



For social ownership of the banks and industry

DOCTORS CALL FOR NEW COVID PLANS

We say:

» **Full isolation pay for all**

» **Take care homes into public sector**

» **Refuse unsafe working**

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Reimposing "conditionality"

Tories plan to reimpose "conditionality" and reopen Jobcentres

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British workers and slavery

How the workers were won to backing anti-slavery in the US Civil War

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Block Netanyahu's plan to annex!

By Colin Foster

The timetable set for itself by Israel's Netanyahu-Gantz coalition government provides for moving formally to annex to Israel large parts of the Palestinian West Bank this week, on 1 July.

Annexing large chunks of what is now "Area C", under Israel control, will create new barriers to an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel, other than in the sham form of a string of disconnected patches of land (Palestinian-inhabited cities, towns, villages) surrounded on all sides by Israeli territory and connected with each other only by Israeli-supervised channels.

It still remains possible that the Israeli government may delay, allowing a little more time for mobilisation against this obstruction to the possibility of a democratic peace settlement recognising Palestinian rights.

Benny Gantz, now holding the title of Israel's "Alternate Prime Minister", said on 29 June that before annexation, "people must be returned to their jobs and the coronavirus must be dealt with". Israel has a second wave of infections.

French workers on streets

French workers have come out on the streets again as the virus emergency eases there. On Tuesday 16 June, 18,000 health workers demonstrated in Paris and many thousands in other cities.

They were demanding a pay rise of €300 a month for low-waged health workers, increased staffing, and a moratorium on bed closures. They are calling for action from president Emmanuel Macron on his promise, made during the emergency, of a great renovation of French health care.

Macron has also promised a referendum to amend France's constitution by inserting a reference to ecological values, but is fending off some more specific demands recently made by an officially-organised "citizens' convention", notably for a tax on company dividends to finance green spending.

The second round of the municipal elections, held on 28 June, was the first electoral test in a major country of political shifts from the emergency. Results were ambiguous.

Abstentions were very high, maybe in part because of health fears. Macron and his allies did poorly. The Greens progressed from holding two of the 236 biggest municipalities to holding ten. The Socialist Party more or less held its ground, retaining the mayoralty in Paris.

The French Communist Party and La France Insoumise came out with 18 municipalities (from 25 in 2014). The quasi-fascist Rassemblement National won Perpignan, but generally made little progress. The biggest gains were for the category "miscellaneous right". □

There have been anti-annexation rallies across Israel. The Palestinian leadership in the West Bank has warned of a return to guerrilla warfare, though whether it has the means is doubtful.

A protest demonstration in Jericho on 22 June drew not only angry Palestinians, but the United Nations peace envoy for the Middle East, Nickolay Mladenov, the EU representative, and British, Chinese, Russian, Japanese and Jordanian diplomats. Mladenov spoke at the protest.

Labour's shadow foreign secretary, Lisa Nandy, has called for Britain, as a move against annexation, to block imports of goods from Israel's West Bank settlements. This sort of focused sanction against the occupation of the West Bank has possibilities of leverage for a democratic two-states outcome which the call for boycotting Israel as such cannot have.

The main international backer for the annexation move is US President Donald Trump. Netanyahu is keen to get it done before November's US presidential election. □

Anti-racist resources

We have compiled various anti-racist resources to learn about anti-racist movements, and arm yourself with ideas to beat back racism: readings and pamphlets, video and audio.

See workersliberty.org/anti-racist-resources □

74 lashes for Iranian workers

42 workers at AzarAb Industries, in Iran's industrial city of Arak, have been sentenced to one year in prison, 74 lashes, and one month of forced labour.

That is for a protest in 2019 against delayed wage payments after the firm was privatised. Workers' wages have again not been paid in May and June 2020.

Non-payment of wages is commonplace in Iran, and so is jailing of workers who protest,

On 23 May, however, charges against Esmail Bakhshi, Mohammad Khanifar and Ali Nejati were dropped as part of a wider amnesty granted at Eid by the government.

Esmail Bakhshi was a strike leader at the Haft Tappeh sugar cane complex in south-west Iran, and Solidarity has worked with Iranian activists in exile on many protests against his jailing.

Mohammad Khanifar is another worker at the complex, and Ali Nejati is a retired worker.

A new workers' protest at Haft Tappeh, for overdue wages and for reinstatement of sacked workers, was held on 15 June. □

• See bit.ly/protest42 for an appeal for letters of protest at the AzarAb jailings.

New Covid plans

“ Editorial

Doctors and scientists want a shift in virus-control policy. An [open letter](#) to all the political parties, on 23 June, by leading medical figures, called for an urgent effort to map new policies because “the available evidence indicates that local flare-ups are increasingly likely and a second wave a real risk”.

Jeremy Farrar, a member of the government’s official scientific advisory group SAGE, told the BBC (28 June) that unless the next two months are used “cleverly”, we’ll have “rebounds and second waves... come the winter”.

Other SAGE members have criticised in coded language. The “Independent SAGE” group set up by David King in early May is strident.

Different scientists have different alternatives. Most don’t want covid-distancing reduced just yet. Many stress what the “Independent SAGE” calls a “Find, Test, Trace, Isolate and Support” plan.

Others, like Marc Lipsitch of Harvard University, warn that: “We should be trying to get contact-tracing infrastructure in place because it will help around the margins... We *must* stop thinking of it as a magic bullet (which it has been arguably nowhere, at most in a few very low-incidence settings)”.

Solidarity cannot claim scientific expertise. We don’t know. But we do know social measures important for making a virus-control system effective which are not being taken. The Labour leadership has supported the government’s 4 July plans to reopen pubs with reduced covid-distancing, making only mild criticisms on the side. We want rank-and-file pressure to turn that round.

- Power for workers, using expert advice, to stop unsafe working. Around late March many groups of workers forced safety changes by using their rights to withdraw from unsafe work areas (under legislation like section 44 of the Employment Rights Act 1996).

Barnsley postal workers did the same on 22 June. As we go to press, Jobcentre workers are considering the same.

It’s harder for workers in pubs and cafés, due to reopen from 4 July, but possible for them too. Refusing unsafe work is not “industrial action” in legal terms, and groups of workers can do it even without a union.

- Full isolation pay for all. We now know that in early March infections rose to thousands a day in early March, escaping the eyes of official testing and tracing. Around half those with Covid-19 and symptoms continued to work, because economically they couldn’t afford to self-isolate.

Yet now the Tories propose to cut isolation pay for outsourced workers in the civil service (see p.15). And we’ve won full isolation pay in only 40% of care homes. We need

to win the other 60%. Identified contacts of Covid-19 sufferers, who may themselves have no or scant symptoms, also need to be able to self-isolate.

- All care homes should be taken into the public sector, and the jobs in them should be made secure and well-paid under public sector conditions. Christina McAnea, assistant general secretary of the public service union Unison, told the *Observer* (28 June) that we need “quick change, not a new commission... a national care service”.

- The testing and tracing operation should be made a direct public-health operation, with direct public management and responsibility, and workers on public sector conditions.

At present large parts of it are contracted out via Deloitte for the testing and Serco for the tracing, with Serco employing tracers as casual workers on little more than minimum wages.

The tracing system is not working. There are lots of tests, but geared only for headline testing-numbers, and without the reliable rapid turnaround needed for tracing to work.

- Industry should be requisitioned for reliable supplies of PPE, and private hospitals should be nationalised into the NHS.

- Suitable accommodation should be requisitioned by the government for people who should self-isolate but live in crowded housing, and for people coming into the country to quarantine. Other countries have done this. Hotels and student accommodation will serve the purpose.

Yet to come

The worst of the pandemic may yet be to come. World-wide, cases have been rising fast again since late May. Deaths too, since early June – slowly so far, but that may be a statistical illusion from undercounting in Brazil and India.

The lockdown-easings done carefully and piecemeal across Europe since 7 April continue to “work”. But in Iran and Israel botched easing has already produced second waves.

Belgium and the Netherlands have had high Covid-19 tolls, like Britain. They have reopened cafés and bars, the Netherlands on 1 June and Belgium on 8 June (and schools, too, earlier), without disrupting their clear decline in infections.

But, by cases per population, Britain is now where the Netherlands was early May, Belgium late May. By deaths, Netherlands mid-May, Belgium early June. Further solid infection decline might justify further easing in England in *mid-July*. Not now.

As it is, the Tory government’s move to reopen pubs from 4 July will probably avoid serious hurt only if it “fails” in the Tories’ terms, that is, if their drive to encourage people to pack in fails, and the pubs remain fairly empty. □

Fighting police abuse and racism

By Emma Dalmayne

The murder of George Floyd, which was the equivalent of a public lynching, is tragically nothing new. Police brutality against black people has always been there.

This time, however, it's been caught on video. It was a slow, terrifying and painful death for Floyd. The amount of times he clearly said "I can't breathe..." and was ignored. Unconscionable that anyone could ignore that, let alone carry on causing it.

The subsequent killing of Tony McDade further compounded the lack of care from the police to the BAME community. Trust has been broken repeatedly and people have had enough.

The protests are needed: when a spoken voice is not heard, you have to shout! Protests only evolve into riots when the police begin attacking the protestors. I have seen much concern by the public, predominantly the white public, about the desecration of statues and buildings. When all you have to worry about is bricks and mortar and not your skin being seen as a weapon or a threat, well that's the definition of White privilege right there. How can you dictate how anyone, especially black people who have been enslaved, raped, murdered, kidnapped and stolen from for over three hundred years, express anger?

The policing of BAME communities is similar in the USA and the UK in that black people are targeted. I believe if a police officer has a previous proven allegation for violence against someone then they should not be working, full stop. Stronger penalties for violence would serve as a deterrent.

The police need to know that a BAME person stopped by them for whatever reason, already has it in their head that they may not make it out from this stop alive. So nervousness, lack of eye contact, not reading body language and facial expression and all the other signs of what could be a condition like autism, could simply be a neurotypical person's terror that they may never see their family again. Now imagine that same scenario in the head of someone who already has communication difficulties? Devastating.

We have seen numerous cases of police brutality against autistic people, especially BAME autistic people. As a black autistic activist, I think that the employment of neurodivergent advisors in the police force would be a step towards some sort of acknowledgement of the con-

tinuous mistakes they make. A council of BAME advisors I believe, is desperately needed, to keep a record of public concerns and wrong doings by the police.

There should be more black voices in the autistic and neurodiversity movements: we are not asked as much as we should be. The stereotype of an autistic is a white cis male, not a young black female. This needs to change. We have a place at the advocacy table, it's time a plate was laid out.

A large part of this exclusion of BAME advocates is due to class and lack of opportunity. I can only speak for myself and I have always felt included, heard and welcomed in the labour movement. □

What Labour should do

By Kas Witana

We need to change the entrenched position that more police is an answer to society's problems. We need to develop clear demands to curb their powers to harass BAME, poor and young people, and to make them more accountable to democratic scrutiny and control.

We should demand a dramatic reduction of the prison population, and an end to damaging policies like criminalisation of drugs, which feed the prison system.

More broadly, we need to reshape not just criminal justice but the whole of society.

Genuine democratic community policing can only exist in a society of democratic community economics – socialism. But at present society is moving fast in the wrong direction.

Labour is not campaigning for even for the most obvious and basic demands to help the working class, and particular BAME workers, defend ourselves. Why aren't we calling for a publicly-run track-and-trace system? Why aren't we campaigning to stop a new wave of council cuts, and restore the desperately needed funding councils have lost?

Why aren't we campaigning for all workers to be able to isolate on full pay, and radically better sick pay? Why aren't we demanding public ownership of social care?

We need a comprehensive program for rebuilding and expanding our public sector, our youth services, our mental health services, our refuges – and providing the jobs, homes and support people will need in the coming crisis. That means a major assertion of public ownership. Demands like this are also, in the existing conditions, anti-racist ones.

• More at bit.ly/kas-blm. Kas was speaking at a meeting on Black Lives Matter and Brexit organised by Labour for a European Future and Labour for a Socialist Europe. □



Next steps for the left? Panel debate

Join [a panel debate](#) with speakers from Workers' Liberty, Mutiny, and Red Flag, speakers from three different revolutionary socialist groups to discuss the key issues facing us today, with plenty of time for questions and discussion from the floor.

• See workersliberty.org/c19-online □

USA: the unions and the cops

By Traven Leyshon

Certain small unions which are traditionally on the left, like the ILWU and the United Electrical Workers, have taken very strong positions – and in the case of the ILWU actually shut down the West coast ports. On the East coast the ILA docks union did nine minutes of silence, in agreement with employers.

The Amalgamated Transit Union, which has a large black membership, has also taken a strong stance, and many of its locals have organised action, including refusing to cooperate with police.

The national AFL-CIO has had a number of requests from affiliates to kick out the police unions that are part of the federation. (Many police unions don't want to be part of the trade union movement.) But the leadership is opposed.

Many important unions, including local government union AFCSME and the Teamsters, have cops in their membership. There are also prison officers in a number of unions. Bear in mind that, with the incredibly high incarceration rates and vast prison system in the US, there are a lot of these people and they are highly organised.

Firefighters' unions also tend to be very conservative and pro-police.

These organisations generally exert a very conservative political influence in the union movement. Even in Vermont, where the labour movement is generally more progressive, the correctional unions have vigorously opposed any support for Black Lives Matter.

In society there's a law-and-order common-sense and a glorification of the police and that is reflected in the labour movement too. Mass incarceration has been raised periodically in the labour movement, but not so much in recent years. Obviously the events of the last month have opened everything up and there's now a chance to have these debates.

The question of kicking police unions out of local Labour Councils or regional AFL-CIO bodies is a very hot

issue, but not much has actually happened. The Martin Luther King Labour Council in Seattle – which has a radical history, for instance in the 1999 anticapitalist protests, and real authority – has done it, but I don't know of any other cases. I'm sure many would like to but there is a fear of reprisals from the national AFL-CIO.

The Vermont AFL-CIO has issued a pretty strong statement on the fight against racism, and it says we don't want to organise any more police into our unions. But it's not saying kick them out.

That relatively strong stance has had a lot of feedback from the membership, both positive and negative. In fact in the first place it came partly out of pressure from black members. Some affiliates, e.g. in the building trades, said they were sympathetic but that they knew their members would be opposed.

Remember even in Seattle it was only about two-thirds voting for expulsion.

In terms of debates about policy, the big focus is on defunding the police. Every state and certainly every municipality is facing a revenue crisis and demands for more austerity. So what's going to be cut? Taking money away from the police to invest in things that are socially beneficial, housing, and jobs, and living people out of poverty, makes sense.

Of course it's not enough by itself. In the depths of the economic crisis we're going to need a whole range of measures. The Vermont labour movement has rightly called for taxing the rich. But remember that in the US a huge amount is spent on the police, often a third of municipal budgets, even after years of crime rates falling. □

• Traven Leyshon is President of Green Mountain Labour Council in Vermont, USA, and a member of Democratic Socialists of America and Solidarity. He spoke to Sacha Ismail.

New audio!

Listen, download or subscribe to [Workers' Liberty Audio](#) recordings of our paper, other publications, and many meetings. **New this last fortnight:**

- [Starmer and the Labour Left](#) – intro to how we got here and what we should be doing now, with Duncan
- Josh Lovell: [Covid-19 and Fighting Council Cuts](#). Josh is a Labour councillor.
- [Solidarity 553 part 1](#) and [part 2](#); [552 part 1](#) and [part 2](#)

See workersliberty.org/audio for links to the audio version. It can also be found through many podcast providers: search "Workers' Liberty" or "Solidarity & More". More information on subscribing and using podcasts at [the URL above](#). □

New videos!

Watch Workers' Liberty's videos and playlists, and subscribe to [our youtube channel](#)! Many have subtitles. **New this last fortnight:**

- [Rhoda Dakar \(of The Bodysnatchers/The Special AKA\) on racism, class and culture](#) – interview with Janine
- [The Anti-Social Family part 1/2](#), intro speeches from the Socialist feminist reading group
- [Organise to make the future!](#) *Solidarity* editorial
- [What is the police? Where did it come from?](#) A two-minute doodle intro
- [Autistic advocate William Vanderpuye on anti-racist protests](#), interview with Janine Booth
- ["Do we need prisons?"](#) intro speech by Anita Downs in ["The state, crime, prisons, and police"](#) series
- ["Left Unity: is Momentum fit for purpose?"](#) intro speech by Ruth Cashman □

Please watch and subscribe; like, comment and share! All at: youtube.com/c/WorkersLibertyUK

Hold Starmer to 2030!



Environment

By Abel Harvie-Clark

On 29 June a Labour spokesperson said that while Starmer “had supported” the 2019 Green New Deal policy, he would not commit to retaining the policy, and that the party’s position would be decided in “4 or 5 years” with the next manifesto.

This should ring serious alarm bells for the left and environmentalists, and reminds us of the need for an organised and vocal left Labour membership to hold leadership to account.

In a general sense, the comments from Starmer’s team show a clear lack of respect for party democracy. The motion passed overwhelmingly at 2019 conference called for “net-zero carbon emissions by 2030”, already scaled down by union and party bureaucrats from the member-written motion for “zero carbon emissions” by the same date. Other key policies in that passed motion included “repeal[ing] all anti-union laws, facilitating worker-led activism over social and political issues” and “free

or affordable green public transport”.

As Starmer moves the party to the right, this crucial issue demands that we advocate for the sovereignty of Labour Conference.

The recent comments are disappointing also as they reveal the continued attitude of leadership that policies are only for election time, not to be campaigned for in between. Just as Starmer’s “support” for the BLM movement has been weak, this same attitude denies the potential wins that can be achieved outside parliament to fight climate change through organised workers’ action.

The implication that we must wait for a Labour government to tackle the climate crisis is a farce and only distances the Labour Party from the climate movement.

With the impacts of fossil fuel capitalism being passed on to the working class both in the UK and, to an even worse extent in the Global South, the Labour leadership must wake up to the urgency of the climate crisis. Thousands of jobs are being lost in North Sea oil, while the limited renewables sector is known for lack of union recognition and poor employment.

The left needs to build on the climate movement of 2019 to present an alternative based on an internationalist, environmental socialism. □

Private hospitals: don’t subsidise, nationalise!

By Angela Driver

According to the [Financial Times](#) (16 June) the government is considering a longer term deal with private hospitals.

In late March, as the first wave of Covid 19 was on the rise, the government worried that health resources in the UK would be overwhelmed, as they had been in Italy. The government made a deal with private hospitals – a rolling deal that can be terminated.

The deal gives the NHS access to the facilities and staff of private hospitals. The government pays all overheads, including lending commitments and rent, for the private hospitals at an estimated cost of £100-120m per week. Without that intervention the private-hospital businesses would have been in crisis, and might have shut down, with lack of demand during and after lockdown.

The facilities “booked” through the deal have been largely unused so far. NHS hospitals have reorganized themselves so that Intensive Treatment Unit capacity has increased. Patients are now reluctant to come to hospital. Many hospital beds remain empty.

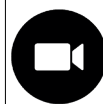
A huge backlog of routine treatments has been put on hold in the pandemic. It may affect up to 10m patients by December. This includes elective surgery. Hospitals are restarting those lists, but with restrictions. Part of my hospital, for example, is separated from the rest (different exits, staff etc.) so that carefully screened patients can have minor elective surgery. Some elective surgery is now

taking place in private hospitals. It will be limited by the fact that many private hospitals have no Intensive Treatment Unit facilities.

A longer-term deal, maybe two years, would, so the *Financial Times* expects, lead to permanently increased funding for the private sector from the NHS. It may lead to decreased funding for NHS hospitals, if contracts with private health companies are prioritised.

We have argued for the requisitioning of private health-care. The government should take the facilities over, wholesale. It should not be subsidising private companies that would not have survived without NHS funding.

Spain nationalised all its private hospitals ([though temporarily](#)). The UK government looks like choosing instead to use taxpayers’ money to make the rich richer. □



Remember the Urumqi massacre. Fight for Uyghur rights & freedoms!

Join the Uyghur Solidarity Campaign, Sunday 5 July, the Urumqi massacre anniversary, 12-1:30pm, discussing solidarity with the Uyghur struggle for freedom.

Speakers include: Zumretay Arkin, eyewitness to it; Rahima Mahmut, World Uyghur Congress; Maira Aisaeva, Uyghur Community UK; Peter Tatchell, human rights campaigner; Ben Towse, USC UK. □

• bit.ly/usc-meet

Abuse of Uyghur women



Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

China is carrying out forced sterilisations of women of ethnic minority populations in the western Xinjiang region, according to [research](#) published on 29 June.

More than one million Uyghurs and other mostly Muslim minorities are imprisoned in re-education camps. Uyghur women and other ethnic minorities are being threatened with internment in the camps for refusing to abort pregnancies that exceed birth quotas.

Women have been involuntarily fitted with intrauterine contraceptives or coerced into receiving sterilisation surgeries, even were they had fewer than the permitted two children. Government documents showed that women in some rural minority communities in the region have received frequent mandatory gynaecological exams and bi-monthly pregnancy tests from local health officials. Having too many children is a major reason people are sent to detention camps, with the parents of three or more families incarcerated unless they can pay huge fines. Of the 484 camp detainees listed in Karakax county in Xinjiang,

149 were there for having too many children – the most common reason for holding them.

Police raid homes, terrifying parents as they search for hidden children.

Population growth in Xinjiang counties predominantly home to ethnic minorities fell below the average growth in primarily Han-majority counties between 2017 and 2018, a year after the officially recorded rate of sterilisations in the region sharply overtook the national rate in 2016.

China's anti-Muslim eugenics programme also seeks to pair Uyghur women with men from the Han ethnic majority, and is aggressively promoting voluntary intermarriage between Han Chinese and Uyghurs. Muslim women whose husbands have been detained in Chinese internment camps are being forced to share beds with male government officials assigned to monitor them in their homes. Uyghur families in Xinjiang are required to invite government officials into their homes.

China has deployed more than a million spies – most of them male and part of the country's Han ethnic majority – to stay in Uyghur households every two months as part of what it calls the "Pair Up and Become Family" programme. The policy is sparking fears of a campaign of mass rape of Uyghur women. □

AIDS, and how it was fought



Podcast review

By Zack Muddle

AIDS, caused by HIV, was first written about in 1981, in the USA. "Straight America" mostly responded with indifference. Patients were blamed for their suffering, shamed for their sexuality and lifestyle. The BBC radio documentary mini-series "[A big disease with a little name](#)", released June 2020, tells the story, movingly and informatively, up to today.

HIV has a long incubation period, allowing wide infection before symptoms appear. This is coupled with an infection fatality rate (IFR), without treatment, of near 100%. Covid-19 has an [IFR](#) of perhaps 1% or less.

Many gay people lost dozens of – previously young and healthy – friends to it. People would nurse their dying lovers through their painful degeneration, knowing that they, too, had it and would (almost) inexorably succumb and die, in turn, and alone.

"ACT UP", the "AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power", in the USA brought in gay men from varied backgrounds, some still closeted; numerous lesbian women, and others. Many ACT UP activists had contracted HIV, were fighting with their backs against the wall. Instead of surrendering in grief and despair, they channelled anger into organising to fight for better.

Through a series of campaigns, activists forced the price of treatments down rapidly from \$10k/year to less than a quarter of that.

Many changes won had much wider impacts.

The series also looks at palliative care and LGBTIQ community support; the major black market in anti-HIV treatments, the growth of AIDS denialist conspiracy theorists which costs hundreds of thousands of lives, particularly in South Africa; the development of effective treatment; and the situation today.

Today, PEP and PrEP can effectively protect individuals against contracting HIV. Where individuals do contract it, ongoing treatment can make it undetectable, untransmittable, and have no impact on health or life expectancy.

Major stigmas still exist, feed homophobia, and form obstacles to effectively combating HIV.

The 10 short episodes, two hours altogether, are told through first person narration, interview snippets.

The series doesn't cover the impact on trans women, or on sex workers. It only touches in passing on the epidemic among drug users, in the global South, or differential impacts on people from different socioeconomic background.

It doesn't mention anti-condom campaigning and legislation driven by religious institutions, particularly the Catholic Church. Or draw wider political conclusions – e.g. the need for greater funding for public health research and programs. But well worth a listen. □

• Abridged. Full text bit.ly/aids-how

British workers, slavery,

By Sacha Ismail

In the 1860s, through a four-year, 600,000-death civil war, slavery in the United States was destroyed. The defeat of revolutionary movements unleashed by the war, above all movements of the ex-slaves, created the system of white supremacy and racial segregation which endured till the 1960s and the legacies of which continue to shape the US today.

The US (the Northern states) had many advantages over the Southern Confederate States of America: population, industrial base, economic dynamism. Yet early on the outcome of the civil war was in doubt. One factor was support from foreign governments.

The British government of Viscount Henry Palmerston joined France in recognising the Confederacy as a belligerent power, giving it various rights in international relations. A blind eye was turned to the illegal building of Confederate warships in Britain. Prominent government figures publicly advocated proposals ranging from "mediation" to stop the war to outright military intervention in support of the Confederates.

A Confederate victory would mean vast Western territories being dominated by the production of staple crops for the world market (including cotton for the British textile industry); a US victory, free commercial farming fuelling the growth of industrial capitalism (in competition with Britain).

Future Tory Prime Minister Robert Cecil set up "Southern Clubs" to agitate on the side of the Confederacy, receiving funding from a number of large employers.

In November 1861, the US navy stopped a British ship, the Trent, carrying two Confederate diplomats across the Atlantic. War seemed imminent. The thousands of troops Palmerston had dispatched to Canada were put on alert and the Canadian Governor General told to prepare for war.

The anti-slavery stance of Britain's workers was a factor in stopping Britain joining the war on the Confederate side, and thus in enabling the US to win.

Workers against slavery

Many workers suffered appallingly as a result of the war, as the dependable supply of cotton ceased and swathes of British industry froze up.

Unemployment in the Lancashire textile areas went from near zero in November 1860 to something like 330,000, about 50 percent, two years later. In a society without a welfare state, millions of people were reduced to grinding poverty. Many tens of thousands of "cotton operatives" (textile workers) struggled to get food or heating, or were evicted from their homes. Mill-owners took the opportunity to depress wages and lengthen the working day for those who stayed in work.

In the early 1860s the British workers' movement was weak, and had been since the defeat of Chartism in the late 1840s. Trade unions got bigger in the 1850s, but they

were not generally very radical. The Lancashire operatives had previously been involved in many mobilisations, but less and less so in recent years.

Many of the best-established union leaders, and papers and journals which said they spoke to and for the working class refused to support the North or even supported the Confederacy – for reasons including tailing the ruling class, racism, illusions that the Confederates were fighting a national liberation struggle, and viewing anti-slavery activists as bourgeois hypocrites unmoved by the suffering of workers in Britain.

In Lancashire, pro-Confederate capitalists hired former radicals and working-class activists who had more recently been involved in arguing against strikes to propagandise for the slaveowners' cause among workers.

Defenders of the Confederacy argued slavery was not at stake in the war, or even that Confederate independence would help free the slaves. (For the first year of the conflict, the US government was extremely reluctant to take action against slavery.)

The propagandists were frustrated by their inability to make a real dent in workers' solidly pro-Northern views. A Confederate agent who had travelled to Britain from Alabama wrote back to his bosses: "The Lancashire operatives [are the only] class which as a class continues actively inimical to us... With them the unreasoning... aversion to our institutions is as firmly rooted as in any part of New England" (the most strongly anti-slavery part of the US).

As the former Chartist leader Ernest Jones, who played a crucial role on the other side, put it:

"Those base planters [the Southern slave-owners] did not know what English workingmen were made of... The people had said there was something higher than work, more precious than cotton, more glorious, indeed, than a satisfied stomach – it was right, and liberty, and doing justice, and bidding defiance to all wrong."

Britain had a long history of anti-slavery campaigning. Slavery had been clearly illegal inside Britain since 1772; after big campaigns, the British Empire abolished the slave trade in 1807 and slavery itself in the 1830s and 1840s. Under pressure from slave revolts and calculating how to gain advantage over its rivals, the British state worked to suppress the slave trade and sometimes slavery in other countries.

The US civil war, when the interests of British capital were threatened, was another matter. But large numbers of working- and middle-class people took anti-slavery ideas more seriously. There was an early 19th century tradition of specifically working-class campaigns. Many in Britain, and other European countries, admired the US as the most democratic society in existence.

From the time of the Trent affair, British workers began to organise mass meetings against military intervention and slavery. A resolution passed by the first one Marx reported on, in Marylebone in January 1862, declared:

"This meeting considers it the particular duty of the workers, since they are not represented in the senate

and the US civil war

of the nation, to declare their sympathy with the United States in its gigantic struggle for maintenance of the Union, to denounce the base dishonesty and advocacy of slaveholding indulged in by the Times and kindred aristocratic journals, to express themselves most emphatically in favour of the policy of strictest non-intervention in the affairs of the United States... to protest against the war policy of the stock-exchange sharks, and to manifest the warmest sympathy with the endeavours of the [American] Abolitionists to bring about a final solution of the question of slavery."

In the course of 1862, US war aims radicalised, and the North started to fight something more like what Marx called a "revolutionary war" instead of a "constitutional" one, freeing larger and larger numbers of slaves. British workers' mobilisation stepped up.

In the North

In the second half of 1862 a series of pro-Northern working-class rallies – something like a combination of public meetings and demonstrations, usually attended by thousands – swept across Lancashire and Yorkshire.

These meetings typically adopted anti-slavery and pro-US resolutions unanimously or by overwhelming majorities.

When pro-Confederate campaigners attempted to hold meetings, they were often taken over by hostile workers who passed anti-slavery resolutions. In July 1862, for instance, something like four thousand people attended an outdoor meeting in Blackburn called to demand British "mediation" of the war, a step towards recognising the Confederacy. Of those, all but twelve voted for an amendment from the secretary of the town's Weavers' Association turning the motion into an anti-slavery and pro-Lincoln one.

The climax of this wave was a meeting of six thousand people, overwhelmingly workers, with many cotton operatives, in Manchester's Free Trade Hall on 31 December 1862 – the day before Lincoln's "Emancipation Proclamation", legally freeing three million slaves in the Confederacy and authorising the recruitment of black soldiers, came into effect.

A black American named William Jackson, who had previously been a slave to Confederate President Jefferson Davis, was in the audience, and addressed the meeting to cheers after cries from the floor for him to speak.

Mass meetings/demonstrations took place across the country, from Brighton to Edinburgh – even in previously pro-Confederate Liverpool, built on the slave trade. Two took place in London on New Year's Eve 1862, at the same time as the first Manchester Free Trade Hall meeting.

Most important was the 26 March 1863 meeting in St James' Hall, Piccadilly, organised by London trade unionists.

This gathering, attended by about three thousand people, heavily made up of skilled workers, was addressed by a new generation of left-wing union leaders. Those

present passed an address to Lincoln which urged him to complete the task of destroying slavery, arguing that the American Civil War had

"...opened the gates of freedom to millions of our negro brothers who have been deprived of their manhood by the infernal laws which have so long disgraced the civilisation of America... like our brothers in Lancashire... we would rather perish than band ourselves in unholy alliance with the South and slavery."

This strongly anti-racist and internationalist stand taken by many British workers and trade unionists was widely recognised at the time. Abraham Lincoln himself said:

"I never knew anything truer than their conduct. They knew that to get cotton would be to them to get work and food. Their instinct would be to break through the blockade and get the cotton. But they could not allow their instinct to override their consciences."

St James' Hall was a triumph for a new layer of trade union leaders who had emerged in the fight to build the first large, stable unions of skilled workers in the 1850s, using relatively militant tactics in strikes and struggles in industries including engineering and construction. In London they cooperated closely, running the Trades Council which they had formed in 1860.

The influence of union leaders who had refused to support the US anti-slavery struggle was severely weakened. George Troup, who as editor of London Trades Council paper the *Bee-Hive* had published pro-Confederate propaganda, was forced out of office and the paper re-oriented.

The connections British labour activists built with activists in other countries in the course of this struggle resulted, in November 1864, in the creation of the International Working Men's Association and a growth of working-class organisation internationally.

For a while at least many of the same union activists, working with Marx in the International, also took a strong stand against Britain's oppression of Ireland. □

• More: bit.ly/workersvslavery. The story is told in more detail in the Workers' Liberty pamphlet *Workers against slavery: the US Civil War, the First International and the British working class*. See workersliberty.org/pamphlets

What we demand in the crisis

1. Requisition key sectors
2. Fight for workers' control
3. Make the labour movement an essential service, fighting on the issues listed here
4. Defend workers' rights. Work or full pay! Cancel rent, mortgage, and utility payments.
5. Take care of the worst-off
6. Defend civil liberties
7. International solidarity □

• See full text at bit.ly/what-d

• Animated video of full demands: bit.ly/demand-video

On the sacking of Rebecca Long-Bailey

By Ira Berkovic

A worldview which sees the hidden hand of Israel behind every social ill, and which radically inflates the power of the Israeli state, are key aspects of what Workers' Liberty and others have called "left antisemitism". The claim in the actor Maxine Peake's recent interview in the Independent ([bit.ly/maxineindy](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/article-maxine-peake-interview-2023-06-28)), that "the tactics used by the police in America, kneeling on George Floyd's neck, that was learnt from seminars with Israeli secret services", belongs to that worldview.

The claim itself is false. US police have attended conferences in Israel, and in other countries. There is no evidence to suggest the specific technique of kneeling on the neck, a restraint tactic seen in instances of police brutality all over the world, "was learnt from [...] Israeli secret services". To suggest that Israel is the source for some element of the USA's "systemic racism" is precisely to blame Israel for social ills, and to radically inflate its power. The reality, of course, is that the USA's systemic racism is very much homegrown.

For Labour MP Rebecca Long-Bailey to have promoted the interview with Peake without a critical comment on that claim suggests she either did not read it fully, or that she did not recognise that claim for what it was: an antisemitic canard.

Nevertheless, Labour leader Keir Starmer's sacking of Long-Bailey from her Shadow Cabinet role will encourage those who advocate administrative and disciplinary responses to the issue without open political debate and

education.

Moreover, the sacking cannot be viewed in abstraction from Starmer's political agenda: to accelerate Labour's rightwards lurch, and rid his Shadow Cabinet of the person most prominently associated with the "Corbyn project". Starmer has seized on an opportunity to further marginalise the left within the leadership of the party.

The internationalist, class-struggle left in Labour must rally both to resist Starmer's drive to the right, and to fight for a new political common-sense on Israel/Palestine that rejects conspiracy theories. □

• For explanation on why the initial claim was antisemitic, see this Twitter thread by SOAS academic Yair Wallach [bit.ly/yairwthread](https://twitter.com/yairwallach), and this related argument from US organisation Jewish Voice for Peace [bit.ly/jvpexplainer](https://www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org/2023/06/28/peake-corrects-claim/). Peake has since corrected her claim: [bit.ly/mp-correx](https://www.mps.org.uk/peake-corrects-claim/).

Labour reopening still stalled

Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs) are still instructed not to have decision-making meetings except on such matters as approving annual accounts. After the May meeting of Labour's National Executive (NEC), we passed on a report that the NEC had promised plans for reopening CLPs. That wasn't accurate: a recent [report](https://www.workersliberty.org/2023/06/28/report-from-the-clp-reps-on-the-nec-records-that-the-matter-was-raised-but-no-decision-made/) from the CLP reps on the NEC records that the matter was raised but no decision made. We still need to increase the pressure to wake up Labour! Sign the statement: [bit.ly/w-u-1](https://www.workersliberty.org/2023/06/28/sign-the-statement/) □

Labour: stay and fight. But for clear politics!

Momentum's National Coordinating Group election closed on 30 June, the day we go to press. We backed the candidates endorsing [Momentum Internationalists](https://www.workersliberty.org/2023/06/28/momentum-internationalists/).

On 28 June the Forward Momentum grouping organised a "Stay and Fight" rally. About 500 people attended over the course of the meeting, 360 at the height.

But the meeting lacked *politics*.

Talk about organising in communities, building trade unions and supporting campaigns is important, but here it smacked of platitudes.

John McDonnell spoke about the sacking of Rebecca Long-Bailey, but added little to this discussion. Some of the exchanges in the chat box reflected conspiratorial and reactionary politics on Israel.

Councillors talked about local work, but none of them really even mentioned fighting current or coming cuts, or the Tower Hamlets dispute.

Stay and fight – yes. But discuss what to fight for! □

Top Labour official suspended

Novara Media reports ([bit.ly/novarareport](https://www.novaramedia.com/news/2023/06/28/labour-officials-suspended/)) that half a dozen former senior Labour officials have been suspended in connection with the party's leaked report on antisemitism (and in fact a wide range of other issues).

This includes Emilie Oldknow, who was reported to be Keir Starmer's choice for new General Secretary of the party until the leaked report made that impossible.

A Labour NEC (National Executive) member told Novara:

"Almost three months since the leaked Labour Party report, which exposed racism, sexism, discrimination and bullying by senior officials in Southside, justice is finally being served."

Given Starmer's general contempt for the rights of Labour's membership, this is surprising as well as good news. It has not been widely reported. We should make it known as widely as possible to help ensure justice and party democracy are served. □

Unite the Union needs a new left

By Dale Street

With a resurgent right in the political wing of the labour movement, and a General Secretary election due to take place sooner rather than later in the giant union Unite, recent election results demonstrate the urgent need – and opportunity – for a regroupment of the genuine democratic left in the union.

The [results of the elections](#) which closed on 18 June for the Executive Council (EC) of Unite were not good for the United Left (UL), once the dominant “Broad Left” in the union.

In the 2017 EC elections there were contests in 28 of the constituencies (geographical, industrial, etc.) represented on the EC. But this year there were contests in just 16 of the constituencies. Overall, nearly half the seats on the EC were not contested.

Only in the Retired Members constituency (which did not exist in 2017) was there a decent turnout (33.6%) this year, with the UL candidate winning by over 3,000 votes.

That is an indication of the weakness of the UL. The age cohort in which it has traditionally been rooted and which previously delivered at least half-decent turnouts and electoral success has now moved on from the world of work into retirement.

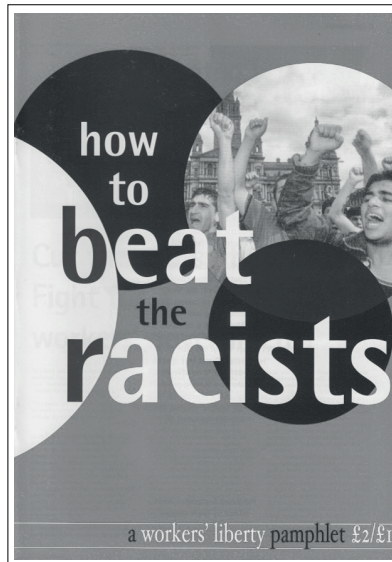
Turnout in this year’s EC elections was far lower than in the previous EC elections, held in 2017.

This year no other constituency reached even an 8% turnout. Just four had a turnout of more than 7%. Five constituencies had a turnout of between 6% and 7%, and six had a turnout of between 5% and 6%.

In 2017 turnout was not good, but it was higher than 9% in seven constituencies, and below 6% in just two.

The even lower than usual turnout could be partly explained by the fact that election campaigning was impossible (other than in cyberspace) because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

A number of left candidates argued – only to be ignored – that the elections should be postponed until campaigning was possible. The level of turnout vindicates their position.



The 2001 edition of this pamphlet, published after the far-right BNP more than tripled its votes in the election that year, aims to convince labour movement activists of the importance of fighting racism, anti-racists of the importance of the labour movement – and fighting to transform it. This message is as relevant as ever.

workersliberty.org/pamphlets

A number of UL slate candidates had only a surprisingly modest number of branch nominations, and in only two geographical constituencies did they secure election to the EC. In industrial constituencies they did particularly poorly in Local Authorities, Passenger Transport and Construction.

Even where UL candidates were elected, there was often a slump in their votes.

In Scotland, for example, two UL candidates saw their vote collapse by between 40% and 50% compared with the previous EC elections. In 2017 the two candidates had a fraction short of 5,000 votes each. But this time one picked up less than 3,000 votes, and the other not even 2,500 votes.

There is no sign of a new generation of activists replenishing the ranks of the UL. In the 2017 EC election voter turnout in the Youth constituency was just 2.9%. This year, the Youth constituency was not even contested.

Despite its poor performance in the elections, it appears that the UL still enjoys a small majority on the Executive Council, mainly because of the number of seats it occupies for constituencies which were not contested, but also because of its well-known practice of signing up as UL members non-UL candidates who defeat UL candidates in EC elections.

In any case, it appears that the UL is about to enter an informal “coalition” with the Unite Alliance grouping – not to better pursue any militant class-struggle policy, but simply to keep (nominal) majority control of the EC.

The EC election results saw wins for left candidates outside of the ranks of the UL. They also saw wins for candidates to the right of the UL, although the increasingly blurred profile of the UL and the decay of the old right, too, makes it increasingly difficult to define who is to the right of whom. □

Upcoming meetings

Workers’ Liberty have a packed schedule of varied, important and exciting meetings coming up. They are open to all, held via zoom videocalling.

From Wednesday 1 to Tuesday 15 July, excluding ongoing study courses:

Thursday 2 July, 6-7.30pm: First of a [new reading group](#), weekly to 23 July, on *History of the Russian Revolution to Brest-Litovsk*

Sunday 5 July, 6.30-8pm: [1906/1997: The Labour Party and the right to strike](#)

Sunday 12 July, 11am-12.30pm: [Winning in schools for all workers](#), with AWL school workers

Sunday 12 July, 6.30-8pm: [Next steps for the left?](#) A panel debate with speakers from Workers’ Liberty, Mutiny, and Red Flag

For full and updated details, zoom links, later meetings, and more, see workersliberty.org/c19-online □

Schools: recovery, not catch-up

By Patrick Murphy

According to the *Daily Mail* on 27 June, Education Secretary Gavin Williamson used a speech to Tory backbenchers to describe the largest and most vocal schools union, the National Education Union (NEU), as “the No Education Union”.

This follows attempts by Boris Johnson to blame the NEU for the low numbers of children returning to school after 1 June, the date announced as the start of wider re-opening. The government know there is huge frustration at the lengthy closure of schools and the lack of any clear idea as to when that might change. They understand the risk that, if parents blame them for this, the electoral damage could be catastrophic. It's hugely important that the blame is directed elsewhere and the obvious place is the education unions, most of all the NEU.

There are significant problems with this, however, and they are growing. The low number of children returning to eligible year groups since 1 June is a telling indication of the Tories' failure. It's not credible to blame the unions for this, and it won't be believed. The fact is that the government have not convinced parents that they have sufficient control of the virus for schools to be safe.

Children may be less likely to suffer Covid-19 symptoms but they return to the homes of family members who don't have that relative advantage. Enough parents and families don't want to take that risk. That's not because of the NEU having influence on them. It's because they don't trust the government.

The bigger problem is that, despite a series of ad hoc announcements and promises, the government have completely failed to deliver. Worse than that they have failed even to come up with any detailed plan for the re-opening of schools. This was true ahead of 1 June. It has been repeated when statements have been made about summer and September. They have u-turned on a plan to have all primary pupils in this term.

Johnson said on Wednesday 10 June that the government would be “doing a huge amount of catch up for pupils over the summer”. He gave no details and said there would be an announcement the following week.

On 19 June the government announced a £1bn fund to help England's children catch up on what they have missed while schools have been closed. The most disadvantaged pupils would have access to tutors through a £350m National Tutor Plan programme. But the statement made clear that this was intended “over the year from September”.

Primary and secondary schools will be given £650m to spend on one-to-one or group tuition for any pupils they think need it. That's £80 per pupil. This £650m will go direct to schools, it will not be weighted towards those with the most pupils in the greatest need. All schools will get exactly the same per-pupil funding.

The announcement did not include any specific push towards catch-up activities running through the sum-

mer break, except an expectation that the usual summer clubs would be running. Schools minister Nick Gibb told the BBC there was leeway for heads to set up summer schemes if they so wished.

In short, *there is no visible plan to have schools open or staff working over the summer*. Nor is there any alternative plan or resourcing for other workers, volunteers and supply teachers to be used to provide activities.

While this chaos reigns at government level, the only organisation to make any concrete proposals for provision for children and young people has, in fact, been the NEU. Earlier in June the union issued a ten-point “education recovery plan” which included:

- Free school meals must be provided over the summer holidays
- Local authorities must be funded to make a summer holiday offer to children and young people. They should coordinate the planning of summer holiday clubs, particularly in areas of deprivation, with places for those on Free School Meals fully funded by Government
- Public buildings, such as libraries and sports halls, civic centres and religious buildings, should be used to expand the space available to schools so that social distancing can be achieved
- Children and young people living in poverty and low-income households must be given the resources they need to learn at home, including access to books and creative resources, as well as technology
- A fully resourced national plan for children's wellbeing should be launched to support children who suffered trauma in the pandemic.

The irony of the insults thrown at the education unions is that the NEU is the only organisation to make any serious proposals for education and vulnerable children (the Labour front bench has made none, too), and the union has got this one right.

Talk of “catch-up” is not what is needed here. What all children will need, but especially the most disadvantaged, is recovery. □

- Patrick Murphy is a member of the National Education Union executive, writing here in a personal capacity.

((•)) Upcoming livestreams

Workers' Liberty have a schedule of videos going “live”. Please tune in to watch, take part in the conversation as they are streaming, invite others, organise watch parties on facebook! The videos (often subtitled) will “go live” at the times below on our [facebook](#), and (if not before) [instagram](#), [youtube](#), and generally [twitter](#). From Wednesday 1 to Tuesday 7 July:

Thursday 2 July, 1.30pm: “New Covid plans” – *Solidarity* editorial with Stephen Wood

Monday 6 July, 1.30pm: “The state and the current crisis” with Kate, intro from series on the state

Shame on Tower Hamlets NEU

By David Pendleton

The proposed Tower Rewards scheme (see page 16) will see Tower Hamlets council workers sacked on 6 July and re-employed on worse terms and conditions, specifically a significant reduction in severance pay and reduction in payments for out of hours working.

It will affect school workers. The council denies it will. It claims that each school will make its own decision. It is highly unlikely that schools will not follow the council's lead. It will also, almost certainly, immediately affect the centrally-employed school workers: peripatetic teachers

Support cleaners' fight for dignity and fair pay

By Mark Osborn

On 4-5 June 17 cleaners at Ark's Globe Academy, just south of the Elephant and Castle in Southwark, South London, walked out over unpaid and underpaid wages.

The workers are members of the small, radical, United Voices of the World (UVW) union.

Their employer, the cleaning company Ridgecrest, seems to have now addressed some of the issues of money owed. Nevertheless some of these badly paid workers had faced the threat of eviction for non-payment of rent as a result of not being paid properly and on time.

The workers are now fighting for the London Living Wage, which would represent a significant wage hike. Ridgecrest wants the workers to break with UVW and has even offered to provide adequate PPE if they do so!

UVW is taking the company to an Employment Tribunal on the grounds of union-busting.

The union is also taking court action against the company on the grounds of indirect race discrimination. All the cleaners are from BAME communities and some are migrants. This court case is being conducted together with similar groups of workers at the Ministry of Justice and Royal Parks.

The workers also intend to ballot for industrial action to win the London Living Wage, occupational sick pay, union recognition and a Health and Safety committee.

Despite the fact that there are a lot of National Education Union (NEU) members in the Academy, there is no NEU rep at the school.

The Covid emergency has underlined what an important role cleaners play in schools and other workplaces. This dispute underlines the need for all contracted out workers to be brought in-house, with union recognition, job security and union-negotiated rates of pay. □

and specialist support services.

The NEU has around 35 members who are centrally employed. The slashing of severance pay could be a precursor to restructuring and large-scale redundancies.

When Tower Rewards was originally announced at the beginning of the year, Unison, NEU and GMB, quite rightly balloted their members for industrial action. Unison and NEU got positive results which beat the anti-union laws thresholds. That indicated the willingness of members to fight against this assault on their terms and conditions.

Both unions were preparing to strike when the Covid crisis struck. The unions then suspended the action, and, after some hesitation, the council postponed the implementation of the scheme to "the summer".

Now the council has re-started the process and Unison has declared strikes on 3, 6, and 7 July. Shamefully, the leadership of Tower Hamlets NEU have demobilised their membership.

Despite knowing of Unison's intention to strike they didn't inform their reps and members until late in the day, and then demanded that they make a snap decision on whether they could win strike action in their schools. As they posed this question to their reps, they emphasised all the obstacles in the way of successful action. Unsurprisingly, they largely got the response they wanted, with only two schools suggesting they could win action.

The leadership of Tower Hamlets NEU also suggested that the centrally-employed school workers might strike. Understandably, those workers were willing to strike alongside all NEU members in Tower Hamlets but not to go it alone.

The approach of the leadership of Tower Hamlets NEU is a disgrace. They have undermined the fighting instincts of their members and almost certainly lost them significant terms and conditions. They have also left Unison to fight alone. □

Ukrainian trade unions under the guillotine

Trade unions in Ukraine are facing a severe legislative attack, and need solidarity. More on the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign website: bit.ly/ukrainsolidarity □

The Black Jacobins

Workers' Liberty online meeting. Our speaker will discuss *The Black Jacobins*, a classic history of slave rebellion, by black socialist CLR James.

Join us for a discussion of the history the book covers, of CLR James, and of the context for the book in radical politics in the Caribbean of the 1930s.

Sunday July 26, 6.30-8pm. More info, register, and zoom link at: bit.ly/clr-j

Tube unions plan funding campaign

By Ollie Moore

Unions organising across Transport for London and London Underground will hold a joint online rally on 15 July, to launch a campaign for increased funding for TfL and against cuts. At the time of going to press, RMT, Aslef, and Unite were backing the rally, with TSSA also expected to come on board. Exact details, including the time, had yet to be confirmed.

Since the Tories abolished the central government subsidy to TfL, it has been almost wholly reliant on funding from fares and commercial revenue streams, meaning it was plunged into a profound financial crisis when passenger levels dropped by over 90% during the pandemic. A government bailout to see TfL through to October was accompanied by significant strings, including agreeing to a full audit of all TfL finances, and having government officials sit on the TfL board.

The government had now appointed KPMG to conduct that audit, which will almost inevitably recommend swingeing cuts to TfL's already diminished budget. A political and industrial campaign to resist those attacks, and to propose alternative workers' and passengers' plans for the future funding and governance of public transport in London, is vital.

Passenger levels on the Tube hit 15% of the same time last year in the week commencing 22 June, slightly over the 13% level at which TfL calculated it can comfortably

maintain 2m distancing amongst passengers. RMT is promoting a charter of workplace demands to ensure additional safety measures implemented to protect staff during the pandemic are retained and extended.

Meanwhile, RMT is balloting its members on the Heathrow Express service, which shuttles passengers between the airport and Paddington station in central London, over a plan to cut more than 100 jobs in the Mobile Sales Advisor and Customer Concierge grades.

Heathrow Express plans to manage the cuts via a reorganisation, which will involve some workers taking a cut in hours. A union statement said: "RMT is appalled that under the cover of the Covid-19 crisis, which has seen Heathrow Express workers furloughed, management have chosen to put a gun to our members' heads demanding they accept a total reorganisation, including moving half the workforce on to part-time contracts, or face unemployment." □

Belly Mujinga

The TSSA transport union is supporting a petition calling for justice for Belly Mujinga, the transport worker who died of coronavirus after being spat at on the concourse of Victoria Station: bit.ly/belly-p □

“What we stand for

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty fights for socialist revolution, for the labour movement to militantly assert working-class interests.

See workersliberty.org/about – if you agree, join us! □

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Oppose the Immigration Bill!

As we go to press, the Tories are ramming their Immigration Bill through both its "Report" and "Third Reading" session in Parliament on 30 June.

The Bill will go to the House of Lords, and then come back to Parliament. The Tories want to rush it because they want to rush Brexit – despite the pandemic meaning that the Brexit negotiations are like trying to draft a big legal document while riding a bike along a potholed road during an earthquake.

As it stands, the Bill is essentially a blank cheque to the Tories to write whatever immigration rules they want to replace EU free movement.

MPs have submitted dozens of amendments to the Bill, only some of which may be called for debate. An amendment limiting the length of time asylum-seekers can be held in detention centres, and another on EU "settled status", look to have the best chances.

Hundreds of people have used the campaign tool developed by the Labour Campaign for Free Movement (LCFM) to write to Keir Starmer calling for them to counterpose Labour's conference policy as the clear alternative to the Bill.

LCFM particularly promoted amendments curtailing indefinite detention and ensuring that Brexit doesn't stop child refugees stranded in Europe from joining their families here.

Amendments or not, LCFM will be continuing the battle to bring down borders and win free movement, and to press Labour to keep its commitments. □

• Background info: bit.ly/jcwi-b. LCFM proposals to Labour NPF: bit.ly/lcfm-npf1 and bit.ly/lcfm-npf2

Unsafe, unworkable, unacceptable



John Moloney

The Secretary of the State for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has announced that she wants job centres to open from 4 July, with mass opening to the public on Monday 6 July.

This is unsafe, and unworkable – there is no means to safely distance in an interview with a claimant in a small job centre, and no mitigations and additional safety measures have been installed, such as perspex screens or additional hand sanitising facilities.

The government also plans to introduce stricter conditionality on claims, meaning claimants will face more stringent checks on how much job searching they're doing and face being sanctioned or having their benefits withdrawn entirely if they fail to meet the benchmark.

Millions more people are now jobless and will be claiming benefits, so the government is effectively asking millions of people to report to usually quite small and compact job centres at the same time, which is clearly dangerous from an infection control perspective. It also means there'll be many new claimants who won't know how bureaucratic, petty, and draconian the system is for people trying to claim benefits. The system is set up to punish people for failing to have found a job, rather than to support them in finding one. This could lead to a lot of irate claimants, who may then take that anger out on our members.

£3,837 towards £10,000

Donations from John and Adrian bring our total up to £3,837, towards our target of £10,000 by 22 November. That £180 this last week has helped to cover the cost of some of the equipment which our office staff have needed to do their work at home while the lockdown prevented anyone from working in our office (the whole industrial estate where we're located was shut down). Thanks!

We expect to see some uptick in activity over the coming weeks. Most years July is a time when labour movement activity turns down. But many workers will be less focused on summer holidays and more on the huge coming job cuts, on the risks of a virus "second wave" from the Tories' floundering, and on following up on the challenge of Black Lives Matter. We want to maximise the potential for our ideas, and publications to reach new people.

Keep making your transfers, or donations by PayPal, or send cheques to our office address. □

• workersliberty.org/donate

The union has made its opposition to all of this clear. If the government refuse to back down, we'll have to advise members that we think they are in serious and imminent danger. We'll be reminding members of their rights to refuse unsafe work, including under Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act.

An online reps' meeting planned for Monday 29 June assessed the situation and discussed practical strategies for organising to resist unsafe work.

The situation is very fast moving, but depending on how things develop we could move to a situation where reps organised safely-distanced meetings in car parks prior to work beginning to discuss how best to use those legal rights.

Government also wants driving instructors to return from 6 July, which is another sector where distancing is impossible. In both these cases, the announcements were political, made unilaterally by ministers to give the impression of the economy opening back up, rather than coming from the civil service as an employer as such. As far as we can tell, senior civil services bosses weren't consulted, and there was no discussion within the collective bargaining machinery of the civil service.

We were also informed recently that the sector-wide agreement that outsourced workers will receive full occupational sick pay for periods of sickness and self-isolation will be withdrawn, with the decision on whether to pay full sick pay being devolved to individual departments.

This is clearly unacceptable, and shows the urgent need for the union's recently launched "Dying for Sick Pay" campaign, which fights to win full occupational sick pay as standard for all outsourced workers across the civil service. □

• John Moloney is assistant general secretary of PCS, writing here in a personal capacity.



History of the Russian Revolution to Brest-Litovsk

Four part [reading group](#) to discuss and debate the issues around 'The History of Russian Revolution to Brest-Livotsky', by Leon Trotsky. [Weekly from Thursday 2 July](#), 6pm.

• See workersliberty.org/c19-online □

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Solidarity



For a workers' government

SUPPORT THE TOWER HAMLETS STRIKERS

By Sacha Ismail

On 6 July Tower Hamlets Labour council intends to implement a plan, "Tower Rewards", to sack its entire 4,000-strong workforce – carers, caretakers, children's centre workers, housing and homelessness workers, refuse workers, cleaners, social workers, teaching assistants and many, many others – and re-employ only those who will accept substantially worse terms and conditions.

Key elements include reducing severance pay on redundancy; a longer working week; ending automatic incremental pay progression; cutting shift, premium and overtime payments; and abolishing the flexi scheme.

So much for valuing and supporting frontline and other key workers in the context of the Covid-19 crisis. So much for valuing the lives of BME people in the light of the Black Lives Matter protests (this is a heavily BME workforce).

The council leadership planned to impose the new contracts in early April. Unions won big majorities for strike action; then, as the lockdown started, the unions suspended the strikes, and, eventually, the council postponed the imposition. Now, still in the midst of the Covid-19 emergency, they are back on it.

Tower Hamlets workers who are members of Unison will strike on 3, 6 and 7 July, with some safe, covid-distanced real-world picket lines, plus virtual pickets and a virtual rally.

Earlier on the GMB and NEU were also due to strike. The council tried to stop the NEU calling its strike ballot, using the Tory anti-union laws, but eventually backed down. Since then those other two unions have withdrawn from the action (on the NEU, see inside, page 13).

Only six councillors have broken ranks and even mildly criticised this assault on the borough's working class. Local left activists say one of Tower Hamlets' MPs, Apsana Begum, has been supportive of the workers; the other, Rushanara Ali, much less clearly so.

Local Labour Party activists have been very supportive, but have had to negotiate numerous obstacles from the local party hierarchy. Members in Bethnal Green and Bow eventually succeeded in passing policy to oppose

Tower Rewards and support the workers, but are having to fight to get action on that from their officers. Members in Poplar and Limehouse have not yet been able to get past the various obstacles and pass policy.

Tower Hamlets mayor John Biggs has repeatedly argued that this was a "non-political" decision taken by senior council staff. The idea does seem to have come from council Chief Executive Will Tuckley, a high-paid transfer from Tory Bexley, but that doesn't make it "non-political".

The Labour leadership under Corbyn and McDonnell said nothing about the council's outrageous moves. Naturally, neither have Starmer and Rayner.

Despite all this, local Labour members are organising with other left-wingers and labour movement activists to support the strike. They need the strongest possible outside support. Do what you can to help them win.

This also raises two wider questions in the Labour Party:

The shutting down of party democracy makes it even easier for Labour councillors and others in positions of power to evade accountability to members and affiliates. We need to end the lockdown on democracy and win the right for local parties to start meeting formally, discussing meaningfully and taking decisions.

And where is the campaign to reverse council cuts by winning more funding from the government – or even to stop the new round of drastic cuts that is coming? Why have Labour councils put so much energy into provoking conflicts with their communities and workers, and so little into building campaigning alongside them to reverse cuts and win decent funding? □

- For more see facebook.com/TowerHamletsUnison. For the virtual picket bit.ly/THvirtualpicket
- Please add your name to this statement "Don't sack council workers" – already signed by 500 labour movement activists and others in a few days bit.ly/THstatement1
- Send solidarity messages to Tower Hamlets Unison via mario.kyriacou@towerhamlets.gov.uk
- More on campaigning against council cuts at fightcouncilcuts.carrd.co