

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

STRIKES CAN BEAT JUST EAT BOSSES



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Strikes can beat gig economy bosses



As the strike by couriers employed by Stuart to deliver food for Just East enters its third month, it is increasing in strength.

The strike, organised by the Independent Workers of Great Britain union (IWGB), started on 6 December, after Stuart cut the basic per-delivery payment for drivers by 24%.

Stuart has offered concessions on payment for waiting time at restaurants, and on the driver insurance system, but not yet on pay.

The strike paused over Christmas. For much of January it was largely been carried by Sheffield drivers, with scattered action elsewhere in the UK. But that was not dead time.

During those weeks, leadership teams were being developed in other cities, as drivers quietly made up their

minds about joining the fight. And now strike action has re-started in Chesterfield (targeting Greggs) and drivers in Middlesbrough have started a strike (targeting McDonald's). Meetings are planned for several other cities including Sunderland and Leicester.

Drivers in Wakefield held a protest independently of the national movement a couple of weeks ago. Stuart representatives came to meet with them and offer them concessions. This week Wakefield drivers are assessing the company's offer and will make their decision about taking further action. Naturally we urge them to join the national strike movement. The prospects for the strike to spread to many other cities are good.

In Sheffield, drivers have shifted tactics, now boycotting Greggs between noon and 3pm and locking off all deliveries from all large clients of Stuart from the Woodseats area of town from 1pm to 4pm. The picket teams are now larger, and the strike better-observed,



than ever before. Donations continue to roll in, with a £5,000 donation from the post and telecom union CWU, £2,500 pledged from the UK Student Climate Network, and many more smaller donations being made on picket lines or by union branches.

The CGT, the French union that organises Stuart riders in the home country of Stuart's ultimate owner La Poste, has issued a statement of solidarity with UK drivers. It points out that the French postal service, of which Stuart is a subsidiary, has a code of ethics and respect for working conditions, which Stuart's behaviour in the UK violates.

To date 27 MPs (all Labour or recently-Labour independents, apart from Jim Shannon of the DUP) have signed Early Day Motion 911, in support of the couriers' pay fight.

Over the course of this strike, many drivers who work for other platforms have approached the striking Stuart riders and said, "when are you going

to do UberEats?" or "when will we do Deliveroo?" This strike is beating at the doors of an uncivilised, unorganised sector.

Protected by legal trickery and spurious self-employment, big "gig economy" firms are currently able to ply their exploitative trade without worrying about worker organisation. But if the Stuart riders win, it will show workers right across the "gig economy" that organising pays. A victory in this strike could transform the whole landscape of labour organising in the UK and help spark a much broader fight around pay.

Socialists should follow the example of what we in Workers' Liberty have been doing, marshal support for this dispute, and go out and speak to couriers in their local area to discuss organising.

Solidarity can beat the gig economy bosses! Organise the unorganised! □

• Strike fund: bit.ly/StuStrike

McDonald's CEO Hamburgled

By Michael Elms

Tuesday 1 February was a special day for Hillsborough McDonald's. Drivers heard that this directly-managed store, one of the most profitable in the UK hamburger empire, was due to receive a visit by Chris Kempczinski, the global CEO of McDonald's, who – it was said – had come over from the USA to congratulate the restaurant for its high turnover. Drivers felt that Chris needed to hear about his UK delivery supplier Just Eat and their decision to slash driver pay.

While supporters staked out the restaurant, drivers assembled in a nearby car park, and waited for Chris to arrive. We weren't completely sure that it was Chris himself who was due to arrive, but it was clear someone important was coming: high-ranking executives were waiting around nervously in the restaurant while members of staff had to power-hose the brickwork – one worker was ordered to scale a ladder to scrub the ceiling!

After 45 minutes, and noticing police prowling around, the drivers decided to launch their protest, and entered the restaurant drive-thru area with horns blaring. Customers all received a leaflet, banners were unfurled, and a letter addressed to Mr Kempczinski was handed to executives, who also received a stern talking-to about their treatment of couriers. Meanwhile, demonstrators put on a good show out front with smoke flares.

Kempczinski never showed. We later heard that his security detail had ve-



toed his visit on account of the danger posed to one of the most powerful men in the world by our smoke flares. Our source told us, "most of the workers were taking the piss that he was scared of flares, no-one was gutted that he didn't show up"; "it was so damaging to the manager that you're not allowed to talk about it in the kitchen, it's like Tiananmen Square". We are unable to independently verify these reports. □

Together we are stronger

By Parirs Dixon

Parirs Dixon, chair of the Sheffield Independent Workers of Great Britain branch, spoke to Solidarity

It's going well. I heard that we've got Middlesbrough on board now, and potential for other cities like Wakefield etc., which is good. It's spreading, which we need. Once we get a good spread, and all those cities coming on board properly, it'll make the strike stronger and more national.

That's best for all of us in the union. That's the way we can get a win. If it's national, we all have to do the same thing... The indication that all these cities are in communication with each other, I believe, will give the big dog – Stuart – more of a worry than them doing it individually.

Because if they do it individually, Stu-

art can just sneak down. Wakefield had a protest, and Stuart went down to go and see them behind closed doors. They did that to keep them quiet.

If we are communicating, if we are together, we are stronger. It's not just Sheffield. It's a circle of Sheffield, Blackpool, Sunderland, Middlesbrough, Wakefield, all holding hands, and communicating. That's what will make Stuart crumble even quicker.

The people who have been helping us out within this strike, with the strike fund, coming to pickets, sending emails, tweeting about it: I just want to say a massive thank you. Without all your help we wouldn't have been able to keep going and last as long as we have been doing. Whether that's contributing to the strike fund or standing on a picket line for an hour, we are making history and you are part of it. □

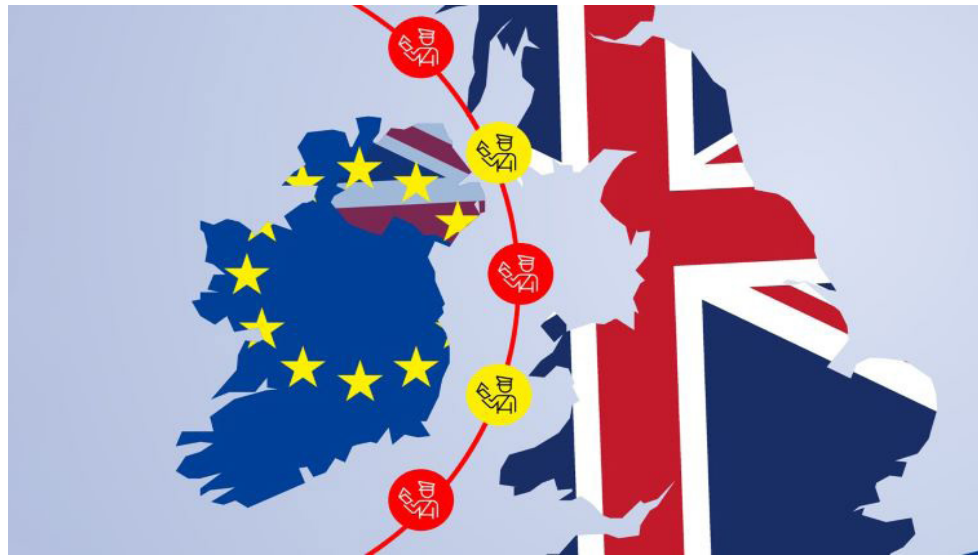
DUP flounders in Brexit crisis

By Patrick Murphy

Since 2 February the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) has appeared to step up its efforts to end the Northern Ireland Protocol, the part of the Brexit deal which requires checks on goods transported between Great Britain and the Six Counties.

First Edwin Poots, DUP Health Minister of Northern Ireland, instructed officials in his department to stop carrying out these checks. On 3 February, DUP leader Jeffrey Donaldson announced that the DUP First Minister of Northern Ireland (NI), Paul Givan, would resign. Under the provisions of the Good Friday Agreement this means that the Deputy First Minister, currently Sinn Féin's Michelle O'Neill, must also step down. The political settlement approved in 1998 requires that the NI Executive is led by two ministers drawn from the two main communities. If the leading party from either community refuses to nominate, or withdraws, the other must follow.

The DUP's aim here is to create a crisis which forces a harder line from the UK government on the Protocol. Their preference is that Britain invokes Article 16 of the Brexit treaty and withdraws from the border checks. But Britain's discussions with the EU have been protracted and, since the replacement of David Frost by Liz Truss as chief negotiator, have focused more on reducing



and mitigating the checks than on ending them.

The apparently minor detail of trading arrangements here has huge symbolic importance to some Unionists. From their point of view it weakens the Union by creating a border of sorts between Britain and NI, while the border with the Republic of Ireland becomes ever softer.

Yet this new "border" in the Irish Sea cannot be explained as the result of a republican plot or a betrayal by too-meeek Unionists. The Protocol is a consequence of Johnson's Brexit deal which the DUP, alone of the main NI parties, supported. A Brexit without the "border in the sea" was possible under the deal put to Parliament by Theresa May; but

the DUP were decisive in defeating that deal. They are the irresponsible parents of their own unwanted child.

The timing of the recent announcements looks to have been motivated by electoral opportunism and panic. The DUP has been the leading Unionist Party for most of the 24 years since the Good Friday Agreement, and since the Unionist vote has outstripped nationalists, the DUP has always held the First Minister position.

The communal demographics have been moving consistently in the direction of nationalism, and it's widely regarded as only a matter of time before Sinn Féin is the leading party in NI and entitled to take the First Minister position. That could happen as early as May,

when fresh elections to the Assembly are due to take place. Time is running out fast for the DUP.

There is no single party threatening to overtake their position in Unionism, but the Unionist vote has rarely been so fragmented. More liberal voters have been defecting to the Ulster Unionists and Alliance parties, while hardliners are attracted to Traditional Unionist Voice, a kind of DUP tribute act for people who preferred their earlier material.

In the past the DUP rejoiced in its ability to frustrate and disrupt at a whim. You might not have liked it, but it was effective. But now its latest dramatic actions are widely derided as opportunist stunts likely only to self-harm.

That judgement may be premature and complacent, but so far the public service workers carrying out sea border checks have ignored Poots' instruction and continued their work. Two days after he issued the order it was ruled unlawful by a High Court judge. The Assembly continues despite the absence of its lead Ministers, and with the co-operation of other DUP members. There is little or no sign of a concerted attempt to bring down the Assembly and administration. Instead, the elections most feared by the DUP and eagerly looked forward to by Sinn Féin may be moved forward from May.

So far, DUP leaders seem to have brandished their heaviest weapon, only to discover it's a water pistol. □

Omicron: lessons from Denmark?

By Martin Thomas

Denmark dropped all its Covid curbs on 1 February. The move, by the country's right-wing social-democratic minority government, is supported by most of Denmark's other parties.

The official infectious-diseases agency has said: "mortality has followed a declining trend in all age groups as from Week 1 [of 2022] and is now approaching the normal level."

"This occurs even though the number of deaths in which the patient had a positive PCR test is increasing [i.e. more people dying of other causes have Covid too]..."

The prime minister says: "I dare not say that it is a final goodbye to restrictions... We do not know what will happen... A new variant might come along". This not Bolsonaro-type policy.

As measured by excess deaths over two years, Den-



mark has the best Covid record in Europe, alongside Norway. It has shown about 1% excess deaths, and Britain 11%.

If hospitals are able to cope (unlike in Britain), there is no special virtue in curbs which delay Omicron infections bound to arrive soon-ish anyway.

There may even be an advantage in widening immunity fast through rapid mild infections.

Denmark's Covid curbs have mostly been lighter than the UK. It started them some days earlier in March 2020, and eased them quicker (was the

first country in Europe to re-open schools). It has a higher vax rate than Britain, but no vax mandate for health workers.

Until 1 February it required "Covid passports" (proof of vax, previous infection, or negative test) for entry to cafés, bars, etc.

A bigger factor in the less-bad outcome is probably that before February 2020 social provision in Denmark had survived neoliberalism better than in Britain.

It has higher, wider sick pay. It bans zero-hours contracts. Pensions and elderly care are better. Its Gini-coefficient

measure of inequality is 0.25, and Britain's is 0.35. Denmark scrapping curbs does not vindicate Tory policy in Britain, with our overstretched NHS and poor social provision. It points us to fighting for better

sick pay, a boosted NHS and social care, workers' control of workplace safety, and improved housing. □



Upcoming meetings

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

Sunday 13 February, 11-12.30pm: Ecosocialist reading group - How to stop the next pandemic

Wednesday 23 February, 2-3.30pm: SOAS Workers' Liberty - Revolution and counter-revolution in Iran. B203, Brunei Gallery, SOAS University of London, 10 Thornhaugh St, London WC1H 0XG

Wednesday 2 March, 6-7pm: Sheffield Workers' Liberty Students - Fighting for the Health Service. University Arms, 197 Brook Hill, Broomhall, Sheffield S3 7HG, UK

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



Morning Star silent on Irish impasse



By Jim Denham

The tragi-comedy that is the Democratic Unionist Party's inability to deal with the consequences of Brexit continues.

Last week they attempted to pull the plug on the Irish sea border checks that are required under the protocol negotiated by Johnson and Lord Frost (even though both of those now talk as though they had nothing to do with it).

Then the DUP first minister Paul Givan resigned, leaving the province without a functioning government. This is the culmination of a series of disastrous misjudgements going back to the DUP's original decision to jump on the Leave bandwagon in the referendum and, paradoxically, made worse for them following the 2017 general election when they won the balance of power at Westminster, only to make the wrong choices for themselves and their community at every turn.

Drunk on hubris, they rejected Theresa May's proposal to keep the whole of the UK aligned with some European Union rules rather than leave Northern Ireland under a separate regime. Instead, they plotted with Tory hardliners to replace her with Johnson. They have been rewarded with one betrayal after another. If it wasn't so bad for the people of Northern Ireland, it would be hilarious.

You might expect Britain's socialist daily paper, the *Morning Star*, to be making some trenchant observations about this farce, but at the time of writing they haven't done. The only article to appear so far has been a straight news report (4 Feb) that describes Givan's resignation as "paralysing the territory's government because of disputes over Brexit on continued British rule."

Sinn Féin's Mary Lou McDonald is quoted as describing the resignation as a "disgrace" and "narrow and self-serving" but the *Morning Star* and its political masters, the Communist Parties of Britain (CPB) and Ireland (CPI) appear to have nothing to say.

This might be explained by the fact that, unlike Sinn Féin, they support

Brexit. In fact, with regard to Brexit's effects on Ireland (North and South) they have virtually the same position as the DUP: first denying that Brexit would have any destabilising effect upon Northern Ireland, and then, when reality intruded, blaming the EU and (sometimes) the Irish government – but never Britain.

Anyone who finds that difficult to credit should ponder the following quotes, taken fairly randomly but entirely representative:

"It is not Britain's border, or Ireland's border: it is the EU's border. It is up to the EU to sort out this problem in the interest of its members, in other words Ireland, the only member affected by it": CPI, in their paper *Socialist Voice*, 2 Feb 2019.

"The myth of the Irish border 'problem' (is) neatly dismissed... thanks to the Anglo-Irish Common Travel Area" (book review, *Morning Star* 28 February 2019).

"The whole 'Brexit-border-Good Friday Agreement -terrorism' nightmare scenario is a concoction of cynical and reckless politicians, commentators and top bureaucrats. Its intention is to undermine Brexit in general and justify

the Irish backstop in the UK-EU Withdrawal Agreement in particular" (editorial, *Morning Star*, 19 April 2019)

"During the EU-UK withdrawal negotiations, prominent EU politicians and bureaucrats hinted that any failure to agree arrangements that respected EU neoliberal capitalist rules by – in reality – keeping Northern Ireland within the European Single Market could force the EU to impose north-south border controls." (editorial, *Morning Star*, 15 October 2021).

These Stalinists do have one argument left to justify their contortions on Brexit and Ireland: that Brexit will hasten Irish reunification.

It won't wash. On the contrary, British and Irish membership of the EU drew some of the poison out of the sectarian dispute between nationalists and loyalists. Brexit reignites old disputes, setting back the cause of Irish reunification – unless you believe as the Stalinists seem to, that Irish national unity can be achieved without some measure of working-class unity. □

Carbon offset is deceit



By Stuart Jordan

Oil giant Total is in the process of opening up a new oil field off the coast of Suriname containing an estimated ten billion barrels of oil and 30 trillion cubic feet of gas. Total's exploration and drilling takes place in a world where 60% of developed reserves must stay in the ground if we are to have half a chance of halting warming at 1.5 degrees Celsius.

However, according to the Total, this project remains within their "Net Zero" goals because of a \$50 million carbon offset bought from the Suriname government. The "carbon offset" will not draw down any carbon from the atmosphere; it will be used to prevent the destruction of 15 million hectares of forest. This is the latest frontier of climate change denialism: carbon offsetting.

Under cap-and-trade schemes, businesses and countries can offset any emissions above their allocation by purchasing carbon credits that are supposed to represent a reduction or removal of CO2 gas elsewhere. The market in compulsory offsetting schemes is worth \$277 billion (90% of

which is the European Emissions Trading Scheme [ETs]). Alongside the compulsory market, the voluntary carbon offset market (used by businesses and individuals) grew by 60% last year and is now valued at over \$1 billion.

The offsetting schemes are easily gamed. Between 2008-2019 European cement, steel and fossil fuel corporations used ETS to supplement their profits by 30-50 billion euros. Far from curbing their CO2 emissions, the scheme is boosting their polluting power.

Carbon offsetting suffers from a problem of "double counting". Both the buyer and the seller of the carbon credit claim the offset against their own emissions target. COP26 has attempted to tighten regulations to minimise double counting within the compulsory schemes but these rules do not apply to private business and loopholes remain. At root there is no bank-like entity keeping a reliable ledger.

The Total example demonstrates the perverse logic about what constitutes an "offset". Many carbon offsets are sold on the presumption that escalating destruction of carbon sinks and escalating emissions are the unavoidable baseline. The "offset" is relative to the business-as-usual scenario of escalating emissions. It is not a reduction in emissions.

In fact, some offsets are positively

harmful. Afforestation schemes sound like attractive "nature based solutions" but monocrops of fast growing trees are extremely damaging for biodiversity. They often encroach onto farmland, threatening food security, or involve the direct appropriation of indigenous lands. And to offset by tree planting alone all the CO2 planned to be released by 2050 would require an area of land five times the size of India.

The stated goal of the carbon markets - emissions reductions and the development of carbon drawdown technology - is urgently necessary. The world economy needs to rapidly transition to develop mass carbon drawdown infrastructure on a similar scale to current fossil fuel infrastructure. The safe planetary boundary for avoiding catastrophic global heating is 350 ppm CO2. We are now at around 410 ppm and the rate at which we are adding CO2 is increasing.

Drawing down carbon and sequestering it in long term storage will be necessary for decades and centuries to come. But banks and governments have created a greenwashed swindle rather than an effective mechanism for organising carbon drawdown. The major banks that facilitate and profit from this swindle are all members of the Global Finance Alliance for Net Zero.

As an alternative to the implicative



Pic: Mike Langridge

denial of capitalist carbon markets, Holly Jean Buck suggests that blockchain could provide a means to finance real carbon drawdown initiatives. A carbon credit on blockchain is retired on use. This prevents a lot of the gaming of the carbon markets. Blockchain is a "distributed ledger" and so uses computer technology to automate and democratise a function usually monopolised by the banks: keeping the score on who owes who what. Blockchain is a way of putting purchasers of carbon credits in direct contact with verifiable carbon drawdown initiatives.

This would make the carbon markets transparent and prevent double counting.

Blockchain-based platforms are already being set up by entrepreneurs. Whatever their flaws, the blockchain enthusiasts are correct about the need for a root-and-branch overhaul of carbon markets and the financial and governmental institutions that support them. □

Joe Rogan, Neil Young and me



Eric Lee

By Eric Lee

Let me start by declaring my ignorance. I never heard of Joe Rogan until a few weeks ago. When Neil Young recently announced that he was pulling all his music off Spotify, I took an interest. And the more I read and listened, the more I admired what Young had done.

Watching Rogan engage in friendly banter with the likes of Canada's Jordan Peterson or Britain's Douglas Murray, you can instantly spot the appeal. Rogan is a smarter, friendlier version of Trump.

People who listen to him a lot will challenge that, of course, but I wasted several valuable minutes of my life watching Rogan's video trying to explain himself. After all, Young had accused him of something very serious: spreading disinformation about Covid through his enormously popular podcast hosted on Spotify.

I posted something on Facebook, as one does, that I thought would prove pretty uncontroversial among my friends. Here's part of what I said:

"Hey, Joe Rogan, three million of your followers just heard you tell us how

much you love Joni Mitchell, especially her song 'Chuck E.'s in Love'. (Which, of course, is not her song.) And then you explained that from now on, you will follow 'controversial' guests (meaning liars) with 'other viewpoints'. You'll keep hosting people who spread disinformation about the pandemic, you won't stop doing that, but you're happy to tag on a reasonable person at the end of the show."

I thought that was a pretty fair summary of what Rogan said. And most people I know agreed.

But not all. One British leftist who I actually met when he came to a Bernie Sanders campaign event a few years back, instantly denounced me with this comment: "It is called free speech. Something the Pfizer-left does not believe in."

I don't know why I bothered to respond, but knowing this fellow's views on the pandemic (from elsewhere) I thought, what the heck. I'll go nuclear with my response - that will shut him up.

I simply wrote, "Just out of curiosity - unrelated to Joe Rogan - do you support 'free speech' for Holocaust deniers too? Or do you place limits?" I guess my point was that maybe some "free speech" (like spreading Covid disinformation) might be a problem.

That was sure to return my Facebook page to its previous calm. I imagined he'd say something like "how dare you

bring the Holocaust into this?" (Which would be a fair point.) But nope, that's not what he said. What he wrote - and this is a member of the British Left, a Corbyn supporter - stunned me: "How would you know what Holocaust denial is unless it is expressed?"

A couple of exchanges later and he clarified exactly what he meant: "How would you know the contents of *Mein Kampf* unless they are available to read?"

That's right - in defence of Joe Rogan, prompted by a cursory Holocaust comparison I admittedly raised first - I got this comrade to compare the Joe Rogan show to a publisher who releases a new edition of *Mein Kampf*.

I know that there are differences on the Left over the question of "no platforming" the Nazis. For many years it was true that in the US, most liberals and leftists opposed any kind of censorship at all. The American Civil Liberties Union famously defended the "right" of Nazis to march through a Chicago neighbourhood populated by Jewish survivors of the Holocaust.

But in Europe, a different view prevailed - especially in Germany, where Nazi propaganda is pretty much banned. If you want to buy *Mein Kampf* there, you can - and this is very recent - buy a thick, heavily edited volume in which most of the text is from historians pointing out what crap Hitler's book is.



I tend to line up with the "no platform for Nazis" crowd on this one.

Which brings me back to Joe Rogan. Apparently the number of people listening to Neil Young's songs has gone up as a result of this, which is a good thing. But Joe Rogan is also now better known, which is probably not so good.

People who are worried about "censorship" can calm down. Spotify is happy to keep Rogan on air, because he's a huge money-spinner for them. Apparently he's worth more to them than Neil Young or Joni Mitchell.

As for critics of the (non-existent) "Pfizer Left"? Some of them, at least, seem to be just one Facebook comment away from defending the Nazis' "right to free speech". And that really is a depressing thought. □

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

Changing the culture in football



Women's Fightback

By Katy Dollar

The Football Association and Premier League have been called on to improve players' education on consent and healthy relationships. An open letter from women's groups called on chief executives Mark Bullingham and Richard Masters "to confront a culture of gender-based violence".

The letter was signed by The End Violence Against Women Coalition, The Three Hijabis and Level Up.

It comes after the arrest of Manchester United forward Mason Greenwood on suspicion of sexual assault and threats to kill. He is not the only Premiership player accused of sexual assault. Manchester City footballer Benjamin Mendy is currently being tried for seven counts of rape relating to four women, one of sexual assault, and the latest charge is of attempted rape involving a new complainant.

In Scotland, Raith Rovers announced on Friday that David Goodwillie, who

was ruled to be a rapist in a 2017 civil case, would not play for the club after a backlash to his signing, including their women's team severing ties. It is "shameful" that David Goodwillie was allowed to continue playing football after being found by a court to have committed rape, the woman he assaulted has said. Denise Clair hit out at the footballing authorities, accusing them of being "complicit" with their "silence".

The letter to the footballing authorities says "it is clear that our beautiful game has an ugly underside when it comes to violence against women".

Women's groups want mandatory training for players, coaches, owners and managers on gender-based violence and "clear sexual misconduct policies", which include the option to suspend players without pay and implement lifetime bans, and a gender-based violence charter in football and prevention programmes for academy players.

The near ubiquity of the academy system in top-flight football means clubs are often involved with players from a very early age. In Premier League academies alone there are around 3,500

boys; the youngest are nine years old, although pre-academy training can start even younger. Clubs are not just employers of footballers, they are also responsible for the education and welfare of boys and young men.

The League responded: "The Premier League strongly condemns any form of abuse or violence against women and girls and takes these issues extremely seriously."

A spokesperson stated that EFL academy players aged 16 to 18 undergo mandatory education on consent as part of an online induction.

The Premier League runs workshops for academy and first-team players from under-14 to under-23 level "addressing healthy and respectful relationships" as well as "seeking consent and understanding sexual harassment".

The letter concludes: "Football players and the teams they play for have a unique position in shaping the attitudes of boys and men."

There has been successful campaigns to shame clubs over individual players accused of sexual assault, but we need prevention not just retribution. □



Activist Agenda

The next in Labour Left Internationalists' series of meetings on "linking up the campaigns" will be on 19 February, about how Labour activists can help push for workers' and union rights, with speakers from Free Our Unions and others.

Labour conferences have repeatedly voted for repeal of all anti-union laws (including those of the Thatcher era). Even under the Starmer leadership Labour has produced a green paper with much good content (bit.ly/amc-nd), but never campaigns for it. A number of unions decided (bit.ly/u-demo) in 2021 to go for a big demonstration on workers' and union rights in early 2022. □

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

A starting point on left antisemitism



Book review

By David Osland

For something many socialists don't even think exists, recent years have seen a surfeit of literature on left antisemitism.

Three of this spate of books already sit on my shelves: Dave Rich's *The Left's Jewish Problem*, which includes a page or two on my own distant political past; David Hirsh's *Contemporary Left Antisemitism*; and *Israel and the European Left* by Colin Shindler.

So the obvious question for any reviewer to start with is, why another? And my answer would be, because this one is badly needed.

The clue to why Daniel Randall's *Confronting Left Antisemitism: Arguments for Socialists* stands out from the pack is in the name.

This is not an attempt to write backward from preconceived conclusions, mangling history to fit the exigencies of current disputation, or a disingenuous bid to pass off humdrum polemic as academic sociology.

Moralistic

Randall instead eschews moralistic imprecations in favour of open ideological confrontation, backed by the full strength of the revolutionary socialist tradition, particularly the sub-section thereof to which he subscribes.

The effort is largely successful. For the socialist reader, this feels like the right starting point towards an understanding of the controversies that dogged the period in which Jeremy Corbyn led the Labour Party, and rumble on even now.

It isn't the self-image we collectively like to project, but the left has not in the past been immune to bigotry of any description. Accordingly, there is no guarantee that we are immune today.

One of the strengths of the book is the warnings it offers against the pitfalls of the inchoate populism that landed us in the shit in the first place.

The left cannot gaze enviously at the success of the right's flirtation with that brand of politics, conclude we are missing a presentational trick or two, and attempt to adapt the formula to our own ends.

It's unduly harsh exaggeration to reduce Corbynism to a left populism that substituted the super-rich for some undefined notion of "the elite". At its best, it had rather more intellectual substance than that.

But then again, it wasn't always at its best. Ritual invocation of "banksters" inevitably opens the backdoor to the

antisemitic Rothschild and Soros stereotypes that never quite go away.

Randall's key analytical framework is provided by a tripartite taxonomy of the primary historical phrases of left antisemitism.

The first is what he calls "the primitive strand", the late nineteenth century/early twentieth conflation of Jews and finance capital that was a feature of many labour movements.

The clearest example in this country may be the repeated accusations from the likes of prominent Edwardian Marxist Henry Hyndman and leading Liberal radical J A Hobson that Boer War was being waged on behalf of nefarious Jewish interests.

That attitude died hard. The more honest biographies of such heroes of mainstream Labourism as Attlee and Bevin are littered with antisemitic remarks, seemingly as casual as they are grotesque, as late as the middle of the last century.

Strand

The second strand emerged in the USSR and its satellite states in the 1950s, following the allegations of a "doctors' plot" on the life of Stalin and the Slansky trial in Czechoslovakia.

Echoes in this country were not extensive. Yet the question was debated within the Communist Party of Great Britain, especially after allegations of the persecution of Jews in Stalin's final years were published in *Folkstymme*, a Yiddish-language communist publication in Poland.

The CPGB's hapless Jewish committee - whose membership somehow included Rajani Palme Dutt, a famously slavish Stalinist hack of no known Jewish heritage - at least managed to get muted objections on the record, despite the leadership's efforts to play things down.

The third strand, anti-Zionism twisted beyond breaking point, has arisen in recent decades, and this is the predominant contemporary variant on the left.

It's no easy matter to raise it in left-wing circles without getting shouted down. Most of those who fall into this trap get there from the entirely justified starting point of moral repugnance at Israel's oppression of Palestinians, which all too frequently takes on armed and bloody substance.

Here we have what is sometimes described as "the anti-imperialism of fools", by analogy to the description, usually attributed to August Bebel, of antisemitism as "the socialism of fools".

Opposition to imperialism and solidarity with Palestine are, of course, elementary duties of socialists. But that just makes theoretical clarity all the more essential.

Depressingly, examples of the third strand are all around us and cover the full spectrum of the organised left, from



movementist to reformist to revolutionary.

We see them in every chant of "from the river to the sea", in every strenuous insistence that a Zionist cabal is in clandestine charge of US foreign policy, in every fervid protestation that Israel now "controls the Labour Party".

There are of course limitations of Randall's schema. Like all taxonomies of this kind, it cannot hope to be comprehensive, and is insufficiently capacious to act as a filing cabinet for every known instance of the disease.

But it is a useful classification, not least because it highlights the roots of the phenomenon. This is a backstory that needs to be better known.

Yet even those friendly to the the argument may do a double take on chapter seven, in which it is maintained - in the face of orthodoxy on the topic - that left antisemitism does not meet the threshold at which it becomes racism, or at least is "not best understood" as such.

That exemption is specifically extended to left antisemitism alone, with "many" other forms of antisemitism "clearly classically racist".

Of course, a valid analytical distinction is to be made between third-strand left antisemitism and antisemitism of knuckle-dragging fascist persuasion or Christian fundamentalist provenance.

But my, doesn't this look like a Get Out of Jail Free card, carefully placed in advance to undermine the ability of other far left organisations to lay the charge that the nasty AWL is calling them racists.

You can also hear the centrist execrations now; he's trying to let the far left

off the hook! Double standards! Once a Trot, always a Trot!

After all, if antisemitism that postulates Jews as immensely powerful is analytically distinct from the racism that portrays blacks as less than human, that is as true of the antisemitism of the far right as the antisemitism of the far left.

I also offer other minor criticisms. One niggle is the curious lack of any discussion of the work of Lenni Brenner, which has been hugely influential in Trotskyist circles and beyond.

Brenner

Brenner's 1983 volume *Zionism in the Age of the Dictators* is the locus classicus of the contention that fascism and Zionism were allies in the decades before world war two.

It is regularly cited by Ken Livingstone and others to that end, and their arguments have found widespread social media resonance among those who won't have read Brenner themselves.

It would be useful for those making the arguments against third-strand left antisemitism to have included a concise critique of such ideas.

But let me close out on a note of praise. While I have never denied the extent of left antisemitism, Randall's book brought it home to me that the problem goes beyond the aberrational.

By trying to keep things soft focus and "broad", a mistaken analysis has become an integral element of meat and potatoes left-wing thinking, especially on foreign policy questions, with the consequences we see before us.

Confronting Antisemitism on the Left may well be the far left's last best word on the topic. I am going to reserve definitive judgement on that until I've read yet another contribution to the debate, David Renton's *Labour's Antisemitism Crisis: What the Left Got Wrong*, which I have seen positively reviewed.

Meanwhile, the left Shachtmanism on which Randall's book is so obviously premised remains a niche ideological product, and dislike of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty is so widespread that many ears will be closed in advance.

I presume Daniel was named after the famous prophet of the Hebrew Bible. As I dimly recollect from Sunday School, Old Testament prophets were famously not heeded. Sadly I suspect he will get a similar reception. □

• David Osland is a long-time left wing journalist and author. Follow him on Twitter at [@David_Osland](https://twitter.com/David_Osland)

• Buy *Confronting Antisemitism on the Left*: £9.99 plus post, at bit.ly/c-a-dr

The poison in the prison system

By Angela Driver

Currently 79,412 people are in UK prisons. That is over twice as many, [per population](#), as the Netherlands, Norway, or Finland, though only one-fifth the rate of the USA.

The number is likely to increase with an increase in the sentencing powers of magistrates' courts and laws such as the Police and Crime Bill that will criminalise more people. The government aims to imprison more people and new prisons are currently being planned.

The media and government portray prisoners as monstrous people. We are told that the purpose of prisons is to lock up dangerous people, to keep us safe that prisons are to punish and rehabilitate people so that when they are released from prison, they are no longer a danger to others.

Violent?

In fact, 63% of those in prison were not convicted of any violent crime. Of the 4% of prisoners who are women, only 28% have been convicted of a violent crime. Most prisoners have sentences of less than one year (despite good evidence that short prison sentences are less effective than community sentences at reducing reoffending).

Prisoners are overwhelmingly working-class. Black people are over represented in the prison system, and that trend is getting worse. Many prisoners have mental health, addiction, or learning difficulties. Some people detained under the Mental Health Act (rather than convicted of offences) are housed in prison due to lack of space in psychiatric facilities.

A disproportionate number of

care-leavers end up in prison. Many prisoners have suffered violence and abuse themselves. Some studies suggest that the majority have sustained significant head injuries.

Prisoners report that prison is often a traumatising and brutalising experience. Bullying by other prisoners and prison officers is rife. So some resort to violent retaliation: "unless you fight back you'll be seen as a victim and be bullied for it".

The act of imprisoning someone removes their basic autonomy and removes the prisoner from whatever support networks they had. The separation and stigma often weakens those networks so people have less informal support from families and friends after release.

On release, some prisoners are homeless. 17% are sleeping rough. Only 50% are in settled accommodation. Little support is available, - prisoners are not able to claim universal credit prior to release and only some are given a "leaver's grant" of just £76. Employment is more difficult to find with a criminal record: only 17% are in employment a year after release.

It is little wonder that the rates of reoffending are very high.

Prisons are CQC regulated by the Care Quality Commission (CQC). The last report from Belmarsh prison in summer 2021 showed that the rates of self harm there were four times higher than in the 2019 inspection. There had been two suicides in this time.

Staff on "suicide watch" were found by CQC inspectors to be, "reading newspapers and making no effort to interact with the prisoners."

Prisoners have died of Covid and many prisoners have refused the vaccine due to lack of trust in authority. Prisons responded to the virus by reducing the amount of time that prisoners were released from their cells, and, despite the low rates of Covid over the summer, CQC found that the majority of prisoners (those without jobs) were still in their cells 23 hours a day. Communal facilities such as libraries and gyms remained shut.

Abuse

The Prisoner Solidarity Network (PSN) claims that the levels of violence from prison officers to prisoners has increased during Covid. Prisoners are most vulnerable to abuse by prison officers, especially when they are separated in cells and easier to control by force. The Belmarsh CQC report noted that officers do not turn on their body cameras, so it is difficult to hold them to account for the force they use against prisoners.

There is a minority of people who have been convicted of violent offences and are likely to continue to pose a serious threat to public safety, and prisons do at least contain these people for a period of time. But most prisoners are released eventually, and the statistics show that the rates of reoffending are very high.

What the expansion of prison does do, by painting prisoners as monsters, is justify the need to have large numbers of police, courts... and prisons. It bolsters the view that the state is a neutral arbiter when in fact it acts on behalf of the ruling class.

Instead of people with severe mental



health problems, or children coming out of the care system having endured abuse at the hands of those who should have cared for them, being supported and helped, those people are criminalised and put in jail. Especially so if they're black.

Providing accessible services to support people with mental health, addiction issues, homelessness or indeed a means of escape from child or domestic abuse, can help reduce the risks of crimes being committed in the first place. It can also help people escape abusive relationships, recover from drug addiction, and get safe housing.

63% of the prison population should be released immediately (those not convicted of violent crimes). All pregnant prisoners should be released immediately (prisons cannot meet the needs of pregnant people or their babies). We demand investment in domestic abuse refuges, addiction services, youth services, mental health services, homelessness services and services for children in care and those leaving the care system.

And we fight to change the structure of society from one of exploitation and competition to one of solidarity and equality, to reduce damage in the first place as well as having better ways to mend or mitigate it. □

Justice through solidarity, not through nudging or conquest

By Martin Thomas

On 1 February 2022 Amnesty International published a [report](#) saying that the Israeli state's "oppression and domination" of Palestinians "amounts to apartheid".

Amnesty's practical conclusion is only to seek to nudge the Israeli government to do better, with a [petition](#) calling on the Israeli government to stop house demolitions (which are indeed grievous).

The headline of the report ailments the already-widespread view of Israel as a unique pariah state, as South Africa was before 1994. In the small print Amnesty clarifies that it "does not seek to argue that... oppression and domination as perpetrated in Israel and the

Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) is... analogous to the system... perpetrated in South Africa between 1948 and 1994". It is indeed not analogous to actual historical apartheid. It is colonial occupation of the West Bank - brutal in the style of a colonial occupation - and national-minority disadvantage of Palestinian citizens of Israel. The description as "apartheid" relies on using that term as a general word for all severe oppression.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been and is fundamentally a national conflict - one in which the Palestinians have been cruelly and repeatedly defeated, and often been the main victims of conflicts primarily between neighbouring Arab states (not the

Palestinians themselves) and Israel. The answer is the right of self-determination for both nations - for both the Israeli Jews, who already have it, and the Palestinians, who lack it. Amnesty says, ambiguously, that it "recognises that both the Jewish and the Palestinian people claim the right to self-determination", without saying whether it recognises that right for them. Oddly, it does not even call for Israel to withdraw from the West Bank and cede the Palestinians their right to a state of their own, and at one point says that it recognises there can be good reason for abrogating some liberties under occupation.

The report is skewed by sloppiness in detail, but also by interpreting all the issues

as of *racial* rather than national oppression. The two are different, though one can spill over to another.

The report is written as if Israeli misdeeds have all been gratuitous acts of unforced prejudice, without reference to most of the early citizens of Israel being refugees and facing decades of threats from larger neighbouring states to wipe out their "liferaft state". That slant is reconciled with a perspective of nudging Israel, by petitions and the like, to ease oppression "one pillar at a time", through an idea that the nudging will finally dissolve Israel via a mass "return" by Palestinians across the world to where their grandparents or great-grandparents lived.

[Socialist Worker](#) claims with

some justice that "the argument [the report] makes point[s] to nothing else" than "dismantling the Israeli state" and regrets that Amnesty "doesn't say [it] openly".

"Dismantling" a state whose people are determined to defend their political unit (even if they dislike its current regime) cannot be done one nudge at a time. It can be done only by suppressing, breaking up, conquering. Both the perspective of nudging and that of conquering are dead ends.

Better solidarity with democratic movements inside Israel like Standing Together, and with campaigns in the West Bank against Israeli occupation, to win "two nations, two states". □

Who was James



Unexpurgated Connolly

By Sean Matgamna

A number of readers have complained that they know little about James Connolly or why we have started publishing instalments of "the unexpurgated James Connolly" in *Solidarity*. A full-length biography of Connolly by comrade Liam McNulty is due to be published in 2022 by Merlin Press. That will give a proper account of Connolly, who he was and why he is important to socialists. Here I will give a brief account.

I

James Connolly is one of the most sympathetic and admirable figures in Irish history and in the history of the international working class movement. There is much to criticise, in my opinion. And there is the hindsight of one hundred years after him.

James Connolly was in his combination of elements unique, sui generis, one of a kind. Born in Edinburgh in 1868 of Irish parents, he joined the British Army at 14 and was a soldier for seven years. He may have had contact with physical-force republicans when stationed in Ireland as a British soldier. Later, he would be military commander of the Dublin insurgents in the 1916 Rising.

There had been a number of Irish risings in the 19th century, none of them serious military efforts: 1803, 1848, 1849, 1867. The Fenians of the 1860s were a powerful movement, but the rising of 1867 was feeble. 1916 was the biggest rebellion since 1798.

After the defeat of the Rising, wounded, with a bullet-shattered ankle, which turned gangrenous, Connolly was carried to the slaughter-yard on a stretcher, propped up in a chair before a British Army firing squad and shot dead on the morning of 12 May 1916.

At that point, James Connolly entered the pantheon of Irish national heroes. W B Yeats would write: "O words are lightly spoken," Said Pearse to Connolly, "Maybe a breath of politic words Has withered our Rose Tree; Or maybe but a wind that blows Across the bitter sea." "It needs to be but watered," James Connolly replied, "To make the green come out again And spread on every side, And shake the blossom from the bud

To be the garden's pride."

"But where can we draw water," Said Pearse to Connolly,

"When all the wells are parched away?"

O plain as plain can be

There's nothing but our own red blood

Can make a right Rose Tree."

II

Connolly was a socialist when he left the British Army, probably in 1889. His eldest brother, John, was already a socialist. James Connolly was or soon became also a "Fenian", an Irish Republican. He identified as Irish.

Previously none too literate (he had left school at 11), he had probably availed himself of the educational facilities the British Army offered to recruits and begun to read books.

In 1896, aged 28, James Connolly went to Ireland at the invitation of a small group of Dublin Socialists to become their paid organiser. He founded the Irish Socialist Republican Party and in 1898 began to publish a weekly journal, *The Workers' Republic*.

The British Marxist organisation, the SDF, called, as had Karl Marx, only for "legislative independence" for Ireland. The Irish Home Rule Party, the "official" nationalists demanded only a limited measure of local government: Home Rule. So the word Republic in the title pinned a radical nationalist green flag up alongside the revolutionary socialist red.

One of James Connolly's central ideas for the rest of his life would be that the cause of Ireland was the cause of the working class, and the cause of the working class is the cause of Ireland. Was it so?

Peasants fighting for land against landlords had been made synonymous with Irish home rule. Connolly wanted to do something of the same with the working-class cause. In that, he failed entirely.



The tattered Irish flag flown over the General Post Office in Dublin during the Easter Rising of 1916.

Connolly wrote a number of articles advocating the idea that a republic would have to be a workers' republic and published them in small Republican magazines. He reprinted some of the writings of Fintan Lalor, a radical land reformer in the 1840s, and of John Mitchel, a revolutionary nationalist of 1848, which Connolly thought would feed the idea that consistent commitment to national independence implied socialism.

The measure of the freedom of a nation, he thought, was the place of the lowest class within it. The thought was not original to Connolly, but it became his. If Connolly had lived before 1916, as was just possible, perhaps we would have had more of that idea. But he did not. And we did not.

Mitchel, who had preached revolution during the early period of the 1845-49 Famine, and for that was deported to Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania), was influenced by the idea of what Karl Marx and Frederick Engels had called the reactionary socialist, Thomas Carlyle. In eventual American exile, Mitchel became a positive champion of black slavery, as was Carlyle himself, and a supporter of the Southern states in the US Civil War of 1861-65.

Mitchel was far from working-class socialism, but citing him served James

Connolly's drive to find Irish support for socialism and to root socialism in the soil of Irish history and the revolutionary tradition in Ireland.

III

With James Connolly's backing and collaboration, in 1903, a group of Scottish members of the SDF broke away and founded the Socialist Labour Party of Britain. They published a monthly paper, *The Socialist*, which survived until 1923 the defection of most SLP members (if not the leadership) to the new Communist Party in 1920-1.

In 1903 also, Connolly and his large family moved to America. Early in the 1900s Connolly had become a supporter of the Socialist Labour Party of America, led by Daniel De Leon. The De Leonites criticised the socialist movement of the time, asserting that the organisations were hollow and incapable of doing the work of overthrowing capitalism. Vladimir Lenin did not see that or understand it until the Socialist International collapsed in 1914, on the outbreak of the Great War. Rosa Luxemburg understood it by 1910. De Leon understood it from the turn of the century. On that, James Connolly never ceased to be a De Leonite.

In the USA Connolly fell out with De Leon and the SLP. The issue was, all

s Connolly?

in essentials stripped away, Connolly's limited conception of what Marxism is.

Connolly wrote an article criticising the SLP and De Leon on three counts. First, on the view that trade unions could not in the long run raise real wages, a conception found elsewhere, the so-called Iron Law of Wages. Connolly thoroughly demolished De Leon's views, arguing for the view general in the Socialist International that trade unions could push up wages.

On the two other points, socialist concerns with family structures, and the attitude of socialists to religion, Connolly was blatantly wrong and certainly out of step with the prevalent ideas of the international Marxist and socialist movement.

Connolly was militantly and thoroughly committed to full social, civil and economic equality for women. He objected to the Marxist view that saw marriage, sex, and the family as historically formed institutions that would be radically transformed in the course of a socialist revolution and after.

The German socialist leader August Bebel had written a big book on *Woman Under Socialism*. De Leon had partly translated it and published excerpts. Bebel based himself on Frederick Engels's *The Family, Private Property, and the State*, and on Lewis Henry Morgan's anthropological studies of Amerindian society.

Connolly took the view that the existing monogamous (in theory) nuclear family, even if it had been shaped by history, was the ideal final form of the family and of sexual organisation. Socialists had no business criticising it or proposing radical change in it.

He also argued that socialists have no business criticising or opposing religion, not even when, for example, the Catholic Church forbade its members to be socialists and campaigned against socialism and socialists, or organised to break the Dublin strike, as it did in 1913-14. Connolly himself never did criticise or oppose religion. Arguing within Catholicism, he was perhaps an early advocate of what became known in the 1960s as liberation theology.

Connolly's position on religion and the family amounted to a very narrow conception of Marxism and Marxian socialism, with its scope and concerns limited to the economic class struggle. In 1914, during the great Dublin Labour War, Connolly put it like this in a reply to a strike-breaking hooligan archbishop who had set the thugs of the Ancient Order of Hibernians (the Catholic Or-

ange Order) onto strikers and their families.

"Let it be at once understood that the strictures upon socialism and syndicalism embodied in the Pastorals leave us unmoved. As complete systems of thought these two principles do not exist, whatever some extremists may say or imagine. As lines of action they do exist, and their influence is wholly beneficial. It is only when taken as offering a completely worked-out system of thought capable of dictating human conduct in all possible phases, and hence governing human morals accordingly, that either of them came under the strictures of theologians with any degree of justification. But in their present stage in the labour movement, viz., as indicating lines of activity in the industrial and political world – the only stage in which they are ever likely to be popular or useful in Ireland – the most consistent socialist or syndicalist may be as Catholic as the Pope if he is so minded".

IV

Connolly himself was and remained a Catholic. In a letter he wrote to his friend, the Scottish De Leonite John Carstairs Matheson, he said of his Catholicism that it was only a "pose". The record of Connolly's expressed opinions, and the stances he took at different times suggests that he was not telling Matheson the truth.

All the signatories of the 1916 Declaration of the Irish Republic, except for one, died avowed Catholics, priest-cleansed of sin by Confession and Extreme Unction (Catholic death rites). The exception was not James Connolly, but Thomas Clarke, an old Fenian long alienated from the Catholic Church, which had condemned and damned the Fenians. Catholicism is too pervasive at too many points in Connolly's life and political work to have been a mere pose.

In jail just before he was shot dead, Connolly urged his wife Lillie to convert to Catholicism, or so Lillie's friend Annie Smithson reported.



Soon after Connolly was killed, the man who "inducted" him into the British Marxist movement, John Leslie, wrote on the front page of *Justice* under the title, "James Connolly, an appreciation".

"It is my last request to you, Lillie - I want you to go under instruction in the Catholic Faith, and then, if you can feel you can do so, be received into the Catholic Church'. He added that he knew he had not always been an exemplary Catholic, but he wanted very much now, that she should do this for him. She promised". Lillie converted in August 1916.

The De Leonites, with whom he parted company in 1907-8, denounced him as an "agent of the Vatican" in the socialist movement.

V

Separating from the SLP, Connolly became a New York organiser for the Socialist Party, the big militant party of Eugene Victor Debs, and then for the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), the great advocates and organisers of industrial unionism. Connolly was committed to industrial unionism for the rest of his life, though in an article of 1914, *Old Wine in New Bottles*, he discussed what was deficient in it. He there also suggested a partial remedy which militants later used - "wildcat" unofficial strikes.

In 1910, Connolly returned from the USA to a changing Ireland. He was Ulster organiser of the Irish Transport Workers' Union, and in 1913-14, he became central, as James Larkin's deputy, in the leadership of an epochal working class battle, the Dublin Labour War.

VI

For two decades before 1912, the Irish Home Rule Party had become a tail of the Liberals in the House of Commons. The only way Home Rule could be le-

gally achieved was with the support of one of the two "great" British parties. The Irish MPs, numbering a little over 80, could never achieve it on their own.

Both factions of the Irish were clients, the Home Rulers of the Liberal Party, the Irish Unionists of the Tories, and both were corrupted by being clients. The solution to division in Ireland was not sought within Ireland, but from English allies. Many decades later the Provisional IRA would echo this, with its calls for Britain to act as "persuader" to push Protestants into a united Ireland. By "persuasion" they meant not alone words, but economic and other coercions.

Gladstone's Irish Home Rule Bill of 1886 was defeated in the House of Commons. A second Home Rule Bill in 1892 passed in the Commons, but was vetoed in the House of Lords. At that point the Lords veto on the elected House of Commons was absolute.

VII

The Liberals won an absolute majority in 1906. They did not bring in a Home Rule Bill. They did, however, carry through a profound political revolution that made Britain for the first time a parliamentary democracy.

Britain had made a number of incremental steps to broaden the franchise. The Reform Act of 1832 gave the middle class the vote and important cities like Man- continued on page 10 →

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continued → chester and Birmingham parliamentary representation. Disraeli's Tories gave the vote to some urban workers. The Liberal Act of 1884 greatly extended the rural vote.

A convention had it that the Lords would not veto "money" bills. In 1909 they broke the convention when Lloyd George's Budget began to lay the foundation of a welfare state. The Liberals, backed by the Irish Home Rule party, launched a vigorous campaign to abolish the power of the House of Lords over the House of Commons. It was a fierce battle, polarising the country profoundly.

VIII

In the two elections in 1910, the Liberals lost their House of Commons majority and after the second one could only go on governing with the support of the Irish Home Rule Party. The Liberals paid the price by bringing in the third Home Rule Bill in 1912.

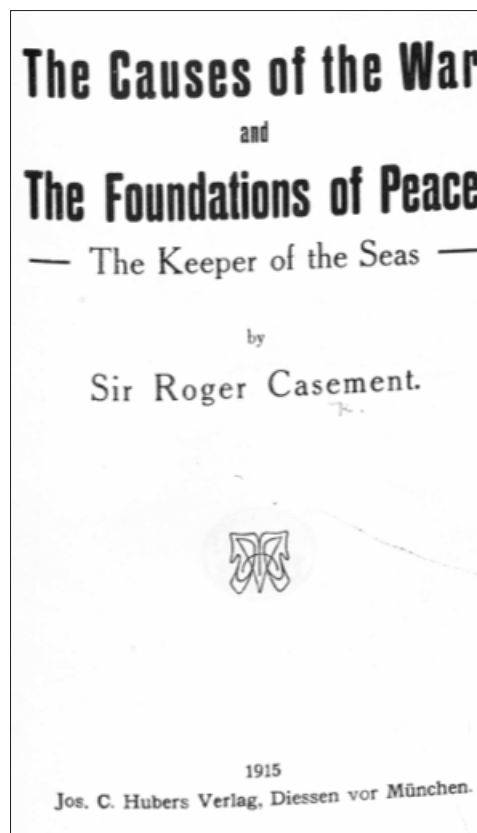
Karl Marx in the 1860s and 70s had thought that a Home Rule Ireland would rise against the landlords and that the revolt would spread to Britain, triggering a radical revolution there, too. In fact, what would happen was a party conflict in England on the "constitution" creating and helping foster an immense bitterness that spread to the already embittered "Irish question" and made it worse.

Protestant Unionist Ireland (29% of the Irish electorate in December 1910) said no to Home Rule. They had always said no, and the local government corruption and sectarianism of the Catholic Orange Order, the Ancient Order of Hibernians, then very powerful in Catholic Ireland, did not help change minds. The Protestants backed Edward Carson and the English Tories in opposing Home Rule for any part of Ireland. With the help of the British Unionists, they mobilised, marched, held meetings, brought in rifles from Germany, published papers and pamphlets.

Their attitude wasn't just hostility to Catholic Ireland, though that was an enormous part of it. Religion in England and Ireland had helped create both British and (more so) Irish nationalism. The Protestant resistance was essentially also a question of their positive identity, their sense of British national selfhood. Their bitter anti-Catholicism directed immediately against their working-class Catholic neighbours and fellow workers, their flaunting of the symbols and regalia of British oppression and British imperialism, their master-race pretensions and proclamations - all of that was and is repulsive to liberals and socialists.

As indeed, with the AOH equivalents (it was divided into two factions, the AOH and the AOH Board of Erin). The AOH existed, with Catholic members only, to promote Catholics and perceived Catholic interest.

Religion in England and Ireland had helped create both British and (more so) Irish nationalism. The Protestant resistance was essentially also a question



"In a pamphlet [published in Germany, where he went to live during World War 1] Casement proves that the independence of Ireland means the 'freedom of the seas' and the death blow to the naval domination of Britain" - Leon Trotsky

of their positive identity, their sense of British national selfhood.

The Protestant minority in all Ireland was a majority in North East Ulster. Belatedly, the home rulers offered them special arrangements within a Home Rule Ireland. It was much too late for that.

As the Liberals and the Home Rule Party pushed through Home Rule, now without the fail-safe of a House of Lords veto on the Commons (the Lords now had only a two year delaying power), the Unionist revolt, backed by the Conservative and Unionist Party, got wider and deeper.

Led by Edward Carson, a Dublin lawyer, MP for Trinity College Dublin, the Unionists said they would not obey an Irish Home Rule government established by London. They set up a Provisional Government in "Ulster", ready to contest power with a Westminster-backed Dublin government. They organised, drilled and armed (with specially imported German guns) an Ulster Volunteer Force.

The Liberal government was faced with civil war if it kept to its set Home Rule course. The Unionist slogan or demand was "No Home Rule without a general election". They believed that the Liberals would lose such an election, and so it seems did the Liberals, who wanted to avoid a general election at all costs. Partition of Ireland was the Liberals' alternative to a risky general election.

IX

The Irish labour movement was helpless in this crisis. The working class was split, Orange and Green. Most of the Irish industrial working class was Or-

ange and backed the Tory unionist revolt against Home Rule. The only force that could coerce Protestant Ireland (if coercion was advisable) was the force of the Liberal government. The labour movement too, in effect, looked to the British government to force Home Rule on the Northeast.

Assuming Home Rule was a certainty, the labour movement had prepared for life in a Home Rule Ireland dominated by the Home Rule party and the AOH, for example by creating an Irish Labour Party to fight the Irish gombeen bourgeoisie, and pressing the British Labour Party to insist on such things as payment for MPs in a Home Rule Ireland so that workers could be MPs. James Connolly's famous debate with William Walker in 1911 was part of that.

When it came to serious moves to partition Ireland, the labour movement was also helpless. James Connolly dismissed the capacities of the Irish movement to resist Home Rule as bluff, speaking of "the wooden guns of Ulster". Plainly they were not bluffing.

He wrote: "I am not speaking without due knowledge of the sentiments of the organised Labour movement in Ireland when I say that we would much rather see the Home Rule Bill defeated than see it carried with Ulster or any part of Ulster left out". The 1916 Proclamation would say nothing about partition, which by then the British government was already committed to as the Home Rule Act was passed into law and then suspended at the start of World War 1.

X

The outbreak of the Great War at the beginning of August 1914 changed everything in James Connolly's political world.

The vote on 4 August 1914 by the German Socialists for the Kaiser's war credits threw many socialists into a crisis. It set the tone for the Socialist International in the war. French, Belgian, British and other socialists soon followed in supporting their own governments. The Basle resolution of 1912 had committed the International to oppose war. This collapse destroyed it.

Vladimir Lenin and his companion Nadezhda Krupskaya at first refused to believe the news from Germany. When shown an issue of the German party paper *Vorwärts* reporting the vote, he said it had to be a forgery put out by the general staff of the German army. When he could no longer deny the fact, he at first decided to abandon politics and emigrate to Argentina. He soon adjusted and took up the working-class socialist struggle against the war and for a new International.

All his public life Connolly had been a radical working-class socialist. His first response was to oppose the war. Hearing (mistakenly) that Karl Liebknecht had been shot for opposition to the war, Connolly wrote: "The war of nation against nation in the interest of royal freebooters and cosmopolitan thieves is a thing accursed. All hail, then, to our continental comrade, who, in a world

of imperial and financial brigands and cowardly trimmers and compromisers, showed mankind that men still know how to die for the holiest of all causes - the sanctity of the human soul, the practical brotherhood of the human race!"

But on 29 August 1914, in an article *The War Against the German Nation*, he came out as an Irish nationalist in support of the German Empire. If the British Navy's control of the seas could be broken, it would be tremendous progress. Following Roger Casement, a former British colonial administrator who wrote a pamphlet on the control of the seas and sided with Germany (and the Irish rebels), Connolly became a propagandist for Germany and the German war. Implicitly he supported the majority of the German Social-Democratic party.

"But seeing that the socialist movement did not so put the faith of its adherents to the test, seeing that the nations are now locked in this death grapple, and the issue is knit, I do not wish to disguise from anyone my belief that there is no hope of peaceful development for the industrial nations of continental Europe whilst Britain holds the dominance of the sea. The British fleet is a knife held permanently at the throat of Europe; should any nation evince an ability to emerge from the position of a mere customer for British products, and to become a successful competitor of Britain in the markets of the world, that knife is set in operation to cut that throat" (International Socialist Review, [March 1915](#))

XI

The idea that Connolly was against the war is entirely wrong. He actively supported Germany in the war, except in the earlier part of August 1914.

At the same time as the war broke out, the Home Rule crisis was temporarily resolved. The British parliament passed a Home Rule Bill while stipulating that it would not be implemented until after an Amending Bill to rule out "coercion of Ulster", and after the end of the war.

Simultaneously with James Connolly's turn to Germany, he turned to the organising of an Irish national insurrection. The two were connected. England's difficulty was Ireland's opportunity, the old adage said. Britain's enemy was Ireland's friend. The best hope for a rising was that it should have German support and military help.

For Connolly and his friends, hope for Ireland was totally entwined with the fortunes of Germany in the war. They wanted Germany to land soldiers in Ireland to fight alongside them against England.

In the moves towards an uprising, Connolly set the pace for the Republican idealists around Clarke and Pearse. The fierce militancy he had wanted in the working-class cause against all the war powers was now directed against Britain in the war.

Roger Casement was in Germany for the future insurgents. He came back to

Ireland on Good Friday 1916 to stop the Rising because there would be no German soldiers sent to Ireland. He was captured.

XII

A rising was planned by the Irish Republican Brotherhood to break out all over Ireland on Easter Sunday 1916. The conspiratorial secret society, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, of which James Connolly was now a leading member, engaged in manipulation of the broad Irish Volunteers movement, intending to rise under cover of a national mobilisation of the legal Volunteers.

Central leaders of the Volunteers who were not in the confidence of the secret IRB, most importantly Eoin MacNeill, national head of the Volunteers, discovered the plan and put advertisements in the Sunday papers cancelling the mobilisation of volunteers on Easter Sunday and wrecking the IRB plans for the Rising.

The IRB in Dublin turned out on Easter Monday against impossible odds because the alternative was to let their movement collapse in a fiasco of poltroonery and irresolution. They saw the choice as letting the enterprise fizzle out in fiasco, or rising in Dublin in the hope that it would thereby belatedly trigger and support the national rising they had planned.

There is a question. There were sparks of insurrection struck in Galway and Wexford, but with Dublin "out" there was no general rising. British censorship alone does not account for that. Yet none of the leaders, not even the two, Patrick Pearse and Joseph Mary Plunkett, who had written poems which after the event could be construed as advocating mystical self-sacrifice, had planned the Rising to be their own funeral pyre.

Connolly died before a British Army firing squad, as did 14 others. A 16th, Roger Casement, was hanged in Pentonville Jail on 3 August. Connolly's hopes for a new Socialist Ireland were mocked in the new Ireland that arose in the independent 26 Counties.

XIII

Everything Connolly said and did in his last 20 months was nationalist, not socialist. The Irish Citizen Army was merged into the Irish Volunteers for the duration of the 1916 Rising. (The 1930s "Irish Citizen Army" was an entirely different organisation).

Michael Collins said that the 1916 Proclamation of the Irish Republic was too socialistic for him. The only thing socialistic in that proclamation are the assertions that "We declare the right of the people to the ownership of Ireland" and that the Republic will "cherish all the children of the nation equally".

That is Pearse's nationalist concept, not James Connolly's old concept of working-class socialism established by the workers themselves; and it is a concept held by many people, including people far to the right: for exam-

ple, Jose Maria Rivera of the Spanish Falange of the 1930s.

Most of those who took part in the rising were not socialists, and many were far from socialism. Yet many people and organisations have asserted that Irish nationalism at a certain level of intensity flows into socialism or can be made to flow into socialism. Eamonn McCann writes that the militant Republicans will realise that they can realise their Republican goals only by joining the fight for a Workers' Republic. That's what we used to say in the 1960s and 1970s. It is all nonsense.

Many socialists have become nationalists. Many active as Republicans or Republican militarists are privately socialist. Yet the socialist republicans of the Irish Republican Socialist Party sometimes functioned as Catholic sectarians, for instance, killing people as Protestants at the small Protestant church at Darkley in 1983.

The idea of nationalism flowing into socialism is nonsense because though the existing partition is artificial, imprisoning the nationalist majority of Tyrone, Fermanagh, Derry City and other areas, there is a distinct Protestant majority in north-east Ulster. Only a power capable and willing to occupy and hold down that population by force, only the UK government in fact, could have unified Ireland in 1912 and in all the years since.

The Provisionals in the 1980s and 90s pressing the British government to "persuade" the Protestants into United Ireland were true to the reality, however, fantastic their idea that by their war they could compel the British to act for them.

The Six County entity created an artificial minority of Catholics in Northern Ireland. Crying injustice? Yes. But neither that fact nor the Provo war made the idea of a united Ireland any more acceptable to northern Protestants.

The reasoning is common that James Connolly, a socialist, could function as a nationalist, without ceasing to be a socialist. It is natural for socialists to claim James Connolly, a great nationalist icon, as our own. But Connolly did not serve socialism in 1916. He died nationalist and, in fact, a proselytising Catholic.

Connolly's response to the idea of partition before 1914 was that the Home Rule Bill should be dropped. The war and the collapse of the Second International changed Connolly's view and changed his mind on nationalism and national rebellion. The view



Immediately after the 1916 Rising, Henry Mayers Hyndman, who had been the leader of the British Marxist organisation, the SDF, wrote about James Connolly in the weekly Justice.

of Sean O'Casey, one time secretary of the Irish Citizen Army, was right: James Connolly joined Irish nationalism in 1914 and fought the 1916 Rising as an Irish nationalist.

James Connolly was quoted by William O'Brien, the trade unionist, as saying before the Easter Rising that they were going out to be slaughtered, but: "In the event of victory, hold on to your rifles, as those with whom we are fighting may stop before our goal is reached. We are out for economic as well as political liberty".

I believe O'Brien that Connolly did say that. He never said it or anything like it in public. Given those who were to rise with Connolly, it was also an enormous crass understatement of the issue then.

Close to the idea of nationalism flowing into socialism is the idea common amongst Trotskyists (I think of myself as a Trotskyist) which implied that the Provo War, could magically transform the Protestants into nationalists. That never made sense.

People such as the writer (living in England) who would never have agreed to the Provo war felt in the early 1970s that we had to give them "critical support" against our own government. From the late 1980s and early 1990s, when we openly called on them to stop the war, it was more critical than it was support.

In practice, the idea of magical transformation paved the way for Trotskyists to align with the existing Republicans,

who were far from ideas of permanent revolution.

The idea of the permanent revolution in Ireland was always complete nonsense, serving only to mask a nationalism, parasitic on republicanism, of nominal Trotskyists, such as Socialist Democracy and the League for a Workers' Republic of the 1970s and 80s.

XIV

It is possible to imagine "alternative histories" of the 1916 Rising and after. What if the Germans had done as the Irish insurgents wanted them to, and landed an expeditionary force in Ireland? Ireland would have become a theatre in the Great War of Germany against Britain, with different sorts of Irish on each side, and with a civil war subsumed into the world war.

The actual Easter Rising, though it was an event in the history of a very small nation, was a major event in world history. A revolt against imperialism whose example helped inspire peoples all over the world held in the maws of empires run by predatory brigands.

And so far, as the divisions within Ireland allowed, the Rising was successful. The 26 Counties state became effectively independent six years after the Rising was crushed.

Vladimir Lenin [said](#) of the Rising that the Irish rose too soon. Of Connolly, Liam McNulty's forthcoming book will tell more. For now, let James Larkin's be his epitaph too:

"He talked to the workers... not for an assignation with peace, dark obedience, or placid resignation, but trumpet-tongued of resistance to wrong, discontent with leering poverty, and defiance of any power strutting out to stand in the way of their march onward" (Sean O'Casey).

And Yeats's words:
And what if excess of love
Bewildered them till they died?
I write it out in a verse -
MacDonagh and MacBride
And Connolly and Pearse
Now and in time to be,
Wherever green is worn,
Are changed, changed utterly:
A terrible beauty is born. □

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Tube strikes on 1 and 3 March

From Tubeworker

The RMT union has called strikes on London Underground for 1 and 3 March. These strikes will be the first time RMT's entire LU membership - which includes workers in all functions: drivers, station staff, fleet and engineering workers, signallers, service controllers, and others - has struck together since 2015.

The union has three clear demands: no reduction in staffing levels, no detrimental changes to terms and conditions, and no detrimental changes to pension arrangements. LU bosses have refused to give any assurances; on the contrary, they have announced a job cuts programme, initially targeting up to 600 jobs on stations. A review into the Transport for London staff pension scheme, which LU workers are part of, has been tasked with identifying potential "reforms". The review reports on 31 March.

The decision to call strikes was made following a lively meeting of RMT reps on 1 February. A constructive debate amongst reps focused on issues of both timing and duration of strikes. Tubeworker is pleased that our opening salvo involves more than a 24-hour walkout. Striking for 48 hours sends an important signal to the company that we're not making a token protest. Splitting the strike across two days makes sense too, as the effect on train and maintenance schedules means that services will be disrupted on 28 February, 2 March, and 4 March.

It's important these strikes are followed up with an announcement of further action. It's unlikely the 1-3 March strikes will be sufficient to win the dispute on their own; the union will need to name an ongoing programme of escalating action. As well as all-out strikes, this could involve selective action with different groups of workers striking on different days.

LU responded to the announcement of strikes by mechanically repeating its mantra that the pension review is "only a review" (as if there's any possibility of a review demanded by the Tories recommending retaining the status quo!), and insisting that, because job cuts won't be made via compulsory redundancies, they somehow won't affect existing staff. This is patently nonsensical, as cuts achieved through deleting vacant positions will still lead to increased workloads for those who remain, as well as reducing opportunities for future workers. Cuts of the scale LU is proposing will almost certainly also lead to displacements for many existing staff. LU also claims that there are "no proposals to change terms and conditions", which is a straightforward lie: the company has already proposed changing agreements for the Revenue Control staff and the Special Requirements Team, to increase "flexibility" and allow managers to change work-



ers' shift times and locations at shorter notice.

Aslef, which organises a narrow majority of drivers across LU, has its own live ballot mandate, but has yet to call action. Aslef members should respect RMT picket lines, and demand their own union names action as well. Members of TSSA and Unite on LU should do likewise.

Ultimately, this dispute will require a "political" resolution; the government must restore regular, adequate funding to TfL, filling the funding gap, now standing at nearly £2 billion, stemming from the Tories' abolition of the central government grant to TfL in 2018. □



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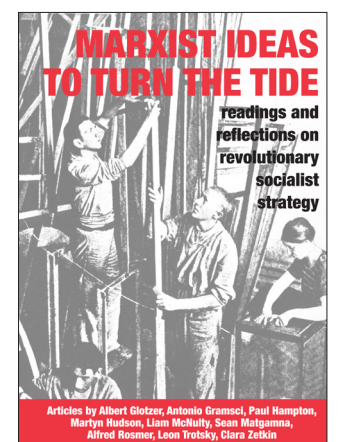
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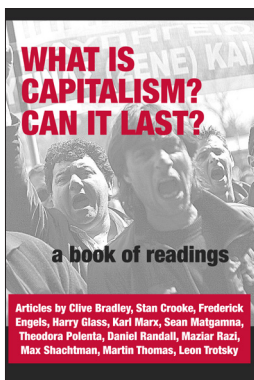
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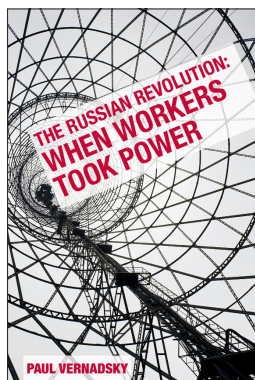
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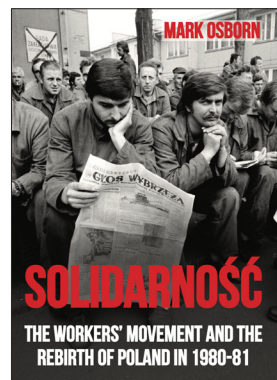
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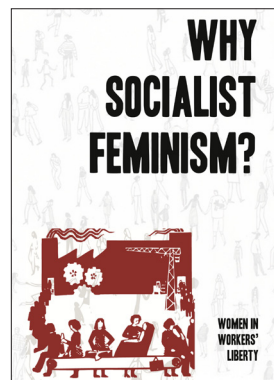
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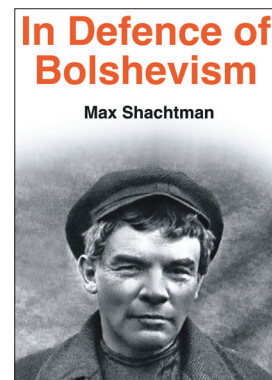
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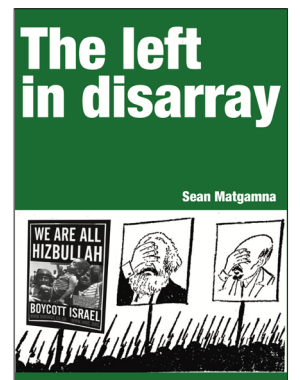
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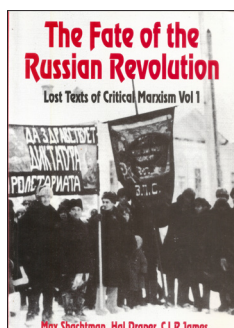
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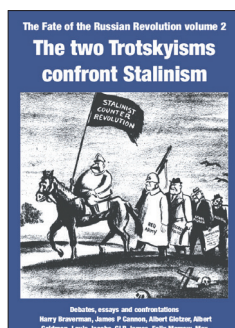
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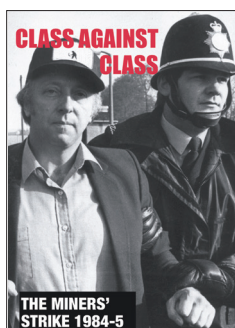
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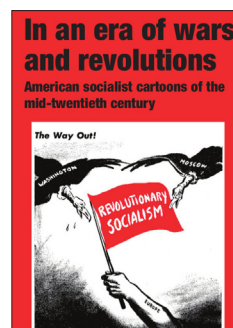
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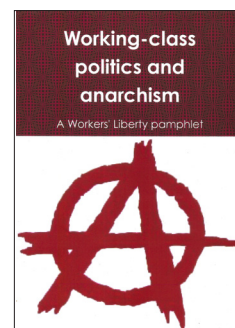
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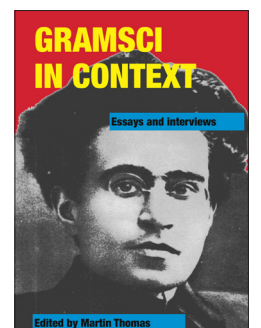
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Reinstate Paul Holmes!



By a Unison member

On 2 February Kirklees council announced the dismissal from employment of the left-wing branch secretary of Kirklees Unison and national union president, Paul Holmes. The decision followed a disciplinary process that has lasted longer than two years. The complaints relate to allegations within the union branch.

The employer has no place investigating or taking action about what goes on in a union office. Unions are independent workers' organisations which should uphold their own rules

and procedures. Bosses have no place investigating unions in their workplaces. Unison must demand his reinstatement and take action to win it, and Unison members must resist if union officialdom tries to use the Kirklees sacking to exclude Holmes from his union-president or national-executive functions.

Holmes got the best vote of a left candidate in Unison's history in the recent General Secretary election, losing out to bureaucracy candidate Christina McAnea.

Holmes has as yet not given any public information on, or explanation of, the charges against him. But, following the hearing, some details have come out in the press and as well as a statement on social media under the name of the Kirklees 14.

Both sources allege complaints have been made by 14 current and former Kirklees Unison reps and branch-employed staff. These include:

- Bullying, threatening and intimidating behaviour towards colleagues.
- That Holmes made repeated and unreasonable work demands on colleagues, behaving in a controlling and coercive manner, working in a draconian driven office environment over 20 years.
- Sarcastic, demeaning and sexist comments towards colleagues, including constant and unjustifiable criticism.

The complainants say they would have preferred that the Unison branch had dealt with the complaints, some going back years, but the branch chair refused to deal with them. To date the national union has also failed to inves-

tigate complaints made to it, despite suspending Holmes for over a year.

Unison's delay in investigating the allegations emboldened the employer in investigating and dismissing Holmes. Given Unison's history of taking action against left-wing activists, it is certainly credible that the bureaucracy sat on complaints in order to allow Kirklees to dismiss Holmes, threatening his position on the Unison National Executive and therefore as union President. This delay has been unfair and harmful both to Holmes and to those who made the allegations.

The allegations need to be taken seriously. We call on Unison to make sure that they are investigated by an appropriate labour movement body, constituted to be independent and if possible acceptable to all sides. □

Goldsmiths fights redundancies

By Cathy Nugent

The new round of local strikes by the University and College Union (CU) at Goldsmiths University of London – ten days over three weeks, up to 4 March – takes place after the college's Senior Management Team refused to back down on their targeted 46 compulsory redundancies, despite the college having made huge savings through its voluntary redundancy scheme. This action follows 15 days of strikes last term.

If Goldsmiths management get away with these cuts, much more will follow; plans will destroy ground-breaking courses (e.g. in Black and Queer History), downgrade humanities, and recreate Goldsmiths as a bargain-basement uni with a shallow radical gloss.

In the third week of the strike (28 February to 4 March) UCU members should be joined by Unison members who are also affected by the redundancies.

The UCU nationally is supporting an academic boycott of Goldsmiths. This is about building support across higher education, asking academics to show solidarity by refusing to give guest talks and participate in events and new research partnerships.



Build support for the boycott and ask in your union branch for donations to the strike fund: "UCU Goldsmiths College Hardship Fund", a/c 20392303, 60-83-01, UCU, Office 4, 18 Laurie Grove, London, SE14 6NH. □

• More: goldsmithsucu.org and @GoldsmithsUCU

Unison begins to move on uni pay

By Vicki Morris

Nine Higher Education (HE) branches in England and Scotland of the public services union Unison have beaten the 50% turnout threshold and voted for strikes against the 1.5% pay offer that took effect on 1 August 2021, out of 37 that chose to ballot.

The results from Northern Ireland should be available after 9 February. The union calculates that the value of HE pay has fallen by over 17% in the last 12 years.

The nine branches include Leeds, Brighton, King's College London, Birkbeck, and Gloucestershire. It's a positive sign that determined branch leaderships can achieve a 50% turnout, when recent pay votes in local government and health have failed. This vote is a sign of hope in a backwater of the union that suffers from weak density and underdeveloped

branches. What will the nine do with their strike mandate? Ludicrously, none of the branches has been told officially who the others are!

Some of them have made themselves known on their social media. It is hard in these circumstances to coordinate action, but at least one branch plans to strike on 2 March alongside the UCU and the NUS student strike and hopes to coordinate with other branches.

All HE branches should be encouraged to hold pay protests on days of UCU or Unison strike action, particularly those who came close to 50% - assuming they have been told their ballot result!

There are disputes on the left in our union; nevertheless, in the upcoming elections for the HE Service Group Executive, Unison members should back Time For Real Change (TERC) candidates as the best way to get a leadership in HE that will fight! □

Targeting Stuart's owners, DPD

By Abel Harvie-Clark

On Thursday 3 February, a DPD depot in South London was met in the early hours of the morning by direct action in support of the strike by couriers employed by Stuart on a contract with Just Eat. Stuart is owned by DPD. Officials from IWGB, the couriers' union, and local activists, entered blowing vuuzelas and banging drums, to the surprise of the morning shift workers and the annoyance of shift managers.

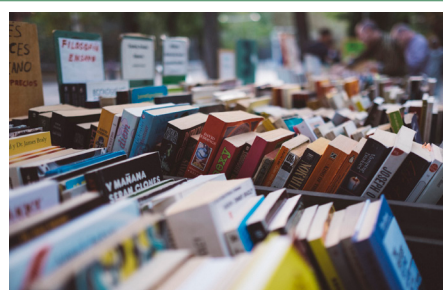
Actions like this can increase pressure on Stuart bosses, who sit in a chain

of ownership reaching up via DPD to French-state owned La Poste. Some DPD drivers in the depot were visibly annoyed at the more middle-class, white intruders, but there was also a widespread understanding that we were on their side, and it was down to their managers to usher them away from speeches about workers uniting against pay cuts.

More direct actions can help win this dispute for the Stuart couriers. And above all we must organise more unorganised workers to fight back against exploitation. □

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Diary of a firefighter

By Adrian Noble

It was a day of contrasts. In the morning, a primary school visit, the first the watch had done since Covid hit, to talk about what we do as firefighters and some basic fire safety. We spent an hour answering questions about why we wanted to join the brigade, what station life is like, and the almost mythic cats-up-trees rescues. This wholesome activity was immediately followed by a zoom call with senior officers about their plan to send us into active terrorist situations in ballistic vests alongside armed police. I know what I'd rather spend my time doing.

This recent chapter in the saga of the brigade's attempts to respond to marauding terrorist attacks (MTAs) goes back 18 months or so, since the brigade and the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) restarted negotiations of the issue, P tells me. But the issue goes back years, since efforts to have frontline firefighters don body armour and enter the hot zone of an ongoing attack for casualty extraction was first rebuffed by the union. (We currently attend these incidents to deal with fire etc., but not in the hot zone where body armour would be required.)

Since the Manchester, London Bridge and Fishmonger's Hall attacks, there's been a new sense of urgency from the brigade and Home Office. Currently, some senior officers are paid 7% extra

to take on this role and carry a pager so they can be mobilised to respond to MTAs while off duty.

The zoom call was about a deal negotiated with the FBU to give London and Manchester firefighters a 2% pensionable skills payment to take on this new work. A consultative ballot of members on accepting the deal is about to end. 2% is derisory, no doubt about it – especially with inflation over 5%. Getting shot at in body armour wasn't something that came up when talking to the school kids about the job, and nor is it something many of us enthuse about, the odd Territorial Army firefighter aside. But most of us are willing to do it if properly recompensed. P says the union is adamant this is the most they will be able to wrangle, and I'm afraid he's right.

There are plenty of fire chiefs and bastards in the Home Office that think we should be doing this for free, and only the London and Manchester fire chiefs have recognised that this is new and extra work – unlikely a coincidence, given they are the cities with the most serious recent terror attacks. Tom Windsor, the Tory brown-nosing, union-bashing fire and rescue service inspector and passionate advocate of the removal of our collective bargaining and right to strike, wrote to the Manchester and London fire chiefs explicitly threatening to advise the secretary of state to use their powers to intervene and ban the pay rise. To their credit, both commissioners have held firm.

During the Q&A with senior officers,



numerous important questions were raised and mostly not satisfactorily answered, around PPE standards and policies and procedures. They were also asked to confirm the rumours that turntable ladder operators were to be given sniper training (rule no.1 in the firefighter's code – never miss a chance for a wind-up).

I voted yes in the consultative ballot. What swung it for me was P explaining that frankly this would happen whether we agree or not; but if we reject the deal, the union would have no mandate to negotiate on health and safety, putting it in a very difficult position regarding ensuring standards on PPE, safe systems of work, etc.

If I'm going to be put in a position where I need to wear a ballistic vest, I'd like to be confident it's not already riddled with holes, and health and safety is probably where the FBU is strongest, so at the very least they can make sure of that. ☐

The best known film from Ukraine



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

The Georgian-Armenian Sergei Paradjanov made a number of films in Ukraine for the Dovchenko Studio in Kyiv. *Shadows of Our Forgotten Ancestors* (1965), set in the remote Carpathian Mountains among the Hutsul people, is based on a novel by Ukrainian writer Mykhailo Kotsiubynsky.

It follows the story of childhood friends Ivan and Marichka. Their families hate each other; nevertheless they decide to marry. Ivan goes away to earn some money for the forthcoming wedding, but while he is gone Marichka dies in an accident. He is grief-stricken, but eventually marries Palhanna. He cannot forget Marichka, and he and Palhanna drift apart. In a fight Ivan is seriously wounded. Going out into the snow, he sees a vision of Marichka,



reaches out and touches her. In that instant he dies and they are re-united.

Paradjanov used the Hutsul dialect of Ukrainian rather than Russian, contrary to the wishes of the cultural commissars of the time. With its fantasy-dream sequences and a haunting soundtrack based on Hutsul music, the film has been described by some critics as "magic realist" and regarded as an assertion of cultural independence at a time when Ukrainian culture was under attack from Moscow. ☐

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New stirrings over pay



John Moloney

As we continue to prepare for our national consultative ballot (14 Feb to 21 March) for action on the cost of living crisis, PCS members are also fighting local disputes. Two groups of members employed by private sector employers who hold civil service contracts are balloting for industrial action over pay, at Atos and Fujitsu. Our members at the British Council are also balloting for action to resist staffing cuts. The British Council's income collapsed during the pandemic and it is seeking to recoup its budgetary deficit by cutting jobs. It has refused to rule out compulsory redundancies, and our members there are voting on strike action.

If those ballots are successful the union will support action with strike pay, as well as building support for the disputes throughout the wider union and labour movement. With the sharpening cost-of-living crisis, and senior Bank of England officials telling workers not to expect pay rises, it is essential workers refuse that logic and demand decent pay. Our national consultative ballot of civil service members is also over that issue. It's something the whole labour movement needs to take up, not only industrially but politically and ideologically by pushing back against the idea that working-class people have to put up with our wages and living standards being screwed down whilst the wealth of the rich continues to grow.

On Saturday 5 February, I spoke on behalf of PCS at the Uyghur Solidarity Campaign's monthly protest opposite the Chinese Embassy. A number of other labour movement figures also spoke, including UCU president Vicky Blake, along with activists from the Uyghur community, with other supporters including John McDonnell sending messages of solidarity. My speech emphasised that the labour movement needs to take up the Uyghur issue as a matter of basic solidarity. Part of what holds this back is that, unfortunately, some of the people and groups shaping the political and international outlook of unions see the Chinese state as in some sense representing a progressive alternative to western capitalism and imperialism. This is a myth; internationalists in unions need to organise to ensure solidarity wins out against Stalinist apologetics.

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

Strike against outsourcing

By Abel Harvie-Clark

The Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH) security guards' strike kicked off on 3 February with a lively demo at the entrance to the hospital, and is set to go on for the next six weeks (the longest continuous strike in NHS history). The security guards, the majority of black and Asian backgrounds, organised with UMW, are striking against outsourcing, calling it out for the racist discrimination it is, and demanding equality with directly employed NHS staff in conditions and pay, particularly sick and maternity pay.

The security guards are employed through Carlisle Support Services, owned by Tory-donor Lord Ashcroft and making millions in profits. One pregnant security guard pointed that the difference in maternity pay for outsourced workers would see her lose £3,000 compared to an NHS-employed member of staff in the same hospital.

At the rally, some passers-by heckled that we shouldn't be disrupting a hospital. Demonstrators responded that these security guards make the hospital work, and the biggest threat to the patients is the employers' mistreatment of them. The strike is against that threat.

This struggle highlights that addressing the needs of the health service



requires recognising the racialised inequalities with which it currently operates. The militancy and determination of the GOSH strikers is an example to all NHS campaigners. As one security guard, Samuel, said:

"We're buzzing, it's great to be around such positivity. We didn't want to go on strike, but GOSH has pushed us into it. They haven't engaged or negotiated with us, so we've been left with no choice."

"All we want is the same terms and conditions as the NHS staff we work alongside. There's no justice without equality."

The opening strike rally had support from left MPs like Richard Burgon and Jeremy Corbyn. Strike fund: bit.ly/gosh-s □

Biggest NHS Trust on strike

By Mark Simon

Cleaners, porters and catering staff at Whipps Cross, Royal London and Bart's Hospitals are entering their second week of strike against their employer Serco.

The strike (since 31 Jan) has been strong, with picket lines of up to 145 strong at the Royal London and 75 at Whipps Cross. Two large demonstrations have been held, with labour movement supporters joining the pickets.

The Bart's Unite branch is confident the strike will stay strong for the remainder of its planned two weeks. It demands a 15% pay rise and an end to the two-tier pay system for those employed by the NHS and those on Serco contracts.

This is the third time Unite members employed by Serco at the Bart's NHS trust have struck. Serco now wants to drop the contract a year early, opening the way for Bart's NHS Trust to take these vital jobs back into direct NHS employment. The Unite branch are campaigning for that to happen on full NHS terms and conditions.

This battle in the biggest NHS Trust in the country shows the way to fight for a decent pay rise and against contracting out. It should make us think about why it is only in one trust, when health workers in all the unions and across the country voted to reject the 3% NHS pay offer?

Join the picket lines at the Royal London, Bart's and Whipps Cross hospitals from 5:30am every day for the remaining week of this first round. □



Neil Faulkner, a Marxist historian, archaeologist and a leader of Anti-Capitalist Resistance (ACR), died on 4 February, aged 64, after suffering from lymphoma for seven months. Condolences to his partner, family, friends, comrades, and colleagues.

In summer 2020 Neil Faulkner took part in a panel debate on behalf of Mutiny (which later merged into ACR), alongside activists from Workers' Liberty and Red Flag, entitled "Towards a new revolutionary left?". Following that debate, he had a written exchange with *Solidarity* editor Martin Thomas titled "Cooperate where we agree, debate where we disagree." Watch the intro and summation speeches and read the debate: bit.ly/acr-d and bit.ly/nf-mt □

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Tories' level-up is a sham

By Colin Foster

The Tories issued their "Levelling Up" White Paper on 2 February as part of a surge of bluster designed to stop Boris Johnson being top-pled.

In fact, we won't win real levelling-up without some levelling-down of the Tories and the wealthy class they represent. The rest of us will never be "levelled up" to the same rate of luxury and power as the top one per cent have now.

We do not want to level down to universal poverty. With advancing technologies, it is possible to level up the whole population of Britain, and even of the world, to a rate of comfort, of access to culture and free time, of personal autonomy and equality, and to do that without destroying the environment.

To do that we have to break the capitalist spiral of insatiable greed to accumulate more and more, in which the millionaire is driven to seek to become a billionaire, the billionaire a multi-billionaire, and so on.

A society based on solidarity, cooperation, and equality can do that. In a society based on profit we can only mitigate the spiral.

Andrew Bailey, Governor of the Bank of England, expressed the spirit of capitalism neatly when he called for workers to accept wage rises below price inflation in order to avoid pressure on monetary and fiscal authorities to facilitate further price rises (to sustain profits) which might spiral into more unruly inflation.

Torsten Bell of the Resolution Foundation think-tank commented: "Why wages? Why didn't he call for profits to be squeezed?"

The Tory government might respond that they never promised to reduce inequality between rich and poor, between bosses and workers, but only inequalities between regions, much of which stems from Thatcherism's pulping in the 1980s of industries which had been the backbone of their localities. (Disparities in wages and employment rates between areas in the UK have [fallen](#) since the 1990s, but remain serious).

The Tories' White Paper, however, starts with a long list of measures the Tories claim already to have taken to "level up" between regions - with no big effect. It continues with a flurry of targets,



and of promises of pots of money for local administrations. Much of the money is previously scheduled funds, re-announced.

There is no evidence that the new, or pseudo-new, pots will repair the huge cuts in local government funding since 2010. They may not even compensate for the loss of European Union funds which have previously flowed to poorer areas, some £15 billion between 2014 to 2020.

At Brexit the Tories promised that those EU funds would be replaced in full by allocations from the British government. But the Welsh government declared in [November 2021](#):

"Throughout the Brexit debate, the UK government gave repeated assurances Wales would not lose 'a single penny' of EU funding should the UK exit the EU.

"Today's announcement by the UK government shows they are short-changing Wales by cutting the replacement funding we were promised.

"Instead of Wales receiving at least £375m annually in new money to invest from January this year, it confirms Wales will receive just £46m. This is not 'levelling up', it's levelling down".

The labour movement should start real levelling-up - or rather, in fact, resistance to the drive to increase inequalities already in full flow - by a wages offensive. □



Unis: push for harder-hitting action

By AWL UCU members

Ten days of strike action in the University and College Union (UCU) disputes begin Mon 14 Feb. It's a good start, but some way from the escalating action called for by the overwhelming majority at UCU's Branch Delegate Meetings back in January.

The first week of strikes involves only those institutions with mandates in the USS pensions dispute. There are then two strike days, 21-22 February, bringing this dispute together with the "Four Fights" (pay, equality, workload and casualisation), followed by 28 Feb-2 March on the "Four Fights" only. Across the board, 68 branches will be involved, but decoupling the disputes risks weakening the impact of the strikes. The leadership has promised rolling regional action from 7 March, but it remains unclear what that will mean.

The two disputes engage different groups of workers in different ways. The pensions dispute can feel remote to casualised staff who may soon be working outside HE, but is a clear priority for permanently employed members. While the cost of living is rising for everyone, pay is often not the most motivating issue for staff on higher grades, but it is for casualised members. Joint action is the best way to unite members.

A hard-hitting, intense period of disruption with strikes across all institutions with mandates is more likely to concentrate employers' minds than a long-drawn out process of rolling action that allows them time to regroup and put pressure on individual members on those days that they're back at work. Strike pay is key to making this strategy work, and UCU both nationally and

locally need to prioritise fundraising so we can deliver meaningful action while supporting members.

The strategy chosen for this strike was not put to the Branch Delegates' Meeting. It's essential that as the action goes forward branches are fully involved. We support the calling of a "Special Higher Education Sector Conference" which can mandate the union's HEC to adopt a new route forward. Key in such a conference must be the re-coupling of the two disputes, and the escalation of industrial action.

Most branches have mandates only until early May. With Easter holidays taking out much of April, we have a narrow window of opportunity to make this strike hit hard and ensure members stay mobilised in case re-ballots are needed.

Mobilise the rank and file, win control over the strategy, re-couple, escalate and intensify the strikes. □

- Voting in UCU's 2022 elections opened on 27 January and ballots will close on 1 March. Positions open include Trustees, Vice-President, and members of the National Executive Committee. We endorse the following candidates: Rhian Elinor Keyse (for Representative of Women Members & UK-elected HE); Dima Chami (for Representative of Migrant Members); Kyran Joughin (for London and the East HE); Alan Barker (for UK-elected HE); Grant Buttars (for UK-elected HE). We also recommend subsequent voting preferences be given to "UCU Left" candidates.

- More on page 13: Unison action in universities; Goldsmiths dispute



Solidarity

For a workers' government

OPPOSE RUSSIAN WAR IN UKRAINE!

By Dan Katz

The US assesses that the Russian forces massing at the Eastern border of Ukraine are at about 70% of the strength needed for a full-scale invasion. Russia is estimated to have over 130 000 troops near the border with Ukraine.

If Russia does send troops into Ukraine, their most likely objective will be to grab more territory to augment the areas already effectively under their control. The Donetsk People's Republic (DPR), where 2.3 million people live and Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) which is home to a further 1.5 million, have been sustained with funds and military help by Russia.

These areas are on the border with Russia and contain large Russian and Russian-speaking populations. The Russian state has handed out hundreds of thousands of passports to people in the DPR and LPR.

The Reuters news agency, in its advice to capitalist investors, calculates the chances of substantial Russian incursions at 30% and full-scale invasion at 10%. The US believes that Putin has not yet decided what to do although President Biden is likely to be correct when he commented that Putin "has to do something."

In the case of full-scale invasion the Americans believe the capital, Kyiv, could fall within a couple of days. In 2014 Russia overran Crimea in southern Ukraine without a fight. Al-

though Ukraine's army is now stronger it will be no real match for the Russians.

If a full-scale war does take place, US officials estimate that 50 000 Ukrainian civilians will be killed or injured; a major refugee crisis would be provoked; and the West would slap sanctions on Russia and the Russian leadership. The world economy would take a major hit.

If Russia does attack soon it will be before the March thaw, which will turn Ukraine's frozen land into mud. Russia is due to hold military exercises in Belarus from 10-20 February and now has 30 000 troops in Belarus, which is on Ukraine's northern border.

Ukraine is now firmly facing West; its trade with Russia is down to 8% and trade with EU states now stands at 42%.

Putin aims to impede Ukraine's ability to make its own decisions and, ultimately, to dominate it. A key demand he is now making is for the implementation of the Minsk Agreements which were forced on Ukraine in February 2015 following the Russian seizure of Crimea. The West is now pressing Ukraine hard – on Putin's behalf, as a concession to try to avoid war - to enforce Minsk; Ukraine says it will not comply.

Implementation of the Minsk Agreements would lead to incorporation of Donbass as an autonomous area inside Ukraine with a veto over Ukrainian foreign policy. It would allow Putin to directly interfere



with Ukraine's political decision making processes. If the Ukrainian government does give in to Western pressure to implement a Russian version of the Minsk Agreements it will produce a very serious nationalist backlash inside the country.

Russia wants Donbass to have its own police force and judiciary and elections which would take place before Russian troops are removed. That would probably put Russian-controlled warlords into the Ukrainian parliament.

Defend Ukraine's right to self-determination!

No Russian war against Ukraine!

Solidarity with the anti-war left in Russia and the Ukrainian internationalists. □