

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

SOLIDARITY WITH UKRAINE!



Rally in Kyiv,
12 February

» **Workers' unity across borders**

» **Ukraine has right to self-determination**

» **No trust in NATO**

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Push against deforestation and reckless agribusiness

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Solidarity with Ukraine



Ukraine, an impoverished country of 41 million people, faces an army massing at its borders, much larger and more technologically advanced than its own.

On Tuesday 15 February Russia announced it was pulling back some of its troops. However, military units continued to pour forwards towards the border. Russian President Putin, a corrupt authoritarian, made the same lie last December.

The Russian military has surrounded Ukraine on three sides. It has, apparently, over 150,000 troops now ready within a few miles of Ukrainian territory. It has some inside the areas it grabbed from Ukraine in 2014, and now is set to send in more to the "Donetsk People's Republic" and "Luhansk People's Republic" puppet enclaves, probably stepping up fire across their borders so as to seek a Ukrainian response which Putin can then cite as an excuse for a larger invasion.

Attack helicopters, tanks, heavy artillery are ready to go. Planes, missiles and special forces are in place. Russian shells – provocations – are landing in Donetsk in a breach of ceasefire agreements, and pro-Putin militia leaders are mobilising in Ukraine's Russian-occupied eastern regions.

In the Black Sea Russian ships have been joined by warships from its Baltic and Northern fleets and are now conducting drills off the Ukraine's southern coast.

The US estimates that a full scale invasion would cost 50,000 Ukrainian casualties as the vastly superior Russian forces steamrollered over the country.

Putin calls Ukraine the "crown jewel of Russia", as if Ukraine is some exotic decoration to be set in his crown. King Putin has written that Ukraine and Russia are "a single whole". He openly denies that Ukraine has the right to self-determination.

Russia has a long history of dominating and oppressing Ukraine. Ukraine

was denied independence, divided and exploited by the Russian Tsars and other European empires. A deliberately orchestrated famine in 1932-3, designed by the Stalinist ruling class to crush Ukrainian nationalism and opposition, killed perhaps eight million people.

Putin's aim is again to subordinate Ukraine to Russia, ending its independence won in 1991 and asserted in 2014 after a period of tacit subservience to Moscow. To do that he intends to either invade or exert so much pressure on Ukraine that it signs away its sovereignty, levering Western powers into helping him do so.

In 2014, following a popular pro-European mobilisation which drove out a corrupt pro-Russian President, Putin began a frontal assault on Ukraine's rights. His military grabbed and annexed Crimea in southern Ukraine. Then Russia set up two statelets, the Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) and the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR), carved out of territory on Ukraine's eastern border with Russia.

At the time the Russian state was disappointed it did not receive more support among Russian speakers in Eastern Ukraine. For sure any Russian occupation would face mass Ukrainian resistance.

Poll

A polling agency, Rating Group, conducted a poll amongst Ukrainians in December 2021 which found 72% of Ukrainians consider Russia a "hostile state" and only 12% thought Russia to be an ally.

Against a Russian war the Ukrainians have the right to fight for their self-determination, and we support that fight.

An attempt to annex Ukraine entirely would face bitter, long-term nationalist resistance. And that means such a military option is less likely for Russia than extending its existing enclaves, perhaps joining them up to Crimea.

One possible way Putin was exploring to subordinate Ukraine to Russia without war has been to exert so much pressure on Ukraine, with the help of Germany and France, who are frightened of war and want Ukraine to make concessions to Russia to avoid war, that Ukraine's politicians sign away Ukraine's sovereignty.

Minsk 2 was an agreement signed by Russia, Ukraine, the LPR and DPR in February 2015. Putin's interpretation of that agreement is that the LPR and DPR are reincorporated into Ukraine as Russian-controlled entities with their own state apparatuses controlled by Russia and having a veto over Ukrainian foreign policy, while operating within the Ukrainian political structure. That version of Minsk 2 would destroy Ukraine's

independence. But not enough so for Putin; or Putin had decided that he couldn't get Germany and France to put enough pressure on Ukraine that way. Putin moved on 21 February to recognise the DPR and LPR formally – to declare formally that Russia has already detached those areas from Ukraine to make them Russian satellite states.

Putin also says his actions are about NATO and NATO expansion after the collapse of the USSR. He says we should understand Russian "concerns" and "interests", by which he means his concerns and his nationalist interests.

Some gullible socialists in the West have parroted Putin.

But the issue is wrongly put. Why consider Russian concerns above, say, Polish concerns, or the concerns of the Baltic states, or Finland? NATO does not threaten these countries, but Russia under Putin does. These states wanted to join NATO for justifiable fear of Russia. Those fears are being made worse, now, tying smaller European states more firmly in to NATO.

Putin's claim to be acting against Ukraine because Russia fears its own security is being compromised by NATO expansion is an invention. In any case, there is no real chance of Ukraine being admitted to NATO any time soon.

Putin's methods are backfiring on his stated aim, to stop NATO expansion. Russian threats against Ukraine is building support for NATO membership in Sweden and Finland.

Sweden and Finland are not NATO members but Russian attacks on Ukraine make it more likely they will join. In January a poll of Swedes showed 37% in favour of NATO membership, up from 32% five years ago (with 35% opposed, down from 43% five years ago). In Finland, which was ruled by Russia from 1809 to 1917 and has a long border with Russia, 28% now favour joining NATO (up 8% from two years ago) and 42% are against joining (heavily down from the average 50-70% opposition over the last twenty years).

Socialist Worker sees the conflict even-handedly as an inter-imperialist rivalry between the US and Russia, and concludes that since we live in a US ally we should primarily denounce NATO. Here and now, the claim of equal threats is ridiculous. NATO is not massing troops on Ukraine's border, or seizing Ukrainian territory to annex as puppet statelets, or threatening Ukrainian independence and the lives of millions of people in an imperialist war.

It would be different if Britain and the US had armies in Ukraine and aimed to fight Russia on Ukrainian territory in a much more general conflict. But nothing like that is happening.

SW sinks all the details of Putin's



actual war aims, and NATO's actual inclination to conciliate Russia, into generalities.

Centrally, SW ignores the right to Ukrainian self-determination, regarding the right of 41 million Ukrainians not to be invaded as a sorry and uninteresting detail, rather than the central issue. There is no mention of Ukrainian rights in SW's commentary on the conflict. Those rights are ignored.

Given its name, the Stop the War Coalition (StW) might be expected to oppose Russia's war build-up. Wrong. StW, run by the SWP splinter Counterfire and a crew of Stalinists, many of whom actually support Russia but who are not quite brave enough to say so publicly, states, "As the clouds of war continue to gather over Ukraine, the British government, alongside the US, is ramping up the threat of war." StW focuses entirely on NATO and the West and says nothing about the actual threat of war from Russia! Is a stupider position possible in the current situation?

Yes, let's not trust the Western powers. Yes, let's not offer them our political support. Yes, Truss and Johnson are clowns. But the idea that the main problem for Ukraine is the West, which has no army in the area, rather than the very real, massive invasion force Russia has assembled, is an evasion. It amounts to saying: never mind about the huge Russian army set to invade a weaker country and seek to annex or semi-annex it. That's a detail. Let's instead talk generalities about what NATO might do somewhere else.

Support the internationalists in Ukraine, support the anti-war left in Russia! □

• On why socialists should oppose NATO, but not at the expense of muting opposition to Putin's annexationist imperialism, read bit.ly/nato-bt

23-24 April

Workers' Liberty has our yearly conference in London on 23-24 April, and we are currently running pre-conference Zoom meetings to make sure everyone is well-briefed on the documents and debates which will come up there. For more information and details, email awl@workersliberty.org. □

Alive, kicking, and occupying!

By Alice and Gonzo

Alice and Gonzo are two of the student activists who occupied five buildings at the University of Sheffield during the first week of industrial action by the University and College Union (UCU)

It's a rainy afternoon on 14 February, and what a better Valentine's Day gift to the university than to begin a week-long campaign of occupations.

At around 2pm 16 students entered Jessop West on campus, heading in pairs to locations picked to secure as much access to the building - including prime banner-hanging locations - as possible. Once we had spread out across four floors, the security liaison team who were waiting in the lobby declared an occupation of the building to the rapidly-arriving university security people. Very quickly, windows were opened and massive banners began to be suspended across the face of the building.

As a team we roped up huge banners, including the iconic 15-metre-long "Archaeology Now, Who Next?".

The occupations were not just a stunt pulled to demonstrate our arts and

crafts skills. One occupier, Alice, explains why we did it:

"We want to act in solidarity with the UCU strikes as we recognise that teaching conditions are our learning conditions. Solidarity with workers' struggles should be a key principle held by everybody, and the staff deserve better. One especially important reason for this action was the closure of the Archaeology department at the University of Sheffield, which is a local issue, unlike the Four Fights."

The four fights are issues around which the UCU is currently on strike: pay, including £10/hour for in-house staff; workload, a real 35-hours work week; equality, closing the gender and ethnic pay gaps; and casualisation, a framework to eliminate precarious employment.

Alice continues: "As activists we believe that, due to rising authoritarianism, the climate crisis and the desperately unequal nature of late-stage capitalism, we need to radicalise people and fight these challenges. We believe that the student movement has a large part to play in this. The student movement needs a well-organised,

radical culture of direct action. This was supposed to help build that locally, while also being an example to the rest of the country, to inspire a copycat wave of occupations."

Asked what inspired the occupations in Sheffield, Alice says:

"Student occupations have largely been seen as symbolic acts. We learnt with the Rent Strike occupation wave in 2021 that symbolic occupations don't have the means to bring about large amounts of change."

"But this time by the end of the week we had the university in chaos! Many lectures and events were moved online and there was an air of complete uncertainty as to how long we would be there and what buildings would be next. People started creating Twitter polls on which building the public thought would be next."

The University of Sheffield was forced to hire extra security to help close buildings which were occupied.

"We were also inspired by the university's own occupations policy," Alice says. "Security lock down buildings wherever an occupation is happen-



ing; that worked for the 2010's style occupations where 50 or so people were attempting to control access, as security took over and people got bored and went home. It doesn't work when occupiers want a lockdown, and not an open occupation. Locking the building down simply plays into the occupiers' hands."

If as few as four people are prepared to hole up in a building, then they can keep it closed for a long time.

The occupiers were inspired by issues within the university itself, and in higher education across the UK. We believe this is just the start of what can be done to really challenge university management.

If fewer than 50 people can do what was done in Sheffield, imagine what can be done with many more people. It is time students utilise the incredible power we have, to mobilise for direct action, plan more ambitious actions and win the concessions we want and make the change we all desire. §

Stuart can well afford to pay couriers more

By Michael Elms

A new report on Stuart Delivery, the logistics company at the heart of the current wave of couriers' strikes, finds that:

"Stuart Delivery is ultimately owned by the French state. It is a subsidiary of DPD delivery, which is itself a subsidiary of La Poste, the French state-owned postal service."

"La Poste says it guarantees labour rights and trade union representation for its employees - but leaves out Stuart couriers who are treated as precarious sub-contractors."

It has been claimed that the recent pay cut for couriers is because Stuart is making a loss and needs to save cash. The report, from Corporate Watch, assesses Stuart's financial position:

"Accounts filed at Companies House show Stuart Delivery made £41 million in revenue from customers in the UK in 2020, just over double the £20.5 million it had made the year before. Once all its costs were taken into account, the company made a loss of £7.4 million. However, the accounts show its deliveries are profitable: it made a 'gross' profit of £12.9 million in 2020, at a 'margin' of 31.5%. If it paid its couriers more, then gross profit would decrease, but a 31.5% margin gives the company wiggle room to increase pay while still making money from its deliveries (its margin is significantly better than that of its rival Deliveroo...)"

"So why is Stuart losing £7.4 million overall? Because of the £20.3 million it is spending on 'administrative expenses'. The accounts do not break these down but they are likely to include money it is spending in its drive to expand aggressively across the UK, plus head office,

software and other costs... Stuart can afford to continue because of financial support provided by its owner DPD (and therefore La Poste and the French state), which directors say has left it with a 'healthy cash balance'. Stuart Delivery Ltd had £7 million in cash in the bank at the end of 2020 [...]"

"Some people are doing very well from the company even while it is loss-making. The accounts show an unnamed director - presumably Damien Bon - was paid £2.2 million in 2020. So couriers have every reason to demand better pay and conditions: those at the top are already making money from it."

Stuart's business model is same-day logistics: taking as its starting point the "instant" delivery of fast food for platforms like JustEat and Deliveroo, Stuart offers the same service to other firms: Brewdog, Lush, the Co-operative supermarket, and more.

Stuart's success is surely due in no small part to its exceptionally well-connected CEO, the princeling Damien Bon. Bon's father Xavier sits on the Comité National des Conseillers du Commerce Extérieur de la France, an important semi-state body that promotes foreign trade for French firms. Damien Bon was educated at the elite business school INSEAD, before going on to work for Lehman Brothers in the year of its collapse in 2008.

Stuart has enjoyed substantial funding from the French government. Whereas other tech start-ups seek money in "funding rounds" from giants like Amazon, Bon's firm has enjoyed substantial support (a 22 million euro initial investment, and then 100% acquisition in 2017) from the French postal service. □



Upcoming meetings

Workers' Liberty meetings are open to all, held online over zoom (unless otherwise stated).

Saturday 26 February, 9.30am: Online AWL: 100 years of LGBT liberation

Saturday 26 February, 2pm: Stop the Silvertown Tunnel! March, from City Hall, Crystal Building, London E16 1ZE

Sunday 27 February, 6.30-8pm: Lessons of Saltley Gate and 1972, the year of strikes

Monday 28 February, 6-8.30pm: Defend Ukraine, oppose Russian imperialism!

Tuesday 1 March, 6pm: Leeds Workers' Liberty Students: Lenin and the Russian Revolution

Tuesday 1 March, 6:30pm: AWL Unite fraction: So you've joined Unite, what next?

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

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



Putin and Xi's unpaid propagandists



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

Until recently the *Morning Star* would occasionally criticise Vladimir Putin. The Russian Communist Party is the largest opposition group in the Duma and makes criticisms of Putin's domestic policy.

But when it comes to Ukraine, the Russian CP is a very loyal opposition and differs with Putin only by being more belligerent – for instance calling for formal recognition of the self-proclaimed republics of Donetsk and Luhansk.

The *Morning Star's* coverage of China (which the paper unhesitatingly describes as "socialist") has long been no more than Chinese Communist Party (i.e. regime) propaganda; now, as relations between China and Russia become warmer, the same applies to its coverage of the Ukraine crisis. So, International Editor Steve Sweeney simply repeats Putin's propaganda about Russia being the "victim" of NATO "aggression", his baseless claims of a "genocide" of ethnic Russians in the Donbas region (especially ironic in a publication that routinely dismisses claims of genocide against the Uyghurs) and, of course, the long-standing fake narrative of a "Neo-Nazi coup" in Kiev in 2014.

In the 9-10 February edition of the

paper, Sweeney's report on the situation in Donbas claimed that Ukrainian "saboteurs" had been "foiled" in attempts to launch "an offensive" to attack "separatist militia" as "women, children and elderly" were being evacuated. No independent evidence of such an "attack" exists and, given that the "militia" are, in fact, Russian troops, it might be thought that the Ukrainian government would have to be mad to launch such an offensive, given the balance of forces they face.

But the *Morning Star's* Ukraine coverage – and not just Sweeney blatant pro-Putin propaganda – has now lost all touch with reality. The editorial of 17 February mocked predictions of a Russian invasion by quoting the title of Norman Jewison's 1966 anti-cold-war comedy *The Russians are Coming! The Russians are Coming!*

Editorial

The editorial also praised the "heroic indifference [of] millions of Ukrainians more intent on sport, socialising and slumber than armed combat": this marks a notable change of tone from a publication that regularly accuses the people of Ukraine of having elected a "pro fascist" government.

What the jocularity of the editorial, of course, fails to mention is that the Russians "came" to Ukraine in 2014 when Putin invaded, annexed Crimea and began a proxy separatist conflict in Donbas that has now lasted for eight years.

The *Morning Star's* collapse into

pro-Putin propaganda coincides with increasingly cordial Sino-Russian relations, culminating on 4 January in a 5,000 word joint statement endorsing each other's foreign policy and denouncing the democracy and human rights advocacy of the United States and other Western nations as a "one-size-fits-all template to guide countries in establishing democracy." It argues – self-contradictorily – that human rights are universal but should be "protected in accordance with the specific situation in each country and the needs of its population." Applying this standard to China and Russia, the statement concludes that they both practise democracy in keeping with their own "long-standing traditions."



This chilling document was hailed in the *Morning Star* of 17 February as a "plea for a new world order... in which the aim is to create a multipolar world with respect for the sovereignty of countries."

What a pity that for the authors of the statement – and for their loyal, if unpaid, propagandists at the *Morning Star* – respect for sovereignty doesn't seem to apply to Ukraine. □



Protesters came out in London against the Borders Bill 21 February, and will be out again on 27 February from noon at the Home Office, 2 Marsham St, London, SW1P 4DF

Carbon markets are no answer



Letter

Stuart Jordan is correct to critique the deceitful nature of "carbon offsetting" and of many claims to "net zero" (*Solidarity* 623). Yet he stops far short of a much needed fundamental critique of carbon markets.

Blockchain has no special power to verify that purported "carbon drawdown initiatives" actually do draw down net carbon. To verify this happening, we would need clear and rigorous standards with independent inspections and evaluation.

Capitalist markets have repeatedly demonstrated a fail-

ure to regulate themselves and enforce quality control in a decentralised way. Why would it be different here? A centralised body is not, however, sufficient. In environmental matters, like many others, we demand transparency: open the books! Environmental impact audits should be publicly available and subject to peer review.

Stuart recognises the nuance in approaching environmental impacts: "[a]fforestation schemes sound like attractive 'nature based solutions' but monocrops of fast growing trees are extremely damaging for biodiversity." Planting trees can effectively draw down carbon, but other considerations are *sometimes* more important. Already-existing

forests are generally ecologically much better, but as Stuart points out, this cannot be counted as offset.

There are many, sometimes competing, considerations beyond net carbon dioxide flow: other greenhouse gases, biodiversity, other pollutions, resource depletion, and more. This means that – even if there were, fantastically, a universally agreed baseline to measure climate interventions against – there is no one linear metric upon which their value can be quantified.

The complexity of the environment warrants a more nuanced treatment than a one-dimensional marketisable metric, commodifying our planet to be processed as capital, could even theoretic-

ally achieve. Democratic, integrated, and scientific planning by workers in the interest of humanity – not profit – is the only half-reliable alternative.

There is at least one more fatal limitation of carbon markets: their acceptance of some emission.

Even if, tomorrow, we were to miraculously reach net zero, we would still have the carbon emissions of the last two centuries to deal with. The gargantuan effort needed to make a significant dint in that would not only require an epoch-defining amount of human labour, but would unavoidably have major ecological costs in its own right. Doing so, to some extent at least, would be the lesser evil compared to leaving the carbon in the at-

mosphere. Even then, it would not be fast enough to stop many irreversible impacts, from sea level rise to ecosystem extinction, from drowned cities to positive feedback loops.

In this context, no level of additional carbon dioxide emitted is "safe". That Stuart's article implied that there is a logical consequence of entertaining carbon markets as a possible solution. We must aim to reduce as fast and far as we can, across the board; while simultaneously drawing down as far and fast as we can. A system premised on selling licenses to pollute to any who can afford them is anathema to the radical environmentalism we need. □

Zack Muddle, Bristol

For Lithuania's workers, enough is finally enough



Eric Lee

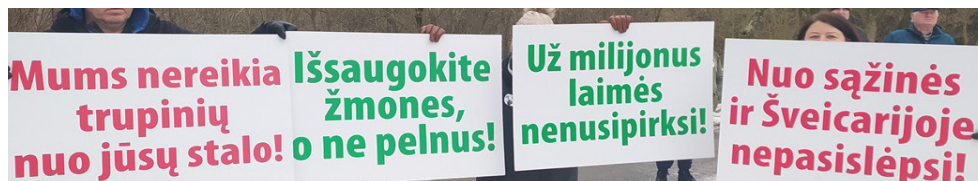
By Eric Lee

When the Soviet Union came crashing down three decades ago, among the very first republics to declare independence were the three Baltic states - Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. This made sense as they had been among the last to be brought under Soviet rule, back in the 1940s. There were people living in those countries who remembered independence in their lifetimes.

What many of us hoped for back then was a quick revival of the political parties that had been crushed under Communist Party rule, and the emergence of strong, independent trade unions to replace the state-controlled labour fronts.

But things did not turn out that way. As happened across the entire former Soviet Union, a kind of unrestrained capitalism filled the void created by the collapse of the Stalinist regime. Independent unions did emerge, but they were not always particularly strong. And in the case of Lithuania, it has taken them all that time – more than thirty years – to organise a strike against a private sector company.

That has now happened at the Achema nitrogen fertiliser plant, where almost half of the 1,300 employees went on indefinite strike on 8 February.



The significance of their action cannot be overstated. As Inga Ruginienė, chairwoman of the Lithuanian Trade Unions Confederation, put it, their strike is the first protest action of this scale in Lithuania since independence.

The workers are up against a particularly nasty employer. Achema CEO Ramūnas Miliauskas told LRT Radio that “a collective agreement, as a piece of paper, gives no guarantees to either side.” He refuses to sign an agreement with the union, but insists he’ll increase salaries without a collective agreement.

Union leaders have described the situation at the company as a “state of war” – and have called the company’s promise to raise wages “a bluff”.

Inga Ruginienė was quoted as saying that “in the history of independent Lithuania, this is probably the first such industrial action. Imagine how exhausted the workers must have been to make that decision.”

Here is what the “exhausted” workers at Achema are demanding: The remuneration system be spelt out in a collective agreement so that the company cannot change pay at will. They are also calling for wage indexation and clear rules on overtime. These are not crazy, revolutionary demands. But the company still refuses to budge.

The union asked for and got a strong statement of solidarity from the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC). ETUC Secretary General Luca Visentini wrote to the Achema management, saying that “we call on the immediate return to negotiations with the Achema Workers’ trade union, and in line with the principles of constructive social dialogue and mutual understanding, to reach an agreement.”

The union has also launched an online campaign on LabourStart, encouraging trade union members around the world to demonstrate their solidarity by sending a protest message. It is the first campaign to appear on LabourStart in Lithuanian, and translations into Estonian and Latvian are expected as well.

Birute Daškevičienė, the chairwoman of Achema’s trade union, said that the strike action will continue until the employer agrees to sign a collective agreement. Thousands of trade unionists around the world sending their messages of solidarity through the LabourStart campaign will help make that a reality.

Show your support for Achema workers here: bit.ly/l-lia □

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

Against far-right anti-vax blockades: labour movement action, not new state powers

By Sacha Ismail

The far-right “Freedom Convoy” protests in Canada have come to an end, after police cleared the blockades in Ottawa. The [Guardian](#) reports that 76 vehicles have been towed and 191 arrests made, with those arrested facing 389 criminal charges, mainly for violent behaviour.

This comes after right-wing truckers and others occupied the Canadian capital for three weeks, with very little police intervention.

It’s not even clear that the police used the powers of the [Emergencies Act](#) which prime minister Justin Trudeau invoked to clear the blockade. But invoking it (and renewing that, with the [support](#) of Canada’s “Labour Party”, the NDP, even after the Ottawa blockade

was dispersed) has set a precedent.

In my report last week I said that the Emergencies Act has never been used before. That is strictly true, but the Act replaced a War Measures Act which was used in both World Wars and during the 1970 “October crisis” involving Quebec separatists.

There has been debate on the Canadian left about how to respond to these developments. Some have argued that the expansion of state powers granted by the Emergencies Act will primarily injure the left and the oppressed; that seems plausible and consistent with the Marxist tradition on such issues.

All three uses of Canada’s War Measures Act involved repression against minority communities (Ukrainian, Japanese, French-speaking Québécois) and the left. In the UK the [1936 Public Order](#)

[Act](#), justified by the need to stop Mosleyite street action, was used against the left and labour movement for decades after Mosleyism collapsed.

The Canadian labour movement did not mobilise on the streets as a mass force to end or confront the blockade. But there was some mobilisation, including a seemingly remarkable action by thousands of Ottawa residents and workers, the “Battle of [Billings Bridge](#)”, which militantly stopped a “Freedom Convoy” contingent in its tracks and forced it to disband. A city-wide “Ottawa Community Solidarity” [mobilisation](#) by unions and community groups was planned for 19 February, but suspended due to the police intervention.

With more such right-wing protests possible, not just in Canada, we need to consider how to respond. □

The people reclaim the Chagos Islands

By Mohan Sen

On 14 February the Mauritian ambassador to the UN raised his country’s flag above Peros Banhos, part of the Chagos archipelago north west of Mauritius in the Indian Ocean.

Jagdish Koonjul explained: “We are performing the symbolic act of raising the flag as the British have done so many times to establish colonies. We, however, are reclaiming what has always been our own.”

In the run up to Mauritian independence in 1968, the UK (Labour) government separated off the Chagos islands and maintained control of them. Between 1967 and 1973, Britain evicted the islands’ inhabitants, with extreme brutality, to allow the US to build a military base on Diego Garcia.

The Chagossians have fought a long struggle to return to their homes, alongside a struggle by the left in Mauritius to force their government into action. Chagossians including a prominent refugee leader accompanied the officials who raised the flag on 14 February.

They are part of a scientific survey team visiting the islands for two weeks – without UK permission. Previously the US and UK have said they would prevent any such visit, and the Mauritian government did not dare or want to defy them.

But in recent years, after decades of campaigning, international opinion and international legal judgments have shifted against the UK/US occupation of the islands.

The British government expresses “regret” for “the manner” in which the Chagossians were exiled, but still insists that it should maintain control of the islands and they should not be allowed to return. □

• More, including commentary from Mauritian socialist group Lalit: bit.ly/chagos-i

Second hand books!

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



COP26 lessons: the need for workers' climate action

By Vicki Morris



Environment

On 17 February, the Office for National Statistics published figures showing that the number of green jobs in the UK is stagnating; in Scotland, host to the COP26 summit in November 2021, it is falling.

The lack of progress toward meaningful climate action was one of the issues addressed on 19 February at a day-long meeting of local representatives of the COP26 Coalition.

The gathering had been planned to take place in-person in Birmingham together with a local climate festival (which went ahead), but it moved online after Storm Eunice disrupted travel.

About 50-60 people joined the ten organisers for a series of Zoom workshops. An in-person event might have attracted more people, including from Birmingham. Perhaps the slightly low turnout for a whole day of online workshops was inevitable; at least it represented a good geographical spread and involved people who are active

in their local COP26 Coalition hubs. We were tasked with contributing to the Coalition's organisational legacy: we brainstormed targets in local areas to provide a focus for campaigning by local hubs, which are continuing in some towns. We also talked about the legacy we bequeath to the organisers of the social movement in Egypt where COP27 is due to take place in November 2022. There are obvious worries that the highly repressive Egyptian state will clamp down on dissent there.

The most important legacy of the Coalition could be its Trade Union Caucus, which will continue online for the foreseeable future. On 15 February it hosted an interesting meeting with African trade unionists speaking. It has mooted organising caucuses for activists in different unions to help them co-ordinate their activities – this would be a very useful gain.

Asad Rehman, executive director of War on Want and a key figure in the COP26 Coalition, in his introduction to the day, argued that the Coalition has succeeded in "bending the arc" of campaigning in the UK toward "climate justice", not just pure "environmentalism"; the concept of a "just transition" is no longer marginal but is hegemonic (see

his *Guardian* article of [27/12/21](#)). It's a fair claim, as the Coalition did dominate in Glasgow, and the slogan was everywhere. But "climate justice" means different things to different people and implies a range of solutions (see a webpage of videos from the Coalition, [bit.ly/v-c26](#), for an idea of the different aspects or takes on the concept).

The Coalition lays the blame for climate change and the failure to tackle it at the door of an "unjust system" and talks of the need for "system change", and the system is understood to be capitalism. The implications are revolutionary... aren't they?

The Coalition spells out the manifold evils of the system, including, sometimes, its unplanned, anarchic drive for profits. But it does not spell out the obvious conclusions; or rather it leaves people to find them for themselves in its welter of ideas. The same problem was observable in Glasgow, at the People's Summit for Climate Justice, a smorgasbord of workshops on diverse topics.

There was no means for people organising workshops or those attending them to debate across and with each other, or feed into a central democratic forum that might propose a course of

action for the whole movement. For the Coalition, trade unions – workers – are a big part of the answer, but is that in the shape of bankrolling climate campaigning through money granted by their general secretaries? Or is it in supplying the foot soldiers for days of protest, just one of many constituencies to be mobilised?

Or is it – as the Alliance for Workers' Liberty believes and argued at Saturday's gathering – as the principal social force that, once mobilised and made conscious of its class interests and its power, can end capitalism, replace it, and bring the transformative change we need to stop the climate catastrophe?

The centrality of class struggle to stopping the environmental crisis is a message to which many in the Coalition and wider environmental movement are open – it just has to be articulated, and those spelling it out need to get organised. □

• Workers' Liberty environment reading group: Sunday 13 March, 10am, with Verity Burgmann, an author of *Green Bans, Red Union*, a book on the New South Wales builders labourers' green bans of the 1970s, joining us live. Register at [bit.ly/gb-ru](#)

Hindu bigots' hypocrisy against hijab

By Sacha Ismail

Our report [last week](#) on the very important state elections in India (results 10 March) discussed the far-right BJP's doubling down on anti-Muslim agitation in Uttar Pradesh (UP).

Last week Hindu nationalist students in UP began agitating for the hijab head-covering won by some Muslim women to be banned on college campuses. Undoubtedly there will be similar campaigns beginning in other states. This is an extension of right-wing agitation in the southern state of Karnataka, over a thousand miles from UP, which has exploded since the new year.

Karnataka's High Court is currently considering whether college administrations should be able to ban students from wearing the hijab. The legal arguments seem to turn around whether hijab-wearing is an essential part of Islam and therefore protected under the

Indian constitution's provisions on religious freedom. That seems to me the wrong question. It is possible to think that women do not have to cover their heads to be Muslims – but still defend their right to do so.

The [statement](#) from the group [Indian Muslims for Secular Democracy](#) is worth reading.

At the end of December management at the Government Girls Pre-University (PU) College in the Karnataka town of Udupi declared the hijab could not be worn in class. In January the young women excluded from classes protested inside the school; and then right-wing Hindu students, seemingly mainly men, organised protests in support of the ban and to exclude hijab-wearers, not just outside the Udupi college but in many places across Karnataka. For three days earlier this month all schools and colleges in

the state closed as a result of spreading protests on both sides.

On 10 February the High Court issued an interim order banning all forms of religious expression in students' clothing. College managements around the state implemented a ban on the hijab.

The Udupi principal justified his decision by saying students could wear the hijab on campus, just not in class; and that sort of rule does already exist in many parts of India, for instance at the college where the right-wing campaign in Uttar Pradesh began. However, the Hindutva demonstrations at college gates, harassing Muslim students, indicate that this is not a reasonable discussion about the detail of uniform rules.

Whatever the mix of electoral opportunism (Karnataka also holds elections next year) and ideological commitment, this is part of the Hindu right's

targeting of religious minorities, and Muslims above all. This is intensifying on multiple fronts. At the extreme end, important Hindu right gatherings in recent months have called openly for mass murder of Muslims – with no response from the government leaders who share their political affiliation.

Karnataka is widely described as a hotbed of far-right Hindu activism. The state's BJP government has introduced Hindu-chauvinist measures including an "anti-conversion" law designed to discourage inter-religious marriages.

The BJP blames the Karnataka conflict on a Muslim political party which is a growing force in the state, the Popular Front of India (and the Social Democratic Party of India, which is the PFI's electoral front). From what I can work out the PFI /SDPI is not exactly an Islamist organisation, but its growth doesn't sound

like good news for the left. However, the accusations of stoking communal tensions can accurately be turned back against the BJP itself, on a far larger scale and with an oppressed minority as the target.

Some responses from Indian left activists seem blasé about the oppressive and gendered social significance of the hijab – let alone more extensive Islamic head-coverings – and their spread. But it is surely correct to point out the cynicism and hypocrisy of the Hindu right, some of whose organisations denounce the hijab in pseudo-feminist terms while simultaneously advocating Hindu women cover their heads.

Recent polling found that 61% of all women in India cover their heads in some form outside the home. That includes 59% of Hindu women – and 66% of women who support the BJP. □

Inside the resistance in Sudan

More from the interview with an activist in Sudan carried on our outside pages.

What is the latest with the protests?

Many people thought they would quickly decline, but so far the demonstrations remain strong. On 7 February we had huge march in Khartoum and there were big protests in ten states.

There are many forms of non-violent direct action. We organised a walk-out from military and security-sector hospitals by doctors and health workers in protest against violence against demonstrators. There are intermittent strikes in a range of sectors, and when there are big demonstrations many people leave work to attend and many sectors shut down. The leading force mobilising in the streets is the local resistance committees.

CCSD its increasing coordination with many other groups of workers. That includes health workers: pharmacists and lab technicians, both part of the SPA; and other groups including nurses are building up their organisation in close coordination with us. Also journalists, lawyers and bank workers. We are now building links with blue-collar workers, for instance the rail workers and the port workers in Port Sudan, who have committees coordinating with us. We are also making links with the long-established committee of farmers in Gezira Scheme, which is a very big irrigation system and farming area [in central Sudan].

Why did the new labour movement in Sudan begin so heavily with white-collar workers?

Over thirty years the Bashir regime

destroyed swathes of the public sector through privatisation and cuts - partly precisely in order to undermine a very strong, very militant blue-collar union movement which had a long history in the public sector. So there was a weakened economic basis for blue-collar unions to organise. Another result is that much of Sudan's infrastructure, for instance its railway and port systems, often barely functions.

However, since the revolution, workers have begun to revive a movement in these sectors and of course we have made every effort to help them. I think in contrast by 2015 professional workers had various networks and channels which allowed us to organise more easily, regardless of the situation in the workplaces themselves, so we could collectivise more quickly and easily.

I should add that most people in Sudan are small families, working on a family farm.

Can you say more about the resistance committees?

They are grassroots democratic organisations; some existed before the revolution but most were formed afterwards. It's almost impossible to stop their activity, as they are horizontal bodies without the hierarchy of other organisations, with their bases in neighbourhoods. The military can arrest people, and they do, but it does not have much effect.

Committees now exist all over Sudan and they are still spreading. They exist even in areas where there was previously armed conflict, like Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile state, where

you have armed rebel movements; you now also have resistance committees that are very committed to non-violent action. Those armed movements are not necessarily very comfortable with the committees, just as they are not comfortable with the SPA and other unions, but I don't think they have any choice but to deal with them. So the committees are really changing the face of society in Sudan.

There are also coordination bodies, for localities, for cities and even for whole states. In Khartoum we have a coordination body for the whole state, covering millions of people, which is working on a new charter for the revolution.

What role do you see for the committees after the defeat of the coup?

We've had discussions in the SPA about things that we got wrong after 2018. There was a widespread view that the SPA got too involved in the detail of politics, that we became almost like a political party. And in fact there was a split in the SPA on political lines - though both sides are still functioning and involved in the struggle.

So I would argue to leaders of the resistance committees, they should consider carefully the limits of their political role. The political diversity within the resistance committees is actually much larger than what we had in the SPA, so the risk of division and fragmentation is even greater.

I would say the focus should be on general themes like establishing a sustainable democracy, establishing the rule of law and demilitarising the state,

rather than more detailed political programmes, which are a matter for political parties.

The pre-coup transitional government continued the neoliberal policies you described. How do you avoid those continuing under an elected government?

In the sixty-odd years it's been independent, for fifty Sudan has been under dictatorships. So the main thing is establishing democracy; our civil society organisations society believe that if we have freedoms and can elect our own representatives, we can work things out. The enemy we have to deal with immediately is the military and security apparatus and the pernicious relationships it has with governments who want to plunder the economy of the country - Russia, China, the Gulf States and others. If we can end this situation then we can deal with other issues.

What forms of solidarity do you want?

I think we deserve to be in the news! This is a remarkable movement which deserves attention around the world. Every time the resistance committees announce a day of protests, every week or more frequently, very large numbers turn out, and every time several people are killed. This is not a small thing and we want the eyes of the world on it. Statements of solidarity, particularly from unions, are very much appreciated. Unions should push governments to put every pressure possible on the Sudanese military and the states that support it, particularly the regional players. □

A "socialist line" to endorse monogamy?



By Katy Dollar

Novara Media have published an article, [Monogamy is Cool, Actually](#). The article, one of the Doing it Right: Sex on the Left series, argues for the radical potential of monogamy as opposed to polyamory.

The author, Chal Ravens, dismisses the idea attributed to "practitioners" of ethical non-monogamy that "relationships outside of monogamy are inherently subversive, not only for committing the mortal sin of adultery, but because

the heterosexual couple is the first stage in the process of creating the patriarchal nuclear family, a basic cog in our oppressive system." She argues to structure relationships in such a way is individualistic and allowing a market ethic into our romantic lives. "Far from being anti-capitalist, it's rooted in the same relentless pursuit of pleasure that reduces us to consumers in every facet of life."

Not content with taking the radical gloss off polyamory, Ravens goes on to advocate for monogamy. "In comparison, monogamy - with its emphasis on the boring work of compromise and coalition - starts to look like the more radical option."

If it is important to you to

work out which structure of relationship is more "radical" then it is not monogamy, the baseline expectation of religion and the state in our society. But who cares? Your relationship status is not going to bring down capitalism. You do not need to live in a poly-cule to challenge hierarchies of power. Nor do you need to show "a dedication to something bigger than yourself" by sticking with your partner as preparation for socialism.

The extension of sexual freedom and ability to leave relationships is mechanically attributed by Ravens to the needs of capital at a time of "flexible production, the rise of global finance and the destruction of the unions."

The women's and LGBT

movements fought for greater freedom in our sexual and romantic lives, the labour movement took many of these fights up. We want the freedom to choose to be monogamous, polyamorous, or even "philandering tourists with no interest in deconstructing relationship norms."

We don't need to work out what relationships under socialism will look like, as Engels says in *Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State*:

"What we can now conjecture about the way in which sexual relations will be ordered after the impending overthrow of capitalist production is mainly of a negative character, limited for the most part to what will disappear...

When these people are in the world, they will care precious little what anybody today thinks they ought to do; they will make their own practice and their corresponding public opinion about the practice of each individual - and that will be the end of it

Socialists should fight for more freedom within the limitations of capitalism, as well as fighting for socialism and the radical flowering of freedom and individuality it will bring. For that we need to turn our attentions from the dating market to the labour market. There is boring work to do, building working class organisation. There is exciting work to do challenging hierarchies and standing up for socialist ideas. □

To block pandemics, keep ecosystems healthy

By Angela Driver

According to a new scientific study (bit.ly/zo-ono), current official plans to prevent future pandemics like Covid-19 are unlikely to be successful.

International bodies such as the WHO, the World Bank, and G20 are calling for increased surveillance after viruses “spill over” from other species to humans to generate so-called “zoonotic” diseases. But often that may be like bolting the door to the stable after the horse has bolted. With a virus as transmissible as SARS-Cov-2, even stringent control measures will not prevent rapid spread.

The authors of the new study claim is more effective and cheaper to try to prevent the zoonotic diseases emerging in the first place. They suggest a three-pronged approach.

Existing viruses that have the potential to become zoonotic (spill over from other species to humans) should be identified as part of a “global virus discovery project”. This data must be freely available internationally, to enable identification of unusual diseases occurring in wildlife and domestic animal populations, to help in targeting areas which need intervention, and to make the production of effective vaccines and tests easier and quicker in

the event that they are needed. The project would also increase our general knowledge of these viruses, the effects that they have, and how they might be transmitted.

The health of wildlife, as well as livestock and humans, must be closely monitored.

Existing international bodies such as the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) have some of the skills and experience for this, but currently do not have the funding to do it effectively. A better awareness of the health status of wildlife being traded would help give early warnings if unusual patterns of illness occurred. It would highlight problems and potential risks for transmission, and could reduce the risk of widespread infection by driving up welfare standards.

And deforestation should be halted. It plays a big role in allowing zoonotic diseases to emerge, by clearing land and moving humans and livestock into areas where they come into contact with pathogens that have not previously encountered.

The authors tabulate the known zoonotic diseases that have had large impacts on humans since the flu pandemic in 1918. Such diseases are emerging more frequently over time. A likely explanation is the increasing rate

at which humans in large numbers are driving into uninhabited areas such as forests, along with increasing transport links and global travel.

The authors conclude that if such prevention strategies only reduced the mortality rate by just one per cent, they would still be cost-effective even in narrow economic terms, and predicts the cost of prevention to be about one-twentieth of those of predictable pandemics.

The strategies the authors propose are similar to the ideas put forward by “One Health”, which came out of a conference in 2004 held in response to the zoonotic flu viruses that had been identified in a number of countries at the beginning of the 21st century.

The health of whole ecosystems, and of the plants and wildlife within them, is indivisible. Mental health is included here, as stressed humans and animals have impaired immune systems which increases the risk of the spread of infections).

The strategy to address these issues is very broad. It extends to the housing, diet, and emotional well-being of all people, as well as the environmental welfare of the forests we live near.

Making “one health” an effective global strategy would require a huge shift in the way business, farming, and

governments operate, and run up against many capitalist norms.

The major companies who turn a good profit from industrial farming, mining, logging, and other activities generating deforestation, will not subordinate those profits to welfare concerns unless they are forced to do so. And in some of the countries that carry out most deforestation (such as Brazil) governments have recently been unwilling even to nudge them.

So the “one world” model appears unlikely to be achieved under capitalism. But it remains the job of socialists and the working class to push for transitional demands that may help to reduce the risks in the near future. International standards on welfare of animals could be implemented through international agreements.

Campaigns targeting companies which profit from plundering these forests can have effect.

China has made some changes to how its wildlife trade is conducted since Covid 19 emerged, but globally the risks of another pandemic remain high. Indeed, the next pandemic may be worse. The ruling classes and their profiteering businesses are pushing that way. □

Covid: defend and extend sick pay!

By Martin Thomas

Rather than just complain about the Tories’ announcement on 21 February repealing Covid measures, the labour movement should launch a campaign to win good sick pay for all, permanently; to restore NHS funding and repeal privatisation; to bring social care into the public sector with NHS-level pay and conditions for staff; and to institute workers’ control of workplace safety.

Curbs designed to slow virus spread have been eased off in other countries with high Omicron rates - Denmark, Norway, Netherlands - and that has produced [no new](#) Covid surge. Partial immunity from vaccinations or from previous infections is now high, and Omicron is less destructive

though more transmissible than previous variants.

But the Tories are doing a show-bonfire of curbs, and trashing capacity to deal with the further Covid surges and future pandemics which are certain to come.

The £500 special sick pay for Covid-isolating workers unable to get regular sick pay has been abolished from 24 February. Statutory sick pay for the first three days of sickness, rather than just from day four, introduced at the start of the pandemic, will be abolished.

The legal requirement to self-isolate actually serves as a protection for workers against bosses who try to force us back into the workplace while sick or infectious, but that will be abolished.

The testing infrastructure will not just be put into lower gear,

but a lot of it dismantled. Much of what remains will have to be financed by the NHS out of already-stretched funds.

The wide spread of vaccinations and infections reduces Omicron transmission, and will limit the spread of new variants. Over time Covid may wind down to something like the “Russian flu” virus of 1889-90, for which (so scientists think) immunity has evolved so that today it looks like just a common cold. But that may take decades! In the meantime new variants are certain, and maybe deadlier than Omicron.

Covid requires special measures because it is so highly transmissible (much more so than flu), and highly transmissible even from people who do not yet have symptoms or may never have many symptoms.

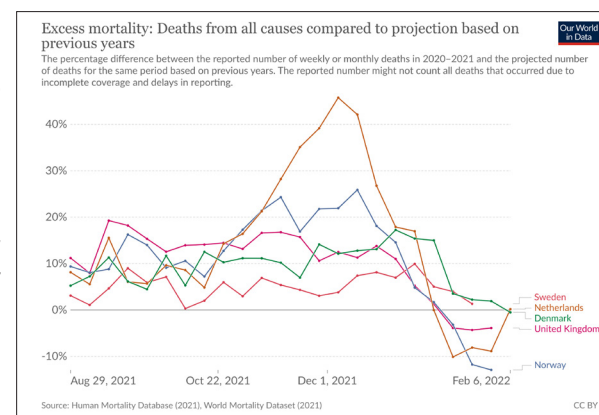
We can’t just rely on remo-

bilising infrastructure and rules as and when new variants come, because we will not know how deadly new variants are until they have already spread widely.

Research has [suggested](#) that the biggest social factor in countries having low Covid tolls - aside from geographical factors like having borders easy to close rigidly - is not so much adroitness in deploying lockdowns (though that may help) as social equality, which is expressed in such things as good sick pay, absence of zero-hours working, good

elderly care, ample hospital provision, less overcrowded housing, unions strong on workplace safety, a spirit of mutual aid, and confidence in public provision and public scientific advice.

Another recent [survey](#) gives no weight to inequality in general, but only to trust; yet [another](#) some weight to inequality but more to trust. □



Strike committees should decide

By Rhian Keyse

University and College Union (UCU) activist and national executive committee candidate Rhian Keyse spoke to Josh Lovell and Sacha Ismail.

I'm a precariously employed researcher at Birkbeck, University of London, and a UCU activist at branch and national level. I've been involved in UCU since 2017; I'm Birkbeck branch secretary and co-chair of the national Anti-Casualisation Committee. I've been a UCU Congress delegate several times, using that position to cause some controversy. I see myself as a rank-and-file trade unionist and an internationalist socialist feminist.

Tell us about the controversy!

In 2018 my branch then, Exeter, brought a motion of no confidence in our then General Secretary Sally Hunt. It was about the democratic deficit in terms of how our pensions dispute then was being run, and how branches were not being adequately involved and the will of members over-ridden. Our motion resulted in the right wing of the union shutting down the congress rather than allowing the motion to be heard. Also in me getting denounced in the *Morning Star* as "ultra-left" and "tactically insane", which I consider a badge of pride coming from them.

What's your assessment of that dispute now?

It was a big dispute, to an extent that I think surprised a lot of members. We'd had so many weak one-day strikes, I don't think people expected the extent of it, the vibrancy, the turnout on the picket lines. I think that was when something really shifted in UCU. There was a groundswell of branch activists pushing for democratic reforms, which in the end however has not really happened.

The strike did win ground, but it was called off for the "Joint Expert Panel" [JEP], which amounted to more discussions that went back and forth for a long period. The employers initially agreed with us that the 2020 valuation was flawed – who does a valuation of a pension scheme in a global pandemic? – but they're now running with it anyway, so four years later, here we are again.

Do you think they were always going to come back for another pop?

Well they're employers, aren't they? The point is you should aim for agreements which actually pin them down to some degree.

UCU is now one of those unions where almost everyone claims to be on the left. What's distinctive about your candidacy?

You have to judge people on how

they act. What's distinctive is my record as a rank-and-file activist and, most fundamentally, my belief that our basic leverage is serious strike action. The whole history of the trade union movement bears that out.

There's a lot of buzzwords in sections of UCU at the moment about making smart arguments and finding "creative", "strategic" forms of action, which is basically a way of evading meaningful action. We need to fight for democratic strike committees, with delegates from branches, to make the key decisions on industrial action in each dispute. We can't just rely on appealing to the existing leadership to do things differently.

I'm also supporting some other solid, independent left-wing candidates in the election. I'm not opposed to having an organised left in UCU – on the contrary – but it needs to be organised around something more than elections. The issue is not how we get members of x grouping elected, but how we make the union more effective by bringing grassroots members into decision-making.

So what about the current dispute?

There's the dispute in pre-1992 universities about the USS pension scheme and the wider "Four Fights" dispute over casualisation, equalities, workload and pay. It's union policy that the two should be fought together even though they're legally distinct disputes, that they should not be decoupled. However, in this round of action the Higher Education Committee and the national officers have taken decisions which effectively decoupled them. That means we don't have the level of disruption we could have had with branches with mandates in one but not both disputes taking action at the same time.

It also means that casualised members in pre-92 branches with both disputes are being hit hardest in terms of strike deductions.

Why has that been done?

There have been repeated attempts in this direction going back to 2019. I think basically the aim is to weaken the Four Fights dispute.

I think a lot of people in the union bureaucracy and more conservative members see USS as a more time-limited dispute, because there's an attack that needs to be beaten off, whereas Four Fights is something where we can set the agenda and decide what to do without much urgency. This fails to recognise the real precarity that casualised members find themselves in right now. As co-chair of the Anti-Casualisation Committee I've been involved in challenging that.

I'm also an organiser with the #CoronaContract campaign, which started two years ago when Covid hit. We're

organising to win decent contracts for precarious workers in the pandemic and beyond. Most recently, #CoronaContract has initiated an open letter for branches to sign, demanding a Special Higher Education Sector Conference, but also strike committees to which branches can send delegates, to debate and work out proposals which could then be formally decided at the special conference. The union nationally hasn't organised strike committees or even meetings of branch delegates prior to decisions for the next phase of action; so we've organised meetings ourselves with support from many striking branches, and the first one is this week.

Despite all the problems, I think the strikes so far have been quite vibrant. At Birkbeck we've had good picket lines, good teach-outs and a lot of student support. A lot of UCU members are very angry about what's happening, and employers have added fuel to the fire by behaving in such high-handed way. It only took the employers three hours to dismiss UCU's pension proposals! Some institutions, for instance Queen Mary in London, have said they'll deduct 100% of pay for action short of a strike, and the employers' organisation declared that such deductions are a "moral duty".

Many employers are claiming the impact is minimal but also making hand-wringing statements about the terrible impact on students. They can't have it both ways! Meanwhile student support is strong and getting stronger, as we see from the multiplying student occupations.

Tell us about the Anti-Casualisation Committee.

It's an elected committee of precarious workers – everyone's on a fixed-term contract or an hourly paid contract or some combination of the awful contracts institutions use. In recent years there has been a growing number of casualised workers in the union, partly because recent disputes brought more people in and partly because of the changing nature of the industry as the precarious workforce grows, unfortunately.

It's a small but determined committee. Our technical role is to advise the national executive with regards to the issues facing casualised workers. We've tried to expand beyond a purely technical role to bring the perspective of casualised workers into debates about industrial action, for instance. The committee has been strongly opposed to the decoupling of the current disputes.

It can be quite a tricky tangle of issues because there are so many different forms of casualised work – so we've launched consultations to get a sense of the range of experiences workers are having and use that to develop our per-

spective. Despite the challenges precarious workers face, I'd say it's mostly us staffing the picket lines. This makes the issue about decoupling the disputes even worse. There is sometimes a lack of solidarity for anti-casualisation struggles, despite the solidarity casualised workers have shown in helping to defend pensions we may not be able to access. UCU promised for a long time that casualisation would be the next big fight, but it's not living up to that.

There's a narrative in certain sections of the union that Four Fights is somehow quite nebulous, but in fact we have clear demands on casualisation too. What we want is a national framework to establish minimum standards employers have to adhere to on issues like gender pay gap, race pay gap, workload and casualisation.

There's also claims that the employers have never moved on this, but in fact before the pandemic hit and the strikes we were on then were called off, they had agreed to discuss casualisation with us. They've now rowed back and are claiming this is not an issue for national bargaining, but we can move them again. □

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Connolly and Home

Introduction



**Unexpurgated
Connolly**

By Sean Matgamna

One of the difficulties with James Connolly's writings is that he went through a number of phases, and in each phase it is hard to know how much of the previous phase survived.

He never stopped being an industrial unionist. He would tell the British court-martial that condemned him to death in 1916 that Britain had no legal authority in Ireland. But in the years after 1910, as Connolly came to see Home Rule as certain, he began to look to things the Irish could ask the British Labour Party to insist on in the Home Rule Bill. High on the list was to compel the Irish party in power in Dublin to

keep payment of MPs (the Liberals had made that law in Britain only in 1911), so that people who had no private income could be MPs. He became a reformist for practical purposes.

The Liberal Party took power with a secure majority early in 1906, but did not want to table a Home Rule bill as previous Liberal governments had done. With the backing in parliament of the Irish Home Rule party, after a 1909 Budget crisis they made the UK a parliamentary democracy where the elected chamber had power by abolishing the Lords' veto over the Commons. In 1911 the absolute veto was reduced to a two-year delaying power.

There were two General Elections in 1910. The Liberals won against the Tories, but lost their Commons majority and now had to rely on the votes of the Irish party. Everyone knew that there would be a Home Rule Bill, and

the Lords could not stop it as it had stopped the 1893 Home Rule Bill.

People began to prepare for Home Rule as a certainty, and the prospect of the Irish party under John Redmond in control of a Dublin government.

Connolly was for a while a Home Rule reformist. So was Patrick Pearse. Both would move into new phases of politics as Home Rule was disrupted by partition plans and then adjourned altogether at the start of World War 1.

The Tories played the "Orange Card" against Home Rule yet again, and they no longer had the Lords veto. The Tory opposition was embittered against Home Rule because British politics were embittered after the veto dispute.

Asked what he thought of the charge that Home Rule meant Rome Rule, Vladimir Lenin replied: "The British won't let it". The power of the projected Home Rule Parliament was indeed

small. But in 1909 the Catholic counterpart of the Orange Order, the Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH), had taken over the parliamentary Home Rule party. Led by Joe Devlin, it was very powerful. Opposition to HR there would have been anyway, but the rise of the AOH gave it a substance it had not had at the time of earlier Home Rule Bills.

Although in the end it would lead to partition, the aim of the anti-Home-Rule agitation was not that. It was to allow Home Rule to no part of Ireland.

Connolly's debate with William Walker in 1911 about socialist organisation in Ireland was centrally about creating a unified, reform-winning, parliamentary-political working-class presence in the Home Rule parliament which Connolly and others then saw as imminent.

We will print that next week. □

Labour in the new Irish Parliament

By James Connolly

What is to be the position of Labour in the first Irish Parliament? To judge by the written opinion of many of our friends we would be inclined to believe that the representation of Labour in that Parlia-

ment would be a certainty, and that it would not be a mere nominal representation, but rather on a large, and as one writer has said, a dominating scale. If this were so, then we might truly felicitate the Labour movement in Ireland upon its marvellous progress, and felicitate the Irish working class upon the keenness of their insight and the alertness of their intelligence.

Writing as one who has a close inside knowledge of the Irish Labour movement, and also as one who does believe in the keen political insight of the Irish workers as a whole, I yet feel constrained to warn the readers of *Forward* that the real outlook in Ireland is not by any means so rosy and full of immediate promise as our sanguine friends are prone to believe. It is somewhat of an uncertainty whether Labour will be represented in the first Irish Parliament at all.

There are many reasons why this is an uncertainty. One of

the greatest is the financial reason. Most people are of the opinion that the Irish Parliament will at least not be a retrograde institution, or elected upon a franchise or after a method held elsewhere in these islands to be antiquated. That any forward step taken elsewhere will at least be presumed for the benefit of the Irish democracy. It is therefore somewhat of a shock to many to learn that under the new Home Rule Constitution, no provision is made for payment of members of Parliament but it is left to be dealt with by the new Irish legislature.

Thus in the first Irish Parliament the members will be unpaid, and as the chief concern of that Parliament will be that of finding the ways and means to keep itself financially afloat, and to soothe the susceptibilities of its critics, there is more than a strong probability that the members will remain unpaid in future legislatures also. Had the present Government

or the present Labour Party in the House of Commons done what the Irish workers had a right to expect that they should do, the chances of Labour representation in the Irish Parliament would have been immensely increased by making provision for the maintenance of Irish Labour members, and thus making smoother the path of the Irish Labour Party. But no such provision was made.

The present Home Rule Party had and have no desire to see Labour in the Irish Parliament represented by an independent party of workers. Representing as they do the capitalist class, the publicans, and the gombeen men or money-lenders of rural Ireland as well as the lowest class of slum landlords in the cities, they dread as they dread retribution, the advent of men or women with ideas of regeneration and social emancipation for Ireland. They do not want anything that might help the

victims of their friends and relatives to put a legislative curb to their slave-driving and sweating.

Of course that is not the reason they alleged. Oh, no! They alleged that they "considered that the Irish Parliament should have control over its own finance, and they objected to the English Parliament limiting its powers in advance." And of course the British Labour Party swallowed this yarn, oblivious of the fact that the English Parliament was limiting the powers of the Irish Parliament in a score of ridiculous and even fatally harmful ways with the full consent of their Home Rule colleagues, and that it was only when it came to increasing the power of the Irish democracy that the Home Rule party objected to the interference of the English Parliament.

An indication by the British Labour Party that they meant to insist upon payment of members being incorporated in the Home Rule constitution, as

Part of a series

- Connolly and the Catholic "Orange Order", [Solidarity 613](#)
- On the yellow unions in Ireland, [Solidarity 614](#)
- The churches and the mobs in the battle for human freedom, [Solidarity 615](#)
- What is the sympathetic strike?, [Solidarity 622](#)
- Who was James Connolly?, [Solidarity 623](#)
- Connolly's critique of De Leon's Marxism, [Solidarity 624](#) □

e Rule, 1910-14

a principle that public services should be paid for by the public, would have made the situations infinitely easier for Irish Labour, but no such indication was forthcoming.

In every Home Rule speech the precedent of the British colonies is cited as an argument in favour of the measure, but the democratic spirit in which the colonial constitutions are framed was deliberately shut out by the framers of the Home Rule Bill. Whereas the colonial constitutions aim at giving power to the democracy, the Home Rule constitution aims at restricting the power of the democracy. And now there are to be still further attempts at restriction and divisions, in order to please the Bourbons of Ulster, who learn nothing and forget nothing.

Added to this hampering restriction upon the Irish democracy's choice of elected members, there is the fact that there is yet no fund available with which Irish Labour constituencies can be contested. Resolutions are all very well, and class feeling is an excellent thing, but in the electoral world neither of these can manifest themselves without the sinews of war. Now if there is one thing the Irish Labour movement is at present wanting in, it is finance for electoral contests. The Dublin Labour Party fight all municipal and other local contests, as does every other district of nationalist Ireland where the new influence is making itself felt, but to do even that is a severe strain upon their resources.

That they could with their present limited resources grapple with the infinitely greater cost of Parliamentary elections is almost unthinkable. In the North the trade unions are for the most part content to play the Orange game, and are as bodies merely passive allies of the capitalist-landlord faction in warring upon the progressive movement. Thus the imminence of the Home Rule elections brings into greater prominence the need for some kind of action being taken in Ireland and elsewhere to

equip the Labour movement with the necessary funds to assault some of the seats in the Home Rule Parliament.

There is talk of sending a delegation to America to solicit funds for that purpose. That is good, but it would be as well to remember that the elements upon which the Irish Labour Party must make war in Irish political life are the same elements, with the same class interests, as those which in the main control Irish political life in the United States. Hence no great funds such as have been accumulated for Irish politicians from Irish American sources in the past can be expected to reward the efforts of Labour delegates to by, America.

The response, such as it may be, will be the response of the emancipated elements - the elements which in America are responding to the calls of progress and democracy in the same fashion as their working class fellow countrymen are responding in increasing numbers to the call of Labour in Ireland.

If this fact is generally recognised, and no absurd and delusive hopes are built upon the mission, the sooner a delegate is sent to America from the Irish Trades Union Congress and Labour Party the better. The workers in America, who have already appreciated the value of independent political action at the ballot-boxes will no doubt do their share in helping to its feet the young infant of Irish Labour. The German Socialist Party was nursed in its infancy by the contributions of German exiles in the United States, and by the subscriptions of many other national elements, who only saw in the German Social Democrats an embodiment of republican revolt against monarchy. Practically every other European Socialist movement has received similar help and encouragement, receives it still, so when the Irish Labour movement makes its appeal for aid in its first electoral battles, it can do so without any false sense of shame, as the road has

been well traversed by its comrades of other nationalities.

It is also to be hoped that the Socialists of Great Britain will allow no narrowness of outlook to blind them to the wisdom of rendering generous financial support to the political Labour movement of Ireland. The success at the polls of Irish workers will make for the success of the British workers, as their defeat would discourage their fellows in Great Britain.

Without the invigorating presence of an alert and independent Labour Party in its midst the Irish House of Commons will be for years a most reactionary and anti-democratic assembly, setting a bad example to Tories and reactionists everywhere. It will be obsessed with the idea of placating the reactionary elements in Ulster, and thus of justifying itself against their aspersions. What this means you can best understand when you realise that Ulster is the most capitalist part of Ireland, that the game will be to represent every bit of Labour legislation which menaces capitalist profits as an attack upon the industries of Ulster, and that the fear of this cry will cause the new Irish Government, and every non-Labour element in Parliament, to oppose all social legislation. Only a strong and determined Labour group, with a true revolutionary outlook, will be able to withstand this cry, force forward progressive legislation and combat reactionary measures.

The dice is heavily loaded against us in Ireland. It is loaded by the evil traditions of the past, by the cowardice of many working class elements in the north especially, by the awful poverty of the country, by the ignorant obstinacy of the capitalist class, by sectarian animosities, by unscrupulous politicians, by a lying press.

We can only hope to carry our flag to victory by securing the aid of all those workers everywhere who desire to see an effective force carrying the green flag of an Irish regiment whilst uncon-



From 1910 to 1914 most people considered it certain that Irish Home Rule would go through in some form. Liberals and Irish Home Rulers argued that this would stabilise and strengthen the British Empire, and at the start of World War One Home Rule leaders like John Redmond (above) backed the war. Connolly looked to how the Irish labour movement could use amendments to the Home Rule Bill, to be pushed by British Labour, and representation in the Home Rule parliament, to win social measures like free school meals.

ditionally under the red flag of the proletarian army. □

• *Forward* (Glasgow), 4 July 1914. The version of the article available [on the web](#) omits the passage from "There is talk of sending a delegation to America..." to "... discourage their fellows in Great Britain. The version in the pamphlet *Ireland Upon The Dissecting Table* omits much more.

Motion for a Belfast meeting, 1912

By James Connolly

Resolved: That this meeting of workmen and women of Belfast welcomes the project of the establishment of an Irish Parliament as opening the way for much needed social reform and the reunion of the Irish democracy hitherto divided upon antiquated sectarian lines, but considers that in the interests of democracy in this country

more facilities should be offered for securing a full and proper representation of the people of Ireland; and we, therefore, demand that provision be made in the Bill for payment of members and election expenses, proportional representation, and the enfranchisement of women; and also that the proposed Senate be dropped from the Bill, as we consider that experience has proven

double chambers of legislature to be useless and dangerous. That a copy of this resolution be sent to the leaders of the various parties in Parliament, and also to the Parliamentary representatives of Belfast. □

• This text is in [Ireland Upon The Dissecting Table](#), but without a source (or a date more precise than "1912") to enable us to check further.



Picketing curbs pushed back

By Ollie Moore

Negotiations between bosses at Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH) in central London and the United Voices of the World union (UVW) have blunted some of the sharper edges of a high court injunction obtained by GOSH to restrict pickets by striking security guards at the hospital.

The injunction had prohibited strikers and supporters from “waving banners”, “playing music”, “shouting”, making “rapid or dramatic movements”, making “loud noises”, engaging in “vigorous dancing”, or “photographing or videoing” within 200 metres of the hospital.

Following negotiations, the area in which the injunction applies has been reduced to 50 metres, and the specific bans on “waving banners” and making “rapid or dramatic movements” have been lifted.

Petros Elia, general secretary of UVW, said: “We’re pleased we were able to

claw back some of the rights which were taken and attempted to be taken from us, including the right to dance and protest in unlimited numbers outside GOSH, among others, but the restrictions in place are still unjustifiably oppressive. UVW will continue to fight back against these draconian attacks from wealthy bosses and call on the union movement to support the striking security guards.”

The revision of the restrictions follows a lively protest outside the Royal Courts of Justice, called at short notice by UVW, on Wednesday 16 February, scheduled to coincide with the union’s legal challenge against the injunction. That challenge was delayed, as the judge originally due to hear it recused himself following pressure from GOSH lawyers, who said the judge might be biased against the hospital because the judge’s son’s treatment at GOSH in 2002 had not gone well.

Around 100 people attended the protest, which was addressed by supporters from numerous unions, including IWGB, RMT, UCU, NEU, and Unison. Speakers stressed the importance of putting the injunction in a wider context of tightening restrictions on democratic and civil liberties, also expressed by the Tories’ Police, Crime, Courts, and Sentencing Bill, and their manifesto commitment to impose new restrictions on transport workers’ strike via legally-mandated minimum service requirements.

A speaker from Camden TUC reminded the protest that GOSH is in Labour leader Keir Starmer’s constituency; with successive Labour Party conferences having passed policies endorsing the repeal of all legal restrictions on the right to strike, Labour members should demand that Starmer backs the security guards, not only as a local constituency issue but in order to



uphold democratically-agreed Labour policy. Even with the easing of restrictions, the injunction still prevents workers from effectively picketing their own workplace. That employers are able to obtain such injunctions, breaches of which could lead to criminal charges, with ease, shows how heavily the legal system is weighted in favour of bosses.

The security guards’ strike began on 2 February, and is due to last for six weeks, making it the longest in NHS history. The workers, who are employed by outsourced contractor Carlisle, are demanding parity of conditions with directly-employed NHS staff. □



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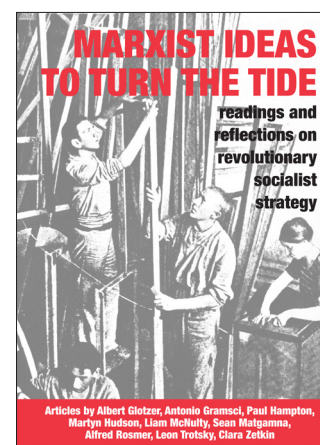
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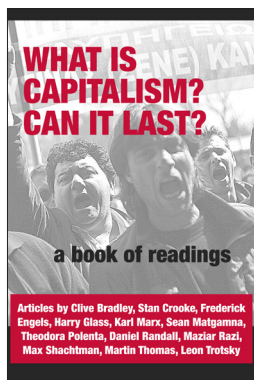
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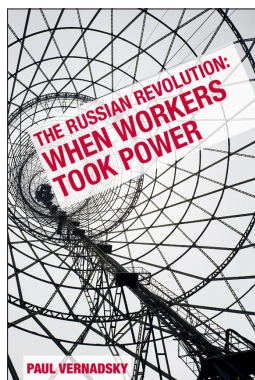
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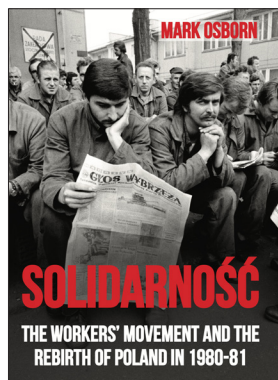
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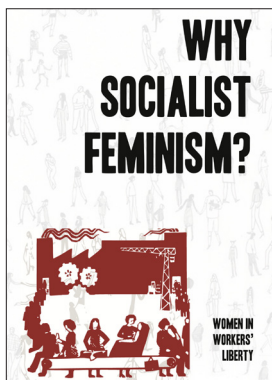
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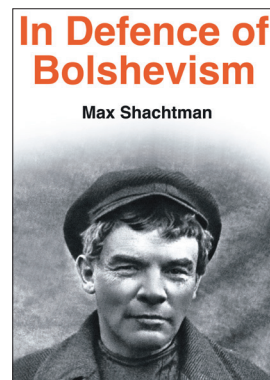
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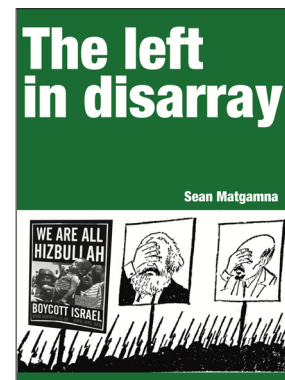
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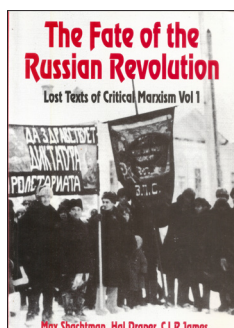
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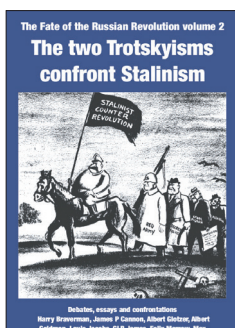
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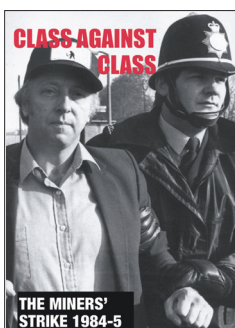
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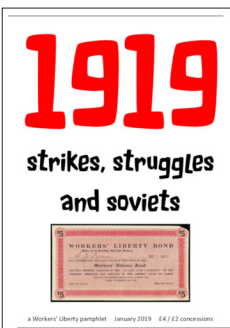
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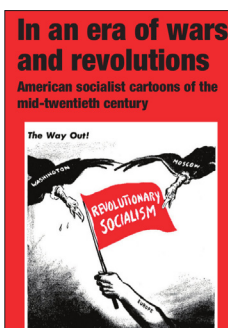
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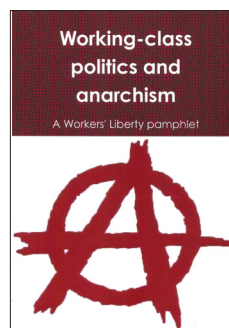
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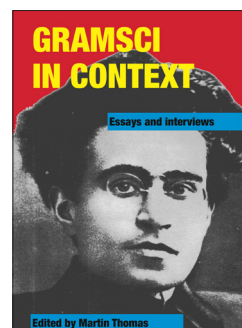
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Lies from London Underground



Tubeworker

From Tubeworker

Reps from the RMT union met with London Underground (LU) via conciliation service Acas on 17 February, to discuss attacks on jobs, conditions, and pensions. The union quite rightly reiterated that we are not interested in negotiating the detail of cuts; we oppose them outright, and want the employer to back off altogether.

Following the talks, LU circulated another "employee bulletin" repeating what has now become their mantra. On pensions, they insist the review is "just a review", as if there's any conceivable way it will propose retaining the status quo. If the intention was to leave things as they are, why commission the review in the first place? And we know from

previous reviews that TfL believes the scheme is "outdated" and "in need of reform".

On jobs, LU tells us no-one currently employed will lose their position as a result of the 600 planned job cuts on stations. It's true that our hard-won no-compulsory-redundancies agreement means LU can't just go round handing out P45s. But deleting vacancies is still cutting jobs. It will increase workload for the rest of us, and necessitate roster redesigns that will inevitably mean a deterioration in work/life balance. They will also lead to displacements for part-time staff. Fewer station staff also means less safe stations for passengers.

But it's on terms and conditions that LU's mantra is perhaps most offensive, as it is not merely misleading but an outright fabrication. Company comms have repeatedly insisted that "there are no proposals to change terms and conditions", which will come as a surprise to staff in the Special Requirements Team

and Revenue Control department, who are facing the imposition of new framework agreements aimed at maximising "flexibility". LU's plans to cut "Station Assistants, Train Services" (SATS) duties on stations, where station staff assist drivers in managing platforms, and detainment duties, where station staff ensure trains are fully empty at terminating stations, will also clearly impact drivers' conditions, by increasing their workloads and giving them additional responsibilities.

So what's going on here? Is LU management simply so disorganised that Nick Dent, the senior director for customer services (stations and trains), in whose name the bulletin was issued, simply doesn't know what's being imposed by more junior managers in SRT and Revenue? Of course he knows: he's been personally involved in negotiations about the changes. Or is it that LU somehow believes the imposition of entirely new framework agreements doesn't amount to "changes to terms



and conditions"? No-one who actually understands the meaning of words could possibly believe this.

We can only conclude that our employers realise they cannot justify their proposals, so have resorted to pretending they're not happening, in the hope that we won't notice. Our bosses are lying to us. Despite repeatedly and patronisingly referring to staff as "our people", they clearly think we're idiots.

We should show them how we feel about the contempt in which they hold us by shutting London down on 1 and 3 March. □

Strikes are for future of public transport



Tubeworker

From Tubeworker

One of the recurrent themes of London Underground's (LU's) communication with staff over the current dispute by the RMT union to defend jobs, pensions, and conditions, has been a kind of pleading.

Referencing TfL/LU's dire financial condition, our employer says, in effect, "well, what do you want us to do to? We've got to cut something!"

Nick Dent has recently written, "there is no scenario in which we can just do nothing."

It's worth responding to this point. We don't want LU, Transport for London (TfL), or the Mayor to "do nothing".

We didn't want them to "do nothing" in 2018, before the pandemic, when the Tories abolished TfL's central government grant, forcing it onto an unprecedented funding model which made it almost wholly reliant on fare revenue. We wanted the London Mayor, Sadiq Khan, to stand up to the government, publicly, and instruct the TfL board, which he chairs, to do likewise.

We wanted LU, TfL, and the Mayor to insist that it was not feasible or sustainable to expect a transport system like London's to run without a regular source of funding from government. We wanted them to make the argument that TfL should not be run like a busi-

ness, but subsidised and sustained as a social good which plays an irreplaceable role in the social and economic functioning of the country's capital.

Throughout the pandemic, when the Tories insisted on punitive conditions for short-term funding bailout packages, we wanted them to continue making those arguments, and for Sadiq Khan, as a Labour mayor, to urge mobilisation of the labour movement in defence of public transport.

Instead, bosses - who had been able to work from the relative safety and comfort of their homes - cooked up cuts plans to scrap jobs and worsen conditions for frontline workers who'd continued to work throughout the pandemic's most dangerous periods.

There are also quite a few cuts we would like to see made... we'd support a cut in senior management bonuses, for which TfL has ring-fenced £12 million, money that is surely better spent elsewhere. We'd support cuts to both the salaries and numbers of senior bosses, and to the money spent on management consultants.

But in the long term, only adequate funding from central government will secure a sustainable future for TfL/LU. Instead of making a stand over that principle, the bosses have gone along with the Tories' ideologically-driven insistence that TfL must be "self-financing", and that the cuts necessary to achieve that condition must be made on the frontline.

Of course, expecting corporate-minded senior managers to stand with workers and our unions in defence

of the principle of public funding for public transport seems utterly fantastical. Nick Dent and his fellow bosses would undoubtedly scoff... "well, we couldn't possibly do that!" The dull compulsion of capitalist normality does largely constrain Dent and co.

In the case of Sadiq Khan, the constraints are more ideological than economic (although those two dynamics are frequently substantially intertwined). Labour local authorities have, in the past, defied cuts directives from Tory governments, mobilising the local working-class movement in their defence, and, sometimes, forcing the Tories to back off. But such an approach is simply not in Khan's political nature. As a centrist politician of the New Labour school, he undoubtedly sees working-class social mobilisation as a threat to be managed rather than an agency for change.

We won't persuade LU to change course merely by compelling arguments. But we should remember that claims that cuts are inevitable, a force of nature, are false, and themselves impelled by capitalist ideology. We will defeat cuts by making the government see that the "cost" of the economic disruption our strikes cause is greater than the cost of restoring adequate funding to TfL. The tabloid press will see that as "holding London to ransom". We should see it as striking for the future of public transport.

Ultimately, we are striking because we have to. To do otherwise would be to accept defeat in advance. No trade union worthy of the name would be

sitting back in the face of 600 job cuts, attacks on conditions, and coming attacks on pensions. In the spirit of his own communications to staff, we might ask Nick Dent what he expects us to do. Indeed, "there is no scenario in which we can just do nothing." □



Activist Agenda

Labour Left Internationalists' latest meetings on "linking up the campaigns" was on 19 February, about how Labour activists can help push for workers' and union rights, with Rhian Keyse speaking from Free Our Unions. Several Labour Party conferences have voted for repeal of all anti-union laws, including those from the Thatcher era, but the Labour leadership has sidelined those commitments, under Starmer and under Corbyn too. Getting the unions to push in Labour for what they are formally committed to looks central.

The next Uyghur Solidarity Campaign 5th-of-each-month protest will be on 5 March, at the Chinese Embassy, 49-51 Portland Pl, London W1B 1JL. □

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

“What we stand for

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

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- Workers' control of major industries and finance for a rapid transition to a green society
- A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression
- Full equality for women, and social provision to free women from domestic labour. Reproductive freedoms and free abortion on demand.
- Full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people
- Black and white workers' unity against racism
- Open borders
- Global solidarity against global capital – workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers
- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation
- Equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small
- Maximum left unity in action, and full openness in debate

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

• workersliberty.org/join-awl

The wheels on the train go thunk, thunk, thunk



Diary of a Tube worker

By Jay Dawkey

Three shifts in a row it's been wet for almost the whole time on the road. Fine for when you are in the pipe but an added faff elsewhere. The windscreen wipers are some of the noisiest bits of equipment on a train, drowning out all other noise and your own thoughts, as the wipers jerk awkwardly, barely pushing the rain out of the way.

But what you really want to avoid is putting flats on the wheels. You don't judge the rain by what you can see so much as by how it's affecting the train. When you accelerate and feel the wheels spin and your speed sensing go haywire, then you know the rain is going to mess with your braking. Flats, when the wheels wear to the shape of a

20p piece, are very loud in the tunnels and need a wheel lathe to correct them.

Avoiding them, or trying to avoid them, means taking longer to brake and doing so gently, "cadence braking"; but if a signal changes suddenly or you end up faster than you planned, then that can go out the window. If the brakes get slammed on and the wheels spin, you'll know about it as soon as you get in the tunnel as the noise starts: "Thunk, Thunk, Thunk", getting faster and faster as the speed increases.

Once you've reported flats they should be dealt with that night; but we all know sometimes the depot claims they are within the accepted tolerance. But why should we, or even the passengers, tolerate the noise? And then you find the odd unit where flats have been reported for days on end but either nothing has been done, or whatever has been done didn't work. Drivers know from speaking to the depot workers that they aren't always given the time needed to sort the flats out or run



the lathe on as many trains as required.

Normally this is a problem when the leaf fall timetable is in place in the Autumn. Leaf fall is about the worst naturally occurring thing for rail adhesion. The combination of decaying leaves and moisture creates a slickness that leads to a big reduction in the line speed limit and sometimes the complete shutting down of branch lines because they are unsafe to travel on.

People often joke about trains being delayed by "leaves on the line", but if you are driving and get poor rail adhesion you soon know about it! □

• "Jay Dawkey" is a Tube driver.

Aslef disaffiliation would be a dead end

By Simon Nelson

LabourList and the *Mirror* have reported that train drivers' union Aslef may disaffiliate from the Labour Party, via a motion going its Annual General Meeting (AGM) in May. Union general secretary Mick Whelan is currently the Chair of Labour Unions (the consortium of Labour-affiliated unions, formerly TULO) and is opposed to disaffiliation, but the sources say that a majority of the Aslef executive supports the move.

Some of the opposition may be hinged on Starmer's rightwards turn, his shutting down of party democracy, and him reportedly having snubbed meetings with Aslef until recently. The opposition to affiliation, however, is likely to combine those against the union having a political affiliation (or much political life at all) with members in Scotland enthusiastic for the SNP and supporters of dead-end organisations like TUSC, or worse, Resist or George Galloway's "Workers Party".

Solidarity believes that unions should assert themselves with the Labour Party, fight for their policies, and increase the number of trade unionists who get involved in the Labour Party. That is best done through a more vigorous campaign, and using the unions' leverage in Labour structures, which is large if only they use it (Starmer wins votes on Labour's National Executive mostly through union support) - not by withdrawing funding or disaffiliation. Aslef delegates should vote down motions to disaffiliate. □

James Joyce on screen



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

James Joyce's semi-autobiographical *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, published in 1916 and adapted for the screen by Joseph Strick in 1977, depicts the coming of age of Stephen Dedalus (Joyce) played by Luke Johnston (when Stephen was ten) and by Bosco Hogan (later in life). Irish actor T. P. McKenna plays Simon Dedalus, Stephen's father.

He features in one of the most memorable moments in the film: a dinner-ta-

ble confrontation between Simon and Dante, Stephen's governess. Simon laments that the Irish "are a priest-ridden race". Dante angrily responds: "If we are a priest-ridden race then we ought to be proud of it!". Stephen listens, fascinated by the banter, and the row begins a process of questioning.

We then follow Stephen through his school days, where he becomes a hero to his fellow pupils by complaining about a bullying teacher. Later, at university, Stephen rebels against the Catholic Church and authority, condemning Irish society as too restrictive. With his family now destitute, and with no-one who understands his growing sense of aestheticism, he leaves Ireland. □

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PCS ballot starts 24 Feb



John Moloney

Following an emphatic yes vote in the strike ballot, ATOS which is a private company, undertaking civil service work, have now made a revised offer to members. As a result, activists have asked that the strike action due on 28 February be suspended. That request has been agreed as members consider the improved offer. This again shows that members working together can achieve decisive changes in attitude from the employers.

This is also what we will happen following the national consultative ballot which began on 24 February. All our public sector members are being balloted, mostly digitally but a fair share by post, as to whether they would be willing to take action over the cost of living crisis facing us.

As part of the first week of campaigning to get members to vote, all those who have given the union a mobile number have been texted. This messaging has generated thousands of responses and so we off to a good start.

Crucially, though, it will be activists in the workplace who will get us over the 50% limit. All the evidence we have, is that where a member is talked to by a local rep, the chance of them voting greatly increases.

From data concerning the last national postal ballot we know that if 50% of members are contacted by local reps in a branch, then on average we get a 60% plus turnout. So, obviously, if we get more than 50% contact rate, then the turnout increases proportionally.

This week, as in all the remaining weeks left, the national union is concentrating on getting activists to talk to members so as to drive out the vote.

We have until 21 March to achieve a 50% plus vote. Clearly though, given that we are running a campaign which is trying to mimic a national postal statutory ballot, we have to get well over 50% plus one. Whilst difficult, it is do-able. □

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

Strikes set example in universities



By a Unison HE activist

Higher Education (HE) support staff pay has been eroded by 17% in the last 12 years, and the main union organising among lower-grade admin and estates and facilities staff, Unison, has started to move to address the problem. When this year's pay offer was just 1.5%, a lot of staff who have had a rough time keeping the universities open during the pandemic felt aggrieved enough to opt for a strike.

Breaking with past practice the union ran a disaggregated ballot, first asking for branches that wanted to be balloted. Only 37 out of around 150 branches felt confident to go for a ballot and of those only nine passed the turnout threshold under the Trade Union Act 2016 – but that feels like an achievement in this relatively poorly organised sector.

A number of branches also have some members in the USS scheme which is the subject of the current UCU action. Of those that balloted their members, three are striking on that issue.

It has been hard to coordinate action between the striking branches: Unison does not allow horizontal discussion between branches! That has to change. The branches must talk to each other about what action they will take after this first round, as their strike mandates have months to run and should not be squandered.

While it's been hard for Unison branches to coordinate with each other, there is some impressive cross-union work being done in institutions. SOAS Unison and UCU branches, together with the students' union, have issued a joint leaflet explaining their action and giving ideas for showing solidarity.

City University, London, shows the impact of Unison acting alongside UCU can have. Management tried to bribe security guards with £100 per shift to work on strike days. These low-paid workers, for whom this would be a significant sum, turned it down and management had to announce that the university will close on strike days.

Unison members, with safety critical roles such as security and cleaning, have power – the next few days can boost their confidence and show the whole HE sector the way forward.

Branches not taking action should



raise funds for striking branches, and organise their own protests on pay, alongside UCU where they can. The whole service group should start gearing up now for an even bigger fight on pay in 2022-23. □

• City University Unison strike fund: bit.ly/c-uni. Unison HE branches taking action: Birkbeck, pay, 21-22 February, 28 February, 1-2 March; Brighton University, pay, 1-2 March; City University, pay, 21-22 February, 28 February, 1-2 March; Edinburgh Napier, pay, 28 February, 1-2 March; Gloucestershire University, pay, 2 March; King's College London, pay, 2-3 March; Leeds University, pay/USS, 28 February, 1-2 March; Queen Margaret University, pay, 28 February; SOAS, pay/USS, 21-22 February, 28 February, 1-2 March; Trinity Laban, USS, 2 March. More: bit.ly/9-br

NHS and care protests 26 February

By Mohan Sen

Dozens of actions around the country are planned for the 26 February [day of action](#) called by Keep Our NHS Public (KONP). The Tories' Health and Care Bill returns to the House of Lords in March.

KONP summarises: "The bill, and the guidance and regulations that come with it, signpost further fragmentation of the NHS, greater privatisation and damage to

services and the workforce.

"The bill will also provide the legal framework required to implement the 40 or so Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) covering England, which pose a threat not least by allowing the private sector an even bigger role than it has currently..."

"The Bill will not address any of the problems facing the NHS or social care and will distract from efforts to rebuild the NHS while it is

still dealing with the Covid pandemic..."

"Whether or not the Bill is passed, ICSs will continue to pose a huge threat to the NHS as a universal, comprehensive health service that is publicly accountable, publicly funded and publicly provided."

More: bit.ly/b-hsc. The Bill also contains the Tories'

[social care](#) proposals, which do nothing to address the crisis while shifting costs on to workers' shoulders. □

Holmes wins in Kirklees

By a Unison member

Kirklees Unison has held its Annual General Meeting (AGM) and Paul Holmes has been re-elected as branch secretary in an online ballot of all members. The [Huddersfield Examiner](#) reports that Unison nationally has supported Holmes in holding the branch secretary position despite him being sacked recently by Kirklees council, as [Solidarity](#) has [reported](#).

Paul Holmes is appealing against his sacking, and believes it is victimisation due to his trade union activities.

Paul Holmes was challenged by Socialist Party member Angie Waller, and the outgoing assistant branch secretary position was also challenged, both unsuccessfully. We do not have the detail of the votes. No one challenged for the chair position, despite the published allegations against Paul Holmes

claiming the branch chair was responsible for refusing to investigate complaints against him.

This re-election adds further weight to the belief that trade union matters, including serious complaints, are not to be taken to the employer, but dealt with in our unions and the wider labour movement. Paul Holmes should be reinstated and any complaints dealt with quickly and seriously by a labour movement enquiry. □

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Workers and students against uni bosses

By a Cambridge UCU member

So far, strikes by the University and College Union (UCU) over the USS pensions battle and “Four Fights” dispute (over pay, equality, workload and casualisation) have shown strong resolve from a wide group of members, despite Covid absences having depressed branch organisation and with Covid still having an impact across the UK. UCU members should feel encouraged by this start. Critical to winning these disputes remains three important factors: mobilising more activists to the picket lines, escalating the action, and maintaining the link between the two disputes.

Solidarity goes to press before the outcome of the 22 Feb national negotiating meeting between UCU and the employers’ representatives (UUK) has been published. It may still not be clear if there has been any movement towards the union’s proposed deal following seven days of strikes this term.

Behind the scenes it has been reported that UUK spent much effort briefing university managements against UCU proposals (which UUK is “consulting” universities on). As of Friday 18 Feb, at least two local joint statements between UCU branches and their managements had been published. Though neither came out in full support of UCU pension proposals, usefully these did break from UUK’s position.

Other branches should take note and force their local management to speak out likewise,



over both the USS demands, and those in the Four Fights.

Unison members at some universities joined this week’s strikes (see page 13). Student direct action has been strong. In London students stormed a Goldsmiths University Council meeting, making known their anger at management plans to sack 46 staff and their solidarity with campus unions. Union activists on campus need to support and link-up with students to maximise this kind of disruption, and develop joint struggles for worker-student control of campuses. □

- Student occupations at Sheffield University: see page 3. Rhian Keyse on controversies in the UCU: see page 9.

Student action escalates

By Abel Harvie-Clark

Student action has escalated again in the second week (from 21 Feb) of the strikes by the University and College Union (UCU), with a number of occupations at Sussex, Sheffield Hallam, and Nottingham universities, following on from the direct actions the previous week. Actions are building up now towards the National Union of Students (NUS) walk-out on the final day of this round of UCU strikes - Wednesday 2 March. Though the time and location of the centrepiece London protest on 2 March are yet to be con-

firmed, we welcome the move to call a national demonstration for free and liberated education, and encourage students to build the event and bring others from their uni. The demo will likely be smaller than we’d wish, due to the limited base to organise, but positively, a number of student unions are sending coaches to London. The demo should lead to more political organising by NUS. It is important that left wing students take the chance to build on this event, and meet students who may have come along as a first engagement with student politics. □



Protest in London 18 December 2021

Sudan in revolt

A Khartoum-based activist with the Central Committee of Sudanese Doctors (CSSD) and the union coalition it is part of, the Sudanese Professionals’ Association (SPA), spoke to Sacha Ismail on 10 February. There were more mass demonstrations in Sudan the day before we went to press, 21 February.

The SPA was established in July 2018, involving doctors, lawyers, teachers, university professors, vets and engineers. It was central in the Sudanese revolution which began at the end of 2018; it was the organisation that announced the Charter of Freedom and Change, which became the charter of the entire revolution.

Now the SPA is an important part of the resistance following the 25 October coup, which ended the transition to democracy and reinaugurated a full military dictatorship. Since then, for more than a hundred days now, people have been protesting strongly and courageously, despite massive state violence. About 80 protesters have been killed.

CSSD was established in 2015; in October-November 2016 it led a nation-wide strike, the largest doctors’ strike in Sudan’s history, to improve the health situation in public hospitals and training conditions for junior doctors. By the way we followed the [2017] junior doctors’ strike in the UK, and around the same time there was a junior doctors’ strike in Kenya too.

During the strike more than a hundred of our members were arrested. But due to the numbers we mobilised the government had to negotiate, and make many concessions to our demands.

That strike gave openings to build relationships with other workers, particularly journalists, who were helping spread news about our movement and had their own organisation, Sudanese Journalists at Work, and for obvious reasons lawyers, with the Democratic Alliance of Lawyers. That relationship between the three organisations then became the basis for establishing the SPA.

It sounds like those events were pretty significant as a prelude to the fall of [military-Islamist dictator Omar al-] Bashir?

Yes, it was very important as the precursor to the [2018-19] revolution; it showed that people could organise strong activities and protests. The fact of independent unions, not controlled or even at first recognised by the government, was highly significant – it was very hurtful to the regime, which had its own controlled “unions”, and energising for workers, who saw they could do things for themselves.

Do those fake unions still exist?

Yes. The irony is they rely heavily on support from unions in other countries, some national union centres in Africa, regional bodies, some unions in Europe and the ITUC [International Trade Union Confederation]. We have raised that many, many times, going ba

k years now – demanding that genuine union bodies should be able to distinguish between real unions and fake unions invented by dictatorial regimes. It is really insulting. □

- More from the interview: page 7



Solidarity

For a workers' government

SPREADING STRIKES PUSH BACK COURIER BOSSES

By Michael Elms

Food couriers across the UK are striking over pay. Currently there is ongoing action in Sheffield, Dewsbury, Middlesbrough and Chesterfield. Workers in other towns are regrouping and reorganising.

Delivery workers organised in the IWGB union who are employed by the contractor Stuart to deliver food for JustEat have had strikes in cities across the North of England since early December 2021. So far, Stuart has made two major concessions: they have promised that paid waiting time will be implemented from April; and they have fixed an issue with their insurance document upload system that was producing many unfair dismissals. As the strike movement and political pressure increase both in the UK and in Stuart's home country of France (Stuart is a subsidiary of the French postal service), more concessions can be won.

In 2021, a new pay structure entailing a 24% cut in the base pay-per-delivery was rolled out across the UK. Food couriers have been joining the IWGB to demand a substantial increase in the per-delivery base rate, to £6; paid waiting time; and an end to unfair sackings from the platform.

The strike has been strongest in Sheffield, where members of Workers' Liberty have been working to help couriers get organised since 2019. In Sheffield, the union began the strike with 80 members, making South Yorkshire the strongest local couriers' group in the IWGB. Now, union membership is higher.

Strike action among Stuart couriers spread quickly in December 2021 to Chesterfield, Huddersfield, Blackpool, and Sunderland. In January and February 2022, these were joined by strikes in Middlesbrough and Dewsbury. In the last week of February, Stuart couriers in Leicester are organising a meeting as a springboard for strike action.

The strike campaign has not always been smooth sailing. At various points drivers in certain towns have had to suspend action temporarily before rejoining the campaign. Throughout, Sheffield drivers have set the pace and provided the model, with daily action and weekly open organising meetings to decide the strategy.

Stuart drivers in Wakefield took action without reference to the union or the broader national campaign. Stuart management organised a separate meeting with Wakefield

workers, and these workers are assessing the outcome of that meeting before deciding whether to continue with action.

The spiralling cost of living, and the courageous example set by Sheffield couriers, have had ramifications that go beyond JustEat's subcontractor Stuart. In some cities, JustEat couriers are employed by JustEat via employment agency Randstad (this is referred to by JustEat as its "Scoober" model of employment). In Redcar and Colchester, JustEat couriers employed by Randstad have struck alongside Uber and Deliveroo riders, over pay. Andrei Lates, a rider in Colchester, told the *Essex County Standard* on 21 February: "We think a minimum of £15-per-hour should be made available, as that would cover a minimum wage plus expenses."

These strikes are happening outside the Stuart dispute, but clearly inspired by it. The efforts of Sheffield couriers have sparked what is proving to be a broader pay rebellion. Socialists across the UK should follow the example set by Workers' Liberty activists and rally support for the couriers' dispute. Strike fund: bit.ly/StuStrike; model motion of support bit.ly/mo-pe; more, page 3. □