

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



For social ownership of the banks and industry



UNITE THE STRIKES!

» **Accelerate and spread action to beat price surge**

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» **Use, defend, and regain union rights**

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Strike wave grows as prices soar

Workers can win if action is accelerated, spread, and united

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The threat of new anti-strike laws



There are more strikes in the UK than for a long time. This tremendous fact, of workers asserting our rights and ourselves, has potential to change many things for the better. But to win, the strikes need to accelerate, spread, and coordinate. If we let the relatively favourable conditions now pass, then by 2023 we will probably face even tighter anti-strike laws from Truss or Sunak, as well as reduced real wages and outright poverty for many.

In response to menacing social regression and a rising spirit of revolt among many workers, some unions are doing much better than for many years. But mostly (not always) they're still operating within a souped-up version of the framework the UK labour movement has trained itself in over decades, essentially that of occasional one- or two-day strikes.

The activists and leaders of rail and

transport union RMT and post and telecoms union CWU should be congratulated for moving into battle and blazing a trail for maybe much wider working-class action. But in the RMT dispute that preceded the action on the railways, the fight by ten thousand workers on London Underground to defend jobs, conditions and pensions, the first strikes, spectacularly shutting down the Tube, were on 1 and 3 March. Then nothing until 21 June, and that was only one day. Then nothing until one day after an even longer gap, on 19 August.

The longer a dispute goes on at a low level, without escalation, the worse the risk that the workers – who have fewer resources to fall back on than capitalists and managers or governments do – will face exhaustion of spirit or budget, and the action will fade (especially if it is low-intensity to start with).

For now, unemployment is still low, market demand generally buoyant, the government in disarray, creating relatively favourable conditions for strikes and workers' struggles. By 2023 all that is likely to be less favourable. Postponing decisive action to worse times is poor tactics.

The Tories are planning even more legal restrictions on strikes. Liz Truss has promised a series of [new laws](#) that would constitute the biggest suppression of the right to strike since the Thatcherite reforms of the 80s. If such laws are imposed, strikes will not be

impossible; but they will become even more difficult.

The threat of new anti-union laws is no doubt motivated by the growing number of strikes; but it's also driven by the Tories feeling confident they can ride the storm. We need campaigning specifically against this threat. So far, Labour is silent, and union leaders have limited themselves to talk of great actions *after* those new laws are legislated (airily referring, for [example](#), to the Chartists, a great movement, but one that developed over some 15 years and failed to win its demands).

Focused union and Labour campaigning to stop new anti-union laws (and repeal the existing ones) is needed. The [Free Our Unions](#) campaign is organising to pull trade unionists, Labour activists and strike supporters into action. But, in fact, utilising the space we have now to the absolute maximum, battering and defeating the Tories and the class they represent with a surge of high-intensity strikes and protests, is the best way to push back this threat too.

That also implies moving fast: Truss has pledged to start legislating on this within thirty days of taking office.

We need:

- speed. For all the reasons discussed above, we need to shorten the gaps between strikes and move as fast as we can towards indefinite action.

- coordination. Strikes can be much more effective if different unions dis-



cuss and plan to coordinate dates. Such coordinated action can also come much closer to being “proxy” solidarity action between different groups of workers and “proxy” political strike action (both solidarity strikes and strikes for political goals, openly as such, are banned under the 1980s anti-union laws).

- spread, bringing in worse-off sections of the working class, even those not yet unionised.

In all this we must demand the labour movement pushes as hard as possible within and against the limits of the law; but the flurry of unofficial, unballoted walkouts over pay by Amazon workers is a reminder we should not be so respectful of the legal restrictions either.

We need to take up these kind of arguments in as many unions and workplaces as possible, urgently. □

Solidarity 644

Solidarity 644 will be out on 31 August, and then we're back to our usual weekly schedule. □

Make clear demands!

By Daniel Randall

The question of what a given strike's exact demands are – and in some cases, whether it even has any specific demands – must also be contested by socialists seeking to develop rank-and-file independence.

In the RMT's disputes on national rail, the union says it is fighting for “a substantial pay rise”, without specifying a figure. This has allowed the media to run away with a casual remark by Mick Lynch noting that, at the time of the Network Rail pay anniversary,

inflation was at 7%, and present as fact the claim that “RMT is asking for 7%”. The lack of a specific demand also enabled some RMT officials to present a 5% offer on ScotRail, which RMT members subsequently voted to reject, as a model for the national dispute.

A typical rejoinder to arguments for specifying a demand is that it “ties the hands of the negotiators”. But that is precisely what specific union policy is supposed to do. The counter-argument betrays a conception of disputes in

which the negotiations themselves are the key terrain, with the mass action of the membership merely a bargaining chip for specialist negotiators (i.e., senior union officials, who in some unions are not even elected) to wield in those negotiations. Conversely, democratically agreed-upon and specific demands give workers a clear sense of what they are actually fighting for, and provide a yardstick against which to measure any offers from employers. □



Upcoming meetings

Workers' Liberty meetings are open to all, and unless otherwise stated those below are online over zoom. We have many local (in-person) meetings, see [online](#).

Thursday 18 August, 8pm – Gramsci's Prison Notebooks Zoom study group. Weekly till Thursday 10 November

Wednesday 24 August, 6pm – Youth 4 Ukrainian Resistance
Thursday 25 August – Sunday 28 August: AWL Summer camp, Lurgashall, Surrey

Sunday 4 September, 2pm – Socialist Feminist reading group: The Transgender Issue, by Shon Faye

Sunday 11 September, 11am – Should socialist back nuclear power? Ecosocialist reading group

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



Unite, accelerate, and spread the strikes

By Daniel Randall

The significance of the current wave of strikes is indicated by how many mark something happening for the first time in many years: the first strike at BT since 1987; the first national rail strike since 1994; the first time rail and Tube workers have struck together since 1989; the first time Tube and bus workers have struck together since the 1990s; the first national postal strike since 2009; the first strike at Felixstowe, Britain's busiest container port, since 1989.

Another marker of the significance is the flurry of wildcat strikes, a phenomenon little seen for many years outside of Royal Mail depots, where a tradition of spontaneous walkouts, mostly over local issues, subsists. On 28 July, un-unionised food workers at Cranswick Continental Foods, in Bury near Manchester, walked out over pay and conditions. From 4 August, wildcat strikes spread through Amazon fulfilment centres, beginning in Tilbury in Essex, with workers demanding an improved pay deal (management had imposed a 35p per hour increase). Although the GMB union has some members in Amazon sites, no site is organised in any formal sense. On 10 August, construction contractors at several oil refineries and power stations across Scotland, Wales, and England walked off the job, demanding improved pay. Construction contractors have a high level of rank-and-file organisation, largely independent of union structures, which allows them to coordinate days of unofficial action.

The industries in which the current strike wave is centred – transport, telecom, the post, logistics, and energy – are central to the functioning of the capitalist economy. That centrality gives workers in those industries wider leverage and power.

The wave could spread: PCS in the civil service is balloting from 26 September, NEU is doing a consultative ballot in schools from 24 September. UCU plans to re-ballot its entire Higher Education membership, following UCU members at 22 Further Education colleges voting in July by an 89% majority for strikes.

In Scotland, refuse workers in Unite at 15 councils will strike 24-31 August, and in Unison, at eight councils, 26-29 August and 7-10 September. In the NHS, Unite is balloting its 100,000 members

in indicative ballots for action, ending on 11 September (in England) and 15 September (in Wales), in response to a 4%-5% pay offer. The Royal College of Nursing is balloting its members, with the ballot concluding on 15 September. The junior doctors' committee of the British Medical Association says it is also preparing to ballot over pay. Unison is balloting in the NHS from 27 October to 25 November.

Outsourced workers at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine struck from 18-20 July; workers at the AQA exam board are striking from 12-15 August; outsourced health workers in Unison in Lancashire, employed by the contractor OCS at hospitals and clinics, have struck multiple times in July, with further strikes on 18-20 August. DHL delivery workers in Unite in Scotland and Northern Ireland are striking 13-20 August.

Co-ordination

Already there have been cases of co-ordination between different strikes – some perhaps coincidental, some surely deliberate. Maximising that co-ordination can both strengthen individual disputes and go some way to “generalise” the strike wave – that is, to turn it from a collection of individual disputes into a class-wide fightback to resist the screwing down of our conditions and living standards whilst profits soar. That is the way to push towards a general strike, better than just demanding the TUC “call a general strike”, which would be to substitute pious plea for real action.

There are also glaring missed opportunities for coordination, with train drivers' union Aslef striking separately from other rail unions.

The two decades from 1968 to 1988 saw the highest tide of industrial militancy in British history, with sometimes possibly pre-revolutionary conditions, some times when workers' action brought down governments. An element present then, but entirely absent now, was strong rank-and-file organisation, including at workplace level, often based on networks of shop stewards and other union reps. The development of independent rank-and-file organisation must be a focus for socialists active in the strike wave now.

This focus does not rely on dogmatic schemas that the rank and file is always incipiently militant, or on mechanically insisting that “the union leaders will fail

to fight” (when many of them, on their own terms at least, manifestly are fighting). The argument for an organised rank-and-file counterweight to and pressure on union leaders like Mick Lynch, Sharon Graham, and Dave Ward does not depend on claiming they are secretly on the side of the bosses.

The questions around which rank-and-file organisation can be built now are mostly how fights already underway can be won, what tactics should be used, and what their demands should be. All these questions pose further ones, about how unions are organised and how their democracy functions.

An issue already emerging in several of the national disputes is that of the intensity and pace of action. In the rail and Tube disputes, unions seem to have settled into a pattern of striking for 24 or 48 hours once every six weeks to two months. Such action, whilst impactful on the day itself, is unlikely to force major concessions from national employers or the Tory government standing behind them.

For BT, one CWU leader has said that the dispute should be seen as a “marathon, not a sprint.” But strikes are rarely won as “marathons”.

Each individual battle, of course, depends on the workers holding out longer than the bosses. But most strikes which win, win relatively fast. They depend for victory on employers calculating that the company will sustain worse damage, either to its revenue or reputation, or both, by refusing to grant workers' demands than it will by granting them; and calculating that they will face escalation if they refuse to budge. If unions signal that, for months on end, they will strike only on scattered days, few employers are likely to make such a calculation.

It is misguided to imagine there is a predetermined total of action an employer can withstand (irrespective of how spread-out the total is), and that if the union carefully parcels that total out into bite-sized chunks that won't “exhaust” its members, the employer will eventually topple over.

Until only decades ago, the standard trade-union action was the indefinite strike – walking out and staying out until the employer made acceptable concessions. It made sense. The confidence to take such action cannot be rebuilt at will, but if unions train members to expect all disputes to be a dribble of one or two-day strikes over several

months, they work against rebuilding.

Currently, the group of workers seemingly most likely to launch an indefinite strike does not come from any of the labour movement's big battalions. At the time of writing, barristers in the Criminal Bar Association were voting on whether to launch an indefinite strike from 5 September, in their dispute over fees.

There are some examples of better practice in the current strike wave (many, it should be noted, from Unite members). DHL workers (13-20 August), refuse workers in 15 Scottish councils (24-31 August), Felixstowe dock workers (21-29 August), and OCS health workers (multiple days in August) have all announced more sustained action.

Of course, strike funds will then be vital. RMT has taken a positive step, by freeing up £1.5 million from its national dispute fund for its branches to administer and distribute to members involved in the current strikes.

Exactly what effective rank-and-file organisation looks like will vary depending on industrial factors and the structures of each union. The overall and immediate aim must be to develop an atmosphere in which workers, and in the first instance rank-and-file union reps, see themselves as driving the current disputes, proposing strategies and perspectives, rather than simply waiting for instructions – however good or bad – from above.

For those who see the endeavour of trade unionism and industrial action in fundamentally institutional terms, with the aim being only to strengthen a union's ability to negotiate for and service its members, an army that does no more than loyally carry out instructions is sufficient. But for those who see the endeavour of trade unionism as a foundation in a wider project aiming to win class power, the rank and file must think for itself.

Against the backdrop of the most significant upsurge in workers' action for a generation, the opportunities to develop that kind of rank-and-file independence are greater than for some time. Socialists will contribute most to the realisation of those opportunities by throwing ourselves into the strikes – to carry them forward in our own workplaces and industries, to spread and deepen them, and to build local networks round Trades Councils and local Labour Parties for practical solidarity. □

Orbán: best just to say nothing?



Antidoto

By Jim Denham

On 23 July Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán spoke to to ethnic Hungarians in Romania. He argued that his supporters “do not want to become peoples of mixed race.”

He went on to claim that migration had divided Europe into two. In one part, Europeans and non-Europeans were living together. The countries where this was happening were no longer “nations”, merely conglomerates of peoples. The clear message was that “racial purity” must be maintained at all costs.

A longtime friend and adviser to Orbán, Zsuzsa Hegedus, resigned after the speech, calling it a “pure Nazi text ... worthy of Goebbels.”

Orbán has often used inflammatory



Pic: CC BY 2.0

Viktor Orbán

language to justify vicious policies on immigration and minority rights. But this time the mask slipped completely and his neo-Nazi sentiments were evident to the world.

The speech was widely reported – and condemned – in the mainstream media but, strangely, not in the *Morning Star* (Britain’s paper of “Peace and Socialism”).

In fact, the paper had reported Orbán’s re-election earlier this year with an article (6 April, by George Gallo-way’s former bag-carrier Kevin Oven-den) that came very close to describing Orbán’s election victory as objectively progressive:

“It turns out that people’s thinking in Hungary is not the same as the one-dimensional propaganda that uses the atrocities in Ukraine to argue for a stronger Nato and EU.

“Orban said he was going to keep Hungary out of the war and he continued to walk the tightrope. He won handsomely. Other parties and

groupings of the right went further in calling for Hungary never to deploy its military for Nato missions and for Nato troops out of the country. There were slogans such as ‘we won’t die in Nato’s war’. Those parties gained.

“Their slogan was often fused with highly nationalist and racist positions. But it tapped a mood that is not right-wing. There was no radical-left force leading a popular sentiment against war in a good direction.

“The opposition Blairite social democrats want more Nato and seemed to agree with Ukrainian state demands that ordinary Hungarians should accept higher fuel prices as “an act of solidarity [with Ukraine]”

And that is the sum total of the *Morning Star*’s recent coverage of Orbán.

Having failed to mention the July 23 speech, the paper also ignored Orbán’s presence on August 4 at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in Dallas, where he urged US conservatives to join with him and “take back Washington and Brussels from liberals”. He also said America needed “a strong

leader” to “negotiate a peace deal to end the war in Ukraine”.

The reasons for this reluctance to condemn a neo-fascist would seem to be: (a) he’s long been undermining the European Union and has now confirmed Hungary’s place as Russia’s only ally within it; (b) he’s a friend of China and in 2015 signed up to China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI): the most recent example of this relationship is the decision to build a Hungarian campus of Shanghai’s Fudan University in Budapest at a cost of \$1.8 billion financed largely by a Chinese loan, exceeding Hungary’s entire budget for higher education. The symbolism is striking, following Orbán’s expulsion of the George Soros-founded Central European University in 2019.

So for the *Morning Star* (and its Communist Party of Britain political masters), Orbán ticks a lot of boxes: undermining the hated EU, in favour of concessions to Putin over Ukraine, and enthusiastically pro-Beijing.

Pity he’s a neo-fascist, so probably best to just say nothing. □

Starmmer, Biden, and the picket line



Eric Lee

By Eric Lee

The distinction often made by socialists between “liberal parties” and “labour parties” has been undermined somewhat by recent developments on both sides of the Atlantic.

Here in the U.K., much has been of Labour leader Keir Starmer’s decision to sack Sam Tarry, who had been serving as the party’s shadow transport minister. Tarry was accused of joining an RMT picket line and showing his solidarity with striking workers.

On the one hand, this is not surprising as Labour’s links with unions have grown ever more tenuous going back to the emergence of New Labour in the 1990s -- and perhaps even earlier. But it was in fact quite shocking -- so much so that some union leaders, such as Unite’s Sharon Graham have expressed genuine anger. According to the *Guardian*, Graham “warned that she found it difficult to justify continuing to

fund Labour through affiliation fees.”

Starmer has expressed the view that it is not the Labour Party’s job to take sides in strikes. Instead, he argues, Labour is a party of government and it should aim to resolve disputes -- not to take sides in them.

The founders of his party, including his namesake Keir Hardie, would not agree. As the TUC reminds us on its website, “Unlike most MPs, Keir [Hardie] usually backed trade union strikes. After all, union members made up most of his voters.”

Things on the other side of the Atlantic are, in theory, entirely different. There is not now and never has been a labour party of any significance in the U.S.

In recent years, unions have tended to throw their weight behind the Democrats, though this was not always the case. The official union position for decades was that labour would reward its friends and punish its enemies. In some cases, that meant endorsing Republicans or, more famously, failing to endorse Democrats. This was the case in 1972, when

the AFL-CIO refused to back George McGovern.

But as Democrats have become increasingly reliant on union votes (and donations and volunteers), they have increasingly talked like European social democrats. This is nowhere more obvious than in the attitude of leading Democrats toward picket lines.

Sanders

Bernie Sanders is obviously a regular on union picket lines and has been at this for many years. But of course he’s not a mainstream Democrat -- he even calls himself a socialist.

But he’s not alone. The current leader of the Democratic Party is Joe Biden who is definitely not a socialist. But Biden is quite proud of his links to the trade union movement and before being elected President in 2020 made frequent appearances on union picket lines.

In September 2019, he announced that he’d be joining members of the United Auto Workers on a picket in Kansas City. The following month, he publicised a phone call he made to another group of striking workers, offering them encouragement and support.

And in December, he tweeted this:

“I won’t be crossing a picket line. We’ve got to stand together with @UniteHere11 for affordable health care and fair wages. A job is about more than just a paycheck. It’s about dignity.”

I don’t think Joe Biden is to the left of Keir Starmer (though Bernie Sanders might be). But I do think that the two leaders find themselves facing different challenges and have responded differently.

Starmer is clearly terrified of being identified too closely with what the *Daily Mail* would call trade union “militants”. When people vote in the next general election, Starmer doesn’t want them to think about the 1984 miners’ strike, or the so-called winter of discontent, or even the 1926 general strike. He wants to distance the new, modern Labour Party from all that. He wants to win back votes that went to the Tories, or have been going to the Liberal Democrats.

Of course he’s entirely wrong about this, even from a strictly electoral point of view. The British public understands why people are going on strike

and are overwhelmingly supportive of the strikers. Everyone is facing the same cost of living crisis and it would not have hurt Labour to identify itself with those working class people who are fighting to keep their heads above water.

In the USA, the Democrats are struggling win back working-class voters who have switched their allegiances in recent years, throwing their support behind right-wing populists like Trump. Trump beat Clinton in 2016 in part because he spoke about genuine issues of concern to working people, like free trade agreements that led to job losses. Clinton was seen as a proponent of a callous globalisation that cared little for workers and their families.

The old distinction between a “labour party”, based on the unions, which defends the interests of workers, and a “liberal party” which does not, may no longer be valid. These days, joining a picket line may be easier for the “liberal” than the “social democrat”. Just ask Sam Tarry. □

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

Don't ban Russians from tourist visas

By Michael Baker

A *Washington Post* interview with Volodymyr Zelenskyy in which he said Russians should have the borders to Europe closed for them, "because they are taking away someone else's land", has triggered demands for Russians to be banned from Schengen tourist visas. Zelenskyy's call was echoed most forcefully by Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas, who tweeted that "visiting Europe is a privilege, not a human right".

Such a ban on Schengen visas has far more worrying consequences, as sociologist Jeremy Morris has detailed quite usefully in a [blog post](#). For a start, the asylum application process in most countries means that escaping Russia on a tourist visa is often the only viable option.

We should also oppose a blanket ban on Russians on political grounds. Putin's leadership has been based around centralising power and preventing the Russian population from expressing dissent in any form – through democratic elections, through trade unions, on the streets, or in the press. The solution here is not to further isolate Russian people from the international community – if anything, that will bolster and reinforce Putin's irredentist, nationalist rhetoric.

Meanwhile, American national team basketball player Brittney Griner has



been sentenced to nine years in Russian prison, after being arrested for carrying a hashish pen in her bag on a flight to a match in Russia. Griner was arrested on 17 February, six days before the invasion of Ukraine began. The US and Russian governments are still currently discussing a potential prisoner swap, where Russia will release Griner in exchange for arms dealer Viktor Bout, who was convicted of attempted murder in the US in 2011, and is serving a 25-year sentence.

It would be wrong to see Griner's case as a straightforward example of judicial cruelty to people of colour on drugs charges. Although that may have played a minor role, Griner's case is the clear result of rising Russia-US tensions. She has been made an unfortunate pawn in a much larger game.

Aleksey Navalny has announced from jail that he has founded Promzona, a "trade union" for prison inmates. As an example of how the union will function, he detailed his first success: an appeal for the prison administration to provide him with a chair while completing his low-paid prison labour, on the grounds that working without one while sewing materials together would result in serious back injury over the course of his sentence.

The "union" seems not to be able to agitate on a particularly widespread basis, but it has uploaded its materials and provided details on how to escalate issues to the prison administration, in the hope of improving individual appeals. □

stop the
#LABOUR
PURGE



Activist Agenda

Labour Left Internationalists is stepping up its drive for motions to Labour Party conference (deadline 15 September).

One of the motions it's pushing comes from the Labour Campaign for Free Movement. LCFM has produced a [promo video](#) and asks for [volunteers](#) for the conference (Liverpool, 24-28 September).

A motion (not for conference) is also in circulation against the banning of Workers' Liberty.

A protest is [due soon](#) against the reopening of an immigration detention centre on the site of a previously-closed one at Campsfield House (near Oxford). Layla Moran (Lib Dem MP for the relevant area) has secured a debate in parliament on Friday 9 September, and LCFM is backing a protest at Parliament Square from 2pm. □

• Text for motions, campaign links, etc. all at workersliberty.org/agenda

Using hate to become a TikTok star



By Katy Dollar

TikTok is facing calls to remove videos of a misogynist influencer. Andrew Tate is one of the biggest stars of TikTok, his videos getting 11.6 billion views. In August so far alone, clips tagged with his name have been watched more than a billion times.

He says a woman is a man's property. He explained women should "bear responsibility" if they are raped.

He runs a school "Hustler University" on how to pick up women and make a fortune.

His students are told to cut and share videos of him, choosing the most controversial clips to drive engagement. The coordinated effort has artificially boosted his content.

In one guide, Hustler's University "students" are told that attracting "comments and controversy" is the key to success: "What you ideally want is a mix of 60-70% fans and 40-30% haters. You want arguments, you want war."

Domestic abuse charities say his videos may inspire men and boys to commit harm offline.

"It's bang out the machete, boom in her face and grip her by the neck. Shut up bitch," he says in one video, showing how to respond to a woman

who accuses you of cheating.

He's enmeshed on the online and offline far right. He appeared on InfoWars, the podcast of conspiracy theorist Alex Jones, and met Donald Trump Jr at Trump Tower. He was photographed with Brexiter Nigel Farage and said "hung out with untold times" with "solid guy" Tommy Robinson.

He discussed being accused of violence against several women. In one video explained moving to Romania because it would be easier to evade rape charges: "I'm not a rapist, but I like the idea of just being able to do what I want. I like being free." Romanian authorities said last week he is subject of an investigation into

human trafficking and rape.

Tate is the biggest British success on the milieu of online stars versed modern communication technology and social media hankering for "traditional values".

Though social media is not the source of misogyny it is providing a space for growth of violent reactionary views. Social resentment that being a white man is not bringing the privileges it "should" can find validation and direction with the online right.

TikTok are coming under increasing pressure to censor Tate. We clearly can't trust private companies to prevent growth of the right. TikTok has suppressed content on abuse against Uyghurs and other



Muslims in China as well as criticism of Erdogan. They report users for "historical nihilism" to the Chinese state.

It may seem glib in a period of growing online misogyny but the answer primarily lies IRL (in real life). Militant socialist and working class movements can undercut the social basis for the right. □

Focus on energy efficiency



Environment

By Zack Muddle

It is good that campaigns such as "Don't Pay" are promoting the need to fight energy poverty, rising bills, stagnating wages; even if we critique their strategy for doing so.

Martin Thomas in "Wage rises, price curbs: where to push" (*Solidarity* 641) is right that the "most effective working-class response to price surges [is] to push for wage and benefit rises". However, on one point he is (and I know he recognises this) off-beam.

On the serious issue of energy poverty, he adds that we "push for the labour movement to campaign for public ownership and democratic planning of the energy industry, which among other things would allow a drive to reduce bills."

The focus, I contend, of driving down energy bills, should not be driving down the selling-price per unit energy, but driving down the needed energy use – not through ecological austerity, but through increased energy efficiency. Ambitious schemes for mass insulation and retrofitting passive temperature regulation systems and co-ordination temperature regulation through networks of heat pumps and hot and cold reservoirs could reduce the energy cost of temperature regulation. Public schemes could retrofit efficient electric cooking and other appliances. This would allow a high standard of living with lower energy use.

Socialising energy production would,

crucially, facilitate the rapid phasing out of fossil fuels, a large rapid ramping up of low-carbon – renewable and nuclear – energy, plus upgrading of grid infrastructure, and use of geothermal and nuclear power plants' waste heat for district heating. This could limit acute supply shortages as currently. Socialising would also end corporate profits, and limit consumer price spikes – as this coming winter.

Renewables and nuclear, on many calculations, are cheaper per unit energy produced than the equivalent cost for fossil power, over their lifecycle. The major financial drawback of those low-carbon options is short-term, the substantial upfront cost of construction, comprising the majority of their overall cost. This is compounded by much fossil infrastructure already existing, reducing future upfront construction costs. To start, then, energy production would be more expensive.

It is ecologically necessary to make a transition as rapidly as technically workable, so a workers' government would throw as much wealth at it – taken from the rich – as needed to cover upfront costs.

Increased domestic, transport, and industrial efficiency would shrink net energy use. In the other direction, however, would be global levelling up of quality of life, transport, health, and other necessary infrastructure. There would be energy costs for attempts (which I would advocate) to ameliorate historic ecological damage. Biodiversity restoration, carbon sequestration, clean up of other pollutants, maybe even solar radiation management.

These initiatives could only hope to

take the edge off future climate catastrophes driven by emissions and activity to date. Many of these initiatives come at significant ecological costs and risks, as does even renewable energy generation. But, some such initiatives will likely be the lesser evil.

Possibly even to the extent that carbon sequestration's need would come to dominate energy usage, taking over as the driving force of expanded energy production and of energy prices.

Directly subsidising energy selling-prices *in particular* (relative to other prices) would be ecologically misplaced only to a lesser degree than – as Martin recognises – cutting fossil fuel tax would be. Alongside other factors, the considerably cheaper residential electricity price in Russia is driving many in Siberia to set up "bitcoin mining" in their homes – wasting huge amounts of electricity and computational resources. Subsidising energy-intensive air-conditioning and heating to (further) undercut retrofitting passive temperature regulation would be a bad thing.

Subsidising in a "progressive" rather than a regressive way, such as a small quota of free electricity rather than subsidising the per unit energy price, may be less bad. It would require an expansion or integration of bureaucracy – energy companies currently charge per household, with no need to know or verify the actual occupancy. Cost of living payments are more progressive still, can be scaled up further without problems. If free electricity rationing covered more than a minimum, it may well feed bad ecological incentives discussed above, perhaps via reselling.

Our solution is workers' control and public works, not price signalling and ecological austerity, but we do not want bad price signalling. □



Action on Covid-19

Covid rates in South Korea and Finland are rocketing, but in the other recent high-Covid-rate countries (ones that had low rates in 2020 – New Zealand, Australia, Taiwan, Japan, Norway, etc.) they are now ebbing. Covid hospital admissions rates in Britain have decreased steadily since early July. They remain quite high. We can't know what will happen in winter, with other viruses and possible new Covid variants. We need to demand preparations in the next months:

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

Monkeypox: a history of neglect

By Zack Muddle

Outside of its endemic regions in Central and West Africa, confirmed monkeypox rates continue to rise to tens of thousands of people globally, six of whom have died: two in Spain, one each in India, Brazil, Ecuador, and Peru; none in the UK.

Monkeypox has long been infecting and killing people within Africa, with some variants killing up to 10% of those infected. Over one hundred people in Africa have been killed in this wave, in 2022, alone.

It is carried by rodents – not monkeys! – and historically

many infections were directly from these rodents: it did not spread far between humans. The smallpox vaccine provides immunity to monkeypox too, and monkeypox rates have been rising in Central and West Africa since the eradication of smallpox and the consequent reduction of vaccination against it.

The disease, those it kills, and the risks of wider global spread have all been neglected – despite warnings – by the richer countries of the global north, until it landed on our doorstep (in a time of heightened epidemic sensitivity). The lower case fatality rates here may well be a com-

bination of better and earlier treatment, better health overall, and the virus becoming less severe as it adapted to spread human-to-human – but we don't know.

Monkeypox, which causes lesions, is spread between humans primarily by skin-to-skin contact, such as during sex.

So far, in the west during this outbreak, it has been found disproportionately among a subset of gay, bisexual and queer men with multiple sexual partners. We often have more densely connected sexual networks than other people, which might allow it to spread faster. We tend to be much better at sexual health

screening so there is likely an ascertainment bias. Both factors may even be compounded by bad luck as to how, and through whom, monkeypox first came to the global north.

Other people can catch it too, and many others have. Stigma, as well as socially harmful, is therefore bad for public health. Plus, rates remain low altogether, and unlike Covid it is not easy to catch.

Many of the "higher risk" subset of queer men, plus individuals who have had contact with infected people, have been vaccinated against it in recent weeks, using a small-

pox vaccine. Hopefully that will curb this outbreak.

As with Covid, while vaccines diagnosis capabilities are needed most in mid-Africa, they are being hoarded by the global north. Production of them should be ramped up here, and in Central and West Africa using wealth and technical know-how redistributed from the global north. This should be coupled with a vast redistribution of global wealth to tackle health poverty; and limiting of the environmental destruction that fuels ever-more-frequent zoonotic spillovers. □

Kids' storytime fends off far-right attack

By Harry Shereen

In Bristol on 28-29 July, Drag Queen Story Time was scheduled to be conducted by the drag queen, Aida H Dee. These story hours were simply book readings, Aida would read a book that they had written, for example, *Its Snot a Problem* or *The Three Goats*. These books aimed at promoting inclusivity and difference for young readers to enable an understanding of different identities from an early age.

Previous dates, particularly in Reading and Crewe, had been disrupted. Those disrupting were a hodge-podge of different individuals, although in Crewe, the most active, potentially dangerous, far right group in the UK was out

in force. Patriotic Alternative had banners and placards, one of which shows a family holding an umbrella to shield themselves from a torrent of rainbow (meant to symbolize LGBTQ "ideology"). In Reading and Bristol, on the other hand, the protestors were of a different strand. These were conspiracy cranks, seasoned from anti-lockdown demos and attempts to storm, or "audit", Covid vaccination centres. The low points of that activity included taking a man about to die of Covid out of a hospital, and destroying medical equipment in a vaccination centre in Milton Keynes.

Patriotic Alternative was founded by Mark Collet in 2019. He was previously Direc-

tor of Publicity for the BNP and Chair for the Young BNP. The BBC documentary "Young, Nazi and Proud" showed him saying his "ideal society is Germany in the 1930s". A video of Young BNP activists shows them decrying various "degenerate" things – Zionists, gays and uh...Stephen Lawrence's mother. This video had Collet's fingerprints all over it, and features none other than future National Action member and sex offender Jack Renshaw.

On Friday 29th, Bristol libraries changed the times around, totally bamboozling the assembled bigots, who went to the libraries to find no one there. Aida then went to Cornwall, where the far right protests seemed to have an



even worse time – they were opposed at every venue. □

• Abridged: more bit.ly/a-dhd

Strikes can change the mood at Labour conference

By Lewis Joyes

From what we know about the delegates elected from Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs) – the closing date was 17 June – a stronger showing from the right is likely at the 2022 Labour conference (Liverpool, 24-28 September) than in 2021 or 2019.

But what this will mean for votes at Conference remains to be seen, and depends a lot on what the unions do. And conference 2021 demonstrated that even under Starmer's leadership, the left could still win policy positions. It wasn't the high tide of 2019, but it wasn't low tide either.

Twelve

In 2019 and 2021 up to 20 different policy motion categories could be prioritised by delegates (ten by unions, ten by CLP delegates). In 2022 this will be reduced to twelve (six from each bloc). Classification by topic can be manipulated by the Conference Arrangements Committee, and we lose by this, but there is still room for a broad scope of debate.

Policy motions to conference remain open to 15 September, and emergency motions to

22 September. We don't yet know what rule changes will get debated. Labour Left Internationalists (LLI) has been pushing three motions (bit.ly/3-motions), which *Solidarity* supports. All three of those are also endorsed by Momentum from their "policy primary": for free movement and migrant rights; for public ownership of energy; and for curbing police powers.

The public ownership of energy motion has now been submitted to Conference (by Eastleigh CLP and Elmet and Rothwell CLP), and the other two are set to be debated by CLPs over the course of the next few weeks. The more CLPs pass a motion, the better the chance of its topic getting prioritised, and the better the chance of its substance surviving the compositing process (in which different motions on a topic are chopped up and reassembled into, usually, two texts for floor debate).

LLI will also be supporting motions on Ukraine and on the strike wave and price surges, if they can get passed. (So will *Solidarity*).

LLI tell us they will run a ground operation at this year's conference, as they did in

2021 under their old name, Momentum Internationalists.

This will include handing out policy broadsheets and bulletins on Sunday, Monday and Tuesday to delegates and Conference attendees, promoting meetings called by the Labour Campaign for Free Movement, the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign, etc. and supporting delegates in compositing. LLI asks those who want to help to email team@momentuminternationalists.org.

The Ukraine Solidarity Campaign (USC) is promoting a draft motion for solidarity with the people of Ukraine and their labour movement resisting the invasion, the cancellation of Ukraine's debt, increased military aid to ensure the liberation of Ukraine, and more: bit.ly/uk-motion.

The USC has been backed by the Labour-affiliated unions, NUM and Aslef, and been offered support by the GMB. But, as ever, how the unions use their right to put motions to conference will not be known until later.

As in 2021, the campaign to write support for proportional representation into Labour policy (run by Labour

for a New Democracy and Labour Campaign for Electoral Reform) seems to be getting most motions. It had 140 motions in 2021. Despite an 80-20 majority of CLP delegates supporting the composite, the union affiliate votes went heavily against and the motion fell.

Since then a number of major unions (including Unite and Unison) have had annual Congress votes in favour of PR. If their delegations vote that way, then it could win.

Starmer so far has refused to back PR, but he could shift. There is a left-wing case for PR – it gives voters more equal weight and distorts the electoral process less than first past the post – but also a right-wing one, seeing PR as the axis for an alliance with the Lib-Dems.

Left

This year's conference comes in the wake of a sustained rightward shift from the party leadership, a general rightward drift in most CLPs, and the proscription of seven organisations (including Workers' Liberty). There is still a left in Labour, but for now it is reduced in size and scope, on the back-foot, and disoriented.

But Conference is happening during the greatest upsurge in direct class struggle for at least a decade. There are now several national disputes, and more unions are balloting. The temperature continues to rise this "hot strike summer".

Many of the unions in dispute are affiliated to the Labour Party. The Labour leaders have at best offered tepid support to workers in some of the disputes (in the form of letters to CEOs and Ministers), and at worst betrayed them, via attempts to ban frontbench MPs visiting picket lines and the sacking of soft-left MP, Sam Tarry (for giving "unsanctioned interviews" to the press).

This new friction between the leadership of the Labour party and the rank-and-file in both Labour and the unions, and in some instances the union leaderships too, makes for a potentially energetic terrain for party activists. The left should use the period in the run-up-to, at, and beyond conference to get Labour on the side of strikes. This will strengthen the disputes, encourage others to action, and put necessary pressure on the Starmer leadership, and its cheerleaders. □

Trans healthcare: expansion, or alibi for cuts?

By Angela Driver

The interim recommendations of the Cass review have been published. This was a review commissioned by NHS England to look at how the Gender Identity Development Service (GIDS) can be improved. The service is for under 18s and is currently managed by the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust.

On the face of it there is much to be welcomed. The main recommendations are that the service needs to be expanded, that there should be more research so treatments are more evidence-based, and that the service should be more holistic – looking at the many needs of the children, not just their gender identity issues.

NHS England has approved plans to open new regional clinics, that have links with paediatric teaching hospitals, and mental health Trusts. They should open in 2023, and at that point the Tavistock will close. In the meantime patients will continue treatment as planned until patients and referrals are transferred to the new clinics.

Despite the overall positive recommendations, there are a few things about the Cass report that cause concern.

The Tavistock has been widely disliked. Patients found the service was poor and waiting times huge – over three years. Opponents of trans healthcare condemned it for giving puberty blockers to children and accused them of doing so too freely. Many of the criticisms that Cass makes are due to the service being overwhelmed with referrals, which have increased massively. Court cases, press attention, repeated changes in guidelines, and uncertainty have added to the pressure over the last few years, leading to increased staff turnover.

Others are to do with the fact it is the only such clinic for under 18s. The

service the Tavistock provides are decided by NHS England. Providing psychological support is a big part of what the Tavistock does, but it is not feasible to provide ongoing counselling – local services, such as the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are expected to provide this, but those services are also overwhelmed. The Tavistock has contributed to the existing evidence base. It provided one of the better powered studies, in a 2017 systematic review.

As the only such specialist clinic in the country it might have had an ongoing role to play in an expanded service. Cass gives no rationale for its closure. Transphobes have seen the decision to close the Tavistock as a victory.

Tavistock

The Cass interim review also criticises the Tavistock for inconsistencies, citing complaints that some practitioners have a more “affirmative” approach than others. Cass highlights “diagnostic overshadowing” – where other conditions such as mental health issues are not treated locally because they are under the Tavistock. Cass emphasises the need for “differential diagnoses” to be considered.

Taken together, the implication is that practitioners are keen to “affirm” children’s experience of their gender difficulties, that alternative or co-existing diagnoses are not considered, which could lead to incorrect treatment for gender dysphoria. This is the conclusion that transphobes have also made, which has added to their sense that Cass is “fighting their corner”. Yet most children referred to the Tavistock do not receive puberty blockers. Some become adults before they are seen in the Tavistock. It is more likely that puberty blockers are being under-prescribed, than over-prescribed.

There are two things that need to be separated out. Firstly, there is the child’s

view on their own gender. For example a child who was assigned male at birth, but strongly feels that they are a woman, that they are in the “wrong” body. The affirmative approach, means that the clinician acknowledges that this is how the child feels, and uses their preferred pronouns.

That is different to diagnosing “gender dysphoria”, or from deciding to give medical treatments for it. The diagnosis of gender dysphoria is based on DSM-5, and ICD-11:HA60 and HA61. The definitions are problematic, and rely on social norms, which are changing. But as Cass points out, giving a diagnosis of gender dysphoria does not tell you what treatment is appropriate. Clinicians generally agree this needs to be individually tailored to the child.

Hidalgo et al [explain](#) the “affirmative” approach acknowledges that gender varies and is not always constant. Many children who experience incongruity between their physical body and their gender find that this resolves during puberty. Hidalgo explains there is difficulty in differentiating between the “desisters” and “persisters” – i.e. – which children’s gender incongruence resolves, and which have a persistent gender dysphoria, for whom treatment is appropriate.

The interim recommendations puts a question mark over the continued use of puberty blockers. Cass says the final report will make recommendations on treatment based on a review of available evidence.

Cass notes much existing evidence is based on a population of mostly young trans women. The demographics have changed, there are now more non-binary people, more trans men and more people with autism being referred. She notes that in trans men the onset of gender dysphoria is often later and occurs after puberty has begun.

Puberty blockers have side effects and their long term effects are not all

known. Their use in trans children is different to the long-established use in “precocious” puberty. There, it is delaying an early puberty, whereas for trans children it means puberty occurs later than normal. It is right to be cautious. But there is every sign that clinicians already are cautious. International guidelines say puberty blockers are helpful for some trans children in specific circumstances. They have been used for decades, and the evidence there is indicates most trans children who are prescribed them have no regrets about this as adults. For most it has a positive benefit. Cass did not need to produce such uncertainty – she could have said that puberty blockers will continue unless there is clear evidence against their use, or similar. By leaving the question entirely open, she provides succour to the transphobes, while raising anxiety among trans children who are waiting for treatment.

Counselling

Cass notes that in Holland counselling happens before, during, and sometimes instead of hormone treatment, and that children here should get the same level of psychological support.

Shortly after her interim report, another report into CAMHS services highlighted the long waiting lists children face for psychological support – even after attempting suicide.

If it is thoroughly implemented in a way that is not warped by the government’s culture war, then the Cass interim review promises to significantly increase trans children’s access to healthcare. But there are already signs that the review may pander to the transphobes, as well as struggling to obtain the necessary resources. It will be down to the labour movement, trans rights, and LGBTQI+ campaigners to continue to fight for accessible specialist healthcare for children questioning their gender identity. □

Bangladesh tea-producing workers strike

By Mohan Sen

On 13 August 150,000 tea-producing workers in Bangladesh began an indefinite strike against poverty wages.

The Bangladesh Cha Sramik Union (BCSU, Bangladesh Tea Workers Union) is calling for an increase in the daily wage from 120 taka to 300. 120 taka

is about £1; workers on some plantations get slightly less.

The owners are offering 14 taka. Inflation is running at about 8% in Bangladesh. Even in this very low-wage country, very few earn as little as the tea workers; three quarters of them live in poverty according to the Bangladeshi government’s metric, against

21% overall. This in an industry producing billions of dollars profit, and in which production has surged since falling during the pandemic.

The government organised a “conciliation” meeting on 11 August but the bosses boycotted it. The move to an indefinite strike on over 150 plantations across Bangladesh

came after almost two years of them refusing to sign a new contract; months of protests; and strikes of two hours a day from 9 August.

The authoritarian-nationalist Awami League government has sided with the employers, using the machinery to set minimum wages in different industries to help slow things

down and frustrate workers’ demands.

Over 75% of tea workers in Bangladesh are women; a majority are from the country’s Hindu minority, mainly from lower castes; many are from indigenous “tribal” peoples, their ancestors having migrated from what is now India under the British empire. □

Against Putin, back Ukraine

By Dan Katz

William Burns, director of the CIA, estimates that Russian casualties in Ukraine have reached around 15,000 killed and perhaps 45,000 wounded. Russia has suffered the same number of military fatalities in a few months of war in Ukraine as the USSR in the decade it fought in Afghanistan.

A growing number of Russian troops are refusing to fight. For example, Corporal Ilya Kaminsky and 77 other troops from Russia's 11th Air Assault Brigade have refused to return to the front after four and a half months without leave during which, according to Kaminsky, around 1,000 troops – or half his battalion – had either been killed or injured.

Since Russia has not declared a war, but only a "special military operation", Russian soldiers are able to refuse to fight, but face dismissal if they do. Nevertheless, refuseniks are being illegally detained. Maxim Grebenyuk, a lawyer from the Moscow-based advocacy organisation, Military Ombudsman, says he knows of 140 troops who have been locked up for refusing to fight. The *Guardian* has seen testimony from one soldier, who stated: "As a result of what I believe were tactical and strategic mistakes made by my commanders ... and their total disregard for human life ... I made the decision not to continue in the military operation." This soldier was then jailed for more than a week in different cells in the Russian-controlled Luhansk.

Russia also seems to be assembling a new army corps of 10-15,000 personnel but finding it difficult to get new recruits.

Some young Russian men who have signed short contracts have found themselves on the battlefield after one week's training. According to Mediazona, for example, Yevgeny Chubarin, 24, was killed near Kharkiv after signing a three-month contract with the Russian army. He was killed after just four days. His mother, Nina Chubarina, said: "There was no training. They arrived, got a uniform and a machine gun – and that's it, go ahead."

Russia's war in Ukraine has damaged or destroyed 105,200 cars, 43,700 agricultural machines, 764 kindergartens, 1,991 shops and 634 cultural facilities, according to the researchers at the Kyiv School of Economics.

Ukraine's Health ministry reports that least 18 personnel have been killed and nearly 900 medical facilities damaged or destroyed during Russia's invasion of Ukraine. (*Guardian* 25 July).

Ukraine's Defence ministry estimated on 2 August that the war had damaged at least 140,000 residential buildings. The war has caused \$47.7bn of damage to apartment buildings and private

homes.

Damages to transport infrastructure, including roads and airports, stands at \$31.6bn. The cost of repairing Ukraine's infrastructure is estimated at \$185bn.

Rebuilding the country as a whole may cost \$1tn.

Workers' Liberty demands that the Western powers cancel Ukraine's debts.

More than 12 million Ukrainians from a population of 42mn have now been forced from their homes. 6.3mn are internally displaced, and another 6.2mn are refugees have been dispersed, mainly across Europe.

By the end of July, 104,000 refugees from Ukraine had arrived in the UK, from 200,000 visa applications. As a proportion of the UK's population that is one of the lowest figures in Europe, a monument to our Tory's government's xenophobia. Workers' Liberty demands the right of refugees from the war in Ukraine be allowed to freely enter the UK and be supported generously, by the state, when they get here.

Troops

In addition, on 10 June a Ukrainian presidential adviser estimated that 10,000 Ukrainian troops had already died; President Volodymyr Zelensky reported that during most of June 100-200 Ukrainian troops were dying each day.

This imperialist Russian war is an affront to civilisation and is peppered with individual incidents of brutality: a Ukrainian prisoner of war castrated and murdered; scores of Ukrainian prisoners of war held in Olenivka killed by Russia after a faked Ukrainian missile attack; Ukrainian civilians abducted and tortured in the occupied south.

The war must end. And the only democratic peace can be one in which Russia withdraws from Ukrainian territory. Since Putin's stated war aims are to overthrow the Ukrainian government and abolish the entity of Ukraine, Putin must be forced to withdraw. That's why Workers' Liberty demands the West arms Ukraine, and donates military equipment which is adequate to force Russia out.

In the last weeks of July Ukraine began to use effectively the limited amounts of high quality artillery provided by the US. They have destroyed numerous arms dumps, rail hubs and Russian control centres, especially in the south, around Kherson. A Ukrainian counter-offensive is underway with the stated intention of liberating occupied Kherson city. Whether they can, in fact, retake the town is difficult to assess; it is very heavily defended and the Russians have moved large amounts of equipment and thousands of troops to the south of Ukraine, from Donbas.

So far the Ukrainians claim to have

taken 60 villages and small towns on their way towards Kherson and have destroyed bridges that the Russians use to resupply their occupying army. This has also weakened the Russian offensive in the East of Ukraine. The Ukrainians also seem to be pushing forward around Izyum in the country's North East.

This appears to be a moment of danger for Putin. He cannot afford to be defeated in Kherson Oblast. If the war turns, and Putin does begin to lose, perhaps putting his political position in Russia in doubt, it will also become a time of danger for us all. Putin has a lot in reserve, including chemical weapons, many more human resources, and the ability to widen the war across Europe. □

- Moldova: ex-president Igor Dodon, leader of the pro-Russian opposition, and currently under house arrest facing corruption and treason charges, has demanded the pro-EU Moldovan government goes to Moscow to beg for a better energy deal from Russia.

Putin is using energy costs as a political weapon against Moldova. Gas prices will rise 47% in August and have risen 220% since January.

Moldova is a poor ex-Soviet state with a population of 2.6m. It has applied for EU membership and was granted candidate status in June.

Transnistria, the sliver of Moldova Russia has effectively ruled for 30 years, could be the base for action against Moldova's government. Inside Moldova some local authorities are Russia-loyal, in areas such as Gagauzia, and could be the basis for Russian destabilisation. Moldova has 3,000 troops, poorly equipped.

- Bulgaria: On 31 July an arms warehouse in Karnobat owned by Emilian Gebrev exploded following a break-in. This is the fifth explosion and fire at facilities owned by Gebrev since 2011. In 2015 Gebrev nearly died in a nerve agent attack attributed to the Russian state. Recently Gebrev admitted to supplying arms to Ukraine. President Rumen Radev has set 2 October to hold Bulgaria's fourth parliamentary election in less than two years. Prime Minister Kiril Petkov's pro-EU coalition government collapsed in June. Opinion polls show some shift in opinion towards nationalist and pro-Moscow parties. Inflation stands at 17% and the country is unsure of its energy supply, much of which comes from Russia.

- Kazakhstan has significantly increased its military spending, from the equivalent of \$1.7bn last year to \$2.6bn. Alarmed by the invasion of Ukraine President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev is looking to strengthen links



with China and with the West.

Despite a close political relationship with Putin's Russia, Tokayev has refused to officially recognise the so-called People's Republics of Luhansk and Donetsk. 20 percent of Kazakh citizens are ethnic Russians, largely living along the long northern border with Russia. Russian nationalists claim that these areas belong to Russia. Kazakhstan has banned demonstrations against the Russian invasion of Ukraine, but also made it illegal to display the pro-Russian "Z" symbol.

- Georgia: former President, and current deputy chair of Russia's Security Council, Dmitry Medvedev, has called for Russia to "restore the borders of our Motherland" by retaking the now independent state of Georgia. He also believes Ukraine should "disappear from the world map".

In a social media post that has now been deleted Medvedev also described Kazakhstan as an "artificial state" and stated that Kazakh government policy "can be classified as the genocide of Russians."

- Kosova, largely ethnically Albanian, was formerly ruled as a province of Serbia and has an eight percent Serb minority, mainly in the north of the country. Following the Kosova war of 1998-9, in which NATO intervened, Kosova declared independence from Serbia in 2008, and is now recognised by around one hundred countries. There is a 3,800-strong NATO-led force in Kosova, KFor, deployed to Kosova in 1999.

On Sunday 31 July ethnic Serbs blocked roads in the north of Kosova in protest against new regulations that would require Serb drivers to display Kosovan number plates. About 50,000 Serbs living in northern Kosovo use licence plates and identity cards issued by Serbian authorities. A significant part of the conflict is the malign influence of Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic, an unpleasant Serb nationalist. Vucic has close relations with Putin's regime in Moscow, which has enthusiastically been backing the Serb minority in Kosova.

Serbia, which is completely dependent on Russian gas, refuses to join sanctions against Moscow.

- The Ukraine Solidarity Campaign is appealing for funds to help the mineworkers' unions in Ukraine: bit.ly/u-m-aid □

Self-determination for the people of Taiwan!

By Chan Ying

Prior to Nancy Pelosi's visit, Biden had quietly continued with Trump's approach of upgrading its relationship with Taiwan as a strategic move against mainland China (PRC). Her visit was however a high profile event, and predictably provoked a reaction from Beijing which was unprecedented in scale and ferocity. Never before had People's Liberation Army (PLA) forces surrounded the whole island, sent fighter jets across the informal border between Taiwan and the mainland, and fired missiles flying over the island.

The military exercises continued longer than most people expected. Foreign countries and companies must have been wondering how to extract their people from China and Taiwan.

And then the announcement came abruptly that the drill was over. On the same day, Beijing published a policy white paper repeating its previous 1993 position of seeking peaceful reunification under the formula of "One Country, Two Systems". This is the same formula that Beijing has used to administer Hong Kong and Macau after taking back the two colonial territories from the UK and Portugal, in 1997 and 1999 respectively.

This time, Beijing agreed that other nations may set up consulates in Taiwan, while international organisations will be allowed to establish offices. However, the 1993 paper's proposal of permitting Taiwan to maintain its defense forces was removed.

The Taiwan government immediately rejected this "peaceful reunification" offer delivered by war games. Neither Taiwan's government nor citizens would have faith in such formulas, especially after what has happened in Hong Kong.

In 1979, the USA recognized the People's Republic of China as the "sole legal government of China", eight years after the inevitable majority vote in the UN in 1971 to recognize Mao's regime. Under Deng Xiao-ping, the PRC in 1979 joined forces with the US against the

USSR, supporting the US against the USSR in Afghanistan as well as invading Vietnam, which was an ally of the USSR. Deng also opened up China to outside investment, thus starting four decades of economic transformation which has resulted in China becoming the world's foremost manufacturing powerhouse, with a GDP second only to the US.

The USA "recognises" but not "acknowledges" the PRC's position that Taiwan was part of China. The Taiwan Relations Act commits the USA to maintain a de facto governmental relationship with Taiwan, including the supply of defensive weapons. The "strategic ambiguity" of the USA's One China policy aimed to deter Taiwan from declaring formal independence and also deter Beijing from seizing Taiwan.

In 1895, Japan defeated the Qing dynasty in a war over control of Korea, and gained Taiwan as a colony. After Japan's surrender in 1945, Taiwan was handed over to the Nationalist Chinese Government controlled by Chiang Kai Shek's KMT. The KMT then lost the civil war against the CCP in 1949 and retreated to Taiwan.

Taiwan has been a separate political unit from China for 127 years, despite the claims of both the KMT and the CCP, renewed in 1992, that there is only one China, of which Taiwan is a part. The Democratic Progressive Party now in power in Taiwan maintains that Taiwan is already an independent country called the Republic of China, so its stance is that there are two Chinese Republics, not one. That is its version of the "status quo".

In 2020, the National Chengchi University Election Study Centre reported that: "Some 62.6 per cent identified themselves as Taiwanese while only 2 per cent identified as Chinese and 32.6 per cent considered themselves to be both. Separately, when asked to choose between a Taiwanese identity and a Chinese one, 86 per cent identified themselves as Taiwanese over Chinese, while 6.2 per cent saw themselves as Chinese over Taiwanese."

Two years on, with tensions high be-

tween China and US, it is likely that even fewer would identify themselves as Chinese, even though 95% of Taiwanese are ethnically Han Chinese, mostly speaking Hokkien/Fujianese, the same language spoken in China's Fujian province across the Taiwan straits.

Status quo

The Study Centre's most recent poll, in July, found that 56.9 per cent of respondents either want no change or prefer to delay any decision regarding unification with China. A further 25.2 per cent prefer the status quo, leaning towards independence. Just 5.1 per cent press directly for independence. Only 1.3 per cent support unification.

Taiwan is a densely populated island, half the size of Ireland but with a population (24 million) nearly five times bigger. It has a highly developed market economy, 21st in the world. Its GDP per capita is twice that of mainland China. Taiwan and Hong Kong were the twin engines of China's economic take-off, the very first to invest heavily after China opened up in 1979. Much of China's technology and manufacturing infrastructure is reliant on Taiwanese businesses. Apple's three largest suppliers – Foxconn, Wistron and Pegatron – are all Taiwanese. Foxconn employs over a million people in 30 locations in China. China is Taiwan's largest export market. The two economies are inextricably linked.

China's top chipmaker, SMIC, has a Taiwanese CEO. He and many senior engineers worked for Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co (TSMC), probably the world's most valuable semiconductor company, leading in global research and with the world's largest "pure-play" semiconductor foundry operation. If TSMC chip foundries which produce 64% of the world's advanced microchips were destroyed or their key staff were dispersed as a result of an invasion, Beijing's ambition to be self-reliant for the most advanced microchips in ten years' time would go up in smoke. The whole world would also suffer from the disruption.

With China's mounting internal economic turmoil, its largely untested military machine, its dependence on a healthy Taiwanese economy, and the prospect of severe US sanctions, invasion ought not to be on the Beijing government's agenda, for now. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is uncomfortably aware of Russia's quagmire in Ukraine. So, having stirred up so much jingoistic anti-US fervour, Beijing has hastened the release of this previously drafted white paper, in its attempt to head off its domestic wolf warriors.

However, the CCP will continue to pursue its goal relentlessly, just waiting for a favourable opportunity in the future. President Xi, seeking his 3rd term of office by neutralising his factional opponents inside the CCP, cannot be seen to be weak against the US.

As socialists we are unconditionally in support of the Taiwan people's right to self-determination. We must oppose any attempt by the PRC to use military, diplomatic or economic pressure to impose its will on Taiwan. No to backroom deals! Only the people of Taiwan people should have the right to decide on their destiny! □



Some union contingents joined the Trans Pride demo on 9 July 2022

Support Sri Lanka protesters against repression

By Sacha Ismail

On 9 July the biggest protests in Sri Lanka's history overthrew the authoritarian nationalist government of president Gotabaya Rajapaksa. His successor Ranil Wickremesinghe, appointed prime minister by Rajapaksa in May as a bland technocrat he hoped would be more acceptable to protesters, quickly unleashed a heavy wave of repression.

As [outlined in detail](#) (5

August) by a coalition of international human rights organisations, Wickremesinghe has introduced a state of emergency in which protesters have been stigmatised as "terrorists" and over a hundred arrested; police granted sweeping powers abrogating basic civil liberties; occupiers in Colombo cleared violently despite having already agreed to leave; and trade unionists, journalists and human rights

campaigners brutally targeted.

The arrested include one of Sri Lanka's best known trade unionists, the secretary of the Ceylon Teachers Service Union (named Joseph Stalin), and multiple leaders of the country's student movement, which played a central role in the overthrow of Rajapaksa.

Meanwhile senior figures in Rajapaksa's government, some of them with very serious criminal accusations against them,

remain free. "Gota" himself has fled to Singapore to avoid possible prosecution, including for war crimes against Sri Lanka's Tamil minority.

Wickremesinghe's repression is not just a matter of restoring political authority. He wants to eliminate opposition to an economic programme whose first outlines have been made clear by the announcement hiking electricity rates 75%.

In April and May millions of workers took part in political strikes to oust Rajapaksa, and working-class struggles played an important role throughout the protests and preceding them. Faced by the new wave of repression, what will workers' organisations do? Sri Lanka's workers and democracy activists need solidarity. More soon.

• workersliberty.org/sri-lanka for more

Linking social and democratic struggles in Israel

By Uri Weltmann

On 1 November Israel will hold its fifth general election in four years. Although the return of Benjamin Netanyahu would be dismaying, both the plausible outcomes are very right-wing in terms of domestic social policy and of the oppression of the Palestinians. In this grim political landscape, struggles by the radical left in Israel are giving glimmers of hope. Uri Weltmann, national field organiser for Jewish-Arab social movement Omdim be'Yachad-Naqef Ma'an ([Standing Together](#)), spoke to Daniel Randall.

The political crisis is linked to and deepened by social and economic crises following the pandemic. After 30 years of neoliberal austerity and privatisation, welfare and public services were not able to cope. Healthcare has been slowly privatised since the mid-1980s, social services are weak. The education system has been partially privatised. Schools are underfunded, classrooms overcrowded. Real unemployment rose to over a million.

In comparison to other countries, including ones with right-wing governments, Netanyahu's government gave very few benefits during the pandemic. We saw waves of strikes – by doctors, social workers, teachers and others – and growing social unrest. This found a sort of political expression in anti-corruption protests, the backdrop against which last year's election took place. Netanyahu was unable to form a government and finally forced out.

But the coalition's only glue was opposition to Netanyahu. Its contradictions have ultimately led to downfall.

Almost all its parties draw their main electoral support from upper-middle-class layers. Working-class and lower-middle-class Jewish Israelis generally vote for the right.

What is the participation of Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel in politics?

There is a growing feeling that, having been through the experience of an Arab party [the conservative Islamist Ra'am, United Arab List] joining the coalition government, Palestinians are not able to influence Israeli politics.

Arab-Palestinian citizens have been represented in the Knesset since Israel was formed. There have been three main political currents: Islamic, Arab-nationalist, and the current represented by the Communist Party [CP], which traditionally defined itself as binational, Jewish and Arab. The CP's influence amongst Jewish Israelis has

declined, with most of its support now drawn from the Arab-Palestinian minority.

In 2015 four parties representing Palestinians united in the Joint List. This was seen with some optimism by many Arab-Palestinian citizens. That year the Joint List became the third largest bloc in the Knesset. In the March 2020 elections, it won a record high of 15 seats out of 120.

Under the leadership of Palestinian socialist Ayman Odeh, from the CP, the Joint List was seen as a real player. But in early 2021, it split, with the United Arab List breaking away. This party is Islamist-conservative, and focuses only on Muslim Palestinians, ignoring the Christian minority as well as the Druze community.

They approached the last elections saying they were ready to join a coalition government, even one led by Netanyahu. The Joint List refuses to join a government, but says it might support an anti-Netanyahu, centre-left government on a confidence-and-supply basis.

What about the extra-parliamentary left?

I see Standing Together [which the CP is also active in] as the main source of optimism on the Israeli political scene.

We formed seven years ago. We have grown significantly in the last three. At the start of 2019, we had 600 members; now around 3,300. We organise both Jewish and Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel – against the occupation, for peace, against racism and for equality, and for workers' rights and social and environmental justice.

Our most recent campaign, which has had some success, has been to increase the minimum wage. Israel has a high percentage of low-paid workers. The minimum wage hasn't gone up since 2017; it's NIS 29.12 [New Israeli Shekels, about £7.40], insufficient to meet very high rents and a rising cost-of-living. In the last year, food prices went up 20% and housing costs 15%. Almost half the salaried workforce is paid less than NIS 40 per hour.

In August 2021, we launched the campaign "Minimum 40", to raise the minimum wage to NIS 40 per hour. The demand resonated across diverse layers of the working class. We saw grassroots action taken in major urban centres such as Tel Aviv, but also in the periphery, in small towns in the north of Israel, even ultra-Orthodox towns such as Bnei Brak. The formal political life in these towns is dominated by the right.

The campaign was able to do something which is key to transforming Israeli society, bringing people together from various communities to struggle around shared class interest. As a

consequence, we have had ultra-Orthodox people joining Standing Together. We first engaged them around the minimum wage, but we have been able to persuade some of our broader perspectives and they have now joined Standing Together. Similarly, we have young Arab-Palestinians, previously anti-political, become politicised through the campaign and join. This is not to say, of course, that everyone involved in the campaign became a socialist, but some of those who initially came part of the way have been convinced to go more of the way.

To transform Israel, including in its relationship to the Palestinians, we need a left that is heterogenous and can mobilise across diverse communities, both among Jewish and among Arab-Palestinian citizens. A left that is able to mobilise in ultra-Orthodox communities, for example.

Minimum 40 also had a parliamentary element. A bill was cosponsored by 47 MKs, really a very high number, including both Jewish and Palestinian ones. On 8 June, we succeeded in forcing a preliminary vote, and it passed. Three coalition factions defied government discipline in this vote! We saw this as a big victory after ten months of campaigning – canvassing, petitioning, leafleting.

The government broke up before we could follow through and get the bill into law. Still, we see all this as a tremendous vindication of our approach. It showed that if you organise and struggle, you can make gains.

Social struggles are schools for class consciousness. They make people realise we are not in the same boat as our rulers. Israeli workers fighting to raise the minimum wage helps efforts to build a movement against occupation, by sharpening class contradictions within Israel. Of course, this is not an automatic or mechanical process. Raising the minimum wage in Israel won't lead to the evacuation of the settlements. Making those connections requires the intervention of socialists to draw those links, to persuade workers of a perspective that connects the struggle for



social transformation within Israel with the Palestinian struggle for independence and equality.

We think our vision, class-based and rooted in socialism, can provide the basis for doing that.

Many commentators say “the two state solution is dead”, with the implication that this opens up possibilities to fight for a single-state settlement of some kind. What is your view?

Public opinion polls continue to show that having an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel is the favored solution for both Palestinians and Israelis, although a majority of them remain pessimistic about achieving it. The fact that anti-Palestinian racism is rampant, that hawkish and pro-settlement parties remain powerful, and that the US government gives full support to the occupation – all of these can be pointed to as reasons why the status quo is supposedly bound to remain in place, and no real advances made.

One of our main challenges is fighting despair and hopelessness, showing that when we organise and fight, we can win. That's true regarding social, environmental and democratic issues inside Israeli, and also vis-a-vis the question of the occupied Palestinian territories.

There is already a "one-state solution": we have a single state exercising its power over the whole territory. What is needed is for Palestinians in the territories occupied in the 1967 war to achieve their national independence within a recognised and viable state. □

- Abridged with thanks from US socialist magazine *New Politics*. Full text, in which Uri discusses the anti-Palestinian and anti-working class policies of the coalition and the participation of “left” parties in it; Standing Together’s campaigning following Palestinian attacks in Israel in March/April; and more about the kind of democratic two-state settlement they fight for: bit.ly/uwinterview. In May we reported on Israel’s fragmented and unstable coalition government bit.ly/israeligovt and its foreign policy bit.ly/israelifo.

Knowledge from

By Simon Nelson

Since 2019, and since 2020 almost weekly, *Solidarity* has had a “worker’s diary” column, variously from an engineer, paramedics, a trackworker, rail station staff and drivers, and a fire-fighter.

Articles vary. Some cover what life at work is like, like an earlier series in *Solidarity* (2010-2012) “My life at work”. Others focus more on conflict and discussion in the workplace.

The industrial and workplace bulletins produced by Workers’ Liberty carry similar snapshots of workplace life.

They are almost unique on the Trotskyist left in Britain, both today and historically. No other regularly produced publication carries a similar diary format. Notes from Below and the Angry Workers of the World, more autonomist-influenced, sometimes produce similar reports, but usually much longer pieces designed to give a deeper overview of a workplace and its processes, rather than a diary format.

The idea draws more on the American Trotskyist movement, from the SWP-USA of James P Cannon and from the maverick post-Trotskyist anti-Stalinist groups around C L R James and Raya Dunayevskaya.

The “Johnson-Forest” (James-Dunayevskaya) grouping had influence on some of the French iterations of the diary format from the Socialisme ou Barbarie group, particularly Daniel Mothé’s (Jacques Gautrat’s) reports from Renault.

Trotsky

Cannon’s desire in the 1930s to make the US Trotskyist paper (*The Militant* or *Socialist Appeal*) more vibrant and increase its “worker-correspondents” was likely influenced by correspondence with Trotsky in the late 1930s. Trotsky described the paper as “...very well done from the journalistic point of view; but it is a paper for the workers and not a workers’ paper. As it is, the paper is divided among various writers, each of whom is very good, but collectively they do not permit the workers to penetrate to the pages... Each of them speaks for the workers (and speaks very well) but nobody will hear the workers. In spite of its literary brilliance, to a certain degree the paper becomes a victim of journalistic routine. You do not hear at all how the workers live, fight, clash with the police or drink whiskey. It is very dangerous for the paper as a revolutionary instrument of the party. The task is not to make a paper through the joint forces of a skilled editorial



board but to encourage the workers to speak for themselves”.

Cannon responded (*Socialist Appeal* 3/45, 27 June 1939): “we have a vast reserve in the shape of worker-correspondents in the field, a reserve which unfortunately has been all too little utilised up till now. Room must be found for the contributions of these worker-correspondents in order to give the paper a more proletarian stamp and make it a truer reflection of the workers’ lives.”

Cannon had made a similar point ten years earlier in the *Daily Worker* 5/150 (26 June 1928): “Worker correspondence – letters from workers in the shops and in the fire of struggle – are the cornerstone of proletarian journalism. We have made but little headway in encouraging and training workers to write for our paper despite the efforts which have been made”.

In *New International* 4/12 (December 1938) the editors republished Karl Marx’s *A Workers’ Inquiry*, perhaps for the first time since it was written for French socialists in 1880. Marx argued: “[The workers] alone can describe with full knowledge the misfortunes from which they suffer... only they, and not saviours sent by providence, can energetically apply the healing remedies for the social ills to which they are prey”. “Socialists of all schools... being wishful for social reform, must wish for an exact and positive knowledge of the conditions in which the working class – the class to whom the future belongs – works and moves... Statements of labour’s grievances are the first act which socialist democracy must perform in order to prepare the way for

social regeneration”. In their preamble the editors say: “The whole aim of the questions is to make the worker aware of his own predicament in capitalist society, to cut through the fog of illusions and habitual responses and fictions which prevent the worker from understanding his social world, and by thus making the worker conscious of his predicament giving him a chance to solve it.”

“With the changes in industrial production during the past half-century, certain of these questions in their given form have, of course, become archaic. But no one would find difficulty in modifying them in such a manner as to bring them up to date. And no one will doubt what the truthful answer to them would reveal, more shockingly and brutally today by far than fifty years ago: the incalculable, hideous cost that the masses of humanity pay for the continuance of the rule of capitalism”.

Perhaps the worker’s diary format was seen as a way to bring the approach up to date. In 1944 the Cannon wing of the US Trotskyists started publishing a *Diary of a Steelworker*, by Theodore Kovalesky.

Kovalesky, likely a pseudonym, is a worker in an unnamed steelworks, perhaps in Chicago, or by the end of his career in Buffalo. By the time he starts writing he seems to be already in his 40s, with long experience in several steelworks, including a bloody battle for union recognition early on. His first columns are in fact styled as letters to his son “Joey”, at that time serving in the US military during World War Two, giving a picture of working-class life “back home”.

As his son is fighting a war abroad, Kovalesky is fighting a war in the steel works. “We fight, not each merely for his own kids, but for all kids – those hollering and scampering around the streets today and those not yet born, that they may have a world fit for them to grow up in. Take care of yourself, Joey. We need you back in the union”.

The columns in *Solidarity* tend to report the recent past, with a week or at most a month between the events covered and publication. Kovalesky’s is a mix of sometimes general reports – the smell and the heat of the steelworks, the injuries, the fatigue, the speed-ups, the efficiency drives, etc. – and longer reminiscences of events, strikes, arguments and fights.

“It is a bleak, windswept plain, drifted heavily with snow. In the centre of it stands a grimy, battered shed of corrugated iron with a strange covered incline running out and up from it, black against the snow. From the incline pours a steady cloud of steam that hovers over it and dissipates in the frigid air.”

“This is the pig machine. Inside the shed men are pouring iron from the great ladles into a continually moving conveyor of pig moulds that travel slowly up the incline as the molten iron cools and hardens, and then drop the pigs crashing into flat cars that will carry them away. The platform men drip sweat as they poke the runners with long sticks keeping the flow of iron steady, but their backs are freezing cold.”

“The lime man runs in and out, checking the flow of lime that sprays in the inside of the pig moulds, and the ‘sticker’ men stand shivering near the flat cars, knocking down with long bars those pigs that have stuck to the moulds after they have turned over”.

Kovalesky tells the story of how he was won over to socialism through argument with a man named “Al” in his first job. At the time, says Kovalesky, he had a bit more schooling than the others he worked with. He planned to attend night school and then “take my place in the world up there with the people on top”.

When “Al” told him of the difficulties of a worker trying to “rise out of his class” of the “atrocities that the ruling classes had inflicted upon the workers during the long course of the class struggle”, Kovalesky at first did not believe him.

“How, I reasoned, could such nice, polite, well-educated people be guilty of such brutality?” Later: “When life

the workplaces

began to be almost unbearable for me with its privations, with its worries and with a new hopelessness, I began to turn more and more to the things that old Al had told me, and to look for other people who also believed those things. Then, when I found them, the hopelessness turned to a fierce optimism, a sense of brotherhood with all the oppressed, the insulted, the poverty stricken... the workers".

Kovalesky is a skilled writer, with a wry sense of humour. He discusses: "the kid who lost an arm in the mill. They gave him a fairly easy job... and they say he doesn't need to worry about being laid off. I heard one fellow say, 'I don't know, I think I'd trade an arm for job security.' No arm, but – what the hell! – he's sure of his job... or at least he thinks he is".

He makes the case for a united workforce, in tones which now might seem labouring the obvious, but in the 1940s USA were not. "... [W]e are all human beings, none of us inferior, none of us superior as a race, but who can and will learn that most of the boys pull together in a crisis like a strike, and that the day will come when all peoples yellow, brown, black and white will live together in brotherhood".

Obstacles

Talking about an early union drive with him and his son as a key "father-son team" he recalls a conversation with "Mac", a representative of the existing company union. "No matter where you work you know Mac. And maybe you like him; lots of people do... But there's a Mac in every shop and you know him".

Kovalesky is trying to organise for the new US industrial-union movement, the CIO, to come into the plant so they can make gains like the autoworkers. Mac doesn't want any "red organisation" in the plant. Eventually they strike, the company makes some concessions, and it seems "Mac" has been won over.

"But when the union was recognised, just about everybody belonged, Mac was there in the hall at every meeting, raising hell about the company. The man really could speak, and he took the floor at every opportunity. Soon he was a steward. Now he's vice-president, a great Roosevelt man, really outstanding for his PAC (Political Action Committee) activity. We'll probably kick him out next election".

Kovalesky also writes about steel workers' life outside the works. "It was an old story that Pete told me. It's been told before in all languages and it will be told and re-told many more times, I'm afraid. Pete told me what a swell lit-



tle wife Lois was. He told me with whiskey tear in his eyes how crazy he was about her. 'Before we were married... we used to plan how it would be. We were going to save up and maybe get a little place of our own. I wasn't going to work in that damn steel mill all the rest of my life. Some day we thought we could get away from here, maybe I'd open up a little garage, or we thought maybe we'd get a little farm or something. You know, some place where we could have something of our own and a little security.'

"But that was all finished. Pete was now blubbing quite openly from the double shots he had been drinking before I got him out... It's all over now. She's finally gone and left me, and hell, I don't blame her.

"I never wanted to go out anywhere or do anything. I'd come home, grouchy as hell and she wouldn't want to take it... she had plenty to gripe about too... she wants to have some fun when she is young, not just scrub floors and wash a bunch of dirty work clothes and do the cooking.'

"I knew what it was like. My old man and my old lady used to hate each other most of the time...and they were always scrapping like cats and dogs... I didn't want it to happen to me and it went and happened all the same... And we never had enough money..."

Some of the diaries deal with the fall-out for workers returning from the military: "it wasn't the same Jerry that had gone away. The guy that came back was a wreck of a man who walked unsteadily, who shook and trembled, and whose voice was broken and twisted into queer, guttural and indistinct sounds... Terry put his hands on Jerry's shoulder, spoke to him persuasively tried to convince him to go back to the Veterans' Bureau for hospitalisa-

tion or at least to get into one of the veterans' schools, but Jerry shook off the hand and began to swear brokenly and thickly. Then he turned and ran out of the room in a limping, lopsided manner. Gus and I could see tears glistening in his eyes. The door slammed behind Jerry, and we haven't seen him since".

Kovalesky reports on his efforts to explain his Trotskyist ideas, for example a conversation with a worker who used to be around the Communist Party and who says he may rejoin one day.

"Dave, the days you remember are dead. There's a funny thing about working-class political parties: without a good, solid program they'll go haywire. And that's just what happened to the Stalinists... that's what we call the Communist Party members, Stalinists... They're not Communists, and it's wrong to call them Communists... real Communists base their actions on the teachings of Karl Marx, but these people don't. They do whatever Stalin says they must do, whenever he says it.

"In those days you spoke about, they were pretty tough. They acted like revolutionists. That was their line. They said Roosevelt was a fascist. But then a few years later they said, and they say it now, that Roosevelt was a great friend of labour.

"Why? Because Hitler, the man Stalin signed a peace pact with, turned around and attacks the Soviet Union; and so they wanted to be friends with the American capitalist government, which was fighting against Germany at the same time... Later, on our way out, I gave him a copy of *The Militant*. He looked at it suspiciously and then grinned. 'This is what I mean. This is communism, I knew you were a Communist!' He's coming to our next forum".

Other contributions are letters to workers in other plants, on the eve of disputes, arguing for a strong "yes" vote for strikes. For a period in 1947 his column repeated previous contributions, because a national steel strike took up his time (and was covered at length in *The Militant*).

His articles began to cover wider political ground – for example, a series of letters to new subscribers to *The Militant* – and stopped completely in 1948, with no explanation given.

Kovalesky cropped up in the paper again once in 1951, with a short piece not dissimilar to his old diaries, and then finally in *The Militant* in 1958 reporting on a socialist election campaign in Buffalo.

He reappeared sporadically in the

Workers' World, paper of the "Marcy-ites" who split from the SWP because they backed the Russian invasion of Hungary in 1956, still with a "Diary of a Steelworker", but with the implication he may himself no longer work in steel; then disappeared again after *Workers' World* 2/2 (January 1960: the *Workers' World* online archive is incomplete). In 1948 when his regular column stopped, the SWP (US) had been involved in a faction fight with a minority sympathetic to the Presidential campaign of Henry Wallace, some of whom would go on to form the Workers' World Party.

Beyond that I don't know about "Theodore Kovalesky". But his best columns were valuable and have influenced our diary columns.

The Johnson-Forest (James-Dunayevskaya) group produced in 1947 probably the most famous of the English language "workplace diaries", but it was more a setpiece one-off report than a diary. In *The American Worker* Paul Romano (Phil Singer) wrote a report on his auto factory; unlike with Kovalesky, the report was coupled by a "theoretical" supplement by an outside writer, Ria Stone (Grace Lee Boggs).

Romano describes the work he and others do, and how they fit together in the production process. He reports on the attitude workers have to the union, whether they will attend union meetings, their thoughts on the bureaucracy. While Kovalesky gives the impression of being a genuine "worker-correspondent" Romano writes more as someone reluctantly carrying out a study who wishes not just, as Kovalesky would, that the job was less physically demanding and better paid, but that he would not have to do it at all.

The "theoretical" part two is not an easy read. Longtime James acolyte Martin Glaberman has written: "Fundamental to *The American Worker* is the dialectical relationship between the two parts. Without the theoretical conceptions of Part Two, there would not have been a Part One."

Revolution

In fact Stone's essay adds very little of value to Romano's. Romano provides insight into an auto factory of the 1940s. Stone labours to demonstrate that they recognise as yet that there had been no fusion in the Marxist movement between worker and intellectual but that *The American Worker* by at least presenting the two pieces side by side is getting closer to doing so. Romano's work also suffers heavily from a breath-

continued on page 14 →

→ from page 13

less pretence that the revolution is just round the corner, that thousands of class-conscious workers are throwing off the shackles of the union bureaucracy and ready to deepen and extend the class struggle.

The workplace-diary columns of Charles Denby (Simon Owens, also known as Matthew Ward) were probably the longest running and most comprehensive. Denby was a black US auto worker whose book *Indignant Heart: A Black Worker's Journal* is worth reading.

Born into a family of sharecroppers in the American South, Denby became an auto worker militant in Detroit from 1943. After brief stints in the Communist Party and Socialist Workers Party USA, in 1955 he became the editor of *News and Letters*, the monthly newspaper of a group led by Raya Dunayevskaya (who had by then parted ways with James). Denby wrote a diary column very nearly monthly from 1955 to his death in 1983, though over the years it became more a collection of stories from different workplaces than a monthly diary of his own experience.

Denby was recruited to the SWP-

USA by Genora Dollinger, a key figure in the Flint sit-down strikes of 1937, while they were at the same car plant. He was drawn towards James, and met Dunayevskaya, by discontent over what he saw as their slowness on black self-organisation and the recruitment and retention of black workers.

In 1951-2, Denby began dictating an autobiography, and Part 1 of *An Indignant Heart* was published in 1952, as a combination of memoir and detail of working life like *The American Worker*.

A later part two would cover later political events, well-written and with a lot of useful detail particularly about rank-and-file movements of black workers and the influence of Maoism in the 1970s, but with laboured philosophising about "Marxist-Humanism": the reader never gets much idea what the philosophical ideas are, but is repeatedly assured that only the philosophy of Hegel as understood by Marx, Lenin and Dunayevskaya enables correct conclusions.

The writing of Romano, Stone, and Denby is infused with frenetic insistence that the revolution is just around the corner, and the masses are ready

to throw off their chains, break with the bureaucracy, break with Stalinism, reformism etc. Kovalsky may look more pedestrian, but is closer to real life.

Since the 1970s, writers drawing on Italian "operaismo" or "autonomism" have emphasised "workers' inquiry", but often shorn of any real political content, telling stories of working-class life as if from a wondering outside observer and with little analysis, making almost a cult of it.

We are given to understand that

building up a larger and greater knowledge of how the productive forces interact will bring us eventually and organically to organisation and action. The tradition tends towards a cult of spontaneity, of informal organisation.

The value of the workplace diary format for the socialist movement cannot be merely as an archivist collecting the stories for posterity. It is about generating collective knowledge, making the inquiry and investigation collective, renewing the movement. □

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Diary of a Steel Worker



Diary of a Steel Worker

By Theodore Kovalsky

It took Terry O'Day quite a while to die, in fact, it took him several years.

I suppose you'll say, "Why, Terry isn't dead – I saw him in the union hall yesterday. What do you mean?" Well, a man can die and still leave his body walking around the streets. That's what happened in Terry's case. It's just his body that's left. You couldn't even say it's Terry's ghost that's around, because the ghost, the spirit of Terry O'Day, is gone. There's just a body with certain well-remembered ways going down to the union hall every day and sitting at the International Rep's desk. But it's not our old Terry.

I guess none of us who knew him will ever forget the real Terry O'Day, the big, black-browed, good-looking young Irishman with one of those grins that made you feel you'd always been his pal and always would be. I guess none of us will forget how he stuck



his neck out day after day all through the organising drive, when the old SWOC (Steel Workers Organising Committee) was signing up the men in our plant.

How the company hated Terry! Before it was over they managed to fire him, but of course we got him back after we won recognition in the big strike, in which he was one of the leaders. Then, after everything was all set up and moving pretty smoothly, when Terry was an officer of the local and one of the best grievance men we had, the company saw fit to reconsider their attitude toward him and tried to persuade him to take a foreman's job.

Terry blew up: "I was just a

no-good trouble-maker when you guys threw me out of here. Now we've got you licked you want to buy me off with a lousy two-bit foreman's job." He didn't take it.

It wasn't long before Terry was put on the union staff. All the fellows hated to see him leave the plant, because he'd been such a good grievance man and such a swell guy to work with, but then everybody was glad to have him right there in the union office fighting for us. The gang figured we'd get real representation with Terry on the staff. But bit by bit, Terry began to grow away from us.

It didn't happen all at once or even soon. Still, over a period of time we'd notice more and more things. Terry wasn't quite Terry. When he'd been away from the open hearth a while Terry got a little bulky around the waist; and he began to get sluggish in his ideas as well. We always used to think of him as mostly heart, courageous, fighting heart. But what kind of fighting heart does a man have when he'll turn back one grievance after another, retreating without even swinging a single punch? And what kind of fighting heart has a man got when

he lines up against his fellow workers, or in Terry's case, his former brothers, in favor of the no-strike pledge?

He saw us each day losing things that we had fought and bled for. He could see that when we couldn't strike we couldn't fight... and that the companies never stopped fighting. What had happened to Terry? Was Gus Miller right when he asked me one night, "Do you think Terry's getting paid off by the company?"

No, Terry didn't get paid in that kind of coin. It's just that Terry's got a new way of life. There's no sweating in the open hearth for Terry now. There's no more getting tired and miserable in the bleak, black winter mornings. There's no more discomfort and danger – no more cranes skimming over his head carrying ladles of molten iron. No more looking through blue glasses into the white-hot open doors of the furnaces.

Now there's a desk in front of him. His denim, his flannel shirts are used only on fishing trips. In their place in his wardrobe are tweeds, white shirts and happy-looking neckties.

In this world, nothing is free: Everything has its price, and

sometimes the price is too high. The price Terry paid was too costly. He came out of the plant a fighter, and he came out for the purpose of fighting. But gradually he became entangled in Phil Murray's [the union leader's] machine. At each step he paid a toll. He began to find that retreat was impossible, and that he could only blunder on to new payments and new defeats. He couldn't win: he didn't know why: he began to think, "So what the hell?" and go farther down.

Terry was a great guy – a swell guy! But he never had a chance. Without a political line of his own to follow, he had to take Murray's line – collaboration with the capitalists (which always means selling out the workers.) He had to stifle strikes and support the no-strike pledge. He had to try to tie the fellows to Roosevelt's coattails.

But all that meant death to the old tough, happy, honest Terry. And it meant the birth of new two-bit Murray bureaucrat going around under the name of Terry O'Day. □

• *The Militant*, Vol 8, No. 48, November 25 1944

Partition, Irish Protestants, and James Connolly



Connolly, politically unexpurgated

By Sean Matgamna

In Desmond Ryan's four-volume selection of Connolly (1948-51) there is a small piece entitled "The First Hint of Partition". It accurately says what partition will do to Ireland, North and South: "perpetuate in a form aggravated in evil the discords now prevalent, and help the Home Rule and Orange capitalists and clerics to keep their rallying cries before the public as the political watchwords of the day. In short, it would make division more intense and confusion of ideas and parties more confounded".

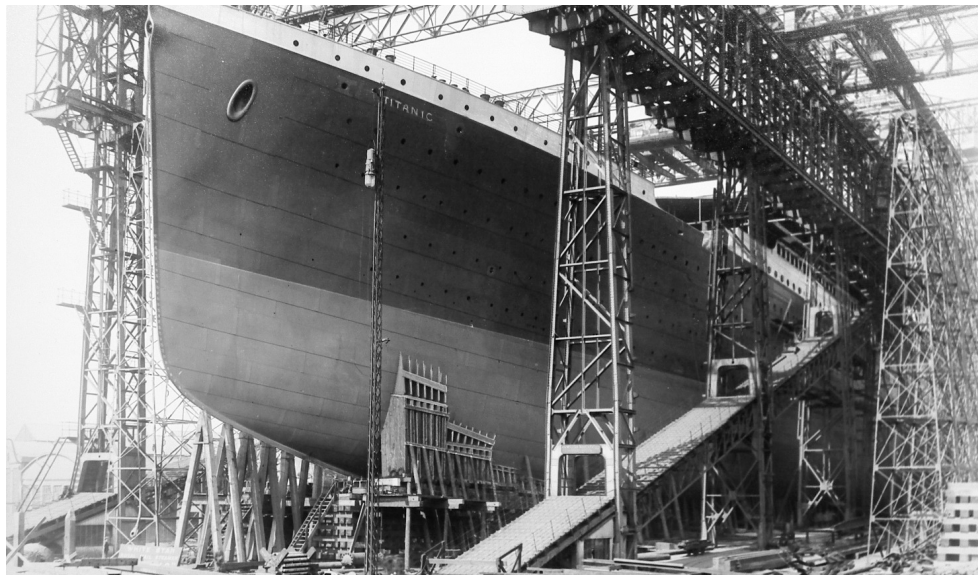
In fact that was a fragment sandwiched into a long article covering other subjects (*Forward*, 21 March 1914). The previous week in *Forward*, Connolly had written a much longer piece on "Labour and the proposed partition of Ireland".

In the Cork Workers' Club version Connolly's piece, with Ryan's title, "The First Hint", is preceded by the long piece on "Labour and the proposed partition".

Partition had become effective politics with the Liberal government's announcement on 9 March 1914 that it intended an Amending Bill to allow the counties and county boroughs of the north-east to vote to opt out of Home Rule, theoretically for six years. [1]

In 1910 the Liberals had become a minority government, dependent for their majority on the 80-odd Irish Home Rule MPs. Previously the Liberals had held back from a Home Rule Bill. Now they had to go forward with one, as they did on 11 April 1912; and now, after the Parliament Act of 1911, the House of Lords could not block this Home Rule Bill, as it had in 1893, but only delay it for two years.

The alternative was a General Election, which evidently both the Liberals and the Tory-Unionist opposition thought the government would lose. In all the dramatics of drilling, marching, arming, and petition-signing against Home Rule in 1912-13, that was what the Tory-Unionist opposition was demanding – a new General Election of the whole United Kingdom before Home Rule. The Tories' demand posed the question of the relevant area – the whole United Kingdom, or just Ireland – for deciding for and against Home Rule.



Socialists quote Bonar Law, the Canadian who led the Tories in the House of Commons, saying "there are things stronger than Parliamentary majorities" (at a rally at Blenheim, 27 July 1912). That what many bourgeois politicians feel, such as the Republican Party now in the USA. Bonar Law too felt that, in general, probably. But specifically he argued that the Liberal government was "a revolutionary committee which has seized by fraud upon despotic power". He continued: "There are two nations arrayed against each other in hostile camps, and, in my deliberate opinion, in all the elements which constitute national strength the nation which refuses Home Rule is stronger than the nation which desires it. There are those two nations, separated from each other, unfortunately, perhaps, separated from each other, by a gulf far greater than that which separates Ireland as a whole from the United Kingdom".

The idea that there were two Irelands had long been part of the folklore of Britain and British politics. In the 17th and 18th centuries the English state saw Catholics as potential allies of great-power rivals, France or Spain. After the "Williamite war" of 1689-91, the Irish Parliament, dominated by wealthy Protestants, brought in Penal Laws against the Catholic majority. The Union of 1800 abolished the separate Irish Parliament ("home rule"), and brought Ireland directly under the Westminster Parliament. Prime minister William Pitt intended that the Union be accompanied by rights for Catholics in Ireland and England (and for that reason it was at the time mostly supported by Irish Catholics, opposed by Irish Protestants). In fact "Catholic Emancipation" was won only in 1829, after a great Irish Catholic campaign;

By the late 1890s Belfast was one of the great industrial cities of the world. Its Protestant majority, including workers, prided themselves on their industrial prowess, with products such as The Titanic

the Irish-Catholic-nationalist bloc thus formed went on to campaign for Home Rule, now opposed by the Protestants.

Karl Marx, who was active, with his daughters Eleanor, Laura, and Jenny, in defence of Fenian prisoners, thought that a Home Rule Ireland would experience a great agrarian revolution that would spread to England, where the landlords were often the same people, and for that reason that England too needed an Irish revolution. The land question then had an importance then for labour and radical movements across the British Isles which it later lost. In the event, the English, before they left, carried out most of the Irish agrarian revolution against the landlords, by buying them out from above.

Thomas Babington Macaulay published his five-volume *History of England* in 1848-59. He said he was writing history so that it would be as unput-downable as a novel, and he did. The *History* became to generations of English, Scottish, Welsh, and Irish, readers what Eric Hobsbawm's books on *The Age of Revolution*, *The Age of Empire*, etc. have been to our generation. It coloured everything.

Macaulay's *History* focuses on the "Glorious" Revolution of 1688, which got rid of the Catholic King, James, who believed in the "Divine Right of Kings" and tried to put it into practice. It put William of Orange and James' daughter Mary on the throne as constitutional monarchs, subject to Parliament, and established habeas corpus, the Bill of

Rights, and the end of pre-publication censorship. Macaulay shows in detail the revolt of Northern Irish Protestants against James – with the Battle of the Boyne, the Battle of Aughrim, and the siege of Derry, still celebrated today as part of the Orangeists' conception of themselves.

Macaulay was also a Liberal MP and sometime minister. He said in Parliament (Hansard, 6 February 1833): "The clearest ground which could be guessed at, as the basis of [Daniel O'Connell's] repeal scheme, would apply a fortiori to a separation of the legislatures of the north and the south of Ireland... the same reasoning, that only a domestic legislature could remedy a domestic grievance, would in a tenfold degree apply in favour of one domestic legislature in Dublin, and another in Derry, or some other large town in the north of Ireland". The editor of the *Economist*, and celebrated writer on the British Constitution, Walter Bagehot, also a Liberal, asked, soon after the Anglican Church of Ireland was disestablished in 1869: "Would not it be very probable that one of the first efforts of Ireland's separate Parliament would be to re-establish a Church in Ireland, but not this time a Protestant but a Catholic Church – an effort which would probably give rise to civil war unless England interfered to thwart the wish of the Catholic party...?" (*The Economist*, 30 September, 1871).

The idea of two Irelands was in everyday speech, with talk of "the Ulster Scots" as distinct from the other Irish. There was a strong awareness of this in America, some of whose early Presidents, Monroe and Jackson for instance, had been of Ulster Scots background.

And of course, as the Industrial Revolution in Britain tied different areas of Ireland more closely to different sectors of the British economy, the industrialising society of North East Ulster came to have much more in common with Manchester, Liverpool, Glasgow, Birmingham, and Sheffield than with the rest of Ireland.

A main explanation from English statesmen who opposed Home Rule in the late 19th century, from Joseph Chamberlain, for instance, who led the split of the "Liberal Unionists" opposing Home Rule, was that that Home Rule would imperil the military defence of Britain. Chamberlain also declared: "Ireland is not a homogenous community... it is a nation that comprises two

continued on page 16 →

BICO and Stalino-Unionism

By Sean Matgamna

Ideas of two Irelands have long been common. In the Provo war from 1971 to the 1990s, they were common on the nationalist side, only the Protestant Unionists were condemned by some of their characteristics as a bad Ireland, as "pro-imperialists". They were thus condemned by the sometimes openly sectarian "left", in the Irish National Liberation Army, members of which gunned down people at random in a Pentecostal church in Darkley, Co Armagh, in 1983. They were in fact so condemned by the Provos, whose "devils" were Unionist shibboleths.

It was strange to see the Unionists as only "pro-imperialist" when for their own reasons the Protestants were frustrating British, or British and Dublin, attempts to get a settlement for Northern Ireland. The British fought a long war to secure the Six Counties entity.

Within this proliferation of politically-defined "two-Irelands" stories, it is tempting to

see the British and Irish Communist Organisation (BICO) version as nearly benign. But it was not.

BICO started in the mid 1960s as Maoists and hard Stalinists. They specialised in populist-republican-Stalinist reprints. In their early Irish-nationalist phase they tried to make James Connolly into an all-purpose pocket political philosopher (as Stalin was for them on other issues, and bits of Lenin were for Stalinists generally). But Connolly died before the two self-governing Irish states, the withering predominance of the Catholic Church in the nationalist state, or many other key elements of Ireland of the 1960s and 1970s, existed.

The Cork Workers' Club were in BICO for a year early on, before the Unionist politics of BICO made them leave; they inherited some of the populist-nationalist-Stalinist publishing enterprises of the ex-Irish-nationalist but now Unionist BICO.

BICO came to accept the Six Counties as a legitimate expression of Protestant

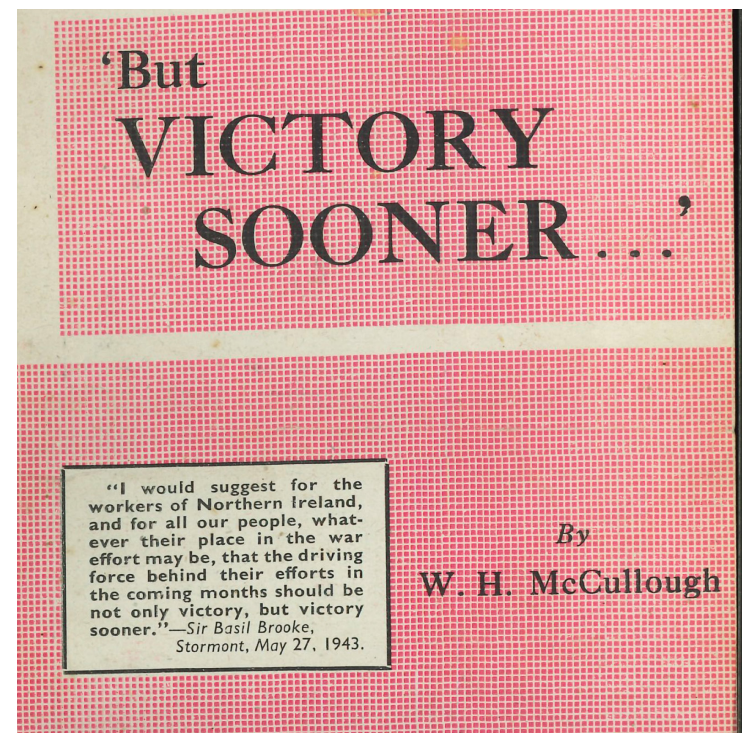
self-determination, when the determining fact was that it wasn't that, with the artificial, and large and growing, Catholic minority in the North. They sided with the Northern Ireland state and with Britain against the Catholic and Provo revolt to disrupt the Six Counties entity.

They did that not only in Ireland, where it might be legitimate, but in Britain. They were close to the Unionists and the rebel Unionists. They held at least one joint meeting with them in London, in defence of the Northern state.

They tried to split the Irish labour movement along sectarian lines, arguing that the Unionist labour movement should be free to defend the Union. There was a big correspondence on that in the *Irish Times* in 1973.

Stalinism developed through a series of distinct periods. BICO took as model the Communist Party (CP) in Britain and Northern Ireland in the period after Russia was drawn into World War Two in June 1941.

The Northern Ireland CP



supported the status quo outspokenly. They had pictures of Tory leader Churchill, with Stalin, on Party cards. With such Unionist politics the CP grew mightily in the Six Counties (the southern Irish Stalinists were a distinct party from December 1941; the northern and southern CPs reunited in 1970).

A 1943 N Ireland CP pamphlet takes its inspirational message from Basil Brooke, especially-bigoted Unionist NI PM from 1943-63.

BICO miscalculated. Pro-partition and pro-Unionist Stalinist "communism" was a much devalued political currency in the early 1970s. □

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nations and two religions".

When, in 1886, the prominent Tory Lord Randolph Churchill decided to play "The Orange Card" to counter Liberal prime minister Gladstone's adoption of Home Rule for Ireland, he invented nothing. He merely looked at the possibilities already in place.

John Redmond, then a Parnellite, published a pamphlet entitled *The Two Irish Nations* in 1886, during discussions about the first Home Rule Bill. He meant the Protestants of all Ireland, not only of north-east Ulster, and Catholics. For him, there had been two nations in Ireland, but they had fused around the United Irishmen, many of whom were Protestants meant the Protestants of all Ireland. Ireland was a nation, he argued, because she too was a "Mother Country". He cited Australia.

If the British ruling class or most of it had been united on Home Rule, then Orange opposition would have been less effective. But it would still have existed. Britain did not invent or create the Orange opposition to Home Rule: the idea that it did is nationalism rendering itself silly.

The idea that Marxism demands a single "economic" explanation of such things as the Protestant-Catholic conflict over Home Rule is vulgar economic

determinism, not Marxism, which takes everything into account, here the entire history of the Protestant community in north-east Ulster and its development in distinction to the rest of Ireland. As Engels wrote: "If somebody twists [historical materialism] into saying that the economic element is the only determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, senseless phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure – political forms of the class struggle and its results, to wit: constitutions established by the victorious class after a successful battle, etc., juridical forms, and even the reflexes of all these actual struggles in the brains of the participants, political, juristic, philosophical theories, religious views and their further development into systems of dogmas – also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their form".

I know of two "economic-determinist" explanations of the intra-Irish conflict over Home Rule. Desmond Greaves saw a Northern reluctance to assume the financial-tax responsibility for buying out the Irish landlords. That may have been a factor, but it was certainly not the demiurge. It would hardly account for the opposition after 1912,

when much of the buying-out had already been done. And Northern small farmers too did very well out of Government economic action on relation to the land.

The other "economic-determinist" explanation, which swept through the left in the late 1960s and early 70s, has the North acting against Home Rule out of fear of the customs duties the South would impose on them in the independent Ireland that would inevitably follow from the limited Home Rule proposed in the three Home Rule Bills of 1886, 1893 and 1912.

This is an anachronistic reading back from the 1930s. As far as could be seen from 1912, in a Home Rule parliament the economic interests of the North, with its dependence on the world market for shipbuilding and on the British market, would have a large say. The Dublin government in the period before the great slump of the 1930s did not bring in tariffs.

The Fianna Fail government brought in tariffs after 1932 against Britain and the North as part of the "Economic War" and of a worldwide turn to protectionism. Under the same minister, Sean Lemass, Fianna Fail would move to dismantle the tariffs in 1958. The Anglo-Irish Free Trade Agreement was inaugurated in 1965.

The attempt at semi-autarky in 1932-58 made sense in Stalinite-Maoist theory, according to which all countries had to be self-sufficient as possible. The "tariffs" argument, as a factor within the left, originated in the British and Irish Communist Organisation (BICO) reading the 1930s policies back as a factor in 1912-14. (BICO, earlier ICO, drew on the 1951 book *Irish Nationalism and British Democracy*, by Erich Strauss. Strauss himself was not a Stalinist, or a Unionist, but a social-democrat).

To read the later attempt by Fianna Fail at semi-autarky, not yet visible even as a prospect, as the secret determinant of 1912-14, is an attempt to explain away rather than to explain the distinct Northern Irish entity, rooted in its long individual history, into which economic factors entered but not as explain-alls.

In 1912-14 there was uproar in Britain over the constitutional question, and the bitterness on that issue expressed itself over the Third Home Rule Bill. Britain was not a parliamentary democracy until 1911. The Lords, the then hereditary Chamber, had an absolute veto over the elected chamber, the Commons. The Liberals carried through a great, fundamental revolution by abolishing that veto in the Parliament Act of 1911. [2] The Tories defended the Lords and accused the Liberal govern-

ment with its majority in the Commons of being “a revolutionary committee”. In the two general elections of 1910, called to get a mandate for the Budget which introduced old-age pensions and for the Parliament Act, the Liberals lost the absolute majority they had won in 1906.

To govern, they became dependent on support from the Irish Home Rule MPs, and they had to bring in a Home Rule Bill as payment for that support.

Connolly, from the time he came to Ireland as a evangelist for socialism, in 1896, to his leaving for the USA in 1903, was a Republican, but had offered a primitive socialist answer on the division of Protestants and Catholics. On both sides the bosses on both sides were concerned to keep wages low, and they were using the Irish constitutional question – the Protestants would keep Ireland ruled by Britain, the Catholics wanted a Dublin Home Rule parliament – in the class struggle with the workers.

The general socialist approach to such questions will bear repeating. The Bolsheviks declared in a resolution of 1913: “Insofar as national peace is in any way possible in a capitalist society

based on exploitation, profit making and strife it is attainable only under a consistently and thoroughly democratic republican system of government the constitution of which contains a fundamental law that prohibits any privileges whatsoever to any one nation and any encroachment whatsoever upon the rights of a national minority. This particularly calls for wide regional autonomy and fully democratic local government, with the boundaries of the self-governing and autonomous regions determined by the local inhabitants themselves on the basis of their economic and social conditions, national makeup of the population, etc.”

Connolly never saw Protestant-Unionist north-east Ireland in this light. When he abandoned stressing the barebones economic class unity line, it was to break from it towards the Catholic and Nationalist position, and to see the north-east Unionists, all of them, with Catholic and Nationalist eyes. They were bigots against the Catholics, to be denounced as such.

They surely were that. But there was more to it. Connolly was defining Protestants by their not being like himself – anti-British and for Irish separation.

Because of that he defined as “slaves in spirit” people who were challenging the Liberal government in London, and were, with British Tory help, about to defeat it. That was a very dangerous game of definitions to play.

The course of events would recommend a federal Ireland to the leaders of the Catholic and nationalist movement of the South. Connolly was dead by then. □

the war and until some new Amending Bill was passed. In fact the Home Rule Act of 1914 would be overtaken by a final shape of partition decided by the London politicians only after the end of World War One and the Irish war of independence.

[2] The reforms of the franchise in 1832, 1867 and 1884 had been immensely important, and 1884 especially so for Ireland; but those had been reforms of an elective chamber that was not sovereign and over which the hereditary chamber had an absolute veto over the Elective Chamber. Britain was only became a parliamentary democracy in 1911. Even then, all women and many working-class men were deprived of the vote. In 1918 all men over 21, and women over 30 (with some property conditions) got to vote. Only in 1928 did women get the vote on the same basis as men.

• This is Part 3 of the subsection on “Connolly and the Protestant workers” of a series on “Connolly, politically unpurgated”.

Notes

[1] The Liberals introduced the Amending Bill in the House of Lords; the Tory majority there changed it to permanent exclusion. All the main movers knew that “six years” was a lie – no parliament could bind another that far in advance – but the Liberals abandoned the Amending Bill. A “Buckingham Palace” conference followed (21-24 July) to attempt a compromise, but failed. With the outbreak of World War One the Home Rule Bill, for which the two years delay had elapsed to which the Lords were now limited, was passed into law, but with a proviso that nothing should be done until the end of



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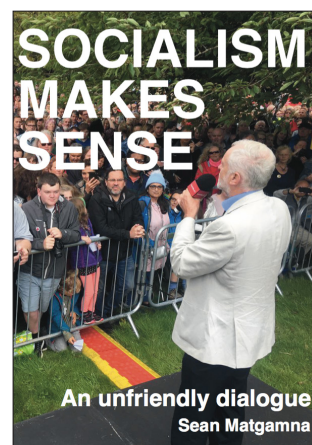
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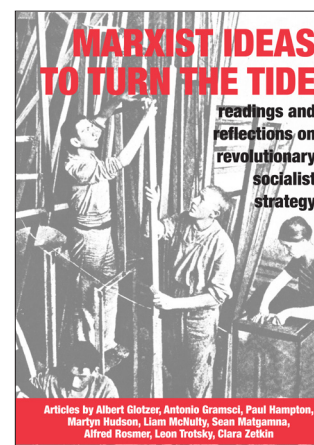
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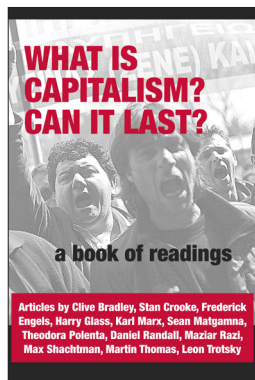
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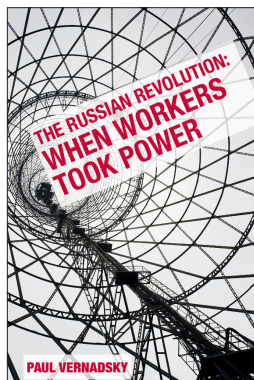
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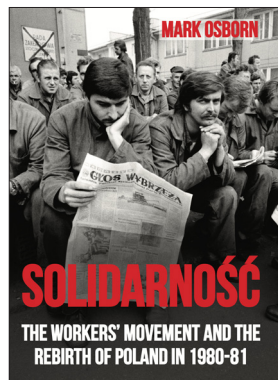
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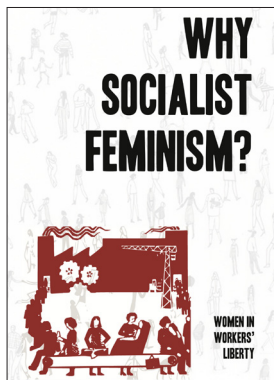
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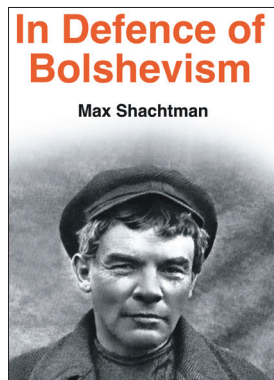
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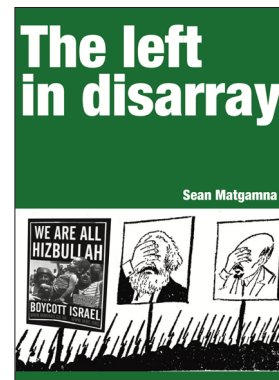
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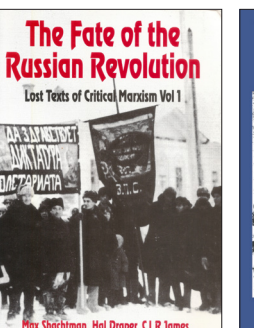
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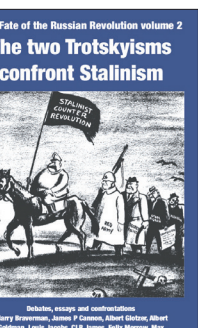
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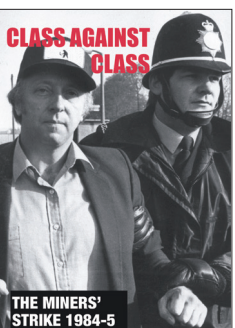
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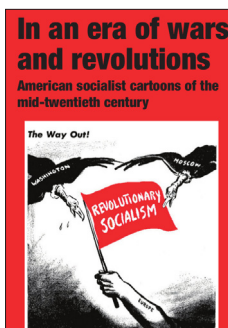
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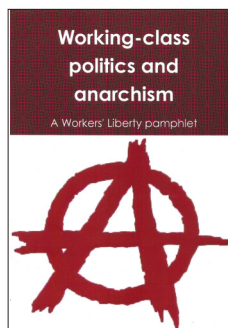
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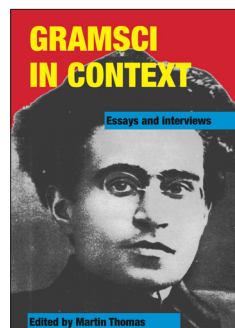
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“Enough is Enough” and workers’ struggles

By Martin Thomas

The best answer to price surges is to win pay, benefit, and pension increases. It is the readiest to hand for the working class. We already have organisations built for that purpose. Many of those trade unions already have strike mandates. The deciding factor will be whether those unions unite, accelerate and spread the strikes, as a sprint rather than a marathon.

Political campaigning is also important. Many unions have sway (if they choose to use it) in the Labour Party. They should demand that Labour [campaigns](#) for benefit, pension, and public-sector real-wage rises; for public ownership of energy; and for increased one-off payments for the energy price surge.

Leftish union leaders from the Communication Workers’ Union and the rail union RMT have combined with left Labour MP Zarah Sultana and other to launch a campaign, [Enough is Enough](#), which “models” what Labour should do. It has called a rally in London for 17 August, and promises other rallies across Britain.

Meanwhile the [Don’t Pay](#) campaign, [launched](#) on 18 June and aiming to get people to stop household energy-bill direct debits, has gained a splash of publicity.

The new action aimed at putting pressure on the government to alleviate the coming wave of poverty is welcome. That CWU and RMT leaders are pushing Enough is Enough is good. If it can be developed into a network of local groups based on Trades Councils and local Labour Parties which supports and stimulates workers’ direct battles,

even better. If the campaign becomes for them an alternative to accelerating industrial action, or to using union sway in the Labour Party, then the net effect will be poor.

The demands of “Enough is Enough” are:

1. A Real Pay Rise
2. Slash Energy Bills
3. End Food Poverty
4. Decent Homes for All
5. Tax the Rich

The detailed explanation is better (for example, the detail under “real pay rise” includes benefit increases), but on some immediate points, the demands are weak. The demand from the Rowntree Foundation, TUC, and NEU to expand one-off payments which the government announced under pressure on 26 May also deserves support.

The NHS and local government will be squeezed by rising energy costs in 2022-3, in addition to their long-term cuts. If workers in those areas are to win real wage rises, if services are to be maintained, if the NHS is to be able to deal with viruses in winter, and if local government is to give extra support to food banks (etc.), then we must force the Tories to increase funding. That is missing from “Enough is Enough”.

Enough is Enough flags one item as “long-term”, not immediate: public ownership of energy. Its immediate demand, before public ownership, is for the “cap” on household energy bills to be returned its pre-April level of £1,277 (as against the £3,500-plus [predicted](#) by some). That converts the immediate demand into one to subsidise the retail end of fossil-fuel energy, where otherwise companies would go bust as they did this spring, and wealthier

households which use more fossil-fuel energy. Direct cash relief would be better than those subsidies.

The world market price of gas has risen from 3.7 per unit in early 2022 to 8.8, and may rise further in the Northern Hemisphere winter, especially if Russia goes for its own “sanctions” against the EU by cutting supply.

The best way to shield poorer households is not a relative subsidy for fossil-fuel prices, but wage and benefit increases (continuing and one-off), improved energy-conservation and insulation, and a rapid shift to renewables and nuclear. I think there’s a case also for a basic free quota of domestic energy for everyone (e.g. by expanding the current [Warm Homes Discount](#)) as a back-stop, for example for people waiting for benefit payments to arrive.

600,000 extra households fell into energy-bill arrears in late 2020 (thanks to insecure workers losing their jobs in lockdown), and a greater rise is likely in winter 2022-3 even without the Don’t Pay campaign, so it’s not shouting into a void. Cutting off supply to households in arrears is difficult for the energy retailers. The Tories are under pressure, if only because they don’t want their own supporters to face tripled domestic and business energy bills and they don’t want weaker energy retailers to go bust.

But the 4.3 million poorest households, on pre-payment meters, are by definition outside Don’t Pay’s ambit. The energy companies can respond to non-payment by switching meters remotely to pre-payment. If the strategy is a “consumer revolt”, then gumming up the energy companies by switching from direct debt to monthly payment and then submitting formal complaints about the bills and insisting on them



Local groups based on Trades Councils and local Labour parties are needed as well as rallies

right through to the Energy Ombudsman may well be a more efficient tactic.

To work like rent strikes and the poll tax revolt, a non-payment campaign needs door-to-door organising on streets and estates. By definition it cannot be anonymous. That sits ill with the initial insistence of the campaign’s central organisers on anonymity.

Worker revolt, for wages and benefits, is more promising. There is no special socialist way of controlling market-economy inflation, not under capitalism, and in fact not even under a workers’ government. The Bolsheviks in Russia had runaway inflation in 1917-22. They mitigated it by distributing basic items free. They could control it only by introducing a new gold-linked currency in 1922.

We want the socialist distribution of “from each according to their needs, from each according to their abilities”. That cannot be achieved by a cunning set of price controls, but only by a society based on common ownership and workers’ control where the basics of life are made available free as NHS health care and schooling are now.

Meanwhile, as Leon Trotsky put it: “Neither monetary inflation nor stabilisation can serve as slogans for the proletariat because these are but two ends of the same stick. Against a bounding rise in prices... one can fight only under the slogan of a sliding scale of wages. This means that collective agreements should assure an automatic rise in wages in relation to the increase in price of consumer goods”. □

Schematism and the CPB



Letter

Eric Lee ([Solidarity 642](#)) is right to say that it is a scandal that unions fund the *Morning Star*, the paper run by the Communist Party of Britain.

He overdoes it, though, when he writes that the CPB is “no less of a threat than the neo-fascists on the right”.

Trotsky was right in 1940 that “the present ‘Communist’ bureaucrats... ideal is to attain in their own country the same position that the Kremlin oligarchy gained in the USSR. They are not the revolutionary leaders of the

proletariat but aspirants to totalitarian rule. They dream of gaining success with the aid of this same Soviet bureaucracy and its GPU”.

It is schematic, however, to draw a straight line from that to the current CPB. Eric himself pointedly refrains from saying that Tolpuddle should have banned the CPB, and writes that he has “no problem” with “post-Stalinists” found today in Italy’s Partito Democratico (or even France’s PCF?) Even in the 1960s, to work effectively in the unions, Trotskyists in Britain had to recognise many CPB members as different from the bureaucrats of 1940 and not tightly controlled by their very faded latter-day counterparts. □

Colin Foster, London

Not in a single jump



Letter

As Kamal ([Solidarity 642](#)) is right that revolutionary socialists internationally are not strong enough to sway the Ukraine war one way or another.

In fact, the much bigger nominally-Marxist movement of 1914 was not in a position to stop World War One – even in countries (Russia, Serbia),

where the socialists held to internationalist principle. The Bolsheviks were not able to extract Russia from World War One until after taking power.

The question is how to build a movement from where we are. That can’t be done by wishing for a sudden jump to a movement stronger than 1914 or 1917.

It can be done, over time, by agitation and explanation on the issues, including the Ukraine war. □

Rhodri Evans, London

Connolly on the dynamic and durable



Book review

By Gregor Gall

Workers' Liberty is to be congratulated for putting together a selection of writings by Scots-born Irish revolutionary James Connolly, on labour unionism. The timing could not be more appropriate as we continue to face a cost-of-living crisis which is only set to get worse and may be added to by a recession. This might be the spur to help a wide circulation of the short book containing his writings.

It is possible that the public unveiling of James Connolly as the political inspiration of RMT union leader, Mick Lynch, will help give the republication of these writings a further, welcome boost. Lynch has become something of a "working-class hero" of late. On the Robert Peston television show in late June 2022, Lynch was asked: "Who is your political hero?" When his answer drew somewhat blank looks, he asked

the interviewer "Do you know who James Connolly is?" and then gave the answer himself: "He's an Irish socialist republican. He educated himself and started non-sectarian trade unionism in Ireland and he was a hero of the Irish Revolution".

So far, so good. But what can the writings of a union leader and revolutionary socialist who was shot after the Easter Rising more than one hundred years ago do to help us understand how to create effective labour unionism? Bearing in mind in his writings about labour unionism in America, Britain and Ireland were undertaken before the advent of mass labour unionism, the Russian October 1917 revolution, the internet and the like – and when stripped of the specificity of the times and places and focusing on generic themes – quite a lot as it happens. This is because he was able to draw upon his experience of union organising in America and Ireland, especially the major struggle embodied in the Dublin lockout of 1913-1914.

Connolly was intensely interested in understanding the relationship between labour unionism and socialism,

especially how socialism – then also called social democracy – might come about. He believed that effective labour unionism was the progenitor of socialism because he sketched out the way in which labour unionism, from the union-organised workplace upwards, could begin to encroach upon the power of capital. In this belief, he argued that democratic union organisation could effectively become a series of workers' councils (soviets) at the workplace, town, regional and national levels (as well as ultimately beyond). Labour union organisation would move from having the purpose of being collective bargainers to that of being collective controllers.

Key to this argument was that the form of labour unionism would be industrial unionism of the kind embodied by the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), known as the Wobblies, and to some extent by the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union which Connolly helped lead. So Connolly had experience of sectionalism of different kinds in labour unionism, seeing it as probably the primary cause of workers being unable to aggregate their

forces together sufficiently in order to overcome the power of capital. He also had experience of the conservatism of labour unionism which in part emanates from sectionalism, especially in the response of unions in Britain to request for solidarity action to isolate the Dublin capitalists during the five-month lockout. Sympathy through fund-raising was necessary but not sufficient to prevent the defeat of workers in the lockout.

Connolly was not a syndicalist – he was involved in various socialist and labour parties – and neither was he unaware of difficulties that permanent labour unionism organisation could give rise to. Yet he did not succumb to what some might see as the appeal of spontaneity given the pressing need for creating organisations which could be dynamic and durable. One such instance was the creation of the Irish Citizen Army to protect striking workers from police brutality. □

• Gregor Gall is a Visiting Professor in Industrial Relations at the University of Leeds.

Lousy night in Georgia



Letter

Eric Lee predictably and wrongly seizes on my recent review on the Russian civil war to rehash fairy tales about Georgia's Menshevik government (*Solidarity* 642, 27 July 2022). Lee's apologetics ignore the reality of the period – include materials from his own book, *The Experiment* (2017). Rather than put the Russian civil war in its international context, he prefers the fantasy oasis of social democracy in one country.

In October 1917, the Bolsheviks led the working class to make a socialist revolution in Russia. They led a revolutionary workers' government. The Bolsheviks faced White military threats from the moment

they took power and intervention from numerous imperialist powers.

The Bolsheviks were never "at peace" with the German empire. The German government imposed bitter, imperialist terms on the Bolsheviks in early 1918, under the duress of their overwhelming military superiority. The Bolsheviks were forced to sign the treaty and concede territory to fend off their complete obliteration by the German army and to keep their pledge to stop the war. The Georgian Mensheviks, led by Noe Zhordania, established a breakaway bourgeois republic.

The Georgian Mensheviks were not "neutral" between the domestic forces of the Russian civil war. As Trotsky explained in his book, *Between Red and White*, on 25 September 1918, an official conference was held, consisting of the repre-

sentatives of the Georgian republic, the Kuban government and the Volunteer Army. The Georgian representatives said they were carrying on a relentless struggle against Bolshevism, crushing it with all the means at its disposal. The proceedings were published by the Georgian government, in a blue book, *Documents and Materials on the Foreign Policy of Trans-Caucasia and Georgia* (1919).

Nor were the Georgian Mensheviks indifferent to foreign intervention. Lee's own book describes how Georgia under the Mensheviks became a German protectorate:

"Zhordania later wrote that when the German commanding general requested that Georgia support the Central Powers (Germany, Austria and Turkey) in the world war, he replied: 'I have never considered the international posi-

tion of Georgia as that of an absolutely neutral state, as the contrary is being proved by evident facts.' Zhordania described Georgia's policy as being one of 'limited neutrality'. Georgia's neutrality, he wrote, was limited 'by the very fact of the presence of General Von Kress and his soldiers on our territory during the world war'."

After Germany was defeated in the world war, the British army swiftly moved into Georgia. Lee stated in his book: "In early December 1918 the first British troops arrived... Early in the new year, the Georgian government held a welcoming banquet for the British military mission, while at the very same time the war minister also gave General Kress a farewell dinner." Whatever the disputes, Georgia remained under British protection and supported Denikin and Wrangel's White

armies. On 14 January 1920, Zhordania made the Georgian Mensheviks' position clear: "You know that Soviet Russia has proposed a military alliance with us. We have point blank declined. Our answer must be known to you... I must say here most emphatically: that I prefer the imperialists of the West to the fanatics of the East."

In my original review (*Solidarity* 641, 13 July 2022), I described Antony Beevor's book as pretty dismal. But at least Beevor recognises some of the interconnections between domestic White forces and big power intervention. The Georgian Mensheviks were hostile to the Bolsheviks and on the wrong side of the conflict, domestically and internationally. No adequate Marxist assessment can ignore that. □

Paul Vernadsky, London



UCU to ballot in the new term

By a Cambridge UCU member

On 12 August, the University and College Union (UCU) launched its latest ballot campaign in Higher Education, “UCU Rising”.

Our union will ballot for industrial action during the first term of the 2023 academic year (exact dates not yet set). It will be a membership-wide aggregated ballot, so under the 2016 Trade Union Act, this means that for a valid mandate 50%-plus-1 of all balloted members in the UCU’s higher education section must vote, with a majority in favour of action.

Members will get separate ballots for the pay and working conditions dispute (covering UCU members in all UK higher education institutes, of which there are over 140) and the USS pensions dispute (covering UCU members working at USS-enrolled “pre-92” universities, of which there are around 70).

This campaign is part of an ongoing effort over the past four years to defend USS pensions from ongoing attacks, and reverse the degradation of pay and working conditions on university campuses. It follows the UCU rejecting offers made by our employers’ representatives, the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA), and the pensions body, the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS).

The UCU demands include a pay rise, reduction of excessive workloads and pay inequalities, and reversal of the 2021-22 pension cuts made in April this year. Although the campaign name “Four Fights” from the 2019-20 and 2021-22 UCU disputes has been dropped, “UCU Rising” focuses on the

same topics.

RPI hit 11.8% in June. Yet university workers were offered a measly 3% pay rise by UCEA. The UCU demands RPI+2%. In a sector in which real-terms pay fell by around 18% between 2009-2019 – and now maybe 25% with recent inflation – even that increase in 2022/23 would leave pay far below the relative levels of around a decade ago.

Nevertheless, a victory on the pay demand would be a massive improvement for those working in the sector. Action is also needed to address campus pay-inequalities: median pay for women trails men in some institutions by over 20%.

The USS pensions scheme cuts in 2021-22 saw average pension pot losses per member of 35% (or £240,000) rising to around 50% for the newest scheme members. Those cuts were imposed based on a flawed pension valuation made in March 2020 – the height of economic uncertainty in the pandemic – which suggested the pension pot had fallen in value by tens of billions of pounds. In reality, even before the cuts were finalised in April, the scheme’s value had grown from pre-pandemic levels. USS can easily afford to raise member benefits. Yet they were slashed.

Then, only three months after USS cuts were made, the Chief Executive of USS, Bill Galvin, trousered a bonus exceeding £100,000, on top of a £480,000 salary.

Workers’ Liberty activists in higher education call on union members to use this latest ballot round to recruit colleagues to the union, build the “yes” vote for both ballots and beat the an-



ti-union 50% turnout threshold.

An aggregated ballot means that if we pass the 50% turnout threshold, the whole sector will be able to strike later this year. This may be a tall order, but we reached these turnout levels in our 2021 ballot. And it is clear from the RMT, CWU, Aslef, TSSA, UCU members in Further Education, and other balloting unions like the NEU, FBU and (on university campuses) Unison and Unite, there is an appetite to fight.

To go from that to winning, we need to enhance the activism and activity of our workplace branches, including raising membership and rep’ densities, link up branches to hold our leadership to account during further negotiations, and build a rank-and-file organisation worthy of the name. If you agree, work in higher education, and aren’t already in touch with us, email office@workersliberty.org. □

Goldsmiths UCU settles, but the fight continues

By Cathy Nugent

The University and College Union (UCU) at Goldsmiths University of London has settled a long-running dispute over job cuts and restructuring at the college.

The agreement came with Goldsmiths’ management under considerable pressure over a marking boycott in spite of their attempts to undermine the boycott by progressing and graduating students without their full sets of marks.

As a result, the branch has won a commitment from the management to no further compulsory redundancies as the remaining elements of a two year “recovery programme” are implemented.

There were concessions on other terms and conditions. The branch was not, however, able to stop this year’s compulsory redundancies, and 17 people have lost their jobs.

For months senior management refused to even discuss current compulsory redundancies in negotiations. The branch continued to push back on this and at the end won the offer of enhanced financial settlements but not reinstatement. Seven workers, with the backing of the branch, will continue to fight for reinstatement through an appeals process.

The deal comes after an extremely hard-fought dispute in which everything was thrown

at the campus unions – systematic management lies and vilification, union victimisation, bullying of student organisers. Goldsmiths’ financial future as of now looks secure – just as UCU said it would be. Whatever damage has been done to the college’s financial security and its longer-term reputation is all on the Senior Management.

The deal cannot be said to be a victory because we did not win back the 17 jobs. But, it is no small thing that the unions’ fight brought down the total number of compulsory redundancies and won commitments for the next year. This is a testament to the hundreds of workers and students who

gave everything to this class struggle in academia. In the end the fight was about the right to organise and that right was asserted to the end.

Even as the deal was struck the prospective Prime Minister Rishi Sunak promised to phase out “low-earning degrees”. These are exactly the degrees that Goldsmiths “sells” to students, in Media, Theatre Studies, Journalism and so on. How will the college respond? How can it when it has thrown away the talent of much-respected lecturers, key admin staff by driving them out, disgusted by their actions?

Even as the deal was struck, the Head and Deputy Head of the Media, Communica-

tions and Cultural Studies department (Des Freedman and Gholam Khiabany) remain suspended for doing their job – informing students about the potential impact of the marking boycott. There will be another fight in the review of fixed-term contracts promised in the settlement.

We now owe it to all those who lost their jobs, and those fighting to save theirs at Roehampton, Wolverhampton, and elsewhere across higher education, to continue the fight. If you’re not active in UCU or Unison, now is the time to get active. □

• Goldsmiths UCU fighting fund: bit.ly/g-fund

Post: “the shop floor is buzzing”

By a postal worker

Communication Workers Union (CWU) members working at Royal Mail (RM) will strike on 26 and 31 August and 8 and 9 September, in a dispute over pay. An industrial action ballot for a parallel dispute, over changes to terms and conditions, concludes on 17 August. A postal worker and CWU rep from south west England spoke to Solidarity.

The shop floor was buzzing this morning after the announcement of the strike dates. It's the same as the excitement at Christmas, when you finally get through the pressure period and all the heavy deliveries and you know you've got a few days off. That's how people feel about these strikes, excitement! They can't wait for them; people have had enough.

The way the company behaves is just fuelling the fire. Just as the CWU announced the strike dates, RM announced that the Chief Financial Officer of RM is being given 72,000 extra shares, worth nearly £200,000. When they do things like that whilst telling us there's no money for a pay rise, it makes clear they're taking the piss out of us. It just makes people more enthusiastic about going on strike.

We know it will be a hard fight, but we are determined. There's a sense that the employer is digging in, and we say: bring it on! During the pandemic, the Government pressured [former Royal Mail CEO] Rico Back over his decision to implement executive action. The company backed down, and Rico left his job with a golden hand shake worth millions. That won't happen this time, so anything we win will have to

be forced out of the employer via our industrial action.

We're fighting two parallel disputes, one over pay and one over terms and conditions. People feel strongly about both, but there is a particular strength of feeling over the terms and conditions. What they're proposing is simply unworkable; as an experienced postie, I know that. They want to impose later starts and finishes, a two-tier workforce, compulsory Sunday working, short notice duty changes, attacks on payments of sick leave and ill-health retirement... they want to control your life. One of the worst aspects of their proposals is the plan for annualised hours. That means that we'll work fewer hours during the summer when the mail volumes are lower, allowing the company to compel us to work longer hours – maybe 40, 45, 50 hours a week – during the winter when there's higher volume.

Staffing is already stretched in many areas. In my area, we've recently had a structural revision using all nationally agreed tools to establish the correct staffing levels, the amount of people needed to run the office. Senior management are only staffing to 95% of that, because they think it's “more efficient”. But we still have to deliver to 100% of our area. Where I work is one of the biggest rural delivery units in the country, so the staffing shortfall hits residential deliveries in the main town, with some deliveries not going out for two, three, four, or even five days.

The strikes we've called are part of the dispute over pay. Our second ballot, over the terms and conditions issues, closes on 17 August. The timing seems a little bizarre to me; if we get a settlement on pay, are we then going



Pic: [Twitter: @CWUnews]

to go back on strike straight away over terms and conditions? Could it be possible that National Executives of different unions are coordinating their strikes?

CWU's National Executive Council is the decision-making body in terms of strategy and tactics in the dispute – when to strike, for how long, etc. But obviously there is informal discussion of that on the shop floor, which gets fed up to them. In the past, we've sometimes had selective strikes where workers in the three sections – processing, distribution, and delivery – strike for one day each. This has been effective in the past, basically meaning no mail gets delivered for three days but each group of workers only loses one day's pay. This is something we should con-

sider again, in my view.

We're focused on winning concessions from Royal Mail, but we're obviously aware that we're striking at a time when lots of other workers are rising up. Social media posts about other strikes and campaigns, and posts from others supporting our dispute, are shared around at work, and people take encouragement from that.

Despite privatisation, the average postie is still committed to treating the job as an essential public service, whereas the RM CEO and board see it as a cash cow of a business, only fit for syphoning off profit for shareholders and themselves.

Enough is enough, bring on the battle! □

Local government £1,925 flat “pay rise” is a real-wage cut



By Cy Grove

Unite has already stated it rejects the local government pay offer (a flat pay rise for £1,925 for every scale point). The GMB has not made its position clear. Unison has launched a consultative ballot (closing 19 September).

The Unison National Joint Council (NJC) committee has made no recommendation to

members. We hear that the right wing on the committee wanted to recommend acceptance.

Previously Unison had said that the union would move to straight to an industrial action ballot. On receiving the pay offer the union dropped that and went for consultation.

Under the rules of the consultative ballot, branches are able to run the votes themselves and can make recommendations. We urge branches to organise to run the vote and recommend rejection and a fight for an infla-

tion-based pay rise.

Clearly the Unison bureaucracy wants members to accept the offer and does not want a fight. It is up to rank and file activists within the union to organise for a proper pay rise.

Unions had demanded £2000 or an inflation-based increase (whichever was greater). The employers' £1,925 offer may appear close to part of that, but with accelerating price rises, it is a real-wage cut.

After tax and national insurance deductions, on average workers will actually receive

a pay rise of only £1,400. The offer is 10.5% for the lowest scale point and 4% for the highest scale point. With RPI inflation at 11.8%, this is a real-wage cut. If inflation rises to 15%, as widely predicted, it is an 8% real-wage cut for the average worker in local government.

Since 2010 local government workers have lost around 27.5% of pay when compared with inflation. The offer would increase the loss to 35.5%. □

More online

Dilemmas of the two-state solution

A discussion article from Barry Finger
bit.ly/d-2s

30 years since The Satanic Verses

Matt Cooper tells the story
bit.ly/yrs-30

Sharon Graham and Labour

Ann Field unpicks the idea that threatening disaffiliation is a good way to fight Labour's right-wing drift
bit.ly/sg-lab

“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.

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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.

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- 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

The dreams are different



Diary of a construction worker

By Bob Carnegie

Conversations with my workmates now, as a traffic controller on construction and civil engineering sites in Queensland, Australia, are completely different from what I had before as a seafarer and a construction worker.

We are employed by traffic-control contractors which function like labour-hire companies, and there are almost no conversations with the workers directly employed on the sites. Traffic controllers want to talk about traffic. There's almost no talk of politics.

There are a lot of complaints about how we are treated by management – by the labour-hire companies, that is, not the main site management – complaints are about getting hours of work (it's a zero-hours job) and about the time and cost to get to sites when

we have jobs. I'm signed up with three companies just to try to get two days' work a week.

But so far I've found only one other traffic controller who's interested in trade unionism. The others aren't hostile to unions, but unions are not part of their world, yet.

There are probably 100 traffic controllers, at most, in Queensland, who are on EBA [union-negotiated] pay rates, but maybe 10,000 others, on varying rates of pay, none much more than the award [legal minimum].

A little more

The ute drivers, who set up the signs and so on, complain most, although they get more hours than the rest of us, they are paid a little more than us per hour, and in practice they are the supervisors on the worksite.

Some of them act like tinpot dictators, though some are helpful and friendly. Every two hours we are supposed to get ten minutes' break, but often we don't get it.

A lot of traffic controllers are workers in their 50s and 60s, and then there are some young women and men in their late teens and early 20s, some of whom seem to have got into the job because other family members have worked in traffic control. Often the older workers are in the job as a result of marriage breakdowns or such.

Their dreams and thoughts are different from those of workers in the better-paid unionised jobs I've worked in before.

These are people fighting to get enough money to rent a house and to pay the bills, where better-paid blue-collar workers think about buying a nicer house or even buying an investment property. Maybe because of the lack of union presence, there is far more pettiness among workers than on a unionised site – much more of one worker trying to embarrass another worker by telling them they're doing something wrong. □

NHS workers vote over next months

By Alice Hazel

Over the next months, hundreds of thousands of NHS workers will be balloted, either formally or through consultative processes, over our derisory 4 to 5% pay award.

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) statutory ballot opens on 15 September. Unison is balloting formally between 27 October and 25 November (a Unison Scotland ballot opens earlier on 3 October.) GMB is consulting from 30 August to 27 September and the Unite consultation is from 8 August until mid-September.

All the unions are recommending rejection and leaderships are making the right noises about fighting for decent pay. It's without doubt a step forward

from last year. In Scotland results of consulting members have been very positive: Unite 89% for action, RCN 90%, Unison 91%, GMB 97%, with all unions reaching the turnout thresholds of the anti union laws.

We must turn our branches out to the ballots, engage reps and members, recruit new reps and activists to reshape the unions in the course of the struggle, and use the favourable time when rail, post, and other workers are striking, and the government is on the back foot.

One of our problems is a lack of co-ordination between the unions and a slow response. NHS workers will want to see a co-ordinated cross union effort to build the strongest possible effective action for a better pay deal. Unity

needs to be built at local level, while also press for a joint timescale and strategy at the top.

The pay award was due in April. It was clear from the start that it would represent a further pay cut. Yet we have waited for months for a trade-union response. Now government and employers are saying the 5% will be in pay packets in September or October.

Building confidence amongst members means making it clear what we are in dispute for. The RCN broke with the other health unions to call for a fully funded pay rise for nursing staff of 5% above inflation. The other unions submitted evidence to the PRB for an inflation-busting pay rise without further specifying. We need a united and clear demand. □

Tory slime-drama at its best



Kino Eye

By John Cunningham

The Thatcher years are over and an unstable but moderate Conservative government has taken her place. However, Tory Chief Whip, Francis Urquhart (Ian Richardson) is miffed that he has been overlooked for promotion. He secretly schemes to have a new leader (himself) installed and the knives are out.

House of Cards, a BBC drama broadcast in late 1990, may be fiction but its depiction of back-stabbing, double-dealing, lying and cheating rings very true. The only element missing from the present Tory leadership contest is that no-one (so far) has been thrown from the roof of the House of Commons or killed with rat poison.

Urquhart stops at nothing to win the



leadership of the Tory Party. Not content with blackmail and lies, he poisons the cocaine-addicted public relations consultant Roger O'Neill. In the penultimate scene he murders the journalist Mattie Storin (Susannah Harker) who has finally seen through his scheming and confronts him with the evidence. At the end he is seen on his way to Buckingham Palace to officially accept the Prime Ministership.

A compelling mixture of *Richard III*, *Macbeth*, Machiavelli and Lucrezia Borgia, *House of Cards* was followed by two sequels and was also adapted for American TV. □

Part of a wider movement



John Moloney

We've been holding members' meetings to build for our national ballot starting on 26 September. The ones I've been to have been well attended, and there's a clear mood amongst members for taking action. This mood is undoubtedly helped by all the other strikes taking place and a real understanding that PCS is part of a wider movement. People are talking about what other unions are doing, and taking confidence from that.

We're getting people signed up as activists, committing to take responsibility for getting the vote out. A lot of them are younger members, under 30, so hopefully this can be part of developing a new generation of reps and activists. The union's membership is increasing week on week, which is obviously a good sign.

We still have a lot of work to do. The union's aim is to speak to every member before the start of the ballot, and we're still away off from that.

We expect Liz Truss, the likely next Prime Minister, to make a concerted assault on union rights in our sector. She says she'll end facility time for reps not only in the civil service but across the whole public sector. The only way this can be done is through a radical change in the law, meaning

that staff won't have the right to be accompanied to discipline and grievance hearing by reps and that management literally won't talk to recognised unions, at least not during the working day. Truss has also attacked the so-called "wokeness" of the civil service, and accused it, without any evidence, of "antisemitism". What she presumably means by "wokeness" is the civil service's diversity and equality policies and training, which are in fact very inadequate.

Right to strike

Truss is also making wider threats against the right to strike. Those threats have to be taken seriously, and the whole labour movement has to respond. There is yet to be a serious discussion about this throughout the movement, which needs to happen urgently.

As well as our national ballot, we have a number of ongoing local disputes. Members working in the court service have recently voted by a 90% majority, on a 62% turnout, for industrial action over the imposition of a new computer system which is causing huge problems. Workers at a contact centre in Liverpool, which works on



an outsourced contract from the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS), are striking for six days from 15 August, after they voted to reject their employer's 3.25% pay offer. We've also got a group of security guard members balloting over health and safety.

We want to encourage any group of members, anywhere we organise, to take action to improve their conditions. Having a backdrop of active local struggles will also help the national ballot and campaign. □

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

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Transport workers discuss co-ordination

By Jay Dawkey and Eoin Hay

Between 18 and 20 August more than 50,000 transport workers will strike. RMT members in Network Rail and the Train Operating Companies are out on 18 and 20 August. RMT members on London Underground and London Overground will strike on 19 August alongside 1,600 Unite bus workers at London United, who continue their strike action on 20 August. London Overground workers are striking for a decent pay increase.

The bus workers have rejected a deal from RATP, the French company that owns London United of 3.6% pay increase for 2022 and 4.2% for 2023, clearly well below current and projected inflation. Bus drivers in Unite at Arriva, one of the largest bus operators in London, which also operates London Overground via Arriva Rail London, are now balloting for strikes, with their ballot closing on 26 August.

If they win this ballot in London there is a real opportunity for an all-out trans-

port workers strike. Aslef's strike on 13 August in nine TOCs was solid and effective.

But there remain a number of questions about the strategy going forward.

The general feeling among drivers is that we have had enough of the nonsense from the bosses, so are more than willing to keep striking.

Weekday strikes or overtime bans are both more popular options than the current plan of striking on Saturdays when other workers are more likely to be using their time for leisure.

Tactics

In some places, members of Aslef and RMT are OK with the arrangement of striking different days. It is causing double the impact where we are well-organised enough for the unions to agree that members will book on when the other is on strike because it costs the company money and there's no work to do.

However it only works well where there is a clear division between un-

ions – where all the drivers are Aslef, everyone else RMT (or TSSA where it is striking). That way, it becomes, in practice, different grades striking on different days, which maximises disruption.

But where it's not – where some drivers are RMT, or some guards, signallers or other grades are non-union or their roles are covered by scab managers – it can become messy and demoralising. More generally, separate strikes, with separate picket lines, means missing out on the great sense of power and unity that striking together gives.

On London Underground, despite Aslef renewing their mandate to strike twice, they are yet to call any action.

More worrying is that Aslef striking on different days from the other unions is not a strategy agreed by the unions to maximise impact.

It's each union doing its own thing. That includes having separate talks with the employers, which points towards separate deals. That would not be good! □

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Connolly, unions, and politics



Interview

Liam McNulty, author of a forthcoming book on James Connolly, and co-author of the introduction to the new Workers' Liberty collection of James Connolly's writings on "Effective Trade Unionism", spoke to Solidarity about the collection.

As far as I know, Connolly did not directly address the "mass strike" debates arising from the 1905 Russian Revolution – for instance, in German Social Democracy between Luxemburg, Kautsky and others.

He was, of course, aware of and inspired by the example of 1905. However, his most direct comments in May 1915 in an article on the "Moscow insurrection" focus mostly on military and technical aspects. It is in keeping with Connolly's drift after the outbreak of war and collapse of the International that he would fade out the mass working-class action of Moscow 1905 in favour of an examination of weaponry and barricade fighting – a clear sign what he felt was possible and necessary in the context of wartime Dublin. The previous year, he mentioned the Russian Revolution in passing when the war broke out. He recalled that many "advanced nationalists" (republicans) had disdained the Russian revolutionaries in 1905 because Russia was then an enemy of England. It was an argument not to take the counsel of these people seriously in the wartime crisis. Of course, in time Connolly would himself ally himself with a faction of the republicans.

Both of these references were more inspired by Irish concerns and arguments than analyses of the mass strike.

After Connolly's death the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union flourished again, but Irish socialist political organisation did not. How would you explain that?

Following his break from Daniel De Leon in 1908, Connolly recoiled from the sectarianism and authoritarian internal culture of the Socialist Labor Party. However, he went too far in the opposite direction, arguing that the industrial union was the primary instrument of socialist construction. Following his break from De Leon in 1908, Connolly recoiled from the sectarianism and authoritarian internal culture of the Socialist Labor Party.

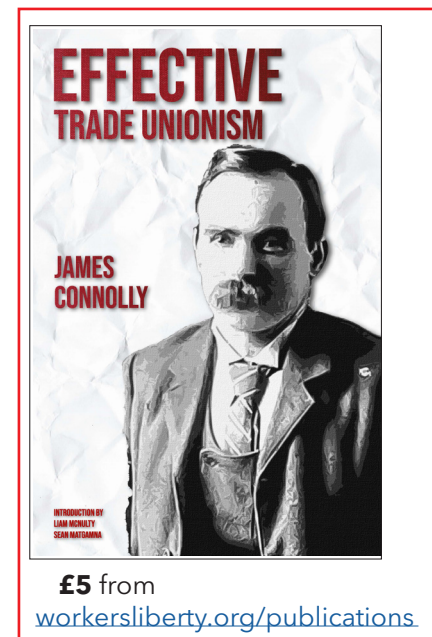
However, he went too far in the opposite direction, arguing that the industrial union was the primary instrument of socialist construction, rel-

egating the party to a propaganda and electoral adjunct.

On Connolly's return to Ireland in 1910, these various functions took the form of separate organisations, linked only by the person of Connolly himself: the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (ITGWU, union); the Socialist Party of Ireland (propaganda); and the Irish Labour Party (elections). After 1913, we can add to this the Irish Citizen Army, first for trade union defence and later for armed insurrection.

Socialist political organisation was definitely not the priority area. The SPI remained small and weak, with little attempt to develop branches or bind its members with a common policy in the unions. In a sense, it resembled the ILP more than the BSP. The SPI collapsed during the war and was revived in 1917 to organise solidarity efforts with Russia. It remained a party of officials leading trade unions, whose primary efforts were organising and developing the ITGWU to respond to an unprecedented wave of strikes and workplace occupations. It did not and, given the merger of its leadership with the bureaucracy of the Transport Union, perhaps could not without major splits, lead a revival of socialist politics after Connolly's death.

Those were some of the subjective factors. Objectively, too, the revived Sinn Féin movement managed to channel widespread national sentiment, crowding out more dissenting voices on the left. The ITGWU provided some muscle for the national movement, for example in refusing to handle military cargo, but did not aspire to win hegemony. The Labour Party, too, left the field open to the republicans in the 1918 General Election. □



• The collection is also reviewed by Gregor Gall on p.19 this week. The first part of Liam McNulty's comments on the collection was in [Solidarity 642](#).

Beat the winter catastrophe!

By Martin Thomas

On 13 August, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF), with the TUC, the National Education Union, and dozens of charities and campaigns concerned with poverty, called for the package of relief payments announced in May to be at least doubled.

That was £1,200 for worse-off families, through a variety of payments. The JRF reckons that worse-off households face an average of £2,800 increased costs, so similar relief plus 130% would do what the May package promised.

The JRF and others also call for deductions from benefits for debts to be eased or paused. As of November 2020 (the most recent figures available), 44% of people receiving Universal Credit were having money deducted to repay debts – with an average deduction of £78 a month.

Paul Kissack of the JRF said that without such measures, "vulnerable people will face a catastrophe on a vast scale when winter sets in".

The Tories, on 12 August, promised some measures in September. Labour leader Keir Starmer, on 15 August, called for the household energy bill cap to be frozen over winter, with the gap between soaring world-market gas prices met by expanding the windfall tax on energy producers, as distinct from retailers (and, in the small print, halting the proposed £400 payments for all households promised by the Tories!)

Starmer was copying the Lib Dems, and given his record he's probably guessing that the Tories will curb bills somehow anyway. Scottish Power and other energy-retail companies have also called for bill increases to be avoided, via a government "deficit fund to cover the difference between what people pay and how much it costs to supply their homes with gas and electricity".

Truss and Sunak will worry about their supporters facing huge energy bills. From a working-class point of view, curbs on retail bills will be better than nothing, but worse than the JRF's increased-relief-payments demand, and worse again than the general increase in wages and benefits which we need to win by uniting, accelerating, and spreading the strike wave.



One, any curb on bills from the Tories will be inadequate for the worst-off. Two, household energy bills are likely to stay high long-term. The sanctions on Russia, and Russia's retaliatory sanctions against the EU, could go on for years. Three, subsidising the household price means a lot of the relief money goes to well-off people with big houses. Four, subsidising the price of fossil-fuels relative to other prices cuts against the environmentally-necessary drive to reduce energy bills by energy conservation. Insulation and housing redesign are effective. Between 2000 and 2018 efficiency measures reduced household consumption by 40% (though other factors offset a large chunk of that improvement). Even in the few months before winter, a lot could be done by government-financed drive to improve insulation.

The right-wing government in France has fully nationalised EDF, its main electricity producer, to drive necessary investment without having to worry about short-term losses (France should be insulated from world gas prices because most of its electricity is nuclear-generated; but inadequate investment in recent years has left it lagging). Britain, too, should take its energy giants in public ownership, allowing for a rapid transition to renewables and nuclear without sudden price jumps. □



Solidarity

For a workers' government

WHY WE DEFEND RUSHDIE

By an Iranian socialist

This article (Socialist Organiser, 22 February 1989) defined our stance when Ayatollah Khomeiny ordered the murder of Rushdie in 1989 – and our attitude to the attack on Rushdie on 12 August in the USA.

We defend Salman Rushdie because we've experienced Khomeinism in practice. Many Iranians, in Iran and in exile, oppose the "Islamic Republic", and want a secular Iran.

Those of us living in Britain would like also to see a secular Britain, and oppose any religious group, including oppressed minorities, trying to foist their religion on everyone else.

Ayatollah Khomeini's threat on the life of Salman Rushdie is typical of the man and his regime. The "Islamic Republic" was founded on the defeat of the Iranian revolution in 1979, and instituted a regime of medieval barbarism, persecuting all of its opponents – left-wingers, Kurds, women and religious minorities.

There is at the moment in Iran a wave of executions of leftist opponents of Khomeini. The threats against Rushdie are also a warning to oppositionists in Iran, and opponents of Khomeini everywhere.

The spread of Islamic fundamentalism is very worrying. Obviously it was spurred on by the consolidation of the Khomeini

regime. Although it claims to be "anti-imperialist", it is deeply reactionary.

Salman Rushdie has a perfect right to write about Islam. Free speech and the right to criticise are vital for a democratic society and religious leaders do not have the right to prohibit or threaten their critics.

There is a danger of a racist backlash; the right have seized on Muslim opposition to Rushdie as an example of barbarian immigrants who don't know how to behave in a civilised country. But there is nothing exclusively Muslim about fundamentalism and intolerance – look at the recent furore over *The Last Temptation of Christ*.

Free speech

The working-class movement must defend free speech. Muslim workers who now call for the banning of *The Satanic Verses* are playing with fire. The workers' movement itself always suffers from bans. If it's Rushdie now, it could be other anti-racist writers later – and Rushdie, let it not be forgotten, is a socialist and anti-racist writer.

The workers' movement needs democracy and debate – in Iran and in Britain. Khomeini and his ilk are the enemies of working-class freedom. Religious leaders who want Rushdie banned or killed will not be striking a blow for Muslim communities, but against the rights



of all people to think, write and talk as they wish. □

- In 1989, pretty much the whole organised left in Britain, including the Socialist Workers Party, also defended Rushdie. When the same basic issue came up again in 2005-6, with the Islamist campaign against the "Mohammed cartoons" published in a Danish newspaper – a campaign in the course of which hundreds of people died, and many editors in the Middle East lost their jobs or were jailed – we took the same basic line. Sadly, many on the left didn't. And today again, [Socialist Worker](https://www.workersliberty.org/2022/08/17/why-we-defend-rushdie/) weasels, not approving the attack, but suggesting it is an ill-chosen but understandable act of revolt. More: "Thirty Years since *The Satanic Verses*", bit.ly/yrs-30

