

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry



Union support for Fare Free London

New campaign says transport should be a public service

Page 6

Cass final report is a setback

Promise to cut NHS waitlists, but limits on care offered

Page 6

Watching the real world

What the online "no vote for Labour" flurry means in reality

Page 4

Study, explain, agitate

A classic exposition of socialist tasks within the working class.

Pages 8-10

The loot of the billionaires



A few thousand billionaires – 2,781 according to the latest [report](#) from *Forbes* magazine – own US\$14.2 trillion in wealth, up by \$2 trillion (14%) from 2023.

The billionaires, and about [60 million](#) millionaires, make the core of the world ruling class. They have huge luxuries. The first guiding principle of economic life, under capitalism, is to make these ultra-rich even richer, i.e. to maximise profits.

They have big houses, private jets, and other luxuries. Most of their wealth, though, is financial wealth – shares, bonds, and other “tickets” to future profit income, the wealth that also gives power over workers.

Most ultra-wealth comes from already-wealth. Most got richer because they started out rich. *Forbes* notes that “every billionaire under 30 inherited his or her fortune”. A few a bit older are “self-made”, though they mostly came

from well-off (if not quite millionaire) backgrounds.

The biggest exception is Palmer Tuckey, a US capitalist (and strident Trump supporter) who started his fortune by designing a VR headset (his dad was a car salesman). All of them, even Tuckey, owe their wealth to getting into a position where they own or control means of production, so can siphon off the excess value, above wages, produced by wage-workers employed on those means of production. Generally inventors, and scientists who make discoveries, do not get rich. The world’s top billionaire is Bernard Arnault, whose fortune comes from LVMH selling bling to other well-off people.

Oxfam [calculates](#): “A progressive wealth tax between 2 and 5 percent rate on the EU’s multi-millionaires and billionaires could collect 286.5 billion euros annually. This money could pay for... more than half of the highest estimate of the world annual costs for climate crisis adaptation and mitigation in low- and middle-income countries.



“A person from the richest 1 percent emits on average 14 times more carbon (CO2) than a person in the bottom 50 percent. A European wealth tax could also address the excessive emissions of the super-rich”.

That is true and immediate, but only a start. Even dividing up the mansions of the rich, and redirecting luxury hotels and restaurants to housing and feeding the worst-off, is only a start.

Our aim is not the redistribution of wealth among households. During

the revolution of 1848, according to legend, Amschel Mayer Rothschild would offer a few coins to each passer-by on the streets of Frankfurt, telling them that he had calculated their share if his fortune were divided equally among the whole population. Most of them shrugged.

Our aim is to win social ownership and democratic control of the vast productive wealth of the billionaires and millionaires, and to redirect investment democratically to social and green goals.

The issue is class power. Who rules, the billionaires with their profit drive, or the working class with our imperatives of social solidarity and social foresight?

The issue will be resolved only by working-class strength and power, that is, by democratic and politically-educated working-class organisation in workplaces and communities. *Solidarity* works for that, day by day, week by week, in times of working-class reflux as well as times of advance. □

The working class and the overpaid



By Martin Thomas

One of the big arguments of Marxists against “utopian socialists” from the start was about class struggle and socialism.

Many socialists argued that everyone – or everyone except a tiny minority – would prefer socialism. Maybe the working class suffered most and so would benefit most, but everyone would gain from maximising the good, socialist, elements of society.

But, as Marx put it, in history “it is the bad side that produces the movement, by providing a struggle”.

Socialist class struggle will prevail only by defeating the capitalist class and a sizeable layer of what Marx called the “middle classes [who] are a burden weighing heavily on the working base and increase the social security and power of the upper ten thousand”.

Marxists think we can and need to win support of a sizea-



ble chunk of better-off people. Enthusing in 1893 about the growth of the socialist movement in Germany, Engels wrote “our ideas are making headway everywhere, as much among teachers, doctors, lawyers, etc. as among the workers. If we had to start wielding power tomorrow, we should need engineers, chemists, agronomists... It is my conviction that we would have a good many of them behind us already”.

And, as workers’ rule flourished, many former rich kids will come to value the social advantages above individual luxury and the joys of command. Many better-off work-

ers, too, will become happy to do without extra “stuff” and “retail therapy”. Even in capitalism, above a certain level, less unequal societies are happier and [less fraught](#) than richer but more unequal ones. The super-rich are [often unhappy](#).

But there is no getting round the battle today against over-pay, and the people deeply attached to over-pay.

A principle of workers’ rule is that “managerial” jobs are elected and done at workers’ wages. The Bolsheviks in Russia after October 1917, knowing they could only improvise in an impoverished country where socialism could gain less middle-class support than

in Germany, set a “party maximum” so party members who held government posts could get no more than a skilled worker. Scrabbling to sustain administration, they agreed “bourgeois specialists” could be paid more, but only as long as their decisions were vetted. As Stalinism advanced, the “party maximum” was circumvented, then abolished, and the pay hierarchies became steeper than in the “West”.

Today, however, in the UK, top managers’ advocates plead that they must be paid [more](#). They do not dare claim that they “deserve” or “need” more, only that US firms pay more and so UK firms risk “losing talent”.

The process of vying for top-manager jobs has been shown to favour [psychopathic](#) traits. The anecdotal evidence is that 21st century “professional managers” are possibly good at doing each other down, but if anything worse than old-fashioned “up from the ranks” managers at organising production in an efficient and human-friendly way.

Let the super-paid managers “flee”. Fellow-workers, elected

by and accountable to their workmates, can do the managing and organising work better, and at workers’ wages. □

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](#)

Solidarity with peace activists in Israel

By Ira Berkovic

How can Israel's war on Gaza be stopped? There is no easy answer, and the sense of helpless despair many feel in the face of mounting slaughter is understandable. But we do no service to the victims of those horrors if we allow our despair to numb us into inaction.

On 13 April, thousands marched in central London to demand a ceasefire and that Britain "stop arming Israel". Such demonstrations have undoubtedly contributed to an atmosphere of international pressure on Israel. The demand that international governments suspend military aid to Israel, or withdraw licenses under which firms based in their countries sell arms to the Israeli state, is also important. Should it be won on any scale, it would add still further to diplomatic pressure.

But while a long-term suspension or cancellation of aid from Israel's



chief ally, the USA, would, over time, degrade Israel's military capacity, it is unlikely to have much immediate operational impact on the war. And in Britain the demand is almost wholly symbolic. Sales from British-based firms account for 0.02% of Israel's military imports.

Demanding governments increase humanitarian aid to Palestinians, including via significant increases in funding

to UNRWA, the UN agency perhaps best placed to administer and distribute aid, is also vital. Israel's restrictive control of border crossings, and difficulties in distribution within Gaza, with allegations of Hamas fighters confiscating aid, make the situation challenging, but underline the need for activist pressure in wealthy, powerful nations to demand more decisive action. Direct donations to humanitarian charities such as Medical Aid for Palestinians can also help.

The international institutions of the labour movement, vastly less wealthy than governments and states, but hardly impoverished, can also do more to fundraise. The International Transport Workers' Federation's Palestine Union Solidarity Fund, which works with the Palestine General Federation of Trade Unions to administer aid, provides a model.

Solidarity has argued that the pressure to which Israel's warmongering Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu remains most vulnerable is internal. Anti-government demonstrations have swelled in recent weeks, with demands from families of Israeli hostages captive in Gaza for an agreement that secures their release increasingly at the centre of them.

Standing Together, the left-wing Arab-Jewish social movement, has intervened in the demonstrations to argue that only a comprehensive political agreement, including a ceasefire and peace talks towards a permanent settlement guaranteeing equal rights to both peoples, Palestinians and Jews,

can guarantee safety and security.

Although *Standing Together* as a movement has no formal policy on what that settlement should be, many of its leaders believe, as *Solidarity* does, that it must begin with the establishment of an independent Palestinian state alongside a secure Israel. The international movement against the war must also be an international movement of solidarity with their efforts. □

Voices from inside Israel

"We are here at the Horev Centre [Haifa], and we are here with the camp of life, the camp that is demanding a ceasefire now, that is demanding a hostage deal now. A deal that will stop the killing and destruction in Gaza and bring the hostages back alive [...] We know the majority of the people that live here, want to live, [and] are against the camp of death led by the Israeli government." – Sally Abed, one of the Palestinian leaders of *Standing Together*, speaking from an anti-government protest in Haifa on Saturday 6 April. (Transcribed from Instagram)

"Fourteen thousand Palestinian children have been killed since the war began. That's 77 Palestinian children killed every day for the 180

days of the war. Think about it. 77 Palestinian children a day. If 77 Israeli children were killed every day, we would lose our minds..."

"The only way to live here is to understand that there are seven million Palestinians here, who are not going anywhere, and there are seven million Jews here, who are also not going anywhere. If we do not succeed in living together, where every person has security, equality, freedom, and independence, then none of us will have a life here. So it's time for a ceasefire, time to end the war, bring the Israeli hostages home, and get rid of the fascists in power..."

- Alon-Lee Green, National Co-Director of *Standing Together*. (Transcribed from Instagram) □

Keep pressing for ceasefire and peace

Indirect negotiations between Israel and Hamas, conducted in Qatar, are formally ongoing, but apparently deadlocked. The latest proposal for a temporary ceasefire and hostage-release agreement would reportedly see 40 Israeli hostages, either women, children, or the elderly, released in exchange for some hundreds of Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails.

International press reports say Hamas has claimed it is not holding 40 hostages in those categories; moreover, it remains intransigent over any deal that does not involve a permanent ceasefire.

From the point of view of Hamas's leaders, prolonging the war makes a certain sense. But for the people of

Gaza, a temporary ceasefire is surely preferable to none at all. Hamas's intransigence suggests a callousness towards the lives of the people it claims to represent; intransigence on the Israeli side also suggests that it sees the still-living hostages as expendable.

Of the 111 hostages freed, only one was rescued by direct military action. All others were released as part of a ceasefire agreement in November.

The hope for a democratic future in the region, although presently remote, rests substantially on the shoulders of dissident movements in Israel, Iran, and elsewhere.

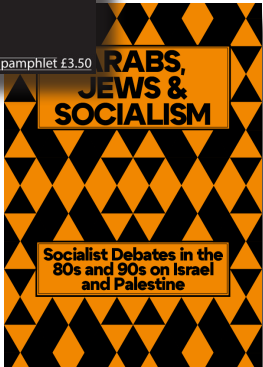
It is a prime duty of internationalists to offer them as much direct support and solidarity as we can. □



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Activist Agenda

Meetings

Thursday 18 April: 7pm. The Carnation Revolution. Marchmont Community Centre, London WC1N 1AB: bit.ly/17apr

Thursdays 2 May to 6 June: 8pm. Zoom study group on *Theses on Feuerbach*: bit.ly/e-feuer, Zoomlink bit.ly/thu-8. Many more at workersliberty.org/events, or scan QR code.

Template motions

Texts: to adapt for union branches and Labour Parties. Top of the list currently: "no work notices", abortion decriminalisation: bit.ly/mo-pe

Socialist-feminist book clubs

workersliberty.org/sf-bookclubs: Sheffield 6 May

At work or on campus

We organise: among health and local government, school and education workers, on the railway and London

Underground, in the civil service, on uni campuses, and more. See workersliberty.org/work-unions, Insta @work-erslibertystudents, and email awl@workersliberty.org for more.

Campaigns

For: UK Friends of *Standing Together*, Labour Left Internationalists, Workers Against the CCP, Free Our Unions, Solidarity With Iranian Workers, Neurodivergent Labour, India Labour Solidarity, Ukraine Solidarity Campaign, Labour Campaign for Free Movement – contact details, activities, template motions, etc. – see workersliberty.org/agenda. For environmental campaigning, including mobilisation for Reclaim the Power at Drax in August, email awl@workersliberty.org. The Ukraine Solidarity Campaign has launched a fund appeal for PPE and other equipment to go to the 10th Mining Rescue Squad in Ukraine: bit.ly/ukrainerescuesquad □

Watching the real world



Eye on the Left

By Rhodri Evans

On Saturday some of us were walking from a Workers' Liberty meeting in York to the rail station. At one junction we couldn't remember whether to turn left or right.

We looked at Google Maps on our phones. Before we could see the answer there, one of us glanced at the real world. There was the station, visible on our right!

With the "don't vote Labour" agitation on the (sort of) left now, it's an inverse problem. Look on your smartphone, and it's huge. Watch the real world, and it's elusive.

None of the groups – Collective, No Ceasefire No Vote (NCNV), Transform, We Deserve Better, Workers Party – does street stalls or leafleting or paper sales or demonstrations or interventions in unions. In 1996-7 Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party, an electoral left-of-Labour effort, had, for a while, a paper, street stalls, branches, visible activity. Now the stir is all electoral-only.

NCNV and Collective held their second conference in Blackburn on 13 April. *Socialist Worker* and the *Morning Star* both report about 150 there, not many more than the [first meeting](#) on 3 March.

Socialist Worker says it was "rather aimless" until George Galloway, the top-billed speaker, intervened. "He rallied much of the room behind him".

"With all the dangers that represents" adds SW. The SWP had a bad time with Galloway 20 years ago, and notes Galloway's reactionary campaigning against LGBT+ rights, against migrants, and against greening of economic life. His Rochdale campaign was not a poor left-wing one, but right-wing.

The Socialist Party praised Galloway in Rochdale, and gives Galloway's Workers Party "observer status" in its TUSC electoral vehicle. It is pressing for a deal between TUSC and the Workers Party to share out constituencies in the general election and offer mutual support. Although *Morning Star* contributor Andrew Murray is keen for Galloway, the MS's report from 13 April was non-committal.

The NCNV conference clashed directly with the conference in London of

the Peace and Justice Project of Jeremy Corbyn. That conference was bigger (200), and wasn't a "no Labour vote" effort. It had PCS union general secretary Fran Heathcote on its platform, and campaigns like Keep Our NHS Public busy within it. It discussed the ["five demands"](#) of the PJP, which Collective has also adopted. The follow-up seems unclear to me. The PJP neither runs street stalls or similar itself, nor organises motions and such to sway the labour movement. Corbyn looks set to stand against Labour in the general election, but as an independent backed by his local Labour Party rather than as a PJP candidate. I'm told Galloway was not mentioned at all from the PJP platform.

It's a mess. But look closely, and there is a (messy) something in real life as well as on your smartphone.

Even though Labour is doing well in the polls overall, real-world doorstep work for the 2 May elections shows many Labour-minded people disgusted with Starmer.

Galloway, rich enough to pay campaign activists, may do well in the Rochdale council elections. Jamie Driscoll dissociates from Galloway, and he campaigns as the person best able to

attract central-government handouts to the North-East rather than as a leftist, but he may well win North-East Mayor. Other sort-of-leftish "independents" will probably win here and there on 2 May. Corbyn may win Islington North in the general election.

It's something. But it's a mess. And a not-very-left-wing mess, as shown by Galloway and by the *Morning Star's* [remonstration](#) that a "new left party" must avoid calling itself socialist or anti-capitalist.

A chunk of Corbyn-era "returners", who joined Labour after 2015 after previously being politically active in the 1980s, seem to have moved on thinking that "the Israeli embassy" robbed them of the chance to get the government of their wishes in 2019, and is now "running" Starmer. Whether conspiracy theory was weak or strong with them before, it is worse now.

Leftists disgusted with Starmer will do better to grit our teeth and redouble the political battle inside the labour movement than to be pulled in the wake of the conspiracy-theorists and Galloway. □

• Jim Denham is away, so no Antidoto this week.

From Madrid to Kyiv



Eric Lee

A little more than 85 years ago, on 28 March 1939, the Spanish civil war ended. The fascist forces under the command of General Franco entered the capital, Madrid, and it was all over. Spain did not see freedom again for nearly four decades.

There are many reasons why the Spanish Republic fell – some of them due to failures by the Republican leadership. But one outstanding reason was the lack of support that the Spanish Republic received from democratic states like Britain, France and the United States. While Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy provided weapons, ammunition and air support to the fascists, the Western democracies kept up an arms embargo. It was an unfair fight from the beginning because of that.

The French socialist Léon Blum, leading a Popular Front

government, was so frightened of the possibility of a civil war breaking out in his own country that he betrayed the Spanish Republic. He not only prevented French support reaching Spain, but actively encouraged dozens of other democracies, including Britain, to join the embargo as well.

The Soviet Union under Stalin's leadership did step in and provide support for the embattled Spanish Republicans. They sent aid and military advisers to help the Spanish fight for a time, but they also sent their secret police to suppress any opposition. George Orwell witnessed that first-hand, and barely escaped Barcelona alive.

The parallels between Spain in the 1930s and Ukraine today are obvious. The authoritarian Putin regime in Russia is throwing everything it has at Ukraine, backed by the weaponry of Iran and North Korea. Ukraine is getting loads of support from its Baltic neighbours and some other European nations including Britain, but its

most important source of defensive weapons – the United States – has disappeared from the scene.

The Republican Party, whose unchallenged leader is Donald Trump, has done everything possible to prevent the United States from arming Ukraine, giving it the tools to defend itself. There remain some Republican leaders who still support Ukraine, but they're fighting an uphill battle.

Trump personally feels close to the Russian leader and has insisted that if re-elected President later this year, he will end the conflict in Ukraine in one day. This is just bluster. He has no plan to end the war. What he means is that he'll fully cut Ukraine off from getting American support, allowing the Russians to win.

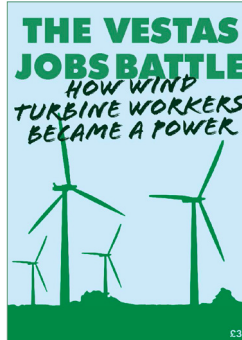
A Russian victory in Ukraine cannot be allowed to happen – and it is not inevitable. Ukraine can still win this war. We on the left and in the trade unions must make sure that the tragedy of Franco's victory is not repeated later this year

in Ukraine.

We will do that by campaigning around the simple, easy to understand slogan – "Arm Ukraine!"

In the US, it means that the Left must support President Joe Biden's efforts to pass legislation to arm Ukraine. This is not yet the case. Bernie Sanders, who initially condemned the Russian invasion in 2022, has now joined Republicans in voting against sending help to the embattled Ukrainians. Sanders said he denied support for Biden's aid package for Ukraine because, as he explained, it included support for Israel and other countries. But he offered no credible alternative, choosing instead to vote to block Biden's bill.

Democratic Socialists of America exploded in growth thanks to the Sanders presidential campaigns and is today the largest socialist organisation in American history. It includes many individuals who would welcome a Russian



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victory. If that remains the view of most of the American Left, the country urgently needs a new Left, one committed to a Ukrainian victory.

In Britain, things are better, with the Labour Party still supporting Ukraine thanks in part to the work of organisations like the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign. And Keir Starmer has been unwavering in his commitment to Ukraine.

85 years ago, we could not save Spain. We said "No pasarán!" But the fascists did pass.

This year, we must make sure that the Spanish tragedy is not repeated. Arm Ukraine now! □

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

Inequalities in fertility care



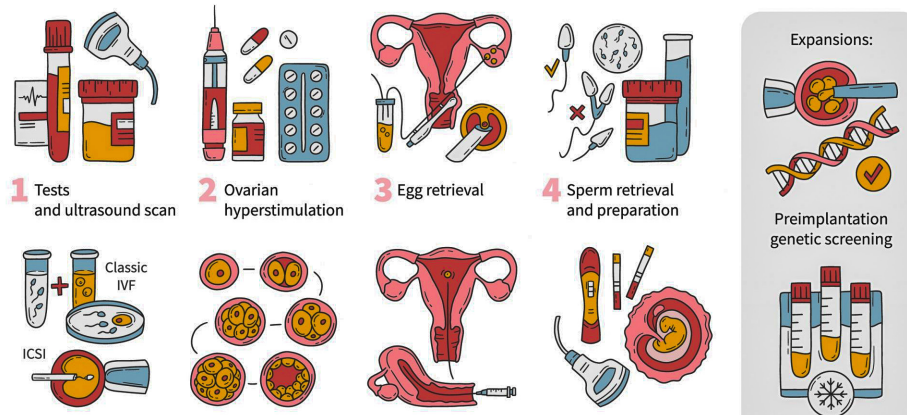
Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

The UK's fertility regulator, the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA), has [found](#) that IVF outcomes have varied widely for Black, Asian and minority ethnic background patients compared to white patients. The report, issued December 2023, gives data up to 2021.

The average IVF birth rate per embryo transferred has increased across

IN VITRO FERTILISATION IVF



all ethnic groups. However, Black and Asian patients aged 18-37 had lower birth rates at 23% and 24% respectively in 2020-1. White patients had 32%.

Single Black and Asian patients are also accessing fertility treatment far later than their white counterparts, which can have a huge impact on success rates. The study shows that these women started fertility treatment at 38-39 years of age, compared to 36.2 years for white single patients.

Black parents who conceived via

fertility treatment were the most likely to have multiple births, which carry a higher risk of complications for both mother and baby.

The findings highlight another area of racial discrepancy in maternal health and care. Black mothers are more likely to die from childbirth and have a 43% higher chance of miscarriage.

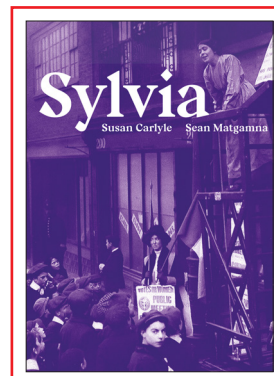
The proportion of IVF cycles which are NHS-funded, among patients under 40 in heterosexual relationships, has decreased across all ethnic groups

however it decreased the most among Black patients in heterosexual couples, down from 60% in 2019 to 41% in 2021. IVF is only offered on the NHS if certain criteria are met. If you don't meet these criteria, you may need to pay for private treatment. If you meet the criteria you are offered three rounds of IVF under 40 as opposed to one if you are aged 40-plus.

The HFEA, the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and the British Fertility Society and Fertility Network UK have called for action to ensure Black, Asian and ethnic minority patients and their partners have adequate access to fertility treatment.

Widespread NHS cuts mean it is increasingly difficult to access fertility care. Fewer people can access it, and those who can do so in less safe conditions.

Workers' Liberty will campaign for the labour movement to push Labour to restore funding and reverse privatisation in the NHS by taxing the rich, and to level up to end inequality within healthcare. □



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

Red Sea and Yemen's people under Houthi attack

By Dan Katz

The ultra-reactionary Houthi Islamist movement which controls most of Yemen continues to target shipping in the Red Sea with missiles and drones in support of Hamas in Palestine.

According to Houthi leader, Abdul Malik al-Houthi, speaking on 4 April, 424 US-British air strikes on Houthi targets have killed 37 people. The US and UK hope to prevent the attacks, which are causing shipping companies to re-route vessels and disrupting global supply chains.

The US-led attacks began in January 2024 and we warned in *Solidarity* they were unlikely to succeed in stopping the Houthis. Unfortunately, that has been proved to be correct. Shipping through the Red Sea is down to about 40% of usual.

Al-Houthi claims that the movement launched 34 attacks in the last month, using 125 ballistic missiles and drones. Some experts say the attacks are in fact diminishing. The US is now looking for a diplomatic way out and expressing the hope that the Houthis are running



out of munitions.

Inside Yemen the position of the Houthis has been strengthened. The regime is highly repressive. Dissidents are often accused of various forms of "immorality".

A judge who used social media to criticise the Houthi attacks on shipping was arrested in January for alcohol consumption.

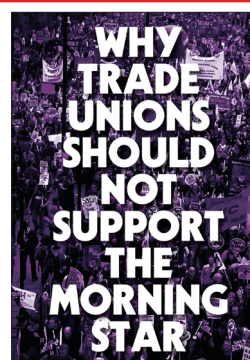
And there has been a recent series of mass trials of men accused of homosexuality.

According to Amnesty International, a Houthi court in Dhamar, northern Yemen sentenced nine men to death

– with seven sentenced to be executed by stoning, and two by crucifixion. 23 others were given prison sentences of between six months and 10 years on charges including "homosexuality" and "immoral acts".

On 1 February, a court in Ibb, in southern Yemen, handed death sentences to 13 students and flogging to three others on charges of "spreading homosexuality".

According to the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor Houthi courts have sentenced 350 people to death since taking over the capital, Sanaa, in 2014, and executed 11 of them. □



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



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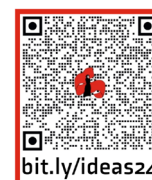
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Fare Free London wins union support



Environment

By Daniel Randall

Fare Free London (FFL), the new campaign demanding free public transport in the capital, took a modest but important step forward recently when it was backed by the London Transport Regional Council of the RMT union, following a motion I moved through my own branch, RMT Bakerloo line. The London Transport Region represents around 13,000 workers across Transport for London, including London Underground and the Docklands Light Railway.

In promoting the campaign in union meetings, and discussing the idea of free public transport with workmates, I sometimes encounter the argument that our unions can't support the de-

mand, because "fares pay our wages." It's understandable fellow workers might think this way, given TfL has, since 2018, been forced onto a funding model that makes it heavily reliant on fare revenue. When fare revenue vanished during the lockdowns, thrusting TfL into financial crisis, the government made a series of bailout payments, but all with restrictive strings attached, including cutting jobs and reforming the staff pension scheme, and conditional on returning to being "self-financing" once the bailout funds expired.

RMT has consistently and rightly argued that transport, as an essential public service, should be publicly subsidised. Prior to 2015, when the Tories began incrementally reducing the government grant paid to TfL, before abolishing it entirely in 2018, fares didn't "pay our wages". Endorsing the demand for free public transport, funded by government subsidy, is an exten-

sion of RMT's opposition to the "self-financing" model that is in line with the union's constitutional commitment to working towards a socialist society. Union policy already supports social provision of services such as healthcare and education, free at the point of use and funded by progressive taxation, so why not transport too?

The demand for free public transport is an example of what have historically been known as "transitional" demands. It responds to the immediate material needs of working-class people – both in terms of our need to travel freely and affordably, and our need to confront the climate crisis. It is winnable, as the introduction of free transport in several cities, including Tallinn and Montpellier, shows. Even New York is trialling free travel on a limited number of bus routes. But it also points the way to a different kind of society, by pushing back against the rule of profit and the

idea that the services we all need to live should be paid-for commodities.

In recent weeks, FFL activists have also addressed the Unite Community branch in East London, and Greenwich Green Party. Simon Pirani spoke on behalf of the campaign at the Campaign Against Climate Change Trade Union Group conference on 13 April. The campaign also plans to contact other transport worker trade unionists, including Unite reps and activists in the bus sector. Winning the demand is undoubtedly a long way off, but the start the campaign has made in promoting it, and winning support in key trade union bodies, gives us a platform to build from. □

• Daniel Randall is an RMT activist and a member of the Fare Free London organising group, writing here in a personal capacity. More: farefreelondon.org – report of CACC TU conference bit.ly/cacctu

Boris Savinkov: a counter-revolutionary



Debate

By Martin Thomas

Eric Lee (*Solidarity* 705) writes of Boris Savinkov as "a forgotten revolutionary". "Fascist" would be a better word, I think.

In August 1917 Savinkov was a leading figure in the failed attempt by a right-wing general, Lavr Kornilov, to overthrow Russia's Provisional Government.

Leon Trotsky, writing with hindsight, called Kornilov's a fascist revolt. Kornilov wanted to suppress the soviets, the elected workers' and soldiers' councils, and re-stabilise the army for war, but not a straight return to rule by the Tsar.

The Provisional Government he aimed to oust was not elected; but it included many nominal socialists, with bourgeois ministers too, and owed its authority to support from the Petersburg soviet, led at that time by Mensheviks and SRs.

The Government's leader, the nominal Social Revolutionary (SR) Alexander Kerensky, had hoped to use Kornilov to suppress the soviet and quell the Bolsheviks. Kornilov, becoming impatient, moved against Kerensky too.

The Bolsheviks fought for a united front to stop Kornilov, and succeeded. That success was the basis for them winning the majority in the Petersburg Soviet and then in the Second Congress of Soviets.

As far as I know, the SRs expelled Savinkov, long only a nominal member, after the Kornilov episode.

After the elected Congress of Soviets voted the Bolsheviks to power in October 1917 – it was the most democratic revolution in history – Kornilov (who had been jailed after his revolt, but now escaped) teamed up with other "White" generals who had loyal troops in the south of the Russian empire. According to his own [account](#) Savinkov quickly joined them. He wrote of their programme: "Dissociation from democracy constituted a political mistake. It gave reason to accuse the Don Civil Council of disguised reactionary behaviour. Even the Council of the Union of Cossack Troops, which represented moderate Cossack democracy, was dissatisfied with the policies of generals Alekseev, Kaledin and Kornilov... I tried to convince them that it was necessary to include democratic elements [to front the enterprise]. After long negotiations, Generals Alekseev, Kaledin and Kornilov agreed with me".

While Savinkov was hastening to Kornilov and Kaledin, were the Bolsheviks suppressing criticism wholesale? No: they were negotiating with the Mensheviks and SRs for a coalition government based on the elected soviets.

The revolutionary government had no "state machine". The old police had disappeared months before, the old army was falling apart (the soviet government officially dissolved it in early 1918), and the old civil service refused to cooperate. The Bolsheviks, with no "authority" other than their democratic mandate from the soviets (and scrappy Red Guard militias) were scrabbling to create a functioning administration.

Several Bolsheviks resigned in November from their posts on the central committee or as People's Commissars because they thought the Bolsheviks were not being soft enough in the coalition talks. Eventually even those "right" Bolsheviks became convinced that the Mensheviks and Right SRs could not be conciliated, and rallied. A coalition was negotiated, though only with the Left SRs, and began to govern.

The Mensheviks, at a congress in December, voted to recognise October as a genuine (though in their view mistaken) workers' revolution,

and for critical support to the Bolshevik-Left-SR government against the Kornilovs. (During the civil war some Mensheviks sided with the "Whites", and the Menshevik leadership never split with them).

In June 1918 Savinkov moved to Samara, where he helped set up an SR-dominated political facade for counter-revolution, first under the protection of the Czechoslovakian Legion, then of another right-wing general, Alexander Kolchak, until Kolchak tired of the decoration and dispersed the SR politicians.

Going into exile, Savinkov sought support from Winston Churchill and Mussolini. They

were overruled or reluctant, but Savinkov concluded after meeting Mussolini: "Fascism is close to me psychologically and ideologically... because it stands for action and total effort in comparison to the lack of will and the starry-eyed idealism of parliamentary democracy".

Savinkov had once been an anti-Tsarist revolutionary, a leader of the SRs' special unit for individual assassinations of Tsarist officials. That tells us more about the political dangers for revolutionaries of having such unaccountable military units than it does about any supposed democratic virtues of Savinkov. □



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Cass final report: a major setback

By Riki Lane

The final [report](#) from Hilary Cass on UK gender identity services for children and adolescents has some good recommendations, but overall has ended up feeding hostility towards trans people. It implicitly frames trans people as “not real” but having a mental health disorder. The associated NHS decision to rule out puberty blockers for young trans people except when they are on a (yet to be established) clinical trial is a huge setback.

Looking at the positives first, the review highlights the woeful level of service provision. NHS waiting lists are over five years, meaning that many young people age out before seeing a clinician. It recommends expanded capacity through a distributed service model, a holistic assessment, and individualised care plans. However, similar recommendations from the 2022 interim report have not been enacted by the NHS.

Downside

On the downside, there are multiple problems with the review’s methodology and what evidence and which people have been included and excluded.

The review rejected the vast majority of evidence relating to puberty blockers (medication to delay puberty given to children facing early puberty, and to some young trans kids), and included [only two](#) of 102 studies. The argument is that the excluded studies do not include a no-treatment group, and none of them have a “blinded” group (a group which doesn’t know whether it is getting placebo or the medication).

But there are strong ethical arguments for why you cannot [deny](#) appropriate treatment; and you cannot run a “blinded” group for puberty blockers.

Those who are not receiving them will know, because they will undergo puberty. The claim of a low level of evidence is based on excluding the large body of evidence that guides professional organisations around the world which have produced guidelines and standards of care.

As [Pang et al 2022](#) put it when discussing the 2022 Cass review interim report: “The American Academy of Pediatrics, the Endocrine Society, and the World Professional Association for Transgender Health have all endorsed the use of these hormonal treatments in gender-diverse young people, but curiously these consensus based clinical guidelines and position statements receive little or no mention”.

The Australian Professional Association for Trans Health has established local guidelines and the Board commented: “The Cass Review dismisses decades of research and support for the efficacy of puberty blockers and gender affirming hormones in gender-affirming care and effectively recommends that Gender Affirming Care be replaced primarily with psychotherapy and antidepressants, with gender affirming hormones and puberty blockers to be considered only with extreme caution and by a national multidisciplinary team.”

The Cass review’s Assurance Committee and other structures included no trans people, and did not include clinicians implementing the consensus standards of care. However, they did include people who challenge the use of puberty blockers and treat trans people as mentally ill.

There is a large contrast between what is happening in the UK and in Australia. In recent years in Australia, state-funded public hospital Gender Clinics



for children and adolescents have been established across the country. They face staffing pressures, but the government response has been much more supportive than in the UK.

The longest established of these clinics, at the Royal Children’s Hospital in Melbourne, set up an ongoing cohort study in 2020 to allow assessment of long term outcomes for their clients. And in 2023, the federal government awarded a large research grant (\$5 million over four years) to compare the models of care and their outcomes across all the gender clinics in the country. I personally am excited to be an investigator on that research project.

Overall, the Cass review represents a major blow to providing affirming care to young trans and gender diverse people. As [Freddy Mc-](#)

[Connell](#) put it:

“If the Cass review was held under a black light, we would see the fingerprints of anti-trans ideology. I don’t believe Cass shares this way of thinking, I think she believes in evidence-based healthcare and that trans children exist. However, allowing her review to be so heavily influenced by bias is a critical failure that is hers to own.”

“As her work is used, as it will be, to perpetuate a broader hostile environment towards trans people in the UK, the young people she has tried to help will, understandably, feel betrayed.” □

• I work in research positions at an Australian university and a Gender Clinic and am a member of the Australian Professional Association for Trans Health Research and Education committees: my views in this article are in a private capacity and not on behalf of those organisations.



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Starmer gives “total” pledge to arms industry

By Colin Foster

Keir Starmer told *Daily Mail* readers ([12 April](#)): “I want to be crystal clear to *Mail* readers. My commitment to Nato and the UK’s nuclear deterrent – maintained on behalf of Nato allies – is unshakeable. Absolute. Total”.

He continued with pledges of increased military spending, indefinite updates to the nuclear-armed submarine fleet, and British sourcing of supplies.

If only he were half as “clear” to working-class people about the NHS or childcare.

Jeremy Corbyn’s election as leader in 2015 brought an odd twist to Labour politics on Trident. Before then, many even



on the soft left [disliked](#) Trident replacement. Even the Labour right would claim only that the nuclear weapons were a sad necessity until multilateral nuclear disarmament could be negotiated. Many better heavy construction projects could offer better jobs.

But, probably because of pressure from the big unions Unite and GMB, Jeremy Cor-

byn, John McDonnell and the new leadership decided that Trident had to be put in the “too hard” box. The issue [disappeared](#) from Labour conferences.

We need to get it back there. Especially in times when the Labour leaders talk about tight budgets.

Trident replacement will [cost](#) £31 billion. □

Labour shift to right

By Chris Reynolds

The election results for Young Labour and Labour students committees, announced 8 April, were bad for the left.

In the 2022 elections, slates backed by the Labour-left group Momentum won majorities on both committees, though the Labour Students majority then let rings be run round it by the chair and secretary, both soft-left “Open Labour”.

This time Labour-right candidates won almost a clean sweep. For Labour students chair, Ruby Herbert won 255 to 141 for Anya Wilkinson (left) and 73 for Anna Baxter (Open Labour).

[Jack Lubner](#) got 2,397 votes for Young Labour chair, against 1,135 for the left’s Alex Charilaou.

Since 2022 the left vote has shrunk, rather than the right vote expanding. The tiny turnouts indicate poorer

organising effort on the left. Momentum has eleven paid staff (more any pre-Corbyn Labour left group ever had), and there is now a small network of left student Labour clubs: with a bit of energy more votes could have been turned out.

Ruby Herbert’s first political [statement](#) after being elected was to criticise the Labour leadership on trans rights. Anecdotally, the shaping thought of such people seems to be not full-on Blairism but a foolish idea of being loyalist up to the general election, then using credit gained to seek a word in the Labour leaders’ ear.

The results should worry us for the National Executive and other elections coming up this year. Nominations from local Labour Parties have to be in by 28 June: bit.ly/lp-nec. May meetings are also likely to decide local Labour delegates to Labour conference 2024. □

Study, explain, agitate:

The road to Bolshevism

Ninth in a series of articles around the 100th anniversary of the death of Vladimir Ulyanov (Lenin)

By Sean Matgamna

Earlier articles have recounted the pre-history of the Russian Marxist movement in revolutionary populism. Before we go on further about the first Russian Marxist groups, we will first ask, with Georgi Plekhanov: what is the socialist movement, and what do socialists do? Plekhanov, the pioneer of the Russian Marxist movement, answered this fundamental question in his 1891 text *The Tasks of the Russian Social Democrats in the Famine*. This is one of the basic documents of Russian socialism, and we print part of it here.

The turn made by the Marxist circles in Russia (mostly small study groups of students and especially studious workers) to mass agitation among the workers in the mid-1890s was directly inspired by the 1894 pamphlet *On Agitation* by Kremer and Martov. The whole question had already been brilliantly outlined by Plekhanov here (and also in work by Pavel Axelrod).

Plekhanov's exposition of what Marxist socialists are and do, and of the relationship of socialist agitation against details of the life imposed on workers by capitalism to our socialist overview and its propagation, is also as relevant to our work in the 21st century as to that of the pioneer Russian socialists.

My comments on the excerpts from Plekhanov that follow are indented. □

Tasks of the socialists

By Georgi Plekhanov

If you had put such a question [what is the socialist movement? what do socialists do?] to a socialist in the [18]30s, to one of the followers of the famous Fourier, for instance, he would have replied more or less in the following manner:

Our brilliant teacher discovered and expounded in his works a whole series of truths, whose existence mankind had not previously suspected. On the basis of these discoveries he worked out a detailed plan of the new social order which alone can save man from his countless moral and material misfortunes. The contemporary socialist movement, the true socialist movement and worthy of the name, is resolved to

spread the ideas of our teacher and to realise them in practice.

An answer of this sort would have been quite correct in the [18]30s. At that time the socialist movement was really concerned to spread the ideas of the various schools of socialism and to try to realise them in practice. In these circumstances each school clearly thought that the teaching of its particular founder was the true socialism.

Some of them, the followers of Englishman Robert Owen and Frenchman, Etienne Cabet, for example, formed utopian socialist colonies in some wilderness or other – Cabet in Texas, where the colony survived for some decades after its foundation in the 1840s – intending these to be the beginning of the new society.

But now things are different. To a contemporary socialist the socialist movement does not look anything like it did to a socialist in the [18]30s.

Even shortly before the revolutionary year of 1848 there emerged among the socialists men who looked at socialism in a completely new perspective. Seen in this new perspective the principal error of previous socialists was precisely the fact that [for them] "Future history resolves itself, in their eyes, into propaganda and the practical implementation of their social plans".

The socialists with the new outlook saw in the future history of the civilised world something else, something incomparably more promising.

What precisely did the socialists with the new outlook see in it? Above all class struggle, the struggle of the exploited with the exploiters, the proletariat with the bourgeoisie.

In addition they saw in it the inevitability of the impending triumph of the proletariat, the fall of the present bourgeois social order, the socialist organisation of production and the corresponding alteration in the relationships between people, i.e. even the destruction of classes, among other things.

Although they knew full well (better than their predecessors) that the socialist revolution involves a complete transformation in all social relationships, the Socialists of the new tendency did not concern themselves at all with working out a plan for the future organisation of society.

They thought this a complete waste of time because the details of the future order would be determined in their own time by circumstances that it was impossible to foresee and its general principles would be sufficiently



Plekhanov wrote on the tasks of socialists in the famine in the Russian Empire in 1891-2

determined by a scientific critique of existing social relationships, i.e. by a critique based not on the sympathies and antipathies of the reformers but on an examination of the historical development of the present social order.

The Socialists with the new outlook broke once and for all with utopias and took their stand on the basis of science....

If for the followers of [Marxist] scientific socialism the whole future history of bourgeois society resolves itself in the struggle of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie, all their practical tasks are prompted by precisely this class struggle.

Standing resolutely on the side of the proletariat, the new Socialists do everything in their power to facilitate and hasten its victory. But what exactly can they do in this case?

A necessary condition for the victory of the proletariat is its recognition of its own position, its relations with its exploiters, its historic role and its socio-political tasks.

For this reason the new Socialists consider it their principal, perhaps even their only, duty to promote the growth of this consciousness among the proletariat, which for short they call its class consciousness.

The whole success of the socialist movement is measured for them in terms of the growth in the class consciousness of the proletariat. Everything that helps this growth they see as useful to their cause: everything that slows it down as harmful.

Anything that has no effect one way or the other is of no consequence for them, it is politically uninteresting...

There is no doubt that the development of capitalism hastens the social revolution.

Consequently, every bourgeois whose activity furthers the development of capitalism hastens the social revolution. But it would be very strange if, because of this, someone were to think of the bourgeois activists as Socialists.

Even people whose activity is directly aimed at fighting socialism can hasten the social revolution.

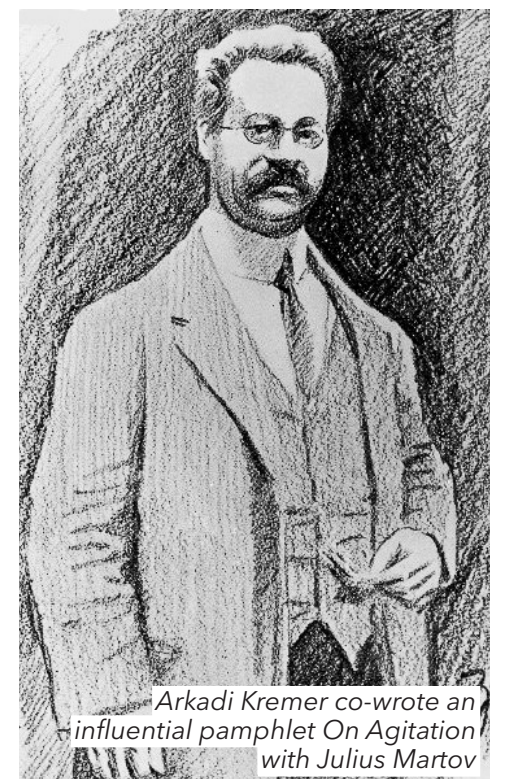
Some German Social Democrats think that the famous law of exclusion against the Socialists [issued by the "Iron Chancellor", Otto von Bismarck, in 1878] has to some extent helped their party. If this view is correct then it follows that Bismarck, in introducing the law of exclusion, has by that very fact hastened the social revolution in Germany.

But who would describe as a Socialist the man who was trying to deal the death-blow to the Social Democratic Party?

I reiterate that, however much you have discussed the consequences of your political activity, you will only be recognised as a Socialist if your activity has directly facilitated the growth of the class consciousness of the proletariat. If it does not exert this direct influence then you are not a Socialist at all, even though the more or less remote consequences of your non-socialist activity may bring some degree of advantage for the cause of socialism....

In identifying the most important and the most direct sign of socialist activity, I do not wish to say that anyone who does not want to betray the Red Flag should unfailingly engage either in writing socialist books or in distributing them and generally in propaganda among the proletariat and its organisations.

Individuals, belonging to the socialist party, may be involved in other matters without ceasing to be Socialists for a single moment. Let us suppose that the



Arkadi Kremer co-wrote an influential pamphlet On Agitation with Julius Martov

how socialists organise

socialist party of a particular country has decided to arrange secret hiding places for its members who are facing government persecution. It entrusts the matter to me and to several other comrades. We willingly and zealously carry out this assignment.

Our individual activity is not directly aimed at the development of the class consciousness of the proletariat. But is it conceivable that, in doing this, we cease to be Socialists? No one could say that.

But why should they not say that?

Because, in engaging in this activity, not only did we remain members of the party that directly promotes the growth of the class consciousness of the proletariat but we also undertook this activity on its instructions.

Another example: the socialist party of a particular country decides that in the near future it will have to come out into open conflict with the government. The success of its struggle depends to a great extent of course on how the army behaves at the decisive moment. And so the party assigns a certain number of its members to engage in revolutionary propaganda in the army.

The soldiers may of course be regarded as proletarians in military uniform. Consequently, as far as the people who explain the ideas of socialism to them are concerned, the question that interests us cannot even arise.

But [that question] is entirely appropriate for the people who deal exclusively with the officers. Do these people cease to be Socialists? Not at all. Why not, then? Once again because their activity is determined by the needs of the party that directly promotes the growth of the class consciousness of the proletariat.

And if they had not belonged to it? In that case they would have ceased to be Socialists because then their work would immediately have lost any connection with the direct and immediate socialist cause.

One could cite very many such examples. But my view, I hope, is sufficiently clear. It is expressed in its entirety in the epigraph to this letter: Without workers who are conscious of their class interests there can be no socialism...

The conflict between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is not the contrivance of the Socialists of a particular school and is by no means a tactical device dreamed up by a fanatical revolutionary, but is that same fateful historical inevitability as was the conflict between the bourgeoisie and the feudal aristocracy in its own time...

But having said that, Plekhanov qualifies it. What follows, about the



Wilhelm Liebknecht, 1848 revolutionary, friend of Marx and Engels, and father of Karl Liebknecht, coined the slogan: *Study, Propagandise, Organise!*

nature and interconnection of agitation and propaganda, will guide the consistently revolutionary Russian Marxists during the expansion of the labour movement in the 1890s and after. In What Is To Be Done, Lenin will base much of his argument against the so-called "Economists" on this work of Plekhanov's. See the chapter entitled How Martynov Rendered Plekhanov More Profound.

If I assert that the promotion of the growth of the class consciousness of the proletariat is the sole purpose and the direct and sacred duty of the Socialists, then this does not mean that the contemporary Socialists stand for propaganda, for propaganda alone, and for nothing but propaganda.

In the broad sense of the word this is perhaps true, but only in the very broad sense.

When at the International Congress in Paris in 1889 the Socialists resolved to strive for the eight-hour day they obviously had it in mind that workers' demonstrations in favour of their resolution would be a marvellous method of propagating their ideas. But a demonstration is at the same time a method of agitation.

In general it is not easy to draw the line between agitation and what is usually called propaganda.

Agitation is also propaganda, but propaganda that takes place in particular circumstances, that is in circumstances in which even those who would not normally pay any attention are forced to listen to the propagandist's words. Propaganda is agitation that is conducted in the normal everyday course of the life of a particular country.

Agitation is propaganda occasioned by events that are not entirely ordinary and that provoke a certain upsurge in

the public mood. Socialists would be very bad politicians if they were not to use such notable events for their own ends.

Let us suppose that the agitation in favour of the eight-hour day has been crowned with success. Frightened by constantly growing pressure from the workers' movement, the bourgeoisie has yielded. In all civilised countries the law has limited the working day to eight hours.

This is a great victory for socialism but the question arises:

There were of course Socialists among them. There were many Socialists who played a leading role, stepping out in front and sweeping the hesitant and the indecisive along in their wake.

But were there really then people who were hesitant and indecisive? Why did they hesitate, why were they indecisive?...

Probably because they had not fully appreciated the benefits of the eight-hour day and because, on a general level, not having assimilated socialist ideas, they were not yet imbued with the thirst for the battle for a better future that is aroused by a consistent and ordered revolutionary outlook.

In a word, these people were not yet Socialists. But now look at what has happened.

The Socialists have drawn people who were not yet Socialists into the struggle for a cause that will be very useful to socialism. In other words, people who were not yet Socialists have already been working for socialism.

And it is agitation that has done this!

Because of this Socialists can use for the cause not just the forces that belong to them at the present time, but also those that will belong to them only subsequently. What has happened is rather like drawing on the socialist account which history will pay for. And this payment will bring the victory of socialism significantly closer.

Propaganda, in the strict sense of the word, would lose all historical significance if it were not accompanied by agitation.

Propaganda conveys the correct views to dozens, hundreds, thousands of people. But people holding the correct views only become historical activists when they exert a direct influence on public life. And influence on the public life of contemporary civilised countries is unthinkable without influence on the mass, i.e. without agitation. (In barbaric despotisms [such as Tsarist Russia] things are different: there the mass has no importance. But we are not talking about them.)

Consequently agitation is essential for any party that wishes to have his-

torical meaning. A sect may be content with propaganda in the narrow sense of the word, but a political party never.

If I had to clarify further the relationship between agitation and propaganda I should add that the propagandist conveys many ideas to a single person or to a few people, whereas the agitator conveys only one or a few ideas, but he conveys them to a whole mass of people, sometimes to almost the entire population of a particular locality.

But history is made by the mass.

Consequently agitation is the aim of propaganda: I conduct propaganda so that I shall have the opportunity to transfer to agitation.

However, let us return to our example.

We supposed that the Socialists had managed to secure an eight-hour day by law. Such a law brings very great benefit to the working class. Even the least advanced, least comprehending and most backward workers soon become convinced of this once it has become a reality.

And they all know that the eight-hour day was introduced on the initiative of the Socialists.

For this reason all workers, even the most backward, will be thoroughly convinced that the realisation of at least some socialist demands benefits the working class. And this knowledge will in any case bring them incomparably closer to a complete sympathy with

continued on page 10 →

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The Road to Bolshevism continued

socialism than a complete indifference to socialist teaching would have done. But let us go further.

By increasing the worker's leisure time, the eight-hour day gives him the opportunity for greater intellectual development and consequently for the easier assimilation of socialist ideas. That means that in this way too the eight-hour day brings nearer the inevitable reckoning: it "hastens the social revolution"...

We have seen that [social relations in Russia] are changing very rapidly. The mutual relationship between the social forces does, clearly, change with them. The autocracy weakens as the historical soil that has nurtured it crumbles and decomposes.

At the same time some forces are growing stronger and stronger, and it is the collision with these forces that drives [autocracy] to its ruin.

This means that, while our propaganda is training revolutionaries, history creates the revolutionary milieu essential for their activity; while we are preparing the leaders of the revolutionary mass, the officers and NCOs of the revolutionary army, this very army is being created by the inevitable course of social development.

But [if that is so, must we not] describe our activity as fruitless or unproductive? On the contrary, is it not absolutely necessary and uniquely productive from the revolutionary point of view?

Drama

On the other hand it is clear that, as long as the individuals that we have "propagandised" exert no direct revolutionary influence on the mass, they are only its leaders in theory.

If they are to become its leaders in reality they will have to influence them in the revolutionary sense.

That is where agitation comes into its own. Thanks to it the necessary link between the "heroes" and the "crowd", between the mass and its leaders, is established and strengthened. The more strained matters become, the more the old social edifice will rock, and the more rapidly the revolution approaches, the more important agitation will become.

To it belongs the principal role in the drama that we call the social revolution. From this it follows that, if the Russian Socialists want to play an active role in the coming Russian revolution, they must know how to become agitators.

This is essential. But it is not easy. The task of the agitator involves putting into circulation in each particular case the maximum possible number of revolutionary ideas in a form that is accessible to the mass.

For every mistake he makes one way or another a harsh punishment awaits the agitator.

If he overestimates the revolutionary mood of the mass he will at best remain unintelligible, but he may be ridiculed

or even assaulted. If, on the other hand, because of extreme caution he puts to the mass demands that it has already outgrown in its rapid revolutionary development, he will fall into the awkward position of agitator-brake, an agitator who inspires the crowd with "moderation and tender conscience".

The whole skill of the agitator consists in his ability to avoid such excesses.

But if he has this skill he has no need to fear failure. His task will be carried out of its own accord. You may perhaps say that he is giving the mass nothing: he is only giving fully conscious expression to the attitude that it already holds, which it is not itself aware of. But in this lies the secret of his influence and the guarantee of his future successes.

Seeing in his words merely the expression of its own demands, the mass willingly follows him. And... it may even itself push ahead of the agitator.

Realising that only yesterday it was still frightened by its boldness and novelty it rapidly goes further, inclining to more daring demands.

In this way, learning from its own experience, carried along by its own movement, encouraged by its own success, it gradually, but on the other hand assuredly, becomes more and more revolutionary, until in the end it deals with a single decisive movement the death-blow to the existing order.

But when the edifice of this order, made shaky, weak and decrepit by history, has shattered, new tasks will unfold before it, it will have to build things better in its new home, not falling into the net of the political exploiters, flatterers and tricksters.

Then the services and the directions of its devoted agitator-friends will be just as important for it as they were earlier in the heart of the struggle with the

old order.

Orators are born, according to the well-known saying. Agitators are also "born" and no science can replace the inborn agitational gift. Agitation cannot be conducted according to a particular pattern. But this does not prevent us from thinking about its significance and preparing for it with all the means at our disposal at a time when we can foresee that there will soon be a broad scope for agitational activity.

A necessary condition for this activity is a merger of the revolutionary forces that have already been prepared.

Through circle propaganda we can involve people who have no connection with one another and do not even suspect one another's existence. Of course the absence of organisation always affects propaganda, but it does not make it impossible.

Organisation

In epochs of great social upheaval, when the political atmosphere is charged with electricity and when here and there for the most varied, most unforeseen reasons there are increasingly frequent explosions that testify to the approach of the revolutionary storm, in short when it is necessary either to agitate or to rally to the flag – in these epochs only organised revolutionary forces can exert a serious influence on the course of events.

The individual is then powerless, and only units of a higher order are equal to the revolutionary task: revolutionary organisations.

Organisation is the first, the essential step. However insignificant the prepared revolutionary forces of contemporary Russia, they will be increased tenfold by organisation.

Counting their forces and stationing them where appropriate, the revolutionaries set to work.

By means of spoken and printed propaganda they spread the correct view of the causes of the present famine through all strata of the population.

Wherever the mass is not yet sufficiently advanced to understand their teaching, they give it, as it were, object lessons. They appear wherever it protests, they protest with it, they explain to it the meaning of its own movement and hence they increase its revolutionary preparedness.

In this way the elemental movements of the mass gradually merge with the conscious revolutionary movement, and the idea that the Zemskii sobor [the Constituent Assembly] must be summoned becomes increasingly popular: the Russian people becomes more and more convinced that it must snatch its fate from the hands of tsarist officials.

This is one side of things. On the other side we must ensure that the people, once it has risen against the existing order, should win political rights for itself and not political privileges for its exploiters...

Direct universal suffrage is the first and most important demand of the Russian Socialists.... Their other de-

mands... are very closely related: freedom of the spoken word, of assembly, of association, freedom to strike, etc., etc. The agitators must win the mass over to every one of these demands.

But from which stratum will the people's representatives in the assembly be elected? Direct universal suffrage certainly does not guarantee that the workers will not elect their bosses, the poor peasants their kulaks or landowners and generally that the exploited will not elect the exploiters.

Direct universal suffrage is a double-edged sword which the government or the bourgeoisie can easily direct against us. How should we fend off their blows?

The worker will only stop voting for his boss when he recognises the irreconcilable contradiction that exists between his own economic interests on the one hand and the interests of the boss on the other.

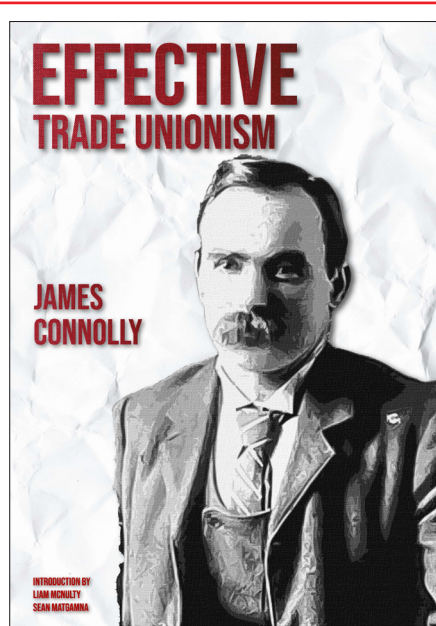
As soon as he does recognise this, he will no longer want to be the political tool of the exploiter, and he will try to give political expression to his economic needs, he will give his vote to the Socialist.

The poor peasant will only stop voting for the kulak [rich peasant], the landowner, or the government candidate when the socialist workers' party – in putting forward its well-known economic demands like those outlined above, for instance – demonstrates to him that there is a close connection between his interests and the interests of the revolutionary proletariat.

Consequently we come once more to the familiar conclusion that our political agitation will bear fruit for us only if it corresponds to the growth in the class consciousness of the proletariat.

The class consciousness of the proletariat is the protective layer that deflects, like water off a duck's back, all the attacks of the parties opposed to us.

I am coming to the end. I have openly set forth our views on the tasks of the Russian Socialists in the struggle with the causes of the famine in Russia and I hope that now there can be no misunderstandings on that account. I welcome those who agree with them as comrades and I remind those who find them too "extreme" that we are Socialists and in the eyes of Socialists moderation is by no means something to be proud of. People will probably tell me that the time is not ripe for an open exposition of our views because this could frighten the liberals. To that I reply: it would be absurd on our part to frighten them deliberately; but if by chance they are frightened of us, against our will, then we can only pity their completely "inopportune" timidity. In any case for us the most insidious form of intimidation is the intimidation of Socialists by the spectre of the intimidated liberal. The harm done by this intimidation is infinitely greater than the advantage to be gained by convincing the liberal gentlemen of our moderation and our tender conscience. □



Aiming to replace capitalism with socialism, James Connolly's organising and ideas evolved considerably. One idea he clung to from the turn of the century to his death was industrial unionism, workers' solidarity across grades and trades, and sympathetic strikes. That is how he saw his work in the Irish Transport Union. 64 pages £5 □

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The Chartist non-revolution of 1848

By Sam Harrison

1848, a year of revolution! From French radicals and Irish nationalists to the various democrats and liberals throughout the rest of Europe, thousands across the continent took to open demonstrations and uprisings with demands ranging from national sovereignty to expanded democracy and improved workers' rights. It was a truly revolutionary moment spurred on by the unbearable oppression of the masses.

But a year of revolution, it was not only. Indeed, it is perhaps better to remember 1848, as Marx wrote in his later analysis of class struggles in France, as a year of the total defeat of revolution.

And a defeat it was! If one was lucky enough to have not been killed or imprisoned during one of those often ramshackle revolutions, rarely was there lasting democratic change.

With the Chartist movement in Britain, the major active radical movement in Europe over the previous decade, the revolution was defeated before it could even begin.

Beginning with the publishing of The People's Charter in 1838, the Chartists movement sought six primary reforms, perhaps chief among them being universal male suffrage, which would expand working-class parliamentary involvement and reduce political corruption.

By 1848, the Chartists were a massive movement. Millions of workers



supported Chartism and were active as part of the movement in one way or another. Few workers' movements in Britain since have come close to rivalling their size, strength and revolutionary potential.

Very quickly, in 1848, the Chartists became aware of the revolutionary wave hitting their comrades abroad. And very quickly did they too become participants within it. Unlike their comrades abroad however, who took up arms, threatened revolt and in some instances attempted to outright overthrow the bourgeois leaders who challenged or temporarily replaced the

old aristocratic regimes, the Chartists chose a form of action more familiar to them. The Chartists created a petition.

This was a beloved form of political participation for the disenfranchised working masses. The Chartists sent three mass petitions to parliament demanding the implementation of The People's Charter, in 1839, in 1842, and finally in 1848. Each petition was rejected by a Parliament for which fewer than 500,000 (in the 1847 election) voted, out of a population of nearly 30 million. Until 1848, each rejection was accompanied by the growth of a revolutionary spirit within the British workers. Whether it be by bullet, pike or the expansion of British trade unionism, the working class sought its own emancipation in a variety of dangerous, bloody ways.

The 1839 Chartist petition for instance, containing over one million signatures, saw its rejection followed by disorganised attempts at radical violence in the Newport uprising and attempted further uprisings in Sheffield and Bradford, all involving and leading to death, injury and imprisonment.

The 1842 Petition, with over three million signatures now, also saw further radical backlash following its rejection in the general strike and large

scale riots of that year. The strikers were forced back to work.

Regardless of their defeats however, the Chartists were setting up a significant trend. That workers, in the wake of the failure of peaceful parliamentary means, would organise themselves in increasingly sophisticated, radical and sometimes revolutionary ways.

In 1848 where, after a gathering of 50,000 Chartists in London for the presentation of their mass petition of over five million signatures in the April of that year, Parliament could still not be swayed. A Commons Committee made the impossible claim to have counted every single signature within just a few days. It said it found fewer than two million legitimate ones, and soon thereafter the entire petition was rejected.

So how did the workers of Britain respond? Did those 50,000 Chartists in London and millions nationally who signed the rejected petition join their foreign comrades during a continent wide revolutionary wave?

They did not. There was no mass radical or revolutionary event following the failure of the 1848 petition. The largest workers' movement ever at the time, one so large and sophisticated that it is rivalled by few movements in the nearly two centuries since, went into a decade of decline. The Chartist movement faded away, and cautious craft unions came to dominate the workers' movement. There was never another Chartist petition and there was no working class revolution in Britain.

That is where some popular histories of the Chartists and the revolutions of 1848 may end. Britain and the Chartists were an outlier in 1848, never having

continued on page 12 →

Timeline

1815: Defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo opens an era of reaction across Europe

1830: "July revolution" in France overthrows restored Bourbon monarchy in favour of the Orleanist "bourgeois monarchy"

1832: After much agitation, Tory government in Britain concedes Reform Bill, increasing the electorate from 400,000 to 650,000

1834: New Poor Law, requiring paupers seeking relief to go into workhouses

1838: People's Charter launched

From 1839: Anti Corn Law League, mass bourgeois movement for reform. Chartists keep their independence

1839: First Chartist petition. Newport rising

1842: Second Chartist petition. General strike

Feb 1848: Uprising in Paris. King abdicates. Uprisings also in the German

states. Communist Manifesto published

March 1848: Uprisings in Vienna and Berlin

April 1848: Chartists present third petition

June 1848: Workers' uprising in Paris. Suppressed

Oct-Dec 1848: The monarchies regain control in Vienna and Berlin. In France, Louis Bonaparte elected president in France; he will take autocratic power in a coup in 1851, and declare himself emperor in 1852

1850s: Chartist movement declines (though in 1851 it adopts a much broader social programme). "New Model" craft unions come to dominate

1864: Some revival of workers' movement: London Trades Council plays a role in First International, until 1871

Late 1880s: Larger-scale revival of workers' movement and socialism in Britain □



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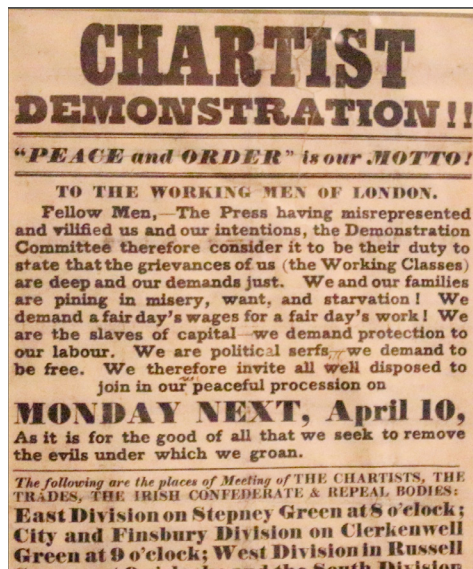
→ from page 11

joined in the revolutions as their radical European counterparts had. The Chartist movement would be considered, by some to have been a failure, having achieved none of its demands in its own time.

That take, however, fades out not only the revolutionary potential the Chartist movement had by 1848, but also of their impact on the entire history of the workers' struggle since.

Some Chartists demanded that the petition be forced through Parliament at threat of violence, and there were Chartist riots such as those in Trafalgar Square in March 1848. There was an undeniably radical and militant feeling within at least some of the Chartist movement in that year. Some, following their refused petition, indeed did plan for revolution in 1848.

A secret revolutionary committee was set up in the National Charter Association, planning for a June revolt of workers in London. When that committee was shut down due to fears over police spies however, planning moved outside of the National Charter Association. 16 August became the date for



a Chartist revolution in London, one in which it was claimed that 5,000 English men and just as many Irish men were ready to take the city and Parliament.

It didn't happen. The fear over police spies in June was not simple paranoia, for spies had infiltrated the revolutionary planning process. Not long before 16 August, police arrested the leading conspirators and seized all the stockpiled weapons they had gathered. No signal went out to workers to arm themselves and take London.

Across Europe, radicals were often able to organise and lead uprisings which built on broader and more diffuse democratic outbursts. The Chartists were not. The efforts of a sophisticated police force against those ill-prepared radical Chartists led to the rapid defeat of revolution in Britain in 1848, a defeat which came before the revolution even began.

The entire history of the Chartists within their own time, of a movement which died out having achieved none of its aims, is undeniably one of defeat.

But what are the histories of a majority of workers' movements throughout time if not histories of defeat? The Chartists do not deserve to be relegated to "their own time" but instead must be thought of as an early, yet vital step in the much wider history of workers' struggle.

The Chartists provided, for the first time, a mass workers' movement based on shared class identity and the need for that class to organise itself for its own liberation. It was this radical organising which instilled, at several points, a militant fever within the workers of Britain. Those who took up arms in Newport in 1839, those who organised

strikes in 1842, and even those who rioted and planned for revolt in 1848, all played their part in developing a radical class identity in Britain.

And it was this class identity which would become vital in the future of radical organising in Britain. Without it, it is unlikely that the trade union movement would have grown as it did on a lasting basis (the big unions before 1834 had all been very short-lived), or that the advances and concessions achieved by and for workers, through their strength and organising, to the modern day would have been achieved at all.

The final truth of the Chartists was well put by Lenin, who described the movement as a last word but one to Marxism. If not for those Chartists and their efforts, radicals and revolutionaries to come would have undeniably had a much more disorganised, weaker and less militant workers' movement to organise within and learn from.

Chartism is a vital part of a history of workers' struggles, a history largely of defeat, and it is that defeat that we must take our understanding and our idealism from if we wish to develop and succeed. □



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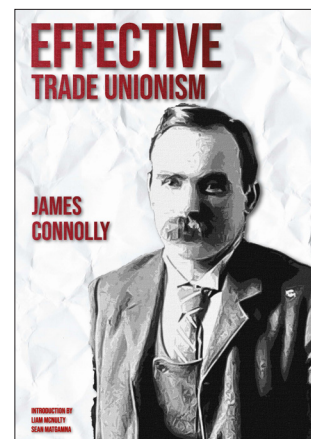
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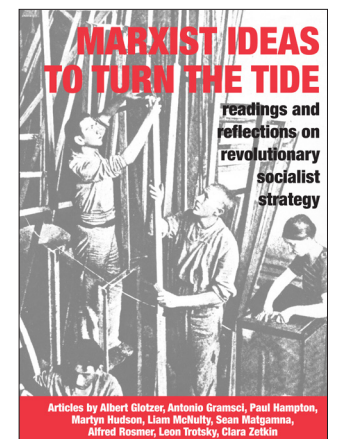
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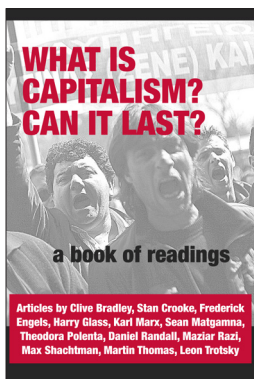
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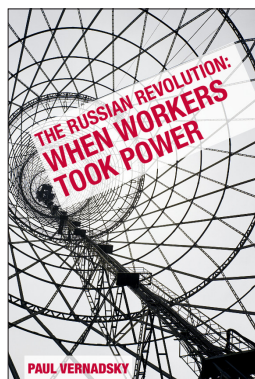
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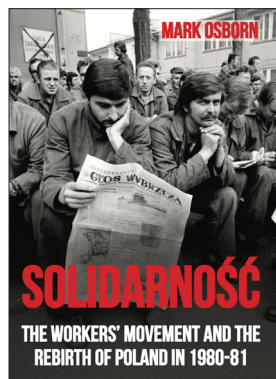
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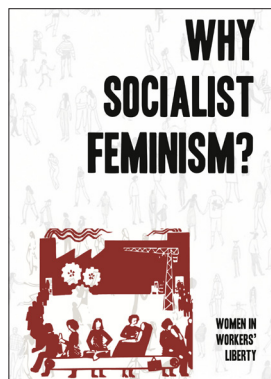
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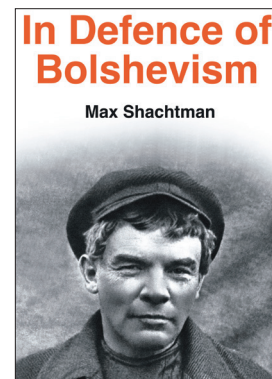
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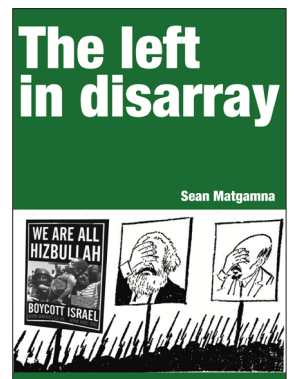
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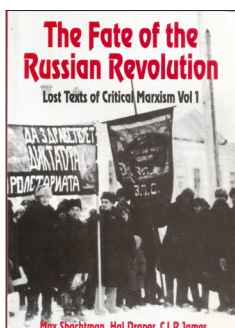
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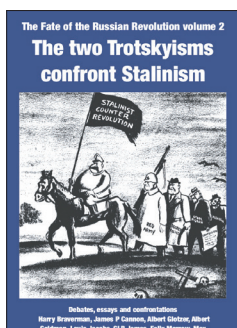
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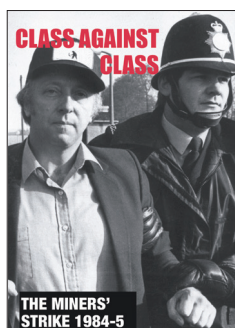
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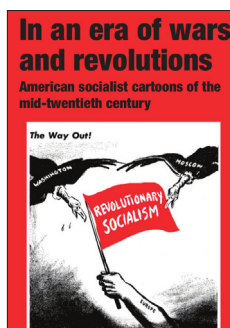
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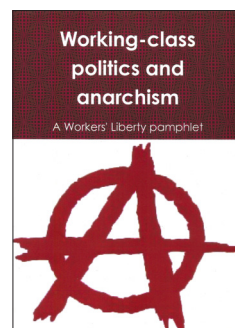
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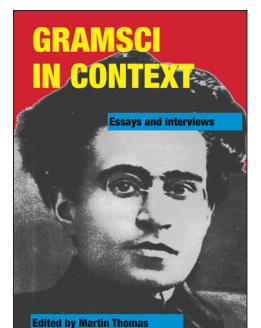
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Unite steelworkers vote to strike

By Katy Dollar

Around 1,400 Tata steelworkers, members of Unite based in Port Talbot and Llanwern (Newport), have voted decisively for industrial action over the company's plan to close its blast furnaces and shed 2,800 jobs. The ballot closed on 9 April.

Community, the majority union in the steelworks, started a ballot on action on 11 April, and it will run for a month. GMB started a ballot on 5 April.

It will be the first time that Port Talbot steelworkers have struck since the national steelworkers' strike of 1980 and the Port Talbot electricians' strike of 1977.

Unite members returned a majority for strike despite Tata threatening the workers with the loss of enhanced redundancy pay if they did. According to [The Times](#) it was a 66% yes vote on a 63% turnout.

Unite general secretary Sharon Graham said: "This is an historic vote. Not since the 1980s have steel workers voted to strike in this way. This yes vote has happened despite Tata's threats that if workers took strike action, en-



hanced redundancy packages would be withdrawn.

"Unite will be at the forefront of the fight to save steelmaking in Wales. We will support steel by all and every means.

"Other EU countries are transitioning their steel industries while retaining and growing their capacity because they know steel has a bright future – a ten-fold increase in demand is predicted in the coming years. In the UK, Tata's plans

and those of the government reflect the short-term thinking of a clapped-out disinterested government marking time to a general election.

"In contrast Labour have done the right thing and committed £3 billion to UK steel following intense discussions with Unite.

"The average age of a Unite Port Talbot worker is 36. Workers and the communities of Port Talbot and Llanwern are looking to the years ahead. They

know that with the right choices steel-making capacity and jobs can be kept and the benefits of growing the industry grasped.

"In the crucial weeks to come, Tata's workers and Unite will put up picket lines to prevent the company from taking this disastrous path."

At the Tata plant in the Netherlands, the blast furnaces are being kept open and jobs protected as the company builds an electric arc furnace and invests in hydrogen DRI technology.

Unite has announced "dates for strike action scheduled to cause maximum impact will be announced soon". The phrasing suggests the union are not planning for indefinite action, though indefinite strikes are far stronger and more likely to win than sporadic short strikes.

Workers at the Tata sites should push for a strategy to win, and that means sustained action. Unions can mitigate worries about sustained strikes by use of strike funds and hardship payments, with fund-raising within the labour movement, and by a strategy which workers believe can save the plants. □

Unison health conference ducks pay issue



By a Unison member

The backdrop to the health sector conference, 8-10 April, of the public services union Unison, was an NHS increasingly in crisis.

Staff shortages, unsafe staff levels, low pay, privatisation and the impact on people who work in health, dominated all of the debates. Conference celebrated and applauded all of those who had struck over this year.

But a plan of detailed action over this year's pay was missing. A pay consultation email was sent out to all health members in England the week before conference but union branches didn't know it was happening, and so it wasn't accompanied by any local campaigns.

This approach will not produce results in the consultation. It will allow those in the Health Service Group Executive who don't want action to say there is no appetite for it among the members.

Health Service group executive elections open 22 April 2024 and run to 17 May 2024. A leaflet was circulated from the Unison left group Time for Real Change (TFRC) calling on people to vote for candidates who support industrial action on pay. The Socialist Party is also standing candidates in the election. Health workers in Workers' Liberty call for votes for both TFRC and Socialist Party candidates in these elections.

Two states

The war in Gaza also dominated the conference. Unison statements for a ceasefire, for an end to arms trading with Israel, and for a two states solution were re-iterated. We heard from a speaker from Medical Aid to Palestine and conference stood to demonstrate its support for aid and for a ceasefire.

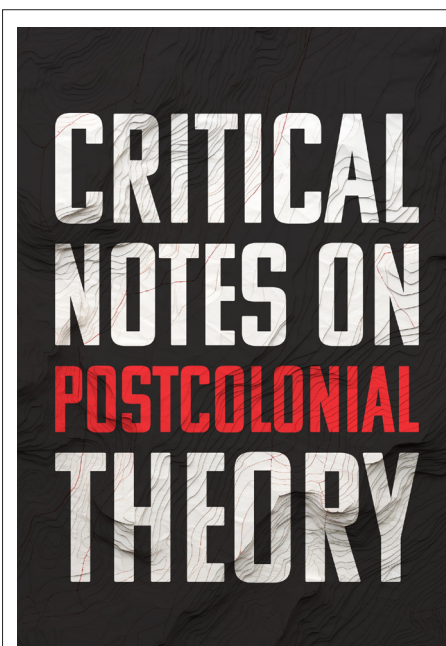
A leaflet was circulated by the Ukraine Solidarity campaign calling for Unison members to back the motion going to Unison national delegate conference in June supporting the Ukrainian trade unions and Russian withdrawal

from Ukraine.

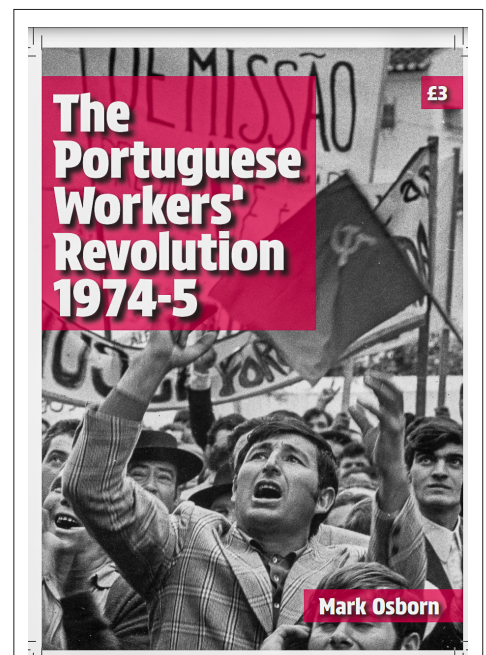
A meeting for Unison members with John McDonnell MP will take place in May to encourage Unison members to support the motion and encourage the building of a Ukraine-solidarity network of Unison members who are organising solidarity with the Ukrainian unions. (Register: bit.ly/unisonukraine).

Wes Streeting MP had been invited to speak at the conference. He probably

realised he would not be well received, and he didn't come. In an election year, campaigning to defend and rebuild the NHS and for a pay increase need to be high priority for the largest health union, as do encouraging health workers to vote Labour and using the union's clout in Labour to press our demands. □



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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

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With Ideas for Freedom now on the weekend of 20-21 July we have slightly longer to reach our fundraiser total.

We hope we won't need it, but we will have to pick up

the pace at our conference to get there!

Total so far £3,692. □

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General secretaries I have known



Diary of a trackworker

By Matt Shaw

I experienced five general secretaries of my union (NUR, then RMT) during my career on the railway. Another is coming up shortly, if rumours are to be believed.

The first was Sid Weighell (1975-83), without doubt the most mendacious of them all. His sole aim in life was to keep the old Communist Party from taking control of "his" union. No trick was too underhand to use, especially obscure rules from the union rule book.

He defied the National Executive on many occasions, with the connivance of the senior assistant general secretary, Vernon Hince, who was lining himself up to take over from Sid when he retired or more likely died in service.

They kept control until 1982 when the first national strike of the NUR took place before dear old Sid managed to get the national conference to call it off, bypassing the National Executive. At that time the NUR was nowhere near a democratic, member-led union.

Sid's downfall came about in 1983 when at TUC congress he cast a vote against the express wishes of the delegation. He first denied it. Over a period of time and some detective work, it was proved beyond a shadow of a doubt.

He wangled a special recall conference to discuss the affair, and expected the conference to refuse to accept an offer from him to resign – effectively, to pardon his actions. We, the left in the union, no longer dominated by the CP, managed to mobilise. The vote while close, but accepted his resignation. Off he went, murmuring about left-wing conspiracies.

The next General Secretary was Jimmy Knapp (1983-2001). A genial sort of person, he was regarded as a stopgap compromise between Charlie Turnock, preferred by the old bureaucracy, and some one more radical, a sort of NUR version of Arthur Scargill minus the Stalinoid tendencies. We could not get agreement on who that was so we compromised on supporting Jimmy Knapp.

Knapp was actually in office for 18 years, during which time the railway started changing. Supporting the miners during the 1984-5 strike with a boy-

cott of scab coal, the signallers had the support of the union leadership as far as that went. But action was left up to individual signallers, as the union did not want to run foul of the anti-trade-union laws.

The biggest let down was not co-ordinating with the NUM and not calling for a strike over the closure of the pits which would have directly led to redundancies on the railway and coal no longer being transported by rail.

The next layer of bureaucracy inside the union was still the old gang from Sid Weighell's time and Jimmy Knapp never took that on board. His tenure was hamstrung by that, and he was unwilling to get help from the left in the union.

Some strikes were called over pay with some success but the biggest fight – against privatisation – was dodged with the argument that action would be a "political strike", banned by the anti-trade-union laws. A lobbying campaign was launched but had little impact.

Knapp died while in office in 2001, his name indelibly linked with that failed fight against privatisation of the railway. More on the other three later. □

The Miners' Hymns



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

Something very different to bring to a conclusion my series of four films for the 40th anniversary of the 1984-5 miners' strike. *The Miners' Hymns* was premiered in July 2010 in Durham Cathedral, directed by Bill Morison the avant-garde filmmaker, with music by Icelandic composer Johann Johannsson, the founder of Kitchen Motors, an experimental art group in Reykjavik.

It is a beautiful, poetic celebration of mining culture and particularly its music. Using archive footage, the film features "The Big Meeting", otherwise known as the Durham Miners' Gala, and the music blends with and highlights the sense of occasion and the solidarity and culture of the mining communities. These emotions are strikingly highlighted by the appearance of the Easington miners' banner as it emerges over the brow of the hill prior

to descending to the field where the Gala culminates.

The banner is draped in black cloth as a sign of respect and remembrance for the 83 men who died in an explosion in 1951. The band which precedes the banner plays Gresford, also known as "the Miners' Hymn". These words by Lee Hall (director of *Billy Elliot*), taken from the booklet accompanying the British Film Institute DVD, are a very appropriate way to end our filmic commemoration of 1984-85.

"So in remembering, celebrating, lamenting our mining past we're not paying homage to the dirt, the exploitation or the circumscribed lives of our forefathers and mothers. We are acknowledging their hope, their aspiration for a better world, but also their lack of tolerance, their anger, their belligerence, and their willingness not to accept the blatant lies they were told, their ability to organise and to look after one another, their willingness to deprive themselves individually to fight for the common good". □

• Watch online: bit.ly/m-hymns



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Wirral CSWs win their battle



By a Unison member

Six hundred NHS Clinical Support Workers (CSWs) on the Wirral have won their long-running dispute for rebanding and back pay.

The workers, who are Unison members employed at Arrowe Park and Clatterbridge hospitals, have been striking since August 2023. Their demands were to be rebanded from band

2 to band 3 on the Agenda for Change NHS pay scale, as they were routinely undertaking clinical tasks such as taking and monitoring blood, performing electrocardiogram tests and inserting cannulas; and for that improved rate to be backdated to 2018.

Seven health trusts in the North West moved workers to the higher rate and backdated their pay to April 2018. East Cheshire and Mid Cheshire trusts also agreed to move their staff up to salary band 3 and provide the same back pay. But the management of the Wirral University Teaching Hospital NHS Trust refused, and the strikes began.

It looked that the dispute would be settled in October, but management's plan for backpay then would have left many workers ineligible, so more strikes were necessary. 61 days of strikes won the dispute.

Picket lines were lively throughout, strengthened by trade unionists and NHS campaigners visiting them and sending messages of support. Members were involved in meetings with management and workers' confidence grew even when faced with setbacks. Membership of the union branch doubled as a result.

Disputes like this are continuing across the country. They are happening because pay increases have been below inflation for the last 15 years and because workloads and pressure to take on extra tasks have increased. They demonstrate that strikes can win. They

will also, hopefully, give NHS workers the confidence to strike over pay.

It is now April, the pay review date, and we should have had a pay rise, but no offer has been made.

Unison and other health unions should be demanding an increase that restores NHS pay to where it would have been if our wages had kept pace

with inflation and putting in place a timescale for balloting on pay. We should not let the Tories set the pace. We can point to successes like the one in Wirral to show that industrial action in health can be successful. The campaign over pay and safe staffing levels should build on these victories. □

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Slouching towards the election?



The train drivers' union Aslef struck on 5, 6, and 8 April, alongside overtime bans over days surrounding the strikes, in continuation of our dispute over pay since 2022 with Train Operating Companies operating primarily in England.

This group of TOCs is represented by an association referred to as the Rail Delivery Group, but in reality their ability to negotiate with the union on pay is being controlled by the Tory government through the Department for Transport.

Although the union continues to tinker with how it spreads out its industrial action between different TOCs and different days, there is no movement beyond one day strikes at a frequency of around six weeks.

The reason is that the union leaders have decided that the right way to conduct the dispute is to plod slowly towards the general election, after

which Labour will, they believe, deliver on assurances given in private to offer a pay settlement without strings to cover 2022-3.

The strings are the main reason that this dispute has been at stalemate for the majority of its two-year length. The RDG and DfT are demanding significant worsening of drivers' terms and conditions of employment in return for 4% on pay. Their offer was not designed to be accepted by the union.

The union's leaders will need one more successful strike ballot in each of the TOCs to see them through until an election in autumn or winter. They are highly likely to get it – members know the grave consequences of a no vote in such a ballot.

But the reliability of members in delivering strong strike mandates is not translating to confidence on the part of the leadership for the kind of action that could shift the Tory government into improving their offer – and put a future Labour government on notice that this is a union willing to fight. □

Barnet council Mental Health workers, members of Unison, are striking from 15 to 26 April. They demand "safe service, no waiting lists, fair pay". They have already struck for 27 days, and schedule further strikes for May, June, and July if the council does not concede.

More: bit.ly/b-unison □



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Galloway's reactionary "grand alliance"

By David Axon

George Galloway's Rochdale "grand alliance" to oppose Labour in the May local government elections is proving neither grand nor even very allied. But it is a threat.

In his victory speech at the end of February he declared a "grand alliance" against Labour, but only one of the Rochdale independents he courted has joined his alliance. "Rochdale town councillors, I put you on notice that I hope to put together a grand alliance of all the parties", he said, and specifically invited the independent David Tully who came second with 21% of the vote: "I look forward to working with Mr Tully, and I hope he will join the grand alliance".

A Workers Party press release on 7 April claimed the support of David Tully and declared its endorsement, "as part of the Grand Alliance", for four Middleton Independents and two Liberal Democrats. Within hours, both the Middleton Independents and the Liberal Democrats had declared they wanted nothing to do with Galloway, and David Tully denied any support. Only Billy Howarth of Parents Against Grooming – who achieved 1.7% of the vote in the February by-election – has been attracted to Galloway's alliance. (And even he has said on social media that it was because he was too late to register an "independent party").

But Galloway remains a threat in Rochdale. There has been a significant collapse in Labour Party membership and organisation. Labour's right wing factions and careerist councillors show no interest locally in efforts to build Labour Party membership and activity. Indeed, some actively celebrate the absence of party organisation on the grounds that would hold them to account.

With a small number of honourable exceptions, Labour Party activity is confined to a focus on the local council, with councillors as self-appointed influencers in the community substituting for building active local branches. That can collapse very quickly as a means of maintaining a Labour vote.

Labour's canvassing returns in Rochdale so far show that the Labour vote has almost halved in the areas most focused on by Galloway. Many young people in those areas will have voted for Galloway as the first vote of their lives, and have no contact with the labour movement through



trade unions or anything else. Labour needs to organise properly in those communities to prevent Galloway's misdirection becoming permanent, and it will be down to the left to do that.

But Billy Howarth's new membership of the Workers Party has attracted some attention outside Rochdale. Howarth has been noted as someone increasingly seen at far right events and associated with far right conspiracy groups and individuals, from "Patriots of Britain" to John Lawrence and the "National Housing Party UK".

The Rochdale District of the National Education Union (NEU) has declared itself "concerned about the transphobic and homophobic finger-pointing at teachers in the Rochdale by-election". Galloway's one recruit, Howarth, took the same line in his by-election statement to Rochdale Online, where (oddly under the "immigration" heading), he says: "I believe SRE [sex and relationships education] is a problem and will be meeting with schools to see where it can be changed."

In its campaigning in Rochdale the Workers Party says nothing about trade union rights, or anything remotely left-wing.

The [Trades Unionists Against Galloway](#) network has been established independently of any individual union to engage more unions and activists, initially with a social media appeal for support. The purpose of this work is primarily to ensure that if Galloway stands again in Rochdale there will be a workers' voice against him.

Taking the arguments into the unions is important. At the Rochdale NEU meeting that discussed the matter, there were members who had previously known nothing of Galloway's record, and who had been unaware of the material he had put out locally in the by-election attacking teachers. □

• Abridged. More: bit.ly/gg-rdale

Ukraine in a corner: arm Ukraine!

By Dan Katz

On Thursday 11 April a massive Russian missile and drone attack on Ukrainian energy infrastructure totally destroyed the Trypilska thermal power plant, the largest supplier of electricity in the Kyiv region.

In this latest attack Russia fired 82 rockets and drones, including six hypersonic Kinzhal missiles. Ukraine's air defences shot down only 57. Ukraine lacks air defence missiles to defend its cities and frontline army units.

200,000 people were left without electricity in Kharkiv, close to the Russian border, which is now facing significant attacks several times each week.

On April 1, Kharkiv mayor Ihor Terekhov said that Russian attacks had destroyed almost all the city's energy plants. The latest attack ruined a substation. Such attacks on civilian targets are war crimes.

Russian President Vladimir Putin claims that the targeting of electricity plants in Ukraine is in retaliation for recent Ukrainian attacks on oil refineries in Russia. However, Russia has aimed to destroy civilian infrastructure since the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The intention is to demoralise Ukrainian civilians.

Far-right pro-Trump US Republicans continue to hold up a \$61bn US arms package for Ukraine in the US Congress. Russia is now battering frontline positions using guided high explosive and cluster bombs launched from planes at a range of 40-60km. Russia is dropping these accurate and destructive munitions, which weigh 250 or 500kg, at a rate of 500 a week, and Ukraine currently has no answer.

Ukraine also has a chronic lack of artillery shells and blames the loss of the destroyed eastern town of Avdiivka, in February, on the lack of ammunition.

On Saturday 13 April Ukraine's new military leader, Oleksander Syrsky, described the eastern Donbas front as having "deteriorated significantly in recent days". Ukraine is still destroying Russian armour and military units, but Russia's resources are much greater than Ukraine's and Russia's political leadership has little interest in preserving the lives of Russian troops.

We demand the pro-Ukraine Western powers step up deliveries of munitions and aid to



Ukraine. Ukraine's war remains a war of national self-defence against Russian imperialist attack and occupation, not a "proxy war" fought secretly for US interests, and Ukraine needs arms, from the devil if need be.

Ukraine's Parliament, the Verkhovna Rada, passed a new mobilisation bill on 11 April. The bill was backed by 283 members of parliament, the majority from President Zelenskyy's Servant of the People party. European Solidarity, associated with oligarch Petro Poroshenko, abstained.

Some key changes to conscription law had been agreed earlier in the month, in particular reducing the conscription age to 25 and the introduction of an electronic register for conscripts.

Ukraine is attempting to press eligible Ukrainian men outside the country to return and sign up, and is threatening to withhold diplomatic services, including passport renewal, to those who refuse.

The contentious issue surrounding the debate in Ukraine over the mobilisation law is the issue of demobilisation. Many Ukrainian troops have been fighting almost continually since February 2022. The draft mobilisation law contained a clause allowing for demobilisation after 36 months of service. That clause was removed.

Ukraine calculates that a new mass Russian offensive is coming, perhaps as early as May, and they need their most experienced fighters in place. As Russia makes gains on the battlefield opinion – which is difficult to gauge in such a repressive society – seems to be hardening in support of the attack on Ukraine.

The *Kyiv Independent* quotes a poll from early February which suggests the Russian minority which has always opposed the war is down to 22%, although more than 50% of Russians may want peace talks to end the war. □

• Abridged. More: bit.ly/uk0415



Solidarity

For a workers' government

NO TO IRAN-ISRAEL WAR

By Ira Berkovic

On Saturday 13 April, Iranian forces seized a ship in the Strait of Hormuz owned by Israeli-linked companies. Then, overnight, Iran launched a barrage of drones and missiles towards Israel. The attack was retaliation for a strike on an Iranian diplomatic building in Syria, which killed several military officials. Israeli defences intercepted the attack, which appears to have injured only [one person](#) (though the notional aim was surely to kill many civilians).

Iranian attacks on Israel are acts of regional-imperialist aggression against a rival power, conducted by a deeply reactionary political force, motivated by a religious-fundamentalist and antisemitic ideology. Iran's attacks do not help the Palestinians. On the contrary, they could help Netanyahu and his government quell domestic dissent by appealing to a need for national

unity in the face of a threat to security. Netanyahu and his far-right allies may go for wider war with Iran. The domestic political benefits of such a war may have been part of Netanyahu's calculation in engaging in actions which risk provoking it. A war between Israel and Iran would also allow Iran's rulers to stoke up nationalism and potentially undermine ongoing protests by women and workers, who face stifling oppression as well as dire economic conditions.

Iran has said it will not, for now, launch further strikes. But the risk of escalation, either of direct conflict between Israel and Iran or between Israeli and Iranian allies in Lebanon and Yemen, remains high.

Conflict may also escalate in the occupied West Bank. On Friday 12 and Saturday 13 April, Jewish settlers attacked Palestinian homes in the villages of Al-Mughayyir and Duma, after a 14-year-old child, Benjamin Ahimeir, was reported missing.

His body was later found, with an initial investigation suggesting he had been killed with a bladed weapon. Dozens of Palestinians were injured, and one killed, in the settler attacks.

Since the Hamas attacks of 7 October, and the siege Israel launched on Gaza in response, almost 500 Palestinians in the West Bank have been killed, either by Israeli forces or armed settlers. As Israel has tightened its military control in the area, the likelihood of a much wider conflict breaking out there has increased. In the wake of Ahimeir's killing, Israeli defence minister Yoav Gallant publicly urged settlers not to commit "acts of revenge". Such words ring hollow in light of his previous comments, describing the population of Gaza as "human animals", and promising to cut off supplies of food and electricity. Israel's war since 7 October has been one colossal "act of revenge", conducted with unrelenting brutality. □