

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

FOR A REAL ALTERNATIVE TO THE TORIES:

» **ORGANISE
WEEK-BY-WEEK**

» **GEAR TO
CLASS STRUGGLE**

» **FIGHT FOR
SOCIALISM**



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The need for week-to-week socialist organising



As we go to press, talk is rife of Tory moves to oust Boris Johnson – in favour, alas, of someone probably even more right-wing. The Tory government is on the back foot, floundering on Covid, commanding little trust or credit, u-turning again and again.

And yet its Borders Bill (went to Lords 8 December), Police Bill (entered final Lords stage 8 Dec), and Health and Social Care Bill (Lords committee stage starts 11 Jan) are going through Parliament with little loud and active opposition. The left seems to be on the back foot, too.

There are millions who oppose the Tories from the left; many tens of thousands angry against the Police Bill, the Borders Bill, and the Health and Social Care Bill; but for now not many on the streets.

Strikes

Although Britain has not had a full-on strike wave like the USA or France in recent weeks, a number of recent strikes have won. Although the Omicron wave may make conditions more difficult for industrial battles, union action has shown itself able to recover from the setbacks consequent on mass work-from-home and on lockdowns. But the big union battalions are moving slowly.

Taking an overview of the last decade or so, strikes and political meetings have generally been smaller and sparser, but street demonstrations have often been big and frequent.

The rise of social media and smartphones makes it possible for quite small groups, catching the mood of a moment, to organise large protests at short notice. It also makes it possible for protests on an issue to be organised more frequently. Black Lives Matter demonstrations in summer 2020, and Police Bill protests in March-April 2021, ran weekly or even more often in London and some other cities. School student climate strikes ran monthly in 2019.

Cause for hope! But street protests



without organisation to connect them with longer-term week-to-week activism in workplaces, in unions and Labour Parties, on campuses and in neighbourhoods, tend to fade away.

Kill the Bill

Many people come to one of the series to register their protest, and see little value in repeating the gesture. The minority who come week after week get worn down.

Thus in March and April, there were many protests against the Police Bill. At least one of them, on 3 April in London, counted many tens of thousands. They faded. Outside Parliament on 8 December, even after the Tories had added fierce new amendments in the Lords, there were a few hundred of us. Noisy and spirited, but a few hundred.

We're lacking the organisational and ideological linkages to knit together the varied protests, or at least elements from them, into an ongoing, self-sustaining movement which sees itself as aiming for, and can be seen by the doubtful as aiming for, a comprehensive social and economic alternative to the Tories.

We're lacking linkages between sporadic street protests and ongoing week-to-week activism in the form of workplace agitation, meetings, pushes in the unions and Labour Parties, street and campus stalls.

With such linkages, the week-to-week welds a core of activists; gives them the means to expand that core, slowly at times, faster on occasion; links them into the big already-existing network of opposition to the status quo, the trade unions and the labour movement, and gives them the means to transform that

movement. The week-to-week work can generate ways to move from street protests to sharper forms of action such as strikes, and it can create sustained political pressure capable of pushing even feeble Labour and similar leaders to legislative change.

Without such linkages even very big leftist street protests are likely to dissipate, leaving little solid behind them. Sometimes even see their energy confiscated by the right, which does have linkages.

Anti-Politics

Reporting from Chile in *Solidarity* 616, Kelly Rogers wrote that in the huge leftist "social explosion" there of 2019-20, an "anti-politics" feeling was "so strong that Frente Amplio activists could not turn up to protests with their flags or banners without being forcibly expelled". The union movement remained weak and largely sidelined. Now the Trump-like José Antonio Kast has won the first round of the presidential election, and on a turnout of only 47%.

Luiza Xavier has *described* how the big leftist street protests in Brazil in 2013 retained an "anti-political-party" tone, and "after about three years these demonstrations changed.... The colours changed, towards green and yellow, which are the Brazilian colours. The right managed to channel quite a lot of the energy of the demonstrations", bringing Bolsonaro to power in 2019.

Something of the same has happened in France, in a more complicated and diffuse way.

Britain does not, or not yet, have that "anti-political" mood in street protests. But energy from protests gets dissipated in milder ways. Many of the activists who stay around for the long haul look to NGO work rather than workplace organising and working-class struggle.

A fraction turn to social-media "activism", feeling "involved" because of a constant flow of messages even without doing much in workplaces or on the streets; or sometimes to a sort of lifestyle politics. A writer in Australia recently *blasted* feminists there for insufficient radicalism. "In my experience, 'intersectional' has become a nice word

for white feminists to excuse themselves from anti-racism work".

The writer didn't mean that those feminists had been late for picket lines in disputes of lower-paid mostly-ethnic-minority workers, like the Sheffield couriers. Or that they were slack about union-organising work among worse-off workers in their workplaces. Or that they had failed to make it to door-to-door campaigning.

The writer is a marketing executive and founder of a "beauty products" firm, and she's writing in an online magazine, PopSugar, concerned with such things as "gifts for the person who has everything". The "anti-racism work" she wants seems to be a cringing tone towards her and her business ambitions, not a fight for social equality.

Both that sort of dissipation of radical impulses, and the inevitable backlashes against it, set us back.

How to make the necessary linkages in a world where social media spread so wide remains to be puzzled out. They can't be made without an agency working to make them.

That agency needs week-by-week in-person organising. It needs a developed overall programme (socialism), and systematic self-education to equip it to analyse and convince. It needs to gear itself into the already-existing mass movement of the exploited and oppressed, the labour movement, and work to transform that movement through class struggle.

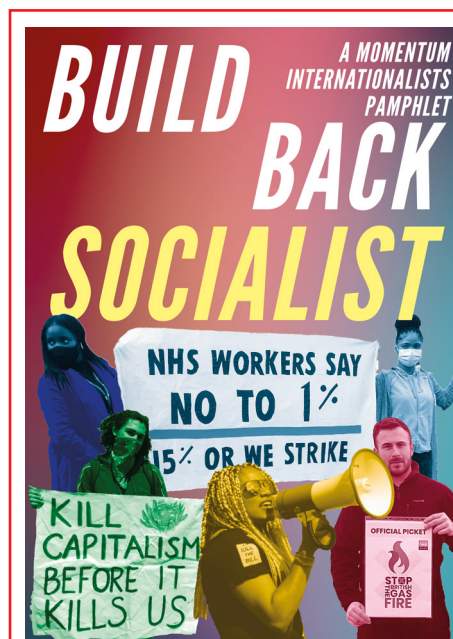
And it needs to be there on all the protests against oppression, sporadic or otherwise. We ask readers to consider joining with Workers' Liberty to build that agency. □

23-24 April

Workers' Liberty's annual conference, where we debate our policies, plan our actions, and elect our committees for the coming year, will be on 23-24 April 2022 in London. (We're working on the assumption that Covid rates will be relatively low by then, at least for a while). More info? Email awl@workersliberty.org □

Solidarity 619 is 12 Jan

Solidarity 619 will be out on 12 January. Because of the holiday-period lull in labour-movement activity, and to give our staff scope for longer-term tasks, *Solidarity* is skipping three weeks. □



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

Borders Bill puts 40% of ethnic minority UK citizens at risk

By Mohan Sen

The protest-criminalising [Police Bill](#) is just one element of the Tories' push towards a vicious authoritarian state. Just behind it in the parliamentary queue of measures to assault the rights of people living in, working in or trying to come to the United Kingdom, the [Nationality and Borders Bill](#) passed the House of Commons on 8 December and is now on its second reading in the House of Lords.

The Bill now attacks the rights not just of the small numbers of refugees whom the Tories are [trying to present](#) as some overwhelming tide, but of vast numbers of UK citizens – mainly with brown or black skin.

Clause 9 of the Bill, updated in November, makes it much easier to strip people's British citizenship – without even telling them.

The Blair government twice lowered the threshold for stripping people of citizenship if they held dual citizenship

with another country. In 2014 the Tories extended this to citizens who the government believes are eligible for foreign citizenship. This was the situation in the case of [Shamima Begum](#), who the government argued could become a Bangladeshi citizen even though Bangladesh's government emphatically said no.

Stripped citizenship

The numbers deprived of citizenship have grown from none for decades to a few a year after 2002 to dozens after 2014 – and 104 in 2017, the last year for which I could find a definite figure.

Now the Tories want to extend the power of deprivation further still. Clause 9 of the Nationality and Borders Bill says that the government does not need to notify those stripped of citizenship if it does not have their contact details, or if it is "for any other reason" not "reasonably practicable" to do so. It also states that notice should not be given if it is not "in the public interest"

to do so.

This will, in many cases, make it much harder to appeal against removal of citizenship. Unsurprisingly, appeals have also risen sharply.

The *New Statesman* [estimated](#) that nearly six million people could become eligible to have their citizenship removed in this way. Naturally this predominantly affects those born outside the UK – though it also includes over 400,000 UK-born citizens.

The *New Statesman* also estimates that while 5% of white UK citizens are likely to be vulnerable to this power, 41% of non-white ethnic minority citizens are.

That includes up to 1.4 million people of South Asian origin (50% of South Asian background citizens), and up to almost a million with roots in black African and Caribbean countries (39%). It includes up to 152,000 of Chinese origin, and up to 102,000 Hong Kongers.

It also includes very large numbers of certain white ethnic minorities, principally Polish (up to 579,000) and Irish people (407,000).

Of course the government is not going to remove the citizenship of anything like six million people – but it is entirely plausible that we could see the numbers increasing dramatically. Meanwhile this will reinforce the wider climate of precariousness, fear and bigotry which is permeating UK society.

Over 250,000 and rising fast have [signed a petition](#) to remove Clause 9 from the Bill.

Some MPs, primarily ethnic minority Labour MPs, have spoken out vocally.

Trade unionists and Labour activists must demand the Labour Party leadership swallows its shameful opportunism and hesitancy and goes beyond quietly voting against to raise a storm of protest against the Bill.

If it passes, we need discussion about how to resist its implementation and get it repealed as soon as possible. We must insist Labour commits to repeal, without wiggles or evasion.

Immediately we need to get out on the streets in protest. It is far from impossible the government can be forced to backtrack. □

Putin's hands off Ukraine!

By Mohan Sen

In 2014 Russia seized the Crimean peninsula from Ukraine, which was a Russian colony until 1991. Since then it has waged a proxy war against Ukraine through right-wing Russian-nationalist forces in the east of the country.

Since the start of November [maybe 175,000](#) Russian troops have massed within striking distance of the Ukrainian border. Russia is moving weapons and equipment to the area.

There seems little doubt that the Ukrainian government has committed human rights abuses in the eastern conflict zones. So have the Russian-nationalist rebels. To give a sense of the scale, the Office of the UN Human Rights Commissioner reports 18 civilians killed up to September 30 this year, and 21 in the same period of 2020. The 18 included 11 killed in mine-related incidents and attempts to safely detonate explosive devices.

When Vladimir Putin absurdly talks of "genocide" in eastern Ukraine, he is trying to prepare Russian and international opinion for an invasion, or promote the idea he might invade in order to gain leverage in the crisis talks Russia is holding with the US.

The Ukrainian government is a right-wing, neo-liberal regime and, despite Ukraine's history of oppression,

Ukrainian nationalism has often been bigoted and reactionary. We support the left-wing, internationalist political forces struggling against both. The rights of the Russian people in Ukraine should be respected and the eastern areas with high proportions of Russians should have reasonable autonomy.

We are against Ukraine joining the US-led military alliance [NATO](#). We reject the idea that the Baltic states joining NATO justifies Russian threats against them, and anyway Ukraine joining is not likely any time soon; but talk of it as a future possibility is used by Putin as an excuse for his troop movements. Equally, we were against earlier NATO expansion in eastern Europe, are against UK membership of NATO, and are in fact against NATO's existence.

But one major reason for support within Ukraine for joining NATO is precisely the threat Russia poses.

The immediate issue is Russia's infringement, and potential much greater infringement, of Ukraine's national rights. The Ukrainian people have a right to defend their independence and self-determination. □

• From 2014: [Why socialists should side with Ukraine against Russia](#). Ukraine Solidarity Campaign: [bit.ly/ukrsc](#)



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

[workersliberty.org/publications](#)



Upcoming meetings

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

Wednesday 15 December, 7-9 pm: Socialist Film Club: 10,000 Black Men Named George New Cross Learning, SE14 6AS.

Saturday 18 December, 12-1.30pm: Chile: can the far right be beaten?

Sunday 19 December 6.30pm: Xmas film online showing: Rocking the Foundations

Sunday 9 January 12-1.30pm: Reading group: Vestas Wind Turbine jobs battle and factory occupation.

Sunday 23 January 2-4pm: London Socialist Feminist Reading Group, Effra Social in Brixton SW2 1DF

Other events

Saturday 18 December, 4.30-6 pm: LLI/MI: NHS and social care – make Labour act!

Saturday 15 January 5-6:30pm: LLI/MI: for free movement, against detention centres!

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



Revanchism, irredentism... and the Chinese state



By Jim Denham

Revanchism, from the French *revanche* or “revenge”, is the will to reverse territorial losses following war or social upheaval. The term originated in the 1870s, after the Franco Prussian War, for nationalists who wanted to revenge the defeat and the reparations extracted by Germany, and to reclaim the lost territories of Alsace-Lorraine.

Revanchism is also linked to irredentism – the drive to expand nation-state territory to claim fragments of the cultural and ethnic nation outside the borders of the core.

When Mao Zedong took power in 1949, he set an immediate goal of re-establishing the “greater China” of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912).

And he achieved that goal following the supposed “peaceful liberation” of the East Turkestan Republic (now Xinjiang) in 1949 and the invasion of Tibet in 1950, increasing China’s size by more than one-third. The politics of this “greater China” are similar to those of the “greater Greece” plan of the early 20th century, or the “greater Hungary” drives.

Every Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leader since has carried forward this vision of a greater China, adjusting and expanding it as the country’s power has grown. Under President Xi this has become even more explicit.

The CCP’s overseas agents and apol-



ogists usually, however, dress up the message in the language of contemporary western peace movements. That is what makes a recent statement by the No Cold War group so extraordinary.

The statement (published in the *Morning Star* of 8 December) is a denunciation of Biden’s “summit for democracy” and starts out with a (mainly fair) catalogue of US aggression over the years, as though that somehow makes all criticism of China mere hypocrisy. The statement puts quote-marks round the words “human rights” and “democracy” as though these concepts simply have no meaning. China’s brutality in Hong Kong is justified by the fact that “Britain ruled as a colonial power [there] for more than 150 years [and] never allowed an election of the Governor General.”

Criticism of Chinese state misdeeds is further dismissed: “From 1840, Britain waged two ‘opium wars’ against China, forcing opium onto millions of Chinese people at gunpoint over several decades.” And: “During the Second Opium War [1856-60 – JD] 3,500 British troops destroyed China’s Old Summer Palace

in Beijing, burning the palace to the ground and stealing much of its contents. Many artworks from the palace, including sculptures, porcelain, jade and gold objects, are today kept in the British Museum in London.”

The Opium Wars were indeed a disgrace and Britain probably should return the plunder looted from the Summer Palace.

But none of that justifies the CCP’s vicious clamp-down on democracy campaigners in Hong Kong, or its atrocities (probably amounting to genocide) in Xingjiang, unless your view of history is essentially revanchist.

Revanchism and irredentism are

similarly central to Putin’s objective of reclaiming the territories of the old USSR: hence the stationing of more than 175,000 Russian troops and heavy weapons around Ukraine’s borders.

The same edition of the *Morning Star* that carried No Cold War’s CCP propaganda piece, also carried (right alongside it) an article of pure Putin-esque propaganda describing the government of Ukraine as, effectively, fascist, and claiming that Ukrainians and Russians “are part of the same families.” This is clearly in preparation for a Russian invasion of Ukraine and a sure sign that if and when that happens, the *Morning Star* will support it. □

Again on Rittenhouse



Charlie George ([Solidarity 617](#)) presents us with the fiction that Kyle Rittenhouse went to Kenosha protests to administer first aid, as if he was someone akin to a member of the St John’s Ambulance Brigade. I don’t know if he ever got first aid training, but I’m sure that even in America instructors do not recommend including an AR-15 assault rifle with the bandages as part of the first aid kit. Incidentally, one of those Rittenhouse shot actually was a certified paramedic.

If Rittenhouse had gone armed only with a first aid kit, he would have been welcomed and nobody would have been shot. Yet as numerous US socialists such as Howie Hawkins have said, Rittenhouse went to Kenosha in response to a call from the fascist Boogaloo Boys group to “defend property”. He wasn’t there to help anyone injured, but to inflict injuries on others. Prior to the shootings Rittenhouse was recorded saying he wanted to shoot people he thought were shoplifting.

It was only to be expected that his defence at the trial would go out of their way to dehumanise Rittenhouse’s victims as a bunch of ne’er do wells who got what was coming to them. An unarmed man with mental health problems tried to disarm Rittenhouse so obviously was fair game. Another protester, fearing Rittenhouse would shoot his girlfriend, clobbered him with a skateboard. They tried to take his rifle from him! Well, wasn’t that a good idea? He got hit with a skateboard. If scissors doesn’t beat paper, an assault rifle sure as hell trumps a piece of wood!

There is an insinuation in Charlie’s letter that the people who got shot were not “genuine” anti racists, and so somehow deserved it. As it turns out, the guy with the paramedic certificate was connected to a group called People’s Revolution, whose slogan is “all lives cannot matter until Black Lives Matter.”

It is impossible to tell how many who took part in the BLM protests did so for “genuine” reasons or had other motivations, including opportunist ones. Episodes like Kenosha have to be seen in a broader context though. This was an attack on an anti racist protest and the character of individuals Rittenhouse attacked is irrelevant.

Charlie also states I repeat “the falsehood that Rittenhouse carried a rifle across state lines.” How is this a falsehood? He was illegally in possession of a firearm because of his age, but the totally partisan judge threw out the underage firearms charge on the basis of Wisconsin laws that allow juveniles to go hunting. That says it all, really!

In Charlie’s odd reading of things the victims become the vigilantes and the vigilantes who were there armed to the teeth in Kenosha don’t even get a mention. The anti-racist protesters are transformed into a “vigilante mob” simply because they wanted to disarm someone who infiltrated their ranks carrying an extremely powerful deadly weapon.

The verdict will embolden heavily armed vigilantes to turn up at any left wing, trade union or anti racist protest in the belief that if they shoot anyone they get away with it by pleading “self defence”. It has become part of the process of normalisation of violence and intimidation going on in America today.

Barrie Hardy, Liverpool

• Abridged. More: bit.ly/kr-bh

More environment reading



I want to add some books that we’ll be covering in our upcoming Workers’ Liberty reading groups to Stuart Jordan’s “Reading on environment emergencies”, [Solidarity 617](#).

In *Big Farms Make Big Flu: Dispatches on Influenza, Agribusiness, and the Nature of Science*, the evolutionary epidemiologist Robert G. Wallace gives vital accounts of how capital is driving our age of pandemics. Large-scale and international agriculture, organised in pursuit of profit and coupled with ecosystem destruction, leads to spill over of ever-scarier pathogens from animals to human: and with increasing regularity. This is also an important rebuttal to nationalist, conspiratorial, or fatalist accounts of the emergence of pandemics.

Historic examples of working-class activism on environmental issues, to



learn from and be inspired by include the Green Bans in Australia by the Builders Labourers Federation, the Lucas Aerospace workers’ fight for an Alternative Plan for production, and the occupation of the Vestas wind turbine factory on the Isle of Wight. Our study group will read and discuss, in turn, *The Vestas Jobs Battle: How Wind Turbine Workers Became a Power*, *Green Bans*, *Red Union: The Saving of a City*, and *The Lucas Plan: A New Trade Unionism in the Making*?

Our fourth reprint of *For Workers’ Climate Action*, out in November, contains a handful of reviews of other books, plus additional suggestions throughout. □

Zack Muddle, Bristol

Is Die Hard a feminist movie?



By Katy Dollar

This column contains spoilers for *Die Hard*.

Christmas may be Christianity's second fiddle religious festival, never enough to rival Easter, but it is the number one festival of the secular world. A global phenomenon filled with nebulous and contradicting traditions.

Even attempts at counter-Christmas culture will be co-opted by this global hobgoblin. In *A Kosher Christmas: 'Tis the Season to Be Jewish* by Rabbi Joshua Eli Plaut, he describes the growth of New York Jewish families spending Christmas day in Chinese restaurants, a tradition that is now definitively "Christmassy". In Japan, KFC have extremely successfully marketed their fried chicken as a Christmas tradition.

In the early 2000s we added a new Christmas ritual to the ever-expanding festival, answering the question "what's your favourite Christmas movie?" With an answer intended to annoy your questioner. Attempting to confound the cutesy, snowflake, twinkly, assumptions of Christmas, millennials birthed the annual argument "Is *Die Hard* a Christmas Movie?"



Whether or not *Die Hard* is a Christmas movie, the set-piece argument is now a Christmas tradition, even appearing in this year's Netflix holiday romcom *Love Hard*. The whole thing is the high point of done to death frivolity, possibly appropriate for a drunk Christmas party argument, but not this column. Who cares if *Die Hard* is a Christmas movie? We need to know if *Die Hard* is a feminist movie.

What does *Die Hard* have in its corner? *Die Hard*, despite constraints that much of the film is one man in an air shaft, passes the Bechdel test. Feminist Twitter advises watching *Love Actually* and *Die Hard* back to back so you can see Alan Rickman's violent death as feminist revenge cinema, his end a punishment for his treatment of Emma Thompson.

John McClane begins the film estranged from his wife Holly. We can quickly see this is his fault. John is a

checklist of stereotypical masculine traits: domineering, emotionally repressed, violent, belligerent and unwilling to communicate. Holly is his foil, a self-possessed, emotionally competent communicator. Though Holly starts as his foil, only through taking on her traits can John survive and triumph. Only by gender-bending can he stop the terrorists. His story is complete when he tells Holly he is sorry, relinquishing patriarchal indomitability.

He tries to get help from law enforcement, but they dismiss his fears and don't help him. All too familiar! The FBI helicopter blowing up is one of the feminist schadenfreude moments of the film, as is the shooting of sex pest Harry Ellis. We're led to believe by convention that Holly is the love interest of the film but the chemistry between Willis' McClane and Rickman's Gruber is electric; not since Bogart and Bacall has cinema seen such sexy back and forth. Ultimately though, John's true love is the one he can be emotionally honest with, the one he can make laugh: Al the chubby child-murderer cop. Al overcomes his greatest fear to save John.

So, is *Die Hard* a feminist masterpiece? Of course it isn't. The film has two redemption arcs. A cop who learns to shoot again having killed an inno-

cent child, and a wife who agrees to give up her maiden name because her husband killed some communists and saved her. But in the age of Covid, temporal anchors are all the more important; whether that is Chinese on Christmas day, asking pointless questions and giving piss take answers, or cod-politics film reviews. □



Activist Agenda

Lee Cheuk-yan, secretary of the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (now dissolved after government pressure) was handed another 14-month prison sentence on 13 December over a banned Tiananmen Square anniversary vigil in 2020. Seven other participants were also sentenced.

Labour Solidarity with Hong Kong, working closely with the Uyghur Solidarity Campaign, will continue to organise opposition to state oppression from Beijing.

The Labour Campaign for Free Movement held a hybrid meeting on 11-12 December to regroup and build plans and actions for the New Year. □

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

Uyghur Tribunal delivers its verdict

By Ben Tausz

On 9 December, the Uyghur Tribunal delivered a [judgement](#) that the Chinese state has committed torture, crimes against humanity, and genocide in its assault on the Uyghurs, Kazakhs and other Turkic Muslim groups in East Turkistan ("Xinjiang" province).

This was an unofficial "people's tribunal". A civil society panel of lawyers and human rights experts assessed evidence against international law and the threshold of proof was "beyond reasonable doubt".

It concluded that the Chinese state – under policies directed by leaders including Xi Jinping – had committed crimes against humanity including: arbitrary mass imprisonment; forced labour; torture; sexual violence; sep-

arating children from families to break their cultural identity; and deliberate suppression of Uyghur birth rates by forcible contraception, abortion, sterilisation, and family separation.

Though Uyghurs have been killed, the Tribunal concluded that there is *not* evidence of mass killings, and rightly warned against exaggerated comparisons to the Holocaust (a point [Solidarity](#) has also made). It noted reason to be sceptical about the political motives behind some governments' and parliaments' charges and condemnations. Nevertheless, it found that deliberate suppression of Uyghur birth rates met the UN Genocide Convention criteria.

It is right to approach this critically, especially given the context of superpower rivalry. However, the judgement is based on the extensive accu-

mulated evidence, including the Chinese government's own documents.

So we should indeed call this genocide. The judgement also highlighted the words of Raphael Lemkin who coined the term "to signify a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups". Socialists should understand the struggle of the Uyghur people both as a simple humanitarian question, and in terms of the democratic principle of national self-determination.

We must be wary of calls for US and other state action against China. We should keep demanding constructive measures like regulations to crack down on corporations linked to forced labour, surveillance and detention. But socialists also have a responsi-



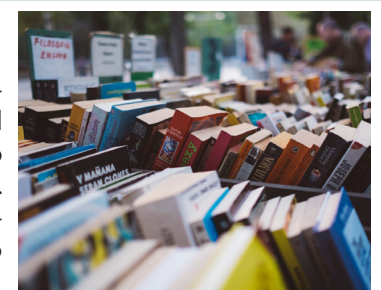
bility to warn against reliance on our ruling classes and their states and inter-state institutions. We must oppose the burgeoning arms race and

sabre-rattling between China and NATO states.

Liberation will not be brought to the Uyghurs by rival capitalist states. Fundamental transformation in China, like any country, can only be led from below: via the organisation and self-activity of its working class and oppressed peoples, the Uyghurs included. Our job is still to build an internationalist labour movement, convinced and capable of connecting to those social forces and supporting their struggles. □

Second hand books!

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



Lithium for batteries: how?



Environment

By Stuart Jordan

Thousands of environmentalists in Serbia have forced a small government u-turn in a battle over mining giant Rio Tinto's claim to the Jadar valley. 130,000 people, 2% of the Serbian population, have signed a petition against Rio Tinto's plan to open the biggest lithium mine in Europe. The government has ditched proposed law changes that would make it easier to expropriate land.

Green tech

As an essential ingredient in car batteries, lithium is a key resource of the green tech revolution. The EU wants to produce 30 million electric vehicles in the next few decades to meet its climate pledges. Demand for lithium is set to rise by 6,000% by 2050.

But Serbians have seen what lithium mining has meant in Chile, Argentina, Tibet, and elsewhere. Capitalist lithium mining is dirty work and it leaves devastation in its wake. Lithium mining is extremely water intensive. In Salar de Atacama, Chile (one of the driest places on Earth) lithium and other mining operations consume 65% of the region's water. Crops are failing and communities are going thirsty due to the local mines.

Mine tailings are poisonous and their poisons leach into the soil and water supply. Rio Tinto expect the mine in Jadar, Serbia to produce 57 million tonnes of tailings which they plan to dump over hundreds of hectares. One of Rio Tinto's proposed tailings sites will involve the destruction of 170 hectares of forest currently home to endangered species.

The region has recent experience of the disastrous impacts on mining waste on local communities and ecosystems. In 2014, a hundred thousand cubic metres of tailings from an antimony mine were released into a tributary of the Jadar during a flood. Hundreds of hectares of farmland are now contaminated with heavy metals. Alongside these local impacts lithium mining is extremely carbon-intensive. 15 tonnes of CO2 are emitted for every tonne of lithium extracted from hard rock.

Recycling

Then a lump of lithium from Jadar will probably end up in a component of a private electric car for a middle class family in the Western Europe. Planned obsolescence, and the high cost of repair, will mean that car has an unnecessarily short life before it goes to waste and recycling.

Capitalist recycling is extremely poor. Under the current arrangement the batteries are built by competing car firms. Each firm develops its own unique design so that car manufacturers can monopolise and profit from repair and servicing. The lack of standardisation militates against effective recycling.

Lithium batteries are difficult to recycle and recycling firms tend to use cheaper methods saving only a fraction of possible materials. Just as a few dud components means junking a whole car, so too high recycling costs prohibit the recovery of useful chemicals and materials from our waste. It is cheaper to rip open the Jadar valley and exhaust these rich seams of lithium as quickly as possible and leave detritus for future generations.

The unprocessed waste accumulates mostly in poorer regions of the world. Last week the EU sued Romania for failure to combat industrial pollution and its smog filled air. Romania is one of Europe's dumping grounds. As well as



mountains of legally transported waste, there are major criminal gangs operating within Romania providing a cheap way to dump Europe's old electronic equipment, plastics, medical waste, or even toxic substances.

Romania takes a large portion of Europe's e-waste and there is an industry of poor people with respiratory problems who pick through old gadgets for in search of rare Earth metals. The toxic air kills 29,000 a year.

Alternative

The alternative to the Rio Tinto mine is not petrol cars, or to just get the lithium from elsewhere, but rather to organise economic life in a way that prioritises the elimination of waste over the maximisation of private profit.

The technology exists to extract lithium from the Earth's crust with very limited environmental impacts. For example, a geothermal spring in Cornwall brings lithium rich waters to the surface. The lithium can be extracted in ways which produce a fraction of the CO2 emissions and leave the local water supply intact.

Mining techniques will be different when the profit motive is replaced by the aim of minimising the impacts on communities, water supplies, and biodiversity. We may see slower, more labour intensive extraction, but also more efficient use of the resources.

Waste cannot be eliminated entirely,

but it can be managed carefully. Mine tailings, the solid waste from mines, are rich in chemicals that could be processed into useful products or at least inert materials that will not poison life. By carefully managing the waste at every stage of extraction and processing, it should be able to produce many useful materials that can be fed into new production processes.

It should also be possible to radically reduce the number of cars we need. In the UK, cars are parked [96% of the time](#). A study from the USA found that at most only 17% of all cars in America are being driven at any one time.

Car sharing

Car sharing schemes could reduce the number of cars we need by 89%. A 2019 parliamentary select committee found that private car ownership is incompatible with meeting the Paris climate goals.

Governments could further legislate to outlaw planned obsolescence and force companies to pay costs of repair. Standardisation could also radically reduce waste, allowing for easy and extensive repair and recycling. A highly efficient system of recycling would reduce demand on extracted lithium.

The road blockades in Belgrade and elsewhere have forced a small concession. But Rio Tinto are still committed to investing 2.4 billion euros in the project, and 40 ships bringing mining infrastructure necessary are currently sailing from Australia.

If Rio Tinto get their way, the capitalist social metabolism will transform that seam of lithium in western Serbia into a scattering of life-destroying detritus in a matter of decades. All our efforts to halt that work of reckless destruction point to the need for democratic economic planning to replace the rule of profit. □

High Court rules against Assange

By Mohan Sen

The UK High Court [ruled on 10 December](#) that Wikileaks founder Julian Assange can be extradited to the United States to face espionage charges. There are still steps in the process, including a possible appeal to the Supreme Court and a final decision by the Home Secretary – but this makes it more likely Assange will be sent to the US.

We have commented on the Assange case many times over the years. For instance, in [Solidarity 536](#), "Assange: don't extradite, don't glorify",

explaining the US charges and extradition attempt. Our overall view remains the same. We oppose Assange being extradited.

Assange's confused and in many respects noxious politics are not at stake in the extradition process. Nor are the rape charges made against him by Swedish authorities in 2010. (The fact that some on the left are willing to ignore or dismiss both is indicative of political degeneration and disarray.) What is at stake is whether the most powerful capitalist government in the world can lock

up a journalist for exposing its secrets, machinations and crimes.

The High Court judges ruled that Assange can be extradited on the grounds that the US has given assurances about how he will be treated if convicted. Leave aside how trustworthy the assurances are. Our objection is much more fundamental. What Assange may be extradited and tried for is, from a socialist point of view, no crime, but for the most part a positive virtue. Workers' governments will do similar on a much bigger scale. □



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Europe's policies enable Belarus border gambit

By Ben Tausz

The humanitarian crisis continues at the borders between Belarus and Poland, Latvia and Lithuania.

Belarus's government triggered the situation, as retaliation for EU sanctions over President Lukashenka's authoritarian crackdown. Belarus has cruelly duped desperate people – mainly from Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan, including many persecuted Yazidis and Kurds – by selling them flights to Minsk and visas that it falsely said would get them legally into the EU.

On arrival, they find they can only cross irregularly, through dense, dangerous forest in increasingly harsh weather. Border guards and troops in the EU states assault, abuse and push them back to their Belarussian counterparts, who do likewise. Trapped in between, they are treated variously as pawns or bogeymen in Lukashenka's attempted diplomatic blackmail, the EU's extreme racist hostility to immigration, and the Polish government's efforts to shore up support with nationalistic fervour (see Igor Wenc's report below).

Poland, Latvia and Lithuania all declared states of emergency. Latvia and Lithuania authorised border guards to use physical violence and restricted the ability to submit asylum applications in border regions; and Poland banned press and humanitarian NGOs from a "red zone" adjacent to the border.

Poland and Latvia have both approved construction of border walls.

There is growing pressure within the EU to abandon its policy not to help fund construction of such barriers.

The "pushback" of refugees thwarts the right to apply for asylum, breaching EU and international law. But such violations are increasingly normalised among European states.

The EU leadership has expressed "solidarity" with the three states. Von der Leyen's Commission proposes allowing them to breach EU standards on asylum rights, detaining refugees for longer in even worse conditions.

The Left

Europe-wide, the left and labour movement must do much more to link up and confront xenophobic politics both inside and outside parliamentary channels, on both a national and EU-wide level. This also requires challenging and driving back pro-border-control elements within the left (from France's Mélenchon to Britain's *Morning Star*) and centre-left (e.g. Denmark's racist Social Democrat government and UK Labour's Starmer leadership).

Does the situation vindicate those who justified backing Brexit by citing Fortress Europe? From outside the EU, the UK still sent troops to help fortify Poland's border. But even a left government in Britain would be in a weaker position to intervene positively. We gained nothing from Brexit except the possibility of a meaningless claim to avoid "complicity", and have lost the ability to augment grassroots action



with direct challenges to Fortress Europe policies, in concert with allies, in the EU's democratic arena – the parliament, elections etc.

Rhetoric

Politicians in the border states, EU and UK justify their policies with increasingly frenzied rhetoric. They frame the migrants as a "security crisis" and Lukashenka's gambit as "hybrid war". That ten thousand refugees could "destabilise" the EU is absurd: wealthy European countries could easily afford a generous welcome to many more, and barely notice.

It is right to denounce Minsk's violence and its abuse of migrants for diplomatic blackmail (not military manoeuvre). But such a gambit is only possible because of the EU's ferocious hostility to immigration.

European policies like the Khartoum Process pay authoritarians, human rights abusers and genocidaires to prevent migrants reaching the walls of Fortress Europe.

EU cash has ended up in the hands of militias and businesses in Libya that capture would-be migrants, torture, extort, and sell them to traffickers. It has bolstered the genocidal former Janjaweed paramilitaries now policing Sudan's border.

The EU trained and equipped Lukashenka's forces to police the border. And Lukashenka is not the first to

use this position for attempted blackmail. Turkey's Erdogan successfully extracted millions in funding by threatening to open the gates. Morocco has used similar tactics to press Spain to accept its claim over Western Sahara.

The EU's and its member states' diplomatic "solutions" to Lukashenka's provocation include further externalisation of border control. They induced Turkey and UAE to ban Afghan, Iraqi, Syrian and Yemeni nationals from boarding flights to Minsk, and Iraq to halt such flights. Blocking flights will probably impel people back towards the even riskier Mediterranean crossing routes.

EU governments could stop the humanitarian crisis and Lukashenka's gambit overnight: simply open the borders, provide safe routes, and welcome new arrivals. □

Reddit vs. Kellogg's union busting

By Wilson Gibbons

Redditors at [r/antiwork](https://www.reddit.com/r/antiwork) have organised to flood the Kellogg's corporation process for hiring scab labour with bogus applications. Once Kellogg's had announced its intention to hire scab labour, members created a [comprehensive guide](#) for how to create a realistic seeming faux application which quickly became one of the subreddit's most popular posts. At one stage, the sheer volume of applications caused Kellogg's website to crash.

Hundreds of workers across four Kellogg's plants in the US have been on strike for over two months after rejecting a contract negotiated between the company and the union. The contract would have divided workers into two tiers, with those who had been at the company longer getting more favourable conditions than newer employees (around 30% of the workforce).

After workers walked out, the company said it "had no choice" but "to hire permanent replacement employees in positions vacated by striking workers".

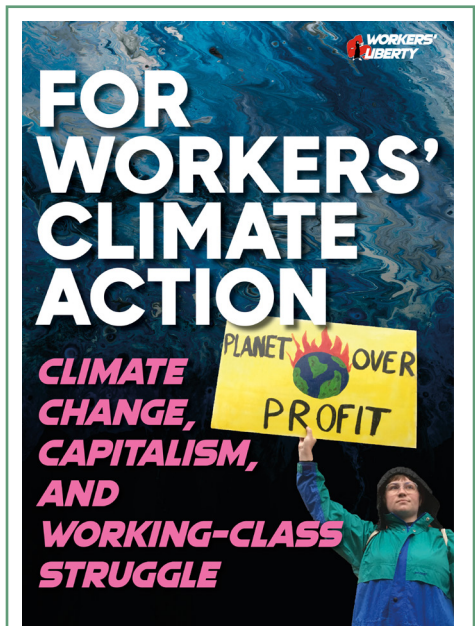
One TikTok user, Sean Black, has even gone so far as to code [a programme](#) which automatically fills out the appli-



cation form with relevant information, including a CV, making the process even easier. "Not bad for a day's work," he said in a video demonstrating the technology. He had previously created a similar piece of code to disrupt Texas anti-abortion activists.

Further [threads](#) have compiled lists of Kellogg's products to boycott and other ways to support the pickets. Workers have expressed their gratitude, calling it a "phenomenal" show of solidarity.

President Biden has [stated](#) that he would support the introduction of legislation to ban replacing striking workers with scab labour. □



Workers' Liberty have published an new edition of our climate pamphlet, updated with new articles, reviews, and debates.

workersliberty.org/climate-pamphlet

Polish government whips up nationalism

By Igor Wenc

Poland's hard-right government, previously flagging in the polls, is using the crisis to stir up patriotic support. It has shown itself willing to match Lukashenka's cynicism and absolute disregard for human life.

The militaristic narrative of refugee pushbacks, presented by the government as defending Polish borders against hybrid war, is based on and feeding into racist and xenophobic tropes of Poland as the "bulwark of Christendom", combined with playing on the fears of imperial appetites of Russia. This allows them to dehumanise refugees: presenting them as either a direct danger (for those more inclined to explicit racism), or as

a means of foreign aggression, that in either case must be stopped at all costs.

PiS ministers have performed stunts like broadcasting old bestiality porn, claiming it showed a migrant on the border having sex with a cow. Officials and state media have accused the Opposition of "treason" and collaborating with Putin and Lukashenka to "attack" Poland's borders.

State media also organises propaganda support for the Polish Border Patrol and Army, including a concert organized by Polish Television and the Ministry of Defence last Sunday. Titled "Stand by Polish Uniform", it featured pop stars performing World War Two patriotic songs. □

Bangladesh's origins

By Sacha Ismail

Fifty years ago one of history's biggest anti-colonial struggles triumphed.

On 16 December 1971, the Pakistani armed forces that had waged a nine-month campaign of genocidal mass murder to subjugate Pakistan's eastern half surrendered in the face of Indian military intervention. East Pakistan – East Bengal – became the independent state of Bangladesh. The Bengali people of East Pakistan were among the largest of the many nations to throw off colonial rule in the 20th century. In 1971 Bangladesh's population, 66 million, was larger than the UK's; today it is the eighth biggest country, with 165 million people. In 1971 the Pakistani army and Islamist militias killed somewhere between 300,000 and three million civilians, and raped hundreds of thousands (Bangladeshi fighters also committed many atrocities, though on a different scale.) Ten million, mainly Hindus, fled to India, and perhaps thirty million were internally displaced.

This is also a story of heroic resistance and struggles for liberation, by a movement many of whose rank and file aspired to create what they conceived of as a socialist society. It took place in the context of a great left-wing upheaval across the whole of Pakistan. Despite support from India, it won against opposition from the world's great powers – including aggressive hostility from the United States and China, both of which aided Pakistan.

At the time Bangladesh's "liberation war" was an important cause for much of the left internationally: but in its 50th anniversary year, there has not been much discussion on the British left. There should be more, as part of greater engagement with the Bangladeshi left and labour movement.

Bangladesh is an example of how nations do not exist as a given, but are formed in the course of history and struggles.

Bengal was the largest province in British-occupied India and a centre of resistance to British rule. In 1905 the British government partitioned it, into a mainly Hindu West and mainly Muslim East, to undermine rising nationalist struggle. The partition was reversed in 1911, but it sparked both a radicalisation of Indian nationalism and a growth of separatist Muslim politics.

Many of the Muslim elite in the eastern part of Bengal were not Bengalis but Urdu-speakers whose ancestors migrated there during the Mughal Empire. (The now dispersed Urdu-speaking elite of Dhaka is my heritage on my father's side.) They were important in



Awami League leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman speaking during the 1970 election campaign

the development of the Muslim-separatist movement across northern India, led by the Muslim League, that culminated in the creation of Pakistan alongside India in 1947.

Partition

The partition of India had many reactionary consequences, in the first instance terrible sectarian massacres as millions fled to "their" side of the new border. The "Muslim" state created – in fact Pakistan then was less of an Islamic state than today – was arguably always unviable, its two wings separated by over 1,200 miles of Indian territory.

Most Muslims in East Bengal seem to have rallied to the idea of Pakistan; but very quickly a different sort of identity, based on the Bengali language and ethnicity, began to assert itself.

The East Bengalis were a majority of Pakistan's population. Yet in 1948 the government proclaimed Urdu – the language of only a small proportion of West Pakistanis, but central to the conception of a unified Muslim culture in the subcontinent – as the sole national language. There were major protests in East Bengal (East Pakistan's official name until 1955). When the policy was reaffirmed in 1952, simmering discontent surged up.

Public meetings and protests were banned, and when thousands of students and others demonstrated in Dhaka, police killed at least nine. This sparked widespread unrest, including a general strike in the important industrial city of Narayanganj.

The development of bourgeois democratic institutions in Pakistan moved at a crawl. In the first election for East Bengal's provincial assembly, in 1954, the "United Front" coalition led by a more Bengali-nationalist, secular split from Pakistan's dominant Muslim League won a crushing majority, 223 seats to the Muslim League's 9.

The same month as that election, Pakistan's constituent assembly finally

voted to make Bengali a national language. This would be incorporated into the 1956 constitution. But three weeks after the assembly's decision the West-dominated federal government sacked the Bengali United Front administration, imposing rule from the centre. Immediately hundreds of activists were arrested, including future "Father of Bangladesh" Mujibur Rahman.

More and more Bengalis were coming to see the issues as about more than just language.

The resistance to giving Bengali official status had a powerful ideological dimension, but part of that was a reflection of the Pakistani state's material domination by the West of the country. Though the East had a majority of the people, up to 1971 it received on average only 40.5% of the public spending and investment West Pakistan did, and in 1955-60 just 31%. It was the economically stronger wing at the time of independence from Britain, accounting for two-thirds of Pakistan's export earnings into the 60s (mainly from jute and tea), but its position declined steadily as wealth was redistributed to the Western ruling class. By 1960 the West's growth rate was 70% higher than the East's.

The army's senior officer layer was overwhelmingly West-dominated, with 1.6% of those ranked major or above of East Pakistani origin in 1956. The very top military hierarchy, even more West-dominated, would shortly take control of Pakistan.

In 1955 the Awami (People's) Muslim League which had won the East Bengal elections before being ousted split, with the majority becoming a left-leaning secular nationalist party, the Awami League. This party would lead the war in 1971. Although it was long out of power in the 1970s and 80s, it is the dominant party in Bangladesh today, inching towards something like a one-party state.

In 1956 the Awami League formed a coalition in Pakistan's national assembly and took over the federal government, with its leader Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy becoming prime minister. (More left-wing forces broke away from the Awami League in protest at his pro-US international orientation.) But in 1957 Pakistani president Iskander Mirza, who had ruled East Bengal with an iron fist as governor after the dismissal of the United Front, pushed Suhrawardy out.

In 1958, Mirza carried out a coup against Pakistan's nascent democracy, arguing publicly that democratic institutions were unsuitable for a country with a low literacy rate. He appointed general Ayub Khan as chief administrator of the martial law regime. By the end of the year Ayub had exiled Mirza to the UK.

Labour militancy

There was rising labour militancy from 1958, and a general election due in March 1959. Fear of Pakistan's workers and peasants and fear of the Bengali majority were surely central to why bourgeois democracy in Pakistan was so slow to emerge and why it was snuffed out so quickly.

Ayub Khan remained dictator, overseeing extensive industrialisation and a growth of inequality, until 1968, when huge social and political upheavals beginning in the West became the prelude to national liberation struggle in the East.

When we discuss 1968, we usually talk about France, the UK, the US, perhaps Italy and Czechoslovakia... The millions of Pakistanis whose struggles overthrew the dictatorship deserve restoration to the leading place in the story of that revolutionary year. Pakistani-born leftist Tariq Ali has gone through a long process of political degeneration, but his description of the 1968-9 upsurge is eloquent:

"The gap between the actions of the Pakistani students and workers and the actual conquest of power was much narrower than in France or Italy, let alone the United States or Britain... The scale of the movement was breathtaking: during five months of continuous struggles that began on November 7, 1968, and ended on March 26, 1969, some 10-15 million people had participated in the struggle across East and West Pakistan."

Like in France, an initially small student struggle sparked this vast mass movement. Some students from the West Pakistani city of Rawalpindi were arrested on 7 November after purchasing smuggled goods from near the Afghan border. When Rawalpindi stu-

and Pakistan's 1968

dents struck and demonstrated, one was killed – and within days student protests swept across Pakistan.

By December large numbers of workers and unemployed people had joined the students, with strikes and working-class direct action spreading across the country.

Soon East Pakistan joined the fray. Its students called for a general strike in Dhaka on 8 December, when Ayub Khan was visiting the city. The regime imposed a curfew, but the strike was highly successful nonetheless. Dozens were wounded when the police opened fire and hundreds arrested; a flood of strikes followed in Dhaka and other towns.

As well with connecting with urban workers, the students were remarkably successful in reaching out to the countryside and mobilising rural workers and peasants. This was partly due to family and wider kinship connections with the villages; but also the students' verve in connecting their struggle to much wider grievances in society.

On 6 December the Rawalpindi students held a conference and demanded an impartial commission to investigate police violence. On 25 December, at a demonstration of tens of thousands of students and workers, they announced that they would no longer present any demands to the military regime, but only to a "people's government". The student movement now demanded Ayub Khan's resignation.

In January 1969 a Student Action Committee was formed in East Pakistan by supporters of the Awami League and the Communist Party. It proclaimed an eleven-point program, only the first of which dealt with student issues (though that included seventeen demands!) The eleven points included universal suffrage to elect a national government, full autonomy for East Pakistan, and subfederation for the Western provinces – but also nationalisation of the big industries and the financial sector; measures to raise living standards and guarantee the right to unionise and strike; and abrogation of military pacts with the US and its allies.

On 17 January a "Demands Day" mobilised huge demonstrations in East and West.

As an East Pakistani newspaper put it, the students' charter of demands "exceeds the imaginations of ordinary political parties... Their programme and leadership has largely been accepted by the people of the country".

The top leaders of the main opposition parties were in prison.

That included Awami League leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, when the pro-

tests erupted already on trial for supposedly conspiring with India. After the removal of Suhrawardy as Pakistani prime minister Mujib had led a shift to more firmly demanding strong regional autonomy.

From 1966, the Awami League championed "[six points](#)" to guarantee genuine autonomy – which, after the students launched their demands, moved from being seen as radical to more like a minimum programme for East Pakistan. Of humble rural origins and growing progressively more radical during the 1960s, Mujib was nonetheless a solidly bourgeois politician.

Pakistan People's Party

In the West the political fruits of the revolt were gathered by the populist Pakistan People's Party (PPP), launched in 1967 by a much more sinister ruling-class politician, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. From a wealthy landlord family in Sindh, Bhutto had served as Ayub Khan's foreign minister until 1966! His criticisms of his former master were right-wing as well as left-wing, urging an even more militaristic stance towards India. He would aggressively oppose self-determination for the Bengalis and back their suppression, providing crucial assistance to the military.

Bhutto's militant- and left-sounding attacks on the regime garnered major popular support and, particularly after his arrest early in the protests, many left-wing activists tragically regarded him as a hero.

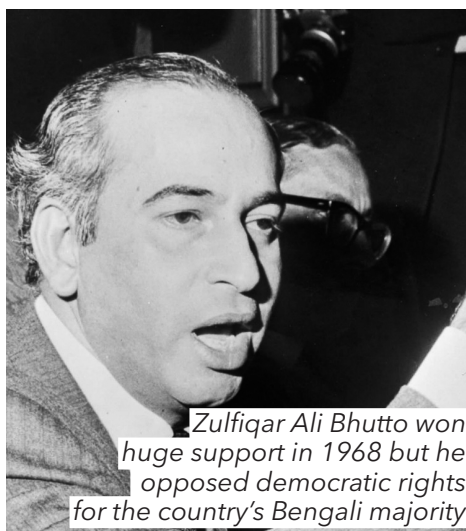
Released in February 1969, Bhutto, Mujib and other opposition leaders took part in national talks with the regime. Bhutto made clear he would not accept the Awami League's six points or anything like them.

Unrest continued to burn, particularly in the East, targeting Ayub in particular. On 25 March 1969, after over a decade in power, he resigned and army commander-in-chief Yahya Khan took over. On 26 March Yahya imposed martial law.

The regime agreed to hold elections, but Yahya Khan had no intention of giving up control, telling an army gathering that he was prepared to stay in power for "the next fourteen years or so".

Pakistan's first ever general election took place on 7 December 1970. The results were a shock for the military leaders.

Only the Islamist Jamaat-e-Islami and three fragments of the Muslim League seriously organised on both sides of Pakistan. These and other openly right-wing parties were routed: Jamaat did best with 6%. Promising "Islamic socialism" and "bread, clothing and shelter"



Zulfikar Ali Bhutto won huge support in 1968 but he opposed democratic rights for the country's Bengali majority

for the people, Bhutto's PPP won 18.6%, entirely in the West, and 81 of the region's 138 seats. The Awami League won 39.2%, and 167 of the East's 169 seats – a majority across Pakistan.

Moscow or Beijing

East Pakistan's strong "communist" and "communist"-adjacent left was divided between pro-Moscow and pro-Beijing wings. The former tended to fade into being indistinguishable politically from the Awami League; the latter sounded more radical, but under the influence of the Chinese regime, closely allied to Pakistan, was ambivalent about Bengali self-determination. So the left was easily pushed to the side.

The Awami League was a bourgeois party, backed by many of East Pakistan's capitalists as well as middle-class professionals, but it drew in the energy of the 1968-9 uprisings and mass support from workers, peasants and the poor, in addition to the student movement.

Its campaign was boosted by the horrendous impact of the Bhola cyclone, making landfall on East Pakistan's coastline on 12 November. Hundreds of thousands died and millions lost their homes. Despite the government's low political capital, its indifferent response shocked millions.

Even aside from questions of autonomy or self-determination for the East, the election results gave the Awami League every right to form Pakistan's government, with Mujib as prime minister. But Bhutto would not accept that. He conspired with the generals to postpone the national assembly meeting, telling them he would support repression against the Bengalis.

The US government also indicated to Yahya that it would endorse military action.

Troop reinforcements began arriving in Dhaka on 27 February 1971. On 1 March, the convening of the national assembly was cancelled – without rescheduling.

Within an hour of the announcement,

hundreds of thousands poured into the streets of Dhaka. Public and private employees in huge numbers went on strike, while university campuses emptied. A cricket match between Pakistan and the Commonwealth XI was abandoned as spectators joined the demonstrations. Thousands of protesters carried iron rods or sticks, and thousands chanted not just for autonomy but for an independent Bangladesh and armed struggle.

In broad sweep Bengali nationalism was progressive and liberatory – and resisting a brutal, utterly reactionary oppressor. Even at this stage it had, like almost all nationalist movements, its ugly side. The late 60s saw rising tensions between Bengalis and minorities in East Pakistan, particularly Muslim communities originating in the Indian region of Bihar, who tended to sympathise with Pakistan. In early March 1971 Bengali nationalists killed hundreds of Biharis.

The Awami League leadership hesitated to declare independence. Negotiations with the military dragged out. On 24 March Bhutto reaffirmed to Yahya he would support repression. At 11.30pm on the 25th, Operation Searchlight, a wave of killings targeting Bengali nationalists, the left, students and academics, and East Pakistan's Hindu communities, began – and with it Bangladesh's war of liberation. □

• A later article will tell the story of the war itself.

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Climate justice, yes



Environment

By Paul Vernadsky

The demand for “climate justice” is one of the great rallying cries for climate activists in recent mobilisations. Global inequalities have to be tackled as part of the fight to prevent dangerous climate change.

Climate campaigners rightly argue that the transition to a net-zero carbon economy must be just. Those in the greatest need should get the resources they require when they need them – which is now. Those with the greatest ability to pay should supply the resources, ideally for free.

Transfers from the richest to the poorest are necessary to tackle structural inequalities. The rich must cover the cost of carbon drawdown technologies which benefit the whole world but yield no income. Temperate countries, mostly richer, must welcome “climate refugees” from hotter and low-lying countries, mostly poorer. These arguments are widely articulated and consistent with Marxist principles.

At COP26, many demonstrators rallied behind banners calling for “climate reparations”. Most did so on the understandable grounds of climate justice and for solidarity with the “Global South”. However, putting the demands in a “climate reparations” frame is problematic on multiple levels.

Marxists have historically opposed demands for reparations. For example, during World War 1, a chief demand of

the Marxist left was “peace without annexations and indemnities”, “Indemnities” meaning the same as reparations.

Our comrades argued that as a general principle, and in advance, not as a particular response to the demands made on Germany by France, Britain, and the USA after the war. They argued not because they dismissed the damage likely to be done, or done, in the war – Serbia, attacked by Austro-Hungary, had over half its male population killed – but because they believed that the only way to construct a world of peace and equality was to unite the working class across borders to level up for the future. To focus on country vs. country demands for redressing past damage could only divide workers by diverting us into endless national claim and counter-claim.

To demand the richest states bear the bulk of the cost of emission-reducing technological change, of carbon drawdown, and of measures of adaptation to the climate change which already locked in, is right. To frame that as “reparations” would:

- Frame the causes of climate change falsely
- Downgrade class analysis in favour of states and “camps”, “good peoples” and “bad peoples”
- Weaken the basic case for redistribution of resources
- Divide rather than unite, and lead workers into nationalist snares
- Fail to mobilise the forces necessary to combat climate change.

The case for “climate reparations”

The case for reparations was recently made by George Monbiot, “Never mind aid, never mind loans: what poor nations are owed is reparations”, *The Guardian*, (5 November 2021).

Monbiot stated:

“The story of the past 500 years can be crudely summarised as follows. A handful of European nations, which had mastered both the art of violence and advanced seafaring technology, used these faculties to invade other territories and seize their land, labour and resources...”

“The stolen labour, land and goods were used by some European nations to stoke their industrial revolutions... Unwittingly at first, then with the full knowledge of the perpetrators, the industrial revolutions released waste products into the Earth’s systems...”

“Some of the pollutants were both invisible and global. Among them was carbon dioxide, which did not disperse but accumulated in the atmosphere. Partly because most rich nations are temperate, and partly because of ex-

treme poverty in the former colonies caused by centuries of looting, the effects of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases are felt most by those who have benefited least from their production...”

“Never mind aid, never mind loans; what the rich nations owe the poor is reparations.”

The Green Party of England and Wales (GPEW) report, *Climate Repairs: Making Reparation for a History of Colonialism and Enslavement* (October 2021), also makes a case for climate reparations. It states:

“We propose a practical implementation of climate justice in the form of global solidarity based on the idea of climate reparations... We are clear that the wealthy countries that are responsible for the majority of historic emissions have a duty to finance the sustainability transition for the countries of the Global South.

“Western countries that have benefited from exploitation and extraction of natural resources, people and land from Global South countries should acknowledge the harm caused and compensate them. These countries that are currently experiencing the worst effects of the climate crisis deserve climate justice. The UK has a special responsibility to the world for historic emissions that are causing loss and damage across the Global South and a duty to make reparation for our shameful past of colonialism and enslavement.”

These arguments were first articulated in Maxine Burkett, “Climate Reparations”, *Melbourne Journal of International Law*, 10 (2009). She put the case in the context of wider reparations demands:

“The reparations ethos is based on international and general law principles that require perpetrators to return wronged individuals to the status quo ante or, if not possible, compensate victims for their injuries... Reparation, broadly defined, describes programmes that are justified by past

harms and are also designed to assess and correct the harm and improve the lives of the victims into the future. This definition incorporates the backward- and forward-looking nature of reparations claims.”

Burkett argued:

“Climate reparations is the effort to assess the harm caused by the past emissions of the major polluters and to improve the lives of the climate vulnerable through direct programmes, policies and/or mechanisms for significant resource transfers, to assure the ability of the climate vulnerable to contemplate a better livelihood in light of future climate challenges. In order to repair individual communities as well as the global community, all those engaged in the reparative effort will have to squarely confront the deep moral questions posed by both the initiating harm – excess emissions – and the continuing harm: the failure to adequately include the plight of the climate vulnerable in the current processes developed to mitigate and adapt to the climate crisis.”

False framing

These authors share a righteous humanitarian instinct. Analytically, though, they bypass investigation of the dominant political economy of the past two centuries, the capitalist mode of production, in favour of telling a story of some bad peoples doing down other, helpless, peoples. Steeped in post-colonial discourse, legal “rights”, and straightforward moralising, they ignore classes and class struggle, lump exploiters and exploited together, and substitute guilt-tripping for serious climate politics.

Marxists make a very strong case for capitalism as the cause of climate change. Capitalism – with its exploitation of waged labour by capital, its competitive drive to accumulate, its insatiable pursuit of profits over human needs and ecological limits – is the system that has given rise to the climate



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! Reparations, no!

crisis. Capitalist states – mired in rivalry, riven by inequalities of power and resources, their governments captive of business and subservient to corporate interests – fail to cooperate or find even the most minimal agreement to turn the tide of greenhouse gas emissions and put humanity on the path to a sustainable future.

Instead, advocates of climate reparations employ catch-all categories of “global North” and “global South”, “Western countries” and “wealthy countries”, to paint a picture of collective responsibility that is divisive, nationalist and ultimately politically reactionary.

US academics Olúfémi O Táíwò and Beba Cibralic, in “The Case for Climate Reparations”, *Foreign Policy* (October 2020), interpret all climate injustice as “climate colonialism” and “climate apartheid”. This gives an alibi to today’s capitalism by attributing its injustices to particular forms largely in the past (West European colonial empires ended in 1975, apartheid was 1948-94). It diverts from anti-capitalist effort by looking to re-run the old fights against colonialism and against apartheid, in somewhat the same way that bourgeois nationalists in South American countries politically independent since the early 19th century have proposed “Second Independence” to divert workers from anti-capitalism.

Advocates of reparations conflate what needs to be distinguished. Past burning of fossil fuels and the resulting carbon emissions started with early nineteenth century British capitalists, but extended to capitalists in Europe, North America and other parts of the world by the late twentieth century. The agents who decided to emit greenhouse gases and who began the process are now long dead, even if some of the firms they built still exist.

More importantly, these agents were capitalists, who made their decisions in competition with other capitalists and with the support or connivance of capitalist states. They did not seek or receive permission from the workers they exploited for fossil fuel production, whose labour they replaced with machines, or whose labour process they transformed – to the detriment of workers’ health and safety.

Therefore to make all those living in advanced industrial states responsible for past emissions is to target exploited workers who have had no part in the decisions and have been the immediate victims as today’s stand-in for the long-dead capitalist perpetrators of previous eras. This is not righting an historic wrong, but creating an historic myth that doesn’t stand up. It is certainly not justice.



Further, climate reparations push responsibility back into the past when the damage caused by greenhouse gases was not well established. Nineteenth and twentieth century capitalists were responsible for heinous crimes against the working class. The imperialist states that colonised vast parts of the world perpetrated oppression and exploitation on a gargantuan scale. They certainly knew they were profiting from misery. To think they knew they were creating climate change and still persisted is to collapse analysis into conspiracy theory. The climate change hypothesis was articulated by Svante Arrhenius in the late nineteenth century. Much of the evidence was collected from the 1950s. Even in the 1970s, respected climate scientists like Steven Schneider were unconvinced by global warming. The global public case for climate change was established by James Hansen in 1988, leading to the UNFCCC and the COP process.

Who gets let off the hook

The North/South dichotomy is mostly an updated version of the old first world/third world categorisation that became popular during decolonisation in the 1950s and 1960s. The old version at least had the virtue of identifying the “second world”, namely the Stalinist bloc around the USSR, Eastern Europe, China, Vietnam, North Korea and Cuba.

The environmental record of the Stalinist states, whether they had previously been imperial powers (Russia...) or subjected to conquest (China...), has been absolutely terrible. In the case of the USSR, the forced industrialisation and collectivisation begun by Stalin caused untold devastation. From Lake Baikal to Chernobyl, the environment was damaged for generations. When climate scientists began to calculate the carbon emissions by countries in the 1980s, the Stalinist states were among the worst polluters. It is not possible to redress that record by seeking out aged former Stalinist bureaucrats, or their descendants, and demanding

reparations from them. Nor should we even try. Also, states which formerly came under imperial rule but became independent many decades ago, and have developed large coal, gas or oil production mostly since then, spawning ultra-wealthy ruling classes in the process – such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Gulf states, China, India, Indonesia, Brazil, Mexico, Venezuela, and Nigeria – continue with this production despite the now-known risks, including to their own peoples, from climate change. To demand that climate change be fixed by workers in Portugal, say, paying “reparations” to the ruling classes of Saudi Arabia or China is a dead end.

The “climate reparations” framing of demands for global justice lets the ruling classes of those states off the hook for their own culpability. These are states in which citizens often do not even get to vote for “their” governments, and where inequalities are even starker than in the old, richer states. The working classes in those states are among those impacted heavily by in the climate change which their rulers have helped generate, yet still have no part in decisions on what to produce or how to produce it.

Reparations is a transactional framing. The demand for “compensation” is about getting money from one party and handing it to another. Extracting transfers in the form of higher taxes from workers in the “West”, themselves ground down by unemployment, austerity, poverty and other blights, is not climate justice. Handing huge sums to the ruling classes of states in the “South”, with no guarantee that it will get to those who most need climate remedy, is not justice.

Reparations smack of “revanchism”, the “revenge politics” which took root in France after Prussia defeated France in war, imposed a large fine supposed to be compensation for war damage (and designed, in fact, to cripple France economically), and seized territory. The

damage to France was real enough: the drive to deal with it by seeking “revenge” led to the Treaty of Versailles. To dismiss those who oppose the reparations framing as defenders of “white privilege” or “white fragility” is ad hominem demagoguery, not reasoned debate.

Transitional demands

The Marxist approach to building climate campaigns is based on the historic experience of the labour movement fashioning united fronts around transitional demands. This is important because the working class is the only international agent with the interest and the power to halt dangerous climate change and build a sustainable society. The fight for a global working class-based climate movement is the central strategic intervention that could make the difference.

The demand for climate reparations attempts to find common ground with Black Lives Matter and other anti-racist campaigns. Climate activists understandably want to learn from other successful struggles, including the anti-apartheid and anti-colonial movements of the past. The movements formed around these struggles have much to teach, but also much to avoid. Cyril Ramaphosa was once a trade union leader in South Africa under apartheid. He then became one of the continent’s richest business people and now South African president.

The demand for climate reparations is not a transitional demand. For workers in the “North”, it is demand that they pay for damage they did not cause. For workers and peasants in the “South”, it is a nationalist demand that directs them to look for “trickle-down” from the reparations to be paid to their rulers. The demand for climate reparations divides the workers of the world, rather than unites.

The duty of Marxists in the climate movement is to tell the truth, propose the best strategies and formulate demands clearly. Demanding “climate reparations” detracts from and confuses the climate struggle. The climate movement does not need the “reparations” framing to unite for redistribution. □



A socialist dissects Left antisemitism. Third ed., 253 pages, £9.99 □

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More on our half-price book offer

By Martin Thomas

The coming weeks of fewer labour-movement meetings and activities are a good time to read our longer books, and within our general half-price offer we're doing a special deal on *The Fate of the Russian Revolution* volume 1 and *The Two Trotskyisms Confront Stalinism*: both large books for £10 post free.

If you've already read those, or want something easier, the half-price offer also makes many shorter texts more available.

Socialism Makes Sense is an attempt to allow anti-socialist ideas full voice and then refute them in favour of the idea of socialism which was advocated by the mass socialist movement before Stalinism and which (we think) is sketched and pointed to by large-scale working-class struggles. That's an idea different from the Stalinist counterfeit.

Democracy, Direct Action, and Socialism takes off from that argument to explore the debate between revo-

lutionary socialism and reformism: it centres on an exchange between Sean Matgamna of Workers' Liberty and Michael Foot, Labour Party leader 1980-3.

We have tagged *The Left in Disarray*, our longest book after *The Fate* and *Two Trotskyisms*, as a third "companion volume". It moves on from the general case for revolutionary working-class socialism to explore what that requires in building a movement of adequately clear politics, and what we must learn from previous mis-steps and failures.

Two big experiences of the British left, in particular, are reviewed in *Corbynism: What Went Wrong?* (a newer book, so not in the half-price offer, but only £4) and in the introduction to *In Defence of Bolshevism*, which covers the left upsurge of 1979-85.

Class Against Class covers the miners' strike of 1984-5, whose defeat marked the end of that upsurge. *In Defence of Bolshevism*, a larger book, has as its core a long-lost text by Max Shachtman on why Bolshevism and the Russian Revolution are to be built on and

learned from rather than dismissed.

The Russian Revolution: When Workers Took Power reviews, in the light of recent research, the revolution and the ideas which radiated out from it into the world labour movement.

Can Socialism Make Sense? is an older version of *Socialism Makes Sense*. It combines an earlier draft of the defence of socialism via "imaginary dialogue" with a collection of short fundamental texts on socialism and the record of real-life debates we've done with anti-socialists.

What Is Capitalism? and *Marxist Ideas To Turn the Tide*, recently reprinted, were produced for our 2012 and 2013 summer schools. They are collections of shorter pieces, useful as introductory or "reference" texts. *What Is Capitalism?* includes, for example, an explanation of what we mean by "workers' government", a summary of what we see as our "tradition", and short illustrations of what we mean by "Third Camp" independent working-class politics, in contrast to left politics geared instead

to a negatively-defined "anti-imperialist" camp.

Marxist Ideas To Turn The Tide includes succinct summaries on the united front, the "workers' government", and transitional demands.

Why Socialist Feminism, Otto Rühle's abridgement of *Capital*, Mark Osborn's account of *Solidarnosc*, *Gramsci In Context*, *Working-Class Politics and Anarchism*, and *1919: Strikes, Struggles, and Soviets*, are all good sellers on our bookstalls, with their content well-flagged by their titles.

In an Era of Wars and Revolutions is a different sort of book. It is a selection of cartoons published in the US Trotskyist press in the mid-20th century, with succinct explanation and commentary. To the reader it thus brings three things: basic arguments for socialism, presented pictorially rather than at length; something of US and world working-class history of that time; and a picture of the US Trotskyist movement of that time, probably the world's strongest, as a living movement. □



Half Price Offer!

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Special Christmas and New Year offer: all older books (everything but *Corbynism: What Went Wrong?*) are half price and post free over the holiday period. □



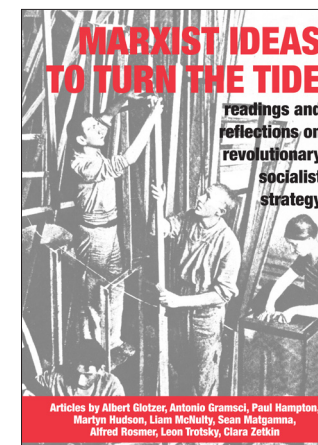
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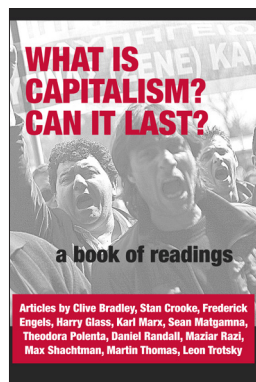
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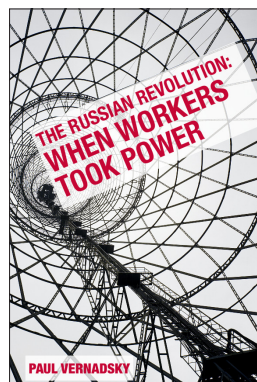
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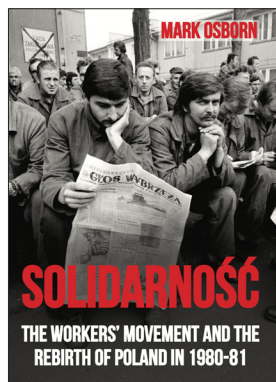
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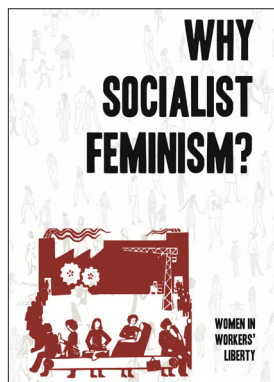
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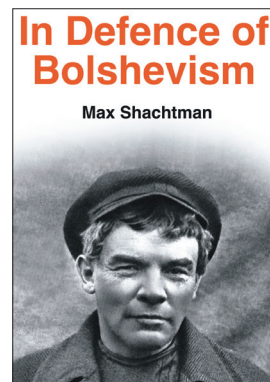
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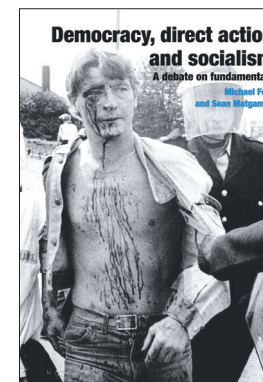
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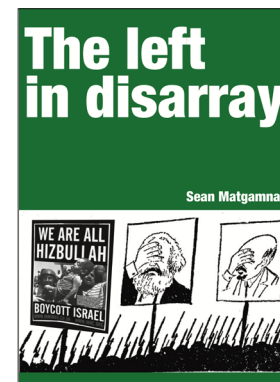
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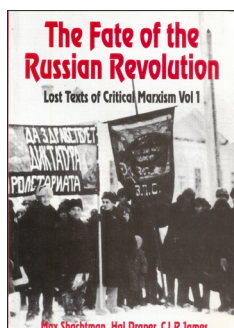
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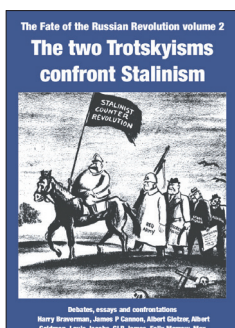
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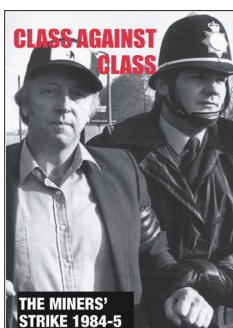
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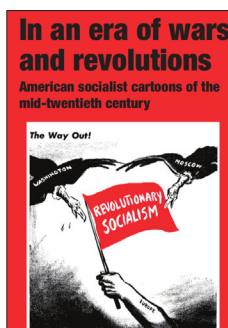
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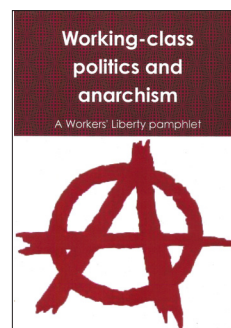
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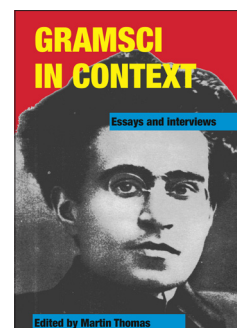
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UCU dispute: build the next stages

By a Cambridge UCU member

With terms drawing to a close in mid-December, university campuses are becoming much quieter places, and will remain so until early-mid January.

Whilst taking much-needed respite following the end of a busy term and kicking off industrial action, University and College Union (UCU) activists and supporters now have ideal opportunities to build our actions into next term. There are five clear things activists should focus on: recruiting to the union; mobilising members to take part in "action short of a strike" (ASOS) and join next term's pickets; getting more branches out; building solidarity with non-UCU staff; and pressuring the leadership to strengthen the actions available to us.

UCU strikes hit 58 campuses on 1-3 December, and "action short of a strike" in 60+ branches is now indefinitely in place. This represents nearly 60% of our membership, which could rise as high as nine in ten of all UCU higher education members if all 42 branches

currently re-balloting beat the anti-union 50%+ turnout threshold. We can use this time to support these 42 branches – contact anyone you know currently being re-balloted, offer them support with phone-rounds, email reminders.

We also need to get more members out on strike, and new people into the union. Until pickets resume (later in January) we need to reach out to colleagues who weren't striking or on pickets and convince them of why we're out, and why their support is essential to win.

There are six types of ASOS that the UCU included on our ballots. So far, just one is in place: working to rule. This offers an important way of reclaiming many unpaid hours university staff work, but alone won't be enough to beat our employers.

Serious thought needs to be put on organising effective marking boycotts that are hard-hitting – in both the Winter and Summer semester exams. The union's higher education committee also needs to issue stronger guidance on rescheduling classes, sharing or up-

loading online material, and covering for colleagues.

Without bulletproof guidance and support from the union and notifications sent to management, senior leadership will too-easily be able to undermine actions of union members. For escalation to start in January, we need to act now.

Building student solidarity will also be crucial next term. Student support puts further pressure on institutions and helps to cohere and boost morale for striking workers. Building national co-ordination, for such things as a national demonstration will be important. The "Red Square Movement" which came out of the lockdown rent strikes could provide that co-ordination.

But the renewed student movement now being built will need to defend the right to protest. An [investigation](#) by *Express* reporter Emily Braeger found 31 universities admitting to monitoring students' social media accounts for political activity. Students at Sheffield Hallam have now launched a campaign to sack their Vice Chancellor, Chris Husbands (@SHUdivorcechris). □

• A three week strike at Goldsmiths college in south London ended on Monday 13 December with a picket line celebration of student solidarity, a presentation of an ["Open Letter to Frances Corner"](#) (Goldsmiths' top manager) signed by over 4,000 academics, researchers and others, songs, and a well-received speech by Jeremy Corbyn.

The strike at Goldsmiths has become a focal point for the wider battle in higher education against cut backs, casualisation and attacks on the workforce. With 52 jobs on the line in just the first wave of management cuts, the local branch will need the solidarity of the whole union through an academic boycott of the college. If management do not back down on redundancies Goldsmiths UCU plans more action.

The Goldsmiths Unison branch, which has many members affected in what is essentially a "fire and rehire" move by the college, is conducting an indicative industrial ballot. If this leads to a formal ballot, both unions may be taking industrial action together next term. □

Tube: unite all grades to fight the cuts

From Tubeworker

The ballot of members in Transport for London (TfL) and London Underground (LU) being run by rail union RMT between 13 December and 10 January is on action against cuts to any grade's jobs and conditions and to all our pensions. It is not just about six hundred station jobs at threat. Those are just the first slice in a long series of cuts.

TfL management have finally shown their hand – or, more accurately, the first of many hands they intend to deal – over cuts to improve their finances

after lockdown. Don't think that grades other than station staff, first hit, have escaped a bullet. All are in line if workers don't unite to defeat this.

The company claims that it could cut five or six hundred station staff without damaging customer service. Its arguments are laughable.

Apparently, we need fewer station staff because of lower passenger numbers due to increased working from home. But during the years when passenger numbers grew significantly, they did not increase staff, so how does a fall in number justify cutting them? In any case, they can not know to what extent numbers will recover after Covid impacts ease.

TfL also claim that cutting this many posts (more than one in ten station staff) will not affect the work-life balance of remaining staff. Pull the other one! Management has pledged that stations will be staffed throughout traffic hours and that minimum numbers will remain the same. It is simply not possible to do that without increasing the proportion of extreme turns. And increased workload has a negative effect on work-life balance even if your hours stay the same.

Management also claim that the rise in use of contactless payment means that passengers need less help. That will be news to station staff constantly dealing with passengers who need help with their contactless payment! In any case, we are there to help everyone, not just the confident, card-swip-

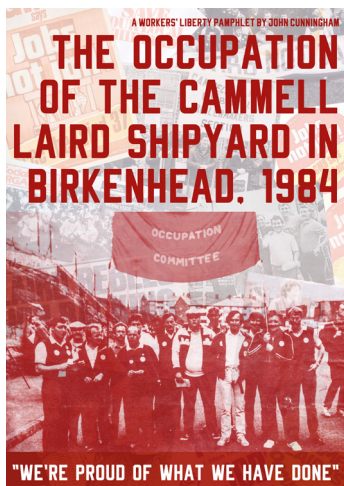
ing, besuited commuter. And good luck with the "clampdown on fare evasion" with hundreds fewer staff!

Passengers will feel the impact if these cuts go ahead. Nearly every customer commendation is for a Customer Service Assistant (CSA), a worker in the first group management are threatening. CSAs help disabled passengers and people in distress. CSAs are first on the scene dealing with safety-critical incidents. Supervisors can not run stations without them.

Management plan to cut detrainment staff and to reduce platform duties. This would load yet more responsibility onto drivers and will lead to more incidents, with potentially serious consequences and drivers' jobs on the line.

Everyone knows that the real reason for the cuts is the "financial crisis". The government is demanding that TfL makes cuts of at least half a billion pounds as a condition of bailing it out for another eighteen months – and TfL, instead of resisting this appalling coercion, is going along with it. (Tubeworker would also like to point out that the same government and TfL regularly accuse us of "holding London to ransom" when we strike – a phrase that fits their actions rather more accurately.)

Management hope that other grades will not rally to the defence of station jobs. Do not play their game. The union is balloting all of us because all of us are under attack. It's a fight for every worker in every grade. □



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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Night Tube battle will run into 2022

A further weekend of action (10-11 December) has continued to disrupt management's plan to re-open Night Tube while abolishing the Night Tube driver role. The rebalot closes on 20 December, and there is further action on 17-18 December, including a full 24 hour strike on all existing Night Tube lines on Saturday 18th.

As well as voting yes in the all-grades ballot across London Underground for action against cuts across the board, drivers need to prepare for further action in the specific Night Tube dispute. □

• With the election of Alex Gordon, a member of the Communist Party of Britain's Executive Committee, as National President, the Broad Left faction – an alliance between supporters of the Communist Party and *Morning Star* and other Stalinists, and a traditional "Old Labour" element – has further consolidated its power within rail union RMT's structures. Workers' Liberty supporters in RMT have published a detailed argument about why a solid rank and file network needs to be developed in the union, and how: bit.ly/RMTrf

“What we stand for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

• workersliberty.org/join-awl

Who will pick the next Margaret up off the floor?



Diary of a Paramedic

By Robert Jordan

I arrive on station early to check my ambulance unpaid, knowing the alternative is to arrive at a patient missing vital equipment. Meeting my crewmate for the day, a terrified-looking newly qualified paramedic, I can't help but visualise her probable remaining career countdown hovering above her head. It says five years.

We exchange pleasantries and head straight out to the first call: Margaret, an elderly female who had fallen on the landing without injury. When we arrive her husband looks at me with a familiar mixture of relief and suppressed anger. I ask when she fell. "I rang eight hours ago" he tells me. I assess her to find she is hypothermic, has pressure sores and

can no longer stand due to her long lie on the hard floor.

Frustratingly, had we arrived last night. I could have put her back in bed. This morning though, I'm going to have to take her to hospital where I know she has a fair chance of catching pneumonia or some other infection from being bed-bound on a crowded ward.

Afterwards I attempt to fill in an incident report on the harm caused by the delay but I'm interrupted by other calls. Throughout the day dispatch calls out in vain on the radio open channel for any available crews to attend life-threatening emergencies. This is all performative, as we on the road can only physically see so many patients in a day and are always with, or driving to, a patient. We all know there is nobody left to respond but hey, it ticks a box somewhere.

I continue seeing patient after patient until I finish late as usual. Due to hospital delays, a final job converts my 12

hour shift into a 15 hour shift. This is not an unusual occurrence any more.

When I'm finally back on station I see a bunch of new faces waiting for my vehicle, the names of many of which I've mostly given up learning as they don't stay that long. Even amongst these newer paramedics much of the general chat is already about escape plans – moving into GP practices and walk-in centres, going to teach at university, anything to get away from working these long shifts on an ambulance.

They've already figured out that it's an unsustainable career. I've never met a full-time paramedic working anywhere near my retirement age of 68.

I figure, good for them that they plan to escape the exploitation of a workplace that will reward the sacrifice of their physical and mental health with real-terms paycuts and a few claps. But then again, who is going to pick the next Margaret up off the floor? □

Private school teachers set to strike

By a Lewisham school worker

On 6 December the indicative ballot of National Education Union (NEU) members who teach in the 23 "public" [i.e. private] schools run by the Girls' Day School Trust (GDST) returned 93% yes for strikes on a 93% turnout.

This sets us on course for a very significant strike.

GDST is threatening to withdraw from the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS), the standard pension scheme for state-school teachers. The TPS is significantly better than private pension schemes GDST would buy in to.

Some members could lose more than £20,000. Ironically for a company that claims it is about empowering women, withdrawal from TPS would especially hit women more likely to take career breaks.

The employers argue that they cannot afford to remain within the TPS, but GDST revenue is healthy. It has reserves of £43.1 million and restricted funds of £95 million. GDST also claims that employer contributions are set to rise to 30%. That is speculation and anyway couldn't happen until 2024.

GDST also claims, without evidence, TPS is likely to collapse.

The employers have threatened

to use "fire and rehire". If GDST does withdraw from TPS it will set a dangerous precedent. Other private schools and academies could follow their lead, threatening an actual collapse of the TPS.

NEU ran the indicative ballot in an exemplary manner; making it clear the union was building for action with the aim of winning, keeping the reps in schools up to date with the turnout, and using strong, clear communication with members. The turnout and result shows how effective that approach can be, even with a section of the membership often considered more conservative. □

One of China's best films: Red Sorghum



Kino Eye

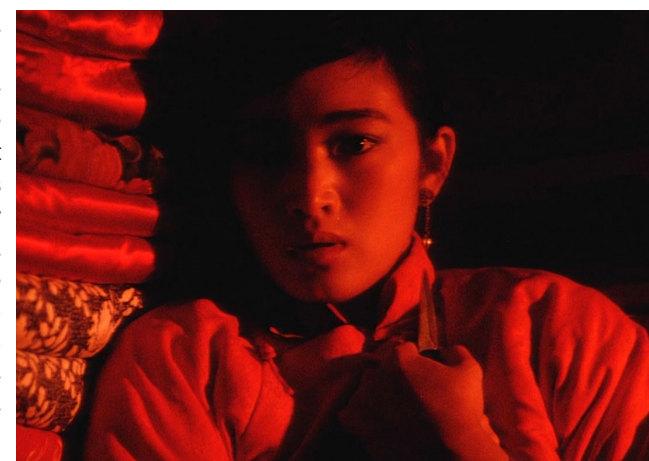
By John Cunningham

Directed by Zhang Yimou, *Red Sorghum* is set in the thirties in Shandong province around the time of the second Chinese-Japanese war (1937-45). Jiu'er (Gong Li) is sold in an arranged marriage to Li Datou, a leper, who owns a distillery which brews Red Sorghum wine. Jiu'er falls in love with a distillery worker, "Grandpa" (Jiang Wen), who rescues her from bandits and later they have a child.

Li Datou dies (possibly murdered); he has no heirs and Jiu'er becomes

the owner of the distillery. Grandpa is the butt of a practical joke and peevishly urinates in the huge wine vats (don't try this at home). The wine acquires a new taste and potency becoming very popular. However, the Japanese army occupy the province and they brutally torture and kill Luohan, a much-respected worker at the distillery.

Drinking wine to bolster their courage, the workers plan their revenge. They ambush a Japanese convoy with improvised bombs made of Sorghum wine. The fighting is ferocious and almost everybody, Chinese



or Japanese, ends up dead. Jiu'er is killed and only Grandpa and their son survive. Outside the time frame of the film the son, in turn, becomes a father and his child is the film's narrator. □

Demands for levelling-up



John Moloney

Our union's (PCS) National Executive Committee met on 9 December, and agreed to conduct a consultative ballot of our entire civil service membership for industrial action over pay and pensions. This is wrapped up into our Cost of Living campaign. The ballot will cover the UK Civil Service and those of Scotland and Wales. The same NEC agreed our pay claim for next year. Those demands will include such things as the levelling-up of pay rates for all our members.

As part of the campaign we are also demanding a decrease in employer contributions to the pension schemes. We know from the government's own calculations that workers are paying more into the schemes than they are getting out. PCS wants contributions reduced, plus the excess contributions over payments reimbursed as back pay.

The timetable for the ballot is yet to be agreed, but it should be in the first quarter of 2022. It's been some years since the union has had a coordinated national campaign of this type, so it's both a test of our organisation and a means by which we can aim to rebuild/strengthen it.

We're not just taking the temperature of the membership; we want to develop union organisation on the ground. We've got thousands of members who've signed up to be "union advocates"; we need to use this ballot campaign to convert as many of them

as possible into reps and branch officers. And, of course, we need to use the ballot to recruit non-members.

Something I'm pushing very strongly is the need to develop separate but parallel campaigns for members in the other sectors of our union who won't be covered by this campaign. There's a campaign meeting on 20 December and I'll be making that point in my contribution there.

A good start will be getting the basics of communication right; in the past, non-civil-service members, for example in the culture sector, or in privatised sectors, have received communication from the union trying to engage them in civil service campaigns. Of course, there's nothing wrong with information being shared but if members are getting messages from the union trying to get them involved in a campaign that isn't actually about their sector that creates the impression that the union is a "civil servants' only union", and could lead to those other members feeling marginalised or excluded. There's a consensus around the need to develop parallel national campaigns for other sectors, but we need to put flesh on those bones.

Another important target for 2022 is continuing the dispute over workplace safety in the DVLA complex in Swansea. The Department for Transport has not re-engaged with us as yet. If they don't, we will need to go for a new ballot, probably on a disaggregated basis, in the New Year. □

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

NHS pay: organise now for April 2022

By Alice Hazel

In second round of consultation ballots by the biggest health unions on NHS pay, RCN members in England voted 89% for action short of strike and 54% for strike action. Unison members voted 77% in favour of industrial action.

Unsurprisingly the turnouts haven't improved significantly since the first round of consultations, 23% for the RCN and an unannounced (but similar) figure in Unison. We're told that very few branches reached the 45% level that the Unison health service group Executive had set to trigger a formal ballot. The GMB formal ballot, which is being run on a disaggregated basis, closes on 15 December. The expectation here is also for a strong yes vote, but with few branches reaching 50%, meaning it's unlikely that action will follow.

The trade union laws have done their job and stood in the way of workers angry about a measly pay award. The union bureaucracies, in turn, have lent on the laws to justify their lack of action.

The street protests organised by Nurses United and NHS Workers Say No! in the summer of 2020 gave optimism to the start to the pay campaign. It was deliberately leached away, particularly by the Unison leadership, which refused to back any protests associated with the 15% demand of NHS Workers Say No, refused to make a recommendation to reject the award, ran two informal ballots over the same issue, and put very little resource into turning out the vote.

The low consultation and ballot turnouts, across all unions, also reflect a longstanding weakness in the levels of trade union organisation with the NHS. If in fact very few branches have been able to reach anywhere near threshold votes, the weakness is widespread.

Yet large numbers of health workers, across all unions, have voted repeatedly for action. We must demand a full breakdown of voting figures from our unions so that we can see where our strength lies. The establishment of local and national activist networks through NHS Workers Say No! will be important in organising these members and taking the fight into the unions nationally.

Preparation for the pay campaign for 2022/23 needs to be started immediately. The government have already sent signals by setting the NHS pay review body report for 22 May, a month after the pay award is due, and stating that any pay increase will come from existing budgets. We must demand that in the year ahead our unions make a united pay claim that recompenses members for over ten years of pay cuts.

Alongside the ongoing pay cam-



paign we must fight on issues of workload, health and safety, job threats, privatisation, and against the continued breakup of the NHS. We must demand that our unions, and especially the newly-elected left National Executive Committee of Unison, build campaigns and protests on those issues and feed them into a concerted strategy for rebuilding union organisation. □

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More online

Thirty years ago, the USSR collapsed

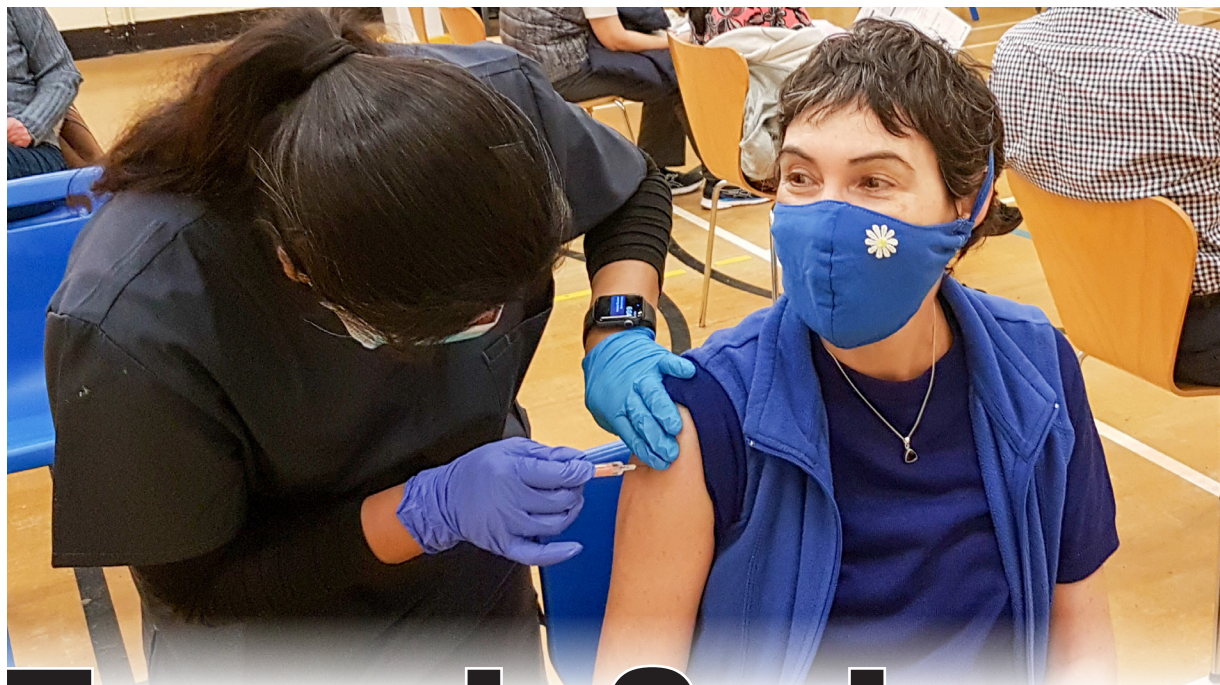
On 25 December 1991, Mikhail Gorbachev announced that he had resigned as president of the USSR, and the USSR itself had been dissolved. Len Glover traces the steps which in just a few years took the USSR from second superpower to collapse.

bit.ly/ussr-c



Ethan Bradley

Ethan Bradley was the chair of the National Couriers and Logistics Branch of the IWGB. He passed away in York on 24 November at the age of 28 following a cycling accident, just as members of the organisation he chaired were preparing for the historic action in Sheffield, with his assistance. His funeral is to be held in York on 14 December. Obituary: bit.ly/et-b. Funeral fund: bit.ly/eb-ff □



To curb Omicron

- Requisition resources for NHS and care
- Isolation pay for all, restore furlough
- Workers' control of workplace safety

By Martin Thomas

As the Tory government flounders on Omicron, Keir Starmer could tell us on 13 December only that out of "patriotism" he would back its Plan B measures against the let-the-virus-rip Tory right, the people who call themselves "libertarians" though they back the Police Bill, the Borders Bill, anti-union laws, and voter ID.

Labour left MP Richard Burgon has rightly pushed the need also for full sick or isolation pay for all, and reinstatement of furlough pay.

Emergency measures are needed to boost the NHS and social care, which were already overstretched before Omicron and before winter proper set in (December). Demand the Tories pay the NHS workers their 15% pay rise now, requisition private hospitals and clinics to integrate them into the NHS, take social care into the public sector and level up care workers to NHS pay and conditions!

The Omicron surge will be bad even if it is at the milder end of the possibilities scientists are now assessing. Probably more covid-distancing restrictions will be necessary. *Solidarity* claims no expertise on how best to calibrate them.

We know that they can only delay virus spread. Those, including on the left, who have been saying that a few months' lockdown would banish Covid for good, are sadly wrong. But that delay, to allow more vaccinations and ease hospital overstretch, can save lives.

Centrally we advocate the social measures that can reduce Covid's hurt long-term and, short-term, make the restrictions effective (at present one in four say that if tested positive for Omicron, they would still go to work for lack of sick pay). Over the years, after Omicron, will probably come other variants partially evading established vaccines. Covid is likely to fade over time, but we don't know how long. It won't "end".

As Britain rushes for boosters, Africa is still jogging along at 0.14 jabs per 100 people per day, a rate at which it will take six years to get everyone triple-jabbed. Only 8% are twice-jabbed. Yet Omicron is spreading most rapidly in South Africa and neighbouring countries.

Demand the governments of the world requisition the assets of Big Pharma – starting with the patents and the technical know-how to expedite vaccine justice by ultra-fast vaccine production and distribution! □

Police Bill: wake up the labour movement!

By Sacha Ismail

An energetic demonstration, initiated by Extinction Rebellion and involving many different campaigns and activists, gathered at Parliament on 8 December to oppose the Police Bill.

Let's make this the start of a renewed movement against the Bill, reviving the spirit of spring 2021 when tens of thousands across the country demonstrated against it.

There is not much time. The House of Lords will start voting again on 17 January, and soon after the Bill will be back in the Commons.

We need to wake up the labour movement, rousing the biggest possible sections of it to shout out and get people on the streets.

In the spring many trade unions made statements against the Bill – followed by months of silence.

In September unions finally [spoke out](#) again – but did not mobilise.

The policy [passed](#) at TUC Congress called for mobilisation of trade unionists against the Bill and a joint union rally.

Now is the time – but there is not much time.

The labour movement should back up every struggle against oppression. Moreover, the Bill poses a huge threat to organised labour specifically. It threatens any strike that is seriously disruptive and our already tightly restricted rights to



picket. The government is moving [amendments](#) saying involvement in a trade dispute can be cited in defence of those charged under some of the Bill's stipulations.

But even if the courts consistently implement this provision, it will be operative only *after* pickets are arrested. Meanwhile external reinforcement of pickets could become much more difficult.

Trade unions and trade unionists, and Labour members, should demand the Labour leadership uses its platform and megaphone to sound the alarm about the Bill – and get people on the streets.

At present Labour is not even a reliable parliamentary opposition.

Last week a little publicised section, circumventing data protection by forcing public bodies to hand over confidential information to the police, came close to defeat in the Lords but survived after the Labour leadership withdrew its whip and few of its members turned out.

There are still chances to at least seriously mitigate the Bill – by defeating the government amendments, and passing amendments like [Alf Dubs'](#) to prevent seizure of Gypsies and Travellers' homes.

If the Labour leadership will not call people out to demonstrate, left Labour MPs should. □





Solidarity

For a workers' government

SUPPORT THE SHEFFIELD COURIERS!

By Michael Elms

On Monday 13 December a meeting of food couriers in Sheffield voted to extend their strike against logistics firm Stuart for another week. Their strike is now the longest and largest in the history of the UK gig economy. Activists in Workers' Liberty have been helping to build the local couriers' branch of the IWGB since 2019 and have been centrally involved in this strike from the very start.

Drivers in Sheffield and Chesterfield are striking against a 24% cut to their per-delivery base rate made by Stuart, which organises takeaway deliveries for JustEat. Drivers in cities where this new, worse, pay structure has been in place for a while report losses of about £100-£150 per week.

In 2020 Stuart made about £20m more than in 2019. But the company can avoid paying tax, because they are able to report a £7m deficit. Why? Between 2019 and 2020 some top executive officers have been awarded pay increases of 1,000%.

This historic strike has drawn warm words and donations from many trade unionists and Labour MPs. To win the couriers need a lot more money in the form of big branch donations, and Stuart couriers in other cit-



ies to join the strike. As of 14 Dec, meetings to discuss strike action are scheduled in two other towns with more in the pipeline.

The chair of the Sheffield couriers' IWGB branch, Parirs Dixon, spoke to *Solidarity*.

"I think the strike's going very well. We've got people that are outside each McDonald's every night, at the picket lines, standing up for what's right and trying to gain themselves respect. We've realised now from going into restaurants in this second week, during our working hours, that staff are showing us a lot more respect and our orders are being done quicker now. I feel like at the start of the strike it was a bit rocky in a few places, but after four or five days, it's got a lot more peaceful, very few people are collecting for JustEat now. And when you've got people on a picket line it makes it harder for people to go past you to collect orders.

"Hopefully, eventually we'll get to a point where we get a response from Stuart about

the strike, indicating that they'll commit to making a change. We didn't want to do this. We will have to back them up into a corner where they've got no choice. We have got other cities on board through our strength and our persistence. We've got Chester-

field already and it's spreading, other cities are beginning to jump on board. It's nice to know that Sheffield was the headquarters for all this.

"What surprised me about the strike was the amount of unity that we've created in Sheffield. I can't really say I'm surprised that people have been out every night. I could almost say I'm surprised that we've still got faith despite some of the negativity we have had. That shows that people know that what we're doing is right. I'm glad that people understand that it's not going to be overnight, or one week, but it'll go for as long as it needs to last for.

"My message to other couriers is that if you can join in, if you don't believe it's right, then dig in, help us to get a response quicker. We'd appreciate your help. But know that you'd be making history, win or lose, and if you get on board with us, you can always say that you were there."

Donate to the couriers' strike fund: bit.ly/StuStrike □