

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

WHAT A WORKERS' GOVERNMENT WOULD DO

- » **Public ownership, democratic control**
- » **Tax the rich, rebuild NHS**
- » **Green conversion**

See inside

Tata: nationalise, not subsidise

Unions ballot for strikes
to save steel industry
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Our demands and a workers' government



Shadow chancellor Rachel Reeves has responded to Jeremy Hunt's 6 March budget by saying that things will be difficult under a Labour government and she may "have to" cut public spending.

Hunt made some tax cuts – 2% off national insurance – scooped Labour's plan to end the "non-domiciled" tax exemption for rich people, and squared it all with the "fiscal rules" by projecting public spending cuts in years ahead. Reeves makes dogma of no tax rises on the rich other than ending a few loopholes. So, "do the math", as they say...

A first answer to Reeves was given by Andrew Harrop of the Labour-right Fabian Society: "Labour will easily find other ways to raise taxes on wealthy people who pay too little".

Raising enough in more taxes from the rich and well-off to meet immediate demands is "easy" in arithmetic terms.

The Tax Justice Foundation offers [measures](#) which between them would raise £50 billion a year. The main items are a small wealth tax, taxing capital gains at the same rate as income tax, and levying national insurance on investment income as well as wages.

The context: total UK output is reckoned at £2,700 billion a year. Government spending is about £1,200 billion (some double-counting there, when the income-tax part of public sector workers' pay passed only from one section of government to another).

Looking at it in class terms, something like £800 billion of that £2,700 billion goes to the basic working class (bottom 80% of households), around £500 billion to a well-off but not rich 15%, £350 billion to the top 5%, £450 billion to the expansion of capital, and

£500 billion in government purchases (some of it stuff for the NHS, some of it weapons...) Of the income of the rich and big business, £40 billion is bank profits (2022), and £90 billion dividend payments (2023).

The BMA calls for about £7 billion a year more on the NHS. Campaigners want another £2 to £3 bn for schools, £8 bn for adult social care. It would cost about £2 bn to restore the early-years SureStart programme, and about £0.5 billion to restore libraries. Still enough "headroom" to cover the withdrawn promise of £28 bn a year on green conversion.

It is "easy", except that Reeves pledges to be "pro-business". It is a question of class, working class versus "business" class.

The first item on the agenda of the fight for a workers' government is to rouse the labour movement so it forces a Labour government to tax the rich to rebuild public services.

That's far from the full agenda.

A labour movement capable of winning those tax rises must also be pushing to restore its *capacity to win*. It will demand the repeal of all the anti-strike laws, the Thatcher-era ones as well as the Trade Union Act 2016 and the Minimum Service Law which Starmer says he will repeal.

It will demand restoration of civil liberties, with repeal of all the anti-protest laws back to the Public Order Act 1986 at least, and full control of the police by democratic local authorities. It will demand full rights for migrants, open borders, free movement, and reversal of Brexit.

It will demand scrapping tuition fees, restoring further education, opening up higher education much more to entrants from workplaces, scrapping GCSE and SATs, turning education from an exam-factory, credential-chasing business into human expansion.

It will demand much more on green conversion than the £28 billion plan. Public ownership of the whole energy industry. A rundown of North Sea oil and gas, on the "just transition" path outlined in the union-backed ["Our Power"](#) report. A switch to renewables and nuclear.

Electrification of everything. Large and rapid expansion of the electricity grid (the first bottleneck at present to feeding in power from renewables). Expansion of rail and rail freight. Insulation and heating-conversion (to heat

pumps) of housing; building of new, denser, energy-efficient, shared-facilities housing.

The energy industry needs public ownership and democratic control; so do all the other utilities, rail, Royal Mail, water. Workers' control at workplace level in all this.

To even begin winning that will need a transformed labour movement: unions which organise the unorganised and where officials operate on workers' wages and under democratic control of a confident membership, a Labour Party where we win regular democratic control by the unions and local Labour Parties. The fight for a workers' government is not only, and not even primarily, a business of writing wish-lists. The fight for each demand is also a fight to transform the labour movement by making it able to win that demand.

Moves

A government which moves some distance along that road will face "flight of capital", as the Mitterrand government in France did in the early 1980s, or the Swedish Social-Democrats around 1990; or "constitutional" sabotage, like the Whitlam Labor government in Australia, "sacked" by the Governor-General in 1975; or even counter-revolution by armed forces, as happened in Chile in 1973 and was threatened by some officers in Britain in 1974.

The labour movement will have to win public ownership and democratic control over the whole of high finance, thus recouping a large part of the £100 bn a year currently paid out as interest on government IOUs, and gaining the capacity for democratic control of investment allocation. It will have to organise its own self-defence groups, and press for the replacement of the "professional" army by a democratic citizens' militia.

In a closely-entwined capitalist world, radical economic measures really will prosper only if extended on at least a continental scale.

The demands are not to be thought of as a list. Rather, a chain or web of ideas, with a movement which grows in strength being able to escalate from each one to others in a criss-cross pattern. The idea here is what the Marxists of a hundred years ago called ["transitional demands"](#).

We do not stop at what seems "realistic" now as what the labour movement, with some effort, might wring out of a



Starmer government. Nor, on the other side, do we construct an "ideal" list of what we want done "after the revolution". We are, so to speak, among the lower "rungs" of the chain now. As we go on, the job of Marxists, as Lenin put it, is "at each particular moment to find the particular link in the chain which you must grasp with all your might... to prepare firmly for the transition to the next link". Only very approximately can we even predict the "starting" links: those depend on how, where, on what occasions, workers stir into struggle.

Commending a programme of the French Workers' Party, Marx wrote that it "solely of demands that actually have spontaneously arisen out of the labour movement itself" (letter to Sorge, 5 November 1880).

"Spontaneous" here is of course relative: whenever a demand appears, someone must first have voiced it. The point is that Marxists listen to the labour movement. We listen for the demands which express its best impulses and hopes, and develop them. We are also the "memory of the class": we "remember" (by studying history) the demands which have emerged as most fruitful in analogous situations in the past. We don't always have to wait until someone else suggests them anew.

We need a workers' government because only by working-class struggle can the blight of capitalism be lifted. A government cannot become a workers' government by anointment or decree: it has to be *made* a workers' government, through stages of struggle.

We do not wait for a workers' government to do things for us. The question is what we *can do*, at first to force concessions even from a self-proclaimed "pro-business" government, and then, as fast as we can, as patiently as we need to, to transform the labour movement to enable it to generate a whole different sort of government. □

Solidarity 704

Solidarity 704 will be out on 3 April, not 27 March, because it's difficult to get good paper distribution across the Easter weekend. This issue, *Solidarity* 703, would normally have been out on 13 March, but we had to skip a week because of multiple staff illnesses. □



“Standing Together” and Gaza

By Ira Berkovic

On 7 and 13 March, the left-wing social movement Standing Together organised direct-action aid convoys, bringing food and other essential supplies donated by Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel, to the Kerem Shalom Gaza border crossing.

On both occasions, the convoys were blocked by police and the military. Standing Together activists had expected to be blocked; their action was principally symbolic, aimed at raising the profile inside Israel of the intense humanitarian crisis facing the people of Gaza, and adding to the atmosphere of pressure on the Israeli state to address it.

Standing Together said: “The police and the army are continuing to not let us get to the border with Gaza with our aid convoy, despite allowing extremists protesting against aid coming into Gaza to reach the border over the past few weeks. We must resist starvation and the collective punishment of a civilian population, and say no to an endless war.”

These convoys are symbolic so far, with less immediate effect than diplomatic pressure. But a movement built from such symbolic actions today can be decisive longer-term.

The USA has increased its own aid-provision operations, coordinating air drops with the Jordanian air force and announcing plans to construct a temporary port for aid deliveries via sea. Under substantial American and international pressure, Israel has now claimed it is “trying” to “flood [Gaza] with humanitarian aid.” It says it will open up new crossings on the Gaza border.

Where global anti-war movements

and mobilisations in solidarity with the Palestinians place demands directly on the USA and other governments, they generally take the form of demanding governments support calls for a ceasefire, and withdraw military aid to Israel, rather than focusing on the provision of aid. But the USA and other powers could do more, much more, to increase the provision of aid even further. Solidarity movements should demand they do so.

Demanding “our”, and other, governments support calls for a ceasefire remains vital. Although few states now say they oppose a ceasefire, the US has continued to use its UN Security Council veto to block the adoption of an unambiguous pro-ceasefire position there.

The call for the USA to withdraw military aid to Israel is also important and necessary. The left should, though, be clear about the limits of that demand, even if it were to be won. It is not a cure-all. It is not a substitute for solidarity with mobilisations on the ground for peace, mutual recognition, a democratic settlement (“two states”), and workers’ unity.

One of many contradictory aspects of how much of the far left thinks about Israel is that it is often presented as far more powerful than it actually is, with “Zionists” internationally seen as controlling the foreign policy of other countries, but equally often as a mere client, or even a semi-colony, of the USA, simply doing America’s bidding and able to carry out its military actions only thanks to American aid.

Israel is not doing America’s bidding now; the regional and global instability caused by Israel’s war on Gaza and its still-live risk of spreading to wider war are by no means in the interests of US imperialism.,

Also, Israel is a net exporter of arms. Its military is not immediately reliant on US aid or supplies. Even a total arms embargo by the US, whilst an important gesture, would not prevent Israel from prosecuting its war. Such an embargo would be a diplomatic statement, even if an important one.

Writing in the Israeli newspaper *Ha’aretz*, journalist Anshel Pfeffer says that America could “delay the supply of F-35s [fighter jets], of which the Israel Air Force has 50 on order, with about half a dozen not yet delivered. These are big-ticket items, and keeping them back is a big statement. [But] it would have little if any impact on the war in Gaza, where the stealth fighters are hardly an essential weapon system for attacking Hamas, which doesn’t have much in the way of anti-aircraft defenses that the F-35 was designed to evade. At the most, withholding the last batch of F-35s would cause some prob-

lems in the IAF’s training and maintenance schedules.”

Pfeffer recalls that the USA imposed an arms embargo on Israel in 1981, when Ronald Reagan’s administration suspended delivery of F-16 fighter jets to Israel after an Israeli raid on a nuclear reactor in Iraq, which violated the airspace of US allies Jordan and Saudi Arabia. Reagan also restricted military aid to Israel in an attempt to pressure it to withdraw its troops from Beirut, Lebanon. Those US actions did not stop Israel making war in Lebanon.

It does not follow that all such measures are irrelevant. It was US pressure which pushed Israel to withdraw from Sinai in 1957-8 and again in 1979-82. However, a sober assessment of Israel’s military capability suggests that international anti-war and solidarity movements should focus more on solidarity with the anti-war and anti-occupation left – made up of both Palestinians and Jews – within Israel.

Sharpening social and political struggle within Israel itself may contribute more to the collapse of the Netanyahu regime than increased international diplomatic pressure.

On 9 March, a speaker at a large anti-Netanyahu protest in Tel Aviv said: “Nothing interests Bibi [Netanyahu], not the hostages, not the evacuees, not the starving Palestinians in Gaza. Only Bibi interests Bibi.” Thus far, the mainstream anti-Netanyahu and anti-government protests have tended not to address the question of Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians. For a speaker to name the issue is sign of small but important progress for efforts by Standing Together and others to persuade anti-Netanyahu protestors to join the dots between Netanyahu’s domestic policies and Israel’s occupation and wars.

Veteran Israeli leftist Adam Keller, interviewed recently in *Solidarity*, once ran a bulletin entitled *The Other Israel*. Part of Keller’s aim was to show the international left that Israeli society was



not a monolith, that it was itself a site of struggle, that there were Israelis resisting the wars, occupation, and racism of the state. There are few more direct symbols of those struggles today than the contrasting images of actions by Israeli citizens around the Gaza border: the far-right settlers who mobilise to attempt to block aid, and the left-wing solidarity activists who mobilise to attempt to provide it.

The Palestinians are an oppressed people, and they have a right to resist that oppression whatever the level of support they have in Israeli society at a given time. No principle obliges them to wait for Israeli support before they demand fundamental rights of self-determination and equality. But in fact the prospect of success for such struggles will be greatly increased if the Palestinians can mobilise the support of Israeli allies. The segment of the Palestinian people most free to act politically and most able to wield politico-economic leverage is, paradoxically, the Palestinian population within Israel and East Jerusalem.

The hope for a future based on equality and democracy in the region therefore rests substantially on whether the “Other Israel” represented by movements like Standing Together, currently a small minority, can make itself hegemonic. □

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. • ukfost.co.uk

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



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](#).

Thursday 21 March, 3pm: Tubeworker meeting: 40 years after the miners’ strike

Tuesday 26 March, 6.30pm: Do we need a revolution, The Lost Wanderer, 46 Leazes Park Rd, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 4PG, UK

Thursday 28 March, 7.00pm: James Connolly and the 1916 Easter Rising, Friends Meeting House, 22 School Ln, Liverpool L1 3BT

Thursday 11 April, 8.00pm: Theses on Feuerbach: study group, Zoomlink bit.ly/thu-8

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



Textile workers strike in Egypt



Eric Lee

The 3,700 female workers in the Mahalla textile factories were furious. The Egyptian president, Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, had earlier in the month raised the minimum wage to 6,000 Egyptian pounds – the equivalent of just £100. That's £100 *per month*. But workers in the state-owned companies, including Mahalla, were exempted from the pay increase.

The decision by the El-Sisi government to raise wages was due to the increasingly severe cost-of-living crisis in the country. In January 2024, the government raised prices of electricity, metro tickets and telecommunications services in an attempt to get a grip on a growing budget deficit. Their efforts were praised, as one would expect, by the International Monetary Fund.

The women at Mahalla de-

cided to go on strike. Their initial demand was to be given the same pay as every other worker in the country.

They took their protest to a Ramadan Expo which was attended by the regional governor, Dr. Tarek Rahmi. They shouted slogans at him, forcing him to flee the area. Workers were later prevented from leaving the factory, locked behind the gates. When news of this got out, workers from other factories joined the women on strike. The strike was spreading.

As peaceful protests continued, both Mahalla's management and the Egyptian government refused to negotiate. Eventually, the Minister in charge of the public sector companies agreed to raise the minimum wage to that just granted to the private sector workers, but by then the workers' demands had grown. They wanted, among other things, a meal allowance equal to £15.

Nevertheless, the strike



Trade unionists protest in Egypt

ended on 29 February – but then the dispute turned nasty. Thirteen workers were arrested by the security services, two of whom remain in custody – Wael Mohamed Mahmoud Abu Zoueid and Mohamed Mahmoud Tolba Hussein.

And incredibly some of those workers were threatened with dismissal for being absent from work – at a time when they were in police custody!

The Center for Trade Unions and Workers Services (CTUWS), which has been campaigning in support of Egypt's independent trade unions since its founding in 1990, has launched a campaign on LabourStart. The campaign calls on the company's management to release the two workers still in custody, stop further arrests and false charges against workers. The CTUWS points out that the ac-

tions of the company and the government are in breach of the International Labour Organisation's conventions, to which Egypt is a signatory.

The campaign can be found at bit.ly/ctuws and deserves wide support in the British and international labour movements. □

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

Singer with a tin ear



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

The singer Charlotte Church seems to be a very well meaning person – probably a pacifist – with a record of support for a range of progressive and humanitarian causes.

At the end of February she took part in a concert at the Bedwas Workman's Hall near Caerphilly, to raise money for the Middle East Children's Alliance, an aid organisation that supports children in Gaza. So far, so good.

However, in the course of the concert Ms Church led a choir in a rendition of a song containing the lyrics "from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" – a reference to the land between the Jordan River, on the eastern border of the West Bank and Israel, and the Mediterranean Sea to the west. It is a slogan that has long been used on pro-Palestinian demos but is regarded by many Jews (and others) as a call for the total destruction of Israel. A look at a map will tell you why.

The Campaign Against Antisemitism said the singer was "at best tone deaf and at worst using her voice to fan the

flames of hatred."

Various far-right figures (notably Nigel Farage, a man with a record of promoting antisemitic tropes) jumped aboard the anti-Church bandwagon and she says her safety and her family's has been threatened.

Threats against Ms Church and her family are clearly completely unacceptable and have rightly been reported to the police.

Ms Church responded with a lengthy 10 March article on her own website which complained about the "liberal legacy media outlets, including BBC News" allegedly, not explaining that the song was sung at a charity event for Gazan children (in fact BBC News, the *Guardian* and the *Independent* all went into some detail about this) and states:

"I do not believe that the phrase 'From the river to the sea ...' is in any way a call for ethnic cleansing or genocide of Israelis, and certainly when I have used it or heard it used by other people it has always been a call for the liberation of Palestine (i.e. the most face-value interpretation). Often it is accompanied by the phrase 'we are all Palestinians.'"

Later on in her article she complains about the fact that the *Guardian* and BBC News headlined her denial of antisemitism and then complains that there has been "no mention of the actual history of the usage of the phrase. Just

incredibly irresponsible 'journalism'". In fact the *Guardian* carried a quite detailed and reasonably accurate article on the history of the slogan.

All of this might seem something of a storm in a teacup, but the prominence of the "river to the sea" slogan, especially promoted by the SWP, on Gaza ceasefire demos, makes a discussion unavoidable.

The *Guardian's* history of the chant describes it as being "open to an array of interpretations, from the genocidal to the democratic". Last November *Solidarity* [paraphrased](#) a Labour activist, a supporter of ceasefire and someone who has worked in the West Bank: "Some may first think it's a bland 'freedom everywhere' call. By now they must know that most Jews see it as threatening; as meaning Arab or Islamic rule in all of 1918-48 Palestine ... and the wiping-out of Israel. So, use a different slogan, unless you want to make the threat, or don't care".

The Communist Party of Britain's *Morning Star* (13 Oct 2023) carried an article by the paper's editor Ben Chacko stating that the slogan "has long been controversial on the left because of its implied backing for a single state, with organisations like the Communist Party always having advised members not to chant it."

On 12 March, however, the *Morning*

THE STOP THE WAR COALITION AND UKRAINE:

a decade of political and factual illiteracy

Коаліція "Stop the War" та Україна: десятиліття політичного невігластва та незнання фактів
Dain Street, 2024

60 pages. **£5**
(inc. postage).
Order
bit.ly/stw-pi

THE EASTER RISING AND IRISH HISTORY



The Easter Rising and Irish History. An attempt at a Marxist account. **£4** (inc. post) □
bit.ly/shop-wl

Star used two full pages to republish Ms Church's "Mother's Day" justification of the slogan. Perhaps the Communist Party's advice against using it has now just withered away? □

Young men drifting to the right?



Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

Young men are drifting to the right on many issues, while young women move left. At least, that is what recent studies suggest.

Polling data reported in *The Economist* from 20 countries indicates that twenty years ago there was little difference between the share of men and women aged 18-29 who described themselves as liberal rather than conservative, but now the gap has grown to 25 percentage points.

In the UK, King's College London's Policy Institute and Global Institute for Women's Leadership in partnership with Ipsos UK have found the gender split in views is starkest among the young when it comes to how helpful the term "toxic masculinity" is, whether it's harder to be a man than a woman today, whether feminism has done more good or harm to society, and approval of misogynist influencer Andrew Tate.

Young men are notably less positive than young women about the impact of feminism.

Overall, 43% think feminism has done



From left: Tristan Tate, Andrew Tate, Elon Musk, Kanye West

more good to society than harm, while only 12% think it has done more harm than good. Among those aged 16 to 29, 46% of women think feminism has done more good to society than harm – 10 percentage points higher than the share of young men who feel this way (36%). Within that age group, one in six (16%) men say feminism has done more harm than good, compared with one in 11 (9%) women.

Young men are still generally more socially progressive than older men, but now they are no more likely than

older men to think equal opportunities for women should go further.

13% of the whole UK public say attempts to give equal opportunities to women have gone too far. A much greater share, 46%, say they've not gone far enough. A third (36%) say these attempts have made about the right amount of progress already. Men (17%) are around twice as likely as women (8%) to say efforts to support women's equality have gone too far. As to thinking efforts to provide equal opportunities have not gone far enough,

the youngest men surveyed (36%) are less likely than the oldest (37%) to hold this view.

Polls from 27 European countries found that men under 30 were more likely than those over 65 to agree that "advancing women's and girls' rights has gone too far because it threatens men's and boys' opportunities". Young women were likely to believe the opposite.

Similar results can be found in South Korea and China. □

Hungary's president forced to resign

By Ferenc Fejes

A series of protests starting on 9 February has rocked Hungary, forcing the resignation of president Katalin Novák the very next day, along with the Minister of Justice, Judit Varga.

The catalyst of the demonstrations was the revelation that the president pardoned the deputy director of an orphanage in Bicske, Endre K., who was found guilty of covering up sexual abuse committed by the director, János V. against children in their care. Endre K. also forced children to write and sign statements denying accusations they had made against the principal.

While the pardon was signed last May (on the day of the Pope's visit to Hungary), its existence only came to light on 2 February, after the news site 444.hu published an article on its discovery. Unsurprisingly, presidential pardons aren't

widely publicized, and this one only came to light because it was referred to in a response to one of the perpetrator's previously filed appeal.

The first demonstration on 9 February was organized by the National Common Will Student Movement in front of the Ministry of Interior. It later merged with another demonstration organized by Momentum, a small liberal party. Other opposition parties also took part, although Anna Orosz, one of the organizers asked people to lower their party flags.

50,000

Anna Donáth, the president of Momentum, asked people to demonstrate every day until Katalin Novák stepped down.

The next day, she did exactly that. After being dragged back ahead of schedule from a visit to Qatar, she announced her resignation.

People, however, were not satisfied. On 16 February,

about 50,000 people demonstrated. Unfortunately, it was mostly (although not completely) apolitical, apart from the clear distaste towards the ruling party, Fidesz, and prime minister Orbán. The people behind it were influencers on social media, with no prior experience in organising protests. They called for an investigation into who knew about the pardon, talked about the horrible state of orphanages, hospitals, maternity wards, schools – areas where the government's rhetoric on protecting children does not match reality.

As the demonstration started, news came out that Zoltán Balog, a bishop of the Reformed Church had resigned as the synodal president, after it came to light that he lobbied Katalin Novák to pardon Endre K. However, as of the writing of this article, he remains a bishop.

The episode was natu-

rally awkward for Orbán and Fidesz, given how they have postured as the defenders of "the family" from dangers real or imagined. After years of smearing LGBTQ people as potential groomers and paedophiles, one of their own pardons someone who protected a child rapist.

Of course, that wasn't her real sin. Her sin was getting caught doing it, and embarrassing the government. That is why she had to go.

Opinion polls show little decline for Fidesz, and little gain for opposition parties. The next parliamentary election is not due until 2026.

There still isn't a political force in Hungary that's powerful enough to challenge Orbán, and neither will be there, as long as bourgeois neoliberals and careerists dominate the political field. The socialist group [Szikra](#) is working to develop a new alternative. □



Activist Agenda

The Workers Against CCP Repression campaign has scheduled protests at Apple stores for 2pm on the second Sunday of every month.

Next is 2pm 14 April, at the Apple stores at 128 New St Birmingham and at Covent Garden in London. The protests demand: End Uyghur forced labour in Apple supply chains; end Apple's collaboration with CCP censorship; union rights for factory workers in China; decent conditions and union recognition for UK Apple workers. □

• Links for this and other campaigns, template motions, etc: workersliberty.org/agenda

Vote Steve for NUS VPHE

By Workers' Liberty Students

Workers' Liberty activist Steve Chapman is standing for Vice President Higher Education (VPHE) in the National Union of Students (NUS). Steve's campaign is an attempt to unite the student left around central demands, to return democracy and action to the NUS, and to connect the student and workers' movements in the UK, particularly in Higher Education.

Free Education, No Cuts, No Debt

Since the introduction of tuition fees in the UK, and especially since their trebling in 2010, the demand for free education has been a central pillar in the student movement. As the student movement itself has waned, the demand has become weaker: demonstrations calling for free education are no longer a regular fixture on campuses; the NUS has passed contradictory policy, which is a barrier to effective action; Starmer and Reeves have said they will

drop Labour's commitment to scrap tuition fees.

Our demand is clear: education must be free at all levels and all ages, funded by taxing the rich. Because education benefits all of us, the costs should be borne by those who have the means to pay for it.

This means fighting against tuition fees, but also against course closures and job cuts in higher education, as we are currently seeing play out at universities across the country including Goldsmiths, Northumbria and Oxford Brookes. For any of these fights to win, the student movement needs to get behind them.

Organise

Participation in the NUS and in its constituent student unions has fallen considerably over the last few years. The student movement – and the broader left that those students go on to be part of – needs more than a few activists calling demonstrations and meetings with the same few faces.

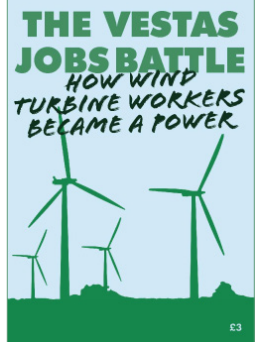
Part of the blame here lies with the NUS: since changes at multiple national conferences, the democratic structures of the union are not fit for purpose. Decisions are increasingly left in the hands of the full-time staff, with elected positions and student activists beholden to the organisation's poor democracy and a strategy based on NGO-style diplomatic influence. We must fight for an NUS that can respond appropriately to an increasingly desperate situation for students across the country.

Workers' Liberty students

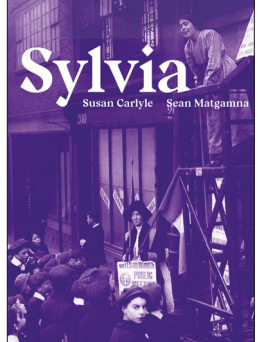
If you are a delegate to NUS conference 2024 [17-18 April], vote Steve Chapman for VPHE and make sure that these demands are heard at the national level.

But these demands cannot be met by one person getting elected. Workers' Liberty Students want to see a revival of participation in student politics and a grassroots movement for education as a basic right. If that sounds good to you, then get in contact with us, and

see what activity we can do together on your campus. □



The 2nd edition contains new material, plus photos from the campaign and occupation. **£4** (inc. post) □ bit.ly/shop-wl



The story of Sylvia Pankhurst including her working-class organising in the East End of London. **£4** (inc. post) □ bit.ly/shop-wl

SRM: research now, but more only under socialism



Debate

By Stuart Jordan

If the workers' movement does emerge as a governing power in the next few decades then it is likely to inherit a planet that is already deep into escalating climate chaos. To rule out SRM or any other technological innovation that might alleviate human suffering would be foolish.

We have an interest in maximising our knowledge of these technologies, to better understand the risks and the obstacles to controlling those risks. On this basis we are broadly in favour of any research that expands our understanding and knowledge.

However, I think Paul Vernadsky (*Solidarity* 693) underplays the dangers of a capitalist-led solar radiation management programme, is overly impressed by the claims of for-hire eco-modernist scientists, and is too pessimistic about the prospects for socialism.

Paul is right to note that David Keith and Ken Caldeira are doing a job for billionaire Bill Gates. He could have

added that they had made their careers in university departments funded and to some extent controlled by fossil capital, and have made small fortunes in private ventures with multinational oil and coal corporations.

These facts alone do not necessarily discredit their scientific work but we should be aware. Keith is one of the primary signatories of the Ecomodernist Manifesto, and his political outlook is deeply conservative. He believes ecological challenges can be fixed through technological means alone with no social change.

With his assertion that "working class power is not on the immediate horizon" Paul also suggests social change is unlikely and arrives at similar conclusions to Keith on SRM. But SRM is not on the "immediate horizon" either. SRM is at best a project for decades in the future at a time when the climate crisis is so extreme that we have run out of alternatives.

Few socialists think international workers revolution will happen within the next weeks or years. But the next few decades? Socialism is a more immediate prospect than SRM.

To paraphrase Marx, there are decades when nothing happens and "days in which

20 years are embodied".

The problem is that Keith's research plan bleeds into actual implementation. We haven't got a test planet that we can research on before we start implementation on planet Earth. The final phases of Keith's research proposal may take us past the point of no return where concerns about termination shock may mean we are already committed.

We should be in favour of using modern computing power to model SRM scenarios. But modelling is only as good as the data we input. NASA scientist [Chris Colose](#) has criticised Keith and his colleagues for the simplicity of their modelling and the grand claims they made for their results. Many other climatologists have [criticised](#) their techno-optimism.

Paul however seems to think it is a shame that research is "mired" in theory and lab work and like Keith wants to press on with real world experiments. Why the rush? Better modelling from publicly funded scientific institutions should precede real world experimentation.

Paul notes "governance" problems with SRM but argues that with a nudge from the workers' movement capitalist

states can be persuaded to collaborate. He downplays the potential for SRM to be used in (or as justification for) military conflict.

But can we expect competing capitalist states with a record of utter failure on climate change to collaborate over the many decades, possibly centuries, on a project that will almost certainly affect regional weather patterns? We should have no such illusions.

Competing capitalist states are extremely volatile and will try and use SRM to their own nationalist advantage, maybe

radically destabilising Earth's climate with SRM.

Only a democratic socialist commonwealth would have the stability and legitimacy to run an SRM programme as part of a broader multi-generational plan to restabilise the climate.

To limit the workers' movement to the role of "guarantor that bourgeois states stick to their promises and get consent for planetary interventions" is to sow illusions in the rationality and stability of bourgeois rule. □



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Unrest rises in Iran

By Dan Katz

"The one that knocks on the door at night, has come to kill the light" – Alireza Ghorbani, Strange Times.

Kazem Nik-Kaah, from the Iranian workers' rights campaign, Free Them Now, believes that there are at least ten worker-protests and strikes each day in Iran, particularly in steel, petrochemicals, oil and gas production.

On 9 March nurses and medics from all the hospitals in the large city of Shiraz demonstrated against low pay and unpaid wages. The next day nurses protested in Bushehr complaining that their salaries are too low and that they were being forced to work extra overtime. The nurses chanted, "We don't want forced work, we are not doing it!"

Nurses in Iran are often paid under the equivalent of \$3 for

each hour of overtime.

In the southern town of Kahunj many nurses announced their resignation, en masse.

Iran has a shortfall of 70,000 nurses and 3,000 are leaving Iran each year. In May 2023 an official report stated that 10,000 medical staff emigrated in the previous year. Most cite poor wages and living conditions as the reasons for leaving.

Inflation has been running at 50% per year for five years, and food prices are rising at over 100%. In the last year the rial has lost one third of its value against the US dollar.

The minimum wage is due to be re-set, and the ultra-right-wing Islamist government seems determined to only increase the minimum salary by 20%, to 115 million Iranian rials, around \$190. At least half Iran's population is living in poverty, with workers often

struggling to pay rents, which are especially high in the capital Tehran.

The increasingly isolated clerical regime has heavily repressed all opposition. Education International has called for the release of 14 jailed leaders of the Coordinating Council of Iranian Teacher Trade Associations (statement, 28 February).

During the mass protest movement following the murder of Mahsa Jina Amini by the Iranian "morality police" in September 2022, over 22,000 people were arrested and 550 killed.

Iran executed at least 834 people in 2023, including 167 (or 20% of the total) from the Baluch minority in south east Iran (Baluchis make up 5% of the overall population). Seven executions were carried out in public.

Iran continues to use amputation and whipping as punish-



ments.

A Gamaan opinion poll (December 2023) of 158,000 people in Iran suggests an overwhelming majority (81%) reject the regime, preferring a democratic state. A recent government survey, leaked to BBC Persian, also suggests that 73% of Iranians support the separation of religion and state.

Ultra-conservative Islamists dominate the new pseudo-parliament and the advisory Guardian Council, having

rigged the poll by preventing even mildly critical Islamists from standing as candidates. Those barred from standing included former Presidents Hassan Rouhani and Mohammad Khatami.

Official polling figures put the turnout at 41% at the 1 March election, a record low. Polling was particularly low in Tehran where 16 seats from 30 remain unfilled as candidates failed to reach the 20% threshold. □

Portugal: fading memories of fascism?

By Tom Harrison

Constant secret police surveillance, arbitrary arrests and assassinations. Violent repression of political protest. Absence of free trade unions and meaningful elections. Censorship of the press, books, radio and TV. Systematic torture of opponents. Island camps for political dissidents. All features of a right wing regime that was swept away fifty years ago in Portugal in the "[Carnation Revolution](#)".

A half a century on, the collective memory of that dictatorship seems to have faded, as many Portuguese cast votes for the far right Chega party in the 10 March parliamentary election.

The figure of Antonio Salazar, who ran the quasi-fascist dictatorship for most of its time from 1926 to 1974, loomed large in Portuguese politics of the last hundred years. When the public broadcaster RTP did a series on "The Greatest Portuguese" in 2007, Salazar came top with over 40% of the vote. After complaints about the skewing of choice in the poll were taken into account, however, his score went down to between 6% and 11%.

Most of Portugal's present-day electorate are too young to have lived through the Salazar dictatorship and unlikely to be experiencing some kind of saudade (melancholic or nostalgic longing) for a return to it. Nevertheless,

the political stance of Chega bears all the hallmarks of such a political programme. It uses a version of the Salazarist motto Deus, Patria, Familia (God, Fatherland, Family).

Chega is led by André Ventura, another reactionary scumbag who, in the footsteps of Trump, Milei and Zemmour, manages to beguile the gullible by being a "TV personality". Chega's ideology is anti-immigrant, anti woman, anti LGBTQ+, anti-Muslim, "eurosceptic", and conspiracy-theorist. It particularly singles out that most persecuted of minority communities in Europe, the Romani.

The ascent of Chega to the political mainstream began in 2019 when Ventura gained a seat in the Portuguese parliament. In 2022 they went up to 12 seats. Now they are on 48 – potentially determining the country's government.

Part of the cause is a major disengagement from the political process since 1974. In the heady days of the revolutionary period, the first legislative assembly election had a turnout of over 80%. In the two elections of 2019 and 2022, turnout scraped above 50%. The election on 10 March saw a significant increase in turnout to 66%. It is difficult to say but a significant proportion of Chega's tally was probably made up of previously "missing" voters.

The "traditional" conservative vote ("Democratic Alliance") was pretty

much static, but Chega's 36 seat gain almost equaled the loss of 40 suffered by the Socialist Party (PS). The Left Bloc – an alliance of leftist groups – held on to its five seats, but is still well below its heyday a decade ago, with over a half a million votes and 19 seats in parliament.

This second general election in two years was provoked by a corruption scandal alleged to have implicated members of the PS government. Low wages and stretched public services increased voter discontent, further compounded by a serious housing crisis.

Lisbon has become a go-to place for "digital nomads" who, since the Covid lockdowns, realise they can work remotely, indeed, keep a "global city" job while moving to a warmer climate with relatively cheap housing costs.

The effect was to force up property prices by over 30% in the last five years. so housing in Lisbon has ended up more expensive than Milan, Madrid or Berlin. "Liberalisation" of the rental market has also made it near impossible for working-class people to afford a decent place to live and bring up a family.

Chega has nothing to offer in the way of solutions to the material issues suffered by the working class. Like some others on today's "far right", it offers little of the "corporatist" and "welfarist" element of old-style fascism. Instead

Chega favours the libertarian "roll back the state" mantra. Yet cuts in state spending and economic regulation will increase poverty and unemployment.

As for Chega's "clean up" promise, they'll doubtless be equally corrupt should they get into office.

Should Chega become a government they'll be following the Orban path of "illiberal democracy" and making sure they stay in power for a good long time. Maybe for as long as Salazar did!

The pursuit of neo liberal economic policies and austerity by the PS and other supposedly left wing governments is a major reason why disillusioned voters have turned to the far right in Portugal and elsewhere. It is the task of the socialist movement to develop a credible alternative which combats the advance of the force of reaction and achieves a just society. □



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Plekhanov as “the father”

The road to Bolshevism

By Sean Matgamna

Seventh in a series of articles on the 100th anniversary of the death of Vladimir Ulyanov (Lenin) in 1924

Black (complete) Redistribution was formed by the minority that seceded from Russia’s revolutionary-populist movement Zemlya i Volya (ZiV, Land and Freedom) in June 1879.

The majority formed Narodnaya Volya (People’s Will). Those who re-

Timeline

June 1879: the revolutionary populist group Zemlya i Volya (Land and Freedom) splits. The majority forms Narodnaya Volya (NV, People’s Will). Plekhanov leads the minority, Chorny Peredel (BR, Black Redistribution).

1879-81: Black Redistribution never really gets going. Plekhanov and his close comrades flee to exile in Switzerland. NV gains support.

March 1881: NV kills Tsar Alexander II, the “Liberator” who had freed the serfs. The new Tsar is markedly more illiberal than his father was; the result is not democratic reform, but increased repression, which quells NV (and the incipient workers’ movement too).

April 1881: The beginning of large-scale antisemitic pogroms and the movement west of Russian Jews. NV welcomes the pogroms as a manifestation of “the people”. BR criticises NV.

September 1883: Plekhanov and his comrades found the Group for the Emancipation of Labour, in exile

Early 1885: Plekhanov publishes his major book *Our Differences*

1891: Famine in Russian empire. The movement in society to deal with it is the turning of the tide for the recovery of society from the repression that followed the killing of the Tsar in 1881.

Early 1890s: Workers’ movement in Russia, and Marxist groups on Plekhanov’s lines, appear after a decade of isolation for Plekhanov and his comrades.

1894: *On Agitation*, by Julius Martov and Arkadi Kremer, appears. □

sisted the majority’s turn formed Black Redistribution.

The Black Redistribution people would be the future West-European-type Marxists, but in 1879 they wanted to continue as ZiV was, “Bakuninist”. Against the new majority and NV line of terrorism (assassination of top Tsarist officials – not, as “terrorism” often means now, of innocent people) to back up the new political demand on the Tsar for a constitution and an amnesty for all political prisoners, Black Redistribution wanted to continue preaching immediate socialism and immediate peasant (or worker) revolt.

But the mass-peasant-revolt strategy had failed resoundingly. The majority which formed Narodnaya Volya had faced up to that and decided to “go political”, with an immediate push for a constitution to be won by the direct action of a (necessarily) small band of heroes doing combat, above society, with the Tsarist state officials and the Tsar. [1]

The people had not answered the revolutionaries’ call, so they had to do without them. The Narodniks’ idea of socialism as something that already existed in the peasant community, the mir, needing only to slough off the absolute monarchy, the landlords, and the bureaucracy, had not gained wide support, so they concluded that socialism was not necessary immediately. But a political movement was. A Constituent Assembly would do.

We don’t need politics, the old approach had said. Narodnaya Volya replied: Bakunin was wrong. They needed politics – remaking the Russian state, a constituent assembly.

Black Redistribution, led by Georgi Plekhanov, turned out to be an organisation in transition (and, soon, scarcely existing) between ZiV and the Group for the Emancipation of Labour, which Plekhanov founded in September 1883.

BR backed and applauded what Narodnaya Volya did. They wanted a mass movement, not the now almost-exclusive NV focus on “individual terror”, but they committed themselves in the 1879 split to critically support NV’s deeds, and they honoured that commitment.

“Mass terror” was the alternative which West European revolutionary socialists counterposed to “individual terrorism”. (Zinoviev invokes it, perhaps demagogically).

Black Redistribution (BR) saw politics as having no useful connection with the

communist revolution they sought.

Plekhanov and his comrades, Paul Axelrod, Vera Zasulich, and others, would become Russia’s first consistent and comprehensive Marxists. They evolved, between their break with the majority of Zemlya i Volya in June 1879 and the foundation of the Group for the Emancipation of Labour on 12 September 1883.

BR urged for the wage-workers emancipation such as the peasants had had in 1861. Land redistribution was the one issue on which Zemlya i Volya had evoked a response from the peasants. But very few joined BR. It declared itself the continuation of the old revolutionary populism, i.e. the same thing as that which had already shown its inadequacy to most of its former adherents. Narodnaya Volya’s turn to terrorism and the call for a constitution had come from that failure. What was new was the turn to the politics of demanding a Constituent Assembly. That was what BR rejected. The widespread story that BR split against terrorism as such is simply not true.

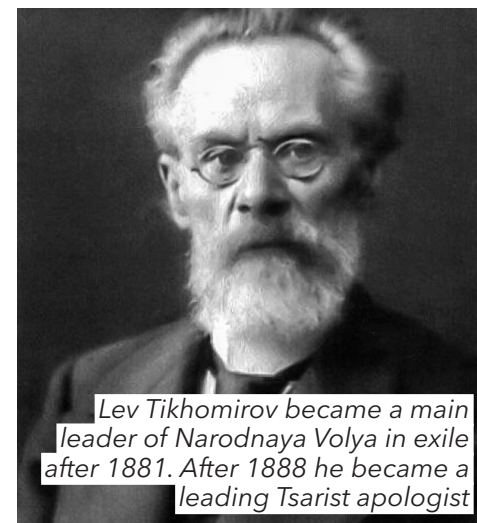
Weight

The failure of ZiV hung as a dead weight around Plekhanov’s neck, but he wanted to stick with its strategy. Now there was the active competition, against BR, of NV. Glamour attached to its deeds of terrorism, which Black Redistribution supported and praised but did not itself do.

The turn to politics was necessary. In a country without a parliament, without the right to free speech, free organisation, free assembly, a free press or the liberty of the person, where official “politics” was never more than intrigues at the Tsarist court, terror was the only form of radical politics in the tradition of the old populists which was available.

It is a measure of how far Plekhanov had yet to travel that he would come to regard the programme embodied in the very name of Black (complete) Redistribution as socially and economically regressive and reactionary. Why? Because it implied levelling down and undoing large-scale capitalist farming, where it had emerged, and replacing it with solely peasant cultivation. [2]

Georgi Plekhanov, 23 years old, walking away from the Voronezh congress of the ZiV in June 1879, was not yet a consistent, or at least not a Western-style, Marxist. He walked away from



Lev Tikhomirov became a main leader of Narodnaya Volya in exile after 1881. After 1888 he became a leading Tsarist apologist

Voronezh not as someone breaking with his previous ideas, or advocating a break with them, but as their defender against the majority at the ZiV congress who were, in Plekhanov’s opinion and in fact, breaking with them by turning to the demand for a constitution.

He was then no innovator. He was still a “conservative” populist, an unreconstructed follower of the ideas of Mikhail Bakunin which had guided the previous phase of populist activity. He would later, as a Marxist, define the Bakuninist positions he still held then as a species of “utopian” socialism.

“The only difference”, he would write, was “that the ‘materialist’ [Bakunin] transforms the Utopian programme of the ‘idealist’ [Proudhon] into something even more Utopian, more nebulous, more absurd”.

The Bakuninist Plekhanov in 1879 opposed the decision of the ZiV congress to turn towards systematic terrorism, not because it was terrorism, but because the terrorism was action to back a political demand (Constituent Assembly). Plekhanov and his comrades were for the assassination of state officials and members of the ruling class. Indeed, one of them, Vera Zasulich, had been the pioneer of terrorism. Both Zasulich and Axelrod came close to joining Narodnaya Volya at more than one point.

It is common for writers on the early Russian Marxists to read back onto the earlier period their attitude twenty years later to the terrorist-populist movement as regrouped in 1902 into the “Social Revolutionary Party” (SRs). The Russian Marxists called the SRs the “epigones”, the unworthy successors, of the earlier movement created by those from whom Plekhanov had broken in 1879, though they said they gave critical support to them against the Tsarist regime. [3]

The Group for the Emancipation of Labour (GEL) explicitly endorsed the terrorism of Narodnaya Volya.

er of Russian Marxism”

“The Emancipation of Labour group at the same time recognises the necessity for terrorist struggle against the absolutist government and differs from the Narodnaya Volya party only on the question of the so-called seizure of power by the revolutionary party and the tasks of the immediate activity of the socialists among the working class”.

Here, in early 1884, the GEL was referring to a drift in NV after 1881 to fading out the Constituent Assembly demand and tying the new almost-exclusive focus on “terrorism” to an idea of the seizure of power by a tiny-minority coup and then engineering popular assent to socialist policies imposed from above.

Why did Marxists come to reject NV-style terrorism? Leon Trotsky was accused in the Moscow Trials of being a terrorist in alliance with Nazism. Factually it was arrant nonsense. Before a commission, under John Dewey, of investigation into the allegations made in the trials, however, Trotsky discussed the practicalities of terrorism in the terms which Marxists would arrive at by later decades of discussion.

“‘Terrorist work’, I wrote in 1909, ‘in its very essence demands such a concentration of energy upon “the supreme moment”, such an over-estimation of personal heroism and, lastly, such a hermetically concealed conspiracy as ... excludes completely any agitational and organisational activity among the masses...’

“It is impossible to fool or outwit history... The basic property of terror as a system is to destroy that organisation which by means of chemical compounds seeks to compensate for its own lack of political strength. There are, of course, historical conditions where terror can introduce confusion among the governing ranks. But in that case who is it that can reap the fruits? At all events, not the terrorist organisation itself, and not the masses behind whose backs the duel takes place”.

The dialectical paradox is in the fact that Plekhanov moved towards Marxist



or “West European” socialism by first entrenching himself in the old Bakuninist anti-political populism, the old utopian socialist current in Russia, against those who had drawn political conclusions from the failures of both the movement to “go to the people” with enlightening education and socialist enlightenment, in the mid 1870s, and ZiV’s attempts to rouse the peasants to revolt after 1876.

In one sense Plekhanov was already a “Marxist” in 1879, but only in a sense he shared with his ZiV opponents. They too accepted economic and historical Marxism, though not without eclectic admixtures.

As can be seen in the collected letters of Marx and Engels, Peter Lavrov, the inspirer of the revolutionary populists’ drive in the mid-1870s to go to the people to educate them and preach socialism in the broadest sense, had close and friendly personal relations with Karl Marx. Mikhail Bakunin, the inspirer of Plekhanov and the “rebels” of ZiV, who tried to rouse the peasants into immediate revolt, had translated the Communist Manifesto into Russian. In the last phase of a long and politically multi-faceted life, Bakunin rejected what he called Marx’s “state socialism”. He wanted “socialism from below” against what he called “socialism from above”, meaning Marx’s socialism. [4]

But Bakunin proclaimed himself not alone an anarchist, but also in agree-

ment with Marx’s interpretation of history and economics.

Others of broadly populist persuasion would translate volume one (1867) of *Capital* into Russian, as early as 1872.

Black Redistribution was a transitional organisation between the Bakuninist populism of Zemlya i Volya and the Marxism of the Emancipation of Labour Group. It had explained itself, and what it thought was wrong with the political turn:

“Political overturns never and nowhere could secure the people’s economic and political liberty”. That was the Bakuninist idea on “politics”. It raised the slogan, “let the worker seize the factory and the peasant the land”.

Black Redistribution inherited the lessons of the limited success of ZiV, among workers in the big towns. But those would not come into proper focus until after the founders of Black Redistribution had broken with the core beliefs of all the Russian populists. Meanwhile there were ongoing attempts to reunite Narodnaya Volya and Black Redistribution.

How was that possible? Between 1879 and 1883 the difference between Narodnaya Volya and Black Redistribution was not over fundamental theory or the belief that socialism existed in the mir – that capitalism was encroaching on it but could be stopped and reversed by sloughing off the ruling class. The differences were on what to

do about the ruling class and what to replace it by.

Moreover, Narodnaya Volya did not repudiate the Narodnik aim of “rousing the people”. The majority at the 1879 conference pledged that it would “lean

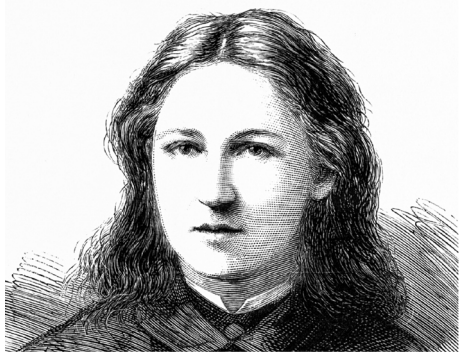
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Vera Zasulich, famous for her shooting of Tsarist police chief Trepov in 1878, and subsequent acquittal by a jury, was Plekhanov’s close comrade in the Emancipation of Labour Group.

→ from page 9

on" the people and not the bourgeoisie. They, like the old ZiV and Plekhanov's Black Redistribution minority, were for killing landlords and local officials in order to rouse the peasants to revolt, as well as terrorism against the central Tsarist state. NV presented its terror as a form of agitation and "propaganda of the deed". As one of Narodnaya Volya's heroic fighters, Vera Figner, who would spend 25 years in a Tsarist jail, put it, terrorism was "an agitational medium of unprecedented strength".

Terror was action, and action that the small groups could undertake at will, thus seeming to free the revolutionaries from the dead weight of the "people", the peasants, who, though central to populist theory, had proved to be immovable and politically inert; and terror was also the line of least resistance in Russian society. I repeat: it was something they could do at will.

Large swathes of liberal opinion in the upper classes lauded the populists, saw their blows against tyrants as blows for the political demand that they had in common with the NV terrorists – a constitution.

Like all political innovations that prove to be decisive shifts, the Narodnaya Volya at first seemed to incorporate the older movement and merely to add to it more effective methods. (That's how the tendency that Vladimir Ulyanov, Lenin, polemicised against – the "Economists" – began, with the 1894 text of Kremer and Martov urging "agitation"). NV remained socialists. They were still champions of the socialist village commune against capitalism.

Narodnaya Volya's programme began: "In our basic conceptions we are socialist and populist". The difference was in their adoption of new means, the focus on individual targets for political assassination. On the other hand, as Vera Figner put it in retrospect: "We were not pursuing the abstract ultimate objectives of socialist doctrine but those demands and needs of the popular mind that in their essence included the socialist principle of liberty". This would come to be very important.

Narodnaya Volya declared that its

terrorist activity had as its goals: "the undermining of the fascination of governmental power, the constant demonstration of the possibilities of struggle against the government, the elevation in this way of the revolutionary spirit of the people and its faith in the success of the cause, and, finally, the formation of forces fit for and accustomed to battle".

"The party", Narodnaya Volya declared, "must pay attention to the people not less seriously". But its "primary task... among the people is to prepare its cooperation [sic] in the overturn".

"In view of the oppression of the people, and since by means of special repression the government will be able to restrain the general revolutionary movement for a very long time, the party must assume the preparation of the overturn itself and not wait for a time when the people will be able to get along without it". [5]

That was the inversion, and with a vengeance, of the old going-to-the-people with socialist enlightenment and of the call of Zemlya i Volya for immediate mass revolt – the policy which Black Redistribution clung to. Now small bands of heroes would substitute their actions for those of an unready, unwilling, and too-repressed people. Something similar spurred the "Guevarists" in the West and their foco theory of the 1960s and 70s.

Such movements evolve – by way of what they emphasise and concentrate on, and the consequent withering effects on those aspects of themselves that they do not, "for now", emphasise or practise. For practical purposes Narodnaya Volya came in 1879-81 to express only the demand for a bourgeois constitution.

It raised the political demand that would serve all the revolutionary tendencies after 1883, except the anarchists – until early in 1918, it was Bolshevik policy too – the convocation of a Constituent Assembly, elected by universal suffrage.

Vera Figner summed it up in retrospect, in 1925:

"Terror in and for itself was never the aim of the party. It was a means of defence, self-defence, and was considered a powerful medium of agitation... Regicide entered this category as a detail... Organisational and propagandist activity always went hand in hand with the war of destruction". But, she says:

"As the struggle grew more heated, as time passed and one magnificent exploit after another was conceived and executed by us, the former activity among the people grew diminished in their eyes; the countryside receded into the distance, that part of the programme... that spoke of the activity in the countryside gradually took on a purely theoretical, rhetorical character".

In a sense, NV broke with the old utopian socialism and moved towards the bourgeoisie, the embodiment of capitalism; Plekhanov and his comrades broke with utopian socialism and moved towards West European type

Marxism and the Russian working class.

Narodnaya Volya's strength was in the fact that, where everything else had failed, the small bands of terrorists could succeed – and, with the killing of the Tsar in March 1881, succeed spectacularly, indeed, or so it should have been, according to what their theory of what they did, decisively.

But their greatest success, the violent deposing of the Tsar, would also reveal how weak such methods really were against the whole system that they opposed, how little fundamental could be changed by killing leading state personnel and getting them replaced, which was the most that could be achieved by their guns and bombs.

In the competition between Narodnaya Volya and Black Redistribution after 1879, immediate success was all, and all-important. In terms of practical activity, Black Redistribution could do nothing. Its members either fell into inactivity, or defected to Narodnaya Volya. There was historical justice in that, because, as Plekhanov would later stress, Narodnaya Volya had moved ahead of them in the necessary turn to politics.

The killing of the Tsar in 1881 did not unleash mass revolution, as some of them had hoped, or even reform. It unleashed a decade of mass reaction and repression. Six Narodnaya Volya members were condemned for killing the Tsar, two of them women. Five were hanged. The sixth, Gesya Helfman, was held from the gallows so that she could give birth to the baby she was carrying. Immediately afterwards she died in jail, perhaps with help.

After the killing of the Tsar, the executive of Narodnaya Volya wrote an open letter to the new Tsar in which they made only two demands on him:

(1) A general amnesty for all "political criminals"

(2) The summoning of representatives of all the Russian people "in order to reconsider the existing system of the State and social life".

Its "moderation" won it the sympathy of "liberal society" in Russia and abroad. It was also a measure of how they had moved from the socialist programme of ZiV – and indeed from their own programme. They now, despite what the 1879 programme had said about leaning on the people, aligned mostly with their natural political allies, the bourgeoisie and the liberal aristocrats.

After 1881, Narodnaya Volya continued to exist and published a journal in exile, but the repression had essentially smashed the group.

In all this, Black Redistribution and its leaders had been politically marginalised. They expressed support for Narodnaya Volya and solidarised with its militants. So, as we saw, did Karl Marx.

They moved only slowly on to the new political ground which they had rejected on principle in 1879 – and towards the foundation of the first non-populist, consistent, Marxist movement in Russia, the Group for the Eman-

cipation of Labour, in September 1883.

Central to the group's theoretical evolution was the existence of a strong working-class movement in Europe and the new and growing working class in Russia. Although politically it was still entwined with a populist movement, the Russian proletariat had already taken action as a distinct class and incipiently as a distinct political force. □

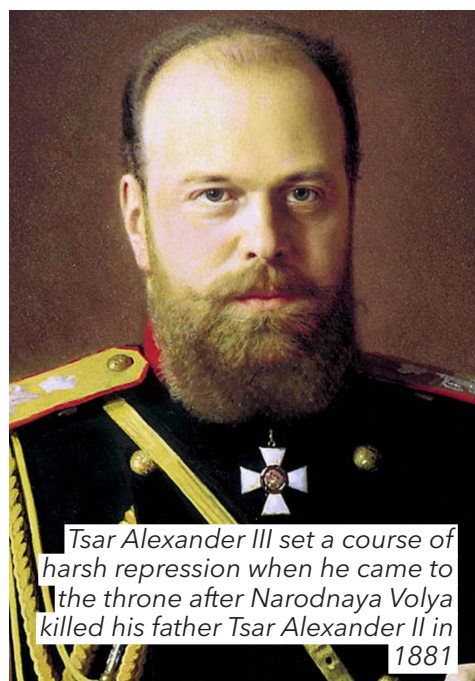
[1] This would later be focused as the Russian bourgeois demand for something like Britain's "supplementary revolution" (the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688, after the civil war period from 1642 to 1649, when the King was beheaded), which gave the bourgeoisie much of what in that age distinguished its wants from the old absolute monarchy: habeas corpus, end of pre-publication censorship, right of free speech, etc.

[2] The question of all or most land to the peasants divided the Left Social Revolutionaries and the Bolshevik Party in 1918, and led to the beginning of the civil war.

[3] As we were "supportive" of the IRA in the 1970s, though we would never have voted to do what they were doing, and sometimes, as with the Belfast "Bloody Friday" bombings of 21 July 1972 and the Birmingham pub bombings of 21 November 1974, had to dissociate pointedly from what they did. They were in rebellion against the artificial partition of Ireland. In Ireland there was a natural (Catholic) majority and a natural (Protestant) minority. The given partition created a second, artificial minority (Catholic) in the Six Counties. We disagreed with the IRA's approach, but, living in Britain, we could not make that disagreement the all-determining thing.

[4] Hal Draper revived this above-below dichotomy and counterposed "socialism from below" to the "socialism (that is, liberal Stalinism) from above" of Isaac Deutscher and of the Orthodox Trotskyists who gave "critical support" to the regimes imposed by the Russian army in Eastern Europe. It thus had a use, and was less organically anarchist. But all revolutions, by definition, are from below – including even the bureaucratic revolutions by the independent Stalinist movements, in Yugoslavia, China, Cuba, Vietnam.

[5] The Orthodox Trotskyists influenced by Ted Grant argued that the reason for the the creation of "deformed workers' states" in Eastern Europe, China, etc. was a spontaneous economic trend. Any human agency would do, not only the Stalinists. Grant thought that what he called "the autonomous movement of the productive forces", the impatience so to speak of the "productive forces" with what Trotsky called "the crisis of leadership", had a lot to do with the appearance of what Grant and others called deformed workers' states. They thought Syria and Burma had become deformed workers' states by the mid 1960s. □



What is Standing Together?

The Palestinian-Jewish Standing Together movement in Israel explains its work

We are a relatively new organisation, but we're proud of how we organise Palestinian and Jewish citizens of Israel to influence and change our society.

This is the political context in which we operate – Israeli society is the one we aim to transform. Our activism and grassroots organising is directed towards this goal: talking with people, gaining support for our positions, and activating people politically.

We have many partners, locally and abroad, who share our values. What is unique about Standing Together is how we operate – the fact that we work for justice, peace, freedom, and equality for Palestinians inside the very country creating and maintaining the violent, oppressive regime.

This nightmarish war has raged for months now. The unfathomable humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza, the civilian death toll, the horror of Hamas' attack on October 7th, and deep concern for the lives of the hostages – we cannot accept living in this reality. We are working hard to change it.

We fight to transform our society because we deeply care for the people around us. We love this land and those who live here. And we look with horror at the direction that the governing leaderships push us towards. We all have skin in the game, and our loved ones are deeply impacted.

Our movement is binational, with Palestinian members, and Israel – the state in which we have citizenship – is occupying and denying the humanity of our people. The state declared war on our national identity and is committing atrocities against our relatives in Gaza and West Bank.

For us, bringing about foundational change is urgent – it is quite literally a matter of life or death. And for the past few months, even more so. We partnered with more than 30 organisations to mobilise thousands in Tel Aviv and Haifa for a ceasefire agreement.

We've repeatedly said – in Hebrew

and Arabic, on the streets, in the press, and on social media – that only a ceasefire agreement can bring back the hostages alive and stop the killing of innocents in Gaza. We've helped shift opinions and have rallied thousands for this cause.

We stand by this very basic fact:

- There are millions of Palestinians in this land. None of them are going anywhere.

- There are millions of Jews in this land. None of them are going anywhere.

And this must be the starting point of any serious discussion.

Our recognition of the right of both peoples for safety, dignity, and freedom clashes with the Israeli political establishment, which continues to promote ethnic cleansing, violent military control, incarceration, and the denial of millions of Palestinians of civil rights and sovereignty. When high-ranking politicians in Israel openly state that they favour an Apartheid state, in which Jews are granted civil rights, but millions of Palestinians should concede to live as stateless subjects under military rule – we must resist, together.

This is why we were the leading movement on the ground fighting against the Nation-State Law, and organised the first protest against this racist legislation in July 2018, where thousands of Jews and Palestinians marched in Tel-Aviv.

This is why we spent the past year participating in the protests against the judicial overhaul, intervening in the mass demonstrations with a message that says that there cannot be democracy without equality, and without ending the occupation. This is why we work to politicise and empower Palestinian youth inside Israel. Organising those left behind by the old political structures, and who want to realise a better society, free from racism, sexism and homophobia. We train them to become organisers and leaders.

This is why we marched to the home of Minister Bezalel Smotrich, in the streets of the illegal settlement Kedumim, calling for its evacuation. This

is why we say – in Hebrew and Arabic, inside Israel – that we reject the settler agenda.

We do so because we know that the current reality is not only deeply unjust – the atrocities committed in the last months shake us to our core – but also because it dangerously undermines our safety. If we and our families are to have a secure future, our political reality must change.

Our years of campaigning against occupation and injustice are not merely based on abstract morals, but on the concrete interests of the majority in our society: we, as people in Israel (Jewish and Palestinian) don't benefit, but lose, from the reality of occupation and war, and must fight to change it. Rather than equating the people in Israel with the establishment at the top, we recognise the deep contradictions between the interests of the majority in our society – Jews and Arabs, secular and religious, Mizrahi and Ashkenazi – and that of the political and economic elites.

Therefore we engage with people from diverse communities in Israel, across differences, around our shared interests. We're not content with denouncing the injustices and condemning our reality, but work strategically to organise and build power from below, to create change.

Sides do exist. But it's not all the Jews on one side against all the Palestinians on the other. It is the vast majority of ordinary people, both Jews and Palestinians, against the few who benefit

from the status quo. Our ideas are not confined to theory, we were able to build a movement around them: 5,000 dues-paying members, tens of thousands of supporters, two dozen local chapters in cities and on campuses, with confident and diverse leaders.

As organisers, we know the real test lies in whether we will succeed in building power: Will masses of people align with our strategy? Will we change policy and common-sense perceptions? Our movement aims not merely to be right, but to win.

Our movement members, after collective discussions and deliberations, democratically adopted a strategy for Standing Together, that aims to build a new majority in our society, one that would allow us to advance peace, equality, and social and climate justice. To do this, we champion the various causes that advance people's interests and improve our lives: we campaign to raise the minimum wage, fight for a Green New Deal, protest for LGBTQ+ rights, women's rights and against domestic violence, and organise urban youth to achieve affordable housing.

So are we a human rights NGO? Or an anti-war movement? We're not really either of these. Standing Together is an attempt to do something new. To create a People's Left that can win a majority away from the ideas of the establishment, and offer hope. If our values resonate with yours – then let's be partners. □

• From [Instagram](#)

Our videos

Watch Workers' Liberty's videos and playlists, and subscribe to our youtube channel! Many have subtitles. **Playlists include:**

- ABCs of Marxism, an introductory series
- Black Lives Matter
- The State, Crime, Prisons, and Police
- Socialist Feminism
- The struggle for LGBTIQ rights in the labour movement
- An introduction to Marx's Capital, in 19 parts, with Martin Thomas
- Tubeworker/Off The Rails, videos by the producers of the bulletins □

Watch, subscribe, like, comment and share: youtube.com/c/WorkersLibertyUK

New shifts on far right

By Harry Sheeran

In late February the new neo-Nazi "National Rebirth Party" (NRP) successfully registered with the Electoral Commission. Its leader, Alex Yerbury, dubbed the "Hull Hitler" for his penchant for dressing like the Nazi dictator, was active in Patriotic Alternative before leaving last year.

The name "National Rebirth Party" is explicitly fascist, with the aspiration of a nation reborn in a "pure" state. Patriotic Alternative (PA) and its splinters want a solely white Britain.

After leaving PA, Yerbury founded the "National Support Detachment" (NSD), which provides security for far right events. Yerbury had aspirations for the NSD to also be

far right shock troops which could be used against the left. He explicitly spoke of targeting picket lines, and Hope Not Hate [argues](#) that the aim of the NSD was to create a "cadre primed for confrontation with the left, especially the Trade Unions"

Yerbury seems to have shifted, for now, towards electoral politics, and hopes to use

his extensive links within the British far right to hold public meetings and field candidates for the NRP.

PA's leader Mark Collett has described Galloway's victory in Rochdale as a "blow to the system" and a chance for "positive change". It seems likely that this is motivated by Galloway's "anti-zionist" beliefs.

Elsewhere, PA is running



Alex Yerbury

three independent candidates in council elections. □

• Abridged. More: bit.ly/nrp-pa

Transnistria, Moldova, and Putin



By Dan Katz

Transnistria is a long, thin strip of territory, formally part of Moldova, sandwiched between the Dniester river and the Ukrainian border. The area forms about 12 percent of Moldovan territory.

470,000 people live in the region. It declared independence from Moldova in September 1990, and independence from the Soviet Union in August 1991.

Following a short civil war, ending in July 1992 after 700 people had died, fought between Moldovan troops, and secessionist militias actively backed by the Russian 14th Army, Transnistria became, de facto, an independent state.

The main issue during the conflict was the "language question". In 1990 the Moldovan parliament decided, for provocative nationalist reasons, that the single official language would be Moldovan in Latin script. Russian speakers objected.

Arms dump

Since 1992 Russia has garrisoned a small force, currently around 1,500 troops, in Transnistria. Although the Russian government signed a treaty 25 years ago saying it would remove its troops, the soldiers remain, alongside an enormous Soviet-era arms dump containing 20,000 tonnes of munitions and armaments. Transnistria also has its own armed force of 15,000.

Moldova's badly-equipped army, of 5,000, is probably no match for the Russian-Transnistrian forces.

The vast Russian arms store at Cobsana, Transnistria, is located two kilometres from the Ukrainian border. It has been estimated that if the weapons all exploded the blast would be equiv-

alent to the nuclear explosion at Hiroshima. Transnistria is only 70km from the key Ukrainian port of Odessa.

Transnistria has all the trappings of a sovereign country, with its own parliament, flag, currency, passport and constitution. However, it is recognised by no other state. Its money can only be exchanged within the statelet and its passport is effectively useless.

Most Transnistrians have Moldovan passports, although some have Russian or Ukrainian papers. 90 percent of the people of Transnistria are Moldovan citizens. The ethnic breakdown is 29% Russian, 29% Moldovan, 23% Ukrainian (2015 figures).

Government-controlled territory in Moldova has 2.8mn people.

According to the 2014 census 80% of those questioned (in government-controlled areas) said their main language was Moldovan/Romanian (essentially identical), with 55% describing their language as Moldovan and 23% Romanian. 9% declared Russian as their main language.

Moldova's language and culture is Romanian. Its recent history as a distinct political unit dates from its creation as a republic in the USSR after Stalin forced Romania to cede the territory in the 1940, in the period of the Hitler-Stalin pact.

Numerous cases alleging abuses in Transnistria have been taken to the European Court. These include Transnistria's banning of the use of Moldova's Latin script, the closure of organisations using the Romanian language, and the use of torture in the Transnistrian prison system. Transnistria has responded by making it illegal for people in the area to make complaints to international authorities, a "crime" now punishable by ten years in jail.

The German news broadcaster, Deutsche Welle, describes Transnistria in this way: "Outwardly Transnistria is a gigantic Soviet outdoor museum,

with monuments to Lenin, red flags, and hammer-and-sickle symbols galore... however [in fact] it is the extensive premises of [a holding company called Sheriff] and a military depot run by a small number of former KGB officers who are now probably working for the GRU, Russia's military intelligence."

Transnistria under Sheriff became a centre for smuggling, gun-running and money laundering.

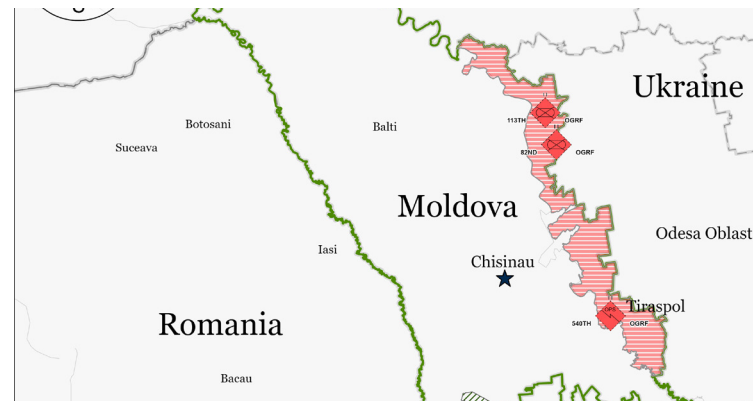
Moldova, the poorest country in Europe after Ukraine, now has a pro-European government and a referendum in 2014 showed overwhelming support for joining the European customs union. Moldova was granted candidate status in the European Union in June 2022.

Moldova's stagnant economy, and widespread corruption, have created a demographic decline and over half of the population are pensioners.

Ukraine war

Moldova has been attempting to make itself less vulnerable to Russian attacks and provocations by making itself less dependent on Russian gas supplies, finally accomplished in 2023.

On Wednesday 28 February, there was much speculation that the authorities in Transnistria would demand incorporation into Russia, provoking a crisis if Russian president Vladimir Putin should use a major speech the next day to accept their offer. In fact, a Transnistrian "congress of deputies of all levels" did convene on 28 February, but made the limited demand of Russian protection in the face of an "economic war"



being waged against Transnistria by the Moldovan government.

The immediate background to the current tensions in Transnistria is the Ukraine war. In February 2022, following the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Ukraine sealed the Ukraine-Transnistria border, cutting off smuggling routes. In January 2024 the Moldovan government declared that all imports into Transnistria would be subject to customs duties. Moldova's president, Maia Sandu, said, "[We are] making small steps for the economic reintegration of the country."

The new custom rules have increased prices in Transnistria.

Originally 450,000 Ukrainians fled to Moldova following the February 2022 Russian invasion, of which 100,000 remain. Most Ukrainian refugees then moved further west into Europe.

Putin would like to spread agitation in Transnistria to Gagauzia, an area in the south of Moldova run by a pro-Russian politician, Yevgenia Gutsul. On 7 March Gutsul was in Russia meeting Russian officials and asking Russia to provide Gagauzia with cheap gas. Gagauzia and Taraclia have a combined, largely pro-Russian, population of 100,000.

Russia should remove its troops, allowing Transnistria to reintegrate with Moldova and join the EU. The Moldovan government should recognise Russian as an official language. □

Momentum convention: a mixed bag



By a Momentum member

The Labour left grouping Momentum held its first-ever "members' convention" via Zoom on 10 March 2024, eight and a half years after the group was set up.

"Gaza", moved by Carol Turner of Labour CND and Socialist Action, was chosen as "the" campaign priority.

Momentum should indeed already have been much more active on Gaza, but since not, the vote was more like an exercise in virtue-signalling.

An addled sort of "virtue", to my mind: the plan endorsed Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions, though a big section of the BDS movement has interpreted BDS as boycott of the actual Palestinian-Jewish anti-war movement within Israel, Standing Together.

I backed "tax the rich to fund the NHS" as campaign priority.

Momentum at its height had 40,000 members and many

local groups. It now has 10,000 members and very few functioning local groups. Labour membership has dropped less. It is 376,000 now; 485,000 in 2019; 564,000 at its Corbyn peak in 2017. Its Blair-Brown era low was 156,000.

The convention had a maximum of 205 people logged into Zoom. Momentum still, however, has eleven paid staff, whereas most other Labour left groups currently and historically have had none.

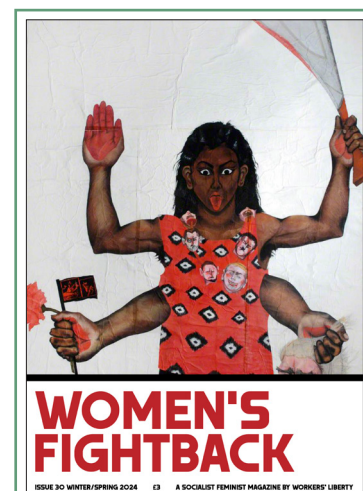
The convention passed a motion designed to facilitate a voice for socialism in the

General Election. However, the proposed political content is bland and unclear, with no amendments allowed, and decisions to be by Momentum's committee.

We'd think it unwise for Labour Left Internationalists to slow down on its parallel efforts, which are likely to carry sharper policies.

There was argument about constitutional amendments, but those passed look unlikely to change Momentum's functioning much. □

• Much abridged. More: bit.ly/mo-co



Women's Fightback.

36 pages, £3.00 □

bit.ly/shop-wl

Food couriers pause action

By Michael Elms

Since January, food delivery couriers working for Deliveroo and other platforms have been on strike against low pay. This strike has now been paused until later on in April.

The strike was organised by a group of mostly-Brazilian couriers calling themselves Delivery Job UK, based mostly in London. A series of days of action organised by this group caused

Deliveroo very substantial losses – 40% of their London business on Valentine’s Day. Part of the reason for the strength of these strikes lay in Delivery Job UK’s social media strategy. Their decision to picket Deliveroo’s “dark kitchens” – kitchens belonging to big chain restaurants which produce exclusively for delivery – was another source of power.

With the help of the IWGB, and networks left over from the national 2021-22 strike movement, in which Workers’

Liberty played an important role, strikes spread across the UK and began to involve hundreds of drivers in the West Midlands, the North East, the south coast, as well as Scotland and Ireland. The spread of the strike presented new organisational challenges for the strike leaders.

To consolidate their organisation, recoup energy after a very strenuous couple of months, and consider their strategy, the leaders of the movement

in London have decided to pause the action for some weeks before returning to the fight. This is a difficult moment for the strike, as it would be for any movement. But the strike unleashed in late January was the biggest in the history of the industry, and may be the most costly. Step by step, workers in the food delivery industry are approaching a strong level of organisation and advancing towards their goal of civilising this hyper-exploitative industry. □

Amazon: more strikes

By Ollie Moore

Amazon workers at two sites in the West Midlands will strike again in March. Workers at the BHX4 site in Coventry, where the GMB union has its biggest base, are striking on 19 and 20 March; at a new site in Sutton Coldfield, Birmingham, on 27 and 28 March. Workers at the Birmingham site struck for the

first time in January.

The strikes are part of a long-running campaign by workers to win a £15/hour minimum wage. Although Amazon has so far refused to negotiate directly with the GMB, the pressure from the strike campaign has already forced it to up its rates of pay, which will rise again from April, to £13/hour.

The GMB has recently sub-

mitted a new claim to the Central Arbitration Committee, the government body responsible for adjudicating claims for union recognition. If GMB can show its members at BHX4 are more than 50% of the workforce, the CAC could compel Amazon to formally recognise the union and establish a collective bargaining structure. This would be the first formal union recognition

agreement at any Amazon site in the UK.

Winning union recognition would be a huge gain. To capitalise on it, should it be won, GMB members will need to use it as a springboard for pressing further demands for improved terms and conditions, and continuing efforts to spread the strikes to other sites. That will allow them to avoid settling into an institu-



tional relationship with Amazon that sees the bargaining structures themselves, rather than workers’ action, as the principal mechanism for winning change. □

Defend right to bad posters

By Cathy Nugent

On 20 February security staff at Queen Mary University in London, acting under instruction from the management, broke into the offices of the University of College Union (UCU) to remove two

posters. One, produced by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, highlighted the slogan “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free”. The other, produced by the UCU, called for a Gaza ceasefire.

Management claimed the posters were causing a “chill-

ing effect on freedom of speech” on campus.

The union branch’s defence of “From the river to the sea...” (presumably the real target) is a statement in favour of a single secular state across Israel-Palestine. Workers’ Liberty has criticisms of that “solution”.

It is far from the democratic ideal it purports to be – an explicit denial of the national rights of the Israeli Jewish community, in place of mutual recognition.

We counter such ideas through political debate. Ripping down posters is exactly

the opposite of creating a climate of free speech where debate can happen. Further, the raid is an attack on the union’s right to organise, part of a pattern of intimidation against Palestinian solidarity campaigning on campuses.

Defend [Queen Mary UCU!](#) □

Bombastic, “dogmatic instead of critical”



Eye on the left

By Rhodri Evans

The last sixty years (though not the previous history of Marxist movements) have seen several precedents for the current frenzy of the Socialist Appeal group (about to rename itself Revolutionary Communist Party).

All those essays ended sorrowfully, but they were nearer realism than the “RCP” today.

Issue 4 (14 March) of *The Communist* has “theses” claiming that “capitalism is in terminal decline” and “the

youth are completely open to radical, revolutionary, and especially communist ideas”.

Thus, in this “year of Lenin”, the “RCP” can reach 10,000 members, become a “mass party”, and look to “the conquest of power”. Almost all the articles in the paper pose “one solution, revolution” for whatever issue they cover.

How? Members must go on the streets, leafleting, selling papers, and making impromptu speeches. Thus they will “find and train new communists... Literally millions of young people... identify as communists, all [sic] we have to do is find them”.

In 1850, Marx wrote against Willich and Schapper, who

advocated “revolution or nothing”. They too saw “finding” young people keen on “communism” as a substitute for the expansion, self-education, and transformation of the labour movement.

“The point of view of the minority is dogmatic instead of critical, idealistic instead of materialistic. They regard not the real conditions but a mere effort of will as the driving force of the revolution. Whereas we say to the workers: ‘You will have to go through 15, 20, 50 years of civil wars and national struggles not only to bring about a change in society but also to change yourselves, and prepare yourselves for the ex-

ercise of political power’, you say on the contrary: ‘Either we seize power at once, or else we might as well just take to our beds’...

“Like the [bourgeois] democrats you substitute the catchword of revolution for revolutionary development”.

At least Willich and Schapper knew what they meant by communism, and proposed to do something practical (an armed uprising).

The “RCP” *What We Fight For* includes nothing on the environment, nothing on LGBTQ rights, nothing on migrant rights, nothing on the state. It says little more on women’s rights than “equal pay for work of equal value”, already law

for almost 50 years. An article praises George Galloway with no criticism of his anti “woke”, anti-migrant, anti-green and “hate Israel” demagoguery.

Next step: “break down the gates [of Parliament], storm the palaces”. Other articles variously stress removing the Tories, admit that Labour is the alternative for now, admit the “RCP” will not run candidates, predict “the ‘lefts’ in the trade unions and Labour Party will [soon] begin to raise their heads” again, and advocate not voting.

Incoherent bombast! Instead: study, propagandise, organise with Workers’ Liberty. □

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!

April is the time when *Solidarity* readers may be getting a pay rise. That is a good opportunity to donate the first month of the rise and any back pay to our fundraiser

In the last two weeks we have had an additional £390. Our total is now £1,501. □

• Donate at workersliberty.org/fund

A strange sort of Big Bang



Diary of a trackworker

By Matt Shaw

After privatisation of the railway in the mid-1990s, we were all expecting an almighty bang. That failed to materialise. Or, rather, it did not come in the way we expected.

First there was an almighty shake up of who was in charge day to day. Previously, each section of track work had its own line of management. Permanent Way would have supervisors and managers with a Permanent Way background, Signals and Telecommunications likewise, and so on.

Now we had managers and supervisors from different departments with little or no experience of what we did but expecting us to help them run the railway and hide their inefficiencies.

In my own area, a new supervisor was appointed whose background was civil engineering, that is, primarily, bricks

and mortar. As a consequence, our work was all over the place with some staff being sent to do the same job three times while much higher priority work was left for months at a stretch.

That all came to a head when we were sent out to bring into work some "new" track circuit equipment which had been left out on track for nearly six months through a very rough winter. We told the supervisor that all the gear was knackered through a combination of vandalism, cannibalisation for spares, and bad winter weather. Not listening, he organised us an overnight stoppage of trains so that we could bring the equipment into work.

No such thing occurred. We tried to get the equipment into operation, but it promptly failed. All the old equipment had to be hastily put back on just to get the service working for the first train. I doubt that we were the only department to suffer from that sort of thing.

The ideology was that a new order had to succeed at any cost.

We were being asked to work at distances from home even more now. With so many workers leaving through re-

dundancy, finding other jobs, and early retirement, whole projects started to stutter to a halt.

Once a team of us drove to Stratford, east London, on a Monday morning from Sheffield. We were instructed to report to the on-site supervisor about testing cables which were to be reused on a display diagram. They were multi-cored cables, and they needed to be fully tested which was a fiddly job at the best of times.

We set to work, but only completed one cable before it was time to leave and go back to Sheffield by train. We left our van on site.

Every day for the next five days we all travelled on the first train to London, crossed from St Pancras to Stratford via Tube, tested one cable, and returned home via the same route, except on the final day when the van had to go back home and there was no time to do any testing. Again, I doubt that we were the only ones doing work that wastefully.

Eventually things calmed down, but not before a lot of time and money had been wasted on the altar of "privatisation is working". □

Leeds pledges no "work notices"

By Alan Gilbert

At the Yorkshire and Humber TUC conference on 16-17 March, Leeds City Council leader James Lewis said his council would never use the Tories' Minimum Service Act, which lets the government set "minimum service" levels in various sectors and then employers issue "work

notices" to oblige named workers to break strikes to deliver those levels.

There will be a formal vote on this at a full council meeting on 20 March, though the [wording](#) looks unclear.

On 9 December 2023 Lewis joined with several other Labour council leaders and mayors to [declare](#): "We will work with trades unions and employers to

explore every possible option to avert any prospect of work notices being issued in our areas".

The first option is for the councils not to issue work notices themselves where they are the employer. The Scottish Government and one Academy chain, [United Learning](#), have already said they will not issue "work notices". The Welsh Govern-

ment and Islington council have made statements strongly implying that.

A "no work notices" resolution passed by Leeds Central CLP on 29 February has been cited as background to Lewis's new statement. Islington South CLP has passed a resolution (21 February) asking Islington council to make its "no work notices" policy explicit. □

A 1940 film about the miners' battles



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

This week, and for another few weeks, I will introduce films for the 40th anniversary of the 1984-5 miners' strike.

The first of those, *The Stars Look Down* (1940), was based on the 1935 novel by A J Cronin and directed by Carol Reed.

It is set at the fictional Neptune Colliery in the North East and centres on

Davey Fenwick (Michael Redgrave), son of a local miners' leader, Bob Fenwick. Davey intends to go to college and hopes with education he can assist in the improvement of conditions in the mining industry.

But Jenny Sunley (Margaret Lockwood) persuades him to abandon his studies. They are married but it does not work out. Then Davey is sacked by the local school where he has become a teacher.

He takes a part-time job tutoring the son of Richard Barras, the mine manager, and overhears a conversation where Barras talks of re-opening a part

of a mine, Scupper Flats, which is prone to flooding and has already caused one strike. He tries to warn the miners of the danger.

Davey is a keen and vocal advocate of nationalisation, a growing sentiment within the industry, the trade union movement and the Labour Party during the war. On the first of January, 1947, "Vesting Day", those aspirations were realised. □

• *The Stars Look Down* is not available for streaming, but some excerpts at bit.ly/s-l-d, but a DVD is available amzn.to/3TE7dYt



Stop cuts at Goldsmiths

By a UCU member

A ballot of members of the University and College Union (UCU) at Goldsmiths, University of London, ending on 28 March, has been called to fight the threatened cut of 130 full-time equivalent posts, in reality, up to a third of all academic jobs at the college.

This is probably the worst in a wave of cuts affecting many universities across the UK. Higher education bosses point to factors including: a drop in both UK and EU students and a tailing off of non-EU students, a freeze on UK tuition fees, and a lack of funding for arts and humanities.

Mismanagement

The Goldsmiths union knows that financial and strategic mismanagement is at the core of the problem. Goldsmiths has done nothing to fight the government's hatred of arts, humanities and increasingly social science, and has subjected the college to two rounds of "restructuring" (cuts), slashing student support, damaging its reputation.

The UCU nationally needs to mount a massive campaign of solidarity for Goldsmiths and other colleges facing cuts. We need to mobilise students and the local community in defence of the future of higher education. □

Tata: nationalise, don't subsidise

By Katy Dollar

Unions are balloting for strikes following the announcement of massive job cuts at Tata Steel. The Indian conglomerate Tata, which has recorded profits of over £23bn, has confirmed this month that it plans axing up to 2,800 jobs; It will close two blast furnaces at Port Talbot, with potential redundancies also at another site, in Llanwnern. It is already closing the Morfa Coke Ovens, in Port Talbot, on 20 March.

Tata Steel currently employs 8,000 people in the UK, 3,859 people at the Port Talbot site. A protest has been held in Port Talbot, and workers from the Llanwnern site (where 917 are employed) have marched in Newport city centre.

Speaking at the Port Talbot rally, Unite general secretary Sharon Graham said there have been almost 6,400 jobs lost in the British steel industry since 2015.

Tata has eyes on more government funding for green transition, even whilst dismissing thousands of workers.

A document for the company says: "Tata Steel has also made clear that, with the right investment and policy environment, it is open to further investment, such as in a direct reduced iron (DRI) plant. We would look at the case for a potential DRI plant in the UK if the business conditions are right and, if in future, the government supported further investment."

The document also directly addresses the prospect of a Labour government, adding that the company "is open to further investment in the future" but

that it wants to turn the Port Talbot plant to profit first. Labour has said it will invest £3bn in the steel industry, and it is seriously considering backing hydrogen steelmaking as an option.

Tata has received about £1bn in pledged state funding. Half of that will support Port Talbot's switch to electric arc furnaces – remaking new steel from the UK's abundant scrap – while the rest will help Tata, which also owns Jaguar Land Rover, build a gigafactory to make batteries for electric cars.

Tata's touting for hundreds of millions of pounds more in subsidies whilst workers are left unemployed shows further weaknesses in Labour's green investment pledge. Without centring just transition for workers, workers' control and nationalisation, green investment can become subsidy for profits of already rich companies.

The Community and GMB unions, working with Syndex, have developed the multi-union plan for Port Talbot, which has been presented to Tata Steel. Unite has also produced a similar Plan for Steel which goes further with plans to increase UK steel production through protectionism. The plan includes a British-steel-only rule on government contracts and a subsidy for energy costs, similar to plans in Germany. The German government has been criticised for policies which subsidise high energy consumption across German industry.

Unite has announced it is balloting 1,500 workers. Community is also balloting and represents more steelworkers than any other union, including the



majority of workers impacted by Tata's decarbonisation plans.

Despite all the unions producing plans for steel, we fear that they are using ballots to leverage redundancy promises rather than transition arrangements to avoid job cuts at Tata. □

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Pay: time to fight to win

By a PCS member

National disaggregated strike ballots in the PCS civil service union over pay, job protection and pensions will run from 18 March to 13 May. Background: a period of unprecedented long term pay decline, with the Tories seemingly bent on imposing another poor pay round in 2024.

The Government has recently acknowledged that "Civil Service average pay within grades has shown a general downward trend in real terms since 2008, due to below-inflation increases." PCS's own research shows that civil service median annual pay by grade has fallen by up to 38%. PCS desperately needs to win the 171 legal ballots across the "delegated bargaining units" into which civil servants are divided and ruled.

Unfortunately, the "Left Unity" (LU) leadership of PCS has been undermining the prospects of a membership fightback:

- In 2023 they wrecked our strike

campaign for a 10% pay across the board pay increase in 2022/23 and added not one additional consolidated penny to our salaries.

- They stood by as the Tories inflicted below-inflation awards across the civil service in the 2023/24 pay round.

- They mis-sold the 2023/24 below-inflation awards as an achievement, echoing the Tories' claim that it was a good settlement.

- They boosted and spun the "national talks" which predictably have resulted in no government concessions.

- They have failed to undertake a serious propaganda campaign for the last nine months.

- The pay demands are deliberately vague: "Restoration means that, in addition to an inflation-proof pay rise [measured how? is the demand less than the previous 10%?], we want some [!] redress for everything that has come before."

- The industrial action strategy is again to be based only on selective strike action, with minimal national ac-



tion.

PCS [Independent Left](#) (IL) supporters on the National Executive Committee (NEC) proposed that the pay demands be clearer and that the ballot be delayed by one month to allow for intensive campaigning amongst members. LU rejected those proposals. With NEC elections approaching (18 April to 9 May) they are desperate to look like a leadership that fights for members.

IL and other activists will work to deliver votes for strikes while contesting the NEC elections in principled alliance with other groups. The alliance has received 66-70+ nominations per candidate, running parallel with the long dominant LU slate. Our immediate slogan is clear: Win the strike ballot and elect a new leadership that wants to win the dispute! □

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Sheriff of Nottingham votes against cuts

By Liam Conway

On Monday 4 March, Councillor Shuguftah Quddoos, the Sheriff of Nottingham, was the only councillor in the city to vote against the Government-imposed cuts.

Her speech was a simple but powerful message to her fellow Labour councillors, delivered to those outside City Hall and later in the council chamber itself.

"Kids in care, people in temporary accommodation, vulnerable adults, our social workers, social housing tenants, our charities and volunteers, our artists and protectors of culture, do not have a vote. But I do, and I will vote against this budget today. It's true that Nottingham has been pushed to the edge by Tory austerity... but surely times of crisis require us to be bolder... Rubber stamping this budget with a heavy heart will do little for the 500 people whose jobs are at risk." Councillor Quddoos concluded with a demand that the rest of the council stand with the thousands of Nottingham people who had signed a petition demanding an end to the cuts.

On the following Saturday 9 March, the Sheriff of Nottingham poignantly led a march from the Robin Hood statue to the Council House, where a supportive campaign cheered every word she spoke about why we need defiance not compliance in the face of government imposed cuts. Shuguftah has now been suspended from the Labour Party for breach of the rules governing local councillors, rules ironically introduced in 2016 during the Corbyn era.

The three big unions representing city council

workers in Nottingham are also the three biggest affiliates to the Labour Party, Unison, Unite and the GMB. Shuguftah has stood by city council workers in those unions. Those unions, from the very top, should now demand that Shuguftah is reinstated as both a Labour Party member and a Labour Councillor.

In the meantime, we have work to do fighting the cuts at workplace level. At the march and rally on Saturday 9 March, workplaces facing immediate threats of closure were represented by workers who want to fight to defend their jobs and services, such as the Jackdawe Complex Care Team. We should support strikes, occupations, localised public meetings in defence of community centres, activity centres, libraries and provision like Jackdawe.

However, so far it remains a minority of workers and service users prepared to demand defiance in place of compliance. A public meeting on Thursday 21 March will seek to look at ways we can effectively mobilise across the city against the cuts and in demanding, as the general election looms, that Labour reverses the cuts and restores central government funding to at least 2010 levels.

There is much to play for in Nottingham and the chance to spread the campaign to other towns and cities threatened with huge cuts, like Birmingham and Coventry. In particular we need the unions at branch, regional and national level to mobilise their members in action against the cuts alongside local Trades Councils and anti-cuts campaigns. □

Tory demagogues turn on dissent

By Colin Foster

The Tory government is adding layer upon layer of restriction and suppression of protest. Its latest move is its new [definition](#) of "extremism", announced on 14 March.

Groups judged "extremist" will, it seems, not necessarily be banned, but the government will shun them and the Tories will put pressure on Labour to shun them.

Labour leaders' feeble response so far suggests the Tories' gambit may well embarrass Labour. Yet it is so transparent that three former Tory home secretaries, including the very right-wing Priti Patel, [protested](#) in advance of 14 March.

Tory-appointed "anti-extremism commissioner" Robin Simcox, who previously worked in the Trumpite Heritage Foundation in the USA, has upped the hype by claiming (7 March) that Gaza ceasefire demonstrations turn all "central London" into a "no-go area for Jews". He was following on former Tory minister Paul Scully ([26 Feb](#)), and former Tory deputy chair Lee Anderson, now with Nigel Farage's Reform Party ([23 Feb](#)).

Solidarity has criticised the chief megaphone-slogans and placards on the Gaza demonstrations – "from the river to the sea", for example, which since 2002-3 at least has meant suppression of Israel.

Because we have criticised, we are well-placed to answer the Tory demagoguery without dissimulation.

Ideas should be combated by ideas, actions

by actions. There are more than enough laws restraining hurtful action by protesters. Measures to restrict ideas diverging a lot ("extremely") from consensus or orthodoxy may trouble reactionaries here and there, but in the long run will more surely hurt advocates of liberation.

On the ceasefire protests, we have been loud with ideas of "two states" and Jewish-Arab workers' unity disliked by the megaphonists. The protests have not been a "no-go" area for us. We've had one case, I think, of comrades being surrounded by angry protesters shouting "Zionist!" at them, but that is about all.

And if there are more? Offensive or even abhorrent verbal excesses are always a risk on angry protests. Against such abuse, we rally our forces and call on the rest of the left to help defend us, not on the cops for suppression.

It would be hopeless to rely on the Tory government to suppress Tory party action against migrants, or the police to suppress police abuses. To support bigger powers for the government and the police in the hope that they will tamp down the elements of protest we dislike, and let other elements flourish, is foolish.

The [Guardian](#) reports that official guidance for the government's scheme against "radicalisation" lists "socialism", "communism", and "anti-fascism" among warning signs.

Defend the right to protest! Against reactionary slogans, counter-protests, and united fronts to defend those targeted. □





Solidarity

For a workers' government

END THE WAR! PEACE! TWO STATES!

By Ira Berkovic

On the evening of Tuesday 12 March, Israeli snipers shot and killed Rami al-Hal-huli, a 13-year-old Palestinian resident of occupied East Jerusalem. The military alleges al-Halhuli had shot fireworks at them. Responding to the killing, far-right Israeli minister Itamar Ben-Gvir said: "I salute the fighter who killed the terrorist."

At least three others, including another minor, were also killed in Israeli military raids.

These deaths are a reminder that, whilst local and global attention is focused on Israel's war on Gaza, the occupation of the West Bank continues to claim lives. The period since 7 October has seen both a spike in settler violence against Palestinians and an intensification

of Israeli military control in the West Bank, including numerous deadly raids.

Although the mobilisations Hamas leaders called for in Jerusalem have not yet taken place, the increase in Israeli military pressure and the killing of Palestinians makes upheavals in the West Bank more likely. The Israeli far right signal that they positively wish for that, so that they can launch heavier military attacks in the West Bank and further push back the Palestinians. They also signal they want full-scale war across Israel's northern border with Lebanon.

The death toll in Gaza also continues to rise, with Israeli air strikes and ground offensives ongoing. Over 30,000 people have now been killed, a large majority of which, according

to Israel's own total for Hamas fighters it has killed, are civilians. A large proportion are children. Many more could die as the result of a deepening humanitarian crisis as the population suffers from lack of access to healthcare, food, and other basic supplies.

As we go to press, negotiations are still underway for a ceasefire and hostage-release agreement. We want a permanent ceasefire and a peace deal, but an immediate ceasefire of any length is preferable to the indefinite continuation of slaughter, and preferable to the Israeli government going ahead with its threatened large-scale attack on the refugee-packed city of Rafah. □

• What is Standing Together? p.11; more, p.3

