

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

PROTEST ORGANISE STRIKE

» That's how to "level up"



More warm words, more CO2

As COP26 approaches, 118,500 new oil and gas wells planned

Page 6

Strikes spread in US private sector

Battles on "two-tier" workforces and on wages.

Page 3

Couriers' strike threat wins u-turn

Planned pay cut defeated by couriers for JustEat. Page 15

Heroic last stand against the Nazis

Joan Trevor tells the story of the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto rising

Pages 8-9

How to really “level up”

6699 Editorial

The government’s “levelling up” bluster is vacuous – but also dangerous. It is dangerous because it functions to hide the reality of *levelling down* for swathes of the working class, in all areas of the country, and of reinforced regional inequality intertwined with that.

The labour movement needs clear demands to “level up” the living standards and rights of as many workers and working-class people as fast as possible, combined with tackling regional inequality. As former Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell has rightly said, in the run up to the government’s Spending Review, the starting point should be demanding reversal of a decade of cuts.

To make this possible, and as a good thing for society in itself, we need a *levelling down of the rich*. Through heavy progressive taxation – corporation tax, capital gains tax, a wealth tax and tax on very high incomes – to redistribute wealth to public services, jobs and benefits; and through stronger and more aggressive unions which can redistribute it to private-sector workers directly too.

The Tories’ dishonesty is sometimes startling. Before he started blathering about “levelling up”, Boris Johnson had a long history of dismissing the rest of the country in favour of London, or rather *rich people in London*; he described the capital as being for “the billionaire [what] the jungles of Sumatra

are to the orangutan... we’re proud of that”.

Johnson gets away with it only because of the lack of fight, and the lack of substantial criticism and alternative proposals, coming from the Labour Party and the labour movement more broadly.

Right-wing Labour politicians are tying themselves in knots about whether they should criticise the government’s “pork barrel” distribution of funds to areas where they want to reinforce the Tory vote, or whether that could wrongfoot them with locals who hope to benefit. None of them is exposing the reality of the Tories’ whole policy. None of them is demanding a real redistribution of wealth and funding to benefit the working class across the country, and more deprived areas within that.

If they were made part of serious campaigning, the figures themselves would shout out. The Stronger Towns Fund will give out £1.6bn between 2019 and 2026. But since 2010 councils have lost almost exactly ten times that much in central government grant.

The Spending Review of 27 October will not change anything majorly for the better. Rishi Sunak is proposing funding for 78 “family hubs” – after the Tories closed 1,300 Sure Start centres. He’s proposing £5.9bn extra for the health service – but if increases over the last decade had matched those after 1997, the NHS budget would already be £50bn higher than it is. He’s proposing ending the public sector pay freeze – which could well mean somewhat smaller real-terms pay cuts.

He’s proposing a 59p rise in the minimum wage – that’s 6.7%, when UK billionaires have increased their wealth by more like 50% during the pandemic.

And so on and so on and so on... The figures can speak volumes, but only if there is a serious argument and fight.

There is no indication that local government, the front line in the Tories’ war on both public services and local democracy, will get anything new, which means more cuts and more council tax rises.

Public spending, private profit

Meanwhile an increasing amount of public spending goes straight to profit-making companies. In social care, transport and many sectors, the debate is primarily about public subsidies for private providers. In the public sector, including the NHS, more and more money goes to private providers too.

The labour movement, Labour Party and trade unions, should demand:

- “Level back” by quickly restoring funding local authorities have lost, £16bn since 2010. As well as battering the poorest in society, those cuts have hit more deprived areas hardest. Give councils extra billions to start a major council house-building programme. Introduce a new funding formula to meet local needs, level up across the country and make future cuts more difficult. Restore local government powers, which Tory rhetoric about “irresponsible” “loony left” councils suggests they want to degrade even further.

- Fund regions to level up to London’s capital expenditure, for transport and other infrastructure. John McDonnell gives a figure of £30bn.

- Combine that spending with a drive to stop privatisation and outsourcing and expand public ownership.

- Set out a quick timetable to increase the minimum wage to £15 an hour. Increase statutory sick pay to a living-wage-level and make it available to all. (Both were demanded by Labour conference.) The TUC’s figure for sick pay is £320 a week, against £96.35 currently. Repeal all laws which hinder workers and unions from organising and acting to improve pay and conditions.

- Reverse all cuts to benefits, starting with the £20 a week Universal Credit cut, and increase benefits to living-wage-level. If standard rate UC was at the real level of unemployment benefit in the early 1980s, it would be £160 a week, not £96. The TUC has called for £260. (More ideas on transforming the benefits system: bit.ly/t-ben)



There is vast wealth in society – we can “level up” by tapping into it, by moving from the rich and employers to the working class.

Part of making policies convincing is fighting for them. To build a real movement for alternative policies, to put force behind motions calling for new Labour and trade-union policies, we need serious organising on the streets and in workplaces, and strikes. Unemployment is lower than we feared it would be after the lockdowns: as in the USA, that gives us a better start-point for pay battles.

The better we can support current or potential workers’ struggles, like the Sage care strikes and the efforts to get action on pay in the local government and the NHS, the more likely we can shift the government and push the unions and Labour to better policies. □

Starmer in clampdown fever

From Labour Left Internationalists

The Labour Party’s National Executive (NEC) has said it will ignore a rule-change passed at this year’s Labour conference (25-29 September) to safeguard a local say in shortlisting in short-notice parliamentary selections.

The NEC has cited unspecified [legal problems](#). For the upcoming Old Bexley and Sidcup selection the shortlisting committee will be three NEC members, one Regional Exec, one local, not three local members, one NEC member, and one Regional as in the rule change.

The rule change had to be submitted in June for consideration at conference (while NEC-drafted changes were, as often before, dropped on delegates at the last minute). No legal

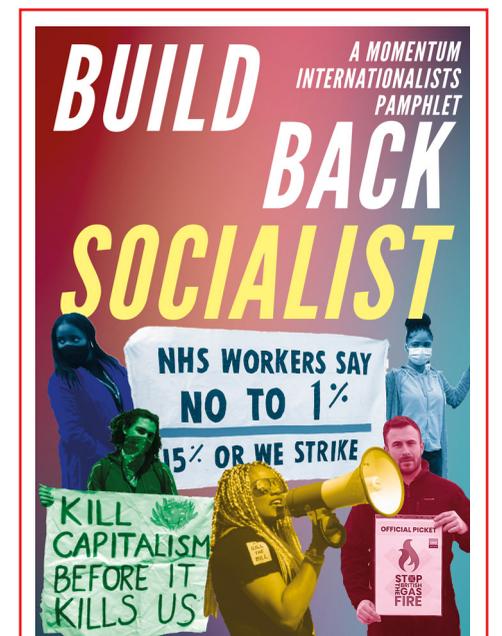
problems were flagged up then.

On 23 October, newly-elected National Constitutional Committee (NCC) member Rheian Davies was suspended on [thin grounds](#) about old social media posts.

At the conference, the left won two out of four National Constitutional Committee places up for election. The elected NCC has been replaced in disciplinary processes involving “protected characteristics” by a board appointed by a committee appointed by the general secretary, but still has a part in others.

Members in local Labour Parties and in the unions must assert ourselves against Keir Starmer’s feverish drive to make Labour “safe for business”. □

• Labour Left Internationalists (formerly Momentum Internationalists): bit.ly/mo-int



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

Strikes spread in US private sector

By Sacha Ismail

The recent flurry of strikes taking place in the US, dubbed “Striketober” is perhaps not yet a wave, but definitely a noticeable stream.

Of about 190 strikes up to 22 October, 40 took place in October.

So far the number of strikers is smaller than the almost half a million in 2018 (and almost as many in 2019), which were the highest figures since 1986. In 2020 there were many small strikes and workplace actions, often over safety in the pandemic, but striker-numbers were way down.

There are some struggles potentially in the offing which could push the whole thing onto a bigger scale. Disputes have been brewing among 35,000 Kaiser healthworkers in the Western US and among 60,000 film and TV technical and craft employees – though the latter are now voting on a somewhat improved deal on pay and

hours. The big workforce actually on strike now is 10,000 United Auto Workers (UAW) members producing farm machinery for John Deere, at 14 plants in Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Colorado and Georgia. The company did well during the pandemic and made almost \$5bn profit in the first three quarters of 2021. Its CEO got a 160% pay rise. However, having introduced a two-tier workforce in the 90s, it now wants to create a third tier with worse pensions. The workers want the second tier abolished and a decent pay rise.

The Striketober struggles seem to involve a complicated mix of defensive – sometimes very severely defensive – and offensive demands.

There are also 1,500 workers producing food for Kelloggs on strike, again against a two-tier workforce. And [many smaller strikes](#) involving low-thousands or hundreds of workers.

In 2018 and 2019, the big force driving higher strike figures was school teachers. That was also significant: because in many parts of the US public-sector strikes are on paper illegal; because they were largely driven from below by rank-and-file teachers; and because many of them happened in Republican-dominated areas in the South without much recent history of militancy. They won important victories, on pay but also school funding.

In contrast the bulk of the current

strikes are in the private sector, even though, as in the UK, it is much less unionised than the public sector – only 6%, vs over a third.

Many US public-sector unions have focused on negotiating conditions for returning to work, with teachers taking a lead. However, many private sector workers never stopped working, a point made by many now on strike.

The wider background is a tight labour market, with the economy rebounding after the impact of the pandemic, and a shortage of workers. There is a very high “quit” rate: in August a record 4.3m workers quit their jobs, about 2.9% of the US workforce. A Gallup poll found 48% of workers actively searching or watching for job opportunities.

At the same time many workers’ terms and conditions are under attack and there is growing inequality. There is simultaneously a surplus of jobs but a dearth of good jobs.

My impression is that although the US labour movement is weaker than ours overall, there are more pockets of strong organisation, militancy and rank-and-file organising than in the UK. The 2018-19 teachers’ strikes are one example. Another is the recent strike of carpenters in Washington State, driven by the rank and file in conflict with their union leadership.

In many respects, however, US un-

ions have over decades allowed a social regression even worse than here. If this strike movement develops further, the leadership of most unions will of course be an obstructive factor.

There are significant “reform” movements rising in two very important unions, the UAW whose members are fighting at John Deere, and the Teamsters, one of the US’s biggest private sector unions, which is making new attempts to organise at Amazon. If the [opposition](#) wins in the Teamsters, powerful but in many ways very conservative and corrupt, that is potentially a big deal.

American unions do face anti-union laws, though in general not as tight as ours. They face even more aggressively anti-union employers. The House of Representatives has passed a relatively strong law to facilitate union organising, the Protecting the Right to Organise or PRO Act, but it is being blocked in the Senate by the Republican threat of filibuster.

No doubt passing the PRO Act would help, but particularly in this situation, the stronger workers’ mobilisations in any case the more likely that is.

Joe Biden has long positioned himself as strongly pro-union – much more than Keir Starmer. But his statement on the John Deere strike was just: “They have a right to strike... I’m not getting into the negotiation.” □



Metal workers win 5%-6% in South Africa

By Mohan Sen

The last two issues of *Solidarity* reported on a major [strike](#) by metal and engineering workers in South Africa, members of the left-wing

NUMSA union. The strike is now over. It looks like the union has given more ground than the bosses.

NUMSA’s demand was an 8% increase for all workers in the first year of a deal, then in-

flation plus 2% in the following two years. The employers offered 4.4%, then inflation plus 0.5% and inflation plus 1%. The settlement is 6% each year for the lowest paid, and 5-5.5% for better paid workers.

Inflation is currently running at about 5%. If it falls, the deal could mean gains. If it accelerates, it could be a disaster. In addition three smaller employers’ associations have not yet signed up to the deal.

It’s hard to tell, but NUMSA’s leadership seems to have been knocked by some smaller unions accepting the deal, as well as by victimisations and violence against strikers. □

Girls Night In calls for club safety

By Lewis Joyes

Calls to boycott nightclubs in towns and cities across the UK are being made between 25 October and 4 November following a recent increase in drink and injected spiking in clubs, under the banner of “Girls Night In”.

Girls Night In groups have formed in over 30 locations so far, with each specifying boycott dates, and are predominantly being coordinated via Instagram.

They are making a range of demands, for more thorough searches on entry, improved



training for nightclub staff, anti-spiking devices to be made available, and increased CCTV in bars.

Please find out if #girlsnightin boycotts have been called near you, and join any actions that have been called along-

side these in support.

An associated [petition](#) to Parliament demanding that in law it is made a “requirement for nightclubs to thoroughly search guests on entry” had passed 168,000 signatures on 26 October. □

Upcoming meetings

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

- Sunday 7 November, 3pm:** Capital study group (in-person session two) New Cross Learning, SE14 6AS
- Monday 8 November, 7:30pm:** Corbynism what went wrong?
- Tuesday 9 November, 11:45am:** Workers’ action for the climate and the fight for free trade unions
- Monday 14 November, 12pm:** Ecosocialist reading group – Geoengineering, drawdown: what should socialists say?
- Other events**
- Wednesday 3 November, 6.30pm:** Fundraiser for Royal Parks strikers, Bread & Roses, SW4 6DZ
- Monday 8 November, 9:30am:** Winning global climate justice: migrants’ rights and global redistribution

For our calendars of events, zoom links, more meetings and resources, see [workersliberty.org/events](#) or scan QR code □



CPB to its youth wing: please don't adore Stalin or deny Holocaust



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

The Communist Party of Britain (CPB) and, more so, its youth wing the Young Communist League (YCL), have been growing. The YCL claims to have trebled in size over the past year, to about 1,200 members.

But this is not unalloyed good news for the CPB leadership.

Regular *Morning Star* readers will have noticed several letters complaining about the image that the YCL presents of themselves, posturing in militaristic garb, faces often covered with balaclavas and kerchiefs that are obviously not just covid masks.

Many of these young poseurs make no secret of their adulation of Stalin and his grisly record of mass murder. This is rather embarrassing for the CPB leadership, because for many years it has been understood that such feel-



ings should only be expressed in private – and certainly not in the pages of the *Morning Star*, which claims to be a “broad left” publication. So now the party leaders have issued detailed protocols on how members should conduct themselves on social media, including the need to avoid “adulation of Stalin and support for the substantial abuses of state power which occurred under his leadership”. Such adulation is “not compatible with our party’s judgement of these matters”, they warn.

However, this stricture has not gone down well with the more performative Stalin fans of the YCL. An email from an unnamed YCL member to the blogger who publicised the protocols (Lawrence Parker), states that many of the new recruits “have a very anti-revisionist, pro-Stalin, position”, and the incom-

ing central committee of the YCL has a “majority ... dead opposed to [the protocol]”. The policy of “no talking about Stalin”, the YCLer writes, “is the knee-jerk reaction of the older generation of the CPB leadership”.

The protocols then move on to antisemitism: “Our class enemy is the ruling capitalist class, not some secretive sinister cabal of Freemasons, Zionists, the Illuminati or the Bill Gates Foundation. Party members promoting absurd theories and claims risk bringing the CP into disrepute. Posting

anything online which ‘normalises’ or endorses antisemitic conspiracy theories – including holocaust denial in any form – is incompatible with party membership.”

It may seem pretty extraordinary that a left wing organisation should need to warn its members against holocaust denial, but it seems the CPB leadership feels this is indeed necessary. It is worth noting that for all the good intentions behind these strictures, the *Morning Star* regularly carries articles and comment that could be called “absolute” anti-Zionism and more than once has had to apologise for antisemitic articles.

It seems unlikely that the majority of the YCL will abide by these instructions. Lawrence Parker’s anonymous correspondent writes: “The YCL recently

voted at its congress to change the position on Palestinian liberation from a two-state solution to a single-state solution. That motion specifically attacked the CPB [two state] line”.

And while holding to a “single state” position on Israel/Palestine is not in itself antisemitic, it hardly suggests that the YCL are in any mood to listen to strictures from the CPB on the subject, or to discourage a world view that sees Israel as a uniquely illegitimate state.

The anonymous YCLer closes their email with the ominous words: “And there’s more of that kind of thing in the pipeline too.” □

• Text of the protocols: pages 4 and 5 of the September issue of the CPB members’ bulletin: bit.ly/cpb-s21; Lawrence Parker’s blog bit.ly/lp-stal

What to do on clerical abuse



Letter

I was a bit surprised to see Micheál MacEoin (“New evidence on Catholic Church and child abuse”, *Solidarity 610*) criticise the report into clerical abuse in France on the grounds that it doesn’t call for the “far-reaching reforms demanded by some campaigners such as the ordination of women as priests or the abolition of clerical celibacy”.

How would that stop paedophiles being ordained as priests and gaining access to children, any more than it has in religious groups which have done those things, like the Church of England, or in other areas where widespread abuse has taken place over decades such as schools, children’s homes and the entertainment industry? Surely the answer now is much more thorough vetting, safeguarding and reporting procedures to protect children in the future. □

Matthew Thompson, Stockport

No place for nuclear



Letter

The front page of *Solidarity 610* calls for an economic shift to power-generation from renewables and nuclear, with transport, heating, etc. taking power from the electric grid rather than from fossil fuels.

Why nuclear? With nuclear power, the dynamics of capitalism impose a technology which burdens the next 10,000 years with highly volatile waste products in the interest of short-term profits.

Whilst nuclear technology might be a rational energy source for a future society of associated producers, we should be absolutely clear that the bourgeois views nuclear technology in a way

fundamentally opposed to the how Marxists should see it. Their concern is for profit, ours is for human need, and the nuclear power stations that they are proposing to build will reflect this difference.

There is no mention on the current agenda of developing thorium-based nuclear generators despite the obvious advantages of this technology from a social and ecological perspective. There is certainly no mention of workers’ control or giving up the nuclear arsenal.

The nuclear power plants that will be built and the waste management systems that they put in place will have the profit-motive written into the very essence and will be very difficult to utilise in a democratically planned economy. □

Gerry Bates. London

Yes, renewables and nuclear



Letter

It’s good that *Solidarity 610* added nuclear to renewables when listing available alternatives to fossil fuels.

Solar energy and wind power depend on the sun shining and the wind blowing. Larger, better grids and batteries can distribute energy further and store in larger amounts, but the technologies are still limited and bring large construction costs.

Hydroelectric power is available only in some areas, and often comes with destruction of habitats and livelihoods. Solar panels generate lots of [toxic waste](#). No technology is perfect. We need a fight for workers’ control over varied technologies, not an absolutist fixation on a few technical options.

Suitable underground storage sites [exist](#) for high-level nuclear waste. The necessary storage can be reduced with better reactor designs and by developing thorium reactors which “burn up” existing waste.

The maybe 50 deaths from Chernobyl were tragic. But more died when dams collapsed and a hydro-power project was damaged in India in February just this year. [Wind](#) turbines and their construction are subject to accidents too. □

Alan Gilbert, London

Teaching history: defending the indefensible?



Eric Lee

By Eric Lee

Last week, a youth worker in the UK named Hannah Wilkinson tweeted an image from a textbook used today in this country for A-Level history. Students were asked "To what extent do you believe the treatment of native Americans has been exaggerated?"

Wilkinson asked "In what world is this an acceptable question/exercise to ask students?" She added that she was "actually horrified."

The text came from a book called *The Making of a Superpower: USA 1865-1975*, published by Hodder Education. The book has been in use for some six years, though the controversial passages have been highlighted only now.

The three authors of the book do point out that Native Americans did suffer at the hands of the European colonists, but added that some historians "have defended the policy of the federal government towards the Plains Indians. To those willing to adjust to the white man's expectations, reservations offered chances for economic self-sufficiency. Others found off-reservation jobs. Most notable were Native American performers who toured with the Wild West shows. Buffalo Bill hired

between 75 and 100 Native Americans during the 1880s."

Wait – they're actually citing Buffalo Bill's Wild West shows as evidence that the treatment of indigenous peoples in North America was alright? Yes, actually, and it gets worse.

"There has been a tendency to glorify the Plains Indians," they write. "However, they also fought brutally, slaughtering white settlers, sometimes torturing their captives to death. No prisoners were taken at Little Bighorn."

Little Bighorn, as all A-Level history students in the UK are surely aware, was a battle fought in 1876 between a number of Native American tribes and the US Army's Seventh Cavalry, commanded by General George Armstrong Custer. The battle was a massive defeat for the American army, and has gone down in history – for white people – as "Custer's Last Stand".

British students are supposed to be able to weigh both sides of the argument.

On the one hand, European colonists across the Americas had been engaged in a ruthless genocide against Native Americans since Columbus arrived in 1492. Almost all the tribal lands were stolen, native populations were decimated and forced into enclaves known as "reservations", and deprived of their most basic human rights and dignity.

On the other hand, some of them got

to dress up as warriors and perform stunts for white audiences in Buffalo Bill's Wild West show.

This is wrong on so many levels that the publisher, Hodder, has announced it is withdrawing the book from circulation.

One wonders what else appears in their textbooks. The three authors of this book have done other Hodder textbooks on subjects including "Weimar and Nazi Germany, 1918-39" and "South Africa, 1948-94: from apartheid state to 'rainbow nation'."

Perhaps those books encourage students to be open to all sides of a question – to see the positive aspects of national socialism and apartheid. Or maybe not – maybe only the genocide inflicted on Native Americans has been "exaggerated".

Hannah Wilkinson asked "in what world" is this acceptable?

The short answer is that for some right-wing historians who are sick and tired about the constant criticism of our Western societies and history, angry about "political correctness" and worried about "woke" students and teachers "decolonising" the curriculum, this is all perfectly fine.

But for the rest of us, it is shocking beyond words. □

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



Activist Agenda

The Labour Campaign for Free Movement joined the demonstration in solidarity with Afghan refugees at Parliament on Wed 20 Oct. The Uyghur Solidarity Campaign tying its regular 5th-of-month protest at the Chinese Embassy (Portland Place, London W1B 1JL) at 6pm on [5 Nov](#) to the climate-change issue.

Following Labour conference's vote to refer back the National Policy Forum report to ensure it included neurodiversity policy, Neurodivergent Labour will be meeting Anneliese Dodds and her team next week.

Free Our Unions is co-sponsoring a meeting at the People's Summit running alongside the COP26 climate conference. It is titled "Workers' action for the climate and the fight for free trade unions" (bit.ly/fou-wca), and is on Tuesday 9 November, 11:45am, Screen 3, Glasgow Film Theatre, 12 Rose St G3 6RB. FOU's next open organising meeting is Tue 2 Nov, 6:30pm, on Zoom: bit.ly/fou-2nov. □

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



Abortion rights: revive the campaign!



Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

On 22 October 2019, abortion was decriminalised in Northern Ireland (NI). This meant that, with immediate effect, no woman in NI who ends a pregnancy up to 24 weeks would be at risk of prosecution. On the second anniversary of the decriminalisation, pro and anti choice groups demonstrated.

Abolish Abortion NI (a coalition of religious reactionaries against the right to choose) held a protest outside St Patrick's Cathedral in Armagh during a service to mark the centenary of the foundation of Northern Ireland. The group

are calling for reversal of the 2019 changes.

Feminists marked the anniversary with a protest in Belfast, because the law is not being implemented. The North's Minister for Health, Robert Swan (UUP), has not commissioned the abortion services required under the law so people who could access abortion are still forced to travel. Earlier this month, Belfast's high court ruled in a case brought by the NI Human Rights Commission that the British secretary of state had failed to comply with his duty to ensure that abortion services were provided "expeditiously".

According to figures from Stormont's Department of Health, 1,556 terminations have taken place in Northern Ireland between March 2020

and June 2021. But health trusts have been only carrying out limited services, meaning some women seeking an abortion beyond 10 weeks in their pregnancy have still had to travel to Great Britain to access services. This was of course only possible for those with resources for the trip during a pandemic.

The same week as the anniversary, Stormont's health committee voted in favour of a Bill proposed by the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) which would further restrict legal abortion. The Bill seeks to amend the law to remove the right to abortion in cases of "severe foetal abnormality". The law currently allows for abortion after 24 weeks in these cases.

The two DUP committee members voted for the Bill.

The UUP's one committee member also supported it. The two members who voted against the Bill were from People Before Profit and Alliance. The SDLP's one member and Sinn Féin's three members all abstained.

The Bill may come to the full assembly for a vote this year. At its first stage, just 12 out of 87 MLAs voted against it. Unionist parties are hell bent on further restricting the right to choose and the nationalist parties are

not standing in their way.

This doesn't reflect opinion across the North. A 2020 poll showed almost 60% of people believed abortion should be decriminalised, rising to 70% when it comes to fatal foetal abnormality cases. The movement which had been visible in the run up to decriminalisation must reorganise and reassert itself. The religious reactionaries and conservatives have not given up on the war over abortion. □

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. □



Rich pour out emissions and COP26 warm words



Environment

By Todd Hamer

Over [400 new coal mines](#) underway or announced as of June 2021. 118,500 [new oil and gas wells](#) projected to start up in 2021-2, 468 new oil and gas [pipelines](#) or pipeline expansions in active development as of February 2021. Behind the empty words of COP26, the terrible reality is that the capitalist class is investing trillions of dollars in expanding extractive industries and the production of CO2 emitting machines.

The personal consumption alone of the capitalist class is responsible for world-altering carbon emissions. The highest-income [1% emit 15%](#) of global emissions, more than double the poorest 50%. The world's 300 largest [superyachts](#) alone generate as much CO2 as the 10 million inhabitants of Burundi.

These people lack the self-restraint to curb their pleasure-emissions; they are not going to forgo the profits available from unregulated fossil capital.

It's not inconceivable that at some point in COP's 26 year history, world leaders might have agreed to a small regulatory measure, like a carbon tax. Instead they have used moral pressure to produce nothing, appealing to a class is psychopathically indifferent to moral pressure. The absence of any global sanctions on emissions means fossil capitalists have continued to expand. CO2 emissions in 2019 were [56% larger](#) than when the COP process started in 1995.

Far from restricting the growth of fossil capital, governments have been acting as its mouthpiece. A recent Greenpeace [report](#) reveals different governments have been lobbying of the IPCC asking them to water down their scientific assessments. The boss



class does not like reality, and so they are asking the scientists to fabricate a new one!

The great derrangement

These are symptoms of what novelist Amitav Ghosh has called the "[Great Derrangement](#)". It is a result of an economic system that is out of control. The work that we are put to, the commodities that we are served up, the environment we are forced to live in, the ever escalating ecological catastrophe, are all caused because economic life is driven not by rational human interests but by the blind pursuit of private profit.

While the organisation of human work is out of control, we have no hope of effectively halting, reversing global warming or adapting to climatic conditions that are now unavoidable.

The pandemic demonstrated what it was like to have a natural force impose itself on our civilisation, forcing human society to bend and adapt to its logic. It has also shown the gaping gulf that exists between our scientific knowledge and our ability to act on that scientific knowledge.

How many lives saved, how much misery avoided, if we just had a form of rational democratic government

that followed the science, even with all science's imperfections and errors? Instead, two billion workers worldwide lack the financial means to isolate. Billions more are denied vaccines, health-care and testing. Instead of society's resources being spent on these rational ends, the capitalist class has used the cover of the pandemic to further ramp up inequality.

During the financial year 2020-2021, the world's [2775 billionaires](#) increased their wealth by \$5 trillion: more than the GDP of pre-pandemic Japan. By privileging private profit over the collective need to bring the pandemic under control, capitalism imposes terrible acts of social self-harm.

As society is forced to bend and adapt to the logic of climate change, this way of organising human work threatens civilisational collapse.

If the capitalist class are organising us, the world's workers, to flood an already glutted atmosphere with hundreds more gigatonnes of carbon, it is incumbent on the labour movement to start demanding preparations are made for the coming storms. We should force our bosses and local politicians to confront the future that their class is preparing for us and demand the resources we need to make adequate preparations to safeguard our communities and livelihoods.

The people who have least responsibility for this crisis – workers and the poor – will bear the heaviest burden. Research from the Climate Vulnerability Monitor in 2010 estimated the people of the global South bear [82% of the total costs](#) of climate damage, and that share will have risen as impacts become more extreme. In coming decades, large areas of the Earth will become uninhabitable.

In 2014 the UN-linked International Organization for Migration [reported](#) that "Forecasts for the number of environmental migrants by 2050 vary... between 25 million and one billion".

If we are to avoid war and population collapse, we need to serious preparations for the planned resettlement of displaced people. Towns and cities that currently sustain millions will be wiped off the map. The labour movement should draw up detailed plans for how we can ensure everyone gets the basics of food, water, housing, health-care, education and safe passage and run campaigns to agitate for climate preparations at work and in politics.

To avoid climate catastrophe, human work needs to be directed according to rational economic plans rather than the deranged logic of profit-maximisation. Organising around such plans is the means by which environmentalists and labour movement activists can awake the slumbering giant of the world working class and forge a social force capable of organising our labour to avert catastrophe. □

FOR WORKERS' CLIMATE ACTION

CLIMATE CHANGE, CAPITALISM, AND WORKING-CLASS STRUGGLE

PLANET OVER PROFIT

In time for COP26 Workers Liberty have published a new edition of our climate pamphlet, updated with new articles, reviews, and debates.

workersliberty.org/climate-pamphlet

Giving up and obstructing the fight?

By Quinn Martin

I spent time recently with two current Labour Party members who were active in the party under Corbyn but are no longer: it was quite disheartening.

Along with someone who had recently quit Labour, they had organised a stall in Newark under the Unite Community rubric publicising Barry Gardiner's Private Member's Bill to end fire and rehire. I asked about adding a Labour Party banner to the stall: Gardiner is a Labour MP and his

Bill is Labour Party policy. All three were opposed. I mentioned that Unite is affiliated to Labour. Not for long, quipped one.

Their general attitude was best summed up by one of them telling me they were on strike from the Labour Party. None of them were happy about the direction Starmer is trying to take the party. Join the club! But, I suggested that displaying the banner would be one way of indicating to Starmer and others that there are still plenty of people in the Labour Party who oppose what

he's doing and want to hold him to Labour policies.

In their bitterness and leader-worship (all three are uncritical Corbynites), they seem to have given up, and worse, are happy to obstruct others who still want to fight.

At one point I was told that if the Labour Party wanted to campaign against fire and rehire it could get its own stall. Pretty uncomradely behaviour. One of the two current members told me they were staying in so they could get expelled. Just about sums them up really. □



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Return to Gate Gourmet!



Black history month

By Sacha Ismail

For decades much of the British labour movement has celebrated the [Grunwick strike](#). That does not mean the dominant forces in our movement have absorbed what was important about it.

Not 45, but just 16 years ago in 2005, another struggle by mainly migrant women workers of South Asian background flared up. The fight of the Gate Gourmet airline catering workers against “fire and rehire” had important similarities with and differences from Grunwick. Although it did elicit solidarity action, it did not produce the kind of powerful and sustained solidarity movement which for a while enveloped the Grunwick strike.

Like the Grunwick workers, the Gate Gourmet workers met comprehensive defeat. Although many of them continued to struggle for justice for years afterwards, the decisive defeat happened much more quickly. Their story has not been widely celebrated, but largely and perhaps deliberately forgotten – demonstrating how little has been meaningfully learnt from Grunwick.

The Gate Gourmet defeat was a crucial turning point in the UK labour movement’s decades-long retreat, with so many brutal consequences for society. It shines important light on the movement’s inadequacies: in terms of working-class interests and struggles in general, and those of migrant and ethnic minority workers in particular.

Rosa Luxemburg [wrote](#) about labour movement defeats from which work-

ing-class activists are nevertheless able to “draw historical experience, understanding, power and idealism” to create a “foundation” for new struggles. Gate Gourmet is an even more terrible story of defeat than Grunwick: but *both* should be reclaimed as important sources of working-class and socialist experience, understanding, power and idealism.

Striking women

For the labour movement, or sections of it, to draw strength from these experiences we must discuss and try to understand them. Sundari Anitha and Ruth Pearson’s 2018 book *Striking Women* is an excellent resource for such discussions. Just over 200 pages, it is remarkably fact-packed and analysis-rich. This really is a book I would urge everyone on the left to get a copy of.

Striking Women not only tells the stories of the two struggles in some detail, but includes extensive extracts from interviews the authors conducted – in Hindi – with five Grunwick and 27 Gate Gourmet workers, all women. (All use pseudonyms, except for pre-eminent Grunwick leader Jayaben Desai, justly famous but often an almost-exclusive focus for accounts and depictions of the strike.)

The chapters on the disputes themselves follow ones on the changing role of South Asian women workers in the UK economy and labour movement; histories (plural) of South Asian migration and settlement here; and the workers’ experiences and struggles in the UK’s gendered and racialised labour market before and after the two disputes. The interview excerpts are woven through several chapters.

What happened in 2005

In August 2005, a shift of the mainly South Asian women employed by airline catering company Gate Gourmet to prepare in-flight meal trays at Heathrow suddenly found themselves confronted with mainly Eastern European agency workers on their production line. The company had introduced these casual workers after floating a “restructuring” plan proposing the sacking of a large section of the existing workforce, as well as severe cuts to pay and conditions. The established workers withdrew to their canteen to discuss with their shop stewards and prepare to negotiate. This was a long-standing practice, yet they were given verbal warnings and then sacked over megaphone. 813 workers were dismissed in total.

Gate Gourmet took over British Airways’ in-house catering operation in 1997, as BA sought to outsource unprofitable parts of its operation. In 2002

it was bought by US venture capital firm Texas Pacific. Faced with declining profits and determined to reduce labour costs, the company introduced a series of changes to conditions – but not without resistance from a long and heavily unionised workforce.

Striking Women goes into some depth on how this resistance was shaped by and shaped the drive for profit, work processes, and the roles of gender and ethnicity. It is eloquent on the strength of the Gate Gourmet workers’ shopfloor union culture and the limits of their union, the Transport and General Workers’ Union (T&G).

Unlike the Grunwick workers, who in 1976 were joining a trade union for the first time, many of those involved in Gate Gourmet had a history of workplace and union struggles. Some had participated in the successful struggles at Hillingdon Hospital in 1995 and Lufthansa Skychef in 1998-9. As Anitha and Pearson point out, the common trade union (shallow) focus on Grunwick to the exclusion of more recent struggles by South Asian women workers is in itself telling.

Solidarity action

The mass solidarity the Grunwick workers received included secondary industrial action by local postal workers, refusing to handle the mail on which the company relied. Despite “secondary” or solidarity action being legal then, the postal workers were bullied and harassed – by the courts, by right-wing nationalist activists and crucially by their own union leadership and apparatus – into eventually giving up, allowing Grunwick management to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat.

The long retreat and decline of grassroots labour movement activity from the late 80s made it less likely that any mass solidarity movement would blossom in 2005. Unlike in 1977, too, many of the tools of working-class struggle used to great effect at Grunwick were by then flatly illegal: among them mass picketing, industrial action without a ballot and notice period, and solidarity action. Union bureaucracies still act to block militant action, and now in symbiosis with a massively strengthened system of legal restrictions.

Yet, remarkably, 2005 *did* see powerful solidarity action. When the Gate Gourmet workers were sacked, British Airways baggage handlers, bus drivers and ground staff at Heathrow illegally struck in solidarity, paralysing BA for 48 hours, forcing it to ground over 100 flights and costing it over £40m.

This luminous example of working-class power and solidarity should go down in the annals of British labour movement history. For a while the T&G



leadership talked of further “[industrial action to protect victimised members](#)” (including baggage handlers threatened after their strike). For really the only time since the 1980s, the leaders of a big union [talked](#) about getting rid of or at least heavily modifying the laws banning solidarity action as something to be fought for right then, right there.

Many of the workers taking solidarity action were also South Asian. Especially in the aftermath, some promoted the idea they were predominantly the husbands and relatives of sacked Gate Gourmet workers. Workers interviewed by Anitha and Pearson make clear that was not the case. The solidarity was class solidarity.

Well into October, BA had to run many flights without the usual catering. But, after all the welcome rhetoric, there was no further solidarity action, and no campaign of taking Gate Gourmet worker delegations round the vast airport workforce (and in the years that followed no stepped-up campaign against the anti-union laws).

On 28 September the workers reluctantly voted to accept terms which the T&G officials had negotiated (and already announced to the press as a done deal), under which only some would be reinstated. Then the bosses delayed and delayed on reinstatement. The T&G told the workers nothing could be done. Eventually only 272 out of 813 workers were reinstated, on worse terms and conditions, and 411 given redundancy payments. A dwindling band of Gate Gourmet workers were left fighting on their own, in meetings and protests, with decreasing hope.

16 years later, from fighting for migrants’ rights to fighting outsourcing to fighting the anti-union laws, our movement is still failing. Only a generalisation of the kind of working-class power and idealism which characterised the Grunwick and Gate Gourmet struggles can turn things around. □

• Longer version: bit.ly/gg-2005. Sundari Anitha and Ruth Pearson have also produced a website with information and resources about Grunwick and Gate Gourmet: striking-women.org



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Warsaw Ghetto uprising: a hero

By Joan Trevor

In April 1943 the Nazis began their final assault on the Warsaw Ghetto, where 40,000 Jews were making a last desperate, heroic stand against Nazi barbarians determined to annihilate them. A mere remnant of Warsaw's once-large Jewish population, they had decided that it is better to die on your feet, fighting, than to die on your knees, unresisting. The Warsaw Ghetto was the first instance of an uprising by "civilians" in occupied Europe during the Second World War.

In September 1939, Hitler's troops had captured Warsaw, the capital of Poland. The Nazis now ruled the biggest centre of Jewry in Europe. A third of Warsaw's population were Jews – around 350,000.

Three million Jews lived in Poland as a whole. Ultimately the Nazis would try to kill them all. To begin with they herded the Jews into medieval-style ghettos – smaller and smaller areas in 45 separate ghetto towns across Poland.

There the Jews worked for German war industries. Some died of malnutrition, which cost the Germans less than a bullet; all awaited the preparation of the more efficient, modern, Nazi method of extermination – the death camps.

Councils

Each ghetto had a Jewish Council appointed by the Nazis from among community leaders. The Councils administered the ghettos, compiled statistics for the Nazis, conveyed their orders to the community. By setting up such structures the Nazis hoped to persuade the Jews that, though it would be a miserable one, they could expect some sort of future under Nazism.

The Jewish Councils hoped that this would prove true. Perhaps, the leaders probably reasoned, if they were useful and compliant the Nazis would not think it necessary to go further. One ghetto leader, Rumkowski of Lodz, took great pride in the fact that "his" ghetto was self-sufficient and economically useful to the Germans. Gradually the Councils became centres for the richest Jews.

In November 1940, the Warsaw Ghetto was officially set up. By the summer of 1941 it was sealed behind a 10 foot wall. It was 2.7% of the area of Warsaw – for over a third of Warsaw's population. Eighty thousand non-Jews had been ordered to leave the Ghetto – to make way for the arrival of 140,000 refugees. By January 1941 380,000 Jews were living there – the population density was thus nine times greater than in the city as a whole. In May of the follow-



Captured resistance members

ing year there were 430,000 living in the Ghetto. Inevitably, conditions were appalling.

Conditions

Twelve people lived in each room. They had a ration of 800 calories each per day – half of what an adult needs to stay healthy. The refugees had nowhere to live and slept on the streets. The native Warsaw Jews resented them and the Jewish Council provided no relief to them. Only youth organisations would help them and recruited from among them.

Sixty-six per cent died in the streets of the Ghetto from cold, starvation and disease.

Every day was a battle to find enough to eat. People turned in on themselves, concerned only to save their own family, or just themselves. In spite of this, many tried to keep up the sense of human dignity the Nazis were ripping from them.

They held concerts; academic and religious life continued. Dr Korzchak, who ran the orphanage, sealed it against the Ghetto and through three years protected his children from knowledge of life outside. People were dying in the streets – but this pretence of normality was the only form of resistance they had.

This desperate desire not to believe the worst was one of the reasons why those who from the beginning wanted the Ghetto to fight could not gain the influence they needed.

The Council members were torn between shame at their assistance to the Nazis, their sense of impotent respon-

sibility, and the knowledge that they could still provide some relief for the Jews. So they rationalised their role.

Deportations

It was all revealed for a sham when the order came in August 1942 that the Jews were to be deported to camps in the East.

They were told they would be settled and allowed to redeem themselves by work. In fact they were going to the death camps.

No-one could know the full horror of the camps, but the Council had some eye-witness accounts of the deaths there. Nonetheless, they encouraged Jews to volunteer for deportation with the promise of better food. At the embarkation point loaves of bread were provided, and jam. When political activists in the ghetto – left-wingers and Bundists and Zionists – put out leaflets telling the truth about the death camps that awaited those who left the ghetto, people just did not believe them. It was too incredible, too terrible for these defenceless, peaceful human beings to take in.

Between July and October 1942, 310,000 people were deported to camps, principally Treblinka, where life expectancy was one hour.

In this situation, what could the middle-class leaders of the Council do? They could have told the people the truth, or as much of it as they had.

Throughout the Ghetto's history criminals thrived and the rich – like the rich of all peoples – were able to secure privileges for themselves. They bribed councillors and police.

When taxes had to be raised to pay the Nazis, or police wages, a 10% tax was levied on basic foodstuffs – the poor paid as much as the rich. In January 1942 the Council voted down a proposal to "take from the rich the means with which to feed the poor".

The ghetto police, on pain of death, were ordered to bring five people each for deportation. They dragged people off the streets, separating families.

The role of the rich in the Ghetto was shameful, and they were rewarded with the hatred of the people. But the Nazis



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Our last stand against the Nazis

themselves made vile propaganda from it to show in Germany. They photographed rich Jews enjoying their privileges, while, nearby, emaciated Jews died in the streets ignored. As if it were only rich Jews who would behave like this and not the rich of any people! As if the Nazis were not themselves responsible for ghetto conditions!

They do not know it, but those on the left who have made "anti-Zionism" and anti-Israeli propaganda out of the behaviour of the bourgeois Jewish puppet councils – for example the late Jim Allen, socialist author of the play *Perdition* – have stood in the direct line of descent from this vile Nazi propaganda.

Until January 1943 the Ghetto was a cohesive society, massively oppressed and terrorised, but a society nonetheless, with its classes and structures intact. Attempts had been made when the first deportations took place to form a fighting organisation but its preparations had little effect. Nonetheless a small organisation – the *Zydowska Organizacja Bojowa* (Jewish Fighting Organisation, ZOB) – had been formed under the leadership of Mordecai Anielewicz. They were passive in the face of these first deportations, which ended in September 1942 when around 300,000 Jews had been removed from the Ghetto.

Resistance

When the final round of deportations was planned, those who wanted to resist felt too bitter to be stopped by any circumstance. The futility of passive hope had long since been put aside. But – most significantly – the Jewish underground had begun to obtain arms (from the Polish military underground). Now the Ghetto went to war against the Nazis.

The essential element in making resistance possible was the presence of organised leftists, militant Zionists, Bundists and Communists, and young people who came together in a more or less united fighting force.

By January 1943 the middle class leadership was so discredited that the SS itself had assumed direct control of the Ghetto. The left won the leadership of the tiny (10%) remnant of the Ghetto, 40,000 people, and led a genuine popular uprising.

It was far too late, and yet it was magnificent.

Why did the Ghetto opposition not fight earlier? Several reasons. They knew what the Nazis were doing. Their printers worked day and night producing an amazing range of publications, warning the Jews of the danger. In spite of the isolation of the Ghetto from outside they were able to keep in contact with the Polish underground and

with their comrades outside.

But, until 1943, they had no arms and they did not have the trust of the people. Until then, they set themselves the job of relief work, organising young people, holding meetings. They exposed the hypocrisies of the Council. Slowly they gained the respect of the masses who remained.

And the oppositionists were themselves divided. Socialist Bund leaders warned the youth against making premature attacks on the Nazis. They were suspicious of the militant Zionists, some of whom were very right wing. They still looked to their links with the remnants of the Communists and Socialists outside. Then early in January when the Nazis came to clear out the Ghetto the opposition set aside their differences, realising that it was now or never for the Jews.

Underground

The years of underground organisation meant that they were able to make the best use of the few opportunities open to them to inflict damage on the Nazis, to save Jewish lives and to set an example to the resistance outside the Ghetto. They killed police informers. They demanded money off the rich to buy more arms. They organised the 40,000 Ghetto dwellers, readying them for the Nazis' final assault.

In January they were able to thwart the Nazis for a few days and to persuade the remaining Jews that it was better to fight even against impossible odds than to give themselves up for deportation. When the German's retreated on the fourth day, five to six thousand Jews had been caught. But the fighters interpreted the German's retreat as a sign of weakness and were determined to prepare themselves for another battle.

Between January and April 22 fighting units were formed, based on the political groups to which their members belonged. Positions for attack inside the maze of ghetto buildings were also prepared. A real expansion of the force was only precluded by the lack of arms. The total fighting forces numbered about 700 to 750.

On 19 April Nazi trucks arrived to start the final deportation, taking peo-



ple to Treblinka. The Nazis and their trucks were attacked. Nazi tanks which guarded them were set on fire. For three days the fighters held running battles with the Nazis, forcing them to retreat. The uprising lasted for some 27 days. On 8 May the headquarters of the ZOB fell. The fighters had not made plans to retreat. They had decided that the battle would go on until the last fighter had fallen.

Finally the Nazis won simply by dint of setting fire to the whole Ghetto, burning the hidden Jews out of their cellars. By mid-May the Ghetto did not exist, either in terms of buildings or people.

Seven thousand Jews had died in the fighting, 30,000 were captured and sent to Treblinka. Hundreds of "rubble fighters" remained to carry out random attacks on the Nazis for months to come. A few hundred Jews crawled for twenty hours through the sewers to join resistance groups in the forests around Warsaw.

The persistence of the Ghetto opposition, in spite of their almost unbearable fear and depression, their isolation, the indifference with which for years their warnings were met, is one of the most remarkable things in this story.

And that they fought knowing that most of them would die; not that they fought so late.

It is easy to tell the story of the uprising; understanding the full horror of Nazi genocide and appreciating the courage of those who fought them takes an enormous leap of the imagination. Seeing pictures of the Holocaust for the first time is a shattering experience for most people. But in time the horror fades to a vague memory of

the numbers involved – 150,000 from this ghetto here, 200,000 from that one there – with no understanding of the violence behind it all.

The Ghetto fighters' first priority was a violent act: to assassinate Josef Szerynski, the leader of the Jewish police, and other police and informers.

This small-scale act of violence by people and on people whose names we know is somehow shocking. It stands out from the anonymous horror and prompts us to look again at the real human experiences behind the statistics in the history books.

We are used to reading about the Jewish people having been treated as one homogeneous lump of expendable humanity. The killing of the policemen reminds us that the Jews, like every other people, had their classes and their divisions too.

That the people who led the uprising were driven to killing these brutes, where most of us can scarcely pluck up the courage to be rude to a policeman on a demonstration, is the other lesson we must learn – the effects of fascism on the lives of ordinary people, and the need to crush it early so that no-one need ever fall victim to it again.

We must organise the mass of people to fight for their own lives now. So that we will never – as the Ghetto fighters did – have to organise people whose one remaining choice is to choose the manner of their deaths. □

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Conspiracy theory and class theory

By Simon Nelson

"A hundred million people use electricity and still believe in the magic power of signs and exorcisms. The Pope of Rome broadcasts over the radio about the miraculous transformation of water into wine. Movie stars go to mediums. Aviators who pilot miraculous mechanisms created by man's genius wear amulets on their sweaters.

"What inexhaustible reserves they possess of darkness, ignorance, and savagery! Despair has raised them to their feet, fascism has given them a banner. Everything that should have been eliminated from the national organism in the form of cultural excrement in the course of the normal development of society has now come gushing out from the throat; capitalist society is puking up the undigested barbarism." – Trotsky, What is National Socialism? (1933)

We have criticised the rise in conspiracy theories during the Covid-19 pandemic; but it would be easy to dismiss socialists as yet another "brand" of conspiracy theorists.

We say that a privileged class in society controls the means of production and keeps billions of people in conditions of servitude. Millions starve, and even relatively well-off workers are sub-

ject to working and living conditions that are not of our choosing.

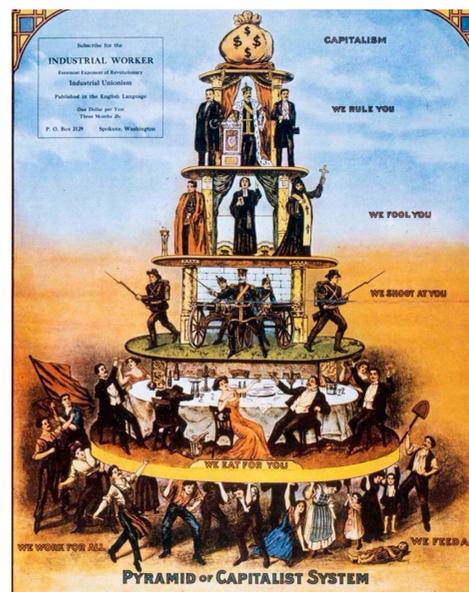
On the face of it, that idea seems not that far away from the conspiracy theorists' beliefs about shadowy elites.

Our argument, though, is that the working of capitalism is not a conscious conspiracy by a secret group, but a structure. The relations of production, which are not secrets or conspiracies, give the owners of the means of production common interests and dominant influence in society.

The conspiracy theorists point to secret cabals of top business people, bankers and politicians overseen by some unseen (often Jewish) hand as in control of world events. We point to a system which can be analysed and understood, not without effort, but on the basis of publicly-available and readily-checked facts.

When conspiracy theories first became popular, during the time of the Crusades, they focused on the ideas of secret societies vying for power. At that time, many secret societies were indeed vying for power, and there was no way other than rumour for ordinary people to work out which lords were conspiring with each other and for what aims.

Once capitalism had dominated the world, theories tended to shift to-



wards the people who were known by public information to be in power also being part of secret conspiracies. In those conspiracy theories there is a potentially healthy distrust of the people in power, but also a sense of powerlessness about changing the world (the people in power secretly have everything sewn up) or at least about doing it through a mass democratic movement.

Nowadays, to believe that the world is ruled by secret conspiracies and yet believe you can challenge them is likely to mean counter-conspiracy: getting

ready for an armed assault or joining a militia of those who have seen through the "conspiracies" hidden to everyone else, as with the storming of the US Capitol on 6 January.

This counter-conspiracy approach is anathema to working-class power. It cuts again making ourselves the "democratic philosophers" that Gramsci called for revolutionary socialists to become.

The "democratic philosopher" builds for collective action on the basis of open and democratic education and discussion, not of being one of a group of initiates who are "awake" and see the hidden conspiracies with their "third eye open": "to construct an intellectual-moral bloc that renders politically possible a mass intellectual progress and not only a progress of small intellectual groups".

The role of socialists is that of "permanent persuaders" for our cause, engaging and learning and listening, explaining how the world works and it is possible to change it. While the peddlers of conspiracies are wont to admonish people for not seeing the "truth" about the world visible to initiates, socialists seek to prepare the working class to educate ourselves to understand the world through debate and science. □

The panopticon and workplace power

A January 2021 article in the [Financial Times](#) discussed a new surveillance system implemented by Amazon. Solidarity spoke to a trade union organiser about new workplace surveillance systems.

Some employers don't really care what happens in the workplace, as long as the job gets done. Sometimes surveillance systems are just there for show. Even Amazon's new systems have turned out to be hot air in some places, it's just someone monitoring CCTV rather than the innovative smart technology they've claimed.

We have seen the arbitrary use of CCTV footage in disciplinary over Covid-related issues, such as whether people are wearing masks. In general fights over the use of CCTV are quite common, but the law tends to side with employers, who've won court cases on their right to monitor and surveil workers.

In warehouses, distribution, and manufacturing, basic sur-

veillance and monitoring systems for individual workers are the norm. Workers are used to having their labour meticulously surveilled. Workers use handheld scanners or consoles which monitor their work and calculate a "pick rate", essentially a productivity measure. In some workplaces there are performance targets tied to pick rates, which can lead to disciplinary action if they're not met.

There is significant variation over the extent to which employers can use these systems to discipline and control workers. Invariably the key factor is workplace organisation. In Amazon, where there is little to no organisation, the existing monitoring systems, which were in place pre-pandemic, are frequently used to dismiss people for having low productivity. But in warehouses where there's strong union organisation, no-one is dismissed for having a low pick rate, even where management do monitor and collect data on it.

Another form of surveillance, particularly in industries that involve workers driving from job to job, is via satnav monitoring. In British Gas, bosses tried to implement a new system that would monitor productivity and calculate the time taken to attend jobs, which would then be integrated with the payroll system. But the software essentially didn't work, and a lot of the working out ended up having to be done on paper.

Division

In industries like that, where you have semi-autonomous craft workers, surveillance and monitoring also creates a big risk of division and conflict between different groups of workers. For example, a dispatcher working in an office might have to do some monitoring of engineers in the field in order to send jobs to them, which can lead to tensions.

The development of new technologies creates concerns about how it might be used in a workplace context, but even when new technol-

ogies are being applied, the general methods are very old. Currently we're seeing a trend towards the reintroduction of piecework, and even "time-and-motion studies" to monitor production. Even these basic ideas of intense surveillance and monitoring aren't new, or necessarily tied to modern technology. You can trace them back to something like Jeremy Bentham's "panopticon".

In manufacturing, it's noticeable that there are fewer older workers than a generation ago. That's a function of the job speeding up and becoming more physically demanding. Roles that older workers might have been more physically comfortable with have been scrapped. In some workplaces in the auto sector, we've seen bosses enlist workers to design productivity monitoring systems themselves, essentially coercing workers into colluding in their own exploitation.

There's a big question mark

over how effective any of these systems are at actually improving productivity. In Amazon, they lead to significant staff churn – you'll have people being sacked for failing to hit productivity targets, but they'll be hired back a few weeks later. It's less about actually improving productivity and workplace efficiency, even on the bosses' terms, and more about simply asserting class power.

There's a comparison to be made with sickness policies; there's lots of evidence showing that harsh, punitive sickness policies don't actually improve attendance. They lead to greater absences and end up costing employers more money. But what the bosses gain from such a policy is instilling a sense of fear in the workers, reminding them who's in control.

That's really what this about – how far the bosses can push the frontier of control in the workplace. □

After Corbynism, the old dilemma remains



Book review

By Terry Ashton

The booklet *Corbynism, What Went Wrong?* by Martin Thomas is written from the point of view of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty (AWL), a Trotskyist political organisation which was mostly frozen out of the Corbynista and Momentum movement.

The booklet recounts the history of the Corbyn phenomenon from the 2015 beginning until the 2019 end.

It regrets the lost opportunity of those years to build a mass movement, particularly of not bringing in even more young people, and at the same time illustrates the mistakes it feels were made. And – equally tellingly – lists its differences with “the office” (i.e. the Corbyn Labour Leader’s office) on strategy and policy.

No wonder, AWL was at one with the mainstream of the Party on antisemitism, abhorring the mealy-mouthed avoidance and shabby manoeuvring of Corbyn including not declaring clear support for the IHRA declaration. Of course in querying this strange aberration – a left faction giving time and space to antisemitism – AWL were not on their own. Jon Lansman, founder of Momentum told me at the recent Conference he “totally abhors” antisemitism. To risk “the project” on this issue must have driven the likes of Lansman, veteran of Labour internal wars for getting on for fifty years, scatty.

And “the office” was also against EU Remain, an issue which must surely have brought many of the younger recruits into the Party. Corbyn’s pretence

of support for Cameron’s disastrous referendum’s aim was undermined by his weaselly words and minimal Corbyn campaigning. It was surely clear to all left of centre that those leading the Brexit campaign were not friends of the Labour Party and a strong “class” argument could have been made against their campaign.

Brexit

Of course deep grumblings did exist in working-class populations after years of anti-EU right wing propaganda but leadership on Labour’s side was needed. As we know, such leadership didn’t emerge from Jeremy, not least as he seemed to follow the line of his leading two lieutenants (and the *Morning Star*) who appeared to be taking the Stalinist line – “socialism in one country” – which maybe they genuinely saw as a possibility for Britain, not least given the opportunity that events had given them.

The Alliance for Workers’ Liberty do think socialism is realistic but not by avoiding debate – which this booklet repeatedly accuses Jeremy’s hierarchy of – and not by going down false alleys like abandoning the working class of Europe or taking sides to shun the historical nationalist ambitions of Jews whilst supporting those of the Palestinians and especially not with antisemitic words and actions which the Nazis used.

Another thing which moderates in the Labour Party would agree with the AWL is the need for face to face interaction with the younger new members. To bring the keyboard warriors in from their isolation and into interaction with actual people and thus real life and real politics.

I’ve known Jeremy for over 45 years



and I always found him kind and compassionate at a personal level.

He is, however, trapped by his history and past lonely political stances. Like Fidel Castro, he obviously felt that his alternatives – should he choose to press on with his leadership, which was in some doubt, especially at the beginning – were narrow, and that he had no alternative, give up or continue with the help of the *Morning Star* and the Communist Party.

Distinct

I heard first hand at the time from John McDonnell the well-known story of Jeremy being obliged to stand by McDonnell and Diane Abbott as they had previously done their duty. These three left beacons of the Labour Party have, in fact, quite distinct politics from each other but have been thrown together by being out on their own in the Parliamentary Labour Party for many years (Jeremy was first elected in 1983).

We know what happened. A surge of – largely younger – people took advantage of Ed Miliband’s unwise £3 membership and a movement, like those in Greece, Spain, and other countries and the Sanders movement in the US accelerated and took over Jeremy’s campaign. You could almost see the shock on his face as the crowds and their enthusiasm grew. There may have been many young and younger people involved, but the campaign was quickly taken over by various Trotskyist and Communist fellow travelling groups and by those with long experience of organising on the left within the Labour Party like Jon Lansman.

Where did Corbynism go wrong? Possibly by not seizing those moments which this AWL booklet identifies, and

maybe the more liberal approach of the AWL would have inspired the new, younger, members in a better way for longer. Certainly, there is a popular view emerging from long serving members that many who joined in the two Corbynite surges can now see that the Labour Party is not inhabited by Tories and that the old democratic and socialist dilemma remains – winning the discussion which is as old as democracy between progressive views and those of the conservative and nationalistic members of the working class. □

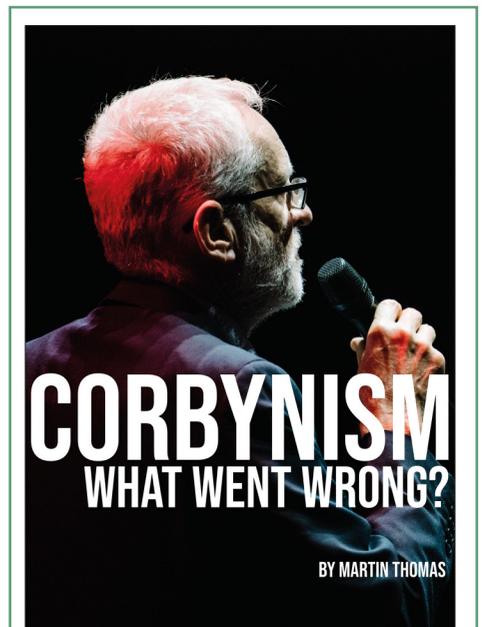
• Terry Ashton was General Secretary of the Greater London Labour Party from 1986 to 2000.

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Solidarity with the opposition inside Israel, not boycotts

By Chris Reynolds

On 24 October, the Israeli Land Authority posted tenders for 1,300 new Jewish-settlement houses to be built in the Palestinian West Bank. This is the first big new settlement plan under the current coalition government. The housing minister declared that he also planned to double the settler population in the Jordan Valley, on the side of the West Bank furthest from Israel. Other building projects are being mooted which would cut off the Palestinian village of Beit Safafa and block Palestinian traffic between north and south of the West Bank.

Defence Minister Benny Gantz has designated six longstanding Palestinian NGOs as "terrorist" groups on grounds that they have some links with the ex-Maoist PFLP.

Meretz and the Israeli Labor Party, the left-ish parts of the coalition, have been reduced to spluttering complaint.

Those new moves may seem to vindicate novelist Sally Rooney's announcement on 12 October that she would not have her latest novel translated into Hebrew and had "chosen not to sell these translation rights to an Israeli-based publishing house" out of a wish to support "Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions" (BDS) against Israel.

In truth, as [Etan Nechin](#) wrote in the liberal daily *Haaretz*: "BDS has a strong hold on Palestinian solidarity campaigns on Western campuses and elite cultural institutions. It tries to shame those who don't align with its murky guidelines, leading even radical thinkers like Norman Finkelstein to disavow them as a 'cult'. But beyond producing momentary headlines, BDS has been a

failure. Since its inception, it has done nothing to damage Israel's GDP or more narrowly, the economic power of the settlement movement. In its 16 years of existence, it has only managed to hurt academics and independent cultural institutions already marginalised by mainstream Israeli society and government for their dissenting position against the occupation".

The "big" boycott of Israel, from 1948 by the surrounding Arab states, won nothing for Palestinian rights and is now decayed: the current "small" boycott, expelling Israelis from film festivals, academic editorial boards, LGBT+ parades, novel readerships, and so on, is unlikely to.

Rather than boycott, we can better counter the Bennett government's direction and help progress by *links* with groups in Israel and the Palestinian ter-

ritories like Standing Together fighting for democracy and recognition of the rights of both peoples – immediately, of the Palestinians' denied right to self-determination.

Nechin denies Rooney's boycott is antisemitic. Doubtless there is little hurt to Jews from Hebrew-monoglots being unable for now to read a particular novel, and Rooney has no personal hostility to Jews or to Hebrew-monoglots.

Nevertheless, a tactic which especially hits, as Nechin says, "academics and independent cultural institutions [with a] dissenting position against the occupation", who are vulnerable because they desire international links with liberal or leftist milieus, and hits them just because they are Israeli-Jewish, could not but become antisemitic if it gathered real momentum. □



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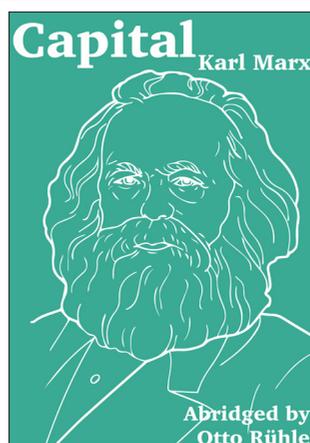
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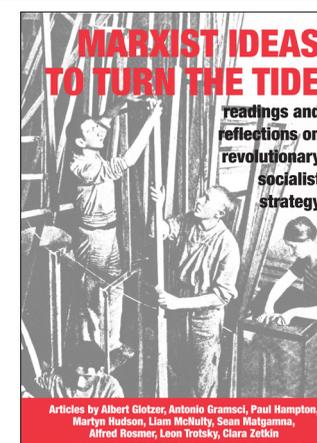
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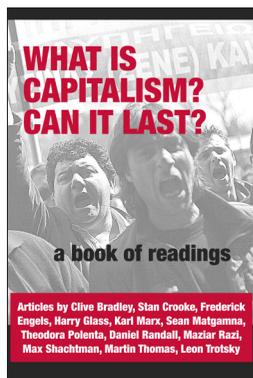
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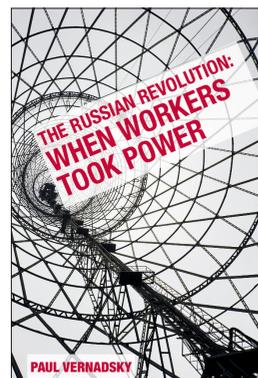
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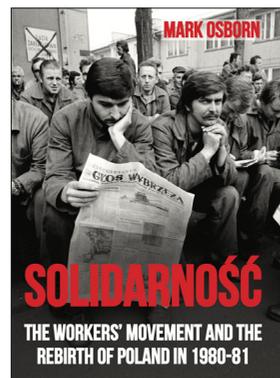
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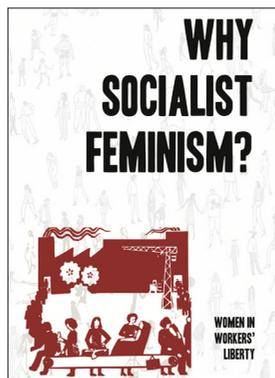
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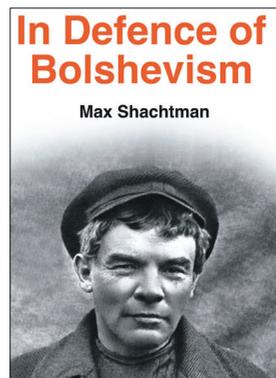
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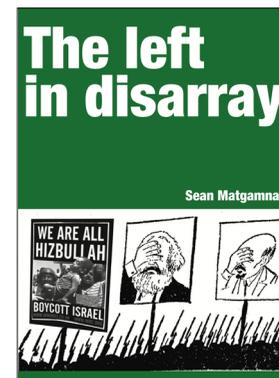
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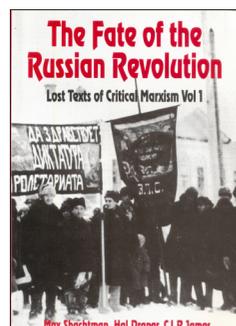
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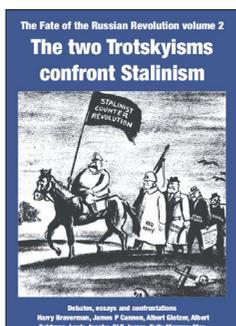
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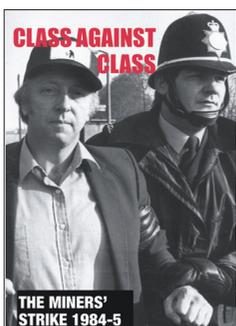
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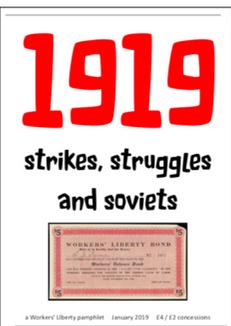
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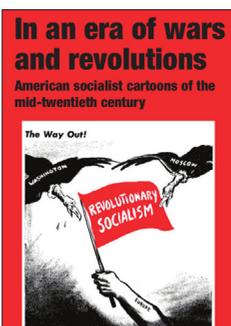
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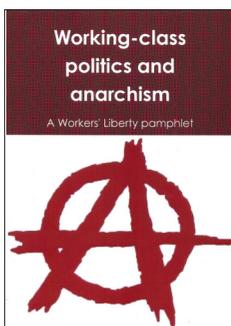
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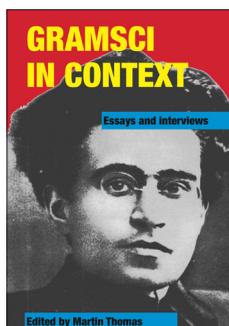
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NHS workers move against bullying

By Tim Cooper (Nottm City Hospitals Unison)

In Nottingham City Hospitals, 44 Unison members are being asked if they want to take industrial action because of the culture of bullying by management. The workers were told to move from urology to gynaecology theatres randomly to plug gaps. That is unsafe for patients and unfair to workers, but the same sort of thing is happening all over the NHS.

Last year, a similar number of different members took out a grievance after being bullied to deal unsafely with the huge numbers dying from Covid.

Local MPs both Tory and Labour local MPs have met with management after a report by the Care and Quality Com-

mission report said that some bullying cases were "directly attributable to racial discrimination". They described the report as "shocking and deeply saddening".

Maternity services were also rated inadequate by the CQC and midwives have spoken to national papers how they are regularly in tears over the understaffing that has led to dozens of babies dying or being brain damaged.

The Tory anti-union laws prevent action being taken immediately following a workplace meeting, though speedy response could prevent deaths and suffering. Instead, this action in urology requires yet more ballots, though the dispute was lodged over a year ago.

Already seven workers have left because, as one said: "This has been a

horrible year for us. I don't come to work to be shouted at. The work is hard enough. For our opinions to be completely ignored after years of building up experience is shameful really".

That sums up how over a million

workers feel with a pay award of 3% (a pay cut with inflation [around 5%](#)), a 100,000 staff shortage, and Covid hospitalisations increasing. We need action now, not Unison taking a second consultation. □

Sage workers boosted by GOSH win

By Ollie Moore

Workers at the Sage care home in north London struck from 20-22 October, as part of their ongoing fight for higher wages and improved conditions. The workers are demanding a pay increase to £12 per hour, as well as parity with NHS staff terms on sick pay and annual leave. They also want paid breaks on night shifts, and unsocial hours pay for weekend and night working.

The strike saw a lively picket at the workplace, as well as a demonstration outside the head offices of Freshwa-

ter, the property conglomerate whose owner, Benzion Freshwater, is on Sage's board of trustees.

Care worker Bile, who also sits on the Executive Committee of the United Voices of the World union (UVW), said: "We built a high profile campaign, supported by care workers around the UK, that led to strike action at the start of the year in the harshest of conditions during a global pandemic lockdown.

"Yet Sage Nursing trustees not only failed to keep their word, but they also continue to preside over a workplace that is short-staffed, mismanaged and where bullying, favouritism, and a blame culture is rife. They have tried every trick in the book to break us, but our resolve is stronger than ever."

Sage strikers also held a joint demonstration with workers from Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH), who recently won in-house employment and, following the threat of further strikes, succeeded in securing an immediate uplift to NHS terms and conditions.

GOSH cleaner Gora Diop said: "We've been fighting with the help of the UVW to be treated equally in the NHS. We won the fight because we voted yes to go on strike and GOSH gave in to us."

A UVW statement said: "We are a small member-led union. Our members are mostly low paid, precarious workers, mainly Black and brown and migrants. Many have been drawn to UVW's grassroots ethos which puts workers at the forefront of collective action and is seen to intersect with anti-racist struggles in the UK and beyond." □

UCU ballots: Vote Yes-Yes

By a UCU activist

The University and College Union (UCU) is balloting staff across UK higher education for strike action in two parallel disputes.

The national "Four Fights" campaign is calling for action to address gender, ethnic and disability pay gaps, end contract casualisation and job insecurity, tackle rising workloads, and for a pay increase of £2,500 on every point of the national pay scale.

Over the last two years pay rises have been just 1.5%, a real-terms cut. Between 2009 and 2019 salaries had already fallen by 17.6% in real terms.

Systematic casualisation means around half of teaching-only staff and 68% of researchers are employed on fixed-term contracts.

Workloads are soaring, with the average working week for an academic over fifty hours.

In the older "pre-92" universities there is a parallel dispute on pensions. The USS scheme has already

been cut substantially, leading to a lifetime loss of around £240,000 for the typical staff member.

Now new cuts of around 20-25% are proposed, based on a valuation of the scheme undertaken at the height of the first Covid wave, when the value of investments had collapsed

UCU is calling for a new valuation as well as for employers to pay a larger share. The proportion of university income spent on staff has declined in the past five years: the funds are there.

Both ballots are being run on a disaggregated basis, meaning every workplace that achieves over 50% turnout can strike or take action short. Previous national action over USS pushed back the employers' worst proposals, while strikes at Liverpool University this summer defeated a management plan for 47 compulsory redundancies. The ballots close on 4 November. Vote Yes to strikes, Yes to action short. □

Goldsmiths fights the cuts

By Cathy Nugent

As it runs a ballot (closing 4 Nov) for industrial action over job cuts, the University and College Union (UCU) at Goldsmiths university in London is gathering wider support.

An Open Letter to Frances Corner (the top manager at Goldsmiths), signed by over 3,000 alumni, academics, local community and other supporters of the UCU, including novelists, artists and so on, was covered by the *Observer* on 24 October.

The letter highlights the fact that the cuts in Professional Services and to English and History are only the first round. Goldsmiths has a number of groundbreaking areas of specialist study and research which could be trashed by the current management. These include the Centre for Caribbean and Diaspora Studies, the Centre for Philosophy and Critical Thought, the Decadence Research Centre, the Centre for Comparative Literature, the Centre for the Study of

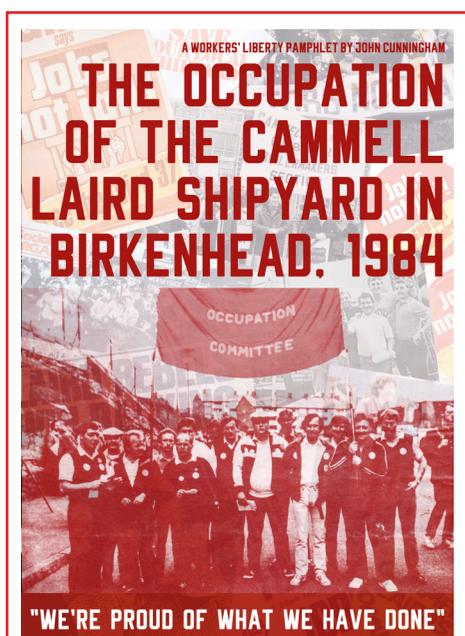
the Balkans, the Centre of the Body, and the Centre for Queer History.

The cuts at Goldsmiths are part of a broader Government drive to shrink Arts and Humanities. The fight at Goldsmiths will be key to asserting the importance of critical thinking, diversity, and humanism.

Meanwhile the UCU is working hard in the next week to get all members to vote, and to vote yes for strike and action short of strike in the ballot. Outdoor rallies are being held every Friday, staff-student assemblies are planned and testimonials for threatened staff, especially frontline admin staff, are being gathered. A campaign to get support among students is going to become very important.

Goldsmiths managers are rattled. Last week they published a page on the college website to dispute the necessity of action. They have very little credibility. Staff and students know no course and no department at Goldsmiths is safe from the cuts. □

• More: [we-are.gold](#)



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

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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.

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- 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! □

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Talk in my depot is varied



Diary of a Trackworker

By Matt Shaw

There is a refreshing normalcy about redundancies being offered. They are always show up around the time that bad news will make people think twice about why they are working. Talk in my depot is varied.

There is a certain older age group who think that now they've done their time, it would be nice to leave with a little something extra; while at the younger end, demoralisation with a job that has changed dramatically, even in their relatively short experience, makes them think about a change of career.

This time is slightly different in that the redundancy process has started with managerial grades, and is only slowly coming down to lower grades. While some would say good riddance, we should all remember that not all these jobs are from feather-bedding of higher levels and they all represent someone's livelihoods.

The staff, levels 5 to 8, that have been offered redundancy can be just as essential as frontline workers. They often take care of work that would otherwise be shifted to staff that are already dealing with masses of bureaucracy and don't need any more, and safety issues don't go away when the staffing levels go down.

In a nod to reality, no offer has been made to the engineering and operations staff on the front line at this time,

mainly because the present level of staffing is struggling to cover sickness, annual leave, and training.

The RMT [the union] has shown its usual level of readiness. Despite throwing away our no compulsory redundancies agreement, and being told repeatedly that management would use Covid as an excuse to attack terms and conditions, the only response has been a couple of circulars saying "don't agree anything with management in local meetings". That only works where management aren't riding roughshod over local reps and area councils.

This is a prime example of why we need workers' control so that we can have oversight in planning a rational workplace. □

• Matt Shaw is a railway trackworker.

Unite strengthens policy on anti-union laws

By Luke Hardy

At the Policy Conference in Liverpool (18-22 October) of Unite the Union, one of the most important composites passed was about the anti-union laws.

Previous policy conferences decided for repeal of all the anti-union laws including the Thatcher ones. This conference passed some concrete policy about a campaign on those laws and on the threatened further "minimum service" legislation attacking transport workers.

The composite referred to breaking these laws if necessary, and a special conference if and when the Tories introduce the "minimum service" legislation. It commits Unite to push the TUC

to organise a national demo to repeal all the anti-union laws and to support any union targeted by anti-union laws.

The one motion that was voted down was a call to "dissociate... from the IHRA definition of antisemitism". Workers' Liberty people have often argued that much of the left has become blind to antisemitism when presented as criticism of Israel and Zionism but actually amounting to denouncing all Jews empathising with Israel (however critically) as racists or as tools of Israel, seen as the world's hidden hyperpower. The defeated motion seemed to show that blindness.

A baggy composite around climate change and just transition lacked bite and omitted targets for net zero by

2030. The conference also passed a motion about a "balanced" energy "policy that puts low-carbon energy at its very heart". Apparently that meant gas and "clean coal".

Much has been said (including by new Unite general secretary Sharon Graham) about the conference voting to support PR including statements made by Sharon Graham. That isn't actually what was passed. The composite motion opposes First Past the Post and instead "support[s] moves to explore, select and introduce a new voting system for the UK". Hopefully Unite will make a firm commitment to fight for proportional representation but oppose a pact with the Lib-Dems.

The conference was originally due in July 2020, but was delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Motions came from branches, equalities committees and industrial sectors, across a whole range of subjects, and where they overlapped were composited together. □

Queimada: The slaves revolt



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

Directed in 1969 by the brilliant Gillo Pontecorvo (best known for *The Battle of Algiers*), *Queimada* is usually released in the UK under the stupid title *Burn!*

The year is 1844 and British agent Sir William Walker (played by Marlon Brando) helps to instigate a slaves' revolt against the Portuguese colonial authorities on the (fictional) Caribbean island of Queimada. He aligns himself with the leader of the black slaves, José Dolores (Evaristo Márquez), but his main purpose is to dislodge the Portuguese so that the



British colonialists can monopolize the lucrative sugar trade. The revolt is successful, but the British install a puppet regime under the control of the local sugar company and Walker convinces Dolores to recognise it. Increasingly dissatisfied with their subordinate position, Dolores and the ex-slaves take over the island in a second revolt. In 1854 Walker returns with a military force to crush the rebels. Dolores is captured but Walker offers him his freedom. The black leader refuses the offer saying that freedom is earned not given. He is then executed. □

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Signs of movement at Royal Parks



John Moloney

Our outsourced worker members in Royal Parks, who have been on strike for the entirety of October, may be close to a breakthrough in their dispute. The latest communication we've received from their employer, the outsourced contractor Just Ask, suggests they are prepared to agree a recognition agreement.

They have also abandoned their initial plans for job cuts of up to one third, although obviously we will push them to commit to no cuts at all. We are hopeful for progress on other issues, such as sick pay, too.

Throughout the dispute, we have sought ways to pressure not only Just Ask but Royal Parks themselves, as the central employer. In the past week, I spoke to the Labour leaders of Camden and Greenwich councils, who both sit on the Royal Parks' board of trustees. They both agreed to take the issue up on the board, which they subsequently did. Indeed we talked to Camden council leader Georgia Gould on the picket line.

My contact with the council leaders was partly facilitated by the relevant local Trades Councils, so overall it's a good example of how we can coordinate pressure across the labour movement.

On Friday 22 October, I met infor-



mally with Sally Abed, one of the Palestinian leaders of Standing Together, a left-wing Jewish-Arab social movement in Israel. In 2022 I'll be taking over responsibility for overseeing the union's international work, so I'm keen to develop links with workers, unions, and class-struggle organisations internationally. Standing Together provide an excellent model of cross-communal organising around a fight for equal rights for both peoples in Israel/Palestine. I hope PCS branches will bring forward proposals to our conferences in 2022 for the union to support Standing Together's work.

On Tuesday 26 October, I'll speak to an online members' meeting as part of the union's mobilisation around the COP26 climate conference. I discussed in last week's column our plans for making climate change a workplace organising issue; I want to play my part in making sure the union mobilises around this key question. □

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

Couriers' strike threat forces u-turn

By Michael Elms

In Sheffield, with the help of Workers' Liberty activists and supporters, food couriers working for JustEat delivery partner Stuart have been organising in the IWGB union in two fights: over job security and pay. On Friday 22 October, the threat of strike action forced Stuart into a U-turn over a planned pay cut.

In August, JustEat's CEO Jitse Groen wrote to Sheffield MP Paul Blomfield to say that JustEat would move its delivery operation over from Stuart to Scoober in the first half of 2022. Where this has been done in other cities, the existing Stuart delivery fleet has not been transferred over to Scoober, or even given priority in applying for the new jobs: it has simply been scrapped. Moreover, where Scoober has taken over delivery operations, drivers have been obliged to switch from cars to electric bicycles. That means harder work, more danger from crime and more risk of death by road collision.

Stuart drivers, organised in the IWGB, organised a community campaign against this mass sacking, getting the support of Sheffield's MPs and Labour Party members, as well as many students, who organised a doorknocking campaign in support of the drivers' petition campaign.

In October, JustEat wrote to the IWGB union stating that they now had "no current plans" to move to Scoober.

Also in October, Stuart announced that it would be rolling out a new pay structure – in fact, a large pay cut. Base pay per delivery would fall from £4.50

to £3.40. Drivers in Sheffield organised a large meeting to oppose this, and organised a plan for an ambitious programme of strikes, with passionate and detailed discussions of previous strike strategies and lessons for the future. Sheffield drivers attended a Zoom-based "information session" held by Stuart to sell the new pay structure to workers. The Sheffield couriers denounced the pay cut and informed participants of Sheffield drivers' united opposition and strike plans.

The following day Stuart wrote to Sheffield couriers announcing that the pay cut would be postponed in Sheffield only. The strike too was postponed as a result. Leading drivers met on Monday 25 October to lay a new plan to press their advantage and involve couriers in other cities in a united campaign for pay justice.

The two-year organising drive among mostly-migrant food couriers in Sheffield, which was initiated and has been sustained by Workers' Liberty activists, is bearing fruit elsewhere too: drivers who have moved from the food delivery job to other logistics firms in the city are beginning to discuss fresh organising projects on their new jobs.

Workers' Liberty will continue to assist these workers in their fight to civilise a lawless industry, and calls upon socialists in other cities to begin talking to couriers about organising. □

Local government and health pay: build the campaigns!

By Katy Dollar

Members of GMB and Unite have voted to reject the local government pay offer, with similar percentages to Unison members, who voted by 79% to reject a 1.75% pay increase (2.75% for those on pay point 1).

Ballot papers are scheduled to go out to Unison members in early December, asking whether they want to strike to secure an improved pay offer.

The union will be asking members to vote yes. Meanwhile, the Joint Trade Union Side have written to the Employers' Side, asking them to return to the negotiations and make an improved pay offer.

Since 2010 the value of local government pay has fallen by 25%. The 1.75% pay offer is completely inadequate.

In order to not fall foul of the anti-union laws we need a huge yes vote. Nationally the campaign has been sluggish, with many branches not knowing

when the ballot would come. We need a positive, proactive campaign from the top (the Service Group Executive), from the branches, and in the workplaces.

Many branches have taken a knock in the pandemic. We've lost activists to Covid-19. People have been less engaged and more atomised because of working from home. We can't accept this as the new normal. We must use the pay campaign to reinvigorate our workplace organisation.

In my branch we have established a weekly strike committee to oversee campaigning up to and throughout the ballot period.

We need meetings online and, in the workplace, promoting the contents of the claim. We should be producing workplace-specific items well as giving out national materials. Days of action, local demonstrations and press coverage can raise the profile of the pay campaign for workers disconnected

from the workplace by remote working. Reps should be contacting every member to tell them about the pay campaign through phone banking as well as emails, mailouts and mass texts.

In the health service, where (in England) workers have rejected a 3% pay offer, the GMB is running a formal ballot for industrial action, from 10 November to 15 December. But Unison is dragging it out: "A survey of members who didn't vote [in the ballot on the 3%] to find out the reasons why... [then] an indicative industrial action ballot". Only if a minimum of 45% of all members take part does Unison plan a formal ballot.

The new left majority on Unison's National Executive, currently locked in a legal showdown with the union's permanent officials, should link its battle for democracy with these battles on pay. □

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Covid: push for plan Z!



Covid-19

By Martin Thomas

Here are the main items that *Solidarity* has campaigned for during the Covid emergency:

- Full isolation pay for all.
- Requisition Big Pharma for ultra-fast production and distribution of jabs worldwide.
- Boost hospitals and social care under comprehensive public ownership and democratic control.
- Grant NHS workers their 15% pay rise demand, fix the NHS staff shortage, and extend NHS-level pay and conditions to social care staff.
- Expand council house-building, and requisition the empty houses of the rich: end overcrowding.
- Workers' control of workplace safety, notably ventilation.

None of that "Plan Z" is in the Tories' Plan A, B, or even C. The Labour Party leaders currently go no further than timidly lining up behind NHS and public health managers to favour "Plan B".

Plan A is to try to get through winter by booster and 12-15-year-old jabs alone. [Plan B](#) is to require vax proof (or, for workers, recent tests) at large public events; to reinstate mask mandates, and, possibly, new work-from-home guidance. The measures we've proposed are all longer-term ones. But they're good short-term too; and Covid will be around long-term. We need to think months and years ahead. "Plan B" type short-term ploys, and certainly a reversal of back-to-the-workplace drives instigated months ago on the basis of lower Covid counts, are called for now by the gradual 50% rise in the Covid-case rate since mid-September.

[Possibly](#) the Covid count will now level off or even drop as immunity from infections and jabs spreads. But we can't know. We do know that since September the Covid death count in the UK has been running much higher than elsewhere in Europe. It is now (proportionally) two-and-half times the rate in Germany, three times Italy or the Netherlands, four times Sweden, France, Spain, Portugal.

Most of those countries have kept mild Covid curbs (mask rules, etc.). Those have only a small effect on the Covid reproduction rate R; but R of 1.1 will have the infection count 80% up over two



Pass sanitaire protest in Paris

months. Of 0.9, 50% down. Most of those countries also have some species of "vax mandate". In Britain, the only mandate is for care-home workers (from 11 November). In Italy, the "green pass" (proof of vax, test, or recent recovery from infection) is required from 15 October to enter workplaces and other public venues. It has led to big far-right protests, on one of which union offices were smashed up.

Numerous left-minded workers also oppose the "green pass". In Italy, the big unions, CGIL, CISL, UIL, don't, but the more militant COBAS does. Port workers at part of Trieste docks struck against the pass.

In France, also, the street protests against the "pass sanitaire" have been far-right, but many left-minded workers oppose it.

Childhood immunisations are legally compulsory in France, Italy, and all 50 states of the USA, though not in Britain. The laws are porous and some countries without compulsion (e.g. Portugal, Sweden) have higher immunisation rates than those with. Although Britain started Covid jabs earlier, its fully-jabbed rate is now behind all the countries named above, bar Germany. In France, the "pass" increased jabs markedly among young people, but the highest jabs rate is in Portugal, without a mandate.

We can see no ground of principle to oppose well-designed vax mandates; but the positive practical case for them is dubious in Britain, where those who refuse jabs but get out and about probably have (partial) immunity already from infection or will soon get it. That would suggest, in workplaces where the majority oppose jabs, arguing the case for mutual protection and against anti-jab protests and strikes, but joining strikes with the majority in situations like Trieste. □



Korean strikers sit down in the road

General strike in South Korea

By Sacha Ismail

Tens of thousands of workers, many dressed in costumes modelled on the Netflix series *Squid Game*, demonstrated in Seoul and other South Korean cities on 20 October as part of a general strike organised by the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions.

The strike was to demand a range of pro-working class economic and social reforms, as well as freedom for KCTU president Yang Kyung-Soo. Yang was [jailed last month](#), along with other organisers, after the government claimed a union demonstration in July violated Covid restrictions. He is the 13th KCTU president in a row to be jailed.

Following the strike and demonstrations, the South Korean government is now threatening further repressive measures.

The unions are demanding stronger workers' and trade union rights, the abolition of precarious work, a workers' say in the shape of post-Covid transition, the creation of jobs in strengthened public services and more public ownership. A widely circulated report on the US left news website [Truthout](#) suggests this includes a call for major nationalisations, including of the country's auto, airline and shipbuilding industries.

The KCTU called the strike "the first step towards overcoming inequality in the world." Demonstrators raised the slogan "Tear down inequality!" In Seoul Korean Metal Workers' Union president Kim Ho Gyu told strikers: "Inequality is

a disaster. An industrial transition dominated by the Chaebol conglomerates would spawn deeper inequality, just like the Covid-19 phenomenon. The Korean Metal Workers' Union will treat this plague of inequality by promoting an industrial transition led by the participation of labour."

Squid Game has struck a major chord in South Korea, where it is set, because its grisly fantasy is inspired by the increasing precariousness of the country's workers following the 2008 capitalist crash. The main character is an autoworker who lost his job when the company he spent years working for went bust. His flashbacks parallel the real-world 2009 bankruptcy of the Ssangyong auto corporation, and the violent crackdown on sacked workers who occupied a factory to demand reinstatement.

South Korea has had relatively low numbers of Covid cases and deaths, but its economy has been hit hard by the pandemic. In the midst of deepening precariousness and poverty, there have been repeated high-profile scandals about corruption and embezzlement by the super-rich and politicians.

The million-strong KCTU has a long history of struggle. In 2016-17 it was central to the "Candlelight Revolution" that ousted right-wing South Korean president Park Geun-hye.

We will look further into the scale of the 20 October mobilisation and the content of the KCTU's demands. What is already clear, in addition to the need for solidarity, is that our labour movement can learn a lot from South Korea's. □

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