

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry



Pic: bit.ly/nhs-p

» **NHS Pay**

» **Violence against women**

IT'S RIGHT TO PROTEST

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It's right to protest

6699 Editorial

The revolt against the Tories' Police Bill, with large demonstrations in several cities just before we went to press, is good news. Faced by an assault against democratic and social rights of many kinds, the labour movement needs to get out on the streets again.

Thanks to left-wing feminist group Sisters Uncut in particular, the focus has been on grassroots mobilisation, and it should continue to be. Without this the Tories would be pushing ahead at greater speed (after the first protests they slowed the passage of the Bill), and without even token opposition from Labour (who originally planned to abstain in Parliament).

The left, in the movement against the Police Bill, and in the labour movement, needs to develop demands on the right to protest and organise that include but go beyond clear opposition to – and if it passes, repeal of – this law. That should include repeal of earlier (Thatcherite and Blairite) "public order" legislation, and concrete proposals to limit and constrain the powers of the police.

In the UK relatively few such proposals came out of last year's Black Lives Matter protests. Politicians who nodded towards BLM while maintaining a "pro-police" stance were



Bristol Kill The Bill protest

not put under sustained scrutiny or pressure. The bulk of the Labour left did not account for its acquiescence in the party's "more police" message under Jeremy Corbyn.

Even since the revolt against the Police Bill pushed Labour into a somewhat stronger stance, much of its opposition has been on the basis of the Bill being "badly thought out". Its new "10 point plan" for women's safety bit.ly/labour10 is focused on

new crimes, more police powers and harsher sentences.

We need to take this fight into our unions, as an important base for pursuing this political battle, and as a base for mobilisation now.

We need to raise the anti-strike laws. Although not formally dealing with industrial action, the provisions of the Bill surely threaten the already very limited right to picket, and any strikes which cause significant disruption. The right to strike is already heavily restricted in the same way the Tories want to restrict the right to protest. This movement should take up the demand to repeal the anti-union laws, including the ban on using industrial action as a means of political protest. □

- An initial gain: from 29 March, protests will be explicitly legalised again, if organised by a named "political organisation" and with the "required precautions": bit.ly/p-law, bit.ly/a-wag

Bristol and the police

By Misha Zubrowski

At perhaps 10,000 people, Sunday 21 March's Kill The Bill protest was one of the largest demonstrations I've been to in Bristol, and even more impressive given that it had to be organised "under the counter" due to current anti-protest regulations.

The large majority of participants were comparatively young, under mid-30s. There were many home-made placards, and little else. Almost everyone was wearing masks, taking covid-safety seriously.

There was a strong appetite for wider politics, and excitement about the copies of *Solidarity* and *Women's Fightback* that I was selling.

After a lively, spirited and peaceful march, many demonstrators started to depart, taking a celebratory atmosphere from our sense of having fought back, and drifting into the sunny park, beers in hand.

Police attempts then to clear protestors from the road

provoked hundreds of us to march down to the police station. Over the next few hours, kitted-out riot police – and horses – tussled with furious protesters. Police used batons, cameras, and pepper spray against demonstrators, while a small number of activists graffitied, rocked and eventually burned a van. Activists and police were injured, and many activists have been arrested.

The police are due a fair share of criticism for the rioting that happened, as are the media for their reporting of it and the protest as a whole. In this case, the direct action against the police was disadvantageous for fighting for the right for protest. But the big surprise here is that such a destructive expression of people's outrage hadn't happened previously.

When the labour movement is not loudly offering a constructive and energetic alternative, is it any surprise that righteous ire gets channelled this way? □

- Abridged. More: bit.ly/21m-b



NHS pay protests set for 1 April

By Angela Driver

NHS workers are continuing to organise against the 1% offer on pay. Unison has announced a day of action on 30 March, and Health Workers Say No! are planning activity on 1 April, backed by GMB.

Although the RCN have made a big announcement about their strike fund and all health unions are talking about ballots – Unison has issued an email to consult members informally – realistically any ballots will take place after the NHS pay review body reports in May and the government responds.

Then the unions will formally consult members. That could be as late as June or July. The delay could act as a cooling down period, especially if the government raise their offer a little above 1%, which is likely. Instead, we must use the time to build organisation and solidarity.

NHS workers are angry about the offer. After the year we have had, many will be willing to vote for action. We should aim and work for national action across the NHS. However, the lethargic and divided record of the biggest health unions, poor organisation in many workplaces, and the legal thresholds on ballots are huge barriers to mounting a national dispute.

Work towards to getting a yes vote and organising effective action should include:

- organising cross union rank and file networks that meet regularly and discuss strategy, including how to

push the unions towards a unified fight;

- consideration of disaggregated ballots, i.e. a national ballot broken down into units so that even if the thresholds are not passed nationally we can organise action in the places where we meet them. Tory legislation requires both a 50% turnout of those entitled to vote, and, for essential workers, a further barrier of yes votes from 40% of those entitled.

- early consideration of issues such as democratic control of strike action, imaginative action short of strike that was used effectively in the Irish health workers' strike, and workers' control of emergency cover.

We should also build solidarity and support within the broader Labour movement, including campaigning for the Labour Party to back the 15% demand and raising the possibility of solidarity action by non-health workers. □

Transform “Test and Trace” into an isolation service!

From Safe and Equal

Despite a budget of £37 billion over two years “NHS” Test and Trace is having a negligible effect on reducing infections. Only one in five are fully isolating when they have symptoms.

Around 12 million workers still have no occupational sick pay and have to rely on Statutory Sick Pay of just £95.85 a week.

An isolation service should ensure that workers are not losing any income due to isolation. Germany has a scheme that allows all workers to isolate on full pay for up to six weeks.

Practical support could be offered. In New York residents who need to isolate access medication and grocery collection.

Alternative hotel quarantining should be an option for people in overcrowded accommodation. Schemes like this in the US and South Korea have been shown to reduce infection rates.

People who isolate should be celebrated for their contribution to the collective effort.

And all migrants should be granted “leave to remain” to reduce the fear of accessing isolation support and other health services.

An isolation system on these lines would cost a lot of money, but £37 billion is currently being wasted on a system that does not reduce infection rates and has failed to prevent two lockdowns. □

- Abridged from safeandequal.org



Upcoming meetings

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

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

Sunday 11 April, 11.30am-1.00pm: Socialist Feminist Reading group, Rape: From Lucretia to #MeToo

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

Tuesday 13 April 6.30-8.30pm: Free Our Unions: Striking for the climate?

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

Plus

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

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

Our calendars of events: browse or subscribe!

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

Morning Star goes quiet on 40% more nukes



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

On 16 March the government set out its plan for a post-Brexit "global Britain" in the so-called "Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy". One aspect of the review caused consternation even in the Tory press: "Shock plans to increase the country's nuclear warheads by 40 per cent were met with fury last night... the remarkable move comes more than 50 years after the signing of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty" noted the *Daily Mail*. Even the *Sun* asked "And why do we need 80 more nukes... aren't 180 city-destroying bombs enough?"

The *Mail* also noted that "In another controversial policy shift the UK could consider using its nuclear arsenal against non-nuclear countries..."

You would have expected the *Morning Star* to be shouting from the rooftops about this. Yet on the same day (17 March) that the *Mail* and *Sun* were expressing their dismay, the paper of "Peace and Socialism" didn't lead on the story and ran an editorial which noted Boris Johnson's "conciliatory language" towards China and welcomed the review's designation of China as a "systemic challenge" (rather than a "threat", like Russia).

True, the editorial did condemn the "staggering increase in the number of nuclear warheads," but the emphasis was on denunciation of "those attacking Johnson for going easy on the Chinese".

Well, there's a turn-up for the books: the *Morning Star* apparently more willing to defend Johnson over defence and foreign policy than the *Mail* and the *Sun*.

There is an obvious explanation for this: the fact that uncritical subservience to the interests of the Chinese state and ruling class is now the determining consideration for the Communist Party of Britain and its mouthpiece, the *Morning Star*, when it comes to international matters.

In fact, the *Morning Star* and CPB now regard doing or saying anything that annoys the Chinese ruling class as contributing to a "new cold war" and to be the way that "left" and "right" is now defined: thus Fiona Edwards of the No Cold War Campaign is quoted approvingly (18 March and again on 20-21st) claiming that Lisa Nandy's criticisms of Dominic Raab's stated willingness to trade with China regardless of human rights considerations, "puts Labour to the right of the Tories on this issue."

Embarrassed

A second explanation – less obvious but still quite possible – is the fact that this review was the direct, foreseeable and inevitable result of the hard Brexit that the Johnson government chose to go for, with the scarcely concealed support of the *Morning Star*. It is noticeable that the review hardly mentions the EU and proclaims a "tilt to the Indo-Pacific" that in reality amounts to little more than Johnsonian post-imperial posturing and an ambiguous attitude to China. This is the consequence of the Brexit that the *Morning Star* and CPB backed, perhaps making criticism difficult and even embarrassing for them, though the equally pro-Brexit *Mail* and *Sun* evidently felt no similar inhibitions. □

No to offshoring asylum-seekers!

By Sacha Ismail

The Tories' latest anti-migrant move – suggestions of removing asylum-seekers to camps in remote locations, hundreds or thousands of miles away, while their claims are processed – has now been condemned by numerous humanitarian and migrants' rights organisations, by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and, though in fairly timid terms, by the Labour Party.

Many organisations have pointed to the humanitarian consequences of Australia's use of this model. As Enver Solomon of the Refugee Council put it: "We know from the Australian model that offshore detention leads to appalling outcomes including high levels of self-harm and mental illness. It is an inhumane policy..."

Whether the proposal is to move asylum-seekers three hundred miles to the Isle of Man, a thousand miles to Gibraltar, or 4,000 miles to Ascension island in the Atlantic, it must be defeated.

We must build momentum to comprehensively reverse the decades-long push towards marginalisation and demonisation of refugees (and other migrants), or the downwards spiral will continue.

The labour movement must fight to win safe routes to the UK for asylum-seekers, for the abolition of all immigration detention, and for rights to family union, to work with the same rights as other workers, and to access normal benefits and public services. □

WINTER/SPRING 2021

A SOCIALIST FEMINIST PUBLICATION BY WORKERS' LIBERTY

WOMEN'S FIGHTBACK

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MY BODY MY CHOICE MY ABORTION

PHOTO: FEMINIST COLLECTIVE LONDON

W o m e n ' 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

The fight for equality and respect



Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

The murder of Sarah Everard, and police action at subsequent vigils and demonstrations, has opened a public discussion on gendered violence. The circumstances of the tragedy fit perfectly with the public imagination and conversation of the threat faced by women.

A middle-class white woman, she was a model of female "respectability" and a "proper" victim. Many have commented that Sarah "did everything right" – wearing bright clothing, walking along the lit main road and calling her boyfriend. She didn't know her attacker, and was snatched on a street at night.

The focus on strangers as perpetrators, and on women not being safe walking the streets, ignores that most of the violence against women is committed by someone the victim knows. Young men are disproportionately affected by street violence, and women are more likely to face violence at home. The press focus on street violence is part of the "othering" of violence against women and girls.

The [Femicide Report 2020](#) revealed 61% of killings of women were by a partner or ex-partner. 6% of femicides (nine victims) were committed by a stranger. Many women live with their abusers. Their safety could be improved by removing the barriers to escaping – free transport, easily accessed public housing and specialist domestic violence services.

Still, women are afraid to walk alone at night. Women wrap their fingers round their keys, text as soon as they are home, and plan journeys to avoid back alleys and dark spots. Learning to fear violence, and in particular sexual violence, is core to becoming a woman. We live our lives as perpetual, potential victims, with a lifetime of harassment and "minor" incursions reminding us of our vulnerability.

The psychological damage of living in fear is immense. Many of us respond by being smaller, quieter, or hyper-vigilant. Women have a right to noisy and messy lives, and should not feel forced out of public space.

Violence against women is not biologically written. It can be promoted or diminished by ideological apparatus, cultural messages, and norms. This has already happened to some extent. Public understanding of violence against women and sexual consent has greatly improved in Britain thanks to the women's movement of the sixties and seventies.

Psychologist John Pryor developed the "Likelihood to Sexually Harass Scale" which looked at factors statistically related to coercive sexual behaviour. These factors were lack of empathy, belief in traditional gender roles, and a tendency toward authoritarianism. Environments which



Flowers at the Sarah Everard memorial in London

encourage extremes of these factors, such as prison and the army, were sites of widespread sexual abuse.

We can reduce violence against women and girls by increasing social equality, gender equality, consent, respect and non-violent communication – inside and outside the sexual sphere.

Boys aren't simply gendered to be tough and entitled, and therefore violent. Boys are touched and talked to less, even as babies. Boys are taught to expect a lack of empathy. Sharing your feelings is seen as an example of gender non-conforming. Crying is for "sissies". Experiencing a lack of empathy and emotional support creates a lack of emotional regulation and resilience, and makes people less likely to respect emotional and physical barriers in others.

This contributes not only to male violence against women but all male violence and higher rates of male suicide. Education should not focus on what people should not do, but on how to build positive relationships, respect for yourself and others.

If we want to create a less violent society we need to fight gender stereotypes and prejudice, fight the understanding of the family sphere as private and under male authority, and remove the general acceptance of violence as part of the public sphere. □

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 selection:

- *Schooling in Capitalist America*, By Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis
- *What is to be Done?* by Vladimir Lenin
- *Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution*, by Vladimir Lenin
- *Can Bolsheviks Retain State Power?* By Vladimir Lenin
- *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, by Vladimir Lenin

Lessons of Fukushima



Environment

By Les Hearn

On 12 March 2011, an earthquake near Tōhoku, about 200 miles north of Tōkyō, caused a tsunami which killed up to 20,000 people in eastern Japan.

One of its effects was to overtop the defensive walls and knock out the cooling systems of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant (NPP), resulting in three meltdowns, hydrogen explosions and releases of radioactivity. Those resulted in the death of... no-one.

As a safety precaution, 109,000 people were ordered to evacuate from within a 20 km radius of the NPP (while 45,000 others chose to evacuate from the wider surroundings). Among these, there were over 2,000 deaths, mainly of elderly and sick people who died at greater rates than usual when being moved from hospitals and care homes or while in temporary housing.

There have been several suicides, including a 102-year-old man who refused to leave his village and a 60-year-old woman who burnt herself to death while depressed about her inability to return home. Those deaths exceed those caused in the Fukushima prefecture by the tsunami.

No danger from radiation

Analysis in a recent article in [The Conversation](#) concludes that probably no one needed to be moved, with a minimal risk to life expectancy from staying put. This was also the judgement of physicist and radiation expert Professor Wade Allison who has [argued](#) that current radiation safety levels are at least 1,000 times too low.

Allison has written and lectured on nuclear safety and Fukushima before and since 2011, criticising the dominant Linear No-Threshold (LNT) model which is the basis for the setting of permissible levels of radiation.

The LNT model assumes that radiation damage is simply cumulative and it is – for non-living material. But living matter has evolved in an environment where radiation is ever-present (“background”) from cosmic rays and naturally occurring radioisotopes. All cells contain efficient DNA-repair systems that fix the damage that occurs constantly from background radiation; only when these systems are overwhelmed by an enormous dose does serious harm occur. Such enormous doses would be impossible in the Fukushima situation unless one was a worker in the power plant, and even the few who suffered radiation burns have not suffered subsequent ill effects.

It appears that there are two scandals with Fukushima.

One concerns the inadequate tsunami protection of the Fukushima plant: the protecting walls were too low, flood water knocked out the electricity, and the back-up cooling system only operated for a short time, so the fuel



Workers at the Fukushima plant after the reactor meltdowns

rods started to overheat. The owners, TEPCO, had been warned in 2000 and again in 2008 of the need to urgently improve tsunami protection. Other safety failures made the accident in 2011 much more likely. In contrast, the Onagawa NPP, closer to the epicentre but with safety features exceeding minimum design requirements, was undamaged.

The second concerns the largely unnecessary evacuation of people in area surrounding Fukushima. The threat to people's health from any increase in radiation levels would have been statistically undetectable, indeed negligible, given the usual threats to health from infections, diet, life style, cancer and so on. In addition to the deaths attributable to the evacuation, people have suffered severe psychological and economic harm from being exiled from their homes.

There is a knock-on effect in that nuclear power in Japan has fallen from about 20% of the energy mix to 7%, meaning that, in the absence of a significant increase in renewable energy, Japan has continued to get about two-thirds of its energy from fossil fuels, with resulting carbon dioxide emissions, and air pollution causing morbidity and mortality. Japan is the third-largest coal importer, with most coming from Australia.

Since 2011, there have been about 50 deaths of Australian miners alone, with many more worldwide, compared with virtually zero proven deaths from nuclear power radiation. We need a public discussion of the risks of all forms of energy generation and this might well conclude that nuclear power has a role in the carbon-free electricity generation needed for the switch to electric vehicles. □

Back to tabloid 14 April

Solidarity 587 will be out on 7 April (we're skipping a week on 31 March because of Easter difficulties with distribution, and to give our paper staff a bit of time to work on other projects). From 14 April on we plan to return to our usual tabloid format. Thanks to the reader who has noted that we've dated the last few issues, on the cover, as "2020", and apologies for the lapse. □

A setback for Bolsonaro

By Luiza Xavier

On 8 March, Brazilian Supreme Court judge Edson Fachin suspended four corruption charges against ex-president Lula.

The charges were related to a triplex apartment, a farm and donations to the Lula institute, all allegedly given to him as bribes. Lula had previously been found guilty on those charges. He went to prison for 580 days, and was barred from running for the presidency against Bolsonaro in 2019.

The charges were suspended with the reasoning that Sergio Moro was not the “natural” judge for the case, so in theory a judgement on whether Lula is guilty of corruption or not is still due.

Immediately, the suspension of the charges means that, if he doesn’t get found guilty of anything else until October 2022, Lula is now deemed “electable” again. The flip side is that investigations of misconduct against Sergio Moro are also now suspended.

Lula is currently the only candidate shown in polls to be likely to win against Bolsonaro on a second round. The PT (Workers’ Party) has not yet confirmed Lula’s candidacy, and, since there isn’t a grassroots democratic process for the choice of presidential candidate in the PT, we are likely to know for sure only in 2022. But Lula’s speech on the day his charges were dropped was a not-so-subtle nudge about the possibilities.

Lula’s speech was watched live online by millions of people, and was extremely popular. A large part of it was what was to be expected: he harshly criticised Bolsonaro’s government and his handling of the pandemic, and pointed out how his government would have done better.

He also made clear moves to reach out to the centre. When criticising Bolsonaro’s policies to legalise ownership of guns, he said that the people in real need of guns are in “the armed forces and the police”. Lula also said that the markets should like him, if “they want to invest in productive things” and “want people consuming more” but should fear him if “they want to make money off selling off the state patrimony”.

Other likely left-wing candidates, such as Guilherme Boulos of PSOL (originating in a left-wing split from the PT in 2004), have announced they will step back from



Lula in 2016

the 2022 elections to increase Lula’s chances of getting to the second round. The alternative would be a second round of Bolsonaro vs. a “liberal” right wing ticket – Doria (São Paulo’s current mayor, known for controversial social cleansing policies), Luciano Hulk (a liberal game show presenter), or Sergio Moro (judge responsible for Lula’s judgement and imprisonment and Bolsonaro’s ex-minister of justice). □

Fighting council cuts in Nottingham

By Vicki Morris

Labour-run Nottingham City Council have voted to make £15.6m cuts this year, leading to 272 job cuts, 5% of the workforce. They also want to raise council tax by nearly 5%, and are dipping into reserves to balance their budget.

But they face resistance from council unions and determined pockets of the community, particularly to their proposal to close John Carroll Leisure Centre in Radford, one of the most deprived parts of the city.

A motion opposing the cuts has been passed by three Labour Party wards now and goes to Nottingham East CLP this month.

The trade unions have held online and in-person rallies and recently a small socially distanced protest outside council offices.

The council has made some blunders that have contributed to its financial predicament.

Worst of these was Robin Hood Energy (RHE), set up by the council as a well-intentioned foray into the energy supply market. It failed and wound up costing the council around £38 million; 230 RHE employees lost their jobs.

After the RHE collapse, the council, facing bankruptcy, agreed to a City Council Recovery and Improvement Plan to avoid being placed in special measures. □

• Abridged: more at bit.ly/jc-lc • John Carroll Leisure Centre campaign: bit.ly/s-j-c • see also bit.ly/mo-cuts on Momentum and council cuts.

Siyanda appeal opens

Siyanda Mngaza’s hearing in the Court of Appeal opens on 23 March. In May 2019 Siyanda, on a bank holiday outing in the Brecon Beacons, was attacked by three people. Defending herself with a glass in her hand, she cut one of the attackers. She was convicted of “Grievous Bodily Harm” in March 2020, and is now serving a jail sentence of four and a half years. The third and last online meeting of a “Free Siyanda tour” will be on Saturday 27 March, 4pm-6pm: bit.ly/free-siy. □

Turkey moves to ban HDP

By Pete Boggs

Procedures to ban the People's Democracy Party (HDP) in Turkey are now moving quickly. At the beginning of March, the Court of Cassation (Turkey's highest court of appeals) began an inquiry into the HDP, focusing on the actions of HDP parliamentary deputies during the 2014 protests against ISIS's [Daesh's] siege of Kobanî. On 17 March, the Chief Public Prosecutor submitted an indictment against the HDP, calling for the party to be banned and for 687 HDP politicians to be banned from public office.

The government has accused the HDP of acting in concert with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), and threatening Turkish national integrity by championing Kurdish democratic rights. Parties for the representation of a particular ethnic group are banned in Turkey, and despite having a broad left-wing political programme of social freedoms and support for the Turkish-Kurdish peace process, the HDP is commonly perceived as a Kurdish organisation, particularly by the Turkish right wing.

State Repression

The party has faced serious state repression since its foundation in 2012. Many elected HDP politicians have been removed from office and arrested, and many local representatives have been replaced by government-appointed trustees. On the same day as the indictment against the HDP was submitted, the HDP parliamentary deputy Ömer Faruk Gergerlioğlu had his parliamentary position revoked, due to his legal conviction for tweeting an article in support of the Turkish-Kurdish peace process. He refused to leave the parliament building, instead carried out a "Justice Watch", and was arrested on Sunday morning but released later that day. Justifiably, the HDP have accused the Turkish judiciary of acting on behalf of the government to "[play] on the opposition as the stick of the political power holders."

Weak and Unreliable EU Critics

The proposed HDP ban also comes as the European Union has softened its attitude towards Erdoğan. Planned sanctions based on Turkey's "unauthorised drilling activities" in the Mediterranean have now been shelved, at least partially by the instigation of the Biden administration. A number of European politicians, including the European Commission Vice-President Josep Borrell, have

spoken out against the proposed ban, and the upcoming European Council meeting this week will address EU-Turkey relations. However, it is likely that the primary interest will be in Greek and Cypriot grievances against Turkey. Despite potential condemnation, it is difficult to see any concrete action being carried out in the event of the HDP's closure, unless it is added to a laundry list of Turkey's indiscretions.

Despite its lacklustre consternation, the European Union is neither an effective nor consistent critic of the Turkish government. It relies on the Turkish government as its outsourced border force, keeping Syrian refugees out of "Fortress Europe". A dangerous precedent was set last year when Germany sentenced ten members of the Communist Party of Turkey/Marxist-Leninist (TKP/ML) to jail, which is designated a terrorist organisation by Turkey but not by Germany. Setting aside any assessment of the TKP/ML, it is worrying that involvement in an organisation proscribed by the Turkish government has now been deemed a criminal offence in Germany. If the HDP is banned, will German state carry out Erdoğan's dirty work against its members? Bourgeois governments in Europe cannot be relied upon to stand up fully for democracy and against anti-Kurdish repression in Turkey. □

• Abridged. More at bit.ly/hdp-ban

Further cuts in SEND provision

By Gerry Bates

Many councils across the country – the National Audit Office estimates over two dozen – are negotiating with the government for bailouts to make it possible to balance their 2021-2 budgets. Cuts in school special needs and disabilities (SEND) spending are among those demanded "in return" by at least five councils.

Details for Bury, Hammersmith and Fulham, Kingston upon Thames, Richmond-upon Thames and Stoke on Trent have been published on the Department for Education website and reported by *Schools Week*. Some councils now promise to meet special needs in a "more cost-effective way within mainstream settings", i.e. to axe separate special provision. Another common promise is to "improve efficiency of commissioning services to drive down costs".

SEND funding has been squeezed for years, and the pandemic has increased the gap between need and provision. The labour movement should campaign to restore central funding for local services, not resign itself to "managing" the shortfalls. □

“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 □

Australian women march for justice

By Janet Burstall

Around 100,000 joined March4Justice around Australia, in capital cities and regional towns, on Monday 15 March. Angry opposition to rape, sexual violence and cover-ups has erupted since the exposure of two high profile rape cases involving the national parliament.

In the first case, former staffer Brittany Higgins gave a TV interview on 15 February, alleging that in 2018 she had been raped in the office of her boss, Minister for Defence Linda Reynolds, by another staffer, and then was undermined when she reported it. Friends of a woman who suicided during Covid lockdown in 2020, wrote to three women MPs in late February to report that the dead woman had spoken with New South Wales [NSW] police shortly before she died about being raped in 1988, by a now Cabinet Minister.

The Government and its Ministers have become trapped in their own contradictions. They pay lip service to recognising that sexual violence against women is a serious problem, and that women should be believed. But they disbelieve and deny when faced with implications of exposure of perpetration by their own colleagues. The March4Justice rallies have focussed on sexual violence against women in political life, with a sense that if governments and politicians do not act to prevent it, then how can it be prevented elsewhere.

Government cuts endanger women

One of the four calls made by the March4Justice is for "Australia-wide strategies for deep cultural change in work places, and the political and criminal justice systems, focused on promoting equality, respect, fairness, integrity and a level playing field for all." These are generous sentiments. Yet other recent political decisions that are not "cultural" endanger women, some directly, such as the privatisation of the 1800 Respect phone hotline for women, and the abolition of the Family Court.

Others endanger women more indirectly, such as the cut to JobSeeker unemployment benefit back to \$308 a week, after it had been \$550 during the height of the pandemic. The higher rate had enabled many women and their children to escape domestic violence.

A shortage of public housing, and defunding of women's refuges, mean many women have nowhere to go when they try to leave a perpetrator. Policing and policy entrench the victimisation of indigenous and other working class women, through child removal, mutual obligation and work for the dole. Criminalisation of sex-workers exposes them to police violence.

Ending violence against women will become far more



possible when every woman has independent means to a secure livelihood, a safe home, and quality child care. This can happen when governments fund a lot more public housing, lift income support above poverty lines, and make child-care free again, as it was at the height of the pandemic.

Power imbalance and power dynamics were identified by many women discussing Brittany Higgins case, and the unusual nature of the employment relationship between MPs and their staff, which gives MPs unfettered, unchecked power to hire and fire. Whilst parliament houses as workplaces appear somewhat peculiar, in fact all employer-employee relationships are based on the power of the employer to hire and fire, even if that power is somewhat checked. Curtailing employers' prerogative to hire and fire can decrease their power.

That prerogative has been amplified in recent years by weakening unions, and unfair dismissal laws. Further, with more rights to organise in the workplace against management, women would stand a chance of banding together to work out exactly what needs changing in their own workplace.

Power over livelihoods is a foundation that enables violence, and fuels the sense of superiority, that makes perpetrators believe they can act violently. There are many demands to be formulated and asserted, inspired by the spirit of the March4Justice, aimed at breaking not just a culture of male superiority, but breaking the material conditions that allow men and bosses to perpetrate violence against women and cover it up. □

• Abridged. More: bit.ly/march4j



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“Anti-monopoly” doesn’t mean backing small capitalists



Letters

I am struggling to understand what points Jim Denham was trying to make in his article *Return of the Anti Monopoly Alliance* ([Solidarity 581](#)).

I am not a spokesperson for the Communist Party of Britain but I am in favour of left and socialist unity and believe this can only happen if we are open and honest with each others’ respective political positions and not construct straw windmills.

Jim claims the concept of the Anti Monopoly Alliance is making “more frequent reappearances” in his favourite daily newspaper, the *Morning Star*. Actually, it never went away. The “anti monopoly” nature of the broad alliance for progress and social change was one of the key demarcation issues in the divisions in the original Communist Party of Great Britain in the 1980s. The “anti monopoly alliance” is very much written into the DNA of the CPB and its programme Britain’s Road to Socialism (BRS).

Jim claims an implication of the anti monopoly alliance may be an alliance between the labour movement and small capitalists, but doesn’t describe his specific concern. I think Jim is insinuating by omission that the CPB is proposing an alliance of equal partners between the labour movement and small capitalists, a cross-class alliance which cannot by definition be anti capitalist since it includes small capitalists. Not true.

Capitalism is a system of society and a system of economic, social, ideological, political and state relations. When the BRS refers to monopoly capitalism, this simply describes the nature of capitalism in Britain since the early 20th century. It is not intended to imply that we other forms of capitalism are in any way preferable, that we want to “de-monopolise” capitalism or that capitalism can be reduced to a number of big capitalist corporations.

The BRS’s opposition to monopoly capitalism in Britain means opposition to capitalism as it is in Britain, to capitalism itself as a whole system.

The BRS makes clear the aim is the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist class, of capitalist rule and of capitalism itself. And for it to be replaced by the state power of the working class, the political rule of the working class and socialism. It makes clear the leading force for the revolutionary social change is the working class and therefore achieving the maximum unity of the class and winning it to the politics of anti capitalism and in favour of socialism is central to the BRS. The working class combined with working people more generally constitute the majority in Britain, so winning the majority of working

people to revolutionary social change is fundamental.

The BRS does point out that within the capitalist class there are some who can by no means be described as big monopoly capitalists and who therefore may have interests not in line with those of monopoly capital. Exploiting potential divisions within the enemy capitalist class makes good tactical sense and also serves to highlight the miniscule numerical scale of the true ruling class in this country.

The BRS also identifies intermediate strata such as small business owners, small farmers and shopkeepers who are also subject to the economic and financial domination of the big monopoly capitalists. They may technically be self employed, they may “own” a small amount of capital (probably from a bank loan), employ a small number of workers, but they themselves are often required to work hard for long hours for little direct remuneration and subject to economic conditions dictated by the big monopolies. They therefore have far more in common with the working class among whom they live and work than the jet setting multi millionaire or billionaire monopoly capitalist class.

We should always try to maximise our forces, to deprive our principal opponents of allies and cause as much disruption and dissent within the capitalist class as possible.

However, winning over a number of small business owners, small farmers and shopkeepers to the “popular, democratic, anti monopoly alliance” for revolutionary social change is in the scheme of things fairly marginal to the main tasks of uniting and politicising the working class itself. □

Andrew Northall, Kettering



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Not so much vipers...



Letters

Emma Rickman's column, *Diary of an Engineer*, gives us a window into the male dominated workplace. And in her latest entry, *A Nest of Vipers* ([Solidarity 585](#)), she gives us a window into the minds of the men who work there.

Such a workplace as depicted here, and there are many of them, is a safe space for those men who are threatened by world events to air their prejudices. It is a place to exaggerate, moan, entertain their mates and laugh in the face of their own weakness.

You know, reading Emma's column, that S did not tell his wife to "fuck off" in bed. He's an idiot for bragging to his mates with his lies and, if he did say it, he's an even bigger idiot. A lose-lose situation for him. You also know that the joker who wants to turn 95% of sexual abuse of women to 100%, telling his mates that they are slacking, is polite to the woman in Lidl's checkout, obediently waving his card over the reader on her instruction without so much as a misogynistic murmur. No, he's bigging himself up, and thinks this is the way to do it. Another idiot.

The pressure on the one woman who is there listening to this is intense, especially when you know that a lot of it is being said precisely because she is there, and also because everyone then looks at her and expects her to be the one who challenges every little piece of crap that's said. My experience of this taught me to pick my battles. If you try to respond to them all, you get labelled the moaning woman... by the moaning men.

Is working class solidarity really possible across genders? It does make you wonder. Except, when the chips are down, men and women workers tend to find whose side they are on!

A lot of this shit gets blown away in the heat of a struggle. I am reminded of the Notts striking miners who, on hearing that a bus load of Greenham Common women were on their way up the motorway to support them, said that they didn't want any bra-burning lesbians in their village, thanks very much. That's the idiot talking right there. After one day on the picket line where the Greenham women stopped the scab lorry getting in and took on the police in a fearless fight, the idiot had turned into the respectful comrade: "She's staying at my house".

These are the times when voices dismissed by mysog-

ynistic society get heard sometimes for the first time. And it is at times such as these that men who have gone along with the crap for years, assuming it to be "normal", revise what they said, what they did, feel embarrassed, and change.

It is hard to remember that when you're the lone woman in a male dominated workplace. So in the meantime, Emma, solidarity sister! □

Jean Lane, Sheffield



Activist agenda

From 24 to 31 March, Momentum is holding a "[policy primary](#)" – an all-members' vote-out, by single transferable vote, to decide what motions Momentum sends to Labour Party conference. Workers' Liberty are supporting [Momentum Internationalists'](#) recommendations:

- The Build Back Fairer motion on social measures to restore working-class health and safety, rights at work, and living standards, in the pandemic and as it fades, passed by North East Momentum, Stevenage Momentum and Southampton Momentum.
- The motion from the Uyghur Solidarity Campaign on ethnic cleansing in Xinjiang/East Turkestan and supporting the Hong Kong democracy movement
- The "Migrants Welcome" motion submitted by Labour Campaign for Free Movement and Lesbians and Gays Support the Migrants, calling for support for workers who refuse to implement deportations or Hostile Environment measures, replacing Settled Status with an automatic "Right to Stay", and re-entry into the European free movement area
- The motion from Free Our Unions and the Fire Brigades Union (the last one in the brochure) calling for the abolition of all anti-union legislation
- The Global Climate Justice motion from North East Momentum and others.

The Build Back Fairer motion indicates a series of concrete, practical emergency measures that the movement should take up – such as the right to isolate on full pay and the banning of zero-hour contracts. A Zero Covid motion vying for priority in the same area mentions almost no specific measures. More: bit.ly/bbf-zc

This online-only policy primary is a step forward for Momentum democracy in comparison with the way things have been run from 2017. However, it is still run on the liberal-technocratic basis of an email ballot. Restoring a real activist democracy based on local groups remains a priority. More on the Momentum Internationalists website at bit.ly/mo-strat and bit.ly/9-mths. □

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“We need to develop



Interviews

By Henry Chango Lopez

Henry Chango Lopez is the new General Secretary of the Independent Workers Union of Great Britain (IWGB). He spoke to Sacha Ismail.

How has the IWGB grown in a period when unions have generally been stagnant?

It's really just about the situation of workers at the moment, the way the economy is, outsourcing, precarious employment – these are problems many unions have not tackled. Unions do not effectively organise workers in these situations. The problem is so wide, exploitation is so wide, that if you organise you can be successful.

This exploitation is everywhere you go – in education, in government departments, in multimillionaire private companies. Workers increasingly don't have proper contracts, don't have basic conditions like sick pay, holidays and pensions. The IWGB has been taking on these issues and these employers and that is why we have been growing as a union. We challenge employers in any way we can – industrial action, taking them to court, direct action.

We were established in 2012. We represent workers at University of London, private hire drivers who work for companies like Uber, couriers who work for companies like Deliveroo and many others, security guards and receptionists, foster carers, game workers, yoga teachers, cycle instructors. We recently formed a nannies' branch. We also have a holding branch, which was formed during the pandemic to help other workers who don't fit in an existing branch, so we can find out if we have more workers in that industry and create new branches if there are workers who want to organise.

Several industries we organise in, like couriers, private hire drivers and foster carers, are very much all over the country and so we have spread to cities outside London as well.

At University of London [the central Senate House site, where Henry previously worked] we managed to finally bring outsourced workers like cleaners and security in-house in November, after a very long struggle. We've spread to other University of London universities like Goldsmiths, where we also overturned some outsourcing, and UCL, where we've made some progress on helping workers win better conditions and equality.

We've also organised cleaners and help them win gains at a number of other workplaces, including a number of private clubs.

We've fought against private hire drivers having to pay the congestion charge, and challenged courier companies like Deliveroo which have been seriously exploiting

workers. We managed to secure employment rights for foster carers in Scotland through legal action.

The pandemic has been very challenging. We're a union that runs on a shoe-string due to the low wages our members mostly receive. It has meant we often can't

take direct action, and meanwhile we're faced by many employers using the opportunity of the pandemic to attack terms and conditions, cutting hours, not putting people on furlough when they could and so on, to say nothing of the weaknesses in the schemes the government has introduced. Many of our members have more than one job and so are faced with these kind of problems with multiple employers.

Over the last year we haven't been able to pursue everything we wanted to. At the same time in we have recruited lots of new members, because for many low-paid workers the situation has highlighted the need for a union.

Particularly if you're a low-paid, precarious worker, there is really no effective way to assert the most basic rights, not even say if the company fails to pay you, unless you're in a union.

We've made good use of Zoom meetings and online rallies, petitions and campaigns targeting bad employers, and so on, as well as individual conversations with members. The fact that lots of workers are on furlough has given us more opportunity to talk to, engage and involve them.

We've worked hard to help workers with various problems, for instance with Universal Credit and Settled Status applications, by working with a variety of sister organisations to facilitate that.

We have organised a number of workplaces during the pandemic and our membership has continued to grow. It's now about 6,000, up from 500 seven years ago.

What's your view on how we transform the bigger, more mainstream unions?

I think it's more about workers than unions themselves. The workers who are part of those unions need to organise and demand things, or it is hard to get the unions to demand.

We generally have a good relationship with the bigger unions, in terms of supporting each other's struggles and also sometimes we receive help financially, as a show of solidarity to support of our struggles. In the past we had more hostility from other unions, but it's faded as we've grown. But there is an issue about unions failing to organise precarious and outsourced workers in various sectors,



workers' capacities"

and only taking an interest if we come in and start organising. If unions don't organise workers then that creates a problem which other unions have to take up.

How does the IWGB relate to politics, and what are the key demands you raise on that level?

We worked very closely with many MPs under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell, who support a lot of our initiatives. We are still in contact with Labour and other MPs who are supportive, and it's something I want to pursue.

Our main demands would be ones that relate to the gig economy, particularly in terms of guaranteeing basic workers' rights for all workers, whatever their employment status. There have been victories in the courts, most recently against Uber, but these rights need to be rolled out to all workers, and that takes political action. We need political and government action to roll back outsourcing.

We oppose the anti-strike laws. Obviously those laws are there to make the situation harder and restrict the work that we're doing. We've got to a ridiculous situation now where you not only have to go through all these procedures, but even inform the police when you are going to strike. It's sick, and it makes people think twice about asserting their rights.

For us as a small union reaching the thresholds for strike ballots isn't such a problem; obviously for bigger unions balloting a much bigger membership it can be much more of a problem. For us workers campaigning in solidarity with each other has been very important. The ban on industrial solidarity action needs to go.

The IWGB campaigned against Brexit. Why and how do you see the issues now?

Our membership includes loads of workers who have come here from the European Union. Moreover many of the workers' rights we've taken advantage of derive from the EU. Now the Tories are not even restrained by the EU rules. As a result of Brexit workers face an increasingly difficult situation, and particularly migrant workers.

Migrant workers are the worst impacted by the restrictions on support during the pandemic, and migrants' rights is absolutely crucial for the labour movement to take up.

Look at what happened in the NHS when the families of workers who died were offered the right to remain, but that was not extended to cleaners and other outsourced workers. You can see the attack on migrants and outsourcing intertwining.

The Labour Party should be fighting to improve the situation of all workers and all people in this country. That has to include migrants. When people counterpose one to the other it's a problem.

How do you think the trade union movement does in terms of fighting for migrants' rights?



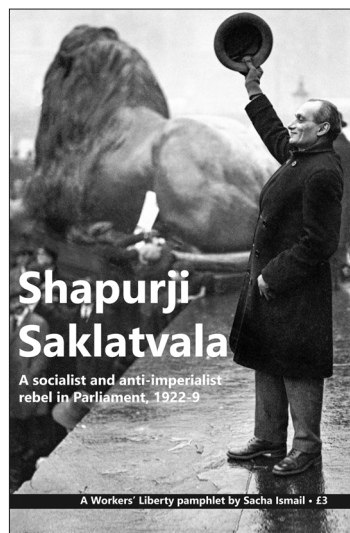
Henry Chango Lopez
(Centre, Pre Covid)

I look back to how we left Unison at University of London [in 2013 – bit.ly/13iwgb]. The leadership in the branch was white British, and we tried to change and diversify that, to put migrant workers in leadership positions, but we faced real hostility in trying to do that, and so our elections were cancelled, and that's why we left. That's the opposite of what we need, trying to encourage migrant workers and provide the space for them to become the ones leading the fight and the struggle. In the IWGB we've tried to do that but of course there's more we can do.

There is a tendency in unions, and in all organisations, including on the left, for them to become dominated by a graduate layer, more white collar and formally educated. How do you deal with this?

It's about providing training and given people the opportunities to get involved and feel included in leadership. It can't just be about having a small number of leaders, it has to be about involving much larger numbers of workers much more thoroughly. It's not unreasonable that people with graduate backgrounds take organising positions, but we have to prepare the leaders of the future so we can gradually start to shift the situation. We need to develop workers' capacities. □

• Abridged: more at bit.ly/henrycl



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Agriculture and climate:



Debate

By David Walters

The debate in the pages of *Solidarity* [on animal products and climate change, bit.ly/ani-p] is, in my opinion, of profound importance. Not because of the influence of this paper but because it mirrors larger debates going on in the “climate change community”, and, more importantly in the agricultural communities.

The intertwining of both the devastating effects of climate change and food security are obviously closely linked. For Marxists, it also raises the issue of what can be achieved under capitalism and what has to be put off until after a planetary seizure of power by the working class and true planning on a global scale is implemented. Much of what needs to be done has to wait until this occurs. However, we have to do something *now* under the aegis of capitalism at least in a transitional way. We cannot wait.

My focus, however, does not start from the perspective of climate change, *per se*, but rather from my interest in food in the micro level: its diversity, its wonderful cultural communities, its history and, on the macro level: the soil it is grown in. This latter point is where I have started as a student of soil science.

Soil science

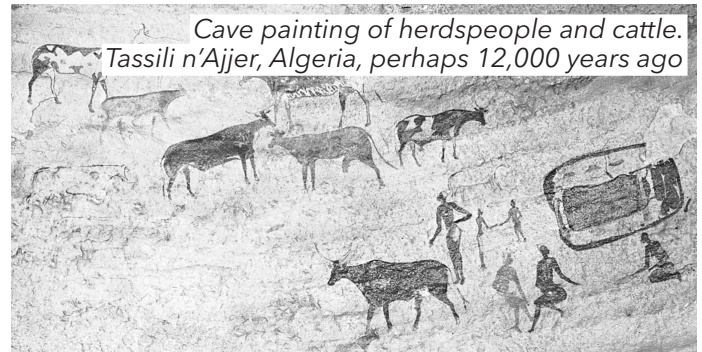
For this I have relied extensively on the works of geologist David Montgomery and many peer reviewed works on soil formation, popularly expressed in his books *Dirt: the Erosion of Civilizations*, *The Hidden Half of Nature: The Microbial Roots of Life and Health* and lastly *Growing a Revolution: Bringing Our Soil Back to Life*.

On the agricultural side, the practical or “clinical effects” as presented in the video lectures to agricultural conferences of rancher-farmer Gabe Brown and grass-fed-grass-finished rancher Greg Judy all point to the same thing: it is all about the soil.

Needless to say, then, for readers of the 2019 debate in *Solidarity and Workers Liberty* (bit.ly/ani-p), I come squarely down on the side of Paul Vernadsky, who rejects the idea of removing animal products from the food ecosystem. In fact, we need more ruminants (grass eaters) not less.

The idea of lab grown meat, whether vegetable-matter based or lab grown meat from the cells of cows, goes totally against the direction of letting nature do the work that it has for hundreds of thousands of years, and done so successfully.

The problem with cows is the way they are fed and managed, not that they exist. There were as many ruminants 2000 years ago as there are today. So what changed? We



changed. We decided to remove cattle from the grass lands where they evolved and put them in concreted and steel pens feeding them grain (no ruminant would ever eat grains of any sort when offered real grass). We also decided to pump vast quantities of CO₂ and methane into the atmosphere, adding to what nature has already puts there.

Needless to say, it is not the cows (or sheep or goats or pigs) who are the ally of devastating climate change, but us. So, it is we who need to stop much or most of the production of CO₂ throughout industry and transportation. This can be done. I don't need to run through the solutions here. I want to return to the focus of my own study of the problem: the soil.

There is a soil crisis in the world today, especially in North America but also on all the livable continents. Through farming practices organised by the political economy of Imperialism, production at any cost is the order of the day. Even primitive farming practices of the pre-industrial agriculture, such as deep plowing/tillage and mono-crop agriculture, predate the rise of imperialism in the 19th Century. But first the crisis...

Carbon and nitrogen

Due to the way in which we farm, plowing up the land (8,000 years and running), destroying the micro-biology of the soil, essentially *mining the soil for its carbon*, then adding, at least beginning in the mid to late 20th Century, fossil fuel and nitrogen derived inputs like fertiliser, herbicides, insect and pesticides, we have reduced what had been extremely high Organic Carbon sequestered soils from highs of 4% to 8% down to less than 1%. Most of this OC was returned to the atmosphere in the form of CO₂. Every year, gigatons of CO₂ are emitted from industrial agriculture into the atmosphere.

No one debates that it is happening, though the figures are quite *soft* in terms of actual contributions and they range from a low of 10% to as high as 50%. In any case, those emissions can be reversed.

Running in parallel is the nitrogen crisis. Nitrogen is 80% of our air. Nitrogen-based fertilisers use millions of tons of petroleum to be produced every year. The nitrogen is washed out of the soil and downstream into the oceans, creating vast dead zones in the oceans. The largest one

It's all about the soil

resides near the mouth of the Mississippi River in the Gulf of Mexico, but they exist globally. This is the result of industrial fossil-fuel based agriculture that destroys our soil.

In North America, where I reside, the soil is essentially dead. When white European farmers came to this hemisphere, they *mined the soil* for their crops. They didn't even have to add fertiliser for decades because the thick top soil, about four times the depth it is today, allowed the settlers to plant what they wanted without worrying about soil fertility. While this started out as subsistence farming, it quickly, through the introduction of corn, barley, sugar and eventually cotton, allowed millions of tons of *carbon* to be removed from the soil over decades. Most of this was for commodity capitalism and the early mercantile market-place. That carbon had to be replaced.

In addition to the removal of carbon in the form of plants harvested by our species, and exposing the soil to the elements and most notably, the sun, the microbiology was slowly being destroyed as well. Eventually the soil was depleted and fertiliser started to be applied, usually guano and even human waste.

Fertiliser

By the 18th Century, at least, nitrogen (the essential fertiliser in guano as well as the essential element in making munitions) was starting to be applied artificially. Early on it was understood by farmers that crop rotations had to be established to allow the soil to recover (a good practice in any event for any holistic-oriented farmer). But with the advent of chemical fertilisers, crop rotation became largely unnecessary. Thus the birth of industrial mono-cropping, the staple of the international export industry for everything from soybeans, to corn, to wheat and a variety of tuber and cereal grains. This has to end.

With the introduction of new, high tech and modern holistic farming practices, farmers are able to establish a more natural carbon and nitrogen cycle, one that mimics nature. This is what is called "regenerative farming" and is, fortunately, being increasingly adapted even in the advanced *industrial agricultural* countries. This form of farming has two distinct spheres of practice: mob-grazing of cattle in very managed rotational grazing and no-till agriculture. More of this explained in my essay at bit.ly/dw-ag.

Regenerative farming

Briefly: cattle in nature (bison, water buffalo, wild goats, deer, elk, caribou, wildebeests, etc.) are moved around *constantly* by predators (including, in the past, humans). The constant moving prevents cattle from chewing grasses down to the soil, thus allowing regrowth. Their manure provides all the carbon, nitrogen, and phosphorus necessary along with solar energy via photosynthesis to build up the soil with carbon (carbon sequestration). The constant movement promotes root growth (the largest part of carbon sequestration is when the roots dies off when the grass is chewed down).



A tractor spreads fertiliser

Generally, pesticides are not needed as 90% of all pests that affect cattle are usually in the first four inches of the grass from the roots. All this goes for an amazingly healthy, growing topsoil. Above all it allows rain infiltration and almost gets rid of soil runoff altogether!

Cattle moving around on small paddocks mimics this. Stocking densities can actually increase tremendously and, with farmers not having to cut checks to the chemical companies, it can work well with rotational cropping as well, where farms can plant crops after the cattle pass over using seed drills instead of plowing up the soil. This is far more fossil-fuel-efficient, and is better for the soil because it preserves, if no chemicals are sprayed on the soil, the amazingly large amount of micro-biology in the soil (from fungi to dung-beetles to earthworms).

There is debate about how much CO₂ is sequestered from the atmosphere. There is no doubt that in every study, more CO₂ is sequestered that would be without regenerative methods of agriculture even when some studies show that gain to be very small. The microbial activity of methanogens in soil feed on methane and help reduce the vast amount of methane exhaled by ruminants.

Sequestration

There is, however, an upper limit on how much CO₂ can be sequestered in the soil by cattle. Most studies in the vast array of agricultural studies generally only look at the first few years to determine how much CO₂ is sequestered. Often times the studies are done in labs to see if science can somehow show what happens on a farm in terms of % increase in soil organic carbon (SOC). They are not life-time studies, though some are ongoing. We don't really know what that upper limit is. But so what? If there was an increase in the planet's agricultural lands from 1% to 5% of SOC, it would, in effect, erase almost all of the CO₂ ever put in the atmosphere by our species though industry.

Regenerative agriculture is a real solution to many of the problems (including the ethical ones) regarding how we regard our grasslands, steppes, prairies, how we treat and husband our food animals and feed the world. It has the *added benefit* of helping mitigate megatons of CO₂ that otherwise would be produced. The answer to the role agriculture plays in climate change lies in the soil, not the lab. □

Some responses on the USA



Debate

By Martin Thomas

Responses to Paul Hampton's contribution in Solidarity 585, bit.ly/paul-s

1. On principle?

In 1954 James P Cannon argued that the Independent Socialist League's (ISL's) decision to back selected left trade-unionist candidates within the Democrats, and in general elections if selected, was wrong on principle, not just tactically.

If Cannon was right, and Paul seems to argue so, then also we were wrong, and wrong on principle, to back Sanders in the Democratic presidential primaries of 2016 and 2020, and to talk about backing him if he won the primary. I don't think we were wrong.

2. The class line?

In arguing against the ISL, Cannon felt a need to reassure his comrades they were not choosing sectarian self-isolation. How, in the difficult conditions of 1954? By telling them that "In the Second World War you have had the proof that this new economy... gave the Soviet Union the strength to prevail in the war... And now you have China and the ever-expanding colonial revolution on your side".

Illusions in the "working-class" character of Stalinism did help to sustain the morale of the Cannonite SWP, and saw it through until recruitment recovered in the "Fair Play for Cuba" movement in the early 1960s. We can conclude simply that Cannon was right only by looking at an artificially short time-scale.

Since 1979 the SWP, under a new leadership of people recruited and trained as young activists in the SWP's pro-Cuba growth in the early 1960s, has shrivelled into a Stalinistic sect.

The ISL dispersed and bio-degraded in the 1960s. Even so, remnants from the ISL tradition – Solidarity, the remnants from the ISO, the DSA – are more live today than the SWP.

3. Fabian-type politicking

From the mid-1950s Max Shachtman slid away from direct revolutionary-socialist advocacy and from building a distinct revolutionary-socialist organisation, towards Fabian-type, string-pulling politics.

In the 1960s he did some of that Fabian-type politicking in Democratic Party circles. As I read the evidence, and Paul's account confirms rather than refutes, Shachtman's main focus was on politicking with leftish, or more accessible, union officials, rather than Democrat politicians. (At the end, in 1972, Shachtman would follow the AFL-CIO union federation in refusing to vote for the Democrat

presidential candidate that year).

The trouble was the shift to Fabian-type politicking, not that a shift to Fabian-type politicking would have been ok if developed in another sphere, or that the shift could only have happened by involvement with the Democrats.

4. The 1956 presidential election

As I noted [previously](#), Labor Action and the ISL didn't call Joe McCarthy a fascist. They did, however, describe his movement at its height as an imminent risk to the very life of the labour movement in the USA.

That had no bearing on their 1954 decision about the Democrats, nor on their line in the 1956 presidential election.

From mid-1954 Eisenhower and the leading Republicans turned openly against McCarthy. Soon McCarthy was marginalised and ill. He would die in May 1957.

Eisenhower had been asked by Truman to be the Democrat candidate in 1952, but decided instead to be the Republican. In 1956 Eisenhower was backing federal action for school desegregation in the South. His Democrat opponent, Adlai Stevenson, though in general terms a liberal, opposed federal action for desegregation (I guess in deference to the Southern Democrats, then the bulwarks of US racism).

The anti-union Landrum-Griffin Act would be adopted as a bipartisan measure in 1959, going through a Democrat majority Senate where Lyndon B Johnson was majority leader.

That the Democrats were no lesser evil than the Republicans in 1956 was everyday fact. I can understand an argument for voting Hawkins on 3 November 2020 even though a Biden victory was a lesser evil than a Trump victory, but not that Biden or Trump made no difference.

The problem for the ISL with the 1956 presidential election was that the Socialist Party candidacy they backed, Darlington Hoopes, got only 2,128 votes across the whole USA, and was obviously not even an effective propaganda candidacy. (The SWP ran their own candidate, with 7,797 votes).

5. The road and the mire

You could make an argument that if the ISL had retained more energy and morale in 1954, then it could have got ahead by its own direct activity, and done without tricky tactics in Democrat primaries.

Whatever else about the Sanders movement and the DSA, they are not forces which were going ahead by direct socialist organising and rank-and-file workplace activity until sadly diverted into the "mire" of the Sanders primary campaigns. They are regroupments of fresh young socialists drawn into politics by those campaigns, many of them now as a result turning to rank-and-file workplace and neighbourhood activity. □

• More: bit.ly/d-m-d. Part of an ongoing debate, collected at bit.ly/trump-d

Was there life on Mars?



Science

By Josh Lovell

Is life on Earth unique in the universe? That is arguably the most exciting unsolved question in all of science, but the vastness of space and the technical limitations of interstellar travel significantly limit our ability to answer it. Fortunately, the answer may lie closer to Earth.

Scientists hunt for signs of extraterrestrial life in many ways. But only by directly observing “biosignatures” (physical traces of life or life-induced processes) can its existence be confirmed. That requires landing instruments on planets and moons, and for now is only feasible in our Solar System. Where life once existed, evidence could be preserved in rocks or soil, or where it persists, in the form of microbes or more complex entities.

The latest attempt to detect these started in February, when NASA’s “Perseverance” rover survived the perilous journey to Mars’ surface, with the goal of determining if life ever emerged on The Red Planet.

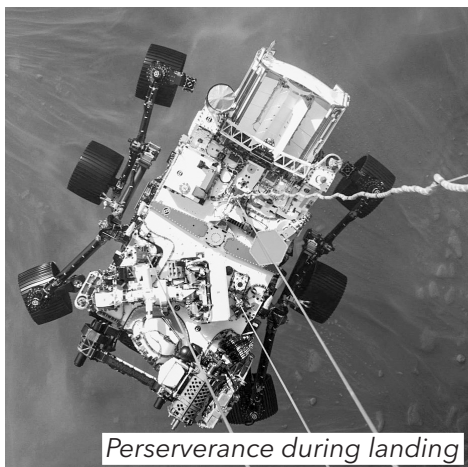
Mars is special for two reasons: it is the closest planet to Earth we can land and control robotics on for sustained periods of time, and once had the conditions (likely) necessary for the emergence of life. Although the planet is now mostly a dry, dusty, freezing desert, this wasn’t the case four billion years ago, when Mars had rivers and lakes of water, and an atmosphere almost as thick as the Earth’s today. Mars is both a promising location where life may have emerged, and somewhere humanity can readily land robotics.

There is however no guarantee that life ever formed on Mars. Attempting to answer this is the primary aim of NASA’s “Mars Exploration Programme”: a series of missions to study the planet in detail with orbital spacecraft and surface landing instruments, of which Perseverance is the sixth installment.

Perseverance is a six-wheeled robotic buggy packed full of science instruments. It can measure the weather on Mars and investigate its surroundings above and below the ground. Over the next few years, Perseverance will travel the Martian landscape, photographing it in high resolution, and analysing rocks and soil to measure for the presence of biosignatures and other molecules.

It was landed in Mars’ “Jezero Crater”: the dried out landscape where a river once met a great lake. If life began on Mars in a similar location to where it is believed to have formed on Earth, Jezero is amongst the best places that its biosignatures could be found.

In 2012 NASA landed the “Curiosity” rover on Mars, which is still in operation. Perseverance hosts a number



Perseverance during landing

of new and improved instruments in comparison to Curiosity, but there are two other significant differences between their missions. Whilst Curiosity only analysed Martian rocks and soils, Perseverance will analyse and store samples awaiting a future mission to return these to Earth (2031 at the earliest). Since powerful laboratory analysis (only possible on Earth) may be essential to assess Martian rocks and soil for signs of life, retrieving these samples may prove vital.

Secondly, Perseverance is equipped with a drone, and will make the first attempt to fly a small helicopter on another planet. Despite being limited to 5m altitudes and 90 second flight times, this could prove to be important technology for future surveys and human-missions to Mars.

Perspectives for Perseverance

If Perseverance doesn’t detect or collect any biosignatures, that could mean one of two things: life never formed on Mars (if not, why?), or it did and Perseverance missed it (if so, how and where should we try looking again?). Minimally, this mission will improve human understanding of Mars’ environment, atmosphere, and surface and underground geology, important for preparing future scientific and exploratory missions.

Alternatively, Perseverance may finally provide proof that life emerged elsewhere in the Universe. This answer isn’t likely to arrive for some time, but whether that is measured in years, decades or centuries, humanity must continue working towards this discovery, whether it is made by Perseverance on Mars, or elsewhere. □

• More info on Perseverance: nasa.gov/perseverance

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- Left Antisemitism: What it is and How to Fight it
- Arabs, Jews, and Socialism: Socialist Debates on Israel/Palestine □

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What we owe to Chris Barber

By Jim Denham

The term “end of an era” is an over-used cliché, but with the death of Chris Barber on 2 March, it is fully justified.

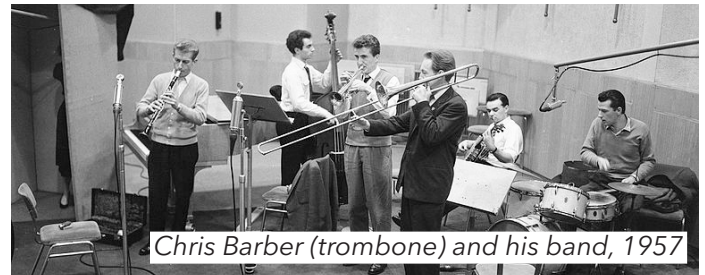
Trombonist Barber was the last surviving bandleader of the “trad jazz” movement that for a period in the late 1950s and into the 60s was immensely popular and competed with rock’n’roll for the allegiance of Britain’s music-loving youth.

But Barber was more than a “traddie” (as they were known): over the years his highly-polished bands, made up of top-quality musicians, embraced R&B, skiffle, Ellingtonia and more modern styles of jazz.

Perhaps most importantly, Barber always appreciated jazz’s roots in the blues and gospel music. Early in his band’s evolution he brought in the vocalist Otilie Patterson, a Northern Irishwoman with a soulful, Bessie Smith-inspired voice and a natural feel for the blues. For a while Otilie and Barber were married but, perhaps more importantly, she further encouraged his commitment to the authentic music of black America and confirmed the band’s blues orientation.

Over the years Barber brought over an amazing roster of Afro-American musicians, many of them well outside the ambit of what would be considered “trad jazz”:

Alex Bradford, Big Bill Broonzy, Wendell Brunious, Gene “Mighty Flea” Connors, Jimmy Cotton, Wild Bill Davis, Champion Jack Dupree, Edmond Hall, Louis Jordan, John Lewis, Bill Morganfield, Ray Nance, Albert Nicholas, Russell Procope, Mac Rebennack (Dr. John), Sonny Terry & Brownie McGhee, Tommy Tucker, Kenneth Washington,



Muddy Waters, Sonny Boy Williamson, Jimmy Witherspoon, Trummy Young ... and that list is far from complete.

It must be remembered, though, that throughout all this time (from 1949 up to 2019), Barber maintained a high quality band that deserves to be remembered in its own right. Trumpeter Pat Halcox, who was with Barber from 1952 until 2008 (he died in 2013) deserves a special mention, as does a later collaborator, the trombonist and arranger Bob Hunt, whose “Ellington Orchestra” became, in 2001, the basis of “The Big Chris Barber Band” that gave the leader’s career a final, glorious revival.

By all accounts, Barber could be a difficult person to work with and the stories of his tactlessness, insensitivity, and control-freakery are legion. It has been suggested that he may have been autistic, although this was (as far as I know) never diagnosed. He was certainly an unlikely front-person for a band, lacking much in the way of obvious personal charisma and making mumbling announcements that were virtually unintelligible. His commitment to the music he believed in was absolute and his contribution immeasurable. □

• Donald Christopher Barber, musician and bandleader, born 17 April 1930, died 2 March 2021

CWU democracy on hold

By a CWU member

Having failed in a previous attempt to move to a biennial conference, the NEC [National Executive] of the post and telecoms union CWU has used the Covid crisis as an excuse to cancel this year’s conference, which would normally take place around the end of April.

This means branches will not have an opportunity to shape union policy again until 2022, three years on from the last conference.

However, the NEC has announced a one day rules revision conference next month to deal with what it describes as proportionality issues. This is likely to be yet another attempt to dilute democracy in a union that once prided itself on its democratic traditions.

This process started under previous General Secretary Billy Hayes and involved rewriting the rule book to include things like two year elections for national and regional posts, along with other changes including on the role of union President. The collapse of the Broad Left, a group that was only ever influential in the telecoms con-

stituency, has made what now appears to be an ongoing task a lot easier.

When “proportionality” on the NEC was introduced in 2018, it was done in a way that meant rotation of seats, a sure way to limit any long term opposition building up to the leadership. New proposals from the NEC are likely to build on this.

That said since Dave Ward’s defeat of Hayes in 2015, which effectively ended the long running fight between the two factions at HQ, the NEC has largely become a rubber stamp committee.

This year’s elections to the NEC have been postponed until after the rules revision conference, but they are unlikely to offer members much of a choice. The dominance of the ruling HQ block and a shrinking of the activist base means that incumbents have very little to fear. All this takes place against a backdrop of an employers’ offensive across the industries the union organises in, failure to recruit in new sectors and a membership increasingly demoralised by the lack of an effective fightback. The need for a rank and file grouping has never been greater. □

Building pressure on school bosses

By Pat Markey

In the campaign in defence of victimised NEU [National Education Union] rep and NEU National Executive member Tracy McGuire, local trade unionists and councillors have signed a press release, and plans are afoot for community activists to seek a meeting with Tracy's school, Rydal Academy in Darlington.

The campaign is holding weekly updates on Zoom to oppose the academy chain adding Tracy to a list of redundancies, apparently as a result of Tracy doing her job to keep her colleagues and community as safe as possible during the pandemic.

Meanwhile, over 230 supporters attended an online rally on Mon 22 March to support Kirstie Paton of Greenwich NEU. As well as Kirstie, the rally was addressed by other victimised reps Louise Lewis, John Boken, and Tracy McGuire, Kevin Courtney (NEU Joint General Secretary), Paul Mason, and John McDonnell. International solidarity was given by Ellen Freedman from the US.

NEU members at Kirstie's school, the John Roan School, are currently balloting for strike action. At Shrewsbury College, NEU members are striking to force management to drop all charges against John Boken.

The approaching NEU Annual Conference (online from

7-10 April) provides an opportunity for the union to develop policy on defending union reps. A prioritised motion on "Defending School Reps" calls for "preparations for a ballot for industrial action to oppose suspension or dismissal [to] begin as soon as the Rep is suspended". □

Students make new connections

By Abel Harvie-Clark

Workers Liberty supporters remain active organising and building a number of struggles across UK universities, promoting a socialist program for free education and a democratic campus, and building solidarity with staff campaigns.

The recently reported fee strikes at SOAS and Goldsmiths in London ([Solidarity 583](#)) continue strong, and both campaigns have recently held "superforum events" to build their struggles with other university campaigns. Connecting with rent strikes and campus union campaigns has been prioritised in both fee strikes, and making space to build understanding between student and staff struggles is a positive step.

The neoliberal university has left many groups feeling opposed to management and marketisation policies: ranging from students wanting fees "refunded" to campus staff facing wave after wave of redundancies, as well as campus campaigns opposing racial and gendered violence in universities. The 24hr sit-in at Warwick University on 18 March demanding action to address sexual violence is but one example of the energy and organisation that is emerging from a radicalising student movement.

The ongoing struggles do not replace the importance of making use of student union bodies, however pacified they may have been. After many rent strikes have been surprised with the difficulty of getting their SU's to back their strike, and management have often recognised the SU as the only "legitimate" student representative, over 30 rent strikes are standing candidates for sabbatical positions in their unions.

At Sheffield Hallam, a strong campaign by members of the rent strike campaign galvanised other rent strikers to turn out and vote. It wasn't enough to win the positions, partly because of the difficulties in reaching students off campus. □

Uber cheats justice as drivers strike

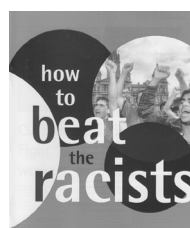
By Michael Elms

On Monday 22 March food couriers working for UberEats struck in Plymouth, demanding higher pay. At the time of going to press, UberEats drivers in Sheffield are discussing taking action, too. For all that Uber is trying to turn the screws on its food delivery workers and cheat its taxi workers, recent developments in the courts have opened a door for workers to make big gains.

A ruling by the UK Supreme Court earlier this year stated that Uber taxi workers (though not yet UberEats workers) should be classed as "dependent contractors", i.e. a type of worker, also known as a "limb (b) worker". This means that Uber owes these workers sick pay, holiday pay, pension contributions, protection from discrimination and the national minimum wage, i.e. £8.72/hour for over-25s.

But there's a catch: Uber is only paying for the time that a customer is in the car. Entitlements to minimum wage and other benefits only accrue during the time spent transporting a passenger. In other words, the lion's share of most drivers' shifts, the time spent waiting for a job, or waiting for a tardy passenger, will go unremunerated.

To really get the rights afforded them by the courts, and more, Uber taxi drivers need organisation. □



This pamphlet – **now an audio too** – aims to convince labour movement activists of the importance of fighting racism, anti-racists of the importance of the labour movement – and fighting to transform it.

workersliberty.org/publications

Pay the care workers!

By Alison Brown

On 19 March the Supreme Court ruled that care workers had no right to the minimum wage for "sleep-in" shifts.

Showing an astounding lack of understanding, the judge stated, "The sleep-in worker who is merely present is treated as not working for... national minimum wage purposes". Care workers, often perched on a sofa, usually barely sleeping, listening out for a call, and regularly interrupted, are not "merely present," they are doing a vital role and obviously deserve to be paid at least the minimum wage for it.

Mencap, the organisation who challenged the care workers' claim, said it was doing that to avoid high levels of back pay, which would break the sector.

The care sector is already broken, failing to pay its skilled workers a decent rate, failing to protect residents from infectious disease, and often facing economic crisis due to the loss of residents during the pandemic. Work-

ers should not be made to pay for the crisis. The need for public ownership, funding and democratic control has never been stronger.

Immediately the ruling endangers situations where care workers currently are paid at an hourly rate. Many care workers have stated they will refuse to work those "sleep-in" shifts until this is resolved. Employers and local authorities should be put under pressure to continue with hourly rate for sleep-ins, and more generally to concede an uplift to pay and conditions to NHS workers' standards. The labour movement must demand that the government change the law to recognise sleep-ins as the work they are. Unison has a petition on this issue.

Care workers [are organising](#). The labour movement needs to step up and take the issues of care workers seriously, supporting workers to organise, standing in solidarity on the immediate day to day issues, such as full pay for self-isolation and sleep-ins, and demanding that the care sector be taken into public ownership. □

What's "left" in the NEU?

By a Lewisham teacher

The NEU [National Education Union] Left was launched as "a membership organisation" on Saturday 13 March. It was "launched" as a brand over two years ago, at the NEU conference.

Over those two years, it has existed as a nebulous bureaucratic lash up between the Socialist Teachers Alliance (STA) and the Broad Left (BL), both legacy organisations from the NUT, and some invited legacy members of the ATL. The aim from the start has been to create an electoral bloc large enough to control the union. BL controlled the union until 2008, when the STA and CDFU (Campaign for a Democratic and Fighting Union) took over.

Since the NEU's "brand" launch, it has struggled to square the competing careerist interests of all its component parts. On paper three of the four candidates in the current NEU Deputy General Secretary contest are "NEU Left".

Worse, the NEU Left is not really left. The "membership" launch was accompanied by ["five founding principles"](#). It is not clear how they were decided.

The first sections in that document would be agreed by virtually everyone in the union (though when it refers to "one union for all in education", it still uses the term "professional unity", which has often meant teachers-only; and the "Equality" section mentions only racism, omitting sexism, trans rights, and LGBT rights generally).

A bland commitment to internationalism and solidarity is made specific only by a call for "solidarity with teacher

trade unions in Cuba and Palestine".

Why only teacher trade unions? Why not school worker unions? Why not all unions? Why not other countries too? The arbitrary focus feeds into "absolute anti-Zionism" and the demonisation of Israel. Workers' Liberty stands in solidarity with the Palestinian trade unions. But the Cuban union SNTECD is a government-controlled, yellow union.

Sadly, "internationalism" in the NEU and NUT has for too long meant union money for junkets to Cuba. □

School cleaners' strike wins

By Darren Bedford

Cleaners in the United Voices of the World union (UVW) at La Retraite Catholic girls' school in south west London have secured a 24% wage increase, full contractual sick pay, and the repayment of withheld wages, just three days into a planned 40-day strike.

The strike, which involved cleaners predominantly from Latin American migrant backgrounds, was due to be the longest school cleaners' strike in UK history. UVW had also launched a legal action against the school, and outsourced cleaning contractor Ecoclean, alleging unlawful treatment and discrimination.

The school's headteacher, Dominic Mallin, earns over £110,000 per year. Prior to the victory, striking cleaner Magaly Quesada said: "We're cleaners, we're key workers and we're proud, we will not stop fighting until we are treated with respect, dignity and equality." □

British Gas threatens “fire-and-rehire” for 31 March

By Ollie Moore

British Gas engineers in the GMB union continued strikes against the imposition of new contracts via “fire and rehire”, from 19-22 March, with further strikes planned on 26-29 March.

British Gas says it will dismiss the entire workforce en masse, and rehire only those who have agreed to the new contracts, on 31 March. GMB has advised its members to sign the contracts by 25 March, writing in an email to members: “If you plan to stay with British Gas after March 31 and intend to ultimately sign a new contract, our lawyers’ advice is to do so by noon on March 25 if you want to avoid the loss of protected terms and changes you have fought for.”

The implication of the GMB’s email is that workers not signing by 25 March will lose the slightly improved terms negotiated in a recent proposed settlement, which offered improved pay protection. GMB members voted by a 79% majority, on an 88% turnout, to reject this proposal and continue with strikes.

British Gas has been conducting individual consultations with workers, which are being used to pressure engineers into signing the new contracts.

An additional complication is added by the fact that, for the dispute to continue beyond the imposition date of the new contracts, a new ballot may be necessary, as the initial dispute centred on the method of imposition (i.e., “fire and rehire”) rather than the substance of the new contracts itself.

That ballot, if it proves necessary, should begin as soon as possible. British Gas engineers have demonstrated



incredible resolve throughout the dispute, striking for nearly 40 days at the time of writing. The turnout and outcome of the referendum on the settlement surely shows a will to continue fighting.

GMB activists say that the strike has helped to draw increased numbers of workers into regular union activity, creating the potential to renew and revitalise GMB organisation in British Gas. If British Gas is able to impose most of the detrimental changes to terms and conditions it always planned to, that will be a setback for the workers. But if, through the course of their dispute, they have strengthened and renewed workplace organisation, that provides a higher platform for renewed struggles to reverse those changes. □

Union plans all-BT ballot

By Darren Bedford

The Communication Workers Union (CWU) has announced plans to ballot its members working for BT, including Openreach and EE. The union said a ballot would take place “barring a dramatic eleventh-hour about-turn by a belligerent new senior management team which has now spent more than a year pursuing a brutal and needlessly confrontational agenda.”

BT Group plan a restructure which the CWU says will involve site closures, job cuts, and attacks on terms and conditions, including pension arrangements. In December 2020, CWU members in BT voted by a 97.9% majority for industrial action in a consultative ballot, on a 74% turnout. If replicated in a formal ballot, this result would smash the thresholds imposed by anti-strike legislation.

Strikes would be the first BT-wide industrial action since 1987. CWU members working as Repayment Project Engineers (RPEs) for Openreach, part of the BT Group, have been striking in a dispute against regrading.

The CWU said the union would “set out the exact timetable [for the ballot] in the coming weeks.” □

Metroline bus ballot closes 9 April

By Ollie Moore

A ballot of over 4,000 London bus drivers working for Metroline is continuing. The vote is due to close on 9 April. The dispute centres on the company’s plan to impose a remote sign-on system, which the workers’ union, Unite, says could lead to pay cuts and decreased safety.

Meanwhile, drivers working for London United, a subsidiary of French firm RATP, struck again on 17 March, in a dispute over pay and conditions. However, planned strikes of drivers at Quality Line and London Sovereign, also RATP subsidiaries, were called off as Unite began a referendum on the employers’ latest offer. Should the offer be rejected, further strikes are planned on 24 and 31 March.

Unite bus workers at Go North West in Manchester are continuing their strike against a “fire and rehire” plan. The strike reached its 20th day on Friday 19 March.

• Bus driver and RMT union rep Declan Clune, who was sacked by Bluestar in Southampton for raising safety concerns, will speak at an online rally, alongside unfairly sacked Tube driver and RMT rep Gary Carney, at 7pm on 24 March. The RMT has called Declan’s sacking “an attack on the foundation of our union structure and on our representatives who come forward to ensure members receive the best possible advice, support and help at work.” Details: bit.ly/dc-gc

“Proceed with caution”



Diary of a Paramedic

By Alice Hazel

I'm working with a new paramedic. After we check our equipment we sit and have a quick cup of tea. We talk about the pay offer, the miserable 1%. He says he can't believe that the government is using the crisis to pit those that have suffered most financially against us instead of recognising our work. Our conversation is interrupted by our first call. We go out and get on with the job.

On our break there's, unusually, a few other crews on station. One of them is writing a report about a violent incident they've been to, and we get into a discussion about everyone's experiences. A few people report being sent to potentially aggressive situations without much information. At one incident the patient had a knife but they were asked to "proceed with caution". It's a phrase we are all used to.

On another, a crew were asked to check out the situation despite the fact that there were three violent people rampaging around. The bloke telling the story is hilarious, and everyone's laughing about the chaos we manage. At the same time everyone acknowledges it's risky, and shock plays a part in the laughter.

I ask why people don't stand off and get more information. One person says no one really cares. There's defi-

nately a feeling that we have to cope with any situation as part of our job.

I talk about the change from years ago when we used to stand off from scenes waiting for police to attend, but as they got busier, we had to wait longer, sometimes for hours. It was uncomfortable that people in distress would have to wait for so long, and it's good there's been a change in understanding that people need support not a police response, but I'm really worried that crews aren't delaying enough to assess dangers. Everyone gets sent out before we talk about what we need to do about it.

The day passes easily, which happens when you work with another paramedic. It's good to share decisions and responsibility. It takes the stress away. □

• Alice Hazel is a paramedic.

More online

"Build back fairer" and "Zero Covid"

Mohan Sen on two Momentum motions

bit.ly/bbf-zc

"A union GS should not be like a CEO"

John Leach, a candidate for general secretary of the RMT, speaks to *Solidarity*

bit.ly/jl-rmt

Massacres in Tigray

Luca Brusco denounces the killing and raping by Ethiopian and Eritrean forces

bit.ly/e-tigray

After the Omnibus Bill

Australia's new anti-union law gutted, but... Janet Burstall reports

bit.ly/omni-b

Review: "Modern Slavery"

George Wheeler follows his interview with Emily Kenway (*Solidarity* 584) with a review of her book

bit.ly/ek-tms

Into her own hands



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

Adoption (from Hungary: Marta Mészáros, 1975), centres on the plight of Kata, a factory worker who is single and, at the age of 45, has decided she wants to have a baby. She tells her lover Joska, who is married, but he refuses to go along with her wishes. Kata befriends Anna, a teenage orphan who she meets in a café, and finds the support and solidarity she so desperately needs. Kata, now having rejected Joska, goes to the orphanage where Anna was brought up and adopts one of the children. The film ends in a freeze frame with Kata getting on a bus with her adopted child. No easy future beckons, and Kata will probably remain a factory worker, but she has finally taken her life in her own hands. □

£20,000 by 11 July

Thanks to Andrew and the attendees of the lockdown quiz organised by North West Workers' Liberty on 20 March, we raised an additional £180, bringing our total to £1514.35. We will work to quicken the pace as the lockdown eases further from 29 March and street protests become unambiguously legal again. Donate at workersliberty.org/donate2021 □

DVLA action from 6 April



John Moloney

The union has been in last-ditch talks with bosses in the DVLA [Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency] about the Swansea complex, where our members have voted for strikes over safety concerns. Vastly more workers than necessary have been compelled to come into work, and there have been multiple Covid outbreaks.

We held a members' meeting on 18 March, and there is determination to go ahead with action. Many activists are pushing for strikes to be called as soon as possible. Therefore the union is going for strike action from 6 to 9 April 2021 and action short of strike action from 10 April 2021 onwards.

We are also planning a tactical experiment as part of any strike. On strike days, workers will also notify management that they are refusing unsafe work under Section 44 of the 1996 Employment Rights Act. The union will then pursue a legal claim under Section 44. If that claim is successful it could lead to the reinstatement of the wages workers lose by striking. No union has ever attempted such a claim before, to our knowledge. Whether the claim is successful or not, action is necessary and our members are prepared to strike.

We've also named strikes involving our members in passport control at Heathrow, for a week, beginning on 1 April. That's an escalation of the action we already planned, consisting of a work-to-rule and overtime ban. The strike will also coincide with action by Unite members, who are striking against the imposition of worse contracts via "fire and rehire". The issue in our members' dispute is the imposition of a new roster. It's unworkable, and has led to huge queues at passport control, despite the lower numbers of passengers and flights.

Members in two courts, in London and Liverpool, have also voted to strike over safety concerns. It's possible they'll extract concessions from the employer, such as a commitment to enforcing distancing in courts, without taking action. Also in the Ministry of Justice, strikes by outsourced worker members employed by the contractor OCS are highly likely.

In the Department for Work and Pensions, there are now indications that bosses want more staff back in the physical workplace from April. If they attempt to push that, a dispute is almost inevitable. □

• John Moloney is assistant general secretary of the civil service workers' union PCS, writing here in a personal capacity.

Heathrow workers plan rolling strikes

By Darren Bedford

Unite has announced 41 strikes across a 23-day period, from 2-25 April, as its members at Heathrow Airport continue to battle the imposition of new contracts via "fire and rehire".

Heathrow Airport Ltd., the principal central employer at the airport, dismissed its entire 4,000-strong workforce and re-engaged them on worse terms and conditions, leaving some workers facing substantial pay cuts. A Unite statement said: "Workers have experienced pay cuts of up to £8,000 (25 per cent of earnings) and report being forced to downsize, move to cheaper areas or give up their car, as a result."

The workers have struck nine times so far, most recently on 12 March. They are employed in a variety of functions, including engineering, airside operations, landside operations, Heathrow's fire and security services, and central terminal operations.

Unite said: "Targeted strike action will begin on Friday 2 April and there will be 41 strikes over a 23 day period, with the final strike scheduled for Sunday 25 April. [...] Each sector will be taking seven days of strike action. During the strike period at least one of the sectors will be on strike on most days."

Unite members at aerospace parts firm SPS Technologies in Leicester are also striking against a "fire and rehire" plan, which will see workers' pay cut by up to £3,000. Workers struck on 12 and 19 March, with further strikes planned on 22 and 26 March. Unite said: "Our members are incandescent at SPS's fire and rehire threats, particularly in light of their hard work keeping the company operational during the pandemic. It is shameful that SPS is using this terrible virus as an opportunity to attack its workers' terms and conditions." □

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

Solidarity



For a workers' government



Protesters in Yangon

STAND WITH MYANMAR'S WORKERS

"One cannot overstate the heroism of the Myanmar union movement right now in the fight against the military dictatorship, nor the horror of the military's ongoing crimes against humanity." So wrote Andrew Saks, a US union organiser working in Myanmar, on 19 March.

There is now a steady flow of killings by the regime. Current estimates in the international media, which Burmese activists say are too low, are around 250.

14 March saw almost a hundred killings, two thirds in the Yangon factory suburb of Hlaing Tharyar. The military is targeting working-class areas and trade unionists, declaring martial law in a number industrial zones. Two days after the Hlaing Tharyar massacre, six workers at a shoe factory there were killed after going to collect their wages, not receiving the full amount and arguing with the owner – who called in the military.

Meanwhile the regime is trying to wear down and break the resistance of workers participating in the "Civil Disobedience Movement", targeting public-sector workers. It declared that teachers and education workers who did not return to work by 22 March would be "temporarily" laid off, in what is being described as the first step in mass sackings to purge the education system.

Thousands of rail workers are faced with imminent eviction from their homes.

Yet it seems very large numbers of workers are still on strike.

On 17 March Myanmar's last independent print newspaper suspended publication, returning the country to the situation that existed for decades before 2012.

Reports suggest remarkable orderliness and restraint among protesters given the military's brutality and prov-

ocations. There are, however, reports of growing discussions about and experiments in both defensive and offensive use of force. The Guardian reports talk about forming a "people's army", drawing in militias based among various of the country's ethnic/national minorities. It's hard to know how to assess that.

We must defend the right of the democracy movement, particularly its working-class component, to resist the coup by any means necessary, and condemn the military's hypocritical propaganda about violence.

Some governments, including the US, and some multinational institutions have imposed limitation economic sanctions on the regime. China, a major player in the Burmese economy, has not. Myanmar's labour movement, or the bulk of it, is calling for "comprehensive economic sanctions" (statement from the largest union federation, CTUM: bit.ly/ctumstatement; explanation from CTUM organiser Khaing Zar Aung bit.ly/kzainter-view).

Myanmar's worker-heroines and heroes need support. Some things you can do:

- Donate to one of the funds to sustain the strikers. UK union United Voices of the World has [launched one](#) for the Independent Federation of Myanmar Seafarers.
- Several [brands](#) with suppliers in Myanmar have shops here, including Tesco's, Marks & Spencer, Primark and Lidl. So far none has agreed unions' demands to protect workers taking part in the anti-coup movement. Organise a protest outside, take photos.
- Take a photo with a sign supporting Myanmar's workers and democracy movement and put on social media. Examples at bit.ly/my-sol
- Follow English-language updates at twitter.com/AndrewTSaks [□](#)