

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

UNIONS MARCH FOR UKRAINE

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March for Ukraine on 9 April!



Workers' Liberty is actively building the trade union-organised march for Ukraine assembling at 12 noon, on Saturday 9 April, in Parliament Square, London.

As Odesa burns, attacked last Sunday with Russian missiles, and Mariupol is surrounded and devastated by Vladimir Putin's artillery, British workers need to stand up and show our opposition to this carnage.

The Russian imperialist war, conducted with the intention of destroying Ukraine's national rights, must be opposed by the left and the labour movement.

As Solidarity goes to press six national unions are backing this demonstration in opposition to Russian imperialism and in defence of Ukraine's right to self-determination. In addition two Ukrainian union federations, two Ukrainian rail workers' unions and the independent union of Ukrainian mine-workers are also supporting the initiative.

It is important that the British unions and labour movement makes solidarity, in our own name, with Ukraine and the Ukrainian workers' movement. This is one of a series of trade union-sponsored initiatives across Europe which aim to make direct links and solidarity with the Ukrainian left and working

class. A Workers' Aid for Ukraine convoy has just left Vienna. A similar initiative is being worked on by a French union confederation.

We are not liberals, we are working-class socialists. Yes, we are for Ukraine against Russian imperialism. We are also for the Ukrainian working class against the Ukrainian bosses and their right-wing political advocates who dominate Ukrainian political life.

Delegations of British activists will march behind their union's banners on 9 April. Too often in recent years the labour movement has "contracted out" our responsibility to protest in our own name to front organisations for the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), such as Stand Up to Racism, or to the Stop the War (StW) coalition.

During this war StW has disgraced itself. It is dominated by people who are sympathetic to Putin's regime, who are quietly obstructing the 9 April protest march because they perversely see the main threat in this war as the West, not Russia.

Situation

And what does "stop the war" mean in this situation? If it means, "Russia should stop fighting and withdraw its troops", we agree. But how could that happen without Ukraine forcing them to leave, as an overturn of Putin's regime in Russia seems highly unlikely right now? The way to stop the war is to back Ukraine's war.

If Ukraine has the right to self-determination it also has the right to defend itself. If it has the right to fight, it has the right to ask the West for arms. We support Ukraine's war and demand the West provides weapons so that Ukraine can defeat the Russian occupation.

Socialist Workers Party members and supporters of the Communist newspaper, the pro-China Morning Star, are actively preventing all the unions backing

this march.

Their worldview – in which US imperialism (rather than capitalism and imperialism more generally) is the source of most of the world's problems, and states and forces who oppose the US are seen as somehow being in our camp – has been profoundly exposed as false and misleading during Russia's war on Ukraine. These socialists damage reality when they talk only or mainly of conflict between NATO and Russia during a war in which NATO is steadfastly refusing to fight and Russia is pulverising Ukraine.

Socialist Worker writes: what about NATO? What about the crimes of US imperialism?

We say in response: The overwhelming problem in Ukraine, right now, is the aggressive Russian war aimed at ending Ukrainian rights to self-determination. The first victims of Putin's occupation of Ukrainian territory are workers, and trade unions and democracy.

The prototype for the new Russian occupation exists in the territory grabbed by Russia in 2014, in Eastern Ukraine. The so-called People's Republics of Luhansk and Donetsk are areas run by warlord-gangsters responsible only to Moscow. Half the pre-2014 populations of these areas have left, the economies have collapsed, trade unions are repressed, and torture and arbitrary arrest are widespread.

This is what the areas of newly Russian-occupied Ukraine will begin to look like. Already, in towns overrun by the Russian military, Ukrainian politicians have been kidnapped and councils have been replaced by "People's Committees" run by Quislings. Ukrainian demonstrators, demanding the Russian army leaves their towns, have been violently dispersed.

We support the rights of all those displaced by the Russian attack. Ten



million Ukrainians – one quarter of the entire population – have been forced to leave their homes, with four million (including two million children) fleeing the country. This march backs an open door policy for the refugees, in contrast to the narrow nationalist meanness of the Tory government's immigration policy.

And finally, we encourage our readers to make some connections. The socialists who oppose this march, who do not back Ukraine's fight, are also (more or less) the same left-wing groups and individuals who supported the nationalist idiocy of Brexit and who demonise Israel. These are not isolated mistakes. These socialists are, in their own way, being consistent – consistently wrong, that is. The issue is that their underlying political framework is a version of Marxism which has been heavily corrupted by Stalinism.

Support Ukraine and join Workers' Liberty. □

More online on Ukraine

Check out bit.ly/ukr-more for background and debate. □

Oust Johnson, oust the Tories!

By Sacha Ismail

The Ukraine crisis bought Boris Johnson some time. His disapproval-approval rating improved from 73-22 in mid-January, but only to 63-30 in mid-March; and that was before the cost of living surge accelerated, before the Tories responded with plans to keep benefits and public-sector wages way below inflation, before the return of "partygate" with fixed-penalty notices for

20 un-named people in 10 Downing St.

Johnson is now more unpopular than the government as a whole. Yet if he is ousted, his likely replacement as Tory leader would be equally or even more right-wing. The labour movement should shake off its lethargy after the pandemic, and take advantage of the Tories' unpopularity to drive them from office.

The Labour Party and the

trade unions should call and campaign for a general election.

But a general election to get what? The labour movement must put forward *much* stronger alternatives to the Tories' disastrous policies, at least strong enough to actually defend and push up working-class living standards.

The policies passed by Labour conference in recent years provide a good basis;

but Labour leaders ignore them. Starmer is not even demanding reversal of the £20 cut to Universal Credit.

We need to push our unions to campaign both for wage rises and politically, including by pushing Labour.

For unions, the basic starting point both for winning alternative policies *and* for pressuring, weakening and defeating the government is to launch many more strikes over pay. □

23-24 April in London

Workers' Liberty has our yearly conference in London on 23-24 April, and we're currently running Zoom pre-conference meetings. □

Street protests return in Russia

By Michael Baker

Over 200 have been arrested after protests in no fewer than 18 cities in Russia on Saturday 2 April, the first major protest action in a few weeks. The police presence remains large and aggressive, arresting passers-by as eagerly as actual protestors.

For the first time since the start of the war in Ukraine, the protests had a concrete demand attached to them: for the Russian government to give the real statistics for how many soldiers had died so far in the campaign. In terms of tactics, the idea was to have "sit-down" protests in as many cities as possible, in part to make mass arrest slower and more arduous for the police. Russian weather unfortunately made that a difficult task. Thick snow made sit-down protests essentially impossible in many locations.

There were reports from arrested protestors in several regions of great

force and harassment from police. One man claimed to have a policeman kneel on his back while handcuffing him; another stated that police "nearly broke his arm" during questioning. Many were threatened with falsified charges of drug dealing, and in one case police threatened to kill a protestor for not answering questions. Many were asked who paid them for taking part in protests – a question that has been common throughout the growth of the Russian protest movement for the last decade, and seems to reflect a genuine belief for many in the Kremlin, as well as the Russian police force and judicial system that any protestor must be paid by someone..

The campaign within Russian universities to force students into submission is continuing to grow. The Higher School of Economics, one of Russia's most prestigious universities, sent a memo to all students this week detail-

ing the punishments for any anti-war agitation or protesting. Punishments start at 300,000 rubles (£2,700) for "discrediting the armed forces of the Russian Federation" and go all the way to 15 years of imprisonment for spreading falsehoods about the use of Russian armed forces in the defence of national interests and citizens of the Russian Federation". There have also been reports of students in some universities being pressured to write letters and post on social media in support of the war.

Despite the growing threats from the university administrations, the student movement is still going strong. Students Against War (see an interview with them in Solidarity 630) continues to share pictures of agitational material and stories from activists at universities across the country, and encourages students to fight back against pro-war attitudes in the classroom or lecture

hall by submitting formal complaints against the teacher, organising student boycotts against pro-war classes, or simply taking the teacher at their word – if they want to bring discussion of the Ukrainian invasion into lessons, then students should interject with information about what's really going on.

The editors of student journal DOXA had their final court hearings before their sentencing this week. The prosecutor has asked for a sentence of two years hard labour for each of the four editors, for a video they published in April 2021 which the prosecutor claims was an incitement to protest (against the arrest of opposition leader Navalny). This would be a lighter sentence than the prison time many were expecting, but considering the evidence for the case has been proven to be entirely fabricated, it would be a sorry indictment of the Russian judicial system – one of many in the past few years. □

Unions must act on maternity scandal

By Mohan Sen

Becky Talbot, one of the organisers of last autumn's March With Midwives [protests](#) told us:

"Every single case in this [Ockenden] report [on Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust] is heart-breaking and appalling. Put them together and it's a huge disaster. It's particularly bad, but it's not something separable from the wider crisis in maternity services and the NHS.

"Central to all of it is chronic underfunding, chronic understaffing, lack of training, lack of continuity of care. It's only got worse since 2019 [the end of the period the Ockenden Report covers]. There's a hospital near me where it's come out they only have 43% of safe

staffing levels. Think about that: it's less than half of the bare minimum to provide safe care, forget about anything else.

"The Ockenden recommendations seem pretty good: safe staffing levels, proper funding, a well-trained workforce. Also trying to learn from incidents, rather than shoving them under the carpet to try to avoid damages, and listening to women and families.

"But this can't be addressed in a purely localised or purely technical way. It's part of a huge crisis far beyond this trust, one shaped by the terrible state of the NHS because of all the attacks it's under. Even with the best policies, it would take years to build back to even where we were before 2010. At the moment it's all still

getting worse.

"It's not just safe staffing levels and being properly funded and having a well-trained workforce: it's that the whole of society has been plunged into poverty.

"And when we started March With Midwives last year, we were astounded that there was so much fear among maternity staff about speaking out. That fear is installed not only in the workplace but by the Royal College of Midwives (RCM). There's a patriarchal, hierarchical structure, and a culture of bullying and silencing of staff.

"RCM [Royal College of Midwives] chief executive Gill Walton, blamed midwives for promoting natural births. She ought to be standing with the workers she is supposed to represent, not scapegoating them. Where is her fire on the government? I can tell you that midwives are incensed."

The Ockenden [Report](#) reveals a chain of circumstances, actions and inactions which resulted in the deaths of 201 babies and nine women, and horrendous suffering beyond those numbers.

It looks back to 2000, a decade before the first wave of the current Tory assault on the health service began. But the report does centre the NHS's authoritarian management culture and its poverty

of resources – both worsening since 2010.

Measures that reduce poverty and mitigate the impact of poverty on the health of women before and during pregnancy have a significant impact on the risk of neonatal mortality.

Between 1993 and 2013, the infant mortality rate and neonatal mortality rate decreased considerably in England. The infant mortality rate fell from 6.3 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1993 to 3.9 in 2013 and the neonatal mortality rate fell from 4.2 deaths per 1,000 live births to 2.7 over the same time period.

Since then progress has stalled. In 2019, the infant mortality rate increased to 4 deaths per 1,000 live births and the neonatal mortality rate increased to 2.9 deaths per 1,000 live births. The increase

corresponds to 2,413 infant deaths and 1,759 neonatal deaths.

March With Midwives organised impressive protests last year with very few resources. The unions should be acting. Only workers' action, starting with demonstrations, can force the government to change course. It is possible. In the depths of the Covid crisis protests and strikes by French health unions forced the very right-wing Macron government to concede significant pay rises and billions in extra funding.

A serious trade union and political fightback can help change the atmosphere and balance of forces in the health service too, making it more likely that failures and abuses are exposed and challenged as they happen. □

Tory retreats on Elections Bill

By Colin Foster

The Tories have stepped back on two clauses in the Elections Bill, due to start "report stage" in the Lords on 6 April. Powers remove the right of categories of organisation (maybe including unions) to campaign in elections will now be effective only on the recommendation of the Electoral Commission. New

rules that could have made Labour's affiliated unions liable for Labour campaign expenditure will be deleted. The Bill still includes a rule requiring photo ID to vote, and more. But this shows again that this government is one with many u-turns, unconfident with its strategy, and can be pushed back by campaigning. □



Upcoming meetings

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

Friday 27 – Sunday 29 May: Come to LO Fete with Workers' Liberty. More info bit.ly/wl-lo

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



War, peace... and trade?



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

The *Morning Star* keeps telling us that it opposes Putin's invasion of Ukraine, and up to a point that's true. The paper and its political masters at the Communist Party of Britain (or, at least, the majority of them) do oppose the invasion – but only because it's been a tactically “maladroit” move that has resulted in “temporarily uniting Nato” (editorial, 4 March).

This “opposition” should not be mistaken for support for Ukraine's right to national self determination, still less any support for its right to fight the invader. Time and again, the paper has counselled against arming Ukraine, which can only (in the words of the editorial of

4 March, “strengthen those most reactionary elements in the Ukraine government mix who want war.” And the given that Russia “cannot be beaten on the battlefield” (editorial 5-6 March), then the best thing the Ukrainians can do is ... give up and let other forces (the US and/or the EU) negotiate “peace” concessions with Russia over their heads: “Warmongers will object that this is ‘rewarding’ Russia for its violation of international law. But the reality is that the West cannot intimidate Russia into backing down – it has, after all, been trying to intimidate Russia for years. Nor have sanctions generally proved effective in undermining hostile governments. Only through talking can we hope to end this nightmare (editorial 5-6 March)

In fact, the *Morning Star* reckons that in addition to “talking” there is there is one other route to ending the war: trade. In a remarkably frank editorial

on 28 March (“Nato, the EU and the US: unity against Russia only temporary?”), the paper looks forward to “a reordering of global trade if Western sanctions against Russia are institutionalised. This confronts European leaders, especially Scholz but also the former socialist countries and constituent republics of the Soviet Union, with a new dynamic: submission to a renewed Atlanticism on terms largely dictated by the US or a less antagonistic relationship with a Russia now partnered with China, the economic power that is rapidly superseding the US and has already replaced it as the world's principal trading partner.”

This line – “trade with Russia and China is a better deal than with the USA” – sounds like a pitch from a bourgeois minister of trade or an ambassador. It's a quite extraordinary argument for a supposed “socialist” publication (which sometimes even claims to be “revolu-

tionary”) to use. But then, the *Morning Star* and the CPB are unashamed (if unpaid) propagandists for Chinese state capitalism. Given Xi and Putin's recent declaration that the friendship between the two countries “has no limits” there can be no doubt that both paper and party – for all their criticisms of Putin's tactics and timing – hope that the invasion succeeds.

And despite the widely reported failures and incompetence of the Russian military, the *Morning Star*'s Nick Wright (March 24) remains in breathless awe of “a trained military force, equipped with armour, superior communications and effective air support.” Presumably, Wright is one of the people within the CPB who are urging open support for Russia in place of the waffle about “peace” and “trade”. □

Jovan Divjak, 1937-2021

By Sacha Ismail

A year ago, on 8 April 2021, former Bosnian general Jovan Divjak died aged 84. He should be remembered.

2022 is thirty years since the start of the [Bosnian War](#). Between 1992 and 1995 the newly independent ex-Yugoslav republic defended itself against Serbia and Bosnian Serb nationalist militias. Tens of thousands of civilians were killed, the great majority of them Bosniacs (Bosnian Muslims).

Since the 1995 Dayton agreement, Bosnia has had a fragile and divided peace. Now Serb nationalists are threatening secession, raising fears of a new war.

Divjak was one of Bosnia's top generals during the 1990s war, for a period deputy head of the army and responsible for defence of the capital Sarajevo against the Serbian attack that began its four-year siege. *Divjak was himself a Serb.*

He vividly symbolised the fact that, despite the claims of the SWP and others, the war was not symmetrical. Multi-ethnic Bosnia fought to defend itself against a vicious ethnonationalist [attack](#); many Serbs (and Croats and others) took part in its political and military struggle.

In 1991, on the eve of war, seeing the imminent Serb-nationalist assault, Yugoslav army officer Divjak distributed weapons to Bosnian police so

they could defend their communities. Court-martialled and sentenced to prison, he defected to the new Bosnian army. Suspicious of his motives, the Bosnian authorities arrested him and held him in prison for month. On his release, he was promoted rapidly.

Senior officers in the Bosnian Serb nationalist army regarded Divjak as a traitor – because he was a Serb. On one occasion a Serb nationalist general said he would refuse to negotiate with Divjak unless he “admitted” he had converted to Islam; Divjak replied he would refuse to negotiate unless the general came down from the trees.

During the course of the war

the Bosnian government also shifted in a more nationalist and Muslim-sectarian direction, though still nothing like its Serb nationalist attackers. The proportion of non-Bosniacs in the army fell and non-Bosnian officers, including Divjak, found themselves sidelined. Under assault, Bosnian society became less cosmopolitan and more religious. While criticising this drift, Divjak continued to proclaim pride in his decision to defend Bosnia.

In 2011 the Serbian government tried to extradite him for an attack on an army column retreating from Sarajevo early in the war – despite actual video footage showing Divjak jumping onto an enemy tank and shouting “Don't shoot!”

(The International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia had already ruled there were no grounds for prosecution.)

He was famous for *not* using his former military position to get rich, and after the war devoted himself to social and humanitarian projects. As far as I can tell he was a liberal, though he did quote Marx (against religion as a tool of political reaction) in one of his last interviews.

In a world where many forms of ethnic and religious sectarianism run riot, the courageous liberalism of Jovan Divjak can provide inspiration for socialists' fightback. □

Rana Ayyub barred from leaving India

By Sacha Ismail

Indian journalist Rana Ayyub, one of the most resolute and high-profile exposers of Narendra Modi's far-right government and the Hindu nationalist movement it serves, has now been barred from leaving the country.

Last week she was due to fly to London to speak at an event about... the targeting of journalists in India. This event had been widely publicised and her travel plans long fixed, but immigration officials at the airport in Mumbai prevented her from boarding.

The official reason, nonsense even in its own terms, is an investigation into accusations of money-laundering. Literally just after being barred from her flight, Ayyub received an email summoning her to a new meeting over the charges.

The money-laundering charade is part of a much wider campaign of harassment against her – not limited to official chicanery, but including a stream of death and rape threats from far-right Hindu nationalists.

In February the UN “special rapporteurs” for freedom of expression and

for human rights defenders [spoke out](#) formally about the “relentless misogynistic and sectarian attacks” against Ayyub on social media, their connections to judicial harassment and the Modi regime's complicity.

She has a consistent and remarkable record of using her journalistic skills to defend human rights, those of India's Muslims and women in particular, and of exposing the Hindu right's war against them.

Ayyub's 2016 book *Gujarat Files* exposed the complicity of BJP officials and politicians in the anti-Muslim [po-](#)

[groms](#) which killed thousands in 2002.

At the end of February left-wing Labour women MPs of colour headed an international [statement](#) sounding the alarm about the growing persecution of Muslims in India, and Muslim women in particular. They argued that India may be “on the brink of repeating the Gujarat ‘experiment’ on a much bigger scale”.

As part of magnifying this alarm, the UK labour movement should raise its voice in defence of Rana Ayyub. □

Council clamps down on “semi-nudity”



**Women's
Fightback**

By Katy Dollar

The future of London's sex-positive, LGBTQ+-friendly parties Klub Verboten and Crossbreed is at risk. London Borough of Tower Hamlets contacted their regular venues, E1 and Colour Factory, challenging their right to host parties with nudity or semi-nudity under their current licence.

Klub Verboten released a statement on Instagram: “In this day and age, the council are seeking to dictate to informed, self-regulating adults what they can and, crucially, what they can't wear.” They challenged the council, asking: “Is the sight of an ankle, bare shoulders, buttocks, cleavage and bare

chest a matter of legitimate public interest?”

A spokesperson for Tower Hamlets Council sent this comment to local newspaper *Resident Advisor*.

“[E1] is in a residential area and has a premises licence which allows for alcohol and entertainment. It does not have a sexual entertainment licence or a licence that would allow for nudity or partial nudity. We understand Klub Verboten is hosted by this venue and therefore what events take place in its premises has to be decided by the venue in line with its licence.”

The venues claim morality clauses quoted by the Council prohibiting nudity and public nudity are conditions on performers not guests at the event. There are no performers or performances of this kind at Klub Verboten. “This condition isn't about what people are wearing when they come into the event,” one of the organisers said.

“What am I meant to do? Check people's gender at the door and ask them, ‘are you a man or a woman?’ Are you allowed to cover your nipples or not?’ That's not up to me to check, although it's been pushed to be up to me.”

It is not an offence to be nude in public in England and Wales, though it may become an offence if it can be proven that it occurred with the intention of harassment or causing alarm and distress. So far the Council has not confirmed what constitutes “semi-nudity”. A campaign by organisers encourages guests to email Tower Hamlets with detailed descriptions of their planned dress and undress and ask if it qualifies.

Since the mid-2000s there has been a marked decline in the number of LGBTQ+ venues in London, often driven by rising rents due to gentrification and property speculation. Now more spaces are under threat as councils use moralistic anti-sex licensing

clauses. Klub Verboten point out that the Boudoir Club, a swingers' club in Tower Hamlets aimed at a straighter crowd, has not faced the same issues.

Both Verboten and Crossbreed say they invest heavily in ensuring a safe environment at their nights, including heavy vetting of prospective guests, strict door policies, bouncers licensed by the SIA (Security Industry Authority), and externally trained safeguarding teams who oversee and monitor all activity at the events. This is arguably more than your typical London club.

Local government licensing should be based on public safety, not moral panics over consensual adult relationships. There is clearly a demand for these club nights, especially with young queer people. Councils should support diverse and safe nightlife that caters to different interests. □

Why we oppose NATO

By Chris Reynolds

Why does our suggested wording on Ukraine (bit.ly/mo-pe) say “we oppose NATO”, alongside saying that the war is between Ukraine, fighting for its freedom, and Russian imperialism, and not driven by NATO efforts to do down Russia?

NATO was set up because West European governments and the USA feared Stalin's USSR expanding its range of conquest in Europe to the west of the lines of 1945.

The NATO governments did not think it worth the risk to push back the USSR from those 1945 lines, and did not intervene when the USSR ordered invasions of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 to crush movements which might threaten Russian control.

They did set up secret paramilitary networks for resistance in the event of Russian invasion, which have been credibly accused of links to far-right and neo-fascist violence, for instance in Italy in the 1970s.

NATO gave no support to France in its Algerian war or the USA in its Vietnam war or its 2003 invasion of Iraq.

Such alliances are designed to freeze power-balances

and forestall wars. But they conserve those balances between powers which they find good, or at least not the worth the risk of trying to improve by war. They forestall wars, when they do, by telling powers that opportunistically essaying conquest will bring war with a large alliance, not just with a small victim-nation.

Thus the start of World War 1. On 28 June Serb nationalists assassinated the crown prince of the Austro-Hungarian empire which then ruled large parts of what would become Yugoslavia.

To conserve its imperial outreach, Austro-Hungary threatened Serbia, checked its long-time ally Germany would back it, then invaded Serbia on 28 July. Russia, part of a rival British-French-Russian alliance, saw that as a threat to its influence in the Balkans, and mobilised on 31 July.

Germany, seeing itself as facing war from Russia, France, and Britain, decided to move fast, declaring war on Russia (1 August) and France (3 August), and threatening Belgium. That brought Britain into the war (4 August).

The alliances had negotiated small conflicts. But they also meant that beyond a

threshold, clashes would escalate into a world war between alliances, with each alliance seeing itself as primarily defending what it already had.

Neither a better system of big-power alliances (the UN and League of Nations aimed to be that), nor an imaginary set-up with no alliances, will block the threat of escalating wars. Only socialist change can do that. But we oppose the powers that make up NATO, and warn against the threat which capitalist alliances to freeze status-quo relations always pose. □

Eric Lee's column

Eric Lee, the founder editor of Labourstart, is taking a short break from the regular personal-opinion column which he writes in *Solidarity*. He has been invited to spend a month in Georgia by the Writers' House in Tbilisi. He will be researching his next book – about the 1924 uprising against Russian rule in that country. Eric will resume writing for *Solidarity* upon his return. □

Tory u-turn throws trans people under bus

By Simon Nelson

The government's U-turn and then evasion on conversion therapy is another blow to trans equality. Within the same day the government claimed that conversion therapy could be tackled under existing legislation, and then, in an about-face, confirmed it would ban the practice but only for so-called “gay conversion”.

NHS England describes conversion therapy as any “therapeutic approach or view that assumes one sexual orientation or gender identity is innately preferable to another, and attempts to change someone's sexual orientation or gender identity on that basis”. More than 50% of these “therapies” are carried out by religious groups.

The Tories' exclusion of trans people from its planned legislation comes despite trans people, these days, being more likely to be pushed into harmful conversion “therapies” or pressured into rejecting their trans identity. Nearly 70% of LGBTQ+ people who were pushed into conversion therapy experienced suicidal thoughts. Trans people, particularly young people, are already at an increased risk.

It appears this is yet another

victory for the LGB Alliance. They have celebrated the announcement. Documents made available to *Open Democracy* show the group met with equalities minister Kemi Badenoch to argue against including trans people.

What really concerns the LGB Alliance is under-18s being given access to trans healthcare, the denial of which often leads to irreparable harm to trans young people.

Badenoch had already met with Keira Bell and their lawyer Paul Conrathe, an anti-abortion activist and opponent of equal rights for LGBT people.

Stonewall CEO Nancy Kelley said: “After years of delay, in which LGBTQIA+ people across the UK have continued to suffer as a consequence of conversion practices, it is devastating that the UK government is breaking its promise to implement an inclusive ban that protects all our communities from abuse. Trans people are nearly twice as likely to be targeted by conversion practices and any ban that is not trans-inclusive abandons those that are most at risk”.

Argentina, Uruguay, Ecuador, Chile, India, Canada, France, New Zealand, and many regions in federal states have [banned](#) conversion therapy. □

Target must be converting from capitalism



Environment

By Stuart Jordan

The April rebellion of Extinction Rebellion (XR) started with blockades at oil refineries from 1 April, and will move on to London on 9 April.

It demands that the UK government ends all fossil-fuel investments immediately.

XR is still the most visible face of environmentalism and a rallying point for people alarmed at the blithe indifference of capitalist society to global heating and ecological breakdown.

However, tactically, XR is misdirecting the good instinct to do something, and courage and persistence of activists, into performative stunts rather than effective activism.

Most XR activists realise that climate change and ecological breakdown are due to an economic system that prioritises profit over people and planet. But capitalism cannot be beaten by simply filling jails with environmental activists. The London action offers options to people who do not want to seek arrest, but we need ongoing environmental activism linked into the labour movement as well as street protests done as adjuncts to tactics seeking arrests.

Multiplying arrests may help “raise awareness”. But awareness of what? Very few people now deny anthropogenic climate change, not even the fossil-capital-backed denialist outfits. The problem is a lack of effective solutions. Denialist outfits now ply their trade by promoting false solutions, such as individual lifestyle choices. Deliberately getting yourself arrested, and taken out

of ongoing activity for a while, is also a false solution.

The first flurry of the rebellion has included blockades of oil refineries. The way they’re done, they risk antagonising workers we want to convince.

On 8 April, 24 April and 6 May workers at the Fawley oil refinery near Southampton are on strike over pay. Over these three strike days, oil workers will prevent more CO2 emissions than all the disruptions that take place during the rebellion. If these workers and others like them can be convinced of the urgency of the climate and ecological emergency and of class struggle strategies to address that emergency and convert economic life, then real change becomes possible.

The newly formed XR Trade Union group will be going to picket lines to speak to workers about a worker-led just transition, and taking solidarity action. A liveable future means the Fawley oil refinery and many workplaces like it need to be wound down as quickly as possible. We need a united labour movement campaign to guarantee jobs, retraining, and income for fossil-fuel workers.

There is only one social movement that has the potential power and interest to halt climate change and organise human society on an ecologically sound basis: the workers’ movement. Climate change will be stopped when wage workers stop following their bosses’ ecocidal orders and organise economic life to serve human and ecological need.

A few hundred arrests this April will not trouble the capitalist class; the beginnings of a new coalition between environmentalists and organised labour will.

In the rush to find new non-Russian

sources of energy, a section of the bourgeoisie want to increase fossil-fuel exploration. Shell and the UK government have expressed renewed interest in exploiting the Cambo oil field.

Expanding fossil-fuel use is the worst option, and not a quick fix anyway. New gas and oil exploration will not plug the gap left by Russian fossil fuels. The government’s own Climate Change Commission says it will take 26 years before new oil fields produce any useable hydrocarbons. New fracking operations will take a decade to set up.

Nuclear power is lower-carbon, but big new nuclear power stations, like Sizewell C, will take over a decade to build. Even Small Modular Reactors will take two years, and they are as yet an experimental technology. Extending the life of current nuclear power stations, or in Germany reopening mothballed nuclear power stations, could help short term, but is limited.

Wind and solar technology can provide electricity much quicker. According to the European Wind Energy Association a 10 MW onshore wind farm can easily be built in two months. A 2 MW solar farm can be built in three months.

But 2015 changes to planning regulations made onshore wind turbines almost impossible to build. We need to force changes to these rules and encouraging community-led energy conversion.

A shift to low-emissions energy is



vital, but the rush to meet an unquestioned “energy demand” obscures an important distinction between the “energy services” needed to heat homes, keep the lights on, provide for essential transport and manufacturing, etc., and the energy required to fuel unchained capital accumulation.

As Ben Tausz points out in [Solidarity 630](#), a capitalist shift to solar power will run up against problems of resource depletion and ecological degradation. And spiralling demand for balsa wood for wind turbines is driving deforestation of the Amazon. Wind turbine blades, made from hard to recycle composites, end their working lives leaching toxic chemicals into landfill. These are not in fact “renewable” technologies.

Capitalist growth requires ever increasing energy and material throughput, maximising waste. With the [Jevons paradox](#), under capitalism, energy efficiency gains often produce increased energy demand. We need to reorganise provision of basic needs with diminishing energy inputs, through home insulation, increased efficiency in industrial processes and transport, and similar efforts.

The so-called “energy crisis”, like the “climate crisis”, is a crisis of social organisation. □

More debate on the DSA



Letter

From Ben Tausz – “Barry Finger ([Solidarity 630](#)), while purporting to defend Eric Lee’s argument, actually makes a quite different one. He says the problem with DSA-USA is around a ‘relentless barrage of language, loyalty stress tests and the threats of suspension or expulsion’ based on

a particular, de-classified form of intersectionality politics.” [bit.ly/crass-s](#)

From Martin Thomas – “I doubt Barry Finger’s implied view ([Solidarity 630](#)) that I overestimate how good the ex-ISOers in the DSA-USA are. My argument is that many DSA people lack access to political education through reading, discussing, and comparing more-or-less worked-out answers (which inevitably come from groups with prior ‘agendas’): [bit.ly/2-acc](#) □

Far right calls off 9 April march

By Zack Muddle

The far-right “For Britain” organisation was forced to cancel a racist demonstration planned for 9 April in Bristol, citing fears of “Antifa... plotting to disrupt”.

The organisation, which claims Tommy Robinson as a member, planned a rally in support of slave-trader Edward Colston, and against

Black Lives Matter. Many left groups were mobilising to prevent them marching, and the fascists complained that the police had not guaranteed them the support they need.

The police have protected fascist protests, kettling anti-fascists, in the recent past, but it looks like this time the numbers willing to directly confront the fascists were too many. Success! □

Don't back arms for Ukraine



Letter

I was astonished by your editorial of 30/3/2022. How can any socialist support war in Europe and with the death and destruction that takes place? Demanding the Western powers give even more military and financial support to Ukraine will simply prolong and escalate this tragic conflict causing even more death and destruction, plus the attendant risks of unintended consequences, especially as there are three nuclear powers involved, Russia directly, and the US and UK indirectly actively supporting the opposing side.

At the time of writing, it appears President Zelensky is now ceding that Ukraine should be formally neutral and keep out of aggressive western military alliances. That is good. That doesn't weaken or undermine the sovereignty of Ukraine but is to exercise it responsibly in a modern, complex, dangerous world. There remains a second significant issue, which I suspect was the major reason for the Russian intervention, namely the slow-burn, ongoing

war against the Russian speaking and ethnic Russian populations, mainly in the East of Ukraine.

That ongoing war since 2014 has claimed around 14,000 lives, the vast majority Russian speaking citizens and it this, plus little things like the banning of the Russian language in education, media and everyday life, which has really infuriated, upset and traumatised those Russians in Russia proper who do support the war.

Yes, Ukraine is a genuine nation and should have full rights to independence, sovereignty and self-determination in a modern Europe. But as with individuals, rights are always relative, never absolute, and always come with responsibilities. The current Ukraine-Russia border was pretty arbitrary and fairly meaningless in the context of all being part of a large multinational multi-ethnic USSR. The Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic did include land and peoples who were Russian rather than Ukrainian. These differences have, unfortunately but a reality, been antagonised and sharply exacerbated since the collapse of the USSR and especially since the events of 2014.

Ukraine should have full rights to

independence and self-determination and to live in peace and security. So should the Russian speaking and ethnic Russian populations who are a majority in the east and south. Perhaps this could have been possible within a federated Ukraine but now that option no longer exists, if it ever did. Certainly, the present Ukrainian state has done nothing to protect those populations; quite the reverse, the front line paramilitary and military forces doing the actual killing and destroying in the Donbass have been actively backed by the Ukrainian state.

The peoples of the Donbass should have their rights and to self determination equally guaranteed and protected. They may choose to remain part of Ukraine or for some other solution.

Socialists should be calling for a complete and comprehensive ceasefire by all military and paramilitary forces – not the unilateral arming of one side and escalation of war – and a negotiated peace and democratic settlement which respects and addresses the genuine security concerns of all parties and the rights and needs of all affected peoples. □

Andrew Northall, Kettering

Our reply: Ukraine's right to defend itself

It's not a matter of "supporting war" in Ukraine. The war is happening, because of Russia's invasion. The question is: do the Ukrainians have a right to defend themselves, or not? Without that their "rights to independence, sovereignty and self-determination", which you say you support, go up in smoke.

You say that Western support for Ukraine will "prolong" the conflict. That is true only in the sense that without weapons and other external aid Ukraine would quickly be over-run by Russia. Are you arguing it should surrender? If not, doesn't it have a right to get weapons and aid from foreign governments?

We don't want Ukraine to join NATO either. In fact, Putin's aggression against Ukraine has been a godsend to the previously struggling organisation, driving up popular support for joining it – and not just in Ukraine. (In the same way it is giving a boost to those who want to increase military spending.) Internationally, Russian defeat in Ukraine seems likely to create much better conditions for opposing NATO than Russian victory. In any case, whether or not Ukraine joins should not be decided at the point of a Russian gun.

The idea that Russia "intervened" because of the rights of Russian-speakers and ethnic-Russians in the east of Ukraine is fantastical. If that was the case, why has it tried to conquer Kyiv?

In any case, Putin has been abundantly clear: he does not believe Ukraine should exist or that it has a right to self-determination. This is rooted in a centuries-long [history](#) of Russian oppression of Ukraine and ideologies justifying it.

Yes, of course the people of eastern Ukraine should have their rights. That does not justify Russia's policy any more than the existence of the British-Irish population in the north of Ireland justifies partition, let alone a UK invasion of the Republic!

Moreover you seem to assume the "People's Republics" in Donetsk and Luhansk have strong majority support. The evidence suggests otherwise. These highly repressive gangster [regimes](#) only continue to exist because of Russian support, and they are effectively run from Russia.

I don't know where your casualty figures come from. The UN says that up to September last year civilians accounted for about 3,400 casualties out of 13,000. The great bulk of these deaths were before 2016.

You do not have to prettify or refuse to criticise Ukraine's military actions in Donbas to recognise that it was Russian intervention that began the war, resulting in so many thousands of deaths.

We oppose Ukraine's 2019 language law; but your description of it is hyperbolic. It did not "ban Russian". It made

Ukrainian the sole state language, requiring it to be used – but not necessarily exclusively – in certain public spaces. It does not apply to private "everyday life" (!) This is a bit like the claim the Ukrainian government has banned all left-wing parties, when in fact it has (wrongly) banned pro-Russia parties, a few of which claim to be left-wing.

You seem concerned to justify the motivations of chauvinist and pro-imperialist Russians who support the war, but say nothing about the millions of Russians who oppose it and the thousands arrested and repressed for taking action against it.

Yes, the peoples of Ukraine need a democratic settlement to resolve the Donbas conflict. But the Russian state, particularly under Putin, should absolutely not be regarded as a legitimate "party" to such a settlement, and particularly not one that has "genuine security concerns". For years it fuelled and exacerbated the conflict – even prior to the wider invasion. The Ukrainian government may have to negotiate a peace deal under duress; but socialists and labour movement activists around the world should focus on opposing Russia's war and solidarising with Ukrainian resistance to it. □

Sacha Ismail,
London



Don't tell us the ending



Letter

I've been enjoying the Kino Eye columns very much. It's so refreshing to hear about films we might not otherwise discover. May I make a suggestion? Perhaps it would be better not to reveal how the film ends. I do enjoy watching Mr. Kino's recommendations, but a degree of dramatic tension is lost once you already know the protagonist is going to get blown up by a mine. □

Beryl Smeaton, St Austell

I will endeavour not to

Thank you for your comment. Although, personally, knowing the ending of a film doesn't spoil it for me, I recognise I am in a minority and others have, from time to time, expressed their dislike at knowing the endings of films beforehand. I will therefore endeavour not to reveal endings in future. □

John Cunningham



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Using “anti-imperialism” to

By Sacha Ismail

Socialist Workers’ Party leader Alex Callinicos has been debating Lebanese Marxist Gilbert Achcar, a supporter of the Fourth International and the Anti-Capitalist Resistance group in the UK, about the war in Ukraine.

On 27 March *Socialist Worker* published a long [piece](#) by Callinicos arguing that an “understanding of capitalist imperialism as involving a system of interstate rivalry is completely missing from Achcar’s analysis” and criticising him for arguing that socialists should support Ukraine, including by supporting the provision of weapons by Western governments.

On 30 March the SW website [published](#) a reply from Achcar and a further reply from Callinicos. Achcar does a good job, but there is more to say.

Callinicos’ original article defines the war as “an ongoing battle between imperialist rivals, driving forward by capitalist competition”. In short, and at one point quite explicitly, he defines it as like World War One. That started from threats from Austria to Serbia’s self-determination, but immediately became a general war between big powers for the redivision of the world, with Serbia’s rights unavoidably secondary to its main drivers.

His arguments are laced throughout with disingenuousness and evasion. Right at the start, objecting to mainstream bourgeois narratives depicting a conflict between “democracy” and “authoritarianism”, he cites “enthusiastic” support for Ukraine from “the

far right government in Poland” while claiming that India, which “remains a multi-party democracy” despite Modi, supports Russia. In fact India abstained in the pivotal UN vote; Poland is also a “multi-party democracy”; and India has arguably travelled even further down the road to far-right authoritarianism than Poland.

Necessary

Callinicos suggests that the necessary “theoretical frameworks for understanding the conflict” are provided by “the idea of imperialism” – “but it’s important to be clear what we mean by imperialism”.

He suggests that Russia’s imperialism in Ukraine and elsewhere, “intent on restoring the old Tsarist Empire that was destroyed by the Russian Revolution” is part of a “phenomenon that spans historical eras... the way in which powerful states dominate, conquer and exploit neighbouring societies”.

But “capitalist imperialism isn’t just big states bullying and conquering smaller states – though there is plenty of that. It’s a global system of inter-capitalist competition. Just as before the First World War, today imperialism means geopolitical competition against the background of global economic integration.” He highlights alliances and conflicts between what he calls the six leading imperialist powers – US, China, Russia, France, Britain and Germany – and the first three in particular.

“The power of the antagonists”, says Callinicos, “depends on their position in the capitalist world economy”.

Presumably Germany, and not for instance India, has been included in the list to underscore the idea of capitalist economic power, as well as to nod towards Western, or European, or NATO dominance. But Japan’s GDP is higher than Germany’s; Russia’s is lower than those of not only all the aforementioned, but also Italy, Canada and South Korea! No doubt various other economic statistics could illustrate the same problem. Some big powers, like Russia under the Tsars, under Stalin, and under Putin, are so by military clout; others, like Japan, have economic clout with relatively small military assets.

“Just before the First World War”, the imperialism shaped by inter-capitalist competition in that period was primarily a matter of “big states bullying and conquering”, i.e. colonial imperialism (or sometimes semi-colonial, as in the tussles of the big powers over the decaying Ottoman Empire) in a world which was “already divided”, so, largely, each empire could gain only by taking from another. The dominant forms of imperialism today, a sort of

“imperialism of free trade”, though also shaped by capitalist competition, are very different. The USA and Germany do not need East European states to join NATO in order to have investment and trade links. The USA is not trying to conquer Ukraine militarily because otherwise it will lose investment and trade openings there. Putin’s Russia resorts to old-style conquest-imperialism because it is economically weaker, rather as Portugal held on to its African colonies after other European powers had released theirs because it was economically weaker.

As Lenin [argued](#): “There is not, nor can there be, such a thing as a ‘negative’ [socialist] slogan that serves only to ‘sharpen proletarian consciousness against imperialism’ without at the same time offering a positive answer to the question of how [socialism] will solve the problem when it assumes power. A ‘negative’ slogan unconnected with a definite positive solution will not sharpen, but dull, consciousness, for such a slogan is a hollow phrase, meaningless declamation”. The positive working-class answer is self-determination of nations, and socialist revolution to end the economic disadvantage of weaker nations imposed by market relations even when they are politically independent.

Objects

But no. Callinicos objects to Achcar drawing out the distinction – between conquest-imperialism and economic domination through market relations – to support Ukraine, on the grounds that “the Western imperialist powers are instrumentalising the Ukrainian national struggle against Russian imperialism for their own interests”, as if between the two outcomes, Ukraine being conquered militarily by Russia, and Ukraine winning its freedom but still suffering the cruelties of the capitalist world market, there is nothing to choose. He claims, falsely, that Achcar “focuses exclusively on the struggle between Ukraine and Russia”. In fact Callinicos largely sinks this struggle into wider tensions and conflicts.

The vague phrasing about “instrumentalising” begs many questions. After all big capitalist powers “instrumentalise” everything they can for their own interests – but in a range of widely varying ways.

In his long article, Callinicos does not answer Achcar’s important objection that “if any war where each side is supported by an imperialist rival were called an inter-imperialist war, then all the wars of our time would be inter-imperialist, since as a rule, it is enough for one of the rival imperialisms to support one side for the other to support the

opposite side.”

(In his later reply, in another example of disingenuousness, he answers it by inaccurately claiming that Achcar defines an inter-imperialist war as “one where both sides are seeking to conquer each other’s territory”, i.e. core territory as distinct from spheres of domination, in which case even World War One would not be “inter-imperialist”).

Support

Callinicos cites support by the US and its allies for the Islamist resistance to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan after 1979, rightly characterising this as part of the US-led bloc’s Cold War struggle against the USSR. This does not prove what he seems to think it does. The wider international alignments and interventions notwithstanding, wasn’t it correct to specifically denounce and oppose the Russian invasion and occupation of Afghanistan?

Any hesitation or qualifications to positive socialist support for the Afghan “resistance” concerned its extreme-right politics and sectarian characteristics, rooted in various ethnic-religious *minorities* in Afghanistan and murderously opposed to other minorities. Neither of those kind of problems is anywhere near decisive in Ukraine.

Let us take another example, important but rarely discussed on the British left. The Bangladeshi “Liberation War” of 1971 was simultaneously a classic anti-colonial uprising, against Pakistan, and a cockpit for inter-imperialist conflict and manoeuvring. (Although there was plenty to object to in the Bengali liberation movement, including elements of ethnic sectarianism, it was in broad sweep progressive.) Right from the start India energetically supported the Bengalis’ armed struggle, for a range of reasons but including to strike a blow at its long-standing enemy Pakistan. In the end, Bangladesh became independent only when India intervened *directly* by invading East Bengal and crushing the Pakistani army.

The US, China and many other states supported Pakistan; the USSR supported India and the Bengalis. Right at the end of the war the two main Cold War powers both sent ships to the Bay of Bengal. We can speculate what might have happened if Pakistan had not quickly surrendered to India.

In important (not all) respects Ukraine’s “liberation war” is less intertwined with inter-imperialist rivalry than Bangladesh’s was. Will the SWP now argue that it was wrong for socialists to support Bangladesh?

Should Indian socialists have opposed their country’s government arm-

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to avoid siding with Ukraine

ing the East Bengali fighters? Callinicos is very clear that he opposes Western governments sending weapons to Ukraine, virtually concluding his second reply to Achcar with opposition not only to "sanctions" of all sorts but also "Nato arms shipments".

To add to the confusion, the same paragraph agrees that the current conflict is also "a war of national defence on Ukraine's part", which "requires us to support the Ukrainians' national

rights". In his first article too, Callinicos says that "it would indeed be good if the Ukrainian people were able to drive out the Russian invaders". How? With placards and shouting, but no weapons? Elsewhere SWPers have surreally suggested that street protests are an alternative to Ukrainian military action against the Russian army. Callinicos does not seem to think that.

To finesse this point, the SWP confers magical powers on NATO weap-

ons shipments, as if they, rather than numerous connections between the Ukrainian government and ruling class and Western governments and ruling classes, are central to Western imperialist influence in Ukraine.

Callinicos objects to Achcar arguing that a Russian victory in Ukraine will boost the most militaristic elements in Western states and reinforce NATO – as indeed the invasion of Ukraine already has – while a Russian defeat

would create "better conditions for our battle for general disarmament and the dissolution of Nato".

Disingenuousness again: if the Ukrainians won, Callinicos asks, would "the US and its allies react by disarming and dissolving Nato? Of course they wouldn't." But this is obviously not what Achcar argued. □

The "West" that backs Putin

By Tom Harrison

During Ronald Regan's presidency, the Republican Party knew where it stood with Russia. It was the "Evil Empire", home of godless communism. The GOP were its only true opponents.

In the years following collapse of the Soviet Union, an element of confusion entered into the thinking of the American right on Russia. The state-run economy had been privatised and increasingly controlled by oligarchs. Additionally, the vast sums of money wealthy individuals acquired from pillaging the assets of the Russian people could be spirited abroad "to win friends and influence people".

Trump's businesses were among many to benefit from massive injections of cash from Russian oligarchs. The notorious example in his case was the sale of a Florida mansion to Dmitry Rybolovlev which netted Trump a \$54 million profit. Trump's one time lawyer, Michael Cohen, wrote that oligarchs like Rybolovlev "are just fronts for Putin. He puts them into wealth to invest his money.... Trump was convinced the real buyer of the house was Vladimir Putin."

American real estate has in effect become a laundromat for Putin's dirty money, and the Biden administration will have great difficulty applying sanctions because ownership of many assets are heavily disguised. It is estimated that \$2.3 billion has been laundered through US real estate in the last five years. In all probab-

ity the sum is certainly much higher.

Money is not the only aspect of Putin attractive to the Western far right. They have come to realise that they stand on the same ideological ground in detesting "the liberal values of the decadent west". Putin is "anti woke." Homophobia and opposition to immigration and diverse societies are key elements. Many on the far right believe Putin is conducting a "crusade" in defence of "white civilisation".

Ann Coulter, a right wing pundit frequently on TV, [tweeted](#): "In twenty years, Russia will be the only country recognisably European." Notorious KKK leader David Duke has also regarded Russia as "key to white survival." Twenty per cent of the population in the Russian Federation are not ethnic Russians, and over a hundred different languages are spoken there, but to Duke and Coulter it remains a "pure" redoubt. While some on the left see Putin as at least countering "the West", those most keen on the supremacy of that "West" see Putin as an ally.

Tropes

Familiar tropes about "globalism", "white genocide" and "the Great Replacement" inevitably lead to the white supremacist invocation of number one hate figure George Soros. "If evil George is supporting U (Ukraine) then the opposite is the right thing to do," said a leading Michigan Republican. Flowing from this are antisemitic conspiracy theories about what BNP leader Nick Griffin described as "the crim-

inal/Zionist regime in Kiev" which also easily dovetail into the fruitcake world of QAnon. Zelensky, for example, has been accused of "masterminding" human trafficking rings in Ukraine.

The Internet Research Agency, aka Glavset, a "troll farm", is expert in promoting such conspiracy theories on social media for the Putin regime, the better to enable useful idiots to pick up and run with them. One such success of theirs is the false claim that the Biden administration is funding secret bio-labs in Ukraine. Chief among those promoting this misinformation is the most popular host on Fox News, Tucker Carlson.

Carlson has proved a useful tool for Putin propaganda, so much so that the Russian government has instructed its now completely state-controlled news media to show clips from his show as much as possible. Satirists have dubbed Carlson "Tuckio Rose", after "Tokyo Rose", a Japanese American who broadcast pro Axis propaganda from Japan during World War 2. Prior to the invasion, Carlson had been denouncing Ukraine as a puppet state of the USA, a charge not dissimilar to that made by some who consider themselves on the political left.

Trump's utterances on the situation have mostly been shambolic nonsense. The invasion was motivated by "a lot of love" for the old USSR. Putin wants to put Russia "back the way it was", although "it actually didn't work very well." Putin is "smart", but now he has "made a big mistake." Such is

the drivel from someone who might once again become US President.

Europe, closer to the war, has proved a more difficult environment for politicians on the far right. French fascist Marine Le Pen has tried to call back a million campaign leaflets featuring a photo of her with Putin, but the cost is a small dent in the €11 million loan she's had from Moscow to finance her election campaign.

The invasion has apparently "partially changed her opinion of Putin", but the presumably positive attributes she thinks he retains remain unspecified. Her tack is now is to oppose sanctions against his regime in the name of 'defending French people's spending power.

Matteo Salvini, the far right Lega leader in Italy, was fond of parading himself in T-shirts depicting Putin. His party sought millions of euros in covert funding in the run up to the 2019 European election when he dubbed Putin "the best statesman currently on earth."

In a fake attempt to show solidarity with Ukraine, Salvini went to Przemyśl in Poland to show sympathy for refugees fleeing the war. The mayor of that town handed Salvini a Putin T-shirt and told him to go to the border "to see what your friend Putin has done." Salvini's arse was truly served up on a plate!

Nigel Farage has said Putin is the world leader he most admires. We do not know the extent to which Farage and his pal Aaron Banks got help from the Putin regime during the 2016 referendum, but they

certainly were in contact. A full disclosure of Kremlin interference has been blocked by the Johnson government.

Farage

Unsurprisingly Farage blames the Ukraine situation on the European Union. Ukraine it "provoked" Russia by wanting to join rightly or wrongly an alliance it believed would make it more prosperous. The Farage solution to the whole situation is...wait for it...a referendum! People in areas occupied by the Russian army can "choose" between being in Russia or Ukraine. We all know what such an outcome will be, under Russian guns.

In 2015, the International Russian Conservative Forum held a conference in St Petersburg where speakers railed against the "Nazi fascists in the EU," and denounced Obama as "a feminised Nazi." One of their number was Roberto Fiore, who'd signed an "anti-fascist memorandum" justifying Putin's annexation of Crimea.

He didn't find it derogatory to be called a fascist himself, however. He'd previously been on the run in the 1980s to avoid terrorist charges in Italy. In Britain he became a pal of Nick Griffin (former leader of the British National Party, then British Unity Party, and they both went to the forum in Russia.

Griffin hoped that the event would open up the moneybags for outfits such as his. "If someone offered you a pot of money, would you take it?" he asked. □

China, Covid, and ultra-lockdowns

By Chan Ying

Over 25 million people in Shanghai are in ultra-lockdown over Omicron. Having seen the loss of life in Hong Kong, where after two years of “Zero Covid” policies, in one month over 7,700 people out of 7 million have died from Omicron, Shanghai has made a dramatic U-turn.

As recently as 26 March, as the city recorded 2,269 new coronavirus cases, Shanghai city leaders still declared that it would not lock down the city. According to Hong Kong’s *South China Morning Post*, Wu Fan, an expert member of Shanghai’s Covid-19 response task force stated:

“No, we can’t, because Shanghai is not only home to Shanghai residents. It plays an important role in national economic and social development and even affects the global economy.

“If the city came to a complete stop, there would be a lot of international cargo left floating on the East China Sea, which would have an impact on the national and global economy. All Shanghai citizens should have such a big picture view.”

As China’s most prosperous city and a sophisticated metropolis, Shanghai has greater resources than other areas, and local officials had much pride in how they had kept previous waves of Covid at bay. With the Omicron outbreak, the city tried a fine-tuned neighbourhood grid system to track and isolate those infected, and avoid the mass lockdowns in other large cities like Xi’an, and currently in the province of Jilin, the main tactic in China’s policy hitherto (now renamed “dynamic Zero Covid”).

By 30 March, the city leaders surprised inhabitants by a rapid decision to divide the city into two. It isolating its eastern half, Pudong for four days for mass testing, and then the other half, Puxi four days later. The plan is that all those infected, including those without symptoms, are put into hospitals or special quarantine camps.

Putin’s pet trade union

The FNPR union confederation in Russia is not just pro-Putin. Originating from the state “unions” under Stalin and its successor, it acquired a little autonomy in the Yeltsin 1990s, but since then has reverted to type, campaigns more as an auxiliary to Putin than to push to improve workers’ conditions, and depends on an inherited property empire and government contracts for its income. Read the story at bit.ly/fnpr □

A number of key factories, such as the Volkswagen and Tesla plants were shut down. The stock exchange, fourth largest in the world after New York, London and Hong Kong, remained open through keeping key staff in a “closed loop” (i.e. locked into their work 24 hours a day).

The data from Pudong showed very large numbers of infections, leading the authorities to maintain restrictions indefinitely, as Puxi is put through mass testing.

Chinese President Xi Jinping has staked his personal prestige and political authority on the success of the zero-Covid policy. Asserting that China is the only country in the world to have conquered Covid is a cornerstone of his claimed legacy and his launchpad for extending his term of office.

Indeed, since the initial outbreak in Wuhan and up to now, the death rates to Covid in China has been several orders of magnitude lower than in every other part of the world, from the USA and UK to Russia, India and other populous countries. Even if *The Economist* is right in its [calculation](#) that China has underestimated its Covid deaths by a factor of many dozens, the death figures are relatively low. A fierce and efficient police state has enabled ultra-lockdowns much tighter than in other countries, and kept borders rigidly closed.

However, Omicron’s ability to spread rapidly in a population where relatively few have immunity from previous infection, many elderly people are not vaccinated, and the vaccination relies only on Chinese-made vaccines (which experience in Chile and the Seychelles suggest are less effective) has created turmoil in China, has made heavy repression necessary to blot out discontent and protests. (It is difficult to tell, but most journalists suggest that the heavy police action to curb Covid has been fairly widely supported or accepted until now).

Many provincial party “cadres” have been sacked for failing to contain Omicron, and so the choice for local leaders is to deny or minimise the spread (if they can), or to go for ultra-lockdown. In Shanghai, already, there have been distressing cases of people needing dialysis and other urgent medical attention being faced with closed hospitals.

While 90 per cent of Hongkongers aged 60 to 69, as well as over 80 per cent of those aged 70 to 79, had received at least one vaccine dose, only about 60 per cent of people aged 80 or above had done so. More than 90 per cent of the 7,732 deaths recorded during the pandemic’s fifth wave in Hong Kong were patients aged 60 or above. The Chief Executive Carrie Lam announced on 11 March that over 90% of the people dying of Covid were not



fully vaccinated.

In China as in Hong Kong, the elderly have been vaccine-hesitant, partly because official advice was at first that the vaccines were unsafe for over-60s. In Hong Kong, it was too late for many elderly people to get vaccinated as Omicron spread: either they had already become infected, or they were too frail from other illnesses.

Xi’s regime is seeking to maintain “stability” until this autumn’s Chinese Communist Party Congress, which is expected to endorse him to continue as the Party’s General Secretary and the country’s President for a third five-year term. So it looks like the regime will keep trying to control Covid by police measures at least until then, rejecting the shifts away from “zero-Covid” by governments with lighter policing power like New Zealand and Australia.

After decades of chaos up to Mao’s death in 1976, the Chinese Communist Party was led by Deng Xiaoping, who introduced a protocol that no senior party leader should ever again hold formal office for more than two five-year terms, or go beyond a retirement age of 70. De facto he retained ultimate control after his own “retirement”, and displayed his iron fist by crushing the Tiananmen students and workers in 1989, but Deng did establish a collective leadership and succession planning framework. The next two party leaders each served a ten year term before Xi came into office in 2012.

Xi, however, has brushed aside factional opponents very effectively and seems intent never to relinquish power, to become an equal to Mao and Deng.

As supreme leader, Xi has been making long term strategic plans at home and abroad to sustain China’s challenge to rival US imperialism – the Belt and Road initiative, the summer and winter Olympics, the Made in China 2025 – as well as deal with his factional opponents. However, even his Stalinist apparatus cannot blot out Covid and the war in Ukraine.

Omicron, on top of economic and political headwinds from Xi’s stance

over the war in Ukraine, is adversely affecting China’s already-stalling development as it struggles against bad debt bubbles at home, setbacks in its wrestling match against US imperialism, and a demographic time-bomb of an aging population combined with a rapidly falling birth rate.

The CCP has bought people’s compliance thus far with economic growth. But the 10% annual economic growth during Xi’s first term of office is unlikely to be sustainable in his third term.

A perfect storm is brewing, and could decisively unsettle Xi Jinping’s leadership and control of China’s Stalinist party-state. □



The count of people admitted to hospital with Covid (not necessarily because of Covid) has risen again since late February, as precautions have faded. Evidence from other countries where BA.2 subvariant arrived early suggests that this particular surge may be short and mild in effects. But maybe not. In any case new variants are certain to come in due course, and may well be fiercer than Omicron.

We seek to make the labour movement fight for the social measures necessary to underpin curbing Covid:

- a sustained public-health testing-and-surveillance system
- good sick pay for all
- restore NHS funding and repeal privatisation
- requisition private hospitals to augment NHS resources
- bringing social care into the public sector with NHS-level pay and conditions for staff
- workers’ control of workplace safety (especially ventilation)
- requisition Big Pharma, especially its patents and technical know-how, to speed vaccine production and delivery world-wide. □

Class struggle under Boric

By Gonzalo Cuadra Malinarich

On 11 March left-wing former student leader Gabriel Boric was sworn in as president of Chile. Gonzalo Cuadra Malinarich, a physician training to be a psychiatrist, was heavily involved in Boric's campaign last year. He spoke to Sacha Ismail in February.

What new struggles do you expect to see now? How do you think social movements and the new government will relate?

It is difficult to say, because of the interruption of the pandemic pushing the social movement partly underground. I'd say it seems likely that some sectors in which reforms will be attempted – for instance health, pensions, education – will see struggles. I think feminist movements will continue to be important, because feminist issues cross and intersect with all kinds of other issues where we'll be campaigning.

In Chile we have a low proportion of workers in unions, around 15% – that is one of the legacies of the dictatorship. There are some sectors that are relatively heavily organised – health, the mining sector, school teachers. In private firms, however, the situation is much more difficult. Union negotiations are at the level of individual firms, rather than branches of the economy, which makes effective organising more difficult – though unions in mining have sometimes managed to push beyond that restriction and engage in sector-wide negotiations and strikes. There are various bureaucratic requirements to form a union and have it recognised, and also very restrictive rules on the right to strike.

The legal restrictions constitute one of the key locks, so to speak, that the ultra-neoliberal model put in place. One of the tasks of the new government must be to undertake a series of reforms.

The trade union movement have been present in many struggles, and provided important support to them, but it has not been the leading force.

Many trade unionists have links with parties including the Communist Party and the [soft social democratic] Socialist Party, and through those links influence in politics. The Communist Party, the Socialist Party and the Christian Democrats all have significant strength in the structure of the CUT [Central Unitaria de Trabajadores – Workers' United Centre – Chile's union federation]. Social Convergence less so, though we do have some strength in some public employees' unions.

In the election, the CUT did not straightforwardly back Boric, because of these divisions and because that is

not its practice; but many of its leaders did, as did individual unions affiliated to it.

The sub-secretary [junior minister] for women and gender equity, Luz Vidal, was an activist in a domestic workers' union. This is quite unheard of in Chile and I'd guess in many countries. In Parliament more broadly there are a number of trade unionists.

The first big challenge will be tax reforms, which will be key to tackle inequality and also enable many other reforms.

Then there issues of social rights. Health has got to be a top priority. In Chile we have a private system which covers about 20% of people, and 80% are covered by public provision. The private sector engages in what is known as cream-skimming – they treat healthier, richer and younger people, and people with greater need are left with fewer resources. Our manifesto includes a key reform to address this by developing a Universal Health System that, gathering the compulsory contributions of the whole population in a single fund plus direct public health expenditure, will provide equitable access to comprehensive, integrated healthcare to our people.

Of course, as I've already mentioned, there is reforming the pensions system – which is very much among the main demands of the Chilean people over many years and in recent struggles.

It's only a four year government and it won't be possible to do everything, but I think there are important changes to be made in education too, particularly in terms of student debt and more support for public universities.

Beyond that, we need to deal with the issues of migration and the conflict of the Chilean state and the Mapuche people – which are difficult issues to tackle.

It's a centuries old conflict that has not really been addressed. Territories were taken from the Mapuche people were only restored partially and in a haphazard way, and their autonomy denied. The post-dictatorship governments never really got to grips with this, let alone creating arrangements for them to have greater autonomy and self-organisation, and they subjected Mapuche communities to a significant degree of exclusion and even to state violence. We are miles behind even a country like New Zealand.

I should add that many Mapuche people now live outside those traditional areas and have played a significant role in wider social movements as well as the development of our nation in general.

In the case of some national resources, I think there will be debate

about nationalisation. The constitutional convention is debating it too. The Piñera government tried to leave lithium mining to private tenders in its last weeks, and there is now a legal battle about that. I don't think such things are out of the question but we will have to have more debate.

I hope that the right in a broad sense do not simply rally to the far right and make it the main force we are debating with. Undoubtedly the far right will do what it can to undermine the government and undermine belief in politics in general. I think they will focus on the difficult issues I have just mentioned, where it is easier for them to get support and they have already made a lot of noise.

A sector of the big capitalists will definitely actively oppose the government, but not necessarily all of capital. A sector of them, I think, will recognise that there has been a long-running social crisis which will continue unless we make significant changes and guarantee certain social rights. So for a while at least the bourgeoisie will be divided. Of course those who are less hostile may still push for reforms to be much more moderate than what we intend.

The key challenge is for our own grassroots movements to be stronger and more effective and exert pressure from the other side – in terms of political organisation but also social movement organisation in struggles on the ground. It is important to have political debate and internal democracy within our movement, otherwise there will be conflict between the government and social movements, which will become alienated from the political left.

People from my wing of the left, the libertarian left, have a lot of emphasis on the need for discussion and independent thinking. On the other hand we are now much more high profile and the media is constantly watching so we have to be a little bit more circumspect regarding our internal debates.

For the constitutional refounding process, a big criterion is winning the referendum at the end and actually having a new constitution! This is a very important fight that will set the stage for the campaign to change Chile's economic and social model. You could say the new constitutional arrangements will in some ways be just as important as what the government does. This government should be the government of transition between the old and the new regimes, the neoliberal Chile and the post-neoliberal.

Obviously we want the package that is agreed to be genuinely transformative. Given who is in the convention, I'm not really too worried about that. But we also want it to be widely known,



understood, and supported by the people. There was a lot of popular discussion in the run up – but since the convention was elected and met, a lot less. There is a concern that people will not understand and lack enthusiasm and even that we could lose.

In terms of the substantive changes, what is really important is to remove a lot of the locks on social progress that were included in the old constitution. Part of that is about the structures of governance, including empowering regional governments, and how participatory democratic bodies are. Part of it is about social rights, as we've discussed.

One of the key lessons the Allende experience left us, and Boric referred to this in his victory speech, is that if we want lasting and profound change we need a wider section of society to support it. Allende is an inspiration for us all, everyone in the Frente Amplio [the grouping of left organisations that Convergencia Social is part of, affiliated to the Apruebo Dignidad which put Boric forward], in the Communist Party and for some in the Socialist Party; but we need more consideration of that movement's achievements but also their failures and mistakes.

Allende was elected with 37% in the first round and then elected by parliament; and, in the context of intense pressure and destabilisation attempts from the US, he struggled to achieve a broad consensus in Parliament for his reforms. That is something we need to do now to overcome neoliberalism in Chile. □

• Abridged. More, and links to the first part of the interview and to background, at bit.ly/cs-boric

India's workers fight against the odds

By Mohan Sen

On 28 and 29 March, tens and maybe hundreds of millions of workers struck in India to halt and reverse the Modi government's viciously anti-working class policies. The strike was sponsored by ten of the country's big union federations – generally organised in India on party lines – with the glaring exception being the Hindu nationalist federation run by the Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

The unions' twelve demands include reversing anti-worker changes to labour law, regularisation of informal workers, expanding social security and halting privatisation of industries and banks. You can read the demands as reported by the Indian website [News-Click](#). The *Guardian* reports that turnout was lower than expected; but it does not cite any sources beyond the estimate of "some analysts" and I haven't found any similar reports.

The *Guardian* article does plausibly

suggest that growing mass unemployment and precariousness in the wake of the pandemic have workers' mobilisations more difficult.

It also quotes an Indian academic arguing that "the unions missed a huge opportunity in the farmers' agitation. That was when the industrial unions should have joined hands with them. Together, they could have forced the government to respond."

In fact it was a union general strike, on 26 November 2020, that launch the farmers' *struggle* that defeated Modi a year later. (Full implementation of the farmers' demands was one of the planks of last week's strike.) But while the farmers' movement dug in and continued its battle over twelve months, the unions took symbolic action for one day and then went back.

The repeated mass mobilisations by India's working class – six general strikes since Modi came to power in 2014 – are impressive. They reaffirm



the existence of a large reservoir of class consciousness and class anger in Indian society. But they are evidently not enough to shift things much, either in terms of the BJP's neoliberalism or the growing threat of Hindu nationalist bigotry and violence.

A socialist involved in the recent Delhi childcare *strike* told us these periodic general strikes are "rituals" with no real strategy to change anything. Having such strategy is, as in all labour movements, the most important thing.

Sustained struggles like the Delhi strike and the months-long anti-privatisation

battle of transport workers in Maharashtra have been left isolated and even undermined by the union federations.

Indian workers also lack political representation. The multiple bourgeois parties opposing the BJP, including "left-wing" ones, showed their colours by using state governments to stop workers taking part in the strike. □

• You can donate to an appeal for support the Delhi childcare strike and the MAS precarious workers' union in Haryana bit.ly/child-c

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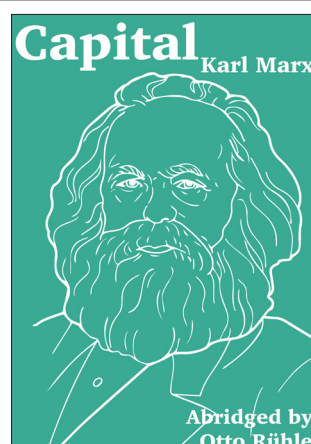
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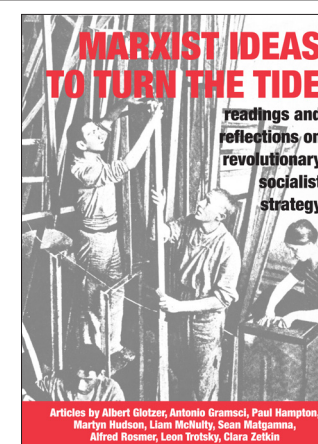
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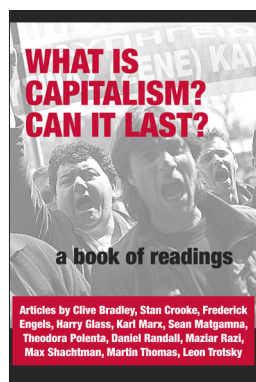
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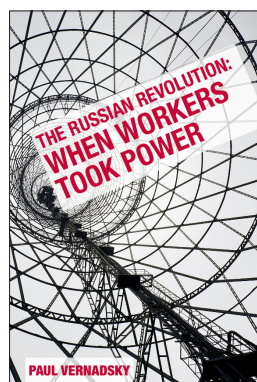
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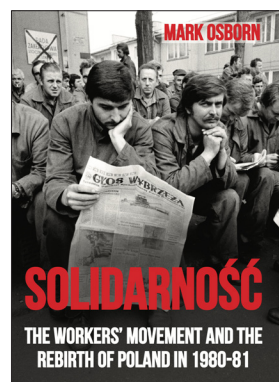
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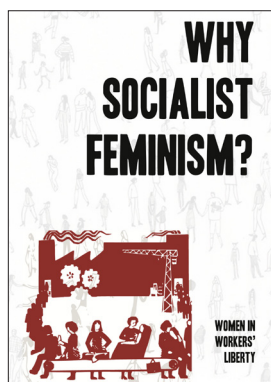
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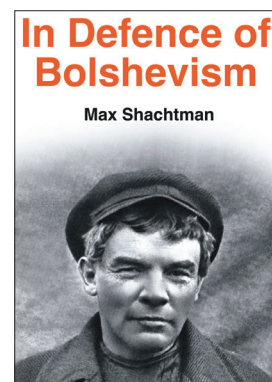
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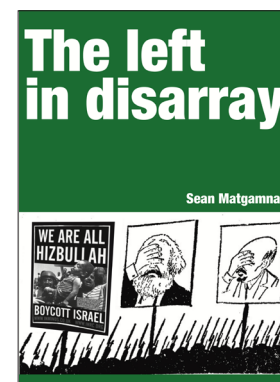
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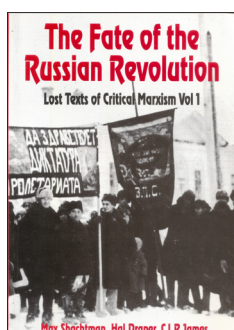
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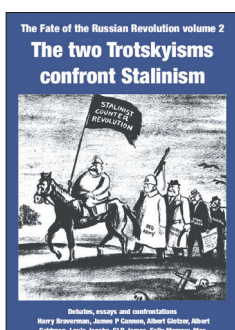
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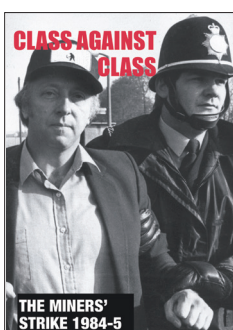
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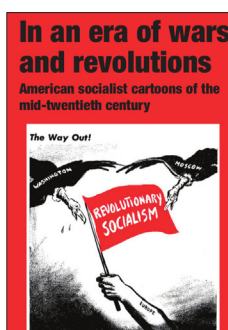
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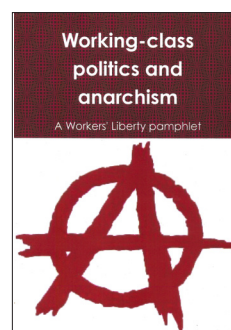
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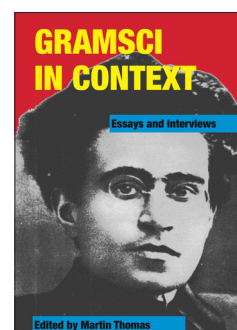
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Unions: rally for real NHS pay rise



By Alice Hazel

In its submission to the NHS pay review body (PRB) for 2022/23, the government has said it wants a 3% increase on NHS pay this year.

Inflation set to rise to 9% this year, so this is a big pay cut for health workers. It comes on top of more than a decade of real-terms pay cuts, which for Agenda for Change (A4C) bands 4-8 amount to 11.1% between 2011 and 2021.

Last year's pay award alone resulted in a real-terms loss of £232 for workers

at the top of band 3 and £336 for those at the top of band 5.

The health unions, in a joint submission to the PRB, have demanded an above inflation pay rise. The RCN has rightly gone beyond this pinning down a figure: inflation +5%. In addition the unions call for the living wage for all, an end to unpaid and excessive overtime and a review of banding of key roles.

The process of trade union submissions to the PRB were completed at the end of March. It is high time for the unions to pick up their campaigning and engage members in these demands.

Last year across the health unions workers voted yes for industrial action on pay by 80 to 95%. No action came, because turnouts were significantly below the legal thresholds.

Now we have the hike in energy costs, the rises in both national insurance and NHS pension contributions, along with the widespread dissatisfaction with last year's award. The RCN reports that a big majority, 68.6% of nurses, are dissatisfied with their pay.

The challenge is to build with the networks of activists set up over the last couple of years to reach that majority.

And to start straight away. The government has asked the PRB to report in May – to recommend on a pay award that should be in pay packets in April. Every week without a decent pay rise is another week of workers leaving the NHS.

The unions state there needs to be a negotiated settlement prior to the PRB process and they will actively cam-

paign for that. Faith in the independence of the PRB is fatally damaged, now that it has provided a cover for wage cuts for years.

The government cannot be won over to better pay for healthworkers by reasoned argument. The haemorrhaging of staff to the private sector suits their plan for the further decay of the NHS. If they cared about the cost of living emergency for workers, they wouldn't have increased inequality in Sunak's Spring Statement.

The only way for workers to win on pay is through industrial action. Members need to be involved from the start, convinced that there is money in society to pay for a well funded and safely staffed NHS, and that strike action is possible and necessary in the NHS. □

Forced academies, mark 2?

By Sean Cassidy

On 28 February the government issued the first Education White Paper in six years. The headline proposal is a return to the central element in the previous White Paper, in 2014, the idea that all schools should become academies.

Most of the other content is strikingly unambitious when compared to previous Tory programmes for schools. Some proposals had already been announced elsewhere (the promise to move to a teachers' starting salary of £30k by 2024). Others re-

quired schools to do things most are already doing (the length of the school day).

But the new Paper says is that all schools in England will either be in a multi-academy trust (MAT) or be in the process of joining one by 2030.

As of now, 44% of all schools, and the majority of the 3,500 secondary schools, are already academies, but the majority of the 17,500 primary schools are not. The 44% figure has remained fairly static for a number of years now. The previous Tory plan to force all schools to academise was withdrawn within months

of being published as a result of overwhelming opposition, including from Tory leaders in local government.

Revised plan

The revised plan is vague how to force to academise, though it may become clearer when it moves to the legislative phase. A major change in approach is indicated by the proposal that local authorities can set up Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) in their area. This is both a retreat (a recognition of the role of LAs) and a threat (as local authorities will not run the MATs they set up).

The White Paper tries to make an educational case for academies as the driver of "higher standards", but it is an exercise in unequal comparisons and the selective misuse of data which underplays the success of LA-maintained schools and hugely exaggerates benefits from academy status. Those claims have already been fairly comprehensively dismantled by the National Education Union (NEU).

It remains to be seen whether the unions, labour movement and education community can mount the sort

of opposition which sank the last White Paper. It is already clear that Labour won't make opposition to forced academy conversion the centre of their campaign against the White Paper, preferring instead to label it "irrelevant".

That is a big mistake. The most effective way to challenge these proposals is for the trade union and labour movement to make the positive case for a fully inclusive, comprehensive education system run by and accountable to local communities through our elected representatives. □

Fighting death penalty in Singapore

By Dylan Seah

On Sunday 3 April, around 250 to 400 protesters gathered at Hong Lim Park to demand the abolition of the death penalty in Singapore. Hong Lim Park, the only place in Singapore where protests can legally be held, recently reopened for protests after being shut for two years during the pandemic.

The protest was almost entirely made up of young people. It was organised by activists Jolovan Wham and Kokila Annamalai, both of whom have previously been arrested for protesting illegally. Workers Party – the only Opposition party in Parliament – was nowhere to be seen. Ananth Tambyah of the Singapore Democratic Party – an-

other Opposition party – was present but did not speak.

Size

The size of the demonstration was impressive considering it was called at short notice and during a pandemic. But the fact that it wasn't bigger is likely an indication that most people are still lukewarm on the issue. With regular – perhaps monthly – protests, this can change.

The annual Pink Dot protest for LGBTQ rights grew exponentially from year to year until the pandemic. It helped to change social attitudes and build pressure on the state, and it now looks increasingly likely that the government will repeal the ban on gay sex.

The struggle to abolish the death penalty must be part of a wider struggle for democracy in Singapore. There are severe restrictions on the right to protest. The problem with demonstrating only at Hong Lim Park is that it is hemmed in by trees and barricades. It can barely be seen from the main road. There is little visibility, let alone disruption.

Right to protest

The removal of all restrictions on the right to protest should be a central demand in every campaign, whether it is a campaign about LGBTQ rights, climate justice or the death penalty.

The death penalty cannot be viewed in isolation from what Singapore is

economically. It is a place where capitalists are allowed to treat their workers incredibly poorly, without having to pay very much in wages or taxes. It is no wonder that, in attempting to address poverty and addiction, the Singapore state would rather hang all drug traffickers than tax the rich to fund free healthcare, education and mental health services.

Regular campaigning and protests – combined with a specific, alternative, positive programme of demands – can help to shatter the confidence of a regime that has executed more than 400 prisoners since 1991. □

“What we stand for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

• workersliberty.org/join-awl

Measures had already frayed



Diary of a Tubeworker

By Jude Pelham

On Monday, all the remaining distancing measures are removed from the station. The sign giving a capacity limit for the mess room is taken down, and the barriers used to create "staff safe zones" on the gate lines are gone too.

Our unions register concern about the removal of the measures, but there's no big fight over it. Some workmates feel the measures, the enforcement of which had significantly frayed, had become more theatrical than effective.

"Do you feel unprotected?", a workmate asks on our first shift without the "staff safe zone" in place. He's kidding, but I mull it over. I do feel a bit cagey about work at the moment; infection rates are still high, but mask wearing on the Tube has gone right down. I

stopped wearing one myself briefly, but have recently started again. At this point, I doubt whether a few tensabariers would make any meaningful difference to our safety, but it's important we don't slip into a mindset that sees the pandemic as decisively "over".

The independent review into our pension scheme, surveying the various options for reform, is finally published, and there's some mess room buzz about it in the days immediately following. It's a lengthy document, so not everyone has the time to read it cover-to-cover. The review stresses that implementing any reform to the pension scheme will take time, so the general consensus is that it represents a kicking of the can down the road. There's still a general resolve that we will need to strike again.

In the midst of all of this, our station is blessed with a visit from a senior director. Sadly, I miss him, so forego the opportunity to convince him to quit his job, betray his class, and declare his fealty to the cause of labour, which I'm

confident is what would have eventuated if I'd been able to have a quick chat with him. Or something like that. Workmates who do speak to him say he shook a few hands, asked some incredibly perfunctory questions, and left.

"They should make the directors work some shifts every few months... let them see what it's really like", someone suggests. Knowing our management, if such a scheme was ever implemented, they'd likely just grit their teeth through the shifts and then use the fact they'd done it to claim their plans for cuts had "front line" credibility. But I share the sentiment; it's beyond galling to have a clique of corporate suits, who've worked 9-5 from home throughout the pandemic, tell us we can get by with 600 fewer staff on stations – cuts that will never directly impact them.

It can be cathartic to get an opportunity to vent our concerns directly to the top brass, but the best way of sending them a message remains straightforward: shut the job down. They need us, we don't need them. □

P&O faces courts, but workers still sacked

By Ollie Moore

P&O Ferries faces criminal and civil investigations into its recent summary dismissal of nearly 800 seafarers. The government says it wants the Insolvency Service, which launched the investigations, to consider disqualifying CEO Peter Hebblethwaite from serving as a company director.

However, with the announcement that all but one of the sacked workers have signed up to P&O's severance terms, which include a commitment not to take the company to Employment Tribunal, the prospects for rein-

statement for the workers seem to be shrinking.

RMT and Nautilus, the unions which organise on P&O, have continued to campaign, with RMT leading demonstrations at ports in Liverpool, Portsmouth, and Hull. P&O has also seen some of its vessels effectively impounded due to safety concerns. But without any immediate means of exercising industrial leverage over P&O – and seemingly without any strategy for building towards that, for example by linking with dockers and other workers at P&O and DP World ports to seek solidarity action – the campaign's focus

is now mainly propagandistic and political, seeking to retrospectively hold P&O to account for its actions.

There is also an ongoing struggle over conditions on the vessels themselves. Maritime law allows shipping employers to pay seafarers significantly less than the minimum wage of the countries the vessels serve (for example, the UK, Holland, and France). The average wage for the new agency seafarers P&O has hired to replace the sacked workers is £5.50, almost half the UK's national minimum wage.

That struggle must be fought in the workplace, by the crews organising themselves to take action, and politically, by demanding legislative change from government. It should be fought alongside a continuing struggle to win justice for the sacked seafarers. □

Deflating McCarthy, 1953



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

A film about the McCarthy era seems appropriate. , 1953 There's quite a few to choose from. One of the best known is George Clooney's 2006 release, *Good Night and Good Luck*, set in 1953 at the height of Senator Joe McCarthy's increasingly deranged "crusade" against supposed "communist" infiltration of every facet of American society. David Strathairn plays the American broadcaster Edward R. Murrow, whose famous signing off phrase provides the title of the film.

Murrow is increasingly concerned about McCarthy, noting that some of

his colleagues are becoming scared of even opening their mouths. Along with co-producer Fred W. Friendly (Clooney) they decide to invite McCarthy to be interviewed on the news show *See it Now*. McCarthy agrees to appear and damns himself by his bullying, aggressive and utterly incoherent ranting. As Murrow points out, he can only reply to his critics by accusing them of being "communists".

Shortly after his appearance, news emerges that McCarthy will be investigated by a Senate Committee. Although the film tends to portray Murrow as the crusading liberal knight in shining armour who single-handedly destroys McCarthy – it didn't happen that way – it is nevertheless a film worth seeing. More films from the McCarthy period next week. □

Join Workers' Liberty!

Want to be part of an organised long-haul collective effort to spread the socialist ideas you read in *Solidarity*, and to link together activities in diverse campaigns and conflicts around that consistent socialist thread? Then take some copies of *Solidarity* to sell each week, and contact us to discuss joining Workers' Liberty, the group that produces and sustains this paper. Check it out and contact us via workersliberty.org/join-awl □

Next steps on pay



John Moloney

The National Executive Committee (NEC) of our union, PCS, will shortly be discussing the next steps in the union's fight over pay and other cost-of-living issues, on the basis of a full analysis of our recent consultative ballot, broken down to workplace level.

The NEC will consider whether to move to a statutory ballot, and if so, over what timescale.

Clearly, doing nothing is not an option. The context for the NEC's discussions is the cost-of-living crisis, which will continue to affect PCS members. It's vital the union gives a lead and empowers members to fight back. I believe we need to move towards a statutory ballot, and ensure we have organisation in place on the ground to get the necessary turnout.

We're also facing attacks in the Department for Work and Pensions, where management is threatening to close over 40 offices, which will lead to job losses. Reps are discussing the strategy and the group executive will decide on the next steps. There, too, I believe we need to build for industrial action.

The union is continuing to promote the "Unions Stand with Ukraine" demonstration we're co-sponsoring on Saturday 9 April. As I write, the UCU has become the latest UK union to sponsor the demo, bringing the total of UK union sponsors to seven. I'm also proud the demo is being supported by five Ukrainian union federations or unions. As well as mobilising to make the demonstration as big as possible, we need to plan ongoing solidarity with the Ukrainian labour movement. □

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

Strike again for jobs, pensions, and conditions!



Tubeworker

With the publication of TfL's latest review into its pension scheme, we have some more detail as to the attacks the employer plans to make.

The review lists a number of possible "benefit reforms", which could save TfL between £79.3 million and £182.4 million per year. The review is categorical that "almost all of the benefit combination scenarios see reductions in the future service benefits available to members, and increased contributions compared to the current position". In other words, workers will pay more, and get less.

Proposals for cuts include limiting the amount of our pay which is pensionable, and reducing the ratio of employer/employee contributions.

Although the review stresses that implementing reform will be a drawn-out process, we cannot be complacent. The only way TfL will abandon plans for cuts is if they are forced to by sustained industrial action.

It's also vital we remember that pensions is only one of three central issues



in RMT's dispute, which delivered magnificent strikes in March. The other two issues, jobs and working conditions, must remain prominent. LU is pressing ahead with job cuts on stations, looking to cut up to 600 positions, and imposing new framework agreements on the revenue department and SRT. However long pension reform takes, these are attacks we face now. Senior LU bosses have already confirmed they plan similar cuts to staffing levels and "reviews" of framework agreements across every area of the business.

We must name further strikes. We landed a major blow on LU with our 1/3 March strikes, but a fight rarely ends with a single punch.

Tubeworker advocates that RMT names an ongoing programme of action, and explores possibilities for area-by-area action to keep up the pressure in between all-out strike days. We also

need a public, political campaign to demand adequate funding for TfL. And members of other unions on LU should join any action RMT calls, and mobilise within their own unions to get them off the sidelines.

Green Park/Euston: vote yes for action!

RMT has launched a ballot, which runs until 6 April for the Green Park/Euston Area station staff for industrial action against an overbearing, disciplinarian management culture.

Returning a massive yes vote, and delivering action if necessary, will show bullying bosses they can't continue to throw their weight around unchallenged.

Piccadilly Line drivers: vote yes for action on training standards!

RMT has launched a ballot of Piccadilly Line drivers for industrial action to defend training standards.

Management still insist watching a training video is enough to get Picc line drivers up to speed with the expansion and change to South Harrow sidings. Rightly drivers have stuck two fingers up to this. The ballot runs until 8 April. Vote yes! □

Strikes throughout April at GOSH

By Ollie Moore

Outsourced security workers at London's Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH) resumed strikes on Friday 1 April, with further strikes planned every Friday throughout the month.

The workers are striking to win parity with NHS workers' terms and conditions. Following a successful struggle by GOSH cleaners, security staff are now the last remaining outsourced workers at the hospital.

Picketing remains restricted by a court injunction secured by GOSH, which means workers are only able to picket opposite, not directly outside, the hospital. Striking security guard Erica said: "GOSH trustees hope to deny us our rights to equality and to speak the truth. But we will not be silence. We are strong. We are determined."

The workers' union, United Voices of the World, plans a strike rally on Friday 29 April to mark the conclusion of the month of strikes. □

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Rail union plans national strikes to break pay freeze



Off The Rails

By Ollie Moore

Rail union RMT has declared disputes with Network Rail and 17 separate Train Operating Companies, and plans to ballot its members for strikes to break a

rail industry pay freeze and defend jobs and conditions.

The announcement represents a meaningful step forward, in terms of a major national union taking an offensive, combative stance around cost-of-living issues.

TOCs have imposed a pay freeze since January 2021, when Tory rail minister Chris Heaton told them there was "no budget" for increased subsidies to finance pay increases. A statement from

the government's Rail Delivery Group said: "It would be unfair to increase the burden on taxpayers by funding rail industry pay rises, and we would only consider increases in exceptional circumstances." Network Rail has also launched a programme of job cuts.

A timetable for the ballots has yet to be announced. See the Off the Rails blog for further info and opinion in the coming weeks: workersliberty.org/blogs/rails. □

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Keep connecting with Workers' Liberty to debate!

By Mohan Sen

The [ban](#) on Labour members "supporting" Workers' Liberty passed by the Labour National Executive (NEC) on 29 March includes exemptions allowing people to attend our meetings and so on to "debate" us.

Labour Party members should declare now that they will continue to come to our events and debate us. The qualification looks like a "loophole", but it has been made for us, and not for the other groups banned, because of an important political reality: we are unusual on the left in pro-actively seeking debate. In fact, though Labour's purge-minded officials may genuinely not understand this, pretty much everyone comes to our events to "debate" to one extent or another. We don't just debate, we also act, for efforts like the 9 April Ukraine demonstration, but we debate all the

time.

Our columnist Eric Lee, who as regular readers will know is often at odds with the editorial line, has declared that he will continue to write in *Solidarity* despite the ban.

Retrospective?

Left-wing NEC member Mish Rahman reports that the proposers and party powers-that-be refused to give an assurance that the ban would not be applied retrospectively (i.e. to criminalise past interviews, articles, or attendance at Workers' Liberty events). The "debate exemption" is probably there to save embarrassment for hard-core Labour right-wingers Luke Akehurst (also an NEC member) and John McTernan, who have accepted invitations onto [our platforms](#) to argue for Trident (Akehurst) or for Blair's New Labour as a model for the future (McTernan).

We regularly host debates with different or opposing views at our events, and seek more such debate. John McDonnell MP has debated us at Ideas for Freedom, our summer weekend of political discussion. So has former Momentum chair Jon Lansman, journalist Owen Jones, and many other Labour left-wingers.

Ideas for Freedom 2022 takes place [30 June-3 July](#). We invite Labour members – and other activists, of course – to come along to debate us. We have many [local](#) discussion meetings too. □

Move this motion

Please adapt this motion for your union or organisation or Labour Party. Please let us know if your organisation has passed it or you want help or advice proposing it: awl@workersliberty.org

We are glad that the ban imposed on Workers' Liberty by the Labour Party National Executive on 29 March 2022 was explicit that debating with Workers' Liberty is not to be penalised.

Even if that is an escape clause to safeguard prominent Labour Party figures both of left and right who have debated with Workers' Liberty, it establishes the principle: these ideas are good to be debated among socialists.

We believe Labour Party meetings too should be open to debate on those ideas. And the Labour Party will be poorer for trying to remove the active contribution of Workers' Liberty people. The Executive cited no harmful action by Workers' Liberty people in making its ban.

We call on the National Executive to reverse this ban. The Labour Party will be better able to defeat the Tories if we organise as a broad church, with no bans and proscriptions, and disciplinary action only after due process and for specific harmful actions.

Authoritarian slide

- "Proscription lists; mass expulsions; the centralisation of power. It's naive to think the 'crisis of democracy' and the slide to authoritarianism afflicting western polities won't affect our own political institutions." – Clive Lewis, Labour MP for Norwich South on Labour's ban on Workers' Liberty and other groups
- Why Keir Starmer wants to ban us (with link to document put to the Labour NEC): bit.ly/ban-wl
- Revolutionary vs "democratic socialism"? A reply to Luke Akehurst on "entryism": bit.ly/reply-la
- Where Labour came from: bit.ly/lp-orig

Ban means narrowing Labour

The [document](#) put to Labour's National Executive Committee on 29 March to support a ban on us (which was passed by 20 votes to 11) says it will explain why, but doesn't.

It suggests our "aims and values" are incompatible with those of the Labour Party, but then says nothing more about them.

Unlike the people who would ban us, we are open and proud about our aims and values. As explained in *Solidarity* every week, in our other publications and on our website, we aim to build up a working-class movement to fight capitalism and replace it with socialism.

Obviously our politics are radically different from those of the Labour leadership. But so are those of a huge number of Labour members and affiliates (including many who voted for Starmer, which our supporters did not). If those pushing to ban us were logical, consistent and honest, they would advocate banning any advocacy of anti-capitalism and militant working-class struggle. If they want a monolithic party in which socialist ideas are banned, they should admit it openly.

The document objects to us having democratic structures; local groups; and a website, social media and publications. It does not explain why these supposed criteria apply to us and not other groups in the Labour Party.

It cites our support between 1998 and 2010 for some socialist candidates against Labour, run as "demonstration" candidates in safe Labour seats. Over the years many Labour members have supported some non-Labour candidates and either got away with it (particularly if they are right-wingers), or changed their mind and been readmitted. Others have joined Labour from other parties, of left and right. Unlike most of those Workers' Liberty has always, all the way through, advocated a Labour government.

In 1998-2010 we were never banned and very few of our members were expelled. Why now?

Those pushing the ban know well that our political tendency has been active in Labour for many years, since the 1970s. They cannot bring themselves to explain what in that long record they object to.

What they object to is our advocacy of socialism as a radically different social system, replacing capitalism; of militant working-class struggle against capitalism and capitalists; and of consistent and thoroughgoing democracy, starting in the labour movement itself. □



For Labour victories on 5 May!

Labour's record and policy in local government is, if anything, even more wretched than its national stance. Labour councils are not protesting against the cuts decimating local government and demanding more funding, let alone organising active resistance and campaigning.

That applies to the Labour left as well as the right. "Left-wing" councils are often better on this or not that issue, but they are not fighting back. The bulk of the left promotes flim-flam about "community wealth-building" and avoids agitation, let alone organising, to push the Tories to restore local government.

Nonetheless, Workers' Liberty supporters will be campaigning for Labour victories on 5 May.

From our own class-struggle, socialist perspective we support the Labour Party. We want to see Labour, a party based on the trade unions, defeat the Tories.

We believe Labour's failings reflect (and magnify) the failings of the bulk of the trade union movement, which has done little to indict, let alone organise against, local government cuts. We want to transform both the unions and Labour.

We call on Labour left-wingers standing in the elections to reflect and reorient, and help organise a serious fightback against the Tories.

We urge all readers of *Solidarity* to campaign for Labour in the elections. □



Solidarity

For a workers' government

FOOD COURIER STRIKES SPREAD TO LEEDS

By Michael Elms

Food courier strikes have spread to Leeds: there are now weekly strike actions and drivers' meetings taking place in Beeston, Heckmondwike, Birstall and Morley. There is an urgent need for Leeds-based socialists to mobilise behind this struggle, as socialists have recently in Chesterfield, Middlesbrough, Mansfield, Worcester and Sheffield, to great effect.

The strikes are part of a battle across the UK over pay, against industry giant JustEat and their delivery supplier Stuart. At the same time as fuel prices spiral upwards, Stuart riders are dealing with the effects of a 24% cut in their base rate of pay; and those riders who are contracted directly by JustEat have also been hit with falling rates of pay per delivery.

On Wednesday 30 March, Stuart's UK General Manager Brendan Hamill came to meet one of the leading Sheffield drivers: clearly, the pressure is getting to the company. But

Hamill's visit was not a constructive effort at ending the dispute. Instead, raising his voice and belittling his employee, he tried to belabour the striker into giving up, and just repeated the company's previous media talking points.

Unimpressed by this arrogant, ham-fisted negotiating tactic, drivers and supporters entered the hotel after the meeting ended, and staged a short demonstration outside the meeting room, where Hamill was still debriefing with his underlings via Zoom. Faced with an eloquent and spirited response from couriers, Hamill flipped up his hood and scurried out of the building.

There is an urgent need for the labour movement to back these couriers by supporting their strike fund and helping spark couriers' strikes in their area. Please use the model motion (bit.ly/mo-pe) and circulate the link to the strike fund, tinyurl.com/StuartStrike, and contact us on awl@workersliberty.org to find out how to get

active and help spread the dispute to your area.

Couriers' strikes over pay started in Sheffield on 6 December. Following a break for Christmas and new year, strike action has occurred every single day in Sheffield since 10 January. The Sheffield drivers, who started the strike and remain key to its spread, are approaching 100 days of strike action.

The strength of the Sheffield drivers' organisation is due to the years-long campaign of organising which drivers there have conducted, with the help of the Sheffield branch of Workers' Liberty since 2019. Lately other socialists in the city including members of the Labour and Green Parties, Socialist Alternative and the Socialist Party have joined in with the strike effort.

Far from petering out, the strike continues to spread and drivers continue to mount ambitious actions, to rattle their exploiters into conceding on pay. □

