



For social ownership of the banks and industry

THIS WAR MUST END

» **Ceasefire**
» **End siege**
» **Free hostages**



See page 3

Tel Aviv, Israel, 18 January, thousands protested for immediate ceasefire, peace, a hostage-prisoner exchange, organised by Standing Together.

Trust rules out "work notices"

Unions must push other employers not to use new Tory law

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How Putin seized Crimea in 2014

A first move to imperialist conquest of Ukraine

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The Zapatistas, 30 years on

Able to "change the world without taking power"?

Page 8

When workers began to stir

The first organising in Moscow & Petersburg on the road to 1917

Page 10-12

Labour: fit to oust the Tories?



Editorial

Is Labour fit to oust the Tories? On 15 February Labour won two seats in by-elections, Wellingborough and Kingswood, with big swings from the Tories.

Labour is still a broad movement. There is more hope there than in the dim and narrow leftish splinters of the last few years.

Yet Keir Starmer and his new-Blairite backroom are working to shrivel hope. Starmer evidently believes that the Tories are floundering so badly that to win the general election “safely” he needs only promise big business a safe and friendly hand on the wheel, and appease “socially-conservative” voters.

The 15 Feb turnouts were low. The Rochdale by-election on 29 Feb will be a fiasco for Labour. After the nomination deadline Labour had to dump its candidate, Azhar Ali. Comments indicating that ever-hidden Jewish conspiracies guide the world had not been taken up in the Labour internal meeting where they were made.

Some others there must have seen what was wrong; but, adapting to the norms of Starmer-Labour, they chose to “avoid trouble”, keep quiet, and hope nothing came out.

Then it came out in the *Daily Mail*. Bookies now favour the reactionary demagogue George Galloway (see page 4) to win Rochdale. In any case, Labour can't win in Rochdale.

Labour's opinion-poll lead may be fragile, especially if British capitalism recovers a bit – inflation is after all falling – and if the Tories get back on their feet

And if the opinion-poll lead continues through to election day, what then?

Keir Starmer is hosing down expectations, hoping that even the most meagre achievements in government will then suffice.

But the wounds and sequels of over a decade of squeezed real wages for many, of Covid and the lockdowns, of recent high inflation, and of collapsed public services, are hurting.

And if Starmer thinks it an easy get-out to postpone and curtail green conversion measures, reality says different.

In the USA, some have written about an epidemic of “deaths of despair”.

Social despair is also, in many countries, pumping up a politics of rancour – against green measures; against migrants; against respect and sympathy for transgender people; against, even, the slownesses of democracy; and for illusions of “making great again”.

Those who sow the seed of despair and hopelessness fate themselves to live choked by the weeds which then

sprout. The smug new-Blairite officials in Starmer's back rooms are making wastegrounds for the future.

Solidarity works for a labour movement which is not smug, mean-spirited, short-sighted, minimalist, manipulative, and dishonest; but instead, thoughtful, generous, perceptive, energetic, straightforward, and truthful. □



Our audio

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See workersliberty.org/audio for episodes, and for information on subscribing and using podcasts. All recent episodes can be found through most podcast providers: search “Workers' Liberty” or “Solidarity & More”. □

“Post-materialism”: 1796, 1840s, 1970s, and today



Socialism vs Capitalism

By Martin Thomas

“Let all the arts perish”, declared the first communist manifesto of relatively modern times, written by Sylvain Maréchal for the Conspiracy of Equals in France in 1796.

“If need be”, he added, “as long as real equality remains!” With productive capacities as they were then, a meagre and uniform ration for all seemed to him the only answer. “But one education, but one nourishment... the same portion and the same quality of food... for each”.

In the notes which he wrote in Paris in 1844, as he moved from radical democratic politics to communism, Karl Marx criticised that “crude communism” or “barracks communism”.

“Crude communism is merely the culmination of... envy and desire to level down on the basis of a preconceived minimum... [Thus] an abstract

negation of the entire world of culture and civilisation, and the return to the unnatural simplicity of the poor, unrefined person who has no needs and who has not yet even reached the stage of private property, let alone gone beyond it...

“The community is simply a community of labour and equality of wages, which are paid out by the communal capital, the community as universal capitalist”.

Marx looked to a communism “going beyond” the dichotomies of private property, greed or asceticism, extravagance or thrift.

“Private property has made us so stupid and one-sided that an object is only *ours* when we have it, when it exists for us as capital or when we directly possess, eat, drink, wear, inhabit it, etc.... The life [the objects] serve is the life of private property, labour, and capitalisation”.

When we go beyond private property, “need or employment [will have] lost their egoistic nature, and nature has lost its mere utility in the sense that its use has become human use”.

Four years later, in the Communist Manifesto, Marx would explain that “we by no means intend to abolish [the everyday] personal appropriation of the products of labour... for the maintenance and reproduction of human life”. People will still have personal property. But the *social* property which is now *capitalist private* property will become collective wealth.

Even in 1844, Marx could see the way capitalism expands human needs as a keystone of future emancipation. He also described the peculiar, twisted form of that expansion.

Under capitalism, one person “speculates on creating a new need in the other, with the aim of forcing him to make a new sacrifice, placing him in a new dependence and seducing him into a new kind of enjoyment and hence into economic ruin”. “Each new product is a new potentiality of mutual fraud and mutual pillage. The person becomes ever poorer as a person, and needs ever more money” to keep up with the whirl.

“Lack of moderation and intemperance become the true



standard... All passions and all activity are lost in greed”.

The wealthier classes are caught in to-and-fro between empty individual extravagance and miserliness (in order to invest more, to get more money in future). And for the capitalists “the crude need of the worker is a much greater source of profit than the refined need of the rich... But the crudity on which it speculates is artificially produced... The English ginshops are, therefore, the symbolic representation of private property”.

Among the organised socialist workers whom he met in Paris, he found a new form of expansion of need, pointing the way to the future.

“When communist workers gather together, their immediate aim is instruction, propaganda, etc. But at the same

time, they acquire a new need – the need for society... Company, association, conversation, which in turn has society as its goal, is enough for them. The comradeship of humanity is not a hollow phrase, it is a reality, and the nobility of humanity shines forth upon us”.

Paris in 1844 was in a period of radicalisation leading up to the 1848 revolution. Such communistic conversion of “need” flourished more in the 1970s, a period of high class struggle, than it does now. People talked of “post-materialism”, and green politics had its first stumbling start, in working-class actions in Australia.

It will come again: not imposed asceticism, not rationing-from-above, but a turn to human development beyond the escalating individual acquisition of private property. □



Gaza: End the war! Rebuild life!

By Ira Berkovic

Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu has repeated his intention to launch a new assault on Rafah, the Gazan city on the Egyptian border where over half of Gaza's population is now sheltering, many in tents.

Meanwhile, on 7 February, 35 Israeli NGOs and campaign groups, including Standing Together, Peace Now, B'Tselem, Gisha, and others, released a new statement calling for an immediate ceasefire, a comprehensive prisoner exchange, and the provision of humanitarian aid to Gaza. A massive billboard commissioned by Standing Together on Tel Aviv's Ayalon highway reads: "This war must end: leave Gaza, release hostages, rebuild life."

The social pressure from a global anti-war movement can help too. Its pressure will be sharper and, crucially, more principled if elements within protests that cheerlead Israel's regional-imperialist rival Iran and its paramilitary allies and proxies (Hezbollah, Hamas, and the Houthis) are clearly marginalised. Where workers can take action to block arms shipments bound for Israel, they should.

The Israeli government has made no move to a comprehensive evacuation plan for civilians, with Netanyahu first referring vaguely to possible evacuation to an area north of Rafah, and more recently to a "humanitarian zone" on the coast. In reality, there is no feasible way close to 1.5 million can be evacuated quickly and safely. An offensive on Rafah will be a massacre. Whilst Israeli defence minister Yoav Gallant has said Israel has "no intention" of displacing Palestinians from Gaza into Egypt, satellite imagery suggests Egypt is build-

ing structures on its borders, leading to speculation that it is constructing walls and fences to keep out a possible influx of refugees fleeing the assault.

Numerous governments, including even the USA, have explicitly opposed Israel's plan, insisting it must rethink. Netanyahu's insistence the offensive will go ahead may be posturing bluster designed to present a strong-man image on the international stage. Or it may be a true indication of Israeli military plans.

Qatari officials helping to broker ceasefire negotiations between Israel and Hamas say talks have "hit an impasse". Meanwhile the death toll in Gaza continues to mount, with growing risk of further untold deaths from disease and other impacts of the destruction Israel's war has wrought to housing, healthcare, and sanitation infrastructure.

Opposition

In recent days Netanyahu has reiterated Israel's opposition to the establishment of a Palestinian state. The US's favoured postwar roadmap involves progress towards an independent Palestine alongside Israel, governed by a revitalised Palestinian Authority, with political and financial aid from neighbouring Arab states. Netanyahu's government, meanwhile, straightforwardly opposes any form of genuine Palestinian self-determination, preferring a perpetual state of war that endangers both Palestinian and Jewish Israeli lives.

What, then, can break the impasse? International diplomatic pressure on Israel can help. (As of 20 Feb, Keir Starmer's abject Labour leadership is at last signalling it will vote to call for a ceasefire). Whilst Israel is a regionally powerful and highly militarised state, it is not a global power, and operates within a network of intersecting geopolitical alliances. Even right-wing Israeli governments value their security relationships with Arab neighbours such as Egypt and Jordan, and continued pressure from these states may have some effect. Britain, France, and the USA have all imposed sanctions on individual settlers implicated in anti-Palestinian violence, although this largely symbolic act is unlikely to have much effect on the mechanics of the settlement project.

Demolitions of Palestinian properties in occupied East Jerusalem have continued in recent weeks. On 12 February, Israeli settlers carried out a pogrom against the Palestinian village of Asira Kablah, torching houses and shooting at Palestinians, wounding two.

It seems increasingly likely that the impasse may only be broken by the ousting of Netanyahu's government, with its far-right elements ideologically committed to ethnically cleansing the

Palestinians. On 17 February, thousands took to the streets of Tel Aviv for anti-government protests, with many demanding national elections be called sooner than the scheduled 2026 date. Those protests are, so far, smaller than the sustained mass demonstrations that took place against Netanyahu's planned reforms to the judiciary, but anti-war and anti-government protests have grown steadily in recent weeks and months.

Polls show that, were early elections called, Netanyahu would lose heavily. His likely replacement, Benny Gantz, is hardly more progressive on the question of Israel's relationship to the Palestinians, but the fact a Gantz government would not include far-right leaders of the settler movement such as Itamar Ben Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich means it would create some social breathing space.

It has been a consistent refrain on the right, centre, and even parts of the left of Israeli politics for decades that no progress towards a Palestinian state is possible because there is no "partner for peace" on the Palestinian side. The claim is wrongheaded on its own terms; there are forces in Palestinian politics, both within the Palestinian community in Israel and in occupied territories, with whom Israel could have sought negotiations towards a political settlement. Even negotiations with the corrupt Fatah-led Palestinian Authority would have been preferable to Netanyahu's policy of "managing the conflict."

The major problem is that there has been no "partner for peace" on the Israeli side. As the overwhelmingly superior military party and as the occupying power, Israel holds almost all the cards; for decades, no substantial force in mainstream Israeli political life has had the courage or ambition to even advocate the resumption of a genuine peace process aiming to end

the occupation. The occupation of the West Bank and the blockade of Gaza has been accepted as a permanent state of affairs, enabling Hamas, whose own chauvinism mirrors that of the Israeli right, to grow.

Palestinian political forces aiming for peace and equality can only assert themselves effectively when they know they have real partners in Israel. Currently, the forces that could grow into such partners lie predominantly outside of national electoral politics.

The more the Israeli anti-war movement can grow and assert itself, the less stable Netanyahu's government becomes. Activists internationally who wish to see progress towards peace and equal rights should make it a priority to support that movement. □

UK Friends of Standing Together

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

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

UKFoST promotes the benefits of joint struggle by Jews and Palestinians to this end. □

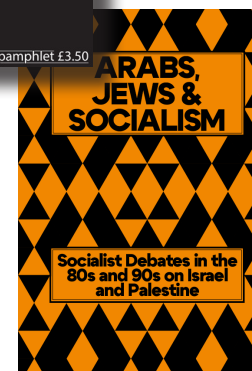
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Upcoming meetings

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](#).

Saturday 24 February: March and rally on anniversary of Russian invasion of Ukraine, multiple locations

Sunday 25 February, 12pm: Student day school, Rutland Arms, 86 Brown Street, Sheffield, S1 2BS

Tuesday 27 February, 6.30pm: Solidarity with Ukraine, The Lost Wanderer, 46 Leazes Park Road, Newcastle, NE1 4PG

Tuesday 5 March, 6.30pm: Socialist chat, The Lost Wanderer, 46 Leazes Park Road, Newcastle, NE1 4PG

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



Murray gets his way on Galloway



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

Andrew Murray has finally got his way – the Communist Party of Britain (CPB) and its mouthpiece the *Morning Star* have thrown in their lot with George Galloway.

When Galloway and his (then) friends the SWP announced the formation of Respect in December 2003, Murray was one of those in the CPB who pushed (unsuccessfully, then) for the Party to sign up with not-so-gorgeous George. Murray was chair of the Stop the War coalition (then controlled by the SWP). He was regarded by his opponents within the CPB as having “gone native” and succumbed to the overtures of leading SWPers (at the time) Lindsey German and John Rees,

and of their friend Mr Galloway, then an MP recently expelled from Labour and infamous for a grovelling, obsequious address to Saddam Hussein in 1994.

Apart from personal affinity, Murray’s liking for Galloway made political sense: both were (and remain to this day) essentially old-style Stalinists. In fact, Galloway was more of a Stalinist than many people in the CPB at the time.

The *Morning Star* of 20 December 2003 went so far as to carry an article by then-editor John Haylett calling for support for Galloway and Respect and looking forward to a “special congress” of the CPB in January at which the party’s attitude to the new formation would be decided. In the event, the pro-Galloway people were to be disappointed: the vote went 60% to 40% against them.

In November 2007 Galloway and the SWP fell out. With the so-called “Trots” of the SWP gone, Murray and some oth-



ers in the CPB renewed their overtures to Galloway, but by now the great man was riding high as Respect’s (only) MP, having defeated Labour’s Oona King in

a typically dirty and divisive campaign in Bethnal Green and Bow. In 2003 Galloway had been keen to have the CPB on board (as a counterweight to the SWP), but now he wasn’t that interested in their support or involvement, having surrounded himself with Muslim businessmen and “community leaders”.

Having deserted Bethnal Green, Galloway won a by-election (2012) in Bradford West with a campaign stressing that he didn’t drink alcohol, making him a better Muslim than Labour’s candidate.

Galloway doesn’t limit himself to Muslim communal politics. During the EU referendum, he supported “Leave” and happily appeared on platforms with Nigel Farage, Bill Cash and Peter Bone. In the 2019 European elections he supported the Brexit Party.

He attended a far-right “forum” in Kazakhstan, where he was photographed hugging Steve Bannon.

In 2021 he called for a Tory vote in the Scottish Parliament elections. The Batley and Spen byelection of May 2021 was described by the *Guardian* as “mired in accusations of aggression and intimidatory tactics from Galloway’s campaign, which some say has fuelled anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric.”

None of this has prevented the CPB coming out for Galloway in the Rochdale byelection and, naturally, the *Morning Star* has followed. An editorial (14 Feb) claims that “Galloway cannot be accused of jumping on a bandwagon” and that he “has always been on the right side of history.” It even suggests that “besieged Palestinians” would want to see a vote for Galloway (surely Palestinians have more pressing concerns?)

Both the CPB’s pro-Galloway statement and the editorial note that there have been a few problems with Galloway’s record, but in a fawning interview (17-18 Feb) these are tactfully ignored. The interviewer is one Andrew Murray. □

Who is George Galloway?

By Simon Nelson

As we go to press, George Galloway is the bookmakers’ favourite for the Rochdale by-election (29 Feb), and has been [backed](#) by the Socialist Party. But he is not fit to become an MP yet again.

He first became an MP for Labour in 1987. He was at best soft-left, by no means an outstanding rebel, with a strong Stalinist tinge such as had been relatively common among MPs for some time. As he has developed a distinctive individual profile as an “anti-imperialist”, he has become a bad smell the left seems unwilling to get rid of.

While on a delegation of European MPs to Iraq in 1994 he spoke the words that should follow him to his death, to Iraqi dictator and butcher Saddam Hussein. “Sir, we salute your courage, your strength and your indefatigability.” While presenting Hussein with a pennant from Palestinian youth in the West Bank he added “we are with you” and then in Arabic, “Until Victory! Until Jerusalem”.

We called for his local Labour Party to dump him. But he and others portrayed his pro-Saddam war-mongering rhetoric as a matter of being a great fighter for the Palestinians and a trenchant critic of Bush’s 2003 invasion of Iraq.

In reality Galloway has been a mercenary self-promoter, serving different imperialisms of his choice against others: Iraq and Iran against Israel and the

US. Russia against Ukraine.

From 1996 he got money from two successive Pakistani governments to run a newspaper in London (*East*) aimed to back Pakistani policies in Kashmir. The paper folded after a *Newsnight* exposé.

He was kicked out of the Labour Party in 2003 for calling for troops to defy orders in Iraq. In 1998 he had launched the Mariam Appeal, notionally to pay for the cancer treatment of an Iraqi child and then provide other medications to Iraq. Galloway was able to spend much of the money raised on overseas trips by himself, which included Christmas lunch with Saddam Hussein’s foreign minister Tariq Aziz. When challenged about the funding, he said that most of it came from the United Arab Emirates or from a businessman trading with Iraq, and he didn’t know the businessman got money from the Iraqi regime.

Even before he became an MP, his time as general secretary of War on Want, 1983-7, ended with criticism of his spending. Later, when he became MP for Bradford West (2012-5) he pocketed another £265,000 from TV presenting. He earned £150,000 from a previous appearance on *Celebrity Big Brother*.

His prominence in the Stop the War coalition was at its height in 2003, and then he helped to break up the Socialist Alliance, a short-lived coalition of almost the whole radical activist left. The SWP, which was the biggest com-

ponent in the Alliance, wooed Galloway. Workers’ Liberty denounced that wooing. At the time, almost all other left groups denounced us as “sectarian” for doing so, but we believe we have been vindicated.

With a new electoral vehicle, Respect, or rather, “Respect (George Galloway)”, Galloway won Bethnal Green and Bow in the 2005 general election. He turned against the SWP, which had provided foot-soldiers for Respect, in 2007. The rump Respect which he ran after that wound up, after scandals, in 2016.

While a Bradford MP he also suggested that Julian Assange could not have been guilty of rape because these allegations were not rape, “as anyone with an sense can possibly recognise it”. He added: “I mean, not everybody needs to be asked prior to each insertion”. He has long been opposed to abortion rights and has proudly used his stance to show that he is “not as left wing as you think”.

Galloway did not try to contest Bradford West in 2015. He had paid little attention to Bradford or to parliament since being elected. He has been active as a media figure on RT, the Russian state international broadcaster, and since 2019 as the head of the “anti-woke”, Stalinoid Workers Party of Great Britain.

We hope he will not be able to re-activate his parliamentary career from Rochdale. Whatever about that, he has no place in the left. □

Backlash after unions' trans-rights vote



Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

On 18 February Scottish Labour Party conference voted down a motion submitted via the Scottish Labour women's conference which had urged it to "acknowledge the principle of women's sex-based rights" (established code words for trans exclusion). The large unions used their votes to block policy seeking to push Labour further from trans inclusion.

On a [card vote](#), 69.3% of Constitu-

ency Labour Party (CLP) delegates' votes were for the motion. Votes are weighted equally between CLP delegates and party affiliates. The motion fell because 77% of affiliate votes were against it.

The motion had urged Scottish Labour "to acknowledge the principle of women's sex-based rights, as well as those conferred upon them by other protected characteristics". It called on the conference Scottish Labour to "encourage positive debate within the Labour Party. Conference also calls on Scottish Labour to take account of the primacy of the Equality Act 2010 in policy development and to take the steps required to end inequality and protect

women and girls from violence, discrimination, and exploitation."

In compositing some of the most egregious anti-trans content had been lost including the line "We recommend that Scottish Labour leadership follow Keir Starmer's lead and openly recognise women as adult human females."

Supporters of Labour Women's Declaration, which backed the motion, took to social media to denounce Unite, GMB and Unite. Some went on to target trans lay members of UNISON sharing their photos.

Labour MP Rosie Duffield posted on X in support of LWD and the motion, adding: "We will continue to demand our rights whether these organisations



like it or not." The Labour leadership have been moving back on trans rights, apparently trying to court small-c conservative voters, running up to the election. This pandering could give confidence to transphobes.

Affiliated unions were right to block this motion and should fight at conference for a clear pro-trans-rights position and fight for it to be implemented in the run up to election and in government.

Union activists must stand in solidarity with all those been targeted by transphobic online harassment. □

AWL conference 27-28 April

By Rosalind Robson

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty has begun discussing the motions and reports which will be voted on at our conference on 27-28 April.

The conference will assess left-wing responses to recent changes in the capitalist world order, the trends towards a world of rival blocs, shifts to the right in many countries and war and conflict especially in Ukraine and Israel-Palestine.

We will be debating the forthcoming US election, where all of us see the prospect of a second Trump term of office as a mortal threat. However while some of us analyse Trump and the movement around him as quasi or incipiently fascist, others see this as a far-right figure consistent with similar leaders and parties around the world. Some of us conclude socialists should call for a vote for Democratic Party nominee for President, Joe Biden, as a lesser evil, while denouncing his capitalist policies and maximising effort to create new and socialist alter-

natives with urgency. Others disagree, not recommending any vote for President, arguing the sole focus should be on a project for independent working-class politics as the way to combat the threat.

A motion on ecology codifies policies we have developed over the last ten years.

We will also be discussing the work we do in the UK – in the Labour Party, in the trade unions, in our student unions – and assessing how well we do at promoting our ideas through our literature and public meetings. Specific reports will highlight practical plans for campaigning around solidarity with workers and dissidents against the Chinese government, our feminist work and on the environment. The conference will also elect our National Committee.

If you are interested in finding out more about the AWL's policies and plans for 2024-25 please get in touch. Close friends and sympathisers of the AWL are invited to join us for our discussions. □

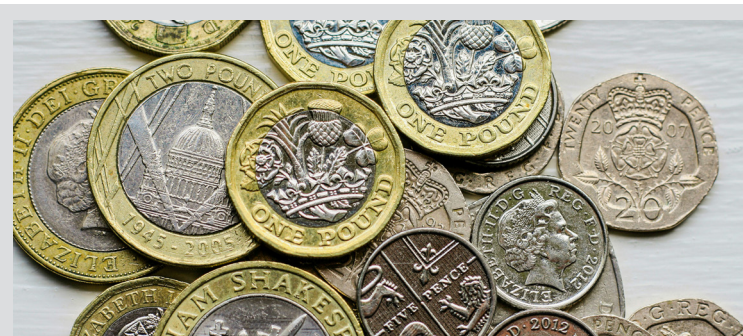
**STAND WITH
UKRAINE
UNTIL VICTORY**



**Activist
Agenda**

On Saturday 24 February, supporters of freedom for Ukraine will march to mark the second anniversary of the Russian invasion in 2022. The London march is 1:30 from Marble Arch. Rally from 4pm in Trafalgar Sq. Ukraine Solidarity Campaign (USC) meeting with reports from a recent delegation to Ukraine, 5:30pm Elizabethan Room, Civil Service Club, 13-15 Great Scotland Yard, SW1A 2H. USC is running an appeal for medical aid to Ukraine, closing 31 March: bit.ly/ukrainemedicalappeal. The demonstration in Nottingham assembles 2pm Speakers' Corner; Sheffield, 1pm at St Mary's Church, Bramall Lane; Edinburgh, noon at 58 Melville St. □

• Links, template motions, etc: workersliberty.org/agenda



Prices are flat, but...

By Rhodri Evans

The latest official figures show prices were flat (zero inflation) for the last months of 2023 (September to December inclusive), and food prices are actually falling. That is true on both CPI and RPI measures of inflation.

The published "headline" figure shows "4% inflation": that is the movement from Dec 2022 to Dec 2023. With increases won in the 2022-3 strikes coming through, average real regular wages (seasonally adjusted) [recovered](#) a little (2.2%) from March 2023 to Dec 2023. Still wages have not recovered from the impact of high inflation in

2021-2 (6% decline between April 2021 and March 2023), and public sector wages definitely not from the squeeze on them since 2010.

The Bank of England is keeping its standard interest rate high by historical standards at 5.25%, worrying that otherwise wages will rise. Former Bank chief economist Andy Haldane [says](#) that such rates are likely to "crush the economy", continuing the recession which started late 2023.

The other effect of a high Bank rate is to push up the government's cost of borrowing, tightening the squeeze on public services and investment. □

David Miller's world: the Employment Tribunal

By Dale Street

David Miller recently won an Employment Tribunal case against Bristol University. His "victory" was in fact heavily qualified, as we shall see.

In *Solidarity* 699 I documented Miller's repeated claims that Israel, "Zionists", or Jews have extraordinary and malign power in Britain. Miller began teaching at Bristol University, as a professor, in September 2018. Complaints – mainly about a lecture in which he accused the Community Security Trust of promoting Islamophobia – began in March 2019.

These were soon followed by other complaints alleging that Miller used antisemitic language, tropes and conspiracy theories. Two investigations launched by the University into these complaints continued through 2019 and 2020.

Miller was given a clean bill of health in December 2020. But in February 2021 two new investigations were initiated, covering public comments made by Miller earlier that month and in October of the previous year.

Miller had accused Bristol University's student JSoc (Jewish Society) of making bogus complaints of antisemitism about him; acting as pawns of Israel; engaging in activities which were a threat to Arab and Muslim students; pursuing a campaign of manufactured hysteria; attempting to silence critics of Zionism and Israel; being part of a campaign of censorship directed by Israel which sought to determine what should be taught and who should be employed in universities.

One of the two investigations, concerned with the issue of free speech in an academic context, concluded that Miller had not crossed the line. The second investigation, concerning whether Miller had breached University Codes of Conduct, concluded that there was a case to answer.

Following a disciplinary hearing in September, Miller was sacked for gross misconduct: His public attacks on the University JSoc had breached a plethora of University Codes of Conduct:

"The statements single out students and student societies. You [Miller] connected a properly constituted University of Bristol student society to activities that any reasonable person would object to. The way in which you have expressed your views and the consequences of such expression have led to an adverse impact on those students and the University."

In October Miller appealed against his dismissal. The appeal was heard in

December. All seven grounds of appeal were rejected.

Miller lodged Employment Tribunal (ET) claims for unfair dismissal, wrongful dismissal and seven other counts. The ET hearing took place in late 2023. It published its judgement in early February 2024.

The ET dismissed most of Miller's claims.

The February 2021 investigation into his criticisms of the University JSoc did not constitute harassment. Nor did the non-publication of the findings of the 2020 investigation. Nor did the alleged "failure" of the University to defend Miller against accusations of antisemitism.

Comments made by the University to the media once Miller was "in the news" did not constitute direct discrimination. There was no "continuing act" (i.e. pattern) of discrimination from December 2020 onwards. A further claim dating from 2020 (which would otherwise have been upheld) fell as it was out-of-time (i.e. it had been lodged too late).

The ET upheld Miller's claims of unfair dismissal and wrongful dismissal, and his claim that the rejection of his appeal against dismissal constituted discrimination. But the upholding of the latter two claims followed automatically from the decision to uphold the claim of unfair dismissal.

Qualified

Even the finding of unfair dismissal was heavily qualified.

The decision to dismiss was unfair because it was excessive: "It would have been proportionate to issue some disciplinary sanction short of dismissal... Inadequate attention was given to the possibility of a sanction short of dismissal... We conclude that a disciplinary warning would have been both fair and proportionate."

The ET found that Miller contributed to his own dismissal by his own conduct. His public attacks on the University JSoc were "culpable and blameworthy." He abused the "significant power differential" between himself as a professor and university students.

It had been "inappropriate" for him to have publicly "aimed aggressive discourse at students or student groups." His conduct "clearly had an impact on not only the University's reputation but also on sections of both the student and academic body."

As a consequence, the ET ruled that any damages paid to Miller should be reduced by 50%, in order to reflect the extent to which he contributed to his own dismissal.

The ET also ruled that damages should be reduced by a further 30% on the basis that Miller might well have been fairly sacked later because of an antisemitic tweet of August 2023:

"There is sufficient evidence for us to conclude that there is a realistic chance that the claimant would have been dismissed after these further actions. ... We conclude there is a 30% chance that the claimant would have been fairly dismissed two months after the tweets were made in August 2023".

Miller and his supporters have made much of the fact that the ET found that his dismissal constituted an act of discrimination against a "protected belief" held by Miller. But the ET made it clear that the discriminatory aspect of the dismissal was secondary to its excessive aspect:

"Even if we had not found the dismissal to be direct discrimination, we would have found the dismissal to be unfair ... because the actions of the claimant did not amount to gross misconduct and also because inadequate attention was given to the possibility of a sanction short of dismissal."

A "protected belief" might sound quite grandiose. In fact, the bar set for what counts as such a belief by earlier cases – principally *Grainger PLC v Nicholson* and *Forstater v CHG Europe* – is rock-bottom.

According to the latter, only "the kind of belief the expression of which would be akin to Nazism or totalitarianism" should not qualify. Holding a belief deemed not as bad as Nazism is not much to boast about.

And Forstater is problematic anyway. According to *Grainger*, a protected belief must be "worthy of respect in a democratic society and not in conflict with the fundamental rights of others". But there are many beliefs which, while not being full-on Nazi, fail to meet those criteria.

In any case, Miller's protected belief was not the central issue in the ET hearing.

Miller defined his protected belief as: "Political Zionism is inherently racist, imperialistic and colonial, and ought therefore to be opposed." In fact, Miller's attacks on the University JSoc arguably flowed out of a different belief: a world Zionist conspiracy aimed at global domination. The University did not challenge either belief as antisemitic. Insofar as his protected belief was discussed at the ET hearing, Miller seems to have been given an easy ride.

Miller believes that "every single Zionist organisation the world over needs to be ended." But his conflicting



evidence to the ET went unchallenged: "At no time did the claimant suggest that JSocs or the UJS should be disbanded, or that Zionists should not be free to associate with one another."

What he argues in his chats with ex-MP Chris Williamson and Lowkey on Iran Press TV has a different tone. His next programme, for example is "about the possibility of solving the question of Palestine by means of a referendum in which all Palestinians would get a vote. Any such vote would result in a mandate to dissolve the Jewish state. The second half deals with what would have to happen afterwards, specifically with those millions of Israeli citizens who played an active part in the genocide. A possible model is the agreement made by the Allies at Yalta in 1945 to institute a process of denazification."

Bristol University's tactic at the ET was to sidestep any serious challenge to Miller's protected belief. Instead, it argued that Miller's comments in February 2023 had nothing to do with his protected belief. The comments were simply inappropriate and serious enough to merit dismissal.

The ET disagreed. It found that Miller's comments were an expression of his protected belief. To that extent Miller's dismissal was "tainted by discrimination". But the main reason why Miller's dismissal was unfair had nothing to do with his protected belief.

It was simply a case of the penalty imposed being excessive. But Miller's own conduct was 50% responsible for his dismissal. And he would probably have been sacked not long afterwards anyway.

Miller and his supporters have put a very different spin on the ET judgement.

They see it as a vindication of their antisemitism-in-the-guise-of-antizionism. As a glance of their recent social media output confirms, they have taken the judgement as a green light to be even more deranged in their rabid antizionism than they already were previously.

But the ET judgement leaves one question unanswered.

If the Zionist movement is as powerful as Miller claims – if it exerts "an extraordinary stranglehold" over British society, with "Zionist entryists and spies at senior levels in every major British institution" – why were the Zionists unable to nobble a lowly Employment Tribunal panel in Bristol? □

• Abridged. More: bit.ly/dm-w

Pakistan in turmoil after poll

By Dan Katz

On Tuesday 13 February Nawaz Sharif's Muslim League (PML-N) and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), together with other smaller parties, agreed to form a coalition government, the main aim of which is to prevent supporters of Imran Khan taking control of the state.

Khan's party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI, or Pakistan Movement for Justice), has been heavily repressed and its candidates were forced to run as independents in the 8 February general election. Nevertheless, PTI ran an effective social media campaign and out-performed the army-backed PML-N. Sharif had been expected to win easily, but the PTI got the most votes and the most seats, although fell short of an absolute parliamentary majority.

Independent candidates, mostly backed by PTI, won 101 seats of the

266 directly elected constituency seats in the National Assembly (other seats are reserved for minorities and women). Nawaz Sharif's PML-N has won 75 seats and former foreign minister Bilawal Bhutto's PPP has won 54 seats.

The PPP will not take any ministerial positions in the new administration as Bhutto appears to be wary of being too close to what will be an unpopular government.

Khan's party also alleges widespread ballot rigging in favour of Sharif. The US, UK and EU have all openly doubted the fairness of the election. On election day the state imposed a mobile and internet blackout.

The election results are a rebuke for Sharif, who has been Prime Minister three times previously. Sharif has been regularly accused of corruption, in particular following the Panama Papers leak in 2016, after his children were named for holding secret off-shore bank accounts.

Pakistan ranks 133 from 180 states in Transparency International's corruption index.

The poll results are also a blow aimed at the powerful Pakistani military and the secret intelligence service, the notorious ISI. Since Pakistan's creation in 1947, the military has either ruled directly or intervened and manipulated Pakistan's election results and the administration of governments.

Following military coups the army was directly in power from 1958-71, 1977-88 and 1999-2008.

In 2022 the outgoing Pakistan military chief, General Qamar Javed Bajwa, admitted that the military had, "constantly meddled in politics for the last 70 years." Bajwa promised that interference would end. Predictably that pledge turned out to be untrue.

Imran Khan has originally founded PTI in 1996 as a pro-Western, modernising party. He was then a world-famous cricket all-rounder, Oxford-educated, and an ostentatious playboy who had married into the British aristocracy. Ten years later, after 9/11, the overthrow of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Iraq war, Khan repositioned himself as a devout Muslim who was highly critical of the West.

Khan was brought to power in 2018, with the military's backing, promising clean government. However, corruption increased. He heavily repressed opposition parties and independent media, and ran a pro-army administration. In 2021 he began to move against the army, and the army struck back.

Khan was arrested on 9 May 2023 and sentenced to three years in jail on corruption charges. His supporters then overran the plush homes, within gated estates, of leading army generals, exposing the great wealth these parasites have gathered over decades.



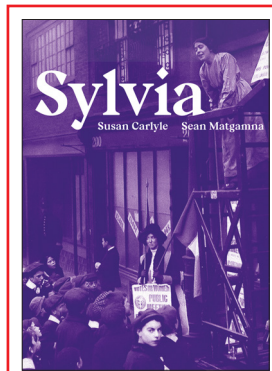
Nawaz Sharif

In January 2024 Khan was sentenced to ten years in jail for leaking state secrets.

Unfortunately for Pakistan's working class there is little difference between the contending parties who in power enrich themselves and protect the army's behind-the-scenes dominance. The vote for the PTI was a vote in opposition to corruption and incompetent government. But Khan and the PTI are incapable of delivering that. Annual inflation is running at 28%. 42% of the population are illiterate and more than 95mn of Pakistan's 240mn population live in desperate poverty. Islamist terrorist bombings regularly take place.

In June 2023 the government was close to defaulting on its debt and was bailed out with \$3bn loan from the IMF. Some of that money has been handed over already, but the IMF is stalling on further payments, which it says must be negotiated by a new government.

Pakistan's debt currently stands at \$100bn. □



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"Putin has murdered Navalny"



Eric Lee

When I studied at university, I had access to reprinted editions of many American left publications. Among them was *Labor Action*, the weekly newspaper of Max Shachtman's Workers Party.

I have never forgotten the headline from an edition in late August 1940. The headline was "Stalin has murdered our comrade Trotsky". Those first three words are still relevant today: "Stalin has murdered". Because we now know, decades later, that the assassin was in fact an agent of the NKVD, the Soviet secret police. But back then in August 1940, we did not really know. The

assassin had pretended to be someone sympathetic to the exiled Bolshevik leader.

But Shachtman and his comrades knew – knew with absolute certainty – that regardless of who held the ice pick that shattered Trotsky's skull, the murderer was the man in the Kremlin.

This is what I was thinking when I first heard the news of the death of Alexei Navalny last week. We may never find out the truth of who or what killed him. Maybe he was poisoned – again. Maybe the guards at the IK-3 camp in the far north of Russia found another way. It doesn't matter. We know beyond a reasonable doubt who killed Navalny just as Shachtman knew who killed Trotsky.

Putin is responsible for the lives of people jailed by his regime. Even if he did not inten-

tionally kill Navalny, or order his execution, it doesn't matter. He created the conditions that guaranteed Navalny's death.

Putin has a long history of ordering the killings of people he perceives as threats to his power. These include Alexander Litvinenko, murdered in London using radioactive toxins. Or the investigative journalist Anna Politkovskaya, killed in Moscow. Or Sergei Magnitsky, who like Navalny was murdered in prison. There are many more. Putin has much blood on his hands.

Differences

There are many differences between the murders of Trotsky and Navalny. By the time Trotsky was murdered, he no longer represented a serious threat to the Stalin regime. His own supporters inside the USSR had been exiled, imprisoned and murdered – there

was nothing left of the old "Left Opposition". His attempts to create a successor organisation to the old Third International proved unsuccessful. He was certainly right in his criticisms of the Communist regime in Moscow, but hardly anyone was listening anymore.

Navalny, on the other hand, continued to have followers inside Putin's Russia, as well as some kind of profile overseas. As he was shunted from jail to jail, eventually winding up in the Arctic Circle, he continued to make news. And his death last week, unlike Trotsky's, prompted demonstrations across Russia resulting in hundreds of arrests.

One might argue that such comparisons are unfair because Navalny was up against an authoritarian regime which for all its brutality is limited in what it can do to its citizens.

The totalitarian Stalin regime had no such constraints.

Both Trotsky and Navalny were intelligent and charismatic, both had a vision of a different society than what the Kremlin wanted, and both were seen to have constituted threats to the regime even if they were exiled or jailed. In both cases, the hand of the Kremlin could be clearly seen in their murders.

The facts about Trotsky's murder did eventually come out. The Stalin regime was convicted by history of its crimes. I am certain that the same will happen to Vladimir Putin and those who serve him. Their crimes will not go unpunished. □

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

2014: how Russia seized Crimea

By Dale Street

Ten years ago – in the early hours of 23 February 2014 – Russian President Vladimir Putin met with his personal advisers and military and security chiefs. The meeting agreed that Russia should seize the Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea.

Less than 24 hours earlier Putin's placeman in Ukraine, President Viktor Yanukovich, had fled Kyiv after three months of mass popular protests. He had then been voted out of office by the Ukrainian Parliament.

Even before Putin's meeting had finished, Russia was already transporting marine and Spetsnaz (Special Operations) units to the Anapa airfield on the Russian mainland opposite Crimea. The airfield was to serve as the base for the seizure of the peninsula.

In the following days Russian troops were flown into Crimea itself. More troops, and also armour and artillery, were brought in by landing ships. Russian airpower was boosted with the arrival of combat helicopters at the Kacha airbase to the north of Sevastopol.

These reinforcements strengthened the Russian military forces already based in Crimea. Under an agreement signed with Ukraine in 1997, whereby Russia leased naval bases on the peninsula for use by its Black Sea fleet, Russia was allowed to station up to 25,000 servicemen in the bases.

Putin later claimed that the despatch of Russian troops from 23 February onwards was allowed under the terms of the 1997 agreement: The "ceiling" of 25,000 servicemen had never been breached.

But this argument, and the mission with which the troops had been entrusted, ignored other clauses in the agreement.

Those clauses stated that Russian military personnel had to show their military ID cards when crossing the

Ukraine-Russia border, and that they could operate "outside of their deployment sites" only after "co-ordination with the competent Ukrainian agencies".

The lease also included a clause whereby Russia agreed to "respect the sovereignty of Ukraine, honour its legislation, and refrain from interference in the internal affairs of Ukraine."

Russian soldiers, stripped of their military insignia, began to patrol the streets and surround Ukrainian military bases. They were accompanied by members of the local militia which they had helped create in order to give the appearance of a popular indigenous uprising.

Prominent amongst the local militia were members of the Salem and Baskaki criminal gangs, recruited by the FSB (Russian security service) through its connections with the Solntsevskaya Brotherhood, one of the largest organised crime clans in Russia.

On 26 February Putin's political allies in Crimea attempted to convene a meeting of the Crimean Supreme Council. But 7,000 Tatars turned up to protest, easily outnumbering the 2,000 pro-Russian protestors.

Tatars

The Tatars had mobilised to support the elected government, and to oppose any attempt to transfer sovereignty over the peninsula to Russia.

Tatars were Crimea's indigenous population. In 1944 Stalin had ordered their mass deportation to Uzbekistan. Half of the 200,000 deportees did not even survive the journey. From 1954 onwards Tatars began to return to the peninsula. By 2014 they numbered between 12% and 15% of the population. They had no desire to return to Russian rule.

The meeting of the Supreme Council due to take place on 26 February did not go ahead. Although the start time was repeatedly pushed back, the session remained inquorate.

In the early hours of 27 February Spetsnaz forces seized control of the buildings of the Supreme Council and the Crimean Council of Ministers. Later in the morning armed members of the local militia visited deputies in their homes and workplaces to ensure that they attended that day's parliamentary session.

Even so, at most only 64 of the Supreme Council's 100 deputies were recorded as having attended. Some of the 64 later issued statements saying that they had been absent and that their electronic voting cards had been used without their permission.

The Council meeting, such as it was, passed votes of no confidence in the Council of Ministers and in the Prime Minister. It voted to replace the latter

with Sergei Aksyonov, although his Russian Unity Party had won just 4% of the vote and three seats in the 2010 Crimean parliamentary elections.

The meeting also agreed to hold a referendum on 25 May on whether the Crimean constitution of 1992 should be reinstated, which would amount to a form of autonomy within Ukraine.

In the following week Putin and his Crimean allies held further discussions about the wording of the referendum. By 5 March they had decided that the wording should include the "option" of annexation by Russia.

The following day a further meeting of the Supreme Council loyally overturned the decisions it had made only a week earlier regarding the wording and date of the referendum.

The date of the referendum, originally planned for 25 May but subsequently brought forward to 30 March, would be 16 March. That left just ten days for campaigning. In the event, campaigning for any outcome other than absorption by Russia was impossible.

There would be two questions on the ballot paper: "Are you for Crimea re-uniting with Russia, as a subject of the Russian Federation? Are you for the reinstatement of the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Crimea and for the status of Crimea as part of Ukraine?"

Nothing

Nothing on the ballot paper allowed voters to opt for the status quo. The first question was pointless when Russia had already decided, as it had, that it would absorb Crimea into its territory.

The second question was meaningless to anyone who had no memory or knowledge of the constitution adopted for 13 days 22 years earlier. An additional complication was the fact that two different constitutions had been adopted by the Crimean Supreme Council in 1992.

In the run-up to the day of the referendum billboards across the peninsula proclaimed the choice to be one between "Nazi rule" by Kyiv or "reunification" with Russia.

Russian troops occupied the peninsula's television and radio stations, the offices of the telecommunications provider, and the Crimean Internet Exchange. Ukrainian television was taken off the air and replaced by Russian channels. Telephone and internet communications with the rest of Ukraine were cut off.

Leaders of the peninsula's Tatar community denounced the referendum as a sham and called for Tatars to boycott it. Activists who attempted to challenge the staging of the referendum were intimidated and arrested.

The Russian media boasted of the international observers who would be present for the referendum. But they

were silent about the fact that the observers were members of pro-Putin far-right organisations.

Referendum observers included members of the Parti Communautaire National-Européen, Jobbik, Fiamma Tricolore, Ataka, Vlaams Belang, Som Catalans, Forza Italia, Samoobrona, the French National Front, Dveri, and the Freedom Party of Austria.

Other observers included Srdja Trifkovic (a Srebrenica-genocide-denier who had spoken in defence of Radovan Karadzic at his trial for war crimes), Johan Backman (a far-right Finnish propagandist for Putin), and members of the Alliance of European National Movements (which included the British BNP amongst its affiliates).

Unsurprisingly, the observers gave the referendum a clean bill of health. In fact, the referendum was anything but free and fair.

The Crimean authorities did not even have access to an up-to-date electoral register. The Ukrainian Central Election Commission refused, for obvious reasons, to recognise the referendum. It therefore blocked access to the Voter Registers for Crimea and Sevastopol.

Russian citizens were allowed to vote, ballot papers were printed off on ordinary office paper, journalists were denied access to polling stations, and armed soldiers patrolled outside of the stations.

The turnouts and results of the individual polling stations were not announced. All (claimed) figures were sent to the Crimean Central Election Committee, which subsequently announced the overall Crimea-wide result of the referendum.

The authorities claimed a turnout of 83% and a 97% vote in favour of "re-unification", meaning that just over 80% of the total electorate had voted for "re-unification".

Assuming that the Tatar boycott had been successful, this figure would have required every single ethnic-Russian voter (65% of the Crimean population) to have backed "re-unification", plus every single ethnic-Ukrainian voter (15% of the Crimean population).

The official figures were contradicted by a report briefly posted on the website of the President of Russia's Council on Civil Society and Human Rights two months later. According to that report, turnout had been between 30% and 50%. Support for "re-unification" had been between 50% and 60% of votes cast.

On 18 March, two days after the referendum, Putin convened an assembly of all members of the lower and upper houses of the Russian Parliament. Crimea and Sevastopol – constitutionally, two separate entities – were formally incorporated into the Russian Federation. □

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The Zapatistas after 30 years

By Pablo Velasco

On 1 January 1994, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), a few thousand mostly indigenous guerrillas, came out of the Lacandón jungle in Chiapas, Mexico with the cry of “Ya Basta” – Enough.

On the day of the uprising, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between Mexico, Canada and the United States came into force. The EZLN, fronted by subcomandante Marcos, called for the cancellation of NAFTA, land reform and indigenous autonomy.

President Carlos Salinas de Gortari, in his last year leading the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), sent the Mexican military to suppress the rebellion. Throughout Mexico hundreds of thousands of people protested, demanding the assault stop. I recall enormous demonstrations in Mexico City and across the country, some involving hundreds of thousands of protesters, to demand a truce. I reported in *Socialist Organiser* newspaper during those first weeks about the palpable excitement the uprising generated. The mobilisations helped prompt an uneasy ceasefire.

The Zapatistas were founded in 1983 by activists in northern Mexico. They were inspired by an amorphous tradition of armed rebellion, notably Chinese and Cuban Stalinism, following the ideas of Mao Zedong, Che Guevara and Régis Debray.

Originally called the National Liberation Forces, by the late 1980s the group relocated to Chiapas. They added “Zapatista” to their name in honour of Emiliano Zapata, the revolutionary peasant movement leader during the Mexican Revolution (1910-20). Since the revolution, Mexico had been ruled as a “soft” one-party state by the PRI and its predecessors.

The Zapatistas promoted a form of social ownership of the land. After the Mexican revolution, notably under Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-40), land was given to male members of peasant or indigenous communities in the form of ejidos, state-leased land to be held in perpetuity by them and their descendants. While sometimes collectively owned, ejido land was often held as individual parcels belonging to the patriarchal heads of families.

In August 1994, the Zapatistas called a convention in San Cristóbal, inviting academics, activists, and a handful of foreign delegates. Marcos spoke in front of an enormous Mexican flag. Zapatista soldiers marched with wooden rifles. The EZLN presented themselves as radical nationalists and supporters of indigenous rights. They called for a constituent assembly and a new constitution, but not socialism.

In 1995, the new PRI government led by Ernesto Zedillo ordered the Mexican army to harry the EZLN. The Zapatistas organised a “liberated zone” where their indigenous and mestizo supporters lived and ran their own autonomous communities, schools and local governments. On 16 February 1996, the Zapatistas signed the San Andrés Accords with Zedillo’s government, a treaty granting autonomy, recognition and rights to the indigenous people in Chiapas. But the Mexican Congress failed to adopt them.

In 1997, the EZLN launched a national organisation, the Zapatista Front for National Liberation (FZLN). But this was not a real coalition of social movements, trade unions and left political parties. The EZLN dominated the FZLN. As a result, it never had the desired impact.

The EZLN also attempted to form Zapatista workers’ organisations. The Zapatistas opposed participation in existing trade unions, not only because they were bureaucratic and tied to the state, but also because the unions held elections and the EZLN opposed voting. Unwilling to relate to existing union structures and spurning longstanding rank-and-file union organisations, the Zapatista labour front failed.

Holloway

In the late 1990s, academic John Holloway popularised Zapatistas ideas in a series of best-selling books. Holloway argued that under the influence of indigenous communities, the EZLN rejected the old Marxist paradigm of the working class struggling for state power. Instead, anyone could make the revolution by asserting their dignity and forming a liberated community where they were. The Zapatistas seemed to be building a communitarian alternative to capitalism in Chiapas. Holloway cheerfully told activists to follow the Zapatistas: “change the world without taking power”.

Holloway merely generalised the confusion inherent in Zapatismo from the start. The Zapatistas cut themselves off from the militant struggles of Mexican workers, preferring to base themselves on indigenous peasants. They failed to build united fronts with other left forces, including in the trade unions, to build a counterpower. They failed to use the limited openings of bourgeois politics as a platform to mobilise workers to struggle.

In the 2000 elections, the EZLN rightly did not support the ruling PRI, the conservative National Action Party (PAN), or the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) led by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas. However, they did not back Manuel Aguiar Mora, a longstanding socialist, either. The EZLN rejected elections in general and denounced



Mexico’s political parties as compromised and corrupt.

Vicente Fox of the PAN won the 2000 election, ending the PRI’s Bonapartist hold on the Mexican government. The Zapatistas took advantage of the political opening, travelled to Mexico City and sent representatives to address the Mexican Congress. They asked to implement the San Andrés Accords, without success.

In 2006 presidential elections, the EZLN took a different approach. They did not support Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) of the PRD. The EZLN did not put forward their own candidates and did not support the candidates of other parties, but instead travelled around the country with their *Otra Campaña* (the Other Campaign).

The EZLN’s campaign was joined by several other left groups, from Trotskyists to the Communist Party Marxist-Leninist (CPML). They held moderately successful meetings and rallies, sometimes speaking to thousands. But the CPML’s giant portraits of Stalin hung in the background, casting doubt on Zapatist liberatory politics. And the EZLN abstained from the ferment around electoral fraud.

Felipe Calderón from the PAN won the 2006 presidential election. He launched a “war on narco-traffickers”, which further brutalised Mexican society and led to incursions against the EZLN. The PRI candidate Enrique Peña Nieto won in 2012. Paramilitary attacks on EZLN communities increased.

The election of AMLO as president in 2018 might have heralded an improvement in the context facing the Zapatistas. However during AMLO’s term, the situation has dramatically worsened. For the last three years, the EZLN has warned about the escalation of violence, carried out by the cartels and the state.

In May 2023, paramilitaries funded by landowners unleashed a wave of kidnappings, assassinations, shootings and other crimes. The EZLN warned that Chiapas was “on the verge of civil war”. In November 2023, the EZLN leadership issued a communiqué calling for international solidarity. They also announced the dissolution of their auton-

omous councils and the reactivation of their military command. The Zapatistas seem to have come full circle, verging on a return to armed struggle.

The tragedy is that the Mexican left remains fragmented at a time when it is most needed. In the late 1980s, the Trotskyist PRT had six senators and a mass base among workers and peasants. They broke on the rocks of the PRD in 1988, before the Zapatista uprising. Despite the Zapatistas’ twists and turns, the left has not been rebuilt.

Today the sizable Mexican working class continues to resist exploitation. In places, it has formed militant, independent unions. Peasants fight for land. Sadly, no sizable socialist organising centre exists to direct and coordinate those struggles. Of course the left should defend the Zapatistas from the assaults on their communities and supporters. But Zapatismo is not the basis on which to form the next Mexican or international left that the new situation demands. □

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When the workers awakened

The road to Bolshevism

By Sean Matgamna

Fourth in a series around the anniversary of the death of Vladimir Ulyanov (Lenin) in 1924

All populism, in theory, “denied a future to Russian capitalism. The proletariat was assigned no independent role at all in the revolution. It happened accidentally, however, that propaganda designed in its content for the villages found a sympathetic response only in the cities... assembling only the intelligentsia and some individual industrial workers”. (Leon Trotsky, *The Young Lenin*)

The Workers’ Union of South Russia of 1875 (described in *Solidarity* 699) survived the arrest of its leaders for a while, and took on a different political coloration.

Its programme now, though it did not demand a constitution, called for: *Factory legislation which would protect the workers against the capitalists’ arbitrary control of their lives; Freedom of speech, of assembly, and for a working-class press; Freedom to form unions, credit unions, etc.*

Higher wages, and an end to oppressive taxation of the peasants; Reduction in the hours of work.

The Union of Workers of North Russia was created in Moscow and St Petersburg around 1878.

In 1875 and early 1876 a group of populists published the first Russian working-class paper, *Robotnik* (Worker). It explained that the Russian workers must “join together with other workers into a great obshchina [commune], to create a world in which the land belongs to all, everything belongs to all”.

Despite its openly populist ideas, *Robotnik* marked a new stage in the separating-out of a distinct consciousness in the working class. It discussed such things as the British trade unions, critically, but nonetheless in order to see what could be learned from them.

It told of the Babeuf-communist left wing in the French Revolution. It criticised the peasant hero Pugachev, leader of the Rising of 1773-5, for wanting to be Tsar and for not “hanging” merchants and usurers as he hanged landlords.

The base of the group was Moscow, where they had about 20 people working to spread its ideas and win support for them.

Still populists in their goals and conceptions – they raised the slogan, “the

cause of the workers and the peasants is one” – they had decided to “go to the people” in the factories. They told the workers: “We need to seize the factories like the peasants need to seize the land”.

One of the activists, Vera Figner, explained their ideas in a fine passage about an exile student group in Switzerland in the mid 1870s:

“We read the *Organisation du Travail*, Cabet’s *Voyage en Icarie*, Proudhon’s *Plan for a People’s Bank*, and everything seemed to us to be practical and feasible. The word ‘utopia’ did not exist for us. We saw only ‘plans’ to bring about a social revolution, and we were equally enthusiastic when we read the speeches of the genius Lassalle [1825-64], who summoned the workers to conquer the State, as when we read the anarchist pamphlets of Bakunin, who repudiated the State and appealed for the ruthless and implacable destruction of its whole edifice.

“Most of us thought that this last idea was best suited to the conditions of Russian life. For us parliament did not exist. There was no question of even thinking of universal suffrage and elections and workers’ delegates.

“In Old Russia there had been governments of the people, as Kostomarov had described; there were artels which we read about in the works of Flerovsky; there was the obshchina... This obshchina was the prototype and at the same time the germ of the just organisation of the future society.

“All the new ideas of democracy and economic equality seemed to us quite irrefutable from the point of view of logic. And if anyone made any objections to them, we thought that he could only be inspired by motives of egoism and fear...

“In the world as it then was, during the time of propaganda, when all those in power were hostile to Socialism, when the government offered only persecution, anyone who took this road must be prepared for every kind of material and moral privation. To be up to the task that awaited him, he must prepared himself for all the blows of fate.

“The asceticism of some who wanted to give up all the goods of the earth achieved the impossible. One day, unawares, the daughter of a landlord from the region of Tambov, called Bardina [of whom we will learn more later], admitted that she liked strawberries and cream, and was teased by the group to which she belonged. From that day on Vera Lyubatovich [another member of the group], with perfect sin-

cerity, looked upon her as ‘bourgeois’.

“When... the programme of the new revolutionary organisation came under discussion, the girls proposed that it should include a renunciation of marriage. The men protested, and the clause was not accepted.

“Militant Socialism, which promised real liberty, equality and fraternity to the workers and the oppressed; Socialism which refused to recognise the strength and wealth of the powerful, and which was persecuted for the truth which it discovered – this seemed to me a new Gospel... Christian concepts and feelings, the ideas of the sanctity of asceticism and sacrifice, all these led me to the new doctrine... This was the really apostolic mission of our time”.

Return

After returning to Moscow, a number of women, disguised with false papers and imaginary life-histories, went to work in the factories in order to merge themselves with the workers. That meant living in the barracks-like dormitories of the women workers. They were soon exposed and sacked. But they had made contact – and some of the contacts were continued and developed. In a short time they had supporters in 20 factories and small workshops, and their connections spread to the region. Franco Venturi (*Roots of Revolution*) quotes these descriptions of what they did.

“Beta Kaminskaya took advantage of every possible pretext to start discussions with the workers. If she saw a young man holding the book which his employer had given him and which contained the rules concerning the workers’ duties, Kaminskaya read it to him aloud, explaining the meaning of each rule and showing the workers how each one of the articles was harmful to them and advantageous only to the employer.

“She spoke to them of the lives of workers in the West, of their solidarity and their struggle against exploitation by their employers. Gradually as she got deeper into the conversation, she spoke of history, and told them of episodes of the revolution in France and elsewhere.

“Naturally the workers were very amazed by these stories. Kaminskaya had said that she was of peasant origins; her seriousness and her culture, which were so unusual in a peasant, made the workers conclude that she belonged to the Raskol [the heretical religious sects]. For the women of the Raskol are indeed the best educated of

the inhabitants of Russian villages...

“Sofya Bardina took the first opportunity to begin to read a booklet which she had with her, *The Story of the Four Brothers*. The success was enormous. A large crowd collected round her.

“When she stopped reading, the questions were endless: ‘Where do you come from? Who are you? Who has taught you to read so well?’

“Bardina said that she was from the Raskol, that as a girl she had been employed as a maid by the gentry and that she had learned to read. She had gone back to her village, and there had become a devout reader of the [Christian] scriptures, but now necessity had driven her to try and find work in the factories...

“From then on Bardina frequently visited the men’s dormitories... The workers were proud of her, and on their day of rest, in the inns, they turned to her beseeching her to read them the newspapers”.

Eventually (1875) the populists were denounced to the police, and the group was smashed. Many workers were arrested, as well as the “outsider” populist intellectuals. After three years in jail, they were tried – it became known as the “Trial of the Fifty” (1878) – and seized the chance to use the courtroom to explain themselves and their cause.

One of them, Pyotr Alexeyevich Alexeyev, a worker won over by Sofia Perovskaya, came to be the first proletarian in recorded Russian history to speak “on the record” for himself, for workers like him, and for his persecuted brothers, the peasants, too, indicting Tsarism.

Born in 1849, the son of serfs, he had become a weaver as a boy. At 17 he taught himself to read. The populist propagandists had given him the beginnings of a working-class world outlook. He declared in court:

“I know something about the problems of our Western brothers. Their conditions are in many ways different from those in Russia. Over there they do not persecute, as they do here, those workers who devote all their free time and many sleepless nights to reading. Indeed, there they are proud of them, and speak of us Russians as a people of slaves and semi-barbarians.

“And how else can one speak of us? Have we any free time to apply ourselves to anything? Are our poor folk taught anything in their childhood? Are there any useful and accessible books for the workman? Where and from whom can he learn anything?...

“The peasant reform of 19th February 1861 – this reform which was a ‘gift’ –

in Moscow and Petersburg

even though it is indispensable, was not provoked by the people itself, and does not guarantee the peasant's most indispensable needs. Just as before, we were left without a piece of bread, and with a completely inadequate strip of land, and so we passed under the control of the capitalists...

"If we are unlucky enough to be forced again and again to demand an increase in wages which the capitalists are constantly decreasing, they accuse us of striking and deport us to Siberia. And so this means that we are still serfs!

"If we are forced by the capitalist himself to leave the factory, they accuse us of organising a revolt and use a soldier's rifle to force us to continue our work, and some are deported as instigators to distant lands. And so that means that we are still serfs!

"From all that I have just been saying it is obvious that the Russian workman can have hope only in himself, and can expect help only from our young intelligentsia which has stretched out a brotherly hand to us.

"It has understood in the depth of its soul the meaning and origin of the desperate complaints which come in from all sides. It can no longer look on coldly at the persecuted, oppressed peasant as he weeps under the yoke of despotism. It alone, like a good friend, has held out a brotherly hand, and in all sincerity wants to lift us out of our difficulties and put us on the right road for all the oppressed. It alone is tireless and leads us on...

"And it alone, united with us, will accompany us until the time when the muscular arm of millions of workers will arise and the yoke of despotism, defended by the soldier's bayonet, will fall to pieces".

The court's response was to sentence Alexeyev to ten years' hard labour. Sofya Bardina, of whose taste for strawberries and political work inside one of the factories we heard above, also got ten years' hard labour. After some years she escaped from Siberia, but she committed suicide in exile.

Many others were given heavy sentences. The organisation was wiped out. For a while no organised working-class movement remained in Moscow.

In St Petersburg working-class organisation had not been destroyed when its populist organisers, the Chaikovists, were arrested early in 1874. The workers themselves kept the organisation going and spread its ideas. It developed underground.

After 1874 it was no longer only the revolutionary students who sought contacts in the factories. The workers themselves, once they had been converted by propaganda, took the initiative in tying together broken threads,

and repeatedly asking for support and help. Indeed they themselves were now stretching out a "brotherly hand" to those intellectuals who could give more significance to their dissatisfaction and revolutionary spirit.

The beginnings of a self-driven working-class movement, capable of sustaining itself, now existed in St Petersburg. When Zemlya i Volya (Land and Freedom), a tightly organised party of professional revolutionaries whose organisers went armed and were willing to use both terrorisation and terror against oppressors and officials – who would try to kill policemen who attempted to capture them – emerged in 1876, that is what they found in St Petersburg.

Read

Venturi: "By about 1875 there was already a large number of workers in St Petersburg who were not only keen to learn and to read – typical self-educated men from workshops and factories – but who were also well able to hold their own views on the various political ideas about which they had heard the students speak. They were able in fact to contrast populist propaganda with the events of their own lives..."

"These workers... were at this time acquiring new personalities through their first experience of political activity".

In 1875 and early 1876 the surviving Chaikovists resumed work around the St Petersburg factories. G V Plekhanov was involved.

Plekhanov, who did most of his work for Zemlya i Volya (from 1876) among the town workers, wrote a book, *The Russian workers in the revolutionary movement*, about these working-class militants and their movements.

He found that the mental transformation of those workers, awakened by politics to a new sharp view of their own lives and of their surroundings, generated in them an enormous drive for knowledge and culture.

Marx had summed up the purpose of atheist propaganda against religion in these terms.

"Criticism has plucked the imaginary flowers on the chain not in order that man shall continue to bear that chain without fantasy or consolation, but so that he shall throw off the chain and pluck the living flower".

And so it was when the populist propagandists stripped away the illusions of the workers in their "Little Father", the Tsar, in the Church, in God, and in the ruling class. They unleashed an energetic need to understand and to know the truth.

This would be a great fermenting power in the Russian labour movement, as it has been in all labour movements – sharper self-awareness and



The 6 December 1876 protest by Zemlya i Volya (Land and Freedom) outside Kazan Cathedral in Petersburg was the first ever street demonstration in Russian history, and the first occasion when the red flag was shown in public. Georgi Plekhanov, aged 20, was a main organiser and made a brief speech before the police broke it up. 31 (out of a few hundred) demonstrators were arrested, many getting long sentences; Plekhanov managed to escape.

the sense of ignorance generating the drive for knowledge and leavening the economic and political struggles for working-class self-betterment.

Plekhanov commented:

"When I asked the workers themselves what exactly they wanted from revolutionary writings, I met with the most varied answers. In most cases each of them wanted a solution to those problems which for some reason were of special interest to my individual hearer at each particular moment.

"In the mind of workers such problems were increasingly enormously, and each had his favourite questions according to his own tendencies and character. One was particularly interested in the problem of God and claimed that revolutionary literature ought to use its energies mainly for destroying the religious beliefs of the people.

"Others were interested in historical or political problems, or in the natural sciences. Among my acquaintances in the factories, there was also one who was specially interested in the question of women".

Workers who became "educated" would become political and "self-motivating" populists. But there were other processes at work too.

In St Petersburg the more educated metalworkers predominated – those workers who were more distant from peasant roots. Elements of the typical town worker's contempt for the ignorant country bumpkin peasants would soon, even among workers who in general accepted the outlook of the populists, help workers define themselves as distinct from the peasants.

The emergence of Zemlya i Volya in 1876 was a product of harsh and sobering experience in the shambolic "going to the people" in 1874 and after. ZiV's solution was to rouse the peasants to revolt not for socialism, but, immediately, for "land and freedom".

ZiV helped organise the first working-class-initiated political demonstration, in St Petersburg, in the square of Our Lady of Kazan, on 6 December 1876, at which the 20 year old Plekhanov was the speaker, risking ten years hard labour if he were taken by the police.

On the morning of 6 December, perhaps 300 workers and a larger number of students and intellectuals gathered in the square, outside the church. Plekhanov shouted, "Long Live Land and Freedom!" Workers unfurled a big red banner with "Land and Freedom" written on it, and Plekhanov started to speak.

The police immediately attacked the demonstration, but the crowd stopped them seizing Plekhanov. A large number of demonstrators and bystanders were attacked and arrested.

Trial

In the ensuing trial, the court was savage with the intellectuals, but relatively lenient with the workers. The strange half-medieval character of the society in which the workers were laying the foundations of a great labour movement is shown in the sentences meted out to some of the workers. They were sent to serve a period of prayer in a Russian Orthodox monastery! Others were deported to Siberia.

By contrast, the intellectual Alexei Emelyanov got 15 years in jail, where he was flogged with such violence that he went mad and died in jail. Two other intellectuals got ten years' hard labour, and one six. But the workers' movement survived.

The populists could not but be poignantly aware of the sharp contrast between the mobility and combativity of the urban workers and the inertia in the countryside. Venturi quotes a reflective report for the leading layer of Zemlya i Volya written after Kazan Square. Its

continued on page 12 →

→ from page 11

author might be Plekhanov, but Venturi thinks probably not.

"The important result of the entire affair is the union that has now been brought about between the intelligentsia and the people". The author contrasted the workers with the liberals.

"The Russian liberals were very learned. They even knew that liberty had been conquered in the West. But obviously one ought not to try to apply this knowledge to Russia.

"Russia is led along the road to political freedom not by the liberals but by dreamers who organise ridiculous and childish demonstrations; by men who dare to break the law, by men who are beaten, sentenced and reviled.

"The Russian workers had shown themselves more united and compact because of the equality of their conditions; more developed because of the variety of their impressions of town life and because of their frequent and bitter conflicts with the representatives of the government and the ruling classes; and, finally, more open to socialist propaganda...

"The worker is always clearly aware of the injustice of the social regime that oppresses him... He can see that the luxury which is the work of his own hands is enjoyed by others. And so his mentality is attuned to demand a fight which will produce immediate results.

"He does not want to postpone the battle, but he wants to obtain (if not

everything he wants) at least as much as possible as can be obtained at that given time. He wants to make at least a breach in that order of things which has become unbearable for him.

"He wants to be a free man with the right to think and speak openly in accordance with his opinions. In fact he sees that to fight against his economic exploiters he must make use of what is called political freedom.

"But this freedom he will have to conquer and he will therefore have to enter into conflict with the very essence of our State system. His activities along the road to freedom inevitably take on a political character. The events of 6 December are the result of this state of mind among the most conscious of the

working classes".

The author concluded that the Kazan Square demonstration showed that in Russia, "the movement would follow the same direction as in the West, i.e. from the town to the country and not vice versa". Therefore the revolutionaries should organise the urban workers and win them over politically.

The ferment in the working class of St Petersburg and the surrounding region helped make this possible. There was a general revival of the working-class movement. It would culminate politically in the public proclamation of the Northern Union of Russian Workers at the end of 1878, at the height of a strike wave. □

Axelrod the pioneer

What became Bolshevism – that is, the organisation and ideas which led the Russian proletariat to the conquest of state power in 1917 – was the ultimate outcome of a whole series of previous Russian versions of Marxism, of successive self-definitions by groups of revolutionaries against what had existed before.

At the end of the 19th century revolutionary working-class Marxism had to define itself against the "Legal Marxism" of those like Peter Struve who took from Marxism the insistence, against the populists, that capitalism was an unavoidable stage in Russian history – and wound up as liberals, "worshipping" capitalism.

Those who published *Iskra* (*The Spark*) after 1900 – Plekhanov, Axelrod, Zasulich, Lenin, Martov, Potresov – defined themselves against the "Economist" tendency which, they argued, wanted to create a loose working-class movement politically subordinate to the liberal bourgeoisie.

The early Bolsheviks defined themselves against those "Mensheviks" who, in the 1905 revolution and, especially, after it, looked to the bourgeoisie for leadership in the struggle against Tsarism.

In early 1917, Lenin rallied those who would lead the October Revolution against those Bolshevik leaders (Stalin, Kamenev) who were imprisoned by the obsolete conceptions which they and Lenin had once shared.

There would be other, later,

examples. The first of those Marxist self-definitions against what had gone before was made by the Group for the Emancipation of Labour in 1883. It had to define itself against the populist socialists, many of whom, as we have seen, subscribed to the general Marxist material conception of history.

Against the idea of Russian socialism rooted in the peasant commune with its common ownership of land, the Group for the Emancipation of Labour counterposed the idea that Russian capitalism had developed, would develop, and would destroy the village commune; the way towards socialism in Russia was through a West-European-style proletarian labour movement.

The heavyweight literary work here was done by George Valentinovich Plekhanov. But Plekhanov's comrade Pavel Borisovich Axelrod was arguably the pathfinder, the first of those who would orient to the creation of a distinctively wage-worker political movement in Russia.

Among the leaders of the Russian Marxist movement, Axelrod was singular. Almost all the others came from the upper layers of society, from families of education and culture, riches or comparative riches, and an ordered place in the world.

Axelrod came from the lowest of the low, from a family of illiterate pauper Jews. His mother was intelligent and sensible, but entirely illiterate. His pious father could read the Hebrew prayers he recited, but

was illiterate in Russian. Born in 1849 or 1850, Pavel passed his early childhood in a one-room family hut. His father lacked the internal passport necessary to reside legally in the village where they lived, and went about forever afraid of the police. He borrowed money to start a tavern, and when it failed, was thereafter harassed by the usurers. The family moved around. They spent time in a poorhouse run by their Jewish community.

For the child Pavel there were things more damaging and more permanently scarring than those. In his autobiography, written when he was past 70, he recalled with horror the ingrained fawning, cringing subservience of people like his family towards anyone with the sartorial or other mark of being socially superior.

Then something more than a little like the plot of one of Charles Dickens' novels occurred. From the 1850s the Russian state provided some state schools for Jews, with the intention of alienating them from Judaism. Intent on saving their own sons from corruption in such places, some pious wealthier people in Axelrod's community provided clothes and food for starveling children to fill the Jewish quota in the unclean Russian school.

If Axelrod's pious father had not been away from home, he would most likely have rejected the offer to pay for Pavel's schooling. But in fact Axelrod's whole life was switched onto a different and unexpected track.

He went to school, and

moreover, though Jews could not be headteachers, the head teacher there was not a Christian bigot. He was very helpful and caring towards the boy.

At over 70, Axelrod could still recall the good feeling when he put on the clothes provided by his benefactors, the warm coat and the shoes, enjoying such things for the first time in his life.

After three years, the 12-year-old Axelrod went on his own to a strange town, passed the tests for entry, and enrolled in a higher school. He had neither money nor a place to live, nor, until an enlightened Jewish family of strangers provided it, the student uniform necessary for attending the school. He slept where he could, and scavenged for food.

Some of his teachers found him after-school work tutoring less accomplished boys, and the 12-year-old, with those small earnings, became better off than he had ever been before. But he stimulated the pupils to question things their parents believed in, and thereby lost the tutoring work.

Reading a book about astronomy led him to question his own religion. He remembered wrestling with his conscience and fervently praying to god to save him from leaving his faith. By the early 1870s he was a populist, a Bakuninist anarchist.

He spent time in Germany and there marvelled at the dignified, self-respecting workers he saw at meetings organised by the German Social Democracy. By contrast, in Russia, the lower reaches of the working



class had only – to use the words with which James Connolly described the condition of the "unskilled" workers of Dublin before Jim Larkin and the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union taught them to organise and fight – the arts of the lickspittle and the toady with which to defend themselves.

Though Axelrod remained an anarchist – and therefore a critic of the German Marxist Social Democratic movement – from that point on his outlook shifted.

He wanted a movement in Russia like the one he saw in Germany. In the still anarchist Black Redistribution group after 1879 he provoked a crisis by advocating the raising of social democratic "minimum" demands, long before the others were ready to turn to politics.

All through his life Axelrod would remain a herald and an advocate of working-class self-organisation. We will see, as the story is unfolded, what he thought that meant in practice. For in the formation of Menshevism, in contradistinction to what became Bolshevism, Axelrod was Lenin's most consistent opponent. □

Civil service pay down 15 to 38%

By a PCS member

Academic [research](#) commissioned by the civil service union PCS has concluded: "... UK Civil Service wages have dramatically eroded in real terms due to persistent below-inflation pay rises. Depending on the inflation indicator used, at best, real wages in 2023 were at where they were two decades ago... Since 2010, median annual pay has fallen between 15 and 38% in the civil service, depending on the grade and inflation indicator."

The Tories have no intention of seriously addressing either this deliberate reduction in real pay or the endemic low pay in the civil service and may be preparing to impose another below-inflation award.

In this situation, facing a potentially powerful, unified, [challenge](#) in the 2024 National Executive Committee (NEC) elections from the PCS Independent Left (IL) and other groups, the Left Unity "leadership" (LU) of PCS has decided that it must appear to be doing something about pay.

On 16 February PCS General Secretary, Fran Heathcote, [wrote](#) to the Government setting out PCS's National Pay Claim for 2024/25, including an inflation-proofed increase plus pay restoration; pay equality across the civil service on the best possible terms; and a living wage of £15 per hour. LU has also launched a truncated (20 February to 5 March) membership "survey" "to gauge support for the campaign" but with little notification to, or campaign

resources for, branch representatives.

In a 15 February video message about the 2024/25 demands, Heathcote again claimed that "...our industrial action [in 2023] was paused...to allow for talks to take place...at a delegated level...[and] also with the cabinet office around future pay strategy and pay coherence." But LU's eight months (and counting) "pause", when PCS abandoned all strike leverage, has resulted in weaknesses that PCS must now overcome in the fight for the 2024/25 claim:

Our demands for a 2022-23 10% consolidated increase, with a £15ph underpin, were abandoned without one consolidated penny added and the 2023/24 delegated bargaining level talks again resulted in below inflation "awards".

Members were very disappointed to do so badly across these two pay years.

The national talks have not resulted in one reported Tory concession.

Legal strike mandates were allowed to lapse and the strike levy ended.

The LU leadership has not even "propagandistically" campaigned on pay for the last eight months.

PCS must now legally win 50%+ majorities, and turn them out for effective strike action, in less advantageous circumstances.

LU is not qualified to meet these challenges. Serious activists must persuade members to fight for the 2024-25 claim while simultaneously building support for the IL-supported slate and developing the ability of branches to hold any and all PCS leaders to account. □

Belarus's 25 Feb election is rigged

By Dale Street

Parliamentary and local elections are being held in Belarus on 25 February. They are the first elections in Belarus since the rigged presidential election of 2020. The 25 Feb elections are even more rigged.

In 2020 Alexander Lukashenko was elected to his sixth term of office as President of Belarus. Every election, apart from his first in 1994, has been neither free nor fair.

Don't extradite Assange!

On 20 and 21 February, the High Court is considering whether to allow a final full appeal against extradition by Julian Assange. Assange is too ill, in jail, to attend. If his lawyers lose this time, he could be extradited to the USA. Facing prosecution there under the US's Espionage Act, because of his work with WikiLeaks to expose state machinations, he could face a long sentence.

Despite Assange being no sort of political hero, we must oppose his extradition and support his right to return home to Australia. □

In the run-up to the 2020 election most of Lukashenko's potential challengers were either ruled ineligible to stand or arrested and detained on trumped-up charges. Street and social media protests by opposition activists, journalists and bloggers saw around 1,300 people detained in the run-up to the election.

Lukashenko denounced the protests as a plot by America and/or NATO to destabilise the country.

In the evening of election day Lukashenko was declared winner. He had supposedly won over 80% of the vote, and Tsikhanouskaya, his only serious opponent, a mere 10%. The manifestly implausible election result, buttressed by multiple reports of election irregularities and ballot rigging, triggered the biggest protests in the history of Belarus.

Police used truncheons, water cannons, stun grenades, and mass detentions of some 35,000 people to quell the protests. By late 2021 the Belarusian authorities had succeeded in driving the opposition off the streets.

A new wave of repression began in early 2022, partly in response to opposition to Lukashenko's support for Putin's invasion of Ukraine, and partly in response to opposition to a referendum on constitutional changes designed to cement – even further – Lukashenko's grip on power.

Over 800 anti-war protestors were arrested in February alone, the month in which Putin launched his invasion. Heavy prison sentences were imposed on the "Railway Partisans", accused of sabotaging rail lines to hold up Russian troops ordered to invade Ukraine from the north.

The maximum penalty for preparing or committing acts of terrorism – a catch-all charge used by the regime not just against the "Railway Partisans" but against many dissident activists in general – was increased from 20 years imprisonment to the death penalty.

The referendum on constitutional changes, held the same month as Putin's invasion, was a sham, and its result a foregone conclusion.

Campaigning for a No vote was not permitted. Workers were threatened with dismissal if they failed to vote, in line with opposition calls for a boycott. And "monitoring" of the referendum was conducted virtually solely by observers from Russia and other countries allied with Putin.

Five months later, in July, all independent trade unions and trade union federations in Belarus were banned by the Supreme Court, leaving the Lukashenko-loyal Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus (FPB) as the sole nominal "trade union" body.

The independent trade un-

ions had long been a target for suppression by Lukashenko.

They had been active in the campaigning of 2020/21, they had exposed the role played by the pro-Lukashenko and pro-employer FPB in workplaces, and they had issued anti-war statements condemning Lukashenko for allowing Putin to use Belarus as a base for his invasion of Ukraine.

The government has absolute control over the mainstream media and owns the country's only internet provider. Authorities routinely threaten, harass, arrest, detain and imprison critics of Lukashenko's rule. Freedom of assembly and freedom of association are so restricted as to be non-existent.

In recent years 971 organisations – human rights groups, lawyers' associations, independent media, and even amateur theatres – have been outlawed. Nearly 200 groups and 4,000 individuals are classed as "extremist".

There are currently around 1,500 political prisoners in Belarus. Torture in police stations and prisons is widespread, and forced labour by convicted prisoners even more so.

In preparation for the elections the Belarusian authorities have carried out a "re-registration" of political parties. Of the fifteen parties active in early 2023, only four have been re-registered. All four – including the Belarusian Communist

Party – are pro-government.

Repression has increased in the run-up the elections. In a wave of mass detentions by law enforcement agencies in January, about 200 people were detained across the country.

Photographing ballot papers is now illegal. Voting booths are open, not private. The turnout threshold for elections has been scrapped. There will be no voting abroad, i.e. in Belarusian Embassies. (In 2020 Tsikhanouskaya came out on top in virtually all votes in Belarusian Embassies.) □

• Abridged. More: bitly/bel-r

More online

Lula on Hamas

A wrong comparison
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The genocide label

Ben Tausz responds
bit.ly/gen-slo

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The Armenian genocide
bit.ly/par-bey

Can Atalay

MP removed from seat
bit.ly/can-at

Two "Word4Word"s

"Bog-standard" and "mau-mauing": bit.ly/bog-s
bit.ly/mau-m

What we stand for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

• workersliberty.org/join-awl

Help us raise £15,000 by 6 July!

Workers' Liberty supporters were out on the streets at both the Gaza demonstration and the Workers Against the CCP protest at the Apple Store in London on 17 February. Our sales were OK and included some for our new pamphlet dissecting Stop the War's record on Ukraine.

With £15 from John and £120 in other donations we are still some way behind where we need to be in our fund drive. Total so far £278. □

• Donate at workersliberty.org/fund

Coming to see how to fight for a future



Diary of a trackworker

By Matt Shaw

When I joined the railway industry in 1979 I had already experienced some of the more obvious problems with capitalism. A childhood in the east end of Sheffield in the 1960s was full of almost stereotypical images: steel works, lack of open green spaces, pollution from the furnaces, and chemical pollution in the local canal.

There was a strike at the nearest engineering firm, with meetings taking place at the entrance and the occasional speaker from what I can only assume was the Communist Party (CP). My mates and I took the piss as young kids do, but after a while I started listening to what he was saying and in my very youthful way (I was about nine), it started to make some sort of sense.

I never followed it up with the CP, but it started me thinking about what my parents had to put up with in their

everyday lives, and how unfair it was to them and the other families around in the rows of terraces. At that point I didn't think so much of unfairness to myself, since all the other kids around had similar conditions to me.

Fast forward to my leaving school in 1977. I had no particular career aims and drifted into a couple of low-grade semi-clerical jobs until 1979, when I applied for an entry-level job on British Rail.

The pay was poor, but surprisingly, the feeling of belonging to something worth fighting for was instilled in you by the blend of post-war optimism from the older guys and the fact that some people were a bit more worked-out in their thinking. It was not management who had sole charge over what went off.

None of that was organised in any sort of way. The union at that time (the National Union of Railwaymen, NUR, which in 1990 merged into RMT) was controlled by a combination of right wing careerists, bureaucrats, and the Communist Party. That was my first experience of the CP in action, or should I say inaction. They said much but ac-

tually achieved nothing, the right-wingers and full-timers running rings around them.

I attended a few union branch meetings, but with no clear idea what needed to be done.

Fortunately for me, I met another worker, Rob, who had given a lot more time and thought to how the world worked. He took the time to chat, and soon my raft of vague thoughts and ideas started to make some sort of sense. More importantly, I began to see how we could go about actually getting other people interested.

There was no "road to Damascus" conversion, but more of a patient education in organising and what could be called the classic Marxist texts.

Our labours inside our union branch brought some successes and some failures, but the basic ideas from our discussions hold as firm for me today as they did back then.

The only force capable of making the change in society to a socialist order is the working class, and that change should be by our own hands, not given as some sort of beneficence from on high. □

Ridley Scott's Napoleon



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

At the end of the credits of *Napoleon*, there is a brief dedication for Lulu, Ridley Scott's dog. My guess is that the poor mutt died of shame after watching this pile of dross.

It is difficult to think of anything positive to say about *Napoleon*. That is surprising, given Scott's previous offerings include *Blade Runner*, *Thelma and Louise*, and *Gladiator*. The French Rev-

olution is portrayed as only an orgy of ritualised sadistic murder. Napoleon's victory at the battle of Toulon is said to have fixed his military reputation, although his much greater success in the Italian campaign (ignored in the film) was more important in the long run.

His expedition to Egypt provides some opportunity for impressive scenery, with pyramids popping up everywhere, and gives scope for Josephine to demonstrate her infidelity while he is away. His relationship with Josephine is portrayed as the bedrock of Napoleon's life. Even if that is true, the



first scene when they meet, when Josephine spreads her legs in front of him, is tacky to put it mildly.

Joaquin Phoenix, no doubt a good actor, can't do anything with the second-rate

material he has to work with. As an antidote, look at Rod Steiger's excellent performance as Napoleon in Sergei Bondarchuk's *Waterloo* (1970). □



Join junior doctors' pickets!

By Sacha Ismail

Junior doctors in England will strike again for five days from 24 to 28 February, the tenth round of strikes in their fight for "pay restoration" – a real-terms pay rise and clear timetable to restore the real value of their pay to its 2008 level.

As *Solidarity* went to press, junior doctors in Wales were due to strike 21-24 February. Junior doctors in Northern Ireland will strike, for the first time in this dispute, 6-7 March.

The British Medical Association (BMA) is rebalancing its junior doctor members in England to extend its legal strike mandate under the anti-trade union laws for another six months. That vote runs to 15 April. This time the ballot includes the right to take "Action Short of a Strike", which is not affected by the new Minimum Service Levels (MSL) law – though BMA leaders are also implying they will not shy away from further strikes too.

Unlike on the railways and in the fire service, no official regulations under the MSL law have yet been announced for the NHS, so the law cannot yet be used. The BMA is being pressured for voluntary local arrangements, and discussing how to respond to the situation. Already some hospital trusts and NHS England itself have sought to abuse the system for "derogations" – union-agreed strike exemptions for some doctors – in order to undermine the strike.

Junior doctors' strikes already have emergency cover inbuilt, with consultants (senior doctors) covering their junior colleagues' work. There is a possibility the government will seek to go well beyond that to include elective – pre-planned, non-urgent operations, appointments and tests – in the minimum service requirement.

Junior doctors' fighting spirit remains high: the recent Northern Ireland ballot registered a 97.6% yes vote on a 63.7% turnout.

The wider movement must start rallying to support them with similar determination. □

Trust rules out "work notices": make others do the same

By an NEU teacher in a United Learning school

Schools Week has [announced](#) that United Learning (UL), the largest Academy Trust in England, operating 89 schools and employing 7,000 staff, has stated it will not use the Minimum Service Law (MSL) to issue "work notices" instructing staff to strike-break.

The Trust is quoted as saying that use of the law would "damage industrial relations and harm [their] image as an employer". Use of the law would make it "impossible to retain the goodwill and discretionary effort of staff; harder to retain staff; and the reputational im-

pact would make it harder to attract new staff... In the end, this would have a more negative impact on children and parents than the strikes themselves."

The Trust describes the MSL as "wrong in principle and in its details likely to be self-defeating in practice."

Employers are not required to issue work orders under the MSL. UL state it is "inconceivable that any employer will in fact choose to do so."

That is, in the context of schooling in 2024, a rational management policy and a damning rebuke to the government. UL adds that the idea of a minimum service level was not one that could be "coherently applied to

schools". A National Education Union (NEU) official informed me that: "The union did not have a role to play in UL's MSL position and we have not been privy to their reasoning."

"As far as we are aware they are the first Trust to make this commitment."

It is essential that the NEU now press every one of the Academy Trusts to make a similar commitment.

Activists and reps must not leave this work to officials and union leaders, this is work we should press for right now, using the precedent created by UL as a lever to get similar pledges across the sector. □

Northumbria university cuts

By a Northumbria uni student

Northumbria University has announced £12.5 million cuts from its staffing budget. The University and College Union (UCU) has [declared](#) a dispute and is

running an indicative strike ballot which will end on 27 February.

The students' union, however, has refused to sign a joint UCU-Unison statement, and has scolded one of the UCU officers for fearmongering. It wants to avoid "an

immediate worry among the student body, who may not be impacted by this situation".

Anti-cuts

Northumbria Against Cuts is [launching](#), with plans for leafleting and posterling on

campus, announcements in lectures, and a meeting in March once the indicative ballot.

Cuts, and anti-cuts groups, are also developing at Sheffield Hallam, Oxford Brookes, and Aberdeen universities. □

Couriers out again on 23 Feb

By Michael Baker

On 23 February, from 5 to 10pm, food couriers will be taking their third day of strike action this month over low pay and poor working conditions.

The strikes have been organised by Delivery Job UK, a group largely run through social media, popular among Brazilian delivery drivers in particular. Strikes on 2 and 14 February were patchy by area, but impressive in many places, with hundreds of couriers stopping services and Deliveroo offering astronomically high prices for scabs



to break the strike. Action on the 14th brought dozens of drivers directly outside the house of Will Shu, Deliveroo co-founder, to demand a £5 minimum fee per delivery (the price can currently go as low as £1.90).

Deliveroo's response shows that the strike is clearly touching a nerve. Emails to restaurants have recommended turning off the app during the strike period, and the company encouraged restaurants to report "anti-social behaviour" and "loitering" to the police – implicitly encouraging strikebreaking tactics. The strike on the 14th saw police [guarding](#) dark kitchens in order to ensure deliveries continued uninterrupted by picketing.

The need for strikes is apparent: drivers are being paid [amounts](#) per delivery that make even reaching minimum wage a gruelling ordeal. The opaque algorithm used to allocate orders to drivers means that it is often impossible to find out the reasoning for changed rates of pay or to complain. Uber's CEO recently [admitted](#) to investors that the

algorithm identifies drivers likely to accept lower wages and adjusts their pricing accordingly – something it has previously denied doing.

To win their demands, strikers will need to work more with a union that can negotiate and spread the action. The IWGB has been playing a supportive role in publicising and building the strikes. Deliveroo signed a recognition deal with the GMB eighteen months ago (as the IWGB was campaigning for recognition), but the GMB has taken little to no action in support of couriers, and has stayed silent on the current strikes.

Workers' Liberty has been leafleting couriers, encouraging drivers to join the IWGB and spread the strike for it to win. □

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How to beat antisemitism

By Daniel Randall

Nick Griffin has [endorsed](#) George Galloway in the upcoming Rochdale by-election. What unites Griffin, the fascist, and Galloway, the self-proclaimed anti-fascist, is that both see “anti-Zionism” as a starting point from which an entire worldview can be developed. For both, “Zionism” is a world-shaping power.

“Free Palestine and Britain from Zionism”, says Griffin’s Twitter profile. The musician and activist Lowkey, who has shared many platforms with Galloway, presents a [video](#) hosted by Double Down News purporting to “expose” Israel’s “secret role” in “controlling key functions of our intelligence and police services”. The first target in the video is Infosys, an Indian company; the fact it has Israeli subsidiaries and employees is enough to render it part of Israel’s web of international control.

Labour ditched Azhar Ali, its candidate in Rochdale, after comments Ali made in a Lancashire Labour meeting were picked up by the press. Ali claimed Israel deliberately “allowed” Hamas’s 7 October attacks to get a pretext for bombing Gaza.

Israel redeployed forces from the Gaza border to act as security for armed settlers in the West Bank, hobbling its ability to respond swiftly to Hamas’s attack. Maybe frontline reports that Hamas was preparing were dismissed. But imperial hubris is not the same as deliberately “allowing” the attack to happen.

Such claims feed, and are fed by, the idea that “Zionism” pulls strings behind the scenes to such an extent that even Hamas attacks can ultimately be attributed to Israel. Other comments by Ali were even more explicitly antisemitic. He claimed the recent suspension of Andy McDonald MP was the result of influence from “certain Jewish quarters in the media”, promoting an idea of all-pervasive Jewish power.

Racialised antisemitism, casting Jews as biologically subhuman, is now relatively rare. It remains dangerous despite that rarity. And antisemitism in varied forms still impels violence. In Britain in the



last year, antisemitic assaults [rose by 96%](#).

Those actual assaults were only 6% of *antisemitic incidents overall*. The primary threat posed by antisemitism in Britain is more of ideological abuse than physical attacks. Anti-Zionism is not necessarily antisemitic. But those “anti-Zionisms” where “Zionism” is held to be a conspiracy by Jews for world domination are antisemitic. And such forms of “anti-Zionism” have currency, including on the left.

If not confronted, antisemitic ideology will poison the left, miseducating activists, sending them down conspiracist rabbit-holes hunting for the hidden hand of “Zionist” power, rather than organising to resist real capitalist class exploitation, in the name of freedom and equality for all.

Where antisemitism poses a physical threat, it must be confronted physically. But where it exists mainly as ideology, it must be confronted primarily through a campaign of political education.

The Labour leadership’s “solution” to antisemitism is no good: just bans and exclusions, while positively discouraging debate and education, rarely promoting discussion on exactly how statements like Ali’s are antisemitic, and discrediting the whole enterprise by deploying the bans and exclusions arbitrarily and factionally. Workers’ Liberty has been working for political education against antisemitism, including left antisemitism, for decades, long before Keir Starmer said anything about it. Join us in our efforts! □

After Putin murders Navalny

By Michael Baker

Nobody should be surprised that Alexey Navalny, erstwhile leader of the anti-Putin opposition in Russia, died in prison on 16 Feb, long before his 20-year sentence was up. The Federal Penitentiary Service published a report (a mere two minutes after his official time of death) stating that he had “felt unwell after a walk and almost immediately lost consciousness”, and did not respond to attempts to revive him.

Navalny had been in prison since January 2021 on charges of “extremism”, a feeble attempt to justify his immediate arrest upon arriving back in the country after a failed assassination attempt by the FSB, Russia’s Federal Security Service and heir of the Stalinist KGB. In December 2023, he was transferred to Penal Colony 3, in the Arctic Circle.

Russian prison is a horrifically brutal institution at the best of times. Prisoners arrested on spurious grounds with little recourse to justice die in captivity on a regular basis. Even then, Navalny’s sentence was harsher than most. OVD-Info [report](#) that of his 32 months in prison, he spent 290 days in “SHIZO” – a particularly harsh form of solitary confinement. He was denied food, lost a lot of weight and for weeks at a time was denied access to meetings with his lawyer or family.

Arrest

The first arrest of a protestor after Navalny’s death took just a couple of hours – a woman carrying a placard in Murmansk was arrested early on the afternoon of the 16th. The Russian state prosecution service has pre-emptively warned citizens against taking part in unsanctioned protests. Demonstrations have been called in cities around the world, and statements of support for Navalny and anger at Putin have been coming in a steady stream since the announcement was made.

Outrage and upset at the cruelty of the Russian state and the death of yet another Russian oppositionist is entirely justified. Navalny’s predecessor, Boris Nemtsov, was shot on a bridge in Moscow in 2015. This death is the latest in a long line of Putin’s opponents to have met similar fates; constant and bloody setbacks to any organised movement against the Russian leader

are forming a depressing cycle.

Anger should not prevent us from keeping a clear head: as *Solidarity* has [said consistently](#), despite his evident charisma, Navalny’s politics were concerning. He had a streak of racist nationalism that he explicitly refused to renounce, and no plan for addressing the roots of Russian oligarchy and mass inequality beyond rallying people against “corruption”. That is a famously slippery term in post-Soviet Eastern European politics. Once upon a time, Alexander Lukashenko was elected as the “anti-corruption” candidate in Belarus.

Movement

In protests against Navalny’s arrest, and the anti-war movement that Navalny spurred on from the courtroom, the thousands who participated were a bigger and more politically diverse force than Navalny’s own politics. As we [reported](#) at the time, many who participated in those protests did not see Navalny as central to them, and were fighting instead for a positive vision of a freer Russia, a Russia that did not invade its neighbours, and did not imprison its political opposition.

This movement can, and should, live on after Navalny. □

• More inside: Eric Lee’s column, p.7

Join Workers’ Liberty!

Want to be part of an organised long-haul collective effort to spread the socialist ideas you read in *Solidarity*, and to link together activities in diverse campaigns and conflicts around that consistent socialist thread? Then take some copies of *Solidarity* to sell each week, and contact us to discuss joining Workers’ Liberty, the group that produces and sustains this paper. Check it out and contact us via workersliberty.org/join-awl □



Solidarity

For a workers' government

СОЛІДАРНІСТЬ З УКРАЇНОЮ! SOLIDARITY WITH UKRAINE!

By Dan Katz

Ukraine is the victim of Putin's murderous, Russian-imperialist aggression. Ukraine is right to fight to defend its democracy and its right to self-determination. The international left and labour movement has an obligation to make solidarity with Ukraine.

The full-scale war which began two years ago, on 24 February 2022, has led to 22,000 civilian deaths. 5.1mn people are internally displaced. 6.2mn have fled Ukraine.

The US suggested that by summer 2023 the total number of deaths, on both sides, amounted to around 500,000. A staggering waste of life.

18% of Ukraine is still occupied by Russia. In the occupied areas Russia has abolished elected authorities, arrested and tortured many hundreds of anti-occupation activists, kidnapped Ukrainian children, and driven trade union organisation and political opposition underground.

The current estimate is that rebuilding Ukraine will cost \$500bn. In Ukraine 20% are unemployed and GDP is 25% lower than before the invasion of February 2022.

Within Ukraine the class struggle continues, of course. Endemic corruption impedes

the war effort and official politics is dominated by pro-capitalist parties.



Class

Ukraine's working class, elderly and the poor are impacted most by the invasion and Ukrainian government policies.

The rich have money to bribe their way out of armed service, and find it easier to go abroad. The government aims to reform the Labour Code to allow longer hours at work, shorter holidays, and to make it easier for bosses to sack workers.

Viktoriia Pihul from the Ukrainian socialist organisation Sotsialnyi Rukh (Social Movement) argues that the government's priorities are unfair and damage the war effort. "Wealth that exceeds the norm needed for a decent life should be confiscated. Progressive taxation should be introduced."

Workers' Liberty stands with Ukraine against Russian occupation and terror, and with the Ukrainian workers against the Ukrainian oligarchs and capitalist politicians.

In the UK we fight for the rights of refugees from Ukraine. We demand Ukrainians in the UK should be fully supported by the British state and integrated into the British trade unions. Following the 2023 TUC Congress the British union movement is now committed to make solidarity with Ukraine.

Workers' Liberty stands for international workers' unity.

Join us and fight for Ukraine! Fight for democracy and workers' power! □