



For social ownership of the banks and industry

# WORKERS' CLIMATE ACTION

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# For social foresight against profit priorities: workers' climate action!



The COP26 talks (Glasgow, 31 October to 12 November) are an embarrassment for the capitalist class. On the one hand they cannot simply ignore the reality of climate change. On the other hand, they are aware of years of failure, the fossil fuel industries' current plans for a multi-trillion dollar expansion, and the complete absence of a carbon drawdown infrastructure.

In 1992, when the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change was established, leading to the COP process, 78% of primary energy generation was from fossil fuels. In 2019, twenty-four COP summits later, it was 79%. And 79% of a 60% bigger total.

The share of wind and solar had risen from almost zero to 3%; of hydroelectric, stayed at 6%; of nuclear, dropped from 5.4% to 4%.

In the absence of any strategy to limit emissions the capitalist class are sounding increasingly unhinged. The voice of bourgeois respectability, the *Financial Times*, ran a headline "Extinction" over a picture of an primate skull. Boris Johnson compared the picture to a football match: "humanity as a whole is about 5-1 down at half-time".

None of them can explain the problem, still less a solution. Who does Johnson think "humanity as a whole" are playing against? What is this unstoppable force that is driving us to catastrophes?

The capitalist class has spent the 26 years since the first COP meeting in 1995 organising workers to do specific jobs, mining, drilling, refining, logging, etc., rather than working on renewa-

bles, nuclear, and energy economies. Capitalist decisions have resulted in an extra 700 plus gigatonnes of carbon in the atmosphere.

We have over [400 new coal mines](#) underway or announced as of June 2021. [118,500 new oil and gas wells](#) projected in 2021-2, 468 new oil and gas [pipelines](#) or pipeline-expansions in active development as of February 2021.

The world leaders have been powerless to even halt the expansion of fossil capital, let alone curb and replace it. How are they going to cope with escalating numbers of climate refugees, food shortages, and sea level rise?

## Profit

Despite appearances, capitalists do not run the economy by free individual decisions. Economic life runs according to its own mindless dynamic, the endless pursuit of profit. Workers have to follow the bosses' orders or face destitution; bosses have to maximise profits or they go out of business. Left to its own devices, unrestrained profit-seeking wrecks human and ecological havoc.

Capitalists do not create profit. Profit is a part of the new value produced by workers in our daily labour. It is the difference between the new value we produce and wages we take home. That surplus belongs to the capitalist class. They distribute it among themselves and their lackeys (politicians, top media people, consultants, top public officials, etc.), whether via swindling and corruption or "above-board" payments is secondary. The fossil fuel industries are undoubtedly deeply corrupt and corrupting, but that is not the cause of their growth.

They have grown because they produce profit. Constructing fossil-fuel

infrastructure and vehicles yields profits, and reduces short-term costs compared to lower-emission alternatives.

There are three main ways to increase profit: minimise costs, maximise turnover, and expand. Everything that is produced under capitalism is produced according to these principles. In the physical world, this means the waste products of capitalist production are dumped as cheaply as possible, renewable resources (including human workers) are exploited to the point of exhaustion, and the scale of destruction grows with time.

William Blake's "dark satanic mills" were a consequence of the unrestrained profit seeking of early industrial capitalism. In 19th century England rivers were thick with sewage, and children worked for 12-14 hours a day handling chemicals that left them facially disfigured. Working-class pressure, and the reluctant awareness of capitalists that they were fouling their own nests, forced state action in the form of legislation (the Factory Acts, environmental regulation) and public services (sanitation, healthcare). Capitalists tend to resist regulation and taxation, knowing it eats into their profits. It is class struggle that forces the state to act.

But piecemeal state actions imposing costs on capitalism's most wasteful practices do not solve capitalism's tendency for ecological destruction. So long as the rule of profit dominates, those state actions often push crises onto new terrain, and often at a greater scale. The world is now home to 900 million slum dwellers without basic sanitation, two billion sweatshop workers, and 40.3 million slaves.

Atmospheric carbon has amassed because fossil capital is still largely unregulated.

Almost all the scenarios of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) scientists that limit warming even to 2 degrees Celsius (let alone the 1.5 C Paris target) require a massive and rapid deployment of carbon drawdown infrastructure. Yet there is still not one large gas or coal-fired power station anywhere in the world that is capturing and storing its emissions. "Direct air capture", taking CO2 from the atmosphere, is still a small-scale infant technology.

Carbon drawdown and storage produces no sellable commodity. For capitalists, this is a waste management problem that can only be paid for out of general taxation. The 192 national governments that meet at COP have no idea how to fund this work, so it is simply not happening.

Without curbs on fossil capital and public resources building carbon drawdown infrastructure, the crisis will worsen. Climate crises will escalate and compound one another and at the same time the resources we need to deal with those crises dwindle.

## Workers' power

The solution is to build a social force that can replace the rule of profit with common ownership and rational democratic planning, which can organise the work of halting and reversing climate change and building resources to adapt to the climate damages that is now already locked in.

History provides many examples of mass workers' movements taking over workplaces, seizing productive wealth, and reorienting to "social production controlled by social foresight", as Marx put it. Those episodes of workers' control were often short lived, but they show a latent social force capable of organising human work on a rational basis rather than by the priority of profit.

We call on environmentalists to join with Workers' Liberty supporters for political struggle inside the trade unions and Labour Party, and labour movements internationally, to win the mass organisations to these perspectives and to sharp, definite policies in place of greenwash or vague "do-something"-ism.

At the Labour Party conference on 25-29 September, we helped win a majority for a bolder green [policy](#) than ever before. The Labour leadership wants to override the conference policy, for example to delete common ownership of the energy industries. The outcome depends on political battles in hundreds and thousands of workplaces, trade-union branches, and local Labour Parties, and their equivalents in other countries. □

## Expropriate the banks!

The world's biggest 60 banks have provided in the order of \$4 trillion of finance for fossil fuel companies and projects since the 2015 Paris Climate Deal.

The UK's Barclays is the worst European culprit. In 2020 it provided \$27 billion (£19.4 billion) of fossil fuel funding.

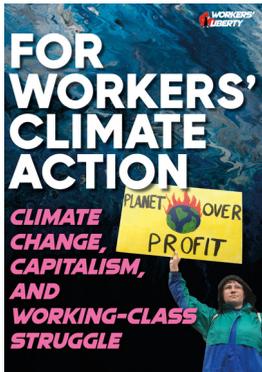
Four other UK banks are in the list of 60, including [Natwest](#), still majority government-owned.

Climate campaigners have rightly targeted the UK financial sector and

the City of London, highlighting their continuing fuelling of climate change. But the dominant demands are essentially for the existing private, deeply undemocratic and predatory banks to be better.

To comprehensively and rapidly break the finance-fossil fuel link, and use the sector's vast resources to positively tackle climate change, the banks must be taken into public ownership and democratic control.

• Petition and other resources: [bit.ly/banks-o](https://bit.ly/banks-o). More: [bit.ly/banks-f](https://bit.ly/banks-f)



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](https://workersliberty.org/climate-pamphlet)

# Resisting the coup in Sudan

By Sacha Ismail

On Saturday 30 October many cities in Sudan saw huge demonstrations against a new military coup, with around a million people on the streets.

In 2019 mass protests, including significant workers' mobilisations, resulted in the ousting of 20-year Islamist-influenced dictator Omar al-Bashir, and a sort of power-sharing agreement between civilian representatives and the military. The military was supposed to handover the chairship of Sudan's Sovereignty Council by 17 November this year.

Now, following the attempted military takeover on 25 October, civilian politicians including prime minister Abdalla Hamdok have been arrested. The military and police have also arrested numerous activists, blocked roads and put up barbed wire barriers. At least ten protesters have already been killed and hundreds injured.



Protesters on the train from Atbara to Khartoum

Sounding eerily like the generals who seized power in Myanmar earlier this year, coup-leader General Abdel Fattah Burhan said he remains committed to civilian rule – in July 2023.

Sudanese civil society activist Hamid Khalafallah, who spoke at our Ideas for Freedom event in 2019, told us that while he and most democracy activists expected some kind of chicanery by the military, they did not necessarily expect this out-and-out coup attempt.

He said that, reflecting the outrage most people in Sudan feel, the demonstrations on Saturday 30th were significantly bigger than any during the 2019 mass movement. He also pointed out the number and size of solidarity demonstrations around the world, particularly in London.

Hamid described disagreements between activists in a widespread network

of local committees, which are demanding the complete purging of the military from power, and politicians who want an improved version of the pre-coup set-up.

He said that Sudan's labour movement is more fragmented than in 2019, when the Sudanese Professionals' Association (SPA) of white-collar trade unions played a leading role. Since then the SPA has split on political lines. But he also said that though strikes now are less coordinated than in 2019, they are still playing a very important role, and that many more groups of workers, including more blue-collar workers, have become organised.

Hamid said that the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Saudi Arabia are key foreign supporters of the Sudanese military and its coup attempt.

In terms of bigger powers, he emphasised the role of Russia, which he said wants a military base in Sudan. He said the US's role has been better than he expected (the Biden government cancelled \$700 million dollars worth of aid only 24 hours after the coup).

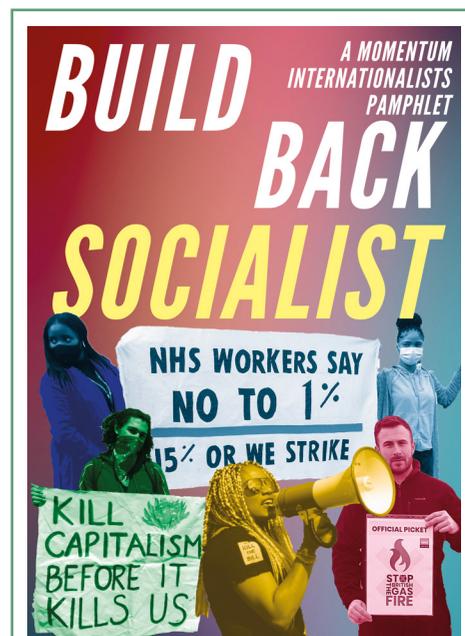
In the face of overwhelming popular opposition, Islamist groups are the military's most important internal civilian support, but the generals are under pressure from their international allies not to give them too free a rein.

Hamid stressed the importance of international solidarity with Sudan's democracy movement. □

• Full interview on the Sudan page on our website: [workersliberty.org/sudan](http://workersliberty.org/sudan).

Interview from 2019: [bit.ly/sudan-u](http://bit.ly/sudan-u)

• What you can do - Sign this solidarity letter from UK trade unionists: [change.org/NocoupinSudan](http://change.org/NocoupinSudan) - Rush protests to the Sudanese Embassy in London, calling on the military to immediately cease all forms of repression and restore civilian rule: [bit.ly/sudan-e](http://bit.ly/sudan-e) - Organise a meeting – get in touch and we will help you find a speaker - Pass a resolution in your union branch or Labour Party condemning the coup and demanding that the British government breaks all links with the Sudanese military. □



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](http://momentuminternationalists.org)



## Corrections

The Young Communist League's estimate of its membership now is [450](#) (tripled from 150 in 2018), not 1200 as in [Solidarity 611](#). We can offer Daniel Randall's new book *Confronting Antisemitism on the Left* at [£9.99](#), but not at £5 as mistakenly printed in *Solidarity 611*. □

## Assange: against extradition!

By Mohan Sen

Proceedings began at the High Court in London on 27 October for the US government's appeal against a court decision in January 2021 to block extradition of Wikileaks founder Julian Assange on charges of violating the USA's Espionage Act.

In 2010 Wikileaks published thousands of secret US military and diplomatic documents about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, revealing what look like war crimes.

The US government has provided various assurances



about how it will treat Assange. Given that the UN special rapporteur on torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment believes he has already suffered mistreatment in the British prison system and is in poor health,

these assurances are worth little. We do not see Assange as a hero of the left. His politics are a confused mix of "libertarian", left-wing and right-wing. His seven years in the Ecuadorian embassy (2012-9) started with him seeking to avoid a hearing in Sweden on charges of sexual assaults there.

But the "leaks" for which he is charged in the US are on the whole no crime from a socialist point of view; rather, a positive virtue. We back the call for him to be released and allowed to return to his native Australia. □



## Upcoming meetings

Workers' Liberty meetings are open to all, in person or on zoom

**Monday 8 November, 7.30pm:** Northern Workers' Liberty meeting - Corbynism, what went wrong?

**Monday 8 November, 9:30am:** Winning global climate justice: migrants' right and global redistribution.

**Tuesday 9 November 11.45am:** Workers' action for the climate and the fight for free trade unions. In Glasgow and over zoom.

**Sunday 7 November, 3pm:** Capital study group (in person) New Cross Learning, SE14 6AS.

**Monday 14 November, 12 noon:** Ecosocialist reading group - Geoengineering, drawdown: what should socialists say?

**Wednesday 24 November, 7pm:** South West London Workers' Liberty meeting - Workers and climate change. Park Hill Housing Co-operative, SW4 9QA.

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



# Cycling is safer than driving



Letter

Michael Elms' article "[Couriers' strike threat forces u-turn](#)" (*Solidarity* 611) is inspiring and informative. But one section of it misses the point and is bad in its implication. Michael writes:

"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."

Contrary to widely held beliefs, cycling is safer than driving. People who commute to work by bike instead of driving have substantially lower risks of death, and longer life expectancy, studies have found [again](#) and [again](#). Cycling's physical and emotional benefits drastically reduce the risks of cardiovascular disease and cancer (which cause most deaths), and "all cause mortality".

Also, people travelling by car or bus actually breathe in [more air pollutants](#) than cyclists.

If we single out one, comparatively rare, cause of death, road accidents, cycling is riskier than driving. But then if you never eat fruit, you may be less likely to die from an apple allergy than someone with a balanced diet.

Cycling or driving long shifts day after day is not the same as the commuting which most studies consider. The

health costs of driving and benefits of cycling are increased with longer hours (an attraction of the work for many bike couriers). The risks while on the road itself likely scale faster still, but probably not decisively (for most individuals).

Even with road accidents, when you consider all angles, cars are more dangerous. Where accidents happen, those in a car or similar vehicles are more likely to injure or kill others, and less likely to be killed by them. To favour a car over a bike on such grounds is not reducing risk but shifting and increasing it.

And that is before we consider the

contribution of cars to air pollution, which kills millions yearly; or to global warming, an order of magnitude more destructive still.

Fundamentally, we want a transition from cars to bikes, including electric bikes.

The problem with Scoober is this change being forced on workers, in the interest of profit. We look to workers as the agents of transition.

When I worked as a Deliveroo courier, one dispute was over Deliveroo's attempts to move things in the opposite direction. They imposed a new contract and algorithm which favoured

motorcyclists and cars over bikes. We fought this (unsuccessfully) on workers' rights grounds, but also on environmental grounds. And we were right to do so.

Couriers are right to resist attacks on their jobs, and imposed changes to their working conditions. But we are not sectional trade unionists: we advocate that workers consider, and fight for, the wider interests of our class. This means championing safer roads, and a safer planet, by fighting for a transition to bikes and ebikes, in our industries and beyond. □

Zack Muddle, Bristol

## Girls Night In: better demands needed



Letter

Lewis Joyes in [Solidarity 611](#) calls on readers to join the Girls Night In Protests, the one-night boycott of venues in over 30 towns and cities, called in response to a worrying increase in reports of women having drinks spiked, or being drugged with syringes. The nationwide movement began following several police reports of female students being injected with needles while on nights out in recent weeks.

*Solidarity* reports 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. We stand in full solidarity with those demanding the right to be safe on nights out and fighting sexual violence. But socialists should intervene in the movement with better demands. More searches on entry and increased CCTV would do little to prevent sexual assault in clubs. Increased searching will far more likely be used to catch those with recreational drugs for themselves. Injection spiking is incredibly rare compared to drink spiking, and both are dwarfed by alcohol-related violence and sex-

ual assault. Most rapists could not be caught at the door in advance.

Girls Night In Manchester were right to call for an education and publicity campaign on consent in the city. There should be support services in cities and on campus. Local authorities and universities should provide free and safe transport for nightlife.

The dominant narrative says the answer to sexual assault is more surveillance and cops. We know this will make black and LGBT young people less safe on their nights out. We need to present an alternative. □

Katy Dollar,  
London

## The real-life William Walker



Letter

It was great to have the exceptional film *Queimada* flagged up for essential viewing in Kino Eye ([Solidarity 611](#)), but the article missed relating the film's positive ending following on the execution of the revolutionary leader Jose Dolores.

As the cynical British agent William Walker makes his exit from the island, he encounters a black dockworker who reminds him of his first meeting with Dolores. This time Walker gets his come-uppance when the docker stabs him to death. The end "message" of the film is that the people have learnt a valuable lesson through struggle and their fight goes on.

The screenwriters for the film based their villainous character in part on the real life William

Walker, a notorious filibuster who invaded parts of Central America in the 1850s. Walker operated in the interest of the plantocracy of the southern USA who dreamt of building a slave owning empire in the region as an economic counterweight to the increasing industrial might of the Northern US states.

Walker organised several military interventions into Mexico and Central America with the aim of reintroducing slavery there, and even managed to usurp the Presidency of Nicaragua for eleven months in 1856. The Central American states combined against him, and he eventually faced a firing squad in Honduras in 1860. Thus we have a positive ending to the dastardly William Walker in real life as well as fiction. □

Bas Hardy,  
Liverpool

## Structural problems and child abuse



Letter

Matthew Thompson writes ([Solidarity 611](#)) that my article criticises 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". That was not necessarily the intention of what was quite a flat and neutral factual account. It merely noted that "some campaigners" had demanded measures such as "the ordination of women as priests or the abolition of clerical celibacy" and that these recommendations were not included in the final report.

It is not the role of social-

ists to "reform" the Catholic Church and the statistics for child abuse are complex.

There some evidence, however, that the majority of abuse is carried out by men - see, for instance, recent Office for National Statistics data into the gendered breakdown of convicted child abusers.

Moreover, it is true that much abuse is carried out within the nuclear family, that abuse is about power rather than sexual gratification, and that therefore the direct link between celibacy and abuse is complex.

However, the celibacy requirement is part and parcel of the elite requirements of the priesthood. Not only is celibacy sex-negative and reactionary on its own terms but it bolsters the authoritative position of the priesthood vis-a-vis the laity.

More fundamentally, Thomp-

son suggests that the issue is "paedophiles being ordained as priests and gaining access to children" and that none of the proposed reforms would prevent this.

No one would disagree that part of the answer is "much more thorough vetting, safeguarding and reporting procedures to protect children in the future." And it is true that other religions, such as the Church of England, have a problem.

However, Thompson's implication is that this is a problem of a "few bad apples", or existing paedophiles attracted to the Catholic Church, rather than a structural problem with the Church which enables and encourages abusive behaviour. This strikes me as naive, and ducks the question of more fundamental practices in the Church. □

Micheál MacEoin,  
London

# Moral panic against trans women



**Women's Fightback**

By Katy Dollar

The BBC [website article](#) "We're being pressured into sex by some trans women" has caused a backlash, with 20,000 people signing an open letter against it.

The article used a survey of just 80 people, conducted by the anti-trans pressure group Get The L Out, to claim that trans lesbians are routinely pressuring cis lesbians into sex. The article intersperses LGB Alliance anti trans propaganda with testimony by cis lesbians describing rape and coercive sexual relations with trans women, along with women claiming they have been pressured by a societal messaging against transmisogyny into sex which they do not want. We should not belittle or deny the experiences of women who detailed abuse in the article. We must also be clear the article is an attempt to stoke a moral panic about the sexual danger posed by trans women. It seeks to conflate acceptance that woman can have penises with interro-



gation of aspects of our sexual preferences, with pressure to have sex with particular individuals.

Nobody has a responsibility to have sex with anyone they don't want to. Nobody should have to defend their reasons for refusing sexual activity; even if their reasons are bigoted they are not up for challenge. Consent is sacrosanct, it trumps all other matters in sex.

That does not mean we should ignore the ideological shaping of desire. Sexual desire – its objects, acts and expressions – are shaped both consciously and unconsciously by society, and that includes aspects that are oppressive and unpleasant. Individual revulsion

expressed towards disabled and trans bodies or prevailing preference against black women and Asian men are not simply matters of individual taste that spring forth naturally. Saying who we have sex with is our own choice is not the same thing as refusing to question why we choose what we choose. Being considered outside the norms of beauty and desirability is an element of exclusion; disabled people's organisations have been arguing for years for sex education that is inclusive by normalising sex with disabled people.

Interrogating and questioning our preferences should not be an exercise in self-disciplining of desire and sexuality. Our sexual preferences can and do change, sometimes due to conscious effort and reflection, but that should not be the expectation or even the aim of looking at how reactionary politics can shape our sexuality. To see the inclusion of trans women in lesbian culture and spaces as an individual exhortation for each lesbian to have sex with trans women to show their allyship reflects the individualistic, performative politics which dominates feminism (both transphobic and trans inclusive). We want to understand the structures that oppress us and how they infiltrate

areas of our life, even those which feel very personal. We want to understand them so we can bring them down. We know the structures that oppress us are perpetuated by capitalism. Where the trend in feminism is to zoom in to the individual, we should be looking to zoom out from individual experience to the structures which shape our lives, to show the collective interest we have in destroying capitalism and the myriad of oppressive structures it rests on. □



## 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](https://bit.ly/2h-books) for the current stock and prices, and to order. □

## Sudan: Unions take lead in fight for democracy



**Eric Lee**

By Eric Lee

Military coups are, sadly, a fairly regular occurrence in Africa. In the last couple of years, we've seen the military seizing or attempting to seize power in Mali, Guinea, Ethiopia, Gabon and Sudan. What makes the recent military coup in Sudan of particular interest to us is the extraordinary role played by the country's trade unions in the fight to defend democracy.

The coup began, as might be expected, by a crackdown on journalists. According to reports from the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), "Bloomberg/Al Sharq correspondent Maha Al-Talb and her crew were arrested and held for two hours in the country's capital city, Khartoum. On the same day, military officials stormed the headquarters of the Sudanese state radio and TV broadcaster and arrested several of its workers."

The government used Facebook to announce that "Joint military forces have stormed the TV and radio headquarters in Omdurman and detained a number of staff."

According to the IFJ, the coup "also disrupted the free access to internet,

mobile services and radio stations."

None of this is new, as Sudanese authorities have been making life difficult for journalists for several years. Last year, an arrest warrant was issued for the President of the Sudanese Journalists' Union. And last December, 84 broadcast workers were fired over alleged loyalty to the former regime. More than 30 news websites were blocked in the run up to protests demanding the resignation of the government in July this year.

While the crackdown on the media may not be new, the response of Sudan's organised workers to the military coup is something worth noting.

Workers at the state petroleum company, Sudapet, announced last week that they would join in the nationwide civil disobedience movement that had already been called by other trade unions. Meanwhile, the doctors' union announced it was going on strike. The Unified Doctors' Office, which is made up of different unions, was quoted as saying: "As we promised and previously announced we would enter a general strike across Sudan in the event of a coup, we are keeping to our word and timing completely."

The international trade union movement was quick to speak out. The IFJ's General Secretary, Anthony Bellanger, said: "The military must stop the crackdown on media and reestablish the free flow of information and access to

the internet. The IFJ will closely monitor all the incidents against journalists to ensure press freedom and a free access to information in such a critical moment for Sudan."

The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) noted that "Sudan's trade unions are at the forefront of widespread civil opposition to the military's seizure of power." Its General Secretary Sharan Burrow said: "We unequivocally condemn the actions of the military, which are designed to allow military leaders to fully regain control of key economic sectors and escape accountability for human rights violations over many years, much like the military junta in Myanmar.

"We stand in solidarity with the Sudanese trade unions and the people of the country who are opposing the military and demanding the resumption of a democratic transition. All those who have been detained by the military must be released immediately, and the authors of the coup must be held accountable for their murderous crimes against the people."

The Sudanese people are showing incredible courage in standing up to the new military regime and they deserve the full support of trade unionists and democrats everywhere. □

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



## Activist Agenda

The Uyghur Solidarity Campaign is tying its regular 5th-of-month protest at the Chinese Embassy (Portland Place, London W1B 1JL) on [5 Nov](#) to the climate-change issue: stop drilling for fossil fuels on Uyghur land, end forced labour in solar energy.

Neurodivergent Labour has launched a campaign for all special schools to be provided with RT-LAMP Covid tests. Many neurodivergent and other disabled children can not tolerate the PCR test, and so have to stay at home when they have been exposed to Covid, missing out on their education and the therapies they receive at school. The simple solution is to provide the saliva-based RT-LAMP test, but parents trying to access this have to pay a fee and travel some distance. □

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



# One of the memories we must unearth

By Sara Lee

On 23 Jan 1925, Wong So Ying, a young Chinese woman anarchist, bombed the Office of the Protector of Chinese in Kuala Lumpur [in Malaya, then under British rule]. Newspapers at the time noted that she was dressed in a modern style, had a bob haircut, and spoke fluent English and Malay. The *Straits Times* reported that she was “self-educated against the will of her parents.” She was found to be acquainted with the names of anarchists in China and Chinese anarchist publications.

Wong’s bombing was celebrated in several Chinese anarchist newspapers, one of them calling her “China’s Sophia Perovskaya.” In one Chinese pamphlet about anarchism, the story of her life is told alongside that of Emma Goldman.

Wong was sold to prostitution in Singapore, where she met Mak Peng Cho, a Kuomintang (KMT) branch manager in Penang and member of a Communist Kuomintang Society. She had an on-and-off relationship with Mak and spoke freely about Chinese politics in the presence of him and other men. She moved in and around the same



Kuala Lumpur 1920s

circles as Yat Man, an anarcho-syndicalist and print workers’ unionist.

Wong committed suicide in prison following her arrest. Five years after the bombing, Chinese writer Xu Jie, escaping KMT persecution in Kuala Lumpur, visited her grave. He wrote a short reflection on the anarchist movement in Southeast Asia happening against the backdrop of communist and nationalist movements in China. He praised Wong for her bravery, but rightly polemicised against individual acts of “propaganda by the deed.” He argued strongly for a mass working-class movement.

More of such memories and debates need to be unearthed from Chinese-language sources, especially the anarchist and communist literature that circulated from Shanghai to Malaya. □

# China, climate, and 2030



Environment

By Chris Reynolds

In 2019 China’s greenhouse gas emissions passed the total of the richer countries (OECD and EU) to reach 27% of the world total (USA 11%, India 7%, EU 6%).

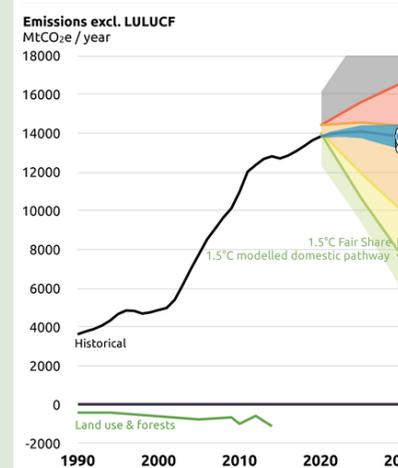
Proportional to population, China’s emissions are still much lower than the USA’s (though now higher than the UK’s). And its historical total emissions are much lower.

To get from here to a world with average temperature rise limited even to 2C, China will have to cut emissions.

For COP26, the UK offers a plan by 2030 to cut emissions to 33% of 2005 levels, and the USA, to cut to 49%. China offers that by 2030 emissions will stop rising.

China is by far the world’s biggest user of coal power. China has pledged to level off use of coal, and to stop funding coal power in other countries through its Belt and Road Initiative.

China has expanded nuclear, wind,



solar, and hydroelectric power faster than fossil-fuel power, so its fossil-fuel percentage of primary energy has gone from 94% in 1995 and 93% in 2011 to 85% today (pledge: 75% by 2030).

The US and UK plans are

inadequate. China’s even more so. The Chinese government knows that China will not escape global warming, and wants to do something. But at as little cost as possible.

The Chinese regime allows no space for an independent labour movement, or environmental movement, or even critically-informed public, to put pressure on it. Though we know that our achievements where we do have that space have been cruelly limited, we must support the underground movements and workers’ battles seeking to win that space in China. □

• Data mostly from [Our World in Data](https://ourworldindata.org/)

# John Deere striker killed

By Angela Paton

On 27 October at 6am (central time, 11am UK time) a striking John Deere agricultural equipment worker, Richard Rich, 56, employed at the company for 15 years, was hit by a vehicle at a poorly lit intersection at the main parts distribution centre in Milan, Illinois, and died of traumatic chest injuries.

Workers have raised the safety issue for some time, but management would not improve lighting. The strike by 10,000 workers is part of the stream of US private-sector strikes dubbed “Striketober”. The apparent accident happened near the car park which strikers at the distribution centre use when picketing.

One striker said that John Deere “have blood on their



hands”. However, a statement released by the United Auto Workers union (UAW) didn’t denounce John Deere or place any responsibility for the striker’s death on the company. This is typical behaviour from the UAW, which has been pushed into the first strike action against the company in 30 years by pressure from workers.

As socialists and trade unionists we must hold the bosses and our own unions to account. Workers should not be dying in this tragic and needless way.

We should call on the UAW to encourage solidarity from unions internationally, including Unite in the UK, and work for vastly improved health and safety across the sector. □



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Péter Márki-Zay

# New anti-Orbán coalition in Hungary

By John Cunningham

The possibility of ousting Central Europe’s “Little Caesar” Viktor Orbán and his Fidesz party is obviously to be welcomed. However, the announcement of a six-party coalition to contest Hungary’s elections coming in April or May 2022 does not inspire much confidence.

The candidate for prime minister chosen by a coalition primary in September-October, Péter Márki-Zay, describes himself as “independent”, a “conservative Catholic”, and was once a manager of a multinational company. His only previous political experience appears to have been winning the mayoralty of Hódmezővásárhely, a sleepy

one-horse town in South-East Hungary. Although polls suggest that the coalition is popular, the same polls show that 23% of potential voters are, so far, undecided. Alongside the usual suspects, liberals, greens and (so-called) socialists the coalition includes the far-right Jobbik party, who in the past have been happy to do the dirty work that Orbán publicly disavows. For the moment, at least, Jobbik have parted ways with Orbán and are working hard trying to look respectable.

What appears to unite the coalition is little more than a gut-hatred of Orbán. This is perfectly understandable, but not the stuff of a successful united political movement. A lot can happen between now and the election. □

# Syria: how Assad defeated the democratic revolt

By Simon Nelson

A bit over ten years since the first protests against the Assad regime broke out in Syria in March 2011, and thanks to the active support of Russia and Iran, Assad has control across the bulk of the country. He controls all six main cities and 12 million people out of an estimated population of 17 million.

At Assad's low point, in spring 2013, he controlled only a fifth of the country.

The majority of the population are living in poverty, with at least 60 percent food insecure. The United Nations World Food Programme reports that food prices increased by 376 percent between October 2019 and February 2021. Syria now also faces a drought with millions at risk of further food shortages. The salary of a state employee is now equivalent to \$20 per month. It was \$400 in March 2011.

## Refugees

6.8 million Syrians are refugees and a further 6.7 million people are displaced within Syria. 11.1 million people in Syria need humanitarian assistance. Probably half a million have been killed.

The Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) and their allies in the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) have small areas in the north. Smaller groups of rebels with little connection to the democratic impulses of 2011, and the remnants of Daesh in Syria, control some territories, mostly in the north west. Turkey controls areas near its border. Russia and Iran effectively control many other bodies.

After the dictator Ben Ali was toppled in Tunisia (14 January 2011), and Mubarak in Egypt (14 February), small protests rippled across Syria in early 2011. In late February fifteen teenagers were arrested in Deraa, and tortured, for scrawling "the people demand the downfall of the regime" on walls across the city. That sparked a series of protests across cities and towns in Syria including in Damascus and Aleppo. Protests were violently suppressed by the regime, but funerals for those shot at the protests in Deraa turned into bigger protests.

By the end of March demonstrations had spread across the country, with a mass non-sectarian movement against Assad. Bashar Assad had ruled Syria since the death of his father Hafez Assad in 2000. Political opposition was strictly controlled. There was a ban on the teaching of the Kurdish language in schools.

Assad did allow the Turkey-based PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party) militia to set up training camps in Syria. Although he owed his survival to aid from the Shia sectarian theocracy in Iran, he professed secularism, allowing religious space to his own Alawite Shia sect, to Christians, and to the Sunni majority, and more latitude for Palestinians in Syria than in other Arab states. After 2011, the Kurds, primarily through the PKK-allied PYD, quickly took control of areas in the north they described as Rojava. The Assad regime left them alone, so most of the Kurds' fighting has been against other rebels and later against Daesh.

## Crushing resistance

Elsewhere it was different. Hafez Assad faced down rebellions in the 1980s with massacres. After 2011 Bashar Assad laid siege to as many strongholds of the rebellion as possible, cutting off their access to food and supplies, shelling them and barrel-bombing from the air, using chemical weapons.

He destroyed the largest Palestinian refugee camp in the world, Yarmouk, because rebels had managed to gain control. More Palestinians have been killed by Assad during the Syrian civil war than have died in the conflicts between Israel and Gaza in the same period.

The ad-hoc militias that had come to control many towns could not withstand the assault. The initiative in battle against Assad slipped to those with outside funding from the Gulf states. Even they could do little without the anti-aircraft weapons denied to them.

Non-sectarian and democratic activists sought to help civilians with medical care. Groups like the White Helmets, were slandered by regime supporters and Russia to suggest they were Al-Qaeda or faking on behalf of the CIA.

In the early days of the uprising, Local Coordinating Committees organised the distribution of food and medicine, and protection in the besieged areas. There were debates and discussion about strategy, with leftist input, particularly on the potential for local councils undermining Assad's state.

The Syrian National Council created the Free Syrian Army (FSA), a mix of ex-regime soldiers, small militias and individual volunteers. It was non-sectarian, but dominated by an Arab chauvinism that excluded Kurdish forces from the beginning.

Turkey played a key role in forming,

funding and providing support for the FSA. Turkey did not want Kurdish regions along its border with Syria to gain autonomy.

Foreign mercenaries and jihadists moved to Syria. Iraqi Shia militias sponsored by Iran, Hezbollah, and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, came to back Assad. Syria became a focus for Shia-Sunni sectarian conflict across the whole region.

The increasing militarisation of the rebellion sped its degeneration. No revolutionary council in a town or suburb of Damascus could compete with the militias funded, equipped, and supplemented by external powers.

## Daesh

Alawites (members of the same Shia sect as Assad) found themselves isolated within the rebellion. Sunni Islamists pushed slogans like the "the people demand jihad" and "the ummah demand an Islamic Caliphate". The culmination was the advance of Daesh from Iraq into Syria, declaring its Caliphate from Raqqa.

The regime claimed to be the only force who could defend the Alawites, Christians, and other minorities, and regained some support on that basis. By 2013 we noted that, "Given the fragmented and increasingly religiously radical nature of the opposition, a victory for the rebels will lead to ethnic cleansing, chaos and warlordism... if the opposition are able to overrun the Baathist state conditions (both for the welfare of ordinary Syrians and for the possibility of progressive struggle) will be made worse, and so we should avoid slogans which lead to this".

The first reaction of Western governments in 2011 was to wait. It took several months for US president Obama to call for Assad to go. Hillary Clinton, then Secretary of State, declared Assad to be himself a reformer!

Daesh's rapid advance, with massacres and enslavement of Yazidi women and children pushed the US, in September 2014, to begin a bombing campaign targeted at Daesh and promise to provide military support to militias who would concentrate on fighting Daesh and not the regime. In practice that meant the Kurdish-led SDF (Syrian Democratic Forces).

When Daesh besieged the Kurdish-held city of Kobani, in northern Syria, from July 2014, Kurdish groups and supporters across the world called for support and arms for the YPG (Peo-

ple's Protection Units), the military wing of the PYD. In January 2015 the YPG successfully drove back Daesh from Kobani; the YPG subsequently came to control large stretches of Northern Syria, running prison camps of Daesh members and their families. In 2018-19, the Turkish army and allied Syrian militias drove the YPG further from Turkey's borders. Turkey now controls much of the border areas. It now looks unlikely that the 900 US troops stationed in north east Syria will leave any time soon.

To gain control of most of Syria, Assad counted on Iranian-backed militias and on Russian airstrikes and support from Russian troops. From 2015 a shift to Assad occurred, thanks to the Russian military aid. Russia bombed Raqqa and other Daesh-held areas, but also civilians in rebel-held areas. Iran, Russia, or Turkey control almost all Syria's borders. Russia has a major naval base in the port of Tartus, which it has leased from the Syrian regime and is expanding both for military and commercial use, and operates a sizable airbase near Latakia. Sroytransgaz, a Russian company linked to a Kremlin-supporting oligarch, has been granted 70 percent of all revenues from phosphate production and control of the Tartus port for the next 50 years. Syria has one of the largest deposits in the world of phosphates (key ingredients for fertilisers).

Syrian writer Leila al-Shami describes parts of Syria now as under Iranian occupation. Iran wants ties with Syria, as with Iraq, to build its "axis of resistance" against the USA and Israel. Iranian companies hold contracts for large infrastructure and reconstruction projects.

The Gulf states were some of the first to call for Assad to go and were early funders of the anti-Assad groups, but now seek to do deals with Assad. The Gulf states can provide finance and economic support for further Syrian reconstruction and hope to use that influence to push the Iranian militias out.

"Caesar Act 2019" sanctions by the US are still hitting the Assad regime. Previous rounds of sanctions targeted figures in the regime and military, but the Caesar Act hits businesses within Syria and limits trade. The regime, however, remains on its feet. It staged a presidential re-election in May 2021, reporting 95% of the vote for Assad, and more votes than there are voters in government-controlled areas of the country. □

# Justice for the 37 jailed

By Eddie Marnell

Eddie Marnell was one of the workers jailed for taking part in an occupation to stop job cuts at the Cammell Laird shipyard in Birkenhead in 1984. On 20 October he spoke at a Workers' Liberty meeting in Liverpool to promote our [pamphlet](#) about the occupation, alongside its author John Cunningham and local Unite organiser Ross Quinn. Ross spoke about more recent struggles at Cammell Laird, including a largely successful strike against job cuts in 2018.

The first thing to say is that 37 men went to jail because of the occupation. Others were sacked for supporting it – one of them is here in the audience. He was one of two apprentices who got sacked. 12 of the 37 have since died, and I have vowed to keep up the fight not only to support the families of those who are living, but the families of those who have died.

The first information we had of something going in British Shipbuilders [the then-nationalised shipbuilding industry] was around Christmas 1983. In 1984 the rumours got busy. In January 1984 Hansard stated: "Liverpool as part of a shipbuilding closure area will qualify for ninety six million pounds of European aid". Well, the only shipbuilder in the area was Cammell Laird.

Several days after that, we went for a CSEU [Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions] conference in Newcastle. Myself, Billy Albertina and a few other stewards from the boilermaker side were sitting in the hotel, and on the telly a local MP comes on. He says Cammell Laird and Austin &



A march in solidarity with the 37 jailed

Pickersgill [in the North East], the jewels in the crown of Shipbuilders, are going to be sold off. We had a meeting with British Shipbuilders the next day and we put that to them. They completely denied it.

In May the first redundancies were issued. Over 50% of workers at Cammell Laird were threatened with redundancy. The boilermakers immediately had a meeting. The boilermakers' committee would be decimated, because out of 16 people, there were something like nine on the redundancy list.

We decided to take action, to picket both the Type 42 frigate [a Royal Navy ship] and a jackup accommodation rig [built for the oil industry]. Initially we just picketed, and we gave management access for care and maintenance, but we soon found out that was being abused. It was then we decided to occupy both the frigate and the jackup rig. First we occupied the rig [on 28 June]. In terms of the frigate, we allowed all military personnel on board, but then we learnt that scab stewards from the yard had gone onboard it with management people and taken it over. I went over with a team of very handy lads; we went on board, and on the quarterdeck I was met by these stewards and management standing together.

I used, shall I say, unceremonious language to the stewards and told them to get off. They refused. The other lads and I started undoing the gangway. I then went on the intercom and said, in the words of a Navy commander: "Now hear this... Now hear this... all person-

nel ashore now". Next minute the actual Navy commander comes up from down below. I knew him quite well from working on the ship. He says, "Eddie, what's going on?" I explained and he went over and told the stewards to leave, also in very unceremonious language!

The management was abusing the right we gave for care and maintenance of the ship, so we went back to the committee and decided to occupy. [The frigate was occupied on 3 July.]

We allowed naval contract work on the Type 42. On the rig we allowed no maintenance work whatsoever. In the words of management, we made it impregnable. On the accommodation side of it we jammed off all the stairways, leading from the main deck up to the wheelhouse deck. On the wheelhouse, we had heavy metal shutters down on the wheelhouse windows. We locked all internal doors, and we lifted the planks on the helicopter deck. The reason for that was that we were getting buzzed by a police helicopter all the time, so we knew they meant business.

The occupation went on for quite a while. They brought in the police, they were all over the yard. However we were allowed to come and go as we pleased, even though we'd been issued with summons after summons telling us to leave the yard. Of course we ignored all that.

We worked with Birkenhead Unemployed Centre, and it was there that we were approached by an ITN [ITV news] crew, two young women, Jackie Ashley, and Jane Corbin, who is now a well-

known producer in the Middle East. They asked us would it be possible to get onboard the rig. I said are you sure you want to, and they said yes. So we arranged for them to meet us at three in the morning. At three in the morning, a team of men with ladders went down to the perimeter wall, put them up and we assisted these two young women and a full camera crew to get over into the yard and up onto the rig, and they began filming.

On ITN that morning it said: "... and we will now be going over to Cammell

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## How to fight elections

The story of Labour's socialist campaign in Wallasey, 1987



The story of Labour's election campaign in Wallasey, in 1987, when sacked Lairds worker Lol Duffy came within 300 votes of unseating Tory minister Linda Chalker. □

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# ed for fighting for jobs!

Lairds yard, we will be filming from on-board the rig today". We saw management and police running all over the place like scared cats because there was a camera crew there. When the crew left, and had to go down the ladders, the girls got down no problem, but we had problem getting the men down and actually had to carry them.

The next day we saw all these vans roll up next to the construction hall, and out of them came soldiers. They went into the shop, erected scaffolding similar to that on the rig, and left the doors open so we could see people scaling up and down it in the shop. The only thing that resembled was the Balcombe Street siege [involving IRA members in 1975], when the SAS had come in. From then on, they were there alongside the police.

Still, we wouldn't be moved. It didn't scare us! What was a problem was that they turned the lights off, turned the electricity off, and the water became an issue. The electricity we got around by robbing virtually every battery in the yard and making our own electricity. We couldn't do anything about the water. We couldn't get off the rig because it was surrounded by police and we knew the SAS were on board. Some people may think that's not possible, but I can assure you, later in life, I found out the name of those SAS members.

Now we faced the situation of either staying on board with no water or giving ourselves up. We had a vote and it was very close. It was something like 15 to 12 to walk off, so that's what we did. But prior to walking off, Bill Albertina was on the main deck, and he was talking to someone on the wharf. Billy got

me on the radio and said come down here. So I went down and there was this fella on the wharf, and he looked just like Jack Charlton with the hair and the black cromby. He said: "Are you Mr Marnell?" I said yeah. He said: "I'm going to take this rig and the Type 42 today". I said "Are you, mate, good luck!" He said: "Well I'm telling you. Some of my men may die. But so may some of yours".

A lot of people came to gawp from all around the yard. The first thing we insisted on was get them out of the way. The only people in front of us were the police and a load of police vans. When we came off were handcuffed individually to a copper and taken individually to a van. We were taken directly to Birkenhead Bridewell [police station], where we were processed. And from there directly to Walton jail. We were put in I Wing, the top security wing.

We were locked up 23 hours a day. We got out one hour a day to walk round the dartboard, as I used to call it. It looked like a concrete dartboard. You just went round there, walked round and had a bit of chat. Anyway, in the corner, there was a toilet, a brick building. One day I went and heard from a fella "Cammell Laird bastards..." Now you'll remember, there was murderers in there. I went out to the yard and said to the lads, be careful, something's going down. Nothing happened.

But the next day the fella from the previous day, about six foot seven and built like a brick shithouse, came up to me and apologised. I asked what was going on. He told us one of the wardens had said we had pickets outside, stopping visitors coming in. When you



Eddie Marnell (left) and Billy Albertina

consider you had lifers in there, imagine their feelings towards us. That was done by the wardens in there.

There were four Albertina brothers inside, and an uncle, and they lost their mother. They were allowed out for a funeral. We had a meeting prior to this and we said, look, don't come back. The reason is we'd been approached the previous Sunday by the attorney general [Michael Havers]. He said we could sign the release forms right now, if we apologised, and we'd be out! We were in the chapel and someone started singing "Faith of our fathers", and the next minute we were all singing, and he stormed out...

We were taken back to our cells and believe it or not, he came down to every cell. At each cell one was taken out while he went in and spoke with the other one, and offered the chance to apologise and be released immediately. All 37 told him to do one! They knew we were not going to admit we'd done wrong.

The wardens were constantly trying to wind us up.

One day I had a visit. They said, go into the holding area before you go into the visitors' centre. Then the bells were ringing! They threw me in one of the holding cells and kept me there for about an hour. I was taken out and taken back to my cell, missing my visit with my wife and two kids. I said to one of the wardens who was alright, what was that about. He said I'd been mistaken for a murderer on the other landing. I said: "You're joking aren't you, he's ugly!" That's the sort of thing they'd do. Some were alright but most weren't.

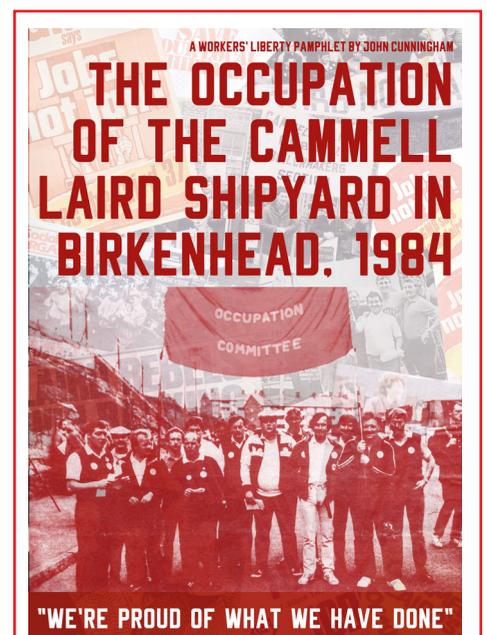
Since I got out, from that day to this, I've kept up a fight. I'm a branch secretary in the [GMB \[union\]](#), so I feel ok to write to whoever I want to. I've written under the Freedom Information Act to every conceivable body. I keep getting told no information available.



I applaud the Shrewsbury pickets getting their judicial review, and I actually think we've got an even stronger case. First of all, we never got properly tried. We went straight to jail, and were tried in absentia. Also we were picketing our own place of work.

In 2014 I went to the European parliament [their committee on petitions] and got their backing. They said the British government should apologise and look to reimburse us for the loss of wages and pensions and what have you. Here we are in 2021 and still no apology, let alone anything else. What else do you expect with the clown we've got [Boris Johnson]? I will keep on fighting. We in Liverpool are not renowned for giving up, and I certainly won't be! □

• Lightly edited from the speech transcript



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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# The early life of Paul Frölich

By Paul Hampton

Paul Frölich deserves to be better known. He is chiefly credited for his valuable 1928 biography of Rosa Luxemburg. However Frölich was a significant figure on the German revolutionary left in his own right. A recent book, Paul Frölich, *In the Radical Camp: A Political Autobiography 1890-1921*, edited and introduced by Reiner Tossorff, provides a window into his life. The book deserves the attention of contemporary socialists.

Paul Frölich was born in Leipzig on 7 August 1884. Both his parents were active in the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD), which was illegal at the time Frölich was born. Frölich joined the SPD in 1902, when it had 300,000 members and 30% of the vote. Leipzig was a bastion of the SPD and Frölich's political apprenticeship came through the local SPD newspaper, *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, aligned with the party's radical left. He went to work on the *Hamburger Echo*, another local SPD paper, in October 1910, and in May 1914 joined the editorial team of the *Bremer Bürgerzeitung*.

Frölich was one of the leaders of the anti-war left in the German workers' movement during the First World War. In Bremen, Frölich belonged to the *Linksradikale* (left radicals). Interrupted by military service from September 1914 to autumn 1915 and again from July 1916, he was co-founder of the weekly *Arbeiterpolitik* that first appeared in June 1916. At the end of April 1916, he attended the international socialist anti-war conference in Kiental, Switzerland.

The left radicals were initially a loose, informal combination. It was only on

the eve of the November 1918 revolution that they formed the Internationale Kommunisten Deutschlands (IKD). At the end of 1918, the IKD and the Spartacus League united to form the Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (KPD). Frölich was elected to the central committee.

Frölich was active in the Munich Soviet Republic in April-May 1919, writing an account of its activities. He was a leader of the KPD during the Kapp Putsch in March 1920, the unification with the USPD in December 1920 and the March Action in 1921. Frölich was a KPD Reichstag deputy from February 1921 to April 1924. He was re-elected to the Reichstag for the KPD in 1928, serving until September 1930.

In 1928-29, Frölich was expelled from the KPD and subsequently took part in founding the Kommunistische Partei-Opposition (KPO). In 1931, the SPD expelled six Reichstag deputies for their refusal to "tolerate" the Brüning government. The Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei (SAP) was formed. In 1932, Frölich led a minority of a thousand KPO members, a third of the organisation, who went over to the SAP. Hitler's rise to power saw Frölich sent to a concentration camp. In December 1933, he was released, fleeing to Czechoslovakia and then Paris.

## Exile

In exile the SAP published the newspaper *Neue Front* and the theoretical journal *Marxistische Tribune*. The SAP initially shared Trotsky's position to found a new, Fourth International, but soon turned away towards "broader" forces. The SAP increasingly divided over its assessment of Stalinism. Walcher supported the "critical defence" of the USSR, while Frölich became increasingly opposed.

During and after the Second World War, Frölich faced many difficulties, reaching the USA in 1941, where he lived until his return to Germany in 1950. He died on 16 March 1953 in Frankfurt.

This book consists of an authoritative introduction on Frölich's life, along with the manuscript of his autobiography, covering his life until 1921. The autobiography was written in the late 1930s at the behest of the International Institute for Social History. However the manuscript was lost until 2007, when it was discovered during some clearing work. The English text is abridged from the German version published in 2013.

As Tossorff points out, the biography seems particularly obtuse because Frölich says nothing about his private life. Readers learn nothing about his first wife, with whom he had three children. Nor does he discuss Rosi Wolfstein, who shared his political life from



the 1920s until his death. Nevertheless this is a valuable book with much to offer modern socialists.

The chief merit of Frölich's autobiography is his honest assessments of some key episodes during this crucial period. Probably the biggest revelation is that within the Leipzig SPD, the old illegal organisation continued to exist after the end of the anti-socialist law in 1890. This was known as the "Corpora", the "inner organisation" or "internal". Although co-opted into the Corpora in 1906-07, Frölich argued to replace it with an elected membership. This was rejected.

The culture of the SPD left was poetically summed up by the epithet on Bruno Schoenlank's grave, probably selected by Rosa Luxemburg:

Regret I did not enter into battle  
With sharper blows and with far greater zeal,  
Regret that only one time I was banished  
Regret that often I knew human fears,  
Regret the day I struck no wounding blow,  
Regret the hour when I no armour wore,  
And, overcome now with remorse, regret  
That I was not three times more keen and bold.

Frölich is self-critical about the attitude of the left radicals towards the formation of the USPD, which held its founding congress in Gotha on 6-8 April 1917. The Spartacus League joined, preserving their own organisation, independence of propaganda and the right to their own actions. The left radical tendency rejected adherence to the USPD, preferring complete independence.

Frölich concluded that the Spartacists were "certainly correct to make use of such a favourable situation". The left radicals were influenced by the particular situation in Bremen. However, "the general conditions in Germany should have been the deciding factor, and not the exceptional case. The left radical tactic was therefore wrong".

Frölich also criticises the position he took at the founding congress of the KPD, where he propagated the "unitary organisation", of combining trade

union and party in one organisation. Frölich concluded that "the idea was wrong, as it failed to consider the essential difference between the party as an organisation of convinced socialists and the trade union as a class organ... In the course of 1919 I was forced to realise that the idea was wrong and unattainable. It also turned out to contain syndicalism and was already wrong on this count, since all its champions recognised the primacy of politics".

## KPD

He also came to criticise the KPD's attempted seizure of power in January 1919. During the battles, Radek wrote a letter to the party leadership, calling for the immediate suspension of a struggle that could not be won. Radek advised that "Nothing prevents a weaker party from retreating before a superior force". However Luxemburg read the letter with great displeasure and cried out: "We do not need this advice. The struggle will continue". Frölich favoured Radek's position.

After the murders of Luxemburg, Liebknecht, Jogiches and others, Paul Levi took over as KPD leader. Further defeats in Munich and elsewhere, plus the threat from the left, put the KPD in a perilous position before its Heidelberg congress in October 1919.

Levi enforced an "ultimatum", in the power struggle for the leadership of the party against the "left communists". Frölich accepted that Fritz Wolffheim was "an unscrupulous demagogue", and Heinrich Laufenberg "a political intriguer". Both "did indeed pose a danger to the party". Nevertheless Frölich lamented the loss of members and the damage to the central committee's authority.

The Halle USPD congress in December 1920 decided to unify the party with the KPD. Frölich reported "an atmosphere of great enthusiasm", in which Zinoviev's speech made "a tremendous impression". The right wing around Hilferding refused to go with the majority decision, soon rejoining the SPD.

Frölich pointed to the early bureaucratisation of the unified KPD:

"Until then our life had been pervaded by a Spartan spirit. We scarcely felt needs, as we had no time to indulge in them. There had never been more money than for the strictest necessities. The USPD people came with different ideas of life and different habits. To go some way to meeting their expectations, salaries were immediately doubled..."

"Now a daily expenses allowance was introduced, which to us seemed scandalous even if it was still far below those

continued →



Women's Fightback Issue 26, is out now. Included articles on protecting women beyond policing, sex positive feminism, solidarity with Afghan women and more.

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# The counter-revolution has been televised

By **Barrie Hardy**

I have never been a fan of Halloween horror movies like *Nightmare On Elm Street* and would rather watch anything else when 31 October comes around. However, this year I sat through *Four Hours at the Capitol*, a documentary account of the 6 January assault on the United States Congress which provided far scarier viewing than anything Freddie Kruger come up with.

The film graphically documents the attempt to overthrow a democratically elected government by storming the building holding its legislative branch. A misguided belief that such an event could never happen in the USA provides a partial explanation as to why the building was so poorly defended by the Capitol police, who weren't expecting an invasion by thousands of Trump supporters.

We will never know how many of the assailants were armed, but some certainly had guns, knives and various gas and pepper sprays, plus of course a noose for VP Mike Pence. Pitchforks were apparently also present - a nice reminder of what those superstitious outraged villagers wielded in various Frankenstein movies.

Some participants were straight out of freak show central casting. There was a pot head who boasted he smoked weed in the Rotunda and naturally shared this remarkable feat on line, earning 6.7 million hits. He was convinced that 800,000 children had been kidnapped to be used as sex slaves.

The QAnon Shaman also put in an appearance, declaring Donald Trump "anointed by god." We were also

treated to a representative of Cowboys for Trump. He was all in favour of capital punishment and hard labour, but didn't like his own treatment in prison, because he was denied the opportunity of taking a shower. Another participant chanted "Free the People!", but precisely from what it was impossible to ascertain.

And then there was the blatantly fascist outfit styling themselves "The Proud Boys". They had come organised for the occasion, as had many other far right racist and fascist groupuscules. Whether or not their efforts were co-ordinated or connected with Trump personally has yet to be determined, although Steve Bannon's refusal to testify on the matter, putting him in danger of another jail term, suggests a strong likelihood.

The whole day started with a rally at which Trump fired up his supporters "to be wild" and "fight like hell," telling them "walk down and I'll be with you at the Capitol." Trump didn't know exactly how things would turn out, but it was certainly one of a few stratagems to be used to hold on to power. When buses turned up to take away besieged legislators, they refused to go. They feared that would mean handing over the building to the insurrectionists, enabling Trump to declare martial law and invalidate the election.

Numerous questions still arise concerning the events of 6 January and Trump's personal role in it. The Republican Party is doing its best to stymie questions and minimise the importance of the event. Many continue to propagate the lie that the election was fraudulently stolen from Trump.

Darker days are indeed ahead. Trump



has elevated Ashli Babbitt, the woman shot at the Capitol, to heroine status. Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene has encouraged talk of civil war. The judge in the Kyle Rittenhouse case - he shot dead two demonstrators using an illegally held firearm - has said the defence can call them rioters and arsonists, but his victims can't be called "victims"! Election officials in numerous states have been trolled and issued death threats if they dare again

to claim a Trump election defeat can happen other than by fraud.

Disappointment at the Biden government's failure to do anything much for the working class could see a return of a Republican administration. This time it is unlikely to be a return to "normal", but instead lead to the entrenchment of a right wing racist authoritarian regime. □

• *Four Hours at the Capitol* is available to view on BBC iPlayer

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→ paid by the SPD and the trade-union leaderships. Each party brought with it its staff of employees, and although the administration was simplified, we could not bring ourselves to decide on dismissals. This led to an inflation of the apparatus. This was encouraged still more so by Moscow, as only the Comintern subsidies made all these measures possible."

The March Action was the failed uprising led by KPD and other organisations in 1921. Frölich supported the action at the time and his account contains some justification for it. However his balance sheet accepted the mistake:

"All the same, we overestimated the tensions, did not see the inhibiting factors, and particularly failed to recognise the possibility of a compromise in foreign policy... I failed to recognise as a general strategic lesson the necessity of a retreat or escape in a dangerous situation; this would only be brought home to me under the pressure of very harsh facts in the particular case..."

"It was only much later that I under-

stood that it was wrong to conduct a vanguard struggle in a bad position and with an unfavourable balance of forces for a decisive battle. Further, that it is impossible to apply suitable tactical formulas for all cases, one must rather depend in each situation on a correct view, instinct and intuition."

### Pen-portraits

Frölich provides some very sharp pen-portraits of key socialists he worked with over these years. Franz Mehring was "exquisitely sensitive. A misunderstanding could lead to a proven friendship being broken. The rapier was always ready at hand". Paul Lensch was "a very talented journalist", but he was "a bulldog, broad-shouldered and broad-legged, biting, reckless and insensitive. His style was not that of a fencer but of a butcher... a talented insulter".

Leo Jogiches aroused "strong prejudices", yet won respect:

"His dedication to the cause was boundless, his capacity for work amaz-

ing. The whole person was pure will. The discipline he had imposed on himself made his face an iron mask. He never let his feelings show. He was hard on people... Jogiches had just one response to my explanations: 'The day has twenty-four hours'... In Leo's time, the word 'duty' was written on the central committee in capital letters... His instructions, criticism and objections gave the sense of how seriously he had himself thought through every detail. He was a large-scale organiser and the only objection that could be made to his manner was that he took everything too much on himself."

Frölich is scathing about Paul Levi's leadership of the KPD between 1919 and 1921:

"Paul Levi's personality allows us to understand how deeply the particular qualities of a party leader can help to determine the fate of a party, particularly in times of turbulence... [He] contributed extraordinary intellectual gifts as a party leader: an extremely ready penetration of complex events, a view for political realities, rejection

of romantic illusions, activity, personal courage, tremendous oratorical and literary talent...

"As the number one, he was a failure. His political habitus was too one-sidedly intellectual. He lacked the inner connection with the masses, with people in general. He did not have the patience to understand people, convince them and win them over..."

"Paul Levi did not belong to the 'family'. He stood apart. His connections with the others were only for party business... He had conflicts with many of his assistants, the causes of which are hard to understand... He treated people that he had something against with deliberate brutality, and this was how matters were dealt with. There was no collegial common work with him on the central committee... He did not feel the need to convince, to win people for his opinion... If he came up against resistance, then he answered with blows of the whip, arrogantly, scornfully, injuriously, in a way that took away from the others the desire to debate further..." □

# Kathleen Stock resigns

By a UCU activist

Kathleen Stock, a professor of philosophy widely criticised for her role as a trustee of the LGB Alliance (which plays a pernicious role in undermining inclusive LGBT+ campaigns) and for her support for so-called “sex-based rights” for women that exclude trans women, has quit her job at Sussex University. Despite public backing from University management, and from Universities Minister Michelle Donelan, she claimed that she had been forced out. Donelan has called explicitly for another university to give Stock a job. Stock is clearly positioning herself as a “free speech martyr”, despite the fact that her resignation is her choice.

It is not surprising that the government is defending Stock. The Tories see



this case as a way to wage their culture war. They want to claim that opponents of trans rights are the real victims. In fact their cuts to services mean many trans people cannot get vital healthcare unless they pay to go private.

The Stock case has been widely portrayed in the media as a freedom of speech issue, but Stock’s freedom of expression was far better defended by both government and management

than that of her student critics. Freedom of speech is not for one side alone: we support students’ right to protest even when we oppose their demands. Allegations that some of Stock’s opponents have engaged in threatening behaviour are not an excuse to clamp down on protest generally.

While there has been no sacking here, in general, *Solidarity* opposes dismissal of academics for political views. Allowing such sackings opens the way to their use against critics of the government like us. Discriminatory or harassing behaviour that can (but doesn’t necessarily) follow from political views may be grounds for sacking after due process and where mitigation without further harm to victims is impossible. In all such cases we call for independent and transparent

processes to deal with allegations of misconduct. □

Workers' Liberty 3/61, *Gender: the Right to Choose* sets out the socialist case for trans rights. [workersliberty.org/gender-right-to-choose](http://workersliberty.org/gender-right-to-choose)

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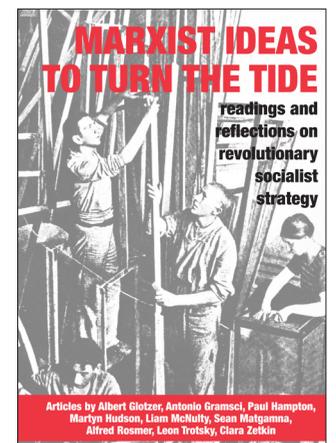
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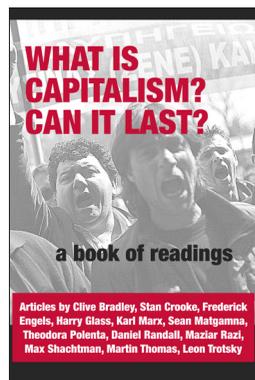
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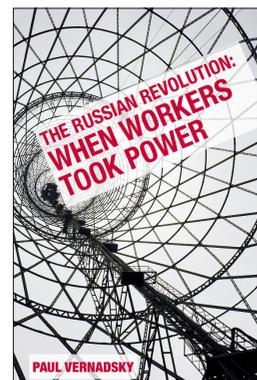
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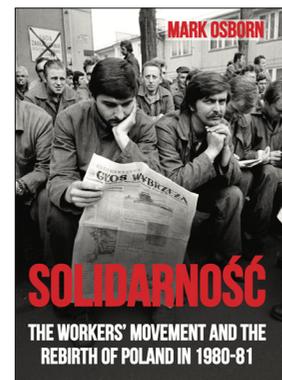
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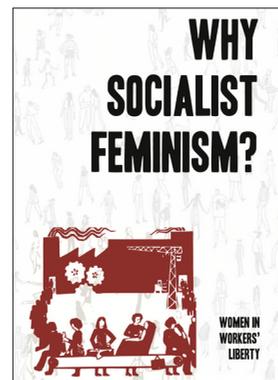
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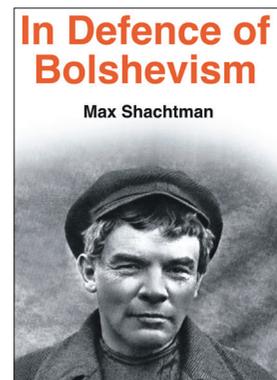
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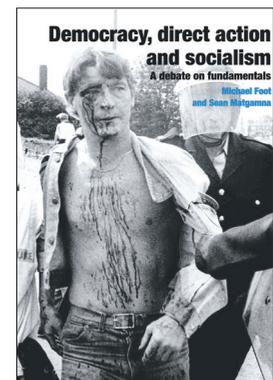
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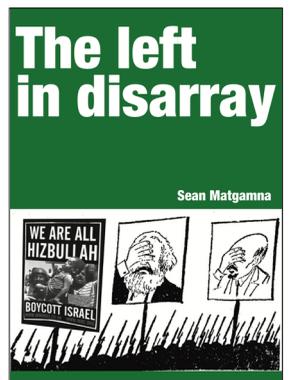
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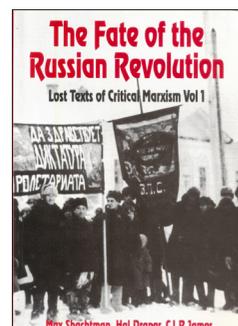
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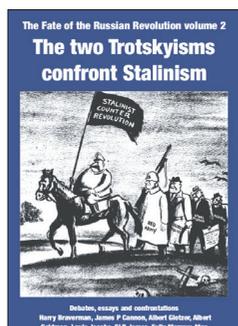
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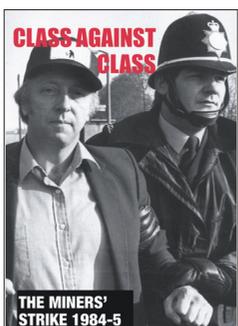
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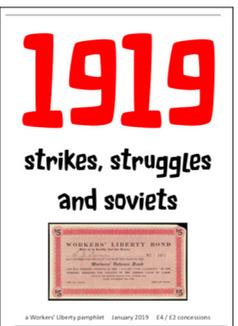
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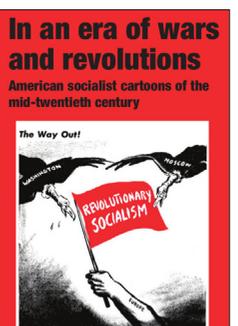
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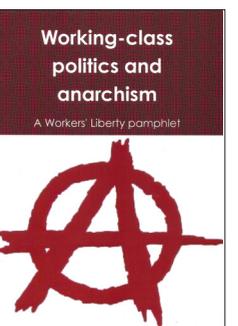
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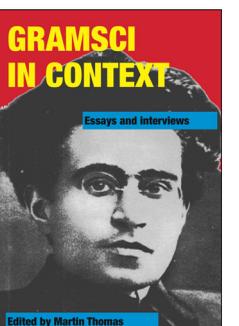
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# Mixed picture at RMT AGM

By Daniel Randall

Daniel Randall was a delegate to the recent AGM of the RMT rail union. He reports here in a personal capacity.

The annual general meeting of the National Union of Rail, Maritime, and Transport workers (RMT) took place in Leeds from 24-29 October. The AGM had held-over business from the truncated 2020 AGM, which took place online, as well the 2021 business. It took place against the backdrop of threats including big job cuts in Network Rail, a pay freeze across the rail industry, and cuts on Transport for London.

Recent officer elections in the union have seen the Broad Left alliance between Stalinists, primarily supporters of the Communist Party of Britain and *Morning Star*, and "Old Labour" types, consolidate its power. Broad-Left-backed Mick Lynch became the general secretary in May, and on 25 October Eddie Dempsey was announced as narrowly beating Alan Pottage for assistant general secretary, by around 600 votes on a turnout of 14%. Politically, Dempsey is a Stalinist, as well as an outspoken critic of "woke liberal identity politics".

The AGM, however, did not suggest a drift to the right. It endorsed a broad swathe of radical policy – some backed by the top table, but some passed against top table recommendations.

The conference reaffirmed the RMT's commitment to opposing all anti-union laws, and its support for the Free Our Unions campaign. The motions passed, which were submitted by branches including my own, also included a commitment to adopt a policy of non-compliance should new laws requiring minimum service levels during transport workers' strikes be passed.

## Green New Deal

On climate change, a radical motion proposing a "Socialist Green New Deal" had been rejected in 2019, on the basis that its call for an end to fossil fuel extraction would lead to RMT members working in the offshore energy sector losing their jobs, despite the motion explicitly committing the union to a worker-led just transition approach. This year, a similar motion was overwhelmingly carried, and a motion calling on the union to support an expansion of jobs in methane gas extraction was rejected.

On officers' pay, whereas the 2019 conference had overwhelmingly rejected a motion supporting the principle of "workers' representatives on workers' wages", the 2021 AGM overwhelmingly endorsed a proposal to reduce the general secretary and assistant general secretary salaries by 20%

and 10% respectively. To his credit, this proposal originated with Mick Lynch himself. The proposal acknowledged the pressure that had built up in the union around the issue, with a number of candidates in elections committing not to take the full salary if elected. While individual officers in other unions have enacted similar pledges, the RMT's decision makes it the first TUC-affiliated union to move at AGM level on the problem of excessively high pay for union officers. Workers' Liberty supporters have been central to this argument within RMT over a number of years.

## China

In a debate on China, Alex Gordon, secretary of RMT's Paddington No. 1 branch and a member of the Communist Party of Britain's Political Committee, moved a motion proposing the union support the "No Cold War" campaign, and organise a delegation to China to meet union representatives. I opposed the motion, arguing that rallies for the "No Cold War" campaign had seen speakers whitewash (or "red-wash") the Chinese state, and that any delegation to China that met with "official" trade unions would be a similar exercise in whitewashing, given that independent unions are illegal and the "official" union federation is an arm of the state.

Despite Gordon describing my assessment of the "No Cold War" campaign as a "dirty smear", the conference voted down the motion. It then overwhelmingly carried a motion from my own branch opposing China's repression of the Uyghur people and resolving to support the work of the Uyghur Solidarity Campaign, whilst also condemning anti-Chinese bigotry and militarist posturing towards China.

The AGM also endorsed a motion marking the centenary of the Poplar Rates Rebellion, and agreed to support the "Poplar100" committee in its memorial activities.

The AGM passed numerous appeals against NEC decisions, particularly on their failures to properly act on and carry out motions from the union's Disabled Members' Advisory Committee. This committee has only existed for four years, after the 2015 AGM overturned years of opposition from the union's leadership. Since then, it has developed and organised in a very positive way, but faced repeated obstruction from the previous general secretary and NEC. Winning these appeals will mean that the committee will be able to step up campaigning against discrimination and for accessible, mentally-healthy workplaces. It also gives a strong message to the national leader-

ship to work with the union's equalities committees, not against them. Many delegates spoke in debates about the need to tackle inequality and improve diversity within the union's leadership, but unfortunately, the agenda lacked the proposals needed to do this.

Proposals for structural change supported by the general secretary and the Broad Left were rejected overwhelmingly. On the surface the proposals seemed positive, purporting to reorganise the union along more industrial lines and create reserved seats for equalities groups, both aims Workers' Liberty members in RMT have backed for some time. But they propose only to create two reserved seats, for women and BEM members, excluding the LGBT+ and disabled members' equality structures. They were also made without any prior consultation with the elected equalities committees. They rule out in advance any expansion in the size of the full-time, lay NEC, so any additional NEC seats would be part-time only.

## Status quo

Yet the status quo - with unrepresentative regional constituencies and an overwhelmingly white, male leadership - is indefensible. Workers' Liberty members active in RMT will seek to work with other activists to develop alternative proposals for reform.

As the highest governing body of the union, the AGM assumes the full powers of the NEC for the week it sits, and therefore makes all decisions about industrial action and disputes. So it was the AGM that voted to reject an unsatisfactory settlement in RMT members' dispute with ScotRail, where workers have undertaken weeks of strikes.

The offer was based on a two-year deal with a £300 bonus for working during COP26, improved rest day arrangements, but with a tranche of productivity strings in the second year. The lead officer supported putting the offer to a referendum, and the general secretary emphasised the lead officer's assessment, but the AGM followed the lead of rank-and-file ScotRail reps at the AGM who said unanimously that it was so clearly unacceptable that it should be rejected outright.

The following day, a new offer was tabled, including a 2.5% pay increase and removing the second year and productivity strings, which the ScotRail reps then urged delegates to accept. Although it is perhaps unfortunate that the union gave up the leverage that strikes planned during COP (1-12 November) would have given workers, it was right that the AGM took its lead from the ScotRail reps themselves.

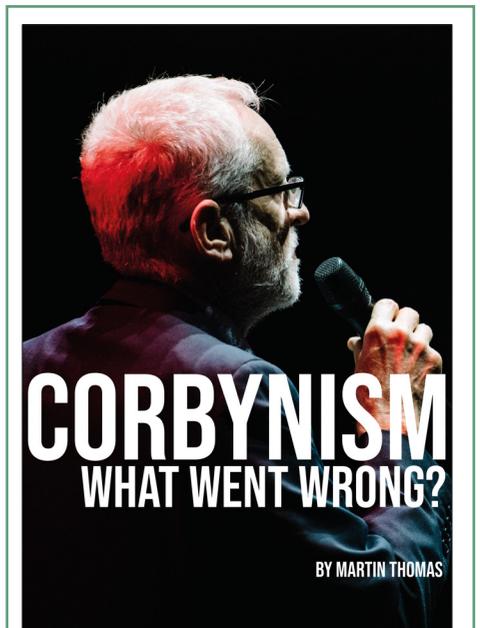
Unfortunately, the conference ended

early on its last day when head office staff, present to provide administrative support to the conference, held a walk-out. This was in response to the AGM upholding an appeal against an NEC decision regarding a protest at the union's head office, following the RMT's Union Learning Rep coordinator being made compulsorily redundant. The protest presented itself as a picket line, and some staff felt that by overturning the NEC's decision to condemn aspects of the protest, the AGM was collectively denouncing staff who worked despite the protest as "scabs".

Although I voted for the appeal, I did so because the NEC decision included the reopening of a disciplinary process against the dismissed ULR coordinator, who had subsequently been reinstated. It was certainly not my intention, nor the intention of any other delegate I spoke to, to condemn other union staff.

Subsequently, accounts of the events appeared in the press, including the BBC, *Morning Star*, and Union News UK, which presented a misleading and inaccurate account of events, and included references to an "extremist faction" within the union. At the time of writing, the strike has ended, but the dispute with union staff is still ongoing, although it is unclear what its demands are. Arrangements need to be made swiftly to ensure the AGM can reconvene to conclude its business.

We need an independent rank-and-file left, constituted not merely as an electoral network but as a body that seeks the radical transformation of the union – both to push back any rightwards drift, and to accelerate the more radical trends suggested by the policy outcomes of the AGM. □



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# Firefighter interrupted: a typical day



## Diary of a firefighter

By Adrian Noble

Our days follow the same underlying structure. Arrive, tea, roll call, assignment of daily duties. Test breathing apparatus set, complete inventory checks and routine equipment tests. Breakfast. Drills, training, "stand easy" (lunch). Tea. External duties: hydrant tests, community outreach events, fitting smoke alarms, visiting local risks, inspecting the waking watches of clad buildings. Tea. Dinner, tea, wait for change of watch, home.

Of course, it's rarely that simple. Today was busy, but not unusually so in terms of numbers of shouts (although wearing BA [Breathing Apparatus] is not an everyday occurrence by any stretch). Sometimes you're so busy that it feels like the emergencies are getting in the way of your work, rather than the point of the routine stuff being to ensure your effectiveness at emergencies. Whether drilling with the 135 ladder or about to have that first bite of lasagne, when the bells go down, it goes out the window.

9:40AM: person threatening suicide behind locked door. A patient at a nearby mental health facility has locked herself in her room and her doctors have called us to help them gain entry. We discuss options: breaking the door window to access the internal handle is easiest, but she could use the glass to harm herself before we can stop her. Entry via brute force could escalate the situation.

After discussing the risks with the

doctors, we use a forced entry tool to ease the door from the frame and pop the lock. We head back to complete inventories.

10:42AM: flooding. Water is dripping from an upstairs flat into the one below through a light fitting. We find the leak, turn off the flat's water supply and isolate the downstairs flat's electrics.

11:56AM: automatic fire alarm (AFA). An alarm has gone off in a nearby supermarket. We find the actuated detector head, search the area using a thermal imaging camera, no sign of smoke or fire. We silence and reset the alarm panel.

12:42PM: person locked in a bathroom. We slip the lock and remove the mechanism from the door frame to stop it re-locking someone in.

12:55PM: on the way back to station, another AFA, this time in a large high rise. Lunch when we get back, inhaling it out of fear of not getting through it before being called out again.

1:34PM: another AFA (spot the trend) at a high rise. LFB [London Fire Brigade] mobilise five fire engines, a fire and rescue unit and an arial appliance to every high rise AFA, so we go to a lot of them. We check in on the waking watches of two clad buildings and start testing hydrants before being interrupted.

2:56PM: fire, in a high rise around the corner from the station. It's clear on arrival that we've got something. I'm down to wear BA today so my partner and I rig, taking a high rise firefighting grab bag and lengths of hose in, establishing a bridgehead two floors below the fire floor. We get under air, book into entry control and set into the dry riser one floor up, the driver having charged the riser from the appliance.

It's a small kitchen fire which we put out, thoroughly searching the flat for



casualties and ventilating the property. Once the incident is wrapped up, we are detained for a couple of hours assisting a fire investigation officer. Back at station, we change our contaminated PPE and clean and service our BA sets so we can go back on the run. We're hungry, but dinner prep was heavily delayed, so it will be a late one.

7:00PM: AFA in a high rise several miles away – the crew first on scene send a false alarm stop message to control and turn us back before we arrive. As we turn onto our road:

7:22PM: fire, a garden shed in a neighbouring ground. Once we arrive the local crews have already got it under control and said we're not needed, so we head back to station. On the back of the truck, the three of us sit in silence and look straight ahead, partly from hunger, partly from tiredness, but mostly a superstitious unwillingness to break the spell, all thinking the same thing, hoping against hope that we can get back to station for dinner undisturbed by further calls to mobilise.

The gods of LFB Control smile on us – we eat, and the next time we hear the PA system's voice, it's to announce change of watch. □

## Warsaw's anti-fascist resistance

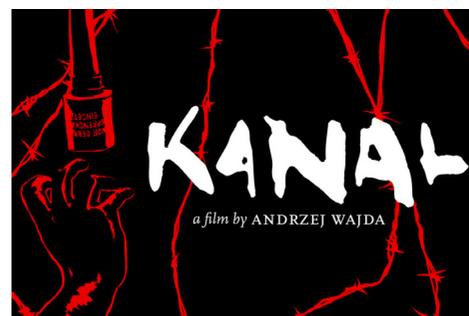


## Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

There are a number of films which depict aspects of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of 1943, including *Jacob the Liar* (Peter Kassovitz, 1974), *The Pianist* (Roman Polanski, 2002) and *Run Boy Run* (Pepe Danquart, 2013). However, I want to highlight what I think is the best film of the Polish anti-fascist resistance films: *Kanal*, by Andrzej Wajda (made in 1957), which actually shows the later Warsaw Uprising of 1944.

In many ways it is a harrowing film; a band of Polish resistance fighters are trapped and the Nazi forces are closing in on them. Driven to desperation they devise a scheme to escape through the sewers which have previously been



used as a communications system. The cinematography captures the nightmarish conditions in the sewers as the Polish fighters struggle to keep mind and body intact. At one point they are attacked by gas and they find that all escapes are closed off by the Nazis.

Eventually, a small group reach the Vistula but their escape is prevented by an iron grill which they cannot dislodge. Starving, exhausted, covered in filth, they are eventually forced to emerge from the underground, to be taken prisoner. □



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# Surprise vote in NEU

By a Lewisham school worker

The Deputy General Secretary (DGS) election in the National Education Union (NEU) has been won by moderate candidate Niamh Sweeney. It had been expected that Gawain Little of the "NEU Left" would win.

Workers' Liberty supported Martin Powell-Davies, the candidate of the rank-and-file Education Solidarity Network, and we advocated a transfer to Sweeney to stop Little. Little is a prominent member of Communist Party of Britain, with all that entails.

In the first round Little got 9,953, Powell-Davies 6,724, and Sweeney 11,035. Sweeney got around 60% of Powell-Davies's second preferences. Sweeney will have benefited from being the only woman in the election in a union overwhelmingly representing women. Before the NEU she was a member of the Association of Teachers



Niamh Sweeney

and Lecturers (ATL). In the new union many prominent ex-ATL members continue to act as a caucus, evidently of some strength. Her platform was posed as moving beyond factionalism and representing all our members.

For the "NEU Left" the result is a

significant blow. What is essentially a bureaucratic lash-up to win positions keeps failing to win positions. There will surely be internal ructions. The Socialist Workers Party (SWP), despite being avowedly anti-Stalinist, supported the high-Stalinist Little, but apparently with qualms (*Socialist Worker* did not mention his campaign).

Fewer than 7% of members voted. In part that must be due to the extraordinary fatigue school workers are experiencing as school leaderships drive unrealistic catch-up schemes. However, the low turnout, the election of someone on the right of the union, and the disappointing result for Powell-Davies are sobering. They show how much work rank-and-file militants in the union have to do. Sweeney is surely now in pole position for the General Secretary election in two years' time. □

## A union policy on climate



John Moloney

I spoke at an online members' meeting about the union's climate change activity on Tuesday 26 October. Although much of the discussion understandably focused on the upcoming COP26 conference, I was keen to emphasise that the real fight for us is after COP, both industrially, in terms of organising around decarbonisation demands in civil service workplaces, and politically, in terms of pressuring the government to take radical action.

The government has no serious plan, either as an employer, for the decarbonisation of government workplaces, or at societal level for meeting its targets for cutting emissions. It will rely on market mechanisms. There is also a clear split in the ruling class, reflected in the Tory party, between those who accept the need for action, and those who oppose the taxation and spending that will entail and want to look at cheaper mitigations instead.

Workers need to organise independently to demand the radical action we need. Trade unions need to place themselves at the head of a social movement. I want to approach like-minded unions to form a bloc on this, including within the TUC, to argue for a radical, independent working-class climate politics.

Our outsourced members in the



Royal Parks conclude a month-long strike at the end of October. That strike has forced major concessions from the employer, but we're pushing for more. For example, they've conceded an increase in sick pay entitlement from six days to three months for those with 36 months service and lesser amounts for lesser service, but they want only certain staff to have the enhanced sick pay. We are taking this differential offer as an attempt to split the work force. In a meeting on Friday 28 October members made it clear that all workers must have equal entitlement to sick pay. So, while we're pleased with the progress we've made, we're absolutely prepared for further action, and will look to strike during the Win-

ter Wonderland festival in Hyde Park this winter if necessary.

The union has been actively fund raising around the dispute. As part of this there's a benefit gig to raise money for the strike fund on 3 November at the Bread and Roses pub in Clapham.

Our re-ballot of members at the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Authority (DVLA) complex in Swansea is continuing. Management will be watching the outcome keenly; if we beat the thresholds, I think they're likely to make concessions. □

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



## Refounding? Or lost?

From [Labour Left Internationalists](#)

"Refounding Momentum", described as "a deliberative process that will radically redesign Momentum's constitution, structures and how we organise with each other" has stalled. Or so it seems.

On 26 September interim proposals from the "Momentum Assemblies" should have been published, with amendments allowed up until 24 October. Then an all-members ballot is due for December.

The last official communication, 13 September, reported two assemblies on "politics and people and "power and participation", but since then there have been no social media posts, no emails to members, nothing on the Momentum Slack channel.

The lack of discussion or even acknowledgement of the missed deadlines should be of concern for an organisation that now reports going from a high of 45,000 members to 20,000.

Labour Left Internationalists (formerly Momentum Internationalists) submitted [proposals](#) back in July, and will continue to campaign for a genuinely democratic Momentum, and meanwhile work on regrouping and reactivating the internationalist Labour left. □

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# AFTER CORBYNISM: BUILDING A NEW LEFT

A dayschool on the politics of rebuilding a workers' movement which fights for a world based on solidarity, real democracy and equality.

The great promise of left-wing change, opened by the election of Jeremy Corbyn to the Labour Party leadership, failed. And it did not lead to the rebuilding of the UK labour movement.

Yet, still there is resistance. NHS and local government workers have rejected proposed pay deals, and plan strike ballots. College workers have taken and plan strike action. Railway and cleaning workers in Scotland plan strikes around the COP26 climate conference.

At 'After Corbynism: building a new left' we will discuss the politics of how we can rebuild a workers' movement which fights for a world based on solidarity, real democracy, and equality as the interlinked threats of a hard right Tory government, capital driven climate change and the pandemic loom large.

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# Social provision key against Covid long-term



## Covid-19

By Martin Thomas

When the G20 met in Rome on 30-31 October, World Health Organisation director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus got a slot to speak.

"Low-income countries, most of them in Africa, have received just 0.4% of [Covid] vaccines; more than 80% have gone to G20 countries.

"We understand and support every government's responsibility to protect its own people. But vaccine equity is not charity; it's in every country's best interests.

"82 countries are at risk of missing the target [of 40% vax by end-2021]. For most, the barrier is not absorptive capacity, it's insufficient supply...

"We ask you to support local vaccine production in Africa. We call on those countries that have promised to donate vaccines to make good on those promises, as urgently as possible".

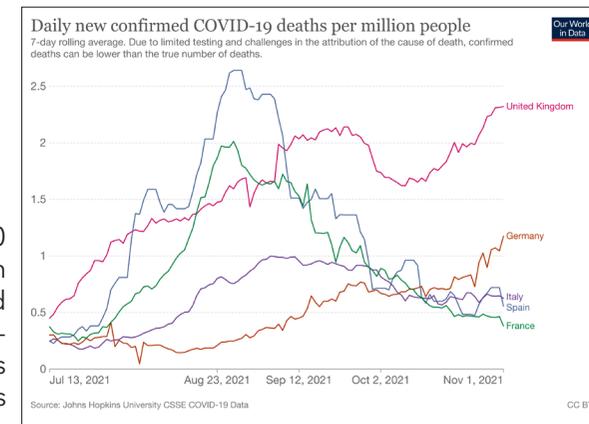
But, as the political leaders gather in Glasgow for COP26, they're not talking about that call.

Yes, climate change is a bigger health risk than Covid. Yes, Africa's count of cases and deaths is currently falling. Yes, the big Covid spikes now are in Russia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, driven more by resentment of public authorities limiting jabs than by lack of vaccine.

But it is urgent now to vaccinate poorer countries to prepare for months and years to come. Much of Africa is in the Southern Hemisphere. The virus seems to have seasonal patterns. Africa has previously had spikes in July 2020 and July 2021, when it was winter in the South.

Jabs in Africa are still jogging along at 0.1 per 100 per day, and worldwide at 0.4 per 100 per day.

Socialists add to the WHO's request our demand to requisition Big Pharma: to lift patent protection, to extend production, and to distribute vaccines and other tools against Covid (like the new [anti-Covid pill](#), which looks to be useful in



the first few days of infections) at cost-price.

In Britain, the calls for "Plan B" type mild Covid curbs have abated with levelling-off or possible fall of Covid counts since 21 October, after the steady rise from mid-Sep until 21 Oct. The argument is still strong. New Covid-count increases may come as winter makes for more indoors

crowding. Britain's Covid deaths and hospital admissions (though, thanks to vax, much lower than early-2021) are from 2.5 to five times higher, depending on count and country, than most other West European countries, most of which still have some mild Covid curbs.

Britain has twice as much testing as France or Italy, ten times more than some other west European countries with lower Covid rates.

Testing is necessary to identify Covid cases and see how the pandemic is developing. Regular quick-result lateral flow tests may help in workplaces even though they have a lot of "false negatives".

But the 27 October parliamentary Public Accounts Committee [report](#) indicates that England's Test and Trace is working more as a cash funnel to thousands of consultants paid £1,000-plus a day and to profiteers. It is called NHS Test and Trace, but it is run by private contractors, who (despite some government promises following campaigning by Safe and Equal and by Emily Thornberry MP) often do not even offer proper isolation pay to their workers.

Some 700 million tests have been issued. Results have been recorded for only 14% of them. The lab capacity is heavily underused. And still over 60% of those with Covid-like symptoms fail to get a test.

International experience [suggests](#) that the biggest factor in limiting Covid tolls longer-run is relative social equality and social provision: isolation pay, uncrowded housing; requisitioning of resources for public health, public health-care, and social-care provision; workers' control of workplace safety. □



# Solidarity

For a workers' government

## RESTORE THE NHS FOR WINTER!

By Sacha Ismail

The daily count of new Covid cases is averaging around 40,000. It has been above 25,000 since mid-July. Thanks to vaccinations, the death count is about one-tenth of the early-2021 peak, and the hospital-admission count about a quarter, but both are edging up even before winter sets in.

Years of budget-paring have set hospitals to operate with no leeway even in ordinary winters. The NHS has to deal with a big backlog. Flu rates are for now unusually *low*, and rates for the other common virus RSV modest, but they could well surge.

We need increased funding, including to increase NHS workers' pay; decreased privatisation; and wider social measures to tackle Covid.

In the *Guardian* on [29 October](#), an NHS respiratory doctor wrote:

"Currently, we regularly see 50% more patients per day in A&E than the maximum it was ever designed for.

"There is often a wait to secure even a cubicle... for examination. Sometimes I have to send a colleague to fetch a patient while I wait in some inappropriate location – on one occasion an equipment store –



just to reserve somewhere with sufficient privacy before someone else takes it.

"Ambulances queue outside the door with waits of hours just to unload their patient and get back on the road; a criminal waste of their time. On top of this... we are often functioning with staff ratios less than 50% of what they should be...

"There are precious few beds available... the optimum bed occupancy to be efficient is 85%... We usually run around 95% even in summer months, and often over 100% as patients discharged in the morning are replaced in the afternoon. Even a small increase in demand is therefore critical.

"We have had to declare several 'internal incidents' in the past two months due to the bed crisis. This happens when the situation becomes so bad that patient safety is directly threatened..."

The £6 billion extra funding Rishi Sunak has proposed is absurdly small. Before Covid, the

NHS had been underfunded for years. If increases since 2010 had matched those after 1997, its budget would be £50 billion higher.

As well as a much bigger funding increase, the health service needs a privatisation decrease. More and more funding is siphoned into private profit through a host of mechanisms, a trend the Tories' Health and Care Bill is set to strengthen.

Privatisation and outsourcing should be halted and reversed. Private hospitals should be requisitioned and integrated into the NHS.

The NHS is maybe 100,000 staff short, and its workers are stretched and worn. Support workers on rights and pay – and extra funding for the [15% or £3,000](#) increase health workers want! Help Unison activists with their "indicative ballot" for action on pay, running from 3-4 November to 2 December.

The Labour Party is still saying and proposing little about the situation in the NHS.

The health unions – which include the left-led Unite and Unison with its new left-wing national executive majority – should call a national demonstration for the NHS, with clear demands, and call on Labour to support it. □