

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry

SUPPORT THE RAIL STRIKES!



Pic by Steve Easton, December 2019, bit.ly/r2s-19

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Solidarity with Ukraine! Defeat Putin!



The BBC's Ukrainecast estimates that up to a million Ukrainians originally living in the now-occupied East of Ukraine have been coerced into leaving for Russia. These civilians have been dispersed throughout Russia, some managing to get out of the country by escaping through the Baltic states.

Apparently these people have waited months in terrible living conditions (a thousand people billeted at an old school with one functioning toilet, for example), waiting to go through the Russian's "filtration" process.

"Filtration" involves aggressive interrogation by Russian troops and officials. The Russians examine phones and often demand men strip so they can check for Ukrainian military or nationalist tattoos. Evidence of support for the defence of Ukraine can lead to beatings and torture. Apparently one in ten of those passing through "filtration" disappears into prison camps.

Russia's war in Ukraine is staggeringly destructive. Another measure of its violence is the number of Russian war dead. British military intelligence puts the number of Russian troops killed at 15,000, the same number as the USSR lost in its war on Afghanistan over the whole period, 1980-89.

According to a Western official quoted in the *Economist* magazine,

Russia's invasion force had been reduced to 58% of its pre-war strength by mid-May.

Ukraine has suffered 10,000 military deaths and many thousands of civilian casualties. UNICEF says that two Ukrainian children are being killed every day. The Ukrainian government states 100 of its soldiers are being killed, and 500 injured each day.

The estimates of the cost of the damage to Ukraine's infrastructure (buildings, factories, roads) stood at \$100bn as of 25 May.

At the start of May estimates of the number of Ukrainian refugees stood at 7.4 million and those internally displaced at 8mn from a pre-war population of 44mn.

Russia is now concentrating its most effective forces in Ukraine's east, aiming to overrun Severodonetsk, where 10,000 civilians are trapped in basements as fighting continues street by street. The town has, effectively, been destroyed.

Ukraine's highly motivated defenders are fighting for their country's freedom and for democratic and workers' rights. The Ukrainians know what they can expect from President Vladimir Putin's occupation forces. In areas where the Russians have control they are ruling through terror, abolishing democratic rights and replacing elected Ukrainian councils with their own appointees.

Although Russia's net gains of 450 square kilometres in Eastern Ukraine from early April to mid-May seem modest, Russia is slowly winning there. Ukraine is smaller and much poorer than Russia, and has fewer resources to defend itself. The Western powers are helping Ukraine, but not yet to the extent it can win the war. Workers' Liberty backs Ukraine's just war and believes the West should arm Ukraine adequately so it can defend itself from Russian imperialism. And the US and UK should cancel Ukraine's debt, which will help its devastated economy.

In the south of Ukraine, where much of the Russian-occupied territory was seized at the start of the war and significant Ukrainian populations remain, it seems resistance to the occupation is growing. The rail hub of Melitopol in the south was overrun three days into the war, and the Russians now face significant opposition. A command post was attacked and an armoured train destroyed on 18 May; rail track and a radar station were blown up on 22 May; a Ukrainian rally was held on 29 May; a collaborator's house was blown up on 30 May.

The military resistance is being coordinated by a Ukrainian unit called the Special Operations Forces (SSO), set up in 2015 after Russia's invasion of Donbas. The Ukrainians claim their partisan operations have killed 100 Russian troops.

Moldova

And reports trickle in from other parts of the occupied territories. In Kherson, also in the south, an airbase has been attacked over 20 times. In Enerhodar, Andrii Shevchyk, the Quisling town mayor, was targeted for assassination. In Izyum, in the East, a seemingly friendly older woman killed eight soldiers after giving them poisoned pies to eat (this information comes from Ukrainian intelligence who claimed to have taped a phone call from a Russian soldier).

If Russia manages to win in the East of Ukraine it will have the option to continue its offensive in other areas. Kherson or Sumy might be attacked again. Or Russia might look to take Odesa in the south, cutting Ukraine off from the Black Sea, moving towards Moldova where Russia has effectively ruled in the region of Transnistria since the early 1990s.

Moldova is particularly vulnerable. It is a small, poor state which is not a member of the EU or NATO.

The other possibility is that Russia

will halt and seek to impose a peace agreement on Ukraine which legalises its occupation and aims to permanently subordinate a rump Ukraine to Russian political power. If Putin decided to hold what he has and force Ukraine to sign a lousy peace deal he would find significant support amongst Western politicians. France and Germany helped Putin to force Ukraine to sign the terrible Minsk 2 treaty in 2015 because they wanted to re-establish working relations with Russia.

Workers' Liberty opposes any attempts by Western politicians to sign away Ukraine's right to self-determination. The West's role should be to support Ukraine, not sacrifice it.

Workers' Liberty is for Ukraine against Russia's invasion, and for Ukraine's workers and labour movement against their bosses and right-wing political leadership. The mainstream Ukrainian politicians aim to make the labour movement pay for the costs of war.

A new labour regulations bill, 5371, poses a serious threat to workers' rights and ability to organise. One Ukrainian soldier commented on social media, "While we miners, metal workers, teachers and doctors, trade union activists, are defending the freedom of Ukraine at the front, the fattened rear rats in the Verkhovna Rada [Parliament in Kyiv] are stabbing us in the back."

"On 12 May 246 deputies voted in favour of Bill 5371, which deprives most Ukrainian workers of labour rights. We will never forget and never forgive those who vote for this project on its second reading."

The Ukrainian socialist organisation, Sotsialnyi Rukh (Social Movement) denounced the proposed new law as allowing the capitalists a free hand in conditions of mass unemployment. 5371 allows bosses to sack workers at will.

Victory to Ukraine! Solidarity with the Ukrainian working-class and Russian anti-war activists! □

Corrections

Only a hundred delegates, or fewer, attended the PCS conference (24-26 May) online. Not more than in-person (as stated in *Solidarity* 637). □

January 6 hearings, continued

→ from outside pages

Will this lead to Trump actually being indicted for any crimes? A case of criminal conspiracy can certainly be made, but the Biden administration has to have the bottle to bring such charges. Most doubt Attorney General Merrick Garland will do it, because he fears it will stir up Trump's base. The Democrats aren't even bringing a knife to the gunfight as the Republican Party puts its people in place up and down the country to

overturn the popular vote if and when the need arises.

The model for their future regime is some kind of "illiberal democracy" along the lines of Orban's Hungary, where a rigged voting system and assaults on opposition media would keep the GOP in power for decades to come, despite being rejected by a majority of American voters.

The decision of the US Conservative Political Action Conference to have a special session in Hungary last month addressed by Orban himself

underlines they wish to follow his path.

That may be done with or without Trump. Rupert Murdoch, ever keen to keep a foot in more than one camp, has allowed his *New York Post* to attack Trump as a prisoner of his own ego "whose tweeting and narcissism turned off millions." Should Trump actually be damaged by the J6 hearings he could well be replaced by Ron DeSantis as a safer electoral bet to carry forward the Trumpist banner.

Little confidence can be

placed in the Democrat leadership or the judicial system to prevent the establishment of a right wing authoritarian regime trashing the existing (flawed) democratic norms. Mass movements are a much better hope of doing that. Tens of thousands have rallied demanding gun controls, and there will be many more protests are also certain against moves to outlaw abortion. Such movements can defeat reactionary forces, given the necessary leadership. □



Summer schedule

Nos. 638-640 will be on our usual schedule, on 22 and 29 June, but we will skip some weeks in the holiday times of July and August. Nos. 641-644 will be 13 July, 27 July, 17 August, and 31 August, and then we're back to usual. □

Support the rail strikes!

By Simon Nelson

Forty thousand rail workers in the rail union RMT will strike on 21, 23 and 25 June against the national pay freeze, compulsory redundancies, and change to terms and conditions.

London Underground workers will also strike on 21 June against job cuts, attacks on pensions, and the threat of changes to terms and conditions. This will be the largest national rail strike since 1996 and the first to include London Underground workers since 1989.

Aslef, the biggest train drivers' union, has called some strike action in Train Operating Companies (TOCs) during and after 21-25 June.

Unite, which has members on the railway, has also balloted, and is expected to call similar action. If Aslef and TSSA, the other rail union, also put their words into deeds and join the action, the balance will tip heavily towards the unions.

Even alone the RMT action is enough to shut down the railway. Aslef is balloting for action over pay in some TOCs. TSSA is balloting in some TOCs and in Network Rail.

The RMT leadership is serious about this strike going ahead. It is also committed to not allowing individual employers to try and pick off groups of workers in the dispute. For now at least the plan is for one united movement. RMT members should demand all negotiations are as transparent as possible and continue to argue for rank-and-file control of the dispute.

The rail unions have industrial clout. Rail strikes have bigger and quicker economic impact than strikes in many other sectors. The government, which awards franchises for and funds the TOCs, and controls Network Rail directly, is shaky and discredited. The railworkers can win this one, and open the way for many other groups of work-

ers to win pay rises offsetting the price surges and to defeat the post-lockdown cuts threatened in several areas.

This dispute will set the parameters for all the big pay disputes coming up - BT, Royal Mail, civil service, local government, NHS - and hundreds of small ones too.

Already the Tories are threatening new legislation to require transport workers to keep a "minimum service" on even during strikes, and to license using agency workers to break strikes. There is little chance of them getting the new laws through in time if strikes are pursued at a good tempo, but it shows the Tories are determined to resist. The dispute will not be won by just three days of action.

RMT has policy to fight a minimum service law, up to and including defying it.

The entire labour movement should rally to these strikes. Socialists and

trade unionists should get down and support local pickets and make ongoing links for future disputes.

While the Tories issue threats, Labour has no consistent position. The Party's left has continued its support (to varying degrees) for strikes. The noises from the leadership are more ambiguous. Keir Starmer himself has called merely for a resolution to the dispute. Front benchers Lisa Nandy and Wes Streeting have evaded stating direct support for the strikes, but [suggested sympathy](#), Nandy saying she is on the railworkers' side and Streeting (though generally an aggressive Blairite) saying that if he were an RMT member he would have voted for strikes.

Local Labour Parties should support the dispute, visit picket lines and continue to put pressure on the Labour leadership to support these and other strikes to drive up wages and rebuild the unions. □

Rwanda: it's "state trafficking"!

By Sacha Ismail

The Tories' plan to send refugees to Rwanda is a "cash-for-deportations policy... akin to state-sponsored trafficking and transportation" (as SNP home affairs spokesperson Stuart McDonald puts it). It must be defeated.

Two initial legal challenges to the policy - organised by campaign groups Care4Calais and Detention Action and civil service union PCS - have been rejected, so the first flight

to Rwanda was due to leave as we went to press on 14 June.

Challenges on individual cases have reduced the numbers so drastically that there's speculation it might be cancelled anyway. On the afternoon of 13 June Care4Calais said fewer than eight people were due to be put on the plane. The cost of the flight if goes ahead is £500,000.

The requests rejected by the courts were for "interim relief" to stop implementation of the policy in the run up to

a wider judicial review. In April the government withdrew proposals to "push back" refugees in the Channel the day before a judicial review was due to begin.

Because we cannot rely on the courts, and to create the best conditions for legal victories, the crucial thing is public protest. Thousands have taken to the streets in London, and hundred in Manchester and elsewhere, at short notice. We must keep protesting.

It's good that PCS, the main

union of Home Office workers, has been central to legal efforts on both the pushback and Rwanda policies. However even PCS isn't doing much to mobilise members.

The recent Home Office group conference of the union voted to condemn the Rwanda policy. Unfortunately another motion to the main PCS conference proposing investigating an industrial dispute to scupper it was not heard.

Labour spokespeople have just about managed to con-

demn the Tories' policy on moral and political grounds, but buried deep in a focus on its practicability. Shamefully, Keir Starmer commented that it "isn't going to solve the problem", as if the issue is to fix a problem of "too many" of the millions across the world who seek refuge coming to Britain. The fight to shift Labour to a pro-refugee, pro-migrant, pro-free movement [stance](#) in line with its 2021 conference policy is vital. □

New anti-union law threat

By Mohan Sen

After threatening to impose a "minimum service [requirement](#)" in transport, the government has now branched another threat against rail workers - repeal of the ban on agency workers being used as strike-breakers.

Introduced by Blair in 2003, this law has not prevented the use of agency workers for union-busting more generally (e.g., just after it was passed, in the [Gate Gourmet](#) dispute and, just now, at [P&O](#)). Nor is it clear the Tories will actually repeal it: the idea was flagged up by transport secretary

Grant Shapps to the *Sunday Telegraph*, not officially announced.

They are trying to scare rail workers and their union leaders (and other workers and unions) out of a serious fight.

Not very impressively, Shapps also warned rail workers not to expect overtime to make up for lost earnings during their strike - even though this will mean further disruption to services.

The labour movement should vigorously oppose repeal of the agency workers restriction. With the minimum service threat, we have heard quite a bit of militant-sound-

ing talk from union leaders, but little in the way of practical activity or proposals to resist. Passivity will encourage the Tories to go ahead.

The most important thing is not to get scared out of action. Faltering from strikes and struggles - or losing them - will embolden the Tories and the bosses too.

If the agency workers ban is repealed, workers who cannot be so easily subbed in for (like train drivers) must, more than ever, live up to their responsibility to strike alongside those who can be replaced by strike-breakers (like customer service staff on stations). □



Upcoming meetings

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

Thursday 23 June, 7pm: first of three Zoom study sessions on Marxism and wars

Thursday 30 June, 6.30pm: Ideas for Freedom 2022 Walking Tour: Rebels, radicals and revolutionaries of Clerkenwell

Friday 1 July, 7pm: Ideas for Freedom 2022 Film Night: The Young Karl Marx

Saturday 2 – Sunday 3 July: Ideas for Freedom 2022, Camden School for Girls – book now!

Friday 26 August - Sunday 28 August: AWL Summer camp, Lurgashall, Surrey

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



Morning Star stumbles amidst the “fog of war”



Antidoto

By Jin Denham

The *Morning Star* likes to quote Clausewitz's expression “the fog of war”, suggesting it is impossible for ordinary folk to work out what is going on in Ukraine, and “official” information should not just be assessed critically, but ignored.

This hasn't stopped the paper's International Editor Steve Sweeney (who has publicly backed the Russian invasion) reporting the Russian version of the bombing of a Mariupol maternity hospital in early March (denial that the bombing happened at all, while simultaneously justifying it by claiming the hospital was being used as a base by the Azov Battalion) or the paper's Foreign Desk repeating Russian claims that evidence of mass killings of civilians in Bucha in early April “had been staged by Ukrainian forces.”

Now the paper has seized upon a claim, originating from the Russian news agency Sputnik, that Ukraine's former human rights chief Lyudmila Den-

isova has “admitted promoting fake news” (Steve Sweeney, 11-12 June) or, as the same issue's editorial puts it: “she admitted fabricating atrocity stories to put pressure on public opinion in Nato states to boost arms exports.”

It turns out that in this particular case, “the fog of war” can be cleared up sufficiently to establish what actually happened: the facts (largely gleaned from the German Deutsche Welle website and the independent Ukrainian LB.ua website) are that a majority of Ukrainian parliamentarians from different parties, including President Zelenskyy's governing Servant of the People party, removed Lyudmyla Denisova after a vote of no-confidence on 31 May. The main accusations against her were that she had failed to fulfill obligations including the facilitation of humanitarian corridors and countering the deportation of Ukrainians from occupied territory.

Ms. Denisova was also accused of making “insensitive and unverifiable statements” about Russian sex crimes.

In an interview with LB.ua on 3 June, Denisova said (about the language she used in her reports): “Yes, then this vocabulary was very harsh. I said that, indeed, maybe I exaggerated. But I tried

to achieve the goal of convincing the world to provide weapons and pressure.”

“I agree that sometimes the vocabulary was very harsh, but I used it as suggested by the victims themselves ... It has been confirmed that sexual violence exists, now investigators need to prove it.”

Admitting to “exaggeration” is not the same thing as admitting to “fabrication” or “promoting fake news”. And, of course, can anyone imagine a Russian official being sacked for making “insensitive and unverifiable statements” about alleged atrocities by the other side? If this story proves anything, it is that Ukraine has a parliament that values truth and accuracy in official reports.

The same editorial also mentions “Ukraine's foreign legion of wannabe Rambos some of whom are now sentenced to death.” This is clearly a reference to Britons Aiden Aslin and Shaun Pinner and Moroccan Brahim Saadoun, who have been convicted of “mercenary and terrorist offences” by a kangaroo court in the so-called Donetsk People's Republic and now face execution.

The two Britons have been in Ukraine for several years, and Saadoun since 2019. This means they fall squarely within the definition of persons entitled to POW status. It also means they are lawful “combatants” - a status that entitles them to take part in hostilities against the enemy.

The fact that all three are officially members of the Ukrainian armed forces means they are not mercenaries. But that does not prevent the MS editorial denouncing them with a turn of phrase first used by the paper's columnist Nick Wright in an article (24 March) gloating over “these wannabe Rambos ... [who will] encounter a trained military force [ie the Russians] equipped with armour, superior communications and effective air support ... this cause is attractive principally to an international alliance of the foolish and fascist.”

Both Aslin and Pinner previously fought against ISIS in Syria with the Kurdish people's Defence Units (YPG) whose politics are left wing – hardly the background you'd expect for “wannabe Rambos”, still less fascists.

I will reply to Andrew Northall's letter (*Solidarity* 637) next week. □

Bitcoin's e-waste problem



Letter

Luca Brasco, in their article *Lon blockchain in Solidarity* 637, identifies many of the flaws of cryptocurrencies and blockchain. I feel obliged to add a couple more.

Modern bitcoin mining requires specialised hardware known as ASICs to be profitable. It is exercised as hard as possible to maximise returns. The chips typically burn out within eighteen months. In “Bitcoin's growing e-waste problem”, Alex de Vries and Christian Stoll [show](#) us: “Bitcoin's annual e-waste generation adds up to 30.7 metric kilotons as of May 2021... comparable to the small IT equip-

ment waste produced by a country such as the Netherlands”. Given how few socially useful transactions occur on Bitcoin, this is comparable to landfilling a new single-use smartphone every time you buy a packet of crisps.

Secondly, to make blockchain money practical, we need Exchanges - websites that make the interaction between the relatively secure blockchain and the real world (people, keys and fiat currency) practical. These websites, which hold the keys to billions of dollars, are just as hackable as your regular bank, with the added bounty that once money is stolen, it is impossible to get it back.

Blockchain is an interesting technological thought experiment, but it is not a sensible or progressive way to design a money system. Nationalis-

ing the banks is an old idea, but it is a much more radical solution to the problems cryp-

tocurrency purports to solve, with the added benefit that truly democratic ownership of

finance does not come with a bonus dose of ecocide. □

Colin Applebaum, London

A festival of dialogue



Letter

As Dale Street reports (*Solidarity* 637), the debates on Ukraine at Lutte Ouvrière (LO) fete this year (27-29 May) were poor. Still, I think people in our Workers' Liberty contingent had a good time.

The Fete itself is impressive for bringing together many thousands of socialists and workers – working-class families from the region and groups of workmates brought

by LO activists from all over France – in a fun event that mixes genuinely good food and entertainment with a really inspiring and educational international meeting of revolutionaries.

Workers' Liberty has described the world socialist movement, shattered by many splits, as resembling so many island nations, speaking mutually unintelligible languages and rarely encountering one another. The Fete de Lutte Ouvrière is an important bridge that brings those groups together and allows real dialogue and exchange.

Workers' Liberty comrades were able to have interesting, informative discussions with comrades from Korea, the USA, Argentina, Greece, Turkey and Haiti, as well as talking with some older French comrades about their experiences of 1968.

Obviously, there were a lot of disagreements! But as an institution, the Fete is to be celebrated and emulated, as is LO's impressive focus on workplace activity and forming firm links with the working class. □

P G Healy, Normanton

Putin to expand anti-gay law

By Michael Baker

On 8 June, the Russian State Duma (parliament) announced a new prospective bill to expand the scope of the country's now-infamous "Gay Propaganda" law.

The original law, which passed in 2013 with 388 votes in favour, one against, and one abstention, introduced fines for "propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations among underaged individuals". It was the first homophobic law in Russia since the ban on "sodomy" was lifted in 1993. Although few people have actually been sentenced since the law's passing, it is an attempt to remove any discussion or education around LGBTQ+ people and communities in schools and on any media platform – including private social media. In 2017 the European Court of Human Rights declared that the law was incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights, something the Russian government has disputed.

Paired with the government and police force turning a blind eye to violence against queer people (and in some cases either encouraging or participating in it), the effect of the law has been an enshrined state position of homophobia and transphobia, with Putin openly framing LGBTQ+ people and communities as an "ideology"

which has been brought over by 'the West', primarily through American popular culture.

The proposed change to the law is a simple one: the "age restriction" on the ban is to be lifted. Should the bill pass – and with formal opposition almost non-existent in the State Duma, it almost certainly will – any "propagandising" of "non-traditional" sexualities or genders, to people of any age, will become a criminal offence. It is highly unlikely that this will lead to many people being fined. There will not be neighbours denouncing their gay neighbours or children denouncing their trans parents. But to any LGBTQ+ person living in the country, even so much as coming out to your friends will now, legally speaking, constitute a criminal offence.

This bill must be seen in the context of the invasion of Ukraine. In the last three months, practically all of Russia's public-facing LGBTQ+ NGOs and social media channels have been designated foreign agents, some forcibly liquidated, and several organisers have been individually persecuted. As happened with the discussion around the 2013 law, the bill's announcement will now lead to a spate of discussions on state-owned TV channels, spreading and encouraging bigoted vitriol to bol-

ster public support amid a faltering military campaign. Along with attacks on workers' rights, attacks on political dissidents and the organised left, attacks on the student movement, and attacks on the newly-born anti-war movement, the Russian government are increasing their attacks on the LGBTQ+ community as a means of reinforcing nationalist rhetoric.

Recent LGBTQ+ repression in Russia is often framed as a uniquely Russian phenomenon, but it shouldn't be. The wording of the 2013 law was drafted based on proposals by American Evangelical Christian pressure group the World Congress of Families, and similar laws were passed in several other countries in Central and Eastern Europe – Poland and Hungary the two most famous examples. Florida's new "Don't Say Gay" bill covers very similar territory to Russia's 2013 bill, and in Britain the Tories' refusal to ban trans conversion therapy is a worrying return to the politics and rhetoric of Section 28, which was almost certainly a model for more recent laws in other countries.

As socialists we stand in solidarity with the Russian LGBTQ+ community against these attacks, but we must also draw parallels with the repression of LGBTQ+ people in countries across the world, our own included. □

#LABOUR PURGE



Activist Agenda

A motion (bit.ly/mo-pe) protesting at the 29 March 2022 Labour Party National Executive ban on Workers' Liberty has been ruled in order in London, after previous declarations that it was out of order.

Local Labour Parties will have elected their delegates for Labour conference this September by 17 June. The deadline for policy motions for conference is 15 September: local Labour Parties are likely to debate their choices in July, August, or early September. Three motions originating in or around Labour Left Internationalists – on public ownership of energy, on free movement, on curbing the police – are among Momentum's eleven priority choices: see bit.ly/mo-pe.

On 5 July (from 6pm) the Uyghur Solidarity Campaign will co-sponsor a protest at the Chinese Embassy, Portland Place, London W1, with Stop Uyghur Genocide, UK Uyghur Community, and the World Uyghur Congress.

The Labour Campaign for Free Movement's conference is 16 July at Birkbeck, London (bit.ly/lcfm-c). Already confirmed are speakers from lots of grassroots campaigns and Nadia Whittome MP. □

• Links, info, etc. on many campaigns: workersliberty.org/agenda

Not just shock-absorbers, but fighters!



Women's Fightback

By Connie Leadbetter

My mother's mental arithmetic was second to none, and her management skills were astonishing, in the days before Excel spread sheets, her accounting skills were fine tuned to the penny on the back of brown envelopes. Despite having little time for hobbies, but perhaps with a secret desire to run away with the circus, she perfected plate spinning and juggling.

She was, during the 1970s, a domestic poverty manager. The pay for this relentless work

was exhaustion. The sort of exhaustion that comes from constantly putting a brave face on things, of traipsing from shop to shop to save pennies here and there, and of using far too much physical and emotional energy just holding it together. She was isolated in this work despite being one of millions of women all doing similar.

Now, fifty years on, the cost-of-living crisis is biting, and it is still working-class women who are bearing the brunt, still isolated and largely unorganised. Professor Ruth Lister describes working class women as the "domestic shock absorbers of poverty", taking the knocks and buffering the pain for others.

Of course, poverty did not disappear for fifty years, only

to reappear in 2022. Poverty for a whole layer of our class has never disappeared. But the safety net of the 1945 welfare state has been slowly disappearing since the Thatcher government of the 1980s. Since 2010 the Tories (with the help of the Lib-Dems in coalition) have made deep and drastic cuts totalling £37 billion to the benefits system.

Cuts

The bedroom tax, the introduction of Universal Credit, cuts in disability benefits, a cap on Child Benefit payments to two children per family and then their redirection into a single payment to households (rather than being paid directly to mothers), have left women, children, and people with dis-

abilities particularly and significantly worse off. These vicious anti-working-class cuts made by the political representatives of the capitalist class are part of a much bigger and for now continuous onslaught. Cuts to and finally the dismantling of Children's Centres, the almost 50% real-term cuts in local authority funding, the rise of the gig economy and precarious working, the Covid pandemic and the callous cut of the £20 top up to Universal Credit last October have all taken their toll. Yet crisis profiteering has seen billionaires taking vast wealth.

The anger, energies, skills and abilities of working-class women are wasted in the private sphere. We need to be on the streets shouting our

demands and, in the workplace, organising the fight-back. We need a movement that will give voice, gather, and organise working class women where our needs and aspirations become demands. We need a labour movement campaign where rank and file members are front, centre and back.

The TUC's Cost of Living Crisis march on 18 June has only the token, non-specific, and bland slogan "We demand better". It promises no more than a paper campaign beyond the day. Our demands need to be clearer and bolder, with a desire to make a real difference to the lives of working-class people. □

91% tax break for fossil fuels



Environment

By Stuart Jordan

Hidden in the detail of the Tory windfall tax on energy companies is a 91% tax break on all new investment in fossil fuel extraction. The green capitalist thinktank E3G say the tax cut could equate to handing Big Oil a £5.7 billion subsidy over the next three years to expand production.

Shell has already had £200 million cut from their windfall tax bill after they secured “final regulatory approval” on the Jackdaw oil field last week. Jackdaw will add an additional 25 million tonnes carbon dioxide equivalent (MtCO₂e) to the atmosphere over the course of its lifetime and comes in addition to the 195 billion-tonne-plus carbon bombs that fossil giants are planning in the near future. None of these taxpayers’ subsidies are available for wind or solar developments; none are compatible with a liveable future.

The windfall tax will be used to make

a one off payment of £400 to eight million households in the UK and £650 for the very poorest to help with soaring energy bills. But this will hardly compensate for the £1,500 hike in energy bills that the average household is likely to suffer this year when the price cap is reviewed again in October.

Also it does nothing to reduce demand for energy, which is key to meeting climate targets.

The absurdly named Tony Blair Institute for Global Change has made the reasonable point that the money spent on the tax break could be used instead on energy efficiency measures that would reduce permanently cut bills. According to their research, if the taxpayers’ money the government is pouring into fossil fuel extraction went instead on a home insulation programme, then energy bills could be halved by 2035.

The Labour leadership’s response has been predictably woeful. Claiming the Tory’s U-turn as a victory, they have made only very muted criticism of the massive subsidies for fossil fuel expansion and the lack of a home insulation programme. Worse, Labour has criticised Tory plans for a further windfall tax on electricity companies (who have



also made enormous profits from rising fuel bills) on the basis it will “damage the investment environment”.

Labour has democratically agreed policy to nationalise the Big Energy firms and organise a rapid transition away from fossil fuels. That is a rational policy that at least opens up the pos-

sibility of slowing the acceleration towards climate breakdown. Labour party members and trade unionists must organise to ensure that our spokespeople articulate our democratically worked out policies rather than whatever they believe will ingratiate them with ecological big business. □

The left and Momentum’s election

By Mohan Sen

Labour left organisation Momentum last held elections for its National Coordinating Group (NCG) in 2020. Nominations for [new elections](#) opened 13 June and close 20 June. Voting will be 28 June to 6 July.

Momentum is diminished, but still a significant force, or potential force, with about 20,000 members.

The two main slates in 2020, Forward Momentum (which won) and Momentum Renewal (representing the 2017-2020 “office coup” leadership), have [rebranded](#) as Your Momentum and Momentum Organisers.

In 2020 the Momentum Internationalists (MI) group, coming out of Labour for a Socialist Europe and with Workers’ Liberty involved, had some candidates on Forward

Momentum’s slate and some independently. This time MI’s successor, Labour Left Internationalists (LLI), is discussing standing its own candidates.

Following victories for the left in ballots on democratic changes in Momentum, this election will use Single Transferable Vote proportional representation, so it will be easier for radical and dissident candidates to get elected.

We’ll update next week; but here are five of the reasons a campaign like the one LLI is discussing is needed.

Supporting workers’ struggles: As we approach serious class battles, with the number of strikes rising, we need Momentum to mobilise in support of working-class struggle – through its extensive social media networks and on picket lines and demonstrations. It has done little of that, for ex-

ample over the food couriers’ strikes since 6 December 2021, where Momentum support would have made a real difference. When demonstrations against the Police Bill dwindled, an effort by Momentum could have reversed that. There was none.

The alternatives

Some criticisms of the Your Momentum / Forward Momentum leadership that Momentum Organisers implies – lack of focus, chasing after faddish political trends, lack of seriousness about fighting in Labour – may be justified. But the alternative they advocate is insubstantial; and their record shows that what they really stand for is conservative machine politics laced with Stalinism and nationalism and suppression of democracy (thin in Momentum, but even

thinner in 2017-20). In 2020 some MR candidates witch-hunted opponents and critical voices. Neither grouping represents anything like an adequate socialist voice.

Fighting local government cuts: One central front of struggle should be fighting to restore local government. The current leadership evidently regards Momentum’s councillors network, advocating “community wealth building”, as a jewel in its crown.

In fact it offers little. When councils have [lost](#) most of their national funding, the blather about “building socialism” is a cruel joke. Build fights to stop cuts, win more funding and reverse the losses as quickly as possible!

The fight in Labour: Since 2020 Momentum has had some successes in Labour, but its campaigning has lacked

focus, consistency and politics. The organisation should become a lever and platform to build coalitions in the party in support of working-class struggles and pro-working class, socialist policies.

Yet at 2021 conference Momentum did little about the policy debates and the challenges to the NPF reports.

Internationalism: The outgoing leadership has put out a statement supporting Ukraine’s self-determination, but done nothing to mobilise against Russia’s war. Momentum Organisers probably would not even have done the statement.

LLI stands with workers’ struggles and battles of the oppressed from Ukraine to Palestine to the Uyghurs, and for a fight to reverse Brexit. □

The pitfalls of sanctions

By Martin Thomas

"The [Russian] economy will be under sanctions as long as Putin is in power", wrote John Sawers in the [Financial Times](#).

Sawers, accustomed to backroom calculations (he is a former chief of MI6), takes that continuation as fact even though he is more optimistic about Ukraine's military chances than we dare to be.

The sanctions didn't stop Russia invading Ukraine; they're not stopping its war; and they will probably continue after the war unless it drags on for many years.

Russian's import revenues were up 65% in the three months March-May compared to the similar months in 2021, according to the [Economist](#) magazine quoting the Institute of International Finance. Europe has cut Russian oil and gas imports somewhat, but rising prices have more than compensated.

At the start of the sanctions, their designers told us that the sharpest blow to Putin would be through financial measures. The rouble fell against the dollar in early March. It is back up again, stronger than it was before 24 February, and indeed stronger than it has been since 2018.

Russia's imports were down by 20% in March-May. It creates difficulties for Putin and for the better-off in Russia when flows of high-tech equipment and consumer goods are cut off. But Russia can replace many of those flows from China, and probably some from its own resources. It inherited advanced military industries from the USSR, and has many skilled engineers and scientists. It will take time for the adjustment, but if Putin can deal with the short-term effects of the sanctions, then he can probably deal with the long term too.

Russia's economy is in a bad way, and predicted to contract this year. That is probably as much to do with Putin's bad management of the economy even before 24 February, and the costs of war, as with the sanctions.

As Sawers signals, there is no good reason to expect the sanctions to give decisive help to Ukraine. Ukrainian resistance may defeat Putin, but sanctions won't. US sanctions against Iran,

enforced in one shape or another since 1984, and with much bigger effect than the sanctions against Russia, have not stopped Iran sending troops into Syria. Those sanctions' main effect has been to worsen conditions for the workers and farmers of Iran, and probably to make some of them more inclined to excuse some of the misdeeds of the clerical-fascist regime.

The countries suffering most from the war and the sanctions are probably some others in Europe (the Polish zloty has crashed while the rouble has boomed) and countries like Egypt dependent on wheat exports from Russia and Ukraine.

Solidarity said [at the start](#) that the sanctions "are implemented and controlled by governments - like our own - who represent our capitalist class-enemy, and so are unreliable. They can have unpredictable, counter-productive consequences. Sanctions might even strengthen Putin's grip on power in Russia, allowing him to present himself as the victim of the West". "Attempts to seize the money of Putin's immediate circle" caused us no tears, but we did not think those "measures... likely to deter Putin".

The facts since March, and study of the history of sanctions, reinforce sanctions-scepticism.

Workers' action

Workers' action to block Russian oil was inspiring and good, but for its moral and political effect, rather than economic. We would be pleased to see reduced imports of fossil-fuels; but the actual sanctions go with efforts to get Saudi Arabia (with its war in Yemen, and intense oppression of migrant workers) to boost exports to compensate, tax-breaks for new fossil-fuel projects, extending life for coal power stations, etc.

We don't campaign to restore their confiscated property to the oligarchs, or to increase imports of Russian fossil fuels. We do say that sanctions, or tighter sanctions, will not stop Putin, and may have counterproductive consequences.

Sanctions have been a staple of big-power politics since World War One. The victors of World War One, sated with colonial empires and spheres of influence, judging it unprofitable to try to conquer more, thought that they could underpin the stability of commerce which they wanted most easily by economic sanctions. They would be less costly than war, and would not bring the risk of revolutionary kickback such as around the end of World War One.

The League of Nations, set up to be the instrument of those stabilising sanctions, was limited because the USA never joined. But it pressed on.

There were minor cases where sanctions – or rather, the threat of sanctions – "worked", as in turning the threat of war by Greece on Bulgaria in 1925 into negotiations.

The League's main sanctions effort, against Italy in 1935-6, failed in its announced aim (to stop Italy seizing Ethiopia), and produced different and bad consequences, analysed by Nicholas Mulder in his recent book *The Economic Weapon*.

Self-sufficiency

The Italian government under Mussolini, alarmed though not deterred, resolved to increase its economic self-sufficiency. That meant dominating more territory, and allying with other states out of favour with the League, like Nazi Germany. Previously, Italy had seen Germany more as a threat (via the ambitions of Austria in northern Italy).

Germany, likewise, looked to gaining economic territory that would be secure, and yield sufficient supplies, whatever sanctions the League might impose. It drove to war.

Japan faced mild and then sharper sanctions from the USA from July 1938. They had the proclaimed purpose of deterring Japan from its war to conquer China (the USA wanted to keep an "open door" for all international capital in China, and for that reason aided the Chinese in their righteous fight for national independence).

The sanctions did not deter the Japanese. They did help push them towards alliance with Germany, and into going to war, with the main aim of securing Indonesia as secure economic territory.

The United Nations was set up at the end of World War Two to be a more efficient instrument of sanctions to stabilise the world. The breakdown of the wartime USA-USSR alliance into Cold War put severe limits on that.

Conflicts between the USA, Russia, and China since 1989-91 have contin-

ued those limits. The USA - conscious, since Vietnam and Iraq, that large military interventions are costly and risky - has continued to deploy more and more economic sanctions since the 1990s.

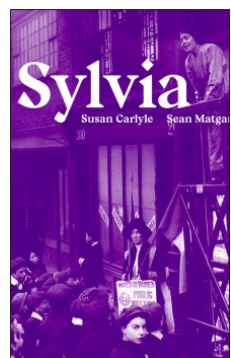
The US economic threats against Britain which forced the Tories to withdraw from Suez in 1956 "worked". Most of the sanctions haven't. But they make good political theatre, and they have been safer for the USA than the 1930s sanctions were because of the USA's great hegemony.

Russia is different from Italy, Germany, and Japan in that it is more self-sufficient in industrial raw materials than perhaps any other country in the world, and relies little on imports for its military equipment. But in a world increasingly "multipolar" even before Ukraine – with China's and Russia's growing economic and military clout in Africa, for example – the ramifications of sanctions spread wider.

Russia and China are being driven towards constructing an economic sphere of their own, able to prosper through its internal trade whatever sanctions the USA and its allies may impose. We are a long way off spheres being as sharply demarcated as they were in the Cold War, or even between the Europe-centred colonial empires of before 1914 (though there was much trade between empires before 1914, in fact more than within empires).

But even limited demarcation into spheres reduces the chances of concerted action on the environment (each rival is more sharply pushed towards the cheapest short-term expedient) and increases the risks of large and escalating wars.

Solidarity with Ukraine, yes. Arms supplies to Ukraine, yes. Economic aid to Ukraine, yes. Drop Ukraine's debt, yes. Look to sanctions to defeat Putin, no. □



The pamphlet tells the story of Sylvia Pankhurst including her working-class organising in the East End of London. £4 (inc. postage) □ bit.ly/shop-wl



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China is not the m

By Chen Ying

The image of China as a single homogeneous nation is false. The republican movement which rebelled against the Qing dynasty in the early 20th century saw themselves as standing up for a Greater China against the Manchu rulers. They had a five-coloured flag, proclaiming unity of five major ethnic groups – the Han (red); the Manchus (yellow); the Mongols (blue); the Hui (white); and the Tibetans (black).

GMD leaders like Sun Yat Sen and Chiang Kai Shek saw themselves as creating a Chinese people through a melting pot of different ethnic groups, and replaced the early republican flag with the “blue sky, white sun, red earth” flag.

The Chinese Communist Party long had its main base in areas dominated by minority ethnic groups, and adapted by promoting a liberal policy on minority rights until it seized state power in 1949.

Within the Han population, the biggest, there are also several regionally-defined language groups. North of the Yangtse, mainly Putonghua and Jin. In the south, the Shanghai region, the Pearl River Delta (Cantonese), Fujian, and the Hakka areas all had different languages, and there were more language groups inland. For example, Mao spoke Hunanese.

When the CCP came to power, they designated 50-odd minority ethnic groups within China as having territories and local rights, but the top administrators were always Han Chinese, and not ethnic minority. Ethnic minorities were encouraged to join the Communist Party, but ethnic Han dominated. Minority languages are increasingly marginalised by Putonghua (based on the Beijing dialect).

As the People’s Liberation Army crossed the Yangtse River to defeat the Nationalists in the south, they recruited tens of thousands of civilian administrators from the northern regions to be administrators in the southern provinces, people from the north who did not speak Cantonese, Shanghainese or any of the regional languages.

Minority languages were initially still in use in schools, but there was not a lot of systematic education available in the early fifties. The pension system and the efforts of national literacy really got going in the mid 50s, and the government really started promoting Putonghua.

Progressively the minority ethnic groups became minorities within their own lands through ethnic Han migration. Mongolia in 1949 had about twice as many Mongolians as ethnic Han; and

now it’s something like ten to one the other way around. Now the Mongolian language is totally marginalised in terms of any kind of publication or popular media, and it is not the medium of instruction in schools.

Already in 1949, probably more than half the population were Putonghua speakers from the north. That majority has got progressively bigger.

But the minority Han languages are still large by comparison with other countries. At one time in the 1980s, under Jiang Zemin, the entire Chinese Politburo, all seven of them, were Shanghainese speakers. Even now there are about 70 million Shanghainese speakers, and more Cantonese speakers, especially if Hong Kong and the overseas diaspora are included.

Shanghainese is such a large language group that I can’t see it disappearing. There are some attempts today to revive Shanghainese arts and culture, television stations, publications and artworks, but generally under Xi Jinping’s push for a strong centralized state and national language, assimilation is particularly sharp.

Cantonese

In Hong Kong, Cantonese language and culture continues to thrive, even though politically the territory is being throttled. Hong-Kong-made films, television programmes, and pop songs still resonate tremendously because when China first opened up, it was the Cantonese pop songs and rock stars that dominated the early cultural scene. Lots of mainland Chinese would learn to sing the most popular Hong Kong Cantonese songs.

The other languages are fading quite fast. In Hong Kong, before masses of incomers arrived after the Second World War, the indigenous people spoke other languages. Hakka was one of the major ones, and that is now dying away even in the rural parts of Hong Kong.

The Fujian province language will survive because that’s also the prevalent spoken language in Taiwan. When the Guomindang moved into Taiwan, they banned all local languages, and imposed the same language as used in Northern China.

But the political party currently in power in Taiwan, when they first took office, one of the very first things they did was to make the Fujianese based Taiwanese language an official language of government and have it back in schools, where previously it was banned.

The language and ethnic differences interact with the stresses which mainland China faces in the next period

– over the “zero-Covid” policy; demographic stress with the ageing of the population and falling birth rate; readjustment of China’s place in the world economy; and uneven development between coastal and inland provinces.

The regime tries to build survival and legitimacy in several ways. If they can continue economic growth, if they can keep people feeling their lives are getting materially better, that’s one lever for their legitimacy. At the same time they push the message that they are the custodians of Chinese civilisation, and Chinese civilisation was at its best when the country was unified. They rely heavily on Confucianism rather than any claim to Marxism.

Confucianism emphasises prudence, self-sufficiency, wise decisions by leaders. The Chinese government now talks about the rule of law, but’s not about a division of powers or legal checks on government. Rather, they have moved from the early days the party was the law to one where the party makes the law and rules by law.

Yet economic inequality is increasing. There are huge numbers of Chinese billionaires in Beijing, Shanghai, and Shenzhen, and then there is inequality between the better-off workers and the hundreds of millions of migrant workers still registered in inland regions, but moved to the coastal megacities for work, who have far fewer rights as citizens than people registered in the coastal areas.

Hong Kong is just as bad in that respect. In the 1980s Hong Kong had a policy importing domestic workers to free up more local parents to get into the workplace. The Hong Kong government signed a deal with Marcos and a huge number of migrant workers from the Philippines, mainly female, came to work in homes, to look after the elderly, to look after children. They were denied the opportunity to become permanent residents of Hong Kong. They were later joined by other workers from Indonesia.

Right now, with the “zero-Covid” lockdowns, is about the only time when China’s GDP growth is less than the United States. In previous years, GDP growth was always reported at about 10%, quite high even though a lot of it was based on inflated figures from the provinces, and a lot on massive expansion in the housing market: China’s housing market is like a huge balloon waiting to burst.

China is trying to become less dependent on world trade and more oriented to internal consumption because some of the manufacturing operations

are going out of China now to cheaper places like Bangladesh and Vietnam. China is also trying to move up the “value-added” chain. But they run a risk of getting stuck in the middle, with trouble breaking through to high-tech markets.

Demographically, the “one child” policy went on for far too long even in narrow economic terms. It now means that there is a generation of single children who have the burden of looking after an ageing population.

People in their thirties and forties with that burden don’t want to have children, or if they do, they might just have one. The government is now giving incentives people who have two or three children, but the working population is slowly shrinking.

In the early days of “opening up”, the first investors going into China to build factories were from Hong Kong and Taiwan. To the present day a large proportion of economic and manufacturing capacity is Taiwanese or Hong Kong Chinese owned. If things don’t work out those investors could pull back to Taiwan or other parts of Southeast Asia.

And in an economic and political crisis, the Fujian region (next to Taiwan), the Shanghai region and the Cantonese speaking region around Pearl River Delta, might decide that they have less in common with the rest of China and they would be better on their own, like Catalonia wanting to separate from Spain.

The politicians in mainland China think far further into the future than the single parliamentary terms which are mostly the horizon for UK and US politicians. But even if they think ten years ahead, Hong Kong will be difficult to digest.

The original memorandum between Britain and China was that Hong Kong would have 50 years of one country, two systems, and we’ve just got to the halfway mark. Beijing recently announced an intention to persist with the one country, two systems beyond 2047. What they mean is that they expect Hong Kong’s Thatcherite capitalism to continue.

The regime feels let down by the Hong Kong elite, who were supposed to keep things in order – the big property developers, the tycoons, the people in government who work hand in glove with them, the top 1% of Hong Kong who have continued to enrich themselves over the last 25 years, even more so than under British rule, and have just ignored all the social and housing problems that working people face in Hong Kong.

monolith it seems

The Beijing regime is annoyed that the Hong Kong elite failed to pacify the population. Mainland capital has moved in significantly into Hong Kong, taking over enterprises, and beginning to dominate the HK stock market. And the more far sighted of the Hong Kong capitalist class have already diversified themselves out of Hong Kong.

Li Ka-Shing, Hong Kong's richest tycoon, invests heavily outside Hong Kong – the 3 telephone company, Hutchison ports, Zoom...

But Beijing has no intention of undoing the part of the 1997 deal which allows it to use HK as an economically important window to the world. Before Deng Xiaoping, Hong Kong's GDP was a quarter of the whole of China's. It is now only three or four per cent. But a lot of multinational companies internationally still rely on Hong Kong's common law and commercial law as the insurance for their financial involvement in the Chinese economy. And the regime knows that.

Schools

Even from Beijing's point of view, it won't make sense to turn Hong Kong into "just another" Chinese city. They might want to change the education system, maybe replacing Cantonese with Mandarin in schools, but then again, they don't have teachers who are natively fluent in Mandarin to do that quickly.

The political resistance and the cultural resilience of Cantonese speakers is strong. The population in Hong Kong is still around seven million. About one million of those are people who have moved across the border since 1997.

But many of them came to Hong Kong because they thought there was a bit more breathing space: even if they are CCP members they see Hong Kong as their escape route out of China.

In the period of the democracy movement, a lot of them wanted Hong Kong to maintain its freedoms, though they were not happy with the anti-mainland xenophobia of many of the localists. They didn't like being despised by people who said they didn't speak Cantonese correctly. But they appreciate the social and economic benefits of living in a modern city, with fairly open access to the internet, for example.

In Hong Kong, you can no longer go out and campaign or hold a public rally to commemorate June 4. But people can still go online and read what they like.

The education system still values English way above Chinese language. The vast majority of university courses are taught in English. It's not to do with

Hong Kong having been a British colony, but the global power of English as a language, especially in the fields of technology and business.

Also, the history of the education system was one of neglect by the colonial authorities, funding other people to run schools rather than running them directly. The vast majority of publicly funded schools are run by the Anglican or Catholic churches.

Out of Hong Kong's seven million people, there might be a million Christians. But the influence of people who have been through church-run schools persists. If the regime wants to move Hong Kong along the assimilation line, they've got to deal with the churches' influence in Hong Kong. Not only do they run schools, they operate hospitals, they run social services and community centres for the elderly, they do a huge amount of charitable work.

The 90 year old Cardinal Zen, who retired as Bishop of Hong Kong but still well-known to Hong Kongers for his strong anti-Beijing views, was recently arrested in Hong Kong. This highlighted attention on the Vatican, which came to a rapprochement with China in 2018. They renewed it in 2020. They would allow Beijing to nominate priests who should be appointed bishops, and the Vatican would then approve the list. That was in return for allowing the open Catholic Church to continue in China. In China, there is also an underground Catholic church that refuses to recognise Beijing's authority over the church, and that underground church is still getting persecuted.

Xia Baolong, a trusted aide of Xi Jinping, who in 2015-16, when in charge of Zhejiang province, orchestrated the removal of Christian crosses from public buildings is now the top "cadre" in charge of Hong Kong.

And then the link between Cantonese and ancient Chinese civilisation goes back hundreds of years more than with any other language in China, back to the Tang Dynasty and the Song Dynasty's literature and poetry. The traditional script is still used in Hong Kong and Taiwan.

The regime's claim to be the custodian of China's cultural heritage will look very hollow if they try to move against Cantonese and impose simplified script on Hong Kong.

By driving a lot of Hong Kong people overseas, the regime has created a diaspora which could undermine their "soft power" work in Canada, the UK, Australia, etc.

At one point the number of mainland Chinese students in Australian and UK



Police fight with an anti-lockdown protest in Shanghai in April 2022

universities was going up and up, and the number of Chinese students from Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong was going down. That seems to have reversed.

In London, for example, a good number of the Hong Kong people arrived recently are not happy with the Chinese community associations which have been in the pockets of the Chinese embassy.

Beijing has been able to send millions of mainland students overseas without kickback because those students saw that they had better career and economic prospects by going back to China than staying overseas. But if Beijing can no longer maintain economic growth year after year after year, that could run into significant difficulties. Unlike in previous years, fewer than 20% of this year's graduates in China have found employment.

A lot of the students who have come overseas are from families who are well-connected politically. They will have parents who say, whatever you do, don't rock the boat; and, by the way, we're shipping more family money out.

The regime churns out huge amounts of propaganda, pointing to the decay of American society, the racism, the gun violence, lack of humanity as a core – it's not difficult to create that narrative about the United States – and United States atrocities in various parts of the world. They tell the students that the USA is a decaying, arrogant imperialist power, and they'll be better off coming

home and supporting the regime.

But if things get stressed in China, then that could change quite quickly. Historically, the Qing dynasty's Republican opposition was largely based in the diaspora.

If a message can get a grip that there's a third camp, a third alternative to the USA or the Beijing regime, then that changes things. That's our key aspiration. □

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Post-Covid suffering and how to minimise it

By George Davey Smith

George Davey Smith, professor of clinical epidemiology at Bristol University, talked to Martin Thomas from Solidarity

In my view, we should refer to post Covid conditions rather than “long Covid”. which makes it sound as though the disease is continuing.

It is a really heterogeneous group of phenomena which gets put under these headings.

There is a very tiny number of cases where people have very long infection, and they’re actually infected with the virus for a very long time, but everything else which has been called long Covid is different.

There are people like the writer Michael Rosen: he was on a ventilator for months and now has lost hearing and kidney function. He’s clearly got organ damage which occurred during the disease and is going to have long consequences.

The older you were when you got the infection, the more likely you that you

end up with such damage. The risk of serious cardiovascular diseases like pulmonary embolism, deep vein thrombosis and heart attacks, is for old people about 30 times the normal risk during the time you’re actually infected, and even after a year, your risk is still higher. Influenza also increases the risk of cardiovascular diseases.

And then there is a much more diffuse range of symptoms, including among young people, particularly fatigue. There are a lot of post-Covid conditions, and it’s unlikely appropriate treatments will be the same for them all. There’s a spectrum.

It’s just not possible to give accurate numbers. Two million is quoted, but that comes from a study in which you’re asked a question, “Do you think you’ve got symptoms that go on following Covid?” while you are pricking your finger to supply blood into the container for another part of the survey. It’s not exactly gold standard epidemiology.

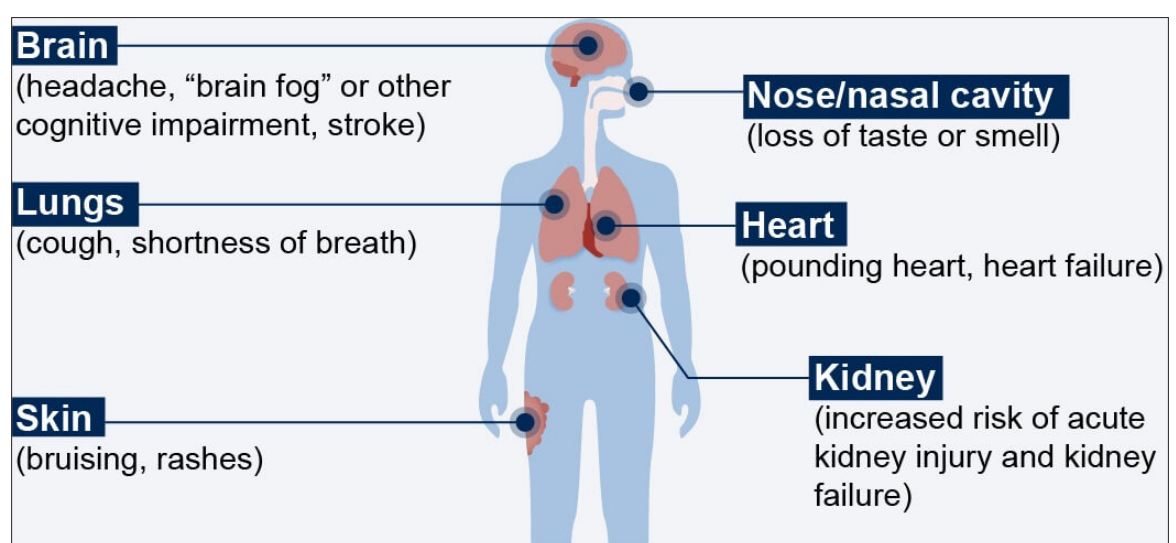
Post-Covid symptoms are much more evenly spread across the age range than severe Covid symptoms. There’s been another study for kids, where they did ask about whole sets of symptoms. It showed that there were some more symptoms reported by people who had been infected, though there were a large number of the same symptoms reported by people who hadn’t been.

For sure, in younger and healthier people, after three months, many still have some symptoms. The strongest result there is continued loss of sense of smell and taste. There was a difference in those reporting fatigue, but it was around 30% versus around 20%.

Much of it looks like Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. It seems to be part of a widespread pattern, where symptoms are triggered by exposure to a virus that that the individuals hasn’t been exposed to before.

Sadly, there’s no specific treatment yet been identified for these conditions, though trials are going on, and we hope is that they will come up with treatments that benefit in post-viral conditions.

The post-Covid conditions are most likely to be more severe when it’s an initial infection - when you’re immunologically naive and you get a new virus



- or if you have not been vaccinated before the infection. Or, at least, that is the strong indication from the pattern with other viruses.

After the “Russian flu” epidemic of 1889-90, which some people think was actually the arrival of one of the seasonal coronaviruses, a wave of fatigue-like illness followed. The term “neurasthenia” was essentially invented to describe falling victim to those sequels of the epidemic. There wasn’t the same, or not on the same scale, after the 1918 “Spanish flu” epidemic.

What can individuals do to reduce their risk of post-Covid symptoms? And what can public health authorities do to reduce the risk? The most important thing is vaccination. Getting infected for the first time when you’re immunologically naive is the biggest risk factor.

Vaccination will probably have to be repeated over a period when the virus is changing, certainly for the at-risk and the elderly; probably it will become something like flu vaccination.

I think public health authorities should consider a wider vaccination,

but I think they should do it in the context of a proper trial to see what the effectiveness is.

For now there is a large population who already have the symptoms: maybe they’re now not able to do their job now, or much less able to do their job. For example, they’re concerned to have this condition classified so that they can get time off work for it. There should be good sick pay for them; post-Covid symptoms should be recognised as a condition leading to long periods of inability to work.

There is also a perceived need for specialist services to deal with post-Covid symptoms – GPs were already under extraordinary pressure before Covid came along, and dealing with everything – as well as continuing professional development for GPs to inform them about new research.

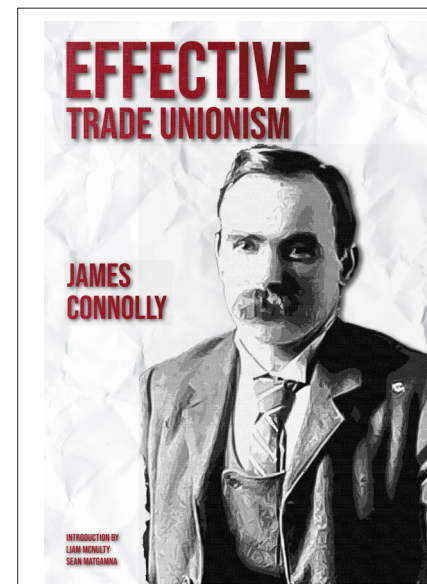
There is no detailed or reliable analysis yet of the difference in incidence of post-Covid conditions across different countries. You can’t get detailed or reliable statistics about chronic fatigue across countries, for example. □



Action on Covid-19

Scotland now has rising Covid rates; maybe the BA.4 and BA.5 subvariant surge is coming now, rather than earlier as we expected. We can reasonably hope it will be smaller than Portugal’s, which in turn looks shorter and shallower than previous surges. But new variants are certain to come in due course, and may be fiercer than Omicron. So, prepare:

- 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)
- specialist clinics for post-Covid conditions, and recognition of them as a “disability” in employment matters
- requisition Big Pharma, especially its patents and technical know-how, to speed vaccine production and delivery world-wide. □



Aiming to replace capitalism with socialism, James Connolly’s organising and ideas evolved considerably. One idea he clung to from the turn of the century to his death in 1916 was industrial unionism, workers’ solidarity across grades and trades and sympathetic strikes. That is how he saw his work with Larkin on the Irish Transport Union: a union for an industry and the members watching the moment until they could take over running the industry. His articles on that theme have never previously been collected compactly, and many appear in this booklet for the first time in full since original publication. Out late June 2022; single copies £5, five copies £18, 10 copies £32; order at workersliberty.org/connolly-unions

No to religious censorship!

By David Kenworth and Sacha Ismail

Following protests organised by right-wing Sunni Muslim groups outside cinemas showing the film *The Lady of Heaven*, on 7 June the Cineworld chain cancelled all screenings of it.

We have not yet seen the film, but this is how things look to us.

The writer of *The Lady of Heaven* is himself a right-wing religious bigot – a Shia Muslim sectarian hostile to Sunnis. From what we understand the main purpose of the film is to promote such sectarianism. But a film having politics judged objectionable is not a justification for it being suppressed. If (in this case Sunni Muslim) religious reactionaries can get away with suppressing films made by other (in this case Shia

Muslim) religious reactionaries, all sorts of reactionaries will be emboldened to do it to progressive and radical writers and film-makers they dislike.

The Lady of Heaven depicts the life of Fatima, daughter of the Islamic prophet Muhammad. Its opponents object to what they see as a negative portrayal of prominent figures from the early days of Islam who are revered by Sunni Muslims but not so much by Shia Muslims (particularly Muhammad's wife Aisha, daughter of the prophet's immediate successor Abu Bakr). And ludicrously, from what we understand, the film attempts to link the supposed crimes of Aisha etc to the likes of ISIS today.

It was written by Yasser Al-Habib, a Shia Islamist ideologue in exile in the UK from Kuwait. Al-Habib takes a hard-line bigoted sectarian attitude towards

Sunnis, and has clashed with the Iranian government because of its reluctance to go down that road. Even many Shia Islamists, to say nothing of apolitical, religiously moderate and left-wing Shia people, will condemn Al-Habib and his film.

But, again, that is not a reason for it to be effectively banned from cinemas. Outside very extreme material that, for instance, seriously incites racial hatred, it should of course be possible to show films and so on with (very) bad politics.

People should of course be able to protest against *The Lady of Heaven*. People should not be able to prevent it being shown.

Tellingly, judging by videos and reports of the protests, many of the protesters are not even citing the film's bigoted politics as such as the reason



for wanting a ban. Rather they emphasise the claim that it is "blasphemous". Democrats and socialists should defend the right to criticise religion and even to offend religious (and other) sensibilities. Even if the content of *The Lady of Heaven* is, as appears to be the case, sectarian and bigoted towards Sunni Muslims, freedom to show it is the price of freedom to show other, including politically progressive, material.

Cineworld says it has taken its decision to "ensure the safety of our staff and customers". This is understandable but not a good argument. It is a recipe for reactionary groups to feel confident to push to cancel artistic productions they object to. We are no advocates of the capitalist police, but if cinemas and the like are threatened for what they choose to put on, the police should protect them.

Nationalist right-wingers including Nigel Farage are already trying to make an issue of all this - opportunistically pretending there are bigoted Islamists only on the anti-film side - for their own Islamophobic and culture war reasons. The left must not remain silent. □



Extinction Rebellion (XR) activists have been taking action against fossil fuels. In Keynsham, a town near Bristol and part of Jacob Rees-Mogg's constituency, around 100 people demanded urgent climate action on 11 June. This responds to Rees-Mogg's call for "every last drop" of oil to be extracted from the North Sea, and government policy following suit. On 14 June, XR Scotland activists disrupted a greenwashing roadshow of "Vanguard" from within and without. Vanguard is the world's second biggest asset manager, and has over \$300 billion directly invested in fossil fuels. □

Winston Churchill: his times, his crimes



Book review

By Len Glover

An enduring memory from my youth is of my father returning from the pub telling me how he had been taking bets on how long Churchill, by now very ill, would survive. He died shortly after (24 Jan 1965). The memory hardly fits with the usual image of a cult of hero-worship around Churchill.

Some of the views of Tariq Ali have been rightly criticised in *Solidarity*, but in his new book *Winston Churchill: His Times, His Crimes* he has produced a powerful exposé of the Churchill myth and all the accumulated nonsense

that it carries in its slipstream. Churchill was never the "hero" that post-war propaganda made him out to be. He was – and still is – loathed in many former coalfield areas.

The ideas that dominated Churchill's life were, in no particular order of priority: a love of Empire, a deep seated racism (which included a strong distrust of Jews), and a demented loathing of Marxism and the left (particularly for Lenin and Trotsky), although he was quite happy to cosy up to Stalin.

Time and again Churchill engaged in infantile adventurism, part and parcel, it seems, of his "military-aristocratic heritage" in the Marlborough dynasty. At one point he posed as a journalist so he could be a spectator in the Cuban war of liberation against the Span-

ish Empire. Military service in India and the Sudan followed. He appears to have been less keen on the Boer War in South Africa: he didn't like the idea of white men fighting white men. Conflict in the Empire was about the civilised white race fighting the native "savages".

He reserved his most vile comments for the people of what was then called the "Indian sub-continent", whom he saw, basically, as little better than animals. Here is Julian Amery, an old friend and Secretary of State for India in the War cabinet: "On the subject of India Winston is not quite sane... I don't see much difference between his outlook and Hitler's".

After the war, Churchill's beloved Empire rapidly crumbled. By the time of his death

there was nothing much left of it, although Labour politicians such as Clement Attlee and the Empire-lover Ernest Bevin tried to maintain colonial rule where they could.

When examined critically and intelligently, Churchill's life shows one shameful debacle after another: the murderous insanity of the Gallipoli campaign in World War One (number of Allied deaths unknown but in the region of 142,000), his incompetent and futile attempt to crush the Russian revolution, his role in suppressing the General Strike of 1926, his attempts to restore Empire in the Middle and Far East, using poison gas against the Kurds, supporting the French for example in their efforts to re-colonise Vietnam, his support for the disastrous 1956 invasion of Egypt over the Suez Canal,

and much more. Eventually, even someone as obdurate and blinkered as Churchill had to admit that the British place in the world order had been taken over by the USA.

His response was to foster the notion of the so-called "special relationship", one of the greatest shams of the post-war period.

The creeping toad and Churchill sycophant, Tony Blair, once donated a bust of Churchill to George W Bush in the White House. No doubt remembering Churchill's role in the oppression of the Kenyan liberation movement, the grandson of Hussein Onyango Obama, one of the Kenyan rebels, had it removed. A fitting epitaph, if ever there was one, to the life of this anti-working class, empire-loving, war-monger, racist, and antisemite. □

Michael Marmot: “Restore funding. No way round it”

By Sacha Ismail

The only speaker in the opening plenary of the Progressive Economics conference held at the University of Greenwich by the Progressive Economy Forum on 11 June was Professor Michael Marmot. Marmot is director of the UCL Institute of Health Equity and author of the famous “Marmot reviews” on health inequality.

Measured in tone and heavy with statistics, Marmot’s speech was a powerful indictment of the Tories’ policies and urging of the case for a clear alternative. His work is a yardstick against which the lack of strong proposals and campaigns from the labour movement – and particularly the Labour Party – should be measured. As a new wave of

attacks on living standards begins, his analysis should function as a wake up call.

At the Progressive Economics event, Marmot presented data showing that the bigger the reduction in a council’s funding, the worse the decline in life expectancy in its area is likely to have been. And the worse the deprivation in a council area, the worse the funding cuts it is likely to have received.

He also pointed out that, in terms of “levelling up”, 2021 allocations from the government’s “Levelling Up Fund” amounted to £32 per person in the North. Meanwhile the drop in annual council spending across England amounts to £388 per person – and £413 in the North.

As he has previously, Marmot called

in his speech explicitly for reversal of cuts to local government funding and (and other services).

The Progressive Economics conference had a dedicated session later in the day on local government. But as so often with such discussions now, that focused not on fighting to stop and reverse cuts, but on “community wealth building”, a way of avoiding the issue of central government funding. Advocacy of this notion, and not a struggle for more resources, is increasingly the dominant position on the Labour left too.

In response to a question about this contradiction, Marmot praised the work of many councils but then insisted: “We absolutely need to restore the central government funding local authorities

have lost since 2010. There’s no way round it. I would never say ah yes we can just avoid that issue.”

I don’t know much about Marmot’s wider politics, but he seems to be broadly a social democrat. In any case, he’s an academic – a politically engaged one, but operating from an academic standpoint. Yet he is much more radical on this crucial question than those who run Momentum, for instance!

Marmot knows what he is talking about. We should take his work seriously, and act accordingly. The left and labour movement should reorient urgently, and start fighting seriously to reverse the defunding of local government. □



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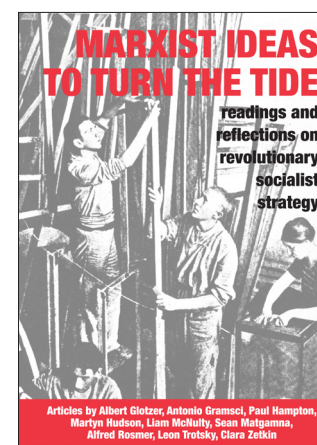
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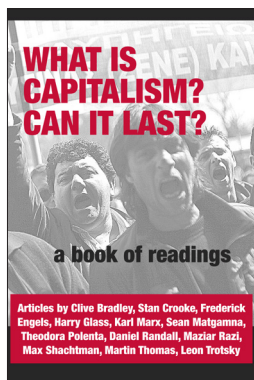
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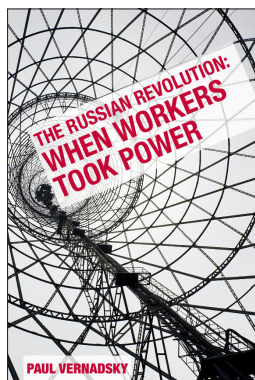
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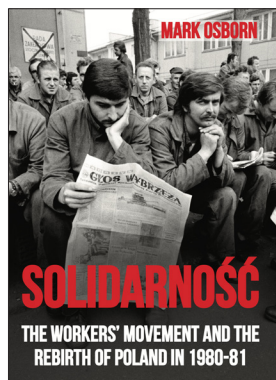
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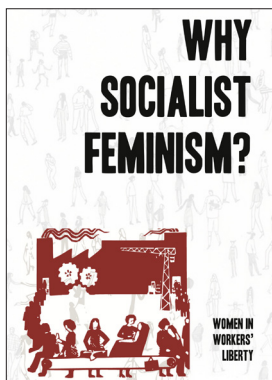
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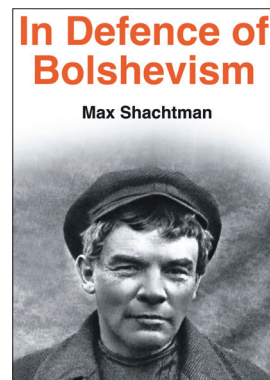
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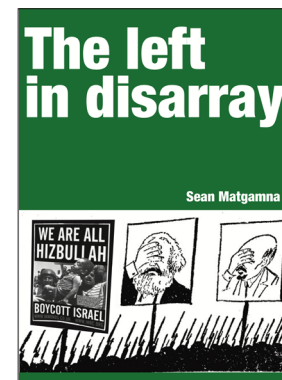
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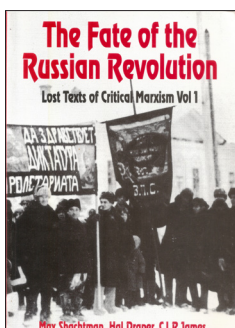
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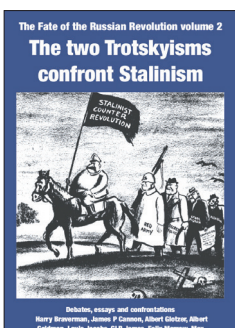
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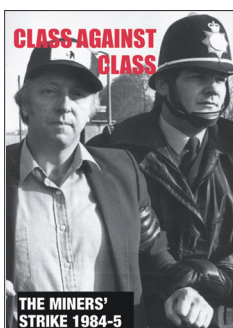
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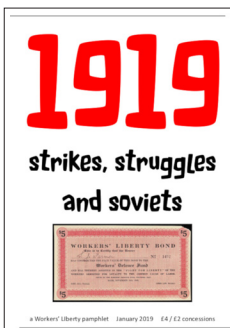
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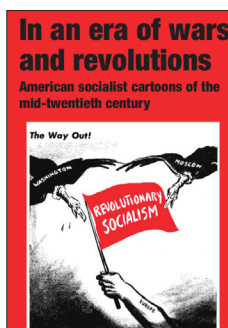
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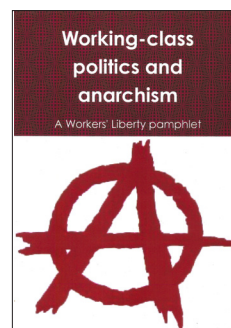
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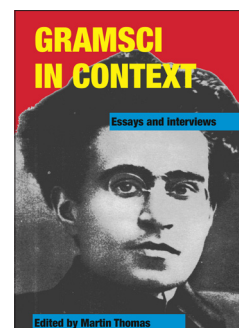
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Debating tactics for local government pay 2022-3



By a Unison member

The local government conference of the public services union Unison on 12-13 June was dominated by discussion on how to win ballots for strikes on pay.

A ballot on the 1.75% pay offer for the year from April 2021, done between 5 Dec 2021 and 14 Jan 2022, fell flat with a turnout of only 14.5%. 50% minimum turnout is required for strike ballots in public services under the Trade Union Act 2016.

For the year from April 2022, unions

in local government (Unite and GMB as well as Unison) put in a [claim](#) on 6 June for £2,000 or RPI-matching increases (around 11%). A response from the employers is expected in July, but is unlikely to be anywhere near the claim.

In Scotland, where a claim for £3,000 increase with a £12 per hour minimum was submitted in January 2022, and the local authorities responded in February with an offer of 2%, a ballot is running from 10 June to 26 July.

The union is planning targeted action, and is targeting the ballot on members employed in schools, in early years, and in waste and recycling services, although the claim covers all council workers.

The Scottish example was referred to often, and debate generally accepted the tactic of disaggregated

ballots (ballots which are counted section-by-section, so sections which beat 50% turnout can strike even while others can't).

Debate also covered better communications, phone-banking and so on. The essentials of local government pay tactics are decided by the National Joint Council of all the unions, and the Unison reps there are not directly accountable to the Service Group Executive or even the Service Group conference.

The conference heard that West Cheshire and Chester, and East Ayrshire, councils have brought at least some social care back in-house, and Sandwell and Neath/ Port Talbot have brought leisure in-house. It discussed further efforts to get services in-house, and a £15 per hour minimum wage for

care workers.

The other big theme was combating sexism, and inadequate black and ethnic minority representation, in the union. It is a real issue, even though the right wing will be using it demagogically in Unison's 14-17 June National Delegate Conference (the conference which debates the union's general and political campaigning, as distinct from the industrial matters covered by Service Group conference).

Almost every vote in the conference was unanimous, suggesting a lack of confidence in the left to push for sharp decisions.

But there was a mood in the conference of determination to turn things round in the union after the poor result in the December-January ballot. □

Arriva busworkers strike on pay

By Cy Grove

Unite members began a indefinite strike over pay on Monday 6 June in Arriva buses in West Yorkshire and some services in North and East Yorkshire.

Over 650 drivers and engineers had voted 96% for strikes following the company's pitiful offer of a 4.1% pay

rise. At the Wakefield depot there have regularly been between 60 and 100 workers on the picket, and in Castleford around 50.

Very few staff have crossed the picket, and no buses have been running in the Wakefield area since the strike began.

Workers told *Solidarity* that no Arriva buses have been running from any of the af-

fected depots since the strike began.

Over the weekend 11-12 June Arriva agreed to further [talks](#). Workers are confident that the strength of the action they have taken and the effect it is having on bus services in West Yorkshire will make Arriva crumble and offer them the pay increase that they need. □



More online

Tories stage EU clash on Protocol

We should demand that Brexit is unwound; the Irish labour movement should work out a programme for a federal united Ireland, with minority protections and social "levelling up" across the island: bit.ly/ni-pr

Taking sides in Ukraine

To counterpose a "transnational politics for peace" is to blot out Ukraine's national rights: bit.ly/uk-tss

Estonia's landmark novel

A story of peasant life, now translated into English: bit.ly/var-mae □

Resist the bus cuts!

By Mohan Sen

London's bus routes, covering far more of the city than Tube and rail, and used by many who cannot afford rail travel or work too late or early for it, face drastic cuts very soon. Transport for London (TfL) is [consulting](#) (1 June to 12 July) on scrapping 16 of the 650-odd bus routes it contracts private companies to run. Already a period of running down services through frequency reductions (no consultation required) has removed 300 buses from service since the start of 2021.

Sadiq Khan, the mayor of

London, says that if TfL doesn't get adequate funding from the Tories by the end of June, he will have to make cuts scrapping more like 80 to 100 routes, or running down a larger number.

The Tories accuse Khan of using the threat of bus cuts to extract more money. That may be what he thinks he's doing. It's a crap "strategy".

As with TfL funding generally, Khan and the Labour establishment have no intention to mobilise an actual fight against the Tories for more funding.

In March we saw the mayor's ability to bring large numbers

to the streets, when tens of thousands answered his call to demonstrate in solidarity with Ukraine.

If the mayor and GLA, the Labour Party, transport unions and the wider labour movement worked together they could mobilise significant action and pressure on the Tories. Instead the mayor and his supporters attack the unions where they are taking action against cuts, on London Underground. Labour councils in London are promoting petitions to the government for more money for TfL, but that's all.

Unfortunately the unions

with membership on London buses, Unite and RMT, aren't doing much about this issue yet either. Activists in both should push.

The threat outside London, where bus services are worse than in the capital, is also bad. Earlier in the year campaigners warned that funding cuts could mean a third of services being scrapped. In March the government announced new funding – but only till October, and insisting there will be no more after that.

The labour movement should campaign for public ownership and permanent funding to expand services. □

“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

Expanded primary care, or just cheaper?



Diary of a paramedic

By Alice Hazel

The "Additional Roles Reimbursement Scheme" of NHS England pays GPs to employ non medics – pharmacists, physician associates, social prescribers, paramedics, etc. – in primary care. In many surgeries there are now more of those roles than doctors. It's important that these roles are used to make healthcare better, not just as GPs on the cheap, as a 13 June BBC [Panorama](#) investigation found to be happening in a big chain of GP practices.

Since starting work in primary care recently I've seen what the scheme looks like, if not the abuses reported in that [Panorama](#) screening. Everyone on a mission. Short, focused conversations. Efficiency is seen as the key. The people doing these jobs are highly skilled, and kind. But even so this still translates into spending less than 10 minutes with

patients, dealing with complex issues. Sometimes the cases just don't fit in to those slots.

"I know that patient is on too much pain relief but I wasn't going there." "If he didn't drink so much he probably wouldn't have diabetes, but we haven't got time to talk about that now." People are complicated. Commodified healthcare doesn't fit with that.

Since 2015, when the government pledged to raise GP numbers across England by 5,000, the actual number has dropped by around 2,000. GPs are retiring early or cutting their hours under the weight of pressure in the NHS. The burden falls on newer doctors, either newly qualified or trainees. NHS Digital figures show that, in the last year, the head count of qualified GPs has dropped 1.9%.

In contrast to these declining numbers the demand for primary healthcare is rising and appointment numbers are up in response. In the area where I'm working there's been a 50% increase over seven years. The NHS scheme is

meant to help fill the gap, but there are problems.

"We just get left on our own once our training is done", Erica told me. I was working with her the day before she left. Turnover is high. There's a very individual culture. "Get your training and then get locum work", an experienced nurse practitioner, Megan, told me. When I asked her about a trade union, she said: "You have to look after yourself. When you get new skills go and ask for more money."

Some of the changes going on in the NHS, connected GP practices and primary care hubs, tend towards changing this culture, "We try to link up across surgeries", one GP partner told me, "but people started talking to each other and finding out what each other were paid." As a new face in a developing group of workers that sounds like a good conversation to get stuck into. □

• Alice Hazel is a paramedic who has recently moved from working on ambulances to working in a group of GP practices.

Summer camp 25-28 August

On the weekend of 25-28 August 2022, join Workers' Liberty for our socialist summer camp near Haslemere in Surrey! Our annual camp has run for eleven years (with a break in 2020 due to coronavirus) and it is a long weekend of food, drink, swimming, music, campfires and fun in the great outdoors, alongside political discussions in a relaxed atmosphere.

Last year, we mixed hikes, wild swimming, visits to castles and a pub quiz with workshops and talks about the workers' movement in Turkey, the story of UK sound system culture, experiences organising the unorganised in Britain; and we heard fascinating reports from friends of ours who are organising in Hong Kong and elsewhere around the globe.

The camp is fully child-friendly with dedicated childcare workers offering a full range of activities suitable for visitors of all ages. We are seeking to make this event as accessible as possible, so if you have any medical or other requirements, let us know and we will work to accommodate them.

This year's camp is being run mostly outdoors once again as a coronavirus protection measure.

So pack a tent (or let us know if you need to borrow one) and book tickets online or seek more information at workersliberty.org/summer-camp □

From blocking Macron to rebuilding left politics

By Martin Thomas

As a tactic, Jean-Luc Mélenchon's Nupes alliance of his La France Insoumise with the Socialist Party, the Communist Party, and the Greens (EELV), on a soft-left platform, worked well in the first round of France's National Assembly election, on 12 June.

In a low turnout (48%), Nupes got about the same vote (26%) as the Ensemble coalition of Emmanuel Macron, who was re-elected president with 59% on the second round on 24 April.

Having one official Nupes candidate in each seat, rather than four different candidates from the four components, means that Nupes gets into the 19 June run-off votes in 370-odd of the 577 seats. Polls predict it will win between 150 and 190 seats, way up on the 72 seats its components had between them in the outgoing Assembly.

Macron may well fail to get an Assembly majority for Ensemble. Macron without a majority may,



Jean-Luc Mélenchon

however, face paralysis.

The paralysis will encourage pay strikes, already sprouting in France. Its political result, however, depends on the left's ability to rebuild as a political force.

Marine Le Pen's fascist Ralliement National won 19% on 10 June, down on Le Pen's 23% on 10 April, but up on the RN's 13% in 2017. Despite Le Pen's vote-pulling, the RN is still a small party (maybe 20,000) which has suffered from many splits. Increased Assembly representation in a period of government paralysis could help it solidify.

Mélenchon's La France Insoumise is (like Renaissance, the core group of

Macron's alliance) more an email list than a party. The Socialist Party and the Communist Party are still parties, but much weakened (40,000 for the CP, less for the SP).

The revolutionary socialist group Lutte Ouvrière (LO) got 1.0% for its candidates, better than 0.7% in 2017 but still way down on its votes early in the 21st century. LO has said nothing about how it recommends voting in the run-offs. The Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste mostly backed Nupes (plus a few local far-left coalition candidates) on 12 June, and backs Nupes in the run-off. □

• Abridged: more bit.ly/f-12j

Preparing for pay ballot



John Moloney,
PCS Asst Gen Sec
(p.c)

The National Executive Committee of our union, PCS, will meet on Thursday 16 June to discuss arrangements for our national ballot for industrial action on cost-of-living issues, which will begin in September. Part of that discussion will be around how to organise the ballot, which I've discussed in previous columns. There's important administrative and auditing work that needs to happen well in advance of launching the ballot, to ensure membership lists are up to date.

Key to winning the ballot will be mobilising the activist base. Of course the national leadership needs to lead, and there'll be a strong campaign from the centre. But the reps and activists in branches and workplace need to pick up the campaign and run with it. This isn't about exhorting the activists to do things, it's a matter of persuasion. We need to convince them to see the ballot campaign as theirs, something they're leading, rather than something they're being "told to do" by the union centrally.

Branches need to coordinate and work together. Centrally, we need to ensure they have access to money and resources to run local campaigning. There'll be national material, but activists need to be supported in producing local material that focuses on the aspects of the campaign that are felt most keenly by members in a particular area.

We need a continual dialogue between the central union structures and activists in workplaces: checking in about how the campaign is going, what resources they need, and so on. Social media will be important too, especially with many workers still working at least some of the time from home.

On pay, we're demanding a 10% increase with an uplift to a £15/hour minimum wage for the lowest paid. There are also other demands around improved annual leave, equal pay and the working week.

In the Department for Work and Pensions, 42 offices are facing closure. Many fixed-term staff who were taken on during the pandemic are not having their contracts renewed. I think it's vital we consider balloting workers in those 42 offices to resist closure, and move towards a ballot to demand fixed-term staff are made permanent. A strong fight on staffing in the DWP will stand us in good stead for the national campaign. □

Local deals and the UCU disputes

By a Cambridge UCU member

As the long-running University and College Union (UCU) disputes in Higher Education (HE) continue, further local settlements have been offered to branches to withdraw disruptive marking and assessment boycotts. The local offers provide cash for staff in certain campuses, but the national picture of the strike is being eroded.

On the one hand, branches winning settlements are ensuring higher pay for campus staff in the near-term, highly important in the context of an escalating cost-of-living crisis. On the other, the likelihood that our union will win our national disputes reduces in the short term with every branch that steps back from the fight. This pattern could have serious, negative implications for sectoral bargaining arrangements in the longer term.

UCU congress was 1-3 June. More on that in next week's paper: in brief, however, the HE disputes will be balloted on again in the Summer/Autumn, meaning further industrial action may kick in from the first term of the next academic year. This ballot will be aggregated, and so over 50% of all UCU HE members will need to vote in favour of action for this to beat the anti-un-

ion laws' turnout threshold. Branches have an important task in the coming months to get ballot and strike ready: getting member lists updated and convincing members that impactful strikes and other forms of action can win.

That branches have been winning local concessions and disputes with marking and assessment boycotts and strikes should provide some encouragement on what coordinated hard-hitting action can do.

In UCU's Further Education section, strike ballots opened at 33 colleges on 14 June and are open for a month. The dispute is over their measly 2.25% pay offer. It is well below inflation this year, and the union estimates that pay in the sector has fallen behind inflation by 35% since 2009. Follow UCU's [#RespectFE](#) campaign for more.

In local UCU news, the University of Cambridge UCU (CUCU) branch recently agreed a partial recognition deal for their members. This is due to be ratified by their university council in the coming months. CUCU is the final branch in England to be recognised by the employer (two UCU branches in Scotland remain unrecognised).

The agreed deal does not include UCU members who work for any of the university's 31 colleges, staff in

the university's Press and Assessment department, or PhD students. It was the culmination of many years of campaigning, and during the last two national strike periods, direct action in the form of staff demonstrations at management meetings and student occupations. Winning recognition for all members must remain amongst the branches' top priorities, to avoid having two tiers of membership for long. Only one branch member voted against the deal on that basis. □

Join Workers' Liberty!

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

TSSA members: vote yes for action!



Off The Rails

TSSA has announced ballots of its members at several TOCs and Network Rail for industrial action over pay, conditions, and job security, opening up the possibility of further coordinated action between rail unions later in the summer.

870 TSSA members across Avanti West Coast, East Midlands Trains, Cross Country, and West Midlands Trains will be balloted. The Avanti West Coast ballot begins on 15 June and closes on 29 June, with ballots in the other three TOCs running from 16 June to 7 July. In Network Rail, TSSA will ballot 6,000 members, mainly working in office-based roles but often with operational and safety-critical responsibility, from 20 June to 11 July.

It's too late for TSSA to coordinate with RMT's strikes on 21-25 June, but if thresholds are met and majorities are returned, future rounds of action could

be coordinated. We encourage all TSSA members to vote yes for action!

We also encourage them to query an obvious omission from the list... London Underground. Although TSSA's industrial base on LU has, to put it mildly, dwindled somewhat in recent years, it does still have members there. Following its official statement of solidarity with the RMT's recent strikes, it makes no sense for TSSA members not to be in dispute too.

With all three major rail unions now with strikes named, live mandates and/or plans for ballots, ensuring that coordination takes place is vital. The unions' leadership must communicate and coordinate directly, but we don't want that communication to take place behind closed doors in union head offices. We also need coordination on the ground. As the dispute develops, workers in any workplace with members of multiple unions which are in dispute must aim to set up rank-and-file disputes committees to facilitate the maximum coordination possible. □

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IDEAS FOR FREEDOM

WEEKEND OF SOCIALIST DEBATE AND DISCUSSION

The world's political life is dominated by governments pledged to keep the **wealthy comfortable** and the **working class** in its place. For many, life is often **difficult** and **miserable**. And **unnecessarily** so.

Workers' Liberty fights for a world based on solidarity and democratic working-class control over economics and politics. We organise **Ideas for Freedom** each year to **discuss, debate**, think and listen to ideas to transform the world. **Join us!**

Book tickets now! Cheap rates for unwaged, students, and low-waged, and even cheaper until 17 June (**£9 unwaged, £22 low-waged, £38 waged**). bit.ly/ideas-22

Crash **accommodation**, free **creche** (register by Friday 23 June) and cheap **food** will be provided.

Thursday 30 June – Radical Clerkenwell **Walking Tour**

Friday – **Film**, *Young Karl Marx*



SATURDAY 2 JULY

11:30 – The punk rock politics of **Joe Strummer**, with Gregor Gall • The legacy of **George Orwell**, with author Dorian Lynskey • A socialist history of **race and racism**, with Camila Bassi • Renewing our **unions**, with John Moloney, PCS; Jocelyn Cruywagen, Lambeth Unison; and John Leach, RMT (all p.c.) • The struggle for **reproductive freedom** worldwide

2pm – Workers' solidarity with **Ukraine**, with speakers from the Ukrainian left and labour movement

3:55 – The **Covid-19** pandemic, with Professor George Davey-Smith • The **history of Ukraine**, with Chris Ford (Ukraine Solidarity Campaign) • **Couriers** vs gig economy bosses, with speakers from the JustEat couriers' strike • Why the **working class**? with Kelly Rogers • Defending the **right to protest and strike**, with Rhian Keyse, UCU; Sarah Wolley, BFAWU; and Janine Booth, RMT (all p.c.)

5:35 – Capitalism, **disability**, and socialism, with Janine Booth, author Ellen Clifford, and Richard Rieser (World of Inclusion) • The legacy of **James Connolly**, with Paul Richards • The **left in disarray on Ukraine** • What is a **revolutionary party** and why do we need one? with Jill Mountford

7:15 – Informal **social** at a nearby pub

SUNDAY 3 JULY

10am – The Cammell Laird **shipyard occupation** and the fight for justice, with Eddie Marneil, former occupier, and John Cunningham • **Class struggle in India**, with Sacha Ismail • The significance of the **Russian revolution** • Is a united **Ireland** in prospect? • **Monarchy, republicanism**, and socialism

12:40 – Should socialists back a "**progressive alliance**"? Joan Trevor debates Michael Chessum • **Climate change** as class war, with author Matt Huber • **Sheffield's** early socialists, with E.M. Johns • The history of **Hong Kong**, with HK socialist Chen Ying • What is **imperialism**? with Cathy Nugent

2:45 – Should socialists be active in the Labour Party? Ruth Cashman debates Paul Davies • Revival in the US labour movement? with Lisa Xu, UAW for Democracy (pc) • Soviet composer Dimitriy **Shostakovich** and Stalinism • Class struggle in **China**, with Chinese socialist Chris • The climate movement in **Australia**, with Janet Burstall

4:05 – Closing plenary



January 6 hearings: nothing to see?

By Tom Harrison

If you found time to watch the excellent drama *Gaslit*, starring Julia Roberts and Sean Penn, about the Watergate scandal, you probably asked an obvious question. How come Nixon was discredited and finished politically and yet Trump gets away with it? After the Russia probe and an unprecedented two impeachments Trump still dominates the Republican Party and could become President again in two years time.

Part of the answer why things are different now from the mid 1970s has to be the advent of Rupert Murdoch's Fox News and a plethora of other right wing TV and radio stations. When Nixon's henchmen were grilled by Congress the American media still followed the Federal Communication Commission's so-called fairness doctrine, requiring media outlets to reflect both sides of political debates and give facts far higher priority than opinion. That doctrine was scrapped in the Reagan years, opening the way for rabid racist talk radio hosts like Rush Limbaugh and ultimately leading to the establishment of Fox News in 1996.

During the Watergate hearings millions of Americans tuned into major TV networks ABC, CBS and NBC, which rotated coverage. Nowadays Fox has refused point blank to televise live coverage of hearings into the 6 January 2021 storming of the Capitol. Instead they opted for counter-programming slagging off the entire proceedings.

When the hearings opened last week, Fox News went for two and a half hours without commercial breaks. They would rather lose advertising revenue than risk viewers switching channels and finding things out it didn't want them to! Tucker Carlson, Trump and Putin cheerleader, stuffed his programme with conspiracy peddling wing nuts,

one claiming the riot was a "false flag" event and that the police weren't really police at all but "crisis actors". Fox News is moving into a parallel-universe fact-free zone – a QAnon of the airwaves.

Attempts at deflection and delegitimation are now familiar parts of the Trumpist playbook. The hearings are "a political witch-hunt" to smear Trump. What happened on 6 January was nothing more than "a normal tourist event". Carlson claims it "barely rates as a footnote." Trump himself recently dismissed it as "a hoax": like all those mass shooting in schools it never really happened!

Apart from new video footage showing considerable violence did take place during the attack, not much else was revealed on the hearing's first day which hadn't been known already. Trump agreeing that Mike Pence deserved to be lynched by the baying MAGA rabble was probably the most damaging revelation.

Also significant was Kushner's admission that he was too busy churning out presidential pardons to be bothered with what went on at the Capitol. Several Republican Congress members allegedly asked the Trump White House for these as a consequence of what they did on 6 January, which is effectively an admission of their own criminal guilt. These "pocket pardons" are expected to be pulled out as "get out of jail free" cards should any of them be indicted.

It will become increasingly clear as the hearings go on that Trump and his cabal – Rudy Giuliani, Michael Flynn, Sydney Powell – cobbled together a plot to overthrow the election result and keep him in power. The degree to which this was done in coordination with fascist groups such as the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers has yet to be ascertained, but you can bet your bottom dollar it did take place at some level.

continued page 2

2-3 July • Camden School for Girls, London • Tickets: bit.ly/ideas-22



Solidarity

For a workers' government

- **STRIKE TO PUSH UP WAGES AND BENEFITS!**
- **SQUEEZE PROFITS, TAX WEALTH!**



By Sacha Ismail

In the midst of the cost-of-living misery, the *Sunday Times* has released its "Rich List" for this year. Rishi Sunak and his wife Akshata Murthy are on for the first time; their £730 million puts them 222nd. The total wealth of the thousand richest individuals or households listed is £711 billion, up 8% from last year. The combined wealth of the top 250 is more than that of the entire list five years ago.

In 2019 the UK had 151 billionaires; in 2021 171; and now 177.

The richest thousand are only a small minority of the capitalist class in the UK, and many other capitalists are doing well too. As wages and working conditions have stagnated and declined, and rent, energy, transport, childcare, social care and other costs risen remorselessly, money has flowed from our pockets into those of the rich.

The trend of ever greater ine-

quality is not inevitable, but it is a built-in feature of capitalism. It is something like inevitable if the labour movement continues to mumble while ducking and botching fights.

To turn the tide we must:

- Launch many more well-organised, aggressive strikes. The number of strikes is rising significantly – but only a small fraction of what it was during the last price surge this bad, in the 1970s. Too many union leaders – to say nothing of the Labour Party's – are afraid of strikes. Many activists are afraid too: understandably, given the deluge of attacks we face. But only by fighting can we have any hope of winning, and helping others win in turn. We must rally round every strike, above all the rail workers, and the strikes likely to follow if the railworkers' impact encourages others: Royal Mail, BT, civil service, and more.

- Campaign vocally and actively for alternative policies

– starting with higher benefits, a higher minimum wage, public-sector pay rises, rent controls, public ownership of energy and repeal of *all* the laws restricting unions and strikes. We must win those to defend and raise living standards – and if we can, our chances of winning wider changes will increase. (For more ideas, see bit.ly/beyondwindfall)

The resources are there – we must access them through a belligerent fight for higher wages, and belligerent measures to tax and expropriate the wealth of the rich, diminishing their power while gaining resources we need.

Trade unions, Labour-affiliated and not, should stop tolerating Keir Starmer's Tory-lite agenda and insist the party fights for the left-wing policies both union and Labour members support.

Work with us, join us, help organise the fight: awl@workersliberty.org workersliberty.org □