry and training, although they are from different branches of Shiia Islam and are not natural close allies. The Houthis retain their own independent command structures, have a distinct set of priorities, and are not Iranian state puppets.

The Houthis’ campaign to support Hamas by targeting ships in the Red Sea is to be condemned. Disrupting the world economy in this way, for these reasons, is not a progressive act “against imperialism” or a “defence of the Palestinians.” These are actions of a religious-military dictatorship motivated by ideological sympathy for the Hamas pogrom against Israeli Jews.

Action

But it is not clear that the US-UK military action will help – that it will stop the Houthis, who seem to be looking for a confrontation. The Houthi movement has just emerged from a long-running war with a Saudi-UAE-led coalition. They have built a sophisticated, large and adaptable military machine.

The Saudis aimed to smash the Iran-backed movement and launched 25,000 airstrikes on Yemen over seven years after 2015. The Houthis saw off the Saudis and UAE troops, and emerged stronger and much better armed. The Saudi action pushed the Houthis closer to Iran.

The US-UK action has strengthened the Houthis’ position inside Yemen. There was an enormous demonstration against the Western bombing in Sana’a on Friday 12 January.

The Western powers have also made a regional war more likely.

What the US and its allies should do, positively, is openly demand that the Israeli government stops the war in Gaza and offers the Palestinians a free, independent state alongside Israel. That is the right thing for the Palestinians, who are harmed by association with the Houthi movement. A Two States settlement would undercut the Houthis politically. □

Inequality keeps spiralling

By Colin Foster

At 1pm on 4 January, CEOs of the FTSE 100 top firms had already pocketed more than the middling (median) UK wage for the whole year.

According to the [High Pay Centre](#) those CEOs are now on an average of £3.81 million a year, and their year-on-year rise at 9.5%, while the middling wage has gone up 6%.

Broadening out to bosses at smaller firms, and near-top managers at big firms, the top 1% of UK full-timers are on £145,000 or upwards, and will have overtaken the annual pay of the median full-time worker by 29 March.

This inequality is increasing, despite sizeable recent increases in the minimum wage. Those will have pulled up full-time low-paid workers a bit, while workers who depend heavily on state



benefits, and middling workers, lag behind.

Overall, average (mean, not median) real wages have recovered a little, but are only just getting back to 2006 levels. The average fell sharply in 2009-14 and from 2021 to maybe mid 2023, with public sector workers especially doing poorly.

With furlough money, average wages did not too badly in the lockdowns, though many casual and insecure workers suffered. A [study](#) last year, however, found that bosses and shareholders did especially well from the huge government pay-outs then. Meanwhile interest payments on borrowings then exert pressure on the government to crush public services. Just five companies scooping in £333.4 million furlough cash reported £6 billion in profits in the 2020-1 peak-lockdown year. Another five taking £352 million paid out £1.3 billion to shareholders that year.

Unusually, many middle-class people and better-off workers have gained recently because increased interest income from household savings (£34 billion) has, on average, [outstripped](#) increased pay-outs on mortgages (£18 billion). That is likely to reverse in 2024-5. Inflation has subsided: the latest CPI year-on-year rate (November) was 3.9%, and RPI, 5.3%. Month-by-month, both CPI and RPI price indices *fell* from September to November.

But all workers face crushed public services. And, unlike the CEOs, many workers are still battling to catch up to where we were before the 2022-3 inflation spike, or before Cameron-Osborne austerity. □



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Solidarity

For a workers' government

PUSH BACK THE TORIES!

On 16 and 17 January, the Tories could lose Commons votes on their Bill trying to save their "send them to Rwanda" asylum policy. Even if they win, they have a battle to work the bill, which tries to instruct courts Rwanda must be reckoned safe even if it is not.

From 30 January, train drivers are striking. As yet, the government and the Train Operating Companies (TOCs) hesitate about deploying the new Minimum Service Law, which allows for the TOCs to issue "work notices" instructing drivers to turn up sufficiently for 40% service, and to get the whole strike ruled unlawful unless the union tells members to comply.

Suella Braverman as Home Secretary tried to get the big Gaza ceasefire protests banned, but they continue big. Just Stop Oil (JSO) has people in jail, on sentences or remanded for defying bail conditions, but only a small fraction of the 670 JSO people arrested last November alone. The Public Order Act and the Police Act have not quelled protest.

That the Tories are likely to lose the coming general election does not make them as "weak" as some of us on the

left say. They have pushed through the Minimum Service Law, the Public Order Act, and the Illegal Migration Act. They have resisted public service pay strikes more stubbornly than most private bosses have resisted wage demands.

They stonewall on the funds needed to revive the NHS and other public services. They are forcing many local councils into "section 114", legal declarations that they can't balance their books which legally entail further big cuts.

They have pushed Labour into conformity, offering only bland talk of "growth" and "reform", and mostly just criticising the Tories over "competence" and "chaos".

The labour movement can push back. The Tories are not so strong as to be able to prevent that.

The job of socialists is to inspire that push-back with a positive agenda:

- Tax the rich



- Take the utilities into public ownership under democratic control; reverse privatisation in the NHS

- Restore public services

- Take the whole energy industry into public ownership under democratic control; switch from fossil-fuels to renewables and nuclear; electrify everything

- Reassert the right to protest and strike, repealing restrictions back to the 1986 Public Order Act and anti-union laws back to the Thatcher era

- Welcome refugees, open borders. □

