

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

STOP TORIES WRECKING NHS



Pic: @keepnhspublic

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Stop the Tories wrecking the NHS



The HRT treatment shortages and the record waiting lists show the NHS increasingly unable to provide a basic public health system covering the entire population.

Why is there so little political noise about this? The quiet is possible only because of silence and stillness from the labour movement, the trade unions and Labour.

Stats in the *Financial Times* (28 April) should shatter any complacency.

- Thirty years ago the share of GDP spent on “out of pocket” health costs was less than 1% here, over 2% in the US. Now it is almost level, about 2%.

- Since 2010, paid-for health costs as a share of household spending have risen 0.4% to 0.65%. For the poorest fifth of households, who then paid among the least and now pay the most of all socio-economic groups, the fig-

ure has gone from 0.3% to over 0.7%.

- In 2008 about 1/30 of the poorest households incurred “catastrophic household costs” (exceeding capacity to pay by 40%). It is now 1/14 (among other groups the proportion has barely changed).

- The number of people in the UK launching crowdfunders for health costs has soared. Since 2017 the number of GoFundMe projects has risen twenty-fold.

If the left and labour movement fail to provide solutions, the right will. Even as the government pretends the NHS is sailing forward, right-wing voices highlighting the crisis and blaming it on the very desire to maintain a universal public health service are getting louder. On 4 May the editor of the *Daily Telegraph* felt confident to write denouncing the original creation of the NHS and calling for its replacement with a privately-run system. To make his case, he cited the same *Financial Times* statistics we have here.

The NHS needs:

- Big above-inflation funding increases to compensate for a decade of funding suppression. This year core NHS funding will rise 11% in real-terms – but that boost is to cushion the loss of £33bn in extra Covid funding. Counting that loss, the real NHS budget will actually fall 9%. And the increases planned for the following two years are minimal, not much more than 1% in real-terms. In 1997-2010, the average yearly real-terms increase was 6%.

- Funding for a serious pay rise for NHS workers. Health workers’ demand for a 15% increase for all, with a £3,000 minimum, is now even more urgent, as real wages shrink faster.

- Public money spend on public healthcare, not bolstering private profits. The Tories’ fragmenting and privatising NHS reforms, put through in 2012 and literally just now, must be repealed, a framework for a comprehensive public health service re-established, and all forms of privatisation and outsourcing reversed. Instead of paying to use private facilities during crises, the govern-

ment should start requisitioning them into the NHS.

Campaigns like Keep Our NHS Public and NHS Workers Say No are doing important work; the new coalition they have launched, [SOS NHS](#), held a day of action on 26 February. But the bigger forces, both Keir Starmer’s Labour Party and trade unions, are saying and doing little, not even as a matter of demagogic anti-Toryism.

Left and labour movement activists should campaign for the unions and Labour to call a national demonstration to save and re-establish the NHS, with clear demands, mobilise tens of thousands, and organise a wave of agitation around it.

We should rally support for NHS workers, [directly employed](#) and [outsourced](#), organising to drive up pay and working conditions. The more successful strikes and struggles, the stronger the fight to save the health service will be. The required upheaval needs to happen in our health [unions](#) too. □

Workers’ solidarity with Ukraine

By Dan Katz

Workers’ Liberty supports Ukraine’s struggle against Russian imperialism. Unfortunately, sections of the British left continue to disgrace themselves. A *Socialist Worker* headline reads, “NATO escalation will bring more destruction”, which would read better if they had written, “Russian war brings destruction.”

The fetishisation of anti-NATO slogans in a war in which NATO is not fighting is a strange thing to see.

If Ukraine has the right to oppose the Russian invasion and fight to defend their self-determination, they also have the right to ask for weapons to do so.

Socialist Worker claims to believe that the defeat of Russia in Ukraine would be good, but only without Western help. Presumably they also know a Ukrainian victory is impossible without Western help.

So, to sum up SW’s apparent position: Ukraine should kick Russia out, while refusing Western weapons and help that might allow it to do so. The position of SW really amounts to: the Ukrainians should give in.

Taking weapons from big powers does not damn a national independence struggle.

The French gave guns to the Biafran side in the late 1960s as the Igbo people

fought to secede from Nigeria. The French, with interests next door in Cameroon, gave weapons for their own reasons (financial, political, and largely reprehensible). But the Igbo people needed help from wherever they could get it, so they took help from the French. We would not criticise them for doing so.

In 2014 the US dropped weapons to the Kurdish PKK fighters in the northern Syrian town of Kobane. The Kurds were defending the town’s population from Islamic State. Hemmed in by the Turkish army and IS, the Kurds were glad to get US help. The Kurds were right to take US weapons. The alternative was to be massacred by IS.

The north Vietnamese had the right to ask for weapons from the USSR and China to fight US imperialism in south Vietnam. The totalitarian states, the USSR and Mao’s China, gave weapons to make trouble for the US and to back an allied state. No doubt by asking for weapons the Vietnamese risked escalation of the war. But not to do so would have been to give in.

In fact Vietnam emerged from the war as an independ-

ent state, not as a puppet of the Chinese or Soviet Union (it even pushed back a Chinese invasion in early 1979).

SW writes, “A NATO victory against Russia will benefit the rulers of the West, not the people of Ukraine whose country will be reduced to a puppet state.”

Everything about this sentence is ridiculous. As we all know NATO is not fighting, and has gone to great lengths to avoid fighting.

The claim that Ukraine will become a puppet state of “the West” is made without evidence. And, anyway, SW believes Ukraine is already a puppet (a “proxy”) of the US-NATO.

And the alternative, that Ukraine loses to Russia and is ripped apart, denied the right to self-determination, being made a puppet of Russia, its people driven out or subjugated by terror, is not worthy of discussion by these socialists.

The Alliance for Workers’ Liberty continues to back Ukraine against Russian imperialism and Ukraine’s workers against their bosses. Help us in this fight for international workers’ solidarity. □

Couriers' next big day of action is on 17 May

By Michael Elms

As Ramadan drew to a close in early May, food couriers in Sheffield, Chesterfield, Middlesbrough and the Leeds area suspended their daily or weekly strike action, resolving to move instead to co-ordinated national days of action. The next day of action will fall on 17 May.

Meanwhile, the torch of sustained daily action is being carried by drivers in Darlington, who have been shutting down all food delivery business in that town for two hours every lunchtime throughout the month of May. Drivers in nearby Hartlepool have also recently held a meeting with the IWGB with a view to entering the fight.

The strike movement started in Sheffield, on 6 December 2021, after Stuart (a French "gig economy" logistics company which does deliveries for JustEat takeaway, among other firms) slashed couriers' piece-rate pay by 24%. Couriers organised in the IWGB union

started their action. Now Stuart logistics is coming under international pressure. Confronted by an IWGB representative at his company's annual shareholders' meeting in Amsterdam, the JustEat boss Jitse Groen committed to organise a meeting between the IWGB and the UK head of JustEat to discuss driver pay (including driver pay on Stuart, which JustEat subcontracts).

And DPD, which is Stuart's parent company, was confronted over Stuart's exploitative behaviour by an international union federation in a recent international meeting.

Plans are being laid for campaigns against Stuart's smaller clients and Stuart's suppliers. None of this is good news for the acting UK General Manager, Brendan Hamill, who has so far staked his name on a stance of militant opposition to engagement with his employees' union.

Thanks to two years of campaigning in Sheffield, initiated and supported

by the local Workers' Liberty branch, the couriers there – mostly migrant car drivers – have been able to form the backbone of the longest, biggest strike in the history of the gig economy in the UK. The strike action has spread to towns across the north of England. Daily or weekly strike actions have run in Sheffield, Chesterfield, Heckmondwike, Birstall, Morley, Middlesbrough and Blackpool.

There have been outbreaks of courier strikes in many other places: Mansfield, Farnborough, Aldershot, Ashford, Medway, Sunderland, Redcar, Huddersfield, Worcester, Wolverhampton, Wakefield, and Leeds.

In many of these locations, a lack of experienced leading workers, or insufficient organising resources, whether from local socialists or the IWGB union (a small union launched in 2013) made it difficult to stoke these sparks into a flame. Socialists must assist the IWGB in helping enough "sparks" of action

to catch. This strike is hard, and long strikes frequently lose. But this strike is unlike most others.

Firstly, the "gig economy" nature of the workers' employment allows workers to enter the strike without going through lengthy balloting procedures.

Secondly, this is a strike of strategic importance, which is about cracking into and civilising a lawless industry.

The drivers who lead the strike in every town appreciate the gravity of what they are doing and are committed accordingly, steeled for a grinding fight with many setbacks and hardships. We believe that their resolve is stronger than the will of their millionaire adversaries. The question is whether the rest of the UK labour movement and British socialists also understand the seriousness of this struggle. □

Strike fund: tinyurl.com/StuartStrike. To support drivers' action in your area, contact AWL at awl@workersliberty.org.

Russia's opposition and Navalny

By Michael Baker

Daniel Roher's documentary *Navalny*, now available on iPlayer, was not intended as a response to the invasion of Ukraine. But it sheds light both on the Putin regime, and the inadequacies of Navalny as an anti-Putin leader.

The documentary's main focus, Navalny's poisoning and the investigative operation to find the FSB agents responsible, tells a thrilling story, and watching Navalny call and interrogate his own would-be murderer is as incredible now as it was when the [video](#) was released in December 2020.

Navalny himself is clearly a brave, charismatic, and funny man. Were the political situation in Russia different, one could see him as the leader of a more conventional bourgeois party, the Russian Macron or Merkel. He clearly wants to project exactly this image of himself. He talks repeatedly of Russia being "authoritarian", and that this fundamentally prevents it from being a "democracy", as if all politics falls in those two boxes.

The documentary isn't all too interested in the kind of Russia Navalny would like to create, beyond his vague calls for "democracy" and "freedom". When asked why he marches with "[siege heil-ers](#)", Navalny's response is that he will form a coalition with any Russian person who wants proper political representation, even if he personally disagrees with them. This is left hanging. A more diligent approach might have asked if Navalny's own former racist and [anti-migrant](#) campaigning had a little more in

common with the nationalists than just "political representation".

The documentary's central tenet, as well as its biggest flaw, is the idea that Navalny and his Youtube channel are the ideological vanguard of the Russian opposition movement. The documentary opens with a flurry of Western news reports naming Navalny as "a genuine challenger", who is "running against Putin". In fact, Navalny's parliamentary presence is almost non-existent: for the last few elections, he has advocated either spoiling ballots or using his website Smart Vote to encourage tactical voting against Putin's party (normally opting for the Communist Party candidate instead). If anyone gained electoral ground from Navalny's campaigning, it was the KPRF.

This leaves Navalny's supposed "real" impact out on the streets. As *Solidarity* [reported](#) at the time, Navalny's arrest did spark waves of protest across Russia – protests that

laid important groundwork for the current anti-war movement – but large portions of the protestors did not see Navalny as important to the movement or representative of their views, and were protesting for free press and freedom of speech rather than Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation specifically.

Alexey Navalny is now in prison, serving a sentence of 20 years. In his court hearings in March 2022 he called Russians out onto the streets against the war, but the majority of the protestors are there not because Navalny told them to but on their own volition. It seems increasingly unlikely that he will be the President of a future reformed Russia, and we should question those who claim that as their ideal outcome. As ever, in Russia and the world over, the way forward lies not with the bourgeois politician, but with the organisation of the working class and the labour movement. □

Jail for refusing war machine?

By Mohan Sen

The day *Solidarity* 634 goes to press, 10 May, a 19 year old Israeli, Yoav, will likely be sentenced to military prison for refusing national service in Israel's military, in solidarity with the Palestinians.

This comes as Israeli military and police [violence](#) and repression against Palestinians are [deepening](#), despite the fall of Netanyahu from

power. Yoav writes: "The conscientious committee exempted me from carrying a weapon and the army expected me to enlist. However, my issue is not with shooting in a range or firing practice.

"With or without a weapon, the Israeli army is still an organisation whose essence is war and I do not want to take part in it."

More: bit.ly/yoav-r □

China and Covid: silence from the Star



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

In the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic, the *Morning Star* gave extensive and enthusiastic coverage to China's response, which did indeed appear to be impressive.

A piece entitled "The Planned economy vs the coronavirus" (republished in the MS on 30 Jan 2020 from the US Stalinist paper *People's World*) noted: "The World Health Organisation is praising the Chinese government's quick response to the crisis... The scale of that commitment is now ramping up in a massive way - showcasing the ability of the country's socialist state to marshal resources rapidly and efficiently in the service of public health."

A few days later (2 Feb) *Morning Star* Foreign Editor Steve Sweeney noted "China is set to open a new hospital in Wuhan to deal with the coronavirus today, just 10 days after construction began... Work began on the 1,000-bed

Huoshenshan Hospital on 23 January and Chinese state media said that the last brick was laid yesterday morning... It has an area of 25,000 square metres, and 1,400 staff will operate the facility."

It really did look as though China's authoritarian, top-down system was dealing with the crisis with an effectiveness that a liberal western democracy found impossible.

The paper began promoting a campaign called "Zero Covid" for the UK, based upon the Chinese approach, advocating draconian lockdowns and (logically) increased state powers, though that was never spelt out.

Delay

Then it turned out that although the first case of Covid was reported on 8 December 2019, the Wuhan health authorities took over three weeks to issue any notification. Between 3 and 16 January, the authorities falsely claimed there were no new cases and no evidence of human-to-human transmission.

It emerged that a doctor, Li Wenliang, had warned an online chat group on 30 December, of a new illness spreading in Wuhan, only to be reprimanded by

the police and made to sign a document stating that his warning constituted "illegal behaviour." At least seven other medical professionals were warned over "rumour-mongering" and "disrupting social order."

On 7 February Li Wenliang died of the virus. It was front page news in most bourgeois papers round the world while in China the authorities were unable to suppress social media posts mourning the death of a martyr. It wasn't even mentioned in the *Morning Star*.

In April and May of this year, while most of the world is "living with Covid", with no lockdowns and (as far as can be gauged) a lower excess-death rate than since early 2020, an estimated 340 million people in China have been subject to ultra-lockdowns. More than 25 million Shanghai residents have been forcibly barricaded into their homes and have protested that they are starving. People reporting infections have been forced into quarantine camps. Office workers have been forced to remain at their workplaces, sleeping at their desks for weeks. With Omicron's high transmission rate, it is doubtful whether even such measures can stop the virus

spreading. This has been an extraordinary demonstration of the authoritarian power of the Chinese state – and also of the limitations of the "zero Covid" model once trumpeted by the *Morning Star* and other supporters of the Xi Jinping regime.

China's official Covid death rate of 5,000 compares very favourably with almost a million in the US, but the Chinese figures are not reliable: even now, with hundreds of thousands of infections in Shanghai, the authorities are claiming zero deaths.

Excess

An anonymous city official told Associated Press, "the criteria for confirming cases and deaths are very strict and susceptible to political meddling." And China makes no attempt to account for excess deaths due to lockdowns and unavailability of health care for other conditions.

Much of the information about the latest Covid outbreak in China in this article comes from the *Guardian*, *Observer*, and *Sunday Times*. None comes from the *Morning Star* for the simple reason that it has, so far, published not one word about it. □

Federal united Ireland is only way

By Gerry Bates

Sinn Féin's first place in Northern Ireland's 5 May election was almost inevitable once the DUP dispersed votes to other Unionist parties by backing Boris Johnson's form of "hard Brexit" and then demanding the repeal of its unavoidable consequence, the Northern Ireland Protocol.

The outcome refocuses the unviability of Northern Ireland as a democratic unit, and the case for a federal united Ireland as the only democratic way out.

The immediate consequence is impasse. The DUP refuses to nominate a deputy First Minister to allow the power-sharing rule of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement to operate. Current law rules out prolonged

direct rule as in 2002-7 and 2017-20, and mandates another election soon instead.

The DUP says it won't serve in an Executive until the Northern Ireland Protocol is repealed, and hints it might refuse to serve with a Sinn Féin First Minister anyway.

The UK moving outside the Single Market and Customs Union makes inevitable either some economic border within Ireland, or some economic border between Northern Ireland and Britain (i.e. the Northern Ireland Protocol).

The Tories didn't dare go for a hardening of the border within Ireland. Since Brexit trade across the "soft" border within Ireland has increased markedly, and British-NI trade has been hindered even before Britain departs far from

Single Market rules. Unionists are alarmed.

The 2016 Brexit vote produced a jump in poll support within Northern Ireland for a united Ireland to about 40%. There has been no real up-trend in that support since 2017. Tory party chair Oliver Dowden has felt safe to say that the Tories would honour the Good Friday Agreement clause on border polls if a clear majority for a united Ireland looks likely.

The total nationalist vote (SF and SDLP) was lower on 5 May than in 1998 (36% vs 39%, 35 seats vs 42). But the total vote for the Unionist parties has also declined (40% vs 46%). Parties defined as "neither" have gained, like the Alliance (in fact soft-Unionist), though the left-wing People before

Profit was down to 1.2% on 5 May from 2% in 2016.

Demographic shifts are bringing Catholics close to parity with Protestants in NI, after 50 years when they were outnumbered almost two-to-one. There are now 18% or so classifying as "other" or "no religion".

The ground is shifting under the Unionists' feet, and will continue to shift over the years.

The only way out is a federal united Ireland, with local autonomy for the heavily-Protestant area. The road to that would be much eased by British re-entry into at least the Single Market and the Customs Union.

In practice Sinn Féin now talk as if they accept some federal-type arrangement. Think-tank schemes for federal-type



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arrangements multiply. Lacking still is a drive to win assent from "below", in the working class of all backgrounds, for a democratic compromise, and to link that with social leveling-up and progress. □

White Ribbon and corporate virtue-signalling



By Jessica Bradwell

Recently, my local football club, Lewes FC, launched the #CallHimOut initiative, asking men to commit to challenging other men about sexist comments and behaviour. Our recently-elected Labour Town Councillor, Emily Clarke, has got both the local Labour party and the Town Council to support it.

White Ribbon UK describes

itself as “the leading charity engaging with men and boys to end violence against women”. It is certainly a worthy goal. But its scheme for accrediting organisations deserves some examination.

If an organisation commits to taking various actions, it gains White Ribbon accreditation. The actions include encouraging staff to make the White Ribbon Promise to never commit, excuse or remain silent about male violence against women; recruiting a volunteer male White Ribbon Ambassador; and holding an awareness event. However, it seems that so long as the organisation

ticks these boxes, the rest of its actions avoid scrutiny.

Several police forces have White Ribbon accreditation, while the police continue to fail women (to put it mildly).

When I noticed that Transport for London had accreditation, I wrote to White Ribbon:

“I don’t know whether you are aware of this, but TfL is planning to cut up to 600 staff from London Underground stations. This will make women and girls less safe and more vulnerable to violence while travelling on the Underground. It will also involve women station staff working alone more than they do currently, making

them also more vulnerable to attack.

“The level of sexual harassment and assault on London Underground is already at a shockingly high level, and these staffing cuts are likely to make it worse.

“Do you really want to accredit an organisation as an ally against violence against women and girls, when it is doing this? Would you reconsider this accreditation in the light of this plan to reduce security and protection for women and girls?”

White Ribbon wrote back:

“Thank you for raising this with us. Whilst we understand

your concerns this is outside the direct scope of White Ribbon accreditation. We will bear these points in mind as we work with TfL on the delivery of their three-year action plan.”

So, a charity whose raison d’être is opposing violence against women claims that concerns about violence against women are outside its scope. So long as an organisation ticks some “awareness” boxes, what it actually does in practice appears to be irrelevant.

Accreditation schemes are little more than corporate virtue-signalling. □

PR could open way to new party



Letter

In Britain today we’re not in Russia January 1917 when Lenin famously said that he wouldn’t see a socialist revolution in his lifetime, only to get into power ten months later.

Sir Keir Starmer, Labour leader, does not have the charisma of Tony Blair, and

it is unlikely that Labour will win a landslide in the next general election given its lack of policies.

More likely is that Labour will be the biggest party dependant on support from the Lib Dems, the Greens, and the SNP, probably in a confidence and supply arrangement.

This would be the best outcome for socialists. The Lib Dems, the Greens, and the SNP, would call for the introduction of proportional representation (PR) as a condition for their support.

PR for parliament based on five-member constituencies would keep the local link and, more importantly, lead to a new mass party of the working-class getting seats in parliament.

Under PR the Labour Party would rapidly go the way of the French Socialist Party and the Dutch Labour Party who get just five-percent of the vote in parliamentary elections.

Starmer’s fear of the Lib Dems is why Labour has been delivering leaflets in the 5 May local elections attacking

them from the right by saying the Lib Dems are “soft on drugs,” which is a lie.

The Lib Dems unfortunately don’t currently call for the legal regulation of all drugs. However, the Lib Dems do say that drugs should be seen as a medical problem rather than a criminal one.

We should support proportional representation which could lead to Britain getting its first workers’ government. □

John Roberts, Fenland, Cambs

Children and the trans debate



Letter

Zack Muddle’s article in [Solidarity 633](#) (“Tories say ‘out’ trans students”) contains a number of highly debatable points, slipped in as though they are uncontroversial.

For instance, Zack writes that: “Many people are trans or non-binary.” Zack doesn’t define what criteria are being used here, but as a matter of fact, all scientifically established definitions of biological sex give the same answer: there is no third type of gamete and every human is born due to the fusion of one of each type of gamete. No human has ever existed who was able to impregnate themselves, and that includes the tiny number of intersex people (none of whom, by the way, represent any sort of halfway stage between male and female).

But I am more concerned about what the article has to say about children – i.e. youngsters of under 16 years of age. Zack argues that: “A child or young person’s decision to socially transition gender, or to experiment with doing so should be theirs and theirs alone”, claiming that “it is entirely reversible.” Obviously, no-one can, or should, attempt to prevent a child experimenting with their sexuality and/or gender, but Zack then makes a quite different proposal: “A decision to undergo medical treatment should also be the child or young person’s alone, subject to the discretion of supportive medical professionals.”

Zack doesn’t spell out what is meant by “supportive medical professionals” but I suspect that means people who will simply affirm the child’s decision without regard to other possible issues like homophobic bullying, sexual abuse, or

autism. Workers Liberty has always supported an age of consent, and has stated: “Any fixed age of consent is necessarily arbitrary, but 16 (the age of consent in Britain) does coincide with other markers of adulthood and economic independence (age of marriage, school leaving age, full-time employment).”

“We oppose the call for the abolition of the age of consent.”

Of course, this statement was in the context of consent to sexual relations and not about elective medical interventions: but I think the same principle applies. Children should not be allowed to make life-changing medical decisions about their bodies at an age when the law says (rightly in my view) they are too young to have a tattoo. □

Jack McDonough,
Birmingham

Song not slogan

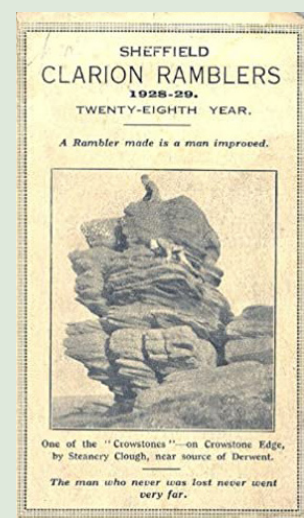


Letter

My short article on the Kinder Mass Trespass in [Solidarity 633](#), thanks to some bizarre editing, claims that the words “I may be a wage slave on a Sunday but I am a free man on Monday” were a slogan adopted by the trespassers.

In fact they are a line from the song *The Manchester Rambler*, written by folk-singer Ewan McColl shortly after the Trespass. I originally intended the words to form a sub-title to the article, but the editor shifted them to the main text and attributed them to a slogan.

I’m too old to go clambering up Kinder Scout any more but I hope the fine tradition of rambling, and the singing of *The Manchester Rambler*, for so long associated with the



Left, will continue.

As someone originally from Sheffield, I note that one of the Kinder Trespass contingents came from that city.

The illustration is an image of the Sheffield Clarion Ramblers’ handbook from 1928-9. □

John Cunningham,
Lancashire

The story of Steven Donziger



Environment

By Luca Brusco

Steven Donziger is an American human rights lawyer who took on Chevron over oil waste in the Amazon.

The story begins in the 60s, when Texaco, in partnership with Petroecuador, started drilling for oil in the rainforest.

The website Chevrontoxico.com claims that Texaco deliberately dumped over 16 billion gallons of toxic waste, spilled 17 million gallons of crude oil, and left hazardous waste in open pits in the forest, to save about \$3 per barrel.

For the local indigenous population, so the website reports, that meant of numerous types of cancer, miscarriages, birth defects, deaths from poisoning, and skin diseases. Various findings quote the excess rates of cancer at either 130% higher, or 30 times higher than the rest of the country.

In 1993, Steven Donziger and other attorneys sued Texaco in New York on the behalf of over 30,000 farmers and indigenous people living in the Amazon.

However, in 2001, Chevron bought Texaco, and insisted that the responsibility for the cleanup lay with Petroecuador – despite Texaco already admitting to dumping toxic waste in the area for decades.

Chevron fought for the lawsuit to be moved to Ecuador. The US courts ruled in Chevron's favor, under the condition that Chevron would accept the verdict by the courts there. Given that Chevron's annual revenue at the time was higher than the entire GDP of Ecuador, it's easy to see why the company would prefer to have their trial there. But Chevron miscalculated. It was found guilty in 2011, and was ordered to pay \$18 billion in damages to the plaintiffs. Chevron appealed, but the ruling was upheld, although the damages were reduced to \$9.5 billion.

Not a cent

Fair.org describes the background to the rulings the following way: "Economic collapse in 1999 led to massive political upheaval in Ecuador; the country had seven presidents from 1996 until 2006. Under President Rafael Correa (first elected in 2006), Ecuador's judiciary became far less subservient to multinationals."

What was Chevron's reaction? It moved out all assets from the country, and vowed to "fight until hell freezes over . . . and then we'll fight it out on the ice", breaking its previous promise to accept the results of the trial.

To this day, Chevron has not paid a

single cent for the cleanup. Instead, it went for Donziger, filing a suit against him for his attempt to "extort" the company.

The case was presided over by New York Judge Lewis A. Kaplan, a former tobacco lawyer. He ruled that Donziger won in the Ecuadorian court by "corrupt means". This ruling relied on the testimony of Alberto Guerra, a defrocked Ecuadorian judge, whom Chevron moved to the United States and gave him a monthly stipend 20 times of his former salary. According to an interview with Donziger, Guerra later admitted lying under oath in a separate arbitration, but Judge Kaplan upheld his verdict, and Donziger was disbarred from practising law. Donziger never got a jury trial.

Judge Kaplan said during a hearing on 8 February 2011:

"We are dealing here with a company of considerable importance to our economy that employs thousands all over the world, that supplies a group of commodities, gasoline, heating oil, other fuels and lubricants on which every one of us depends every single day. I don't think there is anybody in this courtroom who wants to pull his car into a gas station to fill up and finds that there isn't any gas there because these folks [Donziger's clients] have attached it in Singapore or wherever else."

Then, so Donziger writes on his

homepage: "Chevron upped the ante in 2019 by targeting me in New York with the first corporate prosecution in the history of the United States. Not only is this corporate prosecution a threat to the rule of law, it is also a dangerous attack on the very fabric of our democracy (...) Kaplan (...) appointed the Chevron law firm Seward & Kissel to prosecute me on contempt charges after the regular federal prosecutor rejected his case. I had just appealed a shocking order from Kaplan that I turn over my computer and cell phone to Chevron - an order that would have forced me to violate attorney-client privilege and put the lives of my vulnerable clients in danger."

Locked up

"[Because Donziger refused] the prosecutor from the Chevron law firm (Rita Glavin) promptly had me locked up at home in August of 2019. After being found 'guilty' in July 2021 in a non-jury trial by another judge with financial ties to Chevron, I now face a six-month sentence in a federal prison after having been under house arrest for well over two years."

At the writing of this article, Donziger has only recently been released.

It's a story of what a company with practically limitless resources can get away with, even in nominally free, bourgeois democracies. □

Macron, Mélenchon, and June

By Martin Thomas

On 7 May Jean-Luc Mélenchon launched his slate for France's 12 and 19 June National Assembly elections, NUPES, the New Ecologist and Social Popular Union, with a rally of 1,500 in the Paris suburb of Aubervilliers.

The slate will have a common platform, not yet published, but featuring a rise in the minimum wage, a price freeze on some basic goods, a restored wealth tax, reducing pension age towards 60, and green policies. It shares out constituencies between Mélenchon's own La France Insoumise, the Socialist Party, the Communist Party, and the green EELV. Its proclaimed aim is to force president Emmanuel Macron to appoint Mélenchon prime minister.

There's a lesson for the Blair Return Project people around Starmer: Blair-type policies

since 2012 reduced the Socialist Party to 1.7% of the vote in the 10-24 April presidential election, and it has had to

adopt a more leftish face to avoid extinction.

NUPES is doing well in polls, at 34%. The centre (behind Ma-

cron) is on 25%, the old right 9%, and Marine Le Pen's Ralliement National 20%. Much will depend on turnout, and on first-second round transfers between centre, right, and far-right. The common slate allows NUPES to beat the 12.5% threshold on the first round of voting to get into the run-off almost everywhere. Without the joint slate none of its constituents could be so sure. Although Mélenchon took most of the leftish vote in the presidential election, his La France Insoumise is not a party, only an electronic sign-up operation. It has only 17 out of 577 seats in the outgoing Assembly and only 46 local councillors out of 220,000 across France. The SP and CP are still parties, though much weakened.

The weakness of NUPES, from a socialist viewpoint, is that it is not a party, something which can be pushed to

develop beyond its leaders; and Mélenchon's is a populist and nationalist politics, rather than working-class or socialist. Mélenchon proposes it as an *alternative* to (as he puts it) "kilometres of demonstrations", and a way of mitigating Macron's rule rather than overthrowing it. He says that he and Macron will find a way to agree policies "because it is in the country's [France's] interest" to do so, over Ukraine; and what else?

Lutte Ouvrière is standing outspoken revolutionary socialist candidates in the first round everywhere in metropolitan France. The Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste finally refused to join NUPES, citing a poor offer of seats in the slate share-out more than political objections: it will back NUPES in most areas, seeking "unitary left" contenders only against SP candidates and a few others. □



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War in Ukraine means hunger in Africa

By Neil Roberts

The implications of the Russian invasion of Ukraine for world food could be even more worrying than for fuel markets.

Ukraine contains some of the richest soils on earth and has for centuries been a significant exporter of food – its grains fed ancient Greek city states, the Roman and Ottoman Empires.

The 18th and 19th centuries saw

food become a truly globally traded commodity, with Britain pioneering free trade policies which saw vast new tracts of the Americas and Australasia cultivated for export. The major industrialising European nations followed Britain to become net importers of food. The major exceptions were Ireland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania and the portion of the Russian Empire north of the Black Sea, of which Ukraine was a major part.

The capture of the Ukraine to use its agricultural exports as cash cow was central to Catherine the Great's conception of building the Russian Empire, a tradition that the current Russian leadership see themselves as part of.

Ukraine's role as a breadbasket became even more critical in the geopolitics of the 20th century. The food strategy of the German leaderships in both world wars hinged on capturing and exploiting what was hoped to be Germany's equivalent of the North American prairie, allowing it to withstand being navally blockaded. The interval between the wars saw Ukraine experience the Holodomor, where agricultural production was devastated by Stalinist mismanagement and the Ukrainian people subjected to profoundly discriminatory allocation of the food that was produced, killing millions.

Russia and Ukraine were, on the eve of the invasion, the first and second ranked exporters of wheat in the world respectively, and rank highly in several other key staples. However, Russian territory does not enjoy the same access to deep water ports (as ever the great bête noire of Russian imperialist aspirations) as the Ukrainian coastline. Much of Russian food export was shipped through Odessa. In addition, Ukraine's increasingly western economic orientation has frustrated Putin's attempt to establish what has been referred to as

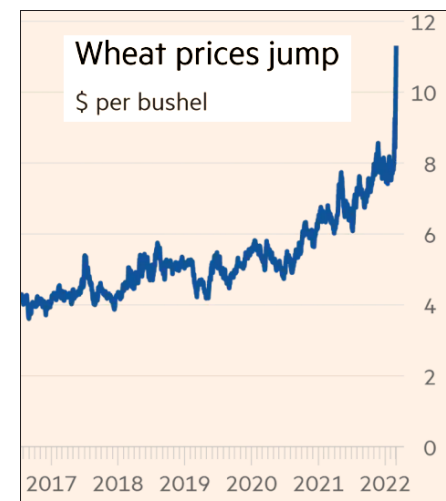
"an OPEC for wheat", a cartel for controlling prices, and gain diplomatic and economic leverage.

Food has historically been central to Russian war aims of securing Ukrainian territory generally and the Black Sea coastline in general.

And terror through hunger, like in previous campaigns in Chechnya and Syria, has been central to Russian methods of war. Food infrastructure has been deliberately targeted and despite heroic efforts the food situation for many Ukrainians is worsening.

The implications for those around the world dependent on Ukraine for food could only just be beginning. The major harvests are in the summer and autumn but already the disruption to the transport of existing stockpiles and uncertainty over future supplies have been felt.

Food prices are spiking faster than



any time since the 2007-8 global food crisis. Many of the worst affected nations are in Africa and the Middle East, where imports of basics often go alongside huge agricultural production of cash crops for export. □



Covid case counts have fallen but remain high. Precautions like mask-wearing and self-isolating when sick have faded. A new wave (though probably a mild one) is likely with the BA.4 and BA.5 subvariants. Whole new variants are certain in due course, and may be fiercer than Omicron. We combat the Tories' and bosses' scaling-back of virus-surveillance, sick pay provision, etc., and 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. □

Sri Lanka's PM forced out

By Sacha Ismail

On 3 April, following weeks of protests in Sri Lanka, the country's entire cabinet resigned, except prime minister Mahinda Rajapaksa. On 28 April there was a general strike – the first since 1980

Now, following a second general strike on 6 May, with a week of union-organised protests set to culminate in a march on parliament on Friday 13th, Rajapaksa has resigned too. However, his brother Gotabaya Rajapaksa remains executive president. Protesters are saying "Gota, go home". Al Jazeera reports unions threatening an indefinite general strike to oust the president.

Despite the power of the protests, Gotabaya – a nationalist authoritarian of the Modi-type, but with more of a

military background – seems unlikely to go easily. His brother's resignation came after hundreds of government supporters went from being addressed by the president to attacking a protest camp in Colombo with iron bars, sparking violent clashes and destruction across the island. At least five have been killed, including a government MP, the houses of numerous government MPs have been attacked and the Rajapaksas' ancestral home set on fire.

As discussed in [Solidarity 633](#), the question of what political forces and what policies can replace the Rajapaksa regime is still difficult. □

- What's happening in Sri Lanka? Discussion organised by US group Internationalism From Below Monday 16 May, 4.30pm UK time. Register at bit.ly/s-lanka

The real history of Labour, NATO, and bans

By Mohan Sen

In 1949, when Parliament actually voted on signing the North Atlantic Treaty, six Labour MPs voted against. That was near the height of the Cold War, with the Berlin airlift and more. Three of the six were expelled – it seems for solid Stalinist affiliations, not just opposing NATO – and three weren't. Of the three expelled, two drifted out of politics. The third, Konni Zilliacus, was readmitted in 1952 and was an MP again after 1955 for a very right-dominated Labour

Party, while remaining a (now somewhat dissident) Stalinist.

Ian Mikardo – who vocally opposed NATO's creation in the name not of "Communism", but a social-democratic united Europe as a global third force – remained a prominent MP, with the same sort of politics he'd had in the 40s, until 1987.

Labour's leaderships have always been pro-NATO, even when the party supported nuclear disarmament in the 1980s. But there have always been MPs, as well as many party units and activists, who opposed that stance.

Yet now there is talk that Keir Starmer may "purge" Labour MPs who signed a Stop the War Coalition [statement](#) critical of NATO.

The *Times*, which carried the story on 3 May, [editorialised](#) the day before calling for a purge.

"There should not be a place in Labour's ranks", loftily declared the paper, as if Rupert Murdoch should be the arbiter of who belongs in Labour and who doesn't, "for a current of opinion that extenuates aggression and echoes the claim of the Kremlin." Of course the

Times only means some aggression. Saudi aggression in Yemen or US invasion of Iraq (etc.) is another matter.

Some in the Labour Party have soft-soaped Russian imperialism. But John McDonnell, mentioned most prominently in speculation about a purge, has been more vocal and active denouncing Russia's war and supporting Ukraine than the Labour leaders!

Workers' Liberty has no time for the Stop the War Coalition; we are fighting in the labour movement to overturn support for it. We believe NATO and its

expansion are marginal to the causes of the current conflict, a war of Russian imperialist aggression. Still, the left must insist on our right to criticise and oppose NATO.

If Starmer does move to get rid of MPs for criticising NATO, this will in fact be unprecedented. John McDonnell entered Parliament in 1997, under Tony Blair. There was never any suggestion his attitude to NATO disqualified him. Even Blair never threatened expulsions for holding such views. □

Roe v Wade: Day of action 14 May

From Tempest

On 6 May US revolutionary socialist on-line magazine Tempest carried [reports](#) on early pro-abortion rights demonstrations around the US. Predominantly organised by socialists, these protests have mobilised between hundreds and a few thousand, heavily young people. Tempest says:

This is an outrageous assault on the right to control our own bodies, lives, and futures for women and people who can become pregnant, and will disproportionately impact poor and working class people, especially people of color. 13 states have so-called “trigger laws” designed to immediately

go into effect should Roe fall.

The fact that a body of nine unelected people can override the will of the sixty percent of people who support Roe v. Wade is testament to how deeply undemocratic this country really is. And it’s a wake-up call that the dominant strategy of lobbying and voting for Democrats to protect abortion rights that liberals have pursued for decades – even when that means supporting Democrats who oppose abortion – has failed.

Barricades

From the moment the leak became public, activists mobilised outside the Supreme Court, where police had put

up barricades in anticipation of the backlash. In the following days, thousands of people built emergency protests to oppose the draft decision, with more planned this weekend. A national day of action has been called for May 14 by the Women’s March and Planned Parenthood.

While the organisers are likely to focus on the November midterms and getting out the vote (for Democrats), the protests present an opportunity to build a mass, fighting abortion rights movement based on a different strategy – one that recognises the need to mobilise the masses of people who want to defend abortion rights where it matters: in the streets. We need to

urgently build and join ongoing grassroots organisations that can fight consistently for free abortion, on demand, without apology, no matter who’s in office, and no matter what the court decides. We need to get our unions on board, too.

Won

This is not only how other countries from Argentina to Mexico to Ireland have won abortion rights – it’s also what it took to win Roe in the first place. □

- More: “What strategy?”, from Socialist Alternative (linked to Socialist Alternative in the UK): bit.ly/w-stra

Flight attendants condemn attack on rights

By Sara Nelson, President of the Association of Flight Attendants

The right to abortion affirmed in 1973 was transformational for women’s rights and our jobs. Cabin crew fought executives who exploited our sexuality and pushed gender inequality. We organised to define our careers and keep our personal choices as our own.

Choice and self-determination are at the foundation of why we formed our union 75 years ago. In the earliest days

of commercial aviation, we were allowed few choices in the workplace. Every part of our bodies and our lives were dictated by management. Airlines only hired white, single, childless women under age 32 who met specific height, weight, and male-defined appearance standards.

Choosing

Even if you met those “standards”, getting pregnant, having a baby, choosing to marry or gaining a few pounds meant giving up your job. Our first demands as a union were sen-

iority-based scheduling, to stop managers using schedules to coerce us to choose between sexual exploitation and earning a living.

Today anyone with the heart of a Flight Attendant can choose this career, and through our unions we have a voice on the job to protect our rights. As union members, we understand democracy in our workplaces and in our public square. Americans overwhelmingly support safe, legal abortion. This is not just a radical assault on our rights and settled law, it is an attack

against the majority of this country and the ideals upon which it was founded.

The Justices who wrote this opinion will not stop here. They will work to strip Americans of other freedoms we have fought for. They will strip the freedom to marry from our LGBTQ colleagues and neighbours. They will strip away our rights to birth control. They have already gutted the right to vote, and our right to elections free of corporate influence. Our union will continue fighting for equality and freedom for all.

We call on airline management to stand with us and for equality, anti-discrimination, and mutual respect. It is not enough that corporations espouse these principles – now is the time to demonstrate this commitment to their employees and passengers.

Freedom

This is about our safety and our freedom. We cannot work if we are not safe. □

- From a [statement](#) from the Association of Flight Attendants (Communication Workers of America).

A million illegal abortions a year?

According to [US National Public Radio](#), before the Roe v. Wade Supreme Court ruling legalised abortion in 1973, between two hundred thousand and a million women a year had illegal abortions. NPR says twenty states are poised to ban or restrict abortion

if the Supreme Court overturns Roe v. Wade. Moreover, American legal historian Mary Ziegler told them: “In the longer term, the anti-abortion movement is not going to be satisfied with reversing Roe. We’ve already seen anti-abortion lawyers asking the court to

recognise the personhood of a fetus under the 14th Amendment [to the US constitution, in theory guaranteeing equal citizenship nationally], which would make abortion unconstitutional everywhere, illegal in places like New York and California as much as in

places like Alabama.” And indeed on 7 May Republican senate leader Mitch McConnell, currently looking likely to become Senate majority leader again in November, told reporters that if his party wins Congress could vote on a national legislative ban on abortion. □

Abortion bans imminent unless Democrats change course fast

By Jenny Brown

In the leaked draft decision, Alito writes: “It is time to... return the issue of abortion to the people’s elected representatives.” Large majorities of people in the United States (between 60 and 72 percent) support Roe v. Wade, so a healthy legislative system would have long since made abortion legal through federal law. Ours is moribund.

In September, anticipating a Supreme Court bloodbath, Democrats in the US House passed the Women’s Health Protection Act, a law codifying the rights enumerated in Roe. A Senate vote defeated it 46-48. Two Republican senators who allegedly support abortion rights, Lisa Murkowski and Susan Collins, voted against, citing quibbles with its language. [In any case,] the fili-

buster rule means 41 senators can nix anything.

Short of abolishing the Senate, it would certainly help to get rid of the filibuster. A host of vital bills are being held hostage, from climate change legislation to a higher minimum wage to union rights.

Having been unable to pass most legislation that would actually help communities pillaged by corporations and

oppressed by right-wing state legislatures, Senate Democrats are now set to use abortion to try to gin up support in the midterm elections. But even if a massive popular uprising on this allows Democrats to hold on to the Senate, unless they abolish the filibuster, a law protecting abortion access has no chance. What can they promise us tomorrow that they can’t deliver today? It’s time to

defend democracy and make abortion legal throughout the country. □

- From an article in [Jacobin](#). Jenny Brown is a former editor of rank-and-file union publication *Labor Notes*, and author of books including *Women’s Liberation and National Health Care: Confronting the Myth of America* and *Without Apology: The Abortion Struggle Now*.

Bird flu: a warning for the next pandemic

By Angela Driver

Avian flu has been affecting many countries this year, leading to widespread culling of poultry in UK, France, US, and other countries.

In America this has led to direct-action protests at the methods used. Glen Taylor, a billionaire who also owns Rembrandt Enterprises, culled 5.3 million hens by “ventilatory shutdown plus” (VSD+). Protesters glued themselves to goals to disrupt the games in April of the Minnesota Timberwolves basketball team, where Taylor is majority shareholder.

US authorities (but not UK) advise that VSD+ is a legitimate method of culling. The birds die slowly over several hours from overheating and suffocating after ventilation is shut off and buildings are heated. Campaigners have shared footage that shows some were still alive at the end of hours of that.

Workers at Taylor’s farms had the grim task of clearing out the dead birds, and worked twelve to fourteen hours per day to do so. Once the job was finished, all 250 workers were sacked after weeks of gruelling work.

This is the biggest bird flu outbreak in America’s history, with over 35 million birds culled so far. It is also the biggest outbreak in UK history. The government won’t release statistics on the number culled, but the BBC estimated back in January that it was over a million, and new cases have been identified in the UK up until a few days ago, so total is probably greater. Five million birds have been culled in France.

This international outbreak is of concern for humanity, as every outbreak of bird flu makes the transition into a new zoonotic human pandemic more likely.

Influenza has four types A, B, C and D. D does not occur in humans. B and C occur in humans, but do not mutate easily, and most humans become immune to them in childhood. The strain that is of concern is type A.

There are two proteins that are used to classify subtypes of A: H (spike protein) and N (an enzyme). There are 18 known types of H and 11 known types of N, and these form 198 theoretical combinations. About 30 of these have been sequenced.

Apart from H18N11 and H1710, isolated in bats, all identified subtypes occur in birds, most commonly in migrating wild waterfowl.

H2N2 used to be endemic in humans, but is now believed to be extinct in the wild, after it mutated to H3N2, which is now endemic in humans. H1N1 and

H1N2 are also endemic to humans. Those subtypes continue to mutate frequently, which is why the flu vaccination is updated each year.

If other subtypes of the virus evolve to the point where human-to-human transmission is ongoing and uncontained, then that will result in another pandemic among humans. A flu pandemic may be much harder to manage than the coronavirus pandemic, as the flu virus mutates much more quickly than the coronavirus does.

Virologists also believe that a flu pandemic is very likely, as type A flu has jumped species many times, infecting cats, seals, pigs, bats. Some subtypes are endemic in dogs, and horses.

There have been numerous zoonotic flu outbreaks among humans in the past. The most famous is that of 1918 Spanish flu, an avian flu caused by H1N1. In 2009 swine flu from H1N1 infected humans, and spread across the globe, fortunately with few serious illnesses.

When H2N2 evolved into H3N2, it became the “Hong Kong flu” of 1968-9, killing maybe a million people at a time when populations contained many fewer frail elderly people, then became endemic among humans.

The H2N2 that preceded it caused the “Asian flu” outbreak in 1956-1957, and may have also caused the “Russian flu” in 1889.

Each subtype of the flu virus is also classified as either highly pathogenic (HPAI, highly pathogenic avian influenza) or low pathogen (LPAI). LPAI can become HPAI during an outbreak.

Historically wild birds were carriers of flu viruses, but rarely became ill as a result of them.

Most of the avian flu outbreaks that have led to the culling of millions of birds internationally over the last year have been caused by HPAI H1N5. This subtype was first identified to be causing illness among birds in China in 1997, and went on to infect people, causing fatalities in over 50% of cases. Most cases of human infection come from direct contact with diseased birds, and it is rare. There have been some examples of human to human transmission, but too rarely to cause a pandemic.

The current strain of H1N5 is thought to be less deadly for humans, and less transmissible, and has only resulted in two human transmissions in US and one in the UK. But the more outbreaks there are, the more the subtype is transmitted, the more likely it is that it will mutate to a form that can cause wide-



spread disease and death among humans.

There are other subtypes that have caused bird deaths and spread to humans, such as H7N9, which emerged in China in 2013, and has caused at least 1,500 infections in people. 40% of cases are fatal. Studies have shown that this subtype is mutating, and becoming able to transmit among other mammals.

Human actions of humans make it more likely that more pandemics will emerge. The flu viruses circulate in migratory birds. The birds have various flight paths around the world. One across Russia and Europe, one Pacific to the Americas, and one in Eurasia. They overlap in northern Asia, where birds spend part of the year, allowing pathogens to mingle before they circle the globe in different directions.

Migratory birds can spread disease to local wild birds and to domesticated birds by direct and indirect contact, and through faeces and feathers.

When the virus encounters domestic birds, it often finds them huddled together in huge numbers, with low genetic diversity, immunocompromised by stress and poor welfare conditions, and too young to have developed many non-innate antibodies. In those conditions the virus spreads fast, and mutates.

As they are domesticated, these birds are in frequent contact with humans, and so bird-to-human transmission is more likely.

The government Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs (Defra) notes that even when there are live alerts and the disease is known to be present, there is poor biosecurity on farms. Farmers fail to take precautions like cleaning, changing clothing, and securing buildings, to prevent viruses from outside reaching livestock. Humans act as vectors, spreading the virus

from one building of infected birds to other buildings.

Despite the Covid 19 pandemic, sufficient measures are not being taken to reduce the likelihood of future pandemics. Large-scale farmers continue to keep animals in conditions which reduce their immune systems and increase the risk of disease from wild animals infecting livestock, mutating, and then becoming a zoonotic disease and infecting humans who interact with the livestock.

According to the World Health Organisation, zoonotic diseases are occurring more and more frequently. Farming needs to be planned with the welfare of people, plants and animals as the priority, rather than as it is now – on the basis of short term profit. □

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A titanic struggle

The Dublin Labour War, 1913-14, part two



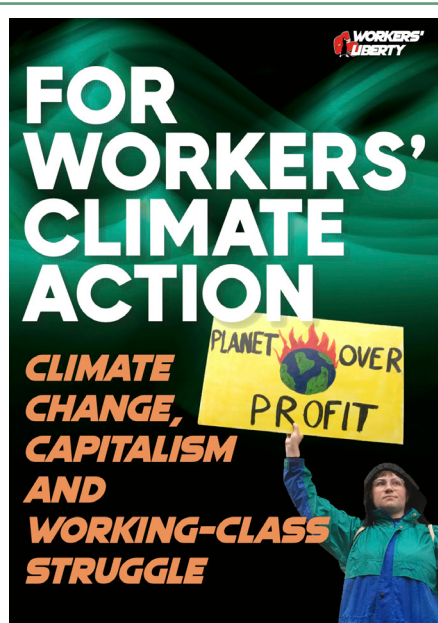
**Connolly
politically
unexpurgated**

By James Connolly

This is part 2 of the section on the 1913-4 Dublin Labour War of our series on Connolly: politically unexpurgated: workersliberty.org/connolly

What is the truth about the Dublin dispute? What was the origin of the Dublin dispute? These are at present the most discussed questions in the labour world of these islands, and I have been invited by the editor of the *Daily Herald* to try and shed a little light upon them for the benefit of its readers. I will try and be brief and to the point, whilst striving to be also clear.

In the year 1911 the National Seamen's and Firemen's Union, as a last desperate expedient to avoid extinction, resolved upon calling a general strike in all the home ports. At that time the said Union as the lawyers would say, was, more or less, an Ishmael among trade unions. It was not registered, in most places it was not even affiliated to the local Trades Union Councils, and its national officials had always been hostile to the advanced labour movement.



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

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They believed, seemingly, in playing a lone hand.

Perhaps the general discredit into which it had been brought by the curiously inconsistent action of its leaders in closely identifying themselves with one of the orthodox political parties, and at the same time calling for the aid in industrial conflicts of the Labour men whom they fought and slandered in political contests, had something to do with the general weakness and impending bankruptcy of the National Seamen's and Firemen's Union, at the time it issued its call in 1911.

At all events the call was in danger of falling upon deaf ears, and was, in fact, but little heeded until the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union began to take a hand in the game. As ships came into the Port of Dublin, after the issue of the call, each ship was held up by the dockers under the orders of Larkin until its crew joined the union, and signed on under Union conditions and rates of pay.

Naturally, this did not please the ship-owners and merchants of Dublin. But the delegates of the Transport Union up and down the docks preached most energetically the doctrine of the sympathetic strike, and the doctrine was readily assimilated by the dockers and carters. It brought the union into a long and bitter struggle along the quays, a struggle which cost it thousands of pounds, imperilled its very existence, and earned for it the bitterest hatred of every employer and sweater in the city, every one of whom swore they would wait their chance to "get even with Larkin and his crew."

The sympathetic strike having worked so well for the seamen and firemen, the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union began to apply it ruthlessly in every labour dispute. A record of the victories it has won for other trade unions would surprise a good many of its critics. A few cases will indicate what, in the hands of Larkin and the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, it has won for some of the skilled trades.

When the coachmakers went on strike the Transport Union took over all the labourers, paid them strike pay, and kept them out until the coachmakers won. The latter body are now repaying us by doing scab work while we are out.

The mill-sawyers existed for 20 years in Dublin without recognition. The sympathetic strike by our union won them

recognition and an increase of pay.

The stationary engine drivers, the cabinetmakers, the sheet metal workers, the carpenters, and, following them all the building trades got an increase through our control of the carting industry. As did also the girls and men employed in Jacob's biscuit factory.

In addition to this work for others, we won for our own members the following increases within the last two years: cross channel dockers got, since the strike in the City of Dublin Steam Packet Company, an increase of wages of 3s. per week. In the case of the British and Irish Company the increase, levelling it up with the other firms, meant a rise of 6s. per week. For men working for the Merchants' Warehousing Company 3s. per week, general carriers 2s. to 3s., coal fillers halfpenny per ton, grain bushellers 1d. per ton, men and boys in the bottle-blowing works from 2s. to 10s. per week of an increase, mineral water operatives 4s. to 6s. per week, and a long list of warehouses in which girls were exploited were compelled to give some slight modification of the inhuman conditions under which their employees were labouring.

Sympathetic strike

As Mr Havelock Wilson, General Secretary, National Seamen's and Firemen's Union, has mentioned the strike on the City of Dublin Steam Packet Company as an instance of our erratic methods, it may be worth while to note that as a result of that strike some of his sailors got an increase of 5s. 6d. per week.

In addition to the cases enumerated I might also mention that the labourers on the Dublin and South-Eastern Railway got increases of 6s. per week, and those in the Kingstown Gas Works got increases varying from 3s. to 10s. per week per man.

All of these increases were the result of the sympathetic strike policy, first popularised by its success in winning the battle for the Seamen and Firemen – who are now asked to repudiate it.

These things well understood explain the next act in the unfolding of the drama. Desiring to make secure what had been gained, Mr. Larkin formulated a scheme for a Conciliation Board.

This was adopted by the Trades Council, at least in essence, and eventually came before the Employers' Executive, or whatever the governing committee of that body is named. After

a hot discussion it was put to the vote. Eighteen employers voted to accept a Conciliation Board, three voted against.

Of that three, William Martin Murphy was one. On finding himself in the minority he rose and vowed that in spite of them he would "smash the Conciliation Board."

Within three days he kept his word by discharging two hundred of his tramway traffic employees for being members of the Irish Transport Workers' Union, and thus forced on the strike of the tramway men. Immediately he appealed to all the Dublin employers who had been forced into a semblance of decency by Larkin and his colleagues, called to their memory the increases of wages they were compelled to pay, and lured them on to a desperate effort to combine and destroy the one Labour force they feared.

The employers, mad with hatred of the power that had wrested from them the improved conditions, a few of which I have named, rallied round Murphy, and from being one in a minority of three he became the leader and organising spirit of a band of four hundred and four.

I have always told our friends in Great Britain that our fight in Ireland was neither inspired nor swayed by theories nor theorists. It grew and was hammered out of the hard necessities of our situation. Here, in this brief synopsis, you can trace its growth for yourselves. First a fierce desire to save our brothers of the sea, a desire leading to us risking our own existence in their cause. Developing from that an extension of the principle of sympathetic action until we took the fierce beast of capital by the throat all over Dublin, and loosened its hold on the vitals of thousands of our class.

Then a rally of the forces of capital to recover their hold, and eventually a Titanic struggle, in which the forces of Labour in England openly, and the forces of capital secretly, became participants.

That is where we stand to-day. The struggle forming our theories and shaping the policy, not only for us, but for our class. To those who criticise us we can only reply: we fight as conditions dictate; we meet new conditions with new policies. Those who choose may keep old policies to meet new conditions. We cannot and will not try.

• *Daily Herald*, 6 December 1913

Charlotte Despard in Ireland in the 1920s

By Jill Mountford

Part two of a series on the feminist and socialist Charlotte Despard (1844-1939)

"Bad news from Ireland... (the General Post Office) is in the hands of the rebels".

That was an entry in Charlotte Despard's diary in April 1916. A couple of days later she wrote "the Irish trouble seems to be spreading".

These in-passing comments in Charlotte's diary, written in the midst of World War One and all the activities and causes she was involved in on the ground in London, were about events yet to have a significant impact on her.

The Vote, the newspaper of the Women's Freedom League (WFL), of which Despard had been a founding member and was still very much the leading figure, carried articles on the Easter Rising:

"On the situation in Ireland one can speak with no sympathy at all, save for the loyal lives unnecessarily sacrificed and the nation's burden of mourning increased. The plot was not even secret, which makes its own futility, and idiocy of those who complacently watched it forming, all the more infuriating".

Other articles talked of "heartless rebels" harming women and children. The pages of the paper showed no interest in Constance Markievicz, until she was elected the first woman MP in 1918, although in April 1916 she had been imprisoned and for a period was awaiting execution for her part in the Easter Rising.

Despard was not the editor of the paper, but there appears to be no evidence that she put up a fight about any of that comment. Too busy with her great collection of committees and causes, she seemed unable to see the importance of *The Vote* as a propaganda tool.

Sylvia Pankhurst and the newspaper of her East End Suffragette organisation, *The Woman's* (from 1917 *Workers' Dreadnought*), were different, with an immediate, thoughtful, and socialist response to events.

The *Dreadnought* was determined from the outset to be a tool for independent thinking, a tool to organise people, to educate them and to agitate for improvements in the here and now, and increasingly for a different world.

But the outrageous summary killing by British troops of her friend, fellow suffragist, and socialist pacifist, Francis Sheehy Skeffington, on 26 April 1916

that shook Charlotte to the core. And it was the death of Terence MacSwiney, Mayor of Cork in October 1920, on hunger strike in a British jail, that appears to have determined the course of the rest of her life.

She had joined the Irish Self-determination League (a front organisation for Sinn Fein in Britain) in 1918. In May that year seventy three men and women were arrested and imprisoned without charge. Maud Gonne, Kathleen Clarke, and Constance Markievicz shared a cell in Holloway prison. Three months later they were joined by Hanna Sheehy Skeffington (widow of Francis Sheehy Skeffington).

As a seasoned suffragist, Hanna immediately went on hunger strike, and was released two weeks later. Maud Gonne remained in prison with declining health until the end of October 1918. During this time Charlotte Despard sat outside the prison day after day, come rain or shine, on a vigil for the imprisoned Irish women.

Elections

Under British rule there were elections in Ireland in December 1918 as part of the UK general election. While Charlotte was standing as the Labour Party candidate in Battersea North, in Ireland Sinn Fein, which had been set up in 1905, contested a general election for the first time. It won a spectacular 73 out of 105 Irish seats, sweeping away John Redmond's Home Rule party.

Despard commented "To the ordinary thinker there is no issue, Russia is Bolshevik and Ireland is Sinn Fein."

Despard's brother, John French, was replaced as Commander-in-Chief of the British Home Forces by General Haig and in 1918 he became Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. He agreed to the job providing he could be "Military Viceroy at the Head of a Quasi-Military Government". By March 1920 he had played his part in the establishment of the "Black and Tans", a force notorious for its brutality and made up largely from unemployed British ex-soldiers from the First World War, recruited to fight on the side of their ruling class against the Irish War of Independence.

That same month Terence MacSwiney had been arrested and charged with being "in possession of seditious articles and documents". He was transported to Brixton Prison in London. After a few months he went on hunger strike, and he was allowed to die 74 days later. That focused Charlotte's mind on the cause of Irish Independ-

ence and her commitment to Sinn Fein.

Of his death she said: "Terence MacSwiney, patriot and martyr, is dead, that is the one thought".

In September 1920 Charlotte had received a letter from Maud Gonne asking if she would approach John French about securing the release from prison of Gonne's 16 year old son, Sean MacBride. Needless to say, Charlotte's brother did not help.

On return from a speaking tour in Hungary in November, Charlotte had three letters waiting to be opened, all pleading with her to persuade her brother to intervene in the execution of Kevin Barry, a young soldier in the Irish Republican Army. He was sentenced to death for his part in a raid on a supply lorry where three British soldiers were killed. Barry was already dead by the time she returned from Hungary. She said: "...I fear something desperate, then a massacre, following (sic) by the stifling of all spirit".

Early in the new year of 1921 she left for Ireland at the invitation of the Irish Women's Franchise League. Despard and Gonne wasted no time as they embarked on a tour of inspection around Cork and the south-west, collecting evidence of the violence and brutality of the British forces. The tour was not without its risks. Martial law was in place and soldiers and police were "on knife edge alert" after the events of "Bloody Sunday", when Michael Collins, chief of the pro-independence forces, led his men in the assassination of 12 British Intelligence officers and three others. The British state retaliated later that day at a football match where 14 civilians were killed and 60 injured.

Gonne said of the tour: "With her I was able to visit places I should never have been able to get to... It was amusing to see the puzzled expressions on the faces of the officers... who continually held up our car when Mrs Despard said she as the Viceroy's sister".

Over the months Charlotte wound up her life in London, donating property to social use. Her house in Nine Elms she gave to the council for use as welfare and childcare, and the house in Surrey she shared with Kate Harvey she transferred to Kate for social and welfare use. She took herself off to spend the rest of her days in Ireland.

Having given up her many commitments in London, Charlotte now found herself the President of the Women's Prisoners' Defence League, set up in 1922 by Gonne, Despard and the women folk of Republican prison-

ers outside Mountjoy Jail. There were many brutal reprisals for family members seeking news about prisoners and even worse for prisoners. Gonne said there were "at least 11,000 (Republican prisoners) including 250 women... The constant sound of firing in the jails and wounding of prisoners made the need of a Prisoners' Defence League obvious and urgent."

In December 1921 the Irish Free State, covering four-fifths of the land area of Ireland, was declared, formally ending a five-year Irish struggle for independence from Britain. From June 1922 to May 1923 civil war raged between the Free State and the Irish Republican Army opposed to the Treaty with Britain which had ended the War of Independence. The Civil War divided those who had only recently fought together as comrades for Irish independence. Despard, along with Gonne and Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, supported the Treaty, but later took the anti-Treaty side in the Civil War.

Despard the pacifist found the horrors inflicted by both sides of the Civil War abhorrent. Along with her two friends she began humanitarian projects.

A Public Safety Act was introduced in the South, as bad as the Special Powers Act in the North. Around 12,000 suspects were imprisoned. Supporting the families of these prisoners became a focus for the work of Despard and her friends.

Despard had several projects and campaigns on the go and was still taking up invitations to speak at meetings and to protest, all that alongside running a jam factory! It was commonplace for Republicans to set up small industries to employ ex-prisoners and refugees from Belfast, from which many Catholic workers had been driven out during Partition. Despard dutifully did so at great expense to her health, purse,, and morale.

By 1924 Despard was getting disenchanted with the in-fighting, the splits, and the ineffective Republican answer to serious economic distress. De Valera split from the anti-Treaty Sinn Fein, which was committed to boycotting Free State politics, in 1926, and set up Fianna Fail, taking many from the Republican movement with him.

Despard left Sinn Fein, and threw her support behind the communistic Connolly Club. □

• A third article will cover the rest of Despard's life, from 1926 to 1939.

Erasing world-class sportswomen?



By Ally Goodwin

Zack Muddle ([Solidarity 632](#)) mobilises all his certainties to resolve the dilemma which pits women's rights against trans women's rights in sport. In an article which reads as an attitude in search of justifications, Zack ignores the science to come down on the side of trans-women's rights. He proposes sport deletes its sex-based classificatory system to broaden the category "women" to include biological males.

Zack may not intend to, but in cancelling respect for the sex-based category of "women" he echoes reactionary notions that women's sport should not be valued in its own right. Women's 150 year-long progressive push for our sport to be recognised as equal-but-different to men's sport is not important to Zack. And anyone who does not agree with Zack best take care because those pesky fact-mongers who defend the biology-based classification, "women", are going to be labelled "transphobic" and very loudly so.

Zack seems not to know that sex-checks are already in place to protect the integrity of women's sport. Checks were introduced because the Soviet empire used to dope women athletes with testosterone to enhance their performance. The goal of fair play could not be upheld if clean athletes had to compete against testosterone-fuelled women.

Zack does not see the problem with requiring biological women to compete against a category of participants which is actually defined by greater power – that is biological men. He thinks the key difference in performance between people isn't sex but probably height and weight and ability. His solution is to replace the extant sex-based categories with something

like mixed-sex/gender categories of weight, height and ability. But this will not do the trick, because, and here is the rub of the argument, typically men and women of the same height and weight are not equally powerful. That is why the sports which do screen by weight (which tends to take care of the height issues) or by disability category, do so in the context of a higher order classification – sex. At root, this male advantage is caused by the testosterone differential. There are social reasons stacked on top, but basically, it's testosterone which creates the differences. Zack deals with this fact in the same way that climate deniers minimise science: he asserts the impact of testosterone is "wildly overstated".

As Zack denies the impact of testosterone, so he denies that this inequality is established during puberty. Typically, testosterone fuelled puberty creates a body which is stronger, larger, heavier, more muscular, heavier boned, with larger lungs, a better oxygenating capacity and so is more powerful than a body formed through female puberty. Human bodies going through a healthy male puberty register between 300 and 1200 nanograms of testosterone per decilitre of blood. Forming the female adult body requires only 20 and 40 nanograms per decilitre of blood. Typically, testosterone levels greater than c.50 drive a male puberty. The natural testosterone receptors tend to be inhibited in women with an outlying testosterone count.

Denying the importance of testosterone, and so justifying doing away with the sex-based biological categories, opens the door to the domination of sport by people whose bodies have been formed by a testosterone-fuelled puberty: men. People with an estrogenic puberty - women - would be the losers.

Here are case studies in three different disciplines which demonstrate why sport should be organised along sex-class lines.

- Rugby: the power of the male rugby scrum is 120% of the power of the female scrum. It is not a level playing field, nor is it safe to ask women rugby players to take on this superior force.

- Tennis: competitors who have gone through a male puberty, and who are ranked as low as the 500th best man in the world, would beat Serena Williams. Serena is probably the best ever women tennis player, massively experienced in winning games, technically brilliant, a fantastically powerful woman, and still she would lose. If her male opponent reduced his extant testosterone level to the currently permitted maximum she would still loose, though probably less devastatingly. Serena would not be the world's best tennis player in her weight category nor her height category.

In 1973, tennis convulsed as the elite women players campaigned for equal recognition. The most memorable campaign event was the "Battle of the Sexes" where campaign leader Billie Jean King – who was the top of the world - only just beat Bobby Riggs, a fairly run-down 55-year-old who was once a world best.

- Athletics: a few years ago, about 750 UK men ran under 2 mins for 800m while only three women did. It is safe for the two sexes to run against each other, but it is not fair competition: male mediocrity will beat female excellence. These 750 are club athletes. The women are world class. In Zack's world, Laura Muir is not the UK's best woman over 1500m because women athletes are to be hidden from history and instead Laura is reduced to the category of best UK person in the "under 8 stone and under 5'3" category".

These examples show that sport without biological screening wipes away the excellence of world class women and either puts them at risk or reduces them to the category of also-rans. The advantages conferred by the sex-based power differential certainly stand outside the motivations of the athletes and they stand more or less regardless of

a competitor's testosterone level at the time of competition. Maintained testosterone reduction does bring down attainment, but not enough to level the playing field. The current state of medical science makes post-puberty too late for reduced testosterone levels to negate men's inbuilt physical advantage. Here again, Zack is a science-denier. He thinks the rules requiring testosterone reduction levels are "too restrictive" but he doesn't say why.

All in all, the science tells us that just as disabled people are protected as a separate, but a right and proper class within sport, it is fair to protect the recognition of women – as a sex-class. Both classes should be respected and valued in their own right. I suspect that trans women who make physical adjustment to their bodies should have their own sports classification too.

It was nearly 50 years ago when Billie Jean King successfully reframed equality in sport as an equal rights issue. She opened doors for women athletes to excel and be recognised as professional athletes of equal worth to men. It is only in the last decade that campaigners have secured for British women and girls a realistic chance to achieve in football, cricket and rugby.

I accept that Zack does not want to roll back the gains of women in sport, and yet his position does tell women to know their place and abandon their dreams and hobbies because their protected classification should not exist: they are only the equivalent of mediocre or ageing men. Such standing in the way of women's equality in sport is reactionary and so far as politics is concerned, as you do, so you become. □

AWL on trans rights

Our 2018 conference decision, "Support trans people's rights!": bit.ly/trans-r. Workers' Liberty 3/61, "Gender: the right to chose": bit.ly/3-61 □

Court upholds Gillick competence

By Angela Driver

The attempt to undermine the principle of Gillick competence by Keira Bell's solicitors has failed.

Keira Bell took the Tavistock clinic to court for referring her for puberty-blocking treatments when she was under 18. The initial court [judgement](#) stated that people under 18 were unlikely to be able to

consent for such treatment, and that such treatment should only happen after a court ruling. That went against the established norm where competence of under 18s to consent to treatment is assessed by medical professionals in line with "Gillick competence" - i.e. determining whether the person has enough understanding of the treatment and its implications to consent to it.

The ruling was appealed and [reversed](#). Bell's solicitors responded by putting in a further appeal on the grounds that the law regarding Gillick competence had been misinterpreted. The Supreme Court has [turned down](#) this application "on the basis it raised no arguable point of law".

The principle of Gillick competence is crucial to under 18s being able to obtain birth

control including the morning after pill without parental consent. While Bell's solicitor's case related to trans healthcare, the same firm of solicitors also took a case by a woman with Down's syndrome who was arguing that having late abortions in the case of disability breached the human rights of people with Down's syndrome.

There is a pattern, and it is

to undermine women's reproductive rights. This is a very clear example of how women's rights, and trans rights, far from being counterposed, bolster each other. Trans rights do not limit or impinge on women's rights. An attack on trans rights is an attack on women's rights, and often also an attack on other LGBT people. □

Get moving on council pay!



By a Unison member

The public services union Unison has consulted with their members in local government about the NJC (joint unions) pay claim for the year from April 2022 with two options: 10% or a flat-rate £2,000 increase. The consultation went for £2,000.

We agree with a flat rate claim, but £2,000 will be a real-wage cut for the vast majority of workers in local government. All pay points above NJC scale point 6 (£20,043 per year) would be worse off with £2,000 than a 10% rise.

The GMB and Unite have not yet established what their claim is going to be and have not met with Unison to put a claim to the Local Government Association. The three unions should agree upon and take forward whichever union's claim is highest.

A preferable option would be to fight

for a £2,000 flat rate increase or 10%, whichever is greater.

But to win, Unison needs to be proactive, start campaigning on pay now and keep to a strict timetable, to ensure that we begin balloting as soon as possible if the employer does not agree to the pay claim.

There is potential for strikes by the rail unions, by UCU, and by PCS, in the autumn. Local government unions should be working to a timetable to link industrial action with the other unions.

Unison is by far the largest union in local government. It needs to use its size to put pressure on the other unions to meet within the next four weeks and put in a pay claim to the employers.

In previous years pay talks have dragged on for months after the April settlement date. Last year's ballot over pay took place in December 2021, over eight months after workers were due a pay rise. The rise was paid to most local government workers only in March 2022, eleven months late.

These delays have an impact on members' militancy and willingness to act on pay: by the time it comes to a



decision on action, members prefer the backdated amount of almost any offer to a possibly better rise after yet more delay.

We advocate that Unison push the other unions to meet and submit a pay claim before 1 June, and to make it clear to the employers that if they do not agree to the claim within four weeks then unions will ballot for industrial action.

Local Government unions need to link up to ensure that they are balloting at the same times and planning to strike collectively.

Unison needs to begin a pay campaign now, and avoid demoralising workers by letting the negotiations drag on and on, as has happened in previous years. □



Activist Agenda

Free Our Unions is co-sponsoring a Zoom meeting on Tuesday 17 May on "Climate change: why the fight needs free trade unions":

7pm-9pm, Zoom meeting ID: 889 6629 5409, passcode: 850587. The meeting is also co-sponsored by Earth Strike: Empower the Unions, Extinction Rebellion Trade Unionists, Green Party Trade Union Group, Campaign Against Climate Change Trade Union Group, Workers' Liberty, Anti-Capitalist Resistance, and Scot E3.

The Uyghur Solidarity Campaign and Labour Solidarity With Hong Kong plan to be present at the Hongkongers' labour fair on Friday, 27 May, 10am to 6pm, 1 Coral Street, London SE1 7BE, bit.ly/hk-lf; at the Tiananmen Square anniversary on 4 June; and back outside the Chinese Embassy on 5 July. □

• Links, info, suggestions for labour movement motions: workersliberty.org/agenda



UCU moves to marking boycott

By a Cambridge UCU member

Despite tens of thousands of University and College Union (UCU) members in 68 branches striking just two months ago, the long-running USS pensions and "Four Fights" struggles are at risk of petering out.

The USS fight is an ongoing struggle to defend the pensions of "pre-92" universities across the UK, and the Four Fights dispute aims to improve pay and workloads, and tackle inequalities and casualisation across all 140+ UCU branches involved in national collective bargaining.

UCU members struck in cities and towns nationwide, and saw significant student support on picket lines, and from other campus unions, including ten Unison higher education branches who were striking over pay simultaneously.

Following re-ballots in April, there are now around 40 branches with live strike mandates. On 20 and 27 April the union held two Special Higher Education Sector Confer-

ences (SHESCs), one for each dispute, with delegates sent from all UCU higher education branches. But neither allowed sufficient time for proper deliberation and decision making, debates were stifled, and after them, the final industrial action plans remain in the hands of a group of four union officers.

The SHESCs have decided the overall strategy going forward. Both voted for a consistent set of immediate proposals: to initiate a marking and assessment boycott (backed up with ten further days of strikes). They rejected proposals for indefinite strikes, and rejected outright postponement of industrial action until 2023 (as favoured by our General Secretary, Jo Grady). With inflation soaring and staff workloads having rocketed since the start of the pandemic, UCU members can't afford to wait another year to fight!

Marking/assessment boycotts can build significant leverage when timed correctly and solidly implemented. When they start at this point in the year, they are more

limited. In some institutions examinations take place over the course of the academic year and have already been completed, so this type of action falls on a smaller subset of members responsible for assessment. And some employers (such as Queen Mary University of London) are imposing 100% pay deductions on UCU members engaging in marking/assessment boycotts. Others are threatening to deduct large amounts on the basis of "partial performance".

Escalation

Supporters of Workers' Liberty active in higher education called for marking/assessment boycotts as part of an escalating strategy back in January, before most assessments had commenced and when this would have been harder-hitting. At that time, our union officials instead favoured saving this option until May/June.

Nevertheless, that the union has now served employers with notice of a marking/assessment boycott is better late than never. To ensure this remains effective, we must at all costs avoid individuals

upholding the union's strategy from being picked off. The union needs to open up our national fighting fund to members being targeted with such punitive pay deductions, and to those who have already claimed ten days for income lost during strikes. There also needs to be a concerted effort by the union's highly paid national officials to raise more money for our fighting fund urgently. This may prove crucial to avoid members being financially starved into defeat.

To hit as many employers as possible with assessment boycotts, we also need every branch with a live mandate to do it. As it stands, those who beat the threshold in January but not in April have been told they cannot take part, despite having legal mandates for action until July. As we have often pointed out, the anti-union laws don't just empower the state and our bosses, they also give the upper hand to union bureaucracies to minimise action.

The SHESCs also discussed other motions, including ones that passed calling for escalating action into the next aca-

demic year to disrupt teaching and examinations from the very start. This would be a significant improvement on the timing of this year's tactics.

A motion calling for future disputes to be balloted on an aggregated basis was lost at the Four Fights SHESC, but then won a week later at the USS SHESC. Based on national turnouts being inconsistently above and below the 50% turnout threshold in recent years, we believe that the UCU is not yet in a position to ballot on an aggregated basis, and should continue balloting on a branch-by-branch basis to win national ballots.

This is ultimately a tactical question. In the short term, disaggregated balloting has proved successful at winning national strike mandates. On the other hand, winning disputes takes more than just beating ballot thresholds: we need a coordinated strategy across the sector that builds cross-campus union organisation and solidarity with students. □

“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

More managers who don't know how



Diary of an engineer

By Matt Shaw

Just when you thought that management could not come up with anything more stupid, they prove you to be hopelessly optimistic.

The railway has become more electronic and less mechanical over the years. Electrical-power signalling has taken over, in large part, from wires, cranks and pulleys, and now the digital age is putting even more high-tech stuff on our districts.

Obviously, we have adapted, learnt, and gained experience, but always there has been someone with the

knowledge. If you were unfamiliar with a piece of equipment, usually the next level up, a supervisor or engineer, would be available.

We all know of someone whose been promoted beyond their capabilities, but it's never been company policy that these jobs were advertised as not needing some level of technical knowledge. The shop floor are re-tested on a regular basis, about every two years or thereabouts, and are quite explicitly told not to work on things we're not trained on.

That rule is now being scrapped for engineering supervisors and higher. Supervisors are not being held to the same level as us. Some will not be assessed for years at a time.

"New" management will be recruited without needing any technical or en-

gineering qualifications, and won't be trained up on the latest equipment and standards that we on the sleeper ends will be expected to observe.

The upshot of all of this is that on a cold, wet, miserable night when you've got the signallers and their bosses demanding action, and you've got no idea what to do next, there could be no effective support available. Your immediate boss may have got a grasp on the latest computer programme for compiling absence records, but they may have no useful information on the recalcitrant bit of kit that's messing you about.

In short, believe in a deity to pray to, because you'll have more chance of getting help from them than our own dimwitted management. □

5 May results show need to fight back

By Martin Thomas

The Labour leadership claims that the local government results on 5 May show a recovery from the supposed nadir of the Corbyn era. Not so.

Poll-cruncher John Curtice summed up: "The party did no more than maintain its 2018 vote in London, secure a small increase in the South of England, but was down three points in the north of England".

The Tories are convulsed by scandals, deliberately pushing benefits and public-sector wages below rising inflation, and grinding down the NHS: they were bound to lose ground. But Lib-Dems and Greens did better than Labour.

Over 61% of Labour's councillor gains came from just 22 councils in Wales. Possibly Labour in Wales still appears different from the Starmer establishment.

Part of it is that the "Corbyn nadir" story is only quarter-truth. The Corbyn leadership did poorly in 2017-9, failing

to campaign on the 2017 election message of taxing the rich to rebuild public services which had won 40% of the vote, and instead miring itself in equivocation on Brexit and on antisemitism.

Still, 2018 was a relatively good local government round for Labour. Still, Labour's 2019 general election score, 32.1%, was better than 2015 (30.4%) or 2010 (29.0%), and not much behind 2005 (35.2%, when Labour was still able to win 41 out of 59 seats in Scotland).

Some Labour campaigning for 5 May pitched Labour really as more competent Tories, denouncing the Lib Dems for being against nuclear weapons and for being "soft on drugs", and denouncing the Greens for wanting to increase corporation tax, being anti-Brexit, etc. Such demagoguery will disperse Labour supporters, and is likely to appear to socially-conservative floating voters only as a cynical manoeuvre.

Particularly right-wing Labour councils suffered even in London, with Labour losing Harrow, Tower Hamlets,

and Croydon. More leftish Labour councils did not buck the trend: Labour in Preston had a net change of 0, in Salford lost 3, and in North Ayrshire lost the council to the SNP. The more leftish policies, even where real, had not enough class-struggle content to outweigh the general drift of Labour promising only to be more "competent" than the Tories.

The famous "Thermidor" of the French Revolution, in 1794, was at first presented only as a restabilisation, an elimination of Robespierre and a few others to stop the excesses of the revolutionary Terror. It soon unleashed a White Terror. After revolts like Germinal Year III in Paris, the Thermidorians themselves eventually, under the Directory, applied a brake to stall outright monarchist restoration.

The Labour Party still has the affiliated unions and the mass membership to block Starmer's Thermidor, but we are still on the back foot. More on Scotland: bit.ly/sc-lab □

A Popular Front film, 1936



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

The recent French elections have revealed a left that is in chaos. In 1936, much of that left united in the "Popular Front".

It was riddled with contradictions, and short-lived. Trotsky was scathing in his analysis. Yet one aspect of the Popular Front was a flourishing of films with a left orientation. Many film direc-

tors, gathered in the Groupe Octobre, sided with the Popular Front.

The best known was Jean Renoir, who directed *The Crime of Monsieur Lange* in 1936. Amédée Lange (Rene Lefevre) is a writer who works for a publishing company owned by the loathsome Batala (Jules Berry) who is seriously in debt to creditors and fakes his own death after involvement in a train crash. The workers decide to establish a co-operative and, thanks to their ingenuity, hard work and the popularity of Lange's Westerns (featuring *Arizona Jim*) they prosper.

Out of the blue Batala turns up to re-



Valentine, Lange, Batala

claim the company. Lange is outraged and shoots the crook. With his lover Valentine (Florelle), protected by the workers, he flees abroad and escape. The co-operative survives and continues to flourish. □

More station job cuts announced, strikes needed



Tubeworker

From Tubeworker

The Victoria Centre cover group, which includes Euston, Green Park, and Victoria, is the latest station group to learn the detail of London Under-

ground's plans for its staffing levels. Euston is losing 8 Customer Service Assistant 2s (CSA2) and five part-time CSAs, including three Night Tube jobs. Green Park loses two full-time CSA1 positions and nine full-time CSA2 positions.

All but one of its morning part-time positions will go, with five jobs being cut. It will also lose one evening part-time position and two Night Tube po-

sitions. At Victoria, a staggering 28 full-time CSA1 positions are due for the chop, reducing the establishment from 65 to 37. Nine full-time CSA2 jobs will go (26 down to 17), as well as four part-time positions, including two Night Tube positions.

In total, 73 jobs will be axed across the cover group. That's 73 fewer people to assist passengers. It's 73 people who could have got jobs with LU in the

future, but now won't be able to.

RMT reps for London Underground station staff met on 9 May to discuss the next steps in the dispute.

As *Solidarity* goes to press on 10 May the RMT National Executive Committee was expected to announce further industrial action. There was a strong consensus at the meeting for further strikes in response to proposed cuts to jobs on stations. □

Night Tube strikes named on Jubilee: Now escalate



Tubeworker

From Tubeworker

The rail union RMT has extended its drivers' strikes during Night Tube hours to the Jubilee line, to coincide with the reintroduction of Night Tube running.

Strikes have been called from 20:30 to 04:29 on Saturday 21 May, and then every Friday and Saturday until 18 June. The same action is continuing on the Victoria and Central lines.

Drivers across the pre-pandemic Night Tube lines, Central, Jubilee, Northern, Piccadilly and Victoria are currently rebalancing to continue to take action on the dispute. It is likely that the

company will attempt to start Night Tube again on the Piccadilly and Northern lines later in the summer. Drivers need to return a strong "yes" vote for more action to continue to the dispute and push the company back.

It's good the union is standing firm and striking rather than acquiescing to

compulsory night working. But to force the u-turn required from the company, we need to step up our strikes. The two 24-hour strikes across five lines last year were extremely effective. We need action of that scale, and more, to win the dispute. □

Aslef win reballot

Train driver union Aslef have won their third reballot on London Underground for industrial action if "management try to push through changes to working conditions or pensions without agreement".

On an increase turnout of 68.3% and 98.5% in favour, it is to be welcomed that Aslef members have

again said they are prepared to take action. But having now had a live ballot since November 2021 and with no action, Aslef members should be pushing their reps and leadership into take strike action and coordinating with the other unions to use the mandate rather than allowing RMT to fight alone. □

Merseyrail guards: Vote no on deal

From Off the Rails

The rail union RMT is currently conducting a referendum of its guard members on Merseyrail to settle their long-running dispute over the introduction of driver only operation.

Despite its faults, this proposed deal does at least keep a second person on the train. But those faults are numerous and serious enough to vote down the deal. It locks guards into a five year pay deal separate from the other grades that are normally part of their bargaining unit, and forces them to accept a pay freeze in years 3 and 5. This has a knock-on effect on the other grades too, as they will have to negotiate pay for five consecutive years without the grade that carries the most

industrial strength. The deal creates a two-tier workforce within the grade. Guards employed after the agreement takes effect will be on a salary of £27k where existing guards will be on £31k. This deal also introduces a training rate of £20k for new entrants.

The RMT must shoulder some of the blame. They have acted as an "all grades union" in name only. They have agreed to take guards out of pay bargaining for the duration of the dispute and made pay settlements for the other grades separately. This has resulted in guards going for long periods without pay increases while colleague around them were getting them, and this on top of the loss of pay through strikes.

They have allowed the dispute to drag on and on. There have been no strikes since talks started in 2018, and yet it has taken until 2022 to reach a settlement.

Although the union is not recommending a "yes" vote to members, it appears to be doing everything it can to engineer one. After all this time, they have suddenly announced that they are conducting the referendum via e-ballot with a short 10-day voting period. Although they aren't recommending the deal explicitly, they are presenting it as the best that can be achieved through negotiation and the only alternative to a re-ballot for strike action against the backdrop of a cost of living crisis.

Strikes were almost universally supported and,

crucially, drivers respected picket lines almost totally for the entire length of the campaign. Aslef has also refused to enter any discussions on door operation without an explicit go-ahead from RMT that they have reached a settlement on the matter.

This kind of solidarity is an example to workers across the industry and is incredibly powerful - it deserves to be rewarded by a better settlement than this. □

RMT's national ballot on Network Rail and 15 Train Operating Companies ends on 24 May. Read more at workersliberty.org/rails

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Delegation to Ukraine reports back

Kelly Rogers, Ruth Cashman, and Tom Harris have just returned from a visit to Ukraine (3-8 May) with the European Network for Solidarity with Ukraine.

Ukraine is being destroyed by a predatory Russian imperialism. As of 4 May the United Nations registers 3,280 civilian deaths during Russia's military attack on Ukraine; of those, 231 were children. The UN office noted the true civilian death toll is likely "considerably higher" due to the difficulty in confirming reports from heavily besieged regions, and Ukrainian authorities have estimated thousands of more civilians have died as a result of the war.

At the same time, workers' rights and living conditions are being eroded across Ukraine. The Ukrainian left and trade unions need our solidarity. That is why we joined the solidarity delegation to Ukraine.

The delegation included MPs, trade unionists and activists from several European countries. The Network explained its purpose as:

"Moral, political and material solidarity with the resistance of the Ukrainian people, in particular with the initiatives of their political and trade union left-wing organisations."

The delegation attended a conference in Lviv hosted by Sotsyalnyi Rukh (Social Movement), a grassroots democratic socialist group in Ukraine. Reports from the Ukrainian side were presented by representatives of Ukrainian trade unions across health, transport, construction and energy, and social activists working in a diversity of organisations and work including LGBTQ+, Roma, women's rights and mutual aid.

The day we set off on the delegation, Russian missiles struck power plants in Lviv. Residents reported billowing smoke from the railway track. The Russian military is escalating its attacks on Ukraine's railway infrastructure, the country's lifeline to Poland, carrying both humanitarian aid and supplies for the military. Altogether, Ukrainian Railway reports Russian forces hit six electrical substations along the railway system in central and western Ukraine.

Russia has good reason to focus on the railways. Rail has been an essential logistical element of the Ukrainian fightback and its continued operation is a symbol of the Ukrainian resistance.

The Ukrainian rail network stretches across some 13,670 miles. Before the war, Ukrzaliznytsia (Ukrainian Railways) was one of the biggest em-

ployers in the country, with more than 230,000 employees. Trains bring weapons, aid, and supplies to the east of the country and evacuate millions of internal and external refugees.

Olexander Skyba, who works out of the Darnista locomotive depot in Kyiv, spoke to the conference about the heroic work done by members of his union, the Trade Union of Railway Workers and Transport Builders of Ukraine. Some have joined the territorial defence and the military, others risk their lives delivering to and evacuating from occupied areas. His union has had to pivot to provide members with food and supplies; they train railway workers moving to the frontline in first aid, mine removal and basic military skills.

The Atomic Trade Union of Ukraine, representing workers in the nuclear sector, has been in existence since Ukrainian independence and has around 50,000 members. The skills that their members have developed during the last 30 years have given them strong basis for military and humanitarian work in the war. Given the risks of working in nuclear power, their union has always been focused on safety. There is increasing danger at nuclear facilities for those workers and for populations in and beyond Ukraine.

Shelling

The Russian Army have been shelling plants, including one offensive that led to a fire at Europe's largest nuclear power plant. Russian occupiers destroyed workers' facilities at Chernobyl, in the process wrecking health and safety records and computers used for testing. With power stations falling under Russian control, and a lack of expertise in the occupying forces, it is down to atomic workers to self-organise to prevent nuclear disaster.

Health workers in Ukraine - 83 percent of whom are women - are facing a series of challenges. Salaries are below the national average and many work in poor conditions and earn poverty wages. Unsurprisingly, the situation got even worse during the pandemic. In June last year, Zelenskyy issued a presidential decree providing for a pay rise, only to the equivalent of around £360 per month for nurses and £530 per month for doctors. But longstanding cuts to health budgets have meant that even this miserly benchmark hasn't been met.

Health workers are prohibited from leaving the country while the war is ongoing. Many people are facing very difficult decisions: whether to stay

in extremely dangerous situations and put their own lives and the lives of their families at risk or to join the millions of Ukrainians fleeing the war, knowing that when they return - like those leaving temporarily to settle their children and now returning to Kyiv - they will be sacked.

While one can see the need to maintain workforces in key sectors like health and transport, the intransigence of the policy in the face of the real-world situation of individuals was difficult to hear, especially when health workers have been treated so poorly, and paid so pitifully for so long.

Meanwhile, in Russian-occupied areas, health workers are reporting being forced to leave their union and join Russian unions instead. These people are frightened to refuse, because of basic threats to their safety and families' safety; but they are also anxious that if Ukraine wins the war, they would be considered collaborators.

The health unions, like many others, are now focusing a lot of their capacity on providing humanitarian and mutual aid.

Sotsyalnyi Rukh President Vitaliy Dudin explained the new labour law attacking rights at work and ability to organise. The measures further transfer the burden of war from the richest to the working class. Unions are limited in the support they are able to provide, with employment courts shut down and legislation severely curbing trade union rights. This comes at a time when Ukrainian trade unions and workers are mobilised in essential work, popular resistance, and organisation of mutual aid.

Identity

The delegation heard from a number of civil society activists: feminist and queer activists, environmentalists and Roma rights campaigners. One thread that kept on coming up in presentations, conversations and interviews, was the changing nature of Ukrainian identity. There were opposing trends: one feeding a conservative nationalism, another breaking down divides.

On the one hand, we heard of all the different ways that marginalised members of society are suffering as the result of the war; for instance, women experiencing new levels of sexual violence and fleeing into countries with restrictive abortion laws, and paperless Roma people finding it difficult to get visas and lacking the means to leave the country. There has also been an inevitable boost to nationalism. In the military, soldiers are expected to greet each other in Ukrainian, in

a symbolic snub to Russian. At the reality of the Ukrainian resistance is bringing together Ukrainians of all backgrounds.

Though soldiers are told to greet one another in Ukrainian, most frontline planning occurs in Russian due to the geography of the campaign. Roma, the most marginalised section of society, are signing up to fight in huge numbers, as well as providing humanitarian aid. In struggle, barriers within the class break down. Feminist activist Brie told us about screening the film *Pride* to a group of initially socially conservative trade unionists to show the power of solidarity.

We had a chance to meet Ukrainian activists outside of the conference and discuss some of the issues in depth. We will be writing up interviews with trade unionists and left-wing activists for *Solidarity* and the Workers' Liberty website.

Some of the most affecting moments of the delegation came not in meetings and interviews but casual chats in cafés and bars. Katya, an activist who lives in Kyiv, describes her hometown of Mariupol: her home, her school, the buildings she'd recognise have all been bombed, and her young sister cannot go to school.

Train driver Olexander passes round his mobile phone showing videos and photos of trains and depots who've come under military fire. Flicking through smashed windows, bullet strewn train cabs, in one a driver lies dead amongst the wreckage of a street. As we leave Ukraine on a bus filled largely with refugees, we watch dads hug their children goodbye.

Vitaliy opened the conference:

"Ukraine needs solidarity more than ever before. Ukraine will need support from states but we also need support from grassroots activists, trade unionists and workers. We need it not only to protect Ukraine now but to ensure a better future in rebuilding Ukraine."

The trade unionists, socialist feminists, queer activists and anti-racists of Ukraine are our people. They call for the European labour movement to back them in their fight against Russian imperialism and in their agitation, propaganda and organisation for mobilising Ukrainian workers and minorities after the war.

Their fight is our fight, for their freedom and ours. Any left that would sacrifice this for a vapid pacifism, or believes Ukraine owes the East and West a buffer state, lets down not just Ukrainians but the workers of the world. □



Solidarity

For a workers' government

WORKERS' SOLIDARITY WITH UKRAINE!

By Dan Katz

Russia's brutal predatory war in Ukraine continues with terrible human cost.

Heavy Russian artillery fire rains down across the long battle front in Eastern Ukraine. On Saturday a Russian bomb hit the school building in the village of Bilohorivka, Luhansk region, killing dozens of the 90 civilians who been sheltering there.

5.7 million people have fled Ukraine since the war began and 6.5mn are internally displaced.

The UK Tory government's response to the refugee crisis has been contemptible. Only 28,000 Ukrainians have been allowed into the UK, compared to over 3mn into Poland. Vulnerable refugees have been placed in unsuitable accommodation and with men who intend to exploit or abuse Ukrainian women.

The government should open the UK's door to refugees and show care and humanity to these victims of war.

Researchers at the Kyiv School of Economics estimate the Russian war has so far inflicted \$92bn in infrastructure damage. 23,000km of roads have been destroyed. 90,000 cars have been damaged.

The World Health Organisation has documented 200 attacks on Ukrainian health facilities. The Ukrainian government states that 400 health centres have been damaged

and 40 hospitals have been destroyed during the war.

The World Bank and IMF have provided relative small amounts of financial support for Ukraine. One immediate measure the Western states should take is to cancel Ukraine's debt.

Russian military commander Rustam Minnekayev, speaking at a Defence Industry conference in Sverdlovsk, claimed Russia's aim is for "full control over Donbas and southern Ukraine. This will provide a land corridor to Crimea, as well as affecting vital objects of the Ukrainian economy." He added, "control over southern Ukraine will give yet another point of access to Transnistria."

It is certainly possible that this is Putin's current war plan.

Transnistria

Transnistria is a narrow strip of land, formally part of Moldova, with a Russian speaking population. Transnistria has been de facto independent since the early 1990s and is garrisoned with Russian troops. In recent weeks a series of explosions have taken place in Transnistria which the Moldovan government claims – plausibly – to be (Russian orchestrated) provocations. Inside Transnistria pro-Russian separatists are blaming Ukraine, giving Russia a possible justification for intervening.

Denis Pushilin, the head of the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR), and a member of Pu-

tin's United Russia party, has awarded medals for the "liberation of Mariupol" – a town which Russia has largely destroyed.

Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine are slowly being transformed. The DPR officials have been changing road signs in Mariupol from Ukrainian to Russian. Local people now need permits to move around. The Ukrainian mayor of Mariupol, Vadym Boichenko, claims 2,000 Ukrainian men are now being held in two nearby towns and used as forced labour to clear rubble and pick up the bodies of those killed in the Russian offensive.

Local Ukrainian leaders are being arrested and intimidated in occupied areas. Anti-occupation protests are forcibly dispersed. Elected town councils are being replaced with Russian-appointed authorities and in some areas the Russian currency, the rouble, is being introduced.

At stake in this war is not only Ukraine's right to self-determination, but workers' rights to organise unions and organise politically. Ukrainian workers know very well that opposition in the Russian-created DPR (seized from Ukraine in 2014 and run by a Russia puppet government) is effectively banned and opponents of Russia have been arrested and tortured. □

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