

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty

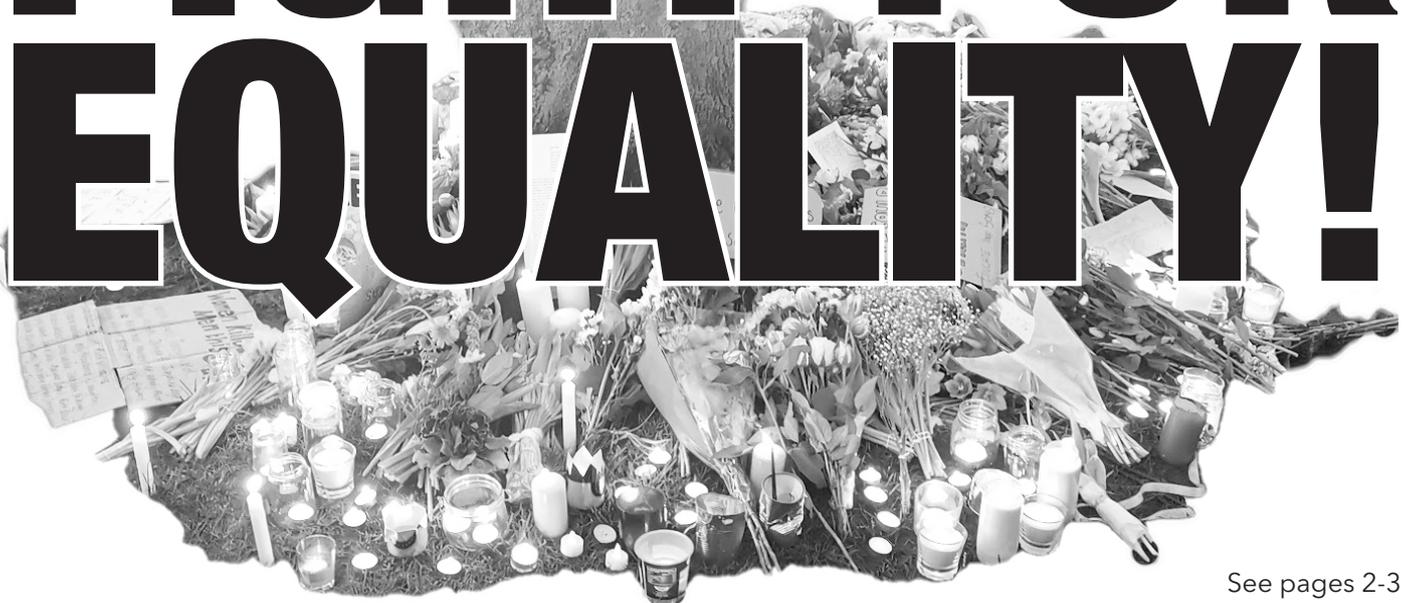


For social ownership of the banks and industry

END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN!



FIGHT FOR EQUALITY!



See pages 2-3

Pay NHS workers 15%

See page 5

Why we went to Clapham Common



Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

On 3 March Sarah Everard went missing from the streets near my house. The route that should have taken her safely home intersects with my walk to work, and passes the homes of my friends. Police knocked on doors in the area looking for more information and advising women to stay at home, or only go out accompanied.

The call sparked an immediate reaction, with women complaining it amounted to de facto curfew and chaperone restrictions on women. At the same time, there was an outpouring of experiences, first locally and then nationally, of indecent exposure, harassment, and assault. These stories were of walks home, of public transport, but also of parties, workplaces, and home life. The psychic burden of lifetimes of sexist intrusions, and how we alter our behaviour to avoid or accommodate to them safely, unloaded publicly.

Our parks, streets and estates still display Sarah's photograph, on missing posters put up by the local community, though Sarah's remains have been found and Metropolitan Police officer Wayne Couzens has been arrested for her kidnap and murder. Local women organised a vigil for 14 March at Clapham Common for Sarah Everard under the banner Reclaim These Streets.

Organisers said that they had been forced to cancel after threats of large fines. By that point, it was inevitable that many thousands would turn up at Clapham Common.

As it got dark, at around 6.30pm, police trampled the flowers placed at the bandstand, in order to "take control" of the bandstand and attempt to move or arrest speakers. The crowd surrounded them, chanting "shame on you", "let her speak", "arrest your own". Whilst the crowd was large, there was little the police could do.

Later, as it got darker and colder and the crowd dissipated, police had both motive and opportunity to shut down the uppity women who'd been chanting at them. They formed a chain and moved in on the crowd, forcing people closer to one another, dragging women away from their friends, bundling them to the ground.

Violent policing certainly isn't rare in Lambeth. Young black men are routinely harassed. That night highlighted it to a new audience.

Sarah Everard was not the first woman to be killed by a police officer in the pandemic. Timothy Brehmer, a Dorset police officer, admitted to strangling his lover but was acquitted of murder and sentenced for manslaughter. Two officers were suspended amid allegations they took selfies next to the bodies of two murdered women, Nicole Smallman and Bibaa Henry, who were stabbed to death at a park in Wembley earlier this month.

Their mother, who said her daughters had been "dehumanised" by the officers, also reported no help from the



police in finding the women because of their race and class: "I knew instantly why they didn't care. They didn't care because they looked at my daughter's address and thought they knew who she was... A black woman who lives on a council estate."

In his astonishingly ill-judged initial response, Keir Starmer called for "more police officers on the beat" as well as "a criminal justice system that works well". Even under Corbyn, Labour could not get beyond "more bobbies on the beat" as the answer to crime.

Figures obtained under the Freedom of Information Act show that 1,491 complaints were filed against police officers, special constables and police community support officers (PCSOs) across 33 forces in England and Wales between 2012 and 2017-8. Of these cases, 371 were upheld, resulting in the sacking or resignation of 197 officers, special constables and PCSOs. Ten police forces did not provide data.

In 2019 the Centre for Women's Justice complained of a "boys' club" culture within certain police forces that allowed officers to abuse their spouses and partners without fear of arrest or prosecution. "Police officers and staff across the UK were reported for alleged domestic abuse almost 700 times in the three years up to April 2018". Just 3.9% of those police officers reported were convicted, compared with 6.2% among the general population. "Less than a quarter of reports resulted in any sort of professional discipline". That is the context surrounding the failure of police to investigate multiple incidents of indecent exposure by Sarah Everard's killer.

There have been calls for Cressida Dick to resign. Yes, everyone responsible for the violence at the protest should be sacked. But what happened in Clapham was not one bad night, or a unique failure of leadership.

The police are not a neutral body, existing to protect the interests and welfare of "the public". They are a force sanctioned to use violence in the service of the state, and the class that rules that state. It is their interests they exist to defend. They perpetuate the structures of power, domination, and violence which our society is built on.

The existence throughout the police force of corruption and bigotry of all kinds is no accident. □

End violence against women! Fight for equality!



Women's Fightback

From Women's Fightback

In the UK one woman in four experiences domestic violence at some point in their life, and one in four experiences rape or attempted rape.

Yet in the face of this, refuges, rape crisis centres, counselling and advocacy services, which were already stretched, are being cut further. Other attacks, such as on housing benefit, will make it harder for women to leave violent relationships as they are priced out of housing.

Stigma around the issue of violence against women means that much of it goes unrecognised. Reactionary, victim-blaming attitudes are still widespread, including in the very statutory services that are meant to help.

There is also widespread misunderstanding about the nature and causes of violence against women.

An oft-cited statistic is that domestic violence increases in times of recession – but economic deprivation doesn't turn men into abusers.

Violence against women isn't caused by stress and it isn't a problem of anger management.

It is a pattern of controlling behaviour and assertion of power that usually starts a long time before the first physical blow is landed.

Domestic violence reporting can go up in times of hardship, and, for sure, domestic violence is created by the society in which we live, but the dynamic is complex.

On the other side of the coin is the explanation that violence is something intrinsic to the male identity – men are the problem and patriarchal society is the root of violence.

There are fundamental problems with that thinking.

Even the slogan "reclaim the night" has problems when it suggests that the danger of violence women face is mainly from strangers when they venture out at night. Statistically, they are in more danger if they stay at home.

The vast majority of rape and abuse is committed by someone a woman knows, usually by a family member or someone she is or has been in an intimate relationship with. And much of the harassment, at one level or another, which women face on the streets, is rooted in the unequal household relations today's society perpetuates.

A large percentage of women say that they feel unsafe when walking the streets at night, but violence in the home remains an often shameful secret. Single young men are much more likely to face violence on the street than women.

For some feminists patriarchy is the defining feature of our society; a way of organising society that entrenches male privilege and involves deliberate actions by men to

maintain women's oppression.

In fact, the history of human society is not based on the oppression of all women by all men. Although the sexual division of labour emerged very early on in human development, it did so as a result of the struggle to control wealth and the division of society into varying forms of class.

Class society under capitalism is a brutal system which warps gender identities, both male and female. Powerlessness, alienation, and a world steeped in violence shapes minds, while sexist representations of women, entrenched sexual divisions beneficial to capitalism, and the structuring of society around a private domestic sphere, create the perfect seed bed for violence against women to grow.

Economic deprivation doesn't create abuse, but class society creates abusers.

This is by no means a full explanation.

But unless we place campaigning in the context of a wider critique of class society, and unless we link campaigning to the broader political struggle of women and men to change the world, then we will not build a movement capable of really challenging the violence which continues to destroy lives. □

• Adapted from *Women's Fightback* bit.ly/vs-w. More at bit.ly/wf-18



Upcoming meetings

Workers' Liberty meetings are open to all, held online over zoom.

Saturday 20 March, 8pm: Lockdown quiz – NW AWL

Monday 22 March, 6-7pm: Workers' Liberty students and HE workers – Free speech on campus!

Sunday 28 March, 6.30-8pm: Shapurji Sakatvala – a socialist rebel in Parliament

Sunday 11 April, 6.30-8.30pm: Understanding Stalinism – Workers' Liberty debates Red Flag

Sunday 2 May, 6.30-8.30pm: The Poplar Rates Rebellion of 1921

Sunday 16 May, 6.30-8.30pm: Socialists on the Israel Palestine conflict – Workers' Liberty debates Red Flag

Plus

Every Monday, 6-7pm: AWL Students' discussions

Wednesday 17 March, 7-8.30pm: *The Retreat from Class* by Ellen Wood, study group

Thursdays, 8-9pm: Marx's "Grundrisse", study group

Our calendars of events: browse or subscribe! □

All online

For full and updated details, zoom links, more meetings and resources, visit workersliberty.org/events

Morning Star applauds UK vaccine nationalism



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

In the run-up to the EU referendum and throughout the Brexit negotiations that followed, the *Morning Star* vied with the *Telegraph* and the *Mail* to be Britain's most anti-EU newspaper. Not only did it use many of the same arguments as the right wing press (most shamefully, calling for greater curbs on immigration), it also used the same rhetoric: "Brussels bureaucrats" (of course), and denouncing pro-EU forces as "a 'fifth column' in British political, media and business circles", who would run up the "white flag" in negotiations with the EU (these are all genuine quotes).

Happily, this rank xenophobia did not go down well in the labour movement: the *Morning Star* "line" on the EU (sometimes known as "Lexit") was decisively defeated in the Labour Party and in most trade unions – including Unite, despite what you might think from Len McCluskey's public comments.

Having (in its very small way) helped Johnson achieve a hard Brexit, the *Morning Star* has since eased off its denunciations of "Brussels bureaucrats", etc. But like the rest of the Little-England press, it couldn't resist gloating over the EU's vaccine failure, and the brief, ill-advised threat to invoke Article 16 to restrict vaccines crossing the Irish border.

Nick Wright of the Communist Party of Britain and a regular *Morning Star* contributor, was first off the mark in an article (4 Feb) on Ireland: "The EU negotiators shamelessly flaunted the Irish tricolour ... But at the first moment when its incompetence in securing adequate supplies of Covid-19 was exposed it reimposed the border as a sanction on a British government which, for all its manifest failings, took advantage of the sovereign powers it regained with Brexit to lay in an early stock of vaccines."

Wright was either ignorant or lying: the EU did not "reimpose the border": it threatened to do so for three hours before withdrawing the threat and apologising. And the British government did not take "advantage of the sovereign powers it regained": Britain was still bound by EU rules when the vaccine programme began and those rules allowed countries to authorise vaccines without waiting for EU approval if they so wished. More to the point, Wright's celebration of "sovereign powers" in this context amounts to an attack not just on the EU but upon the entire notion of international cooperation.

On case anyone thinks Wright's comments were an aberration from one particularly xenophobic Stalinist, here are some comments from *Morning Star* editorials:

• "EU Commission president Ursula von der Leyen will take much of the blame for the continent-wide cock-up over Covid vaccine procurement ...the structural flaws in the EU's architecture are most at fault." (15 February)

• "Our ruling class showed some sense of realpolitik when, enabled by the wriggle room provided by our exit from the EU, it laid in a sufficient stock of vaccine." (11 March).

The truth is, of course, that the EU's slow and bureaucratic procurement and roll-out of vaccines was not the inevitable result of European cooperation, but the result of avoidable errors by von der Leyen and Macron (pandering to anti-vax sentiment), wrong priorities in negotiations with pharmaceutical companies (over-emphasising low prices), and the fact that within the EU public health has always been primarily a national competence, so EU institutions have little expertise in this field.

In fact some of the failures of the EU could be blamed on its lack of federal structures and integration, especially with regard to health powers.

But the attempt to avoid a free-for-all in which poorer European countries were pushed to the back while richer countries hoarded vaccines (as happened over PPE) was correct.

Strangely, the *Morning Star* understands the need to oppose "vaccine nationalism" when it comes, for instance, to Israel's failure to properly supply the Palestinians. The paper has supported initiatives like Amnesty International's "A Fair Shot" campaign, and the People's Vaccine Alliance, opposing vaccine profiteering by the big corporations and hoarding by rich countries.

But when the EU – albeit bureaucratically and weakly – attempts to oppose vaccine nationalism, the *Morning Star* can only sneer – and worse, offer adulation to the Johnson government's supposed ability to take "advantage of the sovereign powers it regained" due to Brexit. □

WOMEN'S Fightback is a socialist feminist publication by Workers' Liberty. Order issue 25, Spring 2021, with a six issue subscription to *Solidarity*, plus our Saklatvala pamphlet for £5 (incl. post), or individually for £1 (plus post). □ workersliberty.org/publications



Pay NHS workers 15%!

“” Editorial

The government's recommendation of a measly 1% pay rise for NHS workers has been widely seen as a kick in the teeth. Protests across the country were sparked following the announcement, reigniting the activists who organised sizeable street protests last July-September.

Nurses United (a group inside RCN) and others in Healthworkers Say No to Pay Inequality have for months spearheaded campaigning for a 15% pay rise (with a £3,000 minimum). The GMB and Unite are following this demand. The RCN calls for 12.5%. Unison has a £2,000 flat rate demand, which looks like it's copied from the flat-rate pay rise the French government conceded to health workers after strikes and demonstrations there.

Street protests must continue. With the government now on the defensive about the right to protest, activists can hope to push back against and block police action like the move to disperse a health workers' protest and fine an organiser £10,000 in Manchester on 7 March. The protests need to challenge the myth of a trade-off between the public and private sector that is pushed by the Tories.

Within the unions we need to make the case for industrial action clearly and lay the ground for ballots as soon as possible. In every workplace strikes are an essential tool in demanding improvements. Health workers will always be concerned for the welfare of patients. But history has demonstrated that organising emergency cover need not prevent effective strikes. We should also start advocating for solidarity action from other sectors.

All the health unions have condemned the 1% announcement. The RCN [Royal College of Nursing] announced the opening of a strike fund of £35 million. The other unions, Unison, Unite, and GMB, are making initial preparations for industrial ballots.

The Labour leadership followed suit. They have accusing the Tories of renegeing on their previous promise of

2.1% but remained quiet on what figure the Labour leaders themselves would support.

The 1% figure is the government proposal to the official Pay Review Body for the year from April 2021. The PRB will recommend in May. After the PRB recommendation, the government is due to decide on pay "awarded".

In the 2020 Spending Review the government excluded health workers from the general public sector pay freeze, and said that they would honour the PRB process. The 2.1% figure was included in the ten-year NHS plan and was in theory the overall pay figure allowed for across the NHS budget. There is a danger that the 1% figure has been given high profile, and that if the government accepts a slightly higher (but still very low) PRB recommendation come May, that will look like a "victory". Activists will push the trade unions and Labour to go for a settlement which at least begins to make up for previous years of real wages being eroded by inflation. In 2019 the GMB union [estimated](#) that the average NHS worker had lost 13% on real wages (relative to RPI) between 2010 and 2018, and some large groups 19%.

Unions should ballot now and can protest against the delayed PRB process to do this. Even if the process does not move forward until the PRB reports, we should be ready to ballot immediately at that point.

The anti-union laws create a significant hurdle for the health unions. The Trade Union Act 2016 makes a majority for action invalid in essential services unless it is at least 40% of those entitled to vote, and getting sufficient turnout in postal ballots is difficult for a large workforce dispersed over many sites and sectors. The unions should work together and consider the best way to overcome this. For example, having "disaggregated" ballots should be considered.

We need to ensure that bureaucratic division and competition between unions and differing pay claims is not allowed to stand in the way of effective action. Immediately cross-union rank-and-file committees should be established to boost the cross-union unity that the street protests last July-September had. □

Lessons from Texas



Environment

By Zack Muddle

As a blizzard of snowstorms tore across Texas in February 2021, many faced energy bills of sixteen thousand dollars for only a few days. And they were the lucky ones. Countless others found themselves without power, having to burn whatever they could to keep warm, having to boil water to sterilise it.

While Hell, Michigan was literally freezing over, an earthly hell was created in Texan prisons. Power was lost, toilets overflowed, food and medicine shortages added to the fear prisoners experienced of falling asleep, lest they didn't awake, ice-cold air flowing through broken windows into their unheated cells.

A household burned to death as they lost control of attempts to keep out the harsh winter chill. A child froze to death. The death toll is at least several dozen, likely higher. Unsafe attempts at heating have even caused a spate of carbon monoxide poisoning.

Some facing skyrocketing energy prices were told to switch to other energy companies – which wasn't possible – or to turn off their power and go to hotels. An unusually honest gas company CFO meanwhile recognised that "this week is like hitting the jackpot with some of these incredible prices." The traumatic life-or-death struggle of millions meant Comstock Resources Inc. "were able to sell at super premium prices for a material amount of production."

Jaw-dropping lies from the Republican Texan governor sought to deflect from both climate change and the failures of their energy system. Right-wingers blamed "frozen windturbines" and even a not-yet-existent "Green New Deal" for the problem, falsely asserting that the disaster "just shows that fossil fuel is necessary."

In reality, fossil-fuels lost nearly twice as much power as renewables, and renewables contribute just 13% to power while fossils fuel the majority. This fight isn't new: Texas Gas Service undermined 2020 environmental plans in the Texan capital, revising "electrification" to merely "decarbonisation", and allowing gas to maintain a role.

Texas's energy system isn't just broken for the global climate, it's broken as an energy system. Privatisation and deregulation in a natural monopoly result – much like the US health service – in people paying more money for worse provision of a necessity of life. Despite repeated warnings, power plants – fossil, renewable, nuclear – were not adequately prepared for winter. And what incentive is there for them to be?

Texan energy generating companies must undercut other competitors to sell power to ERCOT, their equivalent of the national grid market operator. Forward plan-

ning costs, so in the Texas system it is unaffordable. Even more so if failures for millions of customers will be "jackpots" for some companies' bosses.

Through the other side of the energy grid – itself in want of technical improvements – the utilities companies that bill, connect, and disconnect people's homes use predatory contracts which allow daylight robbery when a crisis hits.

These problems were backed up by a "nationalist" ideological commitment to energy independence, not just of the USA from the rest of the world, but also of Texas from the rest of the USA. Texas remained unconnected to the federal-wide national grids.

"Texans would be without electricity for longer than three days to keep the federal government out of their business," Gov. Perry, governor of Texas 2000-2015, and US secretary of energy under Trump, asserted. Easy to say for someone who took over \$800,000 of state money for a mansion, and who has millions of dollars to his name.

"Energy security" is important, as these disasters have shown. But its counterfeit, nationalist, profit-driven imitation cuts in the opposite direction. Local generation of electricity may provide a safeguard if energy transport into the area fails; but wider – national and international – connections allow support from elsewhere when local energy falls falters.

Unequal impacts

A mere moratorium on energy companies disconnecting customers can be no more than a temporary sticking-plaster to these problems. Energy should be integrated under democratic public control – centrally and locally – and upgraded, electrified, weather-proofed and transitioned to green power supplies.

Other public infrastructure in Texas had been degraded likewise, through privatisation and deregulation.

The storms themselves were driven by climate change; more and more extreme weather events will come as climate change progresses.

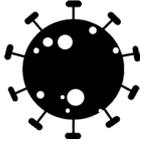
Crises like the one which has ravaged Texas drive home the unequal impacts of climate crises. Climate-science-denying Republican senator Ted Cruz flew from Texas to Mexico, running away from the truth at hundreds of miles an hour. Private firefighters are hired by the rich in California to protect their homes from forest fires.

Yet the real victims of the Texan power outage include working-class people who were forced out of New Orleans following hurricane Katrina 15 years ago, pursued by climate change into their hoped safe refuge.

Undocumented Texans, migrant workers, are hit particularly hard by being cut off from state aid.

How climate change pans out is mediated through the class war. Our class must fight to halt climate change, while simultaneously fighting for adaptations which protect our class from its most devastating impacts. □

Virus test workers denied isolation pay



Covid-19

In response to an enquiry from Emily Thornberry MP, G4S have confirmed that many of their staff operating virus Test Centres are employed on zero hours contracts and have no rights to company sick pay. If these staff have to isolate, then at best they would be paid £95.85 a week Statutory Sick Pay.

Stuart Jordan from the Safe and Equal Campaign explains: "Many Test Centre workers are employed on super-spreader contracts without occupational sick pay or job security. If they have suspected infection they are in an impossible situation: either isolate and face severe financial hardship or go to work and perhaps infect others.

"In effect, NHS T&T is a system for concentrating together all the people in the country with suspected coronavirus infection and getting them to file past an army of workers who cannot afford to follow isolation rules. By using outsourcing firms that employ their workers on these super-spreader contracts, the government have created potential Corona hotspots at every Test site. This £37 billion disaster may actually be a net contributor to the spread of this virus."

Paul Edwards, G4S HR Director for the UK and Middle East, replied to an inquiry by Emily Thornberry: "Due to the unpredictable and, so far, short term requirements of these contracts, most of the staff operating at the Covid-19 testing sites are agency workers provided to G4S, supplied and employed through a number of temporary employment agencies.

"For the remaining staff (namely management and security staff), these individuals are engaged on fixed term contracts or casual worker agreements (flexible hours contracts where staff choose which hours/shifts they work).

"In the circumstance of employees of G4S needing to self-isolate for reasons of exposure to Covid-19, in line

with Government guidance, these staff would receive company sick pay or statutory sick pay. This depends on arrangements in their employment contracts".

The good news so far from vaccinations does not guarantee safety. Measured Covid infection rates across the world, and across Europe and South America, have been rising steadily since mid-February, and daily world death rates are running higher than the April 2020 peak. We demand that governments requisition Big Pharma's patents to enable rapid vaccine roll-out across the world. Safe and Equal is campaigning for full isolation pay for all and to bring social care into the public sector. □

• More at safeandequal.org

Life-saving branded a crime

By Wilson Gibbons

Dozens of activists from NGOs including Save the Children (STC) and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) are facing up to 20 years in prison on "human trafficking" offences after they saved thousands in the Mediterranean.

Italian prosecutors claim that rescue ships arranged direct transfer of refugees from smugglers before returning the boats for further use.

"Saving lives is never a crime..." Francesca Cancellaro, lawyer for the crew of the *Iuventa* (a former fishing vessel, operated by a German NGO), told the *Guardian*. "While the EU turned away from the Mediterranean, transforming it into a mass grave for Europe's undesirables, the crew of the *Iuventa* headed to sea as volunteers, in order to protect the fundamental rights to life and to seek asylum, as required by international law and even more importantly, human solidarity."

This isn't the first time the Italian government has moved to criminalise sea rescue, though most previous charges have been dropped. It is one part of a long line of policies by successive Italian governments to stem the flow of refugees and migrants in the Mediterranean by hardening borders, aiming to make it too difficult and too dangerous for people even to attempt a crossing.

The use of people-smuggling laws to criminalise sea rescue shows how "anti-trafficking" and "anti-modern-slavery" policy can be utterly divorced from and uninterested in the needs of those it claims to help. In fact, a cover for making borders stricter and migration harder, and for policies which create more trafficking by forcing migrants to use more clandestine and dangerous routes.

The criminalisation of sea rescue puts refugees and migrants in acute danger even more directly than other border restrictions and will inevitably lead to more deaths in the Mediterranean. The left must oppose the move to criminalise sea rescue and must fight to extend freedom of movement beyond Europe to ensure safe migration pathways. □



Our audio!

Listen, download or subscribe to Workers' Liberty audio recordings of our paper, other publications, and many meetings. **Playlists include:**

- *Solidarity* Newspaper
- Pamphlets, publications beyond *Solidarity*
- Public meetings
- Fighting racism: pamphlets and more
- Solidarność
- Environmental pamphlet and meetings

See workersliberty.org/audio for all episodes, and for information on using podcasts. All recent episodes can be found through most podcast providers: search "Workers' Liberty" or "Solidarity & More". □

Myanmar: “We need international solidarity”



Interviews

By Khaing Zar Aung

Khaing Zar Aung is the President of the Industrial Workers Federation of Myanmar and a member of the executive of the Confederation of Trade Unions Myanmar. She spoke to Sacha Ismail on 5 March 2021. On 7 March the CTUM, IWFM and sixteen other Burmese union organisations issued a call for an “extended nationwide work-stoppage” to defeat the military coup. The toll of military killings is now in the hundreds, and military repression is focusing on industrial zones.

I became involved with the trade union movement in my early 20s, in 2007, in exile, in the previous period of military rule. We did underground organising. In 2012 we could return to Myanmar and do more open organising and education for the workers and register our unions.

The latest situation is really chaotic and very bad. The military is now killing a lot of people. They have even stopped ambulances which are carrying injured people and beaten and shot the medical workers.

The military has declared many trade unions and labour rights organisations illegal, even ones that were formally registered under the laws on labour associations, in a clear move to deny workers the right of association.

It seems clear that the brutal attacks on the people will continue, but our people will continue the fight to restore democracy. It is our future, the future of the youth, of the people. But by ourselves we cannot win. We need international support and solidarity.

We are asking the international community and governments to start comprehensive economic sanctions, to stop all the financial flows to the military. We are asking the international financial institutions to freeze all activities within Myanmar. Targeted sanctions are not really enough when there are so many source of income for the military. We need to cut off all these channels.

We want trade unionists from other countries to undertake activities and campaigning to support us, including by sending letters to the embassies in their countries. They should demand the release of those that have been imprisoned. You can also help by raising humanitarian aid to support our movement. In a situation where many of our activists are on the run and in hiding, we need funds to support them.

Which unions have had the most impact doesn't just depend on numbers but on the power the workers exercise. Energy, for instance, is quite a new sector for us, with a relatively small membership, but they have a lot of power and an important role. Every sector is important, but in different ways.

Because we are organised, we can quickly spread the idea of what we want to do and organise others, even those who are not union members. Union members and

other workers have organised and then come into the streets, together.

The garment workers joined the Civil Disobedience Movement very early, at the start of the military coup. These are mostly

female workers. Garment workers' leaders have been targeted by the military. Many of the activists cannot stay in their homes, because the military is searching for them. They can be arrested at any moment, if they are seen. In some cases the factor managements cooperate with the military on this.

We are demanding the brands with suppliers in Myanmar tell the suppliers not to take action or penalise any workers who join the demonstrations, who want to exercise their right to freedom of assembly.

The CTUM has 65,000 members and the IWFM has 15,000. We say to become active, to organise, but later on perhaps people will join a union and join with us. If we defeat the coup there is a possibility the unions will grow a lot.

At the moment in Myanmar we don't have any chance to discuss how we want our country to go, in terms of political ideology. We can see the shortcomings as well as the advantages of democracy, and we have also learnt about social democracy, which for trade unions I believe is the best ideology.

We need a lot more discussion, but what is important right now is to become a democratic country, and then we will have mechanisms to discuss what is best for the workers and the country.

I myself have to learn more, and our members have had very little chance to think about these questions. So as trade unions we are discussing how to organise political education for our members, with help from unions in other countries.

The NLD argues for free markets. What kind of free market? We need regulations, or international investors and owners will be king. We need to protect our people. □

• Abridged: more and video at bit.ly/kza-i. • Strike fund for All Burma Federation of Trade Unions at bit.ly/abftu-f



“ 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 □

Defend the right to protest!

By Gerry Bates

Police action to disperse the Clapham Common vigil for Sarah Everard on 14 March (with violence) and a health workers' pay protest in Manchester on 7 March (with a £10,000 fine) has sparked a wave of street protests.

These protests have won a first victory, just by taking place with large numbers. Police have been largely compelled to back off.

The next aim is to defeat the new [Policing, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill](#), which the Tories announced on 9 March and are trying to rush through.

The Labour front bench first planned to abstain on the Bill, but has now been pushed into opposing it.

The police already have far too many reserve powers against protests, increased over the years by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 and the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005.

Covid lockdown rules have also been used against protests, and only by a court case brought by the Unite union has the right to picket been upheld under those rules.

But police action to crowd protesters together, or bundle them into police vans, is more likely to increase infection than outdoors protest well stewarded by the protesters themselves.



Activist agenda

Campaigns usually featured in this column such as the Labour Campaign for Free Movement, the Uyghur Solidarity Campaign, the Hong Kong campaign LMSHKUK, and Free Our Unions, have put motions into the "policy primary" being run by the left-Labour group Momentum. Momentum is due to publish its "short-listed motions" on 18 March, and then ballot members on them Wed 24 March to Mon 29 March. The Momentum National Coordinating Group decides which ones to prioritise in early September. Labour's deadline for motions for its conference (25-29 September) is 13 September, but the deadline for delegate elections and rule-change submissions is on 11 June. □

• All links and info on those and other campaigns, and suggested words for labour-movement motions on many issues, at workersliberty.org/agenda

A [survey](#) by the USA's official National Bureau for Economic Research has found no Covid-spread effect from the huge Black Lives Matter protests there in summer 2020, even despite the heavy arrests. □

Arguments on cuts



Democracy in the labour movement

Campaigning has started for the local elections on 6 May, which in one form or another cover almost every area, since they combine polls due in 2021 with those postponed from May 2020. Official rules [already allow](#) canvassing as long as we abide by the 2-metre distancing rule.

From 29 March, when people will be allowed to gather socially in groups of six or two households outdoors, the same rules will apply to political campaigning. Campaign literature must be collected or dropped off, however, without people meeting indoors, and planning meetings must be virtual.

Workers' Liberty people will be out on the streets, if only because this campaigning will be a chance to meet and talk with other Labour Party members in-person for the first time since early 2020. A first thing to talk about is the series of online meetings, poplar100.com, to mark the 100th anniversary of the Labour council in Poplar, east London, defying the government over social spending and winning.

The National Audit Office reports that 94% of councils are cutting services in 2021-2, and two dozen or so are in or near financial meltdown like Croydon council. Despite huge government spending on items like private-sector Test and Trace, central government funding will not cover councils' extra spending and reduced income in the pandemic.

Some local campaigns are developing against particular cuts, like the one against the closure of [John Carroll Leisure Centre](#) in Nottingham. Often, however, cuts budgets and poor local Labour manifestos have gone through over the heads of local Labour Parties. Even in Leeds, with some left-wing local Labour Parties and big cuts by the Labour council, a general alternative to cuts and an adequate Labour democracy remain to be fought for.

Dozens of local Labour Party officers, across the country, were suspended in and around December for allowing debate on issues like the removal of the Labour whip from Jeremy Corbyn. A few have been reinstated, but most are still in limbo. [According to LabourList](#) their cases will be heard by NEC panels by the end of March. □

Why we should oppose union honoraria



Letters

At my recent Unison health branch AGM a list of honoraria payments was proposed and ratified. Payments were to be given for all elected branch positions, from £800 to £150.

Branch policy states that payments are made as recognition of unpaid work done outside of normal working hours. I said I wouldn't take the honorarium for my position, and the branch agreed to debate the issue at a future meeting.

Some other branches pay much more than mine, but comrades in Wakefield, Barnet, Nottingham, and elsewhere have told me they've convinced their branches to drop them entirely. (Except sometimes for auditors, which seems to me a reasonable exception).

According to Unison rules branches can spend up to 10% of their income on honoraria. The total amount paid can be up to £12,000, with some branch secretaries getting several thousand pounds a year.

Officers who get the payments then have a vested interest in staying in their position so they can keep receiving the payment.

Other branch members who attend conferences, meetings, protests outside their work time don't get the same payments.



It becomes accepted practice that union activity outside of work hours should be paid for, rather than being an expectation of union activists.

The debate is about our commitment to a trade unionism that rejects the view that there should be a material privilege attached to being a union representative. We should oppose these payments, and not take them if we can't yet convince our branches. □

Jayne Evans, Wirral

Uyghurs: the history and the facts

By Ben Tausz

Friday 5 March saw the first in a series of webinars organised by student Uyghur solidarity activists in London and California: SOAS Uyghur Society and SoCal Students for Uyghur Justice.

This event focussed on the history of the Uyghur people and included introductions from academic researchers.

The organisers plan to make the recording available online soon – the [Uyghur Solidarity Campaign UK](https://www.facebook.com/uyghur solidarity campaign uk) will share it. It's well worth solidarity activists watching to gain some background and context.

Lars Laamann looked back through centuries of the region's history. Exploring the development of modern Uyghur national identification, David Brophy argued for solidarity campaigners to reassert the democratic principle of national self-determination. Darren Byler traced the development of the "terror capitalist" police state in the region. Rachel Harris drew on family connections and professional expertise to discuss the culture that is being destroyed, and the hollowed-out, Disneyfied performances of it used by the state and capitalists for whitewashing propaganda and tourist industry profit.

Many audience contributors, from several countries and different backgrounds, had clearly encountered Stalinist or pseudo-anti-imperialist denialism, and wanted to discuss confronting these in the context of rising superpower rivalry.

Future webinars will hear from Uyghur and other campaigners and researchers, and discuss the ongoing genocide (7pm UTC 19 March bit.ly/SOASSoCal2), solidarity activism (2 April) and Uyghur arts and culture (16 April). □

Behind the polls



Letters

The polls are dire, but in a way Labour's vote worries me less than the ever-growing Tory vote: 2010, 10.7 million, 36.1%; 2015, 11.3 million, 36.9%; 2017, 13.6 million, 42.4%; 2019, 13.9 million, 43.6%; 2021, roughly, 14.2 to 14.4 million, 44-45%.

The 3.9 million who voted Ukip in 2015, and the 6.8 million who voted Lib-Dem in 2010, complicate the picture, but we see rising right-wing votes elsewhere too.

Trump lost the election, but the Republican vote went up to 74 million. In France, Marine Le Pen has gone up at the last two elections and in the polls.

Biden, and Labour in 2017, managed by corraling and energising all non-right wing voters, including usual non-voters; but, if we look beyond electoralism, breaking a large chunk of the working class from nationalist authoritarianism is a top task for emancipatory politics.

Luke Hardy, Leeds

Abolish the monarchy!

By Mohan Sen

Since the turn of the century, the monarchy has managed to “rebrand” itself and actually increase its popularity. “Harry and Meghan” were of course an important part of that. If the unpleasant realities of the institution and the social layers it represents are now more exposed, that is a good thing.

There are two fundamental arguments against the monarchy.

Firstly, in terms of the monarchy’s practical political role as a backstop against democracy. Even today, when the British ruling class does not feel seriously threatened or challenged, there are frequent revelations about the monarchy’s anti-democratic role in politics.

Secondly, as Leon Trotsky put it, “the question of the monarchy... is a matter of the complete overturn of society and of purging it of all elements of oppression. Such a task, both politically and psychologically, excludes any conciliation with monarchy.”

Socialists and labour movement activists should argue for a democratic republic. Governmental power should be in the hands of Parliament, with the government chosen by and more strongly accountable to it.

Malaysia deports 1086 to Myanmar

By Pete Boggs

On 23 February, the Malaysian government deported 1,086 people back to Myanmar. This was against the orders of the Malaysian High Court, which ruled on the same day that the Myanmar nationals should be allowed to stay temporarily.

There are millions of exploited migrants in Malaysia, and over a hundred thousand Burmese refugees. The government announced plans to deport 1,200 people, including children. 114 people are unaccounted for by the government as they were not handed over to the Myanmar navy.

Despite the Malaysian government’s claims that they would not deport any Rohingya or official refugees, the United Nations claims that at least six of the deported were refugees who face ethnic cleansing back in Myanmar.

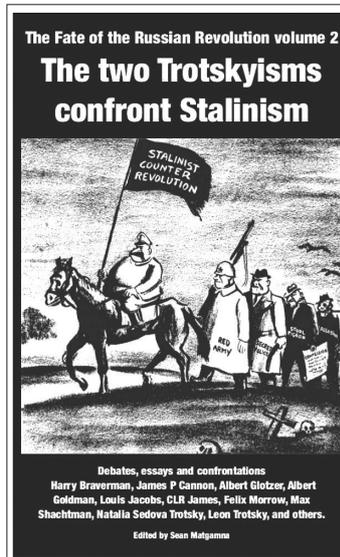
Left-wing organisations including the Parti Sosialis Malaysia and migrants’ rights NGOs held a public protest at Taman Jaya Park in Kuala Lumpur, laying out 1,086 pairs of shoes. They have released a public statement calling on the Malaysian government to end any cooperation with the Tatmadaw junta, and end all deportations and “indefinite and arbitrary detention of all migrants”: bit.ly/m-1086. □

There are many other democratic demands which the left must fight for. Refunding, re-empowering and re-democratising local government is a crucial but often overlooked element of any democratic program, of meaningfully empowering citizens and labour movements to influence their lived environment.

Socialists should seek to link expanded political democracy to measures of social and economic democratisation, including to guarantee decent standards of living, public services, etc, and crucially the right to strike – through repeal of all anti-trade union laws and their replacement by positive legal workers’ rights, set down in law.

The labour movement should argue and campaign for an elected constitutional convention to reshape Britain’s institutions. □

• Abridged. More at bit.ly/abol-m



Featured book

The last century and beyond has often taken revolutionary socialists over uncharted, unexpected, terrain. Understanding and fighting to purge the labour movement of Stalinism has been key. This book documents crucial debates in the 1940s between the two main strands into which Trotskyism divided. 798 pages, £19.99

workersliberty.org/publications

Our videos!

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

- Socialist Feminism
- Black Lives Matter, videos around the movement and related topics
- Socialist commentary on the Covid-19 crisis
- ABCs of Marxism, an introductory series, still being added to
- An introduction to Marx’s Capital, in 19 parts, with Martin Thomas
- Tubeworker/Off The Rails, videos by the producers of the bulletins □

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

Women's Day in Russia: n

Loretta Marie Perera reports from Moscow

It was a cold day in Moscow on 8 March, 2021. A far cry from spring, the temperature hovered somewhere between minus 5 and 15, while snow intermittently fell and wind kept snowfall from the night before floating in every which way. It was Women's Day, a public holiday in Russia, and a day of celebrating women – and one typically of overpriced bouquets, marketing promotion, and special menus.

But for feminists and activists around Russia, this day has never been about roses and fancy dinners. Rather, it is a day to stand in solidarity, to create awareness, and to refocus attention on key issues faced by women in the country.

This year, the day was preceded by a high amount of action, protests, and political unrest since the beginning of the year. Following the protests centred around the return and arrest of opposition politician Alexei Navalny, socialists in Moscow and beyond have kept the conversation going, while feminist activists have been a key part of the movement – as well as constantly creating and intensifying the focus on women's rights.

On Valentine's Day, for example, as protestors gathered outside their homes to shine a light in support of Navalny, a different form of action would also take place: one in support of key members of any protest, home, workplace, or movement – women.

Organisers called for people to join them in central Moscow, creating a human chain of solidarity, holding flowers and photos of women who have been persecuted by the state for political reasons.

The event would be in support of all women political prisoners, prosecuted artists, teachers, doctors, activists, and politicians, and for "everyone who is now beaten and tortured by the police during peaceful protests, everyone who spends their days in courts, police buses and special detention centres," organisers wrote on their Facebook page.

The peaceful gathering, attended by hundreds had one message: To politicise Valentine's Day and remind fellow activists and themselves, that love is stronger than fear.

Addressing Domestic Violence

At the foundation of many events that are centred around women is one grim and unavoidable fact: Russia's relationship with domestic violence.

"Russia has no law on domestic violence," says Katerina Bakhrenkova from the Sexual Assault Recovery Centre 'Sisters'. In 2017, Vladimir Putin signed into law a decree which decriminalised forms of domestic violence including charges against first-time abusers and less punishment for abuse that resulted in "minor harm" such as bleeding or bruises (as compared to broken bones) and that occurred no more than once a year.

The problem, Katerina says, is exacerbated by the fact



that women do not have enough protection from violence. "Conservative politicians say that common measures from criminal and administrative legislation are enough for any situation of violence, including the violence performed by intimate partners or relatives," she says. "But lawyers and NGOs say that this is not true."

She points to the fact that police have no permission to enter houses, or to make any special actions against abusers. Courts don't implement protective measures in cases regarding partner violence and threats, she says, because these cases are often not seen as dangerous. "I think they don't realise that not providing protection in such cases leads to femicide."

In the years that followed, domestic violence rates skyrocketed as women's rights groups and NGOs pushed for re-criminalisation, or at least for laws to be amended. In February 2021, news broke of a 23-year-old student Vera Pekhteleva, who was beaten to death by her boyfriend while neighbours repeatedly pleaded with the police to intervene as they listened to her cries. By the time neighbours broke down the doors themselves, the young woman was already dead.

This is the latest of the grisly tales of women being killed by male partners that have shaken Russian society in recent years, even as the laws remain unchanged.

Another problem is the lack of data for the different types of abuse. "We don't have enough official data about any type of violence against women in Russia," says Katerina. "We have no special law against gender based violence, against domestic violence, and about prevention. The problem is really big – but a lot of cases are invisible."

March 5: Women's Strike

Less than a month after women who participated in the Valentine's Day "Solidarity Chain" faced hundreds of threats of death and rape, another event designed to highlight the violence women face and the importance and essential work of women, would take place: this time in the form of a strike.

In the second event of its kind, socialist-feminist organisation SocFemAlt (СоцФем Альтернатива) – or the Socialist-Feminist Alternative – and co-organisers Socialist

Not all sunshine and roses

Alternative called for citizens to join a strike on 5 March. The strike, designed to be carried out anywhere in the country, would come in several forms: to stop working for two hours, to draft a petition to be presented to workplace management, to start conversations among friends and colleagues, and to post photos on social media with the hashtag #5mstrike.

"One of the main problems of women in Russia today is domestic violence," says Ayten, a member of SocFemAlt. "Passing a domestic violence law is the first demand of our strike."

Beyond this main reason, the strike also aims to highlight several other key issues in Russia: opening crisis centres in each district on state budget, the case of the Khachaturian sisters (three young sisters facing murder charges for the killing of their abusive father), minimum wage, and scholarship deals, social packages, putting an end to Putin's regime, and abolishing all repressive, sexist and homophobic laws.

"Last year we held our first strike – it was one hour. This year was two hours," says Ayten. "We plan to add more time each year. And in the future, to hold a national general strike."

A strike, it is important to note, is not something that would be openly welcomed. "In Russia a strike is viewed with doubt, as many do not believe in its effect, and many believe that they can be fired for participating," says Ayten. "We decided to remind people that a strike is a powerful tool with which the working class can influence political and economic processes."

Women's Day: A Day of Resistance

The movement and message of the strike continued through Women's Day on 8 March. "This day is an international day for women's rights," says Ayten. "This is a holiday not only for women, but for all people. Because the rights of some are the rights of others."

SocFemAlt encouraged everyone to take part on this day. "What would be the right thing for men to do on this day? The same as everyone else," says Ayten. "Take part in a strike, go out to actions, pickets, hand out leaflets, communicate with colleagues about feminism and what it has given us, write about this day and its significance on social media."

In general, she says, to devote this day to activism and resistance.

What Happens Next

Looking forward, feminists in Russia have no intention of slowing down; there is much work to be done yet. "Domestic violence, intimate partner violence, stalking, sexual harassment – in Russia these offences have no legal definition, preventative measures or mandated responses," Katerina says.

"Cyber violence against women is very common and there are very few options on what can be done with it.

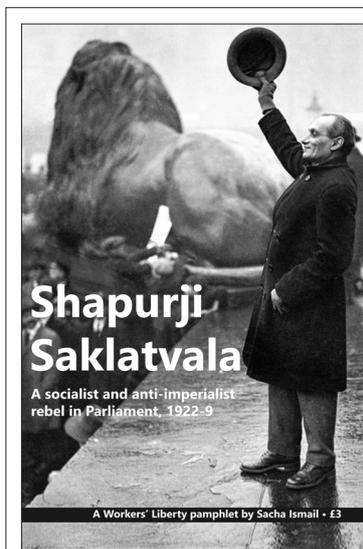


Sexualised violence in some forms (rape, for example) is criminal, but survivors face degrading treatment and other problems during legal proceedings."

For the domestic violence assistance centre, all action is important for the safety of women and the improvement of society. "I think all actions at all levels are extremely important," says Katerina. "But I have the greatest hope for society [to take action], and to become involved in mutual community aid."

Among socialist groups, the movement is set to continue – and Russian activists are working to see that they continue to grow – with international solidarity and support from comrades in other countries, too.

For organisations like SocFemAlt, continuance and international cooperation is key. "Because we stand for the fact that all people from the working class: LGBT, men, women, national minorities, all who are oppressed, and all who live from paycheck to paycheck – 99% of the population – should unite," says Ayten. "To unite and replace the capitalist patriarchal society with a new, socialist one. And [movements like holding] a strike are important tools for uniting, rallying and inspiring solidarity among people." □



New offer

Lockdown continues, and we have a new offer. For £5 including post you can get: the new *Women's Fightback*, a trial subscription to *Solidarity* for six issues, plus our pamphlet on Saklatvala, revolutionary socialist and Labour's first BAME MP. □

workersliberty.org/publications

Shachtman's mistake



Debate

By Paul Hampton

Martin Thomas ([Solidarity 569](#), 28 October 2020) states that in 1954 “the heterodox Trotskyist Independent Socialist League [ISL] decided to back trade-union candidates... in Democratic primaries; and in the general elections if they won the primaries”. He denies that this turn contributed to their political drift to the right. Instead, it was “‘Sanders campaigning’ on a small scale 60-odd years before the fact”.

Similarly, Thomas Carolan, ([Solidarity 566](#), 7 October 2020) wrote: “The experience of Max Shachtman moving to the right once in the Democratic Party inhibits some American socialists still. But while his political evolution may have had special scope to develop in the Democratic Party, it surely was not caused by it.” Both misconstrue the logic behind Shachtman’s trajectory.

Turn to the Democrats

First, the ISL did not rationalise their turn to the Democrats as a response to fascism, despite the McCarthyite witch-hunt at the time. In 1954 the ISL convention agreed:

“McCarthyism is not a fascist tendency or movement. Still, it is not an ‘ordinary’ conservative or even reactionary bourgeois current. Its course is away from bourgeois democracy. It presents not the traditional fascist danger of mobilisation of the discontented petty bourgeois masses as a mass force to smash labour, but rather the danger of the imposition of a dictatorial, labour-curbing regime from above by authoritarian state measures of repression.” (ISL Resolution on Political Situation in the US, *New International*, July-August 1954)

Second, the ISL’s turn was premised on breaking the unions from their political endorsement of Democrats, in order to form a labour party.

“Moreover, in those instances where the participation of the trade unions in the Democratic Party has reached the point where their political activity dominates or controls the local functioning of that party, it is incumbent on us to urge that labour run its own – labour controlled – slate of candidates in primary and general elections for both public and inner party office against, or in disregard of the wishes of the regular party machine. By this means labour’s active commitment to the Democratic Party can be turned into a progressive channel by projecting a struggle within that party, a struggle which will highlight the present contradictions between labour’s domination of local party functions and the utilisation of that party machinery for anti-labour ends. Such an independent stand, even while within the Democratic Party, will tend to split labour from its conservative, bourgeois and im-

perialist allies, and under favourable circumstances can represent a sparking of labour into an Independent Labour Party course.” (ISL Resolution on Political Situation, 1954)

Third, the ISL’s turn to Democratic primaries did not immediately mean endorsing the Democrat presidential candidates. In 1956, they chastised the Democrats for Dixiecrat segregationism and their role in undermining democratic rights. The ISL concluded:

“The Democratic Party has nothing real to offer the workers, to the little people of the country... It is no meaningful ‘lesser evil’ compared with the Republicans... The present policy of labour in supporting the Democrats is self-defeating... we recommend a vote for the candidates of the Socialist Party, especially for its presidential and vice-presidential candidates...” (*Vote Socialist in ‘56! Labor Action*, 8 October 1956: 4)

Finally, Carolan and Thomas underestimate the importance of the 1954 turn in the degeneration of the ISL as a force for socialism. Shachtman’s turn to the Democrats was integral to the ISL’s self-destruction.

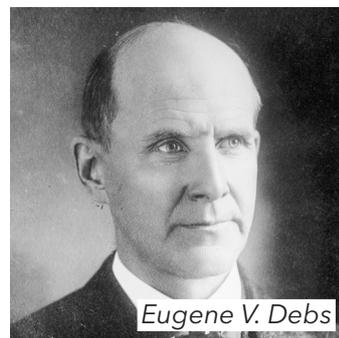
Cannon balls

In 1954, “orthodox” Trotskyist SWP leader James Cannon put the turn in context:

“In the socialist and radical movement of the twentieth century, from the first presidential candidacy of Debs in 1900 up until more recent times, all factions in the socialist movement – right, left and centre – all of them, were committed to the principle of independent political action. The support of a capitalist political party was anathema...”

“It was not until 1936 that even the right-wing socialists dared to support a capitalist party candidate in a presidential election. Even after the communist split of 1919, the Socialist Party continued to run its own independent candidates; it never entered their heads that it was permissible to vote for Democrats or Republicans. It was not until 1936 that the right-wing socialists in New York and the officials in the needle-trades unions, which had traditionally supported the Socialist Party, finally decided to support Roosevelt.

“Up till then the Communist Party had always run its own candidates. In 1936, they went over to class collaboration in politics in a characteristically double-talking manner. They did not yet dare to come out openly in support of Roosevelt on the Democratic ticket. They nominated Browder for president... Then they put out the slogan, which was the main slogan of their campaign: ‘Defeat Landon [the Republican] at all costs!’” (Cannon, Speech



Eugene V. Debs

es are not our model

to 16th SWP Convention, November 1954)

Cannon criticised the ISL and others who had embraced work within the Democrats. Cannon was undoubtedly wrong about the character of the Stalinist states at the time. But he was right about the evolution of these socialists: almost all dissolved before the decade was out.

A “discreditable and foul” road

Peter Drucker’s biography, *Max Shachtman and His Left*, describes Shachtman’s descent from revolutionary socialism to Cold War Democrat. This evolution began in the late 1940s and the turn to the Democrats was integral to the process of abandoning the third camp. In 1949:

- Shachtman rejected the necessity for a workers’ revolution to overthrow the state in capitalist democracies like the United States

- Shachtman concluded that the existing British Labour government was “a workers’ government which permits a peaceful development toward socialism”

- The ISL ended independent rank-and-file organising in the United Auto Workers (UAW) and joined Walter Reuther’s faction

- When the CIO banned Communists from its leadership, Shachtman opposed persecuting trade unionists on the basis of their politics, but nonetheless said: “We stand with the CIO”

- Shachtman argued the “road to [a] labour party” might run through the Democratic Party.

Shachtman’s substitution of the trade union bureaucracy for socialist leadership and working class agency powered his turn towards the Democrats. In 1952, he discussed the intervention of union representatives into the Democratic convention – Reuther’s “new political alignment”. Shachtman speculated that there might be “another road – an indirect, tortuous, discreditable and foul one” to a labour party, through activity within the Democrats. (*Why labor supports Democrats, New International, July-August 1952*)

This was wishful thinking. Reuther told the CIO convention in December 1954:

“America is a place where social groups are in flux, without a rigid class structure... A labour party, here, would commit the American political system to the same narrow class structure upon which the political parties of Europe are built... Basically what we are trying to do is work within the two-party system of America and bring about within that two-party system a fundamental realignment of basic political forces.” (*Art Preis, Labor’s Giant Step, 1964*)

ISL members Don Slaiman and Sammy Fishman played key roles in the Shachtmanites’ accommodation to the UAW and AFL-CIO union bureaucracies. According to Michael Harrington, by the mid-1950s there was “a joke going around... that the best way to become a union bureaucrat was to join the Shachtmanites... With a couple of articles to your credit in *Labor Action* you were a likely



Natalia Sedova, Frida Khalo, Leon Trotsky and Max Schachtan

candidate to be appointed to the UAW staff”.

Abandoning revolutionary socialism

By 1957 Shachtman had renounced organising Marxists independently of the broader socialist movement. Retrospectively, he criticised the Communist split from the Socialist Party in 1919, the Trotskyist intervention in the Socialist Party in 1936-37 and the creation of the Workers’ Party/ISL. (*American Communism: A Re-Examination of the Past, New International, Fall 1957*)

In 1958 Shachtman’s associates dissolved into the Socialist Party. He told Norman Thomas, “The ISL does not subscribe to any doctrine called Leninism”. From 1961 Shachtman began advocating participation in Democratic Party organisations. In 1962 Socialist Party members agreed to join Democrat clubs. “Realignment” now promised labour and civil rights activists would oust the Democrat machine politicians and the Dixiecrats. Soon it meant preserving Democratic Party unity, supporting “lesser evil” Johnson in 1964, the Vietnam war and Humphrey in 1968.

Shachtman’s orientation to the Democratic primaries was a pivotal step away from working-class political representation. The logic of campaigning and voting Democrat pushed him towards deeper integration and then capitulation. Shachtman’s evolution should inhibit today’s socialists from the road of backing the Democratic Party.

The ISL’s orientation to Democrats was a mistake. It was opposed at the time by Hal Draper and other revolutionary socialists. Whatever Shachtman might have meant by this turn in the 1950s, it is not a model to follow in today’s conditions in the United States.

Bernie Sanders and the DSA are not even mimicking Shachtman’s turn. The so-called “dirty break” in current US politics is not based on a trade union upsurge for a labour party. Their “break” is put off for the future. Mired in the Democrats, it may never happen. □

- Part of an ongoing debate. More, including a [reply](#) to this article, online at bit.ly/trump-d

Brexit and the Six Counties

By Micheál MacEoin

This year marks the unhappy centenary of the foundation of the state of Northern Ireland, which was born amid sectarian violence in 1921.

Armed conflict after Northern Ireland's sectarian political system broke down in 1969 lasted from then into the 1990s. In one sense it was ended by the Good Friday Agreement. But in another way, politics is war by other means. Workers' Liberty was glad that the armed conflict came to an end, seeing in the possibility of peace the promise of better conditions for the development of working-class politics.

Nevertheless, we were critical of the Agreement and did not call for a vote for it. The way to "win" politically in the post-1998 system is to pose as the best defender of "your community". That is why since the early 2000s, the DUP and Sinn Fein have been successful as the two largest parties.

Brexit has shaken up politics in Ireland, making national and constitutional questions all the more pressing.

It could be, and was, plausibly argued that common EU membership between Ireland and Britain made the UK-Irish border less contentious.

A soft Brexit, while still reactionary, would have been the neatest solution from the narrow perspective of border in Ireland. If the whole of the UK was in the single market and customs union, there would be no need for border checks, either in Ireland or between Ireland and Great Britain.

Now we are left with the Northern Ireland Protocol, a huge sell-out of the DUP by the Tories. The DUP, having sided with the Brexiteers to make a softer Brexit impossible, have now been left with a border not on the island of Ireland but in the sea between Northern Ireland and the UK.

The DUP are suffering in the polls, with their support draining to the more hardline Traditional Unionist Voice (TUV). In a recent opinion poll, SF are the largest party with 24% and, if replicated in an election, would take the First Minister position.

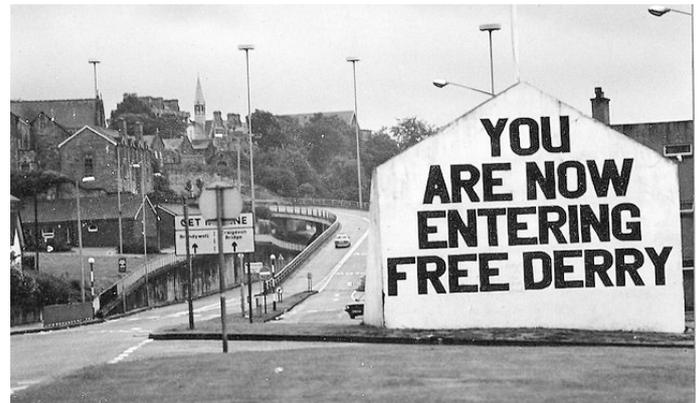
The DUP have fallen to 19%, just one point ahead of Alliance, with the SDLP and Ulster Unionists at 13% and 12% respectively, and TUV up at 10%.

In the 2011 census, 45.1% of the population specified that they were Catholic or brought up Catholic and 48.4% were from a Protestant or other Christian background.

On national identity 39.9% considered themselves British only, 25.3% Irish only, 20.9% Northern Irish only, with others specifying multiple national identities.

Belfast now has a Catholic majority and, as of the December 2019 general election, three out of the four Belfast Westminster seats were won by nationalists or republicans.

Of course, demography is not politics, but it does point a direction of travel. If, as some expect, the 2021 census indicates that Northern Ireland has a higher proportion



of Catholics than Protestants, the pressure will continue to rise for a Border Poll.

The latest poll found that 47 per cent was in favour of maintaining the North's link with Britain with 42 per cent in favour of a united Ireland.

The fixation on a Border Poll – for or against – is an unhelpful framing.

Rather than campaigning positively for or explicitly against a Border Poll before it is clear whether the conditions exist for one to be called, socialists and the labour movement should start pro-actively setting out their vision of what a united Ireland should look like now.

That way, if the conditions do make a Border Poll inevitable, socialists will have already built up a head of steam for an independent working-class campaign and can intervene sharply in the ensuing debates.

Indeed, in so far as it can reassure Protestant workers in the North, such a working-class campaign then makes it more likely that a referendum would result in Irish unity and less likely that it would lead to increased sectarian violence.

While a referendum is a binary choice between unity or not, another demand to raise is that elections are held after any referendum to a Constituent Assembly, which we would write a constitution for a new Ireland.

In the debate prior to and during any poll, and in any constituent assembly election, the labour movement, north and south, should be raising the demand for a federal united Ireland, with minority protections for the Unionist minority in the north-east; and for the full separation of church and state.

Just as people in Northern Ireland are entitled to Irish citizenship, Protestants should be entitled to retain British citizenship as part of a system of dual Irish-British citizenship in a new Ireland.

Of course, none of these constitutional demands are sufficient in themselves.

Our banner should not be for just joining the two existing right-wing states together but a new Ireland: at a minimum for the extension of free health care and good public services to the whole island, for trade union rights and abortion rights. □

• Abridged. More at bit.ly/brx-6c

Report finds genocide against Uyghurs

By Ben Tausz

A [new report](#) tests the evidence of China's persecution of the Uyghur people against the 1948 UN Genocide Convention.

Article II of the Genocide Convention defines genocide as: "any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group."

The report finds the Chinese state responsible for violating all five.

The Chinese state is not, so far as we can tell, attempting systematic physical murder of the entire population of Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslim-majority indigenous groups that would be comparable to the Nazis' death camps. However, the report sets out the state's campaigns of mass incarceration in camps and prisons (where abuse, torture, death and suicide are at least frequent); imprisonment of cultural, intellectual and religious leaders; cultural, political and linguistic repression and re-education; forced contraception and sterilisation; family separation; and the taking of indigenous children into "orphanages" for culturally Han upbringing.

Taken together, the report argues that these constitute an intentional project to destroy the Uyghurs as a group. A mixture of suppression of births, suppression and replacement of culture and language, damaging and killing individuals, and dispersing families and communities, destroys their ability to renew themselves as an ethnic group. (To which we as socialists should add – as a national group, deserving of the right to self-determination).

It is right to approach this and similar reports with a sceptical eye. The report comes from the Newlines Institute, a US-based think-tank which describes its purpose as "enhancing US security and global stability". However, it took contributions from a (politically broad) range of researchers, Uyghur exiles, and human rights jurists and campaigners. More importantly, it points to an enormous evidence base of both leaked and public state documents and statistics; large numbers of eye-witness testimonies; and open-source information like public satellite imagery. Just because it serves current US foreign policy interests, doesn't mean it's not true.

The US, Canadian and Dutch governments have all recently officially recognised that this is a genocide, and debate continues at Westminster over proposals (opposed by Johnson's government) to create a path for the British judiciary to rule on allegations of genocide and potentially to block or cancel trade deals on this basis.

Understandably, many Uyghur activists and allies have looked to states around the world for help in this desperate situation. Consequently, many have focussed much

energy into campaigning for official recognition that this is an ongoing genocide, hoping this will activate states' Genocide Convention obligation to take action to "prevent and punish" genocide.

In the Uyghur Solidarity Campaign UK, we have warned that these are not forces in which we can place trust or reliance. The British, American and similar states will only act on the world stage insofar as it serves their material interests in their superpower rivalry with China. If they intervene, they could even do so in such a way as to make the situation worse, not better. The clashes of a new Cold War will benefit neither the people of East Turkestan, nor the working classes and oppressed people of either China or its Western rivals.

Formal rulings or recognitions that the situation constitutes genocide – whether on a national or international level – will not flip a switch putting otherwise rapacious imperialists onto a humanitarian footing. The "international community" is at base a system for various ruling classes around the world to negotiate and arrange their own interests. Despite the rhetoric, humanitarianism is incidental at best.

More than bourgeois legal processes or action motivated by the rival interests of big powers, what we need is grassroots international solidarity.

We have already seen outcries of grassroots sympathy for the Uyghurs and other indigenous people of East Turkestan in reaction to reports of the atrocities. A particular example has been the strength and breadth of feeling among Jewish people, responding to the parallels many of us perceive with our own history – even if there are significant differences too.

It is right and important for us to recognise this situation as an ongoing genocide. We must acknowledge the overwhelming evidence, not simply declare the opposite of whatever the big powers say on any given day. And we must work to rouse sympathy in the left and labour movements, and from that to rouse meaningful solidarity action, by telling the truth. To paraphrase Trotsky, we must call on our movements to face reality squarely, and call things by their right names. □

• Ben Tausz is an activist with the [Uyghur Solidarity Campaign](#), writing here in a personal capacity

More online

Hegelian usages in Marx's Grundrisse

Marx's 1857-8 *Grundrisse* has many more "Hegelian" usages than his earlier or later writings.

bit.ly/gwfh-g

Sarwar disrupts Scottish Labour

New right-wing leader sacks candidate and hires organiser from joint campaign with Tories.

bit.ly/hc-kw

Three decades after “It’s a Sin”



Documentary review

By Zack Muddle

The excellent *It's A Sin*, brilliantly reviewed in *Solidarity* 580 (bit.ly/sin-80s) has propelled queer pop star Olly Alexander – Ritchie – into greater fame. The deeply moving 2017 documentary *Olly Alexander: Growing Up Gay* (directed by Vicki Cooper, available on [BBC iPlayer](http://BBC.iPlayer)) has got greater coverage.

The documentary looks into the experiences – mental health difficulties, and bullying – of young gay people today, growing up three or four decades after the people of *It's A Sin*.

The contrast between Olly and Richie is perhaps starker even than the unimaginably different contexts. Where Richie was secretive about personal issues, and inexplicably a Tory voter, the real Olly in the documentary is emotionally open, is an LGBTIQ advocate, and a Corbynite.

Through various heartrending conversations – with other queer people, and with people from Olly's childhood – the documentary looks at depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, bulimia, self-harm, and suicidal thoughts.

In the world that Olly's and my generations grew up in, we find society congratulating itself for no longer being openly homophobic, for things having been much worse in the past. Yet insidious homophobia – not to mention transphobia – remains pervasive, as the stats and anecdotes in the documentary testify.

This, coupled with a desire to celebrate our sexualities and gender identities, to maintain a positive face, builds barriers to recognising the emotional experiences many of us faced and continue to wrestle with.

Even where LGBTIQ children and young people are “fortunate” enough to not face much bullying, a straight and homophobic world can leave its scars. Queer people have been intentionally and systematically written out

of history, sliced out of literature and painted out artistic representation. For many, LGBTIQ issues were – and are still – not covered in “sex education”, or are covered tokenistically and badly.

People like you don't exist; or if they do, their dark secret is unmentionable. And if this message isn't clear enough, countless subtle wider cultural cues go one step further. “Gay” is used synonymously with “bad”: being gay *must be bad*.

In a formative stage of our emotional development, a growing awareness of sexual and romantic feelings comes hand in hand with a growing recognition that there is something wrong with you. You have this deep, character-defining and dirty secret which no-one else knows, and which you can talk to no-one else about. Which you must do your best to hide. Any slip or revealing of your inner feelings risks severe rejection, and worse.

Even if we make up, say, one in ten people, growing up each of us may be all alone on the planet. In a context where everyone is assumed straight, where anyone who isn't must go above and beyond to pretend that they are, the inner turmoil of others with similar feelings is no more visible to you than yours is to them.

The documentary does not offer much deep analysis. Nor has it got a huge amount in detail to offer on what we should do now. It is personal, centred around the gay male star, not aiming to be “comprehensive”. It does not explore the experiences of trans and non-binary people, or queer women, extensively.

Yet it is deeply emotive and sensitive, and I found it very relatable. It is worth 60 minutes, particularly for queer people, for parents, and for school workers. □

Second-hand books

Workers' Liberty is selling hundreds of second hand books, on politics and many other topics. Visit bit.ly/2h-books for the full list, pricing, and to order them.

Featured this week:

- *Working Smart: A Union Guide to Participation Programs and Reengineering*, by Mike Parker
- *Choosing Sides: Unions and the Team Concept*, by Mike Parker and Jane Slaughter
- *The Glass Cage: Where Automation is Taking Us*, by Nicholas Carr
- *The Five Giants*, by Nicholas Timmins
- *Max Shachtman and His Left*, by Peter Drucker
- *The Inner Level*, by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett

Openreach engineers strike again

By Ollie Moore

BT Openreach engineers in the Communication Workers Union (CWU) struck again on 3-5 March, with further strikes planned on 18-20 and 22-25 March.

And on 11 March, the CWU announced it would move to a wider formal industrial-action ballot in “every part of BT, Openreach and EE where the CWU is recognised for collective bargaining purposes”. CWU members in that wider area have already voted overwhelmingly for action in an indicative ballot.

The Openreach strikes, which involve a workforce of 170 Repayments Project Engineers (RPEs), working to move or protect BT cabling during construction works, seek to resist the imposition of a new grading structure. The plan would move the RPE role into a management grade, taking it out of the CWU-organised shopfloor workforce, but also leading to potential cuts to pay and holiday entitlement by placing it on the lowest rung of the managerial grade structure. □

For real free speech on campuses!

By **Cathy Nugent**

In October 2020 Gavin Williamson wrote to all university vice-chancellors “requesting” they adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism, and insisting on action before Christmas... or else.

In February the government announced plans to appoint a “free speech champion” whose job will be to ensure freedom of speech and expression is not stifled at UK universities. The role is embedded in the Office for Students (OFS), which would have the power to impose fines on institutions if the OFS find they have suppressed free speech. New legislation introducing these powers will also cover student unions. This seems to be a demagogic attempt to push back against so-called “wokeness”.

Both moves should be opposed.

Workers’ Liberty supported the adoption by the Labour Party of the IHRA “Working Definition” on the grounds that it could serve as a useful educative framework in a context where understanding of modern antisemitism is low. The text is not designed to be a set of rules, and should not be used as a code of conduct or to stifle free speech. In fact the IHRA guidelines have not been used in the Labour Party as a means to mute criticisms of Israel, or as binding codes of conduct against antisemitism. (The Equality and Human Rights Commission report which found Labour guilty of antisemitism based itself on the Equality Act, and did not use the IHRA text).

Since Williamson’s IHRA threat nothing much has happened. But the UCL [University College London] academic board has voted to rescind its adoption of the IHRA definition and replace it with what it considers a more precise definition. That decision came after a Working Group report that the IHRA guidelines conflated antisemitism with criticism of Israel and Palestine. (In our view, they don’t conflate, but, in fairness, this was a detailed, nuanced report.) The Working Group was also justifiably concerned at rising levels of antisemitism, at UCL. We should support UCL’s right to come to its conclusions in this way as a matter of democratic decision-making and academic freedom.

Universities are public institutions. Their policy-making should be both transparent and free from day-to-day political interference by the government of the day.

Whether or not the IHRA guidelines are good enough, or should be adopted, should be a matter of open debate among an academic community and decisions taken should come after debate. University decision-making should also be more democratic, involve greater numbers of both staff and students and representatives from the local community. And the final decision should not be, as it will be at UCL, with a University Council (such bodies tend to be dominated by the “great and good”).

Both new free speech laws and Williamson’s suggestion of imposing the IHRA text will add to complex mixes of already existing policy at universities and add confusion. Universities already have a legal responsibility to uphold

freedom of speech. Why the new powers? Universities already have codes of conduct and obligations to uphold equality law. If the IHRA is intended to be used as new code of conduct or equality guidance, which bit of policy will take precedence?

Unclear

On the IHRA, universal adoption on such an unclear basis may produce a febrile atmosphere where both a backlash against campaigning for Palestinian rights and anti-Zionist witch hunts are possible.

Many Jewish students and staff will want the IHRA text adopted, not least because universities can do much better at tackling bullying, harassment and abuse. We have to campaign for more resources to support students and staff who are victims of abuse. We need clearer and more effective university codes of conducts – ones which allow students and staff to seek redress without recrimination.

There are real problems with free speech at UK universities. They are not as the government defines them. The marketisation of universities has seen the suppression of postering, paper-selling and leafleting, students being subject to surveillance through Prevent, and the use of police against students on campuses.

A broad freedom of speech and organisation for all should be guaranteed, other than for clear-cut fascists and where there is immediately dangerous incitement.

Student unions and activists tend now to argue for administrative bans on reactionary speakers, when a better response is denouncing and organising protests against them. There has been some raising of “no-platforming” from a tactic to a principle of too-wide application.

That has depoliticised student politics. We want political challenges and protests against the views we disagree with to be the norm. Debate from students in all contexts – in lecturers and seminars as well – with rules for respectful conduct of debate without fear of recrimination, should always be what we aim for. □

Our pamphlets

Browse, download, buy, or listen to our pamphlets:

- The German Revolution: selected writings of Rosa Luxemburg
- For Workers’ Climate Action
- Two Nations, Two States
- Workers Against Slavery
- How to Beat the Racists
- Remain and Rebel
- Stalinism in the International Brigades
- Left Antisemitism: What it is and How to Fight it
- Arabs, Jews, and Socialism: Socialist Debates on Israel/Palestine □

More: workersliberty.org/publications

Link-up against school victimisations

By Pat Markey

A well-attended online organising meeting on 9 March discussed [Tracy McGuire's](#) victimisation by Rydal Academy, Darlington, and since then there have been three days of strikes by NEU [National Education Union] members at Shrewsbury College in defence of NEU rep [John Boken](#). Their strike action is to run for three days every week, over three weeks.

The online meeting, hosted by Darlington Trades Council, heard from local and national trade unionists and Labour Party members about the current victimisation cases, and how they can be seen in the wider context of some school bosses clamping down on the space for dis-

cussion and union organising that has been opening up during the pandemic.

Victimised NEU reps Tracy McGuire, John Boken, [Louise Lewis](#), and [Kirstie Paton](#) all participated, and it is good that the different campaigns have made links and are working together. The NEU nationally needs to step up and urgently develop strategy to ensure our workplace reps are better supported from management victimisation. The Darlington meeting agreed to reconvene soon to discuss local campaigning to seek justice for Tracy. □

Private hire workers strike for safety

By Darren Bedford

Private hire drivers working for multiple apps, including Bolt and Uber, struck on 3 March to demand improved safety provision, after Bolt driver Gabriel Bringye was stabbed to death while working on 17 February.

Nader Awaad, chair of the Independent Workers' union of Great Britain (IWGB)'s United Private Hire Drivers branch, which supported the strike, said "As long as these operators [like Bolt and Uber] treat us like second class citizens, denied the most basic rights, operators set a dangerous precedent: that our lives don't matter."

United Voices of the World (UVW) members at La Retraite Catholic girls' school in south west London are preparing for a 40-day strike, due to begin on 16 March, part of a battle against wage theft and cuts to hours, and for full sick pay.

La Retraite cleaner Roberto said: "When we get ill – either with Covid-19 or something else – we simply can't afford to take sick leave. If we do, we'll lose our wages, and as we already live on the breadline every penny we lose risks leaving us unable to buy food or pay for rent. And what's worse is that the La Retraite knows this. Which is why teachers get full pay sick pay. If teachers get it then why can't cleaners?"

Their union is fundraising for a strike fund to support the action: bit.ly/uvw-lr □

“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! □

GMB: lay democracy still needed!

By Dale Street

As of 10 March, and until 17 April, GMB branches can nominate candidates to stand for election as the union's General Secretary. To get onto the ballot paper, candidates need to obtain at least 30 branch nominations from at least two GMB Regions. Voting will be between 12 May and 2 June.

The election was triggered by the resignation of the incumbent Tim Roache last year, following allegations of sexual harassment.

A subsequent investigation, [the Monaghan Report](#), found that the GMB was rotten to the core: sexual harassment, sex discrimination and bullying were rife; the union was run by and for the bureaucracy (especially Regional Secretaries); and the union's lay structures were largely moribund.

Three GMB full-timers are seeking the nominations needed to get onto the ballot paper: Scottish Regional Secretary Gary Smith, Public Services National Secretary Rehana Azam, and Giovanna Holt, the union's Senior Organiser for the North-West and Ireland.

The Monaghan Report identified the Senior Management Team (SMT) as the mechanism through which the Regional Secretaries exercised their dictatorship over the GMB. Smith has been a member of the SMT since 2015. He has never uttered a word of criticism of how it functioned.

Rehana Azam is the GMB's former National Officer for Equalities – in which capacity she seemed to fail to notice the rampant misogynistic culture exposed in the Monaghan Report.

Giovanna Holt's election statement is largely a mixture of the bland and the innocuous, plus the obligatory list of claimed great individual achievements.

None of the candidates understands that the core of the Monaghan Report is about the GMB membership taking back control of the union, and none of them stands for that lay-membership-control. □

• Abridged. More at bit.ly/e-gmb

British Gas engineers reject deal

By Ollie Moore

British Gas engineers will fight on in their battle to resist attacks on their terms and conditions, after voting by an overwhelming majority to reject the employer's latest offer.

Workers voted by a margin of 4-1 to reject the deal, with the largest section of the workforce, Service and Repair engineers, rejecting by a 79% majority on an 88% turnout. Strikes continued from 5-8 March. 8 March was the 30th strike day in the dispute so far. Strikes from Friday-Monday are planned through the rest of the month.

British Gas wants to impose new contracts via "fire and rehire", effectively dismissing its workforce en masse and re-employing them on worse conditions. Workers who do not agree to the new terms will not be rehired. The new contracts involve the equivalent of a 15% pay cut for many engineers, an increase in compulsory weekend working, and up to 156 additional unpaid hours per year.

British Gas Chief Executive Chris O'Shea said the company had made "significant concessions" but now "had no choice" but to press ahead with plans to impose the new contracts.

The GMB union is now conducting an electronic poll of its members, in which workers are asked to vote on how many more strike days they are prepared to support, from "zero more days" to "more than six days."

While there is no option in the poll for "indefinite action", this kind of escalation must surely be considered. The solid support for the strikes thus far, plus the overwhelming rejection of the employer's offer, is a testament to the commitment and resolve of the workers involved. If 30 days of intermittent strikes have not been enough to force the employer into sufficient concessions, all options for stepping up the pressure should be on the table. GMB should fund any sustained action with strike pay, bolstered by donations from the wider movement if needed.

A debate continues amongst workers and union activists as to what victory in this fight would look like. Many, including prominent union officials, argue that the aim of the dispute is to force British Gas to withdraw its "fire and rehire" threat, and that if the threat is categorically withdrawn, the dispute could end to allow for negotiations over proposed changes to terms and conditions. GMB National Officer Justin Bowden said: "British Gas didn't take 'fire and rehire' off the table, the main obstacle to a possible settlement. This huge vote to reject the offer by gas and electrical engineers shows that there will be no

resolution until the company do so."

But others argue that the dispute must retain a central focus on the actual content of the new contracts, not merely their method of imposition, meaning victory would involve forcing the employer to comprehensively back down from its plans to make engineers work longer for less.

Following the resounding rejection of the deal and decision to continue the strikes, that debate can continue on picket lines. □

London bus workers plan more strikes

By Ollie Moore

Bus drivers in London struck again on 5-6 and 10 March, with further strikes planned on 17, 24, and 31 March. Over 2,000 drivers at three bus companies – London United, London Sovereign, and Quality Line – are involved in the strikes. All three companies are subsidiaries of the French company RATP.

All three disputes centre around pay. Quality Line drivers are among the lowest paid drivers in London, earning £2.50 per hour less than drivers at other RATP subsidiaries. They have been offered an increase of 7p per hour. London Sovereign drivers are striking to win an improved pay offer, after management offered an increase of just 0.75%. And London United drivers' strikes aims to resist the imposition of new terms, which will see hours increased and pay cut.

Unite is also balloting its members working for Metroline, one of London's largest bus companies, employing over 4,000 drivers – around 16% of all London bus drivers – for industrial action to stop the imposition of a remote booking-on system. A Unite statement said: "Remote sign on means drivers do not report to a depot, but meet their bus at an alternative location such as a bus stop. It forces drivers to start work away from the depot, reducing costs and boosting the company's profits. The remote sign-on policy raises concerns over lack of toilets and canteens; increased driving hours; and waiting for the bus in inclement weather." The Metroline ballot closes on 9 April.

In Manchester, 400 drivers at Go North West continue strikes against new contracts which their employer plans to impose via "fire and rehire". The contracts would cut 10% of the workforce and could lead to pay cuts of £2,500 for some drivers.

The Unite union has also advised bus driver members in London that they should continue to enforce capacity restrictions (11, 14, or 30 passengers, depending on the size of the bus) now schools are back. When schools resumed in September, drivers were told by bus companies that capacity restrictions did not apply when collecting school children. □

Get our paper every week!

Trial sub (6 issues) £2 special deal; Six months (weekly) £22 waged, £11 unwaged, €30 European.

Visit workersliberty.org/sub to subscribe

Or, email awl@workersliberty.org with your name and address, or phone 020 7394 8923. Standing order £5 a month: more to support our work. Forms [online](#).

Nest of vipers



Diary of an engineer

By Emma Rickman

Work is depressingly slow. The fewer jobs there are, the more lethargic we become. L keeps suggesting: "We'll do that tomorrow – spread it out. Our problem today was that we started too early, that's why the morning's dragging."

A trip to the control room turns into a drink in the control room, then long discussions that become increasingly awful to listen to. I offer to make a round of drinks and A says says to N – "It's International Women's Day, you should offer to make drinks."

N doesn't offer. Instead everyone goes silent and looks at me, as if they expect me to make a speech. I feel cornered, and look for the quickest way out.

"It is International Women's Day," I reply "but I'm still going to make this round. Coffee one?" and retreat to the kitchen.

Another day, Sarah Everard's body is found and the internet is full of sexual abuse testimonials. A friend of mine writes about being assaulted as a teenager: "One of the guys grabbed me, shoved me against a wall and squeezed my breast so hard it bruised." This sentence sticks with me all day like a gagging reflex.

Of course women's safety comes up for discussion in the control room, whether I want it or not. N makes a fly-away comment: "I know a lot of women are saying they get harassed a lot, and I shouldn't laugh, but I noticed this twitter post saying '95% of women have experienced sexual harassment in their lifetimes', and the first comment – I shouldn't laugh – the first comment was 'Let's make it 100% lads, we're slacking!'" N giggles.

Another day S and M are talking about marriage and S starts doing an impression of his wife.

S "We're in bed and she's going [puppeting with his hand] do this, what about that, neh neh – so I do this, I get right close to her ear to whisper something to her, and I go 'fuck off!'"

Roaring laughter.

S "That'll do it. I mean, she'll keep her legs crossed for a few months – but it was worth it!"

Another day two older shift-leaders sit shouting at BBC News.

V "Meghan Markle is a fucking liar! This is absolute madness!"

D "I said – when her and Harry announced their engagement – I said she'd cause trouble. I said this doesn't look good. And now she's got the whole USA laughing

at us!"

V "I wonder what they're going to say, when all the Commonwealth countries start defending the Queen? Won't that be a little bit contradictory...? Just a tad...?"

A weather presenter comes on, a young man with a blonde quiff and a pink jacket.

V "I don't think my missus would let me out wearing that."

N "Don't think he has a missus."

V "Exactly. I mean God..."

N "LGBTQIABC what!?" □

• Emma Rickman is an apprentice engineer at a Combined Heat and Power plant.



A film about the Paris Commune



Kino Eye

Following the new issue of *Women's Fightback*, it's back to 1929 and a rare film about the 1871 Commune: *The New Babylon* by Soviet directors Grigori Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg with music by Dimitri Shostakovich. The title derives from the fictitious department store frequented by the Parisian bourgeoisie where Louise (Yelena Kuzmina) is a shop assistant.

The Franco-Prussian war ends disastrously for France, while the workers of Paris starve to death. They take control of the city and establish the Commune with Louise joining their ranks. She befriends a soldier, Jean (Pyotr Sobolevsky) but he refuses to join her and they end up on opposite sides of the barricades. The Communards are overwhelmed and Louise is shot by firing squad. Jean is horrified when he is assigned to dig her grave. □

DVLA votes for action



John Moloney

Our members working at the DVLA [Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency] complex in Swansea have voted by large majorities for industrial action – 71.6% for strikes, and 76.9% for action short of strikes – to win improvements to workplace safety. This workplace saw one of the worst Covid outbreaks in the UK, but the employer has forced over 2,000 staff to continue to come into work every day. The vast majority could and should be working from home; during the first lockdown only 250 staff were on site carrying out essential work.

In the Ministry of Justice, our members working for outsourced contractor OCS are continuing a fight for improved pay and conditions. They've been offered a 1.5% pay increase, equating to just 13p per hour. We're also demanding full contractual sick pay and improved holiday entitlement. Our overall policy, of course, is for in-house employment, but short of that we're waging struggles to bring our outsourced worker members' terms and conditions closer to those of directly-employed civil servants.

OCS is clearly extremely nervous about the prospects of a strike, but rather than avoiding one by meeting our demands, they're trying to prevent our action by throwing endless legal challenges at the union. It's a further reminder of how restrictive the laws around industrial action are, and how clearly they're designed to give employers multiple opportunities for obstructing strikes. It highlights the vital need for campaigns like Free Our Unions, which the PCS NEC previously voted to support, and for the whole labour movement to mobilise to oppose anti-strike legislation, demand its abolition, and confront those laws when necessary. The OCS campaign in the Ministry of Justice has transformed union organisation there. Through the campaign, we've greatly expanded union membership and developed new layers of reps and activists. A few years back, we lost a ballot there by failing to hit the thresholds. This time around we easily cleared them, with an expanded membership. This kind of culture needs to be spread. It shows that unions grow and build by fighting, rather than presenting themselves to workers as insurance companies or service providers.

PCS members working at Heathrow will also take a month of work-to-rule and banning overtime, from 24 March to 21 April, to protest the imposition of a new roster.

As the lockdown restrictions begin to ease, our policy is that any move away from homeworking must be voluntary, and that all offices must have safety provision overseen and assessed by elected union safety reps. □

• John Moloney is assistant general secretary of the civil service workers' union PCS (personal capacity).

Aslef votes for Tube strike



Tubeworker

London Underground drivers in the Aslef union have voted by a 97.3% majority for industrial action to protect terms and conditions.

With Tube funding, heavily reliant on fares, having collapsed due to the pandemic, workers expect bosses to attack conditions such as pensions as part of a commitment to the Tory government, which has given TfL a series of bailouts, to return to being "self-financing" by 2023.

Although no specific cuts have been announced, two TfL reports have explicitly called for pension reform.

RMT, TSSA, and Unite, the other three unions organising on London Underground, have yet to launch ballots. □

Back to tabloid from 14 April

Our total is now £1,334.35 towards our fund-raising target of £20,000 by 11 July. Thanks to Bryan for £200! The lull in street activity since the end of the large Black Lives Matter demonstrations is beginning to end, with the vigils for Sarah Everard and related protests against the Police and Crime Bill. So, already, a greater circulation than we might have expected for our latest *Women's Fightback* and also for *Solidarity*. As lockdown is eased, we will need your increased financial support to make the return to the streets we need, including going back to our more usual tabloid-format printed *Solidarity*, which we plan for *Solidarity* 588, 14 April. (586 will be 24 March; then we skip a week for Easter; 587 will be 7 April). □

• Donate at workersliberty.org/donate2021

Contact us

 [020 7394 8923](tel:02073948923)

 solidarity@workersliberty.org

 Write to: 20E Tower Workshops, Riley Road, London, SE1 3DG

 Production: George Wheeler, Martin Thomas (ed.), Sacha Ismail, Simon Nelson, Zack Muddle

Solidarity



For a workers' government



HONG KONG: AGAINST THE BEIJING CLAMPDOWN!

By Pete Radcliff

The trial of Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU) general secretary Lee Cheuk Yan, Martin Lee and five others of the Civil and Human Rights Front under old British colonial laws, for "unauthorised assembly" on 18 August 2019, is scheduled to end on Thursday 18 March, and a verdict expected on 1 April.

Meanwhile, 43 of the 47 taken to court on charges of subversion (under the new National Security Law), are now in prison, remanded until the charges are heard in three months time.

Those charges carry possible life sentences. The 43 include not only the radical young activists particularly active in the 2019 street protests but also leading trade unionists like Carol Ng and Winnie Yu.

Behind the big trials, hundreds of others of lesser known activists face trials, such as the students charged with rioting after the police siege of the occupation of the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

A special parliamentary debate was called on 10 March. The government came under heavy criticism from most opposition parties over their failure to activate Magnitsky sanctions (aimed at individuals responsible). John McDonnell MP asked what action was being taken against UK companies operating in Hong Kong, like HSBC and Jardine Matheson, which have supported the National Security Law, and Swire, which has victimised democracy activists.

In Hong Kong, about a thousand congregated outside the court on the first day of the trial of the 47. The police displayed banners declaring the protest to be a illegal

gathering and in breach of the National Security Law, but that didn't move the crowds.

International trade union bodies such as the ITUC and ITF have expressed their solidarity with the 47. They had already declared support for Lee Cheuk Yan.

The arrests of the 47 have been met by street protests in the UK. A demo on 6 March, called by Nottingham Stands With Hong Kong and Labour Solidarity with Hong Kong, attracted sixty people in Nottingham.

Many Hong Kongers are fleeing Hong Kong for the UK. There is talk of 300,000 arriving over the current year. China is trying to get amendments to HK immigration legislation through the Hong Kong's governing LegCo by 1 August to ban people getting out of Hong Kong.

A small minority of those leaving Hong Kong are very wealthy. However, the majority face second class citizenship: having to prove before entry they can provide for themselves for six months, denied recourse to public funds except in exceptional circumstances. In the worst cases, unable to qualify for the BNO (Overseas) Passport, many will have to apply for refugee status.

Both they and the activists in Hong Kong facing the current legal repression deserve our solidarity.

Eight prominent Hong Kong activists now in exile have started a movement in the diaspora, the ["2021 Hong Kong Charter"](#).

The Charter fudges together statements about HK's position in the "Free World" with a soft left "connect with the social movements around the world, such as climate justice and racial equality movements, unite the communities which fight for social justice". □