RALLY LABOUR TO OUST TORIES!

On Sunday 1 October tens of thousands will protest at the Tory party conference, demanding no more austerity; scrap the pay cap; decent health, homes, jobs and education.

At the TUC congress in Brighton on 10-13 September, Mark Serwotka, leader of the civil service workers’ union PCS, said: “We have a weak government with no mandate to implement further public sector pay restraint. Now is the time for the action required to defeat this government pay cap”. More page 5

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Pull out: Nine years on from the 2008 crash

Students: join the free education demo on Nov 15

Unfinished Corbynism

Join Labour!

Our preview of Labour Party conference See page 10

Students: join the free education demo on Nov 15

Unfinished Corbynism

Martin Thomas reviews Alex Nunns’ book The Candidate. See page 11

Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

No 448 20 September 2017 50p/£1

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See page 10
Daesh attacks as it is driven back
By Simon Nelson
The bomb on London’s District Line tube thankfully did not kill or seriously maim people travelling to school or work. Its potential to have done so is horrifying.
Once again Daesh have claimed responsibility for the attack. Early indications are that had the bomb detonated it would have been on a similar scale to that used in the Manchester Arena bombings in May.
The role of tube staff in ensuring there was a safe evacuation of Parsons Green station highlights the potential consequences of further staff cuts and attempts to leave many stations without any staff.
As RMT General Secretary Mick Cash said, “The incident shows once again that tube staff are the first responders in emergency situations and the clear need for safety and security to remain the number one priority and for the resources and staffing to be in place to deal with all eventualities.”

Korean tensions fuel reaction
By Michael Elms
Renewed UN sanctions have not been enough to break the deadlock on North Korea.
As Kim and Trump flirt with war, the tensions on the Korean peninsula are fuelling reactionary politics across the region, and live fire American-South Korean military exercises and repeated North Korean missile launches and nuclear tests.
On 11 September, the UN rejected a harsher set of sanctions proposals from the US, instead adopting a ban on North Korean textile exports and capping oil sales to the country. While Trump has claimed that the oil cap is producing “long gas lines in North Korea”, commentators point out that the cap is unlikely to exert real pressure on the regime, given that China is continuing to guarantee an adequate supply of oil to meet state and military needs, in addition to large grain shipments. Only civilians will suffer.
China’s rulers are not enthusiastic about the Kim regime’s adventures, but they will continue to underwrite the regime. Beijing is not prepared to countenance the collapse of the North Korean regime and the wave of refugees and instability that would come in its wake.
China and Russia have been lobbying for a reciprocal freeze on the North Korean nuclear programme and US-South Korean military exercises (while commencing naval exercises of their own), but Trump looks unlikely to take this up.
For Beijing, the existence of North Korea is an important chip in the broader regional game of rivalry with the US. As China continue to press its territorial claims in the East and South China Seas, the US, India and Japan announced on 19 September that they were to start co-operating on a joint project of port construction in the region – a move clearly aimed at hemming in Chinese expansion, hiking inter-imperialist rivalry in the region to a new level.
In South Korea, hundreds of peace protestors and trade unionists from the KCTU federation joined protests on 7 and 16 September against the installation of THAAD missile systems in the village of Soseong-ri. They were met by a violent response from thousands of riot police.
This has dashed hopes that the apparent collapse of the former government of Moon Jae-in might mark a serious change from the string of right-wing, authoritarian administrations.
In Japan, the repeated North Korean missile launches over the country have given a new lease of life to the career of Shinzo Abe. Abe, whose approval ratings had fallen below 30% following corruption allegations earlier this year, is once again riding high in the polls.
The renewed surge of support for the right-wing nationalist Premier has revived his hopes of being able to revise Japan’s constitution, and permit Japan to develop its own armed forces: another step towards the spread of militarism and jingoism in the region, and a boost to Abe’s own reactionary project of re-establishing the history of Imperial Japan and encouraging new generations of Japanese people to draw pride from its wartime atrocities.
Across the region, it is the labour movement and the left which is standing up for human- ity and dignity, against the irresponsible game-playing of the big powers and the lowering cloud of nationalist madness and war.

What should unions do on pay?
By Charlotte Zalens
On Tuesday 12 September the government announced it was going back on its public sector pay freeze for police and prison officers, though without extra money from the government, but not for anyone else.
The government has signalled that it is weak on public sector pay. It has opened a door that the labour movement now needs to force its way through.
But despite this, and despite much hot air at TUC congress, no serious moves have been made to fight on pay. The Royal College of Nursing held a consultative ballot in May and have had a number of large rallies across the country over the summer, but no strike ballot as yet. The government is holding postal consultative ballot over September-October. No meetings of public sector unions to discuss a united approach were held at TUC congress.
The 2016 Trade Union Act has no doubt made national public sector strikes harder due to the ballot threshold demand. But approaching this obstacle by just holding postal consultative ballots to see if you can hit the threshold will make things worse. In order to get a convincing turn-out on apostal consultative ballot you would need to throw a lot of resources at it, so why not do just a full ballot with those resources? It may be possible to beat the thresholds with some work. If they are not beaten but there is a convincing mandate for strikes why obey the law?
Unions with groups of workers with different pay bargaining units could mobilise for strikes in their strongest section with pay settlement dates coming up, for example in the PCS. Smaller sections of workers could take action much more easily and provide a lead and inspiration for others.
Pay is not just an issue in the public sector, and with inflation rising but unemployment rates low its high time we fought back. A flurry of strikes this August-September have been about pay, from outsourced cleaners at Barts to workers at Sellafield nuclear plant.
The CWU is balloting its members in Royal Mail over pensions, job security and pay (see page 11). The union has produced a wide range of resources for the ballot, asking members to pick a side and “not sit on the fence”. The union has also been organising workplace meetings to rally members to discuss the issues and to fill out their ballot.
Unions should be proactive, and take on a “just do it” attitude. Let’s find places to start fires.

Grenfell inquiry opens
By Gemma Short
The inquiry into the Grenfell Tower fire opened on Friday 15 September. Those affected have little confidence that it will yield justice. The inquiry will not examine the wider social and political context of the fire, including social housing and was criticised by Fire Brigades Union general secretary Matt Wrack as being a “mighty kick of the teeth”. Three months after the fire, only two families have moved into permanent accommodation. Around 150 are still staying in hotels. Many have, understandably, turned down offers of temporary accommodation to wait for permanent offers.
Meanwhile a freedom of information request by the BBC revealed that only 2% of social housing tower blocks tested so far have a full sprinkler system, and only one in three had more than one staircase for evacuation.

War and climate change cases hunger
By Richard Driver
World hunger rose for the first time this century in 2016.
A UN agencies report found that the number of undernourished people in the world increased from 777 million in 2015 to 815 million in 2016. Nearly one in nine people in the world do not have enough food to eat健康发展.
Almost one-in-four children under five are affected by stunting, low for their height. 27% of children in the world suffer from wasting, or low weight for their height. Stunting leads to largely irreversible effects such as delayed motor development and impaired cognitive functioning. Wasting is a strong predictor of mortality among children under five.
The September 2017 UN World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates listed a grain surplus of 609.02 million tons for 2015-16. In the same period the US consumed 348 million tons of grain. Other essential food commodities are also overproduced.
Why was famine declared in South Sudan in February? Why are only north-east Nigeria and Somalia considered to be at severe risk of famine? The world produces enough food for everyone, why are nearly one in nine people hungry?
60% of those who are chronically undernourished, around 489 million people, live in countries affected by conflict. Extreme weather patterns have seriously harmed food security in parts of sub-Saharan Africa, western and south-east Asia. War and climate change are at the root of world hunger.
Only a system of social and democratic control over economic life, socialism, can guarantee that key industries like food production and distribution will be run to meet the needs of human life and not profit.
Merkel: suppressing inconvenient truths

By Ingo Schmidt
(Sozialistische Zeitung)

No-one is a better representative of a united Germany than Angela Merkel. First mocked as [Helm- mut] Kohl’s girl, Forbes magazine has named her the most powerful woman in the world.

After Donald Trump’s victory in the US general election, the New York Times describes Merkel as the last defender of the liberal West.

Merkel is modern: as a trained physicist, being a housewife is just as alien to her as climate change deniers. Against Trump and other xenophobes she defends an open society.

At her most powerful moment, journalists ruminated on the many’s elections on Sunday 24 September. Against Trump and other populists in many other countries, who aim for a welfare state purged of foreigners, the AFD is stag- ing politics on a radical Deutschmark-nationalism.

Merkel’s fourth term in office was supposed to be a major day of action: the first fruits of this programme were the development of a minimum-wage sector and stubborn mass poverty.

Merkel has held a number of social policy initiatives, much to the point of despairing many. But those who believe that the German populists are winning the argument will be disappointed.

Merkel’s leadership has issued a formal call. The leadership of the FO federation suffered a substantial political defeat, which the trade union’s democracy demanded be translated into mandates and representatives.

This was supposed to be the last of the “CGT” days of action; but participants experienced it like their start, and it’s this feeling that counts.

This feeling came from the numbers involved. Many Parisian FO activists calculated that the official figure of 60,000 given by [the CGT leader] was too low. In all, there were 40,000 FO members and supporters, and so many strikers.

This mobilisation has brought the struggle for victory against Macron and the bosses into the deepest layers of the population, who are thinking, associating, and gathering their forces.

The CGT has called for another day of strikes and demonstrations on Thursday 21 September, the day before the Council of Ministers adopts the labour laws.

This will not be just another “day of action”, either, as the main union confederation has features like to call for active opposition to the law.

It is clear that the movement that is being built needs more: there will be a need for centralisation of the efforts against the Executive, and also to generalise the movement, and there will be a need for political expression of the movement.

The first fruits of this programme were the development of a minimum-wage sector and stubborn mass poverty. Merkel took on this legacy and its political blustering power, which has worked well until now.

Merkel has called for these social fissures to be suppressed. And members of all different income groups have answered this call. That is where Merkel’s success lies.

Merkel became Chancellor in 2005, Germany was seen by economists as the sick man of Europe: high debts, high unemploy- ment, little growth. The German economy didn’t exactly sail smoothly through the global economic crisis, and after it the Euro crisis, but they suffered much less from them than did many other countries.

That’s more: the German economy emerged stronger from both crises. State and private debt are low by international standards, and employment is at a record level. The rate of full-time employment has started to increase again.

Because wages are lagging so far behind productivity, profits are surging.

Workers in manufacturing, and in particular those in the upper wage brackets, have seen real wage increases of between 5 and 10% since 1990. But in the same period, labour productivity has increased by about 30% — albeit with a reduction in growth since the global economic crisis.

The majority of German workers are employed in sectors which are closely integrated into the world market, and live in constant fear that their production section will be out- sourced to sweatshops elsewhere in Germany, or abroad.

In the service sector, workers have had to be content with falling real wages since Agenda 2010, and at the lower end of the wage scale, some incomes are now lower than they were in 1990.

The difference between wage in- comes and profit incomes is as great in Germany as it is in the USA. Only state redistribution policies have been able to reduce this inequality substantially below American levels.

In terms of disposable-income inequality, Germany is still ranked among the mid-range OECD member states. But stubborn poverty still remains.

The promise that you can climb the social ladder through study and hard work has disappeared. Your social class is now determined almost exclusively by your parents’ social position.

The first fruits of this programme were the development of a minimum-wage sector and stubborn mass poverty. Merkel took on this legacy and its political blustering power, which has worked well until now.

Merkel is set to win her fourth term as Chancellor

France: an important day of action

On 12 September a day of strikes and demonstrations was called in France to oppose new labour laws. This is an edited version of a longer report from Arguments pour la lutte sociale.

Macron spoke of “idlers” (then tried to row back, claiming he was talking about his predeces- sors); of “cynics”, etc.

But the media has been peddling tragic, banal anti-strike tripe, and selling the lie that 12 September rallied virtually no-one but the CGT and its die-hard “bat- talions”. But they are all kidding themselves, or appearing to; and this is not an expression of their strength, but of their fear.

The reality is that this was an important day of action: the first united social mobilisation against the Macron/Philippe/Gattaz executive.

The day before the Council of Ministers adopted the labour laws. This was particularly the case throughout the country.

The demonstrations were joined by layers of militants who are the central organisers of the CGT, FO, FSU and Solidaires trade union federations. This attempt [by the FO leadership] to stop the FO trade union federa- tion from taking part, and to break the unified front failed; those mem- bers were represented in the demonstrations as if the federa-
**Scottish Labour: back Leonard and transform the Party**

**SCOTLAND**

**By Dale Street**

Nominations closed last Sunday (17th September) for the post of Scottish Labour Party (SLP) leader, left vacant by the recent resignation of Kezia Dugdale. There will be two names on the ballot paper: Anas Sarwar and Richard Leonard.

Sarwar was a Westminster MP from 2010 to 2015, when he lost his seat in the SNP landslide. In 2011 he was elected Scottish Labour Party deputy leader but resigned from the post in late 2014. In the 2016 Holyrood elections he was elected as a Glasgow list MSP.

Sarwar certainly has money and an election machine at his disposal.

His father is a multi-millionaire, a former Westminster MP (who represented the same seat as his son, who directly succeeded him), and Governor of the Punjab until 2015. Sarwar has already hired campaign rooms and paid staff for his campaign.

His problem is his politics. A former vice-chairman of the right-wing Progress faction in the Labour Party, he came out in support of Corbyn in 2015, campaigned very publicly for his resignation in 2016, and has now transformed himself into a born-again Corbynite.

Last year he was dismissing Corbyn’s chances of winning a general election as zero.

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**LETTER**

**Andrew Coates**

Andrew Coates is an astute critic of the state of the 'international left', so I’m grateful for his review of the book, The Russian Revolution: When the workers took power.

Andrew is right to identify the Bolshevism party as the main locus of the book, since it was this party that made the difference in 1917 (compared with revolutionary situations in Germany, Italy and elsewhere) and it is the Bolshevist model that is most relevant for revolutionary socialists today.

Andrew raises questions about the party and about democracy after the revolution. The book is mostly about 1917 and the politics that made it possible, along with the key ideas current socialists might learn from it. However chapter 10 attempts to chart the decline and fall of working class democracy and the concomitant rise of Stalinism.

Andrew raises the issue of whether the same pressures that caused the bureaucratisation of the SPD in Germany also contributed to the degeneration of the Bolshevik party. The SPD was undoubtedly Lenin’s model, but this was the SPD before 1905 — perhaps even the SPD in the early 1890s, before it created the kind of reformist apparatus associated with Friedrich Ebert. Lenin was later than many (especially Luxembourg, Parvaneh and others) in understanding the SPD’s decline.

He was nevertheless consistent in his opposition to the Bolshevism party’s bureaucratisation in power. The social and political pressures were different: in the SPD’s case the weight of the militarised capitalist state; in the Bolshevism it was leading an isolated workers’ state in a backward country.

Andrew also raises questions about the form of Bolshevism rule before Stalinism. He is right that Bolshevism mistakes on matters of democracy and the rule of law cannot simply be blamed on circumstances, since all political actors make choices within the given context.

While some over-exuberant Bolsheviks may have made a virtue out of some necessities (such as war communism), the prevailing mood of the period was summed by Trotsky in 1920: “Russia — looted, weakened, exhausted, failing apart”. The context — civil war, international intervention, economic crisis — cannot be ignored: the Bolsheviks were materialists, not voluntarists.

I think Andrew is wrong to argue that “it was under Lenin that Soviet democracy was finished off”. The book describes the struggle of the Left Opposition for soviet democracy until 1928, when Stalinism snuffed out workers’ rule. The opposition failed, but at least they fought.

That is a key lesson from the Russian revolution that we should not give up until 1928, when Stalinism snuffed out workers’ state in a backward country.

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**Single Market vote**

I suspect a sentence in the editorial of Solidarity (447) said something different from what the writer intended:

“For Labour to back a Tory amendment on a single market would be a mistake”.

Presumably it was meant to read “the single market vote”. But why a mistake?

Labour should have a distinct policy, based on working-class solidarity across Europe, and the fact that it is only the SLP right wing which has rallied behind his leadership bid is attempting to mobilise support for it.

There is also an obvious incongruity between Sarwar standing to be the Scottish labour leader and committed to govern “for the many, not the few” and the fact that he himself is one of the “few” rather than the “many”. If he sends his son to a private school, at a cost of £10,000 a year. But less than 5% of children in Scotland attend private schools. Sarwar spends more on private-school fees than is the total income of most unemployed people.

Although never a member of the Campaign for Socialism, the left-wing contender is Richard Leonard, a former GMB full-timer who was elected to Holyrood as a list MSP in 2016, after having failed to win election as a constituent MP in the 2013 election.

In contrast to Sarwar, Leonard was one of the few MSPs who signed an “Open Letter” supporting Corbyn in last year’s leadership contest.

Speaking at his campaign launch last Saturday, Leonard said that “real change” (his single-slogan) would not be achieved through “nationalism or patriotism” but through “socialism and democracy”.

He committed himself to “radical policies for the many, not the few”, including rent controls, a workers’ rights-to-buy, and an industrial strategy which “considered” public ownership of the railways, Royal Mail, and energy.

Sarwar is backed by a majority of Scottish Labour’s MPs, MPs and MEPs. This is inevitable, given that change in the political composition of Scottish Labour’s parliamentarians lies way behind change in the political composition of the broader Party membership.

In terms of trade union nominations, the mood that Sarwar will achieve is support from Community and USDAW, both of which always back the right-wing candidate (and no matter how right-wing) in SLP elections. All other unions will likely back Leonard.

Although SLP membership has grown and has shifted to the left over the past couple of years, it is primarily a matter of relative growth and positive political change – starting off from the base of the right-wing-rump organisation which right-wing control of the SLP reduced to prior to 2013.

Although Corbyn probably won a majority of votes from affiliated and registered supporters in Scotland in the 2016 leadership contest, and also a majority of CLP nominations, a small majority of the SLP individual membership backed Owen Smith.

The leadership contest is likely to be close. Campaigning for Leonard needs to be combined with the broader task of wresting control of CLPs from the right wing and transforming them into campaigning organisations rooted in local communities and workplaces.

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**Take back Manchester festival protest the conservative party conference**

National Demonstration, Sunday 1 October, 12pm Castlefield Arena, Rice Street, Manchester M3 4JR

Five days of demonstrations, cultural events, rallies, comedy, music and public meetings will take place all across Manchester to protest the Conservative Party conference from 30 September - 4 October 2017 including a major national demonstration the day their conference opens on Sunday 1 October.

The General Election result left Theresa May and the Conservative Party with a weak, unstable Government. The result represents a rejection of their austerity driven policies that only benefit those at the top.

The festival will demonstrate the huge opposition to the politics of austerity, racism and war and demand an alternative that works for everyone. Full timetable available soon - accommodation & transport will be available.

www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk
Rally Labour to oust Tories!

On Sunday 1 October tens of thousands will protest at the Tory party conference, demanding no more austerity; scrap the pay cap; decent health, homes, jobs and education.

At the TUC congress in Brighton on 10-13 September, Mark Serwotka, leader of the civil service workers’ union PCS, said: “We have a weak government with no mandates to implement further public sector pay restraint. Now is the time for the action required to defeat this government pay cap and put real terms pay increases in the pockets of our members.

Other union leaders also said that action was called for, and talked of going for a rise of 5% for public sector workers.

On 24-27 September the Labour Party conference meets in Brighton. Labour has been consistently ahead in the polls since its left-wing manifesto gave it a good result in June’s snap general election.

A more recent poll showed 58% backing Labour’s plan to scrap uni tuition fees; 57% backing renationalisation of utilities and 83% of the railways; and 69% backing a cap on top bosses’ spiralling pay.

More local Labour Party delegates will be at the conference for many years, and they will include many left-wingers who joined or were revitalised after Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership victory in 2015.

The potential is great for asserting and clarifying left-wing policies, and making rule changes to give the Labour Party the democratic life it has not had since Tony Blair imposed his own rules in 1997.

Already the fire down below has pushed the Tory government into saying it will drop its 1% pay cap for public sector workers. Since 2010, according to a calculator devised by the public service workers’ union Unison, workers now on £30,000 a year have become £4,800 worse off in real terms, those on £20,000 a year, £3,200 worse off.

Nine years after the 2008 crash, profits have recovered nicely. Unemployment is lower than since 1975 and the percentage of those of working age in employment higher than ever. Yet real wages across the economy are still falling. They edged ahead of inflation briefly in 2015-6, but have been falling most of the time since 2010.

The Tories’ retreat is slight. They have applied pay rises for police and prison officers slightly above 1%, but still below inflation, and put no money into public budgets to cover the rises.

They hint at slightly higher rises for health and education workers, but still at no reversal of the school cuts and the NHS budget caps, so any higher rises will be at the expense of cuts.

ELECTION

Even after the June election, chancellor Philip Hammond declared: “It would be easy to take our foot off the pedal [of cuts]. But instead we must hold our nerve [with] a steady determination to restore our public finances to balance by 2025”.

The Tories can imagine nothing else. And Hammond, at least, knows that their Brexit plans, despite Boris Johnson’s cooked statistics, will bring economic damage, if only from the loss of tax revenue from millions of EU-origin workers. More at those workers than of the general population are in the tax-paying years of life rather than the drawing-down-the-benefits later and earlier years.

Politically and economically, the conditions are here for the labour movement to go on the counter-offensive. The task of socialists is to get the labour movement ready to do that.

In the unions, that means nailing down the general talk about action into definite plans for definite sectors facing definite settlement dates, and wide and energetic support now for pay disputes already in train, like the Picturehouse workers’ (see page 2).

In the Labour Party, it means organising the left and taking the fight through Labour Party conference for Labour to back workers’ industrial disputes; to open up internal democracy; to help new left-wing activists organise a real Labour youth movement; and to commit to policies capable of overturning the power of capital.

On the streets on 1 October it means maximising mobilisation and a loud demand to tax the rich.

Let’s get to work.

We should not no-platform “bad ideas”

On Wednesday 13 September a meeting billed “What is Gender? The Gender Recognition Act and beyond” was cancelled by the venue (New Cross Learning in Lewisham, south London) after a protest was planned outside the meeting and activists called the venue to argue they cancel the booking.

On Thursday 14 September the meeting was rearranged to a secret location, but was still met with a protest. Attendees at the meeting filmed and harassed the protesters. One attendee at the meeting had her camera snatched away and smashed, and was repeatedly punched.

We are not pacifists, and do not condemn all violence equally and as a matter of course. But we think there needs to be a clear understanding of what requires countering with physical opposition, and when.

A meeting of largely middle-aged, gender non-conforming lesbians and other women, to discuss feminist (not our feminism, but broadly feminist nonetheless) ideas around proposed changed to the law, is not one of those situations. Responding to words with force should be reserved for extraordinary situations. The left’s default position should be free speech.

That is not to say that we should not protest events that, in this case, appear to be transphobic. The speakers billed for the meeting have a long history of anti-trans politics under various guises. We strongly disagree with this sort of feminism (see page 8 for more commentary).

But the ideas of these feminists are not going away. New, young, feminists will come to meet and challenge them. “Not giving a platform”, or trying to shut down, reactionary, bigoted, ideas of any sort will not make them go away — it will allow them to breed in the shadows. Better to have open debate, and not allow anti-trans feminists to gather people around their scaring mongering “concerns” and make themselves the champions of free speech.

We should reserve the idea of “no platforming” for fascists. Fascism is different from other strands of right-wing politics — or, in this case people with an oddly limited range of reactionary ideas — in that it threatens, immediately and physically, the very existence of working-class organisation and, often, the lives of oppressed minorities.

The idea of “no platforming” “bad ideas” rather than organised fascists, is wrong, and is also being applied in an inconsistent way.

Using the “no platform” policy for anti-trans feminists, while for example Tory meetings on university campuses are spared such protests or bans, suggests that the real enemy is other women, not the government who are brutally attacking working-class people and it’s trans, LGBT, women, disabled, non-white, members the most!

* For more arguments on no-platform see bit.ly/2xaTvmy

Help us raise £20,000 to improve our website

By the time you read this, the newly restructured Workers’ Liberty website should be online at www.workersliberty.org

Our website, including its extensive archive, could help build a different kind of socialist culture — one where discussion and self-education are cherished.

From Trotskyist newspapers of the 1940s and 50s, to older Marxist classics, to discussion articles on feminism, national questions, religion and philosophy and resources such as guidelines for Marxist reading groups — it’s all there on the Workers’ Liberty website.

To make our archive more accessible we have paid for professional help to make all content fully integrated, searchable by date and subject, and optimised for mobile reading. We still need to finance a website co-ordinator to ensure our coverage is up to the minute and shared on social media. We have to raise £20,000 by our conference in November 2017. Any amount will help.

£15,402 raised out of £20,000

Since our last issue of Solidarity we have raised £397 from Solidarity readers, £80 from the AWL national committee, and £365 from our crowdfunder. Thanks to all who donated.

• If you would like to donate by paypal go to www.workersliberty.org/donate
• Or set up an internet bank transfer to “AWL”, account 20047674 at Unity Trust Bank, Birmingham, B0-83-01 (please email awl@workersliberty.org to notify us of the payment and what it’s for); or
• Send a cheque payable to “AWL” to AWL, 20E Tower Workshops, Riley Rd, London SE1 3DG (with a note saying what it’s for).
Russia’s “reds” get more brown

By Emma Rimpiläinen

Sergei Udaltsov, one of the leaders of the Russian Left Front was freed on August 8 after spending four and a half years in a penal colony, convicted for inciting to violence in connection with the 2011-2012 mass protests against electoral fraud.

He was also accused of accepting money from shady businessmen from Georgia and Moldova, allegedly to sow discord and chaos into Russian society; human rights campaigners have called these accusations and his imprisonment politically motivated. His freeing has been welcomed by the leaders of various movements of the Russian opposition, but is unlikely to lead to any significant shifts in Russian politics.

The Russian population is politically apathetic after years of political and economic turmoil and relentless persecution of alternative politics, even for most, having food to eat and being left alone by the state is a preferable condition. Unsurprisingly, this situation is not conducive to mass-scale political action.

Further, gauging the actual moods and desires of the population is difficult in a country where elections are not free and the government recently closed down the last independent pollster. Left-wing ideas may or may not be popular; in any case, widespread Soviet nostalgia should not be confused for unreserved support for communism as such.

Most Russians can still remember the Soviet times, but do not see this as a cause to return to. The Russian population is politically apathetic after years of political and economic turmoil and relentless persecution of alternative politics, even for most, having food to eat and being left alone by the state is a preferable condition. Unsurprisingly, this situation is not conducive to mass-scale political action.

RED-BROWN LEFT

Some of the country’s left-wing opposition is assembled under Left Front, a network of left-wing political parties. The largest and most active ones (under FNPR, Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia) have been appropriated by the government; as such, they are patently unable to advocate any kind of working-class policies. Instead, they act as clientelistic redistribution machines and ground forces.

The left is not a serious contender in national politics, although the Khremlin allows the Communist Party of Russia, headed by Gennady Ziuganov, to occasionally make noises about nationalisation of industries and benefits for large families. Like in other post-Soviet countries, the CPRF is socially conservative and far removed from such ideals as anti-racism or gender equality.

Currently, the most popular opposition groups in Russia are pro-market liberal groups of the middle class, exemplified by anti-corruption crusader Alexei Navalny and his Progress Party, and a host of various nationalist organisations.

The opposition has had a hard time providing feasible alternatives by uniting in their resistance to Putin’s regime, because of the stark ideological differences and personal disputes between the leaders of the various groups. Navalny’s neoliberal and light-nationalist ideas are mostly popular in the big cities and enjoy little support outside of the educated middle classes of Moscow and St Petersburg.

Nationalist ideas have grown increasingly popular in Russian society during the past ten years, partially because of the relentless persecution of alternative political movements and the Khremlin’s own campaign for redefining the concept of the Russian nation in more ethnically exclusive terms. Also, liberal politics of the Western stripe have been discredited because of the crippling transition recession Russia endured in the 1990s, which wiped out many ordinary Russians’ savings.

Liberal ideas such as LGBT rights are typically associated with the economic right in Russia, as opposed to Western European countries, where liberal values are usually connected to the political left. A liberal-left agenda does not make a lot of sense to most postcommunist citizens.

University marketisation sparks brutal campus cuts

By Ben Tausz

Across the country, university bosses are announcing cuts to jobs, courses and departments.

Terror has forced all of its professors to repay their own jobs and banned their trade union from a meeting to discuss it. Durham wants to recruit 4000 more students while cutting staff. The Open University plans to slash a quarter of its budget, meaning swathes of jobs, to pay for a “digital transformation” plan.

Many of these universities are in good financial shape, and the government has not recently cut overall funding. So why are the cuts happening?

First, gaming the new Teaching Excellence Framework, and its research counterpart: government-imposed hoop-jumping exercises, supposedly assessing “quality” in universities. Manchester’s bosses reckon they can raise their scores, and so their fees, by becoming a smaller but more “elite” university by slashing workers’ livelihoods and students’ opportunities.

Second, 2011’s introduction of a deregulated student numbers market. Previously, universities had quotas of students they could take, creating stability. Now the drive to marketise education has meant student numbers fluctuate, and with them, income. Universities are scrambling for savings because recruitment has dropped, or cutting socially valuable courses that are less profitable, or cramming in students for fees without properly funding staff to support us.

The rent is too high!

By a Bristol student activist

A consistent trend across universities is the skyrocketing of rent in university halls.

There is no reason why rent should be so high and increasing at the rate it is.

So why is my rent so high? Since 2010 direct funding to universities has been completely cut and now universities are entirely reliant on your £9,000+ fees for funding. Whereas before university funding was always guaranteed, now it is insecure — universities now need to spend copious amounts of money on PR, visit days and brochures, to attract your fees.

However, it also means that universities look for other ways to make funding more stable — one way to do this is to increase rent and channel this money back into management and expansion.

Secondly, universities are acting ever more like businesses — universities now aim ever more for profit and expansion. As such they want to gather enough money to make this possible. They do this by amongst other things: cutting paying, putting staff on worse contracts — and of course making the rent very damn high! But it needn’t be this way. There is enough wealth in our society to make education and housing and accessible for all and get rid of financial barriers to education. We can do this through collective and disruptive action. One way in particular has been to organise rent strikes whereby students withhold rent en masse and gain collective leverage over university management. Students from London, to Brighton, to Bristol, have been involved in this and in some cases have made massive wins as big as £1 million in rent cuts and freezes and bursary increases.

Let’s make housing accessible for all! Let’s cut the rent!
for free education!

Why we are marching

By Ruaraidh Anderson

Higher Education has been devastated by recent reforms. Further Education has been hit even harder.

We’re facing staff cuts, course cuts, rent hikes in halls, a student mental health crisis, institutions catering to the interests of big business at the expense of staff and students.

All of these have their roots in or have been exacerbated by rising fees, debt and marketisation. They all have their solution in a free, accessible and democratic education system. That’s why we’re marching on 15 November.

We could be on the verge of winning free education. On campuses across the country we’ve seen huge victories, like those for cleaners at LSE and SOAS. But these are just glimpses of what can happen when students and workers come together.

Right now the government are on the back foot. They saw know that students and young people made a huge difference in the election comes around. The stronger the visible support, the more likely the Conservatives are to concede ground. It will also keep the pressure on Labour to not only to keep the policy for the next manifesto, but implement it in power.

We are marching to demand living grants for all students so that everyone can access education no matter how old they are, and regardless of background. We are demanding an end to tuition fees, which tie us down with debt and act as a tool for the marketisation of the education sector. We can fund all this very easily: we should tax the rich, those in the education sector. We can fund all this.

But we are marching for more than just top-down reforms. We want to build a mass student movement. We want students and workers to come together for this demonstration, then go back to hundreds of campuses across the country and convince hundreds of others to become activists. United with staff and campus workers, we can transform our universities and colleges from the bottom-up. We can win pay rises, cut our rent, win properly funded mental health services, and free childcare on campus. We can challenge the oppression of marginalised groups that is intertwined with our current system. We can do this with a coherent and democratic national movement tying us all together.

Join us on the 15 November in London. Then join us in building a movement for a democratically run, accessible and liberated education.

Fees wobble

By Ruaraidh Anderson

On 13 September Labour passed a motion in Parliament protesting at this year’s rise in tuition fees from £3,000 to £9,250 per year.

While the motion was not legally binding, it has been reported in the mainstream press as a dent to the democratic legitimacy of the government’s policy to raise fees in line with inflation.

On 17 September there was seemingly even more substantial news — the government may consider lowering fees to £7,500 from 2018-9. Isn’t the government starting to buckle under the pressure of the young people and students who voted and campaigned in large numbers in support of Labour’s higher education policy? And of a proactive Parliamentary Labour Party prepared to embarrass the government?

Yes, and we could see solid victories in the future. We should be pleased, and we should harness this energy to build a powerful student movement.

But with all the hype, it is possible to gloss over some important points. This new policy is not as bad for the government as it first seems.

Firstly, if fees are eventually linked to ratings in the Teaching Excellence Framework — as is the long term plan — then having some institutions stuck at a lower cap than now fits in well with the ranking system. Rather than hinder the government, it could help hasten the rate at which fee gaps between institutions grow. A widening gap in fees and funding is a key component of the artificial market the government is cultivating.

The Tories want to get the “best of both worlds”, a policy which feeds into their marketisation plan while pacifying enough of the active layer of students and young people who campaigned in the election that the pressure will lift on this issue.

It is vital that we carry on making the argument that fees are a tool for marketisation and that this is the case wherever the government sets its initial fee cap.

The government may also give universities an extra £1,500 per student studying a science course, to make up for the funding loss from lower fees. This will encourage universities to trim arts and humanities departments, already in trouble because of students turning to more lucrative fields.

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Changing gender without defending boundaries

By Claudia Raven, Cathy Nugent and Gemma Short

Pat Murphy (Solidarity, 447) says that Claudia Raven did not give enough serious attention to the feminist concerns raised in relation to potential amendments to the Gender Recognition Act (GRA). This is an attempt to give our discussion some more substance, as well as a response. It is often the case that the debate should continue. But this discussion has been made more urgent by the context of the recent stopping of a meeting on the GRA, and a subsequent protest involving physical confrontation at the rearranged meeting (see page 4 for a statement on this).

The first problem with Pat’s letter is that he accepts the position that there are valid concerns about changes to the 2004 Gender Recognition Act without assessing whether, overall, the mooted reforms are good or not. He makes a truism about welcoming the move to reform Gender Recognition in the UK.

Moreover we think the stated feminist “concerns” are neither convincing, nor being argued in good faith. The method of argument underpinning them is to point to marginal examples which do not stand up to scrutiny (e.g. counselling arrangements for rape victims). Or to criticise bits and pieces of trans politics (e.g. the idea of being “authentic” in a gender role) which may be not gender-critical enough for our liking but do not, from any reasonable point of view, constitute grounds to oppose the proposed reforms.

Also it is simply not good enough for Pat to allude to a commonplace paranoia (that you might find in the Daily Mail), by implying that doctors are not, or would not be, hostile to their approaching people and developing gender identity. The real problem, as with all health services, is that there are nowhere near enough sympathetic and qualified professional help and support services.

The second problem with Pat’s letter is that it fails to make a more clear characterisation of the politics involved. Claudia was referring to a small group of feminist activists, many of whom are part of the broad left, who do not accept that trans people are developing gender identity. The real problem is, as with all health services, is that there are nowhere near enough sympathetic and qualified professional help and support services.

But developing these points, it is worth restating what is at stake here. The majority narrative in society is anti-trans. The proposed amendments to the GRA would reconfirm the political framework on which trans politics is anti-trans. The proposed amendments to the GRA would reconfirm the political framework on which trans politics is anti-trans. The proposed amendments to the GRA would reconfirm the political framework on which trans politics is anti-trans. The proposed amendments to the GRA would reconfirm the political framework on which trans politics is anti-trans.

Anti-trans feminists continue to work in specific spaces, and often in academic groups like the London Feminist Network and parts of the trade union bureaucracy. These networks have taken on a sect-like character, of people who are unable to assess changes in the world around them.

Although most claim not to be “biological essentialists”, the arguments they make are tantamount to that. This feminism sees sex as a stable and immutable basis of gender, and does not recognise the kinds of social changes around gender or the great deal of generalised gender diversity that exists in many developed capitalist countries and beyond. Obsessively insisting on the “science” of biological sex, as opposed to the fluidity of gender and sex identities, as real and/or acceptable. And this approach should be consistent: trans-women too should have specialist help available. Our point here is that this all needs to be more general, and more honest, discussion.

The second kind of red herring in the debate is the practice of using (sometimes out of context) ideas attributed to trans activists/the left to say “look how unreasonable these people are”. Claudia cites the idea of cis-women who refuse to have sex with transwomen who are being labelled transphobic. But it is legitimate to ask what the issue might be here.

Assume this woman is indistinguishable from a cis-woman. You are attracted to her, until you discover she is trans and/or has a penis. Is that not transphobia? In Australia there have been excellent studies about race “preferences” in sexual partners, which show that the preferences are indeed just covers for racism. Equally we have to move to a society where we can just say it like it is. Something like, “I like you but I’m not into penises”. We think transwomen might be grateful for the honesty. It might be that the end of the relationship, which would be okay. It might be that she also hates the penis and has no intention of ever taking her pants off. You might have a great sex life without it making an appearance!

The feminism on display from those arguing against the changes to the GRA is rooted in feminist activism of the 1980s from people who haven’t moved on. Some of themselves have been explicit anti- socialist feminists. In the 1980s it would have been anathema for all socialist feminists to see sex work as a particular form of precarity, with all the other divisions of labour to fight for. But rightly, ideas around this have moved on for many of us.

While biological sex binaries are important organising principles in capitalist society and a strong historical basis for women’s oppression, the gendered social structures which are built on these sex differences have been challenged in different ways. In different points in human history and across different societies.

Capitalist institutions (and the people who inhabit them) — families, the law, education etc. — have been affected by dynamic changes, which have broken down gender ideologies and practices. For example, as women have been drawn into the workplace, we have seen a fragmentation of gender ideologies and roles as well as, in discrete areas, institutionalised some forms of marginalised gender divisions of labour. The socialisation of people into gender based on the sex binaries we are assigned at birth remains strong but these are unstable, imperfect and contradictory.

We would also assert that women continue to be oppressed, and that oppression, with all the above caveats, is linked to biology. Sexual division of labour formed the basis for the oppression of women with the development of property. But around this oppression are complex and intertwined systems of oppression that do not require a woman to be child-bearing to be oppressed as a woman. Nobody checks our karyotype, or examines our genitalia, before they call us in the street, treat us as bimbos, or deny us work based on the name on our job applications. Transwomen face oppression as women, it is erasure to suggest otherwise. Furthermore the experience of transwomen involves oppression as women, particularly those transwomen who feel their sexuality is threatened, and use violence to resolve that threat.

The idenity politics of the most progressive of the left needs a coherent and liberatory alternative to the anti-trans bigotry. The furore around the GRA amendments is a backlash. Answering the backlash means unpicking and challenging ideas, we can’t get round that. While the anti-trans feminist ideology does mesh with the dominant anti-sexism of the middle classes, it is combined with being “on the left” and fightting misogyny. There are other examples of left backwardness in history, prejudice towards gay men and gay women was widespread on the left, seen as “bourgeois devianation”. So anti-GRA feminists are transphobic, but they are not the same as the far right. They are a toxic, and influential source for backward ideas in the labour movement.

Human beings have long defined gender, but some have found it impossible to live within either their sexed and gendered bodies, or the social expectations into which they have been born or which are only in recent years accepted in the West that there has been a way to name this and describe this. That people are finding ways to get through their lives in a more manageable way is a good thing.

The fact is that all those who have been, will be or could be punished for not conforming to ascribed gender-roles face a shared source of oppression; trans and non-binary people, feminine men, non-trans women, we all should be marching together to fight gender oppression. Moreover, as the structures that oppress us are those created and perpetuated by capitalism, it is capitalism we want to bring down.

1. Is sexual racism really racist? https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-015-0487-3
Unfinished Corbynism

Martin Thomas reviews The Candidate, by Alex Nunns

Alex Nunns, a journalist on Red Pepper, has based this book on sympathetic interviews with many of the Labour people in Jeremy Corbyn’s 2015 Labour leadership campaign. It’s a well-crafted, well-informed view of the Corbyn surge as it looked from the top.

It’s hard to remember now just how unexpected Corbyn’s 2015 victory was. Before the announcement John McDonnell had attempted to assemble a “Left Platform” group. It flopped dismally.

Labour lost the election. Ed Miliband resigned. The main candidates to replace him as leader started to compete for how right-wing they could promote themselves as being. John McDonnell wrote that it was “the darkest hour that socialists in Britain had faced” for many decades.

Nunns quotes Michael Calderbank: “Labour was tearing their hair out, there was despair.”

We had all underestimated the growth of a broad, sympathetic body of opinion in the country, diffuse, indeed atomised, but there. Although meetings and strikes had become sparser, demonstrations had often been big.

Student protests in November and December 2010 had drawn over 50,000. Big marches had accompanied the public sector strikes in 2011, and maybe 400,000 joined the TUC demonstration in March 2011. Maybe 250,000 would show up to the People’s Assembly anti-cuts protest in June 2015.

All those demonstrations, following the economic shock of 2008 and the “double-dip” in 2012 when GDP fell again, had left a deep deposit in opinion.

Years of small meetings, difficult literature sales, and so on had convinced too many of us on the left that everyone out there was uninterested, when really it was just that we were struggling or dynamic enough, and that “out there” weren’t confident enough, to turn the diffuse interest into consistent activity.

We had also underestimated a slight shift to the left within the Labour Party.

Slow-burning and unsectarian, that left drift was sufficient to create wide indignation when New Labour’s Burnham and Cooper and Liz Kendall started the 2015 leadership contest by competing to retain right-wing blather about “aspiration.”

A flurry, mostly in cyberspace, demanded a left candidate for leader. No-one at that time was ready to go.

John McDonnell refused, and was cool on the whole idea of a left candidate. Ian Lavery refused. He had already opted for Andy Burnham. Jon Trickett refused.

But the pressure was sufficient that, eventually, in a meeting of left MPs, McDonnell told Corbyn: “It’s your turn”. And that enough-of-left MPs, under pressure from their local members, agreed to nominate Corbyn that an addition of maverick and right-wing nominations was enough to get him into the contest.

Without the pressure inside the party for a left candidate, Corbyn would not even have stood. And then “Corbyn was ahead among party members within weeks of getting his name on the ballot paper”.

There followed a much broader “breath-taking wave of people who have embraced Corbyn’s candidacy”. But that “came after party members had put him in the leader, after trade unions had lent his challenge an air of plausibility”.

The Corbyn Labour left still needs organisation and policies

15,800 people volunteered for the Corbyn campaign. Starting from zero, it became a big campaign. The main candidates to replace him as leader started to compete for how right-wing they could promote themselves as being.

That clash signalled some of the problems of the two years since then. In many similar clashes it seems to have been the backroom staff who prevailed, rather than Corbyn’s better instincts.

Nunns cites an off-the-record comment from someone in Corbyn’s inner circle: “He’s not an ideologue; he’s not a strategist; he’s not an organisation builder”.

Corbyn had a creditable record as a voter-against-the-odds in Parliament, and as a supporter of working-class struggles in his area. But, since the early 1980s at least, he has never been an organiser.

Drifting somewhat towards the left from his early loose involvement with Socialist Organiser at the end of the 1970s, Corbyn had become a regular columnist for the Morning Star, although he clearly dissented from the Star’s pro-Beijing line on Tibet, for example.

Before May 2015, it is hard to imagine that Corbyn had any political perspective to than spend a few more years before retirement (he was 66) casting dissenting votes in Parliament, and then to be an occasional speaker at protests and rallies.

Organisation

Once Corbyn was elected, he needed organisation and ideas to deal with the hostility of the great majority of Labour MPs and of the Labour Party staff.

“In no sense was [Corbyn] or his team ready” for the challenges of party leadership writes Nunns. There’s a general lesson here, too, for the left. Some see the time that Marxist organisations spend on discussing history, grand perspectives, and revolutionary experience as of no-benefit. Why don’t we just talk about the immediate practical tasks, and leave all that other stuff aside?

Why not? Because if we do that, when history suddenly jolts forward — as it does sometimes, and it did with the Corbyn surge — then we will be left floundering at exactly the time when our opportunities are greatest.

On a personal level, Corbyn has not done badly. The coup attempt against him in June 2015 has been, in fits and starts, since then, expelling (without prior notice of charges, hearing, or appeal) hundreds more left-wing members than have ever been expelled before in purges under right-wing leaders, and suspending thousands more.

The membership of the Labour Party has increased to 570,000. But none of the undermecocratic rules instituted by Blair have been changed.

The “Operation Icpick” started in 2015 has been continued, in fits and starts, since then, expelling (without prior notice of charges, hearing, or appeal) hundreds more left-wing members than have ever been expelled before in purges under right-wing leaders, and suspending thousands more.

Despite Corbyn’s keynote appearance in September 2015 at the refugee rights demonstration, the Corbyn Labour Party has called no demonstrations. That is, it has called fewer than Michael Foot did when he was Labour Party leader. Or Hugh Gaitskell.

The political weaknesses arising from this decision-making wasorganised in 2018 to improve the issue of freedom of movement for workers. For five months after the June 2016 Brexit referendum vote, Jeremy Corbyn continued to defend freedom of movement in Europe. But there was no broad organised Labour left to support him.

What of Momentum, launched in October 2015 by some of those around Corbyn, and with the help of the databases gained from the leader’s campaign, to rally the “Corbynista” grassroots?

Momentum has gained 20-year-old thousand members — making it, probably, the biggest Labour left movement ever — and generated some good local groups. It has made an effort to construct a left presence at Labour’s 2017 conference, after failing entirely to do so at the 2015 conference.

But it has conducted no campaigns within the Labour Party on any issues other than internal elections. It has publicly declared no policies to fight for. It has pressed for no democratic changes.

In fact, in January 2017, its office shut down Momentum’s own incipient internal democracy, abolishing all its elected committees overnight and imposing a constitution which in fact gives all decisive power to the (un-elected) office itself.

Momentum remains a large movement, and one within which work can be done, but at present is hamstrung by the anxiety of its leaders to keep in with the union leaders and the Leader’s Office.

Again, there’s a lesson: don’t be beaten by Labour’s “campaign against a national” organisation — meetings, debates, votes, democratic decisions, regular activity is just too difficult now, so we must settle for clicktivism instead.

We can and should be imaginative about our forms of meetings, but without high-intensity organisation, which means meetings, votes, accountability, and so on, we can never defeat those who now hold the commanding heights, or even the commanding foothills, of society.
Today one class, the working class, lives by selling its labour power to another, the capitalist class, which owns the means of production.

The capitalists’ control over the economy and their relentless drive to increase their wealth causes poverty, unemployment, the blighting of lives by overwork, imperialism, the destruction of the environment and much else.

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

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

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

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

• Independent working-class representation in politics.
• A workers’ government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.
• A workers’ charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
• Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.
• A workers’ movement that fights all forms of oppression.
• Full equality for women, and social provision to free women from domestic labour. For reproductive justice: free abortion on demand; the right to choose when and whether to have children. Full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Black and white workers’ unity against racism.
• Open borders.
• Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.
• Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.
• Equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small.
• Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.

If you agree with us, please take some copies of Solidarity to sell — and join us!

Where we stand

Opportunities at Labour conference

Labour Party conference, in Brighton 24-27 September, will probably be larger than other conferences since the late 1990s.

Some CLPs [Constituency Labour Parties] are sending fifteen or more delegates, where in the early 2000s often only about 450 CLPs sent delegates at all, and usually just one per CLP.

If the delegates are able to assert themselves against restrictive, often Blair-era, rules and customs, then they can elements of both the conference’s and the Labour Party’s future.

Rule changes on the agenda include: “ensuring a democratic choice in Labour Leadership elections when a member is ‘vacant’”, called the “McDonnell amendment.” It would reduce the percent-age of MPs and MEPs (while they exist) needed to nominate a Labour leadership candidate from 15% to 5%.

It is hotly opposed by both Labour First and Progress, but, as supporters of the change argue, “under the current rule, a candidate who perhaps has the support of 5 per cent of MPs and MEPs, but also would be the choice of 60 per cent of Labour Party members, affiliated supporters and registered supporters, could be denied a place on the ballot paper.”

By established custom rule changes submitted this year will be shelved for a year and not debated (or ruled out of order) until 2018. This year delegates will have the chance to remedy this by supporting a rule change to “abolish one year’s delay re: rule changes from CLPs.”

The National Executive is allowed to push through big rule changes with minimal notice — last year as a package of 15, all voted on together, first proposed only a week before the conference.

Conference will also debate “contemporary” motions on subjects chosen by a priorities ballot by the conference. As opposed to “contemporary”, they must refer to an event together, proposed only a year’s delay re: rule changes from CLPs.

The problem with it is that it gives the National Constitutional Committee wider powers to ban people from the Labour Party for “the mere holding of beliefs and opinions” outside ill-defined limits. The bulk of the opposition to the rule change, however, claims that it seeks to criminalise criticism of Israel. Not true: the rule change does not mention Israel at all.

The rule change can add extra powers of discipline to the NCC for the holding of beliefs, it would not be a positive step for it to pass; but much of the campaign against it is politically toxic.

A proposed alternative from Hastings and Rye CLP includes language similar to that promoted by the JW and includes: “Hatred of Jews shall not be evidenced by non-abusive words or actions regarding Israel or Zionism that are part of legitimate political dispute.”

So if someone claims that a Jewish lobby promotes Israel across the world, or that Israel dominates American foreign policy? Neither of these statements contains abusive words, both are commonplace (does that make them “legitimate”?) — but both are examples of antisemitism, and should not be declared ok.

Delegates will be told that they can raise issues ruled out of order as part of the debate on the National Policy Forum reports instead. This is a poor substitute. The NPF reports are mostly vacuous and many go explicitly against policy from the manifesto.

It takes a two-thirds vote to pass these documents and making them officially part of policy. Since currently they cannot be amended, in recent times they have generally gone through “on the nod.” This year delegates should try to refer back and raise the shortcomings of these reports.

Apart from rule changes and contemporary motions the left should use the opportunity to discuss and debate the kind of Labour Party we want. There are now 575,000 members of the party. Still, only a small percentage are active. Through effort to build consti-tuency Young Labour groups, and public activity in wards and CLPs we must draw more people into activity.

Momentum still provides the largest pull for the Labour left. It has a conference app and will be sending out daily electronic briefings to delegates who have signed up as supporters. It is not clear if any of Momentum’s proposed rule changes or badly circulated contem-porary motions have made it through. Momentum’s democratic deficit makes it hard to know what its line will be.

Printed daily bulletins will be circulated by the Yellow Pages team including CLPD (as for many years now) and by the new Clarion magazine working together with Red Labour.

• Stop the Labour Purge has a fringe meeting on Sunday 24 September, 6.30 at The Quadrant, 12-13 North Street Quadrant, Brighton BN1 3GJ.

Events

Saturday 23 September
March against the pay cap and for the £10 per hour minimum wage
11am, Nottingham Castle, Lenton Road, Nottingham NG1 6EL
bit.ly/2xehiZ2

Saturday 24 September
Ritzey one year strike protest
2pm, Ritzey Cinema, Brixton Oval, London SW2 1JG
bit.ly/2yc5SLg

Saturday 30 September
Unseat Anna Soubry campaign day
11am, Beeston Victory Club, Station Road, Beeston NG9 2AW
bit.ly/2fyz7F3

Saturday 30 September
Grunwick 40 mural unveiling
12 noon, Dollis Hill tube station, Chapter Road, London NW10 1EG
bit.ly/2xvzzW

Have an event you want listing? Email: solidarity@workersliberty.org

Opportunities at Labour conference

The Red Flag being sung at conference in 2016
Build solidarity with DOO strikes
By a rail worker

The dispute over Driver Only Operation (DOO) in the rail industry continues, and is spreading. RMT guards struck on 1 and 4 of September on Southern, Northern and Merseyrail, and on 19 September announced a further two strike days for 3 and 5 of October.

This time RMT members on a fourth franchise, Greater Anglia, will also strike after 90% of the members voted for action over the role of the guard and extension to DOO, on an 89% turnout. RMT has also triggered a formal dispute with New South Western Railway owners First MTR over the issue and will be balloting its members there.

There has been no significant progress in negotiations between RMT, drivers' union Aslef and any of the employers involved. Aslef continues to hold parallel talks with Southern over DOO and pay but are maintaining their near-radio silence over their progress, sticking to the usual sporadic "update" that talks are "constructive" and are "progressing".

Merseyrail retains a model of solidarity between drivers and guards over this issue, having maintained a 100% strike rate everywhere except Merseyside. The national leadership of the union have clearly done nothing behind the scenes to influence their members on Northern and Southern to return to the picket line, with almost all Aslef Company Council and local level reps crossing and coming into work. On Northern this is in spite of an agreement that a solidarity campaign in the wider labour movement is needed to help keep RMT members going and to pressure Aslef into showing the necessary solidarity to get the job done. This is beginning to show signs of getting off the ground, with an appearance by Sheffield Heeley CLP members at the picket line in Sheffield during the last round of strikes.

This kind of thing will need to grow and be replicated around the country as the dispute continues.

Royal Mail workers to ballot for secure future
By Peggy Carter

Workers in Royal Mail are being balloted by their union, the CWU, over pensions, pay, and job security.

The dispute has four main demands: an end to the two-tier pension system, and for a decent pension for all; a shorter full-time working week, with no two-tiered workforce linked to the company's success and efficiency savings that year; Royal Mail made £712 million in operating profit alone in the last year alone, and has been making year-on-year payouts to its shareholders, but are only offering work/life balance issues for owner-drivers who are effectively self-employed, and look to make redundancies.

The CWU has materials on its website for both workers and members of the public to use to support the ballot.

by.1f/2y2Axk8n

Public support for bin strike grows
By Jim Denham

Birmingham refuse workers have renewed their strike action following the Labour council's decision to reject a settlement reached at ACAS and to issue redundancy notices.

This extraordinary and shameful about-turn by the council led to an unprecedented public statement from ACAS (in effect accusing the council of lying about the deal) and the resignation of discredited council leader John Clancy.

Paradoxically, the council's treachery has boosted public sympathy for the workers, with a Birmingham Mail poll showing the majority of Brummies blaming the council. Union branches and Labour parties have been passing motions of support and Southern Birmingham Momentum is pressing Labour councillors to honour the ACAS deal.

Meanwhile, all the evidence points to the (un-elected) council chief executive Stella Manzie having been the driving force behind the sabotage of the deal. Disgracefully, the council is now attempting to recruit a new scab workforce, and inviting other council workers to work overtime to clear rubbish as part of a strike-breaking operation.

Unite assistant general secretary Howard Beckett moved an emergency motion at the TUC in support of the workers; he said, "I say to Birmingham councillors, if you continue to act like Tories then Unite in the region will deal with you as Tories." This is, of course, exactly the right stance: Unite now needs to liaise with the GMB and Unison, whose members at the council also face job cuts: a united response across the council must be the next stage of the battle.

Unite West Midlands have set up a strike fund to support members suffering financial hardship. To make donations please contact Karl Greenway on 0121 553 6051.

Tube drivers to strike
By Ollie Moore

London Underground drivers in the Aslef union will strike on 5 October.

The dispute is a hangover from LU’s 2015 pay settlement with unions, which included a commitment to explore alternative working arrangements aimed at improving work/life balance. As part of this, London Underground ran a voluntary trial of a "four-day week" model, which involved the compression of drivers’ existing hours into four days, on the Jubilee Line.

That trial has now ended, and Aslef say they want the model rolled out to the rest of the network. Their ballot for strikes returned an 88% majority for strikes, and a 93% majority for action short of strikes, on a 53% turnout.

The RMT union, which represents a large majority across all grades of Tube workers, but a narrow minority of drivers, has raised concerns about the model. The Jubilee Line trial involved altering drivers’ terms and conditions to extend the maximum time they could spend driving, and RMT has warned that, if it is rolled out, it will open the door to further attacks on terms and conditions, RMT has argued for a four-day, 32-hour week, and wants a referendum of all drivers before the existing trial is extended.

RMT is also in dispute with LU over work/life balance issues for drivers.

Reinstate Danny Davis
By Gemma Short

Workers at five Picturehouse cinemas in London have again voted to continue strikes for the London Living Wage, sick pay, maternity/paternity pay, and union recognition.

The workers at the Ritzy cinema in Brixton, Hackney Picturehouse, Coach End Picturehouse, East Dulwich Picturehouse, and Picturehouse central in Soho are planning a program of strikes for the busy new release season coming up.

Workers at the Ritzy cinema will strike on Saturday 23 September, on the first anniversary of their strike. Workers from the other cinemas will join them for a demonstration in Brixton.

The BFI London Film Festival, with which they often considered pulling out of Picturehouse venues, will be happening at Picturehouse Central and Hackney Picturehouse from the 4-16 October. A demonstration has been called for the opening night of the film festival on 4 October, 5:30pm in Leicester Square. A series of activities will be organised throughout the festival.

Three of the reps who were sacked from the Ritzy cinema are taking their cases to employment tribunal on the basis of trade union victimisation. The demand to reinstate the reps has been added to the demands of the strike.

Picturehouse, and their parent company Cineworld, are still refusing to negotiate with workers.

Demonstration: Justice for Tube cleaners! End outsourcing! Thursday 12 October, 09:00, City Hall
(The Queen's Walk, SE1 2AA)
Called by the RMT London Transport Regional Council and RMT London Transport Cleaning Grades Committee
More: http://www.rmtlondoncalling.com
Solidarity with the Rohingya!

By Martin Thomas

Around 400,000 people from the Rohingya Muslim minority in Myanmar have now fled to Bangladesh.

The Bangladeshi government was reluctant to admit them, but has been less hard-faced than Britain or the EU generally towards refugees from Syria and Ethiopia. Or at least it has calculated that it lacks the means to be as hard-faced.

Many of the refugees are huddled round Cox’s Bazar in southern Bangladesh. The Bangladesh police say that they “cannot travel from one place to another by roads, railways or waterways”, and that camps will be built to accommodate them.

The Economist magazine in 2015 called the Rohingya “the most persecuted people on Earth”. A February 2017 UN report confirmed that their situation has got worse since then. Now it has culminated in mass flight across the border to Bangladesh.

The province of Rakhine, where the Rohingya live, stretches far along the coastline of Myanmar, but is separated from the rest of the country by a mountain range. For centuries it was an autonomous kingdom. It was conquered by a Burmese Buddhist king in the 18th century, and then incorporated into the British colony of Burma.

Under British rule many of the dwindling social and economic positions in mostly-Buddhist Burma were held by Hindu or Muslim migrants from what is now India and Pakistan.

During World War Two, the Rohingyas were mostly pro-British, and the Buddhists of Rakhine were mostly pro-Japanese.

Further communal clashes erupted after World War Two. Some Rohingya leaders campaigned for the northern part of Rakhine, where there were more Muslims, to be annexed to East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), or at least made an autonomous area.

The coup in Burma / Myanmar by nationalist army officers in 1962 suppressed open conflict but laid bases for exacerbating it. This was a coup which established a more-or-less complete Stalinist structure by top-down military action.

Private capitalists were forced out, not so much because they were capitalists as because they were almost all Indian or Pakistani.

The army chiefs’ Revolutionary Council declared illegal all political opposition, took over the direct management of most educational and cultural organisations, and nationalised all external and internal trade and large sectors of manufacturing.

Quantitative physical planning, from the top down, was made the basic mechanism of economic control. Enterprises were run by military officers, as military operations. Prices were set by the government. It was of no concern to the government whether individual enterprises showed a profit or a loss.

Agriculture remained in private hands, but the state became the sole buyer of agricultural produce. There was strict government control and regulation over even small businesses, and the public sector accounted for virtually 100% of investment.

Some on the left, such as the Militant, forerunner of the Socialist Party and Socialist Appeal, took this to mean that Burma / Myanmar was on the road of progress as a “deformed workers’ state”.

“The army leaders tired of the incapacity of the landowners and capitalists to solve the problems of Burma. Basing themselves on the support of the workers and peasants, they organised a coup, expropriated the landowners and capitalists and established Burma as a ‘Burmese Buddhist Socialist State’... On the old relations there is no way out. In Vietnam, Laos, Kampuchea, Burma, Syria, Angola, Mozambique, Aden, Benin, Ethiopia and as models, Cuba and China... there has been a transformation of social relations”, wrote their theoretician Ted Grant.

In fact the military regime perpetuated poverty and intensified chauvinism against minorities within Burma / Myanmar.

The Rohingya were mostly denied Burmese citizenship and made stateless.

In conflicts in 1991-2, about 250,000 Rohingya fled to Bangladesh, though most eventually returned to Burma / Myanmar. The frequent movements of people across the border with Bangladesh have been used by the Burma / Myanmar government to claim that most Rohingya are in fact illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.

In 2010, Burma / Myanmar finally got civilian government. The army, however, retains huge power.

Also, many in Rakhine’s Buddhist majority, who are an ethnic minority relative to dominant Buddhist communities in Myanmar, and poorer than the average in Myanmar, fear and resent the Rohingya.

Many of the Rohingya, and even of a distinct Muslim minority in Rakhine, the Kaman, who are recognised by the government of Myanmar as indigenous citizens, were confined to displaced people’s camps even before the latest flare-up. A “verification” process by the government of Rohingya people’s citizenship status has offered them only the possibility of acquiring naturalised citizenship (which in Burma / Myanmar brings fewer rights than indigenous citizenship, and is more easily revoked) on condition of agreeing to be designated as “Bengalis”.

The Myanmar government has made much of the activities of Islamists armed groups based among the Rohingya, though those have only minority support.

The persecuted Rohingyas deserve our solidarity.

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