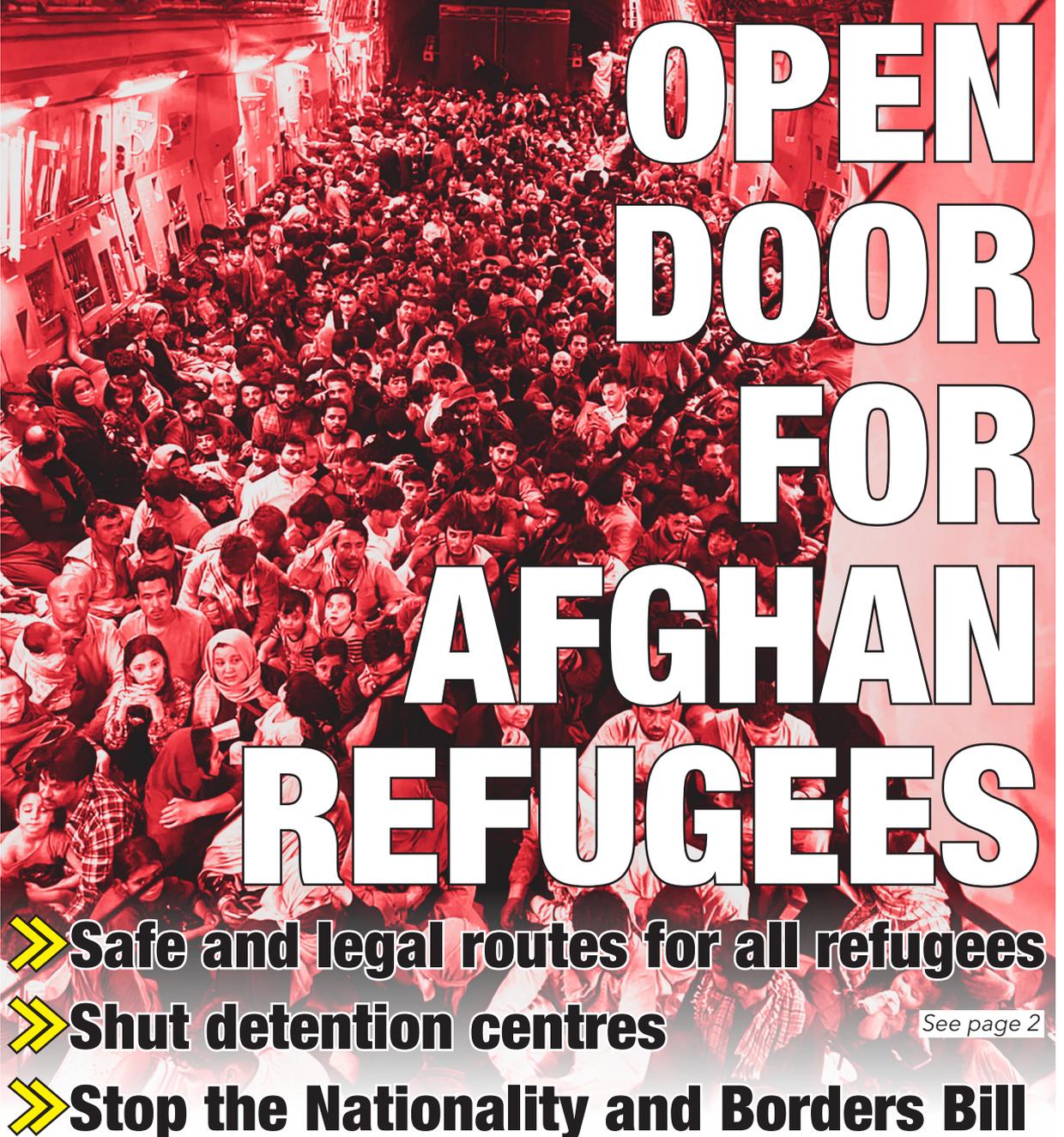


Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry



OPEN DOOR FOR AFGHAN REFUGEES

- **Safe and legal routes for all refugees**
- **Shut detention centres**
- **Stop the Nationality and Borders Bill**

See page 2

Disaster in Afghanistan

Why the Taliban won, and the background in 43 years of war

Pages 8-11

XR's fortnight of action

Zack Muddle reports from the climate protests in London

Page 6

Grunwick, 45 years on

The story of an epoch-defining strike by migrant workers

Page 7

Towards Labour conference

The left fights back in the run-up to 25-29 September in Brighton

Page 3

Open door for Afghan refugees!

6699 Editorial

The Taliban's seizure of power in Afghanistan threatens the rights and lives of millions. The most immediate duty for the left and the workers' movement in Britain is to fight to force open the borders for every refugee who wants to come here.

By the time we go to press, the US, UK and allies will have pulled out of Kabul airport. Their shoddy operation has left behind even many of the Afghans they had promised to help, after their work with Western militaries or embassies put them at risk.

Not only those workers, but millions more will face violence and curtailed rights under the Taliban's misogynistic, sectarian, LGBT-phobic and theocratic regime. We have a duty to champion their cause, and fight for them not to be quietly abandoned and forgotten. Doubly so after the wretched episodes of late August, in which political and logistical attention were diverted away from human lives in favour of 200 cats and dogs.

It is outrageous that the UK government's longer-term plan is to welcome only 20,000 Afghan refugees, including just 5,000 this year. Against this miserly "offer", activists must push the Labour Party and our trade unions to speak up and organise around the demand to open the door for every person who wants to escape here, without caps and without a limited focus on just those who worked with British forces.

The government's targets pale in comparison to historical examples. In 1972, Britain accepted 27,000 Ugandan Asians in just four months, after Idi Amin drove them out. From 1933 to the outbreak of World War Two, Britain admitted 70,000 Jewish refugees.

Though even that was mean-spirited: behind those 70,000 Jewish refugees were hundreds of thousands more who wanted to come to Britain but were locked out and left in the Nazis' hands. The vaunted Kindertransport only arose because Britain's antisemitic government could not be persuaded to relax its restrictions against Jewish adults.

And from 2008 to 2020, the UK deported more than 15,000 people to Afghanistan - more than any other European state. Though homosexuality remained illegal under the Western-backed government, in 2017 the UK government issued guidance that gay men could be deported to Afghanistan, claiming they would be safe if they moved to Kabul and stayed in the closet. Even as the Taliban swept across the country, the UK Home Office continued to insist that refugees could be refused and sent safely to Kabul.



A protestor in London at the Stop Killing Afghans protest, 28 August 2021. Credit: Angela Christofilou

The refugee emergency concerns not only the 123,000 people evacuated by the US and its western allies from Kabul airport. The UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) reckons on around 500,000 fleeing over land borders in the next four months.

Many of those will be unable to settle securely in the countries neighbouring Afghanistan. The labour movement must call for them to be given refuge in Britain and other richer countries, not fobbed off with the claim that they are now in "safe" countries.

Pakistan

Pakistan has been building a fence on its long border with Afghanistan since 2017, and says it is now "almost complete". Pakistan says it will admit only people with proof of residence in Pakistan or urgent medical needs. But the *Guardian* reports that 20,000 a day are crossing the border.

Iran also has millions of Afghan migrants there already, but on 18 August, after the Taliban took Kabul, it "ordered border guards to turn away refugees trying to cross the border".

Over the decades, fewer Afghans have fled north, since they suffer a worse reception there than in Iran and Pakistan. According to UNHCR official Caroline Van Buren (26 August), "the borders with Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are closed for the movement of people".

Uzbekistan has said that "more than a thousand" refugees have been let in since the fall of Kabul, but on 30 August declared that it would "not accept Afghan refugees on its territory". Tajikistan said in late July it was ready to shelter up to 100,000 refugees - but has offered no further comments after the fall of Kabul.

Once escaped from Afghanistan, and

hoping to get further, Afghans face further obstacles. The Turkish government, which already has maybe four million Syrian refugees blocked from further flight into the EU, says that "it is out of the question for us to take an additional refugee burden". It started a wall on the border with Iran in 2017, and now plans to extend it and cover the rest of the border with ditches, wire and security patrols.

Greece has completed a fence on its border with Turkey.

Migrants' rights organisations have raised calls for emergency measures as an immediate response. We need to mobilise the labour movement to the front lines of the battle to win those measures, including:

- Immediately regularise the status of all Afghans already in the UK: grant all outstanding asylum applications (the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants says that "in the year to March 2021, over 3,000 Afghan nationals had asylum claims pending in the UK, over two thirds of whom have been waiting longer than six months"); reverse all rejected asylum claims; grant permanent status to undocumented migrants; cancel all deportations and removals (whether to Afghanistan or to third countries); release all those currently in immigration detention.

- Ensure fresh claims from Afghan asylum seekers are swiftly approved, and in the meantime guarantee no Afghans will be evicted from asylum accommodation or denied asylum support.

- Expand the family reunion route, so that Afghans already here can quickly and easily bring the rest of their family to join them, including parents and siblings.

- Dramatically expand the insultingly inadequate plans that the UK govern-

ment has announced for resettling Afghan refugees - so far, they have only planned to resettle a minuscule 5,000 this year.

- Internationally-coordinated emergency resettlement schemes. Pledge to accept asylum claims from Afghans who make it to neighbouring countries, and abandon policies that attempt to limit refugees to the first country they reach on escaping.

More broadly, such measures are the least we could demand for all refugees, not just those from Afghanistan.

But, as the same campaigners have also pointed out, official resettlement schemes are not enough.

No 'sitting and waiting'

The official evacuation via Kabul airport is over. For many Afghans in different situations and different parts of the country, that route was never feasible in any case. It would be inhuman to tell them, as the Home Secretary Priti Patel has done, to sit and wait for her to announce official resettlement schemes.

Like refugees throughout history, those who choose to flee will understandably do so by any means necessary. Because our governments restrict safe routes and place harsh obstacles in their way, this often means undertaking dangerous sea crossings, dodging violent border guards, placing themselves at the mercy of smugglers, and other desperate actions.

Patel's instruction is part of the Conservatives' broad drive against refugees arriving by irregular routes. The Nationality and Borders Bill that they are currently pushing through parliament is an extreme assault on their rights. If it passes, only those arriving through the extremely limited "official" resettlement routes will be allowed permanent residence and the stability to rebuild their lives.

The two-tier system will penalise refugees who had no choice but to flee by irregular routes. They may be imprisoned in offshore camps for processing. The government may seek to deport them to third countries, and at best, they may get limited and temporary status.

They will have reduced rights, and even those rights will be subject to repeated review, so that the possibility of refusal and deportation hangs over them for life.

The crisis in Afghanistan therefore demands that we seek not just emergency measures, but also redouble the campaign against the Borders Bill. And ultimately that we fight for a welcome and support for every person fleeing persecution, violence, destruction, and destitution.

We stand for open borders and solidarity, against the inhumanity, racism and division of capitalism's bordered world. □

Oppose Labour's new wave of purges! Defend due process!

By Martin Thomas

On 13 August the Labour Party started sending out letters threatening people with "Automatic Exclusion from Membership of the Labour Party" under the terms of the "ban" on four groups decided by Labour's National Executive (NEC) on 20 July.

The recipients were given seven days to show they weren't associated with any of the four groups. The well-known film director Ken Loach refused to attempt to show that, and has been expelled.

Labour HQ responded that it would "not comment on individual cases". In other words, there is no due process. Imagine a legal system under which you could be fined or jailed, and protests or queries would be met with only "no comment on individual cases".

We have no brief for three of the groups banned, and many criticisms of the fourth, Socialist Appeal. But the bans negate all due process. They are a

hardening of the current catch-all rule, used against hundreds or thousands of members in 2015 and 2016 and a number in 2020-2, which says that people can be auto-excluded for "support" (interpreted loosely, then and now) for any political association other than an "official Labour group".

Ken Loach refused to deny association with the "Labour Against the Witch-hunt" group (LAW).

Loach directed the play *Perdition* in the 1980s, which we [criticised for antisemitism](#). The (small) "Labour Against the Witch-hunt" group we have also [criticised for antisemitism](#).

Certainly Labour needs a thorough re-education [against antisemitism](#); and in some cases people should indeed be expelled from Labour for antisemitism.

But expulsions should be on the basis of due process, with a hearing on evidence of actual antisemitic actions or speeches by the actual person charged. And Loach is 85, with a long

record of socialist film-making.

Meanwhile, the Labour leadership has [obstructed](#) local Labour Parties' efforts to conduct educationals on antisemitism, and has done [only token](#) work itself to promote education and discussion on the issue.

Ian Hodson, president of the Bakers' Union, also faces expulsion for refusing to dissociate from LAW. Hodson has a long and good record as a labour-movement activist, and we know of no charge against him on antisemitism. The Bakers' Union has [declared](#) that it will call an emergency conference to debate disaffiliation from Labour.

Pamela Fitzpatrick, Labour candidate for Harrow East in 2019, a local councillor and longstanding activist, faces a demand to prove herself "innocent" of supporting Socialist Appeal because she did an interview with that paper way back. Local Labour activists are gaining many signatures for a [petition](#) defending her.

Many of the local Labour Party officers suspended back then are still suspended, as far as we know. Dozens of others have been suspended in recent months.

Ann Black, a member of the NEC who voted for three of the bans and abstained on the fourth, reports "nearly 100 members still suspended after more than 18 months... more than 1000 complaints... unresolved".

One of the chief aims of these purges must be to push left-wingers in the Labour Party to withdraw in disgust, or left unions like the Bakers to disaffiliate, leaving the party easier for the leadership to control. On the contrary, left-wingers should stick in there, and fight both for a democratic, due-process regime in the party. □

• How to get a democratic, due-process Labour Party: bit.ly/lp-dp • New Labour procedures are stitch-ups: bit.ly/c-procs

Step up the fight against Police Bill

By Sacha Ismail

The Tories' Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill has not, so far, been substantially amended in Parliament. It still constitutes an assault on the right to protest, on workers' rights to strike and picket, on migrants and on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.

The Bill's second reading in the House of Lords has been set for 14 September. Yet the latest round of protests against the Bill, on 21 August, was small and weak, with hundreds rather than thousands in London.

There are multiple reasons why that is the case. One is

that the labour movement has failed to mobilise against the Bill – despite even the threat it poses to trade union rights specifically (see the Free Our Unions [briefing](#) by Gregor Gall).

Most union general secretaries have signed a new open letter against the Bill (with the notable exception, so far, of GMB's Gary Smith). Even that is a step up from unions' general silence since May at least.

We should continue to push for union and Labour organisations to vocally speak out and actually mobilise their members against the Bill; and to raise earlier – Thatcherite and Blairite – restrictions on rights to [protest and strike](#). □

NatWest privatisation: why is the labour movement silent?

By Mohan Sen

The government still owns a majority of one of the UK's biggest banks. Instead of using that stake to impose any kind of public accountability or social responsibility on NatWest, the Tories are pushing ahead with the sell-off of the government's stake – at a massive loss to taxpayers. Yet the labour movement is silent.

Despite a majority of its shares being owned by the government, in the last four years NatWest Group has provided over \$13bn of funding for fossil fuel projects, 46th worst of all the many thousands of banks in the world.

It recently announced plans to distribute £3bn to its stockholders. The "bonus pool" for its bankers in the first half of 2021 was £142m. When its chief executive Alison Rose was appointed in 2019 her basic "salary" started at £1.1m.

Meanwhile, NatWest has led the league table for UK branch closures, shutting down 1,084 since 2015 – just under 30% of all bank branches closed. In 2021 it has continued to close branches and cut many hundreds of jobs.

On these and many other levels the government has simply allowed – or encouraged – the NatWest bosses to get on with their environmental and social vandalism.

The "public" stake in Nat-



West has been cut from 78% in 2015, when George Osborne began the privatisation process, immediately losing £1bn for taxpayers, to 55% now. Rishi Sunak wants to cut it to 40% over the next year, at the cost of multi-billion pound losses. The government's Office of Budget Responsibility estimates that by the time NatWest is fully returned to private ownership in 2025, the total loss to the Treasury since the 2008 bail-out will amount to £39bn.

The Labour Party is saying nothing about this, not even on its usual "Tory incompetence" tack. Neither are trade unions, despite the unanimously agreed TUC policy for public ownership of the banks and high finance.

The labour movement should demand cancellation of the sell-off, and government imposition of democratic public control and social and environmental responsibility on NatWest, as the first steps in creating a democratic public banking system. □

Two Labour left rallies

Two online rallies of the left have been organised in the run-up to Labour conference: by Arise (Labour Assembly Against Austerity and others) on 11 September (bit.ly/fight-thetories), and by Don't Leave Organise, Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, Fire Brigades Union, Bakers' Union and others on 18 September (bit.ly/lis-18). The DLO-CLPD meeting is announced with a joint statement negotiated over a period between 16 groups of the Labour left, and seems to be aimed at producing a better mechanism than the Centre-Left Grassroots Alliance for agreeing "left slates" for internal Labour elections. Left unity for due process and for left policies like repeal of all anti-union laws is necessary; so is a profile for a left clear against antisemitism and committed to internationalism from below. □



Upcoming meetings

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

3-5 September: Workers' Liberty tent-only summer camp. A weekend of debates, discussion, camping, cooking and outdoor activity.

Sunday 12 September 6.30-8: Disaster in Afghanistan – historical background and lessons

Sunday 26 September 6.30-8pm: The Tories, immigration and modern slavery

For our calendars of events, updated details, zoom links, more meetings and resources, see workersliberty.org/events or scan the QR code to the right □



All over the place on Afghanistan



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

The *Morning Star* (unlike some other left wing publications) did not hail the fall of Kabul and the Taliban takeover as any kind of “triumph” or “victory” for “anti-imperialism”. In fact the *Morning Star* of 16 August described the situation as a “disaster unfolding” and quoted a member of the Afghan diaspora now living in Norway saying: “Dark times are ahead as women and ethnic groups like the Hazara will face the same fate as they did in the 1990s”.

But it has been completely incoherent on the underlying politics.

The *Morning Star* claimed (editorial 17 August) that any suggestion that the Stop the War Coalition (StWC) has ever supported the Taliban is a “baseless slander”. That it did, in a backhanded and by-implication way to be sure, is well known to all who were involved in the [StWC](#) when it was first established in 2001 and witnessed the organisation’s leaders blocking criticism of the

Taliban and indeed initially refusing to condemn the 9/11 attacks. (Eventually, under pressure at a StWC conference, Lindsey German said “of course” StWC would condemn 9/11).

These days, the StWC has become more sophisticated and issued a statement including this (which also appeared, in the form of quotes from StWC convener Lindsey German, in the *Morning Star* of 16 August):

“[W]e argued that military occupation of Afghanistan could not lead to stable governance, and would be rejected as a foreign imposition by many Afghans. We asserted then and believe now that democracy and human rights can rarely be imposed externally, and must be the product of the efforts of the peoples themselves if it is to prove durable.”

This may not seem remarkable, but in reality it is: the StWC has not, in the past, had much to say about democracy or human rights. The same statement goes on to mention “the rights of the Afghan people, women in particular.” An innocent reader would assume that the StWC leadership are firm supporters of democracy, human rights and women’s rights in particular, just

not the idea of “imposing” such things from “outside”.

The rest of the paper’s coverage has been all over the place: an article by one Marc Vandepitte (18 August) rehashes an old conspiracy theory, put forward by film-maker Michael Moore in his 2004 film *Fahrenheit 9/11*, that the war from 2001 was really all about oil and gas reserves around the Caspian Sea and the Bush family’s alleged commercial interest in building a pipeline across Afghanistan to bypass Iran. (The pipeline never happened).

14 years of socialism?

Perhaps the strangest contribution came on 19 August in the form of a piece by Nick Wright, describing his “experiences travelling [in Afghanistan] during its 14 years of socialism under siege.” Comrade Wright does not give us the exact dates he was there, but it seems to have been sometime between the Russian invasion of 1979 and the Islamist war to overthrow the rump Stalinist regime following the defeat and withdrawal of the Russians in 1988.

Ignoring the indiscriminate bombing of the countryside and the colonial na-

ture of the Russian occupation, Wright describes how “impressed” he was with Mohammed Najibullah’s semi-Stalinist PDPA government. It seems some attempts to impose modernity “from outside” are more admirable than others – though in fairness it should be pointed out that PDPA administration managed to hang on in Kabul, with no Russian military support, until 1992.

An article by Communist Party of Britain (CPB) general secretary Rob Griffiths (25 August) “Why did the Soviet Union collapse?” doesn’t even mention what happened in Afghanistan.

I had assumed that the *Morning Star*’s hostility to the Taliban stemmed from its position on the Russian invasion, but I’ve been put right on this: following the British Communist Party, the paper condemned the invasion and published honest and highly critical accounts of what was happening in Afghanistan by the Party’s international secretary at the time, Jack Woddiss.

It seems the *Morning Star* and the CPB have now retreated into total confusion – apart from “tankie” Nick Wright, who retrospectively supports the Russian invasion. □

Trumka weak on BLM, coup, and more



Letter

Much of what Eric Lee writes for *Solidarity* is very good, such as last month’s [article](#) on the LGBTI movement’s struggle in Georgia, but his contributions on US politics sit very strangely on the pages of a revolutionary socialist publication. Lots of good articles for the price of a bit of rubbish every so often isn’t an awful deal, but it shouldn’t go unchallenged.

In his obituary ([Solidarity 603](#)) for American union bureaucrat Richard Trumka, he laments that this death received less coverage in the British press than that of “Barry the barred owl”. Thankfully the *Morning Star* has answered Lee’s complaint and reprinted the [obituary](#) written by their sister party in the US, which laughably calls Joe Biden “a long, strong and public friend of organised labour”. Another glowing [tribute](#) came from Thomas Donohue, the former president of the US Chamber of Commerce writing in the

Wall Street Journal, who writes that both Trumka and himself “understood on a fundamental level that business and labor had intertwined destinies”, and praises Trumka’s central role in bringing Democrats in Congress over to supporting Trump’s US-Mexico-Canada Agreement, the “sequel” to NAFTA.

Trumka was lauded by some on the left for his speech during Obama’s 2008 presidential campaign challenging white workers who wouldn’t vote for Obama because he’s black. That seems like quite a low bar,

however, and is undercut by his appearance on Fox News last year to [attack](#) Black Lives Matters protesters for their violence.

Capitol riot

Following Trump’s loss in the election, it seemed possible that he might try to cling onto power and carry out a coup. The Vermont AFL-CIO [passed a motion](#) calling for a general strike if Trump refused to leave, despite the fact that Trumka had written to them declaring such a resolution unconstitutional. In February this year

Trumka [attacked](#) the Biden administration for cancelling the environmentally devastating Keystone XL pipeline.

Biden’s planned labour reform, the PRO Act, certainly has much good about it, preventing anti-unionisation abuse from management and allowing secondary strikes. However, it’s far from a panacea, it has serious problems [outlined](#) by James Hoff writing for *Left Voice*, and anyway looks unlikely to beat the predictable Senate filibuster. □

Pete Boggs, Cheshire

Science, rockets and space



Letter

John Cunningham ([Solidarity 603](#)) points out that the USSR space programme was primarily geared to developing missile technology for the Cold War.

He still cherishes his framed photo of Yuri Gagarin. Gagarin was surely brave and resourceful. But what cause were those qualities made to serve? Since 1972 no government has found sending humans (rather than scien-

tific instruments) beyond low Earth orbit worthwhile even for prestige or possible military spin-offs. And on the International Space Station, the astronomer Martin Rees [says](#): “The scientific returns have been meagre. We have learned a bit about how the body reacts to spending long periods in space, and we have grown a few crystals in zero gravity, but that is in no way commensurate to the tens of billions of dollars that have been spent”. □

Rhodri Evans, London

Command-economy growth



Letter

Tony Southwell ([Solidarity 603](#)) is right that calling on capitalist states to reduce our consumption for climate reasons is hopeless. And he’s right that a socialist planned economy could dampen the drive for people to own more “stuff” (more cars, etc.)

He suggests, though, that Stalinist-type planned economies could also avert the “more stuff” compulsion. I can’t believe that the growth-target

focus of those economies was just coincidence that the individual choices of the bureaucrats all went that way. Their system was organically tied to “development” in emulation of “ordinary” capitalist economies; and systematically biased towards adding new production capacity, rarely scrapping old capacity.

Capitalists vie for the highest returns, but that means those with lower returns collapse, so total growth may be lower than in a command economy. □

Alan Gilbert, London

In the age of Scylla and Charybdis



Eric Lee

By Eric Lee

You will no doubt be familiar with the expression “between a rock and a hard place”. That phrase, apparently, has its origins in labour history. According to one online source, “the phrase originated in America in the early 1900s to describe a dispute between copper miners and the mining companies in Bisbee, Arizona”. Maybe.

It’s a modern take on the myth of Scylla and Charybdis, described by Homer as two immortal and irresistible monsters who controlled the narrow waters through which Odysseus needed to pass.

I thought about Scylla and Charybdis the other day while I listened to a relative in the U.S. describe a difficult choice she had to make. She was hosting

a small group of people in her home, and in accordance with social distancing advice, had suggested they meet outdoors in her garden. But her friends insisted on meeting indoors, as the air quality outside had grown increasingly dangerous due to wildfires spreading across California.

The choice was to risk catching Covid indoors, or inhaling toxic smoke outside.

It’s 2021’s version of Scylla and Charybdis.

Of course we’ve always had viruses, and wildfires are nothing new, but there are particularly 21st century aspects to the dual crises of climate change and pandemics.

We know that climate change is caused by human beings and that late capitalism with its short-term, profit-driven agenda is largely to blame. And as for the pandemic, the lack of affordable, universal health care even in some of the richest countries,

and the absence of health care for millions around the world, have done much to make the pandemic far worse.

When the great socialist thinkers of the 19th and early 20th centuries wrote their books, little attention was given to climate and health issues. Nothing could have been known about the impact of human effort on the world’s climate. And the rapid advances in science and medicine offered much hope in the fight against infectious diseases.

The early Marxists, most notably Karl Kautsky and his contemporaries, took for granted that as capitalism grew increasingly ripe for change, trade unions would grow more powerful, social democratic and labour parties would win the battle of ideas (and elections), and the world would transition to the promised land of a cooperative commonwealth.

Of course that is not what

happened, and capitalism became increasingly ripe and then over-ripe to the point where the actual survival of humans on this planet is endangered.

Things have gotten so bad, with the pandemic, global warming and many other ongoing crises, that no serious person is suggesting solutions that are based on the “free market”. Vaccinating the whole world, or doing what is needed to mitigate and possibly reverse climate change, will require state intervention and international cooperation on a colossal scale. The same can be said about issues like migration, growing inequality, persistent racism, sexism and homophobia, and a rise of deadly, fundamentalist religious cults. There is no “free market” answer to any of these problems – and everyone knows that.

The American socialist author Michael Harrington used

to say that there could be little doubt that the future would be collectivist. The only choice was whether it would be bureaucratic collectivist (like Stalinism) or democratic (like socialism). I think he had a point.

In this age of Scylla and Charybdis, socialists have a unique message which needs to be heard. And that message focusses on the kind of collectivist solutions being proposed for global crises – solutions which must be democratic and fair, for all people, everywhere.

Our vision of a shared future for humanity rooted in respect for the human rights of all has never been more relevant than it is today. □

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

More online

The failings of Corbynism were more than the failings of Corbyn

Dave Osland reviews our booklet on the Corbyn era bit.ly/osland-r

Corbynism isn’t over yet

A review from a different angle by Richard Price bit.ly/price-r

Libya 2011: yes, we were right

Dan Katz argues that we were right not to campaign to stop the big-power bombing which saved the Benghazi rebellion from immediate crushing by Gaddafi bit.ly/liby-2011

Reflections in a jaundiced eye

The history of British Trotskyism to 1944 as summarised in a report done for the Communist Party of Great Britain to inform its leaders bit.ly/trot1944

The new Kyrgyz heroines



Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

The kidnapping of brides has been banned for decades in Kyrgyzstan, an ex-USSR Central Asian Republic lying north of Tajikistan and Afghanistan. The law was tightened in 2013, with sentences of up to 10 years in prison for those who kidnap a woman to force her into marriage. Previously it was a fine of 2,000 soms, about £20.

Despite that, the medieval practise of *ala kachuu* (“take and run”) persists to this day. The [Women Support Centre](#) in Bishkek has estimated that [12,000](#) forced marriages take place every year and very few perpetrators are convicted.

About 80% of the girls kidnapped accept their fate, often on the advice of their parents. It is estimated that 2,000 women are raped by their future husbands each year, and are thus condemned to marry, because returning to their family would be a deep

mark of shame. Fleeing brides also risk further violence and even death. Aizada Kanatbekova, 27, was found strangled to death two days after being snatched off the street by five men. The kidnapping took place in daylight in the centre of Bishkek (the capital city). Kanatbekova’s mother said police had laughed off her plea for help after the abduction and told her she’d soon be dancing at her daughter’s wedding.

In 2018, a woman was murdered and mutilated whilst seeking help in a police station. The victim, Burulai Turdaaly Kyzy, a 20-year-old medical student, was killed by the man who had kidnapped her. He stabbed her, then carved her initials and those of another man she had planned to marry on to the woman’s body. The officers had left the two of them alone in the waiting room, though she had made charges against him.

A feminist activist has developed a successful video game for mobile phones that aims to convince young people that kidnapping is not a tradition but a crime. Despite the coun-

try’s poverty, it has [134](#) mobile phone accounts per 100 people (it was 10 per 100 in 2005). [Tatyana Zelenskaya](#) designed the game’s graphics, working with the human rights organisation Open Line Foundation, which supports victims of bride kidnapping through counselling and legal advice.

Developers had hoped for 25,000 downloads. In just over six months, the app has already been downloaded more than 130,000 times. In the game, players witness the kidnapping of a best friend and must free her, while messages with suggestions prepared by psychologists, journalists and activists appear on the screen, as well as real telephone numbers that can be used in an emergency.

“The idea is to make the girls understand that they are masters of their own destiny. This is why we transform them into heroines capable of rebelling and changing the course of things,” said Zelenskaya. “For a generation of women who grew up with the idea that nothing is possible without a man’s approval, unhinging this concept is difficult.” □



Agenda

Neurodivergent Labour has published an interview with Ben and Emma, two non-speaking autistic advocates in America who featured in the recently-released film *The Reason I Jump*. The interview disproves the common view that if autistic people don’t speak, then they don’t communicate. Using letter boards, Ben and Emma told ND Labour about their struggles for equality and civil rights. Free Our Unions committee member Daniel Randall spoke to the Green Party Trade Union Group on 20 August, and the video recording of the Zoom meeting and a partial transcript are on the [FOU website](#). □

• Links and info for these and other campaigns, and suggestions for labour-movement motions and petitions, at workersliberty.org/agenda

Second hand books!

Workers’ Liberty is selling hundreds of second hand-books – politics, but also fiction, history and much more. Visit bit.ly/2h-books for the current stock and prices, and to order. □

Take the climate rebellion into workplaces!



Environment

By Zack Muddle

From 23 August, environmental activists from across the UK descended upon London for thirteen days of bold and creative direct action against climate change and its financing, XR's "Impossible Rebellion". It was smaller than previous pre-Covid rebellions, but still numbered thousands every day. And not just for a single march, then a coach home: for marching, actions, and confrontation with the police all day long, day after day.

Class-struggle and workplace activists, from Workers' Liberty, "Empower the Unions", and beyond, have been participating: supporting the protests, while trying to raise the urgency of organising at work and in trade unions to fight climate change.

Activists who had come down for the rebellion, sympathisers of XR who had heard it was in the area and popped by, curious passers-by, all were open to conversations about the need for radical working-class climate action.

The minimal political basis upon which XR organises – climate change is bad, something must be done, but we won't directly say what – and their historic visibility have brought in people from a wide range of political backgrounds. XR has offered them ideas which have been rudimentary, politically light, and often not-very-left-wing.

But many activists, seeing environmental emergencies becoming sharper, and XR's successes being lim-



ited, have a thirst for discussion and answers as to how we can actually halt it.

Our stall, draped with a "fight climate change, organise at work" message, attracted people for discussions. We handed out leaflets on climate change, class struggle events in the rebellion, and the fight to abolish the anti-union laws. We sold pamphlets on different environmental topics.

And we collected many signatures for a petition "Fight climate change: Expropriate the banks!" (bit.ly/banks-p). Workers' Liberty had an additional stall and activists circulating through the crowd, likewise drawing activists and sparking debates.

We organised two street meetings during the rebellion, and one delegation of climate activists to a nearby strike.

The strike – organised by the PCS and UWW unions, and over sick pay, conditions, and redundancies – was of outsourced Royal Parks workers, cleaners and attendants for many of London's beautiful parks. Supporting strikes, by building workers' confidence and power, is important in itself for the fight against climate change. This strike had a workers' rights element; a public health element, the demand for full sick pay; an anti-racist element (outsourced Royal Parks workers, on worse conditions, are disproportionately more BAME than in-house workers); and an environmental element, as the workers look after important green spaces.

There was a lot of enthusiasm for the two street meetings: "How workers can fight climate change", co-hosted by Empower the Unions and Free Our Unions; and "Break the finance-fossil fuel link – Expropriate the banks!", co-hosted by Workers' Liberty and Extinction Rebellion. (For the latter meeting, XR pulled out from publicly advertising it at the last minute as it was "too political" – i.e. too left wing!)

On Monday 30, as Hurricane Ida, second in power only to Hurricane Katrina in Louisiana's recorded history, left a million without electricity and forced thousands to evacuate, we held our meeting on banks by the steps of the Bank of England. Perhaps 150 police officers lined up surrounding us, and our speaker had to shout over the helicopter circulating ahead. As she pointed out, all that reminded us of the

importance the state places on defending high finance.

In the end, the turnout to the meetings was not great. With the fraught excitement of XR's actions, and the heavy police presence, lots of participants in the rebellion were caught up in the moment. They were not checking their watches as to when they needed to walk over to our street-meetings. Because of the necessary secrecy in XR planning actions, the timing and location of our street meetings relative to other activities was sometimes off. Nonetheless, the meeting on the banks was very valuable.

As XR's tactics are working less well than previously, the importance of rethinking them becomes clearer. Where previously XR was garnering widespread media attention, this time the media showed less interest, despite on some reports over 300 arrests. The net disruption, too, was significantly lower.

Environmental activists must organise and build democratic power in the workplace, where we can create widespread disruption in a productive way, and force change without relying on favourable coverage from the billionaire media as our intermediary. □

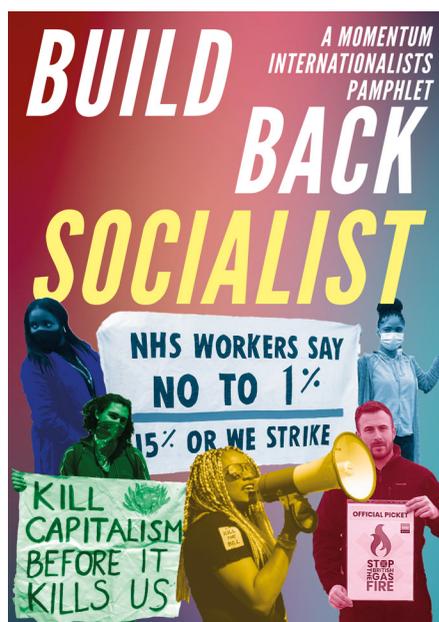


Our audio!

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

- Solidarity Newspaper
- Environmental pamphlet and meetings
- Public meetings – recordings of introductory speeches
- Fighting racism: pamphlets and more
- Solidarność: The workers' movement and the rebirth of Poland in 1980-81
- Many other pamphlets

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



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. □

momentuminternationalists.org

“We are the lions, Mr Manager”

By Jean Lane

On 7 November 1977 a pitched battle took place on the streets of Brent, North London, between police and thousands of workers. It was part of the Grunwick workers' long struggle for union recognition (1976-8). Many of the lessons were similar to those of the great miners' strike of 1984-5: questions of solidarity, the law, the role of the state, the need for rank-and-organisation across unions.

However, Grunwick did not involve workers in a powerful union with a militant history. The Grunwick workers had no experience of being unionised. They were mostly women, in large part young women, some of whom had to fight their families for the right to join the picket lines; they were overwhelmingly Asian; predominantly migrants; and many spoke little English. Grunwick management thought they could be used as cheap labour. Yet their struggle would reverberate throughout the labour movement, drawing in thousands from across the country.

Appalling conditions

Grunwick was a small plant on two sites in Willesden: Chapter Road and Cobbold Road. Conditions were appalling.

Rates of pay differed from individual to individual; white workers were employed on different, higher paid jobs. Overtime was compulsory and could be imposed without notice. Conditions inside the mail order department at Chapter Road, the centre of the dispute, were particularly draconian.

Grunwick made itself competitive by paying low wages – about £28 for a 40 hour week. The national average was £72; for a full-time woman manual worker in London £44.

Pressure inside the mail order department was very high; its manager, Alden, ruled like a despot. Women asking for time off to look after sick children were told: “This is not a holiday camp”. Overtime could be imposed when a woman was going to pick her child up from nursery. She would have to continue work worrying about the fate of her child or argue and get the sack. There was an atmosphere of fear. The annual staff turnover was 100%.

The summer of 1976 was a record-breaking hot one. Chapter Road had no windows and no air conditioning. The pressure of work was incredible. On Friday 20 August four young men, who had earlier discussed the need for a union, decided to work slowly under Alden's nose. One was sacked and three walked out, leaving a huge crate of work unfinished.

The four were unsure what to do next and just hung around the gates. Inside, a woman worker, Mrs Jaya-



ben Desai, who was to become a key strike leader, was told she could not go home as more work had come in. She demanded her cards but instead of leaving made a speech to the workers. When Alden compared the workers to “chattering monkeys”, she replied: “What you are running here is not a factory, it is a zoo. But in a zoo there are many types of animals. Some are monkeys who dance on your fingertips, others are lions who can bite your head off. We are the lions, Mr Manager.” She and her son Sunil joined the four at the gate.

Wildcat action

On Monday 23rd the six turned up with placards and petitions. Every member of the mail order department and some other workers signed, on their way in, to say they wanted a union.

The Citizens' Advice Bureau provided phone numbers for APEX, the Association of Professional, Executive, Clerical and Computer Staffs, the TUC and Brent Trades Council.

At 3pm that day fifty other mail order workers walked out. The strikers marched to Grunwick's processing department at Cobbold Road. Managers locked the doors, imprisoning workers inside, and turned up the radios. One young woman was slapped when she tried to open a window. Another was threatened with a broken bottle by a driver guarding the entrance. Only seven Cobbold Road workers joined the strike that day.

At a mass meeting in a local car park, the workers decided to join a union. Sixty joined APEX. The strikers said they would not return as individuals, only as a union; the management said they would rather see the plant closed than a union in it. Over the next week more walked out of Cobbold Road, until there were 137 strikers out of a workforce of 480.

The strikers were sacked and the fight became one for reinstatement as well as recognition. APEX wanted a speedy resolution through negotiation. But Grunwick's owner, George Ward, refused. APEX tried to get independent arbitration through ACAS. Ward, full of his own right to rule over his workers (“I can buy a Patel for £15”), wouldn't accept that.

Ward's cause was taken up by the right-wing National Association For Freedom (NAFF), who funded and handled all his legal business during the strike. They threatened legal action against the postal workers' union, the UPW, for boycotting Grunwick's mail. UPW general secretary Tom Jackson immediately called this off.

However, Kodak workers boycotted photographic supplies to the factory. Grunwick managers bought it themselves in small quantities and smuggled it in in their car boots. Posties refused to cross the picket line, so Grunwick had to go and collect it themselves. Mail order work from Germany, Belgium and Holland could only be got in by moving from port to port and eventually buying a plane and flying it to small airfields.

Managers baited strikers from behind the gates, and bullied them on their way in. Mrs Desai had her foot run over by a car. A pregnant woman was knocked over. APEX's response was to call for a court of inquiry.

The strikers became demoralised, until one day in March 1977 when only one picket turned up. He was later found badly beaten up. The police said “he deserved what he got”. Police harassed and picked off pickets. Mrs Desai was arrested and charged with assaulting two Grunwick managers. She was 4'11”, and on the other side of a high fence at the time. Not surprisingly the case was later dropped. The strikers lost any faith in the law, or in the official

labour movement to help them. Strike committee secretary Mahmood Ahmad said: “The TUC should be coming to ask us how they can help. Instead we have to keep going to them”. “Official action from the TUC”, Jayaben Desai said, “is like honey on your elbow; you can smell it, you can see it, but you can never taste it”.

Police vs pickets

The strikers put out a call for mass pickets. The first picket of a week of action, on Monday 13 June, was to be a women's picket – to emphasise “peaceful intention” and have a “restraining effect on the police”. In fact the police punched, kicked and dragged pickets across the road by their hair. Mrs Desai was kicked repeatedly. When police tried to arrest another woman, they were surrounded by a crowd of angry, sari-clad women, screaming to let her go. Johnny Patel of the strike committee was hit repeatedly by a cop yelling “You Paki bastard”.

More from Cobbold Road joined the strike. Cricklewood postal workers unofficially resumed boycotting of Grunwick's mail, against their leadership's instructions, and other offices refused to handle it. Drivers, members of the T&G union (now merged into Unite), refused to carry police to Chapter Road. Even bank workers attempted to get Grunwick's account boycotted.

By Friday 17th the picket was 1,500-strong. For the first time pickets outnumbered police. The week of action was extended and hopes ran high. Seeing the police put in their place by row upon row of miners, engineers, dockers, seamen and builders, after a whole winter of watching them harassing and intimidating young women, Jayaben Desai said: “When they talked of the power of the trade union movement I listened but I didn't really believe. Now I see that power.”

That week, Grunwick began bussing their scabs into the plant to prevent any contact with pickets. And for the first time ever the Special Patrol Group (SPG), a specially organised, armed section of the police, supposedly to deal with “terrorism”, was used in a trades dispute. The police brutality on the picket lines was unbelievable. One miner described the “battle of Saltley Gate” in 1972 as a children's picnic in comparison. □

• 20 August was the 45th anniversary of the start of one of the most important struggles in British working-class history, the two-year strike by Grunwick film-processing workers in North West London. This is the first of two parts of an abridged version of an article written by Jean Lane in 1998. More: bit.ly/grunwick

Disaster in Afghanistan

By Colin Foster

The peoples of Afghanistan are being overrun. Those who can, will flee; some will submit to a new regime extinguishing women's rights and personal liberties, as well as collective civil rights; some will be massacred.

The Afghan army, nominally over 300,000 strong, equipped, funded, and trained by the USA over 20 years, offered almost no resistance to the Taliban advance, even though the Taliban is still mostly a scrappy militia of young men with Kalashnikovs on motorbikes or pick-up trucks.

The militia warlords of Afghanistan's north who were able to hold their areas against the Taliban from 1994 right through to the US invasion in 2001, and with only modest foreign backing, have also collapsed. They had switched too thoroughly towards fighting each other to pocket the aid money flowing to Afghanistan from the US and other rich powers.

Some elements of "civil society" have emerged in Afghanistan over the last 20 years, but heavily dependent on foreign-financed NGOs. They were unable to organise any resistance to the Taliban advance.

Between 6 and 15 August the Taliban took all Afghanistan's major cities, with no or little resistance.

The USA has been looking for a way out since at least 2010. In May 2014, President Obama [promised](#) he would withdraw all troops by 2016.

Seeing the Kabul government as precarious, Obama pulled back on that promise and left the decision to Trump. Trump started with a "surge" of extra US troops, to try to stabilise the



Afghan army and air force in a training operation

Kabul government before quitting. That didn't work, so in [February 2020](#) Trump signed a deal with the Taliban, over the heads of the Kabul government, to withdraw by May 2021. The deal committed the Taliban only to going through the motions of talks in Qatar with the Kabul government and Afghan civil-society groups.

A milder Taliban?

The Taliban talk now about a milder regime than when they ruled in 1996-2001. Yet in nearly a year of those Doha talks they offered no guarantees and made no deals. They will now want to keep on good terms with China, Russia, Pakistan, and Iran, but pressure from those for milder rule within Afghanistan seems unlikely.

In 2020-1 the Taliban stepped up rural operations and assassinations and murder-bombings in the cities, but waited their time before storming the cities. By late 2020 they controlled all Afghanistan's major highways, and could sustain themselves by levying taxes on traffic as well by the opium trade.

They calibrated their advance to be large enough to forestall the USA concluding that after all it had reached a sustainable balance in Afghanistan with only few troops there, and also small enough not to panic Trump or Biden into reversing the drawdown.

Back in 2001, opposing the US invasion, we wrote:

"War by the US and Britain on Afghanistan or neighbouring countries will not halt Islamic-fundamentalist militarism... It will not touch – may even comfort – many of the strong bases of fundamentalism; through its disruptions it may well generate more recruits for fundamentalism".

I remember discussing with an Iranian

Marxist at the time. He basically agreed, but thought our statement too general. The Taliban, specifically, he thought, would never revive after being routed and discredited in 2001.

Until maybe 2003 it looked as if he were right. The USA's rulers were convinced in 2002-3 to invade Iraq partly by the illusion that the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan had been an easy victory, that a stable and cooperative Afghan state would soon consolidate, and that the operations of 1991 in Kuwait, 1996 in Bosnia, 1999 in Kosovo, had also been easy and solid.

The Taliban regrouped in Pakistan, aided by at least a large section of the country's military establishment. It restarted operations in Afghanistan. It gained ground from 2006 (especially) to 2009. It developed an "economic base" for itself in opium-poppy production in areas it controlled.

Corruption

The US, unlike the Russians in 1979-89, never attempted a colonial or semi-colonial domination, a "puppet government". The outcome was not a cooperative Afghan government with a real local social and economic base. It was a series of corrupt and ineffectual administrations, led by ex-warlords concerned with enriching themselves.

The USA has turned out even less able to foster a co-operative base in Afghanistan than the Russians were; and less able than the USA itself in South Korea after the Korean war of 1950-3.

The South Korean president then, Syngman Rhee, was dictatorial and corrupt, and Korea was one of the world's poorest countries. Yet Rhee developed a state which had enough elasticity to sustain itself and allow for Rhee himself to be overthrown in 1960 by a student revolt. South Korea's economy grew fast

from the 1960s, and successive workers' and democratic struggles made it a functioning bourgeois democracy by the 1990s.

In South Korea the US had pushed through a radical land reform, making most peasants owners of their own land without compensation to the landlords. It supplied more economic than military aid, and much of the economic aid went directly into developing industry.

There were no measures of similar stripe in Afghanistan. The Stalinists had attempted a land reform in 1978-9, and found that the farmers who would have benefited from it rallied to the Islamists and the landlords to oppose it.

Arrogance

US arrogance – Guantanamo, mini-Guantanamos inside Afghanistan at Bagram and elsewhere, "renditions", and large Afghan civilian casualties from the US "surge" after 2009 – made the US military presence unpopular and sapped the political base of Afghan leaders allied to the USA.

US economic aid was large in the scale of Afghanistan's economy, but very small compared to US military spending there.

The country recovered economically in 2001-9, though not to much better a level than before 1978. The proportion of children who die before the age of five has halved; literacy has increased from 8% to 43%; 89% have access to safe drinking water in the cities (only 16% before). It has not been enough to create a functioning political economy.

Since 2012-4 (in some part, paradoxically, because of the drawdown of foreign troops, and consequent loss of economic life generated by servicing them) GDP per capita has declined. Primary school enrolments, still much better, especially for girls, than in the previous Taliban era, have stagnated. Inequality, poverty, unemployment have continued. Some women were able to escape the burqa, but [many were not](#), and large impunity for "honour killings" of women [continued](#). This is not just weight of tradition. Afghanistan legislated for equality between women and men as far back as 1964. The Taliban have historically been stricter about seclusion for women in the cities than in the countryside, where tradition weighs heavier but women work in the fields, without burqas.

Mineral wealth has been found in Afghanistan, but virtually none has been developed. Two Chinese state companies got a contract in 2008 to develop a big copper mine, but have made no progress on it since.

In 2018 a World Bank [report](#) found: "Since the early 1990s agricultural GDP

Our pamphlets

Browse, download, buy, or listen to [our pamphlets](#) including:

- The German Revolution: selected writings of Rosa Luxemburg
- For Workers' Climate Action
- Two Nations, Two States
- Workers Against Slavery
- How to Beat the Racists
- Remain and Rebel
- Shapurji Saklatvala: Socialist Rebel in Parliament
- Stalinism in the International Brigades
- Left Antisemitism: What it is and How to Fight it
- Arabs, Jews, and Socialism: Socialist Debates on Israel/Palestine
- The Occupation of the Cammell Laird Shipyard, Birkenhead 1984 □

workersliberty.org/publications/

Why the Taliban won

[has] remained stagnant. The increased share in agricultural employment, combined with a constant agricultural GDP, indicates a decline in agricultural labor productivity". Afghanistan, a predominantly agricultural country, now imports over a third of its food, and has only minimal food exports (fruit and nuts).

While the Green Zone and some other areas of Kabul had some boom years with NGOs and aid, over 50% of the city's population live in shanty towns.

Obama's troop surge

President Obama attempted a troop "surge" in 2009-10, trying to shift the balance enough to allow US withdrawal. The "surge" (NATO troop numbers rose over 150,000) pushed back the Taliban over the border somewhat, but tacit aid to the Taliban from sections of Pakistan's military continued. The "surge" also increased Afghan resentment of the US presence, though large civilian casualties. Afghan president Hamid Karzai would long make a show (at least) of refusing to keep US troops in the country after 2014. The US ramped up spending on Afghanistan's armed forces, but produced only an army which would in 2021 collapse in ten days, and an air force whose pilots would fly to refuge in Uzbekistan.



At the end, it seems the US authorities lacked even a good guess about the balance of forces in the country. We didn't expect the collapse to be so quick, either. But we were assessing from a distance, not from a position of having had a large presence in Afghanistan for 20 years.

The new Taliban administration will face huge economic problems. Yet, as Pakistani socialist Farooq Tariq has written: "It seems that the Taliban will remain in the government for a long time now. Just as the Iranian mullahs' government continues after years, these Taliban can now stay in power for a long time, it will not be easy to withdraw them". He also writes: "The return of the Taliban in the Afghanistan government is a setback for the progressive forces

in the world, particularly for South Asia. We condemn the forcible takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban fighters... The establishment of another religious fanatic state in South Asia will promote religious sectarianism throughout the region... We apprehend that a theocratic state that the Taliban intends to install will not only be disastrous for Afghanistan but also for its neighbours and beyond..."

He adds: "Only the victory of a truly democratic socialist ideology can stop the future bloodshed in Afghanistan."

We fight for an open door for the refugees. In the longer term we build solidarity with the democratic and socialist forces in the region, especially in Pakistan, which can change the parameters. □

A disastrous invasion and a disastrous withdrawal

We opposed the US invasion of Afghanistan and always refused positively to support the US and NATO military presence there. We have never sloganised for "US troops out of Afghanistan", because that would suggest some support for a Taliban victory.

For a long while we have said that further years of the US operation would most likely worsen the horrors when the US would, inevitably, eventually, some time, withdraw. That prediction has been confirmed.

Probably an even halfway competently-managed withdrawal relatively soon after 2001 would have produced fewer horrors. Probably any US policy more concerned with the welfare of the peoples of Afghanistan, and less exclusively concerned with aiming for a showy military victory, hoping that market forces would produce economic advance, and then fumbling for a decade about how to get out of a quagmire, could have mitigated the disaster.

But for socialists to seek to advise the capitalist big powers on how to calibrate their military actions can bring only illusion, not progress. The factor that could have changed the whole



picture substantially was a democratic upsurge of workers and peasants in Pakistan sufficient to break the tacit alliance between sections of Pakistan's military and the Taliban.

As Trotsky explained back in 1939: "Our tasks... we realise not through the medium of bourgeois governments and not even through the government of the USSR, but exclusively through the education of the masses through agitation, through explaining to the workers what they should defend and what they should overthrow. [That] cannot give immediate miraculous results. But we do not even pretend to be miracle workers. As things stand, we are a revolutionary minority. Our work must be directed so that the workers on whom we have influence should correctly appraise events, not permit themselves to be caught unawares,

and prepare the general sentiment of their own class for the revolutionary solution of the tasks confronting us".

Or again: "The policy that attempts to place upon the proletariat the insoluble task of warding off all dangers engendered by the bourgeoisie and its policy of war is vain, false, mortally dangerous... The workers will be able to profit to the full from this monstrous chaos only if they occupy themselves not by acting as supervisors of the historical process but by engaging in the class struggle".

Those generalities should not stop us denouncing the specific more-or-less worst-imaginable policy of withdrawal set in train by Donald Trump in early 2020 and followed through by Joe Biden. We quoted Malalai Joya, an Afghan feminist and long-time critic of the US presence, saying about the Doha talks that they were "a betrayal". She was right.

Now, as Joya told the German newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (13 August): "The Taliban are advancing. For ordinary people and especially for women, this means even more suffering. Progressive people like me are more in danger than ever". □

Timeline

1921: Britain concedes defeat in Third British-Afghan War (1919-21). King Amanullah begins modernising reforms.

From 1953: Mohammed Daoud Khan as prime minister under the monarchy builds ties with the USSR and introduces more modernising reforms, especially for women.

1973: Daoud overthrows the monarchy and speeds up reforms.

1978: The PDPA (Afghan Communist Party) overthrows Daoud in a coup and further speeds up measures to transform Afghanistan, now with the USSR as model. It is quickly pitched into civil war with a revolt of the countryside under the leadership of landlords and clerics.

1979, December: The USSR invades Afghanistan and takes over the war against the rural revolt.

1989: The USSR, unable to defeat the revolt, withdraws. Rural-based Islamist and warlord groups take most of the country, though PDPA rule in Kabul survives until 1992.

1994-6: The Taliban emerge as a new Islamist militia, recruited from students at Islamic schools in Pakistan, and sweep most of the country, including Kabul. Rival warlords (the Northern Alliance) hold out in the north east until 2001.

2001, September: Al Qaeda people seize planes and crash them into the World Trade Center in New York. The USA demands that the Taliban give up Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden from his base in rural Afghanistan, and, when it doesn't, provides air and other support for the Northern Alliance to sweep the Taliban out of power. After much jockeying a new government is formed in Kabul under Hamid Karzai.

2003 onwards: The Taliban expands operations from the bases in Pakistan to which it has retreated. Its activity accelerates in 2006-9.

2009 onwards: US president Obama organises a troop "surge" in Afghanistan to try to drive back the Taliban. By late 2010 he has an "Afghan Good Enough" group working on plans for exit by 2014.

2014: Obama declares the US will withdraw by 2016.

2017: After US misses the 2016 withdrawal date, president Trump announces another, smaller, troop "surge".

2020, February: Trump signs deal with Taliban committing US to withdraw by May 2021.

Afghanistan, the left, and the “third camp”

By Martin Thomas

In conflicts between big powers like the USA, and reactionary forces which conflict with those big powers without to any degree fighting for national-liberation or democracy, socialists must support neither side. We instead fight for the “third camp” of the working class and the oppressed, against both the big powers and forces like the Taliban, even if that “third camp” is at present weak and undeveloped.

Workers’ Liberty has long argued that way. Most other groups on the British left have disagreed. In 2001 some explicitly advocated siding with the Taliban (“anti-imperialist united front”, they said). The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) long “refused to condemn” the Al Qaeda attack on New York and Washington of “9/11”. It decried explicit pro-Taliban slogans as inopportune and off-putting, but said their basic idea was right. Few argued as [we did](#) for denouncing the terrorist-Islamism of the Taliban as sharply as the militarism of the USA.

In some recent conflicts, more of the left edged towards a “third camp” view. No-one hailed Daesh taking Mosul in 2014 as a “blow against imperialism”. Few have celebrated Assad’s victory in Syria against forces backed (erratically)



by the USA. But now *Socialist Worker* has hailed the Taliban victory as “a colossal defeat for British and US imperialism”, and *The Socialist* similarly as “a devastating blow to the US and Western imperialism”.

Socialist Worker adds that the Taliban will impose a “brutal, suffocating, and reactionary regime”; *The Socialist*, that it will bring “nothing remotely progressive”. But they headlined the joy about the “defeat of imperialism”, and made the reservations about the Taliban secondary.

Socialist Worker had the front-page headline “Twenty years of horror”, indicating that the PDPA-Islamist civil war in Afghanistan 1978-9; the Russia-Islamist war there 1979-89; the Islamist war to overthrow the rump Stalinist regime followed by intra-Islamist war 1989-96; the Taliban regime 1996-2001; and the coming years of renewed Taliban rule were or will be less horrible.

It also had a good front-page strapline, “Open the borders to all the refugees”. The strapline is relevant because conditions are now getting more horrible in Afghanistan.

Socialist Worker opposed all thought of extending the Kabul airport evacuation beyond 31 August. The negative principle of getting troops out even a few days earlier, even from an operation to evacuate civilians, overshadows the positive principle of solidarity with the Afghan opponents of the Taliban.

Socialist Worker tries to square its circle by describing the Taliban as “terror that the US made”.

This is a reference to the US jockeying with Afghan Islamist groups during Russia’s war in 1979-89, in order to sap the USSR, and to find some group or coalition it could do business with afterwards. But the war “made” those Is-

lamist groups. US financial aid, directly or via Pakistan, was secondary.

Blandly to hail “blows against imperialism” means reducing socialist thought to negativism, depriving it of its essence as the positive advocacy of something better. “Blows against imperialism” are good only if they are blows for something better.

When in 1988-9 Russia was defeated by scrappy Islamist militias, that was a “blow against imperialism” in the sense that it closed the door on a drive by Russia to establish more-or-less colonial control in Afghanistan, and broke the will of the USSR military to try to suppress the democracy movements in Eastern Europe in 1989.

If in 2001 the Taliban had defeated the operation mounted against it by the Northern Alliance with US help, arguably that would have forestalled the later US invasion of Iraq. But then that “blow against imperialism” was only one element, and a speculative one, which could not be allowed to blot out the immediate import of a Taliban victory for the life and rights of the peoples of Afghanistan.

“Blows against imperialism are good only if they are blows for something better.”

There is a smaller “blow against imperialism” element now. The USA’s rulers dropped the “neo-conservatives” triumphalism of 2003 long ago. Trump and Biden have calculated that extricating the USA from a war which it hadn’t bargained for will improve its capacity to act elsewhere. The Taliban victory will embolden terrorist-fundamentalist types elsewhere, but gives no boost to socialist or democratic anti-imperialists.

The “Heterodox Trotskyists” established the principle of a “third camp” in the 1940s and 50s as one of opposition both to the USA and the USSR (and, rightly, combined it with explaining also that the Stalinist USSR was worse, for working-class development, than US-type capitalism).

In those days, colonial empires or semi-colonial spheres of influence still covered much of the world. By the 1940s, and for decades after, popular nationalist movements of one stripe or another had emerged in almost all the

colonies and semi-colonies. A clash between a big power and the local forces would almost certainly be between imperial force, aiming to sustain some degree of imperial control, and some measure or degree of national liberation. Socialists took sides with those liberation movements, even under bourgeois leadership. “Anti-imperialism” was shorthand for support for national emancipation.

Modern imperialism

The Europe-centred colonial empires were overthrown by 1974-5, when Portugal’s colonies won independence. Fifteen or so years later, Russia’s empire in Eastern Europe was overthrown. There are still struggles for national liberation. Turkey, Iran, and Iraq still deny the Kurds independence; China denies rights to the Tibetans and the Uyghurs; Morocco dominates Western Sahara; Israel occupies the West Bank and (with Egypt) blockades Gaza. But for the last 30 years or so the world has been mostly an “empire of capital” rather than of colonialism or semi-colonialism.

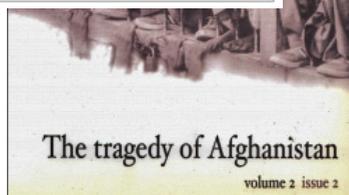
We now have imperialism in the sense of economic domination by the big centres of capital. And we have varieties of “reactionary anti-imperialism”, in the sense of local movements in conflict with those big centres but seeking local hegemonies even more brutal than the “dull compulsion” of global economic relations. The “third camp” idea becomes urgent in a new way. □

Workers’ Liberty



Stalinism and Afghanistan: socialists and the 1979-89 war

By Sean Matgamna



More from Workers’ Liberty on Afghanistan and the third camp.

workersliberty.org/tragedy-afghanistan

workersliberty.org/stalinism-and-afghanistan

The left in disarray

Sean Matgamna



Critical history of the disoriented left, and the way forward.

408 pages, £12

workersliberty.org/left-disarray

Russia's war in Afghanistan and the 1978 coup

By Sean Matgamna

Afghanistan's "Great Saur Revolution", in April 1978, and the Russian invasion of Afghanistan that flowed from it 20 months later, at Christmas 1979, were two of the most important events of the second half of the 20th century.

The invasion led to the so-named Second Cold War. Their failure to subjugate Afghanistan in a nine-year colonial war was one of the things that shattered the self-confidence of the Russian Stalinist bureaucracy, and contributed to its downfall.

The April 1978 revolution was a freakish event – an army and air force officers' coup controlled by the Peoples Democratic Party, the Afghan Stalinist party. The PDP was itself a tiny town-based middle-class organisation of a few thousand people, perhaps as few as 2,000, in a country then reckoned at about 18 million people.

The symbiosis between the PDP and the Air Force and Army officers had come into existence in the previous quarter century, during which Russia had equipped and trained the Afghan air force and army officers. Afghanistan's neighbour and rival, Pakistan, had the patronage of the USA. These army and air force officers took the USSR as their model for modernising Afghanistan.

Lack of mass support

It was a coup, not a revolution, that they made in April 1978. In China, Vietnam, Yugoslavia, Stalinist revolutions had been led by organisations at the head of mass movements. The PDP had no such base. It had only the officer corps. The army and air force soldiers in these organisations obeyed the officers in the traditional military discipline of command and obedience. The military hierarchies remained intact.

A gap of centuries of social and intellectual development divided the towns and their educated elites from rural Afghanistan. Having very small support in rural Afghanistan, the new regime had only force to rely on. It resorted to military and airborne terror to enforce revolutionary decrees for which there was

little or no support in rural Afghanistan – land reform, for a surprising example. Within a couple of months of the coup, the regime was at war with much of rural Afghanistan, and soon with almost all of it.

The Stalinists in power found themselves using the typical techniques of colonial war against the people they were trying to force-march into the 20th century. Villages were napalm-bombed, crops destroyed in the fields, large numbers of people killed or driven over the borders into Pakistan and Iran.

The PDP had been divided between two murderously hostile factions, Khalq and Parcham. They united under Russian pressure to make the coup. But not for long. Soon the Stalinists in power started killing each other. Within a year of the coup so many officers had been killed or jailed that a large number of Russian air force pilots had to be brought in so that the air force could continue to function.

Russian pressure to take things more slowly had no effect on the ruling faction, Khalq. Their policy was to slug it out with the peoples of Afghanistan. By that time they probably had little choice other than to go down before the hostility of rural Afghanistan.

Russia invaded at Christmas 1979, shot the leaders in power, had the leaders they put in their place invite them to invade Afghanistan, and got bogged down in the last great colonial war of the 20th century – Russia's Vietnam war.

Socialists divided

What attitude should socialists take to the Russian annexation of Afghanistan? This question immediately divided the international left. All the "Orthodox Trotskyist" organisations except what is now AWL either backed the invasion enthusiastically or took the line that, the Russians being there, they could not now condemn the invaders or call upon them to withdraw. One segment of the Mandel Fourth International announced jubilantly that Russia had gone "to the aid of a revolution".

Militant (today divided into the Socialist Party and Socialist Appeal) was then the biggest proclaimedly Trotsky-

ist organisation in Britain. They soon came out in support of the Russian occupation.

After six months or a year many of the Orthodox Trotskyists sobered up and stopped supporting Russia's colonial war. Others backed Russia through a decade of savage colonial war in Afghanistan. The Socialist Party never sobered up.

A lot of labour movement people, including some Labour MPs, backed Russia in Afghanistan.

Stalinist opposition

An odd thing in the response of the ostensible left to the invasion was that, in contrast to the "Trotskyists", some Communist parties refused to back the Russians. For example, the Communist Party of Great Britain condemned the invasion. Jack Woddis published factually honest accounts of what was happening in Afghanistan, and condemned it.

These were Stalinists turning themselves into bourgeois liberals, but they had learned something from their experience, and in this case behaved as serious political people.

Before the invasion the AWL had been going through a prolonged "re-evaluation of values". There had been a short but nasty fight in the group on our attitude to the Iranian Revolution, early in 1979.

The argument for a more critical approach to this alien, reactionary revolution had received one vote on the National Committee. We learned from that mistake. In January 1980, we decided that we could not in political conscience join the other "Orthodox Trotskyists" as we had on Iran. We must oppose the Russians in Afghanistan. It was a major event in our ongoing "re-evaluation".

When the Russians pulled out, we responded to the new situation by supporting the cities against the reactionary rural revolt.

Some half-wise people have accused us of inconsistency in our attitude to Muslims. If there is inconsistency it is in the circumstances and situations in which different Muslim peoples exist.

Of course we opposed the attempt to conquer the Muslim peoples of Afghanistan. Of course we sided with the Muslim victims in Bosnia of the butchering Serb ethnic cleansers. Of course we campaigned politically against the international embargo on arms for the Bosnian Muslims. Of course we supported the Albanian Muslims in Kosovo, a Serbian colony, against the would-be genocidal Serbian state and its local supporters.

And of course we oppose political Islam. Of course we oppose their oppression of Muslims and non-Muslims who disagree with them. Of course we oppose them in their drives to set up



A Russian tank quitting Afghanistan

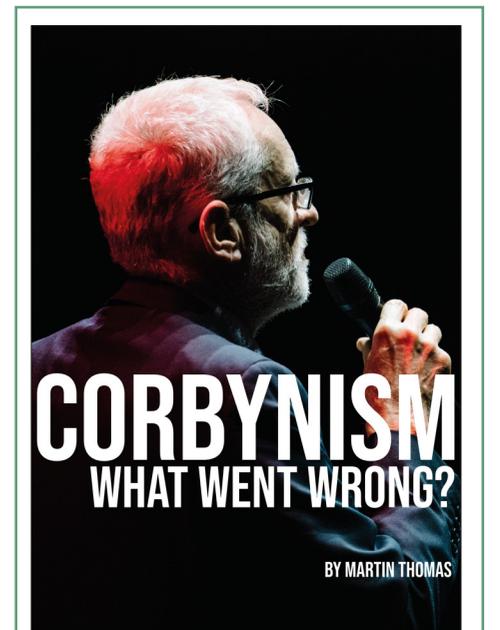
Islamic theocracies. Of course we denounce their 9/11 atrocity in New York and the terror attacks in other places, including London.

Of course we oppose Islam, as we oppose Roman Catholicism, Greek Orthodox Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, etc., etc., etc.. Of course, we believe that the values and best standards of advanced bourgeois civilisation, one dialect of which is our own Marxist socialism, are better, superior, more advanced than backward Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism and all the other obscurantist enemies of reason, democracy and rationality.

Our record on these questions shows the kitsch-left charge that our politics on political Islam now are rooted in a fixed hostility to Muslims as people is ignorant a-political and often hysterical abuse from people who have themselves lost the political plot.

Finally, it has become something of a truism on the left that by arming Russia's opponents in Afghanistan, the USA was the great villain there. No, the Russian invasion and the decade-long colonial war there was the great primal villainy, from which all the other bad things followed. □

• Adapted from the introduction to [Workers' Liberty 3/55](#).



Lessons for socialist activists and the Labour left from the Labour Party under Corbyn 2015-20. 60 pages, £4. □

workersliberty.org/publications

Our videos!

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

- The State, Crime, Prisons, and Police
- Socialist Feminism
- Black Lives Matter
- Socialist commentary on the Covid-19 crisis
- ABCs of Marxism, an introductory series
- An introduction to Marx's Capital, in 19 parts, with Martin Thomas
- Tubeworker/Off The Rails, videos by the producers of the bulletins □

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

Where “incel” backlash comes from

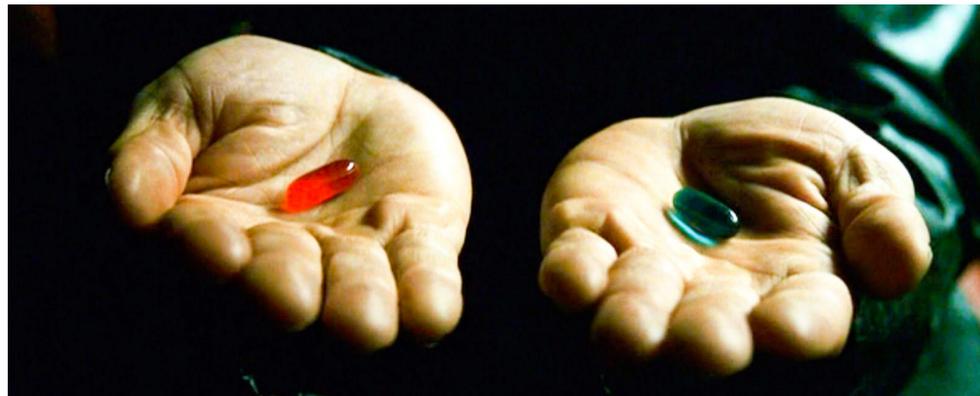
By Shamsun Effendi

The Plymouth shooting of 12 August which left five people plus the perpetrator dead is the latest in a series of incel-related mass shootings that have occurred since 2014 in the US, Canada, Germany and now the UK.

Some have called for the killing to be described explicitly as misogynistic terrorism. That is certainly understandable. The murderer had had a history of posting misogynistic and homophobic comments online.

Short for “involuntary celibate”, the word “incel” refers to an online subculture that has developed over the past decade where people (overwhelmingly male) dissatisfied with their perceived lack of ability to find sexual partners have defined themselves as part of a “movement”.

The movement, if it can be called such a thing, is known to promote extreme hatred of women and even hatred towards the small minority of men



they blame for apparently hoarding all sex with women for themselves. It is one of a series of online subcultures, from “Men Go Their Own Way” to men’s rights activists (MRAs), whose common denominator is explicit opposition to feminism and support for the idea of being “red-pilled”.

“Red-pilled” is an allusion to the film *The Matrix*, where taking the red pill is taken to mean seeing the world as it really is. For incels, this means realising

that women are in fact the group that has privilege and power over men.

This novel subculture, while bizarre and absurd, can be dangerous and lead to real life consequences. The idea that women are all shallow creatures who are depriving lots of men of the sex which they rightfully deserve is what drove the 22-year old shooter Elliot Rodger to massacre six people and injure many others in California in 2014 in the shooting that first drew the

world’s attention to incels. Incel ideology is the latest in a long history of male responses to the idea of female agency and autonomy over their own bodies and sexual choices. It is the backlash against the gains made in the last century whereby women have taken more ownership over their relationships and no longer have to get married off at a young age to have any chance of getting on in life.

While thankfully this way of thinking is not attractive to more than some internet-addicted young men, there is an increasing danger from movements which start as oppositions to political correctness and end up denouncing feminism for all the world’s ills.

To ward off the threat of this reactionary backlash, now and in the future, young people and men in particular, will need to be taught clearly that women are not objects who exist purely for the sexual pleasure of men and that sex is not owed to anyone by anyone. □



Buy our books!

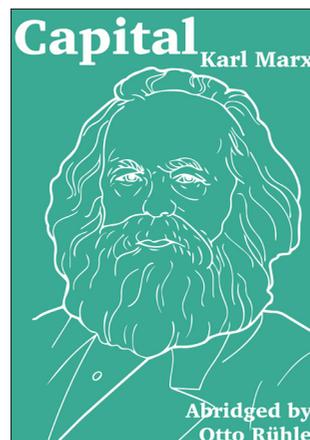
Order from workersliberty.org/publications

Browse, basket, and buy books, pamphlets, and publication bundles – and find more info, related resources, study guides, reviews and so on, from the same place. Some books are free to download or as audiobooks.

Prices listed exclude postage and packaging: £1 for small items, £3 for larger items, free over £30. Every third publication is half-price and 15% off over £50. □



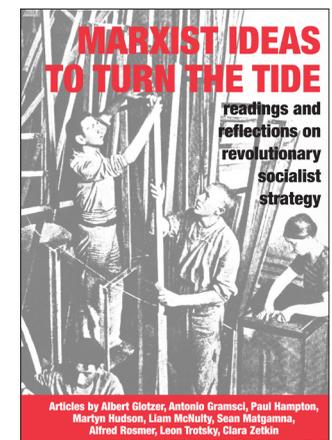
Lessons for socialist and left activists. 60 pages, **£4**



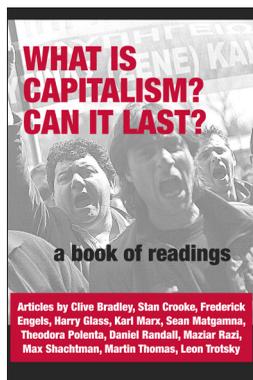
Rühle’s abridgement is a good intro. 131 pages, **£6**



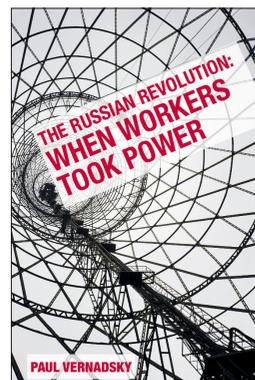
Tackling anti-socialist ideas. 182 pages. **£5**



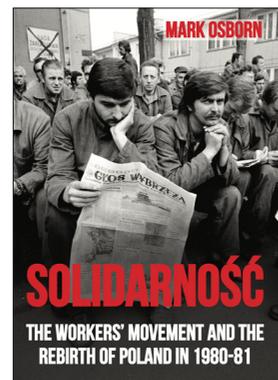
Revolutionary socialist strategy. 138 pages, **£5**



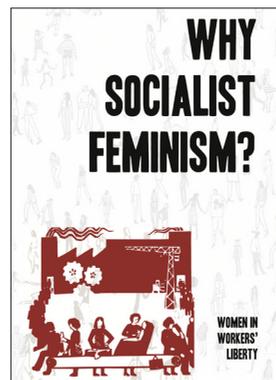
Socialist readings to understand and fight capitalism. 128 pages, **£5**



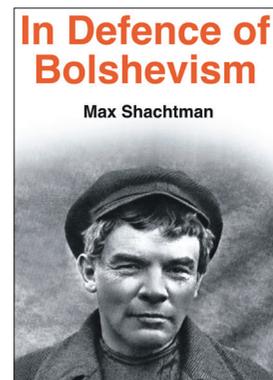
The 1917’s revolution’s real history, and lessons. 374 pages, **£12**



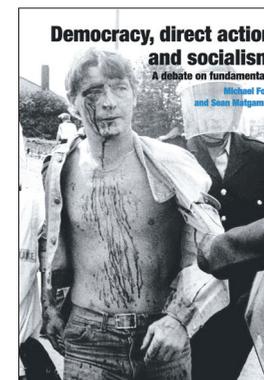
The history of Solidarność, from its dawn until the coup. 116 pages, **£5**



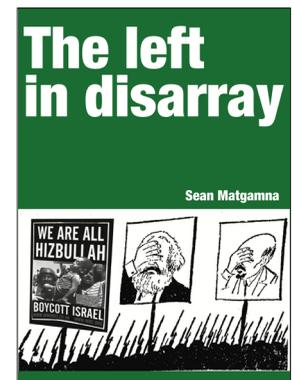
A socialist approach within recent “waves” of feminism. 102 pages, **£5**



Defending the Bolsheviks and their relevance today. 312 pages, **£10**



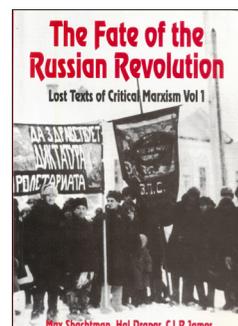
A debate on reform, revolution, Labour, democracy, more. 107 pages, **£5**



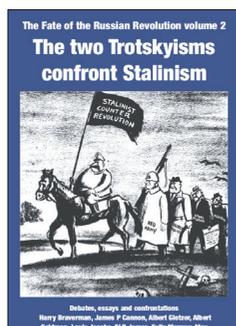
Critical history of the disoriented left, and the way forward. 408 pages, **£12**



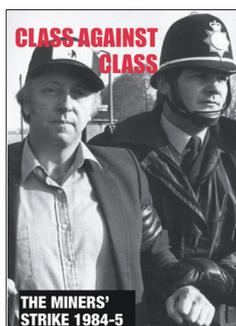
Can Socialism Make Sense? **£8**



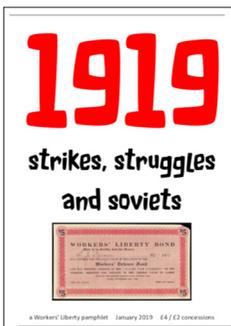
Fate of the Russian Revolution vol.1 **£8**



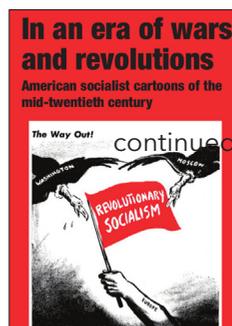
FRR vol. 2: The Two Trotskyisms **£20**



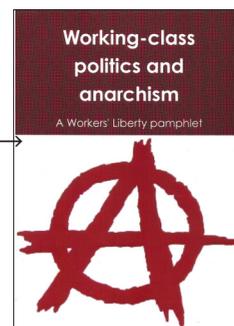
The Miners’ Strike 1984-5 **£9**



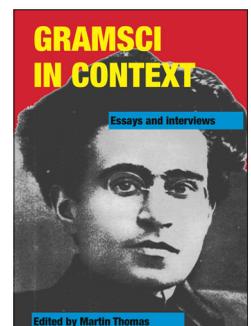
1919: Strikes, struggles, soviets **£4**



In an Era of Wars and Revolutions **£9**



Class Politics and Anarchism **£5**



Gramsci in Context **£6**

No to voluntary redundancies at Network Rail!

From Off the Rails

The Special Voluntary Severance Scheme (SVSS), currently being offered to some Network Rail staff, is an attack on jobs. Network Rail is offering this one-off severance package until 20 September. It will almost certainly be rolled out across Network Rail and to other train operating companies.

The scheme comes from the Rail Industry Recovery Group. The government is funding it. Rather than funding green jobs, it is throwing money at reducing the workforce in one of the few greener industries this country has.

Despite what some might think, many "junior management" jobs are worth fighting for. Timetabling, works

planning, investigating safety incidents, inspecting level crossings, are all important work, done by "band 4" workers on around £30k. Meanwhile, between 2020 and 2021, Network Rail went from [368 to 425](#) managers on over £100k a year.

Who will choose to go? People who are overworked and demoralised, in the lower bands, where staff are already short. Or perhaps older, experienced people who stand to make a bit more from the scheme.

The scheme will not weed out the highest earners. Network Rail is top heavy. Earlier this year transport union TSSA published the salaries of Network Rail's [top brass](#), revealing that "the top 73 highest earners at Network Rail earn

a combined total of £15 million per year." The SVSS will not challenge the pay inflation at the top of Network Rail. If you are a Director on £300k a year, you are not going anywhere.

TSSA has entered dispute with Network Rail. But it does not seem committed to fighting job cuts per se. It just wants "collective bargaining" and "full and meaningful discussions" about how the job cuts are being made. It is preparing to ballot for industrial action if Network Rail won't enter talks.

The other union with members affected, RMT, has said that the SVSS "falls far short of our existing agreements on company reorganisations". It has advised employers who implement this scheme that they are "doing so with-

out the endorsement or agreement of this union." So RMT is objecting to the terms and process, rather than the job cuts themselves.

Our unions need to see the bigger picture. It's not about whether these job cuts are compulsory or the terms of severance. It's about saving the industry from a government-funded attack on transport as a public service. Should we buy the government line that public transport is a drain on public finances or believe it's a vital site for investment to tackle the climate crisis? If we let these jobs go without a fight, then the Government and employers will come back for more and more across the industry. □

• Abridged from bit.ly/svss-no

Vote left for Unison Labour Link

By a UNISON activist

With the success in June of the "Time For Real Change" left slate in the National Executive Committee (NEC) elections for the public services union Unison, the union's Labour Link Committee, mandated to guide the union's activity within the Labour Party, could for the first time be controlled by the left.

Unison have election rules which ban slates in elections, but both right and left of the union have one candidate in each contested seat. (Some are uncontested). Voting runs from 7 Sep to 13 Oct. The left candidates are:

East Midlands - Anjona Roy
Greater London - Ruth Cashman
Northern - Helen Smith
North West - Joanne Moorcroft
South East - Billie Reynolds
South West - Aileen McLoughlin
Yorkshire and Humberside - Paul Holmes

The left split to support different candidates in the Unison General Secretary election and NEC elections, but the Labour left in Unison has agreed

to work together in Labour Link. Most of the candidates are supporters of "Time For Real Change".

Ruth Cashman, the Greater London candidate, has called for Unison to assert itself in the Labour Link, pushing back at the Party's drift to the right.

"We want to win a Labour government based on mass working-class mobilisation and accountable to the labour movement – a government which serves our class as the Tories in power have served the rich, and reshapes society in the interests of people, not profit. Labour are moving to the right at a time we most need radical change.

"Unison must defend the left-wing policies of 2017-2019 whilst fighting for policies to pandemic-proof society through investment and wealth redistribution.

"Keir Starmer said 'fire and rehire is wrong and it should be illegal', but said nothing against Labour Council Tower Hamlets when they used it against key workers in the pandemic. Labour must back our workers when they take

strike action. Unison need to organise action on NHS pay. We should also build solidarity and support within the broader Labour movement, including campaigning for the Labour Party to back the NHS pay demand and strikes.

"Covid-19 has exposed to the public how crucial public sector workers are, our union must be bold and confident in its political demands and campaigns.

"These should include:

- A nationalised and well-paid social care service
- Abolish all anti-union laws
- Mass council house-building programme
- Pay rises across public services
- An end to austerity and privatisation

"I would work to democratise the Labour Link, better engage branches and link up Unison activists to fight for Unison policies at CLP level. Unison should also fight for the democratisation of the Labour Party, including a sovereign conference, where CLPs and unions decide policy, and open selections for MPs". □

Momentum hides their banks policy

By Mohan Sen

In April members of Labour left organisation Momentum voted in a "policy primary" for motions to promote for this year's Labour Party conference. Two of the eight motions [decided](#) called for public ownership and democratic control of the banking and financial sector.

Yet as XR's action targeting finance and climate change unrolled, on 27 August Momentum social media put out a video with economist Grace Blakeley calling for "regulation" of the banks to tackle climate change. The Facebook status and tweet promoting the video also call for "regulation". Not public ownership

or democratic control.

Did Momentum's National Coordinating Group, or some sub-group of it, decide to put out the weak gruel about "regulation", in defiance of the policy agreed by members - or was it the Momentum office without regard to the NCG? □

- More: bit.ly/mo-banks

Universities rebel against "fill them up and test them" model

By a Lewisham teacher

Universities who offer teacher training have [reacted angrily](#) to the Government's "Initial teacher training (ITT) market review [report](#)", published on 5 July. The review consolidates and intensifies the regressive direction of travel in teacher training that the Tories have pursued since 2010.

Under the proposals, institutions offering teacher training would have to be reaccredited. There is to be a stronger focus for trainees on curriculum knowledge and assessment. There is an increase on in-school placements, with a new requirement for "intensive practical placements" where the trainee would be in class teaching for a minimum of 25 hours a week, for four weeks during a one-year PGCE course and for six weeks a year in a three-year undergraduate course.

The aim of the proposals is to escalate and accelerate the Tories' agenda to re-locate teacher training in schools and to shape teaching as an instrumentalist activity of filling students with knowledge and then measuring how full of the knowledge they are by testing them. There will be more "hands on" time in classrooms, but less time to reflect on and consider the experiences. The focus on classroom time and training in schools is likely to ingrain and pass on existing bad practices, unless there is opportunity for reflection and



comparison, the very aspects the Tories want to diminish.

All this sits within the "Gove" focus on curriculum knowledge and testing. The National Education Union (NEU), the largest school workers' union, is explaining well what is wrong with this approach. Recently it has made the case for GCSEs to be [abolished](#) – something that Workers' Liberty supporters have fought for within the union.

Still lacking is a strategy to move from explanation to forcing a change of direction. This September will see baseline testing of all four-year olds in Primary schools for the first time. With phonics screening in Year 1, SATs in Years 2 and 6 and the multiplication tables test in Year 4, this means that primary school pupils will face statutory testing every year except Y3 and Y5.

The NEU should organise and ballot its members in primary schools to boycott these tests and the preparation for them. A real campaign to do this would be a significant step towards changing the damaging direction that education has gone in over the last 11 years. □

6699 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:

- Independent working-class representation in politics
- A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement
- A workers' charter of trade union rights – to organise, strike, picket effectively, and take solidarity action
- 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

Pumps off the run



Diary of a Firefighter

By Adrian Noble

P opens BOSS, an operation database. "What do we reckon then, gents?" It's become a daily ritual – guess how many pumps (the frontline workhorse fire engine of the brigade) are off the run. The guesses come thick and fast, mostly between 25 and 40, although J, ever the optimist, plumps for 20. "33", P informs us. It's a shocking shortfall, but about average for recent months. And that's just the pumps off the run, let alone pump ladders, aerials or any other specialist appliance.

The brigade is chronically, woefully short staffed. At every change of watch, Resource Management Centre play a giant game of firefighter Tetris. Taking pumps off the run to free up personnel and sending them all over London to plug gaps elsewhere. Sending a firefighter driver from one station to another, and a non-driver the other way, to cover a skills gap and keep a machine on the run – leaving the truck at the first station understaffed and off the run until the non-driver arrives. Frantically ringing up off-duty firefighters offering overtime for the next shift.

The reasons are various. Self-isolation and covid are a big one. Some firefighters are vaccine hesitant, meaning the impact of the rule change on 16 Aug about double jabbed people not needing to self-isolate has been patchy. F mentions one two-appliance station where a firefighter had a positive test and only three firefighters from that station were in the next day, with the rest on leave, sick or self-isolating. A minimum of nine riders is needed to keep the trucks on the run.

B partly blames the large number of firefighters still detached to drive am-

balances, an arrangement the commissioner is apparently looking to further extend. He says of course he was fully supportive when Covid hit, as one of the many extra duties the brigade took on to support the battle against the virus. But as "normality" has begun to return, his patience is wearing thin, given our own staffing shortages. O is suspicious of what he sees as a plan to permanently prop up the ambulance service, "co-responding" by stealth. Co-responding with the ambulance service has been trialled and pushed in various ways over recent years. Many on station are ambivalent about it.

The big underlying reason for staff shortages is a decade of cuts, underfunding, recruitment freezes, station closures and a failure to replace retiring staff, coupled with expanding responsibilities and shrinking pay. We have over 11,000 fewer firefighters than in 2010. T tells me that it wasn't too many years back that it was rare to have fewer than six firefighters to an appliance; now, for pumps, four is standard.

Having recently been through a wave of station cuts when Boris Johnson was mayor and knowing another £15 million in cuts is in the pipeline, the universal feeling that our just-about-functioning through the summer, with so many engines off the run, will be used as a justification for cutting those engines. If we scrape through the summer without them, do we really need them?

Of course, as with "spare" capacity in any responsive organisation, some of the time we don't need it – but when do we need it, we really bloody need it. When floods occupied the attention of half the brigade a few weeks ago, the rest was left to cover routine shouts on their grounds – we were sent all over the city, from Hampstead in north London to Deptford in south east. We could have done with a few of those pumps then. The benefit for most firefighters

is the massive amount of overtime currently available, paid for by LAS as part of our agreement with them. Without firefighters taking up this overtime, the brigade would be crippled.

J has mixed feelings about taking it, with a strong sense that doing so only covers up the shortages. Most of the others agree, but there's been no collective stance taken, so there's no sense in individually turning it down. J and P discuss overtime bans – why didn't the union agitate for one and stop the brigade being able to paper over the staffing crisis? P reckons it would have been a hard sell to firefighters who have suffered ten years of real terms pay cuts – overtime can easily be worth several hundred quid a month. I venture that no fire appliance cuts have yet been announced – without a concrete industrial hook, given the severe restrictions anti-union laws force upon us, would legal action have been possible?

In any case, one thing is clear to all of us – whatever problems we have now, there's more down the track. We need to make sure we're up to the fight. ☐

Afghanistan: the last time



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

As far as I know there is only one film depicting the Russian intervention in Afghanistan. Directed by Fedor Bondarchuk, *9th Company* (2005) features seven conscripts who opt to serve in Afghanistan as this means only a one-year tour of duty and then – assuming you are still alive – you can go home.

After several months' rigorous and brutal training they are sent into Afghanistan. Early in 1988 they take part in Operation Magistral and have to defend Hill 3234, which comes under fierce attack from the Mujahideen. Eventually, of the seven comrades, only Oleg Lyuti (Artur Smolyaninov) is left. He launches himself into a one-man attack on the Mujahideen fighters as they approach the hill. Soviet helicopters appear and rescue him. He is told the war is over and the Soviets are pulling out.

Lyuti breaks down as he looks round at all his dead comrades. The final scene shows Soviet troops pulling out of the country. I can't confirm this, but I have been told it is Vladimir Putin's favourite film. ☐

Barnoldswick votes for strikes

By Ollie Moore

Following two weeks of strikes by a group of 17 specialist engineers at the Rolls Royce plant in Barnoldswick, Lancashire, the rest of the workforce has now voted for strikes, in a ballot which closed on 13 August.

Their union, Unite, has delayed calling action. Union officers say "tangible progress" is being made in talks, and that workers are hopeful the dispute can be resolved without the need for further strikes.

The latest phase of the dispute began when Rolls Royce bosses reneged on commitments, won by workers via sustained strikes in 2020,

including maintaining staffing levels at the site at a minimum of 350 workers. Rolls Royce had planned to offshore work from the site and gradually run it down, until strikes forced a u-turn. The settlement also saw Rolls Royce agree to create an apprenticeship academy at the site to train future workers, and explore a transition to producing green technology.

The strike vote shows that, should talks falter, workers are prepared to take action. Rolls Royce's conduct demonstrates the employer is not to be trusted. The ballot mandate must be used if firm guarantees on jobs and future work are not secured. ☐

A model for union joint working



John Moloney

In Royal Parks, outsourced cleaners and attendants demonstrated on 30 August, part of a two-week strike against job cuts, and for improved conditions. The contractor, Just Ask, has already back off from its original plan to cut 33% of all jobs. On 9 September, they're due to write to us with a new proposal. Some of our next steps will depend on that.

There's also a positive aspect to the dispute, including the demand for full sick pay. Royal Parks has admitted that the previous contractor had agreed to implement 18 weeks' full sick pay entitlement to all staff, prior to losing the contract. Given that admission, that's the least we now expect to see implemented. All of this needs to be codified and guaranteed as formal contractual rights. Many workers are currently being denied written copies of their contracts by managers.

The campaign in Royal Parks has been conducted in conjunction with the United Voices of the World (UVW). I believe the partnership we've developed with them can be a model for how more established, TUC-affiliated unions can work with smaller, non-TUC unions like UVW and the Independent Workers' union of Great Britain (IWGB).

During my election, I made it clear that, if elected, I'd want PCS to approach both UVW and IWGB to discuss joint working. After being elected, I proposed a paper on that to our NEC, which was endorsed, giving me a green light to talk to both unions. There's an obvious industrial logic to our collaboration with UVW, as they already had some membership amongst outsourced workers in Royal Parks and Ministry of Justice, which are both government employers where PCS organises the directly-employed staff.

Where UVW has struck in Ministry of Justice, we've built solidarity with their action and helped with fundraising for the strike fund. In Royal Parks, we've undertaken a closer and more direct collaboration. UVW members there had struck in the past; as they prepared to renew their dispute, we discussed and agreed a dual-carding arrangement whereby UVW members would also become members of PCS, allowing us to use our resources - which are obviously considerably greater than UVW's - to support them in taking action. PCS reps and activists have worked closely with UVW organisers, who've continued to lead the campaign on the ground. As the group of workers involved is relatively small, it's been quite straightforward

for them to take democratic decisions about what they want to do amongst themselves, which are then ratified by the relevant committees within both PCS and UVW.

PCS has also given financial support to a legal challenge UVW is pursuing, which argues that outsourcing amounts to indirect discrimination, as it leads to workforces which are majority-BAME having worse conditions than directly-employed workforces which are majority-white.

This is a far, far more constructive approach than the one taken, for example, by Unison in various places, which has been to see IWGB and UVW as a threat. If Unison had taken the approach we've taken, then not only would Unison have more members and stronger workplace organisation, but IWGB and UVW may have been able to win even greater victories than they have on their own.

I am an industrial unionist; I believe all workers in a given workplace or industry should be in one, democratic union. I'm not suggesting UVW should be absorbed wholesale into PCS - there'd be no industrial basis for that, as UVW organises in sectors where PCS doesn't - but I see our partnership with UVW as a way of enacting some of those industrial unionist principles in Royal Parks.

In general, a union that is more interested in territorially defending its "turf" will be less successful than one which does whatever is necessary to empower workers to win. If that means working in partnership with a radical non-TUC union, then so be it.

Workers at the DLVA complex in Swansea conclude a month-long strike on 31 August. With Covid infection rates in south Wales rapidly increasing, and with Covid cases in the workplace going up, the original need for the dispute - to minimising the number of workers who had to be in the physical workplace, getting it down to just essential, emergency staff - is becoming acute again.

Our plan is to re-ballot our members. Although it will be hard work to get that ballot over the thresholds, we are confident that workers are still resolved to continue the action.

On Friday 27 August, we announced a ballot of our driving examiner members. Ordinarily they carry out a maximum of seven tests per day, but the employer wants to increase that to eight to clear a backlog. That's an unacceptable increase in hours and workload, so our members will ballot for action to resist that. □

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

"Workers' wage" pledge fulfilled

When he was taking office in July 2019, the new Assistant General Secretary of the PCS civil service union, John Moloney, outlined in [Solidarity](#) exactly how he would be implementing his pledge to take only a "worker's wage".

He explained his motivation: "I must stress that my stance on the AGS wage is not that of a hair-shirt moralist. It is political. During the five years of my contract, my take home will only increase in line with that of DWP London EOs. Poor pay awards will hit me in the same way as members. Therefore there will be a real organic link between my material well being and that of members. So at least in the pay sense, I can say I am one

with the members and have no separate material interest to them."

John has confirmed to us that he has so far given back £54,000, covering to the end of September - fulfilling his pledge to return £2,000 a month. From October, when his salary increases due to pay-progression, he will increase the amount he gives back. John donated the £2,000 a month for a period to PCS's national strike fund and then to its general fund. He has given the £4,000 for this month and next month specifically to the strike fund for the Royal Parks workers: you can learn more about their fight and donate too at: bit.ly/royalparksfund. □

Labour offer little on welfare changes

By Mohan Sen

The Labour Party's work and pensions spokesperson Jonathan Reynolds has attacked the government's 1 September £20pw cut to Universal Credit (UC), and called the UC system "fatally flawed" - but said vanishingly little about what Labour would do differently.

Reynolds refused to pledge that Labour would reverse the cut, let alone indicate a higher level of Universal Credit. His defence of not being able to set a figure so far from an election is an absurd evasion.

Reynold's "proposals" seem to focus almost exclusively on reducing the "taper" through which those in work have their benefit reduced as their income increases. However he also refused to indicate how much the taper should be changed.

Much left-wing criticism has focused on the fact that Labour is no longer call-

ing to "scrap" Universal Credit. A better focus might be on its lack of substantial policies for transforming the benefit system, and what policies we want to see.

In addition to the absence of anything like a clear stance on the level of UC, Labour is saying nothing about "conditionality", the mechanism through which claimants are denied benefits and more generally harassed and brow-beaten to make them more likely to stop claiming. □

• Debate on Universal Credit and transforming the benefits system: workersliberty.org/uc-debate

Get Solidarity every week!

Trial sub (6 issues) £7; Six months (22 issues) £22 waged, £11 unwaged, €30 European rate.

Visit workersliberty.org/sub

Or, email awl@workersliberty.org with your name and address, or phone [020 7394 8923](tel:02073948923). Standing order £5 a month: more to support our work. Forms online. □

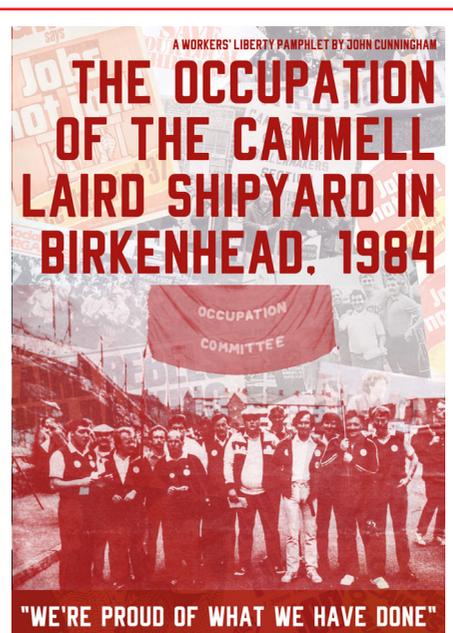
Contact us

[020 7394 8923](tel:02073948923)

solidarity@workersliberty.org

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

Production team: George Wheeler, Martin Thomas (editor), Sacha Ismail, Simon Nelson, Zack Muddle □



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. □

workersliberty.org/publications



By Ollie Moore

On 25 August Sharon Graham won the Unite general secretary election, becoming the first woman to lead the union. Graham got 46,696 votes, with Steve Turner – the favoured successor of outgoing general secretary Len McCluskey – gaining 41,833.

Many feared that two left candidates in a First Past the Post election would allow right winger Gerard Coyne to win; in the event, Coyne came third with 35,334. The turnout was around 10% of Unite's 1.2 million-strong membership. It was 12% in 2017, 15% in 2013, and 16% in 2010.

Workers' Liberty supporters in Unite called for a critical vote for Sharon Graham:

"Sharon Graham's platform emphasises rebuilding Unite's strength at workplace level, especially through the building of combine committees of shop stewards. If this approach were enacted and developed, it could lead to the development of a new layer of rank-and-file reps and activists capable of catalysing and winning struggles.

"Graham's warmer talk about militancy and organisation is linked to no programme for democratising Unite. However, her campaign has won support from a number of leading reps, including in the construction sector, the only section of Unite where anything approaching genuinely independent rank-and-file organisation has been retained or developed. Those reps see the

warmer talk as more than just talk."

We also had criticisms:

"Graham has used her opponents' perceived focus on politics and engagement with the Labour Party to denounce them as 'the Westminster brigade', counterposing her emphasis on 'the workplace'... The answer is more and better engagement – on a democratic basis, with the union consistently asserting its own policies and mobilising its members in efforts of democratic reform within the party – not a de-prioritisation of engagement with Labour by its largest affiliate".

Workers' Liberty Unite activists will push Graham to deliver on organising new workplaces – not just signing up members, but creating stable workplace organisation and winning real workplace gains. Unite should learn from the model of the PCS union's partnership with UUV, a small union which, despite that, shows capacity to organise and win disputes in new areas.

The potential a Graham victory represents is less to do with whether the person of Sharon Graham, through the genius of her leadership or force of will, can transform Unite into a more militant and effective union. We want rank-and-file reps and activists to use the openings created to carry forward a project of democratic reform, driven from below. □

- More: bit.ly/sg-win. Ideas for transforming Unite: bit.ly/tf-unite

Curbing the coming Covid surge



Covid-19

By Martin Thomas

A new surge of Covid cases is probable in the coming months.

It is likely to be blamed on schools reopening. Research worldwide suggests that will be secondary. (Children get Covid less severely than adults and transmit less). Other drivers are certain: people returning from holidays; more indoor time; university students crowding into halls of residence and bars; erosion of voluntary Covid precautions; waning of immunity from early-2021 infections or vaccinations.

Israel mass-vaccinated before Europe and has had an earlier new surge. Ran Balicer, Israel's lead Covid expert, reckons that the "booster" (third) vaccine doses given there have had a "visible" role in the tentative levelling-off of that surge since 24 August.

The World Health Organization has now come out in favour of "booster" vaccination. The scandal remains of Africa being able to vaccinate at only about 0.1 doses per 100 people per day, and so having given only seven doses per 100 people so far. Africa's Covid death rate has decreased from an all-time peak in early August, but we don't know for how long.

The South Korean government has called on the US government to press Big Pharma to share technology to new vaccine factories in South Korea. Labour movements must fight for Big Pharma to be taken under public ownership and democratic control, to enable emergency vaccine production and distribution worldwide.

The *Financial Times* has reported that the Oxford University researchers behind the Astra Zeneca jab quietly sent information to the Serum Institute in India before doing their production deal with Astra Zeneca. AZ then proved more willing to license other manufacturers and sell vaccines profit-free than the other Big Pharma companies.

High-vaccination countries have reduced their Covid case fatality rates drastically, to 10% or less of early-2021 rates, and comparable to flu. Still,



new lockdown-type measures may be needed in Britain over coming months.

The labour movement should fight above all for the social measures which make lockdown-type policies "work", or may even avert them:

- Full isolation pay for all
- Rehousing from crowded accommodation
- Bring social care into public ownership, with workers on NHS-level pay and conditions
- Boost NHS pay and funding
- Workers' control of workplace safety, especially improved ventilation and reduced numbers in offices and classrooms. (The government is sending CO2 monitors to schools to detect poor ventilation, but making no provision for actual improved ventilation).

The longer term prospect looks something like this. Everyone will get Covid eventually, and probably several times over our lives – except the unlucky ones, old or frail enough that we die of something else before we get Covid. But eventually almost all will get Covid *mildly* and build up immunity over our lifetimes to limit its impact until we get old and need a vaccine boost.

Even New Zealand (which unlike other closed-border countries, Australia and Vietnam, may have limited its recent Delta outbreak to keep infections very low until it can vaccinate widely) now recognises that it must reopen its borders some time and cannot avoid some Delta surge then.

It remains important to *slow down* the spread of Covid, so that cases come after vaccination, at a rate which hospitals can deal with, and after improvements in treatment and (if we can win them) in social conditions. Worldwide, more socially-equal countries and areas have had lower Covid tolls. □



Solidarity

For a workers' government

USE UNION AFFILIATIONS TO LABOUR, DON'T DITCH THEM!

By Sacha Ismail

As a result of the absurd threat to expel Bakers' Union President Ian Hodson from the party, the union is holding a [recall conference](#), with the implication that it could disaffiliate.

More broadly, since Keir Starmer's election, there has been increasingly vocal left-wing advocacy for trade unions to disaffiliate or at least weaken their links, cut funding or similar. Understandable as that may be given the leadership's behaviour, and well-intentioned in many cases, it is not an effective left-wing position. It is a distraction from the struggle.

Far from having exhausted the possibilities, affiliated unions could do vastly more to use their positions to promote democracy and left-wing policies within the party and win Labour support for workers' struggles. That does not just apply to "moderate" unions, but to left-wing ones as well.

For example, Unison, one of Labour's two biggest affiliates, is generally seen as part of the party's right. It has a long and continuing history of failing or refusing to fight within Labour for democratically agreed Unison policies and for members' interests.

But the other one of the big

two, Unite, which saw debate about its relationship to Labour during its recent general secretary election, is generally regarded as part of the left. Unite has failed to fight for left-wing policies and party democracy too.

Famously, in 2018 its leadership and party conference delegates voted against open selections for parliamentary candidates – in defiance of the position taken by Unite's policy conference. Similarly, Unite has never fought in Labour or more broadly for repeal of the anti-trade union laws, despite a clear policy conference stance. The same applies to many other issues.

Unite

In the Unite election, it was widely accepted that the "left-wing" position was to advocate loosening (at least) the union's link to the party. The dominant debate was pitched around to what extent to do that. Assessments of how seriously Unite has actually fought in and around Labour, and whether there's more it could do in this regard, rarely featured. The ambiguous rhetoric around "no blank cheques" served to obscure the reality and the issues.

To take another important example relevant to both Unite and Unison, neither has used its

position in or links to the party, or their political voices more broadly, to vigorously prosecute the fight for a substantial NHS pay rise.

Left-wing unions walking or stepping away from Labour would only serve to further weaken and disorganise the left and working-class representation in the party; further depoliticise the trade union movement; and hinder meaningful debate about why unions have mostly not fought for their policies.

Serious

If more affiliated unions got serious about fighting politically for their policies and for their members' interests, both directly through Labour structures and through wider political campaigning which put pressure and made demands on Labour, the whole situation in the party and in politics would shift significantly.

There is no lack of mechanisms by which this could be done. Such campaigning would certainly run into barriers in the party: but the fact is that we are nowhere near those barriers yet. A serious union fight in and pressure on Labour, not stepping away, is the left-wing policy. □