

# Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



**For social ownership of the banks and industry**



# WORKERS' GOVERNMENT!

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# Fight for a workers' government!



The very-mainstream Institute for Fiscal Studies has found that the Tory government's current plans mean real-terms [cuts](#) of around 1.2% in NHS day-to-day spending.

That is the largest reduction for over 50 years, and from a position where the NHS is already staggering – with big staff shortfalls and record waiting lists, and a backlog of repairs needed to hospital buildings.

Local councils are being pushed into dramatic cuts.

Yet the Tories plan tax cuts for the 6 March Budget. These are to be “balanced” by promises of new spending cuts in year ahead. Even the chair of the the Office for Budget Responsibility, set up by the Tories, [says](#) that to describe the Tories' plans as “a work of fiction... is probably being generous”.

Piecemeal pushbacks against this blighting can be won here and there by local demonstrations and strikes. Without that local groundswell, broader political prospects lack propellant. But restoring public services, and the needed greening of economic life, need *government* action.

That is why we call for a workers' government.

It is not something that can be ordered over a counter, or ticked on a ballot paper. The slogan “workers' government” expresses not an electoral preference, but a wide-ranging effort of agitation, education, and organisation. We carry it on our back-page masthead each week, but it needs explaining.

The Labour Party leaders offer nothing like a workers' government.

They repeat that they will stick to the Tories' budget-limiting “fiscal rules”, even though the current version of those “rules” is the seventh since 2010. It was cooked up as recently as November 2022, and sober mainstream economists mock it as useless. They also say that they will not raise taxes on rich, except for closing a couple of loopholes.

So far has that gone that Shadow Chancellor Rachel Reeves has hinted that if the Tories, in the Budget, “steal” Labour's idea of ending “non-domiciled” plutocrats' exemption from tax, then Labour will... scale down its public-investment promises even further, since it will have fewer tax levers to pull.

Quite right-wing Labour figures are worried that if the Tories cut inheritance tax, then Reeves will not be up for restoring it.

The Labour Party official publicity constantly repeats: “Labour is the party of working people”. Reeves and Starmer always balance that by saying

they are also “pro-business”.

Both pro-worker and pro-business? If the policies are so “win-win”, why don't the Tories carry them out? Reeves and Starmer tell us only that it's down to government “chaos”.

In fact it is no more possible to be simultaneously pro-worker and pro-capitalist than it is to be both up and down, both wet and dry, both full and empty.

Workers need better wages. Capitalists may offer some wage sops here and there to recruit and retain stable staff, but basically they want wages as low as they can manage, to pay out bigger profits and super-salaries to top managers.

The working class needs a good NHS. Capitalists and top managers have the option of paying for, and profiting from, private healthcare.

The working class needs “greening” of economic life for a liveable future for our children and grandchildren. Capitalists as individuals may see that too, but as business decision-makers they are driven to maximise short-term profit.

Workers need trade-union rights, to strike, to picket, to make solidarity. Capitalists want to keep unions shackled.

All administrations in recent history in Britain have been bourgeois governments. “Workers' government” doesn't mean choosing an already-available model, but blazing a new path.

The slogan “workers' government” was first developed in the then-revolutionary Communist Parties of the early 1920s, before Stalinism.

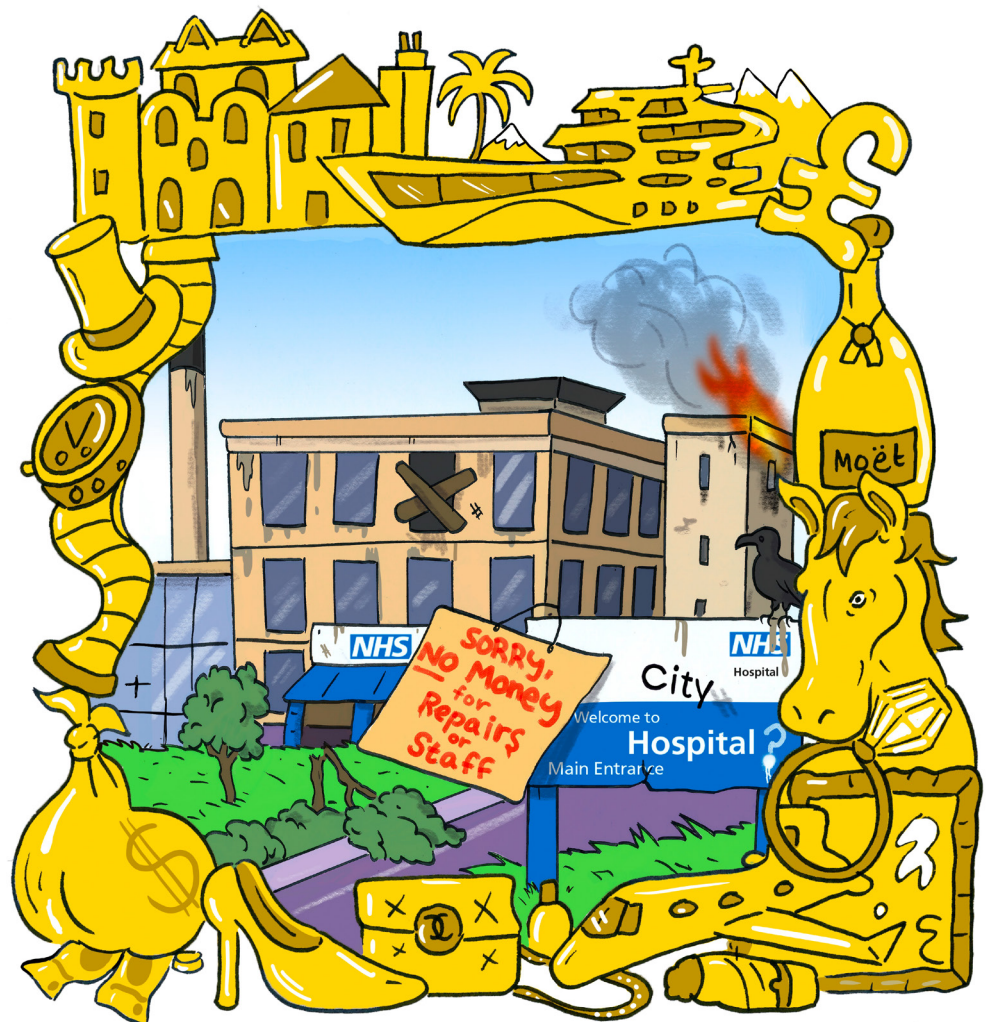
## Keystone

For them, it was a keystone in a united-front approach to the Social Democratic parties, the other big parties based in the working class. It [meant](#) saying to the Social Democrats: unite with us on wage rises, welfare benefits, food supplies (meagre at the time), and workers' self-defence (against the military gangs of demobilised officers and soldiers active at the time).

Unite with us in the factories and on the streets, said the Communist Party; and work together also to form a government which makes itself accountable to the workers' movement, not to the unelected state machine, and which implements the united-front demands.

Such a government might be formed through parliamentary elections. If it was really a workers' government, though, stable cooperation with the unelected state machine and big business would be impossible. Either the government would be driven back, or the workers' movement would push through to break up bourgeois power and replace it by workers' power.

The prediction was not an ultimatum. It went together with proposing joint action with reform-socialists. Let us see



how far we can get together, and draw lessons from experience as we go!

There was, and Marxists knew it then, a danger of the “workers' government” slogan becoming an exercise in wishful thinking or fantasy politics: wouldn't it be nice if the existing labour movement would magically augment and galvanise itself and do xyz?

That danger was compounded when the Communist Parties, only soon after, were Stalinised, and became bureaucratic machines led by cynics tied to the interests of Stalin's autocratic state rather than the working class. The slogan now had to be adapted (or dropped) by small groups with limited leverage.

You got such versions as the slogan “Labour to power on a socialist programme”, used in the 1970s by almost all the left groups other than the forerunners of *Solidarity* and *Workers' Liberty*. The “private” meaning of the slogan, for the groups advocating it, was that they had cunningly combined proposing a full socialist programme and gearing themselves to the existing labour movement. In reality, it told readers only that the groups would like a Labour government to be more left-wing in some way or another... and that a “socialist programme” was no more than the sort of thing a routine Labour government might do on a good day and with a following wind.

The Heterodox Trotskyists of the

1940s in the USA, the Workers' Party, raised the “workers' government” while explaining that it was a line of march, not an off-the-shelf option to be got through an election and a bit of pressure. (There was, after all, not even a reformist Labour Party in the USA).

It meant: fight to augment, transform, revolutionise the existing labour movement – to make it a movement capable of sustaining a workers' government.

That is what it means for us today. It does not, emphatically not, mean advising workers to bury themselves in Labour Party and trade-union routine in the hope of coaxing the leaderships a fraction to the left. Going out on the streets with stalls and on demonstrations and picket lines, agitating and educating in workplaces, and in that process organising new young activists into a force capable of gaining real leverage to augment and reorient the labour movement, is a central part of a multi-dimensional effort.

Leon Trotsky put it like this in 1938: “Of all parties and organizations which base themselves on the workers and speak in their name, we demand that they break politically from the bourgeoisie and enter upon the road of struggle for the workers' government... At the same time, we indefatigably develop agitation around those transitional demands which should in our opinion form the programme of the ‘workers' government’.” □



# Refusing in the name of hope

*Sofia Orr is the latest young Israeli to refuse compulsory enlistment in the Israeli army.*

My name is Sofia Orr, and I refuse to enlist in the Israeli army because there are no winners in war. Only losers. Everyone living here is losing.

In Israel, on 7 October, all of us, especially the residents of the Gaza Envelope [the areas near the Gaza border], experienced unspeakable horrors that nothing can justify. Since then... Israeli society is falling deeper and deeper into messianic delusions, political suppression, and a thirst for revenge.

In Gaza, tens of thousands of Palestinians were killed, more than ten

thousand of which are children, and additional tens of thousands wounded. Countless refugees live in tents, suffering from severe hunger and the spread of diseases, without electricity and basic hygiene, and all they can see on all sides are ruins. All this only leads to more hatred against Israel and increased support for Hamas.

Ordinary citizens on both sides are paying an unimaginable price in this war, and the situation is only getting worse. The present and future of Palestinian and Israeli citizens is inseparable. It is not "us" against "them", and it is not a situation where one side should, or can, defeat the other. Safety and security will only be attained when both sides live with dignity: either we will all lose in war, or will all win in peace.

Nearly all people living between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea want to live a quiet life. The violent occupation policies, and now the war, prevent this for all of us, and push more and more people on both sides to the false belief that only violence can solve the conflict. The war only strengthens the extremists on both sides and their ideologies.

The powers that be tell us, like all the previous rounds of violence, that this we will "destroy" Hamas, that this time "deterrence" will work. Yet violent and extremist groups only grow stronger under extreme violence. It can be tempting to think that "after we destroy Hamas in the war, then we can achieve real peace and quiet here." But this is an illusion.

## Horizon of hope

It is a story that ignores the fact that Hamas is more than a violent group – it is the product of a violent and extreme mindset that grows and flourishes under conditions of oppression and extreme violence. Hamas could only grow stronger when every alternative, horizon, or hope have been denied for decades... Even if the army could kill all the Hamas fighters and dismantle all the tunnels, without a horizon of hope, an even worse organisation would arise to fill its place, and the cycle of violence will continue...

Such thinking can only be dismantled through a political pursuit of peace and by proposing an alternative of hope to the Palestinians. As the much stronger

side, Israel bears much of the responsibility for pursuing this alternative. It has the power to advance a political solution and dictate the tone, changing it to one that promotes peace instead of violence. The only path that can ever lead to a real solution to the conflict is a political one that includes fair Palestinian independence, and the granting of equal rights to all people from the river to the sea.

When I was 16, I visited the West Bank with my classmates on a school trip. We talked with settlers and Palestinian boys our age. When we spoke with the Palestinian youth, one of my classmates asked what was their dream in life. And one of them answered, "The only dream a person locked in a cage can have is to get out." That sentence has stayed with me...

I refuse to enlist because I want to create a reality in which all children between the river and the sea can dream without cages. □

• From the Instagram of Mesarvot, a network supporting young Israelis who refuse compulsory military service. Abridged. More: [bit.ly/s-orr](https://bit.ly/s-orr)



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

## Israelis push against the "occupation occupying Israel"

By Ira Berkovic

On Thursday 29 February, hundreds of Israeli citizens, Jewish and Palestinians, rallied in Tel Aviv to demand an end to Israel's war on Gaza, and an agreement to secure the release of hostages. The protest, which was co-organised by a coalition of anti-war and anti-occupation groups led by Standing Together and Women Wage Peace, was initially intended to be a march. A late-notice ban by the Israeli police forced organisers to pivot to a static rally.

Speakers included both Israeli Jewish and Palestinian activists. The protests were one of an increasing number of

anti-government protests in recent weeks. Other protests against the government have not foregrounded explicit opposition to the war, although many of the slogans raised by those demanding a hostage-release agreement acknowledge the necessity of a ceasefire. Protestors have also demanded immediate elections.

### Far right

Opinion polls show that Netanyahu's bloc would lose badly in national elections. In recent municipal elections, held on Tuesday 27 February, the religious far right made gains, with Jerusalem City Council headed for control

by a far-right bloc. There were also positive stories from those elections, however.

Standing Together supporters were elected to councils in Haifa and Tel Aviv. In Haifa, Sally Abed, one of Standing Together's Palestinian leaders, was elected as part of the Haifa Majority bloc, and in Tel Aviv, Itamar Avneri was elected as part of the Purple City bloc.

On Thursday 29th, hours before the Tel Aviv anti-war rally, dozens of far-right activists charged past an Israeli military checkpoint on the Gaza border and began constructing makeshift "settlements", before being rounded up by soldiers. Nine have been arrested. Had Palestinians, even

unarmed Palestinians, rushed an Israeli checkpoint, it is certain the response would have been deadly. But settlers were able to make it 500 metres into Gazan territory before being halted.

Israel's official policy is that it does not intend to re-settle Gaza and wants ultimately to hand over civilian governance to a demilitarised Palestinian authority (although not the actually-existing Palestinian Authority, which it regards as supportive of "terrorism"). But the de facto political representatives of the activists sufficiently committed to the cause of settlement to storm a military checkpoint, such as Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich,

are ministers in the governing coalition.

Some Israeli leftists describe the ascent to power of such forces as "the occupation occupying Israel". Notwithstanding the obvious differences in the conditions of life experienced by most Israelis and most Palestinians, the image has some explanatory value.

Until it is ended, the logic of occupation, territorial expansion, and suppression of Palestinian rights, will continue to poison Israeli society as well.

That makes our solidarity with forces inside Israel opposing that logic, and fighting for equality between Jews and Palestinians, vital. □

## Ceasefire, end siege, free hostages, reconstruct Gaza

By Ira Berkovic

Israeli minister Benny Gantz recently issued a threat that if the Israeli hostages held by Hamas are not released by 10 March, the start of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, a planned assault on Rafah, where half of Gaza's population is now sheltering, would take place.

Such an assault would inevitably lead to many thousands of civilian deaths, as homeless refugees would have

no means of escaping the Israeli onslaught. At the time of writing, negotiations between Israel, the US, Egypt, France and Qatar, the latter acting as a mediator for Hamas, were continuing, with a view to reaching a ceasefire and hostage-release agreement. They could still fail.

### Haniyeh

Both Palestinians and Israelis have a right to security and life. The Israeli government plays on the feelings of

the many in Israel who are wary of the prospect of a redevelopment plan for Gaza that restores Hamas to power and risks another 7 October.

Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh recently issued a call for Palestinians to march on the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem during Ramadan.

But the only way for a democratic alternative to Hamas to emerge is for normal political life in Gaza to develop, outside of the destructive effects of

bombardment and blockade, free from the fear of starvation and disease, and given room for hope by a real recognition by Israel of Palestinian rights.

In the first instance, that means an end to the war, a massive influx of humanitarian aid, and an internationally-sponsored programme of reconstruction.

In the longer term, it means a political settlement that guarantees equal rights, including equal national rights, to Palestinians and Israeli Jews. □

# Morning Star lurches further “Red-Brown”



By Jim Denham

Over at the Communist Party of Britain and their mouthpiece, the *Morning Star*, there have been some celebrations. At last, things seem to be going their way both domestically and internationally.

Ukraine seems to be in difficulty and Russia has been making some small but significant gains. The CPB and the *Morning Star* in theory condemn the Russian invasion, but many of the paper's writers have made little secret of their hope that it will succeed.

Leading CPBer and regular MS contributor Nick Wright, for instance, has always cheered on the invaders and, early on, gloated that anyone joining the military defence of Ukraine would “encounter a military force [i.e. the Russians] equipped with armour, su-

perior communications and effective air support... this cause [i.e. defending Ukraine] is attractive principally to an international alliance of the foolish and fascist” (24 March 2022).

When Ukraine stood its ground, Wright asked, with obvious disappointment, “why the Russians did not deploy their undoubted capacity to take out Ukraine's air defences and deny the Ukrainian airforce the capacity to intervene? And despite the highly visible material damage, why are civilian casualties so low?”

Now, Mr Wright has started gloating again, claiming that “while the front line remains broadly static, the significant movement, aside from the Avdiivka collapse, is for sustained pressure from the Russians whose supply is consistent and production capacity enhanced, with air superiority, a substantial artillery advantage and a bigger pool of conscripts.”

Mr Wright must be wondering why the Ukrainians don't take his advice and simply surrender. But he does have an explanation: they are being egged on by “the most reactionary circles in the US and the EU who want a war of attrition aimed at weakening Russia with the financial cost borne by tax-payers in Britain, the US and Europe and the human cost paid by what remains of Ukraine's fighting-age population.”

The idea that supporters of Ukraine's right to defend itself are led by “the most reactionary circles” in the world crops up quite frequently in the MS. Presumably, “the most reactionary”

category does not apply to US senator and leading Trump supporter J D Vance, whose opposition to funding for Ukraine and call for a “negotiated peace” (i.e. Ukraine's capitulation) was hailed and quoted with obvious approval in the MS of 19 February.

But supporters of Putin don't have to look to Ukraine for encouragement. Here on the home front things are looking good as well. The CPB and MS threw in their lot with George Galloway a few weeks ago despite some reservations alluded to, but not discussed in any detail, in an editorial on 14 February: “some of them have related to an unfeigned social conservatism, although his voting record on many issues is more liberal than is supposed.”

The editorial didn't elaborate on that supposedly “more liberal” voting record, but it will come as a surprise to LGBT+ people who have been repeatedly insulted by Galloway and his supporters; to Labour MP Naz Shah, whose claim to have been the victim of forced marriage in Pakistan was denied and mocked by Galloway; to women to think rape is more than just “bad manners”; and to anyone who thinks women have the right to abortion. And, of course, he supports the Iranian regime, Assad in Syria and Putin's invasion of Ukraine.

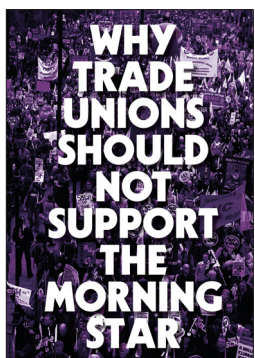
Most obviously, a lot of Jewish people – many of them critical of the present Israeli government and what it is doing in Gaza – will agree with the description of Galloway's stances as “an atrocious record of baiting the Jewish



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community.”

None of that seems to matter very much (if at all) to the CPB or the MS. Their elation at the victory of a reactionary demagogue, the gloating over Putin's gains in Ukraine, the willingness to quote a far-right Trumpite and the enthusiasm (previously noted in this column), for the anti-immigration German demagogue Sahra Wagenknecht, all point in the same direction: Red-Brown politics. ☐



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

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# New far-right group sets election plans

By Harry Sheeran

The far-right “Homeland Party” succeeded on 31 January in getting registered with the Electoral Commission, having failed at its first attempt in August 2023.

Despite a few quiet months, Homeland looks like overshadowing its parent organisation, Patriotic Alternative (PA). Homeland [split](#) from PA in May 2023 partly because of frustration at the lack of progress in on getting registered as a political party. PA had had a few farcical attempts at electoral registration, but had failed on every occasion. On one occasion, their logo was deemed potentially mislead-

ing to voters. Other grievances included the perceived focus of PA-leader Mark Collet's over-emphasis on live streaming, Collet's intent to ease the tight vetting measures that PA had adopted, and lack of real-world organising, as well as PA's clearer links to the banned neo-Nazi terrorist group National Action (NA).

NA was banned in December 2016 after it praised the killing of Jo Cox by Thomas Mair.

Sam Melia, PA's third in command, was sentenced to two years in jail 1 March 2024 for stirring up racial hatred. Melia had been pictured on National Action demos, and Collet was

also photographed with them. Melia's conviction is the latest in a [string](#) that PA have suffered, and almost certainly will not be the last.

Homeland aims to enact the “ladder strategy” that the British National Party (BNP) used to gain local councillors successfully in the 2000s. By its peak in 2008, the BNP had 55 councillors across the country.

### Ladder

Kenny Smith, the leader of Homeland, was a leading BNP organiser, and he wants to emulate that success. The ladder strategy means running for parish and local councils, using that to build up support in certain targeted locales, and

then running for parliamentary seats.

Homeland will target areas, as the BNP did with say, the Isle of Dogs in East London, where it got Derek Beackon elected as its first-ever councillor in 1993. It already has parish councillors, for example Conor Marlow, who has posted extreme antisemitic hate speech online.

According to [Hope not Hate](#), Homeland is eyeing the May elections. It will not stand candidates for by-elections until it has built up support by going for parish or local council spots.

Homeland is attempting to brush off its extreme associa-

tions, but as with the BNP and PA before it, this will be difficult. The anti-fascist research group Red Flare has continued to publish about Homeland, including an [article](#) that outlines Homeland's closeness to terrorism.

Whilst it remains to be seen how successful Homeland will be, they are organised, serious and have managed to achieve one main immediate goal. They are also very extreme, and have beliefs that are identical to PA. Kenny Smith, at the moment, seems to be more competent than Collet.

The labour movement and the left need to keep a close eye on this group. ☐



# “Pro-life” and the Manchester protests



## Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

Hundreds of students have joined protests against the establishment of a “pro-life” (anti-abortion-rights) society at Manchester University. The society was established in January to “create a pro-life culture on campus, engage students on life issues and promote respect for the dignity of human life from conception.”

A petition aimed at removing the society has over 18,000 signatures, with concerns raised about the original all-male committee making decisions regarding female bodies and medical rights.

Students are right to protest anti-choice groups on campuses and student unions should do more to amplify pro-choice politics, but Workers' Liberty does not support banning societies for obnoxious or reactionary views. Bureaucratic bans and censorship are likely to be used against the left and activists for liberation. We do not want to hand universities or student unions a free hand to ban things they find un-

pleasant. The university student union announced:

“From a legal standpoint, it's not possible to stop a society from affiliating for their legal views that are contrary to the views of other students. That means, despite concerns over student safety, the students' union can't block a society from forming because of their beliefs.”

In response, the petition's creator updated their web page to say: “The society is within its legal right to exist, so I do not believe we will be able to meet the goal laid out by this petition. However, I still believe that this petition is capable of being a force of good.

“It acts as a powerful representation of the sheer number of people opposed to ‘pro-life’ culture, which we should all remember. You have the right to choose, and even if this society exists, that won't change.”

Student unions and the National Union of Students (NUS) can do more to fight positively for reproductive freedom. Student unions should call on students to join pro-choice protests, the NUS should mobilise for national abortion rights activity. There has been a marked increase in anti-abortion street activity. We need mass working-class mobilisation to defend and extend reproductive rights. □

# Alan Bates is wrong about Amazon

By Ollie Moore

Alan Bates, a leading campaigner on behalf of over 500 fellow sub-postmasters who were wrongly blamed, and convicted, for problems caused by cash-handling software, has called for the Post Office to be handed over to Amazon.

Bates and other victims are right to be angry at the Post Office bosses' venality and incompetence. But ownership by Amazon would make things worse, not better.

As the ongoing strikes in Amazon's BHX4 warehouse in Coventry show, Amazon's treatment of its own workers has little to recommend it. Amazon resists the union recognition which would allow its workers to assert some rights.

The Post Office is a “state-owned company”, run as a staging-post between public ownership and privatisation. For many years the government has been driving Post Office bosses to make it profitable so it can be sold off without government subsidy.

The bosses have run down “Crown” Post Offices (where workers are employees and have union recognition) in favour of expanding sub post offices, run by self-employed contractors. The union, the CWU, has some membership among the sub-postmasters, but is denied recognition.

The Post Office made losses for 16 years up to 2016-7, but



since then has made increased profits almost every year. It has paid its bosses hugely, and disregarded the rights of its workers and contractors, because that is the road to privatisation.

State ownership as such is no

guarantee of good conditions for workers, as many low-paid and overworked workers in the NHS can attest. The alternative is not full-on private profiteering, but real social ownership, with democratic control by workers and service users. □



## Activist Agenda

The Fare Free London campaign meets on Monday 4 March, following the meeting to set it up on 10 February, and is protesting at City Hall on Thursday 7 March, 9:30am.

On 17 March Workers' Liberty is running a Zoom meeting on environmental “tipping points” (see page 6). 13 April sees the Campaign Against Climate Change trade union [conference](#), and meanwhile we are assembling a contingent for the protest camp at the [Drax](#) power station on 8-13 August.

• Links for many campaigns, template motions, etc.: [workersliberty.org/agenda](https://workersliberty.org/agenda)

# Reinstate Lambeth councillors!



## Democracy in the labour movement

By Chris Reynolds

The right-wing Labour council group in Lambeth, south London, has suspended four councillors from the Labour whip for defying orders to vote against a Green motion (in January) for a ceasefire in Gaza.

The suspension came on 26 February – after the whole Labour leadership had come out for an immediate ceasefire (21 February) and long after London Labour mayor Sadiq Khan

and several Labour councils had made that call.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy, Labour MP for one of the Lambeth constituencies, has condemned the suspensions.

Sonia Winifred, suspended for three months, has resigned from her council seat. Deepak Sardiwal was suspended for three months, Martin Abrams indefinitely, and Sarina da Silva for two months. (She abstained in the January vote. 20 Labour councillors chose to miss the vote).

Labour activists will demand that the councillors be reinstated, and the Labour leaders now campaign for the ceasefire policy they have so belatedly adopted. □



## Upcoming meetings

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

**Sunday 10 March, 2pm:** Socialist Feminist Book Club: How Not To Skip Class by Tithi Bhattacharya, Effra Social, 89 Effra Road, London, SW2 1DF

**Monday 11 March, 7.15pm:** The History of International Women's Day, online

**Tuesday 12 March, 6.30pm:** International Women's Day, The Lost Wanderer, 46 Leazes Park Road, Newcastle, NE1 4PG

**Wednesday 13 March, 6pm:** Women Against Pit Closures, University Arms, 197 Brook Hill Sheffield S3 7HG

**Sunday 17 March, 7pm:** Tipping points – ecosocialist study group, online

**Wednesday 20 March, 7pm:** Class War – Lessons of the Miners' Strike 1984-5, Marchmont Street Community Centre, London, WC1N 1AB

**Wednesday 20 March, 7pm:** A Socialist Perspective on Israel-Palestine, YMCA International Community Centre, 61B Mansfield Road, Nottingham, NG1 3FN

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



# We may be near tipping points

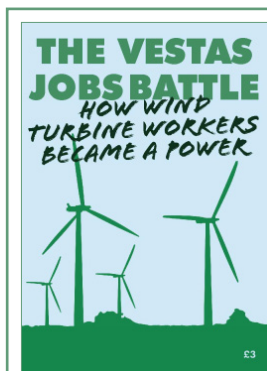


## Environment

By Eric Fileman

The 2023 State of the Climate [report](#) paints a bleak picture. A record-setting year, maybe the hottest globally in 100 thousand years.

2023 brought yet further extreme weather events, from the wildfires in Canada (in which roughly 10 million ha were burnt) to flooding during the monsoon season in northern India (which killed over 100 people). And a



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recent [review](#) of Climate Tipping Points (CTPs) shows that as global heating continues, the trend of increasing temperatures and extreme weather events is likely to be accelerated by self-perpetuating feedback loops.

Climate tipping points are critical thresholds beyond which small perturbations (maybe 0.2°C) will set off a feedback loop causing a large, accelerated and perhaps irreversible change to the climate system.

The term “tipping point” was first proposed in a 2005 [paper](#) modelling the thinning of Arctic sea ice, and expanded on in another [paper](#) in 2008.

In the 2008 paper, fourteen “tipping elements” (large-scale components of the biosphere which will undergo changes when tipping points are exceeded) were identified. This list was expanded [recently](#) to sixteen elements, split into nine global “core” and seven regional.

Estimates were made for the change in temperature at which climate tipping points will occur. For the Greenland and West Antarctic ice sheets, low-latitude coral reefs, Boreal Permafrost, and Barents sea ice, the central estimate

(beyond which triggering the tipping point is “likely”) is around just 1.5°C of warming.

There is further risk of a “tipping cascade” where multiple tipping points interact to amplify each others’ impact. Thus the conclusion that a target of 1.5°C rather than the Paris Agreements’ 1.5–2°C warming should be used to inform climate policy. Current governmental policies are thought to lead to about 2–3°C warming and recent researchers suggests we’ve already surpassed the 1.5°C target.

A recent UN Interconnected Disaster Risks [Report](#) considers not just CTPs, but also ecological and social tipping points (it calls these collectively “risk tipping points”).

It outlines six such tipping points, from mass extinction of species, to groundwater depletion, to the increase in space debris, emphasising how these tipping points feed into each other. A 2022 [report](#) on Planetary Boundaries states that “crossing one planetary boundary systematically results in the crossing of others” – and that report was criticised for not covering the full extent to which we’ve already crossed

some boundaries]. Of the nine planetary boundaries it outlined, as many as six may already have been crossed.

These recent reports, taken together, paint a grim picture of what is likely to come in terms of climate and ecological collapse and its impact on society. The chaotic and interlinked nature of Earth systems means it is impossible to say with absolute certainty what will happen, but all estimates suggest that corrective action in the form of drastic reductions in emissions is overdue.

There is a risk that the catastrophic language of tipping points will cause policymakers to freeze rather than face the issues: reluctance to affront short-term profit interests on the grounds that disaster looks inevitable anyway ends up the same as reluctance to affront those interests in the belief that we have plenty of leeway.

The reports should be seen in terms of every 0.1°C having an impact. □

• Full references [bit.ly/ef-tp](http://bit.ly/ef-tp). Workers’ Liberty ecosocialist reading group on “Tipping Points”: Sunday 17 March, 7pm. Zoomlink [bit.ly/envi-r](http://bit.ly/envi-r) and details and reading at [bit.ly/ti-pt](http://bit.ly/ti-pt)

# Research ban will not make us safer



## Science

By Les Hearn

The US House of Representatives recently approved a ban on “gain-of-function” research that supposedly modifies pathogens so as to make them more dangerous to humans. This may seem like a good idea, but there is more to it than meets the eye.

Gain of function (GoF) refers to mutations in genes that render their products, proteins that function as enzymes, transporters, binding agents etc, more active. Such mutations have occurred throughout evolution (as have their opposites, loss-of-function (LoF) mutations). Whether these benefit the organism depends on many factors, but the current controversy arises from GoF mutations “deliberately” introduced into viruses.

The motivation for virus research is mainly to understand threats to human or animal health. This involves discovering the functions of viral genes

and gene products (proteins such as the “spike” protein that helps Covid bind to human cells, or enzymes that help the virus replicate). One way of studying genes is modifying (mutating) them and seeing what difference that makes. Inevitably, their functions may be enhanced (GoF) or, more likely, diminished (LoF). It is difficult to know in advance what the result will be, so GoF may occur unintentionally. In fact, most mutations make viruses less viable (as with most mutations in any organism).

One area of research might involve giving a dangerous bird flu virus the ability to spread in mammals. This doesn’t sound like a good idea, given that natural mutations of this kind may produce human flu pandemics. However, the justification is that it would allow viruses to be cultured in labs so that their properties could be studied and preparations made for natural pandemics. Of course, lab security is crucial, as with research into anthrax, bubonic plague or smallpox.

There is already a US policy on proposed research that

might result in “enhanced potential pandemic pathogens” (ePPPs). This was recently extended from “highly transmissible and virulent” human pathogens to “moderately transmissible and virulent” ones. The House motion (yet to be approved by the Senate) would ban outright all such research, regardless of justification.

Behind the ban seems to be the conspiracy theory that the Covid (SARS-CoV-2) pandemic was sparked, not by viruses jumping from bats to humans, centred on the Wuhan “wet” market, but from GoF coronaviruses escaping from the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV).

In fact, the WIV had been studying transmission of coronaviruses from bats to humans since 2005, following an outbreak of the coronavirus SARS-CoV-1 in 2002-4. It was the WIV that showed the Covid virus to be 96% identical to a bat virus they had identified. It is not clear that WIV’s research comes under the category of GoF but scientists generally agree that, if so, this played no role in the spread of Covid and

posed no threat to humans.

The proposed ban follows years of misinformation and scaremongering by anti-science populist Republicans. It was promoted by Rep Thomas Massie, who has history in undermining the response to Covid (he was even criticised by Trump).

Many [scientists](#) criticise the ban, not least because of the difficulty of defining GoF research. Because it does not

define “potential pandemic pathogens”, researchers in the field say the ban could halt work on flu vaccines, Covid vaccines and treatments, and RSV, a common respiratory virus that can cause serious illness. GoF studies are routine in these areas. The fact remains that we don’t know enough about coronaviruses and many other emerging threats, so research, including into GoF, is desperately needed. □



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# Alan Woods and his “born again” RCP



Eye on the Left

By Simon Nelson

Socialist Appeal (about to be re-named Revolutionary Communist Party) says that 5,000 copies were sold of no.1 of its renamed paper, *The Communist*. Where, we don't know. The paper does now carry photos of street stalls, though the paper is not much seen at demonstrations, let alone at workplaces or labour-movement meetings. But the group says it had over 1,000 members by the end of 2023 and now aims for 10,000 soon.

Every one of the first three issues of *The Communist* is mostly a series of short breathless reports in a tone akin to “Have you heard the good word about our lord Jesus Christ?” The message to everyone: if you think you are a “communist”, join the RCP.

If you don't know what “communism” is, or how it can be achieved, no matter. In fact, not knowing may help. An article on Ukraine by the RCP's chief writer, Alan Woods, implies that Putin cannot necessarily be blamed for the death of Navalny, and why does Putin always get the blame anyway? Who are the real

enemies of the Ukrainian people? That would be NATO and the US.

Online you find speeches by Woods going back more than ten years, each one declaring that [insert year] is a seismic event for the class struggle. The contradictions of capitalism are reaching such a level that a mass movement of the revolutionary working class is just round the corner.

And now, *The Communist* claims, we are turning the corner. “Similar revolutionary developments are on the order of the day all over the world. The same mood is building everywhere. What is needed is a clear revolutionary communist programme and an organisation to carry it through.” Channelling the SWP on a bad day, they tell us there is “anger everywhere”, as if “anger” of any sort equals communism. (Putin's “anger” against Ukraine, maybe?)

For years Socialist Appeal did little but “Marxist” lecture-meetings on university campuses. Now that has all changed, in some areas anyway.

They have mobilised their branches or “cells” in South Wales to campaign for an occupation of the threatened Port Talbot steelworks. Rob Sewell, in issue 2, calls for a town-wide meeting to elect an action committee. An article apparently by a steel worker gives you little insight into the mood among

workers but promotes the RCP's stalls and banner drops in the town over the last few weeks.

The contrast with the slow, plodding “unbroken thread” approach of Socialist Appeal even two years ago is startling.

Back then they were at pains to insist on a “perspective” that the working class would inevitably turn to the Labour Party and push it left, and on the consequent need for Marxists to patiently position themselves to be ready to lead that push. But their actual record of any activity, for example turning up and putting motions to meetings and conferences, was patchy.

The new apocalyptic tactic is likely to prove as patchy as the old quietist one. The worry must be that in the meantime it can chew up and disorient hundreds of revolutionary-minded young people, as the “Healyite” SLL-WRP's similar drive did from the mid-1960s, and the SWP's imitation in the early 1990s.

If you're a communist, good! But then read, discuss. Educate yourself. “Study, propagandise, organise”, as Marx's comrade Wilhelm Liebknecht put it. Check out our books *Socialism Makes Sense* and *The Left in Disarray*, which explain the difference between the communism of Marx's *Communist Manifesto* and Stalin-type “communism”.



In the new paper, Aaron Bushnell's setting himself on fire is cited by “R” as the inspiration for joining the RCP. “After the martyrdom of Aaron Bushnell I feel I can no longer twiddle my thumbs in anger at the world. His final post discussing ‘what would you do’ in light of the ongoing genocide moved me to want to be more involved. I believe this is where to start.”

Get active in the labour movement with Workers' Liberty, not in a “born again” sect. □

## Antisemitism and Israel



Eric Lee

For sixty years, the Anti-Defamation League has been profiling Americans to try to monitor antisemitic beliefs. For the first half century of doing that, they found a fairly steady and ongoing decline in anti-Jewish sentiment.

They would ask people if they agreed with a number of statements about Jews. Things like: Jews don't care what happens to anyone but their own kind. Jews do not share my values. Jews are more willing than others to use shady practices to get what they want.

Over many decades, belief in many of those once-popular anti-Jewish tropes began to decline. American Jews increasingly felt comfortable in a society which, while far from being perfect, offered a much more secure life than in other countries. America had become a country where being Jewish was no longer a bar-

rier – as it had once been – to success and acceptance. And that expressed itself in almost universal support for the state of Israel. New York City would hold annual “Salute to Israel” parades down the main avenues, with tens of thousands in attendance including major political figures from both parties.

Anti-Jewish sentiment was largely confined to the older generation – people who may have remembered hotels and clubs where Jews were effectively barred. Younger people, on the other hand, were far less likely to embrace anti-Jewish beliefs, just as they were less likely to be racists or homophobes.

But in the last few years, the ADL's annual survey has shown a very dangerous trend. Not only are antisemitic beliefs becoming more popular in the United States, but they are most popular among younger people.

In looking at the data before and after the 7 October Hamas attack on Israel and Israel's re-

sponse, the ADL found that this had surprisingly little effect on anti-Jewish attitudes. In other words, Americans weren't turning against Jews because of something Israel did. The sources of anti-Jewish hatred run much deeper than that.

As the historian Deborah Lipstadt, who is currently serving as the United States' Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism, told an audience in London last month, antisemitism is one of the oldest hatreds. It has been around for hundreds, even thousands of years. It rises and falls, swinging in our own lifetimes from being popular to being a taboo, and back again.

None of this has anything to do with the policies of the Netanyahu government.

This was made very clear when the first ugly, anti-Jewish protests took place in New York City, with the support of Democratic Socialists of America. These not in response to Israeli actions in Gaza, but to Hamas's attack on Israel. The demonstrators were in the



streets, filled with joy (as some were to put it) at the heroism of the Palestinian “resistance”.

If Israel is not to blame for the sharp rise in antisemitism – also in the UK, and also preceding the current war in Gaza – what does cause it? On this, the ADL report was, unfortunately, silent.

But historians will tell us that antisemitism often thrives during periods of social unrest, rapid change, and economic crisis. That is certainly what happened in Germany in the 15 years following the country's military defeat in the First World War. Many of the same factors that are seen as causes of the rise of right-wing pop-

ulist movements today are the same factors that can lead to a rise in antisemitism.

So long as we live in an age of “wars, crises and catastrophes” as Karl Kautsky described it a century ago, antisemitism will thrive. Netanyahu can be ousted from power and a more conciliatory Israeli government come in, with the promise of a more reasonable, humane policy towards the Palestinians. That would be a very welcome development.

But according to the data we have, that may not help much in the fight against that most ancient prejudice, antisemitism. □



# Russia two years later

By Loretta Marie Perera

It's been over two years now that troops arrived and tanks rolled into Ukraine: the country, and the world, awoke to a full-scale Russian invasion. Two years ago we [spoke](#) with several Russians to hear their thoughts on the war, and a year ago, we [caught up with them](#) to see how their lives had changed.

## Challenges and change

For Kirill, who relocated to Italy after the start of the war, things have settled. "I have more or less adapted. I began to understand Italian culture and the country as a whole," said the St. Petersburg native who now lives in Milan. "If you compare it with last year, I feel much more confident, and much calmer somehow."

For Yulia, currently in Moscow, plans to leave Russia are underway, but have yet to be realised. "Me and my girlfriend planned to immigrate this past year but turns out we weren't prepared at all and still have very low resources," she said. "We are getting there, but at a slower pace. Anti-LGBT extremist law is so horrifying and ridiculous at the same time. We feel more unsafe than ever."

While the war in Ukraine has raged on, a string of new laws within Russia have created more dangers for its citizens. In late November 2023, a Russian court [declared](#) the "international LGBT movement" as an "extremist organisation." Under Russian criminal [law](#), participating in or financing an extremist organisation is punishable by up to 12 years in prison.

Another crippling law is on freedom of speech: Human rights group and watchdog OVD-info reported that [19,855](#) have been detained at anti-war protests since 24 Feb 2022, while 896 criminal cases have been filed against anti-war dissidents.

But even as threats abound, life has no choice but to go on, even for those who oppose the war. "Not much has changed, except a new batch of repressive laws has been implemented," said Evgeny, also in Moscow, who says that ultimately, his day-to-day life hasn't

changed significantly. "The cost of living's increased significantly, but inflation's a global trend. There was a loss of western services and brands; it's a minor inconvenience at worst."

"So far the biggest challenge is to stay empathetic and hopeful."

## Numbness for survival, fear from afar

As one can imagine, caring deeply every time bad news emerges is exhausting and unsustainable, especially when you are surrounded by it. While far from indifference, numbness has become a survival tactic for those who oppose.

"I think most people became numb to all the bad news," said Evgeny. "At least, I'm not in the trenches or under constant bombardment."

"I feel like I became more numb to everything," said Yulia. "I guess I've felt so much pain for such a long time that now wherever I see something I just accept it as a fact – I don't process, don't let it in."

When there is a need to keep going, and to get out, staying still to grieve can be a luxury few can afford.

"I can still cry watching cute commercials and movies," said Yulia. "But I try to dissociate myself from all the pain in the world. So I can survive, move, and help."

"Even being here in Italy, I still have a strong fear that Russia is still pursuing me. I'm afraid that if I say that I'm against the Russian army or against Russia, they could just put me in prison," said Kirill. "Although I have been here for 2 years now, I am very much afraid for my loved ones who stayed there."

## The loss of Navalny

Just shy of the invasion's second anniversary, opposition Russians were hit hard once again: this time with the death of the face of Russia's opposition and to many, the last symbol of hope, Alexei Navalny. While Russia's left were [hardly Navalny's biggest fans](#), the loss of what he represented is impossible to ignore.

For all three, his death was inevitable – but it has now brought a sense of hope.



Russians around the world mourned the death of Alexei Navalny

ble – but it has now brought a sense of hope.

"Navalny died. And I didn't cry and didn't feel hopeless as many I know did," Yulia said. "To be honest, I was living waiting for this news, I knew they wouldn't let him live, I feel like I was ready long ago for his death."

"His death was sad but predictable," said Evgeny. "I wasn't his biggest supporter, as he engaged in some right wing populist rhetoric. Condolences to his family and loved ones and supporters."

"I am not a supporter of Navalny in general, I don't like him very much, but every person has the right to life," said Kirill. "I can't compare Navalny's death to how I felt on Feb. 24, 2022, but it is similar when you understand that Russia and the Russian government are simply headed to the bottom and taking the country with them."

But with Navalny's death now comes a newfound hope. "I feel how people are leaning to each other, how they consolidate, unite. Like something is rising. And I feel it in the air," said Yulia. "I don't think there will be a revolution soon, but people uniting makes me feel hopeful. I know they are scared of us – that's why they push harder and harder and harder. And the harder you push – the harder the kickback will be."

Still, uncertainty remains.

"The opposition has lost its symbol of resistance and resilience," Evgeny said. "I'm not entirely sure what would happen next, or what the opposition would accomplish. So far, all their activity's been pretty futile."

"It's some kind of totalitarian terrible

regime, that if you don't support us, you don't support the war, you'll either be in prison or you'll be killed," said Kirill. "For the Russian opposition, they simply killed their most important commander."

"They can just kill a person like that, in front of everyone, without being afraid of anything at all."

## A dark future

In the aftermath of significant events like a 2-year commemoration or the murder of Alexei Navalny, everyday life creeps on, along with the sombre realisation of how much time has passed.

"I almost forgot about it," Yulia said. "A few days ago I suddenly realised, 'it's the 24th in a few days'. And it feels like more than two years have passed. I am still in Russia. Still planning to leave."

"[But] I am much more aware about history now – the situation obliges," Yulia concluded. "Before Feb. 24 I hated my country. Now I know I love it. I love it so much, I want it to be free and progressive and fair and safe. But even more than that I want for Ukraine to win and heal."

"In two years my life has changed completely – my worldview, my language, work, the people who surround me," said Kirill. "I am very sad that my past life has ended. I'm trying to move on with my life, trying to build a new life from a blank slate. Sometimes I succeed, sometimes I don't, sometimes I rejoice, sometimes I cry."

"Today is February 24. I'm going to a rally in support of Ukraine – it is my civic duty." □

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# The fight for free unions in Belarus

By Dale Street

On 16 February Dzmitry Shcharbina, an employee of the OJSC Belarusian Steelworks, was charged under Article 130 of the Belarusian Criminal Code: "Incitement of racial, national, religious or other social enmity or discord".

The basis of the charge is his alleged participation in protests in his workplace after the rigged presidential elections of 2020. Dzmitry faces up to five years in prison.

A few days earlier three employees of Gazprom Transgaz Belarus were taken into detention. According to the Belarusian trade-union-rights organisation Solidarnast, they were then forced to sign statements in which they confessed to "possession of protest symbols", reposting posts from "extremist" social media, and participation in the 2020 protests.

At the same time, Aliaksandr Liashkou, an employee of the Naftan petroleum refinery, was sentenced to fifteen days imprisonment for posting "extremist" materials on social media, and an employee of the Belakta plant in Vaukavysk was detained for participation in "illegal" protests and distributing "extremist" materials.

These are just the latest examples of a wave of repression of trade union and workplace activists stretching back to the nationwide protests of 2020 and even earlier.

According to Solidarnast – based in Bremen in Germany, due to the level of repression in Belarus itself – Belarusian prisons are currently home to 42 trade union leaders and activists who "fought for workers' rights and freedoms, for democratic values and the right to decent work." These include:

Berasneu Vasil (chair of the REP trade union; nine year prison sentence); Varanovich Zmitser (member of the SPM trade union; sentence of two and a half years in a penal colony); Aliaksandr Yarashuk (chair of the BKDP trade union federation; sentence of four years in a penal colony); Karneenka Hanna (member of the SPM trade union; five year prison sentence); Ablab Hanna, Dziuba Siarhei and Hashnikau Aliaksandr (Rabochy Rukh activists; eleven, twelve and fourteen year prison sentences); and Tseranevich Valiantsin (deputy chair of the BITU trade union; twelve year prison sentence).

The collapse of Stalinism in Belarus – a very partial collapse, given the nature of Belarusian President Aliaksandr Lukashenka's [authoritarian regime](#) – saw the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus (FPB) emerge as the successor to the country's state-run fake trade unions.

The FPB leadership remained wedded to a Stalinist concept of "trade

unionism". They saw the role of the trade union federation as one of subservience to, and partnership with, employers and the state, as opposed to representing and mobilising workers in defence of their interests. Even so, the FPB leadership was not loyal enough for Lukashenka's liking. In 2002 FPB chairman Franz Vitko was replaced by Leonid Kozik, formerly the Deputy Prime Minister and then Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration. Kozik's task was to "restore order" in the FPB.

He did so by sacking even vaguely independently minded FPB officials, integrating the FPB into state structures (through inclusion in the Presidential Administration Personnel Register, and the receipt of financial subsidies from the government), and working to undermine the new independent trade unions which had already begun to organise.

The FPB colluded with employers and the state – often the same thing, given the centralised nature of the Belarusian economy – to stifle the growth of independent unions in workplaces, including by backing employers who refused to recognise them for the purpose of collective bargaining.

The increasing use of short-term contracts allowed employers to discriminate between FPB members (contracts renewed) and members of independent unions (contracts not renewed). Activists in independent unions were dismissed, with the support of the FPB, for trumped-up workplace misdemeanours.

## Decline

As a result, independent unions went into decline. Between 2010 and 2020, for example, membership of BITU, the largest independent union, fell from 7,000 to 4,500. Other independent unions – REP, SPB and SPM – suffered similar losses.

(BITU and SPB were general unions. REP covered electronic and radio workers. SPM covered metalworkers. They were all affiliates of the BKDP trade union federation. They have all been banned since 2022.)

The FPB has also provided political support for Lukashenka, campaigning amongst its members for a vote for him in the rigged presidential election of 2020. The same year the current FPB chairman, Mikhail Orda, was elected as a member of the Belarusian Parliament – as a pro-Lukashenka deputy.

The FPB played the same role in the 25 February 2024 local and parliamentary [elections](#). Its members were mobilised to collect signatures for the nomination of pro-Lukashenka candidates – the only candidates allowed to stand – and acted as election observers to give a veneer of democracy to the



Lukashenka meeting with then Chairman of the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus, Mikhail Orda, in 2019

elections.

Repression of independent trade unions and their members increased sharply during and after the nationwide protests against the 2020 presidential elections, which saw Lukashenka elected to his sixth term of office.

The independent unions played a central role in organising workplace protests and strikes. As a result, thousands resigned from the FPB and joined the independent unions. The influx of new members did not transform them into mass organisations. But it did make them more of a threat to the Lukashenka regime.

The regime's response was a brutal crackdown, involving mass dismissals, detentions, imprisonment, torture, and forced labour. Many trade union and workplace activists arrested during the crackdown are still in prison, still to serve many years of their sentences.

In 2022 the regime went a stage further, by banning all independent trade unions, including the umbrella BKDP federation. There has been no let-up in the level of repression since then. If anything, it has intensified. According to the Solidarnast chairperson Lizaveta Merliak:

"The trigger for the Lukashenka regime to finally end the existence of a democratic labour movement in the country [in 2022] was the demands of the BKDP leadership to stop the war [in Ukraine] and withdraw the Russian army from the territory of Belarus and Ukraine.

"All democratic trade unions were liquidated in Belarus, and now trade union activity outside the framework of the pro-government federation of trade unions is prohibited. Every day we hear about more and more arrests, torture, searches, fines in Belarus, where terror has brought us back to the terrible past of Stalin's repression."

Leaders of the FPB have not only failed to challenge the repression of free trade unionism in Belarus. They have also gone as far as giving evidence at the trials of union and workplace activists.

Andrei Rybak, an official of the chemical and mining workers affiliate of the FPB, gave evidence against Aliaksandr Mishuk at his trial for organising a workplace strike during the 2020 protests. Mishuk was sentenced to two and a half

years in a penal colony.

Andrei Rozhynski, another official of the same FPB affiliate, gave evidence at the trial of members of the workers-rights organisation Rabochy Rukh. Its members were sentenced to up to fourteen years in prison.

Exiled Belarusian trade union leaders and activists have set up Solidarnast in order to campaign for "the release of trade union and political prisoners, an end to the repression of trade union activists, and the restoration of guarantees of legal activities of independent trade unions."

In Belarus "there is police terror, torture and harassment of those who disagree with Lukashenko's dictatorial regime, including trade union activists." But workers can play a central role in the defeat of the regime:

"Despite the destruction of the independent trade union movement, workers in Belarus remain the force which can resist the dictatorship. And we must support their aspirations for democracy in every way we can, and at the same time preserve the trade union culture." □

• More: [solidarnast.info](https://solidarnast.info)

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# The triumph and defeat of Na

## The road to Bolshevism

By Sean Matgamna

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

*"The Russian proletariat is no novice in the revolutionary movement. You know that it was a worker who blew up the imperial palace in February 1880. The very idea for this action was conceived in a workers' group" – G V Plekhanov and Vera Zasulich, Letter to the International Socialist Congress, 1891*

*"And our proletariat? Did it pass through the school of the medieval apprentice brotherhood? Has it the ancient tradition of the guilds? Nothing of the kind. It was thrown into the factory cauldron, snatched directly from the plough. Hence the absence of conservative tradition, absence of caste in the proletariat itself, revolutionary freshness: hence – along with other causes – October, the first workers' government in the world. But hence also illiteracy, backwardness, absence of organisational habits, absence of system in labour, of cultural and technical education" – Leon Trotsky, History of the Russian Revolution*

The Bolshevik historian Pokrovsky maintained that the Northern Union of 1878-80 in St Petersburg was the first workers' organisation in the history of the Russian empire. He dismissed the claims of the Southern Union of 1875 in Kyiv on the grounds that it was not organised by the workers themselves but by populists of another class, Shchedrin and Kovalskaya, and because of its tactics – the old rural economic terrorism practised by Zemlya i Volya and still advocated by Cherny Peredel, applied to the factories.

"The idea that mass organisations might become the instruments of revolution was entirely new to the men of the 70s; it was unquestionably suggested to them by working with the workers. It originated however in the head of an intellectual, for the statute of the Southern Union was drawn up by Zaslovsky, a member of the gentry".

### Politics

Such a sharp distinction between the Northern Union and its Southern predecessors begs too many of the questions about the interactions of the workers with the revolutionaries – populists and then Social-Democratic Marxists – of another class that recur, in varying forms, until 1917 and beyond. It is however a matter of fact that the Northern Union was the first working-class organisation initiated and run

entirely by the workers themselves.

Plekhanov would later proudly point to the programme of the Northern Union to claim that it was the working-class movement, embryonic though it was, that had first publicly raised the question of a turn to politics which the political terrorists of Narodnaya Volya would soon raise in their own way.

The union's programme was indeed notably political, and its politics were largely social-democratic, that is, in the idiom of the time, Marxist. It declared an affinity with "the Socialist Democratic Party of the West".

### Development

But the development of such working-class politics required political liberties that were unknown in Russia. Even strike action, which was illegal, brought the workers up against the need to win political liberty.

But how? What could they do to win the right to trade-union and political action that would not be crushed by the state?

What politics was possible in Russia, immediately?

Narodnaya Volya, the majority which came out of the 1879 split in the revolutionary-populist Zemlya i Volya (ZiV) of 1876-9, had an answer: strike at the Tsar and force his successor to grant constitutional rights. The first answer of Stepan Khalturin, the leader of the Northern Union, was that organisation of the working class. When the Northern Union was crushed by the police, Khalturin would see and share the logic of Narodnaya Volya's position: the only feasible politics was political terrorism.

Though he went over to Narodnaya Volya, Khalturin never subscribed to the general populist delusion that an agrarian socialism based on the peasant community was possible for Russia.

Georgi Plekhanov, who led the Chorny Peredel minority in the 1879 split of Zemlya i Volya still adhering to the old idea of immediate mass rebellion and then by 1883 became the leader of Russia's first Marxist group, records that Khalturin thought the lucubrations of the populist intellectuals about the obshchina, the peasant community, were futile. "Do you really mean to say that this is important?", he used to tease the then-populist organiser Plekhanov.

Khalturin had said of the earlier terrorists that the only thing they did was "to shoot their own folk, the officials", and "get in the way of the workers organising".

He said there was "not a chance for us; as soon as we have started something going, bang, the intellectuals

have killed somebody, and the police are on to us. Why don't they give us a chance to organise?" He eventually came to the view that only political terrorism could win from the Tsarist state "a chance to organise" for the working class.

Plekhanov reported that Khalturin envisaged the revolution not as a politically focused outburst such as the populists expected but as a general strike – which, Plekhanov justly noted, was exactly how it did develop in 1905. But that was a generation in the future.

Plekhanov's comrade Pavel Axelrod vainly tried to revive the Northern Union. At that stage of the development of the Russian working class, the Tsarist state was strong enough to stifle all attempts to create an organised labour movement.

Should the activists accept that it would take a more or less long time before capitalist development would render the Tsarist state incapable of suppressing the working-class movement, and that therefore all that could be done now was to prepare for that?

In fact it would be the mid 1890s before the Russian working class movement, augmented by the tremendous industrial expansion of the 1880s and 90s, even began to reach such a stage.

### None

None of the revolutionaries consciously chose that perspective. Plekhanov, Axelrod, Deutsch, and Zasulich, the future Marxist "Social Democrats", who would eventually accept that logic, did not. They wanted to continue as ZiV had been, organising, appealing for revolt, using terrorism to "disorganise" its enemies or in the way the organisers of the Southern Union at the end of the 1870s (who were supporters of Plekhanov's Chorny Peredel) used it.

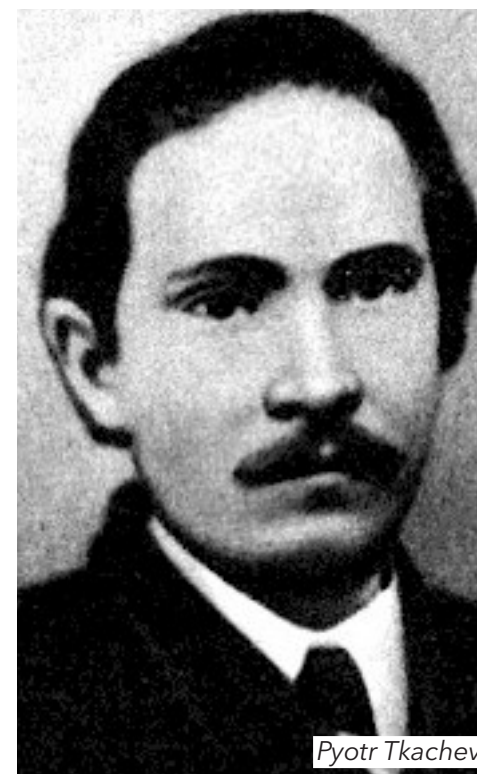
The other logical choice was the one which Narodnaya Volya elaborated – an immediate attempt to blast the Tsarist state out of the power to repress all social movements such as those of the Northern Union.

The second logic proved all-powerful with most of ZiV, including, as we have seen, the working-class leader Khalturin.

Repression became especially fierce after an unsuccessful attempt on the life of Tsar Alexander II in 1879. Russia was divided into six districts, each under the rule of a political-military dictator appointed by the Tsar.

In the spring and early summer of 1879 sizeable numbers of terrorists and Zemlya i Volya people who fired on police to try to avoid arrest were hanged.

Narodnaya Volya was organised



Pyotr Tkachev

in the autumn of 1879. Like ZiV and Cherny Peredel it would attempt to base itself on the urban working class as well as on the urban intelligentsia.

What it offered was the creation of a revolutionary party, made up of militants from different classes and backgrounds but primarily from the intelligentsia, which would capture the imagination of the people and establish itself with them as a sort of collective anti-Tsar.

The historical transmutation envisaged in Antonio Gramsci's conception of the revolutionary Marxist party of the 20th century as "the Modern Prince", the collective equivalent of the single rulers, the princes, of Renaissance Italy, had already been postulated in those terms by Mikhail Bakunin. It was the clearly expressed design to which the founders of Narodnaya Volya worked.

In April 1879 the leading article in Zemlya i Volya declared:

"More than anything else, it is essential to turn ourselves into the people and live within the people; to become a force not only acting in the people's interests, but with sufficient force to hold firm for itself and the people. We must put the revolutionary party in the place that the mythical Tsar now holds in the eyes of our citizens".

As to the question, what would this party, the collective anti-Tsar, do, the Narodnaya Volya faction of ZiV had a compelling answer: the collective anti-Tsar would do bloody single combat above society with the Tsar and his lieutenants.

Most of those populists from the intelligentsia who had been involved in the work around the factories, in both Northern and Southern Russia, went over to Narodnaya Volya. The fragments of the suppressed Northern Union supported Narodnaya Volya, not



# Narodnaya Volya

Cherny Peredel.

Khalturin asked Plekhanov to put him in contact with Narodnaya Volya. He made one of the unsuccessful attempts to kill the Tsar, going to work as a carpenter in the Tsar's Winter Palace in September 1879.

He himself had thought it best to kill the Tsar with gun or knife – he had once found himself alone in a room with him! – but the organisation believed a bomb was more sure, and Khalturin accepted that view. He set off a bomb in the Tsar's palace in February 1880 which killed eleven people but failed to kill Tsar Alexander.

The killing of Tsar Alexander II on 1 March 1881 was followed, not immediately but soon, by the destruction of the Narodnaya Volya military organisation which had killed him. The last members of the "Executive Committee" were rounded up.

Elements of the shattered organisation would survive, as would the mystique of its example and the tradition embodied in that mystique. It would inspire those who planned to kill the Tsar in 1887, for which Lenin's brother Alexander Ulyanov and four others would be hanged.

A newspaper in the name of Narodnaya Volya would continue, edited in exile by no less than Pyotr Lavrov, Karl Marx's friend and the prophet of the earlier "educationalist" populism which had inspired those who "went to the people" in 1874-5. He rallied to support the heroic fighters of NV. So, in his own way, did Karl Marx, who was full of admiration and praise for the simple heroism with which the assassins of Alexander II conducted themselves in court and on the scaffold.

## Shattered

As an organised fighting force Narodnaya Volya was now done for. Not only was its centre shattered, but, most importantly, the ratio between the casualties it endured from the Tsarist police and the new recruits to replace them turned drastically unfavourable for the organisation's survival.

In part that was because of the relentless terror inflicted by the state on anything that moved in Russian society. But that could only have the effect it did because the spectacular achievement of the goal Narodnaya Volya had set itself, the beheading of the autocracy by destroying the reigning autocrat, Alexander, had incontrovertibly shown that political terrorism too could not move Russian forward.

The Tsarist regime automatically extruded another "head" to replace Alexander II – his son Alexander III, who was, even in comparison with his father, a thoroughgoing reactionary.

Narodnaya Volya's spectacular success in their chosen means had pro-

duced only pointed failure in achieving the end to which the killing of the Tsar was supposedly the means.

No outbreak of popular revolt followed the assassination of the Tsar. Indeed, the most common peasant and still-peasant-linked working-class explanation for what had happened to the "Tsar Liberator", who had freed the serfs 20 years earlier, was that he had been killed by the landlords in revenge for ending serfdom. The liberal segments of the bourgeoisie recoiled in fear and horror.

## Reforms

Ironically, on the eve of his death the Tsar had, against the opposition of his son and successor, planned to grant limited liberal reforms. The political reaction unleashed by the assassination put an end to all hope for that.

In the next decades much that had been populism would evolve into bourgeois liberalism – indeed, as we have seen, the "operational politics" of Narodnaya Volya itself, despite its long-term "socialist goal", became nothing but the winning of a liberal bourgeois constitution.

With the destruction of Narodnaya Volya, the early labour movement which populism had inspired and influence also went down to destruction.

Stepan Khalturin had been more than a populist, but the heroic end of that working-class leader turned Narodnaya Volya fighter on the gallows nonetheless symbolised the inextricable connections with populism of the first attempts at creating an organised labour movement.

The issue of whether the revolutionaries should "follow" the people (as ZiV had believed), or try to lead them, emerged very sharply with the pogroms against Jews in 1881. NV chose to reflect the popular Christian anti-semitism. It hailed the pogroms as a splendid manifestation of popular revolutionary initiative. Plekhanov and his comrades denounced NV's support of the pogromists and their work.

In practice, generally, NV did not simply reflect the opinions of "the people", but tried to lead them and to shape their consciousness.

We will find that much of the polemic between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks after 1903 would centre on an alleged analogy or identity between Lenin and the populists and early Russian Jacobins. Following on from those disputes, a veritable academic industry would grow up around the proposition that Lenin's "real" political predecessor and teacher was not Plekhanov but Peter Tkachev, the Jacobin-populist who in the mid-1870s advocated a revolutionary socialist coup carried out by a minority over the heads of the people. □



Just Stop Oil activists cleared of aggravated trespass after blockading an Esso fuel terminal

# Repeal all the anti-protest laws!

By Colin Foster

On top of Tory threats of new legislation, their "independent adviser" Lord Walney (John Woodcock) has made another proposal apparently designed not to change the law but rather to press Labour leaders to police Labour's own MPs and councillors more tightly.

In a 2 March op-ed in the *Sun*, based on an official report he had made to the government, Walney said Starmer (and, for form's sake, Sunak too) "should instruct their MPs and councillors not to

engage with anyone from the Palestine Solidarity Campaign until they get their house in order and cut the hate from their marches [or with] hard-line environmental groups like Extinction Rebellion and Just Stop Oil..."

Walney followed up by eagerly praising Labour's shadow education minister Bridget Philipson for being "open to my recommendation". Philipson's reaction was in fact more like a cautious "no", but we can hardly trust the Labour leaders to stick to that if the Tories step

continued on page 12 →



→ from page 11

up pressure.

Walney is a former Labour MP who was suspended by Labour on charges of sexual harassment in 2018 and got his government appointment and went over to the Tories in November 2019.

New laws were threatened by Sunak in a speech on 1 March. "To that end, this month the government will implement a new robust framework... to ensure that... no extremist organisations or individuals are being lent legitimacy by their actions and interactions with central government.

"We will demand that universities stop extremist activity on campus... We will also act to prevent people entering this country whose aim is to undermine its values".

On 8 February the government had already announced plans to license a month in jail or a £1,000 fine for people who refuse police orders to remove face coverings on protests (such as worn by many Chinese people to protect themselves from surveillance by Beijing agents).

Flares will also be banned from protests, and climbing on war memorials

will become a specific offence with a three-month sentence and a £1,000 fine. The Tories will introduce all that through amendments to its [Criminal Justice Bill](#), already on its way through Parliament.

On 28 February Home Secretary James Cleverly hinted at further measures against Gaza ceasefire protests such as Suella Braverman wanted back in October. He told *The Times* that "regular Gaza protests" should "stop" because they have "made their point".

Policing minister Chris Philp rowed back: "people have the right to protest, so we will continue to police those protests".

### Two weeks

But he suggested the government would go ahead on a proposal from the MP's Home Affairs Select Committee: "The Home Office should consider amending requirements for protest organisers, such as increasing the notice period for protest organisers to inform the police from the current six days". (To two weeks, it suggested. So no-one can protest at massacres or atrocities until two weeks after they happen?)

Shamefully, that recommendation

came from a committee chaired by Labour MP Diana Johnson. (Diane Abbott, a left Labour MP unjustly suspended by the party machine, is also on the committee, and has expressed no public dissent, though she seems to have missed the meeting which approved the committee report).

Solidarity has criticised the forces which dominate the megaphones and placards on the Gaza demonstrations – the Socialist Workers Party and the Islamists of Friends of Al Aqsa and the Muslim Association of Britain. Chants of "from the river to the sea" from their megaphones do express a wish for Islamist or at least Arab rule over the whole area, and so the subjugation or driving-out of the Israeli Jews. We support the ceasefire slogan but go to the protests with our own distinct banners and placards: peace, equal rights, two states, workers' unity. (And we get a good response: most of the protesters are there for what it says on the tin, ceasefire; and the protests are not violent).

But we are against police bans on protests. Reactionary slogans? We respond by counter-protest, not by calling in the police to suppress.

The heaviest measures against protesters in recent times have been under pre-Police-Act powers, against people arrested on a 2021 Kill The Bill protest in Bristol – over 30 jail sentences, with a combined total of more than 100 years.

Hundreds of Just Stop Oil protesters have been arrested, but relatively few convicted. JSO protester Marcus Decker has served the longest sentence for peaceful protest in British history: 490 days when he was released on bail on 19 February. He now faces deportation from Britain. (He is a German citizen with "leave to remain").

That was on the "public nuisance" charge, long a common-law offence with unlimited sentences, made a statutory offence with a ten-year maximum under the Police Act 2022.

Cressie Gethin was found guilty of "public nuisance" on 19 February, and will be sentenced on 3 May.

*Solidarity* urges the labour movement to rally to the defence of Decker and Gethin and jailed protesters; to push Starmer to stand against new Tory threats; and to commit Labour to repeal all the anti-protest laws back at least to the Public Order Act 1986. □



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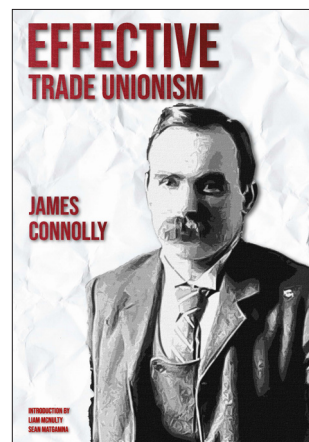
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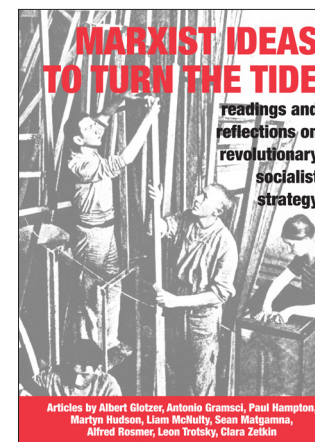
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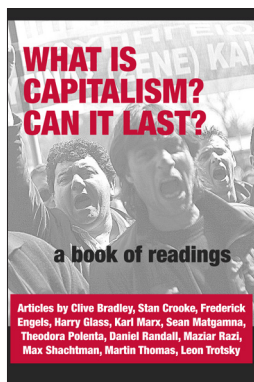
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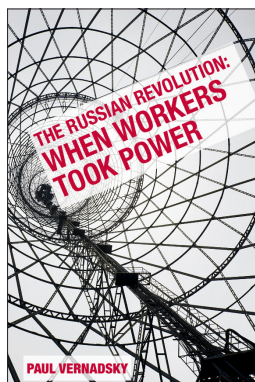
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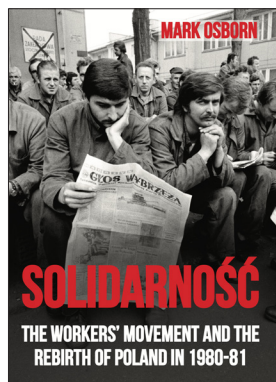
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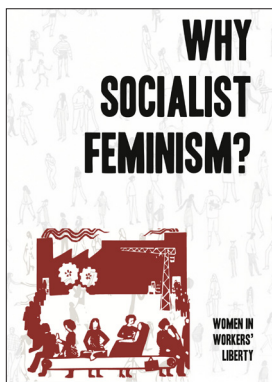
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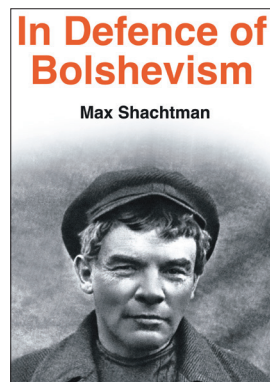
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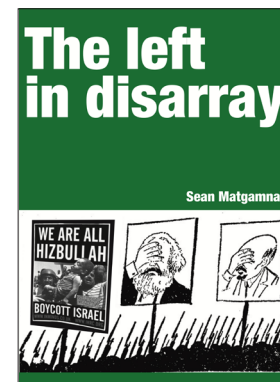
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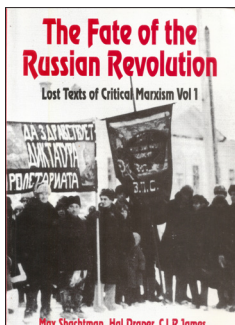
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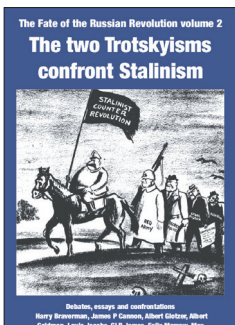
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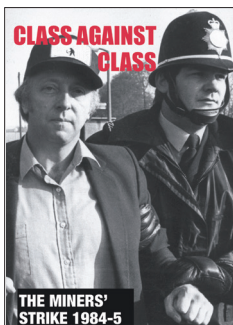
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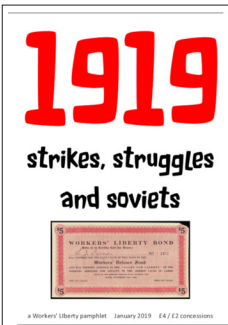
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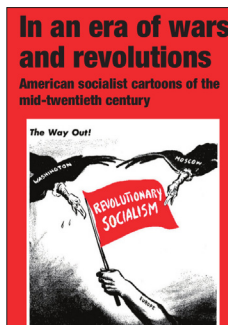
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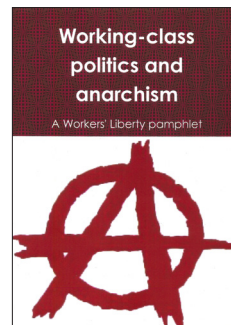
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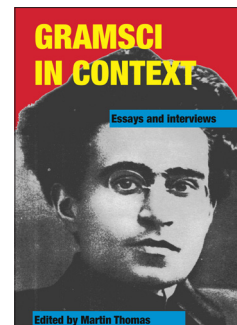
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# At the court of King Donald

By Tom Harrison

Members of the MAGA [Make America Great Again] cult hold many bizarre notions. One of the wackiest is that President Biden is actually dead and his role is being played by various actors wearing masks. James Woods and Jim Carrey are the most commonly cited impersonators.

One can understand, if that's the right word, Trumpers imagining Jim Carrey being part of some nefarious "libtard" plot, because he has been quite outspoken in his opposition to Trump. Woods? He is one of the few in Hollywood staunchly pro-Trump.

Sad to say another is one time Oscar winner Jon Voight. Eight years ago Voight likened Trump to Mother Teresa. However, in February 2024 he moved Trump to the top of the scale – likening him to Jesus!

Voight ranted of Trump "Can he be saved by the American people who believe in God's glory?" Without hesitation Trump put the video onto his ironically named Truth Social platform and managed to resist the temptation of saying he was bigger than Jesus.

Christian nationalism is a major driver of the Trump movement, with its belief that god works in mysterious ways and Trump is somehow the chosen vehicle by which their aim of turning the USA into a theocracy can be achieved. Abortion rights have been overturned despite opposition from the Biden presidency. The state of Alabama has effectively outlawed IVF treatment because it considers embryos as children. Top Republicans don't like the Alabama decision, but the trend continues.

Playing the role of martyr-saviour, Trump dropped in to the National Religious Broadcasters conference in Nashville in February, and he was rapturously received by the assembled faithful wearing "Make America Pray Again" hats. A major bone he threw to the audience was support for anti-abortion protesters convicted for blockading a reproductive health clinic.

These Christian souls were "persecuted" just like him, but have no fear. "I take all these arrows for you."

It's been a busy year for Trump, what with all those bothersome court appearances. As well as presenting himself as Saint Sebastian to the NRB, he has made a two-pronged appeal to black voters.

In an effort to get down with the "boyz n the hood", Trump unveiled his own brand of "golden sneakers" (retailing at \$399 but cost price \$17.98) at the "Sneaker Con" sales event. Not used to appearing before audiences other than his cult followers, Trump was clearly unnerved by loud booing from genuine sneakers fan, who were upset



by his trashy merchandise and more by his cynical racist caricature of black people.

At the Black Conservative Foundation gala, 23 February, Trump claimed black voters liked him because of his multiple indictments and police mugshot. If you thought it couldn't get any worse, he went on to complain that the lights were too bright and that he could only see "the black ones". Video of the event concentrated 99% of the time on the stage, but a fleeting glimpse of the audience revealed it as predominantly white.

## Broken

So-called Christians might be deluded into supporting a candidate who has very likely broken all of the Ten Commandments, but few black voters will fall for his shtick given the Trump family's appalling historical record of racism. They'll particularly remember the Central Park Five, black males in their mid teens wrongly accused and convicted of the rape and murder of a jogger. Trump called for their execution. They were all exonerated when a serial rapist confessed to the crime, but he continues to maintain they were guilty.

Black Americans are 37% of the US prison inmates although they are only 13% of the general population. They know that what passes for the justice system in their country works differently for rich white guys. What vexes them is how come in the country with the highest prison population in the world Trump still isn't penitentiary-bound?

The US legal system favours those with deep pockets, and Trump plays it masterfully in delaying the four felony trials he faces. In Georgia, we've seen the attempt to get DA Fani Willis disqualified via phoney allegations of conflict of interest concerning her love life. Should that happen the case against Trump is expected to collapse regardless of that notorious "find me

the votes" phone call.

In Florida, we have Trump appointed judge Aileen Cannon kicking the documents case down the calendar by failing to set a trial date.

The DC Appeal Court ruled at the beginning of February that Trump was a citizen, not a king, so didn't have immunity from criminal prosecution. Yet he is the man who would be king – a bronzer imitation Sun King, imagining his gaudy Palm Beach palace a modern day equivalent of Versailles.

Like the absolute monarchs of old, Trump also has his own craven court. It's called the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS), and it's returning him the favours!

What a bunch his minions on SCOTUS are! Three owe their prestigious positions to Trump himself. Two have had highly plausible accusations of sexual assault levelled against them. Another belongs to a Catholic sect which predictably has a reputation for child sexual abuse. Additionally, Virginia Thomas, wife of thoroughly corrupt judge Clarence, played a leading role in supporting the 6 January 2021 protest which descended into the attack on the Capitol.

SCOTUS has decided after an unnecessary fortnight's delay to take up Trump's appeal against the ruling that he isn't immune from prosecution. They will start hearing the case at the end of April and give a ruling two or three months later. It's not expected that SCOTUS will deem Trump immune from prosecution, but the delay may mean this most important of trials, on his attempt to overthrow the constitution, won't happen before the November election. Justice delayed or justice denied? If he gets re-elected it'll certainly be the latter!

There is still the election interference and hush money case in New York at the end of March, which may result in

a conviction. Otherwise American will go to the polls without many of the demonstrable proofs of Trump's criminality.

Should they need to know how important the result of the election will be, they only need to look at the antics of the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), the one where Liz Truss denounced the "deep state" and nodded when Steve Bannon described Tommy Robinson as a hero.

Once a forum for "traditional" conservatives, the conference has become dominated by the far right, with assorted neo-Nazis and racial conspiracy theorists welcomed with open arms.

"Welcome to the end of democracy. We are here to overthrow it," said platform speaker Jack Prosbie, a prominent tout of the notorious Pizzagate conspiracy twaddle. "We didn't get all the way there on January 6, but we will endeavour to get rid of it and replace it with this right here."

And that binary choice is precisely what's up for voters to make come next November. Forget about all the talk about the "deep state" being Trump's enemy. There are plenty of members of that entity only too willing to carry out Trump's authoritarian wishes! The motley fascist militias don't need to carry the burden, although they're sure to help out.

Socialists must continue to prioritise the need to build independent working class grassroots organisations. That will be much more difficult to do under a right-wing authoritarian regime. □

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# Trade unionists against Galloway

By Martin Thomas

Some trade unionists in Rochdale are discussing the idea of launching "Trade Unionists Against Galloway" in case George Galloway stands again in Rochdale following his by-election win on 29 February.

Galloway attacked schools in his letter to voters. "I don't like some of the things they are teaching our children", referring to LGBT+ rights. Trade unionists beyond the NEU may be interested too, since the letter was very right wing. It featured:

- Belief in "Britain"
- Belief in "family" and that "God created everything in pairs" (unattributed quote from the Quran); opposition to trans rights
- More policing
- Belief in "small business".

Galloway also condemned "rush" to a green economy. Jane Touil, Rochdale Labour Party's environment officer who resigned to run the campaign for unofficial-green candidate Mark Coleman, denounced Galloway at the count as a "climate denier".

The letter did not mention Gaza, though a separate letter to Muslim voters did. Galloway, who when an MP for Bradford called for Israeli visiting academics and tourists to be excluded from the city, is really not left-wing on Israel-Palestine, either.



Galloway still wants left votes. He has called on Jeremy Corbyn to lead a new party of "the remaining socialists". Corbyn, wisely, has not responded, though his wife Laura Alvarez has [applauded](#) Galloway. Galloway looks elsewhere too. He wanted right-wing maverick Tory David Davis to co-sponsor him in Parliament alongside Corbyn. Davis also demurred.

Galloway compared himself with Nigel Farage as a case of how "experience" and "god-given ability" could score successes against "the political class". Former BNP leader Nick Griffin backed Galloway for Rochdale, and Galloway's sidekick Chris Williamson, when challenged, responded: "You can't spurn endorsements".

Just as Trump combines attacks on "the elite" with boasts that he himself is "very rich", Galloway combines boasts about his parliamentary experience with a claim to stand against "Westminster politics". He copied Trump in an

election slogan: "Make Rochdale Great Again". Galloway has called for a grand anti-Labour alliance for Rochdale's May council election with supporters of businessman independent David Tully. He promises his "Workers' Party" will run dozens of candidates in the general election, or back "independents", "either [to] win or... make sure that Keir Starmer doesn't". He doesn't mind if the Tories win.

How much of the Reform Party base Galloway can pick up we don't know.

On 3 March, "Collective" drew a hundred or so to a conference under the slogan "No ceasefire, no vote", much promoted in speeches at the last big Gaza ceasefire protest of 17 February. The meeting was billed as setting up a new electoral network which would include ex-Labour councillors who have resigned over Gaza. Although many of those resigned councillors are of Asian background, I saw few such going in to the conference. A follow-up is scheduled for 13 April in Blackburn.

Andrew Feinstein, formerly an ANC MP in South Africa, who says he will stand as an independent in Starmer's constituency in the general election, was a leading figure. Feinstein applauded Galloway's win on Twitter. I have seen no comment on Galloway from Collective, as such. Andrew Murray from the *Morning Star*, Chris Nineham from Counterfire, and Kate Hudson from Left Unity were also prominent at the event. Although the Socialist Party has applauded Galloway, it sent only a paper-seller for the start of the conference. The SWP wasn't there, and I noticed none of Jeremy Corbyn's close associates.

In addition to the ceasefire demand, which even by pessimistic calculations may not be current by a general election in autumn, "Collective" says it subscribes to the five (bland) demands of Jeremy Corbyn's Peace and Justice Project. Collective claims to be "in solidarity with" [Transform](#), which declares itself a [new left party](#). I can trace no comment from Transform on Collective, beyond an approving [tweet](#) from Transform's Haringey branch.

People in Counterfire and round the *Morning Star* have experience with Galloway from the fiasco of Respect (2004-12), and that may make them recoil.

The "ex-Corbyn" left, of people who have quit the Labour Party since 2019, is, sadly, a mess. Most of it has just faded. Many of those who remain active are now in danger of becoming a funnel for left-wing votes to right-wing politics. □

## Galloway's election letter

I wanted to write to you before you vote on Thursday to outline to you why I am standing in this by-election.

First and foremost, I believe in Britain. That's why I fought for Brexit, and why I fought against Scottish Independence. I believe in family. I am a father of six children, five of them still at school. And I don't like some of the things they are teaching our children.

I believe in men and women. God created everything in pairs. Unlike the mainstream parties I have no difficulty in defining what a woman is. I have fought for human rights, all my life and I treat others as they wish to be treated. But I will not stand reality on its head. A man cannot become a woman just by declaring as such.

I believe in law and order. I believe in peaceful change. I will fight for more and smarter policing. And will expose any cover-up of crime. There will be no grooming gangs on my

watch. Even if I have to arrest them myself.

I fight for small business, the hardest working people in the country. I've already secured the imminent re-opening of the open-air market at the Exchange and I confidently expect the arrival of Primark there too in due course. As the owner of the Exchange asked me: "Rochdale is 20 minutes from Manchester. How can you not make that work?"

ABOVE ALL ELSE these are my goals:

1. Reopen the Maternity and A&E at Rochdale Infirmary without delay;
2. Make the Open-Air Market the heart of the town. Just like Bury;
3. Secure the long-term future of Rochdale AFC;
4. Bring back big names to our town centre like Primark and finally
5. MAKE ROCHDALE GREAT AGAIN.

• [bit.ly/gg-ro](http://bit.ly/gg-ro)





## Free public transport? Why not?



**Tubeworker**

It's a fairly mainstream view in Britain that healthcare, as a vital public service we all rely on, should be socially provided, for free, and funded by taxation. Similarly, few people would suggest we ought to have to pay to enter public parks, and accept that these should be "paid for" by taxes and free at the point of use. And despite the substantial marketisation of higher education, many people still hold to the view that education should be free, right through university.

So why not transport? Transport is as vital a service as any other; why should something so essential for the functioning of society be a paid-for commodity? Tubeworker welcomes the establishment of the [Fare Free London](#) campaign, launched on 10 February by environmental and transport campaigners.

Some workmates have bought into the idea that higher fares benefit us, on the basis that they "pay our wages". But this argument traps us in the logic of the market. If public transport was properly funded, we could have higher wages and low or no fares. Tubeworker has consistently argued for the restoration of government subsidy to TfL, and for municipal funding models such as a ring-fenced tax on the profits of large corporations benefiting from the running of the public transport system in London, or the replacement of council tax with a progressive tax that taxes richer people more. This could easily subsidise free transport.

Some European cities, such as Tallinn and Montpellier, now provide free public transport, and Paris has a ring-fenced payroll tax that helps fund the Paris Metro.

We look forward to working with Fare Free London to fight for similar reforms here. □

# Goldsmiths UCU ballots against cuts

By a UCU member

Members of the University and College Union (UCU) at Goldsmiths, University of London have begun a ballot for industrial action to fight a devastating programme of cuts which threatens 130 full-time equivalent posts, in reality, up to a third of all academic jobs. Such cuts will leave the college unrecognisable. It may not even survive.

The cuts, laughably called "transformation" by the college bosses, have been caused by a shortfall in student numbers and what they call the "decline of certain subjects" – the arts and humanities on which Goldsmiths built its reputation.

The responsibility for this disgraceful situation lies squarely at the door of a management elite who have run the college into the ground, failed to defend arts and humanities, subjected the

college to two rounds of "restructuring" (cuts), and slashed student support. All that has turned Goldsmiths from an exciting place for students to study, into a place where they have to battle massive dysfunction.

Only determined industrial action has saved Goldsmiths in the past. We will need that again. A mass meeting of staff and students on 13 March will plan the fightback. □

## Grady scrapes back in

By a UCU member

Jo Grady, incumbent General Secretary of the University and College Union (UCU), has scraped back into office with a majority of fewer than 200 votes after transfers. Turnout was 15% – 5,000 fewer members voting than in 2019.

Heavily criticised after undemocratically pausing last year's strikes, Jo Grady gained barely a third of first preferences, with 5,990 votes out of 17,131.

Ewan McGaughey, an independent candidate who gained a profile thanks to his crowdfunded legal challenge to

cuts to USS pensions, came second with 4,724 first preferences. He likely picked up votes from right-wing critics of Grady.

Vicky Blake, the independent left candidate whom *Solidarity* supported, had 3,837 first preferences. Saira Weiner of "UCU Left" had 2,580 (substantially down on UCU Left's 2019 score).

Combined, those votes could have pushed a left candidate into the final round, but fewer than 1,000 of Weiner's votes transferred to Blake, and over 500 did not transfer at all. *Socialist Worker* had attacked Blake over her support for Standing Together. □

## Join Workers' Liberty!

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

## The greatest French film ever?



**Kino Eye**

By John Cunningham

Made in 1937, Jean Renoir's brilliant *La Grande Illusion* is set during World War One and features a group of French prisoners of war, their interactions, escape attempts and relations with their German "hosts".

Two French pilots, the aristocratic Captain de Boeldieu (Pierre Fresnay) and Lieutenant Maréchal (Jean Gabin), are shot down by von Rauffenstein (Eric von Stroheim), also an aristocrat. The collapse of their world and its shared values is one of the themes of the film.

In a POW camp they are joined by the wealthy Jew Rosenthal (Marcel Dalio) who shares his food with the other prisoners and procures costumes for an improvised cabaret. Despite this, he is treated with hostility by some of his fellow prisoners.



Maréchal asks him, sarcastically, if he is "a sportive sort", and another prisoner interjects, "Oh, him? Sportive?... Ha! He was born in Jerusalem". Rosenthal calmly explains that he was born in Vienna.

Only Maréchal and Rosenthal are successful in an escape attempt. Despite occasional tensions they head for Switzerland. They are sheltered by a German woman who has lost three sons in the war. In a calm atmosphere of reconciliation and understanding Maréchal begins to shed his anti-Semitism. At the border the two men part as friends. □

• To view the film: [bit.ly/gd-il](http://bit.ly/gd-il)

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# Food couriers can win a living wage!

By Ray Dartmoor and Satya Pine

Food couriers working for online delivery services are conducting a wave of wildcat strikes across England. The drivers seek a minimum pay of £5 per delivery, plus £2 per mile travelled, from large online platforms such as Deliveroo, UberEats, JustEat, Stuart and others.

Strikes have already taken place in London and the south east, Sheffield and the West Midlands, involving thousands of drivers and costing Deliveroo 20% of their national earnings, as well as wiping millions from their share price. The most recent strike, on 1 March, saw over a hundred couriers in Birmingham city centre form flying pickets across the city centre, with over a thousand now signed up for further action.

Couriers in the West Midlands are now discussing next steps in the dispute. Emergent leaders from pickets are holding "captains' meetings" to develop strategies and plan future strikes. The captain system illustrates what some more deficient theorists might call "organic leaders".

A public meeting is planned for Wednesday 6 March at 3:30pm, in Birmingham's Victoria Square, where couriers will vote on their next actions. In the meantime, couriers and local Workers' Liberty activists are recruiting more strikers and developing a solidarity group with the local labour and trade union movement.

"I was happy [...] I used to make twenty pounds an hour," says one man, who began working as a part-time courier two years ago. Now twenty, he works full-time for delivery services, and often makes less than minimum wage – £7.49 to £10.42 hourly, depending on age. "I sit all the day, from twelve to nine – nine, ten hours – I can't even make ten pounds an hour." Additionally, couriers pay for fuel and insurance.

"So imagine I spend two or three pounds an hour and I make ten pounds: that comes to seven pounds an hour. Who's going to work for seven pounds an hour?" he explains.

Delivery services used to pay at least £4 per order; now the minimum has been reduced to £2.80-£3.15. With the near-impossibility of making more than three or four deliveries hourly, the time spent waiting outside restaurants, and the cost of fuel and insurance, drivers can easily lose money on such poorly-paid jobs, and often decline them. However, JustEat is notorious for banning couriers who reject offers – in one case penalising a driver whose car broke down.

Further adding to the costs is the increasing ne-

cessity of a moped or e-bike to make deliveries quickly. Vehicle rent-to-buy schemes are popular amongst couriers, but they are often targeted by bike thieves, especially in London. Additionally, drivers are often exposed to adverse weather and heavy traffic, while platforms offer them no safety net. "I might face [an] accident – who is going to pay for my accident? If I'm sick ... if I damage my bicycle, my motorbike, nobody's going to pay me," the courier says.

As always, the struggle for workers' rights is tied into migrants' rights. Many delivery drivers are immigrants from East African, South Asian, South American and Middle Eastern nations, dependent on unsafe, poorly-paid work to support themselves and their families. Undocumented workers can rent accounts from someone who has passed right-to-work checks – which Deliveroo also outsources – sometimes for up to 20% of their wages. By enforcing harsh immigration and deportation policies, the government allows companies to use migrants for cheap labour for poor pay in dangerous conditions.

Food delivery services expect customers to make up the pay shortfall through tips – but with the cost of living rising, and the UK officially in recession, this cannot be sustainable. In America, tipping culture is used by business owners to outsource the effort of paying a living wage. In recent years, the expectation has risen: industries outside of food service are asking for tips, and the suggested percentage is rising, leading to widespread consumer dissatisfaction at the hidden costs.

Allowing a similar model to become entrenched in Britain will only worsen economic inequality and worker exploitation, while allowing those at the top to avoid the worst criticism. Customers who can afford to tip or pay for fast delivery receive priority service – but for customers who don't pay, the drivers get blamed for missing orders and cold food, jeopardising their already-precarious employment.

Restaurants are charged for marketing on online platforms. Commission ranges from 14% (Just Eat) up to 35% (Deliveroo) on each order; additionally, both UberEats and Deliveroo charge an on-boarding fee, which is £650 for the former. Generally, restaurants with faster delivery are prioritised on the apps, thus putting further pressure on couriers via restaurant staff.

The numbers of "dark kitchens" is growing. These are delivery-only kitchens masquerading



online as several separate restaurants. Many of these premises are owned by Deliveroo and leased to restaurants, who are then given priority on the app. These reduced costs are not passed on to the consumer.

Deliveroo's earnings for 2023 are predicted to pass £80 million. UberEats and Just Eat ran at a net loss in the same period, but their year-on-year earnings are growing rapidly – while couriers remain underpaid.

Discussions of the gig economy have often focused on whether delivery drivers, ride-share drivers and other casual workers should be classified as employees or independent subcontractors. But the bottom line is: workers should be compensated at the value of their labour-power. We must support and help to spread the strikes, put pressure on delivery platforms, and support workers' and migrants' rights. □

## Defend the right to protest!

By Colin Foster

The Tories are planning new curbs on protest, on top of the [Police Act 2022](#), pushed through despite large "Kill the Bill" protests in 2021, and the [Public Order Act 2023](#), with [measures](#) to sharpen the Police Act.

Their immediate aim seems to be to spook the timid Labour leaders, denouncing them as accomplices of disorder if they fail to back Tory clampdowns.

The stakes are higher than that, though. So far the police have been careful with the new

powers. They will use them more when capitalist power and privilege looks more threatened.

The Public Order Act 1936 was "sold" as a measure to curb the British Union of Fascists. It was little used for almost 40 years, and then heavily when street protest erupted in the 1970s and against pickets during the 1984-5 miners' strike.

The Police Act, the Public Order Act, and new Tory curbs are both immediate threats to many protesters and long-term threats to the whole left and labour movement. □

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# Solidarity

**For a workers' government**

# LET GAZA LIVE! PEACE! TWO STATES!

**By Ira Berkovic**

According to the UN, the total figure for those killed, injured, or missing in Gaza now represents 5% of the total population. Israel's war in Gaza is one of the most destructive of recent times in proportion to war-area population, devastating life and laying waste to the infrastructure that sustains it.

Many more could still die, with bombs and bullets if the current ceasefire talks fail, and with starvation and disease even if they succeed.

On Thursday 29 February, over 100 people were killed, and many more injured, at an aid checkpoint. Claims and counterclaims have circulated since. At some point during the incident, Israeli soldiers opened fire. The deaths seem to have resulted from a combination of gunfire, a crush, and being run

over by moving aid lorries.

The circumstances that led to the incident – thousands of desperate, starving people, clamouring for aid at one of too-few distribution points, through which too-little aid is processed – are a direct consequence of Israel's war, and in particular of the spectacularly destructive way in which it has been conducted.

That destruction must cease. International governments must do much more to increase the supply and improve the distribution of aid. They must restore funds to the UN agencies on the ground. These agencies are an imperfect instrument, but are about the only networks with the capacity to distribute significant amounts of aid and restore rudiments of civil life, even if their capacity too, thanks to months of bombardment is eroded.

Some air drops of aid have already taken place. Experts say that aid distribution via land is more efficient and effective, but more aid is needed by every channel. The risks and pitfalls cited, that aid might be looted or confiscated by Hamas or other paramilitary groups, do not outweigh the greater risk that holding back aid makes many thousands more deaths much more likely.

A ceasefire agreement, whilst essential, will leave Gaza still in hellish conditions if not made permanent; accompanied by an urgent plan to restore life by providing aid and rebuilding infrastructure, made permanent; and followed by a peace deal and a democratic "two states" settlement, giving the Palestinians their right to a state of their own alongside a secure Israel. (More on page 3). □