

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry



Pic: @arthurl1

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How the left can help Ukraine

By Tom Harris

On 3 May, I travelled with other British trade unionists on a delegation organised by the European Network for Solidarity with Ukraine to Lviv.

In Ukraine's far west, Lviv is less than 50 miles from the Polish border and many hundreds of miles from the battlefronts in the east and south. As a result, Lviv feels eerily peaceful and "normal", compared with the horrific images of destruction from elsewhere in the country. If you didn't know otherwise, you might suppose you were in any other elegant old Austro-Hungarian city with its pretty cathedrals, Renaissance architecture, and streets lined with restaurants and cafés doing a decent trade.

A deeper look reveals the truth, though: the military roadblocks here and there, the enlistment points, the soldiers in uniform waiting for trains and buses, the sandbags built up around monuments and sheets of metal bolted over churches' stained glass to protect them from bomb damage.

And then there's the air raid sirens, which sound several times a day. We'd been told in advance what the protocol was (get two walls between yourself and the outdoors, head for a basement if possible) but we'd also been told that virtually everyone in Lviv ignores it. This isn't quite as reckless as it sounds: whenever a missile is detected heading for Ukraine, alarms sound in every city it could potentially hit. The vast majority of times the sirens go off, nothing is heading for Lviv. "Reassur-

ing!", we thought, until we learnt that missiles had hit the electricity and rail infrastructure on the outskirts of town the day before we arrived. Two were injured and electricity was cut off to part of the city.

On our first night at the hotel, we heard the sirens and dutifully made our way to the basement. No one else was there, and eventually some faintly amused security guards turned up to investigate. We reckon they thought we were up to mischief down there.

Many Ukrainians we interviewed told us that this surreal contrast between Lviv's relative normality and the horror elsewhere is a terrible thing to endure psychologically, especially if you have recently lived through a siege, or if, as was true of many we spoke to, your friends and relatives are still being shelled or living under occupation. Lviv's population has been swelled greatly by refugees looking for safety, many of them now living in awful, cramped conditions in cellars or small rooms.

At a conference we heard from Ukrainian trade unionists. Oleksandr Skyba, a rail worker from Kyiv's Darnitsya depot and activist in the Free Trade Union of Railway Workers and Transport Builders, described the incredibly dangerous conditions that he and his colleagues had been working under when Russian forces attempted to besiege the capital. Many rail workers have died. In a theme that would crop up again and again at the conference, Skyba described how the work of the union had become centred on keeping its members alive - moving humanitarian supplies, rescuing workers in peril, providing food and support for the many railway workers now fighting in the territorial defence units and the armed forces.

Oleksandr later told us how he and the union had been visiting members now enlisted in the armed forces to try and make sure they had basic training in first aid and military skills, including identifying mines.

Other themes emerged from the speeches by trade unionists. Many pointed out how clear it was to workers that their independent organisations stood little chance of survival under Russian occupation. A miners' leader who joined us via Zoom from Kryvi Rih, not far from the front line, alluded to the total crushing of trade unionism and all other forms of independent civil society in the Russian puppet-regimes in Donetsk and Luhansk. Serhii and Oksana, trade unionists in the health sector, reported that health workers in the occupied zones had been forced to leave their unions and ordered to join Russian ones instead. This piece of coercion was tied up with the occupa-



ers' demand that the workers sign new, worse employment contracts. Some of these workers managed to contact their old union.

Before the war, health workers were already suffering from low pay and poor conditions. Volodymyr Zelenskyy issued a presidential decree to increase health workers' wages but cuts to the sector's budget meant this never materialised.

Vasyl Semkanich from the Independent Trade Union of Miners in the city of Chervonohrad told us how decades of Russian political intervention had made the Ukrainian economy dangerously reliant on imported fossil fuels from Russia. But he didn't want to absolve Ukraine's native ruling class. He also pinned blame on the Ukrainian oligarchs, who drag the country's energy sector further and further from public interest and scrutiny and use it to line their own pockets. He talked about his union's demands for the industry to be brought into democratic public ownership.

To get a sense of where the socialist left finds itself in Ukraine, we spoke to activists from Sotsialniy Rukh (Social Movement). On the one hand, the war has presented enormous challenges. When the government introduced martial law, the right to strike or organise demonstrations was closed off. The Zelenskyy administration also cut taxes on corporations and diluted workers rights in what it described as an attempt to stabilise the economy. Social Movement are calling for the restitution of the rights that have been suspended, and positively demanding an expansion of labour and social legislation, levelled up to par with the EU.

Social Movement have been able to make progress by pointing out the unfairness with which some aspects of the war are being managed and by telling workers how to invoke their rights. They highlight how the bosses' selfishness

and disregard for workers' living conditions will weaken Ukraine's chances in the war. Pilash said that while Zelenskyy's popularity is very high because of his role as commander-in-chief, many ordinary Ukrainians view the meaner and more unjust policies of his government as somehow unconnected. In this way, popular opinion can be both very pro-Zelenskyy and simultaneously critical of the government.

In enormously difficult conditions, Social Movement and other genuine leftists are struggling to outline an egalitarian and democratic alternative that the Ukrainian public can grasp, clear and distinct from both the corrupt present and from the dictatorial Soviet past.

I spoke briefly at the conference, along with Ruth Cashman from Unison. We outlined the aims we felt needed to be taken up by the trade union movement and left internationally: for arms for Ukraine, for the abolition of the country's international debt, for the opening of borders to refugees, for our unions to make meaningful and practical links with the Ukrainian labour movement. Some aid convoys are coming from European unions, but more needs to be done.

We need to confront the sluggishness and bureaucratism of a union movement that has been badly demoralised by decades of defeat, and the legacy of the Stalinist politics, still present in our movement, which can see imperialism only when it comes from NATO, and turns a blind eye to the aggression of Russia or China.

That will be a difficult task, but a necessary one. We talk a lot in the labour movement about international solidarity and mutual aid. If any of that is real and sincere, we need to act on it now. The Ukrainian left is in a life or death struggle. We owe them any help we can give. □

• Extracted from bit.ly/tom-lv



The expected new Covid wave with BA.4 and BA.5 subvariants has not happened, or not yet. But new variants are certain to come in due course, and may well be fiercer than Omicron. We fight against the Tories' and bosses' scaling-back of sick-pay provision, virus-surveillance, etc. and for:

- 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. □

Dissent simmers in Russia

By Michael Baker

According to OVD-Info, since the start of the invasion of Ukraine, police have charged 1,933 people in Russia for “discrediting” the Russian army. The total amount of fines collected for this charge is 19.9 million rubles (£248,500).

The head of a large Russian news channel has revealed anonymously that “no more than 10%” of workers in the television industry support the invasion of Ukraine. This could potentially indicate that the official government estimate, that 80% of the population supported the war, could be well off the mark (even accounting for a bias within the television industry).

In Smolensk, teacher Aleksandra Korotaeva was fined for using a so-

cial media profile picture containing an anti-war slogan. She has paid the 30,000 ruble (£375) fine, but refused to change the picture. Another teacher, Lyubov Zhiltsov from Pskov, has been charged with a case of “discrediting the military” for uploading a picture taken in her classroom of her holding an anti-war placard. Zhiltsova also refused to carry out pro-war activities as instructed by school staff, and used her classes as a way to talk openly to students about the situation in Ukraine. Both teachers are examples of a growing resistance to pro-war propaganda in the education sector. Nail Fatkullin, a theoretical physicist from Kazan State University, has used his page on ResearchGate (a site for academics to share their research) to upload a [letter](#) in English against the invasion, calling it “criminal”

and demanding a withdrawal of troops. Fatkullin currently remains employed by the university.

Feminist Antiwar Resistance have released the first issue of a paper called *Women’s Truth (Zhenskaya Pravda)*, posted on their Telegram channel. The paper aims to reach those who still lack access to independent news sources, due to government bans on independent press. The paper’s first issue, released in time for Victory Day on 9 May, compares the experiences of women in World War 2 and the current war.

The “Courier” trade union organised a day of “agitprop” in Voronezh, with help from the RRP (Revolutionary Workers’ Party, no relation to the British WRP). The union talked to unorganised delivery drivers on two points: support for the release of Kirill Ukraintsev, and

recent paycuts from a number of employers. The union has an ongoing boycott and a set of demands that include the release of Ukraintsev, and for fairer employment conditions for drivers from the apps that dominate the industry. The group “Students Against War” have urged solidarity from the student movement for the union’s struggle.

The KPRF (“Communist Party”, identifying with heritage of Brezhnev, etc.) was barred from staging a rally in Barnaul on the rising cost of living in Russia, due to fears from the government that the protest could “form a negative relationship to the special military operation amongst citizens”. The growth of economic trouble in Russia continues to push issues of work and income into contact with anti-war activism and conflict with the government. □

A strike for LGBT rights

By Sacha Ismail

On 12 May, workers at the John Fisher School in Purley, South London – members of the National Education Union, mainly teachers – struck for the sixth day since late April in an unusual and important struggle. There may be more strikes soon.

The John Fisher School (JFS) strike is a legal, official dispute, balloted for under the

anti-trade union laws, with demands about the governance of the school. But it also involves much wider issues, about LGBT education, LGBT rights, free discussion, and critical thought.

JFS is a Catholic school. Workers there organised an event for World Book Day (3 March) and LGBT History Month with author Simon James Green, who writes

books for children and young people, some with LGBT characters and themes. But following agitation by right-wing Catholic activists – mainly with no connection to the school or the community – the Catholic Archdiocese of Southwark pushed the school to cancel Green’s visit.

When the JFS leadership team and board of governors decided to go ahead anyway,

the Archdiocese intervened to sack the governors who supported holding the event, dissolve the board and impose a new one.

The workers are demanding reinstatement of the old board and of the event with Simon James Green. They are evidently very determined.

On 12 May, the last day of the strike so far, there was also a small counter-protest by

broadly conservative parents.

The John Fisher strike stands in the best traditions of the labour movement – workers taking determined action to assert not only their material interests, but democratic rights and control in their workplace, and more widely the rights of the community and oppressed people. Take inspiration, and help them win. □

• More bit.ly/jfsstrike

Building broad support for the couriers

By Michael Elms

On Tuesday 17 May delivery couriers across the UK organised in the IWGB union are staging a national day of action.

In Sheffield, Chesterfield, Middlesbrough, Darlington, Hartlepool and elsewhere, couriers will stage a day of strikes and protests. At the time of writing (8am on 17 May), all delivery services in Hartlepool were offline. In London, supporters of the couriers’ cause are set to demonstrate outside JustEat headquarters.

This is a part of a long-running dispute between couriers across the UK and Stuart, a logistics firm which performs deliveries for JustEat and which cut the base rate of pay for delivery workers by 24% in late 2021. This pay

dispute has been raging since December 2021 and is now the largest, longest strike ever in the UK gig economy. Groups of workers in many different cities have been drawn into the action, which was launched in Sheffield.

JustEat and Stuart are not the only targets of the action. Increasingly, drivers working for Deliveroo and UberEats are seeking to launch their own strikes and protests over low pay as the price of petrol and the cost of living skyrocket.

In addition to strikes by drivers, the union is searching for other means of applying pressure. Two members of the IWGB are due to attend the AGM of Greggs, which is a major client of JustEat and Stuart. Other clients of Stuart – Lush cosmetics and Brewdog – will also come under pressure from

the union and its supporters in the near future.

Efforts are underway to build broader-based support for the campaign. On 10 May, a national zoom rally was addressed by PCS Assistant General Secretary John Moloney, John McDonnell MP and UCU President Vicky Blake. Members of the public from across the UK attended and pledged to work to build the 17 May day of action and to support the union more broadly.

Most of all, the union needs money, and volunteers to go out and talk to couriers in their area. Donate to the IWGB strike fund at tinyurl.com/Stuart-Strike; and email awl@workersliberty.org to find out how to get involved in building the strike in your area. □



Upcoming meetings

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

Tuesday 24 May, 6pm: Ukrainian railworker speaks at Off the Rails meeting by Zoom

Wednesday 25 May, 7pm: Workers’ Solidarity with Ukraine, Marchmont Community Centre, 62 Marchmont St, London, WC1N 1AB

Sunday 5 June, 6.30pm: Online AWL meeting: Who was James Connolly?

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



Morning Star's international editor breaks cover



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

The *Morning Star* and its political masters at the Communist Party of Britain (CPB) continue with their formal opposition to the invasion of Ukraine. But is becoming more and more obvious that this "opposition" has nothing to do with defending Ukraine's right to self-determination. It is just a calculation that the invasion was an "error of judgement" on Putin's part.

In an editorial on Friday 13 May, the *Morning Star* repeats its refrain that the invasion was an ill-judged but understandable response to Nato's expansion.

Finland and (probably) Sweden joining Nato "illustrates just how the errors of judgement and miscalculations that allowed the Ukraine situation to get out of hand now threaten not just the prospects of peace on our continent but

also the security of the Russian state." In plain language that seems to mean that Nato, not Russia, is the aggressor, especially now that (according to the editorial) Putin's "recalibrated" war aims are "the defence of the threatened peoples of Donetsk and Donbass, which at least corresponds to the basis on which the mass of Russian people tolerate their government's actions."

Zelenskyy's repeated call for more arms with which to fight the invaders is explained away by the *Morning Star* with the claim that he's really in favour of negotiations and meeting Putin's demands (i.e. the now dead Minsk accords) but "reactionary forces within Ukraine and the Nato pressures from without that hold him hostage are a barrier to a renewal of that process."

Evidently the paper's International Editor, Steve Sweeney, has had enough of this evasive and illogical waffle and has broken cover.

On 8 May he was a speaker (in a "personal capacity") at the London "Victory Day" rally organised by George Gal-

loway, Harpal Brar and their openly pro-invasion Workers' Party. Will he remain the paper's International Editor much longer? □

Protocol

If you think the CPB / *Morning Star* "line" on Ukraine is all over the place, consider their latest thoughts on Northern Ireland and the protocol.

Johnson and his government, readers will be aware, is currently pandering to the DUP and threatening to tear up the protocol that Johnson himself devised, signed, and trumpeted in the 2019 election as a triumph of his negotiating skills.

Now he and his ministers are trying to make out it's a dastardly imposition by the EU (a "foreign power" according to Rees-Mogg) which is (the Tories and DUP claim) undermining the Good Friday Agreement and bankrupting Northern Irish businesses.

Ignoring the fact that Sinn Fein and other pro-protocol parties have a clear majority in the Northern Ireland Assem-

bly, the Tories now threaten to break international law and "disapply" the agreement they themselves negotiated and signed less than three years ago. Carried through firmly, this will lead to the return of a "hard" border across Ireland, as the Tories know, and the DUP probably hopes.

The DUP and the Tories have a firm supporter who claims it's all the EU's fault: CPB general secretary Robert Griffiths! He told the *Morning Star* (14-15 May), "For the EU and its devoted supporters, the European single market is apparently sacrosanct. As we say during the Northern Ireland Protocol negotiations, the EU Commission is the only body on Earth prepared to endanger peace by threatening to impose a hard customs border across Ireland."

You have to ask: does Mr Griffiths understand the first thing about Ireland, the politics of the Six Counties, the EU, Brexit (which he supported, of course)... or the workings of the Johnson government? The answer would appear to be "no" in each case. □

In Georgia, workers challenge a Russian oligarch



Eric Lee

By Eric Lee

Mikhail Fridman is one of the wealthiest men in Russia and a close associate of Vladimir Putin. He was included in the earliest lists of individuals sanctioned by the West for his complicity in the criminal invasion of Ukraine.

Among his many investments is a Georgian mineral water company known as "Borjomi" - which is the spa town where the local water has been bottled for more than a century. The sulphurous taste of the water is not to everyone's liking, but for decades the company has profited from the perception that Borjomi water has certain healing properties.

After the collapse of Soviet rule, the company was privatised and nearly fell into ruin. Nine years ago, Fridman, whose properties include a home in London valued at £70 million, bought the bottling plants. Last year, following an industrial dispute, the company made a number of concessions to its 800 workers, including accepting the

idea of a collective bargaining agreement to replace individual contracts.

But in the last few months, the company has changed its mind. No collective bargaining agreement. No negotiations with the union. And a series of vicious attacks on the workers including a 50% pay cut and the sacking of 49 workers who were identified as union activists and leaders of last year's strike. They were told in a form letter that their jobs were cut due to "restructuring" - which is demonstrably untrue. They were being pun-

ished for standing up for their rights.

The pay cut is especially mean, as the average wage for workers in the factory was just £245 a month. And there have now been threats that the workers' wages from the last month will not be paid at all. Fridman claims that he cannot access any of his bank accounts which have been frozen.

I visited the Borjomi workers last week in the company of two Tbilisi-based union leaders, Giorgi Diasamidze, who heads up the food workers

union, and his colleague Lika Mebagishivi. This was the day that a government-appointed mediator arrived on the scene. I was allowed to sit in on the session where workers made their case. Prior to that, I had the chance to talk with Koba Gogoladze and Andro Bablidze, who were sacked after decades of work in the factory. From them I learned details about their lives and their struggle.

The workers want several of the most notorious managers to be sacked. They want pay increases, not pay cuts. They

want a collective bargaining agreement. And they want the Georgian government to take control of Fridman's share of the business. As they put it to me, Borjomi water belongs to the people of Borjomi - not to this oligarch.

The Borjomi management has now temporarily shut down the factory. I was able to see the darkened factory floor. Management blames the impact of sanctions on their exports. But the workers told me that prior to the shutdown, the factory produced an enormous number of bottles -- and these have been stockpiled in case of a strike.

With mediation now underway, the workers have to wait 21 days before they are allowed to strike or even protest outside the locked factory gates. But at the end of this month, if mediation fails, a strike seems inevitable. I suggested to Diasamidze that an international campaign of support could help - and we're ready to do our part.

Justice for the Borjomi workers is long overdue. □

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

Ban anti-trans conversion therapy!

By Zack Muddle

Around 300 people protested in Bristol on Saturday 14 May for anti-LGBTQ "conversion therapy" to be fully banned - crucially, including anti-trans conversion therapy. The government, years after promises to ban it, has instead opted to restrict it: permitting and hence legitimising anti-trans conversion therapy even for children; and permitting all anti-LGBTQ conversion therapy for "non-vulnerable" adults.

The demonstrators were in general young - teenagers and early 20s - and rightly focussed on trans people, who are particularly vulnerable and are being specifically targeted.

The official demonstration was a static gath-

ering with speeches. Many speakers shared galling and moving stories and statistics about the anti-scientific emotional abuse that is conversion therapy, about wider social transphobia, and about the inextricable links between transphobia and homophobia. While there were some mentions of healthcare, the demands made were generally narrow, and the political perspectives not particularly left-wing. This is not surprising given a left and labour movement which has generally not taken the struggle for trans liberation seriously, and in some cases has even opposed it.

That said, a breakaway march at the end of around 100 people was considerably more left wing in chants, and had a more confrontational approach to police. □

Two states is only way out

By Sacha Ismail

The killing of Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Aqleh on 11 May, and the events that followed, seem symbolic of the wider situation in Israel-Palestine. Only a democratic solution to the conflict – immediately a Palestinian state alongside Israel, with the same rights as Israel – can break the circuit of violence and regression. Both the Palestinians and Israel's internationalist left need solidarity.

Abu Aqleh, a well-known and respected figure in the Arab world, was shot in the head while covering an Israeli military raid on the Jenin refugee camp in the occupied West Bank for Al Jazeera. Her producer was shot in the back, but survived. Both were wearing clearly marked press vests. Al Jazeera accused Israel of deliberately targeting Abu Aqleh. The Israeli army high command now admits an Israeli soldier may have been the killer, and evidence points that way. (The cautious report by investigative journalism group Bellingcat [bit.ly/bellsaa](https://www.bellingcat.com/news/analyses/2022/05/12/israeli-soldier-killed-jenin-refugee-camp) summarises a lot of it.)

The UN and EU have called for an independent investigation. The Biden government has “strongly condemn[ed] the killing”, described it as “an affront to media freedom” and called for an “immediate and thorough

investigation”. (Tory foreign secretary Liz Truss confined herself to evasive platitudes.)

Israeli forces have killed 47 journalists since 2000. In April the International Federation of Journalists submitted claims to the International Criminal Court that Israel's targeting of the media amounted to war crimes. Last year Israel bombed tower blocks in Gaza City that housed Palestinian media organisations, Al Jazeera, and the Associated Press.

Following Abu Aqleh's killing, Israeli forces raided her home in East Jerusalem, confiscating Palestinian flags and preventing mourners playing nationalist songs. Protests were dispersed.

Then on 13 May, as thousands gathered in East Jerusalem for the funeral, Israeli police burst through the gates of the hospital where the procession was beginning and attacked mourners with batons and stun grenades. Some repeatedly hit and kicked pallbearers, resulting in Abu Aqleh's coffin falling to the ground. An Israeli officer was filmed telling the crowd that the funeral will not be allowed unless they stop chanting slogans and singing nationalist songs.

Sally Abed, a leader of the left-wing Jewish-Arab social justice and peace organisation [Standing Together](https://www.standingtogether.org/), said of Abu Aqleh's killing: “What a literal, cruel, unfathomable erasure of Palestinian voices.” As her co-chair Alon-Lee Green put it: “What we saw today at Shireen Abu Aqleh's funeral in Jerusalem is merely a reality: violent control over the Palestinian people. Control that creates violence from which both Palestinians and Israelis suffer.”

It is almost a year since Israel's right-wing nationalist prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu was ejected after 12 years in power. The government that replaced it included self-described liberal and left-wing political parties – and, for the first time in Israel's history, an Arab party. Yet since Netanyahu's fall, the occupation in the West Bank looks even more entrenched, even more oppressive, even more poisoning for Israeli society. Even the glimmer of a political solution still looks beyond the horizon.

This is the environment in which conflict and violence – between the Israeli state and the Palestinians under occupation and between Jews and Palestinians inside Israel – continue to boil and periodically boil over.

Since the new government took office, Israeli forces have killed at least 76 Palestinians, including thirteen children. Killings and injuries have escalated since the government used a string of Islamist killings of Israelis in March and April as the launchpad for a crackdown on Palestinians ([bit.ly/pal-](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-61888888)

[crackdown](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-61888888)). Defence minister Benny Gantz mobilised thousands more troops in Israel, in the West Bank and on the Gaza border, declaring that “all means are legitimate”. Covering the impact of this crackdown is what Abu Aqleh was doing when she died.

Prime minister Naftali Bennett said in a statement: “Anyone who has a gun license: this is the time to carry it.” Violence and damage to property by West Bank settlers and far-right groups in Israel has escalated.

On 5 May the Israeli High Court ended a two-decade legal battle by ruling that the people of eight hamlets in the Masafer Yatta area of the West Bank can be evicted to make way for an Israeli military “firing zone”. This puts over a thousand people at imminent risk, in the biggest expulsion since shortly after the 1967 occupation of the West Bank.

A few days later Israel's Higher Planning Council approved the construction of over 4,000 settler homes in the West Bank. Such steps lock down the denial of Palestinian self-determination and block off future paths towards a meaningful Palestinian state.

In May last year Israel killed over 250 Palestinians, half civilians, and wounded thousands during a military conflict with Hamas in which both sides effectively pushed for escalation. (12 Israeli civilians were killed.) One trigger was Israeli forces storming the compound of the iconic al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, using teargas, rubber bullets and stun grenades. Now tensions have been surging again, with Israeli police and in some instances settlers invading al-Aqsa, causing clashes on the Temple Mount where it stands (and where the Israeli government has long banned Jewish prayers). There has been a new string of Palestinian attacks on Israeli civilians – though again, as usual, more Palestinians have been killed by Israel.

There could easily be a new war. The root issue is suppression of the Palestinians' right to self-determination.

In the 2021 election that dethroned Netanyahu, his right-wing nationalist Likud party lost seats but remained by far the largest party, with a quarter of the vote. The coalition that replaced it was constructed from a mix of smaller right-wing Jewish parties opposed to Netanyahu for various reasons, “liberal” parties Blue and White and Yesh Atid, the Israeli Labor Party and social-democratic Meretz. Amidst controversy on “both sides”, Islamist-conservative Arab party Ra'am – which had broken from the left-led Joint List – also joined the coalition.

Netanyahu was replaced as prime minister by his former chief of staff Naftali Bennett, leader of Yamina, a national-conservative and neoliberal party



that came fifth with 6% of the vote. Under the coalition agreement Yesh Atid leader Yair Lapid, currently foreign minister, will become prime minister in 2023.

Bennett notoriously described the Palestinian question as “shrapnel in the butt” – something you'd rather live with than go through surgery to resolve – and as prime minister has confirmed that he wants to “minimise the conflict. We won't be able to solve it.”

Netanyahu and his allies have attacked Bennett and Lapid's government as “left-wing” and “non-Zionist”, making great play of the involvement of Ra'am. Bennett's response has been to try to “manage” issues and put them off – for example, the threatened evictions in Sheikh Jarrah, East Jerusalem, which also sparked the May 2021 war, are still stalled – but also to attack Netanyahu's Palestinian policy *from the right*.

When it formed, the government had 61 of 120 Knesset seats. Netanyahu is campaigning hard to return to office, no doubt extra hard because of his ongoing trial for corruption.

In April Bennett lost his majority when a Yamina MP defected over the government's policies being insufficiently religious. Then Ra'am suspended its participation in protest at the government's Temple Mount policy (and then a few days ago it signalled its return). Ironically, given Netanyahu's denunciations, he has made attempts to draw the Arab party into supporting him.

Palestinian citizens of Israel, long cowed, are more assertive of their democratic rights: within that big picture, the support that Hamas has begun to win among Palestinians in Israel remains a small fraction. But the West Bank is heavily repressed, and in Gaza the authoritarian and chauvinist Islamists of Hamas, who offer no way out, retain control. Both the Palestinians and Israel's internationalists remain beleaguered. International solidarity to help them upend the political situation is more urgent than ever.

More in *Solidarity* in the coming weeks. □

#LABOUR PURGE



Activist Agenda

With Labour Party meetings re-starting after 5 May, activists will be submitting motions and rule changes opposing the Labour Party's new ban on Workers' Liberty: see [bit.ly/mo-pe](https://www.workersliberty.org/mo-pe). The suggested wording is chosen carefully so as not to be subject to being ruled out of order on grounds used against debate on previous bans, or via the “three-year rule”, or via recent changes to Labour's rule book to give the National Executive “absolute discretion” on some disciplinary points. The Uyghur Solidarity Campaign and Labour Solidarity With Hong Kong plan to be present 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](https://www.workersliberty.org/agenda)



Why are you booing Zack? He's right



Debate

By Hector Lopes

Solidarity 634 was unfortunate to include a debate article and a letter that could, at best, be described as misguided and at worst, nonsensically transphobic. Ally Goodwin's piece ([Erasing world-class sportswomen?](#)), a response to Zack Muddle's article ([632](#)) regarding the inclusion of trans women in women's sports, attempts to make the case against on the basis of biological essentialism. Goodwin states, perhaps pre-empting a backlash, that "those pesky fact-mongers [sic] who defend the biology-based classification, 'women', are going to be labelled transphobic". Whether or not they are themselves being transphobic, Goodwin is certainly arguing for the politics of trans exclusion.

The main crux of Goodwin's argument is that people assigned male at birth go through a different puberty than their biologically female counterparts, led primarily by testosterone. "There are social differences which are stacked on top, but basically, it's testosterone which creates the differences." differences in height, strength, bone density, muscle mass and lung capacity. Goodwin then devotes the second half of the article to a bizarre list of exam-

ples where women's sporting records are compared to equivalents in men's sports, a segment intended to illustrate the need to keep biological men and women apart so that each can shine in their own lane, but which is so cherry-picked and committed to making its case that it reads like a condescending treatise on female inferiority.

The section on tennis is especially egregious - Goodwin states, as though it is fact, that "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". This statement isn't so much backed by evidence as it is a paraphrasing of a John McEnroe quote for which he was rightly lambasted as sexist, an odd inclusion in an article claiming to stand up for the excellence of women in sports. Further down, Goodwin claims that in 1973 Billie Jean King "only just beat" 55-year-old Bobby Riggs in the infamous Battle of the Sexes tennis match, which distorts history in order to make their point; while claims about their age gap are valid, King beat Riggs in straight sets, hardly a close victory. It's telling that Goodwin makes no mention of instances where women have trounced men in sports, such as in 1922 when Sybil Bauer beat the men's backstroke record by four seconds, or the multiple instances in professional boxing and MMA where women and men have been paired against each

other for the woman to roundly win. It is equally telling that Goodwin pushes aside "other social factors" in order to make their case, but social and, importantly, economic factors play an enormous role in the differential between sportspeople.

Social and economic

For one, due to the deep roots of misogyny and sexism in society, women's sports are decades behind equivalent men's sports in funding, training facilities, and social acceptance, in a way that cannot be ignored if we're comparing like for like. No one besides the most absurd ultra-nationalists would claim that, say, Chinese or American athletes are biologically better than their counterparts from other nations - we understand instinctively that these nations' regular presence at the top of Olympic tables has more to do with much higher degrees of funding, access to higher quality training facilities, technology and nutritional regimes. A class divide exists in sports as it does in every other area, one in which the privileged are afforded better training and conditions and thus are more likely, on average, to reach the cutting edge of their field. Goodwin rightly praises the gains made in women's sport over the last few decades, but the changing social and economic factors implicit in those gains are ignored.

To ignore these factors in favour of a focus on sheer biology is to do those

sports a disservice. The pinpoint focus on testosterone leads Goodwin's article to a degree of biological essentialism that will ultimately harm cisgender women.

Of course sheer genetic and biological physicality lead to direct advantages or disadvantages. Multiple gold medallist swimmer Michael Phelps has various physical attributes that give him huge advantages in his field, including a greater than average arm span, large torso, large paddle-like feet and a body that produces less lactic acid than average - yet no one has suggested that Phelps be injected with lactic acid to maintain the integrity of the sport. Meanwhile, spurred by the sort of anti-trans moral panic that Goodwin's article exemplifies, South African Olympic gold medallist and cisgender woman Caster Semenya was told in 2019 by the Court of Arbitration for Sport that she would have to reduce the levels of testosterone her body naturally produces in order to continue to compete. Is that not, to quote Goodwin's own title, the erasure of a world-class sportswoman?

Goodwin is ultimately interested in one issue: does the inclusion of people who have gone through a male puberty in women's sports undermine the sanctity of those sports? Their argument is yes - that "male" physicality gives transgender women an unfair advantage, and may (in what feels like a throwaway

continued opposite →

PR is not magic



Letter

Proportional representation (John Roberts' letter, [Solidarity 634](#)) is more democratic than first-past-the-post, which disadvantages relatively-evenly spread minorities relative to localised ones, and skews political campaigning to focus on a minority of marginal seats.

It doesn't follow that PR is a magic key to progress. We push for the labour movement to have independent politics, not for a coalition or semi-coalition government of Labour and Lib-Dem and SNP because it might bring, or arise from, PR. Germany, Israel, Ireland, the Netherlands, Brazil and many other countries show that PR is no guarantee of a big new working-class party emerging. □

Gary Michaels, London

Teenagers and rights to decide



Debate

By Wilson Gibbons

Jack McDonough ([Solidarity 634](#)) begins by wilfully misinterpreting the term "non-binary". No-one has ever existed, he says, who could impregnate themselves. This is as bizarre, nonsensical and irrelevant: non-binary simply means that someone views their gender identity - not sex - as outside of the male/female binary categories.

As socialist feminists we recognise that the roles that men and women play in society are socially constituted and fluid over time. We are not biological essentialists who believe that one's genitals should dictate one's role in society. It is perfectly possible within that framework, and in fact it hap-

pens in reality, that people identify with neither of those categories. Jack's comments on gametes are therefore irrelevant, and are confused.

Jack adds there are "a tiny number of intersex people" and that they "don't constitute a half way stage between a man and a woman." Irrelevant at best! And research recognises that there are a number of nuances to chromosomal makeup, and maybe around 1.7% of people are born with intersex traits - roughly the same as the number of people with ginger hair in the population. Statistically there is fairly likely to be someone with intersex traits in Jack's life.

Intersex people's existence is relevant here only in showing that gender is not rigidly biologically-based. In most cases where a person is visibly intersex they are socialised - or coercively medically treated - to conform to one or other

of the binary genders in spite of their biology not mapping onto that. Their erasure as individuals and a category serves to perpetuate a binary and biologically determinist illusion.

Consent

Jack goes on to question whether teenagers should be able to consent to medical treatment to affirm their gender identity. What he is in essence calling into question, [again](#), is Gillick competence. This is the precedent in the UK that if teenagers can be deemed to understand their actions and the consequences of them, they can be entrusted with the autonomy to carry out those actions. It is the basis of confidential child sexual health in the UK.

What Jack doesn't realise, or ignores, when he questions Gillick, is that he is questioning not only teenagers' right to affirm their gender, but also

their right to get contraceptives, abortions, vaccinations, blood transfusions or medically necessary surgeries free from parental interference. And in children's social care, it is used regularly to allow teenagers in abusive households to leave and transition into care by their own choice. Jack may think that he is taking a cautious approach which protects children, but his position undermines a cornerstone of children's rights in the UK.

"Supportive medical professionals", in the context of Gillick competence, aren't yes-people acting on the whims of whoever strolls into their office. They are professionals whose job it is to understand and assess whether a teenager has the capacity to understand what they want to do and provide them with all the information to proceed in a safe and informed manner,

continued opposite →

Ukraine is centre of world surrogacy industry



Women's Fightback

By Kelly Rogers

Ukraine is now the centre of the global surrogacy industry. India passed legislation shutting down its multi-billion dollar industry in 2019. Similar laws were passed in Thailand, Cambodia and Nepal, and now surrogacy companies in Ukraine control more than a quarter of the market worldwide.

Surrogates generally give up all rights relating to their control over their pregnancies, with potentially dangerous implications for their health, both physical and mental. They report being forced into abortions when clients change their mind, unsafe living environments, poor health care and lack of postnatal care.

Children are also put at risk. There are consistent reports from Ukraine of client parents abandoning unwanted children, especially those with disabilities. Where children are abandoned they are left stateless; they are not technically considered to be Ukrainian and are, as a result, ineligible for adoption.

Ukraine does not allow surrogacy for same-sex couples. Ironically, considering its record on LGBT rights for its own citizens, Russia does allow it, and is a very popular destination for gay couples looking for surrogates.

The war has changed everything,

but even in the context of war it is the needs of the clients, rather than the safety and rights of the surrogate, that takes precedence. This is leaving these women incredibly vulnerable.

Clients want assurances that the surrogates are safe, demanding that they be moved out of Ukraine - in many cases against the wishes of the surrogates themselves, who want to stay with or near their families. Besides, neighbouring countries, such as Poland, have very different legislation surrounding surrogacy, and if a baby were to be born there, would be considered to be the child of the surrogate, not the intended parents. Babies that have been born in areas where there has been fighting are trapped there, with the question of their citizenship still up in the air.

Feminists are divided on the question of surrogacy. For many, it is the epitome of the commodification of women's bodies and our exploitation. And with the poor record internationally on the issues of conditions for surrogates, alongside widespread reports of human trafficking, one can sympathise with this view. Unsurprisingly, the main factor that leads women to become surrogates in countries like Ukraine, is not altruism but financial need.

It's also true that there is a heavily racialised aspect to the global system in which aspiring parents from the United States and Western Europe go to poor Eastern European nations to buy babies that look like they do. Ukrainian and Russian women are marketed as

being "the most beautiful in the world".

But on the other hand, even though surrogates are paid quite miserly sums by Western standards, pay is low across Ukraine. School teachers, for example, will earn only a quarter of what a surrogate would be paid for bringing a baby to term. It can be a huge opportunity for people.

If the industry is going to continue, then there needs to be urgent and

dramatic reform: increase in pay and conditions and strong legislative assurances around healthcare and autonomy of surrogates as a minimum. The children also need to be protected - an issue that has been made starkly clear by the war. If these reforms can be made, then surrogacy offers huge possibilities for modern and diverse families. □

→ from "Teenagers..."

without censoriousness and without an obligation to inform potentially resistant parents, carers or family members. They are professionally accountable for what they do.

Jack isn't clear how he thinks homophobia, sexual abuse and autism are "issues" that should be "explored" but taking the general sway of his argument, I assume he means these may cause someone to "wrongly" want transition.

But the idea that someone experiencing homophobia would transition to escape that is nonsense. Trans people identify as Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual at significantly [higher](#) rates than the rest of the population. Second, trans people face extreme prejudice in society, so it would make no sense as an "escape". They are assaulted, murdered, discriminated against at significantly higher rates than other demographics.

The idea that sexual assault would make people want to transition echoes 1980s homophobia that claimed that men became gay because they were sexually assaulted as children. I'm sure the people who said that felt they were genuinely concerned with protecting children, but they weren't, and Jack isn't either.

Autism

Evoking the trope that autism wrongly causes people to transition is also essentially a rehash of the age-old homophobic idea: that people are - or think they are - gay because they are "mentally ill". Not only does this transphobic trope feed homophobia, but it is offensive to and discriminatory against autistic people. It treats autism as something wrong, which must be fixed; or at best, means that an autistic individual's decisions should be taken less seriously.

My understanding is that there are many autistic trans people because they understand and experience social constructs differently to neurotypical people and therefore can take

issue with the way that gendered roles are applied to them by others and feel more like themselves by expressing their gender identity differently.

To suggest that they simply don't understand - or are wrong in doing this - is condescending and no better than suggesting that autistic people should be forced to conform to any other neurotypical societal norms they may struggle with.

Jack brings up the age of consent at the end of his article, implying that allowing teenagers to make decisions about their own bodies is somehow analogous to child abuse. This is ridiculous, offensive, and worrying. It reads to me like the 1980s arguments that gay teenagers were too young to be able to make an informed decision about their sexual orientation.

His comparison fails to understand that the age of consent for sex exists to protect children from adults exploiting them sexually, as has been pointed out previously ([Solidarity 609 bit.ly/g-609](#)). Evoking a comparison between sexual abuse and trans healthcare is offensive to trans people and survivors of child sexual abuse.

It also evokes an idea which the article Jack was responding to explicitly critiqued: that children are being encouraged or "groomed" to be trans - Jack is more overt in this than even the Tory right.

For a moment I thought we had begun publishing the ill-informed and mean-spirited ramblings of a Trumpian Texan senator in our letters section. Jack's letter aligns more closely with the Trumpist Christian right's legislative [agenda](#) than even the mainstream Tory party's politics, to date - out of place from a socialist.

The evidence is overwhelming that allowing people to transition earlier leads to them having longer, happier lives. For all Jack's screeching "won't someone please think of the children?" he is the one failing to understand how rhetoric like his is far more harmful than helpful. □

→ from "Why are you booing..."

dogwhistle comment) even put cisgender athletes in danger.

The reality is that, despite vocal claims otherwise, when transgender women have been allowed to participate in women's sport, their results have been distinctly average. The first trans woman to compete in women's tennis in the 1970s, Renée Richards, reached a ranking of 20th overall. Laura Hubbard, the first out trans woman to compete in the Olympics in 2020 in weightlifting, did not complete her lifts or win any medals. Despite the recent controversy around swimmer Lia Thomas, her current record post medical transition is still nine seconds behind the current record holder Katie Ledecky. This is not to disparage the work, talent, and dedication of trans women athletes, but rather to illustrate that however

much Goodwin may talk about the science of bodies, those fears are not in general borne out in reality.

Conservative worldwide estimates for trans women suggest they might be 1 in 30,000 people. Of those, as in society at large, a truly tiny percentage have the talent, dedication and desire to become professional athletes. In a world where athletes have to begin training at a younger and younger age and commit more and more of their time and energy to be competitive, the mental and physical impact of transition cannot be understated. To suggest that these women pose a threat to the integrity of women's sports is absurd. If we are serious about trans rights, those rights must include the right to participate in all facets of life as one's chosen gender, including sports. □

What socialists are



Interview

Denys Pilash of Sotsialny Rukh spoke to Katy Dollar

Denys Pilash is tired. He travelled 600 miles from Ukraine's capital to Lviv to host the European Solidarity Network with Ukraine delegation, then after sleeping on a floor he translated between English and Ukrainian for a conference that overran by several hours. With no break he moved from interview to interview with visitors keen to hear his take on the invasion, the situation for the Ukrainian Left, and the future for Ukraine. Still, he sits with us for an hour explaining the work of Sotsialny Rukh (SR, The Social Movement) and what they are doing to do to build a democratic socialist left in Ukraine:

I was in a small but militant syndicalist student union instrumental in preventing different cabinets from further commercialisation of education and to imposing higher fees. Some of us joined other forces in a new organisation, Left Opposition. This was the basis for the Assembly for Social Revolution that ultimately became the Social Movement. We participated in lots of mobilisations, lots of struggles. We have been struggling against the new neoliberal labour code proposals that have been pursued for 15 years and still the capitalist class didn't achieve its goals.

We also we tried to turn the people's anger that was also behind the

Euromaidan protests and other mobilisations as well, to really point out that all this grievances, starting from police brutality, lack of political representation and the general sense of economic insecurity and no prospects in tomorrow, can be traced back to the system of the oligarchic capitalism, and that that's why we need to speak about an economic and political alternative to it.

Sotsialny Rukh is a completely anti-capitalist organisation. We advocate a break with the neoliberal and oligarchic capitalism that dominates Ukraine. When we say democratic socialism, we mean a society organised on collective ownership of means of production and with democratic self-governance, akin to some ideas of socialism from below. If you have so-called socialism without democracy, you have all these deformations we saw in the Soviet past, in the worst case Stalinist dictatorship. When you have a so-called democracy that isn't extended to economic democracy at the workplace, it means just reproducing the dominance of the capitalist class in the society. It also includes struggles for women's rights, and rights for all the people that are excluded or oppressed by the existing system of dominance.

We also link the struggle against the capitalist system and for workers' emancipation with the issue of ecological and environmental stance. We need to understand all the damage that was done to the environment by both the capitalist and the Soviet bureaucratic model. We now even see how it's all interconnected, when you have fossil-fuel

empires like Russia and Saudi Arabia or Western companies promoting an aggressive agenda, and they are fueled by the same things that are destroying the planet and life. We can go extinct by war or by climate disaster and both menaces are very interconnected.

We had a number of activists who used to be in Trotskyist anti-Stalinist Marxist organisations. But we also were joined by people who had less political experience, newly politicised trade unionists, and also people who came from an anarchist milieu, who were members of the radical students union or from a more social democratic approaches. From the beginning, we wanted probably to have different ideological political platforms inside to give voice to these different political philosophies. Generally we had some disagreements but nothing that couldn't be bridged. For major strategic questions, when we need to adjust our political positions, we try to have long discussions.

Denys recalls his own political journey with humility and humour. He laughs whilst recounting:

I started off with a group called the Organisation of Marxists, and it was a doomed-from-the-beginning attempt to bring together people who considered themselves revolutionary Marxists. Stalinist or anti-Stalinist. You cannot reconcile these political cultures. Our ways parted dramatically.

After a list of impressive militant campaigns, he quips:

I participated in some kind of, you know, union activities, social movements, left wing cinema screenings,

some reading groups, what usual left-wing sectarians do.

Building a new left organisation in the shadow of Stalinism has not been easy for SR.

If you see the political terrain of the countries that used to be the so-called socialist bloc, only a few of them have a feasible new left party, like Razem in Poland or Levica in Slovenia. There is little room for a democratic left. The s-word is discredited here. It won't stay that way forever. But to approach a real-life person in Ukraine, you obviously need to not start with terms but to explain their meaning.

This discredit is the heritage of Stalinism, all its atrocities and crimes. Also the policies of parties with communist or socialist in their name. The Communist Party was socially conservative, not pro-worker, instead pro death penalty, pro Orthodox Church, pro "traditional values" like homophobia. Politics that would seem really nasty even for some tankie in the West. But in the post-Soviet space that's the Communist Party. And then you have different types of so-called socialist parties, essentially vehicles for corrupt political adventurers.

People have this allergy to what is connected to the Soviet Union. But they have equally, if not bigger, hatred towards the oligarchs. No one in Ukraine is content with the existing system, and they are particularly disappointed with the way a handful of people who are effectively are still in control, not just of the economy, but also of the political system. And even the current president was promising a war on oligarchs. But the problem is that every oligarchic party and even every oligarch will say that they are against oligarchs.

You need to explain that the problem is not just Ukraine, though we have some particularly vile people, criminals in the nineties enriched in this process of primitive accumulation of capital. The root of the problem is the system that exploits you. The system that leaves you without normal means to exist. And at the same time, it gives profits to the people who are most incompetent, greedy.

If you participate at your workplace and you are in solidarity with other people who face sacking, low salaries, discrimination in the workplace, and you lend your support and you can speak about what common problems and challenges we have.

We had a more or less social democratic party in Ukraine. It was a combative opposition to President Kuchma, who was the architect of this oligarchic



Many thousands protested across the USA on 14 May against the threat to the Roe v. Wade ruling which underpins abortion rights there. The movement can and must grow through to June, when the Supreme Court gives its decision, and after

e doing in Ukraine

capitalist system in Ukraine. Then it also started to sell out.

The moment the Communist Party was deregistered due to this de-communisation law they were effectively dead, virtual nonexistence. They lost their base, they lost their membership. They only existed on paper.

Though the Communist party was not a real left party, the de-communisation legislation is a threat to the real left. Denys explained:

Of course de-communisation legislation made any kind of leftist politics much, much more difficult here. I wrote three or four articles against the law. It narrows the space for any kind of progressive politics. This law denies a huge part of Ukrainian history itself because the Ukrainian National Liberation Movement was leftist from the beginning and the people who are venerated as the biggest Ukrainian writers, Ivan Franco, Lesya Ukrainka, were socialist. Ukrainian independence was first raised by socialists.

The law was a justification, the far right could beat you up the street and say, oh, it was some commie. It's okay. It's because it is the law. It legitimised this.

The far right in Ukraine has received a lot of attention from the Western Left, Over the sound of air raid sirens, Denys explains the terrain of racist and nationalist politics.

The far right here is minuscule in size, but it was and it is a force on the streets. There was only one point when a far right party made it into Parliament. The majority of the elections, they achieved around 2%: this is an indication of their real support.

We have different far right tendencies. The Svoboda Party is an old right-wing party. It started as a Social Nationalist party of Ukraine, but then

it was rebranded with help of Le Pen. At that point, they were friends with Le Pen and now they are mortal enemies, because most of the European far right are pro-Putin and Putin is pro-far right. Now it's an ethno-nationalist party that is confined only to Western Ukraine.

And then you have the Azov movement. It is no longer a separate battalion, for seven years they have been a regiment under the Ministry of Interior of Ukraine. But they lost the support of their patron, the powerful interior minister who we finally got rid of.

Trends in recent years were rather pessimistic for the far right because they were losing ground and political legitimacy. But now the invasion reinforces some of their legitimacy as defenders of Ukraine. Unlike eight years ago with the outbreak of war in the Donbas, you now have a complete resistance of the entire society. So, the percentage of the far right in this resistance is really, really very low.

In the resistance you have people from all ethnic backgrounds, from all regions of Ukraine, from speaking different language groups, men and women with different political views, but mostly people who deem themselves as apolitical. They are all in the resistance in the war and repealing the aggression. The far right cannot claim that it's their struggle. It's a struggle of the entire multi-ethnic nation of Ukraine.

We have two competing views somehow coexisting during a civil war, but they are mutually exclusive. The first one is a hypernationalist vision of a more ethnically homogeneous Ukraine where everyone has to speak Ukrainian. Many people who used to be bilingual or Russian speaking felt so upset by the Russian invasions that they said they will no longer speak Russian, only Ukrainian. They say we need to rally around the flag and become the opposite of anything Russian.

On the other side, you have Russian-speaking people, Ukrainian-speaking people, people from even the most deprived, discriminated minorities and communities like the Roma people who have joined the military effort, in territorial defence, in humanitarian volunteer networks and so on. And it highlights how diverse we are and how actually we need to promote this multitude of communities and of different regions inside Ukraine.

Sotsialniy Rukh are developing a programme which resists bosses' attempts to shift the full burden of the war onto the working class and looks to build Ukraine on a new basis:

We had this process of this decen-



tralisation, but it was really an austerity policy, dropping the budgets from the state level to the local. We need a devolution that will give more direct democracy for the local communities, and they can influence their issues in their cities, towns, villages, but also maybe some kind of regional identity, what kind of cultural policies they would like.

Again we have a turn to renaming the streets, getting rid of Russian names and so on. But can we have a calm and honest discussion to really include the interest of all the communities that are represented and to not exclude any part of society. For instance people in Transcarpathia, in Lviv, in Donbas, in Bessarabia and in Odessa are very different, but at the same time very similar. It is about embracing that.

Look at the transitional program and transitional demands designated by Trotsky. This idea goes contrary to simple reformist and Stalinist parties that have maximum programs, that somehow in the future you will achieve some kind of just society, communism, now you have some very minimalistic struggles, and you have no bridge between them. We need a real struggle for a feasible thing that is understandable and sustainable. You need to show them why we need to go beyond the logic of the existing system.

When we speak about sanctions against Russian oligarchs, we can point out that there are lots of loopholes, lots of exemptions provided by the system of tax havens. And it's used not just by the Russian oligarchs, but Ukrainian oligarchs and billionaires throughout the world. Those classes in general ditching their own population to protect their wealth. We need to dismantle the system but the same people hiding their wealth, run the system and write the laws.

If you speak about the cancellation of Ukrainian debt, this problem is global. Countries and their peoples are trapped in this vicious circle of debt,

getting more loans to pay off your previous loans. That goes along with IMF driven austerity. It's something that Ukraine shares with not just people in the global south, but also European peripheries. Even people in the most prosperous countries suffer austerity policies. The grievances of our nurses and our railroad workers are very common for people across Europe as well. Maybe as a magnitude it is a bit different between the one of the poorest countries and the most prosperous, but the disparities, inequalities and injustices, they are pretty visible.

We raise demands for Ukraine and see how they transcend to something that is necessary in the entire world. We really need to break the system. Starting from something relatively small, we can show the big picture to the people both here and abroad. □

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The Labour War, 1913-1

The isolation of Dublin



**Connolly
politically
unexpurgated**

By James Connolly

On 9 December 1913 a special congress of the TUC voted down a motion that trade unionists should refuse to handle goods from firms which had been locking out Dublin workers since August. The vote weakened the workers' side in the "Labour War", and by 19 January the union was advising workers to return to work on the best terms they could get.

I want this week to talk about the "isolation of Dublin". Some seven or eight weeks ago the proposal to isolate Dublin was the subject of much controversy in the Labour papers, and much fierce comment in the capitalist press. It is my desire in this week's article to tell how and in what manner the proposal was carried through, and how it is that now Dublin is isolated.

It is not necessary, I presume, to remind our readers of the beginnings of the Dublin struggle. Let us, just for convenience sake, take up the fight at the moment it became a subject of national action on the part of the British Labour movement.

A public meeting had been proclaimed in Dublin in a brazen illegal manner. For declaring that this proclamation was illegal, and advising their leaders to disregard it and stand to their rights, a number of leaders of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union had been arrested and imprisoned. A wholesale batoning of the people had followed, and Dublin was the scene of the most unparalleled police brutality.

An appeal was made to the British Trades Union Congress, then happily sitting, and that body in the name of the British working class nobly rose to the occasion, and pledged the credit of the whole British labour movement to see their Dublin comrades through the fight. As a result, the right of free speech was re-asserted in Dublin, a supply of food was arranged for through the despatch of specially chartered steamers, and a huge amount of money was raised to enable the men and women of Dublin to keep the fight going. Never was seen such enthusi-

asm in a labour fight. Trade unionists, Socialists of all kinds, Anarchists, Industrialists, Syndicalists, all the varying and hitherto discordant elements of the Labour movement found a common platform, were joined together in pursuit of a common object. Now, permit me to underscore that point, and emphasise its great importance. For long years we have been preaching to the labour movement the necessity of concerted industrial action, telling it that the time was rotten ripe for Industrial Unity, and declaring that as the interests of each were the concern of all, our organisations should be rearranged with a view to the conserving of their common interests.

We found that to a large extent these ideas were taking root in the minds of the workers, but that to a still larger extent the tacit acceptance of our ideas failed to evoke concerted action built upon these lines. The forces of our enemies were united and wielded with all the precision and relentlessness with which the general staff of an army would wield the battalions and brigades which formed the component parts of that army, but the battalions and brigades of the army of labour when engaged in battle had no efficient general staff to guide and direct the whole army to the salvation of its individual units; and, worse still, had none of that esprit-de-corps which on the military battle-field would make the desertion of any section to its fate an unthinkable course to the officers of the divisions not engaged. We had seen at London, at Leith and elsewhere that whereas the whole force of the Shipping Federation has been actively engaged in fighting the dockers of these ports, the dockers and seamen of the other ports had maintained the peace, and left their Leith or London brothers to bear alone the full force of the Federation attack, instead of meeting that attack by a movement against the flanks and rear of the Federation in these other ports. We know that although much of this blundering was due to the sectional jealousy of various union leaders, much was also due to the fact that the conception of common action on a national scale by the whole working class had not yet entered the minds of the rank and file as a whole. Something had been wanting – something that would make the minds of the workers more responsive, more ready to accept the broader idea, and act

upon its acceptance. That something Dublin supplied.

The dramatic suddenness with which the Dublin fight was thrust upon public attention, the tragic occurrences of the first few days – working class martyrdom, the happy coincidence of a Trade Union Congress, the intervention of British trade unionists to assert the right of public meeting for Irish workers – filling the gap in the ranks caused by the jailing of Irish Trade Union leaders, the brilliant inspiration of a food ship, and last but not least the splendid heroism of the Dublin men and women showing out against the background of the squalor and misery of their houses.

There are times in history when we realise that it is easier to convert a multitude than it ordinarily is to convert an individual; when indeed ideas seem to seize upon the masses as contra-distinguished by ordinary times when individuals slowly seize ideas. The propagandist toils on for decades in seeming failure and ignominy, when suddenly some great event takes place in accord with the principles he has been advocating, and immediately he finds that the seed he has been sowing is springing up in plants that are covering the earth. To the idea of working class unity, to the seed of industrial solidarity, Dublin was the great event that enabled it to seize the minds of the masses, the germinating force that gave power to the seed to fructify and cover these islands.

I say in all solemnity and seriousness that in its attitude towards Dublin the Working Class Movement of Great Britain reached its highest point of moral grandeur – attained for a moment to a realisation of that sublime unity towards which the best in us must continually aspire. Could that feeling but have been crystallised into organic expression, could we but have had real statesmen amongst us who, recognising the wonderful leap forward of our class, would have hastened to burn behind us the boats that might make easy a retreat to the old ground of isolation and division, could we have found Labour Leaders capable enough to declare that now that the working class had found its collective soul it should hasten to express itself as befitted that soul and not be fettered by the rules, regulations and codes of organisations conceived in the olden outworn spirit of sectional jealousies; could these things have but been vouchsafed to us,

what a new world could now be opening delightfully upon the vision of Labour? Consider what Dublin meant to you all! It meant that the whole force of organised Labour should stand behind each unit of organisation in each and all of its battles, that no company, battalion or brigade should henceforth be allowed to face the enemy alone, and that the capitalist would be taught that when he fought a Union anywhere he must be prepared to fight all Unions everywhere.

For the first days and weeks of the struggle, the Working Classes of Great Britain attained to the height of moral grandeur expressed in that idea, all Labour stood behind Dublin, and Dublin rejoiced. Dublin suffered and agonised, but rejoiced that even in its suffering it was the medium for the apostolate of a rejuvenating idea. How often have I heard the responsive cheers to the question whether they would be prepared to stand by others as these others had stood by them!

And now?

Dublin is isolated. We asked our friends of the transport trade unions to isolate the capitalist class of Dublin, and we asked the other unions to back them up. But no, they said we would rather help you by giving you funds. We argued that a strike is an attempt to stop the capitalist from carrying on his business, that the success or failure of the strike depends entirely upon the success or non-success of the capitalist to do without the strikers. If the capitalist is able to carry on his business without the strikers, then the strike is lost, even if the strikers receive more in strike pay than they formerly did in wages. We said that if scabs are working a ship and union men discharge in another port the boat so loaded, then those union men are strike breakers, since they help the capitalist in question to carry on his business. That if Union seamen man a boat discharged by scabs, these union seamen or firemen are by the same reason strike-breakers, as also are the railwaymen or carters who assist in transporting the goods handled by the scabs for the capitalist who is fighting his men or women. In other words, we appealed to the collective soul of the workers against the collective hatred of the capitalist.

We asked for no more than the logical development of that idea of working class unity, that the Working Class of Britain should help us to prevent the

4, part three

Dublin capitalists carrying on their business without us. We asked for the isolation of the capitalists of Dublin, and for answer the leaders of the British labour movement proceeded calmly to isolate the Working Class of Dublin. As an answer to those who supported our request for the isolation of Dublin we were told that a much better plan would be to increase the subsidies to enable us to increase strike pay. As soon as this argument had served its purpose, the subsidies fell off, and the "Dublin Fund" grew smaller and smaller as if by a pre-arranged plan. We had rejected the last terms offered by the employers on the strength of this talk of increased supplies, and as soon as that last attempt at settlement thus fell through, the supplies gradually froze up instead of being increased as we had been promised.

In addition to this the National Union of Railwaymen, whilst in attendance at the Special Conference in London on 9th December, had actually in their pockets the arrangements for the re-starting of work on the London and

North-Western boat at the North Wall of Dublin, and in the train returning to Dublin the day after the Conference, we read of the line being re-opened. No vote was taken of the men on strike; they were simply ordered back to work by their officials and told that if they did not return, their strike pay would be stopped. The Seamen's and Firemen's Union men in Dublin were next ordered to man the boats of the Head Line of steamers then being discharged by free labourers supplied by the Shipping Federation. In both Dublin and Belfast the members refused, and they were then informed that union men would be brought from Great Britain to take their places. Union men to be brought from England to take the place of members of the same union who refused to desert their brothers of the Transport Union. We were attempting to hold up Guinness' porter. A consignment was sent to Sligo for shipment there. The local Transport Union official wired me for instructions. I wired to hold it up; his men obeyed, and it was removed from Sligo, railed to Derry,

and there put on board by members of Mr Sexton's Union on ships manned by members of Mr Havelock Wilson's Union and discharged in Liverpool by members of Mr Sexton's Union. Whilst the City of Dublin Steam Packet Company was still insisting upon carrying the goods of our worst enemy, Jacob's (who is still enforcing the agreement denounced by Sir Geo. Askwith), the members of the Seamen and Firemen's Union were ordered to sign on in their boats, although our men were still on strike. We were informed by Mr. Joe Houghton of the Scottish Dockers that his Union would not hold up any boat for us unless joint action was taken by the Transport Workers' Federation. As on a previous occasion, his members at Ayr had worked coal boats belonging to a Belfast firm that was making war upon the Irish Transport Workers' Union, we do not blame Joe very much. He had been disobeyed at Ayr – perhaps he was coerced in Glasgow.

But why go on? Sufficient to say that the Working Class Unity of the first days of the Dublin fight was sacrificed in the

interests of sectional officialism. The officials failed to grasp the opportunity offered to them to make a permanent reality of the Union of Working Class forces brought into being by the spectacle of rebellion, martyrdom and misery exhibited by the workers of Dublin. All England and Scotland rose to it; working class officialdom and working class rank and file alike responded to the call of inspiration; it would have raised us all upward and onward towards our common emancipation. But sectionalism, intrigues and old-time jealousies damned us in the hour of victory, and officialdom was the first to fall to the tempter.

And so we Irish workers must go down into Hell, bow our backs to the lash of the slave driver, let our hearts be seared by the iron of his hatred, and instead of the sacramental wafer of brotherhood and common sacrifice, eat the dust of defeat and betrayal.

Dublin is isolated. □

• *Forward*, 7 February 1914. Previous reprints have been abridged.

A lesson from Dublin

By James Connolly

Some time ago I reprinted in *Forward* an extract from an article I had contributed to the *Irish Review* defending and expounding the idea of the sympathetic strike. That was at the beginning of the Dublin struggle. Now, the members of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union who have returned to work in Dublin have done so after signing an agreement to handle all classes of goods, that is to say, to renounce for the time the idea and practice of the sympathetic strike.

This, by the way, is the only agreement yet signed by members of that union. In those firms which still insist upon the former Employers' Agreement banning the Transport Union the strike or lock-out is still in active operation.

But the question arises: what reason is to be derived from our experience of the Sympathetic Strike in Dublin? What lesson can be learned from a cool and reasoned study of our struggle?

Let me repeat the essence of the article alluded to as an ex-

planation of the nature of the Sympathetic Strike. It pointed out that we in Dublin had realised that the capitalist cannot be successfully fought upon the industrial field unless we recognise that all classes of workers should recognise their common interests, that such recognition implied that an employer engaged in a struggle with his workpeople should be made taboo or tainted, that no other workers should cooperate in helping to keep his business growing, that no goods coming from his works should be handled by organised workers, and no goods going to his works should be conveyed by organised workers. That he should, in effect, be put outside the pale of civilisation, and communication with him should be regarded as being as deadly a crime as correspondence with an enemy in war time. I tried to illustrate this by citing examples of social warfare conducted on similar lines in the past by various societies and classes.

It may then be asked: how far has the Dublin experience jus-

tified or failed to justify those who, like myself, contended for the practicability of this policy? We have been forced in Dublin to abandon the policy temporarily because other unions whose cooperation was necessary had not adopted a similar policy. It was not practicable to enforce the policy of tainted goods in Dublin whilst the goods so held up could be transported from other ports and handled across Channel by other unions. The executives of other unions failing to sanction the cooperation of their members, the enforcement of this policy became an impossibility. Hence I submit that the main difficulty in the way of the success of this policy is in the multiplicity of Unions and Executives. Every Union not immediately engaged in the conflict is a Union whose material interests – looked at from a narrowly selfish point of view – are opposed to being drawn into the struggle. Therefore, every Executive naturally aligns itself in opposition to the policy of a Sympathetic Strike, except when it is its own Union that is

immediately concerned. When it is one of the principals in the fight then each Union becomes as enthusiastically in favour of the Sympathetic Strike as it formerly was against it.

We have seen this exemplified recently in London in the cases of the Coalmen's strike and the London Builders' lock-out. In fact every union that nowadays becomes involved in a strike appeals to sympathetic action immediately, even after condemning its theory when at peace. It is no use pointing out the inconsistency of such action; it is merely a case of following the immediate material interests of their Union, instead of the broader material and moral welfare of their class. But when we recognise this ugly fact, what lesson ought we to derive from it?

We ought, I think, to learn that the first duty of the militant worker today is to work for Industrial Unionism in some form. To work for the abolition or merging of all these unions that now divide our energies instead of concentrating them – and for the abolition of all those executives whose

measure of success is the balance sheet of their Union, instead of the power of their class. The doctrine of "tainted goods" is vitally necessary for the salvation of labour upon the industrial field, but its enforcement is not possible as long as Labour is split up by Unions whose executives look upon fellow workers in conflict with dread as possible sources of depletion of their treasures. Be it remembered that it is scarcely humanly possible that these executives should act otherwise if the consciousness of class solidarity has not entered into the minds and hearts of their membership; but if and when it has so entered, then a bigoted Conservatism based upon old traditional methods of action becomes a crime against the progress of the species.

This is to my mind the lesson of Dublin. Industrial Unionism, the amalgamation of all forces of labour into one Union, capable of concentrating all forces upon any one issue or in any one fight, can alone

→ continued page 12

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fight industrially as the present development and organisation of capital requires that labour should fight. This will not be accomplished in a day, nor in a year, but should be definitely aimed at, no matter how long may be the period

of its accomplishment.

The organisation of all workers in any one industry into a union covering that entire industry, and the linking up of all such unions under one head is a different thing from the mere amalgamation of certain unions. But whilst not necessarily antagonistic, it is certainly more in

the line of industrial development, and more effective in the day of conflict.

The name also helps to retrieve the workers' movement from the unnatural alliance with mere antipoliticalism so unfortunately and unnecessarily introduced as a fresh dividing issue at this juncture when all our minds ought to

be set upon unity. □

• *Forward*, 21 February 1914. The reference in the first sentence is to *Glorious Dublin*, *Forward* 4 October 1913 (bit.ly/glori-d), which included a section of *Labour in Dublin*, *Irish Review* October 1913 (bit.ly/lab-d)

The right to refuse unsafe workplaces



Environment

By Stuart Jordan

On the night of 10-11 December 2021 six workers at an Amazon warehouse in Edwardsville, Illinois and nine workers at a candle factory in Mayfield, Kentucky were killed as tornadoes flattened their workplaces. Workers in both workplaces report management threatened to sack them if they tried to leave. As a lawyer for one of the dead workers said, they were worked "up until the point of no return".

Some of the workers at the candle factory were prisoners earning just a few cents an hour as part of the USA's notorious "works program" scheme. But even the free workers were denied the basic freedom to leave the workplace to reach a place of safety without risking their livelihood.

The winds that killed these workers were part of a 71 tornado stormfront that started in northeastern Arkansas and travelled for 250 miles through Missouri, Illinois, Tennessee, and Kentucky. Weather like this turns human structures into deadly projectiles and lifts human bodies clean off the ground.

The right to leave work on full pay when faced with natural disasters is now a key demand of the Amazon Labor Union, which in April 2022 won a historic recognition deal at the Amazon warehouse in Staten Island, NYC.

Many key workers during the Covid surges also lacked the right to be able to leave work without fear of destitution. Around 40% of key workers in the UK were denied the sick pay and job security they needed to be able to isolate. This situation continues today, including in our carehomes and hospitals.

The whip hand that keeps us in unsafe workplaces during natural disasters is the same force that is organising

human labour to commit escalating ecocide. The bosses' control of human labour is pushing species and the Earth's climate "beyond the point of return".

It is one of the great paradoxes of capitalism that it produces sophisticated scientific knowledge that give us forewarning of the many natural disasters we face whilst simultaneously denying us the means and liberty to act on that knowledge.

Metereological science and communications technology meant workers knew the tornado was heading their way hours before it struck. It was the dull compulsion of wage slavery that blocked their path to safety.

Epidemiologists quickly worked out ways to limit the spread of coronavirus, but our work-from-home bosses denied us the means to act on that knowledge.

The IPCC has given us very detailed descriptions of the future we face without drastic reductions in fossil fuel use, but fossil capital is organising workers

to produce 195 billion tonne carbon bombs.

Since the start of capitalism there have always been workers who have refused to accept the bosses' disregard for workers' lives. That tradition, embodied today in workplace safety reps, is the only reason many of us no longer suffer the sweatshop conditions of our ancestors. But neither of those workplaces in Tornado Alley were unionised.

As the world becomes more dangerous, we need to revive the tradition of workplace safety reps and insist on working conditions that do not shorten or stunt our lives. We need workplaces that can withstand the floods, storms, heatwaves, and pandemics that capitalist-led activity is producing on an ever-escalating scale.

We need to confront our denialist bosses with peer-reviewed science and make them pay for the safety measures we need to survive the world they are creating for us. □

Euphoria rather than dysphoria



Book review

By Sacha Fox

Many narratives and testimonials about trans and non-binary people talk about negative experiences, tragedies, difficulties. Discussion is focused on dysphoria, misgendering, and all the associated harms. Regrettably, a great deal of discourse is spent on scare stories around "the surgeries", which makes people questioning their genders see coming out to be a scary and dangerous thing.

Juno Roche, in their book [Gender Explorers](#), goes for an entirely different approach, one invoking euphoria, rather than dysphoria, and one which prides exploration, joy, and authenticity over conservatism. The book brings a much-needed focus on the joy and sense of belonging in exploring gender.

The first half mostly focuses

on interviews with younger trans people, and sometimes their parents or siblings. This section is great in just showing these kids as kids. They talk about hobbies, music, favourite subjects, dressing up and playing. Already in here, there's a sense in which these kids are confounding expectations and stereotypes in a way we can all admire, and all the interviewees have a great sense of intelligence and compassion for others. What's beautiful and heart-warming is that we often read how quiet and reserved they were before, and how much being able to explore their gender has allowed them to come out of their shells.

The highlight of this first part, for me, is the interviews with cis family members – it reveals the process and experiences of parents and grandparents, taking the time to understand the trans kids in their lives, and becoming their defenders when it comes to school bureaucracies and the like. The greatest hope is in hearing

from relatives who originally had quite bad reactions, but came round. A good lesson here is that it's not necessary to get everything right all the time, but that love, support and understanding is the best place to start.

Some interviews talk about how this process can be painful and complicated. One boy's parents describe how they initially ignored his continued requests spanning about three years, but then research showed them how harmful this is. It is enlightening to hear about the mixed emotions, with the dad burying his head in the sand and the mum doing the research but finding pronouns difficult... Still really struggling with the sense of having "lost" a daughter, but loving her son very much, as if she'd had twins. As Roche says in response, "It's important to have shared that... The gritty bits matter".

The second section is a bit more free-flowing, and mostly involves solo interviews with teenagers and

young adults, and gets a bit more into heavier concepts. Some of these interviews discuss transphobic reactions from friends and family. Here we do get a bit more of the negative experiences, including estrangements, mental health issues and bullying. It's a much shorter section, which is a shame, as there's much to be gained from these slightly franker accounts of trans people speaking for themselves.

However, true to the rest of the book, the second part predominantly focuses on positives, of the joy that can come from transitioning, the experience of finding out that you're not the only person in the world who feels the way you do. In fact, the ongoing thread of advice is "find a community who understands". There's more discussion on the complexities of socially transitioning, since most of these interviewees did so in their teenage years or later. It's also important that a fair number of these interviews show people who didn't become aware they

were trans until after childhood, showing that trans-inclusive education is important from an early age, and that not everyone comes out as a kid.

The book rounds off with an odd, but interesting imagined interview between Juno and her eight year-old self, "Pansy". A point that maybe could be made is that Pansy detransitioned. We hear a lot about detransitioning, and it's usually to show how it's a terrible mistake to let kids define their genders – but in this case, we see what comprises most detransitioners, trans people forced back into the closet, for some decades in this case, to comfort a society that punishes transitions and gender variances.

As Juno rightfully asserts, we should celebrate the new spaces to explore gender that these young people are creating. We should call for greater liberty in allowing children to explore their identities. □

• Another review: bit.ly/ge-rev

Unison to debate building turnout



By a Unison member

Members in local government of the public services union Unison will meet in conference on 12-13 June, followed by the whole-union conference on 14-17 June.

Conferences in 2020 were cancelled because of Covid curbs. There were special online conferences in 2021, but the motions and attendance were very limited. These are the first face-to-face national and local government

conferences in two years, and the first since the left, mostly the Time for Real change faction, won the leadership of Unison's National Executive Committee (NEC) in June 2021.

There is a lot on the local government conference agenda, but sadly, nothing really focused enough to turn the union round.

The key motions focus on the process for running pay campaigns, including a campaigning and balloting review, which is essential. Proposals include demands on the NEC to put additional resources in place and ensure telephone banking is in place. In the local government pay action ballot of 5 Dec 2021 to 14 Jan 2022, which fell flat with

a turnout of only 14.5%, activists, stewards, and officers did not have systems in place to ring up Unison members.

This has to change if we are to win the 50% turnout in ballots required under the Trade Union Act 2016.

Other motions propose Unison learns from other unions' ballot and sets up a working group to explore this. The North West region calls on the union to coordinate across service groups.

Other motions discuss new ways of working post-lockdowns, including how to deal with hybrid working practices, and bargaining guidance on home and flexible working.

Many groups will now work in very different ways, with higher numbers at

home or partially at home workers. That presents challenges to union organising.

Motions on care workers include proposals to bring services back in-house, promoting examples where that has happened, and a demand for £15 per hour minimum wage for care workers.

In the coming weeks, we will discuss further motions and rule changes coming up at local government and national conferences.

Unison members have until 25 May to vote in the Service Group executive elections. If you don't yet have your postal or email ballot papers, call Unison Direct on 0800 0857 857. □

Scottish FE teachers push on pay

By Ann Field

After no progress in pay talks with Scottish Further Education (FE) employers on 13 May, members of the EIS-FELA trade union will strike again over pay in the coming weeks.

A pay claim for a flat-rate pay rise of £2,000 across all salary points was lodged in June of 2021, with the aim of the increase being implemented in September. "Over the course of negotiations, acting in good faith and with a willingness to compromise", EIS-FELA negotiators lowered the claim

to £1,300. The employers' side, Colleges Scotland, did no more than up their original offer of a £750 increase to £850, plus a one-off non-consolidated payment of £150, subsequently increased to £200.

In a consultative ballot held in February, a clear majority voted for strikes and action short of strikes.

The legally required ballot on industrial action was held in late March. The first one-day strikes were held on 20 April and 27 April, followed by a two-day strike on 4-5 May.

This was to have been fol-

lowed by three three-day strikes in the remaining three weeks of May. But these were downscaled to one-day strikes with the argument that:

"It would be a mistake for us to play into management hands by continuing with three-days strike action next week now that we know that the action will not bring management back to the table with any improved offer, let alone one that is likely to be acceptable."

The three-day strikes have been replaced by one-day strikes, escalating to two-day and three-day strikes in June.

ASOS (action short of strikes) is now being implemented in the form of a "resulting boycott". EIS-FELA members will mark their students' assessments and exams and inform them of the results. But they will not enter the results in the college systems.

As of 20 May ASOS is to be extended to a withdrawal of goodwill, i.e. "members will no longer engage in any activity that goes beyond what is contained in their contractual terms and conditions."

The pay campaign is now nearly a year old. There should be debate about whether the

tactics pursued – reducing the pay claim, waiting to March before holding a ballot, downscaling the strike frequency, and not carrying out a full exams boycott – could have been improved upon.

But morale among EIS-FELA members remains high and support for the strikes and ASOS is solid. That is the best guarantor of victory.

And then the EIS-FELA can start its 2022-23 pay campaign. □

• Abridged. More: bit.ly/eis-fela

Tories "derecognise" NUS

By Cathy Nugent

The government has suspended engagement with the National Union of Students (NUS) over allegations of antisemitism.

Last month a row erupted over the invitation of rap artist Lowkey to NUS conference and (very old) social media comments made by President-elect Shaima Dallali. The Union of Jewish Students (UJS) objected to Lowkey's ultra-anti-Zionism and a post that Dallali made 10 years ago appearing to legitimise attacks on Jews in Israel-Palestine.

Dallali apologised for the tweet, said her views had changed, that she recognises the alienation of Jewish students and welcomed an NUS

inquiry into antisemitism. UJS has also welcomed the inquiry. In their press release, the government welcomed the inquiry. So why the suspension?

The government say this is to ensure lessons are learned. But why disengage at the moment when engagement seems more possible? Moreover, the action is wrong in principle.

The AWL has disagreements with Dallali and other student activists on how best to fight for Palestinian self-determination. Many argue for academic boycotts of Israeli universities; but those cut ties with people who oppose occupation and with many Palestinian students. Some see our position – for an independent

Palestinian state alongside Israel – as a "half-way house" on dismantling what they call colonial settlerism. Yet, we would say, foregrounding an immediate end to occupation is precisely about dismantling structures of oppression. The point here is that there has to be room for dialogue.

The same must be true between the current NUS leadership and UJS. Dallali has said: "I may at times disagree with people politically, everyone has the right to have their own political ideas, but I don't hate anyone. I definitely don't hate the Jewish community. I do believe I can bridge the gap and build bridges."

What the government is doing is forcing a situation where free speech and di-

alogue on all these issues becomes harder. Dallali has been subjected to appalling racist abuse online. It would be very bad if, in the world of febrile "debate" driven by online platforms, Jewish organisations are targeted as being somehow responsible.

How long the "disengagement" with NUS will last is not specified but it will be long enough for the government to put in place alternative forms of student "representation" e.g. ad hoc panels of random students. That is, phoney representation. This looks substantially like a precursor to more radical attempts to dismantle student organisations at a time when class struggle in higher education is on the rise. □

More online

PCS conference previewed

The civil service union meets 24-26 May. Debates will include job cuts, pay strategy, and Ukraine: bit.ly/pcsconf

HE fights stalled

UCU congress 1-3 June needs new ways forward: bit.ly/he-grid

Glasgow Labour's death wish

After doing not-quite-so-badly on 5 May, it elects "new" leaders from the old guard responsible for its decline: bit.ly/d-wish

“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

Working nine to nine?



Diary of a firefighter

By Adrian Noble

Recently a firefighter sent round a proposal to change to a 24 hour shift pattern. Currently we work two day shifts of 10.5 hours followed by two nights of 13.5, with four days off in between "tours".

The proposal is to move to either a pattern of a 24 hour shift followed by three days off, or 24 hours on, 24 off, another 24 on and then five days off.

T, K and O are all tentatively in favour, seduced by the prospect of reduced travel time and expense, and no longer needing to stay at station between shifts as they often currently do because they live far away - time they feel they may as well be on the run for. Others at station are in favour on the basis that it would give them much more time to spend with their families, particularly evenings and weekends. (We currently work half of all evenings and at least part of three out of four weekends).

The most obvious pitfall is the nature of the job.

At a busy inner London station, a 24 hour shift is pushing it. Many days our shouts are relatively short and sharp and aren't too physically or mentally taxing. But the fire brigade needs to be run upon the basis of what we might be

required to do, rather than what our average day looks like.

This is the same principle as why it is so dangerous to have cut firefighter numbers so drastically. It's not only the stretched coverage and that the extra capacity is required every single day – though there is that - but that when shit hits the fan you really need the extra bodies.

In the same vein if we get one of those days where half of London seems to be on fire and you're busting a gut on the fireground for four hours, if you're then relentlessly shuttled from job to job, getting progressively more tired, it's easy to imagine mistakes creeping in and risks increasing.

Not too long ago there was a 20 pump fire, a 15 pump, an eight pump, a couple of eight pumps and several four pump fires all on the same day, seriously stretching capacity. Some of these protracted incidents required multiple reliefs, so on a 24 hour shift you may find yourself going back to the same job more than once. I imagine the union will have something to say about it.

There are other issues to consider. D is implacably against the proposal on the basis that the 24 hour shift could easily be split into 12 hour shifts, and indeed this is part of what is being suggested.

This could well have knock on effects for the facilities that the brigade is

obliged to provide us on station. A few years ago they tried to take away our mess facilities. He says that they were unable to do so because legally they need to be provided as we work longer than 12 hours per shift.

If the brigade is able to argue the shifts are really 12 hour blocks then our mess facilities and even our beds may be under threat. Take away the mess and you take away the heart of the watch, and there'd be blood in the streets if they came after our beds.

There's also issues around training courses and training days, out duties to other stations, and the impact on annual leave ought to be considered.

Firefighters can be a tricky bunch. We don't like how things are, and we don't like change. □

NHS on film



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

Since its inception the NHS has been the subject of numerous films, soap operas and TV dramas: everything from *Carry on Nurse* and *Emergency Ward Ten* to Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later* in 2002. One of the more controversial was Lindsay Anderson's dark comedy *Britannia Hospital*, released in 1982.

A new wing is to be opened at the Britannia Hospital by "HRH" (presumably the Queen although this term is never used) and the Chief Administrator Vincent Potter (Leonard Rossiter) runs himself ragged trying to ensure the opening goes off without mishap. Fat chance of that! A reporter (Malcolm McDowell) is inside the hospital ready to expose everything to the media, the ancillary workers are on strike, demonstrators outside the hospital are clubbed by police in riot gear, while inside chaos reigns and Professor Millar is performing bizarre experiments of a Frankenstein nature.

Whether the film was a statement about the state of the NHS or a wider, more complex comment on the state of Britain is a matter of debate. Margaret Thatcher's secret plans for dismantling the NHS were leaked a few months after the film's release. She hurriedly withdrew them, declaring that the "NHS is safe with us". □

Bus workers strike over pay

By Mark Simon

On 11 May Unite members at four south London bus garages struck for 24 hours over pay. Three of these garages, Norwood, Thornton Heath, and South Croydon, struck in April. The fourth, Brixton, had been prevented from striking due to a "clerical error" in the ballot notice to the employer.

The error (lack of the dates for the ballot period on the notice to the local management) shows the narrow and punitive nature of the anti-union laws, but also led to members raising questions about their full time union officer who made the error.

Following a re-ballot at the Brixton garage with a 65% turn out, all four garages struck. Picket lines were large and lively, with over 40 at South Croydon in the morning. Only a few scab buses ran on the day. The strike is over pay due in April 2021. Members have voted down an offer of 1.5% and a second offer just before the April 2022 strike of 3%. Average inflation for April 2021 to April 2022 was

above 5%. Arriva is a wealthy multinational that has taken its share of a £2 billion no-strings pandemic subsidy to bus companies from the government.

Unite reps have decided to put a third offer out to a vote by members. It is a slight improvement. Problematically, they also called off a two-day strike due to start on Monday 16 May. That sends the wrong signal to the employer by taking off the pressure before the members have had their say.

Balloting again and again on below-inflation offers wears down members' support. Even when they reject a poor offer it makes members doubt the resolve of the union to fight.

If Arriva South London bus drivers reject this deal, Unite must gear up for a big dispute with a clear demand. Strike support committees should be built in each garage to organise pickets and reach out for solidarity.

Arriva bus drivers in South London are now building links with Arriva bus drivers in North London through the newly established Unite Bus Drivers' combine. □

Coordinate rail strikes for best impact

By a railway worker in Workers' Liberty

The National Union of Rail, Maritime, and Transport Workers (RMT)'s ballots of its members working for Network Rail and 15 mainline Train Operating Companies (TOCs) for industrial action against a pay freeze and threatened job cuts and changes to terms and conditions conclude on 24 May. With around 40,000 workers involved, the ballots cover 50% of the RMT's national membership. As the rail network emerges from the years of lockdowns, a major battle is brewing, and connects with other disputes.

The Transport Salaried Staffs Associations (TSSA), whose membership is drawn primarily from "white collar", clerical, and managerial grades, is in dispute with Network Rail over threatened job cuts, but has yet to announce plans to ballot. The Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (Aslef), a sectional union organising only amongst drivers, has launched ballots of its members on Northern, TransPennine Express, and Great Western Railway over pay. On Merseyrail, Aslef reps have committed not to settle their own agreement on the role of the guard until RMT has settled.

Rail workers have faced a government-imposed pay freeze since early 2021, when rail minister Chris Heaton-Harris wrote to TOCs on 29 January to state that there is "no budget" for increased subsidies to finance pay increases. A statement from the government's Rail Delivery Group said: "It would be unfair to increase the burden on taxpayers by funding rail industry pay rises, and we would only consider increases in exceptional circumstances."

Jobs are also under threat, with 2,500 jobs at Network Rail in line to be cut as part of a £2 billion cuts package. TOCs have also refused to rule out compulsory redundancies, with many continuing to roll out their own cuts plans, including ticket office closures. In a separate dispute, RMT members on Merseyrail, which is not included in the

national ballot, voted to reject a company proposal to resolve a long-running dispute over the role of the guard by imposing a two-tier arrangement, with new starters on significantly worse terms than existing guards.

Workers' Liberty members working on the railway and active in rail unions have [argued](#) for the maximum possible degree of rank-and-file control in RMT's national dispute. If ballot mandates are secured, it's important strikes are co-ordinated nationally, with workers in different companies striking together. Although the timetables and maintenance and engineering schedules between different companies mean that rolling and selective action may be an effective supplement to national strikes as the dispute goes on, the action must launch with, and be centrally based on, national strikes.

If and when other unions secure ballot mandates, coordination with TSSA and Aslef should be sought.

Disputes

RMT can also seek to coordinate its members' action on the mainline railway with its ongoing disputes on London Underground: over enforced night working, involving drivers on the Night

Tube lines; and over threatened job cuts, changes to terms and conditions, and attacks on pensions, involving RMT members in all sections of the workforce. Strikes were held in this dispute on 1 and 3 March, and RMT drivers have been striking during Night Tube hours, on Friday and Saturday nights, for several months, with strikes planned up to 18 June. With 600 job cuts threatened across LU stations, RMT is expected to imminently name further strikes in the wider dispute.

Transport for London's latest financial bailout package from the Department for Transport expires on 24 June; with the Tories still unwilling to restore adequate long-term central funding to TfL, the next short-term bailout is likely to continue further punitive conditions. Meanwhile, workers at Green Park and Euston Tube stations will strike on Friday 3 June as part of a local dispute against management bullying.

Aslef on London Underground has recently renewed its ballot mandate in its own dispute against changes to terms and conditions and attacks on pensions, with 98.5% of its members voting for action on a 68.3% turnout.

This is the third mandate Aslef has secured in the last eighteen months;

however, it has yet to use any of them to name action, and says only that it is against changes "imposed without agreement", implying there is some worsening of pensions or terms and conditions it might support. Aslef has also enthusiastically supported LU management's abolition of the part-time Night Tube driver grade and the enforced imposition of night working onto full-time drivers' rosters.

Unite, which organises around 1,500 members across London Underground and TfL, has also begun balloting its members for action against pension cuts and a pay freeze imposed on staff employed centrally by TfL, in a ballot closing on 26 May.

Also ongoing are company-specific disputes on TransPennine Express, where RMT members are striking every Sunday through 5 June, as well as Saturday 30 May and 4 June, in a dispute over shift patterns, and disputes involving outsourced cleaners working for Atalian Servest and Churchill across several TOCs, who are striking for improved pay, travel passes, and company sick pay. These ongoing disputes also create the potential for further coordination with the national and LU disputes. □

A wild move for job cuts in civil service



John Moloney

The announcement that the government plans to cut 91,000 civil service jobs is overtly political. Senior managers in the civil service weren't even aware of it until the Cabinet decided on it. It's part of an agitation by right-wing politicians who think that cutting the civil service staffing budget will free up funds for tax cuts, and, more widely, it's part of an ideological drive by people who want to physically reduce the size of the state.

On its own terms, it is an irrational decision that will massively backfire. You can't get rid of one-fifth of an organisation with any meaningful plan in place. Yet Departments have been given just one month to produce such plan. Jacob Rees-Mogg has said he would prefer to see cuts achieved by natural wastage, rather than sacking existing staff, but that won't be possible for cuts of this scale. It can only be achieved by mass redundancies.

The government has also recently announced it wants to review the civil service redundancy scheme, as they believe it's too generous. Six years ago, we defeated a plan to reduce redundancy payments, but the employer is now taking that up again. It's tempt-

ing to see these two developments as linked, and although one does dovetail into the other, I think that's more by accident than design. The announcement of the cuts is such a wild move that I don't think it's been conceived of as part of a wider plan. The union's National Executive Committee will hold an emergency meeting on 18 May to discuss our response. We've already said we'll resist any staff cuts. The position must be clear: no job cuts at all, even by natural wastage. We can't fall back to a position that only opposes compulsory redundancies. Job cuts achieved through natural wastage still mean an increase in workload for everyone else. The union will now have to decide whether to add this issue into the proposed national industrial action ballot on cost-of-living issues which will be debated and decided upon at our upcoming conference. In some ways it doesn't exactly fit into how that dispute is proposed, but it's such a massive issue that it will probably have to be integrated. Some reps are expressing scepticism that cuts of this scale could happen. But we have experienced cuts of this scale before, when the Tories and New Labour got into a grotesque bidding war about who could cut more civil service jobs. Bearing in mind that this is driven by an ideological desire for cuts, rather

than any concern for the practical realities, it's possible the government could just steamroller ahead.

Our upcoming union conference (24-26 May) will undoubtedly debate many emergency motions about the job cuts. As I've discussed in previous columns, we'll also debate the union's position on Ukraine. Although no-one will propose an explicitly pro-Russia position, some may use the moves towards Nato membership from Sweden and Finland to propose emergency motions foregrounding opposition to Nato in the union's position. I'm not sure those would constitute bona fide "emergency" motions; Nato existed prior to the motions deadline, and those who wanted to focus on opposition to Nato already had the opportunity to propose motions to that effect.

I oppose Nato – not just its expansion, but its existence – but the war currently being fought is a war of Russian imperialist aggression against Ukraine. That country is fighting for its independence, it is not a "proxy" of Nato. I would be against the union adopting a position that suggested otherwise. □

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

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For a federal united Ireland! Rewind Brexit!

By Mícheál MacEoin

Boris Johnson visited Northern Ireland on 16 May. He spoke out of both sides of his mouth, offering a conciliatory message that he does not wish to scrap the Northern Ireland Protocol, while at the same time signing off Foreign Secretary Liz Truss to prepare legislation unilaterally disapplying parts of the Protocol in UK domestic law.

The UK Government is, it seems, split on the issue. Truss, angling for the position as a future Tory leader, is signalling a “tough” approach in introducing the legislation. Other senior figures, such as Gove and Sunak, are concerned about the possible economic consequences of retaliatory action from the EU, which in the most extreme scenario could unpick the entire Withdrawal Agreement.

Johnson is arguing that the Protocol was “designed before a global pandemic and a European war which has created a cost of living crisis on a scale not seen for half a century”.

This is nonsense. After initial teething problems, the compliance burden of the Protocol is marginal compared to the economic benefits of Northern Ireland’s access to both UK and EU markets.

The Tories suggested they might introduce legislation on 17 May, among other things introducing a streamlined border check process for goods destined to remain in Northern Ireland and not cross into the Republic of Ireland or the wider Single Market. They haven’t done that, but still talk of such legislation soon.

Their idea is to squeeze the maximum of concessions from the EU (which has already made proposals, in October 2021, to ease checks under the Protocol) while giving themselves as much time as they can to spin out the conflict. The legislation may simply enable the Foreign Secretary to disapply aspects of the Protocol through regulation-making powers. This would allow the UK Government to say to the DUP that it had “acted”, while the EU may hold off retaliating until the UK actually exercises such new powers. One source told *The Times* that the Government sees such powers as an “insurance policy” to win conces-

sions from Europe. It is a risky strategy. The EU could move quickly, and impose retaliatory measures even before the new legislation is passed. Even if it didn’t, and even if the “disapplying” legislation might be enough for the DUP for now to tell its supporters it has won concessions on the Protocol, that would simply store up problems for the future.

Probably it would soon become apparent that the UK Government has no intention to make far-reaching unilateral changes to the Protocol, and the political system would plunge into crisis and paralysis once more.

If not - if the Tories really are willing to go into trade wars with the EU - that would mean a new “hard border” within Ireland, which would be hugely disruptive and stoke communal conflict.

In 2017-9, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) backed a hard Brexit, assuming it would lead to a strengthening of the border on the island of Ireland. In the event, in order to avoid Theresa May’s “backstop”, which would have left the whole of the UK in the Customs Union and closely tied to the Single Market until a solution was found to the prospect of a hard border, the Tories opted for another approach.

The Protocol puts a trade and regulatory border in the Irish Sea instead, so that the rest of the UK can harden its Brexit. This solution has significantly undermined the DUP, which has been consistently trailing in the polls for over a year.

Provoked less by the Protocol’s alleged economic impact than by the symbolic fact of Northern Ireland’s differential treatment from the rest of the UK, hard-line Unionists have mobilised in a series of anti-Protocol rallies in Protestant areas of the North.

Though small, the rallies have effectively put pressure on Unionists politicians, with even the “liberal” leader of the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP, milder than the DUP), Doug Beattie, sharing a platform with loyalists such as flag protestor Jamie Bryson. Undermined and betrayed by its erstwhile Tory Brexiter allies, the DUP went into the 5 May Northern Ireland Assembly election under pressure from the even more hard-line Tra-

ditional Unionist Voice (TUV) who ran on a platform of “No Sea Border”.

The DUP predictably lost its position as the largest party, winning only 25 seats to Sinn Féin’s 27. That gave SF’s northern leader, Michelle O’Neill, the right to be nominated as the First Minister.

Since the election, the DUP has refused not only to nominate a First Minister but also declined to nominate a Speaker until it gets “action” on the Protocol. This paralyses the Assembly, preventing it from passing even sticking-plaster measures on the cost of living crisis or the huge backlogs and pressures on the health service.

In response, O’Neill accusing the DUP of “punishing the public” and “holding society to ransom”. It does indeed show that the DUP has no real care or concern for working-class Protestants.

Signing in to the new Assembly, People Before Profit’s representative Gerry Carroll said:

“Stormont is in limbo because of the DUP’s anti-democratic charade which undermines the will of voters. When designating today in the Assembly I signed my forms as ‘socialist’ once again, sending a message to the Stormont elite that as the sole Left alternative in the Assembly, I will use my seat as a platform for the workers’ struggle they try to ignore”.

Under recent legislation, the DUP could theoretically prolong the deadlock late in to the year, while demanding “action” from the UK Government on the Northern Ireland Protocol. What “action” means is not at all straightforward.

The Protocol was appended to the wider UK-EU Withdrawal Agreement, signed by the UK and all EU member states. As retired senior Northern Ireland civil servant Andrew McCormick has since *revealed*, it was essentially drafted by the UK Government, who were clear-sighted about the possible problems it would cause for Northern Ireland but consciously de-prioritised them in order to secure a hard Brexit.

Johnson ran the December 2019 General Election campaign on the basis of his Brexit deal, its Northern Ireland solution included, and Parliament signed off the deal in January 2020. Johnson claimed at the time that “There will be no

checks on goods going from GB to NI, or NI to GB”, though official documents of his own government *recognised* that was untrue.

The current crisis is a product partly of Johnson’s shameless lying, but more fundamentally of Brexit and of the dysfunctional Stormont system, which seeks to manage politics as an affair of relations between sectarian power blocs.

There is a clear answer: demand the UK reverses Brexit, and argue for the labour movement to actively campaign around a vision for a united Ireland with federal protections for the Protestant minority. □

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Solidarity

For a workers' government

UNION ACTION TO BEAT INFLATION!

6699 Editorial

The effective way to counter rising prices is to make the unions fight for better pay.

The government talks in terms of 3% maximum public sector pay rises. In the private sector, reports the research unit [NIESR](#), "median pay settlements [are] rising", but only "from 2 per cent to above 3 per cent", though with some "evidence of larger rises in settlements in the upper quartile", i.e. for better-off workers. And now workers have to pay an extra 1.25% in National Insurance contributions.

Thanks to supply-chain hitches as lockdowns have unwound, to fuel price rises accelerated by the war in Ukraine, to Brexit, and now to further supply blockages from the ultra-lockdowns in China, prices are rising and will rise further.

NIESR thinks consumer price index (CPI) inflation, currently 7%, will peak at 8.3% this year, and retail price index (RPI) inflation at 14.4%. The Bank of England [expects](#) a higher CPI-inflation peak, 10%.

RPI usually gives a higher fig-

ure than CPI, and the gap widens when prices rise a lot between sectors. Neither index tells the whole story about the cost of living for the worse-off and middling. The latest [official](#) UK figures, based on March data, do not yet reflect this, but over a year [world prices](#) of basic food inputs have gone up 30% to April 2022, and of [natural gas](#) 175% to 18 May 2022. Food and energy costs hit worse-off households' budgets harder.

The government has raised benefits only by 3.1%, scrapping the previous Tory "triple-lock" promise on pensions. In October 2021 it scrapped the £20 increase on Universal Credit from early 2020. That leaves Universal Credit [lower](#) in real terms than in 2013.

Meanwhile, the FTSE 100 share index, the quickest real-time indicator of how capitalists are doing, has had a broad rising trend since October 2020. The pay of big-company CEOs rose [34%](#) in 2021, mainly through bonuses. Barclays Bank has increased its bonus pool this year by 17%.

Some groups of ordinary workers have also gained from bonuses paid by bosses short of staff and wanting to minimise baseline pay rises. But unions'

ambitions are falling short. In local government, for the wage rise due in April 2022, the biggest union, Unison, calls only for £2,000 flat-rate, a real-wage cut for most workers, and the other unions haven't yet named a claim. In the health service, unions other than the RCN have not detailed a demand, calling only on the employers to see that they need to pay out a bit to reduce staff shortages.

This is still a relatively good time for pay strikes, as such things go under a neoliberal regime and with anti-union laws. Unemployment is relatively low, at 3.8%. Many employers are short of staff and anxious to revive output after the lockdowns.

More workers are back in workplaces rather than working from home. That makes organising and solidarity easier. The government is discredited and known to make u-turns almost every week.

By leading battles for pay by the best-organised sections of the working class, the unions can also create the conditions to pull up the wages of more weakly-placed workers, and force the government to restore benefits and services. □