

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

BUILD WORKERS' CLIMATE ACTION

BREAK THE RULE OF PROFIT!



» **Public ownership and workers' control to convert energy industries**

» **Social ownership and control of high finance**

» **Green jobs for climate adaptation and conversion**

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Climate: break the rule of profit!



Amid a summer of worldwide climate breakdown, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)'s report - described as "a code red for humanity" by the head of the UN - lays out unequivocally how greenhouse gas emissions are driving increasingly dire climate crises, and a range of "possible climate futures". How do we win the future we need?

Banks and the rich fund oil, gas, coal development, and polluting businesses, pouring rivers of money into enterprises destroying the planet - simply to make money.

The wealth produced by workers but controlled by bosses needs to be seized back, to be used to deploy green technologies, so we can continue to have a decent standard of living without destroying the planet.

Workers and scientists in polluting industries should be retrained: their skills, knowledge, and machinery can be repurposed to efficient electric public transport, sustainable energy production, adaptation to already-locked-in climate change, and much more.

Humanity is capable of great innovation and creativity, but society's resources are tied up by a parasitic minority - the ruling class - who are ruining the world.



They will not willingly hand over these resources. History has shown this over and over again. In the environment, we have seen rate of emissions not only fail to fall, but to continue to increase, at an every-growing rate!

Workers need to work together to demand - and win - changes. Trade unions must represent workers collectively to demand control over production. Environmental demands must be fought for through industrial action.

Capitalists chase short-term profits: workers must look to the long term. This cannot be left to union leaders, who time and again sell us out, but needs to be initiated by rank and file workers in the workplace.

On 9 August, as the IPCC published its latest report, wildfires were turning swathes of Greece and California to

hell on earth; Central Europe was reeling after huge floods.

The IPCC concludes that every part of our planet - already around 1°C hotter than pre-industrial levels - is feeling the effects of climate change. Even bigger, irreversible, and escalating changes will be triggered - unless policies are changed fast and dramatically.

Yet, instead of the radical action needed, we are seeing a "fossil-fuel reboot" from Covid slump, and continued deforestation.

Leaders of the world's governments will probably repeat the same old message at the COP26 conference in November: there must be targets, carbon trading, and aid so poorer countries comply.

Such measures have - time and time again - had negligible effect in slowing

climate change and pollution. Capitalist pursuit of short-term profit, and the big money in fossil fuels, scuppers meaningful action.

Covid-19 was also predictable. But governments internationally ignored pandemic-warnings for decades, or let preparations fade until too late - at huge cost to lives and economic activity.

Environmental activists must work to transform the workers' movement into one with the ideas and power to remake society on an ecological basis. We must work with and support workers to raise environmental demands in their union, in their own industries, and in the Labour Party.

The environmental and labour movements must fight to expropriate the banks and high finance, and to take the big energy companies, transport, and industry into democratic public ownership. This wealth and working-class control will allow as fast as possible a transition, phasing out fossil fuels and replacing them with green industry and technology - scientific research, development, green energy, public transport, well-built housing, repurposing of aircraft and car factories.

And a vast transfer of wealth and technology to the Global South for social and environmental ends, while opening the borders to climate (and all) migrants. □

Expropriate the banks!



Profits and bonuses are soaring at HSBC while it vandalises society. The UK-based international banking and finance giant has increased the "bonus pool" for its bankers by 50%, to £650m, after its profits grew more than fourfold in the second quarter of 2021. It says it may increase it further before pay-outs early next year.

Last year HSBC paid 324 of its bankers more than £850,000 in salaries and bonuses, while eight received more than £4m and one more than £8m.

This comes hot on the heels of HSBC being embroiled in a major international money-laundering scandal; the revelation that it was the second biggest financial backer of companies in the coal industry, providing almost £5bn in financing, in 2019, and with more to come; and the announcement

of 82 new branch closures in the UK this year.

What the conservative *Financial Times* columnist Martin Wolf wrote in the midst of the 2008 financial crisis remains true: "Banks, as presently constituted and managed, cannot be trusted to perform any publicly important function, against the perceived interests of their staff [meaning their top bosses, not the routine clerical staff]."

"Today's banks represent the incarnation of profit-seeking behaviour taken to its logical limits, in which the only question asked by senior staff is not what is their duty or their responsibility, but what can they get away with".

Twice now, in 2012 and 2019, the Fire Brigades Union has proposed to the TUC Congress labour movement campaigning to take the banks and high finance into democratic public ownership. Twice the proposal has passed, and then been left in a drawer.

The giant union Unite, which has many thousands of members in the sector, has twice passed similar policy at its national Policy Conference - but again done nothing about it.

It remains an essential demand. □



Come with us to the XR action and COP26!

By Zack Muddle

In major environmental events coming up, Workers' Liberty activists will be fighting to fuse the socialist and environmental movements, and for socialist environmental politics. Come and help us!

XR's "Impossible Rebellion" in London, after a Kill The Bill demonstration on 21 August, London, runs for two weeks from 23 August. The themes will be "Crisis talks", and tackling the financing of fossil fuels. The high point will be a "climate carnival" on Sunday 29.

We are working with others to organise workshops on workplace organising and the anti-union laws, and public ownership of banks, on Friday 28 and

Monday 31 respectively. We'll be helping with a stall, leafleting, and talking to activists throughout the rest of the rebellion. We're getting involved in XR groups across the country in the run up.

On 24 September there will be youth climate strikes, all over the country.

COP 26, the global climate conference, is in Glasgow on 1-12 November. We can expect more green-washing and inaction from governments. From Friday 5 until Tuesday 9 November especially there will be environmental organising for better. Friday 5 will be a "workers' mobilisation day", in cities all over; Saturday 6 a large demo in Glasgow, then Sunday-Tuesday workshops in Glasgow and online. □

Bank workers and transforming finance



Interview

By Sam Myerson

Sam Myerson, until recently a worker at one of the big banks, spoke to Solidarity.

Until a few months ago I worked in IT for one of the big six in the UK. We were a “global team”, working with colleagues in many countries in Europe and Asia. I did that for six years, and different jobs in the same organisation before that.

A lot of the changes we had to manage were driven fundamentally by cost-cutting, by attempts to eliminate human labour from various processes. Our team itself fell victim to that; when I started it was a dozen people, but by the time I lost my job only two.

What we were doing was very rarely driven by improving the service people receive. It was always dressed up as freeing people’s availability so they could do more productive work, directly supporting customers, but those things were never realised. We’ve seen decades and decades of cost-cutting at the expense of jobs. It seems similar across the sector.

There’s a long-term push from many of these organisations to get rid of workers in the UK and replace them with workers on much worse terms and conditions in India and China, for instance, although that varies between banks.

What response does that get from workers here?

It broadly falls into two camps. There is a fair amount of nationalistic stuff. The main response is people feeling that it’s inevitable. However, there is widespread consciousness that the motivation is to expand a workforce that can be treated worse than we can. People say that all the time. So there’s a thread of positive consciousness there, but instead of pulling it Unite wraps itself in



the Union Jack.

What other issues do finance workers face?

For office workers rather than those working in a bank branch, surveillance technology is a big issue. Even pre-pandemic surveillance technologies were spreading fast among office workers in general, and it’s certainly a thing in finance. Lots of tech players have developed technologies that monitor and record even your mouse movements, what keys you press and so on.

Obviously that suppresses your ability to communicate with colleagues and to organise, but also even just talking about things at work. As a knock-on effect that really impacts people’s mental health.

Unite talks about these problems – I’ve attended discussions where it’s talked about – but essentially has nothing to say about how we would challenge or get round them.

What’s the situation with unions?

In 2005 Amicus led clerical workers at HSBC out over pay. They balloted for strike action, advised members to reject, went out and won. That was before I started in the sector. Since then I don’t know of any serious action. Worse than that, little basic recruiting, much less organising, takes place.

There’s a whole load of different unions. Accord are in Lloyds and its affiliated businesses, there’s Advance in Santander, there’s Aegis, there’s NGSU specifically for the Nationwide Group, and also Community, CWU, GMB, Unison and Usdaw as well as Unite. CWU is mainly contact-centre workers. Unite has inherited the Amicus operation.

I don’t know about density. It’s generally low but I think there are patches of strength, for instance Barclays call centres in the North East apparently have a Unite presence.

Unite does bits and pieces about issues like working time, breaks and bad managers. Fundamentally it’s a service model, not one of helping workers organise.

Across the sector, there’s been no real attempt to resist below-inflation pay rises, attacks on terms and conditions – for instance attacks on sick pay and a shift away from final salary pensions – and of course job losses. All this is being done by managements who are taking home huge salaries and give themselves fat bonuses.

I suspect some union bureaucrats feel, well the public think bank workers are scum, we’re just greedy bankers too, so they can’t go out and argue for us. I remember when I started just after the financial crisis; I was a cashier in a branch and you’d get venom, including from people making a lot more money than you did. Most bank workers are not at all well-paid.

In fact if workers’ organisation was stronger, I think a lot of the scandals about the way the public are treated, PPI mis-selling and aggressive pursuit of profits and so on, would be much harder for the companies to get away with.

The finance sector is not just something to be reviled or otherwise ignored. It is necessary for society and has a far-reaching impact on everyone’s lives. To imply finance per se is evil and

we don’t need it is a reactionary viewpoint. We need rational socialist solutions instead.

How would public ownership make a difference?

We could reimagine what the services we provide look like. We could smash apart the bits of the system that are basically predatory. There’s a long road of changing society before we can get rid of credit, but to start these things can be done in a totally different way.

Most people’s interaction with a bank or financial institution is just because they need a basic service; but unless you’re generating a lot of income for the institution, the help you get is probably going to be pretty minimal. If the industry was run

for the benefit of the public, breaking the link with shareholder-payouts, that would let us reshape this and a lot of the patterns that are currently programmed in could be changed.

If we had a publicly-owned financial system it could be put to work supporting and funding all the things we need now, in local government, in social care, creating green jobs...

For workers it would mean we could re-establish and improve our terms and conditions; but it would also mean we would no longer have to work to serve really anti-social purposes.

What about the argument that finance is an international system, so nationalisation in one country isn’t going to work?

We live in a global society. Energy isn’t purely national either; neither are lots of industries. As a first step you would take over national parts of organisations, which are already demarcated within these institutions. Then of course you extend it internationally.

If we have a campaign here which can win public ownership, obviously we need to talk about it being an international demand, and build alliances with workers in other countries making similar demands. □

• Abridged. More: bit.ly/sambanksinterview. Labour movement statements etc. on public ownership: bit.ly/bank-p. More: bit.ly/wlbanks



Upcoming meetings

Workers’ Liberty meetings are open to all, held in person or online over zoom.

Sunday 15 August, 6:30-8pm: Should Trotskyists be in the Labour party?

Monday 23 August, 7.30pm: Lenin and the right of nations to self-determination.

Sunday 29 August, 2-6pm: Sun and socialism, an afternoon of socialist discussion. Besson Street Community Garden, 81 Besson St, New Cross, SE14 5AE

For our calendars of events, updated details, zoom links, more meetings and resources, see workersliberty.org/events □

No.604 on 1 Sep

We’ve decided to “skip” an extra week in August to allow our paper staff to take breaks or work on other projects. No.604 will be dated 1 Sep (copy date 29-30 Aug), and then back to the weekly routine (605, 8 Sep; 606, 15 Sep; etc.) □

Gagarin, space, and Stalinism



Letter

Eric Lee's article ([Solidarity 602](#)) about Yuri Gagarin, the first human in space, and the stark contrast of his great achievement with the charlatans Branson pickle and Jeff Bozo, is spot on. When I was a schoolboy, I diligently collected the Weetabix "Conquest of Space" cards until I had the full set. This had two effects: a life-long interest in rockets and space travel and an equally life-long loathing for Weetabix.

Once, in Bulgaria, I bought a photo-postcard of Yuri Gagarin at a flea-market in Sofia and framed it. To this day it still hangs in the garage. Also, at the same time, I bought a picture of another cosmonaut - Valentina Tereshkova, the first woman in space - who also must never be forgotten.

Then there were Laika, Belka and Strelka, the three "space dogs", one of whom, Laika, died on re-entry. Many animal organisations around the world, including the RSPCA, protested about this misuse of the dogs but the Soviets went ahead anyway.



Sergei Korolev, the "brains" behind the Soviet rocket programme, was treated abysmally by Stalin, and almost died from his six years in the Gulag. At one point both his upper and lower jaw were broken.

His imprisonment, and that of other rocket pioneers like Valentin Glushko, meant that the Soviet rocket programme was delayed, although

opinions vary on how seriously. Konstantin Tsiolkovsky (1857-1935), the village-based scientist who, working in almost complete isolation, calculated the escape velocity needed for a rocket to leave the Earth's atmosphere, was the first to come up with the idea of multi-stage rockets. His research was so ahead of others that when the Americans abducted Werner von Braun, the

German rocket scientist and designer of the V-2, they found one of Tsiolkovsky's publications in his desk, translated into German, well-thumbed and annotated.

Of course, all this gets very complicated given the background of Stalinism. Tereshkova, by all accounts, was a notorious "hard-liner" in later life and nowadays counts Vladimir Putin amongst her friends. Glushko denounced Korolev to the Stalinists in 1938, although this did not stop him also being imprisoned. Like its US counterpart the Soviet space programme was primarily geared to the development of missile technology, thus furthering the Cold War (the "dark side" of the "space race").

Korolev was at the 1957 launch of Sputnik by a R-7 rocket of which he played a major part in designing - and then he was never seen again. It is highly likely he was transferred to an ultra-secret Soviet research establishment somewhere east of the Urals which was closed off to the outside world. □

Len Glover,
Lancashire

The pioneer right-wing BAME MP



Letter

Dadabhai Naoroji ([Solidarity 602](#)) was the first BAME MP; Shapurji Saklatvala the third. The second was Mancherjee Bhownagregree, another Indian. He was elected for Bethnal Green North East in 1895 and sat as its MP for 11 years, longer than either Naoroji or Saklatvala.

Bhownagregree was a Tory. His election in Bethnal Green, defeating well-known trade unionist and Lib-Lab MP George Howell, who had won the seat three times previously with no difficulty, came as something of a surprise. He did it by an aggressive right-wing populist appeal to support for the empire and hostility to immigration.

Far from downplaying his origin, Bhownagregree played it up - but in order to highlight his support for British rule in his homeland and elsewhere.

Growing right-wing agita-

tion in the East End against migrants from Eastern Europe, particularly Jewish ones, in 1905 would bring about the Aliens Act, the UK's first immigration control. After 1900 Bhownagregree worked closely with the far-right British Brothers League, which campaigned against Eastern European migrants and for the Act.

Bhownagregree increased his majority in the jingoism-dominated "Khaki election" of 1900, but lost on a big swing to the Liberals in their 1906 landslide victory.

Saklatvala was imprisoned for supporting the General Strike and banned from India, while Bhownagregree was made a "Knight Commander of the Most Eminent Order of the Indian Empire". Indian nationalists called him "Bow-and-Agree".

Bhownagregree, as a pioneering BME MP, was a precursor to the likes of Priti Patel. □

Sacha Ismail, London

• Unabridged at [bit.ly/m-bh](#)

British Gas outcome still a defeat



Letter

The report on the settlement in British Gas in [Solidarity 602](#) was right to acknowledge that the concessions in the new deal are real. However, this is not some last-minute victory, nor even a score-draw, but an outcome that blunts some of the employer's worst attacks within an overall context that is still very much a defeat for the workers. The new settlement does not return engineers to the terms they were on before new contracts were imposed. British Gas has ultimately succeeded in imposing worse conditions.

Hundreds of engineers remain sacked for refusing to accept the new contracts, and despite the new settlement apparently opening up a pathway for their re-engagement, there remains no clarity about the possible terms for this, including whether they will be deemed to have continuity of service.



Even at this late stage, despite inevitable fatigue, and despite an all-out campaign by the union in favour of acceptance of the deal, for a 25% minority to still vote for rejection shows there is a core of dissatisfaction with the outcome.

Had the engineers rolled over at an earlier stage, and not held their resolve through prolonged strikes, undoubtedly even the concessions that were won would have been unlikely. But justified admiration and praise for the resolve of the strikers has to be accompanied by a serious assessment of what the union could have done differently in order to win. □

A reader, London

More online

Free publicly-owned broadband for all

Motion passed by the London Labour Party conference, and the speech made for it [bit.ly/free-bb](#)

Dave Chapple's three volumes

Dave Warren reviews an autobiography by a CWU activist [bit.ly/dc-3v](#)

Invasion of the cashed-up

Northern New South Wales has influx of well-off "work-from-home" people [bit.ly/b-ke](#)

Michel Husson, 1949-2021

Tribute to a prolific Marxist economist [bit.ly/m-huss](#)



Husson

The BBC, Barry the Owl, and the death of a union leader



Eric Lee

By Eric Lee

Last Friday [8 August], the BBC News website ran a story with this headline: "A beloved owl who became a well-known resident in New York's Central Park has died." The story went on to say that "Barry the barred owl was flying low in search of a meal when it collided with one of the park's maintenance trucks on Friday morning."

On the previous evening, it was announced by the majority leader in the US Senate, Democrat Charles Schumer of New York, that Richard Trumka had suddenly passed away at the age of 72. Trumka was the president of the AFL-CIO, the main national trade union centre in the United States and the equivalent of the TUC here.

The BBC website had nothing about Trumka's death, not on Thursday and not for at least three days afterwards.

With all due respect to Barry the Owl, and without wishing to cause offence

to his many friends and family, how is it possible that the BBC didn't see fit to mention the passing of the AFL-CIO president?

While the American trade unions have been in decline for a generation or more, a decline not halted by Trumka during his twelve years in office, the AFL-CIO still represents 56 national unions with a membership of around 12.5 million people.

The AFL-CIO is smaller than it used to be, but is hardly insignificant. Among other things, it and its affiliates played a major role in bringing an end to the nightmare Trump years by electing Biden and Harris last November.

Trumka was part of the team of insurgents led by John Sweeney which defeated the AFL-CIO's old guard leadership back in 1995. They inherited a moribund trade union movement in steep decline and despite their efforts, the decline continued over the next quarter century. Not only did the labour movement shrink, but it also split, with a number of important unions breaking ranks to form an alternative centre called "Change to Win." Change to Win includes several of the most powerful unions in the US, among them the Teamsters, the service employees (SEIU) and the communication workers (CWA).

By all accounts, Rich Trumka was a decent man, son of a coal miner and life-long trade unionist. The former president of the United Mine Workers, he was given the thankless task of steering the unions through the Trump years. The Biden administration has promised to enact new labour laws which will make it much easier to grow the unions again – but sadly Trumka will not be around to see something he campaigned decades to achieve.

As TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady wrote, "We have lost a brother today. Rich Trumka fought all his life for working class dignity and rights at work, in the US and around the world. He was the best of comrades to the UK trade union movement."

Is any of this as important as the sad fate of "Barry the barred owl"? To the BBC, apparently not. □

• Eric Lee is the founder editor of LabourStart, writing here in a personal opinion column.



Agenda

Labour Movement Solidarity with Hong Kong is promoting a statement, "Defend the HKPTU - defend Hong Kong teachers!" and a [petition](#) which can also be used as a motion on the issue.

Free Our Unions has welcomed Labour shadow minister Andy McDonald's [declaration](#) (27 July) that "Labour is committed to repealing anti-trade union laws", but is calling for more clarity and definition.

Neurodivergent Labour has slammed the government's new Disability Strategy, accusing it of offering little but platitudes to neurodivergent and other disabled people. ND Labour commented: "Key areas where we need change – including social care, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities / Additional Learning Needs, welfare benefits – are brushed away into separate plans and reviews, which promise little", and pointed out that the organisations consulted by the government were mainly charities, private companies and individuals, not neurodivergent or other disabled people's organisations. □

• Links and info for these campaigns at workersliberty.org/agenda

Support Afghan women against the Taliban!



Women's Fightback

By Jayne Evans

The Taliban continues to make rapid territorial gains in Afghanistan following the announcement that almost all foreign troops will leave by September.

The Taliban has captured half of the territory of Afghanistan, particularly the rural areas, and several provincial capitals. Fighting has increased around the major cities of Herat, Lashkar Gah and Kandahar. Tens of thousands of Afghans have applied for visas to leave the country, fearing Taliban reprisals. The US and Afghan government have responded by airstrikes and bombing of Taliban positions.

Workers' Liberty has never supported the US and allied military presence in Afghanistan; however, unlike many on the left, we do not ignore or downplay the threat that the Taliban poses to democracy and workers' rights, and particularly the threat it poses to women.

When the Taliban were in power from 1996-2001 there were many restrictions, but the treatment of women was particularly brutal, and especially in the cities.

- Women were forced to wear the burqa when in public
- Women were not allowed to work except for some minor exemptions
- Girls could not be educated after the age of 8
- Women were not allowed to drive
- Women couldn't be treated by a male doctor unless accompanied by a male chaperone
- The wearing of nail varnish or make-up was prohibited
- Forced marriages of under-age girls increased
- Women were not allowed to appear on TV or radio or at public gatherings of any kind.

The punishments received for violation of rules varied in severity. Women had the tips of their fingers cut off for wearing nail varnish. Other mutilations reported included

a young woman having nose and ears cut off for fleeing a family she was "promised" to.

Public lashings for not wearing the correct dress, and public stonings, were frequent. There were public executions at the former football stadium in Kabul.

As well as official punishments, taxi drivers and shopkeepers were used to apply pressure on families to conform to rules. Husbands and fathers would be punished if women in the household didn't obey rules.

In addition to the physical punishments, the forced confinement and fear of attack resulted in increased stress, anxiety and depression. Amnesty reports that since 2001, despite women's rights in Afghanistan still being the sixth worst in the world, there have been some improvements.

Women's participation in public life has increased. Women now make up 20% of civil servants. 3.5 million girls are enrolled in school. Thousands of women work in education, and some women are able to go to university.

Two million girls still have no access to education and violence against women is extremely high. However, the growing influence of the Taliban poses a threat even to the limited gains made since 2001.

For many years we have argued that the longer the US stayed the worse, the worse would be the prospects for working-class and democratic forces when inevitably they inevitably withdrew. That seems to be confirmed. But opposing the US is not enough.

This is not a victory for "anti-imperialism", as some on the left would have us believe. A left which thinks that we should just oppose the US

government and its allies, and not oppose the Taliban too, is of no use to those who are fighting to build a movement that can replace both.

We hope that the young population of Afghanistan are able to resist the Taliban in the cities, that the limited improvements in living standards and women's rights have given some room for opposition to build. The big factor that can change the balance of forces will be a working-class and democratic upheaval in Pakistan, cutting off the Taliban from its nurturing hinterland.

We will look for opportunities to organise solidarity with any democratic, women's, trade union or progressive organisations that are able to organise. □

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Beyond growth, or beyond capitalism?



Environment

By Tony Southwell

There's more to Tim Jackson's new book, *Post Growth: Life after Capitalism* than I'm going to deal with in this review. I'd note especially his call for investment in the caring economy, changing the nature of work and the need for new definitions of prosperity.

The [Guardian review](#) has a broader treatment but I'm just going to concentrate on two points. How to legislate for reduced consumption – he doesn't square the circle. And whether or not socialist societies need to grow in the same sense as capitalist ones – he gets it wrong.

Degrowth and the state

Jackson is a proponent of degrowth, defined as "... a phase of planned and equitable economic contraction in the richest nations, eventually reaching a steady state that operates within Earth's biophysical limits", and he would like the state to tell us to consume less. He baulks at the idea because: "People don't like being told their lives are limited... And when the telling is done by those whose lives appear to be much less limited, anxiety rapidly turns to resentment. The challenge of governance in a postgrowth world is profound for this very reason."

His promise to return to this challenge later in the book just compounds his difficulties in my view, because it confirms a Marxist understanding of the state "... the ideal of a benevolent, unpartisan state has already been irredeemably tarnished by wealth and privilege." "The result is a vision of the state as an executive club whose main function is to protect the interests of property-owners."

Jackson isn't a Marxist, but he is thinking along the right lines when he says that "... we haven't yet reached the destination of democracy." Perhaps we need to introduce him to the idea of



economic democracy. He does suggest regulation of party funding and some desirable characteristics for political representatives, but it all seems woefully inadequate compared to the scale of the democratic deficit he outlines and the urgency needed to deal with climate change and sustainable development. In another paper, he suggests that the UK should aim for net zero carbon by 2025, and it ends with an appeal to Buddhist and Taoist teachings on power!

As it is the economies of the richest nations, under degrowth conditions, which need to contract it seems only equitable that within those nations it is the rich who need to contract the most. Jackson doesn't address this. I think it just makes his case for degrowth sponsored by the state, as currently constituted, even more problematic.

The rich won't save us

Of course the rich could set such a moral example to us all by the scale of their downsizing that they might be able to persuade us to follow suit. But if history is anything to go by, then we know that when sacrifice is called for it isn't the rich who step up.

To deal with the issue of economic growth in future socialist conditions requires an explanation of where capitalism's expansionary drive comes from.

Jackson says "First, of course, we should be clear that growth is not exclusive to capitalism. Communist countries have also routinely set growth targets for almost as long as capitalist ones have – and still do so today". Jackson is confused over what constitutes a "communist country", and I think Richard Smith has answered his charge well. In short, there isn't the same in-built drive to grow within planned economies: they can choose not to.

Growth under "communism"

Capitalism and "communism" on the model of China or Stalin's USSR do have something in common: exploitation. Jackson acknowledges the class struggle with the statement that "the owners of capital are in constant competition with the 'owners' of wage

labour", but we could substitute "bureaucrats in charge of state property" for "owners of capital". That would give him an equivalence between the two, but not the one he seeks to demonstrate. Jackson can't discriminate between the different roles of growth in the two systems because he never acknowledges that there is also constant competition between the owners of capital. In order to protect their investments and attract more, capitalists must demonstrate that they are getting and will continue to get the largest returns possible on their capital, and they do that by growing their business. That same dynamic was not at play in the so-called "communist countries".

Jackson's prescription for dealing with sustainability issues seem divorced from the current political situation and pessimistic. At one point in the book, commenting on the struggle for democracy, he says "... we have relegated all hope of that prospect to the gutter."

Implemented right now his degrowth proposal would surely lead to social unrest whilst probably leaving the capitalists in charge.

Instead we should push for a socialist green new deal to slow down the rate of climate change and for repeal of all the anti-union laws to increase the chances for a democratic revival through challenging the power of the capitalists and their governments. Our goal remains a sustainable planned economy controlled by us all, in contrast both to capitalism and to the "communist countries". □

Sheikh Jarrah in suspense

By Colin Foster

On 2 August Israel's Supreme Court proposed a compromise in the Sheikh Jarrah court case.

A Jewish settler group, claiming ownership on pre-1948 authority, seeks to evict Palestinian families from houses in the Sheikh Jarrah district of East Jerusalem in which they were settled by the Jordanian authorities when Jordan controlled East Jerusalem, before 1967.

The judges proposed that the Palestinian families pay a token annual fee to the settler group and in return get permanent and inheritable rights to live in the houses. The settler group demands that the families give signed recognition that the settlers own the land. The families refuse. The court will come back to the case shortly.

The judges, and probably even the Israeli government, fear a backlash against evictions. Sheikh Jarrah has been a focus for demonstrations, and

was cited as a motive by Hamas for its rocket attacks which set off the Israel-Gaza war in May; the US administration has warned Israel against evictions.

Evictions of Palestinians in Israel from their homes are more widespread among Bedouins in the south of the country; the relative Palestinian majority in East Jerusalem has increased since the 1990s; and a court decision against Palestinians in Silwan (also East Jerusalem) in late June has been followed by demolition; but Sheikh Jarrah has become symbolic.

The Jewish National Fund is planning a survey to locate more properties in East Jerusalem and the West Bank over which it can claim Jewish ownership from before 1948.

The way out is through Israel ending its occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem and ceding to the Palestinians the right to a state of their own alongside Israel: two nations, two states. □



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Defend teachers and unions in HK!

By Pete Radcliff

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has now opened up an attack on the very existence of independent trade unions in Hong Kong.

On Saturday 31 July, the main Hong Kong teachers' union, the HKPTU, was accused by the Communist Party and Chinese state media (*People's Daily* and *Xinhua*) of being a "malignant tumour" that needed to be "eradicated". A couple of hours later, the Education Department of the Hong Kong government announced it had broken off all relations with the HKPTU, refusing to talk with them – in effect withdrawing recognition. On 10 August, after a series of retreats, the HKPTU disbanded.

The regime has already made large protests or assemblies illegal, threatening renewals of the 2019/20 democracy protests with the National Security Law (NSL) and possible life sentences. On Friday 30 July, 24 year old Tong Ying-kit was given a nine-year [prison sentence](#), six and a half years of which was for flying a flag saying "Liberate Hong Kong", the first conviction under the NSL.

They have demanded oaths of loyalty to the regime from public sector workers. They have imprisoned some journalists, intimidated others, and forced the closure of some of the oppositional press. The regime's courts have defined the major slogan of those protests "Liberate Hong Kong: Revolution Now" as incitement to secede illegal under the NSL.

Leading activists of the democracy



movement are in jail awaiting trial on NSL charges of subversion for trying to win the 2020 elections. Even the broadest and most moderate groups such as the Hong Kong Alliance and the Civil Human Rights Front have had their leaders arrested and charged under the NSL.

Attacks on unions

Leaders of the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU) such as Lee Cheuk Yan and Carol Ng have been jailed.

The move against the HKPTU is the first against the very existence of the independent trade union movement. The HKCTU emerged in 1990 to challenge the pro-Beijing HK Federation of Trade Unions (HKFTU), and includes new unions set up in late 2019.

The HKPTU is the largest of the HKCTU's affiliates, with about 96,000 members. Most of its members work in schools, a few in universities. And of the 10,200 arrested by the police in the 2019-20 democracy protests, 42% were students.

The pro-CCP authorities say that teachers were fomenting the dissent. Squashing dissent in schools is now the government's highest priority.

Three teachers known to have been involved in the protest movement had already been sacked. In May 2021 respect for the NSL was made mandatory in the Economics, History and Social Studies curriculum.

Teachers [objected](#) to this pro-National Security Law curriculum being forced on children as young as six years old.

However the main charge made against the HKPTU, at least in the Education Department statement declaring derecognition, was their involvement in the Civil Human Rights Front and the Hong Kong Alliance. Most of the activists of both of these broad and generally moderate campaigns have been arrested for their role in protests.

Retreat

Sadly, the HKPTU has responded to the attacks by retreating. On 29 July, the HKPTU withdrew from the Hong Kong Alliance and also declared that it had always opposed independence for Hong Kong. It pulled out from the HKCTU and from the Educational International union grouping. It declared that it was withdrawing from political involvement and would concentrate on welfare work for its members. On 7 Aug, HK Education Secretary Kevin Yeung issued an open letter to Hong Kong teachers calling on them to resign from the union. On the same day, the HKPTU announced a working group to promote a "positive understanding" of Chinese history and students' love of "their country". Then on 10 Aug the

HKPTU disbanded.

The attack on the HKPTU is a threat to the whole independent trade union movement in Hong Kong. Despite the ongoing repression and the arrest of their leaders, the HKCTU has bravely continued to function – representing workers against the repression and against bosses' intimidation too.

The Labour Movement Solidarity with Hong Kong campaign has issued a statement (bit.ly/hk-ptu) signed by three UK union general secretaries and over 150 other trade unionists. We demand a reversal of the HKPTU's derecognition. Teachers and students must be able to challenge the curriculum and education system that the CCP would like to impose on them. We support the HKCTU against the further attacks now likely.

The Hong Kong independent unions are the only legal ones in the territories ruled by the CCP. They are a beacon of hope for workers in China, where the only union allowed is the state-controlled ACFTU, whose primary role in to police the workers rather than organise them to fight back. The National Security Law, with its xenophobic curbs on "collusion with foreign forces" is now being used to stop unions in Hong Kong making contact and requesting international solidarity.

Hong Kong trade unionists can't speak out on this without facing arrest. That makes it even more important for unions and activists in Britain and elsewhere to speak out, working with the growing Hong Kong diaspora here. □

The case for a critical vote for Gary Smith



Debate

By Ollie Moore

Dale Street ([Solidarity 601](#)) is right to take issue with the entirely uncritical hagiography to newly-elected GMB union general secretary Gary Smith offered by a group of "GMB comrades" in their article of the previous week ([Solidarity 600](#)).

Reading the comrades' paean would give readers the impression that Smith was a radical class fighter, if not quite a revolutionary socialist then very near to one, and someone who has dedicated himself to an unambiguous one-man mission to turn the GMB into a militant, class-struggle union.

Smith is exactly what Dale Street has, in previous articles,

characterised him as: a bureaucrat through-and-through, with frankly reactionary positions on some key issues, such as worker-led transitions away from destructive work. Smith opposes that approach, and enthusiastically supports the continuation and expansion of work in fossil fuels, aviation, defence in general and nuclear weapons specifically. Given that the literal future of life on the planet is at stake, these can hardly be dismissed as secondary concerns that can be relegated to the category of the "political", seen as perhaps regrettable but offset by Smith's apparently unimpeachable industrial record.

Smith has also been a factional operator on the right wing of the Scottish Labour Party, having been central to the effort to oust left-wing leader Richard Leonard. But, following his election, he

pushed an anti-political narrative, blaming the GMB's troubles in part on too much focus on the Labour Party. No attempt was made in the *Solidarity 600* article to respond to these criticisms. Instead, the writers attempted to drown them in effusive praise. As Street pointed out, if the comrades wish us to consider the "bigger picture", they too need to assess the picture in its totality, rather than cherry-picking the elements in Smith's record – or, sometimes, his presentation – that they prefer.

Nevertheless, Street, in my view, has committed the opposite error. As far as I can judge from the outside, the 14 July article's claims are accurate about Smith's campaign cohering many of the best officials and rank-and-file reps, who saw it as part of an effort to open the union up and make it more responsive to members'

struggles, whilst challenging the worst excesses of bureaucratic corruption. Undoubtedly many with less admirable motivations also hitched themselves to Smith's wagon, but there was surely at least a case for backing Smith critically.

Industrial record

Smith's industrial record is mixed, but it is a matter of fact that he empowered, rather than obstructed, the reps and officials who led the Glasgow women workers' equal pay strike. Disputes like that will not become the norm, rather than an exception, merely by the election of Gary Smith, but a general secretary committed to supporting such action is a step forward.

Workers' Liberty has recently voted – rightly, in my view – to support a critical vote for Sharon Graham in the general secretary election in Unite. De-

spite our many criticisms of her platform, we recognise that her campaign has cohered a number of militant rank-and-file reps and could therefore open up space in the union for ongoing efforts of reform. Her election would also be an important break from the worst elements of the existing regime.

Much of the same assessment holds for Gary Smith. Like Graham, Smith is a candidate entirely embedded in the bureaucracy. Disrupting the rule of one faction of the bureaucracy and replacing it with slightly more progressive bureaucrats is a long way from a thoroughgoing programme of democratic reform.

But sometimes, especially in unions as bureaucratic and cumbersome as Unite and GMB, with little to no independent rank-and-file life, it can help open things up. □

For workers' unity and a

By Sean Cassidy

This year marks the centenary of the partition of Ireland and the creation of the Northern Ireland (NI) state. It comes after a rare period of relative peace in the territory, and Unionists might have hoped that the celebrations could have been less contentious than previously.

In fact the stability of both NI and Unionism have been thrown into question by the emerging impact of Brexit.

The imposition of a customs border in the sea between Britain and NI, in flat contradiction to explicit promises made by Boris Johnson, has become a flashpoint for loyalist insecurity and anger. Street rioting returned to the streets of loyalist East Belfast recently in protest at this "Irish Protocol".

The street violence was limited in scale and duration, but unrest has been sufficient to create a crisis in the main Unionist party, the DUP.

In May, leader Arlene Foster was defeated in a confidence vote to be replaced by the (even) more hard-line Edwin Poots. Poots lasted only 21 days before he was also forced to resign. The only candidate to be nominated to succeed him, Jeffrey Donaldson, was declared leader on 22 June. Until this year the DUP had had three leaders in 50 years; this year they have had three leaders in 50 days.

The political system in NI for the last 23 years has been based on the 1998 Good Friday Agreement (GFA). The



Iain Paisley (DUP, left) and Gerry Adams (Sinn Féin, right)

GFA established a local NI assembly which requires cross community support to function and has limited power. Political leadership is via a power sharing government with a First and Deputy First Minister. These posts are allocated based on electoral support from each of the two main sectarian-national blocs.

The system has many weaknesses, yet is easily the most consensual, democratic system of government in the history of the state. It was approved by 71% of voters in NI and 94% in the South.

Previously NI was a one-party sectarian state ruled by the Unionist Party (until 1972), and then under direct rule from London (until 1998). The arrangements established by the GFA and endorsed in referenda were linked to ceasefires by the IRA and later other paramilitary groups, and marked the end of 30 years of very bloody military conflict. Remaining paramilitaries have been marginalised.

The Agreement allowed for a united Ireland by a referendum, with no power for the British government to block a majority vote by the people of NI.

Despite many crises the GFA system has held so far, though power-sharing administration was suspended from 2017-20. The evidence suggests that the people of NI still think the alternatives are all worse.

Yet the GFA political system does not represent a real and long-term political settlement. Its strength is wide cross-community desire to avoid something worse: a return to military conflict. It doesn't settle the fundamental issue, the "constitutional question" of whether the future of Ireland's historically-rooted communal divide lies in continuing partition or some new version of a unified Irish political entity. It only postpones a settlement of that issue.

Sectarian division remains at the heart of NI politics, and that's inevitable given its origins as a political unit. The GFA manages that by prescribing local administration which has at least a grudging consent from both commu-

nities. The requirement to have cross community consent for any significant measure creates a pressure on political representatives to declare an identity to one communal side or other. It also makes the system vulnerable to any political crisis (flags, cash-for-ash, Brexit). Either of the two main communal parties can bring down the NI Assembly since the support of both is required for the First and Deputy First Ministers to be appointed.

What has Brexit done?

In the 2015 referendum the people of NI voted against Brexit (56%-44%). The central issue there was the likely impact on the border and relations with the Republic. The main unionist party (DUP) advocated a vote for Brexit (mainly because they believed it would solidify the divide between North and South), but Unionist voters were less ideological than that and much more divided than usual. It seems that the DUP underestimated concerns within their own community about the impact on the economy and peace.

Nationalism, on the contrary, was unified politically, economically and culturally on the issue. Brexit would take the North out of a trading and political relationship with the Republic which had existed since both joined the European Community in 1973 and risk reintroducing a hated hard border.

Despite previously calling for Ireland to leave the EU, Sinn Féin called for a vote to remain. Polling suggests that 85% of Catholics/Nationalists voted Remain and 40% of Protestants/Unionists.

In the Brexit negotiations the EU refused to consider a deal which damaged the GFA and imposed a hard border. Yet an open border would undermine the EU's internal market by continuing to allow free movement of goods between the EU and a non-member state committed to moving away from EU regulations.

There were two options: a hard border, or NI remaining in the EU Single Market and customs union and, consequently, a NI/GB customs border in the Irish Sea. The Brexit negotiating process was made more complex by the bewildering attempt by the UK government, especially under Johnson, to achieve a deal which avoided both those options.

In the end Johnson used the big majority he won in the 2019 General Election to abandon his promises to the DUP and agree a deal which included

what is known as "the Northern Ireland protocol", with checks on goods entering NI from GB. NI is part of the UK customs area, but applies EU Single Market regulations on goods, so it's fine for goods produced there to be transported to the Republic.

For goods originating in Britain, NI is treated as an entry point to the EU. Hence there must be checks on goods moving from GB to NI which are deemed "at risk" of being transported to and sold in the Republic.

This protocol is a major problem for unionism. It creates a border between GB and NI while the border with the Republic remains "soft". And yet it is the result of the DUP's own policy and their strategic alliance with the hard Brexiteers of the European Reform Group (ERG) and Johnson. On three occasions the DUP voted to defeat Teresa May's alternative, the "Irish backstop", which kept the UK in a customs union with the EU and could hope to finesse away the need for either border.

The traditional Unionist option of blaming Republicans or traitors for undermining the Union is not so easily available this time. Arlene Foster, the architect of the alliance with the ERG and the leader who invited Johnson to the DUP's Conference lost her job mainly because of this disastrous strategy.

The Brexit process has underlined and increased the Unionist fear that the relationship between the two parts of Ireland is now widely regarded as equally important as the relationship between NI and GB, or even more important.

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democratic united Ireland

Changes in NI politics and society since 1998

The Brexit crisis arrived at a time when broader and potentially decisive shifts in NI were already well under way. Those shifts also create existential challenges to Unionism.

For decades NI had a stable two-thirds Protestant-Unionist majority. By the [2011 census](#) that had shifted to 42% Protestant, 41% Catholic, and 18% "no religion" or "other".

The 2019 EU elections saw Sinn Fein (SF) top the poll (22%), followed by DUP and Alliance. At the last NI Assembly elections, the SF and DUP vote shares were almost equal (28.1 vs 27.9%). The total unionist and nationalist votes were also very close. It seems inevitable that at some point in the next 5-10 years SF will be the largest party and occupy the First Minister post.

There has also been a significant growth in support for non-sectarian parties. This appears to be happening mainly in middle class areas, and the chief beneficiary has been the Alliance Party. Roughly analogous to the Liberal Democrats in Britain, Alliance had a Westminster MP and an MEP elected in 2019.

In recent elections to the NI Assembly both the Greens and the socialist group People Before Profit have also won seats. Beyond electoral politics there is an increasing interest in non-sectarian issues – abortion rights, LGBT and race equality, climate change. The party most under threat from these developments is the DUP. They have been losing votes to both the hard-line unionist right and the centrist Alliance.

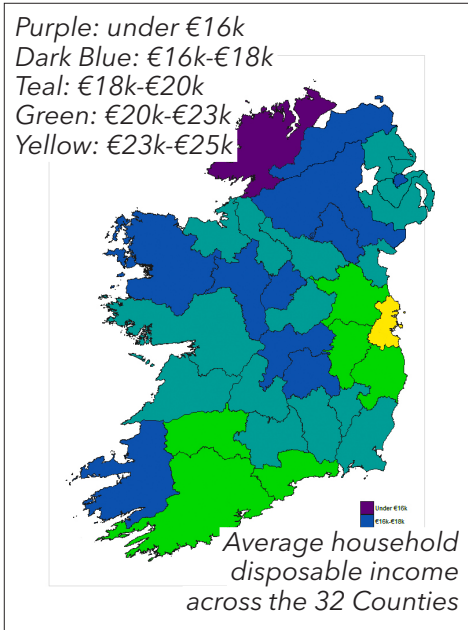
Their historic default response has been to play to hard-line loyalism. Hence their ambiguity on the recent riots in protest at the Protocol and the replacement of Foster by Edwin Poots. The fact that Poots lasted only 21 days as leader shows the crisis of political leadership within Unionism.

Changes in ROI

Meanwhile the Republic of Ireland is also a very different place socially and politically from the "Catholic state for a Catholic people" which emerged after Partition.

Economically, the 26 Counties were markedly poorer and more rural than Northern Ireland at the time of Partition. Now they are more prosperous.

The influence of the Catholic Church has been undermined decisively by the exposure of its role in systematic abuse and exploitation of women and children over many decades. The Republic is, demographically, a very young society, and the political concerns of its young people are more like those else-



where in Europe than the "traditional" focus of 26 Counties politics. Abortion rights and gay marriage have been approved overwhelmingly in referenda, with a degree of consensus between urban and rural areas which would have been unimaginable not so long ago.

Sinn Fein are emerging as a major force in the Republic. Until 2002 they were at less than 3% of the vote there, but in 2020 they won a larger share of first preference votes than any other party.

This exceeded anyone's expectations, including their own. In fact, they would have won significantly more seats if they hadn't withdrawn a number of candidates at a time when polls underestimated their support and they feared splitting their vote.

They fought the election on issues like housing, jobs, inequality, *not* the national question. The swing to SF was part of a broader trend to leftist opposition to the two major bourgeois parties (Fianna Fail and Fine Gael). Parliamentary seats were gained by Solidarity People Before Profit (5), Labour (6), Social Democrats (6) and Greens (12). There is now a general expectation that SF will be in government after next election, probably as the largest party.

Is a United Ireland now on the cards?

So, Unionism is less monolithic than at any time since Partition. The picture of the Republic of Ireland as a confessional Catholic state is out-of-date. There are likely to be Sinn Fein-led governments in both states, with the Taoiseach in the Republic and the First Minister in the North, within the next few years. Does this make a united Ireland inevitable?

There is provision for a referendum on Irish unity ("a border poll") in the Good Friday Agreement. Sinn Fein calls

for a date to be set for a border poll as soon as possible, though it has [also](#) revived the ideas about federal arrangements within Ireland which it dropped in the early 1980s ("British identity can and must be accommodated in a united Ireland and... nationalist Ireland is open to constitutional and political safeguards to ensure this"). But it is for the British Secretary of State for NI to call a border poll, and the only criterion is that it appears likely that a majority would vote yes.

Polls give differing results. A BBC NI Spotlight poll in April 2019 showed a narrow majority for status quo (49-43%). The same poll found that a majority in the Republic supported a united Ireland, but only 51% (with 27% saying no).

At least two trends that are stand out from all polls though. The gap in support between the status quo and a united Ireland has reduced sharply since 2017; and support for unity reduces significantly when people are asked if they would give up access to NHS-style free health care and other social provision to get it.

There is a growing constituency, spanning the communal divide, willing to consider this issue in social context, rather than just on a sectarian, identity-driven basis.

Socialist response

The partition of Ireland was an undemocratic imposition. It created what the great Irish socialist James Connolly predicted it would, "a carnival of reaction north and south". It does not represent self-determination.

The democratic answer is a united Ireland, but a democratically-arranged united Ireland. The communal conflict has deep roots which can easily erupt into civil war again. A simple majority vote will not resolve that division. A demographic shift that sees Catholics overtake Protestants in NI is not a political settlement. It's a continuation of sectarian headcount politics but with someone else winning.

There's also no reason to be sure a demographic shift would lead to a vote for reunification in any case. The polls are more ambiguous on that. More people from a Unionist background are prepared to contemplate a united Ireland, but many in the nationalist community can see a case to remain within the UK, especially if the border within Ireland can be kept "soft".

The project for socialists is to build support across the communities for a settlement that is consistently democratic and that addresses the legitimate concerns of both communities and both traditions. We see our own

class, the working class, as the agency for change. Our programme is concerned with proposing a democratic settlement that can unite our class and set a very different agenda.

Workers' Liberty has long advocated a federal united Ireland, with self-determination for the Irish majority but the maximum autonomy, rights and protections for the Irish minority compatible with that.

It isn't for us to draw up detailed constitutional plans. The socialist objective on the national question isn't revanchism or to pick the good guys. It is to end divisions in our class based on nationalism, to draw the poison from communalism and sectarianism and to develop at every turn the unity of the only agency or social force which can create socialism – the working class.

That remains a huge task in NI, a society still dominated by the divisions that led to its creation. But it seems to me more likely now that at any time since Partition. The space in the middle has grown, the case for accommodation not conquest is widely understood, and old positions are less entrenched.

An immediate or early border poll would be likely to lead to a retreat into tribal loyalties and even civil war. Bringing a socialist voice to the discussion about what kind of Ireland we want and how the rights of both traditions can be respected is much more likely to seize the opportunities we have now.

A militant labour movement armed with a serious democratic programme can take us closer to the Irish Workers' Republic that Connolly counterposed to the carnival of reaction delivered by Partition. □



For more on Trotskyism, Socialism and a united Ireland see Workers' Liberty 45 and 66. □

bit.ly/wlmag45

bit.ly/wlmag66



USA: the new “Grand Old Party”

By Barrie Hardy

Millions of Americans who loathe Donald Trump are giving up on the chances that he'll be prosecuted for anything, despite the numerous crimes he committed before, during and after his term in office. The charges of tax fraud against the Trump Organisation for example have so far only ensnared the hired help, with none stuck on Trump himself.

Although around 600 of his followers have been charged with participating in what has become known as the 6 January insurrection, its chief instigator remains untouched.

If Joe Biden and others were correct in saying that the invasion of the US Congress was “the greatest attack on American democracy since the Civil War,” then we should expect from them firm measures against the leading perpetrators. Yet those looking for such a prospect are likely to be disappointed, just as they were after the Mueller Report and the unprecedented two impeachments.

The Biden administration seems intent to go easy on Trump for several reasons. The most obvious is fear that any criminal prosecution will spark a violent reaction from the armed fascist groups which masquerade under the title of militias.

And Biden acts as if he can achieve some kind of bipartisan consensus with Republican senators, just like in the good old pre-Trump days, when moves like Roosevelt's social security and labour laws, the anti-union laws of the 1940s and 50s, the civil rights and voting-rights laws of the 1960s, and Bill Clinton's “end of welfare”, all depended on extensive “across-the-aisle” support.

This explains Biden's approach of trying to nudge through infrastructure legislation and his failure to push to get rid of the Senate's filibuster power, despite it being used to block laws protecting voting rights. Yet to treat Trump and his

supporters with kid gloves and expect the Republican Party (“Grand Old Party”, GOP) to behave in a way that respects traditional norms and niceties ignores the transformation of the GOP into a party committed to overturning democratic norms and imposing in America a right-wing authoritarian regime akin to Orban's Hungary. Its ultimate goal is the establishment of permanent white minority rule.

Demographic change and voter suppression

The Republican Party fears demographic change in American society, when people of colour forming the majority of the population will exclude it permanently from power. The traditional recourse to voter suppression has been ramped up. Texas is leading the way on this by imposing 20 new voting restrictions and threatening to arrest its Democrat lawmakers who left the state in an effort to stop the law being passed.

The other drive is to deny the legitimacy of election results unless they grant victory to the GOP.

Fresh revelations of Trump's efforts to overturn the 2020 election have emerged, the most damaging of which is a conversation with acting Attorney General Jeffrey Rosen where Trump told him: “Just say the election was corrupt and leave the rest to me and the Republican congressmen.” It has also been learnt that another DoJ official, Jeffrey Clark, drafted a letter for Rosen to sign addressed to officials in Georgia ordering them to convene a special session of the state legislature to declare the election results invalid and hand over the Electoral College votes to Trump instead.

These attempts to overturn the election failed because Republican appointed officials in the DoJ and election officers in states like Georgia were not prepared to go along with them. Thus the push to remove these officials and

replacing them with dyed-in-the-wool Trump loyalists.

The cult of Trump

The Republican Party is becoming a cult of Trump. To get anywhere in it today it is necessary to kiss the Godfather's ring and accept his false claim that the election was “stolen”: even though 6 January failed on many counts, it has succeeded in welding a majority among Republicans who hold to the “stolen election” line. The history of the attack on the Capitol is being rewritten in numerous variants. Leading Republican politicians who in January denounced the attack and denounced Trump have now switched to Trumpist rewrites of the story.

Initially, the violence was blamed on Antifa and BLM “infiltrators”. Then it was talked down as being like a “normal tourist visit” or talked up by Trump as a “love fest”. Marjorie Taylor Greene, probably the most unhinged member of Congress, refers to those arrested in the riot as “political prisoners”, while Trump has lionised Ashli Babbitt, the protester shot by the police, as some kind of martyr.

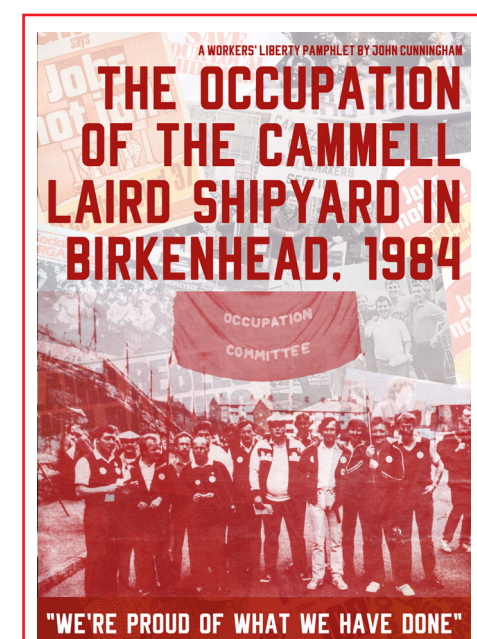
Pushing back against the “phoney narrative” that there was an insurrection is an understandable position for those who want to portray any investigation into the events surrounding 6 January as yet another politically motivated “witch-hunt” against Trump. They hope to minimise the impact of any damaging revelations that may come out.

Normalising or trivialising what happened on 6 January lays the groundwork for a much more serious coup attempt in the near future, if there are more Republican office holders and top military officers in place ready to go along with it. (Joint Chiefs of Staff chair Mark Milley was worried about the risk of a coup in the run-up to 6 January, and vowed to prevent it. Trump talked of sacking Milley, but didn't push through against aides who demurred).

There are grounds for supposing that there was much more coordination going on behind the scenes leading to the event, rather than the attack on Congress being some kind of spontaneous happening. The extent of plotting between Trump, Bannon, certain Republican congressmen and far-right outfits like the Proud Boys has yet to be determined.

Those wanting to prevent a future coup should not rely on the leadership of the Democrat Party. The emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement shows that it is possible to build a mass movement which challenge the power structure.

A similar force needs to be built by the US left which fights to defend and extend democratic rights and calls for the coup plotters to be brought to book. □



This pamphlet remembers the brave workers who occupied their shipyard to try and save not just their own jobs but the jobs of future generations. □

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Ballots, bullets, or...

By James Connolly

In 1909, as now, right-wing politicians in the USA were pushing new voter-suppression laws; and at that time vast voter suppression was already routine, against African-Americans in the Southern states. The Socialist Party was still weak (2.8% of the poll in the 1908 presidential election), and so was the US union movement, but the SP discussed the threatened block to political advance by electoral means as did the much stronger German Social Democratic Party at the same time. This was the contribution (International Socialist Review, October 1909) by James Connolly, active in the USA between 1903 and 1910, and the foremost leader of Irish socialism 1896-1903 and 1910-1916.

Not the least of the services our comrade Victor Berger has rendered to the socialist cause must be accounted the writing and publishing of that now famous article in which he draws the attention of his readers to the possibility that the ballot will yet be stricken from the hands of the socialist party, and raises the question of the action our party must take in such an emergency...

Briefly stated, the facts as they are known to us all are that all over the United States the capitalist class is even now busily devising ways and means by which the working class can be disfranchised. In California it is being done by exacting an enormous sum for the right to place a ticket upon the ballot; in Minnesota the same end is sought by a new primary law; in the south by an educational (?) test to be imposed only upon those who possess no property; in some States by imposing a property qualification upon candidates; and all over by wholesale counting out of socialist ballots, and wholesale counting in of fraudulent votes. In addition to this we have had in Colorado and elsewhere many cases where the hired thugs of the capitalists forcibly occupied the polling booths, drove away the real voters and themselves voted

in the name of every citizen on the list.

These are a few of the facts. Now what are the probabilities? One is that the capitalist class will not wait until we get a majority at the ballot box, but will precipitate a fight upon some fake issue whilst the mass of the workers are still undecided as to the claims of capitalism and socialism.

Another is that even if the capitalist class were law-abiding enough, or had miscalculated public opinion enough, to wait until the socialists had got a majority at the ballot box in some presidential election, they would then refuse to vacate their offices, or to recognise the election, and with the Senate and the military in their hands would calmly proceed to seat those candidates for President, etc., who had received the highest votes from the capitalistic electorate.

As to the first of these probabilities, the issue upon which a socialist success at the ballot box can be averted from the capitalist class is already here, and I expect at any time to see it quietly but effectually materialise. It is this: we have often seen the capitalist class invoke the aid of the Supreme Court in order to save it some petty annoyance by declaring unconstitutional some so-called labour or other legislation. Now I can conceive of no reason why this same Supreme Court cannot be invoked to declare unconstitutional any or all electoral victories of the socialist party. Some may consider this far-fetched. I do not consider it nearly as far-fetched as the decision which applied the anti-trust laws solely to trade unions, or used the Inter-State Commerce Acts to prevent strikes upon railways.

I consider that if the capitalist class appealed to the Supreme Court and interrogated it to declare whether a political party which aimed at overthrowing the constitution of the United States could legally operate to that end within the constitution of the United States the answer in the negative which that Court would undoubtedly give would not only be entirely logical, but would also be extremely likely to satisfy every

shallow thinker and fanatical ancestor-worshipper in the country.

And if such an eventuality arose, and the ballot was, in comrade Berger's words, stricken out of our hands, it would be too late then to propound the query which our comrade propounds now, and ask our friends and supporters: what are you going to do about it?

But even while admitting, nay, urging all this on behalf of the pertinency of our comrade's query, it does not follow that I therefore endorse or recommend his alternative. The rifle is, of course, a useful weapon under certain circumstances, but these circumstances are little likely to occur. This is an age of complicated machinery in war as in industry, and confronted with machine guns, and artillery which kill at seven miles distance, rifles are not likely to be of much material value in assisting in the solution of the labour question in a proletarian manner...

Is the outlook, then, hopeless? No! We still have the opportunity to forge a weapon capable of winning the fight for us against political usurpation and all the military powers of earth, sea or air. That weapon is to be forged in the furnace of the struggle in the workshop, mine, factory or railroad, and its name is industrial unionism.

Organised

A working class organised on the lines on which the capitalist class has built its industrial plants today, regarding every such plant as the true unit of organisation and society as a whole as the sum total of those units, and ever patiently indoctrinated with the idea that the mission of unionism is to take hold of the industrial equipment of society, and erect itself into the real holding and administrative force of the world; such a revolutionary working class would have a power at its command greater than all the achievements of science can put in the hands of the master class.

An injunction forbidding the workers of an industrial union to do a certain thing in the interest of labour would be followed by every member of the union doing that thing until jails became eagerly sought as places of honour, and the fact of having been in one would be as proudly vaunted as is now service on the field of Gettysburg; a Supreme Court decision declaring invalid a socialist victory in a certain district could be met by a general strike of all the workers in that district, supported by the organisation all over the country, and by a relentless boycott extending into the private life of all who supported the fraudulently elected officials. Such a union would revive and apply to the class war of the workers the methods and principles so successfully applied by the peasants of Germany in the Ve-



hmgericht, and by those of the Land League in the land war in Ireland in the eighties.

And eventually, in case of a Supreme Court decision rendering illegal the political activities of the socialist party, or instructing the capitalist officials to refuse to vacate their offices after a national victory by that party, the industrially organised workers would give the usurping government a Roland for its Oliver by refusing to recognise its officers, to transport or feed its troops, to transmit its messages, to print its notices, or to chronicle its doings by working in any newspaper which upheld it.

Finally, after having thus demonstrated the helplessness of capitalist officialdom in the face of united action by the producers (by attacking said officialdom with economic paralysis instead of rifle bullets) the industrially organised working class could proceed to take possession of the industries of the country after informing the military and other coercive forces of capitalism that they could procure the necessities of life by surrendering themselves to the lawfully elected government and renouncing the usurpers at Washington. Otherwise they would have to try and feed and maintain themselves. In the face of such organisation the military power would be a broken reed.

The discipline of the military forces before which comrade Berger's rifles would break like glass would dissolve, and the authority of officers would be non-effectual if the soldiery were required to turn into uniformed banditti scouring the country for provisions.

Ireland during the Land League, Paris during the strike of the postmen and telegraphers, the south of France during the strike of the wine growers, the strike of the peasants at Parma, Italy, all were miniature demonstrations of the effectiveness of this method of warfare, all were so many rehearsals in part for this great drama of social revolution, all were object lessons teaching the workers how to extract the virtue from the guns of the political masters. □

• Slightly abridged. More: bit.ly/jc-ballot

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- Tubeworker/Off The Rails, videos by the producers of the bulletins □

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To tame Covid, combat inequality



By Martin Thomas

Over the longer term, several studies suggest that the biggest factor reducing Covid toll so far has been *lower income inequality*. In separate studies [Annabel Tan and others](#), and [Tim Liao and others](#) have found that for US counties; [Carlos Oronce and others](#) and [Youyang Gu](#), for US states; [Frank Elgar and others](#), for countries (among 84 that they studied).

There are obviously many other factors: vaccines, of course, and judicious lockdowns and quarantines which can usefully *slow* (but on all evidence, not *end*) Covid spread. Hospitals get less swamped, and, in the meantime, more people get vaccinated.

Israel, Malta, and the Seychelles have



all had new Covid surges after widespread vaccination (Seychelles surge centred in June, Malta's in July, Israel ongoing). That makes it likely that Britain will have new surges too. On the evidence of Israel and Malta, the death rates in new surges will be, not zero, but lower than before widespread vaccination. (The UK's Covid case fatality rate is now about a tenth of what it was in early 2021, and comparable with the CFR for flu, though Delta-var-

iant Covid spreads much quicker, and more pre-symptoms, than flu). Israel is giving third booster jabs to all over-60s, with the experts there arguing that they don't know what difference that will make, but in any case the experiment will give evidence for other countries to go by. Seychelles had a high death rate in its recent surge, which may be down to it using the less effective of the two main Chinese vaccines.

Long term

A discussion of longer-term prospects by [Amalio Telenti and others](#) suggests Covid may evolve into a disease which almost everyone gets from time to time, from childhood on, mostly mildly, and with a broadening immunity which can keep pace with variants until old age, when constantly-updated vaccines can protect. But we don't know, and even if Telenti is right, we don't know whether it will take only a few years, or many decades, for Covid to evolve that way.

New trials by the [WHO](#) and by the UK [Recovery project](#) are starting on *treatments* for Covid, but results are likely to be incremental rather than drastic.

The labour movement needs to keep pushing for the social measures which can transmit into lower income equality and blunt the inevitable Covid surges. Full isolation pay and secure jobs for all. Workers' control of workplace safety. Affordable uncrowded housing for all. Social care under public ownership and with workers on NHS-level pay and conditions. Fund the NHS to create increased capacity and better conditions for workers and patients.

And for *public ownership of Big Pharma*, to make patent information and production technologies available worldwide for a full-speed drive to vaccinate worldwide. Worldwide, Covid deaths are still trending up. The world vaccination rate is now up to 0.5 jabs per 100 people per day, but Africa is still on less than 0.1 per 100 per day. □



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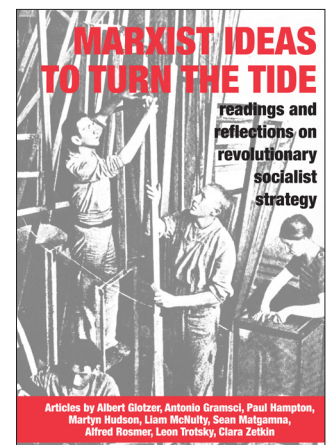
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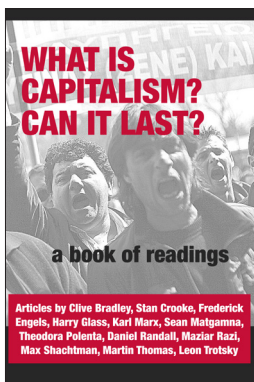
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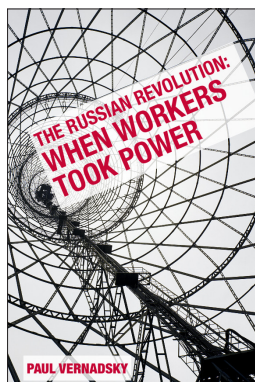
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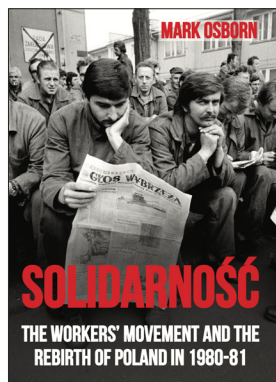
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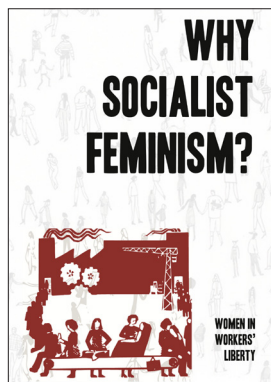
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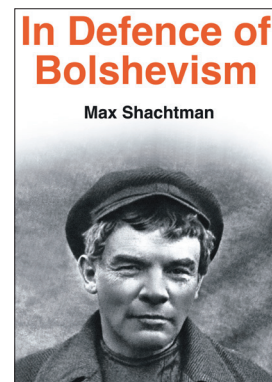
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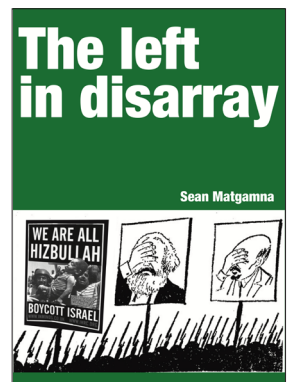
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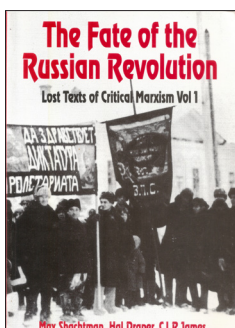
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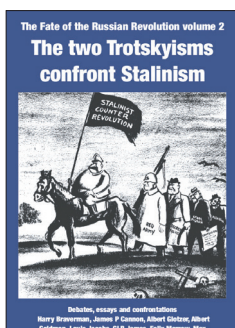
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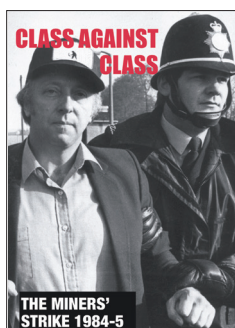
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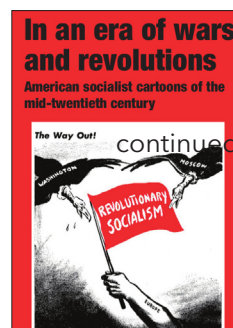
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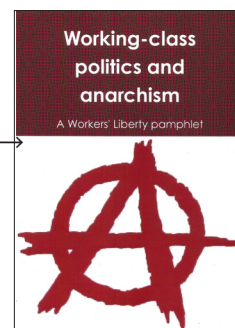
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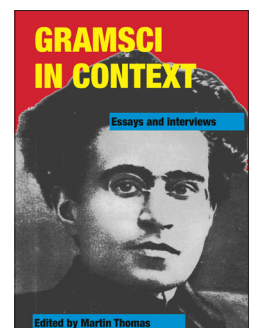
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Unison calls to reject local government 1.75% offer

By Katy Dollar

“Despite their courage and sacrifice throughout COVID-19, council and school workers have been offered 1.75%. With inflation at 3.9%, that’s a real terms pay cut.” With those words, the public services union Unison is launching a consultation with a strong recommendation to reject.

On 27 July the Employers’ Side of the National Joint Council (NJC) wrote to the unions with a final pay offer for

2021.

- An increase of 2.75% for those on pay point 1
- An increase of 1.75% for everyone else
- Completion of the outstanding work of the joint Term-Time-Only review group
- Discussions on joint framework guidance on homeworking (but no offer of a homeworking allowance)
- Discussions on joint guidance on mental health

• Incorporation of new statutory provisions for neo-natal leave and pay into the Green Book.

Unison’s consultation will start in late August. But this will be a particularly difficult pay campaign. During the coronavirus pandemic some 82% of UK local authority staff have been working from home, compared to just 5% before, so usual organising methods such as walkabouts, posterage, and leafletting are less effective. Reps will need to build online meetings, covid-distanced

demonstrations and other alternative modes. Strong local campaigns will put pressure on employers and prepare the ground towards a strike ballot.

A coordinated campaign across the public sector would ramp up pressure on the government and reanimate sectoral campaigns which have so far been low energy despite real term pay cuts. Rank-and-file militants across all public sector unions will be agitating for that approach. □

Electoral reform yes, “Progressive Alliance” no!

By Michael Elms

In the run-up to Labour Party conference on 25-29 September (see outside pages), one area where the left (and the Labour right, too) remains split is on the question of Proportional Representation. There has been a major organised push to get PR motions on the conference order paper this year.

Some on the Labour left op-

pose PR on the grounds that it would make the process of getting a Labour government more complicated, and that the whole idea is often packaged with support for a “progressive alliance”, some sort of electoral non-aggression pact between Labour, the Lib Dems, the Greens, Plaid Cymru and the SNP.

In a 5 August [interview](#) with the *Financial Times*, Starmer dismisses electoral pacts out

of hand. Much as such a pact would drag Labour further right, he seems to calculate that promoting it now would only help Labour votes leak to other parties.

Solidarity opposes a “progressive alliance”. A minority Labour government might well find itself relying on the votes of other parties: but making a deal with them, rather than challenging them to back Labour or face a new election,

could only have the effect of letting anti-working-class or nationalist parties dictate Labour policy, or giving Labour right-wingers a lever to prevail.

But if it can be separated from the question of a “progressive alliance”, the left has to support PR. The reason is simple: PR is a more democratic voting system than First Past the Post. Even if it is the case that a better voting system would complicate La-

bour’s path to forming a government, that is not sufficient grounds to oppose PR.

A reasonable person could see that the left only supports democracy “when it suits them”.

Any weakening of socialists’ principled and absolute support for democracy as a good in itself will ultimately hollow out and weaken the workers’ movement, which needs democracy like oxygen. □

Barnoldswick strike ballot closes 13 August

By Ollie Moore

The Unite union is balloting its members at the Rolls Royce plant in Barnoldswick for strikes, with the vote due to close on 13 August. A group of 17 engineers at the plant have already launched a new strike from 9 August, following a planned shutdown of the plant. Prior to the shutdown, the engineers had struck for two weeks, concluding on 23 July. The first day of the new round of strikes was marked with a protest at the plant.

Workers at the plant previously struck in 2020 against Rolls Royce’s plans to offshore work, thereby cutting jobs. The strikes ended with a settlement including a number of guarantees for the future of work at the plant, including a commitment to minimum staffing levels, and assurances of new work coming into the site. Rolls Royce bosses have now informed Unite that they plan to backtrack on those commitments, with a promised training academy for new staff slated for closure and demolition just two years after it opens.

Unite regional officer Ross Quinn said: “This dispute could be put to bed very quickly if Rolls Royce’s lead-



ership demonstrates to the workers that the agreement signed in January is still valid.

“We were promised a green new deal but all we’ve seen is corporate greenwash. Fan blades that would be transported from Lancashire to Derby will now go via Singapore. No green tech, no training school to compensate, just disaster capitalism.

“The staff, and indeed the community’s surrounding Barnoldswick, know full well that Rolls Royce’s original plans would have seen the factory close for good. All they want to know is whether a Rolls Royce guarantee means anything. Is the company sticking to the agreement made in January or once again will they fail to deliver?” □

Protests push Democrats to extend US eviction ban

By Sacha Ismail

On Friday 31 July the US Congress had failed to extend its about-to-expire evictions ban, and Joe Biden said there was nothing he could do. Then left-wing Missouri congresswoman Cori Bush galvanised protests by camping out on the Capitol steps. She was widely attacked, and not just on the right. A liberal newspaper in her city, St Louis, sneered that Bush “clearly misunderstands the complicated process” involved.

The protests won. On 3 August the Biden administration introduced a new ban, until at least 3 October.

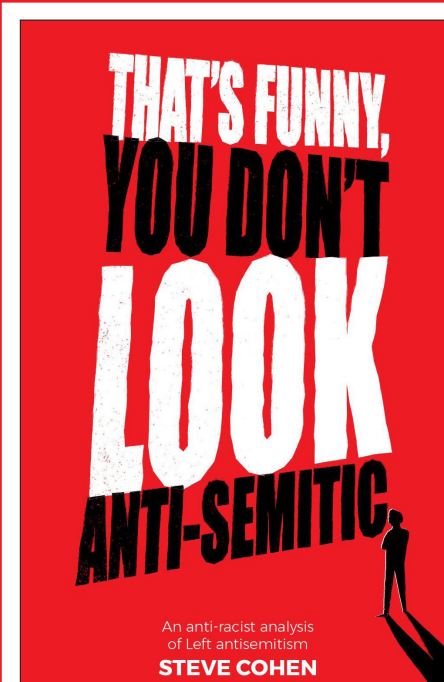
Bush, who is from a poor background and worked as a nurse until her election last year, wrote an open letter to Congress demanding extension, citing her own multiple experiences of being evicted and made homeless.

Despite the UK evictions ban ending on 31 May, there have been *relatively* few evictions. With the end of pandemic support schemes and Universal Credit cut coming in October, that may change.

The labour movement should be mobilising major street protests against these attacks and demanding real solu-

tions including increased benefits and the building of council housing.

Labour and trade union activists should demand Labour MPs show more of the spirit of Cori Bush, and fight for more left-wing, working-class campaigners in Parliament. □



A socialist dissects Left antisemitism. Third ed., 212 pages, £5 bit.ly/shop-wl

“What we stand for

Today one class, the working class, lives by selling its labour power to another, the capitalist class, which owns the means of production.

Capitalists' control over the economy and their relentless drive to increase their wealth causes poverty, unemployment, blighting of lives by overwork; imperialism, environmental destruction and much else.

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

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

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

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

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- Taxing the rich to fund good public services, homes, education and jobs for all
- Workers' control of major industries and finance for a rapid transition to a green society
- A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression
- Full equality for women, and social provision to free women from domestic labour. Reproductive freedoms and free abortion on demand.
- Full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people
- Black and white workers' unity against racism
- Open borders
- Global solidarity against global capital – workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers
- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation
- Equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small
- Maximum left unity in action, and full openness in debate

If you agree with us, take copies of *Solidarity* to sell – and join us! □

• workersliberty.org/join-awl

“If you report it again, they might do something”



Diary of a Tube worker

By Jay Dawkey

“I should have come in on the local rally”, says another driver, as I stand on a platform. “He’s routed me here because I’m early but it doesn’t really make sense. I thought I’d get cancelled but there are gaps going west. If you get the stick [signal] first I’ll ask them [the passengers] to go across to you, alright?”

“That’s fine”. But as I look at the next train coming in, I can see it isn’t mine. “You’ll need to tell him that, I must be the one behind”. “Bollocks, has he got the stick?” He looks up, yeah he has. “Right, I’ll tell them to get over”. I reckon I will be here for the next 5 minutes or so.

The heavens open when my train pulls in. I set up and the wipers go on. Nothing is louder in the cab when the wipers and the air-con are running to-

gether. I turn the train radio all the way up just in case I need to hear anything on the general announcements.

My next pick-up [my next train to drive] pulls into the platform. “Right, this end is good, but that end has got bad flats [poor rail adhesion leads to wheels slipping and skidding and can then lead to the wheels developing flat areas, think of a £1 coin]. The controller knows, it’s in the defect book today and yesterday, so if you report it again, they might do something”.

I don’t look forward to changing ends on the train at the terminus and dealing with those flats if it’s still wet; and then I’m on that end for the rest of the shift. Sure enough, as I pick up some speed I hear, “thunk, thunk, thunk, thunk”. I know it is going to be much louder in the tunnel. To top it off, the brakes on this are slow.

I think I’ve got the train under control and then it slides just that extra foot forward. I slam on the brakes and stop and work out how I am going to adjust what I’m doing. If we are running stick-to-

stick [red signal to red signal, with lots of stops between stations] this is going to be a real pain.

While I am being held at a signal, I think I will let the controller know about the flats. “Train 321 to control. Are you receiving? Over”. “Control receiving 321, pass your message over”. “Hello controller, leading car number 192 has flats on this train, I’ve recorded in the defect logbook”. “Driver that is all received, the depot are aware. Controller out”.

For the first time I have to re-open the doors a few times through central London: it’s starting to get busier. More people are rushing around, but on a weekend more than in the week. “Probably good for us in the long run”, another driver says. “More people get back on, the less reason they [central government] have got to screw us over”. “That’s one way of looking at it, but I wouldn’t be quite so sure,” says another. □

• “Jay Dawkey” is a Tube driver.

CWU capitulates on “Count Me In”

By a CWU telecom member

The telecoms leadership of the Communication Workers’ Union (CWU) has totally capitulated in the “Count Me In” campaign. They have let CWU members in BT and EE down massively.

The union has agreed a “framework” for future talks that (with a Kafkaesque twist) is an “agreement” to have future agreements. It has been presented as this because doing so avoids the basic demands of union democracy. The reality is they have totally given in on pay, jobs and future grading.

There is to be no ballot on this framework agreement despite BT openly calling it an agreement and the Union and BT saying because of this “agreement” the industrial action ballot threatened in the Count Me In campaign will not now be held.

Several telecom branches have complained to union HQ that this breaches union rules which say members must be consulted on any agreement about significant changes to terms and conditions. The complaints have been rejected by the leadership because the framework is only to allow for further negotiations which will (apparently) be balloted on.

But the “agreement” that is not an agreement means we have accepted

the status quo, notably on no proper pay rise this year and redundancies. Lead negotiator and CWU Deputy General Secretary for the telecoms sector Andy Kerr has explicitly said in briefings for branch representatives that the agreement to talk means they are accepting there will be no consolidated pay rise this year - just the bung already paid without agreement- and

accepting that redundancies are to be minimised rather than opposed.

Andy Kerr who is a left winger on the Labour Party National Executive Committee (NEC) and will stand up for Party democracy there, won’t apply the same principles to his day job. No wonder that members in Openreach, one of the divisions facing swingeing job cuts, are saying “Count Kerr Out”. □

The 1911 Triangle fire



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

Tragically, fires in garment factories are not new. The one constant is the culpability of the owners (see [Solidarity 601](#)).

One of the most infamous fires broke out at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in New York on 25 March 1911. Most of the 146 victims were female immigrants, mainly Italian and Jewish. The youngest was only 14. The cause of the fire is not known. All exits and safety doors were locked,

but an inquest acquitted the owners.

The Triangle Factory Fire Scandal is a 1979 TV-film directed by Mel Stuart, distributed in the USA by NBC and available on YouTube. It proved a major stimulus to the growth of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU), established in 1900. At a memorial meeting, Rose Schneiderman of the Women’s Trade Union League said:

“I can’t talk fellowship to you who are gathered here. Too much blood has been spilled. I know from my experience it is up to the working people to defend themselves. The only way they can save themselves is by a strong working class movement.” □



CWU: no change at the top

By a CWU postal member

As expected the elections for the National Executive Committee (NEC) and Industrial Executives of the Communications Workers' Union (CWU) have resulted in the maintenance of the status quo.

All those seeking re-election won, and the small number of genuine left candidates were soundly defeated.

The strength of the HQ bureaucracy is evidenced by the fact that Norman Candy, who was previously PA to General Secretary Dave Ward, got the retired members seat on the NEC unopposed.

The only small glimmer of light is that the equality seats brought some new candidates in, but this will be an NEC that offers no real scrutiny.

In the industrial sectors the postal constituency saw the three candidates from Scotland defeated, leaving the Scots with no representation on that executive for the first time in living memory. This is very bad news for a nation that includes two of the largest and historically more militant branches in the union.

In telecoms the sell out of the long running dispute with BT occurred after nominations closed, but it is unlikely that additional candidates would have emerged given the relative weakness of the activist base.

The 6% turnout could well be the members' verdict on the behaviour of those paid to negotiate on their behalf. Mind you, the turnout amongst postal members was only 12%.

All this against the backdrop of a union in crisis. The recently published accounts show a further loss of thousands of members and a deficit in the pension scheme in the millions. The failure to hold an annual conference since 2019 has saved a lot of money, but HQ costs remain very high, evidence that the bureaucracy is not shrinking as fast as the membership.

Talk of organising in new areas is just that, and years of retreat in the core industries have inevitably resulted in a reduction in density. If Royal Mail makes good on their threat to end Saturday deliveries, then the viability of the CWU really comes into question given that more than 10,000 jobs would go as a result of this change.

Calling for a new deal for workers whilst embracing partnership with employers is no answer. It is Orwellian doublespeak, and the losers are the members whatever sector they happen to work in. □

Tube: suspending strikes is a misstep

From Tubeworker

Rail union RMT called off drivers' strikes against Night Tube grade consolidation planned for 3-5 August. Whilst we respect the views of comrades who argued for suspension, we believe this decision is wrong.

LU has paused implementation of its grade consolidation plan, and has committed to further negotiations over the next two weeks to consider an RMT proposal for staffing Night Tube via voluntary links in depots.

But we should not see strikes as a regrettable last resort, only to be launched in extreme circumstances once management have refused to continue talks with our unions. The aim of strikes is to win improvements to working conditions, not simply to secure further talks.

Because LU has paused implemen-

tation and committed to consider and respond to a concrete proposal from RMT, the talks will have a specific and focused agenda. But they are, ultimately, still just talks.

RMT does have further strikes planned on 24-25 and 26-27 August, and Tubeworker has no doubt that, should management stonewall us in the further talks, reps and activists will do the work to ensure those strikes are solid. But calling off the first strikes makes their job much harder.

We also have concerns about the alternative RMT is proposing. The RMT's plan would see Night Tube duties staffed on a voluntary basis by full-time drivers, who elect to join a link (effectively, a section of a roster) in their depot that includes Night Tube. This plan would still entail the abolition of the existing Night Tube driver grade,

deleting a number of part-time jobs and closing off a line of promotion into the trains function for part-time station staff who need to retain part-time hours.

The Aslef union has played a grubby role on this issue so far, initially opposing grade consolidation before becoming its loudest advocates. We know many rank-and-file Aslef members oppose grade consolidation and the imposed increase in night working it would mean, and we have no doubt many would have respected RMT picket lines – and still will, if the next set of strikes go ahead.

All of us, whatever our views on suspension, need to pull together to get regular info out into depots and remind members the 24-27 August strikes remain on. □

• Abridged. More: bit.ly/n-tube

DVLA workers stay strong



John Moloney (PCS AGS, p.c.)

A month-long selective strike (2-31 August) at the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) complex in Swansea has begun as we move towards the expiry of the current ballot mandate. The [dispute](#) was triggered by management's insistence that far higher numbers of workers than we deemed safe continued to come into work during the pandemic, but the campaign has taken on a wider focus on workplace safety and an authoritarian style of management more generally. The new ballot will begin in the coming months, and we'll campaign to ensure we exceed the required thresholds.

Outsourced workers in the Royal Parks struck on 30 July, and a workers' assembly on the day of the strike agreed further walkouts from 16-30 August. There'll now be negotiations with the employer there this week [9-13 Aug], which is a step forward, but we are far off anything which will mean the strike being suspended.

Outsourced workers at the Department of Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) will also look to strike again in September, once Parliament resumes, if their demands are not met. Their dispute focuses on pay, working conditions, and annual leave entitlement.

Another outsourced contractor, Mitie, has completely backed off under membership and general union pressure from its plans for restructuring pay. However, they still haven't committed formally not to use "fire

and rehire" threats again in future. Therefore on behalf of the union I have written to the company asking them to renounce such tactics.

In my last column I discussed plans for convening building-wide safety committees at sites where multiple civil service departments have offices. We want our reps to work together in a joined up way to formulate common demands. We'll demand the employer recognises and negotiates with those committees, but even where we don't win that, those bodies will still be important for coordination. Some have already been set up, and we've got a target of 20 sites where we want to see committees created. We want local branches to discuss the idea, and hopefully be convinced of the approach, rather than it simply being a top-down directive from the leadership.

The National Executive Committee of the union recently agreed a proposal I made for drawing up demands for radical changes in leave policy within the civil service. There are various entitlements for different types of leave – maternity, paternity, parental, domestic, childcare, bereavement, and so on – none particularly generous, all riddled with management discretion. Also the rules tend to be about limiting leave and not about addressing the reasons why people need to take leave. So we've had members who've lost children in childbirth and have been treated terribly. All this has to stop. We want members to feed into the campaign to formulate what its precise demands should be. It's a matter of workplace dignity. □

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Support workers' strikes in Iran

By Morad Shirin

Morad Shirin of the [Iranian Revolutionary Marxists' Tendency](#) and the [Shahrokh Zamani Action Campaign](#) spoke to Solidarity about the wave of workers' protests in Iran.

There are now over 100,000 oil, gas and petrochemical contract workers in over twenty provinces on strike. Despite hundreds being sacked, the strike has spread to over 110 facilities. Their demands include higher wages, an increase in leave and holidays by ten days, better health and safety conditions (especially with the outbreak of the pandemic).

Conditions are very harsh on the Gulf coast and many workers there are living far from their families. So these are very modest demands.

This is the most widespread oil, gas and petrochemical strike under this regime. But so far, even though they've threatened to join the strike, the official oil and gas workers have not. The regime is trying to divide the workers by offering a pay rise to the more skilled ones. To win though the strike needs to spread to the official oil and petrochemical workers as well as other industries.

Meanwhile the series of strikes at the Haft Tappeh Sugar Cane complex in Khuzestan, in the south west of the country, have been the most important development in the Iranian workers' movement since the regime crushed the 1978-9 revolution. What makes them particularly significant is how during the past two to three years their level of consciousness has developed, based on their own struggle. Their latest strike began on 13 July 2021...

In the past year there have been many hundreds of strikes and struggles: from teachers, nurses, municipal workers, doctors and medical staff, to transport workers (bus, metro and train network), to the food industry and even different mines, heavy industry, oil and petrochemical workers and so on. Pensioners have also been holding regular protests on Sundays. These are a reaction to the long-term dire economic situation, corruption, repression and sanctions. In addition, the incompetent and callous handling of the pandemic has increased social inequalities even more.



There is also the perennial problem of unpaid wages, which seems to have become an integral part of Iranian capitalism. These effectively break the contract between capital and labour, where the worker sells their labour power and doesn't get paid! It is usually at least two or three months' pay, but can easily be twelve or more months of unpaid wages.

And most of the culprits are not small businesses struggling to pay workers, but state-owned or other big companies - including many owned by the Pasdaran - or recent privatisations, where relations of the regime's leaders have bought the companies at a fraction of their true value!

Although these strikes start with a very modest demand, because the state - particularly the Intelligence Ministry and the riot police - intervenes to crush them, there can be a rapid escalation. Confrontations that include blocking roads, rallies in town and other forms of struggle take place. The explosive socio-economic situation can quickly push these strikes on to very radical tactics and demands. □

• Full interview at bit.ly/moradinterview

Rally the left for Labour conference!

By Michael Elms

Many Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs) are yet to decide their motions to Labour Party conference (25-29 September in Brighton) at meetings in August or more likely in early September. Many will have decided in July, and rule-change proposals were in by 11 June.

Workers' Liberty is pushing the [Build Back Fairer motion](#) submitted by Momentum Internationalists and backed by Momentum, about a plan for rebuilding the workers' movement and society on a more equal basis in the pandemic and its wake. We're also pushing a motion on solidarity with the Uyghur people, proposed by Finchley and Golders Green CLP among others.

And we'll back left-wing rule-change proposals: the two main ones on the order paper, so we hear, are for removing the "three-year rule" which blocks CLPs (but not the National Executive) from reopening rulebook issues within three years, and for accountability of the Parliamentary Labour Party to Labour conference.

For Starmer, the conference will be a test of his planned "relaunch" following universal criticism and poor performance this year. For the left it will be an opportunity to regroup politically and begin plans to rebuild - to rebuild a functioning left in Labour, but also to present a left-wing, alternative plan for rebuilding society in Covid times.

Since January 2020 Labour Party membership has gone down by 120,000 to about 430,000, the same figure as in November 2019. Anecdotally, many left-wingers have quit, and others are keeping their heads down in CLPs.

At the London Labour conference on 24-25 July, pro-Starmer candidates from the right-wing "Labour to Win" faction swept the elections for the regional board. We can expect that this rightward shift will also be reflected in the delegates being sent to conference. The crop of left-wing motions being sent appears to be much thinner this year, so far, than it was in 2019 (which was a left-wing high tide).

That doesn't mean that Labour has simply been retaken by the right. The 430,000 membership is still more than double what it was in May 2015. Starmer's attempted purge of hundreds of members of groups like Socialist Appeal and Labour Against the Witch Hunt, while outrageous and

potentially demoralising, is unlikely to change this. Opinion among the membership is still comfortably to the left of Starmer. While the London regional conference elections went to the right, motions were passed endorsing the 2019 manifesto's "free broadband" pledge and calling for Transport for London to bring all of its staff and services back in-house. A motion on Just Transition and the climate crisis passed in spite of opposition from Unite and GMB delegates, who took issue with the motion's call to end airport expansion.

Starmer's recent policy announcements (really, re-launches of Corbyn era policies) on workers' rights, including a pledge of worker status for spuriously self-employed gig economy workers, may be in part a recognition of this diffuse left-wing mood.

The left-wing party membership is poorly organised and still disoriented politically. Momentum nationally has been largely inactive this year. A bad, ultra-suspicious political culture and disdain for democracy hobbled the organisation for most of the Corbyn period. The new Momentum leadership elected in 2020 promised more democracy but has failed so far to reinvigorate local Momentum groups, in part because it has continued much of the top-down, office-led, NGO-style outlook of the previous administration; its "new strategy" [document](#) sheds little light.

Even given all the real difficulties, Momentum's performance at getting its own recommended motions passed by CLPs looks poor thus far. □

• More inside: Labour and PR, page 13



momentuminternationalists.org

Social inequality has deepened the Covid pandemic; the pandemic has deepened inequality. This new pamphlet, from Momentum Internationalists, offers ideas for the labour movement to regroup and fight back on socialist lines. □



Solidarity

For a workers' government

NHS needs across-the-board fight on pay, funding, and privatisation

By Jayne Evans

Over August-September the health unions will be organising consultative ballots on the 3% pay offer for health workers.

Unison's email to members says that the 3% rise doesn't increase pay to anyone unless Band 8C or above; that it increases the pay gap between highest and lowest paid workers in the NHS; and that it "does not embed the real Living Wage as a minimum".

Therefore, says Unison, it cannot recommend that members accept the offer. The union leadership, however, falls short of a positive campaign to reject and go for industrial action. Unison's consultation closes on 10 Sept.

The other health unions are also conducting consultative ballots. The RCN consultation starts on 12 August and ends on 13 September; GMB opened 6 August and ends on 17 September; Unite opens 27 August, closes 24 September.

All the unions have demanded a higher pay rise. However, workplace campaigning and national union action from national union leaderships has been minimal, mostly limited to emails and on-line meetings.

Rank-and-file groups [Nurses United](#) and [Nurses Say No](#) have organised workplace leafletting and protests which helped



push the union leaderships to demand higher, but the success of the campaigning is limited by the inertia of the official union machines and the failure of the Labour Party to raise any demands around NHS pay, funding, or NHS reorganisation.

In workplaces there is additional difficulty when organising around pay in that the main pressure people are facing is their workload, understaffing and waiting lists. For instance, in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and adult mental health, positions remain unfilled. In my workplace instructions are coming more often from the adolescent inpatient ward that they have no more capacity and we must limit admissions.

Staff are also aware that, unlike previously, when the Treasury funded NHS pay increases, this time a large proportion of the increase is due to be met by NHS England from existing budgets. In my workplace, workers will say that they would

prefer any extra money to go to employing more people rather than to pay rises, because the waiting lists are so long and people's lives could be in danger.

We need to convince people that the future of NHS services and staffing will be best served by a vigorously fought dispute over pay. The union leaderships could make a big difference to this and to the outcome of the upcoming ballots.

The newly elected left National Executive (NEC) of Unison could certainly make a difference.

Uniting struggles

If Unison were to announce a campaign of protest and industrial action on pay in the public sector, linked to a fight for good NHS funding and against the Tories' new NHS reorganisation, then they could begin to unite struggles of health workers, local government workers, and the wider labour movement, on both pay and services.

The unions should be discussing industrial tactics that could win, including disaggregated ballots and cross union action.

Activists will push motions with those ideas through branches and regions, leaflet workplaces calling for rejection of the 3%, and continue to organise local actions which link the issues of pay, staffing and service provision. □